

# STANDING STRONG TOGETHER DURING THE CORONA CRISIS

A study into social resilience in the Bospolder-Tussendijken district

drawing: studio NadiaNena

Corona Chronicles represents the stories this study collected from the Bospolder-Tussendijken district during the COVID-19 pandemic. The socio-spatial map shows the places where collective campaigns were concentrated. It offers a coherent image of how people helped local residents through the crisis.

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Bospolder-Tussendijken district

Commissioned by the Resilient Rotterdam programme in collaboration with  
Resilient BoTu 2028 Programme Manager





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# PREFACE

**Numerous initiatives quickly emerged in Rotterdam's Bospolder-Tussendijken district (BoTu) to help local residents in need through the COVID-19 crisis at the start of the first lockdown in March 2020. The Resilient BoTu 2028 district development programme has been running in this district, located in the Delfshaven area, for two years. The aim of this programme is to make the district more resilient, for example by strengthening social networks (community building) and to connect formal and informal players more effectively. The lockdown called on the local community to show its resilience.**

**This document presents a number of insights from the study into social initiatives and collaborations in BoTu during times of crisis. It examines what affects resilient actions in practice and offers recommendations for developing policies and urban interventions which will facilitate community resilience.**





# INTRODUCTION



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## Context

### Lockdown

(Physical) public life throughout the Netherlands came to a standstill in March 2020, in order to prevent a large-scale outbreak of the infectious coronavirus. The country went into lockdown in response to the pandemic: all meeting places were closed, home schooling and working from home became the norm. The corona measures hit vulnerable districts like the Rotterdam Bospolder-Tussendijken district hard and called on local networks to show resilience.

### Bospolder-Tussendijken

The Rotterdam Bospolder-Tussendijken district (now to be referred to as BoTu) is home to 14,500 residents in approximately 7,100 households. BoTu is a relatively child-rich district, as more than 20% of its residents are below the age of 18. Many residents are actively involved with the residents' initiatives and, partly as a result of this many residents are willing to help others in need, according to its score on the Social Index (figures: Municipality of Rotterdam; OBI, 2020 District Profile). The residents live in one of the poorest districts in the Netherlands. The area has taken on an image of being a 'deprived district' as a result of the high concentration of social problems, such as unemployment, high levels of debt and low quality housing. The relative vulnerability of the social fabric in the area is illustrated by a low score on the Social Index, which remains well below Rotterdam's average (figures: Municipality of Rotterdam; OBI, 2018 District Profile). This prompted the Municipality of Rotterdam and its partners to set up the innovative Resilient BoTu 2028 District Development Programme.<sup>1</sup>

### Resilient BoTu 2028 Programme

BoTu is seen as a testing ground for innovation and improvement. The Resilient BoTu 2028 Programme forms part of the Resilient Rotterdam Strategy.<sup>2</sup> The aim of the Resilient BoTu 2028 Programme is to develop the local residents' resilience, allowing them to deal with challenges and change more effectively. BoTu wants to be Rotterdam's first resilient district within ten years, resulting in an increase in the 'Social Index', one of the instruments used by the municipality to measure urban development. The aim is for the Bospolder (= 99) and Tussendijken (= 88) statistics to increase up to the urban average of 2018 (= 110). There is a major physical task in the districts, including making homes more sustainable, tackling the outdoor space and the energy transition. These social and physical tasks are all linked in the Resilient BoTu 2028 district development programme. Over the past five years, investments have been made in the area in the local network and in the collaboration between the government, residents' initiatives and market parties, first with the Bospolder Tussendijken focus approach and subsequently with the Resilient BoTu 2028 programme. Local networks are seen as an important resource for self-reliance and resilience. Residents can arrange support via the social network. In addition, public space offers opportunities for social contact and joint activities. Investments in the social fabric are expected to bear fruit in the face of a setback, such as the current crisis. Investments are being made in BoTu's local network in accordance with Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)<sup>3</sup>. ABCD is focussed on developing districts from the bottom up and from the inside out, by sustainably working together to create strong and connected local communities, where residents can experience and utilise their collective strength.

<sup>1</sup> Municipality of Rotterdam (2018) *Resilient BoTu 2028 Programme*

<sup>2</sup> Municipality of Rotterdam (2016) *Rotterdam Resilience Strategy*

<sup>3</sup> Visser, E.; Lsa Bewoners (2021). *Always Something New!* Asset Based Community Development

## Community Resilience

Many cities have realised they need to be prepared for unexpected crises, shocks or stressors and have therefore developed strategies for resilience (The Rockefeller Foundation and Arup, 2014).<sup>4</sup> Resilient communities will benefit from collaborations between formal players, such as the local area and welfare organisation, and informal players like residents and local foundations. The dynamics and interaction between these players creates a networked community and this is essential for urban resilience. Even though the need for collaborations between formal and informal players for community resilience has been recognised, there is still a great deal of uncertainty where adequate collaboration methods are concerned.

Resilience has been defined in the 2028 Resilient BoTu Programme as ‘the extent to which individuals, communities or organisations can deal with changes, shocks and tensions. How they react to these, recover from these and adapt or even transform in line with these’. The programme therefore specifically focuses on the resilience of human systems: individuals, communities and organisations, referred to in literature as social resilience, community resilience and institutional resilience. The acting capacity of social players is absolutely central to these forms of resilience.

This study into resilience during the corona pandemic is therefore specifically focussed on the actions of players present and involved in the district. One of the most important conclusions of a previously conducted literature study is that resilience only exists if an individual, community or organisation is capable of (collective) actions, otherwise no adaptation or transformation will take place. An individual, community or organisation shouldn’t just have sufficient resources (capacities) at its disposal, they will also need to be able to mobilise these and organise collective campaigns (agency). This study therefore devotes specific attention to available resources. Recommendations from this study contribute to the formulation of strategies and policies aimed at strengthening and supporting the resilience of urban communities. A parallel study by Erasmus University Rotterdam (Social Coalitions in Corona time) into initiatives on the urban scale shows that social capital, boundary spanners and a supportive local government are indispensable for social resilience. The two studies complement and support each other’s findings.

## Method

Veldacademie uses the multi-year Resilience Monitor in Bospolder-Tussendijken, part of the 2028 Resilient BoTu Programme, to follow the developments in the district. The COVID-19 crisis created an opportunity to investigate practical crisis resilience, in addition to the regular monitoring activities. The assignment was to thoroughly document the topicality of the moment by recording and making available stories about residents and initiators experiences during times of crisis. These stories have been collected on [verhalenvanbotu.nl/](https://verhalenvanbotu.nl/) and will be presented later on in this report. In order to arrive at these stories, a series of 66, mainly telephone, semi-structured interviews were conducted with residents and initiators from the area. The respondents were partly known from the network inventory which forms part of the Resilience Monitor in Bospolder-Tussendijken. The interviews mainly took place in the period from March to July 2020 and in some cases the respondents with an important role in the area were questioned several times in order to monitor changes. The interviews were subsequently transcribed, coded and analysed, specifically focussing on the following themes:

- Campaigns and initiatives
- Policy and guidelines
- Effects (psychological & physical)
- Formal players
- Facilitating factors for actions
- Limiting factors for actions
- Requests for help
- Informal players
- Lessons and learning points
- Trigger for actions

The results collectively answer the study question of ‘What factors facilitate existing and new initiatives in Bospolder-Tussendijken to act during the COVID-19 crisis?’. The insights resulting from the analysis are subsequently shared in two workshops, the first of which (Social Coalitions in Corona Times) has been organised<sup>5</sup> in collaboration with the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. A number of initiators, representatives from district councils and district networkers from various districts entered into a discussion in this workshop about the initiatives which have emerged during times of crisis and the extent to which these have been perceived by formal organisations. The second workshop (Build back stronger after the COVID-19 crisis) was used to learn together with residents, district networkers, initiators and policy makers about the need for and approach to responsiveness and collaborations at district level.

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4 ARUP (2014) *City Resilience Framework*. ARUP and the Rockefeller Foundation

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5 Boonstra, B. & Claessens, S. (2021). *Social coalitions in corona times: From a spontaneous initiative to a sustainable partnership*. Rotterdam: The Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences & Liveable Districts Knowledge Workshop



# INVENTORY OF REQUESTS FOR HELP AND INITIATIVES

**The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated government measures resulted in various new requests for help in Bospolder-Tussendijken. The number of people in need of help increased and the types of requests for help broadened. In response to this, a multitude of initiatives arose almost immediately, varying in structure, scale and objective.**

**Following is a description of the most important requests for help, together with the initiatives which have emerged from the study. However, action has been taken in many different ways in BoTu in order to support fellow residents. The overview presented below is therefore not a conclusive whole, but should be seen as an inventory.**

## Informal and formal players

The collaboration between the players involved is discussed per initiative, in order to map out how actions were created and supported. The distinction between formal and informal players is also discussed, in order to provide an insight into the different forms of collaboration within the district network. When this report refers to informal players, it refers to players who operate within an organisational structure in which the division of roles and tasks has not been (fully) officially established. Formal players operate within an established hierarchical structure with a clear division of roles, clear responsibilities and work within the framework of standard procedures and protocols. The distinction is not a hard boundary, but should be seen as a sliding scale.

The overview of players as presented here is partly the result of an inventory of initiatives carried out in the context of the 2028 BoTu Resilience Monitor. Please refer to the initiatives map on <https://verhalenvanbotu.nl/monitor> for a description of the various players and their activities.

## Requests for help and initiatives

### 1. Shopping and meals

A request for help in relation to food provision arose in BoTu right from the very start of the lockdown in March 2020. People needed help with their shopping or preparing meals, but financial help soon also became necessary. This was according to one respondent in early April: ***“There appeared to be an instant need for food packages, I heard there was a real demand for these.”***

The respondents we spoke to identified several different reasons for this request for help. Some people suddenly became dependent on their environment for food provision. Elderly and vulnerable people could no longer go to the supermarket themselves, but people in quarantine sometimes also suddenly became dependent on help from their surroundings to get their shopping home.

However, for some people the problems went beyond logistical issues almost immediately. The lockdown measures meant the (partial) loss of work and a decrease in household income for some local residents. The closing of the weekly market also increased the financial pressure on families who now had to rely on the more expensive products from the supermarket. But existing facilities were also temporarily lost, like the weekly meals in the community centre, for example.

Help with food provisions is therefore one of the first and most acute requests for help. Various different initiatives have been set up for support with food provisions. Campaigns varied from local help within the own network to centrally organised campaigns like the Delfshaven Helpt district platform.

Even though the support for some people took on a structural character as a result of permanent aid provisions, this was a request for help which was especially acute at the start of the COVID-19 crisis and decreased in urgency over time. A respondent told us:

***“Initially it was mainly the acute questions, people were no longer able to go outside, walk-in meals became a thing of the past. Campaigns were initially aimed at material requests for help so plenty was being organised in the field of shopping and meal services.”***

## Initiatives

### Delfshaven Helpt

**Formal players** SSA-radar Jumbo Schiedamseweg, Huis van de Wijk Pier 80, Unilever, Municipality of Rotterdam, Area Committee, Geloven in Botu  
**Informal players** Volunteers, De Verbindingskamer

Delfshaven Helpt is a district platform which was created in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The platform connects help and supplies via a local helpline. Residents were able to call the central telephone number to request or offer assistance. Delfshaven Helpt is the result of a local collaboration between active residents and professionals from the district. Those involved indicate that, right from the very start of the crisis, requests for help were mainly for shopping and food provisions. Those requesting help were matched to volunteers who would go and get their shopping, or prepare a hot meal.

***“I am in contact with the woman who was in need of a food package, if I can’t go one particular week then I feed that back to the partner at the corona helpline and they’ll then look for someone else for that week.”***

- Informal initiative respondent

The helpline developed into a larger platform for local collaborations over time, within which different aid campaigns have arisen. For example, during a one-off campaign, 750 packages with food and hygiene products were distributed among those seeking help. Unilever sponsored a large number of hygiene products, including hand soap and disinfectant gel. With the help of a number of funds and sponsors, such as the Jumbo on the Schiedamseweg, boxes were purchased and the packages supplemented with food products. The Jumbo also made a garage available to the volunteers, where they could fill the packages. The packages were distributed across the district’s houses and volunteers subsequently organised the correct distribution of the packages. The addresses were largely selected by the SSA-radar district coaches, who have an overview of many vulnerable residents in the district.

***“Sponsor campaigns and funds were used to get 750 hygiene packages to those requesting help over the past week. Absolutely unbelievable, we’re talking about Delfshaven, right? Not the whole of Rotterdam.”*** - Informal initiative respondent

### Meal Service - The Salvation Army’s District Support Point

**Formal player** The Salvation Army  
**Informal players** Volunteers

People can normally go to the Salvation Army’s Delfshaven District Support Point for a hot meal. The employees and volunteers started delivering meals when this was no longer possible as a result of the corona measures. Two or three people would take turns as chefs, the deliveries were done by three or four others, with the help of the Salvation Army's bikes and the use of their own means of transport. This enabled the volunteers to deliver fifty meals a day. This allowed them to partly serve people from their own network, but a number of new addresses were also supplied via Delfshaven Helpt.

***“We are still delivering food, as that need is definitely still there. (...) We hope to be able to position a table outside again from 1st June. We’re expecting to serve many more meals at that point, as there is also a group which is far less home-based.”*** - Informal initiative respondent

## **Emergency packages for the ISSALAAM Islamic Food Bank**

**Formal players** Intercultural Foundation Salaam

**Informal players** Volunteers

The Islamic Food Bank from the Intercultural Foundation Salaam has been active in Bospolder-Tussendijken and the surrounding area for many years. In addition to the food packages which the volunteers hand out in a normal situation, between ten and twenty-five extra emergency packages were also temporarily being handed out every week. These emergency packages were intended for people who had lost their job as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, or who had suddenly found themselves in financial difficulties.

