

**A LOOK BACK ON FOUR YEARS OF  
AGE-FRIENDLY CITY THE HAGUE  
WHAT NEXT?**

**OLD  
GOLD**

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO  
THE HAGUE'S SENIORS?

**8 Portraits of  
active residents**

**AGE-FRIENDLY CITY THE HAGUE:  
AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHER INTERNATIONAL CITIES?**

**NEW YORK  
BANGALORE  
SUZHOU**





*“You can’t stop  
yourself from  
getting older.  
It’s much more  
pleasant if you  
remain cheerful.”*

PIET VROLIJK



# FORWORD

OLD GOLD. The name says so much: a rich colour, something precious and attractive - and OLD. You will have realised by now that you have picked up a magazine which is all about older people. Specifically the older people who live in The Hague!

Did you know that The Hague is part of the Age Friendly Cities network? The term 'age-friendly city' was conceived by the World Health Organization (WHO) because they saw that the number of elderly people in the world was growing and that they more often live in cities. And a city naturally has to be set up for that. Various groups of elderly people sat down together and arrived at eight areas (or domains) where improvements could be made in cities, for example housing, social inclusion and other areas.

The Hague has been a member of the age-friendly city network for four years now and this seemed a good moment to make up the balance to provide a starting point for the new period. Based on the municipal age-awareness policy, the Public Library Service of The Hague municipality consider being involved in this initiative to be very important and therefore asked us to ask elderly people living in The Hague how they are making the best of ageing in The Hague and what they need to make that as pleasant as possible, and what they themselves are doing. "We" are Stichting GetOud - the GetOld Foundation (which in Dutch also sounds like 'get out' - and refers to breaking out of the stereotypes surrounding ageing). Since 2010 we have worked for and with older people in many different ways. So this question was right up our street. In this magazine you can read all about what the seniors told us.

Joke Breedijk is our cover model. And with good reason. Joke is our icon for involvement. Her optimism means she feels positive not only about her own life but she also inspired her entire flat complex *De Muttersborgh* with the same enthusiasm. Five years ago *De Muttersborgh* celebrated its 20th anniversary. There was a party, giving Joke a great opportunity to organise a playback performance with some of the other tenants. She dressed up as the Johann Strauss Orchestra conductor and violinist André Rieu, with the others as members of the orchestra. Since then this local initiative has grown to become an André Rieu tribute orchestra under the name of '*Gouwe ouwen op volle toeren*' (Golden oldies flat out) that performs throughout the city to share their joy with others and add a bit of extra colour to their day.

Add a bit of extra colour to the day: isn't that what everyone wants? Together we can do that. In the city of The Hague many people are doing just that every day. From the seniors themselves to the city council. You can read all about that here in Old Gold too. As well as about other age-friendly cities around the world such as New York and Bangalore. You can find reports from 30 group discussions that around 500 people took part in during high teas; a look back over four years of Age-Friendly City The Hague; portraits of eight active and inspiring people living in various parts of The Hague who add to their own enjoyment of life every day as well as that of others, and much more. We hope you enjoy reading our magazine!

**Ingrid Meijering & Marion Duimel, GetOud**





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HABANA BEACH

HABANA BEACH  
NORTON

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NORTON

HABANA BEACH  
NORTON

REST-AFVAL

# AGE-FRIENDLY GREETINGS FROM The Hague

**The Hague wants to be an Age-Friendly City. But what does that mean? And what is the connection with the Age-Friendly Cities programme of the World Health Organization (WHO)?**

## AGE-FRIENDLY CITIES

The ideal city will look different for every age group. Whether that be for children, students, the parents of young children, seniors or the over 80s. A city must have different things to offer each age group if it is to satisfy its residents. From schools for children and affordable housing for students, to accessible public transport for the elderly. The ideal city is age-friendly for all age groups.

On the basis of this principle, the WHO created the Age-Friendly Cities programme that focuses on the elderly. The decision to do this was driven by two major trends: the ageing population and growing urbanisation. Worldwide people are living longer and

more and more people are living in cities. To be able to manage this properly cities need to adapt and innovate. A task for politicians and municipalities, as well as institutions, education and the commercial sector. The goal is to enable the elderly to participate, remove obstacles and create opportunities that will enable people to live their life to the full. And, of course, to break down the stereotype of old people being helpless and dependent and turn that into an image of active and vital fellow citizens who happen to be older (and may sometimes have disabilities).

## Two trends: ageing and urbanisation

An age-friendly place in which to live has a preventive effect. By supporting the elderly to remain independent, they remain less dependent on family and society for as long as possible. Besides



which older people are very much needed, certainly in countries where the generations in work are shrinking. It is unacceptable that people are dismissed on the basis of age, while they can still play a valuable role.

What does a city need to provide for people who have reached an advanced age in order for them to continue to live an independent and active life? The WHO asked groups of elderly people all over the world. Their responses could be divided into eight areas of life - irrespective of culture, tradition and living standards. If the elderly are taken into account in these areas, then a city may be described as age-friendly. The next step is to establish what is actually needed to achieve that. The criteria have been set out in comprehensive guidelines that can be used as a manual and checklist. Older people can use these guidelines to speak to city councillors, institutions and funding organisations when arguing the case for better facilities. These eight domains cover: public spaces and buildings, mobility, housing, social

and civic participation, respect and social inclusion, communication and information, community and healthcare.

### **AGE-FRIENDLY CITY THE HAGUE**

The WHO programme appealed to many cities. There are now 720 cities in 39 countries that have adopted the Age-Friendly Cities model. In 2015 The Hague was the first city in the Netherlands to do so. The eight domains were incorporated in The Hague Age-Friendly City 2015-2018 action plan. To which The Hague added the theme of 'vitality'. The city has so much to offer, but if someone is lacking the physical or, more importantly, mental, capacity to take part they can end up isolated. Therefore it is important to take into account the resilience and flexibility of every elderly person and their ability to deal with limitations and loss.

The elderly of The Hague, of course, had an important say in the development of the programme. In 2015 the Netherlands Organisation for Applied



Scientific Research (TNO) was asked to investigate what older people consider to be important in the eight domains. The results were widely shared in the city with organisations for the elderly, politicians and the council executive, education and other institutions, and others. This resulted in numerous projects in every part of the city. Coalitions and communities were created around each topic.

During a series of high teas organised throughout the city in the autumn of 2017 hundreds of seniors answered the question of: How can ageing in The Hague be made more pleasant for you? The results (see page 74 onwards) reaffirmed the strength of the WHO model. The wishes, comments and criticisms all fell into one of the same eight areas of life. Where there has been progress in these, many older people see a positive effect.

The greatest difference for The Hague in terms of the WHO model, therefore, is its broad approach. In everything that happens in the city, the needs of the elderly must be taken into account. From

public transport, to sport and culture. The approach is broad because it is a task for the whole city: for clubs, businesses, the media and everyone living in The Hague. The commercial sector has also started to become more interested in the over 60s as an attractive target group: shops, restaurants, cinemas and sports clubs are starting to capitalise on the ageing population.

## WELCOME TO THE HAGUE

The Hague Municipality also included the Age-Friendly Cities theme in its communication with the cities that it has been in contact with for a longer time: Bangalore (India), Frankfurt, Manchester, New York and Suzhou (China) (see also pages 14, 24, 40, 42, 56 and 66). All of them cities which also have a rapidly growing group of older residents. Each city has responded in accordance with its own culture, traditions and financial resources. The Hague invited the five cities to work together and create a network of trailblazers working towards an age-friendly future.

Representatives of the five trailblazers, along with other cities, came to The Hague for the Age-Friendly Cities Conference on Ageing and Innovation in October 2017, during the national Vitality Month. The more than 350 people taking part learned about The Hague's approach (together with numerous seniors in The Hague) at various sites around the city and at the closing festival on the Pier.

Foreign delegates gave presentations at the conference on the position of senior citizens in their own city. They took part in workshops and concluded by making agreements about future cooperation. In their own cities the trailblazers will work on creating a more positive image of older people, among other





TEXT: HANS OERLEMANS | PHOTO'S: GETOUD

things. One of the suggestions was to give seniors a role in the promotion of the city, as The Hague already does. It was further agreed to carry out research on e-health applications geared towards safety and living in comfort.

## SENIOR MONITOR

More than 75,000 people living in The Hague are now older than 65. By 2021 that number will be roughly 80,000 (15% of all residents) and by 2040 118,000 (19%). Diversity is also further increasing: in 2016 29% of over the over 65s had a migrant background, in 2021 that will be 33%.

Figures and percentages tell us nothing about individuals. Because no two 70 year-olds are the same. Each has his or her own story, wants and needs. Nevertheless, statistical data also provides us with an overview of the major challenges facing the city. The Senior Monitor is published every two years by The Hague Municipality. It brings together all the available data on the elderly living in The Hague. The latest edition was published at the end of 2018.



**MARLENE SY A TEN**

**ESCAMP**

# “MY SCHEDULE IS PRETTY FULL”



TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUD

When I was four years old my father went to work for Shell in Curaçao. We moved to Paramaribo where we lived. Shell took good care of us. Every four years at Shell's expense we could take a holiday in Suriname with the whole family. I was the eldest of eight children, so that was quite something. I was always expected to set a good example, and so it has been all my life. I no longer have the feeling that I have to, by now it has become natural and something automatic to me.

## SECRETARY

After secondary school and gaining some certificates I also started to work for Shell as a director's secretary. I was in that job for just two years, then it stopped; I got married, so my contract ended and I had to leave. My husband and I had four children. After Shell made

him redundant in 1969 he started a construction firm. And I worked as a secretary again.

## THE HAGUE

Alongside my work I did a lot of voluntary work, mainly with children. I gave extra tuition, was class mother and helped the teaching staff by organising class trips and purchasing school supplies. Our children grew and moved to the Netherlands and the US for their studies. I came to the Netherlands many times for work or on holiday. It was in 2000 - I was already over 60 and retired by then - that I suddenly had an opportunity to look after the house of some friends in Helmond. It was then that I made the decision: I shall stay in the Netherlands and go and live in The Hague.



It is great living in The Hague. It is the best city in the Netherlands, you have everything right here. I soon got to know people by joining all kinds of organisations and taking part in everything that I could. I would have coffee with the neighbours every week and took free courses offered by NIBUD (National Institute for Budget Information) and HOF (later PEP Den Haag). Because of the courses I took I now know, for example, how to detect whether someone is suffering from dementia and how to deal with them. Every Friday I am a volunteer at the Afro Surinam/Hindustani day centre for the elderly in **Het Zamen**. We read the newspaper, tell each other nice stories, sing, play games, drink coffee and, of course, eat delicious food together.

## “I now have a boyfriend”

I set up a telephone circle with several other seniors. We call each other every day at round about ten o'clock to ask if everything is OK. 'Have you taken your medicine, did you hear from your family, and

have the others called yet?' It's ideal. I was also a buddy in a buddy network. I now have a boyfriend as a result of that. He is 86, not so young anymore, but he is so nice.

### DOING THINGS I ENJOY

Actually I only do things I enjoy and I get everyone to join in with me. Sometimes the most remarkable things happen to me. Just recently, in fact. With the 'Seniors in the Neighbourhood' library project for the elderly we were going to visit the Butterfly Garden. There was someone we didn't know in our minibus. She was dropped off somewhere, and walked to the door, but found it shut. The friendly driver let her back onto the bus, but there was nowhere he could drop her off. So I said to her, "Why don't you come with us to the Butterfly Garden?" She came with us and had a great time. Someone like that is so grateful. I have her phone number and the next time we are going somewhere I will call her and I am sure she will come with us again.

People, and particularly the elderly, are inclined to think the worst. They are constantly going on about



how it used to be, see no future for themselves and spend their time waiting for the children to drop by. What I often see is that they are not aware of all that there is out there for them and don't know how to make contact with other people. Actually, they should all do the courses that I took. But whatever you do, don't call it a course, training or workshop, because then they definitely won't come.

## “Falling is a big mistake”

Looking at my life as a whole, I can say that I am still pretty busy, and I am happy. There is just one thing which I really don't want to do, actually that no one of my age wants to do, and that is to fall. Falling is a big mistake and a huge setback, if you fall then generally you won't reach 100. So old folks: don't walk too fast!



# How do they do it in ...

# MANCHESTER

TEXT: HANS OERLEMANS

**Apart from when it comes to football, in many ways Manchester and The Hague are quite similar: both with roughly half a million inhabitants, a trendy and popular city centre with hotels, restaurants, cafes, museums and other attractions, along with a highly diverse and rapidly ageing population.**

Manchester is one of the five trailblazers in the network of Age-Friendly Cities. Willeke van Staalduinen in The Hague coordinates the contact with Manchester.

