



Social inclusion through Meaningful ageing

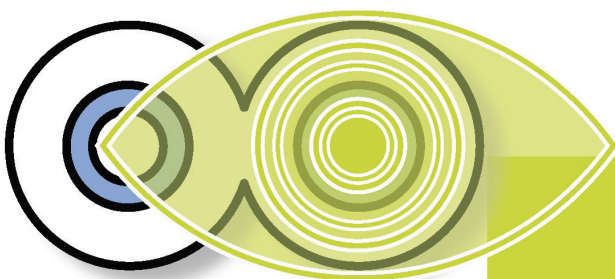
European research report 3:

Good practices on 'social inclusion through meaningful ageing': An analysis of six case studies in Europe

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1. Introduction

In order to explore innovative approaches in care for older adults in Europe, each of the six partners of the European SEE ME project on 'social inclusion through meaningful ageing' (www.see-me-project.eu) closely examined a local care project that they recognised as a 'good practice'. Thus six case studies were performed and scrutinized on inspiring, effective advances to optimizing caregiving skills and competences that may contribute to social inclusion through meaningful ageing.¹

The goals of the case studies were to identify:

- 1) **Descriptive characteristics of the good practice project (program elements);**
- 2) **Innovative principles and organizational features that made it work;**
- 3) **Required competencies of the caregivers;**
- 4) **Effective project mechanisms and manners to sustain them in the care organization.**

For the overall SEE ME study² both intramural and extramural care projects were selected; one of the 'good practice' projects included both types of care. In addition, a balanced distribution of the type of caregivers was made, as to include volunteers, informal caregivers and professional caregivers.

Furthermore, each of the six case studies was based on multiple data sources:

- Documentation regarding the 'good practice' project and the care organization involved;
- In-depth interviews with older adults (clients) and volunteer, informal and professional caregivers;
- If applicable, additional informal observations or talks.

The case studies were mainly based on data from the documents and interviews, whereas informal observations and talks occasionally were used to supplement or check the information.

In all six cases the selected documents concerned organisational year reports, project year reports, policy papers, grant proposals, and websites. Concerning the interviews, per case study five or six respondents were selected for a SEE ME in-depth interview, summing up to 33 respondents: 16 older adults (age range 71 - 91 years), 7 volunteers,⁴ informal caregivers and 6 professional caregivers (*see Table 1*).

1 Full reports of the six case studies (Belgium, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands (2 cases) and Spain) are available on the SEE ME website www.see-me-project.eu

2 See also Reports 1 and 2: Machielse, Van der Vaart, Lacey & Klaassens, 2022a; Machielse, Van der Vaart, & Klaassens, 2022b.

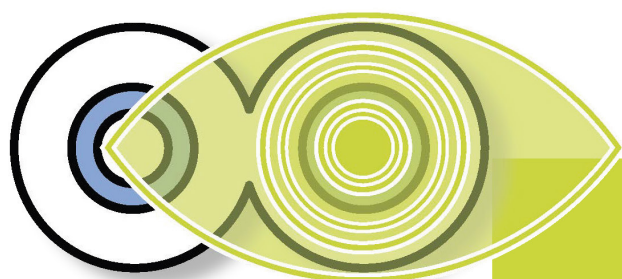


Table 1: The SEE ME case studies and interviews with caregivers and older adults.

Case study	Extra mural	Intra mural	Professional	Volunteer caregiver	Informal caregiver	Older adult
Belgium	X			2**	1	2
Germany	X	X	1	1		4
Italy		X	1	1	1	3
Netherlands I	X		2	1	1	3
Netherlands II		X	1	1	1	2
Spain	X		1	1	1	2
Total N	10*	7*	N=6	N=7	N=4	N=16

*) Number of caregivers; the two German professionals were active in both extramural and intramural settings, each of them is assigned to another category.

**) One Belgian volunteer also had a professional role, but the interview focused on the volunteer role.

The respondents were purposefully selected from the good practice project as to provide insight into how the target group of older clients experienced the project, how volunteers, informal and professional caregivers performed their tasks and what they need to perform their tasks well.

