



Integrated Investment Plan

**Co-creating a Connected
and Caring City**



INTEGRATED INVESTMENT PLAN (IIP)

URBACT Innovation Transfer Network – RECUP

Amersfoort

Integrated Investment Plan

Within the RECUP – Reinventing Culture in Urban Places Network



Version 0.1: Sandra Barth, December 2025

Version 0.2: Sandra Barth, February 2026

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Summary

This Integrated Investment Plan (IIP) outlines the strategy of the City of Amersfoort to structurally reduce social isolation and strengthen community cohesion for the period 2026–2029. Building on the results of the URBACT RECUP innovation trajectory, this plan moves from experimentation to structural implementation.

At the heart of this proposal is the slogan "**Reach out. Make a difference.**", which serves as a city-wide 'funnel' to connect residents to a diverse network of six culture-driven interventions (A1–A7). These projects — ranging from the mobile outreach of the giant puppet REMI to the structural peer-support of Maatjefoort — offer a seamless 'Citizen Journey' tailored to specific loneliness profiles.

To ensure the legacy of this project, the governance is transferred from the innovation phase to the municipal departments of **Social Domain** and **Culture** in collaboration with **Impact033** as a local executing organisation, supported by a multi-source funding strategy. By combining professional marketing with grass-roots creativity, Amersfoort aims to become a city where looking out for one another is a natural part of the social fabric.

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1. Policy Context and Needs Analysis

1.1 Needs Analysis in the Territorial Context

Amersfoort is a mid-sized, fast-growing city in the centre of the Netherlands with a strong knowledge-intensive economy, a highly educated population, and a vibrant cultural ecosystem. Despite this favourable context, the city faces a major and interconnected social challenges: loneliness.

Approximately 47% of residents report loneliness, a figure that has risen sharply over the past decade and affects all age groups. Structural factors reinforce this trend, including a high share of single-person households (45%) and increasing pressures on social cohesion. Among young people, loneliness is also significant: 29% of secondary school students report feeling lonely, with two-thirds experiencing persistent isolation. Existing initiatives—such as community centre programmes, neighbourhood dinners, and youth-driven creative projects by organisations like KOSMIK and the Mondriaan TurnLabs—provide important foundations but do not yet reach the full breadth of the challenge.

Root causes and research question

While loneliness is identified as the central challenge addressed in this Investment Plan, the RECUP process in Amersfoort deliberately moves beyond treating loneliness as a single, clearly defined problem. Rather, loneliness is understood as a *symptom* of deeper and interconnected societal changes that affect how people relate to one another, participate in community life, and experience belonging.

Across the RECUP trajectory, stakeholders repeatedly observed that loneliness manifests differently across groups, but often emerges from structural and cultural shifts such as increasing individualization and different bubbles in society, fragmentation of neighborhood life, loss of informal meeting spaces, life transitions (migration, grief, illness, detention or addiction), and a weakening of shared social narratives. While the health and social care sector often functions as an entry point for action, these root causes extend far beyond the medical or welfare domain alone.

At present, there is limited shared language within policy and practice to describe *why* loneliness is increasing, how it is experienced differently across contexts, and which underlying dynamics reinforce it. One of the core ambitions of the RECUP approach in Amersfoort is therefore not only to intervene, but to *develop a richer collective understanding* of loneliness through creative exploration, lived experience, and co-creation.

This leads to the central research question that guided the project from its outset:

How can creative and participatory methods help uncover the underlying causes of loneliness, develop shared language around this phenomenon, and support more integrated, cross-sectoral responses that address both symptoms and root causes?

The creative and artistic methods applied within RECUP proved particularly valuable in this respect. They enabled participants to articulate experiences and patterns that are difficult to capture through conventional policy analysis alone, and opened space for new narratives about connection,

belonging and participation to emerge. These insights now form the basis for more targeted, systemic and sustainable policy responses to loneliness in Amersfoort.

Amersfoort also possesses strong assets for cultural transformation. The city has more than 400 national monuments, a rich institutional landscape (including the Mondriaan House, KOSMIK, Flint Theatre, and multiple community centres), and a wide range of social organisations and faith communities engaged in neighbourhood life. These provide a strong foundation for creativity-driven social innovation, aligned with the RECUP mission of shifting from cultural consumption to cultural co-creation.

1.2 Policy Response

Approach

Amersfoort's approach aligns strongly with European, national, and local strategies that emphasise cultural participation, social inclusion, and community well-being. The RECUP Investment Plan directly contributes to several policy frameworks.

Alignment with EU and Global Policies

The RECUP-inspired approach in Amersfoort aligns with several European strategic frameworks that emphasise social inclusion, cultural participation, and citizen-led development.

- **New European Agenda for Culture (2018)**

The Plan contributes to the Agenda's objectives of strengthening social cohesion, enabling cultural participation for all, and supporting creativity as a driver for local well-being.

- **EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027**

The Plan aligns particularly with:

- PO4 – A more social and inclusive Europe (reducing barriers to participation, fostering community connections).
- PO5 – A Europe closer to citizens (supporting integrated local initiatives and co-creation in neighbourhoods).
- PO1 – A smarter Europe (encouraging innovation and experimentation through creative practices).

- **Urban Agenda for the EU – Culture & Cultural Heritage Partnership**

Amersfoort's work resonates with this agenda's focus on culture as a tool for inclusion, the activation of public spaces, and the value of integrated governance models involving residents.

- **Alignment with EU Fundamental Values**

The RECUP actions in Amersfoort are strongly aligned with the core values enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. The city's approach places *human dignity, democracy, equality and participation* at the heart of its cultural and social policies. By creating accessible, low-threshold creative spaces, strengthening inclusive neighbourhood networks, and enabling residents of all ages and backgrounds to co-shape their urban environment, the plan contributes to:

- **Democracy & civic participation** – strengthening everyday democratic practice through co-creation, shared decision-making, and culture-based dialogue in neighbourhoods.
- **Equality & non-discrimination** – ensuring participation of groups that are traditionally underrepresented, including low-income residents, youth, older adults, and people with diverse backgrounds.

- **Human dignity & social cohesion** – using cultural participation and creativity as tools to reduce isolation, increase belonging, and create meaningful connections across communities.
- **Rights-based local development** – fostering safe, accessible spaces where residents can freely express ideas, experiment creatively, and contribute to public value.

In this way, Amersfoort positions cultural participation not only as a cultural policy objective, but as a practical expression of EU values in everyday urban life.