**What strikes you about Manchester? Are there major differences compared with The Hague's approach?**

"My impression is that age-friendly is more embedded in the overall policy of the municipality there. Other departments besides care and welfare are also actively involved. When decisions are made about public transport or culture, the elderly are taken

into account right from the outset. Perhaps that is also because the Older People's Board has a much stronger position there than that of the Stedelijke Ouderen Commissie (City Committee for the Elderly) here in The Hague. In Manchester the Older People's Board has to be actively involved in everything affecting the elderly. This has been laid down in the Older People's Charter."

**Are the topics at the top of the agenda in Manchester the same as those in The Hague?**

"On the whole, yes. The centre of Manchester is prosperous, but surrounding that area are the old working class districts where you find similar groups of disadvantaged people as in some parts of The Hague. There you find vulnerable elderly people with all the problems associated with poverty, loneliness and an unhealthy lifestyle. All entirely familiar. To some extent Manchester may even be ahead of this country, if you take obesity, for example. It is much worse there than it is here but, I am sorry to say, that we may well be going in the same direction. Average



# MANCHESTER

## Age-Friendly City

life-expectancy is alarmingly low at 65 years of age. In The Hague it is 80, but here too, there are major differences between those areas where the better-off and the less well-off live.”

**Do you think there is more to be gained from the contact between cities? Until now it has mainly been**

**exchanging information and taking a look behind the scenes, right?**

“Broadening your outlook is always worthwhile. You start to see your own situation from a different point of view. Things that we think are only natural, people in other countries sometimes have entirely different ideas about. And perhaps they may have a point.

PHOTO: MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL





But if you are to maintain enthusiasm in the longer term then you will have to do more, I think. Perhaps exchanging professionals from both cities for a short period, or setting up projects together and applying for European funding for them. Many cities in Europe are struggling with the same sorts of problems and are looking for the same sorts of solutions. So there is some duplication of work. By bundling the expertise and experience, a project can gain more leverage."

### **What themes would be suitable for that?**

"A current focus globally is research to develop IT applications for healthcare and particularly for the care of the elderly. Expectations are high. IT must help find solutions to deal with the growing demand for healthcare and the serious shortage of personnel. People are working on e-health and

robots and sensors are being developed all over the place, although without much interaction or exchange of information. The Hague could take the lead by inviting other Age-Friendly Cities to work together on research or setting up pilots. A major problem is that the long-term funding dries up when e-health apps start to be implemented. When the start-up subsidy ends, projects also often run aground. Who is going to pay for the new technologies? Here too, perhaps a joint model could be developed, working closely with manufacturers, care institutions, insurers and financiers."

### **Do the international contacts have a direct or indirect influence on how things are done from a practical point of view in The Hague?**

"Yes, and they should. The network is simply a



PHOTO: GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY

tool, not an end in itself. We exchange knowledge and ideas to help make the city more age-friendly. Ultimately it will be the elderly in the different cities who will benefit from that. You do still see a tendency to present only the successes to one another. You can learn from successful projects, of course, but you can also learn a lot from projects that stranded or failed. If you will allow partners from other cities to help you find solutions or suggest a different approach to get things going again. That is also an interesting aspect. Because cultural factors can then come into play. In other cultures it is often much more difficult than it is in the Netherlands to reveal any weak areas, or be openly critical of something."

**Besides all the similarities between Age-Friendly Cities, what about the major differences between them in terms of living standards, facilities,**

## **culture and governance? Does that stand in the way of cooperation?**

"No, nor does it have to. Provided you are aware of the differences. In the Netherlands, for example, age-discrimination in employment is not permitted. The elderly should remain active in society for as long as possible. But if you take a country like Bulgaria you see that the elderly continue working long past their 65th birthday. That really is participation! But where there is no employment-based or state old-age pension, they have no other choice. The elderly keep on working until they drop. That's participation driven by poverty. So there is always more to it than simply what the figures show. And you need to be aware of that."

**Willeke van Staalduinen co-founded the AFEdeMy, Academy for age-friendly environments. She works as a coordinator and researcher to promote age-friendly environments and supports municipalities and organisations in drawing up action plans. She was also involved in the organisation of the AFC Conference in The Hague in October 2017.**

**In addition, Willeke was among those actively involved in the development of the Covenant on Demographic Change: towards an Age-Friendly Europe. It brings European cities and regions together with citizens, researchers and businesses to work together to create a residential environment that is age-friendly for all.**



# DIGI-TALES

**For the last three years, Saskia Kuus, who works at the library, has been the driving force behind The Hague's Story Tables. "The level of interest in history has grown in recent years and more people than ever before are starting to write down their own history."**

"At the Story Tables we organise in association with The Hague Municipal Archive and The Hague Memories working group of the *Haags Historisch Museum* (Historical Museum of The Hague), elderly people living in The Hague reminisce about the city and its residents and then make a story from that. These tales were published as a book in 2012 together with an audio CD, but since then these memories have been recorded on film as Digi-tales. So we use new media and stories to record the cultural heritage of The Hague."

## LARGE FAMILIES

"The Tables are a great success," Saskia continues. More than 450 people have already taken part. "All the Tables are remarkable, but for me the one about large families really stood out. Following a notice in the *Algemeen Dagblad* newspaper more than 30 people responded to talk about this topic, while normally we would expect about ten. We inundated them with questions about their memories. What was it like being part of a large family in The Hague, living in a house full of brothers and sisters? For how many people did they have to peel potatoes or cook rice? Where did they come in the family? And how did their mothers manage? Each Story Table round results in ten stories from which digi-tales can be made. This time too, we had ten moving stories about being the eldest, the middle and youngest child growing up in families with from nine to as many as 23 children, which we turned into digi-tales.

We see that people often find it difficult to tell their story to begin with. They don't know each other and are hesitant to speak. But over time and as they see each other more often - we meet seven times altogether - people start to relax and open up more. They help each other to remember, sometimes unpleasant memories too. In no time they become a close-knit group and that is nice to see.

Volunteers help the storytellers to write their story, find illustrations and with the filming. Pieter Sekeris, one of the volunteers, says enthusiastically that he always enjoys the meetings. For him it is wonderful to hear what other people have experienced in their lives, and he has also made new friends and acquaintances as a result.

## ADO - THE HAGUE FOOTBALL CLUB

As you might expect, Frans Leermakers, a big ADO fan, took part in the Story Table about the ADO Den Haag football club. "Initially I was somewhat sceptical about the Story Tables, but after the first two meetings I started to enjoy it," he says. The official presentation of the DVD with the digi-tales was the cherry on the cake. "There were so many people

ADO STORYTABLE, PHOTO: KEES VERDOORN ©





A VISIT TO REMEMBERED PLACES FOR THE LARGE FAMILIES STORY TABLE. PHOTO: JACINTHA VAN BEVEREN ©

there that they had to get more chairs. One of the nice things about it was that after seeing the film, colleagues and other people I know said that they could now understand better why I am so passionate about ADO."

'In the dunes' and 'A day at Scheveningen beach' were two of the Story Tables that Elly Vons took part in. "The interaction with the others encourages you to write down your own story and read it aloud. I could even honour my now deceased father who did so much voluntary work in the dunes. The atmosphere

too, was so positive, we encouraged each other to speak. For example, I even got to read to them a poem I had written myself. The nice thing about that was that someone else had found some really good pictures to go with it. And then the film itself! Family, friends and other people I know all looked at it on YouTube. The comments I received were only positive."

### GREETINGS FROM SCHEVENINGEN

Anyone visiting the *Haagse Herinneringen* (Memories of The Hague) website will find dozens of Digi-Tales there, all of which provide a fascinating glimpse into the lives of the people who took part. The short films are also used in the *Haags Historisch Museum* (Historical Museum of The Hague). They form part of the 'Greetings from Scheveningen' exhibit, for example, about the 200 year history of the seaside town. Some of the films about life during the war are also shown in the museum.

The Story Tables are still going on. A good subject that has not yet been covered is 'The Hague Market'. A lot must certainly have happened in the market and there must surely be interesting and amazing stories out there about it. Digi-ales can be found (in Dutch) at: [www.haagseherinneringen.nl](http://www.haagseherinneringen.nl)





**JAN GOEDBLOED**  
LOOSDUINEN

# “ACTUALLY, WE ARE ONE BIG FAMILY”



TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUD

My father was in the military so I lived in many different places. Following a circuitous route we finally ended up in The Hague in 1940, until we had to leave again.

## **BENIDORM**

I was a police officer with the National Police Force until I retired from that 25 years ago this year. When I no longer had to work and we could spend winters abroad, my wife and I went to Benidorm. We ended up on a camp site where I helped the manager by doing all sorts of odd jobs. I also organised the whist and bridge evenings. Then someone wanted to set up a computer club, which I chaired and I started giving computer lessons. Gradually other things started to come my way which I liked to do.

After some years we decided to return to the Netherlands. I wanted to go to Wijk bij Duurstede, while my wife wanted to move to The Hague because it is easy to get to places from here. I didn't make a fuss about it and with hindsight I am pleased we made that choice. When our daughter started looking for a place to live we said to her: find somewhere near woods and the beach. The beach is really close to The Hague and we live so high up that all you see from the window is trees. We are really happy living in Loosduinen.

## **HENNEBERG**

Back in the Netherlands I found myself at De Henneberg community centre because we wanted to go on the outings. I also started to look for a place to give computer lessons. That ended up being the



library on Berensteinlaan but the equipment they had was so outdated that I said 'I am willing to give lessons but first we need to have better equipment.' Unfortunately nothing came of it. De Henneberg then asked me if I wanted to be a volunteer for the outings. Because of all the public funding cuts at a certain point it was no longer possible to organise any trips through De Henneberg. We volunteers then got all the parties together and they asked me if I would like to organise it. They didn't even have to ask. I was more than happy to do that. At the moment we have ten volunteers. I am gradually handing things over to others because I am going to stop soon. But I will keep going for as long as there are new outings and trips.

### MAINLY WOMEN

Sometimes it is as if I am organising trips for a women's club. I am thrilled if three or four men join us on an outing. I think that trips are probably just not their thing. Especially if we go to a museum - not a single man will do that anymore. But if you go to the De Henneberg community centre you will see a handful of men sitting there chitchatting and playing

cards. They are happy to entertain themselves in that way while the women seek contact more and come with us on the outings.

Sometimes someone comes along who I would not have expected to see on such a trip. But because of the company it always works out. What I like most is that it brings people together. People become friends, we enjoy ourselves together and we even start to feel like we are just one big family. I think that people can also live independently at home for longer because they have made new friends here and have learned how to maintain those new friendships.

*“I just like to be busy,  
I can't help it”*

I just like to be busy, I can't help it. I do things for other people, and for myself. If we go somewhere with the group and everyone is happily chatting to one another, I look around and I know why I do it. But I also enjoy organising the trips. We go every week so it takes quite some time to get it all organised. I



spend a at least half day on it every day. I haggle with everyone about everything, from bus transport to shipping. I have managed to get most of the boats for half price. If you talk a lot, people tell you a lot.

I would like nothing better than to get older as I have so far. Maybe that will change later, but then I will have to accept that. Fortunately I have a wife who supports me. She also does a lot for other people. It's something we feel is important!

## WEEKLY TRIPS

*Samen op Pad Loosduinen* (Loosduinen on the road together) organises a group outing every Tuesday through De Henneberg visiting museums, films, lectures and talks, as well as eating out. For further details (in Dutch) go to: [www.samenoppadvoorwielzijn.nl](http://www.samenoppadvoorwielzijn.nl)

# How do they do it in ...

# NEW YORK

TEXT: HANS OERLEMANS

**In 2007 - shortly after the WHO launch - New York made the idea of the Age-Friendly City fundamental to its policy. That has since worked its way through to all policy areas. Projects range from tackling domestic abuse (elder abuse programs) to Senior Splash (special swimming times).**

*By 2040 one in five New Yorkers will be over the age of 60*

By 2040 one in five New Yorkers will be over the age of 60. The city wants to be prepared for that and in 2017 presented its 'New Commitments for a City for All Ages' programme. The aim is to enable the elderly to participate in the life of the city physically, socially and economically. This is vital, given the growing numbers of seniors in the population. The city cannot allow the elderly to be forgotten and become

dependent. "Ensuring that New Yorkers can thrive as they age benefits everyone."

Roy Wesenhagen in The Hague maintains contact with the city council, institutions and businesses in New York. He knows the city well, not least because he has lived and worked there in the past. What stands out to him?

*'New York is well ahead of The Hague'*

"New York is well ahead of The Hague. You see that age-friendly is rooted in both policy and legislation, and you see that reflected on the street as well. Take the accessibility of buildings and public transport, for example. Bus stops are optimally designed for people who are less mobile. More and more metro stations have a lift. They are doing their best to make that happen."

"What I also notice is the level of respect for the elderly and people who are less mobile. In the bus



# NEW YORK

## Age-Friendly City

or metro people still offer their seat to someone, as in the past. That's also age-friendly: taking people into account and showing respect fits right into the eight WHO domains. In the US people have more patience than we do and are willing to give each other space. New York is hardly a paradise on earth, of course. Far

from it. But in some areas the city is tackling issues on the age-friendly agenda with much more urgency than we are."

