

COVID-19

June 2020

## Community Foundations in Action

### Netherlands - Local is Key



*Reinder Witting, Chairman,  
Twentse Noabers Community  
Foundation*

When you ask Reinder Witting about the latest challenges of his community related to Covid-19, the answer is prompt: the loss of income and the rise of loneliness. At Twentse Noabers Community Foundation those have been the main topics since the Coronavirus found its way to the Netherlands in late February. “Twentse” describes the region of the cities Almelo, Enschede and Hengelo in the eastern part of the Netherlands, close to the border to the German state of Lower Saxony. “Noabers” means “neighbours”. Neighbours that offer support to social initiatives and startups - in the shape of knowledge, lobbying and funding.

Reinder Witting, treasurer, counsellor and heart of Twentse Noabers Cooperative, has brought many years of experience to his position as chairman of Twentse Noabers Fonds. That is probably why an initiative in Hengelo, recently funded by Twentse Noabers, has moved the 72-year-old so deeply. Colouring pencils and Mandala patterns have been given to families and elderly people. “The reaction of some of the elderly people were so deep”, Reinder recalls, “They hadn't had visits for a long time until the volunteers came knocking at their doors. Nobody had contacted them. That's heartbreaking.” Due to the policy of social distancing, a lot of initiatives that were recently awarded funding by Twentse Noabers focused on the important topic of contact. There's one that seeks to send home-made postcards to elderly people, one that collects food and other essentials for those who recently lost their jobs, and another one that is working on the development of an App that operates as a virtual buddy for elderly people. The App is supposed to encourage its users to stay healthy, go outside, but also remind them to take their medicine at the right time. All those initiatives speak to urgent matters - therefore Twentse Noabers has to offer its help as fast as possible. To this effect, the community foundation benefits from its youth: “Since our foundation in November 2019 it has been our goal to be a non-bureaucratic fund”, Reinder explains,



*A volunteer preparing to  
connect through colour*

“Our decision-making process is very efficient, we have two ground rules that have to be met by the applicants.” Number One: the initiative must benefit the community, not the applicant founder. Number Two: the applicant must show that he or she has the support of his or her community. The board members discuss the applications and within a few days, vote for or against the funding. And that is, where Coronavirus has led to a major change in the procedure - since early March, the board meetings stopped taking place in person.



*Generations apart but on the same page in lockdown*

From 13<sup>th</sup> of March on, Twentse Noabers switched to virtual meetings, testing different options and developing the new experiences. At the moment, the community foundation is preparing a virtual meeting of 200 participants where representatives of social initiatives can participate in workshops and exchange lockdown experiences. A similar project is the learning circle - a format, Reinder got to know during his ECFI study trip to Stuttgart a few years ago. He wants to bring together entrepreneurs, volunteers, scientists and donors / funders - “if it's not possible to do it face to face as planned, he will transform the project into a virtual one”.

Connecting social entrepreneurs with decision-makers and funders, doing lobby work for their cause is an important part of Twentse Noabers' work. At the moment, there is an urgency to support social initiatives in negotiations with housing associations and landlords. “Recently, we wrote emails to ask for the suspension of rents and the lowering of

energy costs”, Reinder explains, “We also contacted politicians to ask for their support in this matter.”



Twentse Noabers Fonds  
Hart voor Twente

[Twentse Noabers Fonds](#) , Netherlands, was founded in 2019. The community foundation has an endowment of €23,000 from private donors received €100,000 in grants from the Province of Overijssel over two years. The foundation has two self-employed advisors and engages various volunteers.

*Twentse Noabers is one of 35 community foundations in the Netherlands. For more information see [Lokale Fondsen Netherlands](#).*