

# MAG AGE' IN

**Interreg**   
2 Seas Mers Zeeën  
**AGE'IN PROJECT**

European Regional Development Fund

# Welcome

It is with joy and a some pride that we welcome you, dear reader, to our Magage'in, a unique single-issue magazine about the European Interreg Age'in project. This publication is the result of a four-year journey that we have completed with our partners in France, Belgium and the UK.

For the Age'in project, these partners collaborated to focus on social innovation and loneliness prevention projects in the ageing population. We developed a strategy and worked out methodologies that help us prevent loneliness in the elderly and support their social networks. You can read all about it in the next pages of this magazine and we also made a podcast.

Unfortunately, we were also confronted with the consequences of the Covid-19 crisis. For two years, we constantly ran into unforeseen circumstances. Planned projects and activities were cancelled and international meetings and exchanges were put on hold. But what is even worse: the elderly had to limit their contacts as much as possible, which led to a further increase in social isolation. This challenged us to find creative solutions together and to work out new initiatives that were quick to deploy.

This Magage'in offers a look at how the projects on ageing in place, health, mobility, intergenerational connection and digital literacy were developed. You will read about workshops on the use of smartphones, digital kiosks, digital neighbourhood networks and modern healthcare technology. You will discover interesting ideas on intergenerational activities and local, neighbourhood-oriented network-enhancing projects.

Many of these activities are still in full swing, others have been organised differently or were integrated into our partners' day-to-day operations. The European Age'in project may have come to an end, but this does not mean that the momentum that was set in motion should end as well! Each partner now has a vast collection of ideas and insights at their disposal to continue their journey. We want to create a society in which the elderly can feel connected with each other and with the generations that surround them while being able to continue living comfortably and independently in their own neighbourhood.

The project team also share their testimonials and experiences in this magazine. We hope that their stories will inspire and motivate you to get started yourself. The rise in the ageing population in Europe is a major challenge, but as the great painter Vincent Van Gogh once wrote: "Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together"!

We hope you enjoy the read.



AGE'IN  
PROJECT LEADER



AGE'IN  
WORKPACKAGE 2 LEADER

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# A strategy for detecting loneliness

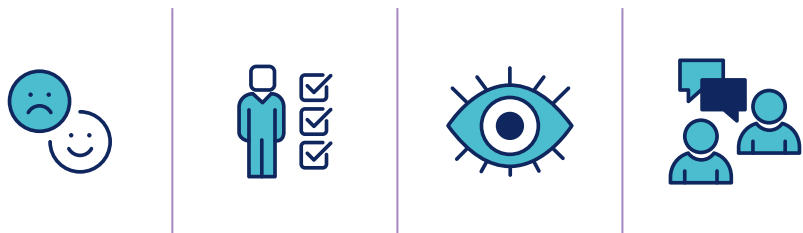


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*One of the objectives of the Interreg Age'in project was to develop and implement a strategy for detecting loneliness in the elderly. This allowed the project partners to gain insight into the needs and vulnerabilities of seniors struggling with loneliness. The outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis made this issue all the more pressing.*

In order to develop an adequate strategy, Age'in Brugge focused on two dynamics. Firstly, the development of a training course in loneliness prevention led to an interregional exchange project between the different partners. Secondly, a dialogue was started with numerous Bruges-based partners that are active in the field of care provision and community work. However, the idea to organise regular meetings and consultation moments was suddenly thwarted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The 2020-2021 national lockdown forced us to come up with other solutions. We decided to organise one-on-one contacts and meetings, in compliance with the prevailing precautionary measures. Numerous care professionals were interviewed about their experiences and expertise in the field of loneliness in (vulnerable) seniors. In a number of Bruges neighbourhoods, we opted for a more outreaching approach, where we personally contacted the older adults to interview them. In this way, we still succeeded in bringing together the necessary knowledge, expertise and experiences.



... *The strategy we used is like a flower with five petals. Each petal stands on its own, but is also inextricably linked with the other components of the flower.*

## A fivefold strategy

Detecting vulnerable older adults and their needs requires a layered and multidisciplinary approach. The strategy we used is like a flower with five petals. Each petal stands on its own but is also inextricably linked with the other components of the flower. As we first needed to know and understand what loneliness actually means, the first step in the development of our strategy was defining the concept of loneliness. Within the Age'in Bruges project, a training course was organised on how to detect loneliness. Our French project partners came to Bruges to take this course and shared their newly acquired insights in their organisations. In addition, a 'compass' was developed to help care providers detect specific target groups within the elderly population and adjust their actions accordingly. In order to visualise loneliness detection in a neighbourhood, a method was developed to literally map out the target groups and care providers, and a model was developed to identify the different roles the stakeholders can play in the neighbourhoods. The Age'in project partners explicitly chose to monitor the development and impact of the strategy by means of the 'theory of change' methodology.

... *The name 'Growcast' refers to the growth of the project in each country, each with its own specific context and presenting its own opportunities and challenges.*

## Cross-border exchange: Growcast

As the Covid-19 crisis made it impossible to organise an interregional exchange on joint strategy development, the project partners decided to make a podcast in which they engage in conversation with each other. The name 'Growcast' refers to the growth of the project in each country, each with its own specific context and presenting its own opportunities and challenges. The podcast was made using online recordings of the conversations and exchanges between the project members. You can listen to the podcast on all the usual streaming platforms (Anchorfm, Spotify, etc.).

## Posters and manuals

In order to present the strategy in an understandable way, posters and information cards were printed. They show the different steps in the detection strategy and provide the necessary information to get started. You can find the posters in the back of this magazine. The infocards can be found on the Age'in website.

### Interested in our strategy?

#### Do you want more information on the methods and models?

Contact Alana Boone, policy officer at cel Lokaal Sociaal Beleid Brugge:  
alana.boone@brugge.be.

### Interested in organising training sessions on how to detect loneliness?

Contact Lien Dereere, coordinator at the Bruges volunteer centre:  
lien.dereere@brugge.be

### Curious about the podcast?

#### Looking for the infocards?

Find them on the Age'In website  
[www.ageindependently.eu/podcasts](http://www.ageindependently.eu/podcasts)



# Overcoming isolation

Step Into Wellness



... *Alone we can do  
so little. Together we  
can do so much.*

Helen Keller

Age UK Cornwall (England – UK) have helped to overcome the impacts of isolation on older people in Cornwall (south-west England), to connect with them, connect them to each other and to their broader communities. Since the start of the project the challenges of isolation have been exacerbated by Covid control restrictions in England, none more so than those instructed to ‘shield’ as their medical condition placed them at high risk. Age UK’s report ‘The impact of Covid-19 on Older People’ (October 2020) cites: “a substantial group of older people have been left frightened, depressed and very much alone.” ... “they found it hard to have hope for the future.”

Cornwall is a large rural and coastal area; Covid significantly exacerbated social isolation and the challenges of accessing support. The demographic most affected are those over 50, with higher percentages of people needing increased support in higher age groups.

## The impact of Covid-19

Demand for services was on the increase pre-pandemic, and engagement with the Interreg project was straightforward with sufficient scope for aligning intentions and approach. However, as Covid-19 has impacted across the world clients now have reduced options for engagement and are demonstrating increased complexity of health and wellbeing needs, for example, our community helpline saw an increase of 93% in March 2020 compared to the previous year and a 122% increase from March 2019, with increased caseloads and complexity across our teams. Engagement with the Interreg partners inevitably changed with the onset of Covid, with different nations adopting differing control measures which has influenced the ability to align intentions and activities.

... *I felt vulnerable and alone  
with no one to turn to.*

Throughout the project, activities have consistently needed to address a range of factors. Increased reclusive tendencies have led to loss of cognitive function, poor mobility and balance resulting (particularly from persistent sedentary behaviours during Covid-19 lockdowns). This in turn has led to increasing pain and anxiety from untreated medical conditions, as health services have only responded to high-risk conditions. The publicity and media coverage around winter illnesses and Covid-19 has generated anxiety and fear of going outside (Covid-19 Anxiety Syndrome, Kingston University), in turn leading to a desire to find Covid-safe spaces to begin to meet and connect with others, which in reality have scarcely been available. Home needs and administrative tasks have been left unchecked, with reduced support from others, especially family, during Covid-19. This has unfortunately given rise in many cases to debt – for example, for those shielding personal debt is 9% above the national average (Excess debts – who has fallen behind on their household bills due to coronavirus? (Citizens Advice, Aug 2020). The worries of Covid-19 mortality rates amongst older people / seniors have given rise to a fear of using public transport. All of which has resulted in fear of being ‘left behind’ and increasing sense of isolation.

... *I no longer had the choice to go out if I wanted to, even to shops or the beach because in the beginning when we didn't understand Covid as we do now, it was all very frightening.*

## The Step Into Wellness Programme

Our activities needed to adapt in a way that responded to our nation's control measures. Using our experience of pre-Covid coaching programmes with the older, and vulnerable communities, we worked with Cornwall's Public Health Team to develop and introduce a Step Into Wellness Programme. Its purpose is to help older and vulnerable people connect, and to transition out of Covid-control measures. It is based around seven key topics: find support and group activities, get active, develop positive relationships, access specialist services and support, give back to your community and others, make healthy lifestyle choices, learn new skills and enjoy new experiences. The coaching programme offers 4 weekly sessions, followed by 3 monthly sessions then a follow-up at month 5. These have mainly been virtual, although some physical sessions have now taken place. At month 5, many participants elect to continuing to meet via digital peer support, known as Digital Cafés, an informal way for participants who were isolated prior to the programme, to keep in touch and have a chat over coffee.

Our initial challenge was identifying isolated seniors / older people who would benefit from the programme. We worked with Cornwall's statutory public health team to identify those required to shield (self-isolate) as they were known to be the most at risk of isolation and deterioration in their health and wellbeing. Our teams and community volunteers contacted them to invite them to the programme.

... *Someone invited me to the Step Into Wellness course. It was just what I was looking for and just what I wanted.*

## Online sessions and personal support

The programme commenced during a period of transitions between varying Covid-19 control measures; this meant the most effective way to run the programme sessions (workshops) was online. Inevitably not all older people had access to IT, and even for most who did, attending virtual online workshop sessions was a new experience for most. We worked with volunteers to support those needing help, usually by telephone to talk them through the process to join the sessions. For those who were confused, or unable to communicate effectively by telephone, we did provide face-to-face support, making sure interactions were Covid secure.

One of the key learning points and successes is allocating each participant a Wellness Volunteer to support them. The volunteer contacts participants regularly to encourage and remind them to attend, to provide technical support to build their IT knowledge and confidence, as well as to check to make sure they are okay. If they are not, follow-up action is taken, such as linking them to a wellbeing coach and/or services that can assist with the immediate problem. Not only has this been shown to maintain engagement with the programme, it prevents further deterioration in their wellbeing and has demonstrated the benefits of being socially connected.

... *I found I was coming out of myself again and enjoying talking to people.*

During the summer of 2021, we supported over 250 people through the Step Into Wellness programme. We were able to enhance this support to older people with long-term conditions through our 'support bubbles' scheme via our day care centres, around 103 people a week. The intensive engagement with people amongst the most vulnerable in our communities has exposed the challenges older people experience, the depth of support needed to effectively transition through Covid-19, and how beneficial connecting with them, and them to each other, can be. It demonstrates that the right intervention, persistent encouragement, and a person-centred approach can overcome the negative impacts of isolation.