- **UN SDGs**

The Plan advances the following SDG's:

- SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities (inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities)
- SDG 3 – Good Health & Wellbeing (social health, connection, mental resilience)
- SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities (inclusion, lower barriers)
- SDG 16 – Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions (new ways of participation, local democracy, co creation with the city).

Alignment with National Strategies – Netherlands

The national programme “Eén tegen Eenzaamheid” (“ONE against Loneliness”) identifies loneliness as a major public health concern in the Netherlands. Amersfoort’s cultural and creative approach directly complements this agenda by strengthening social connection, activation, and meaning-making through participatory culture. Within RECUP, loneliness is approached not only as a social or welfare issue, but as a shared urban challenge that requires cultural, civic, and community-based responses.

Alignment with Local Strategies in Amersfoort

Amersfoort offers a strong democratic and social foundation that aligns closely with the EU values: human dignity, equality, participation, and community cohesion. The city has invested for more than a decade in new forms of local democracy, participatory governance, and community-led development. This makes Amersfoort an ideal environment to deepen citizen engagement and co-creation practices within the RECUP framework.

Initiatives from the municipality over the last years reinforce the EU values of participation, dialogue, inclusion, and trust-building:

- **A long-standing tradition of citizen participation** and neighbourhood-based engagement, highlighted in the municipality’s vision for *bestuurlijke vernieuwing* (democratic innovation). The emphasis on co-creation, equal partnership with residents, and shared ownership reflects the EU value of participatory democracy¹.
- **Strong institutional attention to social cohesion**, loneliness reduction, intergenerational connection, and accessible cultural engagement - core to the EU commitment to solidarity and social inclusion, for example during the ‘Week against loneliness’.
- **Experimentation with cultural and artistic approaches to societal challenges**, such as the Mondriaan Turnlabs, which foster curiosity, empathy, and inclusive public dialogue—values central to the EU’s cultural and democratic strategies.²

¹ 240529 Essay Gemeentelijk Samenspel

² Mondriaan 150 lessons learned (Turnlabs)

- **Growing emphasis on trust-building between government and citizens**, recognising the European principle of open, transparent, and relational governance.
- **Omgevingsvisie (strategic environmental vision) Amersfoort:** The Omgevingsvisie recognises loneliness as a societal challenge linked to the design of the living environment, emphasising human scale, accessible public space, and opportunities for everyday encounters. By focusing on “levensaders” (life veins) and neighbourhood meeting places, the vision positions social connection as a spatial and cultural issue rather than solely a health or welfare concern, providing a strong local policy foundation for the RECUP approach.

These practices were integrated into the RECUP approach in Amersfoort, with which we strengthen the European values of civic participation, cultural engagement, and democratic innovation, while contributing local innovations that can be shared across the EU.

2. The Investment Proposal

2.1 Background to the Proposal

Amersfoort's participation in RECUP builds on several ongoing innovation challenges in the city.

As analysed in our Theory of Change (see Annex 1), Amersfoort has already taken important steps toward strengthening social cohesion, cultural participation, and collaborative ways of working. At the same time, the municipality recognises that further progress is needed to connect departmental efforts, broaden citizen participation in policy processes, and develop more integrated, cross-sectoral responses to challenges such as loneliness. The URBACT RECUP programme offered a valuable opportunity to accelerate this transition and embed co-creation more structurally in our local governance model. At the same time, the city has a strong cultural and community ecosystem, as well as a growing interest in co-creation as a governance approach. These conditions make Amersfoort a fertile context for testing and adapting the URBACT methodology.

The innovative dimensions of the RECUP approach align closely with local needs.

The use of creative methods to explore complex social issues, such as loneliness, fits well with Amersfoort's ambition to strengthen community belonging and democratic participation through culture. During the first phase of the project, Amersfoort applied the *Double Diamond* process, which is described in paragraph 2.3.

This learning phase has generated several insights that motivate the transfer and adaptation of the CUP4Creativity good practice:

- **Creative methods unlock participation** among residents who do not usually join policy processes.
- **Cross-sector collaboration grows organically** when departments and partners jointly explore root causes instead of isolated symptoms.
- **A cultural lens broadens the understanding of social issues**, helping stakeholders see loneliness not only as a welfare concern but also as a spatial, cultural, and civic challenge.
- **Co-creation increases ownership**, both within the municipality and across neighbourhood actors.
- **Small-scale experiments provide fast, low-risk learning**, which is essential before designing larger-scale interventions or investments.

The transfer of the Cup4creativity framework

Amersfoort already has a rich landscape of community initiatives, cultural organisations and participatory practices. The challenge addressed through RECUP is therefore not the absence of creativity or civic engagement, but the question of how existing strengths can be better connected, learned from and translated into a more coherent and shared approach across neighbourhoods, initiatives and policy domains.

In this context, the CUP4Creativity framework does not introduce something entirely new, but offers a structured way to reflect on, connect and strengthen practices that already exist, while avoiding a project-based or image-driven approach and instead focusing on long-term community ownership and governance.

This Investment Plan therefore builds on the lessons learned so far, combining:

- the creative methodologies already applied in Amersfoort;
- former pilots and projects from the department of democratic innovation (bestuurlijke vernieuwing);
- the latest insights and vision of participation processes in the Netherlands;
- the governance, cultural engagement, and community-building elements from the CUP4Creativity pillars; and
- growing institutional willingness to embed co-creation as a permanent way of working.

In this way, this Investment Plan forms a bridge between local experimentation and a structured, future-oriented investment strategy, making the RECUP transfer both timely and impactful for Amersfoort.

In addition, the RECUP process made visible that connecting and analysing existing cultural and participatory practices is essential to move beyond isolated interventions. By jointly reflecting on outcomes across neighbourhoods and initiatives, stakeholders gained deeper insight into recurring patterns and underlying causes of experienced loneliness. This learning dimension is a key innovation of the CUP4Creativity framework: it strengthens the city's ability not only to act, but to understand *why* certain approaches work, and how effective methods can be embedded structurally to address loneliness in a sustainable way.

2.2 Our Starting Point

Amersfoort enters the RECUP process with a strong foundation of ongoing social, cultural, and community-driven initiatives, yet without an integrated model for addressing loneliness across sectors. While previous programmes, such as neighbourhood-based cultural projects, community well-being initiatives, and municipal innovation pilots, have provided valuable experience, these efforts were often fragmented across departments and policy domains. The URBACT partnership offered an opportunity to bring these strands together into a shared learning and co-creation trajectory.

