



Generations coming together: intergenerational work in Time to Shine

**Time to Shine report
February 2022**

About Time to Shine

Time to Shine is one of fourteen areas which form Ageing Better; an ambitious, large scale programme funded and developed by the National Lottery Community Fund. Ageing Better aims to improve the lives of people aged 50 and over by reducing social isolation and loneliness.

Leeds Older People's Forum had been involved in intergenerational activity over a number of years, and wanted to encourage intergenerational activity within the Time to Shine programme.

Several projects undertook intergenerational work, either explicitly or simply as a facet of their project. Not all of the projects were successful initially and attracting younger or older people to take part proved to be more of a challenge than some organisations had expected. To recruit successfully there was a need to focus very clearly on what each age group needed to support their engagement, in both individual and organisational terms.

Leeds
Older
People's
Forum

Time
to
Shine



Working with children and older people

The youngest and oldest participants took part in a project called [Pens to Pals](#). [Fall into Place](#), a community-based theatre company who had run both adult and young people's drama groups and organised other activities to connect the community, wanted to take the community connections to adults living in care homes. They set out to run a project which supported school children and older people to write to each other - to become pen pals - and then to meet. They quickly identified that relationship building with the care homes would take longer than they had anticipated, and that in fact a number of the older people had lost confidence in their ability to write a letter so took more support to engage in the process than anyone had realised. Their thoughtful and flexible approach meant they were able to alter delivery as the project progressed and they ended up with a successful project.

Older people enjoyed writing and meeting the children (11 year olds in Year 6). The project workers found that when the young people asked questions that hadn't been asked in a long time it changed the way residents behaved and responded. This then had the unexpected effect of disrupting the 'them and us' caring relationship with care home staff. In some cases this led to more choice, freedom and autonomy for the residents. Staff recognised the residents as people who had lived rich lives and still have a wealth of knowledge and skills.

“Something as simple as a writing a letter is often an activity a resident hasn't done for many years ...answering questions from a young person about their life can unlock something in their brain. We saw surprise on the faces of the care home staff as residents who had not held a pen in years wrote long letters.” *Project worker*

[Creative Frame](#) worked in a different way. They used a food animation project called [Vegetation](#) to engage children and older people in digital film-making during the school holidays. This helped break down the children's preconceptions about older people and the digital world, and engaged the older people by offering a chance to play.



Working with Students

Leeds has a large student population and not surprisingly a number of projects tried to work with this group of young adults who apparently had time on their hands.

Not all projects that set out to link students and older people worked. [Walk with Me](#), run by [Feel Good Factor](#), originally set out to recruit young people to try and support older people to achieve their goals in terms of local walking. In the end the project worked with volunteers of any age as they found they could not recruit enough students and some of the young people who were able to volunteer had fewer people skills and high support needs. Student recruitment seems to have been difficult because they needed to commit to regular volunteering and in fact there were not many students living in that part of the city.

Other approaches to involving the student population worked well. [Caring Together in Woodhouse and Little London \(CTWLL\)](#) - one of Leeds' Neighbourhood Networks - covers an area right next to the Leeds University campus, and the organisation had worked informally with students over the years. They planned a Small Funds project to attract, supervise and retain a pool of local student volunteers to provide befriending services to local isolated older people who found it difficult to access community facilities and services without help. CTWLL wanted to be able to offer these students more reflective opportunities that took into account their own feelings of vulnerability and loneliness.

“I did, after some time, confide with the coordinator that I was feeling lonely and that this was one of the reasons that I became involved as a volunteer... she told me of other students that had experienced negatively the transition to student life and that even though on the surface they appeared happy and thriving, with seemingly good social lives, they too had found life difficult. I felt like less of an oddity after this.” *Student volunteer*

CTWLL made time for both the induction and the supervision of volunteers to allow for these reflective sessions that provided space for the students to talk about their own experiences of student life and the difficulties of independent living and orienting themselves in unfamiliar settings without family support.

The students all felt that the project took them out of their natural hinterland and helped them get to know the local community. They all had better insight into the issues faced by older people but they also felt things were improved for them too. It helped them to have someone outside the university to talk to, and it put their own lives into a clearer perspective. ‘Not everything was about me.’

