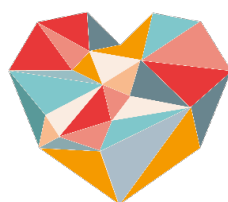




*Buddy project Het Ventiel,
together with theater collective Het Bataljong*

Expertisecentrum Dementie Vlaanderen

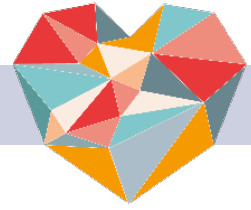


Dementia
in Cultural Mediation



With the support of the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Aktiviteten



Name of the activity

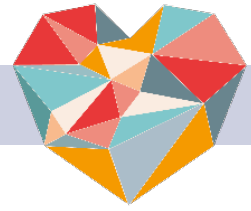
Theater play De Loteling (in English: The Conscript).

Summary

A self-written theatre play with people with dementia, their partners and buddies. They do not play a role, but bring their own story.

Directors Arne De Jaegere, son of someone with young-onset dementia, and Hilde Vanderstraeten, buddy at Het Ventiel and daughter of someone with dementia, from theatre company Het Bataljong worked for a year with a group of people with young-onset dementia, their partners and buddies, through improvisations, exercises and personal conversations. This is how the structure of the play 'De Loteling' came about. The group of actors consists of three actors from 'Het Bataljong', people with dementia, carers and buddies. During the play, people with dementia are put in recognisable situations from their own lives, causing them to react very authentically to the words and objects that are offered. This makes each performance unique. The music was composed especially for the play. This play travels throughout Flanders.

Content



Target group

The group of actors consists of three actors from 'Het Bataljong', people with young-onset dementia, carers and some volunteers who are familiar with young-onset dementia.

The audience is very diverse. The performances are attended by young and old. Both by people who are familiar with the issue from their own experience or profession, and by people who have no link with dementia.

Objective

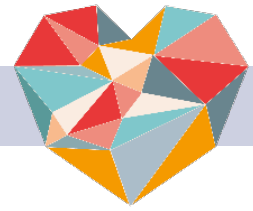
The creation of an awareness-raising theatre piece about how people with young onset-dementia experience their condition and environment. This is a co-creation process: the play is created with and by people with young-onset dementia. It breaks taboos and shows what people with dementia are still capable of. It challenges to dialogue and connection.

Partners

Producing a play requires cooperation between different partners:

- A theatre company (with director, technicians and some actors).
- An organisation that brings people with young-onset dementia and their partners together. E.g. a buddy project for people with dementia.
- Cultural centres and theatres.

Practical



Venue

Theatre play 'De Loteling' is performed in various cultural centres and theatres.

What locations do you need?

- A large rehearsal room
- A cultural centre or theatre hall, depending on the performances

It is important to choose a well-equipped location for technical reasons.

Provide locations with sufficient parking space so that less mobile people can participate. If necessary, provide transport for those who cannot get to the rehearsal room or the performance on their own.

Day, time & duration

The preparatory workshops took place over a period of more than a year. Each workshop lasted about an hour and a half, with a closing moment with a drink and some after-dinner conversation. Each workshop begins with a warm-up moment.

The play itself lasts an hour and a half.

Rehearsals take place again between the performances. There is one rehearsal with everyone before each performance. In between, there are rehearsals with just the actors. Because the intention is that people with young-onset dementia react spontaneously, there is no excessive rehearsal.

Group size

Nine people with young-onset dementia take part in this theatre play, as well as seven partners, two children of someone with young-onset dementia and three buddies. There are also five actors, two of whom are buddies at Het Ventiel.

Supervisors and hosts

Two directors, one of whom is also on stage. Two extra buddies behind the scenes. Since people with young-onset dementia are surrounded by their partner, children and buddies, few extra people are needed to keep the peace behind the scenes.

Materials & facilities

- A sober 'setting', with only a row of chairs on the stage. Through the projection and the music, the setting becomes a museum, a waiting room in a hospital, ...
- A large screen on which images were projected
- A powerful audio installation
- A stand for the audience
- Attributes of the participants themselves, so that they would be recognisable.
- The performance requires a great deal of technical support. For example, the lotto balls that fall down at the end, the combination of sound and light, etc. The play can therefore not be performed in a sports hall or municipal festivity hall, but requires a well-equipped theatre.

Costs

There is no remuneration for the actors.

Name tags

No name badges are used because this is not the custom at Het Ventiel. This is based on the philosophy that people do not wear name tags in 'real' life either.

