



## Linking Generations Northern Ireland

Report and evaluation of:

### ‘Linking, Learning – Growing Together’

Developing linkages between the residents of Kirk House  
Care Home Belfast and their local community

(March 2016 to Jan 2017)



**Project supported by Awards for All**

Report produced 2017 by LGNI

**LOTTERY FUNDED**

# 1. Background

Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI) is dedicated to making a future for all ages. We are one of just two organisations in the UK (the other is Generations Working Together (GWT), Scotland) solely advocating for intergenerational (IG) practice. We take the lead to influence this work in NI. We work to promote IG practice across all sectors as a catalyst for social change. We lobby and encourage; offer advice and expertise; facilitate learning about IG application; and run demonstration projects to help build awareness, understanding and skills.

LGNI is part of Beth Johnson Foundation (BJF), a UK national charity. Our connection with BJF brings linkage to expertise in the UK, European and international fields of intergenerational practice. We have a team of five people in NI, four of whom work part time.



International research has consistently indicated that the use of effective and informed intergenerational practice delivers improved well-being outcomes for the individual participants of all ages, contributes to building stronger, more cohesive communities and a more collaborative society<sup>1</sup> 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 has a vision of an Age-friendly NI and since 2008 we have worked for a NI where all generations are respected, understood, connected and engaged together in their communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Springate, I., Atkinson, M. and Martin, K. (2008). Intergenerational Practice: a Review of the Literature (LGA Research Report F/SR262). Slough: NFER

## Our Definition of Intergenerational Practice

***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 and builds on the positive resources that the young and old have to offer each other and those around them.***

## Our Principles

In delivering our work, we promote and adhere to the core principles of IG practice<sup>2</sup> which are:

- Mutual and reciprocal benefits for all generations
- Participatory
- Asset-based,
- Well planned
- Culturally grounded
- Strengthens community bonds and promotes active citizenship
- Challenges ageism
- Cross-disciplinary

Linking Generations has been in existence since 2009, initially enabled with funding from The Atlantic Philanthropies. Since then, we have received funding for a variety of projects through a variety of sources, most significantly the Department of Justice, Big Lottery and the Public Health Agency.

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<sup>2</sup> MATES (2009). Mainstreaming Intergenerational Solidarity (Online). Available at: <http://www.matesproject.eu/> accessed Mar 2017

## **2. About this project**

Much of our work has been about engaging groups and institutions which deal with just one age group, such as youth groups, schools, older peoples' groups and sheltered housing accommodation for older people. In 2015, we connected with My Home Life, a movement to improve the lives of people living, working and visiting care homes. We were particularly inspired by the aspirations of My Home Life that connect local communities closer to care homes and wanted to trial this work here in Northern Ireland. We were of course aware of the many existing connections that schools and youth groups have with care homes, usually involving singing carols at Christmas or providing other such entertainment. Whilst we welcome this intergenerational activity, it often does not meet our principles and definition as fully as we would like. We wanted to develop a project with a care home that fully engaged with our definition of intergenerational practice and the principles of our practice. Having met Andrea Selby, Manager of Kirk House, at My Home Life events, we began talking about how we might do this. In 2015/6, we developed and submitted a proposal and were awarded a small grant of £9945 from Big Lottery Fund Awards for All. We wanted to use this funding to develop and deliver a project that would enable us to learn about what works in connecting care homes to communities. It was particularly important to us that this project had longevity. We planned to run the activities for 11 months from March 2016 through to the end of January 2017.

In keeping with the Awards for All general objectives, the project was designed to:

- Bring people together and increase community activity and volunteering
- Involve more people in community activity
- Increase skills and activity, and
- Improve quality of life

### **What did we do?**

Prior to the application, we had spoken to the project partners who were: Kirk House Care Home and three community partners, who would each engage in a series of meetings with residents of Kirk House. These community partners were: Gilnahirk Primary School, Our Lady and St Patrick's College Knock and Knock Methodist Church Scouts and Guides. When we received word that we had been successful, we went back to the partners and began to plan the project. The guides and scouts were no longer able to take part and so we identified another community youth partner which was Tullycarnet Youth Club, who are supported by a worker from Charter NI.