Having a mix of potential volunteering experiences such as being an aid to participation, one to one support and telephone support allowed some individuals to opt for a role in which they felt comfortable.

“To be able to set time aside to focus on two real damaging phenomena, the loneliness of many of our older citizens and an increased awareness of loneliness amongst young students, has been of tremendous value to us.” *Project worker*

In recent times the universities have become more serious about community relations and have volunteering officers who are helping stabilise these relationships and more Neighbourhood Networks are starting to work with student volunteers.

Adult intergenerational projects

There were a number of commissioned projects which had significant intergenerational, or maybe multi-generational, aspects. This was particularly the case where younger older people were encouraged to take part in an older people's organisation as there are multiple generations included within the 50-100 age bracket.

[Float your boat](#) was a project that linked several generations. [Canal Connections](#) initially worked with children and young people on the Leeds Liverpool canal. They saw an opportunity to work with older people, particularly men, offering meaningful activity training as canal boat crew. The men, across the age range, were able to form a good working team. Some of them also found working alongside the groups of young people very stimulating.

“We began taking a group of schoolchildren (age 13) up and down the Aire and Calder Navigation. These kids had learning difficulties and I was struck with the amount of energy they had and their behaviour when boarding ...I had a chat with their teacher, asking him if I was mistaken in seeing a difference “I can’t believe it; they would never interact like this with anyone until they knew them well, never mind total strangers”. This statement had a profound effect on me as I have a brother who has been ‘different’ all his life but never been diagnosed.” *Older volunteer*

Mixing with a variety of people improved the confidence of crew members and a number also felt they had the confidence to take on other voluntary roles.





Toast Love Coffee was a Pay As You Feel community cafe which invited local volunteers to set up and run a range of co-produced groups and activities. Though aimed primarily at older people as the cafe was open in the daytime, in fact they engaged anyone who wanted to join and could get along. Younger older members helped older people with digital activities and a lady in her 80s set up a Knit and Natter group, teaching anyone who came into the cafe.

“You just wouldn’t get this hardly anywhere else - being able to mix with people of all different ages.” *Older person*

As a Neighbourhood Network [Armley Helping Hands](#) usually found themselves working with people in their 70s and 80s, but they could see another generation they needed to engage. The Don’t Call Me Old project grew from this need, working with people in their 50s and 60s who would definitely not call themselves old, but who, for a variety of reasons, found they wanted or needed some support in their lives. Group members might be unemployed, heading for early retirement, or suffering from chronic health conditions that reduced their ability to keep up with their peers. A loss of confidence made them isolated, and then lonely. Armley Helping Hands could see that engaging some of this group in co-produced activities would have the dual effect of reducing their loneliness, and creating a group of volunteers who could help support the oldest members of Armley Helping Hands.

One of the first actions Don’t Call Me Old members got involved in was setting up a new local food bank open to anyone, younger or older, and arranging training for members to be food bank volunteers. The crew then supported the Neighbourhood Network from the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic as the organisation took on the role of community hub, with members helping to deliver food and prescriptions.

“When this project closes I will consider myself blessed to have met people who put others ahead of themselves, turn up for work with a cheery disposition no matter what they are facing in their own personal lives. And they have so much pride and dignity when they put on the Don’t Call Me Old T-shirts.” *Staff member*

Armley Helping Hands is determined to continue involving this younger older generation with their work as it links the organisation so closely to their community.

Intergenerational work during Covid lockdowns

Intergenerational work was particularly affected by Covid lockdowns and disruption, specifically work involving schools who were particularly aware the children represented an infection risk, care homes, and older people's organisations who were anxious about their residents and members. Projects were even more important to some people though, as older people really missed intergenerational communications, and the projects devised various ways to make things work, mostly working with the two groups separately and coming together for shorter periods.