Memento

A lot of visual material was made of the performances: photos, video, a news item, newspaper articles, a documentary, ... These are powerful memories for the participants.

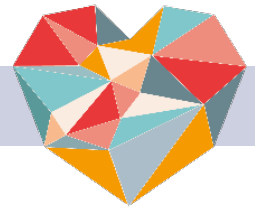
Afterwards

The reactions after each performance and the standing ovations that lasted for minutes were the best gift. That is what continues to resonate with the actors.

The documentary was shown in advance and at the gala performance to the families of those who took part.

At the next series of performances, the play will be filmed in its entirety and distributed on DVD to everyone who participates.

Communication & Registration



Communication

To recruit participants

All the participants, partners and buddies of the buddy project Het Ventiel got the chance to take part in the preparatory workshops. For months they improvised, told their stories in many creative ways, moved, ... without knowing that this was a preparation for a theatre play. Many participants told us more than during a normal conversation about their condition and how they experienced it. Relaxation and amusement were the main focus. Only after a few months we told them that this was in preparation for a play and everyone was free to decide whether or not to go along with the story.

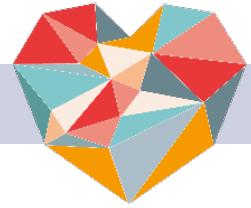
To publicise the play

First, a promotional film was made in which lotto balls play a central role. These refer to the lottery in which people are caught: people with young dementia have drawn a bad lottery ticket. The play was publicised through social media, at local and national level through the press and through the dementia expertise centres. It is unique both in the world of theatre and in the world of dementia. That is why this project was picked up very quickly. The first three performances sold out very quickly and that proved to be the best advertisement. There were requests for additional performances. However, the greatest publicity came from the participants themselves. They were so proud of their performance that they called friends and family en masse to come and watch.

Registration

The audience buys a ticket from the theatre where the play is performed.

Description & Program



The first workshops went on as normal activities of buddy work Het Ventiel and were led by people from theatre collective Het Bataljong. These facilitators are also buddies of Het Ventiel, so everything went very spontaneously. They were not told beforehand that they were working with the production of a play in mind. The people giving the workshops also didn't have the faintest idea of where they wanted to go. However, from the very beginning there was the idea of making a play: with and by people with young-onset dementia and not about them.

It was also a growth process for the makers. Initially, they asked the participants what they struggled with, what they were up against, what dementia did to them... and they did this through music, mime, movement, interviews...

The person who composed the music (partner of one of the buddies), the actors of Het Bataljong and the person who made the background images were present at the workshops from the beginning and were part of the whole.

The author-directors, composer and image-maker also visited a renowned professor, someone from the Expertisecentrum Dementie Vlaanderen, friends and family of people with young-onset dementia, informal caregivers of people with dementia, ... to get to know the target group as broadly as possible.

After six months of workshops, the facilitators told the group that they would continue working towards a theatre play. Everyone was given the opportunity to step further into the story. This left an enthusiastic group with whom the play was written and developed. Each step in the production process was checked with the players and, if necessary, adjusted or discarded.

Were there any ideas from the group throughout the process? Did something spontaneous happen during a workshop? We always looked at whether and how it could be used. The various scenes were recorded with fixed texts, images and music. The actors' interpretation, however, happens spontaneously in every performance. Because the group knew each other well, there was no stage fright and everyone could just be themselves. One could do nothing wrong, one could not miss.

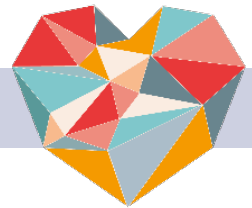
Behind the scenes, we had two extra buddies to bring in material. Because partners and buddies are on scene, people with young-onset dementia are surrounded by acquaintances.

Two weeks before the premiere, the play was performed in its entirety, with all the sound and light effects, for a selective audience, consisting of people from the theatre world, people with young-onset dementia and their environment, people professionally involved in dementia care and people who have nothing to do with dementia. We tested how it came across to each of these groups. This was a very important moment for the creators of the play. The reactions were overwhelming in all groups. Professional carers were overwhelmed and felt that it was a mirror held up to them. For the people with

young-onset dementia and those around them, it was at times very confrontational, but also anointing, true to life and recognisable. The reactions from the theatre world were laudatory. People were expecting something very amateur and were overwhelmed by a high quality, professional production.

Before each performance, the warm-up takes place on stage before the audience enters the auditorium. Every warm-up ends with the same song, which is sung aloud and danced to to great effect.