Throughout 2024–2025, Amersfoort built a broad Urban Local Group (ULG) consisting of residents, artists, social organisations, municipal staff, and other stakeholders. This diverse group jointly explored the challenge of loneliness using a Double Diamond approach (see paragraph 2.3). Through artistic exploration and collective sensemaking, the ULG identified five loneliness profiles (youth, people with addiction/detention experiences, newcomers, people living with physical or mental limitations, and those dealing with loss). These profiles formed the basis for a series of test actions carried out by ULG members in their own neighbourhoods and professional contexts.

In Annex 2 is a description of these test actions and ideas.

The starting point for this Investment Plan is therefore characterised by:

- **Strong civic engagement:** a ULG of ±30 active members and a wider circle of >100 interested citizens and organisations.
- **A shared understanding of the challenge:** the ULG created loneliness profiles that reflect real experiences in Amersfoort's communities.
- **Early experimentation:** first test actions that demonstrate the potential of creativity and bottom-up initiatives to strengthen social connection.

- **Growing cross-departmental interest:** several municipal departments (Economy, Social Affairs, Culture, Democratic Innovation) have already begun participating, although an integrated policy approach is still emerging.
- **Identified assets and barriers:** a culturally vibrant city with strong networks, but also siloed governance structures and limited mechanisms for ongoing co-creation with residents.

While some test actions are still ongoing, a clear pattern of synergy has emerged. We have moved beyond the hypothesis stage to a proven methodology where outreach (physical), training (digital), and landing (structural) work in unison.

The weakening of rootedness is addressed by creating 'Shared Urban Memories' through high-visibility interventions like REMI (A3). These physical triggers disrupt institutionalised individualism by reclaiming public space for collective experience.

To ensure these moments lead to long-term belonging, City Marketing Amersfoort (A1) provides the structural 'Social Glue'. They manage the city-wide narrative through the 'We Amersfoort' platform, transforming individual creative actions into a coherent 'Citizen Journey'. This journey bridges the gap for younger generations (via Legends of the Roof, A5) and vulnerable groups (via Maatjevoort, A6), ensuring that 'responsibility for connection' is no longer seen as an individual burden, but as a shared societal process facilitated by the Cultural Innovation Network (CIN).

2.3 Adapted Version of the Innovative Practice

Amersfoort adapted the CUP4Creativity good practice from Budapest through a Double Diamond co-creation process, rather than directly transferring individual modules. This approach aligns strongly with Pillar 1 (Community Engagement) and Pillar 5 (Participatory Governance), but has been reshaped to match the city's long-standing culture of neighbourhood participation and social innovation.

The Double Diamond model allowed us to explore the phenomenon of loneliness in depth, identify the most relevant target groups, and test creative interventions before moving toward an integrated local model.

Phase 1 – Discover (Diverging): Understanding loneliness through artistic inquiry

We began by using artistic and creative tools facilitated by artist Jeroen Fikkers, collages, clay modelling and storytelling sessions, to surface lived experiences of loneliness in our community. This reflects the RECUP principle of using cultural practices to unlock emotions, narratives, and hidden barriers to participation.

Phase 2 – Define (Converging): Identifying five loneliness profiles

Through synthesis of the creative explorations with our ULG, we facilitated the ULG to define five key profiles that structure loneliness in Amersfoort:

1. young people,
2. people affected by addiction or detention,
3. those experiencing grief or loss,
4. residents with physical or mental limitations,
5. newcomers.

These profiles provided the foundation for adapting RECUP modules to our context. See Annex 3 for these profiles.

Phase 3 – Develop (Diverging): Generating interventions per profile

In co-creation sessions with the ULG, we generated a wide range of possible interventions addressing each loneliness profile. This was done in a session in September and December 2025. These ideas were transformed into test actions, reflecting the RECUP emphasis on prototyping and experimentation in real-life settings. Some of the ideas were already tested in the everyday practice of the ULG-members.

Phase 4 – Deliver (Converging): Learning from test actions and moving toward an integrated model

All test actions were implemented and evaluated during 2025. Their outcomes provide insight into what works, for whom, and under which conditions. In January–February 2026, we will synthesise these lessons into an integrated, city-wide approach to tackling loneliness, combining RECUP principles with Amersfoort’s own experience in community building and cross-sector collaboration. This iterative process demonstrates how RECUP has been adapted to the cultural, social, and organisational dynamics of Amersfoort, ensuring both relevance and long-term sustainability.

2.4 Integrated Approach and Participatory Process

Participatory methods used

Amersfoort applied a structured creative methodology inspired by URBACT tools, local practice, and design thinking:

- **Double Diamond approach** combining divergence and convergence
- **Art-based inquiry** (collages, clay modelling) to surface lived experiences
- **Idea clustering and prototyping**
- **Test-actions** conducted in real community settings
- **Peer reflection sessions** among ULG members
- **Open calls** to broaden participation in the next stage of convergence.

These methods ensure that the Investment Plan is built from lived reality, not abstract assumptions.

The approach of this project is inspired by the thinking of Anton Boone ³on *common-up governance* and co-creation with society. Rather than organising innovation top-down from government or market actors, this approach starts from shared societal challenges and mobilises five interconnected spheres: residents, civil society organisations, public authorities, businesses and knowledge institutions. Each helix contributes its own forms of knowledge, capacity and legitimacy. The role of Impact033 is not to steer outcomes, but to facilitate interaction, trust-building and collective sense-making between these actors. In practice, this means creating spaces where lived experience, professional expertise and institutional perspectives can meet on equal footing, allowing solutions to emerge collaboratively from the city itself rather than being imposed upon it.

³ Boonen, A. J. H. (2024). *Machts- of samenspel? Ontwikkelen van duurzame gemeenschappen. (Power or interplay? Developing sustainable communities).* Research Group Sustainable Communities, Utrecht University of Applied Sciences.

The RECUP process in Amersfoort is strongly shaped by the regional vision and methodology applied by Impact033, which centres on pentahelix⁴ collaboration, common-up governance, and facilitated, not directed, policy innovation. Instead of steering from the system level, the municipality and its partners intentionally create space for bottom-up ownership, collective intelligence and shared responsibility.

