



Linking Generations Northern Ireland

# An Age-friendly School Project Report Cregagh Community



# Foreword

**As Manager of Linking Generations Northern Ireland I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in this very rewarding and successful project. It has been a very exciting journey taking an intergenerational and school-based approach to the vision of Age-friendly and the issue of social isolation amongst older people.**

This project has shown that schools can be a hub for intergenerational engagement promoting the inclusion, participation and wellbeing of older people and the generations they share their communities with. Schools are a resource that should be utilised by community more in today's society and are a place where generations naturally connect through families, the extension to older people is the icing on the cake.

I believe that intergenerational approaches are vital in the development of Age-friendly communities across NI. We all live as part of multigenerational communities within which all members have an important role to play. Intergenerational work is an important opportunity to connect these roles making communities better for all ages.



“When speaking about the projects success, the Acting Principal of the school Mr Heggarty noted its commitment to the community and commented that “the links between the school and community are becoming more and more blurred....and we don't see each other in terms of age but others that live and work in our community”.

”

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'V. Titterington'.

Vicki Titterington LGNI Manager



# Introduction

In early 2014, Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI) were awarded a grant of just under £8,000 to undertake the Age-friendly School Project in the Cregagh estate (South-East Belfast). The grant was provided by the Belfast Health Development Unit via the Belfast Strategic Partnership and the Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership (HASP) under their Age-friendly: Reducing Isolation grant scheme. The purpose of the project was to run a pilot with Cregagh Primary School and Cregagh Community Association to promote the idea of an age-friendly school and to develop better links with older people in the area while promoting the school as a hub for intergenerational engagement.



**Making life better,  
together**

*Belfast Strategic Partnership*

*Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contributes to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive, building on the positive resources that the young and old have to offer each other and those around them.*

## Linking Generations NI

LGNI advocates for the development and promotion of intergenerational practice as a catalyst for social change in NI. We encourage practitioners to focus on activities which promote greater understanding, closer relations and respect between age groups and provide opportunities to address shared problems.

LGNI do this by:

- Developing and promoting opportunities to bring generations together and build capacity within communities to sustain this approach;
- Supporting the statutory, private and voluntary sectors to recognise all-age approaches and embedding them within their strategies, practices and policies; and
- Encouraging, lobbying and influencing the government to provide support to all-age approaches to address ageism and age segregation in society.

## Age-friendly Belfast

Belfast was the first city in Northern Ireland to join the World Health Organisation's Global Network of Age-friendly cities<sup>1</sup>. In March 2014 the Belfast Age-friendly Plan for 2014 – 2017 was launched. The vision of the plan is that "Belfast will be a city where older people live life to the full". The plan has three themes:

- Age-friendly images – creating a positive view of ageing;
- Age-friendly lives – reducing life inequalities and isolation; and
- Age-friendly neighbourhoods – creating friendly places to live in.

The importance of using intergenerational approaches to deliver the plan is recognised particularly in relation to the age-friendly images and age-friendly neighbourhoods themes.

<sup>1</sup> For more information go to:  
<http://makinglifebettertogether.com/age-friendly/>

# Project Overview

The Age-friendly School Project commenced in April 2014 and ran until January 2015. The project was managed by LGNI with the support of Cregagh Primary School and Cregagh Community Association. It engaged 29 pupils from the Primary 5 class (who, during the project, moved to Primary 6) and 35 older people involved with Cregagh Community Association<sup>2</sup>.

The overall aim of the project was to run a pilot to promote the idea of an Age-friendly school and to develop better links with older people in the area while promoting the school as a hub for intergenerational engagement. In addition to focusing on the three themes of Age-friendly Belfast, the project had the following objectives and outcomes.

## Objectives

- To work collaboratively with local services to identify and support older people through a partnership with Cregagh Primary School and Cregagh Community Association;
- To raise awareness and build capacity about social isolation and older people through hosting a single age session with pupils from Cregagh Primary School discussing isolation and Age-friendly environments;
- Identify and engage older people at risk of isolation through a single age session;
- To engage older and younger people and support them to become more connected through two joint planning sessions and an intergenerational programme relating to the three key themes of Age-friendly Belfast.



