

Children write letters and make crafts for pensioners



Charlene Lappin, representative of the Ballygowan Community Association, Harry Lowey, Jax Moffet, Cassie Massey, Brodie McMaster and principal Richard Lawther.



Pupils from schools in the Ballygowan area have been writing Christmas cards for elderly which are being delivered by Ballygowan Community Association. Carrickmannon Primary School pupils Eva-Jane Floyd, Sarah Galway and James Bradley are here posting the cards with Charlene Lappin, Ballygowan Community Association, Sharon Lennon, Principal and Vicki Titterington, Linking Generations. B1-23-12-21

Ballygowan schools reach out to elderly at Christmas

Annie Stewart

a.stewart@ardschronicle.co.uk

PRIMARY schools in Ballygowan have come together to make sure the elderly in the area received a Christmas card and craft this year.

Carrickmannon Primary School have been writing letters and Alexander Dickson Primary School have been writing letters and making crafts to hand out local pensioners. The idea came from Linking Generations project, the Kindness Post Box, where people in the community write letters to be delivered to local care homes. As there are no care homes within the Ballygowan area, Linking Generations teamed up with the Ballygowan Community Association and the schools to ensure older people, who may be feeling lonely or vulnerable during the pandemic, get something this Christmas. Vicki Titterington, from Linking Generations (LG), collected the letters and crafts from the schools on December 15 and delivered them to the older people in Ballygowan. "This is inspired by one of Linking Generations group members in Fermanagh and Omagh, the

Kindness Post Box," she said.

"We've brought this to Ballygowan and lots of schools right across Northern Ireland that are doing this work using LG resources and we're just really, really thankful for all our supporters." The aim of the group is to try and link older and younger people through joint projects to tackle anti-social behaviour, combat loneliness and educate.

"With Linking Generations, we try to keep generations connected and while it's not easy to do face-to-face at the minute, we're looking at innovative ways to connect people," said Vicki. "Christmas offers a perfect opportunity. Lots of people are being kept apart from other generations and their families so what we're hoping is that this lets them know other people are thinking of them and it spreads a bit of Christmas cheer and connection at a time when we are all being kept apart."

Charlene Lappin, of Ballygowan Community Association, said the group is delighted to be involved. "The Ballygowan Community Association are delighted to be here and we're very glad to have the opportunity to be involved with this project," she said.

"It's great that it's happening as it links the children with the seniors. It's lovely for the

seniors to be receiving these cards particularly at Christmas time.

"We haven't been able to see the children's nativity plays of both Carrickmannon and Alexander Dickson, so it's lovely to be involved in this."

Both schools said the children really enjoyed taking part and that it was a learning opportunity to discuss the issues around the pandemic and loneliness at Christmas.

Carrickmannon Primary School principal, Sharon Lennon, said the children loved getting involved as in previous years they would have invited the seniors to their Christmas service and nativity.

"It was a way for the children to actually connect to the older people we haven't been able to see now for the past couple of years," she said.

"They embraced it fully as soon as they heard what it was about. The little ones got theirs all typed up for them because they were worried that older people maybe couldn't read their writing."

Sharon said the school prides itself on being part of the community and for the children, this project was a chance to learn about what an older person may feel isolating throughout the pandemic.

"The Ballygowan Community Association are

fantastic and being the conduit between groups and let us get out into the community. It is really hard as a school to do it on your own."

The P7 class said they enjoyed writing the letters to the older people and that they wrote about their hobbies, families, favourite animals and lots of different things. They said they think the older people will feel happy, excited and less lonely. When asked how they thought the older people were feeling over the pandemic, Katie Meharry said she thought they felt lonely. Abbie Scott said she thought they would feel isolated because no-one would have been able to visit them.

James Bradley said he thought the elderly might have felt afraid because they are more vulnerable to Covid. James Cleland said getting the letters will 'make them happy and know that someone is thinking about them'.

Alexander Dickson Primary School principal, Richard Lawson, explained the kids really enjoyed the project and used it as an opportunity to teach them that sometimes Christmas isn't enjoyable to people.

"We do our traditional carol services, the nativities, the Santa visits and make it a really fun time," said Richard.

"We want them to also to try and appreciate that for some people Christmas isn't as enjoyable as we would find it.

"We wanted to just send a message out to those in the community who are maybe a bit more isolated, maybe vulnerable and lonely, that while we are having all this fun on the run-up to Christmas, we're still thinking about them.

"We were led by our children, we talked to them about the Kindness Post Box and we got the website up and spoke to them about the history of them. We talked about Carrickmannon and ourselves doing the letter, and the children came up with the idea that they wanted to do something a bit different, a bit more crafts related or something else and they've really enjoyed it."

As a school, Richard believes this kind of project is really important for building links within the community.

"It's really important. As a village school we are in the community, and we want to be in the community, but over the last 18 months it's been difficult because we haven't been able to get out into the community or bring the community into the school as we usually do," said Richard.

"It's really important to us to be involved to show people we're not just a school where the children come in and they do their usual school things and that's it. We want to be very much part of the community especially in a village, we very much want to be part of the community and that's important to us.

"We just want to thank the community association and Vicki's team as well for the support because they are very good with us and for us as well.



Alexander Dickson Primary School P1 and P2 pupils Alyssa Moffett, Oliver Irvine, Bailey Carruthers, Jack Quinn, Arlo Apsley and Jorgie Allington posting Christmas cards written for elderly in the area. They are here with Vicki Titterington, Linking Generations and Charlene Lappin, Ballygowan Community Association. B3-23-12-12