

## **Nursing home Vreedenhoff: win-win for both young and old**

*Vreedenhoff is a nursing home in Arnhem for elderly people with physical and/or psychological problems. When this organization was dealing with a vacancy of residents for the first time, Vreedenhoff chose for a peculiar solution.*

### **1. Introduction**

The nursing home of Vreedenhoff is located in a richly forested area of Arnhem. The home offers accommodation, care, and treatment for the elderly. There is significant attention given to the welfare of the residents, also in the psychological area. In August 2014 Vreedenhoff was confronted with a vacancy of residents for the first time primarily because older people with low care needs are being admitted at much later stages, thus rooms or apartments remain empty. Vreedenhoff searched for a creative solution for the vacant apartments. The idea arose to rent the rooms or apartments to young adults. Since February 2015, 195 elderly have been living in the nursing home along with five students who are dispersed throughout the home. The students pay 150 euros in rent per month and contribute 20 hours of volunteer work.

### **2. Principles**

The idea to house students in the nursing home emerged in order to utilize the vacant apartments. In addition, the idea was that students could contribute to the quality of life in the nursing home. Experience shows that this is indeed the case.

The financial benefits for Vreedenhoff are not very substantial because the students' apartments only yield 150 euros per month. The (immaterial) value for residents however, is very significant. The students spend 20 hours per month volunteering, for example, by accompanying an elderly person on a walk, purchasing groceries, or watching a soccer game together. The students live in the nursing home and feel at home. They get to know the elderly, build relationships, swap stories and, even more important, students and senior citizens become interested in each other. Elderly people meet at least one of the students on a daily basis, bringing back a little bit of 'ordinary life' for the residents. This new business model (NBM) not only has an economic value (rental income) but also a much greater societal or social value. This applies not only to the elderly but also to the students. They claim to learn a lot from the elderly. For example, one of the students originally aspired to be employed at a commercial job, but now he is convinced that making social impact is more important. The nursing staff is also learning from the exchanges between the students and the elderly.

Thus, there is multiple value creation because new value is created both economically and socially. Indirectly, ecological value is also created. By utilizing the vacant apartments, fewer new homes are being built which is decreasing the need for natural resources.

### **3. Design**

The idea emerged in August 2014. Internally, the plan was discussed with everyone. Five coffee meetings with the elderly occurred and most generally responded positive to very positive. They knew from the beginning what type of benefits this would offer them, independent from addressing the vacancy issue. This is collective value creation: communally creating and implementing 'activities'. After this, the idea was discussed with the relevant authorities: the client council, the company council, the supervisory board, and all employees. This was the beginning of a *community*. The logic regarding the vacancy was important in the discussion, and it soon became evident that allowing the students to reside at the nursing home would have considerable added value for the residents. Subsequently, contracts were drawn up to adequately regulate rent-control and labor rights.

The students were selected with great care through a number of selection rounds. First, they wrote a letter of motivation, and the selected students were interviewed by a committee consisting of three members of the client council, an employee, a care manager, and the coordinator for volunteers. Eventually, the last round took place through a conversation with the executive head. After the five students were chosen, they were introduced to the residents in a 'speed dating' afternoon where students took turns visiting various tables with residents.

The current model is operating very well. It is likely that, in the future, the number of students living in Vreedenhoff will be increased to a maximum of ten. Currently, the students' fields of study are not taken into account in the selection procedure, which could be included in the future. The initiative has yielded much publicity for Vreedenhoff, and the nursing home could take further advantage of this.

Various types of transactions forms are taking place. One is exchange: students are performing volunteer work and, in return, they receive a discount on the rent. In addition, there is extensive sharing: the elderly and students exchange stories and experiences. Even more value could be created, for example, by having the students integrate their fields of studies more inside the home.

The transaction means that are being used are time and money (and talents and experience).