## Outcomes:

- Increased societal engagement between older and younger people;
- Older participants reporting increased feelings of community and social inclusion through participation in the project;
- Older and younger people reporting more positive perceptions/attitudes towards other age groups; and
- Provision of a good practice example for other schools to replicate.

<sup>2</sup> Of these a core group of 10 older people regularly attended the project activities

# Project Stages and Activities

## Planning

The project commenced with a planning meeting on 4th April 2014. It was attended by LGNI, a teacher from Cregagh Primary School, a representative from Cregagh Community Association, an older person from the local area and the local youth worker. Subsequent planning meetings were held during the project in June and August.

LGNI also organised a brief meeting at the school for a photo opportunity with some of the pupils to be involved in the project and also older participants and a representative from Cregagh Community Association. This photo was used to promote the project on LGNI's webpage, Facebook and also in local media. The project was also promoted on the school's website.

## Single Age Sessions

Single age sessions took place in early May: one in the morning and one in the afternoon. They were used to explore attitudes to age and to talk about age related issues (such as isolation, perceptions, and age-friendly environments). LGNI, a school representative, a community representative and the project evaluator attended both sessions.

## Joint Age Sessions

Two joint age sessions were held during the project. The first session was held at the start of June. The purpose was to introduce the two age groups to each other, introduce the project, the concept of Age-friendly, and gather ideas from participants. Activities on the day

consisted of introductions – interesting facts, a review of posters from the single identity sessions, and an introduction to the Age-friendly themes. In intergenerational groups participants designed Age-friendly posters depicting what was Age-friendly about their community and how they could make it better. They also came up with a wish list of ideas for activities to enjoy and explore together in the coming months.

The second session took place in September. The purpose was to review what had taken place so far using photos and comments from previous sessions and to gather ideas for future sessions. It was also a useful way of updating the new older person and pupils who had since joined.

## Activities

Different types of activities took place during the year. These were decided by the participants based on their ideas and feedback.





### Physical Activity Day (June)

This involved Active Communities Coaches setting up activity stations around the school sports hall for intergenerational teams to use. These included soft bowls, basketball throw, boccia balls into hoops, tri golf, bean bag target and curling target. Individuals were encouraged to help each other and work together. Medals were presented to all the participants by local Councillor Tommy Sandford and Ronnie Milligan, School Principal.

### Lunch & Bingo Activity Day (July)

During the school holidays the pupils joined the Community Association's older people's regular lunch group. They enjoyed making and eating their pudding of fruit skewers and no-bake tray bakes together. The afternoon concluded with a game of intergenerational paired bingo with prizes.

These activities created a lot of fun and interaction while also encouraging more older people from the lunch group to take part in future intergenerational sessions. The Head Teacher, Vice Principal, teacher, community representatives, PSNI neighbourhood policing

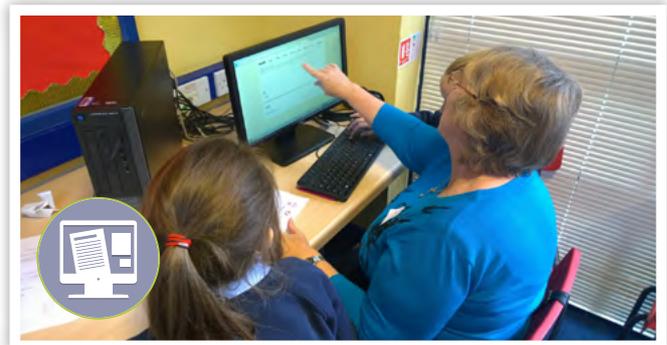
team and summer scheme staff were all in attendance along with the LGNI worker and BJJF CEO who was visiting NI.