Emerging agenda points from the participatory process

Through the ULG meetings and creative co-creation sessions, several recurring agenda points emerged that shaped the integrated approach in Amersfoort:

- While the city has a rich landscape of activities and initiatives addressing loneliness, reaching people experiencing deep or long-term loneliness remains a major challenge. The more severe the isolation, the higher the threshold to participate.
- Participants recognised that loneliness exists in different degrees, requiring differentiated approaches. Group-based activities can support people experiencing mild loneliness, whereas those who are more severely isolated often need one-to-one contact, continuity and trust-building before broader participation becomes possible.
- Long-term loneliness often leads to a decline in social skills and confidence, making social interaction more difficult for both the individual and their surroundings. This can unintentionally reinforce exclusion and confirm feelings of being ignored or unseen.
- Despite many valuable initiatives, learning about what works, for whom, and under which conditions remains fragmented. There is a need to better connect practices across neighbourhoods and policy domains and to reflect collectively on outcomes.
- Finally, the process highlighted the importance of *belonging* and *rootedness* as underlying dimensions of loneliness. Like the philosopher Simone Weil articulates in her concept of rootedness, reconnecting to others, to place, to themselves and to local history and shared practices is essential for restoring a sense of belonging. Cultural and creative practices were identified as key enablers in this process of re-rooting.

Forming and commitment of the ULG

Before inviting the ULG, we mapped the landscape of people and organisations already active in addressing loneliness, including:

- welfare organisations
- community centres
- NGOs
- businesses in the health sector
- local initiatives
- active residents.

A diverse composition of stakeholders participated in the ULG meetings. The composition of the ULG changed over the course of the project due to organisational and personal changes among participants. Overall, participation was enthusiastic and the level of commitment was high.

⁴ The pentahelix approach brings together government, businesses, civil society, knowledge institutions, and citizens as equal partners in co-creating societal and urban solutions.

Type of stakeholder	Mailing list (informed)	ULG
Welfare organisation	4	2
Community centers	5	5
NGO's	20	7
Businesses in the health sector	6	5
Local initiatives	9	4
Artists	1	1
Residents	14	21
Total	59	45

In total, 104 people were involved in the project.

Cross-departmental integration

Several municipal teams have engaged with the URBACT process at key moments, including the departments of Economy, Social Affairs, Culture, Democratic Innovation, and Spatial Planning. Their involvement in early stages has helped surface shared challenges around loneliness, social cohesion and cultural participation and has highlighted the need for more joined-up approaches across policy domains.

URBACT has acted as an important catalyst in this regard: it created the first space in which different departments reflected together on the social dimension of urban development and on the role of cultural participation in addressing loneliness. Although continuous collaboration is not yet structurally embedded, the Investment Plan provides an opportunity to strengthen internal alignment and to formalise a governance model in which multiple departments contribute to a shared, community-oriented agenda.

This gradual, practice-based approach fits well with both URBACT principles and the regional Impact033 philosophy of bridging system and community perspectives. In the coming months, the municipality will explore how the emerging ULG insights and test-actions can be connected to existing programmes and responsibilities within the organisation.

Collective ownership of the Innovation Project

Across stakeholders, a shared working culture is emerging:

- The municipality recognises that meaningful change comes from *co-creation with residents*
- ULG members experience real influence in shaping solutions.
- Impact033 provides an infrastructure for connecting neighbourhood initiatives with system-level coalitions, a.o. in the health sector.
- Partners commit to a common-up approach, building from strengths and assets already present in the community.

This process embodies European values of participation, social cohesion, cultural democracy, and shared responsibility, and lays the foundation for a long-term collaborative governance model in Amersfoort.

2.5 Research and Advice: Strengthening the Social Fabric

In the period of September 2025 to January 2026, a dedicated research project was conducted by Socompany (Student Advisory Bureau of the HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht). The goal was

to investigate how communication can contribute to awareness and action regarding loneliness, specifically targeting residents who are not lonely themselves.

Key Research Findings:

- **The 'Willingness-Threshold' Paradox:** Research shows that a vast majority of Amersfoort residents are willing to help or connect with others. However, they experience a high threshold due to 'handling embarrassment' (*handelingsverlegenheid*); they simply do not know how to start a conversation or fear being intrusive.
- **Small Gestures, Big Impact:** The research emphasizes that the solution lies not in large-scale events, but in normalizing small, everyday interactions. Loneliness is reframed not as an individual problem, but as a collective responsibility to maintain a 'healthy social fabric'.
- **Targeting the 'Non-Lonely':** To effectively reduce isolation, communication should empower the social environment of lonely individuals. By providing residents with simple 'tools' and scripts for contact, the threshold for action is lowered.

Strategic Recommendations: Based on these insights, the students developed the campaign concept **"Maak contact. Maak verschil." (Make contact. Make a difference.)**. This concept serves as the umbrella for the RECUP investment proposal in Amersfoort. It focuses on:

1. **Normalization:** Making it normal to look out for one another.
2. **Activating the environment:** Shifting the focus from 'helping the lonely' to 'strengthening the community'.
3. **Cross-sectoral integration:** Using cultural and social interventions (as described in the following chapters) as the 'excuse' or 'vehicle' for these small contact moments.

This research-driven approach ensures that the adapted innovations in this Investment Plan are not just creative ideas, but evidence-based interventions designed to structurally strengthen the social tissue of Amersfoort.

The campaign the students suggested will be embedded in the on going city wide campaign 'We Amersfoort', executed by City Marketing. Impact033 will coordinate whether the activities will be aligned and communicated through this campaign 'We Amersfoort'.

3. The Adapted Innovation Project

3.1 Value Proposition

The value proposition of the Amersfoort RECUP project lies in its integrated, culture-driven approach to loneliness, which moves beyond traditional social work by activating the city's creative potential. The project offers a unique "Citizen Journey" that bridges the gap between individual isolation and structural community belonging.

Key Values of the Proposal:

1. **Low-Threshold Activation:** By using artistic and mobile interventions (REMI), we lower the threshold for residents to leave their homes and start conversations. We transform the 'scary' step of seeking help into an inviting experience of 'joining the pack'.

2. **A Unified Narrative:** The "Reach Out. Make a Difference" campaign provides a shared identity for all loneliness interventions in the city. It reframes loneliness as a collective responsibility, empowering the 'non-lonely' to strengthen the social fabric through small, everyday gestures.
3. **Empowerment through Storytelling:** By using real human stories (Faces of Loneliness) and creative expression (Legends of the Roof), we reduce stigma and build empathy across different generations and backgrounds.
4. **Seamless Integration (The Customer Journey):** We provide a clear pathway from the first point of contact (the campaign/outreach) to long-term peer support (Maatjefoort). This ensures that no resident 'gets lost' after the initial encounter.