**Is The Hague open to good examples from elsewhere or do we tend to think**

NEW YORK. PHOTO: DESIGN FOR HEALTH (FLICKR, CC-BY)





IN THE MOMA. PHOTO: ROY WESENHAGEN

### that we know what's best for us?

"No, although sometimes perhaps. The Dutch generally have that tendency. Even Rotterdam finds it difficult to adopt a successful project from The Hague as it stands. They always have to give it a Rotterdam flavour first. But it's not like that everywhere, I've noticed. Take Frankfurt, there the councillors and professionals are curious about proven successes elsewhere. They have no difficulty in adopting them, like The Hague's Golden Plates project for restaurants in nursing and care homes. *Main Lieblingsteller* they call it there. The Germans don't suffer from the 'not invented here' syndrome."

### In your view, how should the contact with New York and other cities develop in the future?

"We should make more use of the expert network to learn from one another. The ageing population represents a huge challenge for The Hague. That's not news, of course, but how are we going to tackle it? Added to that is the shortage of personnel in the care sector; the growing number of elderly people with dementia, living in isolation and so on. Altogether, whatever way you look at it, that requires innovation. Other countries are dealing with the same issues and sometimes they are already further along. So



NEWYORK CITY. PHOTO: JAZZ GUY (FLICKR, CC-BY)

we should look around more to see how it is done elsewhere and make people in The Hague aware of that. For the elderly living in The Hague it is interesting to see how things are set up abroad. That could perhaps also help them to put into perspective what you can reasonably expect from government.”

**Roy Wesenhagen is founder and owner of D’Article bureau in The Hague. It develops Age-Friendly Environments for cities and businesses and runs social and civil society projects for the elderly and people with disabilities. In its work D’Article applies the principles of Design Thinking & Development.**





**FRIEDA STOLP**

LAAKKWARTIER

# “TRY TO GET OUT AND MEET PEOPLE”



TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUD

I was born in Boskoop in 1951 and am half of a twin. There were nine of us at home and we had to get by on what little there was. When I turned 13 my father said it was time that I started earning a living. I did production work in the chocolate and marzipan factory, where eventually I became head of production. After I married family life replaced work, but I still had the urge to get out of the house so I went back to the factory. That was fine until the factory was moved to Romania and I found myself made redundant and sitting at home.

## **DE STIEL COMMUNITY CENTRE**

At that time I was living alongside the Gouwe river in Waddinxveen. One day as I was waving to the boats passing by I realised that this was not what I wanted, I needed to have some purpose in life. My twin

sister was living in The Hague and so I followed her there. I started to look for voluntary work. It didn't take long to find something and not far from home either. Working behind the bar in De Stiel community centre, on my own street.

## **CLUB HOUSE**

We have turned it into a real club house here. Once people have been here, they keep coming back. We look out for one another too. So if someone is sick and can't do their own shopping, there is always someone willing to arrange that for them. I hear a lot, and if I think that professional help is needed, then I call someone to arrange that.

Unfortunately we are not really visible here in the neighbourhood. Bingo games elsewhere, for example,



get prizes from the local shops. But we don't. I have approached them all but always get the same answer: sorry, we already give prizes for another bingo game.

### **LONELINESS**

Even though we have a really friendly club here I think that many of the old people on this street are lonely. We are trying to do something about that. We ask all the elderly people in the neighbourhood to drop in. Some of them come once and then seem to say they are fine as they are at home, while they also said that that they are lonely. I find that strange. But I also think that some people are just used to being lonely. Some people deliberately choose to be alone and would rather not be bothered by anyone else. They prefer their own company. Whatever the case, you don't have to be alone if you don't want to be. Go to a club or community centre; there are so many of them in the city. Try to get out and meet people. Talk and listen to one another. It will make you feel better.

De Stiel is a second home to the people who come here. There is a regular group that comes in every morning. About 20 people a day on average, although

it is busier when there are certain activities, like bingo. It's important to me to do something for other people. I enjoying doing that, I am here five or six days a week. I am treasurer, I coordinate the volunteers and supervise the trainees. I organise the coffee, tea, and bingo, and sometimes I cook, I also buy plants for the garden but I don't do the gardening, I prefer to leave that to someone else.

If I were to have to stop for any reason, then we would have a problem. We have been thinking about that for a while now and happily the committee has realised that now. Eventually we will have to make sure that younger people come along who can take it over. We are doing our best to find them.

### **“I get so much back”**

Voluntary work is not just about giving, it goes both ways. I get so much back. I will go with my sister soon to buy some plants. It's one of the little things that I really like to do. People come in and see them right away, and they like them. That makes me so happy.



## COMPLAINING

Elderly people in The Hague are really fortunate, but some of them still complain all the time. Then I think, you have so much. Perhaps it's all been made a bit too easy for them and it's time to look at whether all of it is necessary. During the bingo too, some of them complain. Then I say to them, 'you came into this world with nothing and you will leave it with nothing. So be happy with what you have.' Then they are quiet and say to me, 'Frieda, you should have had a different job, you could have been a social worker

or something like that'. There are old people who are grateful, of course. I always say that I don't want any gifts or other stuff, but a while ago someone had crocheted a pink bear for me as a thank you gift. I was really touched by that.

## DE STIEL COMMUNITY CENTRE

De Stiel is an activity centre for seniors. The activities include bingo, shuffleboard, darts and cards, and there is a dining club. Address: Stieltjesstraat 848A in The Hague.



### National Seniors' Day

National Seniors Day was celebrated on 2 October 2015 in the Zuiderstrandtheater in The Hague. The day dedicated to vitality and ageing also marked the start of the first Vitality Month.

# A look back

### Community combatting Loneliness

Businesses in The Hague work together in the Community combatting Loneliness to see what they can do to tackle loneliness in the local community.



### Age-Friendly City The Hague

The Hague has been the starting point for many new developments in the care of the elderly. A book about this and the Age-Friendly Cities concept was published in 2017.

### Adopt a Care Home

The idea behind Adopt a Care Home is that as many schools as possible should connect with a care home. The *Stichting Creatief Onderwijs* (Creative Education Foundation) can help with this. Eppo van Nispen tot Sevenaer and Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, two well-known figures in the Netherlands, officially launched the link between Oldeslo care home and a local Steiner School.



### Baseline measurement and joining the WHO Age-Friendly Cities initiative

At the start of Vitality Month it was announced that The Hague had joined the WHO Age-Friendly Cities initiative and the baseline measurement for this was presented.



### Opening of hospital exercise garden

Following the lead of other places, in 2016 The Hague opened an exercise garden in the grounds of the Bronovo hospital. Unique to this was the collaboration between the hospital, the municipality, the neighbourhood and The Hague University of Applied Sciences (*Haagse Hogeschool*).



### Visit by Queen Maxima

Queen Maxima visited the *iZi-ervaarwoning* (adaptable home) and *Haags Ontmoeten* (Meeting in The Hague: a contact group for the elderly and their carers). These visits were further to innovations in ageing policy and the care of the elderly.



### Age-Friendly City The Hague Exhibition

To make people more aware of the fact that The Hague is part of the Age-Friendly Cities network an exhibition was organised showing all eight domains, together with explanatory information. A photograph was taken for this in each of the eight districts of The Hague.

### Vitality Awards

The annual Vitality Awards draw attention to practical and creative solutions found in the city which make The Hague even more age-friendly.



### Exhibition opening

In 2017 an interactive exhibition entitled *100 worden en ervan genieten* (reaching 100 and enjoying it) was on display for a while in the Atrium of the Town Hall. This was an exhibition you could take with you as you journey onward into your own future.

## Christmas Dinner 2016

On 22 December 2016 many elderly people enjoyed a Christmas dinner in the Atrium of the Town Hall.

The Resto van Harte (recipe for a better neighbourhood) organisation supplied the dinner.



## Dead simple symposium

The *Dood gewoon in Den Haag* (Dead Simple in The Hague) organisation wants to break through the taboo of talking about (life and) death. In 2016 it celebrated its fifth anniversary with a symposium at The Hague University of Applied Sciences.



## Age-Friendly Cities International Conference

The Age-Friendly Cities International Conference held in 2017 focused on The Hague approach in various parts of the city and at the closing festival on the Pier.

## Say it with a plant!

In all eight districts 50 people were asked whether they knew of an elderly person in their area who - for whatever reason - they would like to see recognised. A plant with a card and a message was then delivered to all 400 of these seniors.

## Cultural Festival on the Pier

The *Grijze Koppen Orkest* (Grey Heads Orchestra) performed at the cultural festival in October 2017. This orchestra was also included in the TV series of Johan Overdevest *Goud voor Oud* (Gold for Old) that was shown on TV West. Elderly people in care homes and primary school children worked together to create the performance.





### **New space opened at Escamp library**

The library helps older people to build on their network and competences so that they can continue to live independently for as long as possible. Among other things, iPad cafés and Story Tables, for example, are organised there. The first truly age-friendly space for this was set up at Escamp library and opened by former Alderman Karsten Klein.

### **Story competition**

Following a short training session by GetOud 150 students from The Hague University of Applied Sciences were linked to seniors during a lunch or dinner at Resto van Harte to record the stories and life histories of these people and write them up. The best story won a prize: 'Top marks for the golden pen'. The project was initiated by *Dood Gewoon in Den Haag* (Dead Simple in The Hague).



### **LAVA tool**

During Vitality Month staff from the Leyden Academy on Vitality and Ageing worked with elderly people to fill the LAVA (Life and Vitality Assessment) conversation tool.



### **Vlogging seniors**

During Vitality Month six seniors took the vlog camera into the field and made 24 films of various activities in the city.



### **Conclusion of Vitality Month**

Vitality Month is rounded off every year with a festive activity. In 2017 this took place in the COMM Museum for Communication.

PHOTO'S: SEBASTIAAN NEDERHOED, MARTIJN BEEKMAN, HENRIËTTE GUEST, RENSKÉ DERKX, D'ARTICLE ENTERPRISE BV, GETOUD.

FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/SENIORVRIENDELIJKDENHAAG.



**AAD TAAL**  
SCHEVENINGEN

# “YOU FEEL THE SENSE OF SOLIDARITY”



TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUD

Born and brought up in Duindorp, Scheveningen. Yes, I that's what I always say. I am and always will be a Scheveninger. When I send a letter it has Scheveningen on it, not The Hague.

## FISHERIES

I was just 14 years old when I left school and joined the fishing fleet. That was hard work. Hardly anyone on board bothered to wash. There was no shower and you slept on straw or, if you were lucky, an airbed. The cook prepared the food in a tiny galley. You were often on your feet for days on end and generally you were away from home for three weeks at a time. When you got home you were paid a sort of advance on your wages, usually in the pub. It wasn't much, but the barkeeper did alright out of it. They used to say, 'the barkeeper writes with a fork'. I soon quit the

work at sea. I worked in logistics until I retired.

## THE CLUB

In the period before I retired I regularly went to the film evening at the **Behouden Teelt** Club, where among other things, films about the fishing industry of the past were shown. When the technology let them down one time, I helped out and I have been there ever since. I am not the only one. I am on the committee together with Herman, Frits, Kevin and Danny, the last two being the youngsters who help out with the modern IT and equipment. So we are five altogether, and everyone has their own job. If necessary we get help from a welfare worker, when we apply for a grant from Scheveningen district, for example - which we sometimes get - and the space they provide for us to meet. We are pleased that we

can organise it all ourselves in this way, no one can say we don't make the effort. Certainly these days, it is difficult enough with all the privacy rules. No, just leave us to get on with it!

## ““n average age of around 75, and all men”

Over the past four years our membership has grown from 50 to 102 people, with an average age of around 75. All of them men. Sometimes I will invite someone to come along who I know is alone. They often answer, 'I can't come, I don't know anyone there'. To which I say that I am sure that there will be someone there that they know. And that is also always the case, and then they come along the next time. And friendships begin in that way too. If someone can't walk very well, someone else will say, 'I will walk part of the way with you'. You feel the sense of solidarity then.

### COFFEE MORNINGS

When I was running the film club, I noticed that some people wanted to get together more often. So I started a coffee morning. Around 20 people come now, almost all single men who enjoy talking to other people and being out and about. That's why we do it, so they don't need to feel stuck at home.

More recently we have been organising outings, people enjoy them. Such as a guided tour of the fish auction, a visit to Rederij Den Dulk shipping company or the Ketel One jenever distillery. Once a year we organise a surprise outing. Only the committee knows



where we are going. As we leave The Hague everyone is looking to see what direction we are going in. That's fun! We have introduced a quiz between the last activity and dinner. Before we did that I noticed that people started to nod off at that point, but now they all stay awake. Some of them cheat by looking over someone else's shoulder, but what can you expect when there's a bottle of jenever (Dutch gin) at stake; that makes people keen.