#### **4. Value Proposition**

A core value of Vreedenhoff is equality. In Vreedenhoff, various types of people are living with different backgrounds and care needs. Everyone is different but is valued equally. That counts for both the elderly and the students. This confirms once again that, no matter how different you are, there is a place to live and work for everyone. Everyone adds something, and the new group of residents (students) again confirms this. The students mean a lot to the elderly. Older people are often lonely and having a student visit every once in a while really breaks up the mundane daily routine. This is invaluable. The original idea was to reduce the vacancy rate of apartments, however, the value it has for the residents is much greater at the moment. The students are of such great value that, even if the nursing home is full, the students no longer need to leave.

This NBM distinguishes itself from other similar initiatives because the students are actually living dispersed among the residents and not in a separate hall created for students. This NBM is easy to reproduce in other healthcare facilities. It is thus 'copyable'. A little luck can be helpful. For example, Vreedenhoff is located near a university, however, when this is not the case, other target groups can be explored that can contribute to the well-being of the elderly such as single women with children who must leave their homes or welfare mothers. They can live somewhere with a low rent rate but must do something in return. The fact that they are included in a community can be very healing.

An important side note is that Vreedenhoff is financially capable of renting out the apartments at such a low rate. The students are living in the least attractive apartments available at the complex. Not every nursing home can afford to rent out a space for such a low price. (For example, when apartments have just been refurbished or rebuilt, this construction does not yield many benefits.) In addition, it is very important that everyone in the nursing home supports the initiative. The orderliness must be disregarded a little, and the idea will be met with great enthusiasm.

There is a *collective value creation* because the elderly and students create the values together and both also benefit from them. In addition, there is *multiple value creation* because Vreedenhoff allows students to live inexpensively while addressing a vacancy problem as well. The students are of great intangible value to the elderly (creating social and economic value). The *shared value creation* is that it provides an improved atmosphere in the home with an entirely new dynamic. In the future, the NBM can potentially provide a change. This initiative has worked out so well that it is very likely that such an initiative will occur much more frequently in the future.

## **5. Community**

The community basically includes anyone who is connected in any way to the nursing home. The students and the elderly but also the caretakers, the client council, the company council were all able to express their concerns in the setting up of the initiative. The executive head did not have to do much to get them excited, and soon everyone supported the idea. Later, the media also became part of the community. There has been significant media attention for the initiative which has certainly contributed to its success. It began with a newspaper article about the idea of letting students live in Vreedenhoff. The next day, the media was storming in from all directions. Following that article, 150 students applied for a place in the home. Because the executive head himself was very enthusiastic, the other members of the community became excited as well. It was still just an idea, however, in February, the idea was completely developed, and Vreedenhoff contacted broadcasting in Brabant and de Gelderlander. This generated immense publicity and, therefore, this contact has proven to be very valuable.

The relationships between the members of the community are mainly informal. The formal regulations are that the students have a normal rental agreement with an additional stipulation that, after completing their studies, they must leave the residence. In addition, they have a

regular volunteer work agreement, and they must abide by the same house rules as those applicable to all residents. Any other communication takes place informally.

## **6. Results**

As previously mentioned, having the students 'inhabit' the home brings great intangible value. It brings a little bit of ordinary life to the home, and that means a lot to the welfare of the elderly. Additionally, it is a solution for the vacant apartments. The NBM provides many positive values. Negative values have not yet surfaced. A survey amongst the residents showed virtually no perceived negative aspects. Everyone sees that the students have been carefully selected and that they are suitable to live there. The only negative thing that could occur in the future is that the turnover among the students could increase which may evoke restlessness for the elderly. However, this concern is taken into account when selecting students.

## **7. Conclusion**

Students live among the ordinary residents at the home, pay reduced rent rates, and carry out volunteer work in return. In this context, they contribute significantly to the atmosphere at the nursing home. The business model will still be viable for the upcoming years and is also suitable for other target groups as well. In the future, older people will increasingly need to remain in their own homes resulting in changes in the population of the residents in the nursing home. Because the health status of the residents will decrease, the relationships with students will be influenced. It might result in a less positive experience for a student, but that does not alter the experience of the elderly residents who live there and who will probably appreciate the contact even more. It is important, though, that there is not too much student turnover because that will evoke too much restlessness in the residents. As long as the University remains nearby, there will be sufficient demand for this housing option. In the future, students will not be getting any wealthier in terms of their budgets.

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