Systemic Perspective

While our interventions address the symptoms of isolation, we remain conscious of the structural causes of inequality (as highlighted by thinkers like Damaris Matthijssen and Kees Klomp). By embedding our project within the municipal departments of Social Support and Culture, we aim to keep these systemic issues on the policy agenda. Our value lies in providing the 'social glue' that is essential for a resilient city, even amidst increasing economic and social pressures.

Innovation: 'Phygital' activation funnel

The project innovates by introducing a 'Phygital' activation funnel: a seamless integration of high-visibility physical triggers (the Giant REMI) and a digital engagement layer (SDA Now). This hybrid approach lowers the threshold for participation by offering 'gamified social quests,' allowing residents to practice social connection in a safe, digital environment before meeting in the physical 'landing places' provided by the Cultural Innovation Network (CIN).

3.2 Workplan

To provide a clear overview of the program, the following core activities and partners form the basis of the Amersfoort Investment Plan:

- A1. Programme management by Impact033
- A2. Campaign 'We Amersfoort' by City Marketing
- A3. Remi, giant puppet, by Social Wolfpack
- A4. Faces of Loneliness, a book by Gerard Keijzer
- A5. Legends of the Roof, a program with a movie for young adults by Kosmik
- A6. Maatjefoort, a peer-support initiative by Community Centre Het Klokhuis
- A7. Digital layer SDA-Now.

Synergy and Cross-Pollination

The strength of this workplan lies in the deliberate connections between these activities. Based on the collaborative sessions of the ULG, we have identified the following structural links:

1. Narrative and Visibility (A2, A4 & A3)

The stories from Gerard Keijzer's book (A4) serve as the "human face" of the city-wide campaign (A1). These stories are not just static text but are actively shared via Remi (A3) in neighbourhoods. This creates a physical 'dating site' where residents meet through the inspiration of shared stories, turning a book into a catalyst for real-life encounters.

2. Outreach and mobilization (A2&A3)

[SB1] megjegyzés írt: 2. Specificeer de rol van de Coördinator

Je hebt budget gereserveerd voor programmamanagement. Elisa wil dat je de taken van deze persoon (de "dedicated coordinator") SMART maakt.

• **Nieuwe taken om toe te voegen:** Niet alleen vergaderingen organiseren, maar ook:

•

• Actoren actief met elkaar verbinden (*connect actors*).

• Kansen (financiering/samenwerking) identificeren.

• Projectontwikkeling ondersteunen.

• Resultaten documenteren voor bewijslast.

• **Actie:** Pas de taakomschrijving in A1 (**Programme Management**) aan met deze actieve werkwoorden.

Tips van Elisa

Remi (A2) and REMI (A3) operate in tandem. Remi acts as the visual and emotional 'icebreaker' that draws people out of their homes with the invitation to 'join the pack'. Once the initial contact is made, SDA Now provides a gamified fun tool, to enhance the capability of citizens to engage.

3. Youth to Community Pathway (A5, A2 & A6)

Youth participating in Legends of the Roof (A5) are structurally connected to the rest of the network. After their creative trajectory, they can join the 'Crew of REMI' (A2), moving the puppet together as a lesson in interdependence. Furthermore, youth who feel unheard or isolated are actively bridged to a peer-mentor within Maatjevoort (A6) for long-term support.

4. Professional Marketing and Routing (A1 & All)

City Marketing (A1) provides the structural platform for all initiatives. They host the routes for REMI, produce portrait series of the 'buddies' from Maatjevoort to normalize social support, and organize an annual highlight event (such as a 'Procession of Light') to celebrate the city's social fabric.

5. Structural Soft Landings (A6, A7 & All)

All outreach activities (the campaign, REMI) lead to Maatjevoort (A6). This ensures that the 'customer journey' doesn't end with a single encounter but leads to a sustainable, equal relationship where residents look out for one another. SDA Now provides the digital 'connective tissue' of the project. Through a mobile gamification platform, they facilitate Social Quests that lead residents on a digital journey through their own neighborhoods. These quests are specifically designed to lower the psychological thresholds for social interaction. Participants are challenged to perform small, playful 'micro-actions' (such as sharing a local story or finding a hidden cultural landmark) that foster a sense of belonging and educate them on how to combat loneliness. This digital layer ensures that the project reaches a younger, tech-savvy audience and provides a safe, low-risk environment to practice social agency before engaging in physical community events.

3.3 Governance and Delivery Model

The governance of the RECUP project in Amersfoort is designed as a **transition model**. It starts as an innovation trajectory and evolves into a structured, city-wide approach integrated within the municipal organization.

1. Current Innovation Phase (Led by Governance Innovation)

At present, the project is hosted by the Department of Governance Innovation (*Bestuurlijke Vernieuwing*). This department acts as an incubator, providing the space for the URBACT Local Group (ULG) to experiment with new forms of co-creation between culture and social welfare. Impact033 serves as the community lead, bridging the gap between the municipality and the local initiators.

2. Structural Phase: Institutional Transfer (The 'Borging')

As the project moves from testing to structural implementation, the governance will be transferred to the thematic departments of the City of Amersfoort: Social Domain (*Samen Leven*) and Culture.

- **Strategic Ownership:** These departments will become the formal owners and commissioners (*opdrachtgevers*) of the loneliness strategy and the results of the RECUP network.

[SB2] megjegyzést írt: 4. Governance: Houd het "Light"

Elisa waarschuwt voor te veel bureaucratie. Ze adviseert een **light governance model**.

