

Buddy Network

YSI - Netherlands - Country case 2

1. Basic information

Firstly, it must be noted that the case of the Buddy Network does not lend itself that well as a country case, as it is merely one of the examples of organisations, campaigns or activities in the Netherlands which are focused on the health and wellbeing of Dutch citizens, either living alone or not. The Buddy Network itself is an organisation that facilitates multiple projects in 9 municipalities in the South-West of the Netherlands.

The use of a 'buddy' as an instrument however is not a national campaign. It has become more or less a national phenomenon as 'buddies' are used by multiple organisations in the Netherlands, among which the Buddy Network, but also Humanitas (featuring in Country case 1 on the Coalition Erbij). Buddies are most often volunteers; Dutch citizens who support and help others in mostly one-on-one contact. To take the initiative of the Buddy Network, their buddies (i.e. 350 volunteers within multiple projects in 9 municipalities in the South-West of the Netherlands) are directed at supporting both adults and children (5-18 year olds) who have a chronic and/or life threatening disease, adults who suffer from dementia, or, as in the project '2tegen1zaamheid' (freely translated as '2 against loneliness') the buddies team up with adults who feel lonely, have a very small social network or who are visually impaired. While this service is not in particular aimed at persons living alone, a high proportion of people in these target groups do live alone.

Other projects or organisation making use of buddies, have their buddies engaged with for example people who have financial problems (helping them to organise their paperwork and financial responsibilities) or people with disabilities (either mental or physical disabilities, acting as a partner to talk to and to engage in activities with).

The Buddy Network - history

The origins of the Buddy Network lie in The Hague, where towards the end of 1987 under the wings of the General Social Work a buddy project was started for AIDS patients within the The Hague region. Because of the enormous growth of this project, by the end of 1991, an independent foundation was raised: the Aids Projects Bureau. The volunteers, named buddies, often had the same sexual orientation and were supporters of the people with HIV and AIDS. The then still terminal (and by now chronic) diseases caused their patients to suffer from isolation while they were afflicted by and died off their disease. The buddies offered support and understanding; solidarity from one human being to another.

The developed method of Buddy care, appeared to be a good instrument to also help citizens with other serious and/or chronic diseases, after which by the end of the 1990's the target group was broadened and the Aids Projects Bureau became the Buddy Network. The amount of partnerships between people with a desire for support and buddies kept on growing and in the

applications or requests for buddies (made by Dutch citizens themselves) a new target group became apparent: people who feel lonely and who would like to start an acquaintance with a buddy. This stimulated the start of a new project '2 against loneliness' (i.e. 2tegen1zaamheid) in 2003. In 2010 a new target group was added, namely buddies for people with dementia and their caretakers. As from 2013/2014 the project '2 against loneliness' the Buddy Network started a cooperation with Visio, a project for elderly people who are visually impaired. The project was named 'Soft Landing' (i.e. Zachte Landing) and has as special focus points: 1) network coaching in order to stimulate the strengthening and/or enlarging of the social network, and 2) offering support of the contact between the voluntary buddy and the paid care professional if this is the desire. As from 2015 the Buddy Network has started a pilot project offering Buddy care to children with serious and chronic diseases (i.e. Buddy's voor Bikkels). The most recent rendition is the E-buddyproject, which is meant to help clients who ask for help, but who are still hesitant/reserved to engage in face to face contact. The contact with the buddy is mainly provided through social media.

Clients can themselves apply or request a buddy with the Network, but more often the application for a buddy is placed by the client's family doctor, nurse, case manager or 'mantelzorger' (i.e. a family member offering structural care to the client). All clients of the Network still live at home (instead of in an institution).

Mission and task of the volunteers

A buddy within the Buddy Network is a volunteer who will keep contact with a client for at least 2 hours a week (of 4 hours every two weeks). Buddies are expected to be connected to the Network for at least one year.

Their task is to offer a structural moment of beneficial contact and social or emotional support with the client. The aim is personal contact which offers the opportunity to pay particular attention to what - at that moment - is important to the client. The buddy offers a listening ear, an earnest engagement and time and attention to both the everyday and more special worries. Next to the attention for the perceptions concerning either illness/disease or loneliness for example, there is the opportunity to undertake joined activities, thus strengthening and broadening the social network and social engagement of the client. The aim of the Network is to offer informal care.

Tool

Due to the individual approach to the clients wishes, needs and desires, and the different target groups within the various projects, there is not a decisive method for acting as a buddy.