... *Really interesting and lovely to talk and share. I felt really elated.*

Covid-19 has significantly changed the way we approach delivery of support services. It can no longer be assumed that physical face-to-face meetings will be the preferred and 'normal' method of engagement. Therefore, the experiences and learning over the last three years has informed our support service delivery plan for the future. The provision of support has to be much more agile and flexible to respond to Covid-control measures as well as what matters to people in their own response(s) to those measures.



A major learning point is that, once isolated, older people have become engaged, almost all do not want the programme to end. As a result, the digital cafés, for participants to continue meeting with their programme peers, has led in many cases to individual participants contacting each other and extending their social networks beyond the programme and digital cafés, in some cases reaching out to other people they know to be isolated.

If you'd like to find out more about the Step Into Wellness Programme, please visit the Cornwall Link website [www.cornwall-link.co.uk](http://www.cornwall-link.co.uk) or ring 01872(UK) 266383, or email [stepintowellness@ageukcornwall.org.uk](mailto:stepintowellness@ageukcornwall.org.uk)

## Three lessons learned

- We have learned that isolation amongst older people is a persistent dynamic of communities across Cornwall.
  - Whilst Covid-19 and the resulting control measures have exacerbated many aspects of isolation, we have identified that the benefits of connecting with older people / seniors are consistent. Once people are connected there is a desire to remain connected and to maintain social interactions, this increases motivation especially in taking care of themselves.
  - Our participation in the Interreg project has taught us to flex and adapt our approach to project delivery, the interaction with partners has not been as regular or in person as originally envisaged, yet our experience is that partners have remained focussed on the original intended outcomes and have been extremely supportive of each other. Even with borders closed to physical travel, the project has remained cohesive and well run.
- ... *Step Into Wellness is the kind of course that people like me, or similar to me, can benefit hugely from. It makes you feel better, helps you shrug off those dark days that can creep up on you, and give you a sunny outlook again.*



A close-up photograph of an elderly person's face, focusing on the eye and forehead. The skin is wrinkled and aged. A teal rectangular box is overlaid on the upper part of the face, containing the text "Reaching out" in white. The background is a solid teal color.

Reaching out



... *The idea is to connect with elderly people in their own neighbourhood, in their familiar surroundings or in their home context.*

The development of a strategy to detect loneliness among older residents gave the project partners of Age'In Brugge the opportunity to reflect on different ways of connecting with vulnerable elderly people. It became increasingly clear that there is indeed a group of older people who do not succeed in connecting with the care and services they need. In addition, the Covid-19 crisis has intensified the feeling of loneliness and social isolation among many older residents.

Age'In Brugge decided to utilize an outreaching approach towards the elderly population of Bruges. Several objectives were put forward. Different forms and models of outreach work (neighbourhood-oriented, case-oriented and location-oriented) were tried out in order to determine the best strategy for connecting older people having help requests with the existing care and services. Finally, the empowerment method was used. A small-scale project was developed to explore and visualize the expertise and experience of elderly neighbourhood residents.

## Going to where the elderly are

There is a wide variety of care and services available in Bruges. In addition to the care offered by professionals, the community centres and senior citizen associations offer a vast range of training activities and meeting opportunities. There are, however, elderly citizens who, for various reasons, are unable to connect to these services. That is why Age'In Brugge chose to focus on personal encounters in a specific neighbourhood in the centre of Bruges. In this neighbourhood, an outreach worker actively engaged in on-one-one conversations with seniors. The aim was to connect with the older residents in their own neighbourhood, in their familiar surroundings or in their home context. These one-on-one contacts allowed us to determine three parameters: the locations of the contacts, the areas where a high number of vulnerable elderly people live, and the places in the neighbourhood where spontaneous meetings take place – where older residents (can) meet each other (benches, laundrettes, parks, grocery shops, etc.). In this way, the outreach worker was able to focus on specific needs for each location within the neighbourhood.

## Keeping a finger on the pulse to perform correct referrals

In a second stage, the frequency and the content of the conversations were inventoried. A distinction was made between individual requests for help requiring a referral (e.g. help with the Covid Safe Ticket, where a referral is made to the community centres or libraries) and broader requests for help requiring a more structural approach (e.g. the need for more meeting places and occasions). We are currently starting to see a pattern where some themes and concerns are being reported far more than others.

That is why we intend to continue working in this way after the Age'in project is finished. In the long term, these inventories can help us realise tailor-made projects and make concrete policy suggestions.

... *It is our conscious decision to look at older residents first and foremost as 'experts in life' and not as inhabitants who are needy by definition.*

## Wisdom obtained firsthand

The outreach work in the Age'in project focuses first and foremost on an empowerment approach. In concrete terms, this means that we try to find ways to address and activate the expertise and life experience of the elderly citizens of Bruges. It is our conscious decision to look at older residents in the first place as 'life experts'; not as inhabitants who are needy by definition. A current small-scale project makes this tangible: through personal conversations, elderly people are asked what life wisdom they would like to share with others. They are also asked to have their hands photographed. In a later stage, a publication will be issued, bringing together the images and words, so that every citizen of Bruges can enjoy this wisdom obtained 'firsthand'.

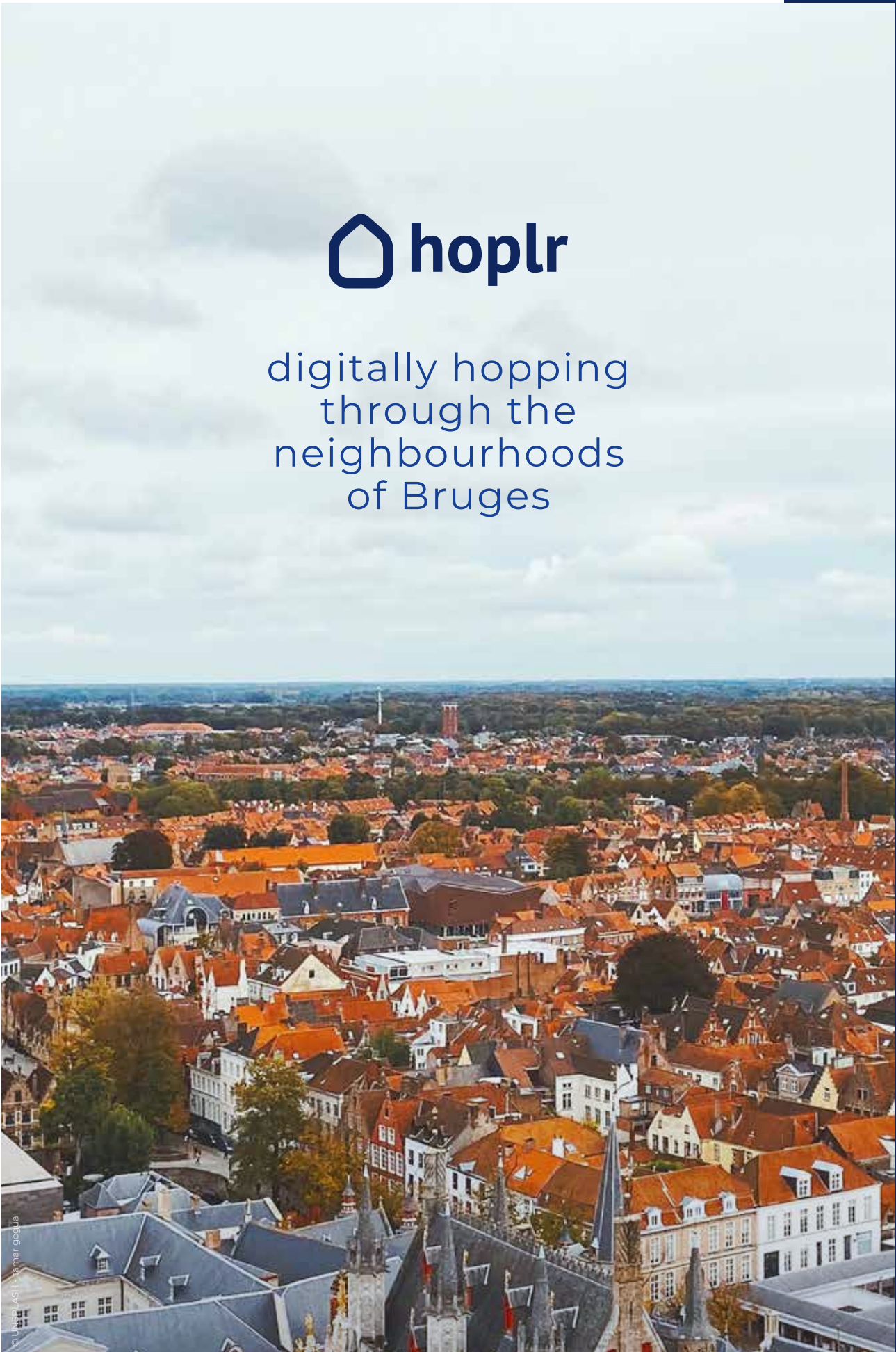
Curious about how you can do outreach work with older people? Would you like more information on how this is being done in Bruges? Contact Alana Boone, policy adviser at the Cel Sociaal Lokaal Beleid Brugge: [alana.boone@brugge.be](mailto:alana.boone@brugge.be)

## Three lessons learned

- Any project about elderly people living at home in their neighbourhood requires two foundations: strengthening the existing social cohesion in the neighbourhood and focusing on individual, outreaching contacts.
- The Covid-19 crisis has put a finger on the sore spot. Many elderly neighbourhood residents express the need for more opportunities to meet and talk to other people. We are challenged to think out of the box about the way in which encounters can be made possible.
- Growing older is not a synonym for becoming 'needy'. Apart from providing care, we also need to focus on the life expertise and life experience of older people.



digitally hopping  
through the  
neighbourhoods  
of Bruges



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*Hoplr is a social digital network that allows its users to get to know their neighbours and neighbourhood better. Launched in 2020, the Bruges network has rolled out across 22 Hoplr neighbourhoods. Since its launch, approximately 10,800 households (22% of all households in Bruges) have started using Hoplr. Almost 40% of all users are over 55.*

The inhabitants of Bruges use Hoplr to share news, to exchange goods, to ask their neighbours for help or to engage in voluntary work. But the City of Bruges, the Social Service Department (OCMW) of Bruges and numerous social partners also use Hoplr to communicate with the neighbourhoods. It is a useful tool to inform people e.g. about road works, corona measures or waste collection. And residents can also share their concerns and ideas with the city administration.

Within the Hoplr project, the Age'in Brugge partners focused on the seniors of Bruges, setting up initiatives to make the digital network more accessible for older adults with low digital skills. The campaign that was rolled out included the distribution of window posters via the official city magazine. These posters invited neighbours to support each other in formulating requests for help on Hoplr. In addition, adapted training sessions were offered, organised by an experienced partner: Ligo, Centrum voor Basiseducatie – a training centre for basic education operating in the Bruges-Ostend-Westhoek area. We talked to Maarten Demeyer from Ligo, asking him a few questions about his recent experiences.