## **Meals during Ramadan - Roof Park Restaurant Steak and More**

**Formal players** Restaurant Steak and More, Municipality of Rotterdam, Dutch-Turkish Volunteers Foundation

**Informal players** Volunteers

Restaurant Steak and More on the Roof Park prepared and distributed daily meals during Ramadan. Even though the initiative took place during Ramadan, the initiators didn't just want to serve Muslims and anyone in need of a meal could sign up. There were two collection moments every day: during the afternoon and evening. People could register in advance by sending a WhatsApp message, but addresses were supplied from the municipality too. Meals which couldn't be collected were delivered to people's homes by car. In addition to the daily meals, a total of 50 food packages were distributed at the end of Ramadan too.

***“Ramadan is naturally a holy month to us, but it wasn't our intention to purely serve Muslims. We prepared hot meals twice a day, making sure people who weren't fasting could collect their meals during the day”***

- Formal initiative respondent

## **Yess Give-away Shop! Pop-up store – Delfshaven Helpt**

**Formal players** Havensteder, Municipality of Rotterdam, Unilever, Geloven in BoTu

**Informal players** Volunteers

The 'Yess! Pop-Up Store' give-away shop first opened its doors in BoTu in early June. Local residents could visit the shop to collect free products every day. The shop was intended to support people who had found themselves in financial distress as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. The initiator wanted to meet the need for help with shopping with the give-away shop. The shop is dependent on donations, both from local small entrepreneurs and large companies like Unilever. Two or three volunteers operate the shop every day. In addition to food provisions, the pop-up store also provides informal training, allowing volunteers to work on their social skills. The volunteers are compensated for their work, which is subsequently saved to pay for official training.



## **Young people go shopping for elderly and vulnerable members of the Ayasofya Mosque**

**Formal players** Ayasofya Mosque Youth Board, the Hasene Foundation

The Ayasofya Mosque Youth Board called on all members of the mosque to offer their assistance. The young people subsequently went out to do the shopping for the elderly and vulnerable people. They also put together packages with dates and distributed these for Ramadan. The Hasene Foundation's help organisation provided them with an additional 10 food packages, which the young people shared out to a number of selected households.

***“The young people immediately launched a campaign, they called all the elderly members and asked them: is there anything you need? Can we offer you any support? For example with doing their shopping or delivering something for them, something they were no longer capable of doing themselves”*** - Religious institution respondent

## **Help with shopping and cooking within the own network**

**Informal players** District residents

In addition to the organised initiatives, the district's residents also offered their assistance within the personal network of neighbours, friends and family. Various respondents indicated they did some shopping or cooking for those in need within their own environment. Sometimes these small initiatives would also lead to the expansion and enlargement of the existing district network.

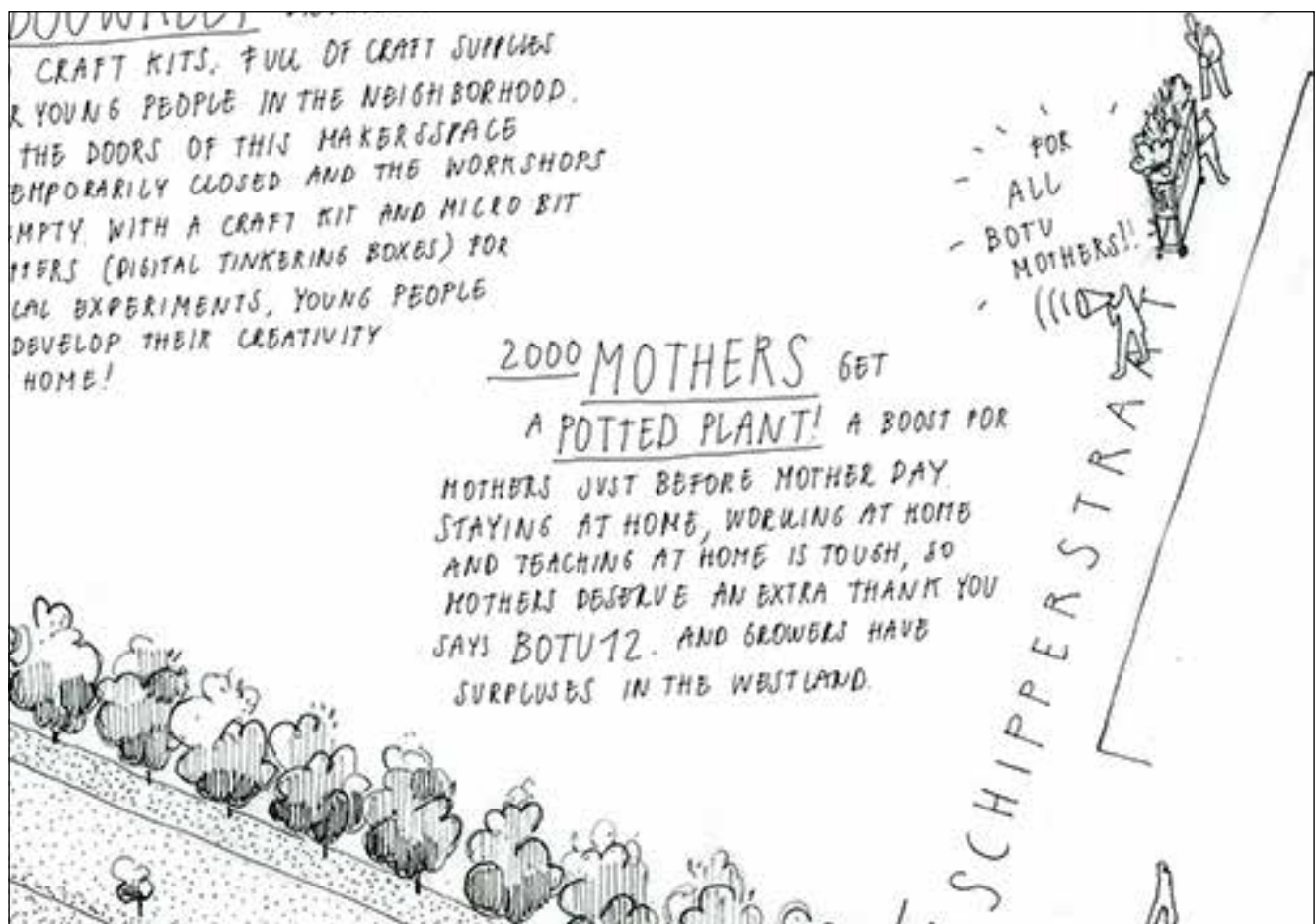
***“I have set up a small network. I said, if we all put in 5 euro per week, as everyone can afford that, then we already have a hundred euro, as there are twenty of us. She can then pay for her extra things with that (...) At one point we accumulated so much money that we were also able to look after another woman in a similar situation, even though we really didn't know her very well. Fantastic, right?”*** - Informal initiative respondent

***“Yes, I know we do the shopping for elderly people in my own neighbourhood. Everyone who has a little bit of spare cash buys something, we collect everything in one place and we then arrange to take these to the elderly people who are really too scared to go outside. There are unfortunately quite a few who daren't go out at all”*** - Formal initiative respondent

***“Yes, I know many people who do this for each other. One other thing I often did was cook and then simply share out the food. After all, everyone was hoarding, right? There were plenty of things we couldn't get hold of, so sometimes I would cook something and then simply share it out.”*** - Resident

## 2. A gesture of support

The COVID-19 crisis hasn't just resulted in a multitude of practical problems, it has certainly also had major consequences for people's mental well-being. Some of the residents experienced anxiety and uncertainty during the lockdown. Respondents also emphasised the lack of personal contact and future perspective. That's why local residents were committed to cheering people in the district up and provide them with a gesture of support.



drawing: studio NadiaNena

## Initiatives

### Flowers handed out for Mother's Day - BoTu 12

**Formal players** Municipality of Rotterdam, SSA-Radar, Huis van de Wijk Pier 80, Area Committee

**Informal player** BoTu12

The BoTu 12 Residents Committee handed out flowers to mothers in the district in the run-up to Mother's Day. The flowers were purchased from a grower in the Westland, who was struggling with surpluses due to reduced exports, with help from the funds. The campaign was completely carried out by members of the BoTu 12 and volunteers. Huis van de Wijk Pier 80 was used to store the flowers. The plants were mainly delivered on foot using carts and a megaphone. Volunteers would use the megaphone to ask people to come outside to collect a plant. A total of 2200 plants were handed out in Bospolder Tussendijken as part of this campaign.

***"We need to do it together. We were helping those plant growers and most definitely the mothers too"*** - Informal initiative respondent

***"The idea was created during one of those zoom meetings and then we thought, yes, let's do it, without really thinking about how difficult it would be. We had never done anything like this before, but we eventually did succeed. We simply shared out 2,000 plants in the district, 2,000, in no time at all."*** - Informal initiative respondent

### Plants from the Zelfregiehuis

**Informal players** Zelfregiehuis, De Buitenboel, An-Dijvie

In order to cheer the neighbourhood up in times of crisis and to make BoTu just that little bit greener, the Zelfregiehuis launched a campaign whereby the district's residents could collect a package which would allow them to start their own little garden either on their balcony or in the windowsill. In total more than 50 people collected a package with seeds and some of these people also became members of the WhatsApp group within which participants share their experiences together. The packages with seeds could be collected from the Zelfregiehuis. Plants were also placed at the natural food shop An-Dijvie, which could be taken free of charge.

***"A great initiative like the Zelfregiehuis which was involved with greening people's balconies. Lots of different people are using their own initiative to do something with the possibilities on offer"*** - Informal initiative respondent

### Ayasofya Mosque delivers flowers to care facilities and the police

**Formal players** Ayasofya Mosque

Chairmen of the four different Ayasofya Mosque departments delivered flowers and cakes to the Sint Franciscus hospital, the Erasmus Medical Centre and the police, in order to thank them for their efforts during this difficult time.

***"Just as a thank you, as a gesture of support, as they are continuing to work through this difficult time, while the rest of us simply sat at home"*** - Religious institution respondent

## **100 cards and congratulations via an aerial platform for 'BoTu Grandma's 100th birthday**

**Formal players** Laurens residential care location De Schans, Municipality of Rotterdam

**Informele actoren** BoTu12, district residents

One resident from the residential care location De Schans turned one hundred years old during the first lockdown. In order to still give her a birthday party, despite the corona measures, a member of the BoTu12 residents' committee had called on people from the district to write a card for the hundred-year-old "BoTu grandma". An aerial platform was organised together with the Municipality of Rotterdam and employees from De Schans, making sure the family could still congratulate the birthday girl from behind the window. More than 200 birthday cards were collected and handed over.

## **Blinking lights for Ramadan – Delfshaven Helpt's Kleurrijk (Colourful) Working Group**

**Formal player** Area Committee

**Informal players** Delfshaven Helpt, Kleurrijk Delfshaven, BoTu12

The Kleurrijk Working Group, part of the Delfshaven Helpt district platform, joined the #celebrateramadantogether campaign. This campaign called on people to hang lights in front of the window during Ramadan. The lights were blinked three times every day, when the fasting was done. The initiators hoped to thereby increase the sense of connectedness at a time when people would normally be able to come together. The working group provided people with lights with support from the Area Committee. This therefore gave everyone a chance to participate. Well over four hundred lights were shared out in the district.

***"The idea was to flash the lights on and off just before sunset. So we could make our neighbour across the road think: hey, you're not on your own, our fasting is done too, but we just have to do it with the corona measures in place"*** - Informal initiative respondent

***"Then I heard that my Dutch neighbours, or the non-Muslim neighbours, really felt a sense of solidarity and wanted to do that with us too. So now there are around twenty homes on the Mathenesserdijk which aren't even Muslim, but who are still flashing their lights on and off with us at ten o'clock on the dot every night."*** - Informal initiative respondent

## **Delfshaven Helpt's garlands**

**Informal players** Delfshaven Helpt, volunteers

Support can sometimes also come from small campaigns. Money was made available from the Delfshaven Helpt's emergency fund to provide a family with garlands. There was no money available within the family to celebrate birthdays. The initiative meant the family still managed to have a festive day.