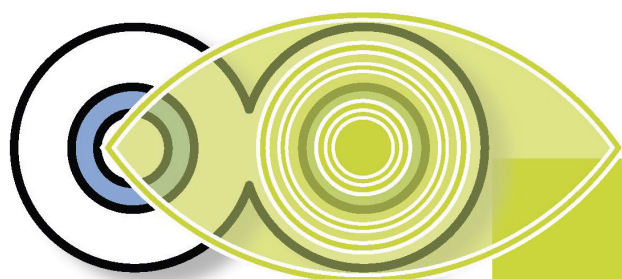
The SEE ME interviews focused on: a) meaning needs, social needs, talents and dreams of the older clients; b) competences and skills of caregivers; and c) additional good practice specifics. Each theme was examined to explore relevant information on the good practice and its working mechanisms.

Combining the different data sources, a thick description was made for each 'good practice project', which involves an in-depth description of the significant project features that are being evaluated. In the current report, the six case studies are analysed on salient read threads with respect to the case study goals as specified above.

Thus the main findings are synthesized regarding:

- Characteristics of the good practice project (program elements);
- Innovative approaches;
- Required caregiver competencies;
- Effective mechanisms and their organizational embedment.

Section 2 deals with the good practice characteristics, while section 3 brings together the analysis of the innovative approaches, competences and effective mechanisms.



2. Characteristics of the good practices: programs and training

The main features of each of the six, comprehensive European care projects on 'social inclusion through meaningful ageing' are presented below. After that, a short impression is given of the role that training and supervision have in these programs. Section 3 will highlight the overall inspiring tactics of the programs.

The 'good practice' programs in a nutshell

Belgium.

The 'Neighbourhood Pension project' (BuurtPensioen) is an extramural project in Brussels (Dury, Vercauteren, Switsers, & De Donder, 2021). It involves a network of neighbours, mostly older adults in vulnerable situations, who help each other in everyday life. Empowerment is central to its approach, believing in the power and capabilities of older adults in their social context. The project employs a limited number of professionals and runs on a high number of volunteers.

Germany.

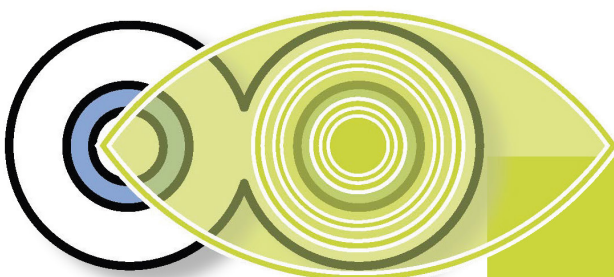
The project of 'Altenheimat Vluyn' concerns an in-patient care program for older adults in Neukirchen-Vluyn (Zisenis & Klein, 2021). It includes intramural and extramural activities focused on promoting community and interaction between residents, staff and volunteers. It seeks to accommodate the resident's individual abilities and desires in a self-determined way. The program is connected to the local city and employs these surrounding in its program.

Italy.

'Animazione' is an intramural project in Campobasso promoting meaningful ageing by offering older adults hands-on and creative activities, tailored to their individual needs (Di Paolo & Grignoli, 2021). The program is coordinated by socio-educators who work in collaboration with other professionals: educators, psychologists, intercultural mediators and social workers.

Netherlands I.

The 'Seniors Project' is an extramural project in Rotterdam directed at preventing and reducing the loneliness and social isolation of older people (Van der Vaart, Klaassens, & Machielse, 2021). The project is managed and guided by some professionals but is largely run by volunteers. Its main activity is connecting volunteers as buddies to older adults, complemented by facilitating encounters between the seniors and discovering their talents and competences.



Netherlands II.

'Enjoyment of life' concerns a Dutch intramural project, which aims to realise person-oriented care through the methodology 'Enjoyment of Life' (Kardol & De Greef, 2021). This approach is run by professionals with the help of volunteers and informal caregivers. It seeks to explore the stories of the older client, leading to a personal plan and a roadmap for caregivers.

Spain.