### Creative IT Sessions X 3 (September & October)

These sessions were supported by two Go ON NI 'digital champions' from a local Argos store. Using PCs, laptops and iPads they supported the group to carry out a range of IT related activities.

Using Google the group researched facts about their individual dates of birth, even discovering how many seconds old they were and how old they were in dog years - this made for interesting comparisons! Everyone had a turn to use the iPads to research the school and local area and take photos of group members and favourite places in and around the school.

They experimented with text font, size, colour, layout and content to create their own word cloud 'wordles' that were printed off and inserted into individual photo frames with a



group photo as a reminder of their sessions together. The last session also included an enjoyable and competitive Cregagh quiz about the school and local area – working in mixed age teams to come up with the answers. Everyone who took part was presented with their own Go ON NI 'goody bag'.

### Drama/Performance Sessions X 3 (November)

These sessions were held with the support of a local drama facilitator. After discussing and



comparing Christmas traditions, and styles and costs of toys and gifts past and present, participants in intergenerational groups went on to devise new sequences to a Christmas poem 'Twas the night before Christmas'. They had great fun rehearsing and creating actions for it before performing it to the whole school Assembly and to the Pensioners' Christmas lunch.



### Christmas Party (December)

A Christmas party was held on 16th December for all of the participants. Together they made Christmas decorations and then played games such as 'pass the parcel' and 'musical

chairs'. A lunch followed and Christmas cards made by the pupils were given to each of the older people. Evaluation evidence was also gathered through 'vox pops'.

### Final Celebration Event (January)

A celebration event to showcase the project was held on 20th January at Cregagh Primary School. All the participants were invited along with funders and those that had helped support the project. Representatives from BDHU, the BELB, Department of Education attended as did Councillors Gavin Robinson and Tommy Sandford.

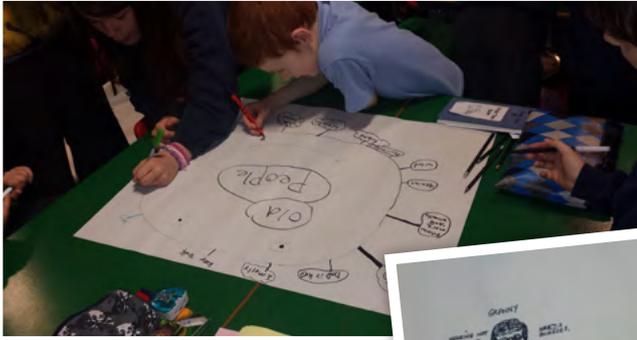
The celebration began with an overview of the project given by the LGNI Development Worker, Lynne Bennett. The pupils and some of the older people then helped to tell the story of



the project and spoke about their experiences. Photos from the project were projected for the audience to see. Each of the participants was then presented with a certificate by Councillor Tommy Sandford. Memory boards were also presented to the school and community association. Following some short speeches, photographs were taken and lunch was provided.

The event ended with participants invited to write their comments about the project on a 'graffiti wall' and complete evaluation forms.

# Evaluation



An external evaluator (Juniper Consulting) was appointed to work with LGNI staff to evaluate the project, specifically its impact and the extent to which the outcomes were achieved.

In addition quarterly monitoring reports were submitted by LGNI to BDHU which reported on the achievement of the project's objectives.

The evaluator attended a number of the project sessions to gather information. The approach involved observations, conversations, vox pops, a graffiti wall and questionnaires.

## Baseline Information

The initial single age sessions were used to gather information on participants' attitudes and perceptions of each other.

Most of the older people attending the session had previously taken part in an intergenerational activity with Cregagh Primary School pupils. They felt that this had helped to improve their perceptions of children and young people and that they now viewed them more positively. The benefits of intergenerational projects were recognised and they were asked to encourage other older people they knew to

take part in this project. Those attending were asked to draw pictures of how they thought young people perceived them and how they would like to be seen.