The Network has developed De Samen Schatkaart (freely translated into The Together Treasure Map), which offers a tool to engage the client in conversation. The 'map' offers the buddy and the client various topics and infographics that can stimulate them in their conversation if needed, gaining ideas for activities etc. It is thus not a real method, but solely a helpful tool. The Network does offer a short manual for the use of the 'map'. The tool is based on the methods of network coaching and the 'presentie benadering' (freely translated as 'presence approach'), thus aiming at strengthening the social network through the presence and approximation of a strong, caring and inspiring buddy.

Numbers

Mostly the Buddy Network is engaged in the large municipality of urban The Hague, but they try and succeed in constituting successful buddy couplings in surrounding municipalities such as Delft and Rijswijk as well (although much less couplings).

Looking at the various projects, in 2016, 312 couples were formed, engaging buddies with cliënts with different diseases such as heart disease, rheumatism or physical impairment, oncological affliction, multiple sclerosis, parkinson, muscle disease and not-congenital brain damage. Within the project of '2 against loneliness' 102 registered buddies are connected to the Buddy Network, who took care of 186 successful buddy couplings of which 166 in the city of The Hague. In 2016 there were 45 buddies for people with dementia, forming in total 62 buddy couplings.

Funding of the Network

The Buddy Network is a foundation which needs to gather funds from external sources, in order to be able to start and/or continue each project. Municipalities have the opportunity of granting financial aid to various initiatives within their own municipality or region. The Network thus highly depends on subsidies from the (mostly) local governments i.e. the municipalities and other financiers such as the church, other social benefit organisations and foundations which are aimed at financially stimulating successful or promising initiatives/project in the social sector (such as the - freely translated - Foundation 1818, the Orange Foundation and the The Hague Green Cross Foundation). On one occasion in 2016 the Network received a small subsidy from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.

The municipality of The Hague is the biggest recipient of the Buddy Network, and it also offers the most financial support.

It has happened that planned projects are not put into action as the application for a subsidy from a municipality was not granted in the end and no other financiers were to be found. In 2016 2 projects were not put into executed.

Supporting the volunteers

Voluntary organisations in the Netherlands can gain a quality authentication named Goed Geregeld (freely translated at Taken Good Care Off). This authentication is granted by the Dutch Organisation of Voluntary Work. The organisation must adhere to certain conditions, procedures and facilities and offer good education and support of their volunteers. The Buddy Network has extended its quality authentication until 2019.

In support of their volunteers expertise the Network offers them basic training (consisting of 3 day parts) and also several additional training opportunities. Buddies in their first year are also expected to join in regular evenings of peer and expert learning in order to boost their knowledge and skills sets. The buddies are also supported by the various coordinators who work at the Network, by offering them either contact moments by telephone or face-to-face.

Reaching Goals

The Network measures its success mainly by the number of clients reached within the various projects. In the near future however, the Network will produce an outcome measure to show the effects of the use of buddies. In their project LEAN, various outcome indicators were developed which will be measured amongst all clients during 2017. The outcome indicators will be aimed at for example: the social well being (i.e. the social network and loneliness), self-efficacy (i.e. social independence and being self effective/taking control), mental well being (i.e. future perspective and emotional perception). Unfortunately no temporary results of this outcome measure are available yet.

The Future¹

To advance their current trainings supply, the Buddy Network will in 2017/2018 expand their working area towards municipalities outside The Hague. The aim is to gain a permanent local working spaces within more Dutch municipalities and the Buddy Network will invest in closing partnerships with local entrepreneurs and organisations. The Buddy Network will continue to take part in important platforms within municipalities to further strengthen the informal care offered and the cooperation with the formal caretakers. Investing in the own volunteers is their premium goal; they are not only buddies, but also voluntary coordinators, trainers and they are the ambassadors of the Buddy Network.

1.1 Role of the public sector

See above at funding.

2. Sources

<http://buddynetwerk.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/53NOT16006-Bestuursverslag-2016.pdf> *The yearly account, in Dutch, of the organisation, its (financial and social) inputs, outputs and impact.*

The website of the Network, only in Dutch: <http://buddynetwerk.nl>

A little information on 'De Samen Schatkaart' (The Together Treasure Map), only in Dutch: <http://www.samenschatkaart.nl/info/>

¹ This information on the future goals and aims is found in the yearly account made by the organisation and which is available on their website. I was not successful in landing an interview with one of the organisations directors.