Our idea was to have each of these community partners connect more closely with the care home.

**Community Partner 1: Gilnahirk Primary School**

We started with Gilnahirk Primary School in April 2017 with an arts-based project, as this was an activity that participants had expressed an interest in. Andrea Selby, Kirk House Manager, adapted the Alzheimers' Society Dementia friend training and delivered a session to the Primary 6 Class in March 2016. This was well received by the children and Andrea was impressed by their intelligent questions. Ken Irvine, LGNI Development Officer also delivered an age awareness session to the class, discussing age and how we are all impacted by ageism.

In May 2016, the residents from Kirk House travelled the half mile to the school by taxi. Shauna Magowan, Community Artist, facilitated 4 art sessions on 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> May and the 7<sup>th</sup> June, where residents and children had the opportunity to talk about their lives, share stories and record some of their personal histories. Shauna worked with the group to decide what they wanted to do and they decided that they wanted to print a collage of their work. One collage was completed for hanging in Kirk House, and one for hanging in Gilnahirk Primary.



Gilnahirk Primary School pupils and Kirk House residents took part in art workshops together



Every participant got a certificate to recognise their participation



Printed friendship collage hanging in Kirk house and being admired by Sammy, resident.



### **Community Partner 2: Tullycarnet Youth Club**

The youth club volunteers for the project took part in Dementia Friend training on 28<sup>th</sup> September, which was again delivered by Andrea from Kirk House, accompanied by Sammy, a resident of Kirk House. The group also had a discussion about ageism and age awareness, facilitated by Ken from LGNI.



On four Wednesday nights in October 2016: 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, the young people came to Kirk House and took part in a reminiscence project with the residents group. These sessions were really interactive and allowed the younger and older people time to get to know each other. The theme for this project was fashion through the ages and the group used memory boxes from the Museum which were 'Clothes for going out in in the

40s and 50s' and 'Beauty and Hair'. This culminated in a vintage fashion show which was put on by the younger and older people to which local people and families were invited. This took place on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> October.



Invitation to the vintage fashion show in Kirk House, October 2016



Fashionistas modelling at the fashion show in Kirk House, October 2016

### ***Community Partner 3: Our Lady and St Patrick's College Knock (OL&SPCK)***

The College has a St. Vincent de Paul group, which is drawn from all years within the school. Volunteers from this group came to Kirk House on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2016 to take part in Dementia friend training and an age awareness sessions which was again delivered by Andrea, Kirk House Manager accompanied by Sammy, Kirk House resident and Ken from LGNI. On 10<sup>th</sup> November students then had a first meeting with residents in Kirk House and then on 17<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> November; 1<sup>st</sup> December and 5<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> January 2017, students welcomed Kirk House residents to the College when they worked together in the computer suite, drank tea and coffee and chatted, sharing ideas and stories using digital skills. The groups also worked together to plan and create images to advertise the final 'showcase' event, which took place in OL&SPCK on 30<sup>th</sup> Jan 2017.

Maria, Phyllis and Megan in the IT suite at OL&SPCK



### **Showcase event in OL&SPCK on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2017**

This event was organised by students from the college with the support of teachers from both schools, Kirk House residents and Ken from LGNI. It was organised to enable all participants to celebrate their involvement and reflect on what it meant to them. It was well attended and we had some emotional and personal reflections from participants of all ages.



Pupils from Gilnahirk Primary speaking at the Celebration event in Jan 2017

Celebrating our new connections at Our Lady & St. Patrick's College Knock, Jan 2017



### 3. Project Outcomes

We evaluated the project by collecting the following data:

- Conversations with the Principal of Gilnahirk Primary School, LGNI worker and Manager of Kirk House
- Surveys completed by all participants
- Focus group discussion with residents of Kirk House
- Recording moments in pictures and in comments made during sessions and at the celebration event

A video outlining the project can be found here: <http://linkinggenerationsni.com/living-learning-growing-together-connecting-kirk-house/>

#### **The key findings of the evaluation were:**

- Older people enjoyed the social contact, felt valued and happy as a result of taking part in the project
- Approx. 100 participants engaging in art, reminiscence, digital and relationship-building across generations over a period of 11 months
- Approx. 70 young people took part in Dementia Friend training
- Many of the participants recognised that their pre-conceived notions of 'old' and 'young' were wrong
- Kirk House deepened and widened their connections with the local community
- Two schools and a youth club in the area developed their connections with the local community
- The connections between Kirk House and the local schools has continued to developed with ongoing projects planned through Autumn and Winter terms in 2017.

