

Oma's Soep

“Every Cooking Day offers a little encouragement, and is a reminder that you are being thought of and not alone.”

Grandma from Amsterdam (NL) participating at Oma's Soep Events



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The Spark

Loneliness is a major and growing problem in the Netherlands, also among the elderly. In 2023 nearly 11% of the Dutch population aged 15 or older felt very lonely, whereas 29% percent felt somewhat lonely. Among the elderly nearly half felt lonely regularly.¹ Lonely people experience social loneliness which is the feeling of emptiness around them and the lack of fun. Emotional loneliness, on the other hand, is the feeling that they do not have people around them who they feel connected to and who they can trust to catch them when they fall.

On Christmas Eve 2016, the grandma of one of the founders of Oma's Soep (Granny's Soup) told him she really enjoyed cooking for family and friends, but that family members were living too far away and that more and more of her friends were less mobile. Inspired by her remark and only a few days later, the idea to bring elderly and young people together to make soup and to combat loneliness was born over a beer in a pub.

The main goal of Oma's Soep is to organise recurring social contact for elderly people living alone. In addition, a contribution is made to reducing food waste.



Governance Model

The social enterprise Oma's Soep consists of two entities: a foundation, Stichting Oma's Soep tegen Eenzaamheid, and a commercial enterprise, Oma's Soep B.V. In its early days, the foundation was mostly supported by several funds and is now mainly funded through the profits of the commercially operating sister enterprise. The latter produces soup in a professional production kitchen based on recipes from elderly people created during cooking days. The soup is sold across physical and online supermarkets in the Netherlands. In accordance with the articles of association, at least 50 % of the profits of this commercial enterprise are transferred to the foundation. This financing amount differs due to investments by the commercial enterprise. Therefore, Oma's Soep also applies for funds and additionally invests in creating strong relations with companies and individuals to obtain financing.

The foundation organises different types of activities where the young and the old are brought together to combat loneliness. Student boards of 7 to 8 people (renewed annually) oversee local operations in 13 student cities across the country. In each city, up to 100 volunteers undertake the activities that bring young and old people together. At weekly **Cooking Days**, young student volunteers and lonely elderly cook soup together in community centres and eat it for lunch. During the Covid-19 pandemic organising these Cooking Days was not possible, and the **"Soup-at-Home Days"** were initiated. Volunteers deliver soup and handwritten cards to the homes of the elderly. They drink coffee with the elderly and/or take them for a walk/ride.

To reach elderly people in areas where there is (not yet) an active student board, "Grandma's Pen Pal/ Call Pal" was initiated. Student volunteers are matched with elderly living in or near the same neighbourhood and regularly send a letter, or make a phone call, creating a personal bond.² To further spread the mission of Oma's Soep and to put the elderly in the spotlight, large and small fun events and PR campaigns are organised a few times a year (e.g. Gala Evening, Disco Balls Bingo, Cooking with Queen Maxima).

Social Benefits

Oma's Soep is a new care concept **supporting people** that connects elderly, that do not cook themselves but rather pass on their knowledge of recipes, and young student volunteers who do the actual cooking. **Vulnerable people** (elderly) benefit from extra activities (large and small fun events) where they are put in the spotlight. This leads to reduced loneliness and improved health of elderly. In addition, the contact between young and old results in valuable and fun contacts.

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Environmental Benefits

Food waste is avoided by making soup (and other meals) from “leftover” vegetables that are still good and edible, but do not meet certain quality standards for regular sales. This not only reduces the environmental impact of food waste by lowering greenhouse gas emissions from discarded produce but also raises awareness among people of all ages about the importance of sustainable food practices and the value of every resource in our food system.

Oma's Soep Impact from 2023³



28,000
Encounters
between young
and old yearly



12,000 kg of
Food saved by
Oma's Soep
yearly



500+
Volunteers help
yearly

Replicability Potential

Oma's Soep illustrates that the basic concept of this social innovation can be transferred to other geographies. After starting in Amsterdam in 2017, operations were rolled out to other parts of the country and now include a dozen other university cities. Their goal is to be active in all 17 student cities in the Netherlands, and international expansion to England is investigated. The active involvement of motivated student volunteers is considered key for successful expansion.



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Sources:

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