### SATISFACTION

Besides the work for the club, I also sing in the *Shantykoor Scheveningen* choir and do their newsletter. I also work one day a week on the restoration of the



old herring drifter *Scheveningen 236 de Noordster* which we are working on together with a whole group of seniors to return it to its former glory. Sometimes I am quite busy, but it gives me great satisfaction. Certainly on one of our film evenings when I see the happy faces, then that gives me an enormous boost. Then when I get home, I am extremely tired and have eyes as black as cannon balls. Well, what would you expect? I always like to keep an eye on everything!

### “Women and chickens on board bring bad luck”

*Oud Vissersdag* (Old Fisherman’s Day) is always the day before *Vlaggetjesdag* (Herring Fleet Day). We call that the ‘trip of all trips’. This year the question came up again: could the women come? Fishermen used to believe that women and chickens on board bring bad luck. And then the Mayor, Pauline Krikke, wanted to join us. And she is a woman, of course. But we all sang together and the ice was broken. My day could not have been better. Those are the great things about voluntary work.

### ‘BEHOUDEN TEELT’ CLUB

*Behouden Teelt* is a club which shows films about the fishing industry, tugboats and the historical figure Willem Barends. These films were often made by former employees who recorded the footage on board the ships. The name ‘*Behouden Teelt*’ comes from drift netting, which began on Herring Fleet Day at the end of May or early June, and ended at the end of November or early December. Throughout that period people were paid a fixed wage which was settled at the end of the trip on the basis of the profit from the drifter. The remaining food on board was also divided up among the crew. This was called the ‘*behouden teelt*’ or leftovers. For further details (in Dutch) go to: [www.facebook.com/clubbehoudenteelt](http://www.facebook.com/clubbehoudenteelt)

# How do they do it in ...

# SUZHOU

TEXT: HANS OERLEMANS

**The Netherlands has an ageing population but it's nothing compared to what China is facing. The success of the one-child policy has had far-reaching consequences.**

There are fewer and fewer youngsters while there are more and more old people, who are also getting older and older. A task with completely different dimensions than what we have to deal with. Nevertheless, China is very interested in how care is organised in the Netherlands.

Jan Booij has maintained contact with the city of Suzhou for many years. Through him the municipality, The Hague University of Applied Sciences and other institutions have been able to forge relationships with Chinese associates.

**Why the interest in our care system?**

"The Chinese like statistics. They look at which countries perform best. For a long time the Netherlands has been among the best when it comes to care and welfare. The Chinese want to know how

we do that. Some degree of social security is starting to appear in Suzhou, such as healthcare cover and something not unlike the insurance for exceptional medical expenses. It's all still very basic but it is there."

**We think that the Chinese arrange everything within the family. It was always such that caring for the children and the elderly was a family matter. Your moral obligation as children. Is that still the case?**

"The traditional family hardly exists anymore. For three generations families had just one child. Uncles, aunts and cousins have become rare. A child has to care for two parents and four grandparents. Added to which families have been torn apart because people have to work far from home and only return for the holidays. Tradition has no solution to offer here. The authorities have to come to their aid."

**Despite the huge differences between Suzhou and The Hague, what can we learn from one another?**

'IT'S ONLY FROM A DISTANCE THAT YOU SEE YOUR OWN QUIRKS'



# HOU

## Age-Friendly City

"The ageing population is one of the priorities of party leader Xi Jiping. China is capable of a great deal and has experience of rolling out centrally-managed programmes throughout the country. A lot of emphasis is being placed on technology: IT, demotics and care robots. Developments are moving much faster there than here, partly because privacy is not an issue for them. Here privacy legislation stands in the way of innovations like the Electronic Patient Dossier. The Chinese embrace every technological innovation much more quickly and on a much more

massive scale than anywhere else in the world. China will therefore become a leader in e-health."

"But in more traditional areas too, such as the planning of public spaces, we can learn from Suzhou. There you find plenty of parks and local squares where the elderly sit together or are actively taking part in Tai Chi, sport, and even ballroom dancing, or playing Go. These public spaces have an important social function. We don't have that so much here."

SUZHOU. PHOTO: JAN BOOIJ



# How do they do it in ...

# FRANKFURT

TEXT: HANS OERLEMANS

**Besides Suzhou, Jan also maintains contact with Frankfurt. The situation there, of course, is more like The Hague, right?**

“Yes and no. Yes, Frankfurt is roughly the same size, is an international city and has many expats working in the financial sector. The population is equally as diverse as that in The Hague. There are plenty of similarities but when you look more closely - at care, for example - then you see the differences.”

“The biggest provider in the city, *Frankfurter Verband*, combines care with welfare. We don't do that. It is interesting to see how they do that. *Frankfurter Verband* is also closely connected with the municipal council. This means that the Alderman is more directly involved in managing care and welfare. In the Netherlands we have separated those things: care is separate from welfare and institutions are separate from the municipality.”

“Things are different as soon as you cross the border, even in neighbouring countries. But we do

see a number of major shifts that are happening all over this part of Europe, such as decentralisation and organising care close to the people who need it. Another similarity is the growing demand for care while the budget remains unchanged or is even cut. As well as a desire to let the elderly live independently for as long as possible. Although the reasons for that are different in Germany than they are here.”

“If you go into a residential or care home in Germany then you largely pay the cost of that yourself. You sell your own house to pay for it, if you have to. If you run out of funds, then the children are asked to pick up the tab, known there as *Elternunterhalt*. That's why the elderly prefer to remain at home for as long as possible, with the support of their children.”

**You have been active abroad for years and put councillors, policy staff and care professionals in contact with colleagues elsewhere. What does that yield in terms of benefits for the city? Is that something that can be seen?**

'IT'S ONLY FROM A DISTANCE THAT YOU SEE YOUR OWN QUIRKS'



# KFUR

## Age-Friendly City

"When you work in a sector like care, you all end up with tunnel vision. You are trapped in a strict system of rules, protocols, professional jargon and a host of assumptions. If a problem occurs everyone has the same reflex and you start looking for solutions within the known framework. Even innovations are made to fit into what is already there."

"It is only when you are abroad that you see that there are other ways of doing things. A nice example is the Julie Roger Haus in Frankfurt for people with dementia. The residents there have far more freedom than is generally the case in the Netherlands. There it is decided in agreement with the family what is still reasonable. They go as far as they can. In the

PHOTO: FRANKFURTER VERBAND FÜR ALTEN- UND BEHINDERTENHILFE





Netherlands we try to rule out all possible risks in advance. For fear of accidents, liability, loss of reputation. But that has an enormous impact in terms of the wellbeing of the residents. Sitting in a chair in front of the TV you run the least possible risk, to put it bluntly. Every approach is a choice and by no means self-evident. That's something you learn by looking at your own situation from a different perspective from time to time."

"Simply copying a good idea from abroad, almost never works. You have to adapt it to your own context and be aware in advance of what obstacles you could encounter. But there are ideas that do

travel. *Frankfurter Verband* applied for the *Roze Loper* (Pink Carpet) label, for example, and is also the first foreign organisation to be awarded the certificate in recognition of its respect for the sexual diversity of its clients and staff."

**The WHO campaign for Age-Friendly Cities creates the impression that there would be one international model for an age-friendly society, as a final goal which we should all be working towards. One city may be further along than another, but the route is the same.**



and they could quite easily mention completely different areas than those listed by the WHO. Take religion, for example. In large parts of the world faith plays a huge role, particularly among the elderly. Perhaps an easily accessible mosque or temple in the neighbourhood is really essential to their wellbeing. As a secular westerner that's not something you really think about. You have to keep asking questions when it comes to things which seem to be self-evident and from time to time examine your own 'quirks' from a distance."

**Jan Booij has had a long career as director, board member and consultant in the care sector. He maintains close contact with colleagues abroad, organises study trips and is co-founder of the European Network on Intercultural Elderly Care (ENIEC).**

"Perhaps the Age-Friendly City concept is indeed the result of a limited vision. Ultimately it is a western idea conceived of by people from the baby-boom generation who have thought about how they themselves would like to grow old. Ask a well-to-do middle-class 50-year-old how they would like to grow old, and you hear all the fun things that 50-year-olds like to do. But will that still be the same when you are 80 and are starting to decline and the people around you are fading away? And is it also the same for people from different cultures and social classes?"

"Ask people in Kenya, Iran or Russia, for example, for eight domains which influence happiness and welfare





**RITA POETOE**

SEGBROEK

# “THEY DO MORE FOR THEMSELVES”



TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUD

My husband was studying in the Netherlands and that was why, at age 23, I gave up my job as a teacher and, together with my son, followed him here. My son told them at the nursery school that I was a teacher in Suriname and that I missed the work. And that's how I ended up working in education here. Because I worked four days a week, I had a day left over to do voluntary work in the Dew Mandir Hindu Temple. The elderly people there said that they missed Suriname, particularly the contact they had with their neighbours. I listened carefully to what they were saying and set up a study group which I also led. People could share their story there.

## **HINDI LESSONS**

My voluntary work extended to various organisations, but I also had my own ideas, such as maintaining my

own Hindi language and culture. So I set up a Hindi school. I am still the Hindi coordinator and give Hindi lessons to three different generations at the same time. The seniors can speak it, but can't read it. The youngsters generally can. They read to the old folks who then tell them what it means. That is so great!

*“I taught them  
how to spell their  
own name”*

In my voluntary work in the Jonker Frans care home I noticed that 60% of the Hindustanis did not speak Dutch properly. This created problems if they had to call a doctor, for example, and had to spell their own



name. This problem also meant that people didn't go to the common rooms in the care home because they could hardly understand anyone. So I started Dutch language lessons. Reading aloud to start with, and I also taught them how to spell their own name and gave them simple word finders. And it worked! We are also active - we do Tai Chi, take walks and have even been to the swimming pool. Swimming is not something that older people were allowed to do in Suriname. Because they had no swimming costumes we first had to buy them at a local chain store. For many of them that was quite an event, a new experience.

### **OWN ORGANISATION**

Besides my voluntary work for Jonker Frans, I also spend half a day a week there with my own group of older people. I do that in my own capacity as the head of my own organisation. All the activities we do contribute to the quality of life and independence of the people taking part. While in the past they often talked about children who didn't visit enough and spent their time waiting for them to come, now they do things together. They learn to tackle things together and to help one another. It is something they are not used to, they have to get out of their

comfort zone for that. It doesn't happen just like that, but with the encouragement and support of volunteers and enthusiastic people in the group, it works out. One time I said, 'Right, we are going on a picnic in Zuiderpark'. Their faces! I said to them, 'If you can't walk then just stay where the minibus drops you off and I will put out a folding chair for you there.' But they started to walk, and they enjoyed it. I even had to call the minibus service to ask if we could be picked up an hour later.

*“I am overjoyed if I can make it possible for that woman to join us”*

Old fashioned ideas can still prevail and the husbands of Hindustani women sometimes prevent them from coming to our meetings. That upsets me. I try to visit the people at home and explain to the husband what we do. I am overjoyed if I can make it possible for that woman to join us.

Over the last few years I have increasingly taken my group with me to meetings of the municipality, the



Lexus volunteer organisation in The Hague, or the Dialooghuis community centre. Recently there was a meeting about social support. They came with me and I said to them in advance, 'Now you have an opportunity to put your questions, comments and complaints somewhere where someone can do something with them'. They are still talking about it. The feeling that they are heard does them good.

### **WELFARE WISH**

What old Hindustanis wish for. Most of the elderly Hindustanis in my group get help at home with their personal care and domestic chores. They are very

pleased with that, of course. What is still sometimes seen as a problem is preparing their own Surinamese dishes. They don't get any help with that even though food is particularly important to them. Of course, they also eat traditional Dutch food, but they find it a bit bland. Some help with the cooking, so that they can eat more spicy food again, that's something they would like. And it's tasty too!

# “HET ZILVERUITJE” (PEARL ONION)

**‘Diverse Den Haag’ is a movement, a network of active people in organisations in The Hague, which holds the ideal that people in the hugely diverse city of The Hague should feel accepted and recognised as citizens and have a role that suits them. They work together to achieve their shared goals and ambitions.**

“We need to recognise everyone, including the elderly,” says Joger de Jong, who chairs *Divers Den Haag*. “They could be gay or they could have a migrant background, we come from all over the place. In our daily lives we sometimes emphasise the things that don’t seem ‘normal’ to us, while actually they should be. So we have the *Roze Loper* (Pink Carpet), a label for residential care, home care, and welfare organisations that recognise the sexual diversity of their clients and professionals. Nice in itself, but actually that pink carpet should stand for the fact that you respect everyone and that everyone can be who they are.”

“We are accustomed to putting people in boxes, target groups, describing them in terms of certain things and categorising them,” he continues. “We want to put an end to that. We want organisations to be sufficiently aware and that people get what they need. What that also means is that we should not be doing something for the Moroccans, because there is no such things as ‘the’ Moroccans. Someone from

Casablanca, for example, will likely be entirely different to someone from the Rif mountains.”