### **Maarten, what is your job, your specific task at Ligo?**

I teach short-schooled adults. In Flanders, one in seven people is not sufficiently literate to function properly in school, at work or in social situations. Did you know that 18% of people aged between 55 and 74 in Flanders do not use internet at home? And this for various reasons: not interested, insufficient digital skills, the high cost of equipment / connection and concerns about online privacy and security.

All 13 Ligo centres in Flanders offer courses to help improve communicative, numerical and digital skills. The courses are based on specific questions from participants, which allows us to take a very functional approach.

I am also the contact person for projects and courses in the Bruges neighbourhoods. In cooperation with the City of Bruges, Ligo is responsible for projects and courses in the fields of digital literacy and neighbourhood communication. The aim of these projects is to strengthen the connection between neighbours and the neighbourhood and to make the communication channels of the Bruges city administration more accessible, in particular to the most vulnerable and/or digitally illiterate residents.



**Hoplr was launched in Bruges in 2020 and has rolled out across 22 neighbourhoods. What do you think is the added value of this digital network?**

This digital network brings neighbours together online. Hoplr allows residents to easily get in touch with the neighbours in their street and neighbourhood. Hoplr is a private and small-scale network. People can only join the Hoplr network of the neighbourhood they live in. This makes Hoplr very accessible and allows local residents to keep in touch digitally with other people in their neighbourhood.

... *By bringing neighbours together online, you also stimulate offline get-togethers.*

**The City of Bruges uses Hoplr as a means to connect its residents with each other. What opportunities and challenges does this present?**

It is definitely a good thing that Bruges has decided to do this! By bringing neighbours together online, you also stimulate offline get-togethers. Hoplr connects local residents that share the same interests and ideas. The initiatives that emerge from this may tickle the interest of other neighbourhood residents. For neighbourhood committees as well, Hoplr is the best tool to quickly spread news in their neighbourhood. The real challenge, however, lies in convincing as many people as possible to use Hoplr. Only then will Hoplr become a success in Bruges.

**In order to make Hoplr more accessible, the courses were adapted to the needs of the participants. How did you go about this?**

Unfortunately, due to the coronavirus, we have been – and still are – unable to organise local training sessions the way we want to. I have, however, had the opportunity to give small workshops in a few neighbourhoods in Bruges. In these workshops, I used a practical approach, helping the participants to register to their own neighbourhood. This approach allowed them to experience for themselves just how Hoplr works. I also advised them to observe before actually contributing.

**What are your experiences with the Hoplr training sessions? What opportunities and challenges did you encounter? What works and what doesn't (yet)?**

In my opinion, Hoplr is not known well enough yet. That is why attendance numbers were low. If you only advertise using the name 'Hoplr', you will not reach many people. It is better to open things up, e.g. by using the subtitle 'Keep up with the news in your neighbourhood'. You also need to get the neighbourhood committees on board. That is why Ligo, together with the Vrijwilligerscentrale Brugge, organises a Hoplr workshop for all the neighbourhood committees in Bruges. Once they are convinced, we can roll out this workshops to the residents in all the different neighbourhoods.

... *During the workshops, I also met people who could barely work with their smartphone or tablet. Hoplr was an opportunity for them to do something practical with their device.*

**It remains a challenge to get older residents of Bruges to use Hoplr. What do you think we can do?**

Organise sessions close to home, in people's own neighbourhoods. Users should be able to recognise themselves in their neighbourhood. Hoplr can also be a tool to teach older adults how to use a smartphone or tablet. Not everyone is convinced of the added value of such a device. During the workshops, I also met people who could barely work with their smartphone or tablet. Hoplr was an opportunity for them to do something practical with their device.





**Apart from Hoplr, you also offer other various training programmes aimed at improving the digital literacy of the residents of Bruges. What do you see as the biggest challenges, for now and for the near future?**

On the one hand, it is fantastic that the City of Bruges has the ambition to improve the digital literacy of its inhabitants. On the other hand, it will be an enormous challenge to reach those residents of Bruges that are not digitally engaged. Most of these people live in a certain degree of isolation and have little need for social contact. They do not feel the need to use a smartphone or tablet. It will not be easy to convince them that they do need to learn this, and that will only work if they see the added value. But we also have to continue supporting the people who are already digitally engaged. Everything constantly changes at lightning speed. By focusing on lifelong learning, we must ensure that everyone remains digitally engaged.

## Three lessons learned

**If you could give us 'three valuable lessons or tips' on improving digital literacy and rolling out digital networks, what would they be?**

- Focus on accessibility. Organise local workshops in the neighbourhoods. If you want to reach people who are not yet digitally engaged, then organise one-on-one sessions and do not ask people to register in advance. For many people, registering for group courses is too big a step to take.
- Use the participants' questions to build your course. People often come to a workshop with very specific issues. Actual practice will make the participants feel involved and will allow you to significantly improve their digital skills.
- Broaden your horizon. Communication skills are important as well: How do I write a good e-mail or text message? How do I use the spell checker? How do I interpret news I read on the internet? By improving the reading and writing skills of your participants, you can enhance their digital self-confidence.

**Do you want to know more about the Hoplr training sessions?  
Are you interested in Ligo's training programmes?**

Visit [www.ligo.be/regio-brugge-oostende-westhoek](http://www.ligo.be/regio-brugge-oostende-westhoek) or send an e-mail to [maarten.demeyer@ligo-regiobow.be](mailto:maarten.demeyer@ligo-regiobow.be).

**Ligo**

Centrum voor Basiseducatie  
Brugge-Oostende-Westhoek

# Meet the projectpartners

AGE'IN FRANCE

Yacine Diallo



EUROPEAN PROJECT MANAGER  
OF CENTRE SOCIAL ECLATÉ AND WP  
COMMUNICATION LEADER

## AGE'IN was an eye opener

This cross-border project, which brought together different types of organisations, allowed us to reframe our way of thinking about ageing and about the autonomy of older people. It offered us a real chance to review our working methods and to adopt new, more appropriate actions and activities.

It was also an opportunity to raise awareness about the challenges of ageing in our area among our local partners and employees. It gave us the opportunity to fight against the isolation of the elderly more effectively and to enable them to live at home as long as possible while remaining active in their neighbourhood.

Isabelle Lengagne



DIRECTOR OF THE  
SOCIO-CULTURAL CENTRE AUDREY  
BARTIER WIMEREUX

## Developing new skill sets

This Interreg 2 Seas Mers Zeeën project has enabled us to develop social link and prevention actions concerning the health and mobility of older people and has given us the opportunity to work on intergenerational connections and digitisation. Recognized as a territorial network, the project helped us strengthen our partnership with institutions and local associations. We became a place where people can obtain information about housing, retirement, financial support etc. In this way, we were able to support inhabitants who reach out to the most isolated and vulnerable people. To sum it all up, this project has contributed to refining our services to the over-55-years-old age group. We are thankful to the European partners, the professionals and to the people that have discovered tools and practices that enable living at home independently as long as possible.

Nathalie Morchain



ENTERTAINMENT  
DEPARTMENT MANAGER, CCAS OF  
BOULOGNE-SUR-MER

## Collaboration and inspiration

The AGE'IN project and the different European partners have broadened our approach to ageing. Cross-border exchanges have been a source of inspiration for the development of new actions, particularly in terms of housing adaptation and the prevention of social isolation. On the one hand, this project was an opportunity to involve seniors even more in the choice of actions and the development of living spaces. On the other hand, it was a chance to arouse or reawaken their curiosity about all sorts of activities set up to maintain social ties and to promote active ageing.

The project also enabled us to get more means to fight against the digital divide. On a local level, it gave us the opportunity to strengthen our collaboration with various partners.



# Older citizens in the driver's seat

Age'in France organised a lot of activities and projects in socio-cultural centres. In many cases, the ideas and concrete proposals for these projects originated from the contacts between staff members and visitors. Christine Saïgh, who has been a community worker at the Audrey Bartier socio-cultural centre in Wimereux since 2016, organises weekly activities and meetings with older people. During one of the activities, she noticed a very concrete concern and decided to work on it. In the following paragraphs, she tells her story in her own words.

## The motive

One Friday morning, I was leading a workshop called 'Atelier mémoire', which focuses on the memories of older citizens and their ability to retain information. Two of the participants, Marie-Geneviève and Anne-Marie, told the group about several accidents in Wimereux involving senior citizens. They also shared that they did not feel as confident behind the wheel as they used to. Following that conversation, we set up a group open to all older citizens who encountered the same problem. Together, we started thinking about a new workshop.

## The search

First of all, we needed to find a professional who could lead the workshops, taking the group's needs and expectations into account. We wanted to find someone who could understand and tackle the specific issues of our group, such as: driving at night or in the rain, altered road signs and driving on roundabouts and highway ramps, etc. There have been many policy changes since our senior citizens got their driving licence. Our group believes that the driving lessons they took were rather basic. Nowadays, the requirements have changed: people need to know their vehicle, understand new technologies, learn about pollution and understand how road users interact.

In short, we needed a revision programme that helped all those who took their driving test in the 1970s and '80s to better understand the causes of accidents and to update their knowledge.

## The workshops

We decided to visit different driving schools and explained our ideas to them together with Anne-Marie and Marie-Geneviève. We received quotes from three different driving schools. This is an obligatory step in our tendering procedure. To ensure that we are using our funds as responsibly and fairly as possible, the procedure prescribes that we have to obtain a minimum of three quotes. Once we got approval from the director, Isabelle Lengagne, we organised the first workshops. We chose to cooperate with the 'Albain Formation et Prévention' driving school in Hesdigneul les Boulogne. Their offer was the most in line with our requirements and came in at the best price. Together, we created the workshop, which we organised in the multipurpose room at the socio-cultural centre, where all the material we needed (video projectors, screens etc.) was available. It was also close to the participants' homes. We then decided to divide the participants into two groups of six people, going through six workshops each.

... *We've been driving for 40 years.  
At our age, we've had time to pick  
up a few bad habits.*





The workshops were held live, with video exercises being projected during each session. The groups worked on the following topics: seniors on foot (on the road and in public transport), seniors riding bicycles, seniors driving cars (traffic safety training, new traffic signs, new rules and regulations, new drivers and new techniques), senior health and wellbeing, general knowledge and cognition, and preventative driving (slower reflexes and risk analyses).

The participants were able to brush up on driving in poor weather conditions: they learned about speed adaptation and about the effects of rain and snow on the braking distance. They also learned about the causes of deadly traffic accidents (e.g. driving under the influence of alcohol or medication).

## Three lessons learned

- It is important to co-construct these actions with participants and set out specific objectives at the start.
- It is essential to contact several service providers in order to stick to the initial objectives and participants' needs. The service provider should be as involved as possible and should be an active listener rather than a salesperson.
- Attention needs to be paid to the tone that is used during the workshop: avoid a moralising or infantilizing approach. We encourage participants to help build the workshop and to actively participate.

**Inspired by our ideas and workshops?  
Interested in organising a similar project  
in your neighbourhood?**

You can find more info on our website ([www.cscwimereux.org](http://www.cscwimereux.org)) or send an e-mail to Isabelle Lengagne, director of the centre socioculturel Audrey Bartier à Wimereux, at [direction@cscwimereux.org](mailto:direction@cscwimereux.org).