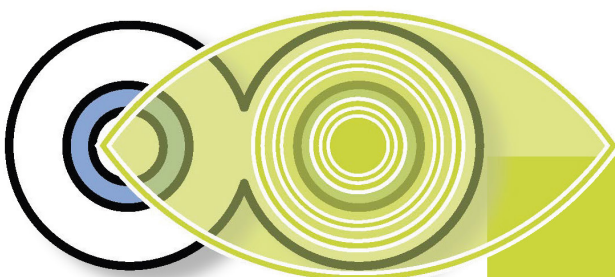
'Grandes Amigos' (Big Friends) is an extramural, state-wide project in Spain that seeks to support older people growing old with dignity, good health and wellbeing (Marsillas & García, 2021). It is largely carried out by volunteers and focused on addressing loneliness by putting volunteers in contact with older people. The program includes a broad array of activities, from administrative help to cultural visits, and awareness-raising campaigns.

Training and supervision in the 'good practice' programs

The programs presented above all include training opportunities for volunteer and professional caregivers. If volunteers have a central role, there's usually a broad supply of workshops available that mostly focus on social and interpersonal skills (and sometimes on ageing and illnesses). As a rule, volunteers are supervised by professionals; this also provides them with the necessary emotional support, like getting special attention when the older adult they work with has been hospitalized or has passed away. More generally, caregivers are guided in intervision meetings, where participants exchange experiences about barriers they encounter. This may include topics such as how to recognize and guard your boundaries as a caregiver and how to say farewell to your clients.

In the case of specific programs, like the Dutch 'Enjoyment of Life' model, caregivers follow a basic training in the applied model. But also for more general, daily assistance tasks caregivers receive training. In the German case, this included issues like how to support residents so that they can organise their activities and everyday life well (how to arrange a morning ritual, choose clothes, join activities, maintain mobile etc.). A salient aspect is, that the focus of the training should not be just on concrete skills and knowledge, but rather on the necessary, essential basic attitude of caregiving.

Training may also introduce the caregiver broadly in the care organisation. In the case of Humanitas Rotterdam, before they start volunteers get training that includes issues like the values of the organisation, the rights and duties of volunteers, and the demarcation of the tasks and responsibilities that volunteer work encompasses.



3. Evaluation and analysis

3.1 Innovative principles and organizational features

Each of the six good practice projects on 'social inclusion through meaningful ageing' encompasses an extended, compound program, consisting of multiple approaches and including a wide array of activities. All the six projects are described in detail by the case studies as composed by each SEE ME partner (*see section 2*). While acknowledging that most of these projects are successful also because of their compound and broad approach, the current section seeks to highlight principles and features that seem to be particularly innovative or inspirational. They are reflected in 9 themes that are grouped, for the sake of clarity, into 'relational focused' and 'care focused' themes. However, both categories are far from mutually exclusive and the themes are highly interrelated.

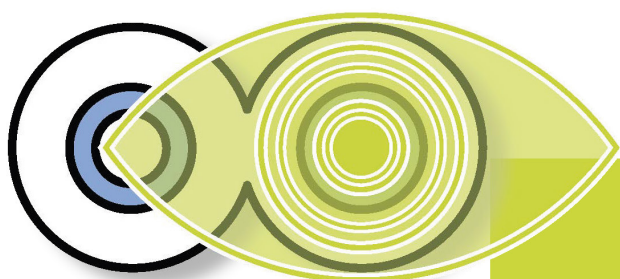
Relational focused themes

Sense of community

Each of the programs seeks to create a caring community of reciprocal personal and professional relationships. This sense of community gives clients a feeling of belonging and makes volunteer and informal carers feel valued. Such an approach promotes interaction between residents, staff and volunteers and the establishment of meaningful relationships between the participants. Like in the Spanish program 'Grandes Amigos' the caring communities are based on values such as friendship, dignity and solidarity.

Membership/ownership

Several good practices explicitly aimed to create a program that was seen as 'owned' by all participants, whether (professional, volunteer or informal) caregivers, clients and further networks or neighbourhoods. This is explicitly done from an perspective of empowerment and creating equal relationships. In this manner, volunteers are not seen as an extra, but are valued as core to the project. Also, clients are not just seen as beneficiaries but as members of the program. This also includes that everyone related to the program is able to provide help, whether caregiver, client or any other person concerned. Similarly, all people can be invited to participate in the planning and management of the activities. A related feature is to employ a decentralised organisation through which each area, group, or task may have their own 'headquarters' or their coordinators.