“I call it fused emancipation”

“We tend to think that if we have this or that organised, then it is fixed. But that’s not true. *Het Zilveruitje* (Pearl Onion) of the LGBT organisation COC Netherlands provides a good example of that. I call it fused emancipation. You need one another to become strong and once you are strong enough you go out into the world and want to be who you are wherever you go. My plea is: organise meetings where everyone feels welcome and can be themselves, because only then will you be dealing with people as individuals!”

## FEEL AT HOME

“COC had already had a meeting place for the over 35s for some years, but there was nothing specifically for older people. That’s what led to *Het Zilveruitje* (the Pearl Onion), a pleasant afternoon for gay older people and those who feel at home among them,” explains Jan van Leeuwen, one of the four organisers at *Het Zilveruitje*. “It has existed for about 15 years now and we organise some entertainment in the afternoon and eat supper together on the first and third Sundays of the month. We always have a theme. Often we watch a film with a gay theme, sometimes we invite musicians and occasionally we visit a



TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUD



museum. Today we are going to play bingo!"

## FRIENDSHIPS

"You often hear that the elderly can become lonely. Heterosexuals more often have children and grandchildren who they spend the weekend with, while homosexuals often don't have that. **Het**

*Zilveruitje* can help to fill that gap. We also think that older people prefer to have social contact with other seniors. It is nice to have somewhere to go where the atmosphere is not dominated by the hetero mentality."

**"You have to be open to it and, who knows, maybe you will be lucky"**

"It is mainly men who come here," Jan continues. "We really enjoy one another's company. Friendships are born, some of them pick each other up, although a relationship even began here once: two men found each other here a few of years ago. They are now married and some of the people who visit **Het Zilveruitje** also attended the marriage ceremony. That was most satisfying. But - you should never come here with the intention of finding 'the one'! That will never work. You have to be open to it and, who knows, perhaps you will be lucky."



**KUI KAN IP**  
CITY CENTRE

# “I AM BUSY SIX DAYS A WEEK”



TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUD

I was 42 years old when, together with my wife, I moved from Hong Kong to Curaçao to work as a cook in a restaurant. We did it purely for the money. We worked hard and the money we earned was for our children, so that they could go to school. My wife is now back in Hong Kong living with the children, while I live in the Netherlands. It's fine like that.

## FULL DAYS

That I ended up in The Hague after I retired was not entirely a coincidence. I knew some people here and then it is quite easy to find somewhere to live close by, isn't it? But I am alone here and I asked myself, 'what I am I going to do the whole day?' That was four years ago and my days are pretty full. On Mondays I go to computer lessons. I do that to keep up with things. There are so many Chinese seniors in The

Hague, but most of them do nothing with computers. A major drawback is that they were not educated when they were younger and therefore they lack the basic skills necessary to be able to use a computer. And if their children explain it to them today, by tomorrow they have forgotten it again. That's how it goes...

*“A mobile phone is not much use to you if you can't write”*

Some of them have been given mobile phones by their children, but such a device is not much use to you if you can't write. Fortunately I can manage pretty



well with it. I often WhatsApp with my wife and children. It is nice to hear what everyone is up to.

### DUTCH LESSONS

On Tuesdays I have Dutch lessons. It is difficult, but necessary. It would be nice if I could speak a few more words of Dutch, then people would be able to understand me better. Although my English is not too bad and on the whole people in The Hague are willing to speak to me in English.

Four days a week I can be found in the library. On Fridays I am a volunteer at a get-together for the elderly at the **Chinese Muur** (Great Wall of China) restaurant in The Hague. We talk, cook, eat, drink and sometimes I give them a bit of advice. It is always a great afternoon.

### SHOPPING

I am not so completely busy that I don't have time to look out for a group of six elderly Chinese people. I call them regularly to ask how they are doing and if there is anything I can do for them. Often I get to hear that they would like their children to visit more often, that they should be doing more

for their parents, doing the shopping, for example, or accompanying them to the doctor. It is difficult. The world that they grew up in was so completely different from the world that their children now live in. I explain to them that their children have their own lives. That they are working to support their own families. They understand that, but there is always that burning desire to see them.

Fortunately, I can often make them happy with my help. Then we get the shopping together or I accompany them to the doctor.

**“It's great to be there together, to sing and pray”**

Basically I am busy with all sorts of things six days a week. I don't do anything on Sundays, although I do go to the Chinese church in The Hague (**CEME Den Haag**) on Issingstraat. That is the church for the Evangelical Mission among the Chinese in Europe. It's great to be there together, to sing and pray.



### **DON'T BE ANGRY, BE HAPPY!**

Over In a couple of months I will be 70 and I am starting to notice that. Things don't go quite as easily as they used to. I do a lot, but at my own pace. Walking is becoming more difficult - I can just manage a half hour walk at a gentle pace. Despite my wanderings, and my wife and children living far away, I am happy! To those people who want to age in an agreeable way, I say: don't be angry, be happy!

# How do they do it in ...

# BANGA

TEXT: HANS OERLEMANS

**Ageing in Bangalore, a city of millions in India. Is it even possible to compare it with The Hague? “Hardly,” says Ram Ramlal. “The differences are huge.”**

**Is The Hague doing better in every respect?**

“Well, no, I definitely wouldn’t say that. In Bangalore I see valuable connections which have been lost in our society and not replaced by anything else. At the same time the technological advances sometimes move faster than they do in Europe.”

Ram Ramlal knows Bangalore well and has maintained contact with companies, institutions and the local government there for a long time now. Age-Friendly Cities is one of the themes of their exchanges. The rapidly growing metropolis is known as the Silicon Valley of India.

**Hasn’t care of the elderly always been a family matter in India?**

“Yes, traditionally the elderly live in the home or on the premises with the children. Life there takes place there in a much wider context. People do not live alone as they do here. Although you do see that changing. The young people work elsewhere in India,





# BANGALORE

## Age-Friendly City

as well as in Europe and America. They have sufficient income to buy care for their parents. That could be a home help or a place in a care home. These are still small initiatives in which the government plays no part."

### Besides family, is religion also a unifying factor in India? What does that mean for elderly people?

"Family and faith are the two fixed values in life. That applies to the Hindu majority, but also to Muslims and Christians, as well as the less well-known religious groups, such as the Jains and Parsees. Religion is woven into the fabric of daily life and provides a sense of meaning, comfort and the sense of being part of a greater whole. It helps people to be at peace with old age and the approaching end. The religious holidays throughout the year are always celebrated, as they used to be here. We have largely left all that behind without creating something else instead. While as you get older the need for meaning and family contact becomes all the more important. People may be less prosperous in India, but their sense of wellbeing could well be greater."

"The reverse side of ever greater individualisation and secularisation is loneliness, together with feelings of emptiness and pointlessness. That undermines wellbeing and also has an impact on physical health."



BANGALORE PHOTO: DAVE. (FLICKR: CC BY-NC-ND)



The loss of stories and connections which give a sense of meaning is not something that can be remedied by providing more care. In my view we are far too fixated on formalising care in legislation, regulations and protocols. All of which is useful and well intended, but that is not the way to make people happy. Sometimes just a brief but attentive conversation can work wonders."

**What is the importance of the contact between The Hague and Bangalore?**

"We can learn from one another of course. But we can also learn not to do things or try to avoid mistakes. Which is just as important! I think that in the West we have been too rigorous in breaking traditional ties, resulting in excessive individualism. If there is a problem, people immediately look to the authorities. I would advise India not to take that route."

"Foreign trips make you more aware of your own situation. In Bangalore I see how people in small



BANGALORE. PHOTO: DAVE. (FLICKR: CC BY-NC-ND)

communities reach out to help one another as a matter of course. Here we maintain distance, protect our privacy and don't want to burden others with our problems. That's a pity. If I can do something for someone else, that makes me feel good too. There is that reciprocity to it. We have forgotten just how great it is to share things among the family, between friends and in the neighbourhood, too."

"The surprising thing about India is how they combine tradition with modern life. Everyone has

a smartphone, for example, just as we do. There are already some advanced healthcare applications available. I have seen how people at home use their phones to look at their medical records and get the results of medical tests. Contact with the family doctor takes place online. The rising cost of healthcare also means that it is unavoidable that in the Netherlands we too will start using more technology for this. And then India and the Netherlands will also have that in common."

**Ram Ramlal was a Member of Parliament (CDA party), Alderman for The Hague, and is a director of MEE Zuid-Holland (an organisation that provides support for people with disabilities). He also sits on the Supervisory Board of Respect.nl.**



# CARE FOR YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

**A project that once began behind the desks of two policy staff in The Hague town hall has been a great success in Loosduinen for five years now: Care for your Neighbourhood.**

Ricardo Buitinga, the driving force behind this project in the municipality at the time, talks about it with great enthusiasm. "Perhaps because it was one of the best projects ever," he says, "there were almost no limitations, essentially anything was possible."

## ORIGINS OF CARE FOR YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

One of the consequences of the austerity cuts in social support was that there was less funding available. That was not immediately the case, but everyone knew that it would happen. People would have to look out for one another and take care of one another even more. Not just when someone is sick, but also in terms of their welfare. A way to facilitate this was to encourage more citizen initiatives.

To encourage people to work together to set up such initiatives, a subsidy of €30,000 was earmarked for each city district. Under the title of **Zorg voor je buurt** [Care for your Neighbourhood] an organisation, usually a social entrepreneur, would go into the district to look for people with ideas on how to do things with and for the elderly. Using the subsidy they could turn these ideas into concrete plans. What was unique about this subsidy was that anyone could apply - whether professional or ordinary citizen.

## CUTTING MACHINE AND TOMTOMS

In Loosduinen it was Ingrid and Marion who went in search of ideas. "It is difficult to get people interested

in starting an initiative, just like that," explains Ingrid. "It also requires a different way of thinking, changing the perspective from 'something will be done for us' to 'thinking of something ourselves'. The idea of that is exciting and perhaps even a bit scary. You sometimes felt the sense of mistrust, 'can we really get some money for this and run it ourselves?'

Nevertheless, in the first year alone more than €60,000 was applied for. There was a new cutting machine for 13 men who meet every week to do book binding and TomToms for the cycling club. You could ask, of course, 'should the municipality really be paying for that?' But you could also think, 'it's great that they got a cutting machine because now they can go on for several years more and the club will continue'. Because it is not just 13 men who share the same hobby, but also 13 men who look out for one another. If someone doesn't come along because they're sick, they take action right away. We see that doing something fun together leads to more social cohesion and that friendships are created.

## MORE LOCAL PEOPLE

Care for your Neighbourhood has since become quite popular in Loosduinen and we even organise three networking get-togethers a year where locals, professionals and the municipality meet one another.





TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUD



During the first year it was mainly professional organisations that put forward ideas, now it is increasingly local people. With just a small budget they can put their idea into practice, get others involved and create something really worthwhile for Loosduinen. Joke, for example, started a rambling club in her flat. The subsidy enabled her to take a course on how to lead club hikes as safely and responsibly as possible. Or Janna, almost 81 years old, who during one of the local Care for your Neighbourhood network meetings said that she would really enjoy cooking with other people. Immediately three more people stood up and together they now receive a subsidy for a cooking club."

### FUTURE

"As far as I know, Loosduinen is the only place where Care for your Neighbourhood, which is also no longer operated by the municipality, has continued," says Ricardo. To which Ingrid added, "my wish is that local people, people working in care, welfare, business owners, family doctors, community organisations, etc. should all be represented in the network. Because we have to care for the neighbourhood together. And it can be done!"



**ARIE MOOIJMAN**  
HAAGSE HOUT

# “WE ARE ALL GREY-HAIRED FOLK”



TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUD

The bombing of the Bezuidenhout in 1945 caused havoc in our house on Johannes Camphuijsstraat. We were evacuated for two weeks, but my mother wanted to return. I was just 5 years old.

## WORK

I started working when I turned 17. First at the *Economisch instituut voor de Middenstand* (Economic Institute for the self-employed), and later at the tax department. That was terrible. It was 'all talk and no action' there. I joined Lippmann Verzekeringen (insurance), a real family business, where I worked as a bookkeeper. Alongside my work I studied commerce at night school. I went to school four evenings a week while working five and half days a week, because in those days you worked on Saturday mornings. We had a little ditty: Thursday, oh Thursday, the best day

of the week. In the morning still half a week to go, in the evening only two days more! We don't have that anymore now that Friday is generally the last working day of the week.

## GETTING MARRIED

It was at Lippmann that I met my wife. She worked in the secretaries' office and sometimes we had days out with colleagues or went to see a film. That's how we met. We married on my 24th birthday. My wife was 21 at the time. If I tell that to younger people now, they think we were crazy. But no one lived together in those days. There was a housing shortage and you had to be married to be eligible for a home, unless you could buy a house, which could easily cost you 30,000 guilders. The family advised against it, after all, you don't want to be saddled with debt.