# Neighbourhood in motion

towards a  
shared mobility



*In the Sint-Pieters neighbourhood, Age'in helped tackle a major challenge. Wanting to improve the mobility options – specifically those available to older residents – we performed a neighbourhood analysis and consulted residents, associations and municipal departments. This allowed us to set up a project in which we experiment with bicycle, rickshaw and electric car sharing.*



## Neighbourhood in the picture

The Sint-Pieters neighbourhood, situated in the north of Bruges, is home to approximately eight thousand inhabitants and is currently undergoing some serious renovation. The City of Bruges has decided to improve and increase the local housing options. In addition, there are also bigger structural changes in the public domain, which poses a big challenge for the neighbourhood. The many spatial development changes, expansions and maintenance and renovation works impact the local residents' daily lives. It is a constant balancing act between preserving what is important for the neighbourhood and its residents on the one hand and renovating and improving the existing infrastructure on the other hand. The numerous changes affect the mobility of the local residents, but at the same time offer the opportunity to gain insight into problem areas and to work out proper solutions.

## Challenges

For the Age'in project, we questioned the older residents of Sint-Pieters about their daily mobility pattern. To do this, we organised interviews and conversations and published a questionnaire on the neighbourhood platform Hoplr. This allowed us to determine several problem areas. The first thing that needed to be dealt with is the traffic situation in the neighbourhood. Sint-Pieters is traversed by two major and busy traffic axes: Oostendse Steenweg and Blankenbergse Steenweg. The busy traffic situation has a strong impact on the day-to-day life of older local residents, who tend to avoid the roads they conceive as dangerous and busy. As a result, they stay close to their homes, feeling that they have limited freedom of movement and avoiding purchases, visits and medical appointments that are not in their immediate vicinity.

The second challenge concerns public transport in the neighbourhood. Taking the train or bus can be an alternative for older residents who do not drive or are too insecure to use their car for longer distances. However, public transport in Sint-Pieters will be reorganised in the years to come: bus stops will disappear and the number of bus routes will decrease. In addition, residents report that the current bus stops are too far apart, not convenient to get to and do not offer protection against bad weather.

The Age'in project offered us the opportunity to tackle these challenges and to find solutions. And that is exactly what we did!

## An experiment

The questionnaire and the consultation rounds with municipal departments, residents and associations were the starting point for our subproject on shared mobility. This subproject aims at offering people various transport options and at developing a mobility volunteer programme.

An electric car sharing project was set up in the Sint-Pieters neighbourhood. Residents can use the electric car themselves or can have a volunteer drive them to their destination.

The same principle was used for a more alternative and unconventional transport sharing project with rickshaws and a wheelchair transporter. This project aims at responding to specific help requests of older residents with physical disabilities. Moreover, these means of transport are energy-efficient and eco-friendly.

Volunteers are the backbone of this 'mobility experiment'. However, it takes a lot of time and effort to make people enthusiastic for a project and to open their eyes to alternatives even if these can support them in their daily lives. The Age'in project wants to widen the scope of the experiment by relieving social isolation among older residents. Inviting them to neighbourhood gatherings, meetings and parties, we want to continue offering them the opportunity to go outside and stay active.

**Are you interested in developing a mobility project? Are you looking for advice, tips and ideas tailored to your neighbourhood?**

Contact the Bruges volunteer centre via [lien.dereere@brugge.be](mailto:lien.dereere@brugge.be) or send an e-mail to the Sint-Pieters community worker via [dirk.vangrembergen@brugge.be](mailto:dirk.vangrembergen@brugge.be).

## Three lessons learned

- It is a challenge to tackle the complex neighbourhood mobility issue in collaboration with a whole array of partners. Consultation is key. The success of the project depends on the extent of involvement of local residents and partners in the neighbourhood. Take your time for this!
- The 'eco-social sharing house' in Sint-Pieters is a place where people meet, and where consultations and exchanges are organized. If you want to set up a project tailored to the neighbourhood, 'being present' is a big asset. A 'home base' in the neighbourhood is a must!
- Age'in mainly focused on ageing residents, but the mobility project is broader than that and can be beneficial to every resident. Grasp the opportunity to connect generations and stimulate encounters!

# Meet the projectpartners

AGE'IN BRUGES



Lien Dereere



VOLUNTEER  
CENTRE BRUGES

## It's not about big projects with big names, but about providing concrete solutions to everyday issues.

The Age'In project made me think about what a neighbourhood needs to come closer together. As the coordinator of the Vrijwilligerscentrale (volunteer centre), I encounter the concepts of 'solidarity' and 'investing in a stronger social fabric' in the field every day. The fact that these concepts are now being applied to an entire neighbourhood – or two pilot neighbourhoods in the case of Age'In – has given me some new insights, in particular how a lot depends on the time you are willing to invest in the social capital of your neighbourhood: are you willing to stop and listen, instead of aiming at quick results? It is not about big projects with big names, but about providing concrete solutions to everyday issues, about making things move – together with the people in the neighbourhood – until they themselves notice that something has shifted (even the tiniest bit), which then makes it possible for them to 'move forward'.

Dirk Van Grembergen



COMMUNITY WORKER

## This story has to be written from the bottom up

Previously in my career, I had only worked with and for young people. That is why, in the past two years, working with a new target group has been a very enriching experience for me. I do, however, see a lot of similarities between the needs of children/young people and those of the 55+ generation in the city, especially when it comes to small encounters and people-to-people connections.

We sometimes collectively forget that these connections form a story that will only last if it is written from the bottom up. I see a lot of dedication in the two Bruges neighbourhoods we are working in, and an incredible commitment from various official instances and stakeholders, in various domains. I hope that the current realisations – however small they may be – will sparkle the desire to continue investing in neighbourhoods and locations. Because, in the end, that is our goal: to work in and for our neighbourhoods and for all the people – regardless of their age – who live there.

Alana Boone



WORKPACKAGE 2 LEADER –  
POLICY OFFICER  
CEL LOKAAL SOCIAAL BELEID

## The Age'in project gave us the space to experiment, to share insights, and to test them

Working together with the community workers, the occupational therapists, the care technologist and the various partners in France, England and the Netherlands has revealed some fundamental issues about ageing in our city.

How do we look at ageing and how do we translate this into a policy and services that are tailored to the needs of the older residents of Bruges? How can collaborations between different official departments, organisations and even small neighbourhood initiatives support living at home longer? How can we ensure that the services that are currently being provided, are also made available to those people who do not benefit from them yet?

The Age'in project gave us the space to experiment, to share insights and to test them comprehensively in several countries.

Vincent Duyck



COMMUNITY WORKER

## A common goal

In my opinion, this project enriches both the neighbourhood and myself. Being able to cooperate and exchange experiences with our European partners has repeatedly shown the multiple benefits of mutual diversity. Every country has its own vision, approach and methods. But we all have one common goal: the happiness and quality of life of our older citizens. That is what connects, inspires and motivates us.

A photograph of an elderly woman with short brown hair and red-rimmed glasses, smiling and holding a white and yellow long-haired cat. She is wearing a red patterned sweater. The cat has white socks with pink paw prints. In the background, other people are blurred, suggesting a public event. A teal text box is overlaid on the image.

## Pop-up events

... *The Age'in project enabled Mintus to invest in a wide range of new (care) technologies.*

*How and how much can older adults benefit from modern care technologies? And how can it help older people live independently at home for longer? The Bruges project partners of the Age'in project (the City of Bruges), OCMW Brugge\*, Mintus\* and Hogeschool VIVES\*) have explored innovative technologies that can support a comfortable and happy home life and want to offer it to seniors in Bruges. In recent years, VIVES and Mintus have conducted extensive research in this field.*

The research into useful care technologies for older residents of Bruges was very broad. It included analyses of adapted communication tools and apps, of equipment for a meaningful use of time, of support for daily activities and of the existing offer of tailor-made appliances. The criteria for evaluation were laid down and a thorough evaluation was made. In this way, the Age'in project enabled Mintus to invest in a wide range of new (care) technologies: adapted mobile phones and tablets for older adults, robot assistants and pets, technological household assistance, calendar clocks, and mobility, vision and hearing support devices.

In addition to the product analysis, the project partners also focused on two other objectives: making the older residents of Bruges familiar with innovative care technologies and starting up a service for free technological advice and support.



## From the research phase to implementation in the neighbourhood

Age'in Brugge has been organising pop-up events titled 'Healthy and fit in your own home' since October 2021. These demonstration afternoons, aimed at older local residents and informal carers, take place in various community centres in Bruges. During the pop-up events, visitors are given the opportunity to experiment with new, innovative care technologies under the guidance of students of the VIVES Hogeschool occupational therapy bachelor programme and of a professional, Zoë from Mintus. The participants – who were able to learn at their own pace, in small groups, and were given ample opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns – rated these intergenerational learning sessions as particularly positive. They also appreciated the opportunity for personal contact with other people. So far, approximately two hundred older inhabitants of Bruges have taken part. The aim is to continue stimulating curiosity and openness to new technology through regular information sessions in community centres and senior citizens' associations.

... *The key to introducing new technology to older adults, who each have their own personal story, is making time and talking.*



## From the neighbourhood to the resident

The participants in the pop-up events are also introduced to a new service offered by Mintus: 'Langer thuis in eigen huis' (ageing in place), where an occupational therapist offers free advice at home to elderly inhabitants of Bruges. Together, they look for ways to improve the life quality at home and for possible home modifications. Thanks to 'Langer thuis in eigen huis', older adults can obtain free tailored advice, can have the technology installed in their home, can have the technology explained to them and can test it. 'Langer thuis in eigen huis' does not, however, sell or promote any products, but refers to professional retailers for this. The relatively new service quickly revealed the importance of personal contact when introducing technology to seniors. The key to introducing new technology to older adults, who each have their own personal story, is making time and talking to each other.

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\* **OCMW Brugge** is the  
Bruges Social Service Department

\* **Vives** is the university college  
of applied sciences in Bruges.

\* **MINTUS** is the name of the  
service for senior care in Bruges.

Are you interested in offering innovative  
care technology services yourself?  
Or are you looking for inspiration and  
ideas for your own pop-up events?

Contact Rebecca Denys,  
Innovation Manager at Mintus:  
[rebecca.denys@mintus.be](mailto:rebecca.denys@mintus.be)

## Three lessons learned

- Much of the technology is app- or smartphone-driven. To make technology really accessible, you also need to offer courses about/an introduction to smartphone use.
- It is not enough to show the possibilities of new technologies, you also need to offer support and follow-up at home.
- If you organise a pop-up event for older adults about technology, you should also make sure that there is enough time for a casual chat. A good, relaxed atmosphere will make the participants even more receptive.