***"We bought some decorations from the Delfshaven Helpt's emergency fund. Afterwards, that mum sent in a fantastic photograph of her celebrating the birthday with the children in a beautifully decorated garden."*** - Informal initiative respondent

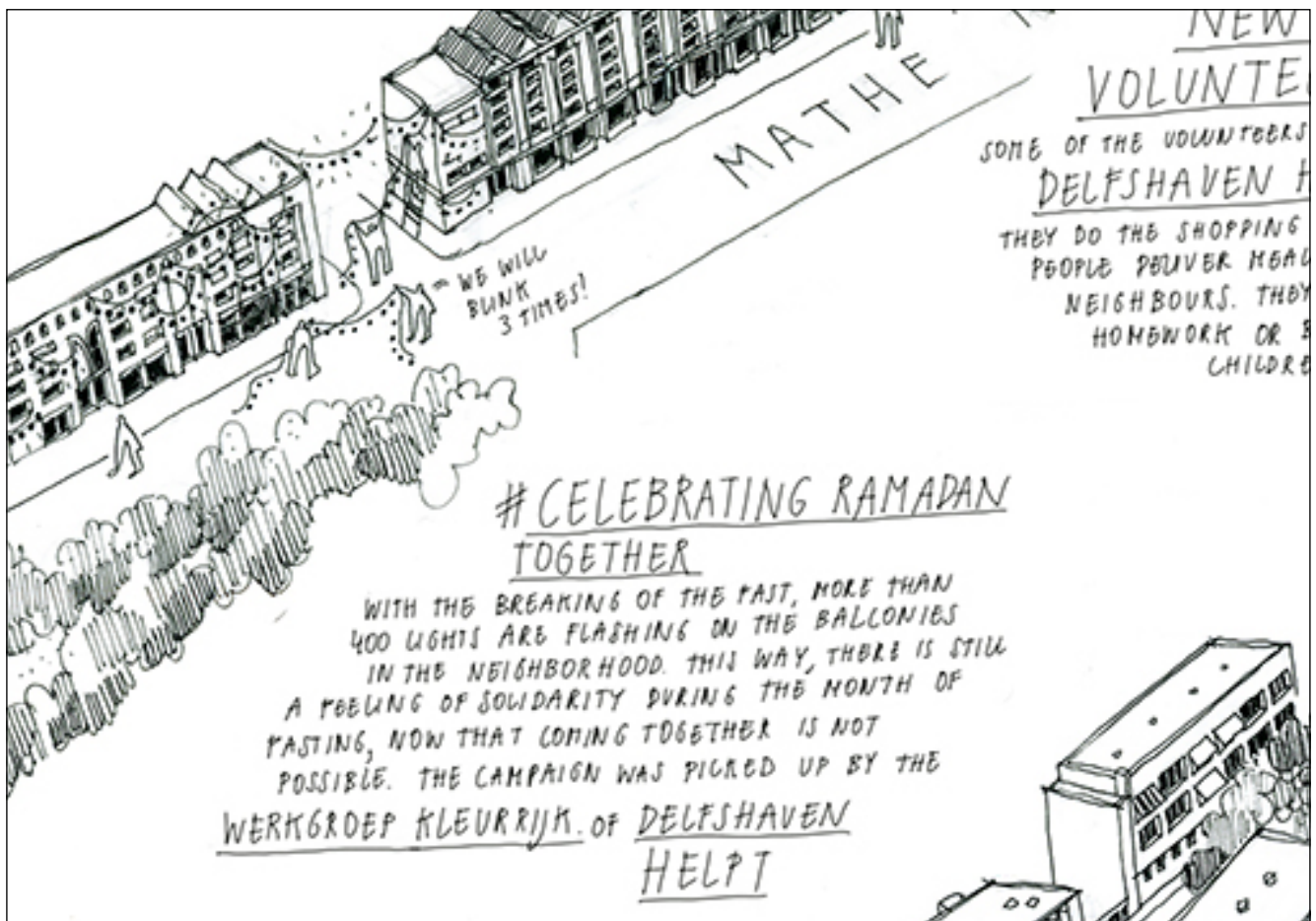
## The Schiezicht Foundation brings flowers

**Formal player** Opzoomer Mee

**Informal player** The Schiezicht Foundation

The Schiezicht Foundation headed into the district to get in touch with people. They started the initiative to make sure they didn't lose contact with the people from the district and to provide the local residents with some much-needed support. The flowers were purchased with help from Opzoomer Mee's budget.

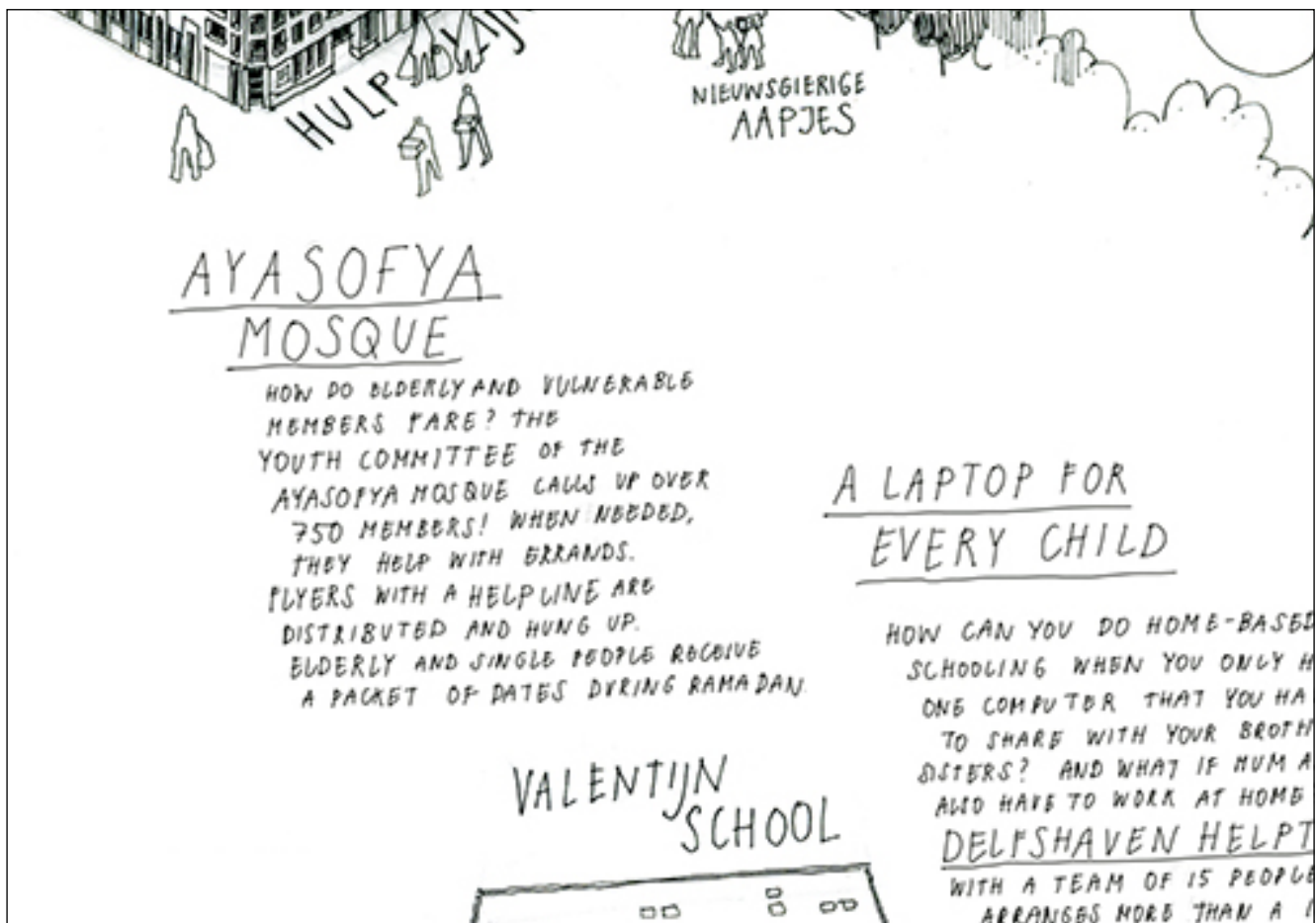
***"We organised another campaign in the neighbourhood to provide everyone with some much-needed support. We received a small budget from Opzoomer Mee and decided to go door-to-door (...) drop off some flowers and tell people that we're thinking about what we can do and to ask what people would actually like us to do. We used this initiative to try and find out what people thought of as important and what they dared to do."*** - Informal initiative respondent



drawing: studio NadiaNena

### 3. Social contact and mental health

A related request for help which was regularly mentioned by respondents is the lack of social contact which arose due to the COVID-19 crisis and the associated measures. The fixed daily or weekly contact moments disappeared for many people. Activities could no longer take place, community centres had to temporarily close their doors and group sizes needed to be limited. One resident from the Gijsingsflat said: **“Our elderly people simply needed someone, as they were completely by themselves. Loneliness. So you’re scared, you don’t know what it is. (...) It was strange, terrible, everything changed overnight. (...) People just needed to have a chat with someone. That simply wasn’t an option anymore.”**



drawing: studio NadiaNena

## Initiatives

### **Delfshaven Helpt: a listening ear**

**Informal players** Delfshaven Helpt, volunteers

Delfshaven Helpt's helpline received several requests from people in need of a listening ear, someone to talk to every now and then. Volunteers were linked to those asking for help. The need for contact was sometimes also fulfilled in combination with the need for fresh air and exercise by linking those asking for help to a walking buddy.

### **Team Toekomst (Future) walks with overloaded parents**

**Formal players** Team Toekomst

**Informal players** Volunteers

Volunteers from Team Toekomst are committed to helping vulnerable families. They helped children with their homework, but they were also there for parents who were in need of a listening ear.

***“So the mother could come outside for a little while and just be able to tell someone her story, talking to another adult when she is spending all day every day with the kids”*** - Informal initiative respondent

### **Young people from the Ayasofya Mosque call (elderly) members**

**Formal player** Ayasofya Mosque

In addition to offering help with the shopping, young people from the Ayasofya mosque also provided elderly members with assistance by telephone. The young people used the calling campaign to maintain contact with the elderly members whilst the mosque was closed, in an attempt to prevent loneliness.

***“The young people called the elderly people and this was really experienced as something very positive. Everyone was thrilled to receive a phone call and they were clearly being thought about.”*** - Religious institution respondent

### **Huis in de Lucht (House in the Sky) TV**

**Informal players** Resilient Community Foundation,  
Schiezicht Foundation, volunteers

The Resilient Communication Foundation launched an online television channel during the COVID-19 crisis, in order to create a greater connection in the district. A talk show was broadcast on the online television channel every week, during which guests from the district were invited to talk about the theme of the week. The recordings were made in a space provided by the Schiezicht Foundation.

The Resilient Community started a workshop for children in addition to this programme: Curious monkeys. Children would get to work on making their own films during this weekly workshop, which would subsequently also be available for viewing on the online television channel.

## **Pancake Party**

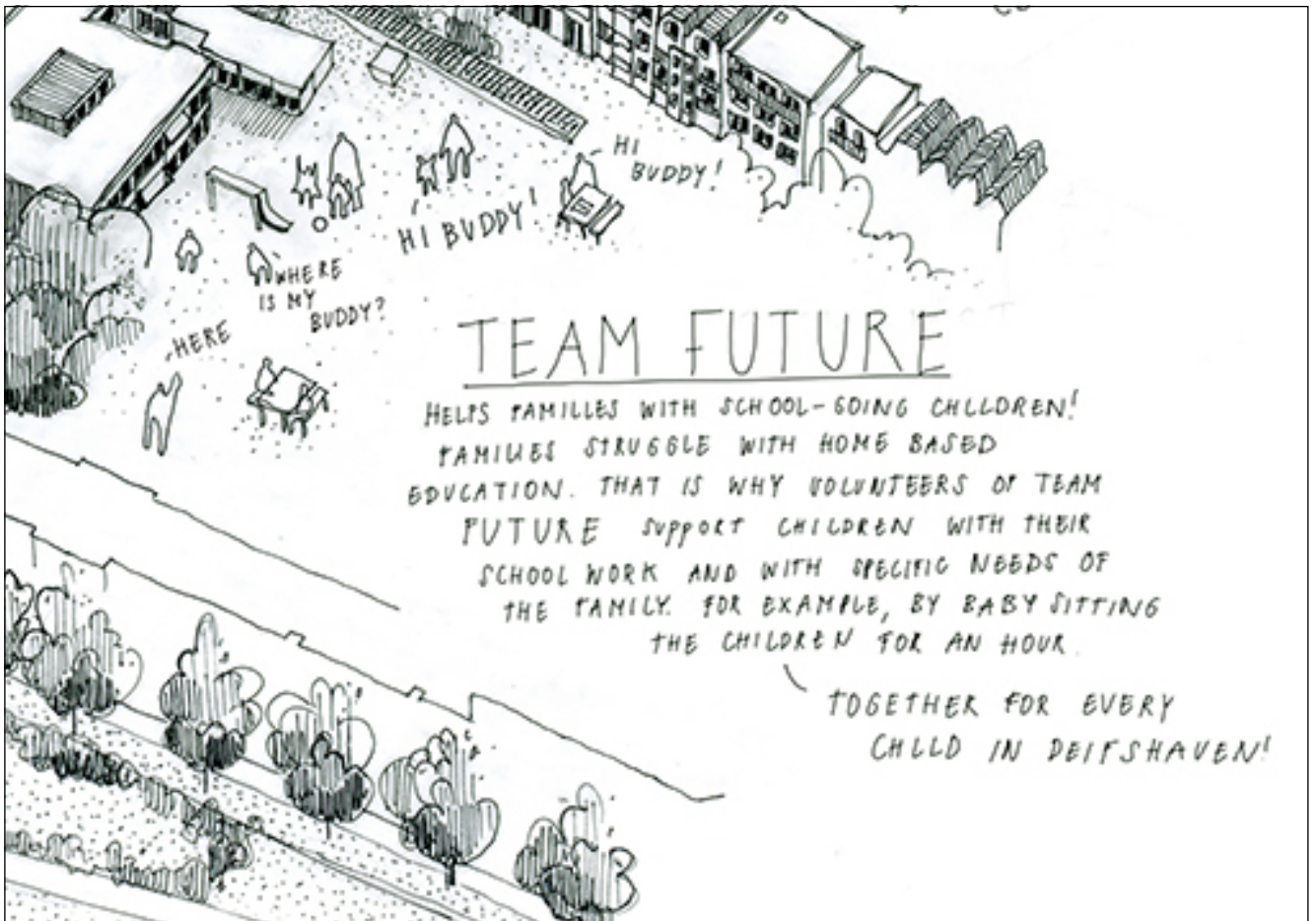
**Informal players** De Verbindingskamer, Buurthuis De Brug

De Verbindingskamer organised a pancake party for residents and volunteers from Bospolder. The party was intended to connect people from the district more effectively. The party was organised in Buurthuis De Brug. The corona rules meant people could register for a shift, there were a total of eight half hour shifts.