#### **Older people – Kirk House Care Home (part of Belfast Central Mission group)**

The residents of Kirk House expressed enjoyment in taking part. Sammy, who was one of the most vocal and during the celebration event, he said 'thank you for coming in to our lives. You are a credit to your school and your families. My goodness, each and every one of you saying 'good morning' to me today!' At the focus group, another resident talked about the previous home they had lived in and said that 'it was deadly there, nothing ever happened, they did nothing' and went on to say that she moved to Kirk House because she knew there would be more opportunities for social activity there.

The survey results showed that 100% of the older people said they enjoyed being with the younger people; 88% said that taking part made them feel happy and feel better about themselves; and all agreed that taking part made them feel better connected to the local community and that it helped them to understand younger people better.

## **Younger people – Gilnahirk Primary School pupils**

The school children from Gilnahirk Primary School started the project in their P6 year and completed it during their P7 year. The whole of the class attended the celebration event in January 2017 and James, a Primary 7 pupil said to the Kirk House residents, 'Thank you for being bothered to come and see us in school.' Kate said 'It was a great experience and I would really like to do it again.' Callum said 'I have a family member who lives in Kirk House so I enjoyed spending time with him. My mum is a dementia campaigner and I really enjoyed learning about dementia.'

The school Principal commented during interview in June 2016 that the project sessions provided valuable opportunities for the young people to practice their speaking and listening skills. He said that this valuable part of literacy development was sometimes neglected in our fast passed family and school lives and that this project was particularly valuable for that reason.

***'We began to love our friends at Kirk House. I think taking part has encouraged us all to spend a bit more time with our grandparents. Honestly, this project made my P6 year!'***

Pupil from GPS speaking at celebration event, Jan 2017

## **Younger People – Tullycarnet Youth Club** (a Charter NI supported youth project)

The eight regular attendees from the youth club were aged between 14 and 18, and were half and half boys and girls. In the surveys they completed, 100% of them agreed that:

- They enjoyed being with the older people
- The project taught them new things
- The project helped them to understand older people better
- The project helped them to feel better about themselves
- The project helped them to understand dementia

