To provide the caregivers’ perspective on being involved in design for well-being, Christine De Lille spoke to care professionals at De Wever, an institution which specialises in care for elderly with dementia.

Together with De Wever and other CRISP STS partners, Martijn ten Bhömer developed two Smart-Textile Services in the context of elderly care. This form of bottom-up collaboration with different partners is second nature for designers, but for care professionals it is still quite novel to work with designers.

As Bianca Pastoors, a physiotherapist at De Wever, points out, “People who work in care are currently quite passive. Their attitude seems to be: ‘Come to me when it’s finished.’ I became involved in the project because I wanted to do something that was not directly related to my discipline; technology is not really my expertise. I noticed that designers don’t really understand dementia. They have a lot of ideas of which I thought from the beginning: this won’t work. That’s why I think it is really my expertise. I noticed that designers related to my discipline; technology is not something to experience the context as much as possible. With this approach, you become aware of a different world, quite unlike the academic world. I joined people from De Wever in their daily practice, in different departments, participated in activities with their clients, and tried to implement the prototypes during the design process as much as possible in the real PSS context. I wanted to make sure that it was a shared project for which all of us felt ownership, which means you have to trust the expertise that already exists within De Wever. You develop the PSS step-by-step, together with the people who will actually use and implement it.”

“For me,” says Martijn, “care for the elderly suffering from dementia was something far removed from my experience as a designer. You always have certain assumptions in mind, which often turn out to be different in reality. That is why I wanted to connect to the context, to experience the context as much as possible. With this approach, you become aware of a different world, quite unlike the academic world. I joined people from De Wever in their daily practice, in different departments, participated in activities with their clients, and tried to implement the prototypes during the design process as much as possible in the real PSS context. I wanted to make sure that it was a shared project for which all of us felt ownership, which means you have to trust the expertise that already exists within De Wever. You develop the PSS step-by-step, together with the people who will actually use and implement it.”

“One thing that became apparent while planning,” Bianca notes, “is the difference in perspective. In care, most things are arranged out of the box. I remember that I joined the project and I really had to get used to the way of working: what had I gotten myself into? Together with Malou, another physiotherapist at De Wever, I visited some of the CRISP STS events, for example, the Careful Designs Symposium at Waag Society and the review sessions to get a better idea of the bigger picture, to better understand the academic world. I have now met other people, for instance, members of the G-MOTIV project, who helped us initiate a new project about humour and dementia. People often don’t realise what is happening and now we have a way in. That is a valuable connection for us.”

Corrie Aarts is a project manager at De Wever, “In projects I have been involved in, it is often the case that you start something and, along the way, notice that it does not work. So you have to continually adapt your goal. You learn this by doing many projects. You sometimes have to adapt, but that is also the strength of the project. That is one thing I learned from this project, this approach of switching fast, learning from other disciplines, and thinking out of the box. I remember that I joined the project and I really had to get used to the way we can be involved in the design process and put the focus on what we need.”