***“People could register for certain 45 minute shifts, during which they could pop in to enjoy a pancake. This resulted in a nice mix of residents and people asking for help. So we eventually no longer referred to people as those requesting help and volunteers, but simply district residents, as this would include everyone. And everyone simply mixed really well.”***

- Informal initiative respondent





drawing: studio NadiaNena

#### **4. Digital resources and skills**

There was certainly also plenty of need for digital resources among residents in Bospolder-Tussendijken, as a result of working from home and remote learning. By no means everyone had sufficient equipment at their disposal for the entire household to work effectively. However, the lack of digital resources and knowledge is not limited to problems with work and education. Many (government) authorities were temporarily closed as a result of the corona measures, resulting in district residents often having nowhere to go with their questions. Many organisations switched to online or telephone consultations, or were even completely inaccessible for a certain time. Using the internet isn't a matter of course for everyone, perhaps as a result of a lack of the right equipment - a device and an adequately working internet or telephone connection - or perhaps as a result of a lack of digital knowledge or language proficiency.

***“This didn't go well with housing corporations at all, support was no longer being provided and no home visits were being done. Certainly also with the family guidance facilities shutting their doors, which we all think is pretty regretful”*** - Informal initiative respondent

***“There is still a little bit of digitisation behind that, there are all kinds of tablets especially for senior citizens, but not all elderly people have Wi-Fi in Delfshaven. So how can you get these people mobile again?”*** - Care institution respondent

## Initiatives

### Laptops

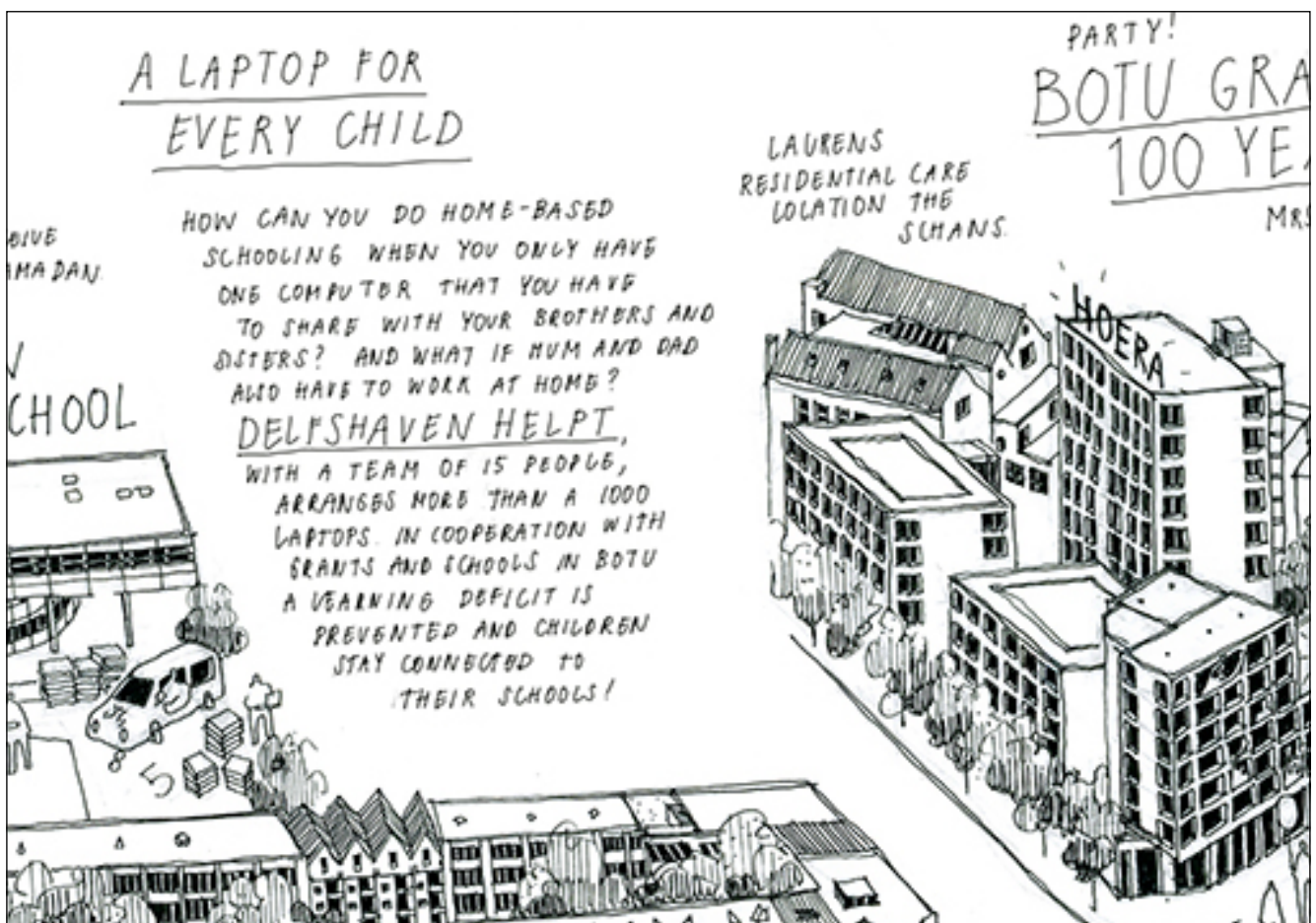
**Formal players** Funds

**Informal players** Delfshaven Helpt, volunteers

Delfshaven Helpt set up a major campaign to collect laptops. The laptops were intended for children who didn't have the right resources at home to adequately follow online education. Various different volunteers became active within Delfshaven Helpt's network in order to acquire the funds needed. A total of 1,040 laptops were distributed in Delfshaven as a direct result of this campaign.

***"There was an acute problem with home schooling. People were at home and children needed to work on computers. There would sometimes just be one laptop, or one computer for several children. And in some households there wasn't a computer at all. So this was truly an acute problem."***

- Informal initiative respondent

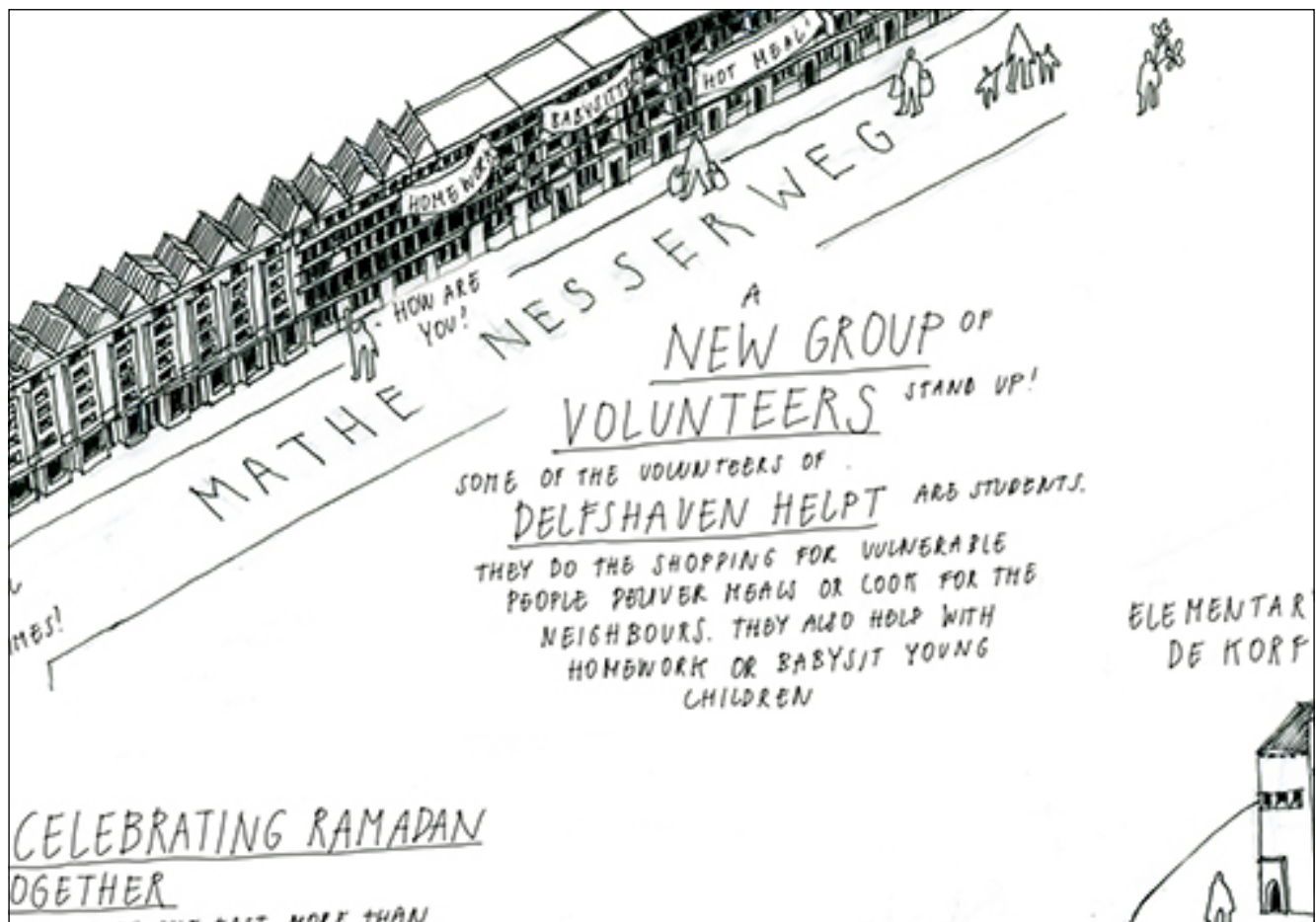


drawing: studio NadiaNena

## 5. Children: education, lack of space and home situation

Many people were forced to spend a great deal more time at home as a result of the corona measures. But Bospolder-Tussendijken is home to lots of people with large families and relatively small houses, resulting in plenty of requests for help where space and the home situation was concerned.

***“Some children were already in the midst of a problem situation and the home situation was made even worse by the parents constantly being at each other’s throats. I think this will have been quite a harrowing time for the children.”*** - Informal initiative respondent



drawing: studio NadiaNena

## Initiatives

### Homework Help - Team Toekomst (Team Future)

**Formal players** Team Toekomst

**Informal players** Volunteers

Social Impact by Design's 'Team Toekomst' initiative supported extra families who found themselves in a difficult situation during the months leading up to the summer holiday. This often involved families living in a relatively small space and where a stressful situation had developed as a result of home schooling. A volunteer from Team Toekomst could, for example, take the children out for a little while to give the parents a few moments of rest.

### Daycare at school

**Formal players** Schools

Some schools did keep their doors open during the period of home schooling for a number of children from overburdened families. This extra form of emergency care was intended to offer children in difficult home situations a quiet place for schooling and to anticipate any possible disadvantages.

***“A type of daycare, which also allowed them to do their homework and give them a few hours out of the house. And I really did like this initiative, as it was obvious parents were very keen to make use of this service. But I do get the feeling we’re really only doing this once they’ve got to breaking point.”***

- Informal initiative respondent

### Children's Newspaper

**Formal player** The Salvation Army

**Informal players** Volunteers

The Salvation Army started publishing a children's newspaper during the COVID-19 crisis. This children's newspaper included stories, puzzles and other fun things children could do during the lockdown.

