

Note of Intent

Problem

What we know about the context.

According to the Whiddon Group, an Australian care provider for seniors, about 50 percent of elderly people living at home report being lonely, as compared to 10 percent for the general population.

¹Isolation among the elderly can be due to several factors including the loss of the spouse, family dissolution due to the departure of the children from home, geographical distances, physical and mental degradation which leads to a progressive loss of autonomy, lack of work, economic precarity due to a minimum pension.

What problem are we answering?

By building gardens in care homes, several problems related to the isolation of the elderly can be addressed: loss of the feeling of purpose because of retirement from a job as this garden might keep them busy, decline of physical health as the cultivated fruits and vegetables will be organic, feelings of loneliness as it will strengthen the links in between the gardeners, and the decline of physical and cognitive strength as gardening requests physical movements and mental efforts

What's at stake?

Social isolation has negative impacts on mental health as well as physical health. Elderly people living alone are 4 to 5 times more likely to be hospitalized, according a report by the National Seniors Council.

Indeed chronic stress caused by isolation attacks the immune system and could be the cause of various diseases such as coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and arthritis. It can also modify the endocrine activity of the body. Isolated people show a higher level of physical pain, depression and chronic fatigue. Feeling lonely can also lead to depression and a loss of appetite. These symptoms can cause dementia and a loss of cognitive skills, leading to Alzheimer's disease.

Furthermore, isolated elderly live in a state of hypervigilance that can cause sleep disorders and increase the risk of morbidity and mortality.

According to the National Seniors Council, social isolation may be a risk factor for abuse on older people and it can lead to facilitated crime or theft. It as well makes seniors less likely to participate to social activities which creates a vicious circle.

What needs? What constraints?

The loneliness and isolation of seniors is mainly a social issue. Governments, the health sector, stakeholders, social groups, etc. need to take stronger actions in order to prevent and mitigate this issue's consequences. Furthermore, people need to be more involved with the elderly members of their families and be aware to signs of deteriorating well-being.

¹ <https://mylumin.org/the-effects-of-loneliness-and-isolation-to-the-elderly/>

However, solutions to prevent and mitigate social isolation of the elderly vary according to the needs, the context and the framework. Interventions need to be adapted across different scales of territorial areas which can be challenging as multiple different solutions have to be created.

Why is this problem important?

Due to the growing longevity and ageing of the population, isolation of seniors is a priority issue for society. A 2014 Council on the Ageing (COTA) study predicts that the number of socially isolated people will more than double by 2040, and is likely to further increase as the number seniors among the global population is growing.

Proposed Concept

Name and detailed description

Goodness Gardens is a gardening project we propose to the elderly so that they could cultivate a hobby of gardening while communicating with other people to alleviate their feelings of loneliness. We intend to organize regular gardening events all around the city of Paris in collaboration with local plant shops, care houses, hospitals, etc.

Scope

Due to geographical limitations, the project will be held mainly in Paris. However, other similar events held elsewhere is encouraged.

Which other solutions do exist?

There do exist few facilities in Paris which provide solutions to tackle senior loneliness, such as group traveling, however, they are either not regular (such as gardening expositions) or not cheap enough².

Why is your solution effective? Original? Feasible?

Therefore, we propose to hold a regular event which requires minimal actions and make it a largely non-profit activity so that it could reduce the financial stress it might impose on seniors without much cash, who happen to be the people who need loneliness alleviation the most.

POC and tests

The project is feasible for the following three reasons:

First, the demand is real and increasing. According to Institut nationale de la statistique et des etudes economiques, 2.5 million senior citizens in France (excluding Mayotte) can be considered as having lost their independence in 2015. This amounts to 15.3% of those aged 60 and above. Of those, 700,000 can be considered as severely affected. 4 million French senior citizens will be affected by loss of independence by year 2050, that is, 16.4% of total

² <https://parisforseniors.com/>

senior citizens. If the pace remain the same, the number of beds available in care homes would have to increase by 20% by 2030, and by more than 50% by 2050.

Second, the project is easy to operate and requires minimal funding. Gardening is a relatively static activities judged by its nature, which is perfect for senior citizens since as people grow older, their physical strength tends to wane; therefore, it is for the best if they could conduct activities which are safe.

Besides, gardening is not that difficult while guarantees a sense of achievement, which is soothing and relaxing. Also, seeds and soil are not very expensive, which lends more practicality to the project.

Last but not least, gardening is indeed effective in reducing the feelings of loneliness³, because it could expose people to nature, which is always nice to calm the nerves and reduce stress as the elderly feels closer to the cycle of life.

Expected positive impacts

(Quantitative &/or Qualitative)

The expected impacts of this project is that senior loneliness could be materially reduced after the elderly's regular participation.