[Cross Gates and District Good Neighbours' Scheme](#) was able to run a project which capitalised on older people's growing willingness to increase their digital skills and students' willingness to share theirs. The Digital Coordinator facilitated a course for complete beginners in a much larger space than the one they usually used. The students could give group members relaxed and chatty 1:1 support to show them how to use tablets or smartphones which enabled the older people to learn at their own pace and practise new skills. The course leader was able to do some preparatory work with the students to brief them on effective teaching techniques and they had a debrief at the end of each session. The whole experience also offered the older people a safe space to interact in as they started face-to-face activity again, and enabled the Neighbourhood Network to forge links with the universities.

How to make intergenerational projects work

The results of the Being Human conversation game, facilitated by [Tea & Tolerance](#) with some younger and older people from Bramley, start to give us some clues about why intergenerational activities work. It turns out that many young people and older people are pretty similar once you get past the superficial differences. Here are some of the questions asked during the game:

What's your favourite hobby? The Elders' was knitting. The Youngers chose football. This introduced one of the themes of the session, which was not being able to move so easily, not being able to be still, and how hard it was to be quiet. A little after this question someone played a 'WILD' card ... the instruction was 'be silent for 10 seconds'. This was really hard for younger participants but they managed it! We all reflected on this and how this gets easier as you get older. Whereas running around and being bursting with energy gets harder.

What superpower would you have? Superpowers wanted ranged from invisibility to teleportation. Also mentioned was the ability to bring people back from the dead. And we had a moment reflecting on people or animals we have lost.

When do you step in? Most Elders and Youngers said that they would step in. Most popular reason was when they saw someone being unfair or hurting someone else. None of us liked the idea of injustice and unfairness. There was a real similarity with how Elders and Youngers felt about this issue.

Who matters most? Family. Everyone said family. It was hard to pick just one member. One Younger talked about love for their dog.

Key learning

- Working in an intergenerational way with any but the youngest children is probably best done in a way that simply offers meaningful activity. The intergenerational effects will generally happen alongside the activity.
- If you want to work with schools, consider their schedules, they have a fixed timetable from week to week and year to year. You might need to talk to them about an activity and plan it in a long way forward.
- Care homes may be more flexible but might also have a daily timetable you will have to work around and a limited number of spaces they can use for activities.
- You might need to commit more time than you think to building relationships of trust when working with schools and care homes. You are bridging the gap between them, and as organisations they have their own priorities.
- Focus on an enjoyable activity.

Case Study: Ageism affect people of all ages

'Ageism affects people of all ages' is one of the key messages of the [Age Proud Leeds campaign](#), led by the Friendly Communities project at Leeds Older People's Forum.

It refers to the idea that ageism is discrimination based on age. It can and does affect us all, at numerous points in our lives. Older people may be stereotyped as incompetent, set in their ways or grumpy. Younger people get badged as lazy, reckless or disrespectful. As well as being unfair and inaccurate, these generalisations create mistrust, fear and distance between the generations. Instead of focusing on what we share, these stereotypes divide us.

To combat this, Age Proud Leeds wanted to involve younger people in discussions around ageism, and bring older and younger people together. In 2020 the team approached [The Preservative Party](#), a group of young volunteers from Leeds City Museum, with a request to meet to discuss how ageism had affected them.

A joint meeting was arranged with the Age Friendly Leeds Steering Group, a group of older people who guide Age Friendly work. The two groups met for the first time on zoom to discuss some 'provocative questions' such as:

"Is ageism worse for younger people or older people?"

The conversation soon started to flow, and the meetings became a regular monthly session. Topics covered ranged from sexism in the workplace, the impact of social media on young people, music, loneliness, politics and fashion to name a few!

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“I enjoy sharing experiences and finding we have things in common, such as that young people feel just as powerless as older people.” (Angie)

After two years the groups created [a short film](#) together about how ageism affects us all. The film recounts examples of ageism as experienced by the individual group members. The group opted to voice each other’s experiences to actively demonstrate how ageism affects people of all ages.

When asked about what we could all do to make society less ageist, the answer was universally about talking and sharing our stories more:

“More mixing. Less segregation...a key moment for me was when one of our group said that she was very shy, and so was her granny...so they both helped each other out and gave each other confidence. We can learn so much from each other...”



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