***The Salvation Army published a children's newspaper four days a week. Parents were really happy for their children to have this little bit of a distraction and something else to do”*** - Formal initiative respondent

### Summer Campus 010

**Formal players** Municipality of Rotterdam, Huis van de Wijk, Team Toekomst

**Informal players** Volunteers

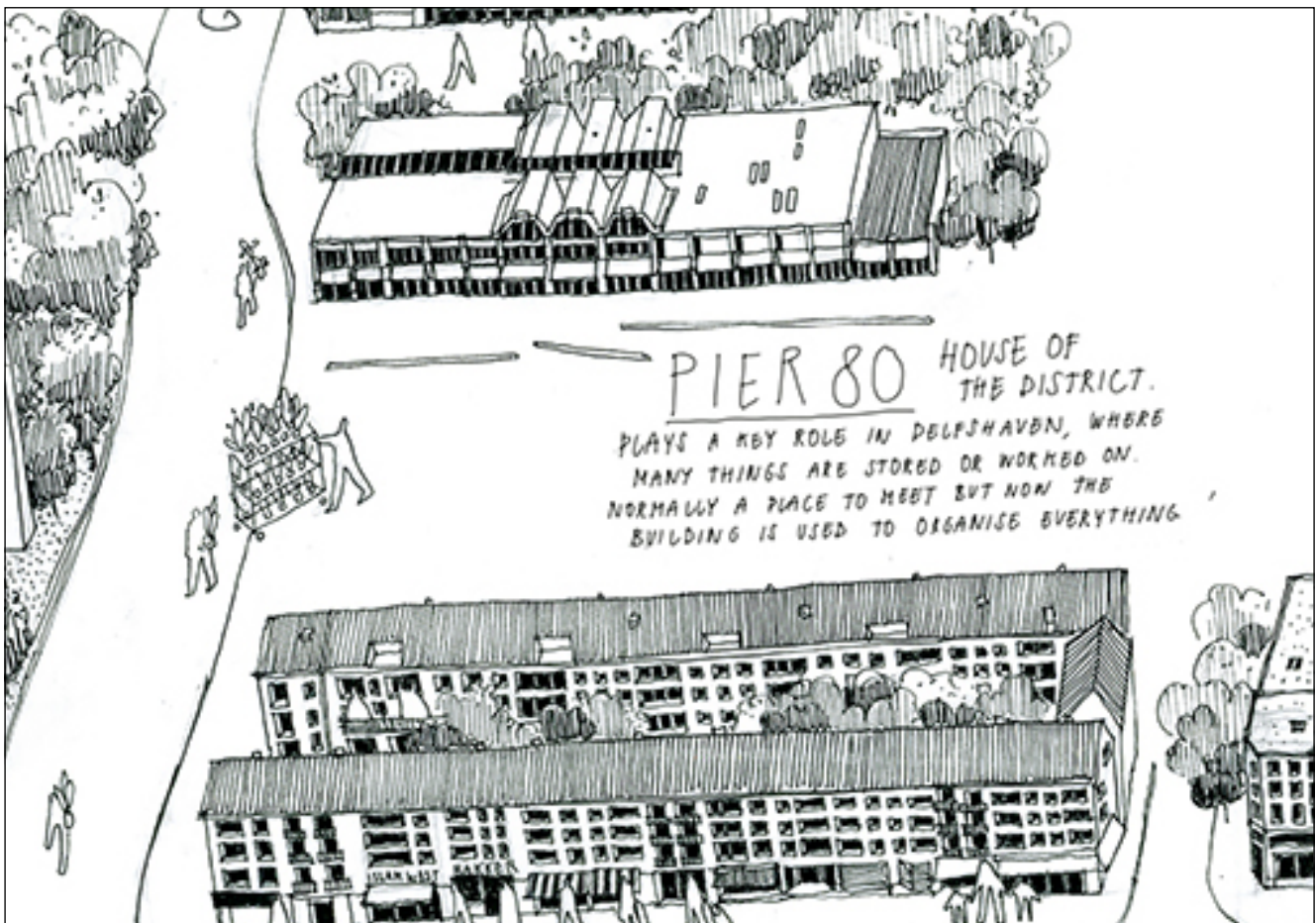
Summer Campus 010 is an initiative of the Municipality of Rotterdam. The initiative was intended to offer children a form of entertainment during the summer holiday, whilst also working on any required additional schooling. The initiative was executed by Team Toekomst in Bospolder-Tussendijken. The focus in Bospolder-Tussendijken was mainly on the children's socio-economic development and on offering fun activities in the summer holiday.

## 6. Identifying and informing

As the COVID-19 crisis progressed, it became increasingly clear how difficult it is to identify requests for help. Initiators have tried to use their campaigns to reach all district residents in need, but often run into problems.

***“There are quite a few people in the district who no one is particularly in contact with (...) that’s now becoming something which is more urgent in the minds of care providers and people are suddenly feeling very concerned. If we’re heading for a pandemic, then we’re going to be finding people dead behind their front doors and that will be because we have missed something”***

- Informal initiative respondent



drawing: studio NadiaNena

## Initiatives

### Delfshaven Helpt Care Avoidance Working Group

**Informal player** Delfshaven Helpt

The Delfshaven Helpt initiative has developed into a major district network with various different working groups, including a care avoidance working group. The working group has been set up to think about new ways in which isolated people in the district can still be reached.

***“The second working group is about care avoidance. We have known for years that we are not managing to reach a large part of the district for many different reasons. This includes shyness and it certainly also includes people who simply don’t want to be found.”*** - Informal initiative respondent

### Door-to-door campaign

**Formal players** SSA-Radar District Coach, SSA-Radar, Area Committee, network partners

**Informal players** Beekhuizen Bindt, Buurtvaders, volunteers

A group of volunteers and network partners visited homes in Bospolder-Tussendijken as part of the door-to-door campaign. The initiators tried to use this campaign to reach people who may otherwise have stayed invisible. The volunteers asked about any possible needs and provided information about existing initiatives and helplines, like Delfshaven Helpt.

***“The vulnerability of certain groups increased to very worrying levels, they were also not or less in sight, so that’s why we decided to just visit everyone to see if we could do something for those people”*** - Welfare institution respondent

***“We’ve got something similar from SSA-radar too, so we’ll visit the resident as soon as we feel something’s amiss. So we actually end up doing proper home visits, in order to find out which services we can offer in whatever field”*** - Welfare institution respondent

***“We are now busy organising these types of door-to-door campaigns in all districts and yesterday I happened to have a conversation with my BoTu district coach and Pier 80’s coordinator and we agreed to meet up next week with a somewhat larger target group consisting of all manner of informal and formal organisations.”*** - Welfare institution respondent

***“We’ll be doing this together with the network partners and this will actually involve a door-to-door campaign during which we’ll be telling people that we’re here for them. We’ve got a number of flyers in a bag, including various emergency numbers which we can hand out if people have specific needs for help, if they can’t work something out, or if they’ve signalled that something’s worrying either outside or with one of their neighbours. This will allow them to inform us and we can subsequently set up the required campaigns.”*** - Welfare institution respondent

## **Informing district buddies out on the street**

**Formal player**      **Area Committee**

**Informal players**    Delfshaven Helpt, Buurtvaders, Kleurrijk Delfshaven, volunteers

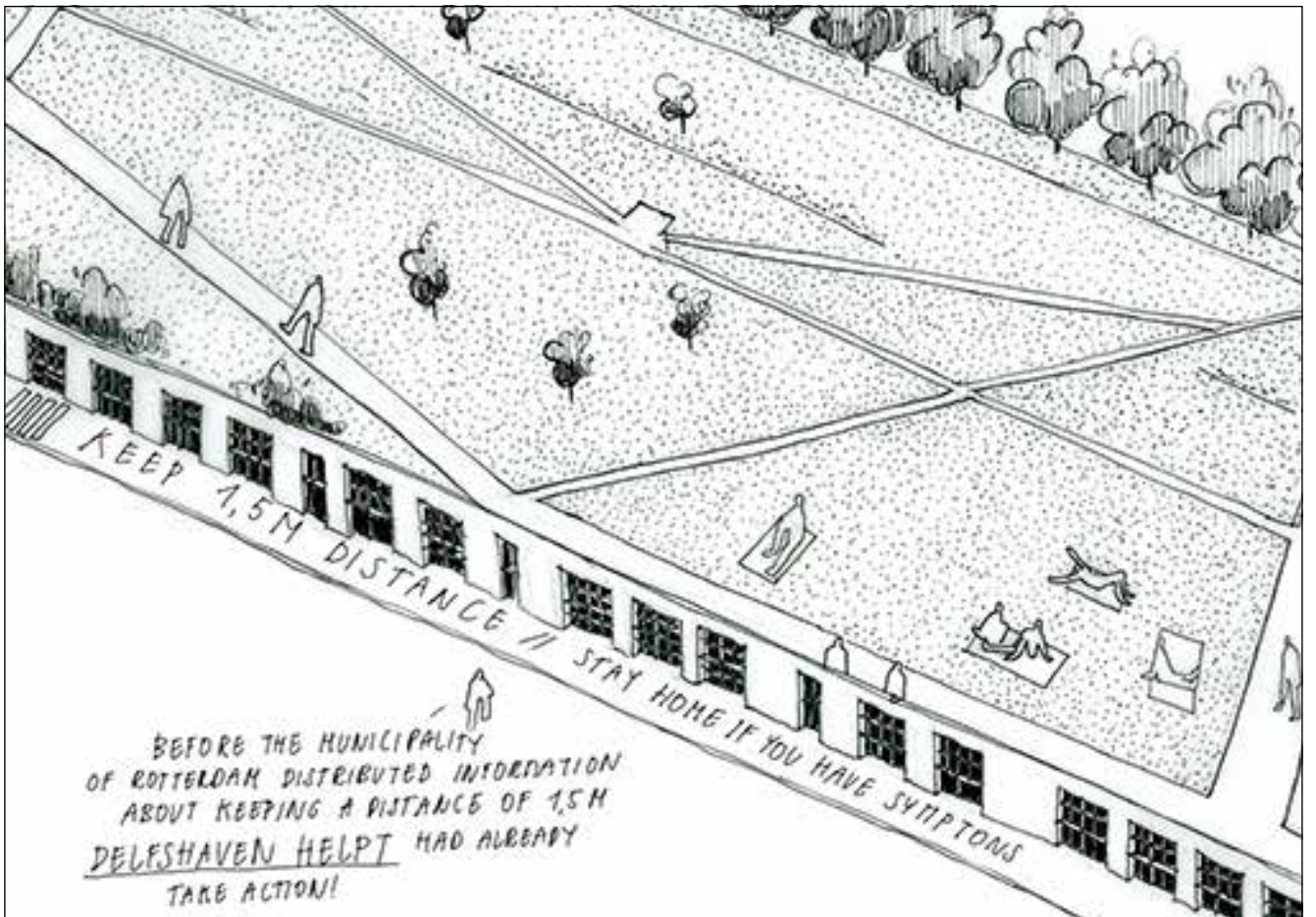
The Buurtmaatjes (District Buddies) is a group of volunteers from Delfshaven who took to the streets every week during the first months of the COVID-19 crisis to inform people. The group split into groups of three or four volunteers who speak different languages, so all the people out on the street could be reached. They walked around with Delfshaven Helpt vests and informed the district's residents about new government measures.

***“There are also mobile teams, who predominantly walk the streets on Friday and Saturday”*** - Informal initiative respondent

***“We said yes to the website quite quickly, as you can't reach everyone by phone, so we simply need to head out onto the streets, face to face, that's the only thing which truly works. We then formed teams consisting of someone who spoke Arabic, someone who spoke Turkish and someone who spoke Dutch, so with three of us. (...) That was done once or twice a week.”***

- Informal initiative respondent

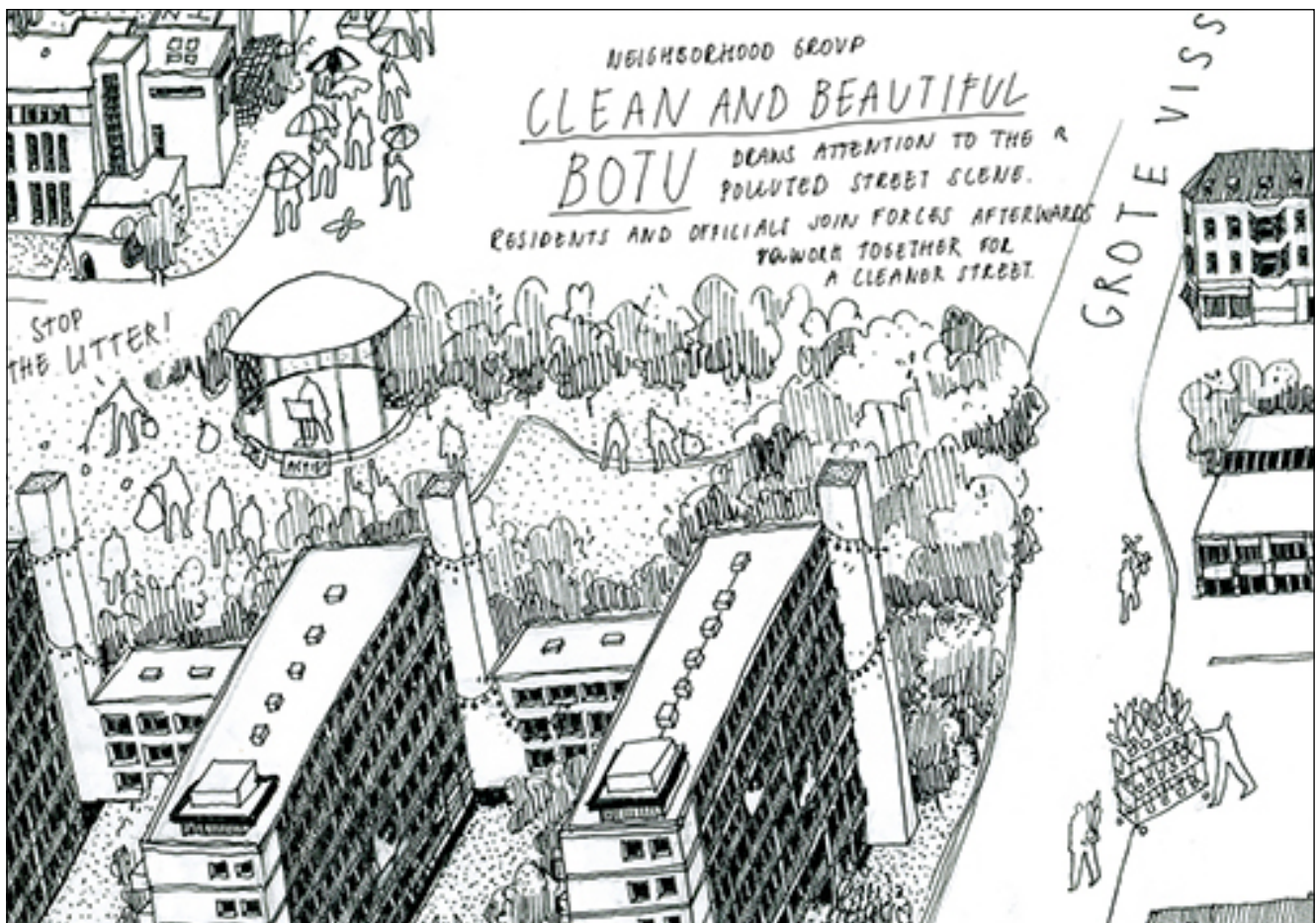




drawing: studio NadiaNena

## 7. Rubbish and quality of life

One request for help which isn't necessarily linked to the COVID-19 crisis by definition, but which did appear to be an issue with many of the residents, is the huge amount of rubbish out on the streets. As people are spending more time at home, they are definitely also producing more waste at home, but this is unfortunately not always disposed of correctly. In addition, the city management can only deploy a limited number of people in connection with the 1.5 meter distancing rule. Residents are annoyed about the rubbish and are taking action.



drawing: studio NadiaNena

## Initiatives

### Picking up rubbish

**Informal players** Volunteers

The local residents are taking action themselves against the rubbish by, for example, picking up waste in their own neighbourhoods.

