



# Linking Generations Northern Ireland

## Final Report and Evaluation

### *Building an Age-friendly Ballykeel*

*An Intergenerational Project engaging members of Ballykeel Development Association, Bright Stars Youth Club members and their extended families and friends.*

*January to March 2018*

Funded by NIHE Community Cohesion

## About us

The Beth Johnson Foundation is a UK wide charity that works to make a positive impact on the lives of older people, to gain recognition for the valuable role that older people play in society and to challenge age discrimination and stereotyping.



Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI) is part of the Beth Johnson Foundation. We are the development body for intergenerational practice, we work to promote the concept across all sectors. We advocate for the approach; offer advice and expertise; facilitate learning about its application; and run demonstration projects to help establish awareness, learning and skills

## Building an Age-friendly NI

In 2007, the World Health Organisation launched a global Age-friendly guide, designed to encourage us to embrace the opportunities and challenges that the ageing population provides. Here in NI, local councils are beginning to embrace the Age-friendly agenda, with about a third of our local authorities now having, or developing, Age-friendly plans for their communities.

We want NI to be Age-friendly. An important part of this is that generations are respected, understood, connected and engaged together in their communities, and this is the role of intergenerational practice.

Intergenerational practice tackles ageism and brings people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities. It is globally recognised as an appropriate response to both tackling the challenges and embracing the opportunities of our ageing planet. Based on our experience and research, we encourage focus on promoting greater understanding, closer relations and respect between age groups and provide opportunities to address shared problems.

## 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.*

## Core Principles of Intergenerational Practice

- **Mutual and Reciprocal Benefits**

Intergenerational Practice (IP) is based on the principle of all participating generations gaining benefit.

- **Participatory**

Successful IP is based on the aspirations of the generations participating; What do those participating want to and expect to get out of it, what do they want to achieve?

- **Asset Based**

IP is assets based. It works with the generations to help them to discover their strengths and then builds on these for success, understanding and mutual respect.

- **Well Planned**

The evidence is that the principles of good programme design are just as essential to successful IP as any other project.

- **Culturally Grounded**

There cannot be common programmes that will work in all settings. Whilst the principles behind the approach may be the same, the needs, context and attitudes of people may differ widely and need to be taken in to account.

- **Strengthens Community Bonds**

Its emphasis on positive connection, recognising and building on people's strengths, is an effective way of building stronger, better connected communities with citizens who are more engaged in local democracy and social concerns.

- **Challenges Ageism**

IP provides a mechanism for the generations to meet, work and explore together, rediscovering the reality of who they really are and what they have to gain from being more involved with the other generation.

- **Cross-disciplinary**

IP provides a vehicle and an opportunity to broaden the experience of professionals to working in a more inclusive way and to become involved with other groups to enable them to think much more broadly about how they undertake their work.

*Adapted from "Guide of ideas for planning and implementing intergenerational projects Together yesterday, today and tomorrow" MATES, Teresa Almeida Pinto et al, 2009*

## **1. About the project**

- **Preparation work**

LGNI has been involved in the Feel Safe and Sound Partnership, facilitated by Mid and East Antrim Age Well Partnership for several years. Through this partnership working, we have identified the need to build stronger and more positive relationships between generations in the Mid and East Antrim Areas. The local PSNI officers attending the partnership identified particular areas where they believed an intergenerational approach may be useful and LGNI Development staff worked with local groups in that area to submit applications to NIHE Community Cohesion Unit, in order to fund two projects. One of these projects was developed in partnership with Linn Road Community Centre Management Committee and the other with Ballykeel Together in Ballymena. This report refers to the work in Ballykeel, Ballymena.

- **Identify and engage**

In the summer of 2017, LGNI staff met with Sandra Kilpatrick and Laura Dewar from Ballykeel Together to discuss plans for intergenerational engagement. It was hoped that we could run the project before Christmas 2017 but due to several factors, the project start date was put back to January 2018. It was decided to work to engage older adults from the Mature Adults Luncheon Club with members of the Bright Stars Youth Club (young people with a learning disability) and their extended families. The sessions would be based alongside the youth club sessions in Ballykeel Community Centre with the aim of developing positive relationships between the generations in Ballykeel

- **Plan and Develop:**

The first session in early 2018 consisted of LGNI staff member Lynne Bennett facilitating a discussion around age awareness to draw out what varying age groups have in common with each other whilst celebrating their differences. This then led on to fun joint-age games and arts and craft activities involving making pom poms and paper flowers and then using clay to construct figures and objects. The purpose

of this was to help everyone get to know each other a bit better and feel comfortable with each other.