At the primary school session the pupils were asked to write down words that they felt described older people. They focused on both positive and negative characteristics of their personality, appearance, hobbies and abilities. Many of the comments were based on older people they knew, for example their grandparents. They were also asked to draw pictures of what they thought older people were like.



## Words That Describe Older People

- "Generous"
- "Kind"
- "Loving"
- "Sometimes they shout at you"
- "Bad at computer games"
- "Not good with iPads"
- "Forgetful"
- "Genius"
- "Bad drivers"
- "Keep stuff – their memories"
- "Good Listener"
- "Grumpy"
- "Rude"
- "Wise"
- "Help you with homework"
- "Slow at walking"

## Vox Pops

At the Christmas Party in December participants were invited to capture their thoughts on the project through a short “vox pop” style interview with the evaluator. Each participant was asked a question and their answers were recorded on an iPad.

Questions included:

- What will you remember most about this project?
- How has this project helped older people in Cregagh? (asked to older people)
- What should older and younger people in Cregagh do next?

All of the participants were very enthusiastic about the project. In describing what they remembered most about the project the pupils talked about the activities they enjoyed the most – for the boys this was mainly the sports and the IT activities and for the girls it was the drama/performance activities.

The older participants spoke about what they liked about the project and how the project had helped older people in Cregagh.

Comments included:

*“This project has helped older people and children mix and get to know things about each other, and in my view it’s been very successful.”*

*“I think it’s helped a lot of older people to think what the young children need and what they meant to the older generation...and it helped us to get to know them as much as they got to know us...and for we(us) to respect them and for them to respect us.”*

*“I think it’s done wonders because the children all know us, ones that wouldn’t have known us, and when they see you out in the street they shout your name and say hello to you and wave to us. Whereas before this all started I didn’t know a quarter of them, so you get to know all the children. And such a laugh we’ve had with them, it’s really really good. I think we enjoyed it better than the children.”*

*“It got people out of the house, got people mixing.”*

*“What I like about the project is getting to mix with the young people, and the elderly people all getting together for different things. I found it very very handy getting out and mixing with people, I think it’s great.”*

The comments highlight a number of key words and phrases (such as “mixing”, “respect”, “getting to know” and “getting out (of the house)”) that provide evidence that the project has had an impact on the outcomes, particularly increased feelings of community and social inclusion and more positive perceptions/attitudes.



## Graffiti Wall

Large sheets of paper were placed on the wall at the final celebration event and participants were asked to write on the ‘wall’ their thoughts about the project.

Other comments included:

*“Best year of my life, great kids.”*

*“I really liked the project but my favourite part was meeting all the old people.”*

*“Great project, inspirational, should happen in all communities.”*

## Questionnaires

At the final showcase event participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire about their experience of the project. Nine questionnaires were completed by older people

100% I learnt that I have things in common with young people.

100% I've changed my views and perceptions of young people.

100% I have met (or made friends with) people my age that I didn't know before.

100% I'm now more aware of what's happening in Cregagh (services, events etc).

100% I now take part (or would like to take part) in other activities in Cregagh.

100% This project has helped me feel more part of the Cregagh community.

100% The project has helped me feel better about myself.

and 29 by pupils. Forms were also completed by the school teacher and the community association representative.

## Older People

Older people were asked to answer 'yes' or 'no' to a series of questions and statements about the project. The first question asked if they had previously taken part in a project with young people or children – only one had. They were also asked if they enjoyed the project

and all advised they had. They were then given a series of statements that focused on their personal experiences of the project which aimed to ascertain the impact of the project on their involvement in the community and their wellbeing. There was full agreement with all of the statements.