***“People started picking up rubbish with one of those grabbers, they tried to promote it all a little bit, in an attempt to get people to take responsibility for keeping their own neighbourhoods clean. I don't see this widespread through the district just yet, but that's where people are now trying to change the mentality.”*** - Municipality respondent

### Clean and Beautiful BoTu

**Informal players** Volunteers, Schoon en Mooi BoTu

A number of involved district residents organised a demonstration to demand attention for the waste problems in the district. As a follow-up to this demonstration, a group of residents united under the 'Clean and Beautiful BoTu' name to further tackle the problems in the district. The action group has entered into a collaboration with the Municipality of Rotterdam's city management department.

***“Yes, that's right, we organised a demonstration against the rubbish, it really was that bad. The amount of rubbish is completely down to the people and it's undoubtedly because everyone has been at home more and creating more rubbish at home.”*** - Municipality respondent

## Players and collaboration

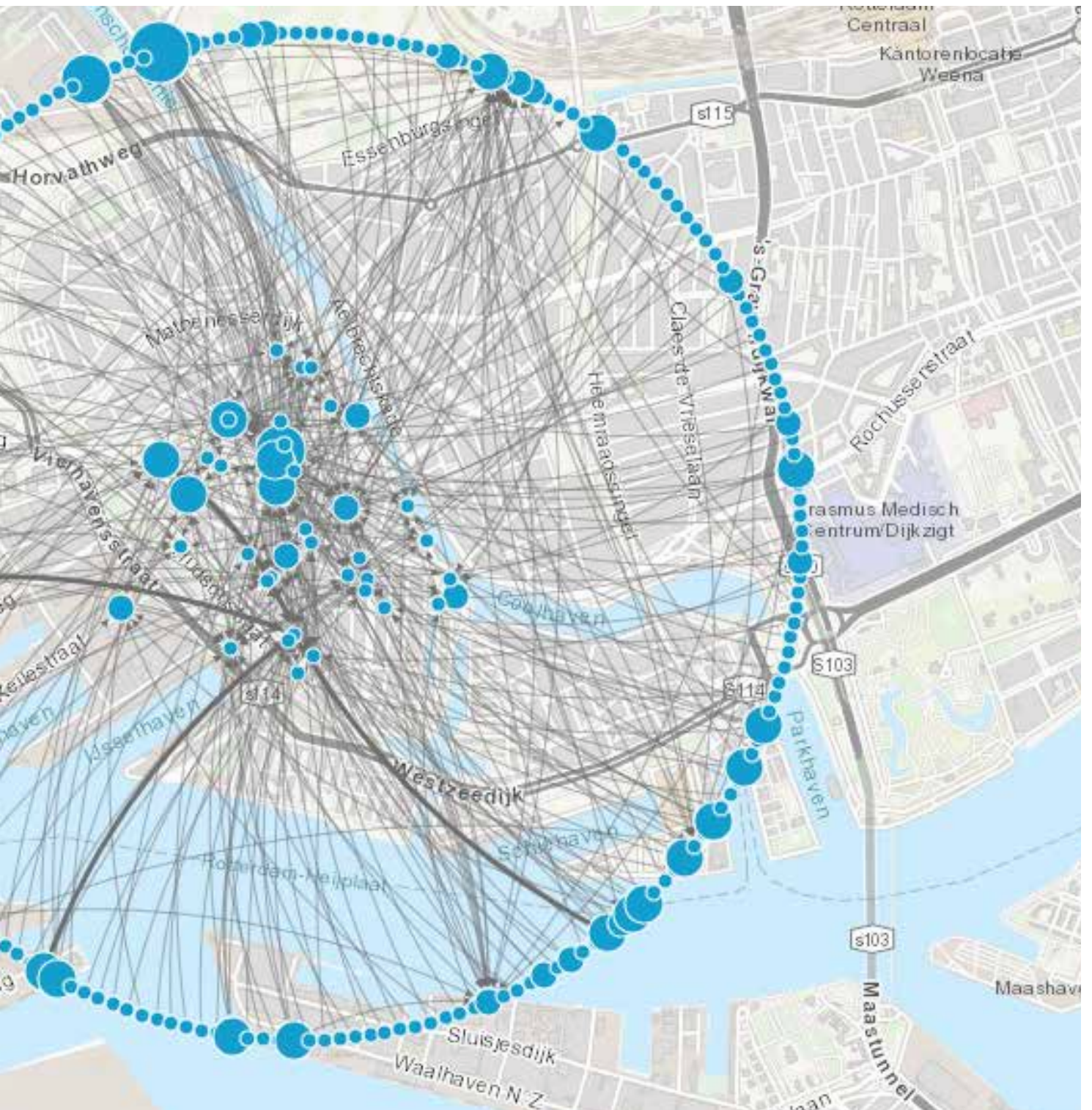
We were able to conclude from previous inventories that the initiatives in Bospolder-Tussendijken are the result of collaborations between a large number of different players, both formal and informal ones. A visual representation of the networks present in BoTu can be found on: [BoTu networks map](#).

Informal players are largely responsible for initiating and executing the aid campaigns where most of the initiatives from the analyses are concerned. Formal players will often link into the initiatives as facilitators. This facilitating role is material on the one hand and will take on the form of financial support and the provision of physical resources, like locations in the district, or the use of a central telephone service. On the other hand, the facilitating role taken on by formal players can also be in the form of a connecting function. For example, SSA-Radar's network was used to identify district residents in need of help.

A striking and very active informal player in BoTu and the surrounding districts is the Delfshaven Helpt platform. The district platform, set up to offer local residents help during the corona crisis, has established itself as an important player in the area. And at the same time, Delfshaven Helpt in itself is also a collaboration between various different formal and informal players. Existing connections in the area have made this collaboration possible. People quickly knew where to find each other and the earlier collaborations also allowed them to quickly find the right contact people within formal organisations. Delfshaven Helpt is therefore an excellent example of the importance of networking for quick and effective action in crisis situations.



Figure 1.1 BoTu Network Map Impression





# OBSERVATIONS: FACILITATING AND LIMITING FACTORS IN RESILIENT ACTIONS

Resilience only exists if an individual, community or organisation is capable of (collective) actions, otherwise no adaptation or transformation will take place. The aid campaigns described in the previous chapter show that the district has the capacity to act and how this is expressed. The sustainable impact these initiatives have on the district's resilience is difficult to determine based on the available data. The campaigns could possibly also have contributed to more and stronger connections in the local network. However, various different factors which influence the actions of the initiatives were identified during the interviews with initiators, local residents and area workers. These facilitating and limiting factors determined to what extent requests for help could be answered and initiatives could contribute to a resilient district.

Following is a summary of how each factor has influenced the individual actions and shows how many of the factors are inextricably linked:

- Work and meeting places
- Visibility of formal authorities
- Personal contact
- Flexibility
- Existing networks
- Communication
- Commitment from the district
- Financial resources

## Work and meeting places

### The importance of a place in the district

Various initiatives which already existed before the COVID-19 crisis have physical places in the district at their disposal, such as office spaces, reception areas and catering facilities. These physical resources help initiatives to start and develop activities. In many cases the space is even necessary to perform their intended tasks.

A physical place in the district will allow for face-to-face contact with residents and those in need of assistance. Plus events can be organised at a physical place and activities can be indirectly supported, for example by storing goods which are being used by an initiative. A place in the district will offer opportunities for meeting, connecting and collaborating.

### Adaptation of public spaces

The outbreak of the coronavirus has resulted in initiatives with a public location having to design this differently in order to satisfy the guidelines set by the government. For example, initiators had to create walking routes which would guarantee visitors keeping to the 1.5 meter distancing rule. The consequence of these measures was that the activities also had to be adapted and the number of visitors per day had to be reduced. A significant group of initiatives and entrepreneurs even had to temporarily close their doors during the COVID-19 crisis. This meant they had to relocate or completely shut down their work and activities. The extent to which initiatives were able to respond adaptively to the crisis situation is, to some extent, illustrative of these individual players' resilience.

### Closure of meeting places

One example of a place which needed to close its doors was Huis van de Wijk Pier 80. This location lost its regular function during the COVID-19 crisis, as the building remained closed to the general public for many months. It was only possible to have limited contact with people from the municipality in Pier 80. The place also served as a storage location for goods being used for various aid campaigns. But the meeting and connecting function which the place normally had was lost due to the strict compliance with regulations. This while various respondents have indicated that, partly due to the COVID-19 crisis, they have become more aware of the importance of meeting places in the district which are easily and freely accessible. The presence of (social) meeting places facilitates the creation of networks and the increase of social cohesion, two factors which respondents regard as important conditions for acting resiliently in crisis situations.

*“Pier 80 was of little value during this time. I don't know what they organised, I wasn't informed of anything. We were generally just informed of warnings, nothing more.”* - District board respondent

*“So it's a gathering place for the local police officer, for the municipal officer. That kind of thing. And from here we made and delivered the food packages. We delivered three and a half thousand plants to single mothers in the districts. Meals were prepared and delivered. So all of this happened from Huis van de Wijk. It's just the meeting and recreation function that's no longer there.”*

- Welfare organisation respondent

*“I think the moment you could have let those facilities fully run during the corona crisis, the distance [between the citizens and government] would have been reduced. How fantastic would it be if you entered a community centre and know that this community centre is fully prepared for any times of need. You then have a fixed point in the district, where people can locally look for help in familiar surroundings and the institutions can subsequently tackle things in more detail. Just as it should be.”* - Entrepreneur

*“No, we didn't allow anything to continue and I think we had dinner together for the last time before the lockdown and decided: we're going to stop.”* - Informal initiative respondent

### New initiatives without a place

Where existing initiatives struggled with the adjustment or closure of their location, several new initiatives didn't even have a place at their disposal yet. They often came about to respond to urgent requests for help which required material resources, such as food packages or laptops. Space was needed to store and distribute these resources, space which the initiators didn't have themselves. This problem was partly resolved by making use of existing places, like the previously described Pier 80 example and a number of new places were sought too. One example is the Yess! Pop-up Store, which distributed food packages from a building which had been made available to them on a temporary basis by the Havensteder housing corporation. The Pop-Up Store subsequently also developed into a place for small-scale meetings.

*“So we really needed a place where you can store everything and a number of cars for distributing everything. And we really felt this was a task for the municipality, but the municipality pushed this back to us.”* - Area committee respondent

*“We now have a building which previously had an office function, provided by Havensteder until 1st September, so the housing corporation. The great thing is that Havensteder has informed us that we can use the building for free until 1st September and that the municipality will subsequently temporarily change the zoning plan with 1 app.”* - Informal initiative respondent



## Visibility of formal authorities Inaccessible help

Residents will look to the government and formal authorities for direction and support during times of crisis. With the closing of many locations in the districts, as described earlier, the visibility of the government and other formal authorities also decreased. Help was being experienced as inaccessible as a result of the absence of aid workers, civil servants and the closing of counters and meeting places.

*“The government has a duty of care and must act during times of need. You obviously call out the fire service when there’s a fire. And the police will attend in case of theft. I expect the government to step up during a crisis.”*

-Entrepreneur

This absence was a direct result of the COVID-19 policies and guidelines which were being introduced and used by the government and organisations. The municipality, housing associations, district nurses and community officers, among others, are mentioned by both residents and initiators as parties who were not visible in the district during (part of) the crisis. This prevented both the residents and the organisation itself from acting resiliently

*“I can see that medical emergencies or emergencies with housing associations are not being dealt with effectively at all. No support is being provided here, no home visits are being done, it’s all gone downhill rather badly.”*

- Informal initiative respondent

*“One thing which struck us was that the district nurses weren’t always present during the meetings, whilst they are very knowledgeable about the district and very few are affiliated with the GP practice.”*

- Care institution respondent

*“Well, I’ve never seen a community officer here before. Normally when you first arrive in a new neighbourhood, you will see a community officer and then you’ll know who he or she is in the future. Or there’s a group of them, but no. I don’t see them out on the street either.”*

- Resident

## Municipality’s area organisation

Various different players from the Municipality of Rotterdam’s area organisation have indicated that they, especially during the initial period, did indeed mostly work from home in line with the municipal protocol. They did start acting in line with their own insights and judgement, which led to a more gradual presence in the district again. They indicated that it was certainly important in this specific district to be visible, also because many of the residents otherwise wouldn’t know how to find their way to the formal organisations.

*“Those of us working as district networkers in Delfshaven simply can’t do that job from home. Sooner or later that’s going to result in problems.”* - Municipality respondent

## Flexibility where abiding by the policy is concerned

Experiencing leeway has resulted in professionals being able to be resilient within their functions and offer alternative forms of help within the district where needed. Respondents from formal organisations have indicated they have experienced differences in the extent to which they have the space to apply the rules as they see fit and to resume their activities. According to some respondents, this lack of leeway has resulted in difficulties and limitations in the functioning of various welfare and government bodies.