Online  
procedures  
accessible  
to all



*At Centre Social Éclaté in Saint-Martin-Boulogne, the Interreg 2 Seas AGE'IN European project financed 'Oupi', an administrative touchscreen 'kiosk' terminal for one of the Neighbourhood Centres. In 2021, 1119 inhabitants used this new service in the three Neighbourhood Centres of Centre Social Éclaté. Yacine Diallo is the European Project Coordinator of the Centre Social Éclaté. She is also in charge of monitoring the AGE'IN project for the community centre. She explains the opportunities of a digital terminal that informs inhabitants about their rights and facilitates online procedures.*

Yacine Diallo



**Yacine, can you explain your role in the AGE'IN project?**

I would say that my role mainly consists in creating a link between the elderly visitors to our centre, the employees involved in the project and the European partnership. I report on the needs and difficulties we encountered, the solutions we have implemented to tackle them and our successes, but also on the things that did not work. I also share the best practices of our partners with the teams to improve the daily support we offer to seniors. And I am in charge of the communication about the project.

**Why and how did you develop the Oupi kiosk?**

The trend to reduce paperwork in administrative procedures and documents (such as taxes, health, social aid and retirement applications) has encouraged us to offer a service adapted to the needs and new demands of inhabitants. In addition, the health crisis forced us to organise an information point that is accessible to the public at any time. Our colleagues at the Centres Sociaux Connectés du Boulonnais project have been working on a project for a few months. They are making a platform for the inhabitants that will gather all the information they need in their daily life. The team proposed to add useful links for seniors, in addition to those already planned (e.g. link to the pages about housing adaptation grants or to the retirement planning website).

**How can Oupi be used, in particular by the most digitally illiterate seniors?**

*Oupi* is a digital touchscreen terminal that allows inhabitants – especially seniors – to access information and useful links for online procedures. It is also accessible online via [www.ouipi.fr](http://www.ouipi.fr). Both the terminal and the website can be used free of charge. Inhabitants can also request assistance from a digital mediator, who is trained and authorised to collect and process personal data. The mediators also make house calls for those who are unable to come to our Neighbourhood Centre. He or she can also offer remote support (by telephone or video call). *Oupi* is a very good digital inclusion tool that can be used on a daily basis by the inhabitants and by our employees. It helps us to better inform seniors about their rights and helps reduce the digital divide in the neighbourhoods.

### Which links are most used on the *Ouipi* terminal?

Not surprisingly, the most clicked links lead to administrative sites about taxes and retirement procedures. In our region, the registration page on online platform of the waste disposal centre is also very popular. It has recently been equipped with a license plate reader and it is no longer possible to enter without registering first. Inhabitants regularly ask our digital mediators to help them register on this website.



Do you want to know more about *Ouipi* or about the possibilities of a digital terminal in your neighbourhood?

Contact Yacine Diallo, European Projects Coordinator, by sending an e-mail to [europe@centresocialeclate.com](mailto:europe@centresocialeclate.com)

## Three lessons learned

Can you give us three valuable lessons or tips if we consider implementing such a terminal?

- Use trained mediators who can reassure and support seniors when using digital technology.
- Find out what works best. For example: combining a digital screen and a keypad makes it easier for seniors to use the terminal.
- Keep in mind that the needs of the inhabitants evolve. Update the links on the terminal regularly.

A photograph of a presentation or training session. In the foreground, a person's hands are visible holding a smartphone. In the background, a man stands next to a whiteboard, pointing at it. The whiteboard contains handwritten text: "gehi", "App", "beginnen", and "DO". The room has large windows and a table with a cup and saucer.

As smart  
as your phone



*The digital age offers many opportunities for seniors. The list of possibilities to communicate using a computer, tablet or smartphone is almost endless. However, the rapid evolution of digital communication is not without its challenges and downsides. Not everyone has a computer or smartphone. And if they do have one, who will help them get started?*

Age'in Brugge talked to both partners from the service sector and to older residents of Bruges about the opportunities and limitations in the field of digital literacy. Digital literacy has been high on the priority list for the City of Bruges and for Mintus for several years now. Hands-on computer, tablet and smartphone courses are offered in the community centres. In the libraries, the 'Digidokters' help resolve issues with computers and digital communication. Conversations and interviews with care providers and with older adults have revealed that senior residents still experience difficulties with digital communication itself and with accessing the available training opportunities. Two factors seem to play a role here. A number of older adults appear not to be interested in modern technology. In many cases, however, this is because they feel suspicious and insecure about using it. In addition, some people live too far away from a community centre. For them, the distance can be too great an obstacle for attending a course. Especially for the most vulnerable older adults, the threshold for being introduced to and learning about modern communication technology is simply too high.

... *A number of older adults appear not to be interested in modern technology. In many cases, however, this is because they feel suspicious and insecure about using it.*

## The role of the neighbourhood

Within the framework of the Age'in project, we examined how and with which partners we could respond to this challenge. The neighbourhood committee of De Meersen in Bruges was found willing to think about this. With its annual activities, the committee reaches most of the local residents, including the older adults. The committee decided to work thematically and to give priority to the use of smartphones. Seniors were asked to fill in a questionnaire, and their questions and concerns were inventoried. The responses given by approximately thirty seniors provided an excellent starting point for developing a tailor-made training programme. Our partner LIGO Brugge, that has built expertise in providing basic education, was prepared to draw up a training programme tailored to the needs of the neighbourhood. They worked out four question-driven workshops 'smartphone for beginners', which focused on basic smartphone use. The number of participants was limited to ten. This allowed them to work more efficiently and offer personal guidance. Devices were provided to those who did not own a smartphone. There was always time for a chat and a cup of coffee as well.

... *The question-driven workshops focus on basic smartphone use.*

## In the heart of the neighbourhood

Apart from the neighbourhood committee and LIGO, a third partner was involved: *Huis met vele kamers* (A House with many rooms). Located in the heart of the neighbourhood, *Huis met vele kamers* offers meeting possibilities, activities and training sessions for mentally vulnerable people. At the same time, *Huis met vele kamers* wants to have more interconnection with the neighbourhood and its residents. They were more than happy to provide the necessary space for the workshops. The first workshops took place in October and November 2021. The feedback we received from the participants revealed several positive effects.





The participants say that their interest in and knowledge of the smartphone has clearly increased. They also tell us that the threshold to participate is much lower, because the sessions are organised close to their homes, which also means that they are more likely to know some of the participants. Some people added that they motivated each other to come to the workshop together. They also said that, in their opinion, meeting other local residents is at least as important as the course itself. We also noticed that the participants became more familiar with the project of *Huis met vele kamers*. They are now more inclined to go into the public meeting room and have a drink or to participate in certain activities.

Age'in Bruges wants to continue using the expertise gained by partners and locally embedded initiatives. Small projects like these provide us with the necessary information, knowledge and experience to continue focusing on providing services that are tailored to the needs of older adults in Bruges, even after the project has ended.

**Interested in developing training sessions about digital communication? Looking for tips and tricks on how to organise training sessions that are tailored to the needs of your neighbourhood?**

Contact Vrijwilligerscentrale Brugge by sending an e-mail to [lien.dereere@brugge.be](mailto:lien.dereere@brugge.be).

## Three lessons learned

- A participative and co-creative project, based on the concrete needs and questions of the senior neighbourhood residents, is necessary to develop a tailor-made training offer.
- Small groups are preferable for smartphone training classes. Some information can be provided to the entire class, but individual guidance and support is a must.
- Seniors have markedly different levels of knowledge about smartphone use. If you give it some time, the trust will grow and they will teach and learn from each other.

# Meet the projectpartners

AGE'IN UK

Nigel Clark



DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE  
AND ESTATES – AGE UK  
CORNWALL (ENGLAND)

Kelvin Yates



COMMUNITY WELLBEING  
MANAGER – AGE UK  
CORNWALL (ENGLAND)

Tracey Roose



CHIEF EXECUTIVE –  
AGE UK  
CORNWALL (ENGLAND)

## A time of learning and reshaping support for seniors

**Nigel Clark**

I have worked in the care sector for over 24 years and have never known a time like the past two years. Covid-19 reared its head around the time the Age'in team met in Sluis, Netherlands in March 2020 and the issues that older people had to face in their normal lives have been multiplied due to the lockdowns that have followed since. This has been a time of learning for all those involved in supporting older people and the value of working with organisations and agencies from the four countries involved in this project has been most beneficial.

We have been able to adapt how we work to ensure that loneliness and isolation can be reduced by offering a new way of engagement. When we look back in the future, The Age'in project will have had a vital part to play in the support of so many people.

## It's about what matters to people, not what's the matter with them!

**Kelvin Yates**

I joined Age UK Cornwall and the Age'In project at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and the UK was going into lockdown. It has fundamentally changed the way we all communicate and interact with each other, and this has made things more difficult for seniors (older people). We have learned to adopt new ways of engaging with people. The Age'In project provided opportunity to work with colleagues across Europe; it has been helpful to hear about the different solutions being adopted, and adapted, and helped reinforce the belief in our approach. We have questioned long-established practices and refined them, adopted new ones and constantly sought to improve intergenerational links across our communities. We have shifted away from 'what's wrong with you?' to 'what matters to you?' and providing support in response. The Age'In project has given us the confidence to try new ways of working and has influenced the way we will deliver our services in the future.


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## We should never lose the opportunity to explore something new

**Tracey Roose**

Working with support practitioners across health and social care constantly highlights many of the hurdles faced by our ageing communities; social isolation, information deprivation and financial challenges amongst many others. It raises questions about how we can best identify those needing support, what the support should be, and how we provide it. As a charitable organisation, how do we make our offer complementary to that provided by government agencies and services? How do we engage other organisations like us and encourage them to work in a collaborative way? The people we work with want to age at home, and with the communities that matter to them, meaning we need to consider place-based and person-centred support, putting the individual at the heart of what we do.

The Age'in project gave us a chance to explore models of 'doing the right thing' as opposed to a governmental expectation of 'doing things right' to meet terms of contracts. Working with partners across the Age'In project has demonstrated there is a common and shared aspiration to help seniors (older people) live a life of their choosing. The goal of inspiring individuals and communities to age well is one we are embracing for the future.

A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together. The hand on the left is younger and has a purple sleeve. The hand on the right is older, with visible wrinkles, and wears a gold ring and a silver watch. The background is blurred, showing a person in a blue face mask. The text 'Connecting people through shared experience' is overlaid in white on a teal background.

Connecting  
people through  
shared  
experience

... *In a digital world  
I am me, I am not  
my age, I am not  
my condition, I am,  
and can be, myself.*

Age UK Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (England) have been supporting older people (seniors) since 1972. We have seen many changes in the way people interact with each other and their communities, not least of which has been the advent of digital technologies, such as mobile phones, computers and the internet. Organisations, activity groups and information about what is happening where and when has moved away from local newspapers, magazines and village notice boards to online digital platforms. It has not all migrated at the same time, or to the same digital platforms. Many people have not kept pace with the development and evolution of digital information and have become information and digitally deprived, in many cases leading to isolation and loneliness.

... *I don't know what's  
happening anymore,  
the local paper has  
gone and the village  
noticeboard only shows  
email addresses,  
I don't have, or want,  
a computer.*

## The Cornwall Link Platform

These comments reflect the sentiments of many clients, and to a significant extent some of the smaller local community groups and organisations, who in turn have not known how to reach out to potential members in the evolving digitalisation of information. We took the decision to initiate a community platform for communities, led by communities. We worked with a local developer, 'Made Open', who understood the challenges being faced and wanted to simplify access to information that connected and supported communities. We worked together to develop and launch the Cornwall Link Platform with the firm intention it would be a single point of access to find out what was happening in the community. We worked with a range of community representatives for both geographic communities, and those of shared interest / identities, such as rural, farming, coastal, fishing and condition-specific including dementia and cancer.