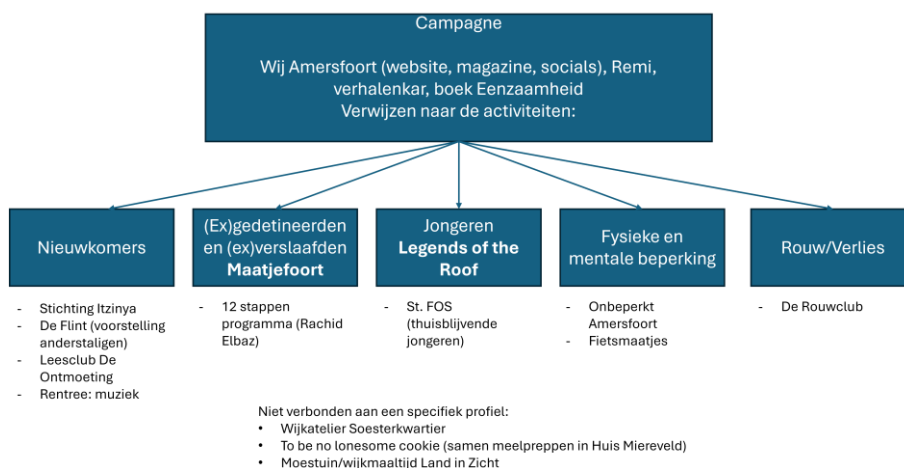
• **Actie:** Zorg dat in je tekst over de structuur staat dat het proces **open** blijft voor nieuwe instromers (ZZP-ers, kunstenaars, kleine NGO's). Gebruik letterlijk de termen: *"ensuring continuity without losing energy and flexibility through a light governance structure."*

Tip van Elisa

- **Professional Delivery:** For the large-scale execution of the city campaign and the coordination of the activities, the municipality intends to commission specialized partners. **City Marketing Amersfoort** will play a key role in the professional delivery and visibility of the campaign, working in close collaboration with the creative hubs and foundations (such as **Kosmik**) that originated the initiatives.
- **Integrated Journey:** The campaign serves as the connective tissue between the overarching message and the specific local initiatives. By aligning the campaign with the participating projects, we aim to realize a tailored 'customer journey' for each specific loneliness profile, ensuring that residents are effectively guided to the intervention that best suits their needs.

3. The URBACT Local Group as a Permanent Network

The ULG will not dissolve after the project ends but will evolve into a **Social-Cultural Innovation Network**. This ensures that the expertise of the initiators remains available to the departments of Social Domain and Culture. This network ensures that the 'bottom-up' energy is preserved while the project is professionally managed and financed through the city's structural channels. This community network can grow during the coming years, when the campaign is active, providing a strong local network of collaborating initiatives en organisations.



3.4 Overall Project Schedule

[Insert timeline/Gantt]

3.5 Sustainability and Institutional Embedding (*Borging*)

To ensure the long-term impact of the RECUP project, a clear transition strategy is being developed. The goal is to move from the current 'innovation phase' to a 'structural phase' within the municipal organization and the city.

1. Institutional Anchoring

While the project is currently initiated by the Department of Governance Innovation (*Bestuurlijke Vernieuwing*), the long-term ownership will be transferred to the thematic departments: **Social Domain (*Samen Leven*)** and **Culture**. By embedding the 'Make Contact. Make a Difference' strategy into the regular policy cycles of these departments, the project becomes part of the city's structural approach to social cohesion and loneliness.

2. Execution and Professional Delivery The delivery of the large-scale city campaign and the coordination of the local interventions will be managed through professional partners. This includes:

- **Strategic Coordination:** The departments of Social Domain and Culture will act as the primary commissioners (*opdrachtgevers*).
 - **Operational Execution:** City Marketing Amersfoort, in collaboration with specialized local foundations and hubs (such as Kosmik and Impact033), will be tasked with the practical execution. This ensures that the creative energy of the ULG is combined with professional marketing and communication expertise.
 - **Network Continuity:** The URBACT Local Group will evolve into a permanent 'Social-Cultural Innovation Network', acting as an advisory body for the departments to ensure that the voice of the city remains central in future policy-making.
4. **Financial Transition** As the European URBACT funding concludes, the financing model will shift toward a mix of regular municipal budgets (earmarked for social cohesion), external funds (as identified in the 'Bidbook'), and private-public partnerships with local businesses.

The structural legacy is ensured through the **Cultural Innovation Network (CIN)**. This network serves as the permanent bridge between the social district teams (*wijkprojectteams*) and the cultural sector. **Amateurkunst033** acts as the formal anchor, ensuring that activated residents find long-term participation in the city's cultural life. The methodology developed in Vathorst will serve as a 'Social Cohesion Blueprint' for other districts.

In de gaten houden: gaat Kosmik samenwerken met Mind US (Hidde Bijl)?

5. Budget and Financing Plan

In this chapter there is the budget and financing strategy.

4.1 Project Costs

Activity	Description	Finance required	Of which	Coverage	Source	Status
A1	Programme management	104.470	47.470	0%	CERV	Application sent in april
			32.000	0%	Urbact 2 or Kansfonds	Urbact 2 on the agenda 13/14 May in Dubrovnik
	CIN		25.000	100%	Municipality of Amersfoort, department of culture	Execution by Amateurkunst033
A2	Campaign 'We Amersfoort'	25.000	25.000	100%	Municipality of Amersfoort, department of culture	Execution by City Marketing
A3	Remi, giant puppet, by Social Wolfpack	80.000	78.000	0%	Fonds voor Cultuurparticipatie	application in progress
			2.000	100%	Urbact test action budget	test action in July 2026
A4	Faces of loneliness, a book by Gerard Keijzer	31.125	2.000	100%	Urbact test action budget	finished
			19.500	100%	Narrative Journalism Contribution by Municipality of Amersfoort	finished
			3.500	0%	Sponsoring other sources	application in progress
			6.025	0%	Sales Revenue book	
A5	Legends of the Roof, a program with a movie for young adults by Kosmik	39.000	2.000	100%	Urbact test action budget	test action in september 2026
			37.000	0%	Bernardfonds or Fonds voor Cultuurparticipatie	
A6	Maatjevoort, a peer-support initiative by Community Centre Het Klokhuis	69.000	2.000	100%	Urbact test action budget	finished
			20.000	100%	Oranjefonds	started
			47.000	0%	Oranjefonds, St Doen or VSBfonds	application in progress
A7	Digital layer SDA-Now	50.000	2.000	0%	Urbact test action budget	applied
			48.000	0%	Kansfonds (together with A1)	application in progress
	Total budget	398.595				

4.2 Investment Sources (A Multi-Source Funding Strategy)

To ensure the long-term sustainability and scalability of the Amersfoort RECUP program, we have adopted a multi-source funding strategy. Rather than relying on a single budget, the investment plan is financed through a combination of public, private, and social capital. This diversified approach ensures financial resilience and broad ownership across the city.