*“I think the municipality really only had one policy and that was working from home as much as possible, full stop. Whilst at a certain point in time, you would think that, with a bit of common sense, you would be able to see people again whilst observing the 1.5 meter distancing rule. You have really shut down all the primary processes. So I don’t think that was handled particularly well.”* - Municipality respondent

*“But you can certainly also notice that one official will create more freedom where dealing with the rules is concerned compared to another.”* - Informal initiative respondent

## Personal contact

### The value and importance of personal contact

People started to realise how important social contacts are due to the freed up time and disappearance of many activities. Residents saw the true value of loved ones and neighbours more than ever before, as they proved to be a real source of support and help. Many problems in times of crisis are resolved within the residents’ informal networks. It was unfortunately also more difficult for residents to see each other as a result of the measures in place. People were definitely missing the human contact.

*“I have noticed that I don’t see festivals or events or other occasions where people would normally get together as being all that important right now. I now think it’s much more important to be able to see my grandma and grandad every now and then, or obviously my parents too.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“Of course it’s all pretty complicated too, because everyone just wants to feel that contact. Just giving someone a pat on the back is the most normal thing in the world and obviously a nice thing to do.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“I’m quite old, you see, so I wasn’t born with all that technological knowledge, so I really much prefer to see people face-to-face and have a cuddle, so I’m finding all of this very difficult.”* - Informal initiative respondent

This missing of personal contact was also noticed by organisations, which therefore couldn’t do their work as effectively. The identifying of people’s needs for help was particularly tricky because of the lack of physical contact. By no means all requests for help during times of crisis were given the required attention on time, mainly because these remained invisible to initiatives and authorities.

*We hugely rely on relationships and contacts and of course, that’s very tricky right now, as video calls definitely don’t work, as you can’t really see what’s going on with someone. I work very intuitively and rely on my instincts and I can therefore now no longer sense how someone’s really feeling, whereas you get a sense of that straight away when someone walks in.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“Many safety net situations have been closed. So in a period when everyone should really be working together to offer and identify help as intricately as possible, we see that the net meshes are actually getting coarser”* - Informal initiative respondent

## Identifying those in need of help

A number of factors have been identified which make the identifying of those in need of help within this context of limited physical contact even more difficult. For example, there are groups of people who lead a relatively invisible existence, like the elderly. They are at home a great deal and have a limited number of contacts. Plus in some cases they are not digitally skilled. There are also residents who are already familiar with many problems in their daily lives and who mistrust the official authorities due to bad experiences, which means they are therefore not inclined to show themselves. In addition, regular information sources (newspapers, online news pages, news) are not being used by all local residents. A significant group uses alternative sources (for example, in a foreign language) to obtain information and is therefore not aware of what is going on in the district and what help is on offer. There is also a certain degree of shyness in asking questions among some of the residents. Sometimes as a result of cultural standards and values, in other cases purely because of personal pride. Residents will often also not deem a need for help as being an important enough reason to venture outside.

*“I do think there are a number of networks and groups which aren’t directly reached through traditional media and through traditional channels.”* - Entrepreneur

*“You need to get creative. But some of the households in the district simply disappeared, like the Cape Verdean mum in her fifties, as she wasn’t on Instagram.”* - Welfare institution respondent

*“One thing you notice here and in Delfshaven is that you’re living with several different cultures who have a great deal of pride and who won’t let you know when they have a problem, or when they’re having a difficult time.”* - Informal initiative respondent

Getting in touch with residents and people in need of help for small-scale problems appeared to help with getting people to open up about more serious matters. For example, asking for help with shopping was often experienced as easier by residents than talking about more major issues. If a professional or initiator was subsequently in contact with a resident to meet this demand, he or she could also get an idea of any further help which may be needed.

*“As we were obviously bringing round the meals. You then see a great deal of what’s going on in the district and you can get a better look at where you’re delivering the meals and how things are going there, so this allows us to keep a closer eye on things.”* - Social initiator in Bospolder-Tussendijken

## Flexibility

### Impact Policy

The policy set by the government or organisations themselves has resulted in action not always being taken when there are requests for help from the district. Various organisations started focussing on their primary tasks as a result of the crisis, which meant tackling any corona-related requests for help hadn’t been part of their tasks package for a long time. This was often a forced choice, because adherence to guidelines meant they couldn’t perform certain tasks. For example, the previously discussed limitation of physical appointments with customers because a location needed to be shut down.

*“You see, on the one hand we were obviously told to work from home, because we are supposed to take on an exemplary position as a government body. People were told: everyone has to work from home, limit all contact etc. But of course that didn’t include anything about maintaining that network.”* - Municipality of Rotterdam respondent

*“We simply weren’t prepared for this and you will see that people will start off with arranging things they need to carry out their core tasks and those are the core processes where system parties are concerned.”*

- Informal initiative respondent

### **Flexibility of activities and location**

Organisations and individuals who have demonstrated flexibility in their functioning have proven to be of enormous value during the crisis. This flexibility was evident in various different ways, including:

- Organisations with a physical location which were looking for possibilities within the rules: by cleaning more regularly, placing screens and introducing walkways; organisations which made sure the same number of people could be helped: maximum number of visitors, but extended opening times and working in shifts;
- Organisations which normally carry out activities on location and which were now taking these to people’s homes in an adjusted form; like a workshop for children which was now sending a package with materials and instructions to homes, or the local library which was bringing books to people’s homes;
- Organisations which used digital resources to be able to carry out activities, like the provision of education, or holding religious meetings.

*“When everything was still very uncertain in the beginning, you could see a clear distinction in who immediately showed resilience, such as local entrepreneurs who responded to the crisis and adapted their business and others.”* - Entrepreneur

*“We would like to organise various different activities for the neighbourhood which would make those people visible and reduce that feeling of isolation somewhat across Delfshaven. And so we’re already involved with finding a new way of doing our activities”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“Remote teaching became a thing very quickly. Primary education has really come quite far where that’s concerned. (...) One thing which I thought was very striking was that the whole of primary education showed a great deal of flexibility.”* - Primary school respondent

*“The solution was to ensure people were still being supported. This is now mostly being done online, via Zoom or via Teams, with seminars or by organising lectures at other mosques.”* - Religious institution respondent

### **Role change**

Flexibility was also there in the form of professionals who temporarily took on a different role and in some cases even operated outside of their organisations. Thereby effectively responding to the new situations and the needs in the district. At a certain point, various professionals functioned as part of aid initiatives, thereby also bridging the gap between informal and formal players.

*“It no longer matters who works where or who has which role. Irrespective of whether you’re a district manager or an area networker, they all helped with distributing the flyers. Literally everyone got involved, including the TOS employees who normally assist the teenagers, they delivered all those flyers in the districts, so that’s amazing. I think there are lots of people who are currently doing things they wouldn’t normally be doing.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“I get the feeling that there are many people who are simply doing what’s necessary, quite apart from what they usually do within their organisations.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“But someone who normally works with children, but who can apparently also build a website, we would never have thought of that. These are the type of new qualities you are suddenly being made aware of and that really is fascinating.”* - Informal initiative respondent

### **Existing networks**

#### **Collaboration**

Existing networks and collaborations have been identified as important facilitating factors during a crisis situation. Appropriate action can be taken a lot faster when people, organisations and initiatives can find each other quickly.

New initiatives, which were initially led by residents, also benefited from being connected to professionals and formal organisations. As formal parties will result in a strong network with long-term collaborations and the connection to this network subsequently increases the chance of safeguarding the initiative for the future.

*“We have acquired a great deal of experience here in Delfshaven and particularly in Bospolder-Tussendijken, we’ve invested a great deal in networks with each other. And it’s important that we’ve invested in a network society together within which we know where to find each other and whereby we know each other’s strengths and how to make use of these. So we managed to create an organisation in just a week’s time and two weeks later we had an impressive 550 volunteers.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“And I think the reason why this was realised so quickly in this district, or really across the whole of Delfshaven, was because we invested in the resilience of various different networks over the past years. So these networks can find each other very easily and very quickly and also have a sort of shared value framework, making it a great deal easier to work together from a position of trust. So in these types of crisis situations it quickly becomes evident that social resilience really does pay off.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“And the one thing which has possibly resulted in the biggest added value during this corona time is that we have truly found a new way of working with partners. I think we were way ahead of the city in Delfshaven where working together and knowing each other was concerned. It was definitely also very difficult to set up an initiative like Delfshaven Helpt.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“I felt the most important thing was the contact between GP practices, the district team and welfare, the SSA-Radar and that really doesn’t run as smoothly in many other areas as it does in Delfshaven.”* - Care institution respondent

*“A number of new key figures are in place, but there are also many people who were already doing that and were able to play an effective role here because they have the right networks, knowledge and experience at their disposal and know the area well.”* - Informal initiative respondent

## **Resources and knowledge**

A network will result in a collective commitment and efficient action. In addition, specific factors are also present within networks which make resilient action possible, such as knowledge and expertise available to partners in the network. Connecting to the network also provided access to the necessary resources: ranging from means of transport, to business space, to food products. With which an aid campaign could then be carried out or facilitated. The exchange of resources and expertise can be optimally used and efficient campaigns promoted when a network consists of connections between both formal and informal players.

*“To start with, soon after the outbreak, we sent out an email to say we were looking for someone who could quickly build a website for Delfshaven Helpt. As I had Delfshaven’s economy in my network too, I decided to share that request and I think the website went live just six hours later.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“A few very handy people quickly put together that platform, that is the incredibly special thing about this*

*network of ours, someone will always know someone who can do something.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“Those food packages were supplemented with food, non-perishable food etc with, for example, Jumbo’s help and sponsoring and eventually they were as big as a removal box.”* - Informal initiative respondent

## **Exclusion**

One potential danger of a strong network formation, on the other hand, is that residents or initiatives which are not connected to the network will fall behind. Not all initiatives and residents from the area felt that they had or were able to find access to the relevant networks. The networks active in those districts were not always connected to each other either, because of something called island formation.

*“We definitely noticed that if there were networks already in place during the corona crisis, these would increase in numbers and we really wanted to strengthen and increase these too”* - Informal initiative respondent

## **Communication**

### **Limiting contact**

Efficient communication has proven to be essential to respond to requests for help, especially when many organisations became physically unreachable due to closed offices and employees working from home. But this certainly wasn’t always easy to achieve. Organisations which were limited to telephone or digital contact with their clients due to the compulsory working from home experienced limitations in the communication possibilities.

Bospolder-Tussendijken has a diverse population composition, which means there are often language barriers. This complicates communication and the linking in to initiatives. When there’s a language barrier, physical contact is often essential to make the message understandable through body language. When this contact is limited to language alone, it can hinder efficient communication.

*“It’s important, you have to address people in their own language, they have to understand the message, but how?”* - District board respondent

*“People could call by phone and then we would help them by phone, but even then you can’t reach a very large part of the people who live here, because they don’t have a good telephone connection and are having trouble with the language. So if I have to do that over the phone, video calling helps a bit, but it’s very difficult to hear and understand each other”* - Informal initiative respondent

And yet telephone communication proved to be an effective solution in other cases. Helplines were soon being set up in the area to contact residents and identify their requests for help and to subsequently link them to the right professionals.

*“I really think this has been incredibly well set up for the Delfshaven Helpt initiative, you are personally approached by one of the partners who are operating that telephone number. This has obviously been set up by several partners in the district and I was called by Verbindingskamer, who subsequently matched me. The whole process ran very smoothly and I eventually messaged them back with my feedback.”* - Municipality respondent

### Digital resources

Digital resources have helped with communication, both to have contact within an initiative and with the residents. (Potential) volunteers could also be reached with these digital resources. The reach was significantly increased via apps like Whatsapp, Zoom and Teams, although we didn't manage to cover everything. That's because this type of communication isn't suitable for all target groups, in particular the elderly are not always digitally skilled, so they were not reached via these channels. The risk of these types of resources is also that information flows become too large. For example, some of the app groups became very full and polluted over time and the message flow was incessant, as a result of which some respondents left these groups and no longer received the information shared in these.

*“There was also a group app which included all partners and this was used to share communication about the guidelines for young people. This did result in short lines back and forth. That was good.”* - Welfare institution respondent

*“Yes, that's going well, anything new is simply thrown into the Whatsapp groups, asking for help wherever needed or accepting donations for certain things, what's the best way of collecting it?”* - Welfare institution respondent

*“And then you notice that the app starts polluting, because people bring in their own anxieties and not just for the purpose for which the app is designed.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“Plus there's certainly also a case of modernity and not everyone is equipped to deal with that. Whatsapp, on-line on websites, entering passwords, all those kinds of things. That can prove to be quite a disability for some. Email drops out, Whatsapp drops out. You can call, but when you do, they will just refer you to the Whatsapp group or website. And that's when people get stuck.”* - District board respondent

## Commitment from the district

### Togetherhness

The multitude of activities resulting from the initiatives require many volunteers. Bospolder-Tussendijken proved to be a very involved district during the COVID-19 crisis. Residents were ahead of formal authorities and acted quickly and energetically where setting up relief actions and initiatives were concerned. The connectedness and togetherhness in the district was praised and there seemed to be signs of resilience and assertiveness.

*“An awful lot is being resolved in the informal network. When you see how many neighbours are looking out for each other, then you realise a great deal is already being done. And these are particularly neighbours who are really doing things for each other.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“Some fantastic things are happening too and you can clearly see the district is resilient and that the networks are incredibly strong. That's certainly also great to see.”* - Informal initiative respondent

### New volunteers

Several respondents have also indicated that a new group of volunteers has established itself. People who previously weren't active in the district, particularly during the initial phase of the crisis, have now made themselves available as volunteers. This includes students and working parents, who offered to contribute to whatever was needed in the district, groups which would normally be less active. The offer of help very quickly ended up exceeding demand.