Reciprocity

Reciprocity is important not only in care relationships as such – i.e., the need to be relevant and giving something (back) is very meaningful - but also in efforts that participants make to assist each other. In a 'good practice' program the feeling that giving and receiving are in a fair balance is essential. One innovative element in the Belgian 'Neighbourhood Pensions project' is the use of a time banking system in which the participants' efforts are registered. In this manner, a fair balance can be kept between the amount of time that a participant spends on help and the time that (s)he requested for help from other participants. Each contributor thus may balance its contributions and benefits.

Attentiveness as an intervention

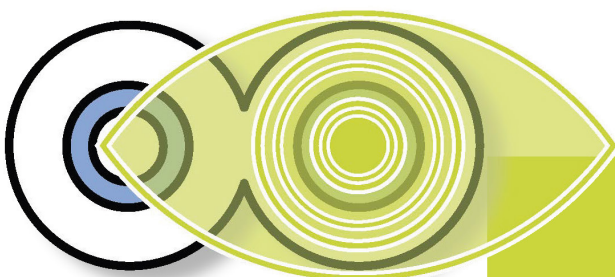
Another feature that can be found in all programs is the importance of providing abundant personal, respectful attention to clients. Innovative is the manner in which this is taken very seriously and is felt like an intervention as such. Like in the case of the Dutch 'Seniors Project' both professional and volunteer caregivers operate in a low profile manner, not forcing programs but putting human attentiveness first by far. The project caregivers seek to be easily accessible, sympathetic, and helpful as good friends or acquaintances.

Volunteer as a buddy

Many best-practice programs allocate in an inspiring way an important role to volunteers. In particular stimulating is the approach to connect volunteers as a buddy to older adults to establish a long-term symmetric relationship, despite their age difference (and because of age differences in intergenerational variants!). Volunteers are matched to older adults, like for at least a year, to activate and assist them to engage in new activities and rebuild their social network, leading to enduring contacts.

Outreach activities

Another refreshing approach that stresses an organisational factor is the way a 'good practice' program tries to take an extra step when somehow older participants are getting out of sight. Instead of accepting that participants drop out, or that activities would come to a halt (like due to the pandemic), the organisation keeps checking upon its members making sure that they stayed connected. This may be done by calling people regularly, sending a postcard, letter or a small gift. Always making efforts to tailor care and looking for possibilities to lift limitations, is seen as a valuable method as such.



Care focused themes

Model-based work

While most innovative aspects of the programs concern their activities or procedures, the inspiring feature of a 'model based' program is that it uses a theoretical model and a systematic inquiry to guide care activities.

The Dutch 'Enjoyment of Life' project uses such a model to realise a personal care plan for each older inhabitant of a care residence. Following the model, it juxtaposes the necessary 'actual, objective' side of care (like health and safety, or standard accountability) to a narrative way of caring for 'enjoyment of life' (as an individual need). By reviewing several 'life domains' the caregiver explores in a dialogue the background, wishes and interests of the older adult. The older person's needs, identity and enjoyment of life are made tangible and insightful through the development of a 'mood board'. This visualisation helps to develop a roadmap for caregivers to provide daily care - and accountability for care - in order to realise 'Enjoyment of Life'.

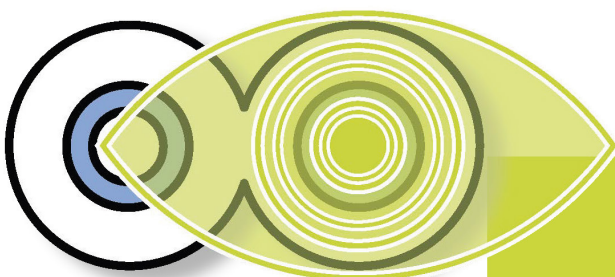
Biographical work

The inspiring features of a biographical approach – which is related to model-based working - consist of a clear life course vision on person-oriented care. Based on a biography orientation and related methods, personal wishes and interests are determined. As in the German case of 'Altenheimat Vluyn', important aspects of the residents' biographies are documented and used to shape their daily lives in the care home. This may result for example in a photo project on a regional history or a personal past. Important features of a biographical orientation are considering personal strengths and abilities and enhancing self-esteem. The personal biography is also used to reflect – in a dialogue between caregiver and resident - on the residents' own life. For biographical work, joint learning of all participants in the organization is important, but the focus is always on the individual with his/her life story and current interests and desires.

