

# Professional Football Organises Community Walk for Youth Mental Health

**27 May 2026**

On Thursday, 28 May, the Eredivisie CV and the Coöperatie Eerste Divisie will organise the Community Walk in Volendam to raise awareness of the importance of mental health among young people. The Community Walk serves as the collective closing event of Community Champions 2025–2026, the social responsibility programme of Dutch professional football. More than 350 young people will walk together in their club kits to the stadium of FC Volendam as a visible signal calling for greater attention to youth mental health.

## **Mental Health Under Increasing Pressure**

The walk takes place in the lead-up to Mental Health Week. Mental health is becoming an increasingly pressing issue for young people. Research conducted by the Play Mental Foundation shows that one in two young people report that their mental health is not in a good state, while 50% regularly experience performance pressure. In addition, 62% are concerned about social issues such as loneliness, future prospects, housing affordability and financial uncertainty. Together with clubs and participants, Dutch professional football addresses these challenges every day through a range of social programmes focused on mental health, positive wellbeing and personal development.

## **Community Champions Helps Young People Grow**

Participants are young people involved in Community Champions through professional football clubs. Over a sixteen-week programme, young people aged between 12 and 30 work on developing their talents, self-confidence and future prospects. They also meet new people and contribute to their local communities throughout the programme. Participants rate the programme highly, with an average score of 8 out of 10, and 97% successfully complete the course. The experiences of participants also demonstrate the programme's impact. Brady Groenewoud (17) from SC Telstar explained that the programme helped him improve his teamwork skills and feel more comfortable connecting with people he had not met before. NEC participant Tijn Scholten (15) has been working on building self-confidence and increasingly feels able to take initiative within the group. Yehor Pozniak (16), who moved from Ukraine to the Netherlands three years ago, uses the programme to further develop his Dutch language skills and approach new challenges with greater confidence.

## **Jan de Jong: “Football Reaches Young People Like Nothing Else”**

Jan de Jong, Director of Eredivisie CV, said: “Football reaches young people in a way and with an intensity that very few other organisations can match, let alone politics. Clubs are deeply rooted in their communities, often serving as the beating heart of a city, and provide an environment where young people feel seen, heard and safe. It is a place where they meet new people and can work on their personal development. Through Community Champions, we want to demonstrate how important attention to mental health and personal growth is. That is important for everyone, but perhaps even more so for young people.”

## **Closing Event at the Kras Stadium**

The Community Walk will lead into the final Community Champions event at FC Volendam's Kras Stadium. Young people from clubs across the Netherlands will come together, including participants from Feyenoord, FC Twente, SC Heerenveen, NEC Nijmegen, De Graafschap and FC Volendam. Several well-known figures from football are also supporting the initiative, including Gianni

Zuiverloon, Kik Pierie and Kees Kwakman.