## **Younger People – Our Lady and St. Patricks College Knock**

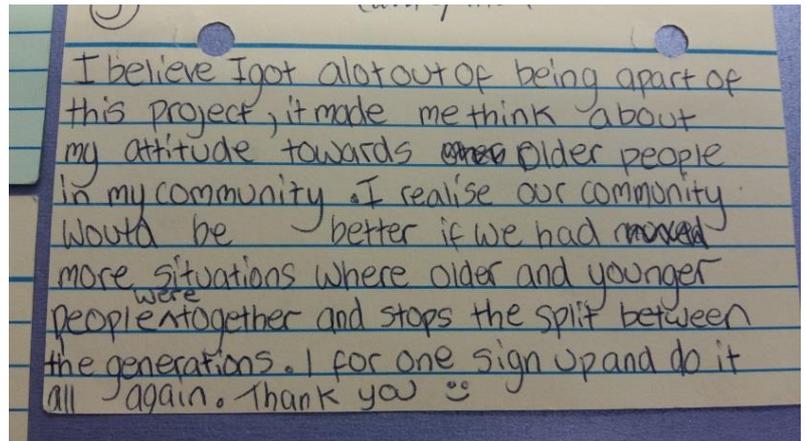
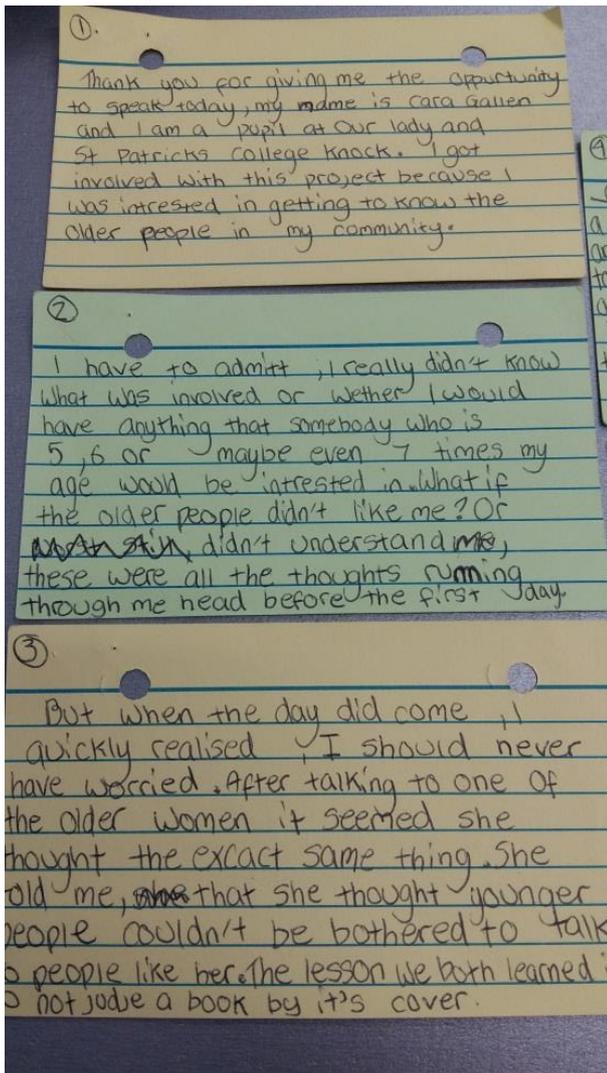
The St. Vincent De Paul Society group which meet within the school took part in the project. Most of these were girls and about 50 % were aged between 11 and 14 and 50% aged between 15 and 18.

100% agreed that

- They enjoyed being with the older people
- The project helped them to understand older people better
- The project helped them to understand dementia

- 94% agreed that
- The project taught them new things
- The project helped them to feel better about themselves

At the final celebration event, which was hosted in Our Lady and St. Patrick's College Knock, several of the students spoke about their experiences. The pictures below are of Cara Gallen's speaking notes and clearly show the impact that the project had on her.



## Recommendations and learning

The project had initially planned to connect with a guide group from a local church but this was logistically difficult, due to the meeting times of the guides and scouts. We found it much easier to work with schools, as they have the resource of teachers who are able to accompany children and also have more flexibility with availability, with the use of after-school programming as an option. This worked well with both the primary and post primary school who took part.

Delivery of the Dementia Friend training by Andrea Selby, Manager of Kirk House was very successful. The materials required small adaptation to be used with younger children and teenagers but the sessions were very well received by the children, with intelligent and honest questions being asked by the children in preparation for meeting the Kirk house residents, some of whom have a dementia diagnosis. It is recommended that any project aiming to connect care homes with communities should incorporate dementia awareness sessions prior to the project starting.

The use of art as a means to connect generations is effective. It allows conversations to develop over a shared activity. Participants appeared to be more relaxed when taking part in the art sessions and this has been shown to be an effective and informal way to build relationships across generations.

The role of the LGNI Development Worker was crucial to the success of this project. That worker maps the area, talks to local organisations about coming together, facilitates the initial meetings and then works to nurture and support the linkages made. In this case, the linkages between the two schools and the youth club. Once these relationships between group organisers, such as teachers and staff at Kirk house are established, the connections can continue beyond the life of the funding. The beauty of connecting a school and a care home is that both have resources that can be shared at no, or very little, cost.

For more information, please visit [www.linkinggenerationsni.com](http://www.linkinggenerationsni.com) tel 02891813022