The strategy consists of three primary pillars:

1. **Institutional Municipal Funding (Structural Anchoring)** As the project transitions from the innovation phase to the implementation phase, funding will be integrated into the structural budgets of the municipal departments of **Social Domain (Samen Leven)** and **Culture**. These departments act as the primary commissioners, providing a stable financial base for the core activities and the city-wide campaign.
2. **Specialized Fund Acquisition (The Bidbook Approach)** Each individual ULG-partner is responsible for seeking additional funding tailored to their specific intervention. To support this, a collective '**Bidbook**' is developed. This professional portfolio is used to approach:
 - a. **National and Regional Social/Cultural Funds:** Such as *Fonds voor Cultuurparticipatie* or *Oranje Fonds*.
 - b. **Private Foundations and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Engaging Amersfoort-based businesses that want to invest in the city's social fabric.
3. **European and Regional Innovation Grants** The Integrated Investment Plan serves as a high-quality blueprint for future grant applications. The RECUP network partners (Amersfoort and its international counterparts) will collaborate to apply for the **CERV program (Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values)**, specifically targeting the 'Networks of Towns' call. This ensures that the knowledge exchange and the 'Make contact. Make a difference.' methodology can be scaled up to a European level. By applying as an international network, we leverage the results of the URBACT project to secure long-term European support beyond the initial RECUP timeframe.

Co-investment of Partners: Finally, many ULG partners contribute through **in-kind investments**, such as the use of community spaces, volunteer hours, and existing networks. This shared investment model ensures that the RECUP legacy is carried by the entire city ecosystem.

5. Monitoring & Evaluation Framework

5.1 Monitoring and Evaluation Approach

Our approach acknowledges the complexity of urban social dynamics. While the reduction of loneliness is our ultimate goal, we recognize the methodological challenge of direct attribution. Therefore, our evaluation focuses on contribution and proxy indicators.

- **Contribution over Attribution:** Instead of claiming a direct causal link between a single activity (like the Giant REMI) and a city-wide drop in loneliness, we measure how our activities strengthen the 'Social Infrastructure' of Amersfoort.

[SB3] megjegyzést írt: @anne is hier nog iets mee gedaan of zal ik het maar weglaten?

- **Triangulation and Proxy Data:** We use proxy indicators, such as the number of new social connections made, the durability of buddy-matches, and the increased visibility of the theme, as evidence that we are creating the *conditions* under which loneliness can decrease.
- **Baseline Reality:** Our baseline in 2026 will capture the starting point of our network's reach. We don't aim to claim credit for every person who feels better, but we will document the **lived experiences** and stories that emerge from our interventions to show qualitative impact.

5.2 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Indicator	Type	Target (2027)	Rationale
Digital activation	Impact	1250 users	Engagement rate and action completion
REMI	Impact	15000 (5 events x 3000 visitors)	Number of attendees at REMI events
Online Conversion	Outcome	Increase in web/app traffic post-events City Marketing	Google Analytics / social media metrics
Youth participation	Output	150 students in 'Legends' program school	Attendance sheets.
Peer Support	Impact	25 Maatjevoort matches	Participant registration
Media	Impact	Reach of City Marketing Channels	Social media & Magazine stats
Social Ripple Effect	Impact	1000 residents per district engaged in micro interventions	Stakeholder reflections & Neighborhood observational data

[SB4] megjegyzést írt: Versterk het Impact Framework (Meten wat ertoe doet)

Je hebt al een mooi begin gemaakt met de monitoring, maar Elisa vraagt om een "simple impact framework" dat specifiek focust op de **netwerk-waarde**.

• Indicatoren om toe te voegen:

-
- Aantal *nieuwe* samenwerkingsverbanden die zijn ontstaan binnen het CIN.
- Aantal professionals (uit cultuur, zorg en welzijn) dat actief betrokken is.
- Aantal culturele interventies dat daadwerkelijk is voortgekomen uit de incubator-functie.

• **Actie:** Voeg deze drie indicatoren toe aan je tabel in Hoofdstuk 5.2. Dit helpt je om later bij fondsen aan te tonen dat het netwerk écht werkt.

Tip van Elisa

Annex 1 Theory of Change

Problem Analysis (What challenges are we addressing?)

Urban challenges such as social isolation, digital exclusion, and limited citizen participation hinder inclusive city development.

There is a need for a resilient urban environment in which culture and creativity contribute to social and economic wellbeing.

Local policymaking often takes place within fixed institutional structures, with limited direct input from residents, cultural actors, and other urban stakeholders.

Municipal frameworks sometimes restrict innovative and interdisciplinary solutions. For example:

Major urban challenges—such as loneliness and social exclusion—are experienced across sectors but are typically addressed within isolated administrative domains (e.g., the social domain focuses on loneliness, while spatial planning considers the social component of urban development separately).

The city itself holds knowledge, networks, and ideas that this project aims to activate and include more strongly in the policy process.

Strategy (How will we address these challenges?)

- Strengthen social cohesion through creative interventions that bring residents and organisations together.
- Promote digital inclusion through culture-oriented programmes.
- Enable policy and planning to emerge from bottom-up initiatives and multi-stakeholder collaboration.
- Realise transformation through co-designed spatial and social improvements involving the municipality, companies, organisations, residents, and knowledge institutions.
- Stimulate cross-departmental collaboration by engaging the departments of Spatial Planning, Economy, Social Development, Democratic Innovation, and Culture in supporting this process.
- Anchor municipal frameworks: by making the positive impact of this process visible, we demonstrate how co-creation can operate within municipal structures.
- Share knowledge across the URBACT network to exchange best practices.

Expected Outcomes (What change do we expect?)

Short-term (Summer 2025)

- Initial components of a process model for co-creating urban solutions using artistic methods.
- Increased engagement of residents in collectively addressing the root-causes of loneliness.
- A functioning multi-stakeholder ULG.
- Stronger collaboration between municipal departments and local stakeholders.
- An emerging network of urban actors jointly addressing the rootcauses of loneliness *with* the municipality rather than *directed by* it.
- First signs of wider municipal interest, with more departments noticing the project and expressing the wish to join.

Medium-term (December 2025)

- Creative and innovative experiments in the city demonstrating how social connectedness and policymaking can reinforce each other.
- Structural collaboration between municipal departments on loneliness, based on evidence from the experiments.
- Policymakers begin to view this process not as a temporary project but as a new working model.

- The ULG experiences genuine influence over how loneliness is addressed and feels ownership of the outcomes.