All also agreed that projects like this can help younger and older people get to know each other better and that they would like to see more age-friendly and intergenerational activities in Cregagh in the future. Comments on the forms included:

*“A truly wonderful and enhancing time in my life.”*

*“Very worthwhile project. Very enjoyable meeting with young people and learning about them.”*

*“It has taught me to respect young ones and for the young ones to respect the older generation.”*

*“I had a brilliant time, and it always gives me something to look forward to. I hope there are many more projects.”*

*“It was very enjoyable and I met new people. I have now started a computer course.”*

*“All I can say is that it was very very good. When I was at the computer course I learnt to use an iPad and I use it at home, it's great.”*

## Pupils

Pupils were also asked on their questionnaire to answer 'yes' or 'no' to a series of questions and statements about the project. Firstly they were asked if they had ever taken part in a project with older people – only eight advised they had. In addition all but one pupil said that they had been looking forward to the project. The pupils were also asked to respond to some statements about the project and older people, focusing on perceptions and engagement. The statements were kept to a minimum because of the age group (9-10 year olds).



All also agreed that projects like this can help younger and older people get to know each other better and that they would like to see more Age-friendly and intergenerational activities in Cregagh in the future. Many of the pupils added comments about how much they liked the activities, while others wrote that they liked...

*"Meeting the older people."*

*"Learning with the older people and playing with them."*

*"The project because the old people were funny."*

*"The project because the older people are great."*

## School Teacher and Community Representative

The form given to the school teacher and community representative focused on the benefits of the project for the participants and the school/community group. Both agreed that the project had a wide range of benefits for participants including developing confidence, gaining respect, learning new things and helping the two age groups to interact. In addition it was felt that the project had contributed to addressing issues of isolation and loneliness amongst the older people. When asked what had been the most beneficial part of the project they commented:

*"The fact that the older and younger people can work together and build strong relationships with each other."*

*"It has been great to see the relationships between older and younger people improve over the time the project ran."*

## Other Information Gathered

The LGNI Regional Development Worker also recorded her observations and some of the comments made by the participants during the activities. Of note is that:

- One of the older people commented on being awarded a medal for taking part in the activity session: "I have never won or

been awarded anything in my life” and another said “This has been one of the best days ever - I never really do much - I really enjoyed being with the children - it was great fun.”

- At least one older participant has credited her improved IT skills from taking part in the IT sessions and having the opportunity to try out iPads in a fun, informal and supportive environment. She was excited to report she had been inspired to start using a tablet she had been previously given but didn't know how to use or for what purpose. She is now using it to compare prices online before going shopping, research cinema film times and reviews and has discovered eBay. Her new found confidence and skills has opened up a whole new digital world to her. Another has been inspired to sign up to a full computer course.
- Herbie, one of the older participants, celebrated his 90th birthday with a cake, a card made by the pupils and a rendition of 'Happy Birthday'. He then made a speech to the whole group, thanking them and telling them about being pleased to have reached the age of 90. This reinforced the bond and connections the group had formed.

### External Support and Recognition

While the evaluation information gathered has evidenced the success of the project it is also important to highlight external support and recognition.

Firstly, during 2014, the Age-friendly School Project was shortlisted for the World Health Organisation Belfast Healthy City Awards under the category 'Healthy Living'. The awards ceremony was held in November and although LGNI did not win, we felt honoured to have



it showcased at this event to a wide range of practitioners from across Northern Ireland and further afield.



Secondly, following an invitation to the celebration event, Jim Wells MLA, Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, wrote a letter to the LGNI Development Worker which noted that:

*“I am very interested to hear about this project to promote an age-friendly school, helping to develop better links with older people living in the Cregagh area of Belfast. This is a very welcome initiative which will benefit the children and older people alike, and it is very much in keeping with the aspirations of the Executive’s new public health framework, Making Life Better.”*

# Conclusions

This final section makes an assessment of the achievement of the project's outcomes and how it contributed to the three themes of Age-friendly Belfast.

A short reflection concludes the report, focusing on key success factors, challenges and opportunities for the future.

## Assessment of Achievement of Outcomes

The Age-friendly school project set out to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Increased societal engagement between older and younger people;
2. Older participants reporting increased feelings of community and social inclusion through participation in the project;
3. Older and younger people reporting more positive perceptions/attitudes towards other age groups; and
4. Provision of a good practice example for other schools to replicate.

