

# The conversation game 'What makes you happy?'

to help homebound older adults in Twente to find more social connection.

## A thesis project to promote homebound older adults to seek new social contact.

This thesis project focuses on homebound older adults in the Twente region and is carried out for the Citizen Science Hub Twente at the University of Twente. Homebound older adults are individuals who feel disconnected but do not actively seek new social contact. Loneliness is a significant issue in the Netherlands, and with a growing population of older adults, this group is an important area of concern (CBS et al., 2023).

CBS, GGD Nederland, & RIVM. (2023). Gezondheidsmonitor volwassenen en ouderen. Volksgezondheid En Zorg. <https://www.vzinfo.nl/eenzaamheid/leeftijd-en-geslacht>

## Village supporters, key actors in the project, struggle to engage with homebound older adults.

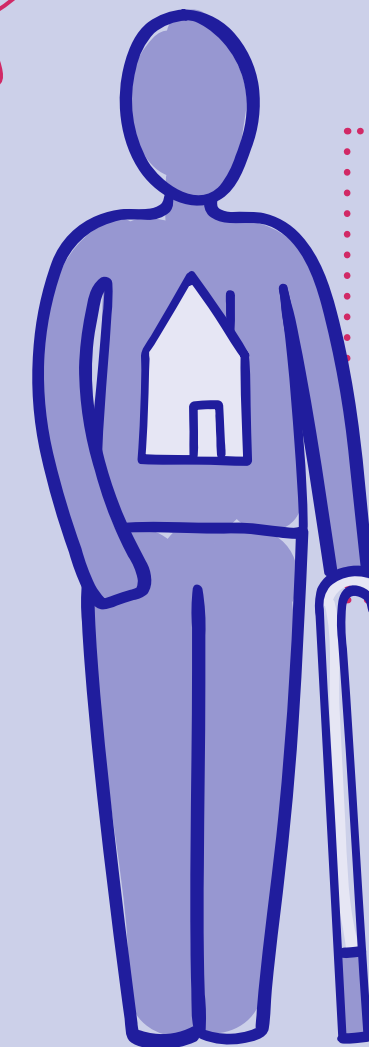
To reach homebound older adults in Twente, I worked with three village supporters. Their role is to enhance quality of life in their villages by informally supporting both residents and the local community (WijzOud in Twente, 2023). However, they face challenges in engaging with homebound older adults.

WijzOud in Twente. (2023). Home | WijzOud in Twente. | <https://wijzoud.nl/>



"I'm going to call an old friend who I haven't spoken to in a while."

"We are going to play this again right?"



### Homebound older adult

Older adults who stick to their familiar circles and routines but often feel socially isolated.

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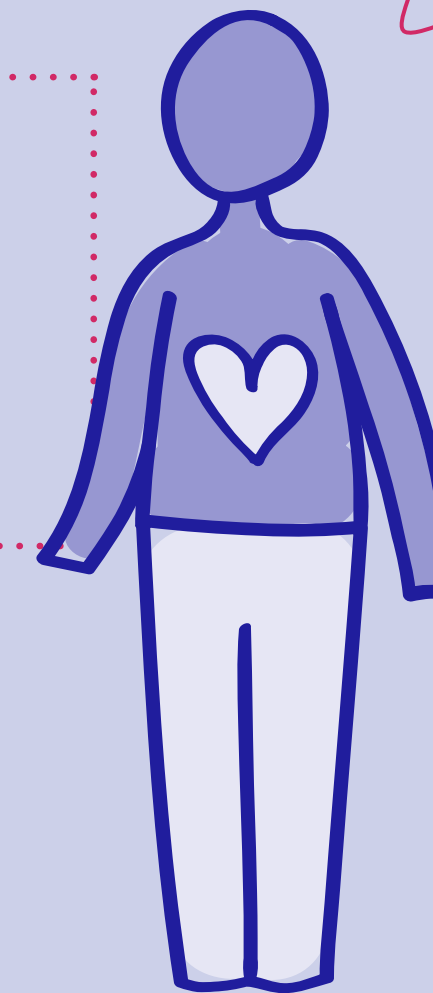
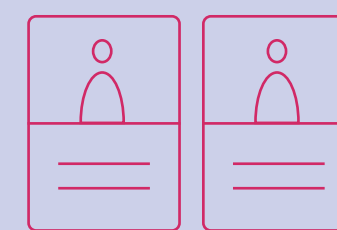
### Trusted contact

Individuals who already have an existing relationship with the homebound older adult.



"It gave me permission to ask questions I usually wouldn't."

"He gave me a hug when I left, he never usually does that."



## Trusted contacts play an important role in helping the homebound older adults.

Research shows that trusted contacts (e.g., family, neighbors, acquaintances) are key to re-connecting these individuals. However, they often lack the tools or skills to help homebound older adults reflect on what is meaningful to them.

## Older adults in Twente value casual and personal interactions, a sense of purpose, and a focus on personal strengths.

Interviews revealed that older adults value casual, informal, and genuine personal interactions. They also value a sense of purpose. This aligns with the Positive Health approach, which played a central role in this thesis. It emphasizes strengths and possibilities rather than focusing on deficits or illness (Huber, 2014).

Huber, M. (2014). Towards a new, dynamic concept of health : Its operationalisation and use in public health and healthcare and in evaluating health effects of food. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20141217mh>

The game helps older adults to **experience more connectedness** and will be distributed via the village supporters.

Playing the game fosters a deeper connection between participants. Players may also consider new social engagement, as they feel inspired to try new activities that suit them. Village supporters can recommend the game to trusted contacts who express concern about homebound older adults within their circles. My intention is to distribute the game to all village supporters across Twente, who can then help spread it within their villages.

## The intervention: A conversation game for the homebound older adults and their trusted contacts.

The game is called *Wat maakt jou blij? Deel en ontdek*. ("What makes you happy? Share and discover."). It consists of two parts, each using cards with an image (part 1) or icon (part 2), a question, and a reflective follow-up question. Players take turns asking each other the questions on the cards from their hand.

- Part 1 *Memories*: Focuses on reflection, with questions about interests, skills, goals, accomplishments, meaning, and personal growth to help players recall positive moments from their lives.
- Part 2 *What makes you happy?*: Encourages players to explore how the emotions and memories from part 1 could translate into meaningful activities in the present or future (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Trusted contacts play a key role here, as I learned from field research that older adults are more likely to try new things when encouraged or accompanied by someone they trust.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "What" and "Why" of goal pursuits: human needs and the Self-Determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1104\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1104_01)

Emmelie Huisman  
Let's bond! Fostering social connection for older adults in Twente  
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**Committee**  
Chair: Prof. Dr. P.J. Stappers  
Mentor: Dr. Ir. C. Hao  
Company mentor: Dr. J.L. Sturge  
**Company**  
University of Twente