Long-term (Summer 2026)

- Development of a vibrant creative ecosystem in Amersfoort.
- A city in which culture and creativity structurally contribute to social cohesion, economic vitality, and sustainable urban development.
- A widely supported municipal approach for co-creating urban solutions together with the city, using arts and culture as key enablers.
- A new governance model granting residents and pentahelix partners a formal role in policymaking.
- Municipal departments collaborate more interdisciplinarily and recognise co-creation as a full-fledged policy method.
- Other departments begin using similar processes to address urban challenges *with* the city instead of *for* the city.
- Stronger networks and collaborations between European cities within URBACT.

Status as of December 2025

**By December 2025, Amersfoort has progressed significantly in the development of its Integrated Action Plan and the local implementation of the RECUP methodology. The following updates reflect the results of the second phase of the Double Diamond, the outcomes of the test actions, and the development of a more mature governance and collaboration structure.*

Progress toward short-term outcomes (summer 2025 → now)

- *The double diamond approach has been fully implemented in the exploration and ideation phases, and is now being continued into the convergence phase in early 2026.*
- *Through artistic methods (collage, clay modelling) and thematic dialogue, the ULG co-created five loneliness profiles (youth, addiction/detention, grief & loss, physical/mental challenges, newcomers). These now serve as shared analytical frames.*
- *A ULG of ~30 active members (17 residents, 13 organisations) meets regularly; the broader engagement list includes 130+ interested stakeholders.*
- *Each ULG member or subgroup has selected a profile to work on, ensuring distributed ownership of the challenge.*
- *Cross-departmental cooperation within the municipality has strengthened: Economy, Social Affairs, Culture, and Democratic Innovation are every now and then participating in the ULG to connect existing municipal initiatives with the URBACT process. There is no structural team yet.*
- *The project has gained visibility and internal legitimacy within the municipality, leading to increased interest from other departments.*

Progress toward medium-term outcomes (expected December 2025)

- *Several test actions have been implemented by ULG members in their own organisations or neighbourhoods, generating practical insights into what works to address loneliness creatively.*
- *Co-creation is not yet recognised internally as a new working method, but as an isolated project.*
- *The ULG reports a stronger sense of agency and influence in shaping the local approach to loneliness.*
- *Foundations have been laid for a more structural, cross-sector collaboration around loneliness, supported by the municipality's growing willingness to adopt participatory and creative methods.*

Progress toward long-term change (early signs)

[SB5] megjegyzést írt: In June we replace this paragraph with a status as of June 2026.

- *Early groundwork has been laid for an ecosystem that works together to reduce loneliness, through a,b,c. (to be finalised in early 2026).*
- *Stakeholders increasingly understand the value of integrating culture and creativity into social and spatial development processes.*
- *The URBACT process is not yet inspiring broader thinking about interdisciplinary policymaking and shared governance.*

[ER6] megjegyzést írt: Hoe? En hoe verhoudt zich dit tot de kernoorzaak (kernoorzaken) van eenzaamheid?

Conclusion

By December 2025, the foundations have been firmly laid for an integrated, community-driven and creativity-led approach to addressing loneliness in Amersfoort. The next steps—convergence, integrated design, and prioritisation—will take place in the first months of 2026, enabling the development of a robust and evidence-informed Investment Plan.

Initial Evaluation Framework (Based on URBACT Local Impact Assessment Framework)

Dimension – Indicators – Method – Timing – Relevance

1. *Citizen and organisational involvement:* surveys, interviews (mid & end 2025)
2. *Municipal recognition of relevance:* internal quick scan (summer 2025)
3. *Number and quality of creative interventions:* observation, case studies (ongoing)
4. *Formation of ULG:* network analysis (end 2024)
5. *Embedding co-creation in policy:* document analysis (2024)
6. *Interdepartmental cooperation:* feedback rounds (mid & end 2025)
7. *Budget vs. impact:* cost–benefit analysis (March 2026)
8. *Policy embedding:* policy review (2025-2026)
9. *URBACT scaling and interest:* network analysis (2026)

Annex 2 Background: Results of test actions

1. Maatjefoort

Target group: people recovering from addiction, former detainees, and individuals returning to society who are at high risk of social isolation.

Description:

Maatjefoort is a peer-support initiative pairing trained volunteers (“maatjes”) with individuals who are rebuilding their lives after addiction treatment or detention. The project creates stable, trust-based one-to-one relationships that help participants re-establish routines, reconnect socially, and access community life. Volunteers provide companionship, practical support, and coaching toward meaningful participation in neighbourhood activities.

Test action:

A small pilot was carried out with several volunteer–participant matches formulated in community center Het Klokhuis. The test demonstrated that a low-threshold relational anchor significantly reduces feelings of isolation and increases confidence to participate in group activities.

2. Gezichten van Eenzaamheid

Target group: residents of Amersfoort across different loneliness profiles (youth, people in recovery, people with disabilities, newcomers, and people experiencing grief).

Description:

Gezichten van Eenzaamheid is a creative research-and-dialogue project using photography, storytelling, and artistic expression to make the lived experience of loneliness visible. Residents participate in portrait sessions and co-create visual narratives that reflect their personal journeys. The project generates recognition, shared understanding, and connection across diverse groups.

Test action:

Dozens of interviews were conducted with people experiencing loneliness across a wide range of profiles, in order to make the diverse forms of isolation visible.

3. Legends of the Roof - Kosmik Film Project

Target group: young people (16–27), especially those who feel socially isolated or lack a sense of belonging.

Description:

Legends of the Roof is a youth-driven creative project in which young residents explore the city’s rooftops as symbolic spaces of freedom and perspective. Through music, spoken word, photography and short performances, they create “urban legends” that represent their experiences of isolation, resilience, and community. The project culminates in rooftop events where youth share their work with the neighbourhood.

Test action:

A preliminary workshop series is organised where young people watch the movie, make their own puppet that expresses their own loneliness and make a photoshoot with the puppet.

4. Student Campaign on Loneliness (Scompany / HU Students)

Target group: residents of Amersfoort (especially non-lonely residents who can play a role in supporting lonely individuals).

Description:

A team of communication students developed a positive campaign encouraging residents to look out for one another under the motto *Make contact, make a difference*. The campaign reframes loneliness by focusing on the strength of the city's "healthy social fabric." It motivates people who are not lonely to invite others into social life through small gestures such as taking someone along to an activity.

Test action:

Students conducted creative sessions, surveys, and interviews to explore what helps people stay connected. They tested visual concepts and messaging in several neighbourhoods.