... *I have never used a  
computer, I don't know  
what the internet is,  
I need someone to  
show me.*



Alongside the development of Cornwall Link, we recruited people who would be prepared to act as 'champions' to sit with and support individuals, groups and organisations. The Champions support those with no, or little, knowledge of using digital technology, even down to the basics of how to turn on and off the equipment being used. This enables us to keep our own ambitions and aspirations grounded in basic functional digital literacy. We worked closely with other projects and local government initiatives to make sure we were reaching, and supporting, as many people as possible to build information technology skills. Cornwall Link evolved into a simple-to-use, single point of access, directory of activities, support, and services that mattered to individuals and communities. It was just becoming embedded as the recommended go-to source of information as 2018 progressed. The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent control measures then provoked a whole new emphasis on connecting people and information as we entered 2019.

... *I have pressed pause on my life, and although I'm dying to resume it, I don't even know if there's a play button there anymore.*

Through our work and projects, it quickly became clear some communities were disproportionately impacted than others, and of particular note were those affected by cancer and veterans, both communities highly dependent on information and connectivity. We worked with Macmillan Cancer Support and local veteran support organisations who, like us, run projects funded by The Armed Forces Covenant Trust, to set up two campaigns on Cornwall Link. For cancer we set up Creating Cancer Caring Communities, and for Veterans we set up Cornwall Veterans Should Not Be Forgotten, both with the aim to link these two vulnerable groups with information and support.

... *You have set me on a journey – a good start to improving my understanding, knowing where to look for further resources and help, and being able to discuss cancer in a professional and supportive way, thank you.*

## The Creating Cancer Caring Communities campaign

For the Creating Cancer Caring Communities we adapted our cancer awareness training to be delivered online. We provided the training to our Macmillan Team so they could assist and support the ongoing programme. We then proactively identified individuals from communities we work with who could work with as Community Navigators, and arranged for them to receive Macmillan Cancer Awareness Training. By delivering the training online we were able to overcome the Covid-19 restrictions, geographical boundaries as well as making it open to adults of all ages. Unfortunately, due to the Covid restrictions we were unable to engage with children through schools as we originally envisaged, as schools were closed for a long time. In the early stages we worked with those able to engage digitally, but as time went on and their experience and confidence grew we were able to recruit less IT experienced and confident participants on to the programme, and arranged for them to have IT support as and when it was required. These courses quickly proved very popular, not only connecting individuals to support, but building their connectivity to their communities and peers.

... *Our Community Navigators will be your researchers and guides when you're in a tough place.*

Throughout Covid-19, our Macmillan Team and Community Navigators worked with individuals, their families and other support services to connect them with information and support that mattered to them. For those directly affected by cancer, the benefits were significant.

... *I didn't know how much I was missing! It's one of the most wonderful things ever done for me. It's brilliant, a godsend.*

## The Cornwall Veterans Should Not Be Forgotten campaign

Veterans of our armed forces and their families face their own challenges of social isolation and IT challenges. Whilst many of the younger veterans and their families are proficient with the use of IT, they were not familiar with using it as a routeway to support. Among the older veterans and their families there is a noticeable correlation between age and confidence with IT, generally the older the veteran and their families, the less confident they are. We worked with our Macmillan colleagues and other veteran support colleagues across a range of organisations to ensure those who needed support were able to access it, particularly those who were suffering from mental health-related conditions such as Post Traumatic Shock Disorder (PTSD). Our campaign quickly drew interest from many involved with the Armed Forces Communities, meaning we were able to connect veterans and their families to support even in the strictest periods of Covid restrictions. This included a bespoke green space activity in a rural part of Cornwall where veterans could meet outdoors to connect with other veterans and participate in a range of practical activities, such as woodwork, forestry and farm work to build confidence and a sense of inclusion. Once they were connected to this and other appropriate support, they quickly grew peer support networks, across all service backgrounds and age groups. Of particular note was a young girl veteran, in her early twenties, from the air force who had experienced a traumatic event and had established a rapport with an army veteran in his eighties. They had barely spoken to anyone else, but established a strong bond and communicated in many ways including Skype, a whole new experience for the army veteran.

... *Talking with other veterans and being able to connect with them at all times, no matter where they are in the county, is a good thing. When a dark hour looms, there's someone who knows what it's like. We have spent many an hour on Skype, or a mobile, saying nothing aloud, but saying so much. Thank you.*

This green space activity not only supported veterans, it also supports teenagers who have had difficult life experiences and there is a connectivity between both groups. Unfortunately, due to Covid and the resulting restrictions this is an area of intergenerational work we have not been able to develop as we would have liked. Many of the veterans here carry their own mental health challenges from childhood that service has brought to the fore. They see themselves in the young people we support here.

... *My smartphone and Cornwall Link have saved my life. I look at things differently now. I thought no one cared, I am amazed how much help there is in the world inside my phone.*

## A concrete success story

These projects and the work done have supported many through difficult times. The importance of digital literacy has been highlighted by the Covid pandemic, yet beacons of success still stand out. We worked with an older veteran who lived a nomadic lifestyle across South West England, he suffered from PTSD and could not settle anywhere. He had been given a smartphone by a homeless support charity which he took everywhere with him. He came to Cornwall during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, but then fell unwell. The usual sources of community support were closed due to Covid, so he used his smartphone to try and get help. He came across the Cornwall Veterans Should Not Be Forgotten campaign on the Cornwall Link platform and made contact reaching out for help. As a veteran, he could be connected with priority health support, which led to a cancer diagnosis and treatment. The swift action meant he was quickly fit again, but he was keen to know more. He participated in our Macmillan Cancer Awareness training and became part of the Macmillan befriending service and is now considering options for settling somewhere.

## Three lessons learned

- Age UK Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (England) operate in an area that has a unique combination of extensive coastal and rural communities. It is plagued by poor digital connectivity, which even during 'normal times' has struggled to offset the decline of localised industry and business. We knew this, but Covid-19 has taught us that once the ability to travel to resources, or for resources to travel to where the need is and that information and support networks quickly fade.
- We reacted quickly with a digital solution, but learned that digital literacy and accessibility can quickly negate the effectiveness, so it's important to bolster it with IT support, sometimes even with the provision of IT equipment, to build confidence and skillsets.
- A third learning point is that it's important to work in partnership with those with a shared aim, a shared desire to support those with need and what matters to them. Working with our Interreg colleagues has shown there are geographical and political variations, yet the fundamental need for digital literacy across communities and generations is consistent. Despite the geographical and political variations, it is an honour to be part of a project that wants to overcome digital and information deprivation so that we can all age well.

To find out more about the Cornwall Link platform ([www.cornwall-link.co.uk](http://www.cornwall-link.co.uk)) and the campaigns please contact us: by mail [email@ageukcornwall.org.uk](mailto:email@ageukcornwall.org.uk) or telephone UK (+44) 872 266383

A black and white photograph of a large group of children and two adults standing in front of a building with many windows. The children are arranged in several rows, some sitting on the ground in the front, while the two adults stand at the back. The building in the background has a series of windows with dark frames.

# A lifetime in Ostrohove

stories from  
yesterday to today





Within the framework of the AGE'IN project in France, the residents of Ostrohove wrote a book, tracing the history of their neighbourhood since the 1930s.

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## In the beginning, there were memories

The Centre Social Éclaté offers activities for seniors in its Neighbourhood Homes, which are located in the heart of the three neighbourhoods of Saint-Martin-Boulogne: Marlborough, Centre and Ostrohove. The atmosphere is always cheerful and the activities offer the inhabitants the opportunity to spend time together, to talk about what current events, to tell old stories about the neighbourhood and to share memories. "What if we wrote all our memories in a book, so that we don't forget them and can pass them on to others?" This somewhat crazy idea of twelve senior inhabitants of Ostrohove led to the creation of the Ostrohove Neighbourhood Home Memory Group.

## A book is born!

For two years, the group collected testimonies from the neighbourhood's residents, looked for photos of the period and regularly consulted the city archives to document their project. Together with a wellbeing worker, they visited all the neighbourhood's inhabitants to present their project and asked them to share their memories. Attracted by the idea, other residents joined the collective and started researching and writing. The participants met several times a week at the Ostrohove Neighbourhood House of the Éclaté Social Centre to write the book *A lifetime in Ostrohove – Stories from yesterday to today*. They were assisted by several professionals: a historian – passionate about and specialized in the history of the town of Saint-Martin-Boulogne – and Isabelle Clauzel, who helped the team in their research work and gave workshops on writing historical texts.



A group of artists – Le Laboratoire d'humanité – led the writing, layout and publication process of the book.

It was an opportunity for the seniors to share how proud they are of their neighbourhood, but also to meet new people and discover the different processes and skills involved in creating a book. With a first-edition run of two hundred copies in 2020, a second edition of the book soon followed. It is a real tool for passing on the heritage of the town of Saint-Martin-Boulogne and for intergenerational sharing. The book is used in primary schools, including the Jean Rostand primary school in Ostrohove, to explain the evolution of the town after the Second World War. The book has also been used to create playful activities and trails (e.g. a geocaching game), explaining the history of the neighbourhood.

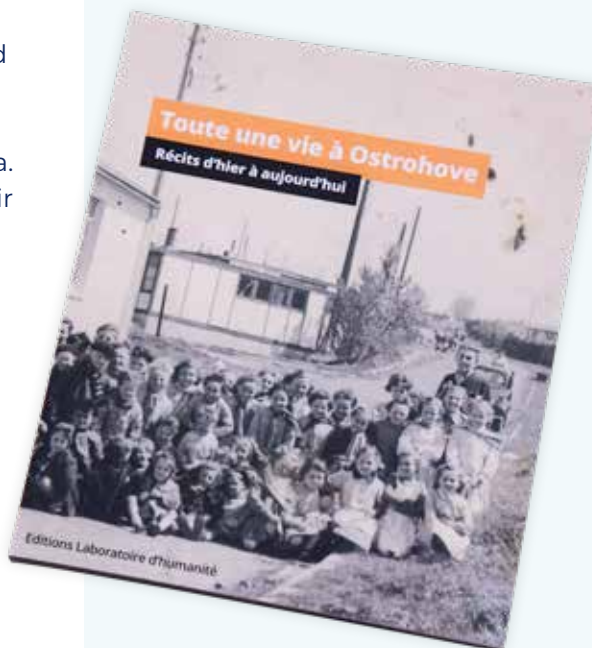
## And they read happily ever after

Encouraging exchanges and encounters, the experience was very enriching for both inhabitants and professionals. *A lifetime in Ostrohove* brought together an entire neighbourhood, strengthening the bonds of solidarity. The budding writers were also proud to pass on this book to their children and grandchildren. Upon reading the book, you feel how proud they are to be living in this area. The inhabitants are always happy to share their anecdotes with passing visitors. The book has inspired other partners of the agglomeration community on our territory (Le Nautilus and CCAS of Boulogne-sur-Mer), as well as the project partners of Age'in Bruges, Belgium. Bruges started organising intergenerational classes about the second World War. You can read more about their project in their article 'When generations learn from each other'.