- **Deliver Project:**

The project then ran for a further 5 weeks to the 21st of March. During these sessions, the young people, their parents, carers and group leaders enjoyed developing confidence and new skills together. Tutor Charmaine McMeekin used games to integrate dance and movement into sessions. This also helped build focus and attention in the group. The parents, carers and group leaders were of varying ages and even though the group meet regularly, this project offered them lots of opportunities for all ages to take part in dance, movement, art and craft activities together to the best of their ability. The last session involved a performance of the dance/movement piece they had been developing, an energetic group 'hokey cokey' making Easter cards and birds and magnetic note holders, party food and ending with participants of all ages being presented with a certificate for participation





## 2. Project Evaluation

The findings showed that there were **19 young people and 9 'older people'** who participated in the project. The childrens' ages ranged from 4 – 18 years.

- **The Overall outcome that we set out to achieve was:**

Relationships between younger and older people in the Ballykeel area will have developed positively, and as a result of taking part in the project, participants will:

- **Report an increase in their confidence**
- **Feel better connected to their neighbours**
- **Feel more part of their community**
- **Have more positive perceptions of the other generation as a result of taking part**

LGNI used an evaluation form to ask participants their opinion and also a 'focus group' for the very young children, using flip charts and discussion to capture their views and experiences. Of those that completed the evaluation form:

- 81% said it made them feel better about themselves
- 91% said it made them feel better connected to their neighbours
- 100% said it made them feel better connected to their community
- 100% said it made them think more positively about the other generation

- **Limitations and learning**

The wide age range and abilities of young people 4 – 18 years plus a 30 year old proved challenging. The large size of the hall they met in created issues in communicating instructions to the group.

Recruitment of older people was also challenging in this project. Although the application had been proposed by the older persons' group, the atrocious weather during the lifetime of the project meant that none of the intended older members attended due to the snow, ice, wind and torrential rain on the Wednesday nights! We regularly asked group leaders to encourage older persons' attendance by showing photos and video clips from the sessions to encourage them to come along, even stating that the less mobile of them would be able to sit and do armchair activities. It was also a little difficult initially encouraging some parents to take part.

## **Conclusion**

This project has met the objectives laid out in the application form. The findings are evidence that this work connects to the communities in transition theme of the NIHE community Cohesion Strategy, because it built 'relationships within and between people and communities, promoted participation in community development... and encouraged greater community cohesion' within an NIHE estate (NIHE community cohesion strategy, quoted from page 18, Theme 3. Communities in transition).

Bringing people of all ages and abilities together has benefited everyone and they supported and helped each other. It was noted that parents, carers and leaders were interacting and talking to each other more and there was a real buzz in the room.

Whilst the participation of older people was not as we would have liked, new connections between all the members and extended families of the Youth Group have been developed and cemented. The Group are keen to develop the dance and movement activity and also arts and crafts. With longer evenings and better weather it is hoped that the older members of the original group of Ballykeel Together Development Association will attend the youth group sessions to encourage interaction.



***And finally.... some quotes from participants:***

Older participants:

*I liked working with and connecting to different people of different ages and abilities.*

*I liked seeing the kids mix and the adults chatting about things they had in common*

*I have learned a lot about other age groups – we all go through the same stuff and we are not alone.*

Younger participants:

*I liked the dancing and making friends.*

*I liked it when everyone of all ages was joining in and helping.*

*It has been good watching the older ones having fun with us and being silly and having a laugh too.*

*I have met and made new friends of all ages.*

Leaders' comments:

*The young people have benefited from working together with mainstream children – all different abilities being together.*

*The young people have gained enjoyment that was evident to see from interacting and having fun and exercise with all age groups.*

*The group plan to keep up with the dancing and movement and also add in some arts and crafts.*



***.For further information about this project, please contact LGNI on:  
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