The first outcome was to be measured by the number of participants engaging in the project. Approximately thirty-five older people took part, with a core group of 10 attending on a regular basis. Twenty-nine pupils took part.

In terms of the second outcome the evaluation evidence suggests that the project has had a positive impact on feelings of community and social inclusion for older people. This can be seen in the comments and feedback received from the older participants. Only one older person had previously taken part in a project with young people and therefore the project has provided them with new opportunities in their community. One of the participants also noted that as a result of the

project they had started a computer class. The third outcome has also been achieved, again evidenced by the comments of both sets of participants. The questionnaire results also indicate that all of the older and younger participants had changed their views about each other.

In terms of the final outcome, LGNI have produced this document which will be sent to schools to promote the model and encourage them to develop their own projects. LGNI have recently engaged with BELB and Department of Education (who also attended the celebration event) and would welcome the support of Age-friendly Belfast and other relevant funders to enable the roll-out of the Age-friendly school model in other areas.

## Achievement of Age-friendly Belfast Themes

The three themes of Age-friendly Belfast focused on Age-friendly images, lives and neighbourhoods.

### Age-friendly Images – Creating a positive view of ageing.

This was achieved through:

- Discussions around age, stereotypes, and experiences which helped to change views/perceptions of both older and younger people;
- Younger and older participants collaborating and supporting each other during the activities promoting respect and understanding; and
- Creating and performing a Christmas drama piece together which developed imagination, built self-confidence and encouraged joint working.

### **Age-friendly Lives - Reducing life inequalities and isolation**

This was achieved through:

- Engaging older people who had not worked with young people before;
- The school becoming increasingly accessible to older people in the community and an 'intergenerational' hub;
- Creating awareness of facilities and services in the local community that older people can access;
- Providing opportunities for older people to mix and make friends with others in their community;
- Providing opportunities and activities that helped older and younger participants to get to know and understand each other better; and
- IT sessions which introduced older people to basic IT skills and digital equipment with support and encouragement from pupils.

### **Age-friendly Neighbourhoods - Creating friendly places to live in**

This was achieved through:

- Discussions about the Age-friendliness of Cregagh and the creation of Age-friendly posters devising a friendly place to live in;
- Celebrating one of the older participant's 90th birthday thereby valuing and respecting them as part of the group;
- Providing the opportunity to meet a variety of new people and learn new skills; and
- Promotion of community involvement and enhancing links with local services, businesses and agencies.

### **Reflections**

Piloting the Age-friendly school model has been a very rewarding experience for all involved. The success of the project was down to a number of factors, including:

- A designated and experienced worker to coordinate the project – LGNI in this case;
- Buy in, support and commitment from the school and community association;
- A planning group put in place at the outset to oversee the project and monitor its progress;
- Flexibility to adapt the approach as required;
- Team working between all involved; and
- Good communication.

There were also challenges faced during the project including:

- Finding suitable times for activity sessions in the busy schedules of both the school pupils and the older participants; and
- Recruiting older people - this can be difficult and therefore LGNI sought alternate methods by linking with the community association's seniors' lunch group.

Moving forward there are many opportunities for Cregagh to continue on the Age-friendly journey and for the school to act as a hub for intergenerational engagement. Indeed the community association has recently started another intergenerational project with the local youth club, funded by Castlereagh PCSP.

We would encourage the school and community association to continue their Age-friendly journey through further joint activities, especially at key times of the year, and by promoting volunteering opportunities in the community and school, for example mentoring and befriending.

I thought it was really good mixing and knowing people from the estate 😊

amazing old people from  
best thing ever  
❤️ Ellie

Very good project  
Positive to see intergenerational work - well done!

Best year of my life  
Great kids

I thought it was really good mixing and knowing people from the estate 😊

LOVE OLD PEOPLE!



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**Making life better,  
together**  
Belfast Strategic Partnership



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