For more information, visit our website [centresocialeclate.centres-sociaux.fr](https://centresocialeclate.centres-sociaux.fr) or contact Yacine Diallo by e-mail [europe@centresocialeclate.com](mailto:europe@centresocialeclate.com)

## Three lessons learned

- Sharing memories is all about unifying and bringing together all generations. The older people are always happy to talk about their memories and the younger people like to talk about their lives today. It is a time of sharing and caring.
- Involving professionals (for the research and writing of the book) further enhances the commitment of the participants. It allows them to learn new things during each session: a perfect and stimulating moment to train their memory!
- Fear of writer's block? Keep in mind that writing a book is like a marathon. You need to motivate the participants regularly to avoid them losing interest in the project. Suggest outdoor time, visits, photo sharing, etc.





# Age'in and animals

a great match!

'Le Nautilus' is Boulogne-sur-Mer's social centre. It is home to a team of professionals and volunteers who develop activities for all demographics. The AGE'IN project was a unique opportunity for this French-speaking 'age-friendly city' – and more particularly for the social centre – to develop and improve activities tailored to seniors within a dedicated department.

## A new solution to a new problem

During to the Covid-19 pandemic, the elderly felt a stronger need to be together. The lockdown exacerbated social isolation among seniors and affected their mental and emotional health (e.g. depression, anxiety). This became very clear during the calls made by the team at Nautilus with their visitors to keep in touch, but also during the telephone conversations made to the Covid-19 number the city created. Inhabitants called this number to ask questions and share their needs. This caused 'Le Nautilus' to organise more activities focused on social links and mental health. After group discussions with seniors, the team came up with a very original idea: animal mediation.

### Three lessons learned

- Flexibility is key. Because of the lockdown and its consequences, we had to adopt the way the team's working methods: carrying out phone sessions, developing new activities, working individually ...
- Animal mediation demands a lot from the coaching team. It is important to take into account that the confrontation with the seniors' private life and personal problems is not always easy.
- Try new things! This initiative, which was new to the social centre and to the participants, helped all nine very isolated seniors find their way back to Nautilus and to its regular activities.

## Animal mediation


From January to March 2021, a group of nine inhabitants older than 55 attended animal mediation sessions, organised twice a week with the support of the Sev&You association, which organises zootherapy workshops. The participants had been identified as particularly isolated during the phone call sessions and even refused to come back to Le Nautilus' or to take part in group sessions. The animal meditation allowed the participants to self-reflect and to get a better understanding of their own needs while taking care of dogs or horses. Building a relationship with an animal helps older people express their feelings. The first sessions took place on location. This was followed by group sessions at Le Nautilus. The most important objective of those group sessions, led by Sev&You, was to increase self-confidence by taking care of animals.

On the one hand, the workshop leader was able to understand certain issues thanks to the animals. On the other hand, it helped the attendees build respective trust. The elderly accepted to share intimate things, which was highly therapeutic. At the end of each session, participants wrote down objectives for themselves and tried to implement them before the next meeting. These objectives were usually very 'down-to-earth', like accepting to meet people, getting out more often etc.

"Positive things happened during the sessions" said an elderly woman living in the neighbourhood. Others added: "It allows us to talk about more personal topics". These testimonies emphasised the group dynamic built between the participants. Animal meditation has been very helpful for both the group and for each individual participant. A participant told us: "These sessions made me reflect a lot about myself and helped me to accept the evolution of my illness."

### Do you want to know more about our experiences concerning animal mediation? Curious about organising this yourself?

Contact Fanny Mampasi Nsika, Référente seniors Centre Socio-Culturel Le Nautilus in Boulogne-sur-Mer, by phone (0033 321 308 394) or by e-mail: [referent.seniors@ville-boulogne-sur-mer.fr](mailto:referent.seniors@ville-boulogne-sur-mer.fr).



When  
generations  
learn  
from each  
other



- ... *In Bruges, we worked out whether we could transform the concept of nursing home classrooms into a 'lesson' or a 'series of lessons' in a Bruges community centre.*

*The Age'in project wants to promote intergenerational contacts and encounters. Connecting generations leads to mutual understanding and respect between youngsters and older people, two demographics strongly impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. The many lockdown measures had an impact on school life and the direct contacts of young people with their peers. Older people were even more socially isolated than before. Consequently, finding a project that connects both target audiences, was a challenge we were happy to take on.*

The French project partners at *Centre Social Éclaté* in Saint-Martin-Boulogne set up a project in 2019 and 2020 in which they wrote a book together with older residents of Ostrohave, a historian and several artists. The book is called '*A lifetime in Ostrohave – Stories from yesterday to today*'. The goal was to assemble the residents' memories about their neighbourhood and to look at how these evolved in recent decades. This book allows younger generations to read more about the residents' insights and experiences. The idea inspired the Bruges Age'in team to set up a project as well.

## Inspiration for a new concept

The Bruges Age'in project team first encountered the concept of the so-called nursing home classrooms in 2019. In 2014, an elementary school from Vinkt (Belgium) started cooperating with the local nursing home to create an intergenerational classroom where the nursing home's residents and pupils in the last year of primary school learned with and from each other on a regular basis. Organising an intergenerational activity at the neighbourhood level, like in Saint-Martin-Boulogne, fitted in perfectly with this concept. In Bruges, we worked out whether we could transform both concepts into a 'lesson' or a 'series of lessons' in a Bruges community centre. The following questions were asked: Is it possible to unite older visitors with young pupils? Can this encounter be a mutual learning process? What is a good theme to start with?

- ... *The community centre's visitors belong to the last generation that can testify first-hand about the years before, during and after the second World War.*



## The last generation

Karel Meuleman, who is in charge of Bruges community centre 'de Balsemboom', noticed that older visitors often compared the 2020 and 2021 lockdowns with their personal experience of being socially isolated during World War II. The memories they shared with each other about daily life in Bruges in the 1940s were still vivid. As it was noticeable how good it did them to talk, we worked out the idea of organising an intergenerational lesson in the community centre. The community centre's visitors belong to the last generation that can testify first-hand about the years before, during and after World War II. Their knowledge and experiences allow younger generations to learn about the consequences of war on day-to-day life. The intergenerational encounters are the perfect opportunity to listen to youngsters and to get to know their world and insights.

## Generations in dialogue

Community centre 'de Balsemboom' and the pupils in the fifth year of primary school 'Sint-Leo Hemelsdaele' are the two partners involved in the intergenerational lesson. The first lessons were planned for the fall of 2021, but postponed until May 2022 because of the Covid-19 measures. The lesson plans were drawn up during co-creation sessions with the partners. The following three elements were emphasized to appeal to all participants' competences: enough time to get acquainted and to have a conversation (pupils learn about the community centre, visitors have conversations with pupils ...), variation in ways of working (gathering and processing information together, games and competitions ...) and variation in methods (videos, mutual interviews, quizzes ...). Finally, after the lesson, visitors and pupils can give their feedback, which is then used to further develop the concept of intergenerational lessons at the neighbourhood level and to offer the lessons to interested community centres and schools in Bruges, if possible.

## Three lessons learned

- Connecting generations starts with enabling mutual trust. Plan enough time for getting acquainted and having personal conversations.
- During intergenerational lessons, both parties should bring in information. Use tasks, methods and ways of working for which the youngsters and the older people need each other.
- Prepare both target audiences well. It is important that the participants know beforehand what the goal of the lesson is, what is expected from them and how the encounter will go.



**Do you want to know how your own community centre can involve older visitors in intergenerational lessons?**  
**Do you want more information about the theme and/or the visitors' or children's experiences?**

Contact Karel Meuleman, who is in charge of the Bruges community centre 'De Balsemboom':  
[karel.meuleman@mintus.be](mailto:karel.meuleman@mintus.be).

# Infographics

# detection strategy



# training to detect loneliness

## STUDY & RESEARCH

- What is loneliness?
- How to recognise it?
- Useful actions and interventions?



## DETECTION TRAINING

### LONELINESS



social and emotional  
experience

### RISK FACTORS



character  
social position

### SIGNS



fysical social  
behavioural psychological

### ACTIONS



enable discussion  
with person

link up with care  
services when needed

## CROSSBORDER DISSEMINATION

### TRAIN THE TRAINERS

Bruges January 2020  
French partners: staff and volunteers



## INTEGRATION & USE IN FRANCE

### TRAINING DISSEMINATION



Project ambassadors  
in neighbourhoods

### INTEGRATION IN PROJECTS



Projects *Aller vers*  
& *Phone watch*

# differentiation compass

## WHO ARE THE ELDERLY?



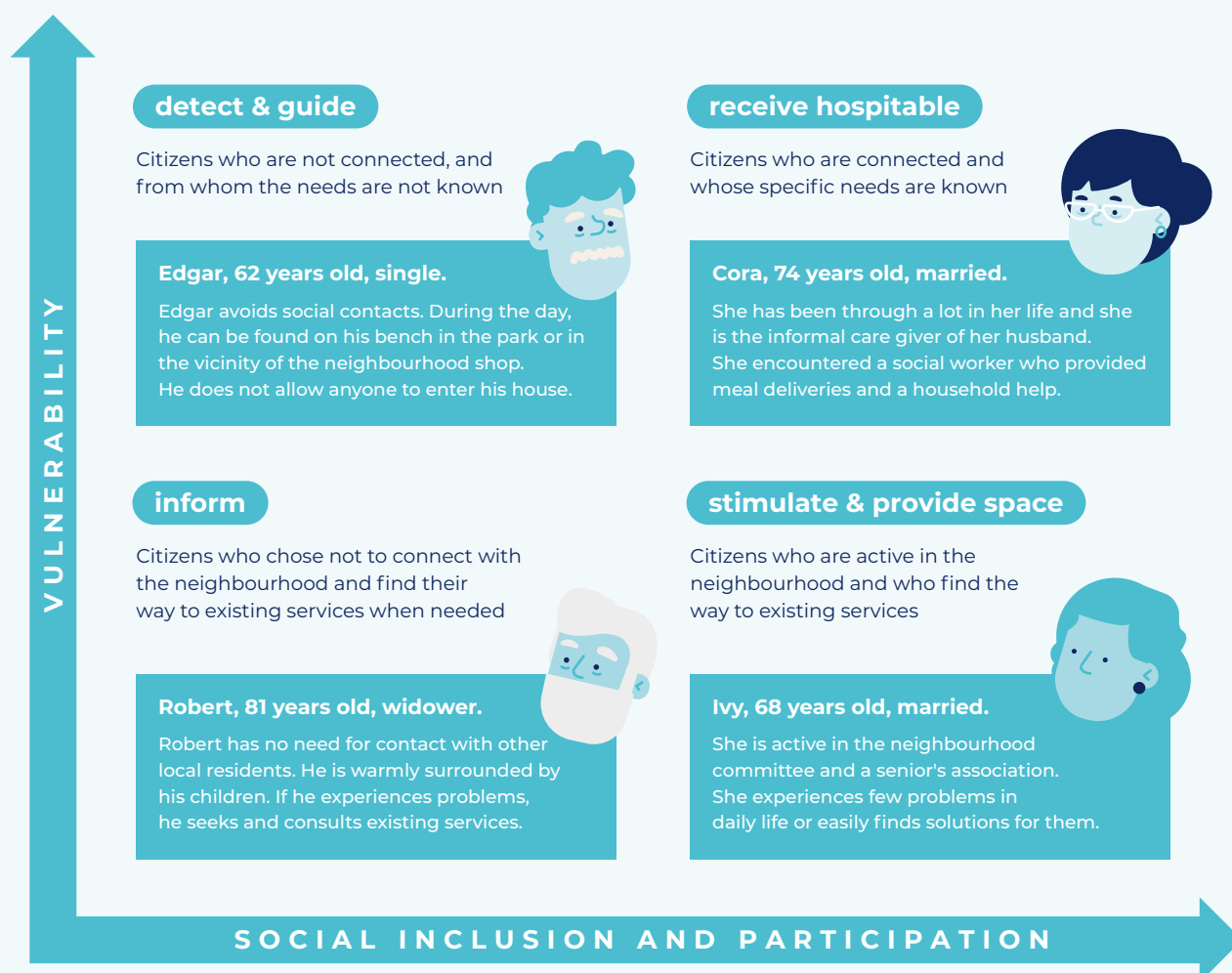
- Impact of their vulnerability?
- Impact of their participation level in neighbourhood?