Tailored care / co-creation

In fact all 'good practice' programs focus on tailoring care to the specific individual needs and involving the older adults in co-creating their optimal form of care. However, two specific, salient examples are represented in the next cases.

First, linked to their biographical approach, the German Altenheimat Vluyn casus provides a refreshing basic example of tailoring also daily, basic care. To enable a meaningful life and respond to individual needs, the caregiver adjusts to the individual rhythm of the residents and adapts the daily schedule to the interests and experiences of the residents.



Second, the Italian case 'Animazione' stresses the co-creation of care activities not just as a cooperation with the client, but involving a multidisciplinary group of experts. By that, a continuous co-creation is induced that results in creative activities personalised for the needs and potential of the older adult. Meaningful ageing and uncovering talents are stimulated by activities like memory games, theatre and cinema, manual activities, music and motor exercises, cooking labs, readings, and the like. The multidisciplinary orientation of experts facilitates activities that touch hidden abilities and makes the older adults feel useful and alive.

3.2 Competencies of the caregiver

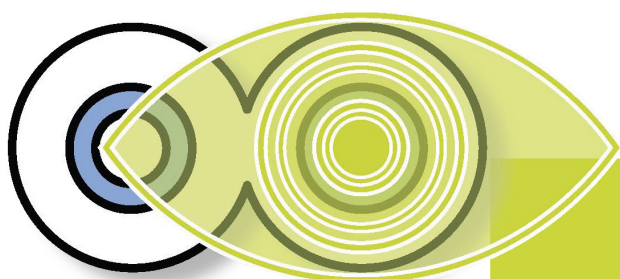
As the above-depicted characteristics and innovative features of the 'good practices' reveal, the involved caregivers – whether informal, volunteer or professional - need a broad range of competences. These required competences have been described and analysed in detail in the SEE ME report 2 (Machielse, Van der Vaart, & Klaassens, 2022), based on the in-depth interviews with all caregivers and additional program documentation. Below an adaption of the main findings illustrates the key capabilities as required in the 'good practice' projects.

To start with, given the broad package of tasks performed by caregivers – ranging from health care tasks to transportation and administration – it is important to recognize that the required capabilities are wide-ranging too. Apart from specific program activities, this basically has to do with the fact that caregivers – in relation to their clients – are involved as well in practical help, as in giving support on 'meaning' issues and in sustaining a 'social' context. Professionals add to this necessarily organizational competences.

The wide-ranging tasks in the context of a specific 'good practice' program, urge the specific capability of being able to maintain contact with other disciplines (health and social work) to provide the best help possible. Also, intervention ability, the ability to choose activities, and referring clients to other organisations are stressed. Given these tasks, it is not surprising that many caregivers state that well developed communicative abilities and relational skills are core abilities.

To be more specific, three main lines of requirements can be formulated.

First, since the 'good practice' projects seek to attune to the clients' needs, caregivers need to be able to tailor care to the individual. Many state that a caregiver needs a skill to 'sense' what people need, which may be hard to train.



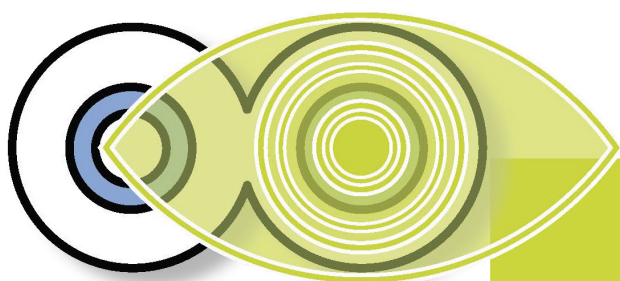
Informal caregivers stress the importance of knowing the older person and his/her life history. Also, professionals seek to connect to the clients' biography to offer perspective on life. Acknowledging wishes and dreams is important, and respecting and creating 'the natural' feeling surrounding informal help every day. A salient and recurring finding was the importance of matching both clients' and caregivers' capabilities and needs as a prerequisite for good care.