We moved to Valkenboskwartier, but six years later moved back to Bezuidenhout, once you have lived there, you always want to live there. Lots of people who leave come back later. You are close to the city here, as well as Central Station, Scheveningen and Leidsenhage shopping centre.

Some years later I started working for a housing association. I was not used to working with computers and there was a fanatic there who changed something in the computers every weekend. Then I arrived at work on Monday and could not

log-in. Every week it was the same story. I ended up on an occupational disability benefit.

### **DISTRICT BUS**

I wanted to do something for other people. My mother was a donor in support of the local bus service. I was curious about it and that's how I got involved. First as a driver and later as treasurer too. I have been treasurer on the committee for the bus service for more than 25 years now. I am busy with that every day. From home, but also in the community centre where we have been given an office. I make the roster for the drivers and occasionally stand in for someone. Now we have about 35 volunteers, we're all grey-haired folk. The bus service runs from Monday to Friday from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm and on Saturdays until 12 noon, taking the elderly and those who are less mobile in the Benoordenhout and the Bezuidenhout from home to the shops, the doctor, or the hospital, etc.

### **HELPING NEIGHBOURS**

We now live in exactly the same place as where I used to live with my parents. That house has since



been replaced by a housing complex with 38 units for seniors. When we moved here in 2000 the average age was 74, it's quite a bit more now 18 years later. My wife and I try to help wherever we can, but that generally ends at the front door. We had a neighbour who tried to replace a light bulb herself, she fell from the stepladder and broke both her arms. I told her that from now on I would do that. There are also people who won't let anyone in, not even help. They deliberately choose not to, perhaps because they don't want anyone interfering.

**“We need people  
on the committee,  
but it is difficult”**

We regularly do the shopping for our immediate neighbours. We have good contact with them. But that will be less in the future. We are getting older too and then we won't be able to do it anymore. For example, we still have five people on the residents committee, but two are leaving and then it will be

finished. The same is true of the local bus. We need people on the committee, but it is difficult to find them. We have become part of the furniture and we would like to see more younger people getting involved, but there are almost no volunteers anymore. We have to continue living at home for longer - and we want to do that - but how?

### **FLEXIBLE HOURS**

What I would like to see is that everyone who needs it can get help at home. There are people living in our complex aged 95 or even older. They get three hours of home help a week, a half hour break is deducted from that, but the home helps are not allowed to accompany you to get shopping. It would seem better to me if you could use those hours more flexibly. Get out, meet people, it's important to take walks. So why not let go of the set tasks?

I hope I can go like this for many more years to come. We are both healthy and enjoy being together. We don't need to go on holiday, every day is a holiday for us. The Haagse Bos park and Duindigt race course are both close by. What more could we want?

# How do they do it in ...

# THE HAGUE

TEXT: HANS OERLEMANS | PHOTO'S: GETOUD

## **In adopting its age-friendly programme the municipality took a different approach to ageing policy. What do you see as the most important innovation?**

"We released the elderly from the straightjacket of Care and Welfare. That really was a turning point. The elderly were (and sometimes still are) primarily seen as a group of people who are dependent and in need of help, a target group requiring special facilities. And if that has all been arranged then the ageing policy is in order. But is that really so? You run the risk that the elderly feel unnecessarily dependent and start to behave that way. Of course, it is good to help people, but are you really helping them if you do that?"

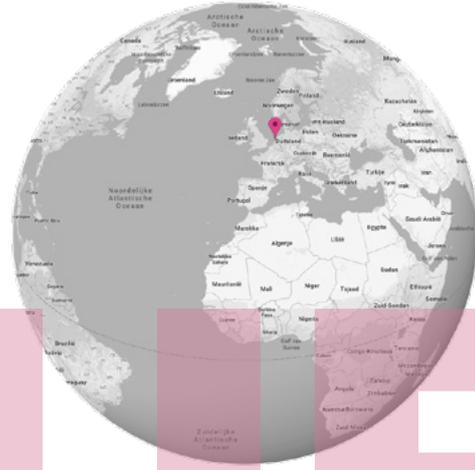
"In the age-friendly city programme we turned that around and took the elderly as our starting point. What is important for you to be able to age in an agreeable way? That could be anything and is certainly more than just care. Facilities are still important, of course, but more as a means than an end in itself. If you ask large groups of seniors what is important

to them, then basically it boils down to the same eight areas of life. These range from housing and mobility, to participation and respect. The Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) investigated this for us in The Hague and worldwide the WHO asked old people in focus groups what ageing in an agreeable manner means to them. The results all pointed in the same direction. We used the eight domains to provide the framework for the city's new ageing policy."

## **To which The Hague added the theme of 'vitality'. Why was that?**

"A city may be age-friendly, but if the elderly are not vital and engaged, then it won't work. What we are talking about here is vitality and resilience of spirit. Physical complaints are almost unavoidable at some point, but that does not need to stand in the way of an active and happy life. Vitality is the key: the will to keep doing things, to get out and meet people. Every individual interprets that in their own way, but everyone needs to feel that they count and to know that there is someone waiting for them."

'THE PEOPLE OF THE HAGUE ARE BECOMING MORE ACTIVE'



# HAGUE

## Age-Friendly City

"In The Hague we became more aware of that. Then it is all about meaning and living a purposeful life. That is highly individual. What do **you** need to be able to age in a way that is fulfilling? It's a difficult thing to talk about. The answer often lies deep within. In the care sector, and elsewhere, we are not used to talking about such things. Even though this is essentially what ageing with dignity is all about."

### What does that mean in terms of the policy?

"The municipality cannot make people happy. We should be clear about that. But we can help to create the space for people to meet and for activities which people consider to be worthwhile. Whatever we do, the discussion is always about meaning, purpose





and enjoyment. The municipality essentially asks the city to get involved with this. And it does. Volunteers, institutions, education and even the commercial sector put forward their ideas and initiatives. A nice example is how students at the Hague University of Applied Sciences record the life histories of old people. These are warm exchanges in which the elderly person looks back on his or her life and the youngster gains respect for how previous generations have had to struggle to create a decent life for themselves. It is just one of many inspiring examples.”

**The Hague is among the trailblazers working to create an age-friendly city. What stage are we at and what can we learn from other cities?**

“We are making progress but an age-friendly city is something that will never be finished. It is and always will be a journey towards an ideal that will continually throw up new questions. Policy is always idealistic. You try to change things. You start by persuading people and getting them on board. A lot has been done in this area in recent years.”

“The international network of contacts is important for several reasons. The WHO unites the world with idealistic goals like Age-Friendly Cities but it cannot do much more than that. There are almost

no funds to set up programmes. It is up to countries and cities to take the necessary action to move it forward. It is a matter of solidarity that The Hague is showing other cities how you can work towards creating an age-friendly city. But it is also reciprocal. We learn from the other trailblazers. Take New York, for example. What strikes you about their approach is the emphasis on quantity: figures and percentages. That is a deliberate strategy. You read in the media, for example, that 2,000 restaurants have already gained the age-friendly certificate or that 3,000 taxis are age-friendly. A local committee of seniors inspects businesses and awards the certificates and that provides nice media opportunities. Other businesses see that and want it too, because it means more customers. It is a subtle way of getting businesses and institutions to take action. And it works.”

**What can The Hague learn from Bangalore and Suzhou? They are miles away from us, both literally and figuratively.**

“Well, they may be less far away from us than you might think. Those two cities to some extent represent our future, despite the great differences in material wealth and culture. The number of caregivers in the Netherlands will fall dramatically in the coming years. Most of today’s voluntary care

is provided by people in the 50-75 age bracket. That group is shrinking. On top of which everyone is expected to continue working longer. The pool of potential caregivers, volunteers and immediate friends and relatives is getting smaller, while the number of elderly people is growing. It would be impossible for professional care to take that on. There is already a serious shortage of personnel."

"That is comparable with the situation in China and India, where there is little professional care, families are providing less care than in the past and there are also more elderly people. You see that people organise informal care and support for one another in the communities themselves. New technology helps them to remain vital and engaged. The Netherlands will also follow in the same direction. Not out of choice, but because it is unavoidable. A trend that you already see reflected in the growing number of care cooperatives in neighbourhoods."

### **More and more of the elderly in The Hague have their roots outside the Netherlands. The cultural diversity is wide. What does that mean in terms of the age-friendly city?**

"The policy change is that we no longer approach the elderly as a group and therefore we also do not approach migrant seniors as sub-groups. Every elderly person living in The Hague is an individual with their own history and their own wants, needs and desires. No matter whether you were born in Limburg, Morocco or The Hague. Therefore we try to keep away from stereotypes and look for what is unique about every individual. No Turkish day-care or other segregated facilities, that's something we have left behind us in The Hague. The elderly can, of course, set up a club for themselves based on their culture or background, but that would be quite separate from the municipality."

"The ideal for every elderly person in The Hague is the same: to remain vital and independent for as long as possible, to have a sense of belonging and meaning in life. That's something that volunteers and professionals need to talk about with clients, irrespective of their origins. But that's easier said than done. How do you deal with different beliefs and

values, for example? The *Divers Den Haag* organisation has a short course on diversity and sensitivity which was specially developed for volunteers and professionals."

### **What has four years of age-friendly city The Hague achieved?**

"Four years is too short a time to see major changes. New social ideas always percolate gradually through society. It begins with a vanguard. You have to keep telling the story, talk to people and inspire them. That has brought a response. In the past people often looked to the municipality to solve any problem. Now we see the people of The Hague becoming more active and rolling up their sleeves together. That applies to the elderly, as well as to volunteers, service providers and business owners. Just look at how many entries there were for the Vitality Awards. All new initiatives. The idea of the age-friendly city has certainly landed in The Hague. Now it has to take root. And of course, it is important to keep a close eye on what is happening: are we doing the right things and are we doing them in the right way? Policy also has to remain vital."

**Elisabeth de Vries worked as policy advisor on ageing policy at The Hague Municipality for ten years. She stopped in October 2018. Elisabeth was closely involved in drawing up guiding policy papers such as the Policy Document on Ageing 2012-2014 OUD is IN! and the Age-Friendly City The Hague Action Programme 2015-2018, and others.**





**JACQUELINE VAN DEN AKKER**

LEIDSCHENVEEN-YPENBURG

# “HIPS & CATARACTS REIGN SUPREME!”



TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUD

I came into contact with community work through the voluntary work I did in the Zeeheldenkwartier district in the 1980s. I gained experience with welfare work, which is also what I later ended up doing.

For years my family and I had lived very happily in the city centre. Unfortunately, in the late '90s the area rapidly started to decline. My husband had just taken early retirement so I said to him, "I want to leave here, let's go to Ypenburg". At the time there was nothing in the area. It wasn't even part of The Hague then. But we went anyway.

## YPENBURG

To start with there was just nothing at all. Everything was 'temporary'. We had a temporary building, a temporary school, temporary shops and if you

needed to see the doctor then you still had to go to your old doctor because the only one in Ypenburg couldn't take any more people. There were often power failures in the evening. There was a huge notice which stated that the municipality could not be held liable for any damage we might suffer because we were on a building site. It was only when Ypenburg was annexed by The Hague in January 2002 that things started to improve. Sadly, my husband died two years after we moved to Ypenburg.

## CLUB FOR THE ELDERLY

I met Mrs Scherpenhuizen on a rainy day in early 2005. I still remember it well. I wanted to catch the tram, but had just missed it. She had a stall in the community centre and I thought I would pop in. There was nothing for the elderly in Ypenburg at that time.



Many had moved there because their children were also living there. And if the children were at work and the grandchildren at school, they had time on their hands. Mrs Scherpenhuizen was drawing up a list of what older people needed and asked me too, 'what would you as an older person like to have?' I was still working and therefore there was nothing I really needed. But what I definitely did want was to meet more people in Ypenburg - because now I was living alone. We decided to start a club for the elderly. We called some people to tell them that we would meet for the first time on 1 April and they came along. That was 13 years ago and we have two regular groups now. We could make more groups but we don't have enough volunteers for that.

### GETTING OLDER

We see that our 'membership' is getting older. To start with we had a cycling club, and then people came by car, now they can't even do that and many of them use a walker. Mobility is declining. As we sometimes say, hips and cataracts reign supreme! That sometimes means that we have to say to people that they can't go with us on an outing. A day spent at Keukenhof gardens, for example, is not suitable for everyone and you have to be honest about that. If we have another senior's day at the end of the year, then they can all

join in. We say to them too, 'there's no reason why you can't come along.' When we hear 'Oh, I did so enjoy it', at the end, then I realise that the club, the outings or the senior's day mean such a lot to them. They don't go on holiday anymore. Some members don't go much further than the shopping centre or their family on a daily basis.