Specifically speaking, senior loneliness will first be assessed by means of questionnaires or focus group interviews; then after the event, a follow-up session will also be conducted so that the change could be quantified and determined. During the process, special attention will also be paid as to the engagement rates of the elderly.

For qualitative evaluation, a specific set of standards are established in order to decide if there exist any positive changes before and after the event.

We expect quantitative impacts to exceed an average of 5% increase, most of which should be positive, that is, a decrease of the feeling of loneliness.

sustainability of the solution

The project is sustainable because on the one hand, it demands little funding, which makes it easy to launch; and on the other, it forms a perfect financial and reputation cycle. First, the plant shops can repurchase the grown plants at a price much lower than market average, which creates a win-win situation for both of the elderly and the shops; and second, the good review and after-events feeds could lay the foundation for next events, which would attract more people to join.

Major risks and actions to reduce them

-Some elderly may lack physical fitness to undergo such an event

Gardening, peaceful and soothing as it sounds, can be physically demanding, since it required necessary watering, carrying, shoveling, etc. However, some seniors might be too frail to be participate, for example, a bad knee, and it could exclude the people who might need it the most.

³<https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/worry-and-panic/201505/petal-power-why-is-gardening-so-good-our-mental-health>

Still, we could host different events which demand different levels of physical strength, or we could distribute different plants to different people, such as small potted plants for people only with capabilities for minimal movement, and heavier work for people who are more physically able, for example, planting roses or even trees. In summary, everyone can join!

-Raising awareness might be hard at first

As many people are preoccupied with their busy work and life, they might forget the seniors left at home, hence low awareness, while getting them moving is also hard since they might not have the time to take the elderly to join such activities.

Besides, the elderly themselves might also feel ashamed or guilty of having to pressure other people so that they could feel more socially active. As people get older, they become less physically able, and being self-reliant all their lives, they are afraid to ask for help for fear of bothering others.

For the former, we need to broaden our publicity channels so that we could remind them constantly that the elderly have been left out by them and by the society, so that they would remember that there is still something we should and can do for them.

For the latter, we need to de-stigmatize such a way of thinking that it is shameful to ask for help, which would be more effective if major organizations and governments weigh in.

-People need to love gardening to be part of it

This is the unspoken prerequisite, but most people love nature. Therefore it should be good to go.

-It highly depends on weather and venue

Gardening is largely an outdoor event, yet it can be indoors. So if the weather is nice, it is perfect; if not, it can still work, just with less pizzazz.

As for the venue, see "Organization". We hope that relevant facilities would provide venues for our event.

Deployment strategy and major milestones

How could your solution be implemented? With what major steps?

First we need to locate necessary facilities, such as local care homes, hospitals, plant shops, etc. to determine the size, venue and form of our event. For example, it could be a small activity piloted in a specific care home in Paris, partnered up with a nearby plant shop which provides seeds and soil.

Then we formulate an event plan and discuss its feasibility inside the group and see if it will work. Brainstorming is also welcome if need be.

Once we settle the major steps, we need to spread the word by handing out flyers (which are already designed), posting on major social media (e.g. facebook, twitter, instagram, local websites), etc.

After that, we can kick start the event led by a preliminary assessment, and with special care to the physical and mental state of the elderly, for which a caregiver and a gardening expert might be needed.

Finally, after the event is finished, we conduct follow-up researches and interviews, and post event feeds on social networks as publicity materials for the next event.

Return on investment analysis

Gross estimated costs and benefits

The costs can be divided into operational costs and product costs.

For product costs, we are mainly funded by partnerships with plant shops or other sources, possibly even donations. The cost highly depends on the scale of activities.

Hence, it is obvious that our group does not necessarily require investors, or rather, we need partners, because it is not a profit-driven project.

As for operational costs, administrative duties are mainly fulfilled by the three of us, so that part will be kept at its minimal.

However, as our group grows larger and similar events become more frequent, such costs will augment and become more systemic.

As for the benefits, the elderly will have more chances to be exposed to nature, to communicate with others, and therefore, feel less lonely; while for plant shops, they can either recover their goodwill by a)gaining nice publicity from such an event since there will be specific feeds about the shop after, or b)re-purchase the fully grown plants for a price much less than the market average as a form of material gain.

Organization

To ensure that our project runs smoothly, we require a number of partnerships with local stakeholders, including care homes and hospitals to run the gardening workshops and spread awareness, as well as gardening shops for gardening supplies. As a starting point, we've put together a list of partners that could support Goodness Gardens.

| Gardening Supplies | Care Homes | Hospitals |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Jardin d'Edgar | ORPEA Les Terrasses de Mozart | Hospital Necker |
| Delbard | Maison de Retraite Korian Brune | Hospital Saint Antoine |
| Carrefour Jardins | Groupe Almage | Hospital Saint Louis |
| Agrivert | Residence Jeanne d'Arc | Hospital Cochin |