Second, looking at the different dimensions of competences and skills (Machielse, Van der Vaart, & Klaassens, 2022), the caregivers seem to stress relational, empathic, hermeneutic (sensitivity), self-care, intervention, empowering, and communicative competences. Overall, it was found that volunteers generally emphasise being empathic, relational, and hermeneutic (sensing what is going on) and employing self-care (putting limits to demands). Informal caregivers showed a similar pattern, stressing certain aspects like adapting oneself to the older adult and creating a trustful meaning connection. Professionals emphasise communicative aspects, intervention/empowering competences, and role competence (organisational skills, flexibility, networking).

Third, concerning training of competences and skills, caregivers seemed to doubt – as we saw above - whether empathy and "really seeing and feeling what others need" can be learned. On the other side, they attached importance to learn more about organisational issues, fundamental health issues, and - for volunteers particularly - psychological and relational competences (like really listening and paying attention to 'dreams'). Also, caregivers valued getting supervision, having intervision meetings, and learning from colleagues in practice.

3.3 Effective project mechanisms and manners to sustain them

The six European 'good practice' care projects all have their own qualities regarding what makes these programs work and how to imbed them well in the organisation. In this section we will highlight the more salient findings in this regard; some relate to innovative features as outlined in section 3.1. While specific good practices are named as examples below, all six care projects contained features of the depicted mechanisms.



Building on organisation values

One mechanism that seems to make projects effective, is working explicitly from the organisation's core values. Not just in words, but actually in practice.

The Dutch good practice of Humanitas Rotterdam (the 'Seniors Project') presents an example of this value-based programming. It translated the organisation's outspoken care vision evidently into the guidance and education of (volunteer) staff. The impact of this approach was clearly visible in the resulting attitudes of the caregivers.

From a value related perspective three approaches that made this 'Seniors Project' effective in reducing loneliness and social isolation stand out:

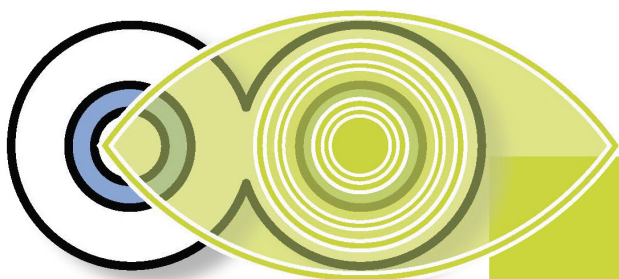
- 1.) **Providing help to sustain the client's strength in taking care of themselves;**
- 2.) **Recognizing low profile activities as a means to enhance social contacts;**
- 3.) **Employing volunteers to ensure frequent, individual moments of personal contact.**

By working in accordance with the core values, translating them into activities and hiring and training staff that embrace and internalise these values, these effective care approaches of the 'Seniors Project' seem to be deeply embedded in the organisation. In this manner, the program assured that the activities were well related to the care vision and project aims.

Building on the community

Another element that makes effective project mechanisms to be maintained is making constructively use of people's citizenship spirit. This approach is recognisable in the manner in which the Belgian good practice 'Neighbourhood Pension project' seeks to embed itself in the community to which it was applied. One salient aspect is that it explicitly seeks to do this also physically: it sees the proximity of the volunteers to the beneficiaries as beneficial for both parties, since volunteers do not have to travel far and beneficiaries always have someone nearby. In the same vein, the project organisation is physically decentralized in various areas, which enables cooperation (and sharing facilities) with local partners such as service centres, community centres or other services. Also, coordinators of each area are closely involved with a smaller group of people so they can build a better connection with them.

Adding to this 'proximity approach' the project stresses participation and shared decision making; this also applies to decisions on supervision and training by the organisation. Participants meet regularly to exchange experiences and formulate expectations. In this manner, the project is basically regarded as belonging to the community.



Building on multiple disciplines

One specific effective project mechanism is using a multidisciplinary approach to make sure that all individual needs can be addressed. Like in the Italian case ('Animazione'), using multiple disciplines in a program (in this case focused on art and creativity) enables it to better explore the 'global fragility' of the older clients and find tailored interventions that fit the individual. Such a multidimensional approach, based on a group of professionals from several disciplines, enhances the effectiveness of initiatives, but also the chance that they may induce fun and happiness for the individual clients.