Evaluation

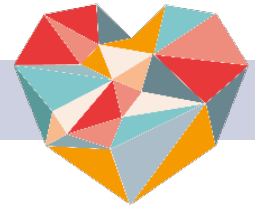


Will the activity be evaluated? How and with whom?

There is no formal evaluation, but the best evaluation is the applause for minutes long after each performance!



Checklist, when to do what



One year before the activity

- Cooperating with director and volunteers
- Start of the workshops

Six months before the activity

- Making the workshops concrete, so that they lead to a performance

The week before the activity

- Between each performance: rehearsal with all the actors.

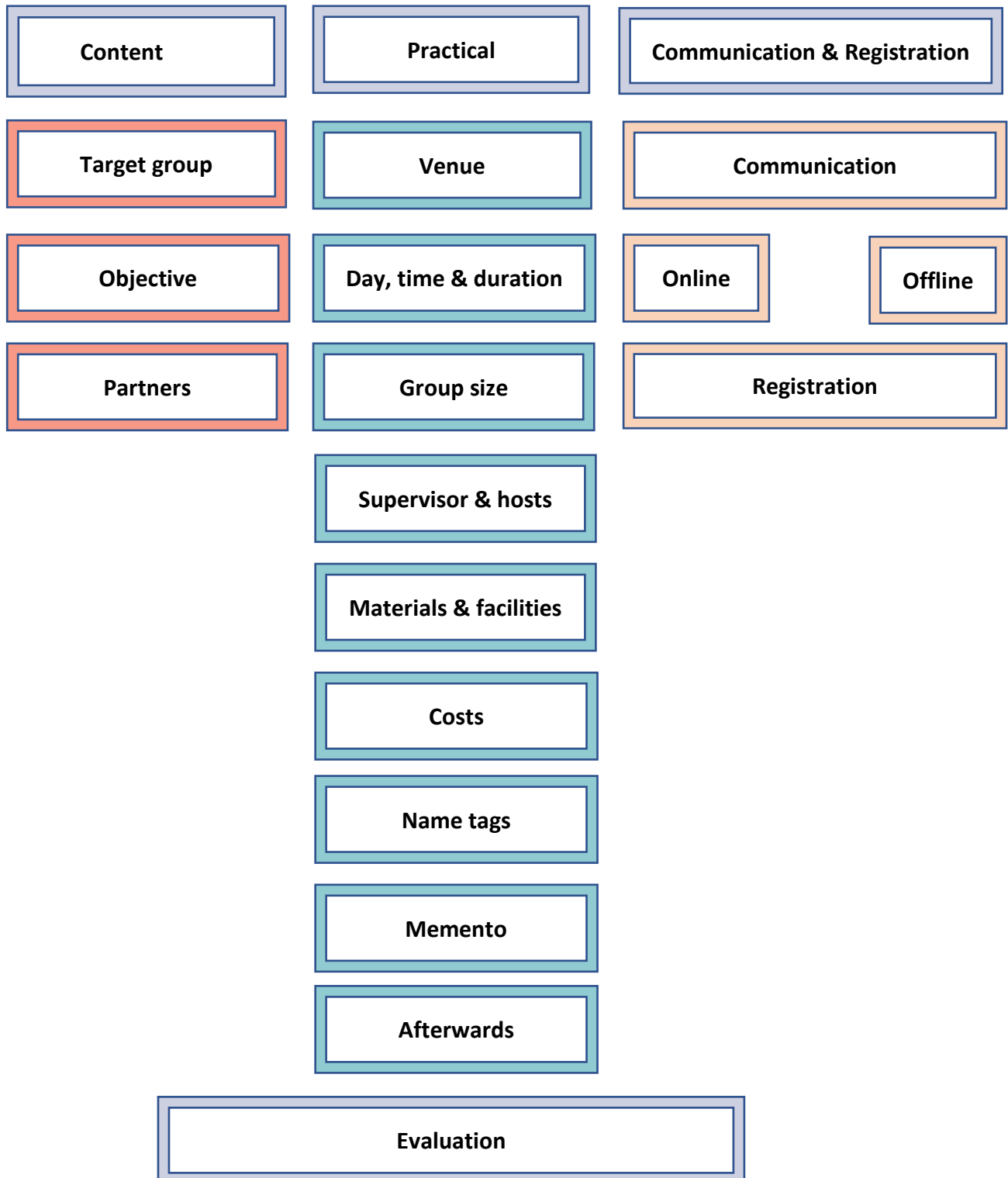
Day of the activity

- Warming up
- Performance

Corona

Because of Corona, they planned theatre performances could not take place. The group picked up the thread after the last lockdown.

Points of attention



De Loteling