**“Our club is now too dependent on the goodwill of volunteers”**

It is also a form of combatting loneliness. Because of the people they meet at the club, little networks form and they can do things together and help each other when necessary. People who feel lonely sometimes suffer health problems. I am regularly called by a GP who says that he has a patient who is in need of human contact. That is worrying. The number of old people is growing and to be able to manage that there really need to be more welfare workers. Unfortunately, in Ypenburg we don't have the benefit of the existing welfare structures that they have in Loosduinen, for example. It seems as though welfare is sometimes seen as a luxury.



## CONCERNS

I am concerned about what would happen to our club if I wasn't here. If as a municipality you want to do something about loneliness and find it important that older people can meet one another, there needs to be a constant factor. Our club is now too dependent on the goodwill of volunteers, like me. If you lose them, then you have a problem. When I retired I said to myself that I wanted to find a balance between the things I like to do and the things I think are useful to do. Fortunately, I have the benefit of my experience in welfare work, without that I don't know

if I could have done all this. The things I do enable me to enjoy life and remain mostly fit and healthy, including mentally!

# HIGH TEA MEETINGS

**One of the principles of an age-friendly city is that its citizens are closely involved in its development. Therefore they will be asked regularly what is important for them to be able to continue to live a life that is vital and active for as long as possible in The Hague.**

The Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) carried out a 'baseline measurement' in 2015 as part of the WHO Age-Friendly Cities programme. Senior citizens together discussed what they consider to be important in the eight domains (public spaces and buildings, mobility, housing, social and civic participation, respect and social inclusion, communication and information, community and healthcare). This was used to provide a benchmark from which it could be seen whether the districts of The Hague were considered to be more or less age-friendly. These results provided the springboard for a new initiative. Every year in the spring the eight domains and ideas for improvements are discussed in every district. This initiative was celebrated as part of the annual Vitality Month and the Vitality Awards. Many voluntary activities have started and since become established as a result.

## VITALITY MONTH

At the high teas organised during the Vitality Month of October 2017, elderly people were asked how ageing in The Hague could be made more agreeable for them. This was repeated in each district, each time on the basis of the eight domains, as a follow up to

the baseline measurement and the focus on ideas and initiatives for and with the elderly. The purpose of the high teas was to inspire older people to make use of the opportunities available to them in the age-friendly city. Many new ideas were also put forward. We will share these in this section of the magazine and they will also provide a good basis for the next phase as the initiative itself and The Hague's policy on ageing moves forward.

## EIGHT DOMAINS IN VR

The high tea had several parts to it. While enjoying a cup of coffee or tea and lots of sweet treats, those





TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUD

present were first guided through the history of caring for the elderly in The Hague. Their knowledge was tested in a quiz with scores and interesting facts about the elderly of The Hague, with View-Masters on hand.

They were then each given VR headsets to watch eight short films, one for each city district, in which a presenter talked about the eight domains. So in virtual reality they sat in the VIOOL local bus in Loosduinen (mobility domain) and on a stair lift in a Haagse Hout flat-building (housing domain), for example. And that's how they travelled in VR through all the districts of The Hague and it was clearly explained to them what the domains covered. The participants then talked about what they thought of the high tea meetings and what the city and their district means to them.

They talked about what is well-organised within the eight domains, what could be improved and even had a few tips for one another. In the next few pages you can read all about what the discussions revealed, each time by domain.

### **ACTIVELY TAKING PART**

About 500 people in total took part in 30 high teas. In each district there were at least two meetings in the library or community centre. Some people even attended several meetings. This was not really the intention, given that there were waiting lists for every meeting. At the same time it was also a very positive sign that so many older people want to be actively involved in thinking about their city, the place where they would like to age agreeably!

Rene works for The Hague's street cleaning service and makes sure the streets of Segbroek district are swept clean. Mr Hagdewising is pleased with Rene and his team.

TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUID



**Public spaces also includes a clean and pleasant environment, the importance of greenery in the neighbourhood, a bench in the park where you can rest, age-friendly footpaths, the accessibility of buildings and safety on the street. All aspects of the public spaces domain can have a major impact on the enjoyment and quality of life of elderly people living in the city.**

# What do The Hague's seniors think of...

## 1. PUBLIC SPACES

"What can we do ourselves to ensure that public spaces look more tidy and people don't just simply dump their rubbish or old bikes there?" This was a question which regularly surfaced during the discussions, to which some of the seniors suggested, "by not always looking to others to find solutions". "We need to re-educate ourselves!" one woman said. "We look to the municipality, but it is us who throw all that stuff on the street," another responded.

Everyone was in agreement about uneven paving stones and protruding tree roots. They are a nuisance, particularly when you are in a wheelchair or have to use a walker. Car drivers who park on street corners or sometimes even on the pavement were also considered to be an irritation. "It means that sometimes I have to go round the entire block in my mobility scooter to get to bingo," said one of the attendees.

The inconveniences of autumn and winter were also mentioned: leaves and snow. Of course it can be slippery then, but here too, the people who were there said that it's something they can do ourselves, "What is there to stop you from sweeping your own bit of the pavement? It's OK if you can't do that anymore, of course, but you could still ask your neighbour. But we simply don't do that anymore, because we are so used to the fact that the municipality does it for us. Why don't we just

do it ourselves again, as we used to? Plus it's good exercise!" Someone else added that you can pick up road salt from the municipality and that people could be made more aware of that.

*The 14070 telephone number was thought to be very handy"*

Happily, the positive points were not overlooked. For example, the 14070 telephone number for questions and to notify the municipality was considered to be very handy. You call and action soon follows. One of the participants described how he takes photos of things as he walks along the streets, as if he were an inspector of sorts. "I then send them through and in no time the problem has been fixed. The municipality is pleased with that".

In all the districts people would like to have more benches. Public toilets too, would be very welcome. The seniors of Loosduinen were keen to invite the Alderman to join them on a walk through the district so that based on their comments she could see for herself what it's like for an elderly person to be outside.

Maarten is one of the volunteers for the VIOOL local bus in Loosduinen. Mrs Opperman is a regular customer who uses the bus service to do her shopping.

TEXT & PHOTOS: GETOUD



**Mobility is the second domain. It is an important one, because it is an essential requirement to be able to take part in activities and make use of many public facilities. The mobility domain covers various aspects, from safe, reliable and affordable public transport, to age-friendly vehicles and modes of transport.**

# What do The Hague's seniors think of...

## 2. MOBILITY

The participants were unanimous on this: mobility is hugely important. All the most amazing and fun activities you can imagine may be organised for you, but what use is it if you can't get there? Own transport is most important, but when you are dependent on someone else, then there are some drawbacks which came to light.

The complaint most often heard was how long you sometimes had to wait before a minibus arrives. But when people were asked, 'what percentage of your trips were not on time?' it turned out that it's not that bad and it is simply that they still remember that one trip that really was too late. An attendee pointed out that when a visit has priority, like a hospital appointment or a funeral, you can request a priority trip. A trip noted with that status means that the bus will always be on time.

The local bus service was considered to be very handy. That the local bus service only operates within a certain area did not bother most people. "I use that bus to go to the hospital, the shopping centre and the hairdresser," said one. "The drivers are all volunteers and they are all very nice." "And arrive on time," said another.

The plentiful supply of public transport was felt to be good although with some tram lines and at some stops it is difficult or even impossible to get onto the tram with a walker. Once inside the seniors can generally always find a seat. It is mainly the youngsters with a non-western background who get up for them. Some thought that the bus drivers could do with some extra training. "They accelerate so hard. You haven't even sat down and the bus races away."

*"It is mainly the youngsters with a non-western background who offer you their seat"*

Some people living in Vogelwijk felt that the frequency of bus line 24 in the evenings could be improved. In the past the service was every 15 minutes and now it's only twice a an hour. "An evening at the theatre is no longer an option for me, waiting for the bus takes too long. I can't manage that anymore and I also don't like standing there on my own in the dark at the bus stop." Another lady had some useful advice for her, "I have bought an umpire's whistle. If I am out at night and something happens to me I can blow my whistle very hard!"

Since Mr van Gameren has had a stair lift he can easily get in and out of his home again. Stephan installed the stair lift for him.



TEXT & PHOTOS: GETOUD

**The housing domain is vital to the safety and wellbeing of older people. The affordability of housing, for example, has a major impact on where the elderly live and their quality of life. The design of the house and its maintenance are also important factors. Other aspects of this domain include the built environment, the presence of support and facilities in the vicinity and the availability of various housing options.**

# What do The Hague's seniors think of...

## 3. HOUSING

Everyone wants to remain living at home in their own familiar environment for as long as possible. "The next time I move," one woman called out, "it will be between six planks of wood". "And if there really is no other way, I hope to end up in a nice nursing home where there is plenty to do," said another. Living at home for longer was seen as positive, but a bit of help is still required from time to time and may even be necessary on occasions. With a stair lift in flat buildings, for example.

*"The next time I move,  
it will be between six  
planks of wood"*

Several people mentioned that in the past it was much easier to get a stair lift, or a mobility scooter, for example. "In those days the municipality wasn't as strict as it is now." "The procedures take too long as well," said another, "I once heard a story that someone finally got it after he had already passed away." "While we're on the subject of stair lifts" said a true native of Schevening, "I sometimes trip over those things because they stick out into the hall so much, is there another way of doing that?"

Several people mentioned that they had noticed a period before and after the cuts in social support. A

woman mentioned that a request for automatic door openers had been rejected by the housing association. "I can still ride my bike. But I don't have the strength in my arms anymore to open the door myself, that's not something that's taken into account."

Several people had had the 'kitchen table talk'. One of them described precisely what that is about. "You know what it is when someone comes to see you? We are not entirely honest. We don't want to air our dirty laundry in public so we are not going to tell them that actually it's not really working at home anymore. No one wants to tell a complete stranger that they needed half a day to recover from making the bed and that's why they don't go to activities. We make out that we are doing better than we are. That's something we also need to pay attention to!"

*"We don't want to air our  
dirty laundry in public"*

Someone there had a golden tip for the rest. She explained that, figuratively speaking, she had seen the storm clouds gathering and packed up in time, "I have already moved to a single storey, no steps house. I was one step ahead and now live in an entirely age-friendly house!"

Cees and Marja perform with Hekgolf, a theatre group in Laak. It is a sociable way to spend their time and they learn new skills.



TEXT & PHOTOS: GETOUD

**Social participation is closely connected with good health and enjoyment of life. Taking part in social, cultural and spiritual activities together with the people around you, friends and family, enables the elderly to use their knowledge and skills, to feel respected and valued and to maintain lasting friendships. Important factors include the affordability of the activities, accessibility, the ability to take part, promotion and awareness of the activities and tackling loneliness.**

# What do The Hague's seniors think of...

## 4. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

The Hague has plenty to offer when it comes to activities. There is always something for the elderly to do in various parts of the city. The community centre, library, local initiatives, museums, lunch concerts, gyms, and more: they organise so many different things. More and more of the elderly have also started to organise activities for themselves. Several people said that lots was going on in their flat complex. "We have a common room and we use that now for games and to play cards." To which some responded, "We don't have that in our flats, there's nothing and I wouldn't know where there is anything like that." Instantly, someone has some advice, "Hang up a notice board so you can share things with each other".

Several people mentioned that you always run into the same people wherever you go. "They talk about loneliness but when we ask people who never come along if they would like to, they don't," one person said. "Recently someone said to me, 'I feel so lonely.' To which I said, 'why don't we drink a cup of coffee together?' And they said, 'no thank you, I have coffee at home.' What can you say?" In Haagse Hout people mentioned that the communal meal sometimes had to be cancelled because too few people had signed up for it. In Leidschenveen-Ypenburg they would very much like to have some more activities for the elderly.

Several people mentioned that the elderly are mainly interested if there is free food and drink on offer but as soon as they have to pay for it, they don't bother anymore. Someone told the story, "We had had a party and there was lots of food left over. So we invited people to come along and find out about our activities. The place was full, everything was free. I was very pleased and asked them if they would come back again in two weeks' time. 'Definitely!' They said. But no, sadly, they weren't there a fortnight later. We didn't organise any more activities after that."

*"The elderly are mainly interested in free food and drink"*

The label 'elderly' was also discussed. People indicated that there was nothing wrong with dropping the term because actually the activities were intended for everyone. "You don't say no to anyone but it is still mainly the elderly who come along..." About which someone said, "I find my contemporaries so old, 80!" My husband and I still play bridge, he still plays tennis twice a week and we also work in our allotment. When I see my peers I sometimes think, 'For heaven's sake grandma, get a move on!'"

After she retired Saša always wanted to be a volunteer in the library. No sooner said than done! Louise also likes to visit the library.