*“It's great to see that these people are now suddenly so involved with the street they're living in, or even the street behind theirs, which they'd had nothing to do with prior to the crisis. (...) A lot of strong shoulders are coming into the picture now. Who definitely also want to be of some use during the current corona crisis.”* - Informal initiative respondent

*“It's also really cool to notice, because those people who normally just go out to work, they are now at home and some volunteers said they had only just realised that they normally don't actually do anything for their district and really do want to be doing something, so someone said this was an excellent starting point.”* - Informal initiative respondent

## **Financial resources**

### **Financial worries**

Existing and active initiatives were hit hard financially by the COVID-19 crisis and had to deal with setbacks from various different sides. Initiatives were missing out on income as their regular activities couldn't take place. Plus initiatives with a physical space in the area were particularly affected because they have to deal with monthly rental costs, which in some cases they could no longer afford. They were therefore seriously concerned about their survival.

One thing which didn't help their financial position was that many initiatives didn't receive government support due to the regulations and their strict application by the tax authorities: social initiatives have an SBC code (Standard Business Classification code) which did not feature on the list for the granting of support.

*“The first 4,000 euro of emergency aid is now being allocated based on those SBC codes. And you simply won't get any if your company doesn't form part of those SBC codes.”* - Informal initiative respondent

### **Financial support**

Initiatives have been able to start activities and make resources available to residents through sponsoring or funds which could be used. Initiatives which link into formal bodies and professionals have often been more successful in raising such financial resources.

*“A great deal of money has been collected through sponsoring, so there are a number of people in the Delfshaven Helpt network who just have a very good professional network and who manage to get money out of all sorts of major organisations. And this money is now being used to buy lots of laptops with.”*

- Municipality respondent

*“And that means lots of hard work to acquire funds and we've been reasonably successful at that and I think we managed to collect 159,000 of funds in just eight to nine days time. And this was achieved with an awful lot of hard work by many people.”* - Informal initiative respondent

On a small scale, residents also tried to provide financial support where possible, through the 'support your locals' concept: buying from local entrepreneurs to compensate for some of the revenue they missed out on.

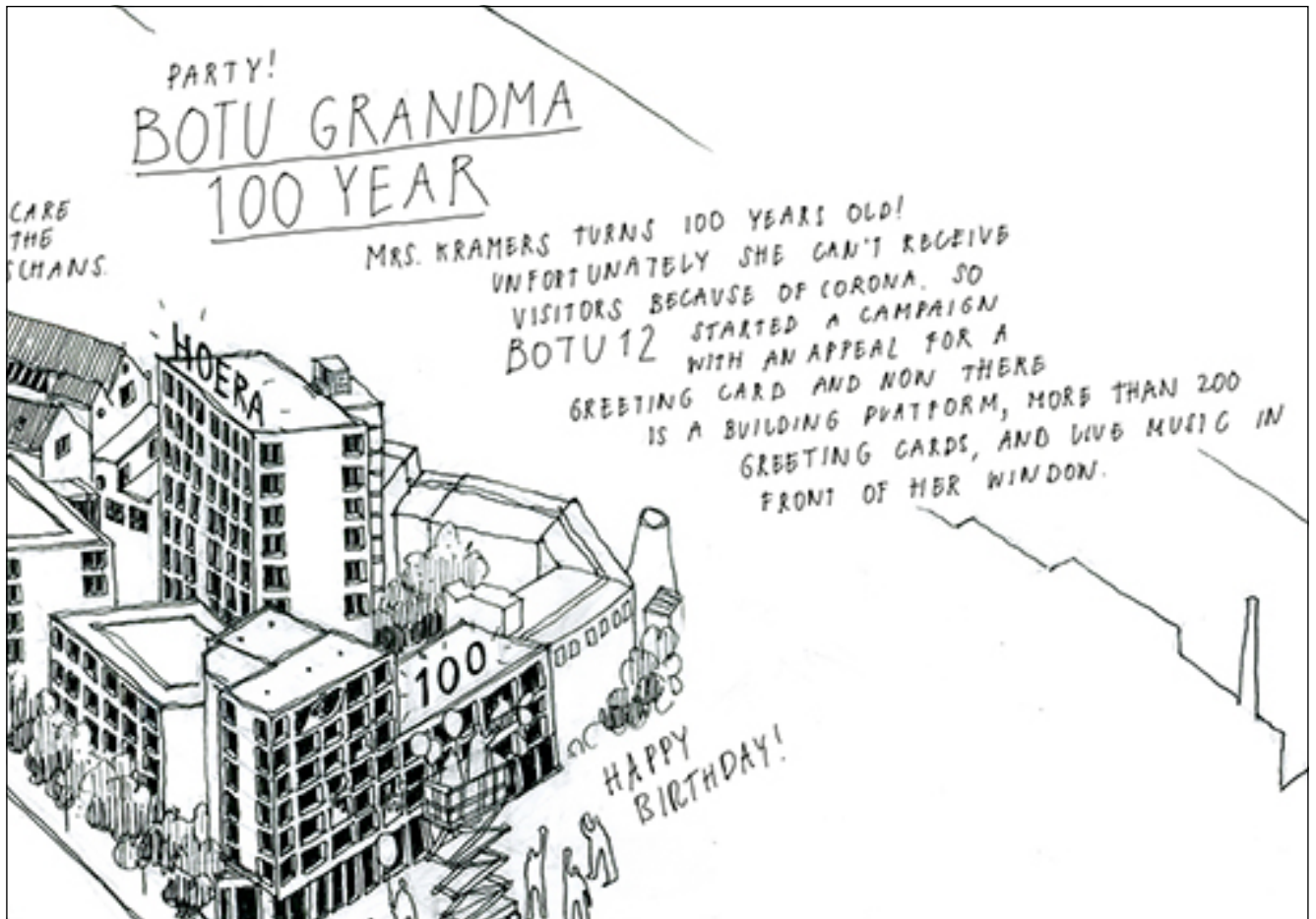
*“So I get my other necessities from the local bakery. I'll visit one butcher one day and another one the next week and so do my best to provide all of the Schiedamse Weg entrepreneurs with a little bit of support. And now the best thing is, I'm by no means the only one doing*

*this, as there are many people in the district doing the exact same thing. Many people in the district here aren't doing all that well, but it's those people who are trying to support the wage costs, isn't that fantastic?”*

- Informal initiative respondent

*“For example, I started with paying a starting out entrepreneur, even though he really didn't want to get paid for his kick boxing lessons. But I made a point of saying we should all start paying for his services.”*

- Entrepreneur



drawing: studio NadiaNena





# CONCLUSION: RECOMMEN- DATIONS FOR RESILIENT

**Based on the presented findings from Bospolder-Tussendijken, five factors have been defined which can influence community resilience: (1) existing networks, (2) collaborations between informal and formal players, (3) flexibility in roles, (4) tailor-made policy and guidelines and (5) effective communication.**

## **1) Existing networks**

The crisis response in BoTu during the first lockdown shows the benefits of a district community with strong networks. BoTu has certainly reaped the benefits from investments in the local network, like during the past year within the Bospolder Tussendijken focus approach and 2028 Resilient BoTu. Existing networks make it easier to initiate actions and support them with additional capabilities and resources. These networks enable informal players to contact formal players for the necessary support. Previous collaborations also create a relationship of trust in which people know each other's strengths and can use them.

In short, a strong network is essential for a community to be resilient. An established district network is used during times of crisis. It's recommended that institutional parties continue to invest in district networks, based on their different roles. How this investment is implemented depends on the situation and the established network. Sometimes there's a need to lead and sometimes there's a need to facilitate. It's important for officials to establish their own relationships and connect others in order to strengthen the resilience of local communities. Forming networks takes a great deal of time and effort. The government's task is to: make sure these networks maintain their continuity and are able to develop. Municipalities can, for example, provide continuity to local initiatives and other types of collaborations by providing long-term financing.

## **2) Collaborations between informal and formal players**

Whilst some initiatives were competitive before the crisis, during the lockdown the players stuck to a common goal to help the BoTu residents. Campaigns were quickly and effectively set up as a result of the formal and informal players working together. This resulted in increased access to capacities and resources in order to solve problems. In general, the campaigns set up in BoTu were initiated by established formal and informal players, who were sometimes (temporarily) working in new coalitions. Even though a large number of new volunteers came forward to support the campaigns, these campaigns didn't manage to reach all of BoTu's residents. In order to reach more diverse groups of residents, such as young people, for example, new initiators may arise or existing initiators may expand their activities. The involvement of formal and informal players in such collaborations is essential, as they have different kinds of characteristics and qualities which complement each other and are both necessary.

It's recommended for policy makers and area workers to facilitate activities which will enable district networks to reach more diverse groups of residents. The policy could possibly be adjusted in line with this, in order to increase the focus on collaborations between formal and informal networks and reaching various different types of citizen groups. The initiated collaboration could develop into a long-term participative collaboration network. In order for the collaborations to flourish, area workers and policy markers can provide some infrastructure for connecting and supporting initiatives. This may be an important role for district managers and networkers. They are a link between the government and the district residents. For the continuity of the network, it's important that these key figures retain a position in the district for a long time, connect different links in the network and monitor inclusivity.

## **3) Flexibility in roles**

Various different players have demonstrated flexibility in the role they played in the district during lockdown. This encouraged the creation of various campaigns. Players have demonstrated flexibility by using other capacities or taking on new responsibilities to meet the changing needs in the district. A great sense of necessity stimulated the role change. In BoTu this flexibility contributed to the problem-solving capabilities in response to the COVID-19 crisis by providing low-threshold and fast access to support capabilities and resources.

Not all players dealt with their roles in a flexible manner. Partly due to strict adherence to the corona measures, formal aid in BoTu became partially inaccessible during the lockdown. For example, according to the protocols, officials were often not allowed to be physically present in the district to meet with residents or collaboration partners. This meant they were limited in providing assistance and support. Some of the area workers were (temporarily) invisible and unreachable as a result of complying with the corona measures, whilst they were actually badly needed in a crisis situation. This hampered the local community's resilience. The flexibility in roles was particularly evident in the first months of the crisis. Activities were partly cancelled and the respondents had a great sense of urgency. As routine activities were resumed, some respondents noticed that people slowly returned to their regular tasks.

**It's advisable for the government to be visible in the district during times of crisis and to take flexibility as a starting point in order to act adequately in times of crisis. It's important for officials to experience leeway in order to be able to provide tailor-made solutions and for them to be supported in this by the underlying organisation.**

## **4) Policy and regulations**

The crisis policy in BoTu followed the national policy. The decisions limited the ability to act resiliently in several cases. Due to the pandemic, some initiatives had to interrupt their usual activities, some also suffered a financial blow as a result. A flexible budget encourages a response to changed requests for help in times of crisis and enables players to act both quickly and effectively. For example, by (temporarily) spending existing funding sources differently, or making financial resources available which can be spent immediately, without justification.

Some institutions initially decided to close meeting places. Meeting places turned out to have specific significance in BoTu, for which specific policies were desired. For example, the meaning of the market is about access to affordable food and that of a community centre is about access to reliable information.

Even though municipalities had some flexibility in implementing national policy, there was no tailor-made policy in BoTu to strengthen the district's resilience. This lack of policy flexibility was partly caused by top-down rules and the lack of mandate given to local players to adapt protocols in line with the location situation. It's advisable to experiment with the local crisis policy, in order to give players, such as district managers and residents' organisations, increased scope (financial and mandate) to adequately act in times of crisis.

## **5) Communication**

Communication is essential for an effective approach to problems in times of crisis. At the start of the corona crisis, a communication structure was set up in BoTu which allowed informal and formal players to easily coordinate the supply and demand for help. The need was expressed to make this platform more sustainable, allowing for needs in the district to be effectively responded to, even after the crisis. Digital resources played a major role in the communication between players. Mobile communication applications were used to shape collaboration. Acting resiliently has, in some cases, been hampered by ineffective communication, for example the sharing of irrelevant information and the lack of digital skills and resources. The latter made access to networks, meetings and information more difficult.

Even though flyers were distributed door-to-door, many residents have not read or seen them. Some of the residents were not aware of the initiatives in the district. The closing of meeting places in BoTu blocked the opportunity to gather and share information. Digital communication resources supported self-organisation, but closing physical meeting places, such as community centres, at the

same time hindered communication. Local residents therefore took the initiative to offer oral information about the corona measures out on the street. Various different information points and communication channels are essential in order to provide a diverse group of residents with reliable information.

The group of vulnerable residents increased during the corona crisis, which may have led to an increase in the number of invisible requests for help. Closing down meeting places hampered the identification of requests for help, because physical and/or personal contact is essential for this. For a number of initiators, corona was a reason to go door-to-door in order to identify requests for help.

**It's therefore advisable for policy makers to be very cautious where the closing of public provisions is concerned. These places often function as communication hubs for residents. Local meeting places are important to give residents access to actions and initiatives which are located in their district.**

# COLOPHON

## STANDING STRONG TOGETHER DURING THE CORONA CRISIS

A study into social resilience in Bospolder-Tussendijken

### Commissioned by

The Resilient Rotterdam programme  
in collaboration with 2028 Resilient BoTu Programme Manager  
Municipality of Rotterdam

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Developed in collaboration with our partners at TU Delft.

We would like to thank all employees who contributed to the realisation of this report.



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