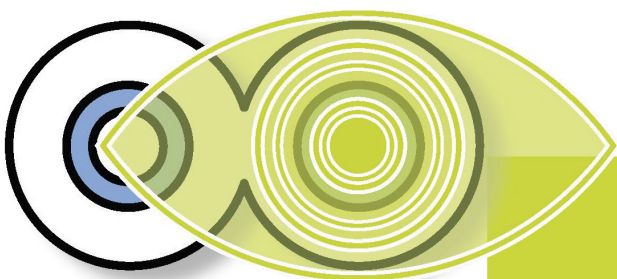
Building on the team of caregivers

A last salient approach to making projects work, is paying profound attention to creating and motivating the team of caregivers that works in its program. In this vein, the Spanish 'Big Friends' project stresses the importance of a highly committed and focused team, who find enjoyment and meaningful relationships – within teams and with the clients - to keep people involved in the project. Having an inspired group of caregivers is an aspect that ensures the sustainability of the project. In this respect, the recruitment, coordination and training of caregivers (in particular in the case of volunteers) play a crucial role. It relates to team building, matching of caregivers with clients and the maintenance of personal and professional networks that are established with the project.

4. Conclusion

This analysis of six European 'good practices' on social inclusion through meaningful ageing aimed to explore what the overall pattern behind the 'good practices' looks like. The focus of the analysis was to discover the care project's a) central characteristics, b) innovative principles, c) required competences of caregivers and d) effective mechanisms and sustainability features.

- a) **The outcomes depict that all the six 'good practice' case studies appeared to comprise a great array of program elements.** Each of these projects - intramural and extramural - had a specific approach with particular activities and tailored training provisions.
- b) **Based on these elaborately developed best practices, the overall analysis revealed 9 innovative principles and features that make these projects inspiring examples.** They involve relational themes – a sense of community, membership/ownership, reciprocity, attentiveness as an intervention, volunteer as a buddy, and outreach activities – and care-related themes – model-based work, biographical work, an tailored care/co-creation.

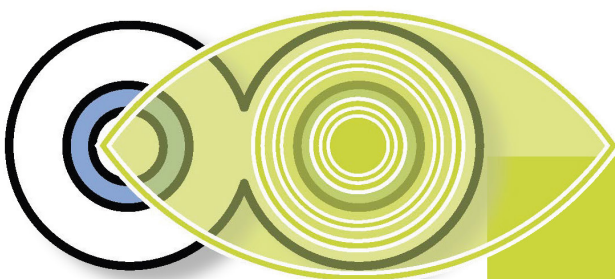


- c) In each of these projects the informal, volunteer and professional caregivers all need a wide range of practical, social and care competences. On top of that, well-developed communicative abilities and relational skills appeared to be crucial.
- d) Finally, the analysis of the good practices revealed four salient project mechanisms that contributed to their effectiveness and sustainability: building the 'good practice' program explicitly on organisation values, being part of the community, employing multiple disciplines and/or establishing and motivating the team of caregivers. All six care projects showed qualities that relate to these mechanisms.

The overall conclusion demonstrates that the 'good practices' are thoughtfully developed projects, characterized by explicit policies, and nuanced and focused programs, in which the capabilities of caregivers are key.

Acknowledgements

This report is based on six underlying case studies produced by the SEE ME consortium partners: Belgium, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands (2 cases) and Spain (www.see-me-project.eu). The reports of the case studies can be found in the references below.



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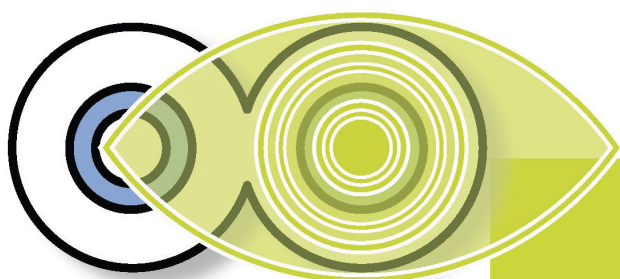
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