## INTERVIEWS ELDERLY & CARETAKERS



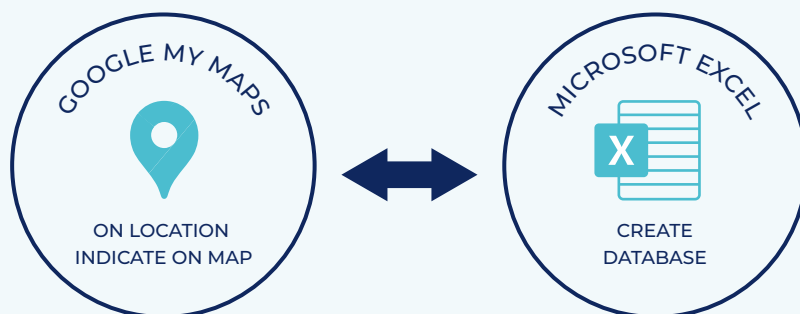
## DIFFERENTIATION / ADJUSTED ACTION & STORYFRAME





# mapping method

## COLLECT & REGISTER DATA



1

ADD ADDRESS OR  
INDICATION ON MAP



2

NAME PARTNER OR  
CONTACT PERSON



3

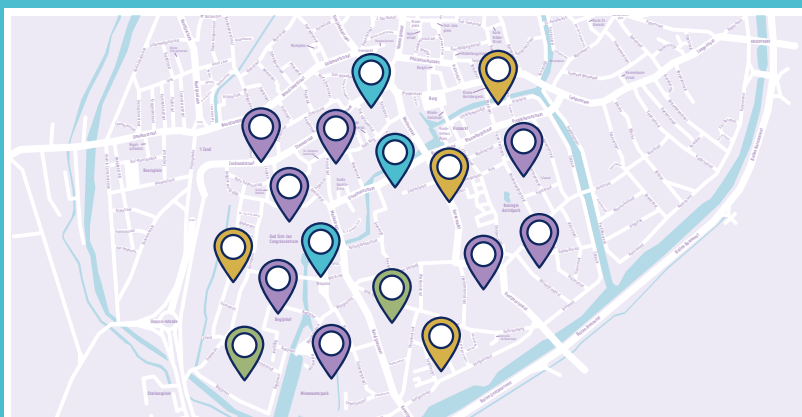
CATEGORIZE:  
PARTNER ROLE /  
TARGET GROUP

## VISUALIZE

### Partners and target groups

#### ▼ CATEGORIE

- Partner Broad Advice (17)
- Ivy's (16)
- Partner Neighbourhood (16)
- Partner Outreach (4)
- ...



## ANALYSE & ADJUST

- **DISCOVER COVERAGE RATIO:** social cohesion of the area and the scopes of your partners
- **DISCOVER THE 'GAPS':** lack of social cohesion or (partner) projects
- **ADJUST NEW PROJECTS/ACTIVITIES/COOPERATIONS** with your findings

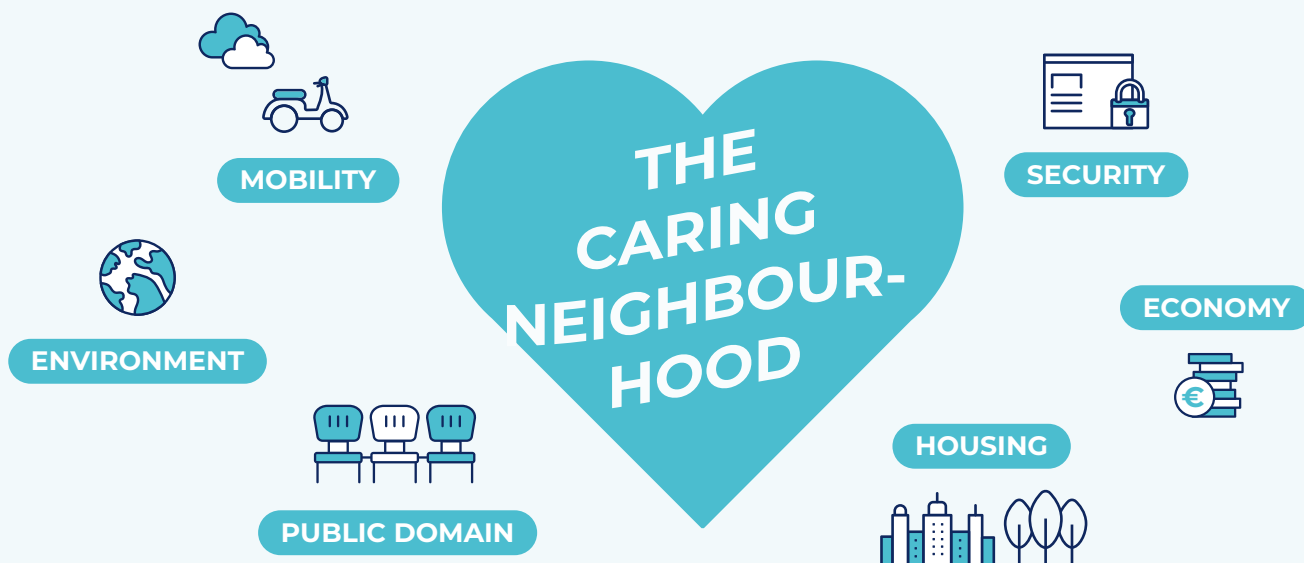
# role clarification model

**Research & study:**  
neighbourhood structures

**Consultation partners:**  
innovation managers, policy officers ...

## RESILIENT NEIGHBOURHOOD

All the available resources that enable the neighbourhood to respond to the growing elderly population

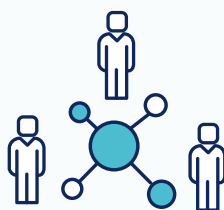


### BROAD ADVICE CARE AT HOME



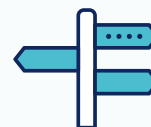
Occupational Therapist,  
Nurses ...

### CREATING STRONG NEIGHBOURHOOD CONNECTIONS



Social centres, Neighbourhood committees,  
Projects and activities ...

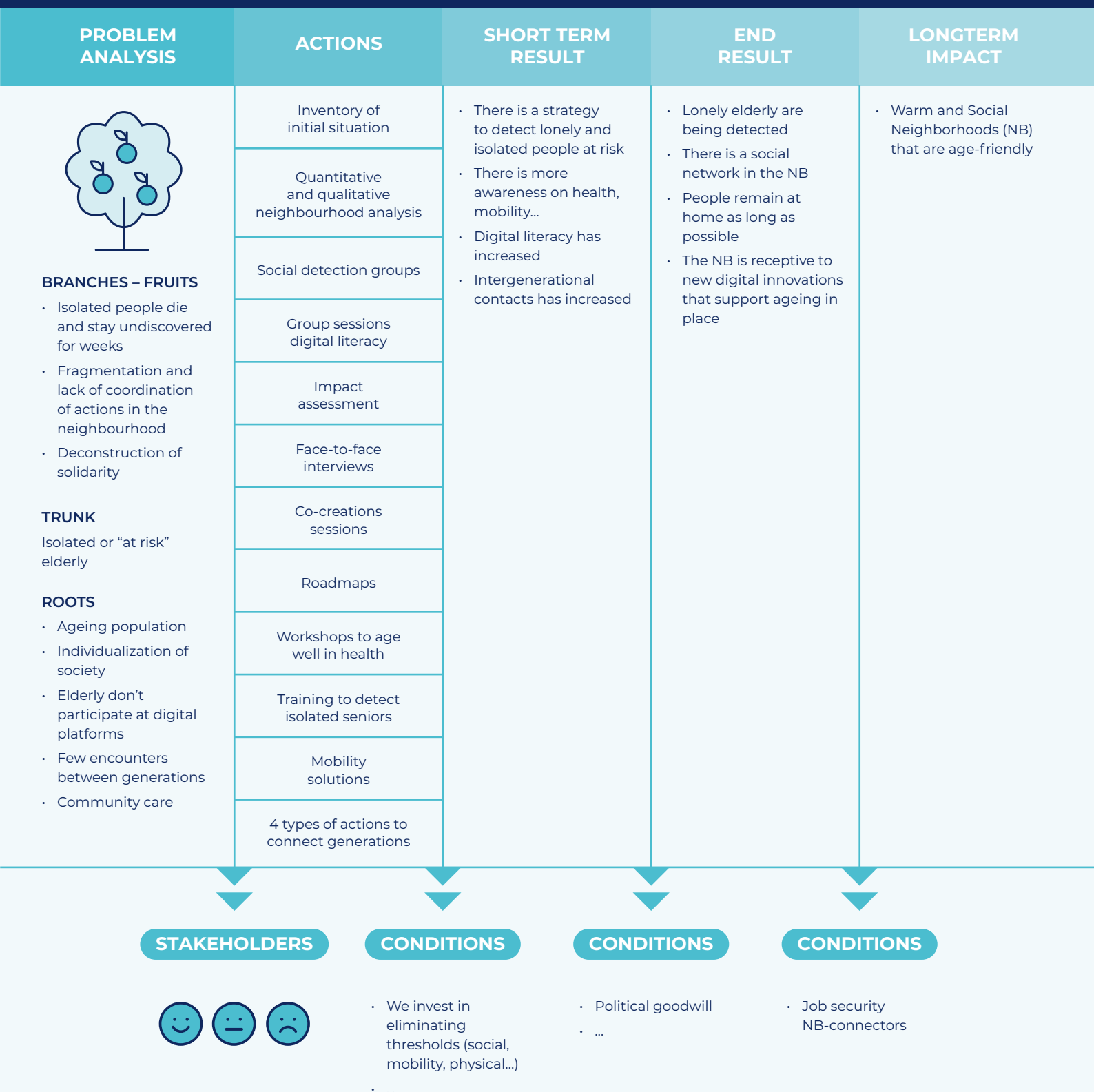
### DETECTION AND GUIDANCE



Outreachers

# theory of change

START → AGE'IN



# theory of change

MID → AGE'IN