TEXT & PHOTO'S: GETOUD

**Civic participation means that the elderly contribute to society, through caregiving or by doing voluntary work, for example. What is important here is that there are sufficient opportunities for volunteer work, that there is flexibility in that and that the contribution made by seniors is appreciated.**

# What do The Hague's seniors think of...

## 5. CIVIL PARTICIPATION

You can be a volunteer all day if you want to. "Through my voluntary work I am still in the thick of it. I just love to do it," said one, while another said, "I have worked hard all my life, I don't want to do that anymore. Let someone else take it over now." Feelings about doing voluntary work vary. Everyone agreed that volunteers are necessary, but some of them do so much that sometimes it almost seems as though they have taken over the work of the professionals.

### **"Volunteers and former volunteers miss appreciation"**

Volunteers and former volunteers miss appreciation. "They say that they are pleased that you are there, but you never get anything, not even a gift token." Someone else mentioned that she is a volunteer

and would like to give other volunteers something for their efforts, "but I am not allowed to claim that". "Be a volunteer in the library then!" Someone responded enthusiastically, "because we are regularly offered something, from cinema tickets to an outing." Everyone agreed that the people you do it for are always extremely grateful.

"What we really mustn't forget," said one of those present, "is that many of the people who were volunteers in the past, have since become caregivers. Combining voluntary work with being a caregiver is difficult. We are getting older and also have our own households to run." Another mentioned that they were a caregiver themselves and that they wished that a bit more publicity would be given to caregiving. The information is there, but it is so hard to find. It was suggested that more information brochures could be provided in hospital outpatient clinics or that you could be referred to it.

Reinier is already well into his 80s, but that doesn't matter at *Haagse Directe* boxing school. Light Fly is one of the weight classes he is training in.

TEXT & PHOTOS: GETOUD



**Respect and social inclusion is important to the wellbeing of the elderly. Taking part in activities depends on the sense of respect and inclusion felt by the elderly. The respect and social inclusion domain covers various aspects, such as attitudes in society towards the elderly, their place in society and in their families, and the interaction between the different generations.**

# What do The Hague's seniors think of...

## 6. RESPECT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

"If we are not nice to the youngsters, they won't be nice to us either." Essentially everyone agreed that there are no real problems between the young and the old. And they have almost never thought about age discrimination. Most of them had also not experienced it.

*"Someone wanted to see more positive discrimination"*

Someone wanted to see more positive discrimination. "As you get older many things are suddenly cheaper. Activities, for example. That should happen more often! I think going to the gym should also be a bit cheaper. I use only about half my subscription." A woman over 80 was refused membership of a gym. 'You are over the age of 80, madam, so sorry, but you can't join' she was told. 'I really objected to that and told them that I had done fitness all my life and I could certainly manage it. With hindsight, they were actually right. Some things were just too difficult for me.' The general trend is that they don't look at your age anymore, but at what you can still do.

Nevertheless there were some people who thought that people looked at you differently if you walk with a stick or a walker. "If you are in a wheelchair, you essentially become invisible. If someone wants to speak to you, they always address the person pushing the wheelchair. That's not nice!" In the area of work some people did feel that there is still discrimination. "Once you are over 50 you're simply considered too old." And that you have to be re-tested every five years for your driving licence was also not popular.

*"I know so little about their culture and background"*

What people sometimes find difficult, certainly in the City Centre and Laak districts, is dealing with neighbours who have a different cultural background. "We say hello to one another, that's not it. But I know so little about their culture and background and if I knew more it would be much easier to understand them." Others also thought this was a good idea, to learn more about their lifestyle. "And what they are making in the kitchen!" Someone else said.

Donald gives people advice and information at the XL service desk in Escamp. Mrs Soknandan regularly seeks advice on her rent and insurances.

TEXT & PHOTOS: GETOUD



**Communication and information is very important to keep up-to-date, remain involved with activities, and to obtain practical information. It is necessary to be able to find good information at the right time, information that is widely disseminated, and is also easy to read and digest. This domain further covers the use of technology tools, such as computers and the internet.**

# What do The Hague's seniors think of...

## 7. COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

When the topic of information was raised, what people almost always first thought of was information about activities. A lot was said but most of it boiled down to the same thing: there is so much for the elderly to do in The Hague, in many different places and there are so many sources you can go to that sometimes it is difficult to see the wood for the trees.

One person suggested that there should be just one newspaper with all the activities for the elderly throughout the city. "I have never heard anything from the Wiekslag community centre in Loosduinen, for example." Another thought that would be a good idea. "Then we wouldn't have to spend so much time looking." To which someone else added, "Then the newspaper needs to be delivered. Here in Schilderswijk we don't generally get **De Posthoorn** (The Hague's free door-to-door newspaper). You can find a lot on the internet, but if you don't have that, then it's a bit of a problem." Others did not agree, even in Duindorp, sometimes a letterbox would be missed. "I bet there were scooters on the pavement blocking the front door." Which was confirmed.

About the internet it was also commented a number of times that it is not always accessible for everyone. Various people did not agree. "The municipality

organises so many things to help us find our way around on the internet, so we have only ourselves to blame if we can't do that."

Several people said that they did receive the free newspapers but could not read them because of the letter type. "It's just too small to read!"

### "De Stadskrant is a good source of information"

**De Stadskrant** (a free door-to-door newspaper published twice monthly by the Municipality) was seen as a good source of information. As were the service desks where you can ask for information. "But that is also quite limited," someone remarked. "You can't get all your questions answered there." Most people were familiar with the service desks. Those who weren't wanted to know more about that. Several people asked whether a similar morning couldn't be organised like the high tea they were all at now. And that information could be provided about everything that is available and what the municipality, care institutions and the welfare department are all doing at such a meeting. "And then it is nice to be all together for that too."

Piet has lived in a residential care facility for several years now where he is looked after. Lahlou helps him and that means a lot to Piet. They often go out together.



TEXT & PHOTOS: GETOUD

**The community and healthcare domain helps the elderly to remain healthy and continue to function in society for as long as possible. This requires that there is sufficient care available, and that it is of good quality and affordable. Care in the home is an important aspect of this domain and enables the elderly to continue to live independently for as long as possible.**

# What do The Hague's seniors think of...

## 8. COMMUNITY AND HEALTHCARE

Almost everyone taking part agreed that they wanted to continue living at home for as long as possible. But they also know that ageing brings decline and many will eventually need care. Whether that be a home help, or moving to a care home. Not a lot was said about this topic. It was as if some people preferred not to think about it, they had had unpleasant experiences themselves or had heard bad things from other people. But there was also signs of curiosity. They were interested to know more about 'what if'. And 'How does that work?'

*“With hindsight, he might have wanted to move there sooner”*

There was no shortage of positive comments. “Care in the Netherlands is very well organised. From cradle to grave you are cared for and it's about time that was said,” a woman commented. Others were also keen to spread some cheer. For example, someone's father-in-law of 86 had recently moved to a residential

care facility and was really enjoying it there. With hindsight, he might have wanted to move there sooner.

*“Everyone in my area rides on one of those things”*

The conversation regularly returned to the various therapeutic aids that are available. Opinions differed about whether it was easier in the past to get them. Some thought it was a bad thing that it was becoming increasingly difficult to get therapeutic aids, while a few thought that people got mobility scooters, for example, far too easily. “Everyone in my area rides on one of those things. They could be more economical about that, because it is taxpayers money, after all.” “But,” someone interjected, “you also need to be careful what you say, because sometimes you really can't tell if someone has a disability or not.”

# THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

**On 14 and 21 June 2018 two brainstorming sessions were held at the town hall on the topic of Age-Friendly City The Hague. Key figures were invited from the worlds of care, welfare, education, policy and senior citizens' organisations. They exchanged ideas about where The Hague now stands after four years of age-friendly policy, where the major challenges lie and likely future developments.**

"I am going to ask over-80s to coach my students at The Hague University of Applied Sciences (*Haagse Hogeschool*). Students need to get out of the classroom, into the city and start talking to older people about how they live."

"Seniors need to have the room to prepare themselves mentally for the next chapter of their lives and to think about what getting older means to them. How does your future look? How do you want to be a force in the world?"

"There are old people, as well as parents with children, teenagers, tourists and the homeless sitting on The Hague's benches. As a designer for public spaces you try to be generous to everyone."

"Active, participating, with a full diary - this may perhaps not be entirely how every senior wants to fill their days. Let's not make the 'super vital' senior become the expected norm."

"The elderly are still often portrayed rather negatively in the media. But the majority of them are doing fine, they are satisfied and active as volunteers."

"You see vital seniors everywhere. But there is also

a large group of invisible older people who are often trying to cope with an accumulation of problems, such as poverty, poor health and despondency. How do we reach them?"

"We have the impression that migrant seniors solve problems within their own circle. But is that so? And does that work?"

"The elderly put off moving for a long time, until they really can't manage anymore. That is also because of ignorance. Where can I go? Can I afford it? With the right advice tailored to their situation people can be encouraged to take the step to move in time."

"You can encourage people to gain computerskills in all sorts of ways, but you should never force it. That's why the municipality and institutions must always offer the possibility of face-to-face contact."

"The young and the old have lots to offer one another, but their worlds are entirely separate. Create more space for spontaneous and organised encounters between generations. Let the elderly tell stories in schools or guide schoolchildren around the city."

"The social gym is a nice idea: youngsters who actively exercise together with the elderly."

"A shared interest or hobby is a great way to bring people together; singing together, dancing or painting."





TEXT: HANS OERLEMANS | PHOTO'S: GETOUD

You see that those who do that also look to each other outside of the activity.’

“Pigeonholing people is never a good thing, but there is a difference between Dutch vulnerability and Moroccan vulnerability. And certainly in how you deal with that. Good care is about taking the individual into account along with his or her cultural background.”

“Libraries are the ideal spot for bringing the elderly together. The **Ouderen in de Wijk** (Seniors in the Neighbourhood) programme in Escamp, and now in Segbroek too, offers a range of activities all year round for a growing group of participants. You see new bonds being forged.”

“The concept of dementia-friendly neighbourhoods is gradually taking off. The **Haags Ontmoeten** (Meeting in The Hague: a contact group for the elderly and their carers) is an example. A place for people in the early stages of dementia and their caregivers. Businesses too, are becoming more aware of older customers with memory problems.”

“Meeting in person is the best remedy against prejudices and negative perceptions.”

*The names of all the ‘brainstormers’ are listed in the credits.*



# COLUMN

As The Hague Alderman responsible for care, I and many others are working every day to ensure that everyone gets the care they need: from the youngest infants to the oldest of The Hague's seniors. It is an important task and something that also affects everyone. Which is why, apart from the weather, it is one of the things most talked about at parties and other gatherings. Now that the municipality has been made responsible for far more aspects of care, so the challenge has grown. As has the city itself and the number of people needing care.

The number of elderly people in our city is also growing. In 2021 there will be more than 80,000 people over the age of 65 living in The Hague. I realise too, that many of the people in that age group don't feel elderly, nor would they describe themselves as that.

The city council considers it a top priority that everyone can participate, but that is certainly not always readily available. Cities have never been physically designed for that. On top of which, for a long time it was customary that if someone had a few too many physical impairments to be able to continue living at home they went to a care facility or an old people's home. To ensure that the growing group of elderly people can fully participate in society and the life of the city, we need to adapt the city for them to do that. This is a task for the entire Municipal Executive and the entire city.

Being able to remain living at home is one of the topics which I, as Alderman, will be focusing on over the next few years. Because staying in your own home and your own neighbourhood for as long as possible will always be far more pleasant. To be able to provide for that in the context of the Care portfolio, I want to organise far more customised care and care close to

home. We will also be making much more use of care innovations that will enable people to continue to live independently for longer. This could be something that would seem to be relatively simple, such as a device to help you put on your socks without bending down.

At the same time I would like to see more attention devoted to the importance of caregivers. They play such an important role in people's lives. And not just in terms of providing care but, more specifically, in terms of what is really important: people's happiness.

The solutions to major problems can sometimes be found in relatively small adjustments. I was recently reminded of that again. I was on a visit in the city, something I always do twice a week to hear what people have to say. During that visit I spoke to a man who very much wanted to continue living independently. He was proud of the fact that at his age he was still doing his own dishes and his own shopping. But the shopping was becoming increasingly difficult because, he joked, the supermarket was getting further away every day. I can't move his home, of course, he understood that, but I could provide a bench halfway. Then he could stop and take a rest *en route* and so continue to do his own shopping. He was sure that many other people would also be pleased to have a bench.

The difference between independence and needing care is sometimes just a matter of having a bench to sit on. I am going to take a look around the city to see where else we could put some benches, in the sun, of course.

**Kavita Parbhudayal**  
**Alderman for Care, Youth and Public Health (ZJV) in The Hague**



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**'THE PEOPLE IN THE HAGUE ARE HAPPY AND HEALTHY. THEY DANCE AND GO TO THE GYM.'**

*Samed Taky*  
(† 2018)

**ENJOY EVERY DAY,  
SEE THE BEAUTY  
AROUND YOU ...**  
*and grab hold of it!*

JOKE BREEDIJK