



Linking Generations NI Christmas Connections Small Grant Scheme 2023 Report



Introduction

With funding support from the Public Health Agency, Linking Generations NI were delighted to be able to award 20 small grants of £125 each, in late 2023, to enable festive intergenerational activities to happen right across Northern Ireland in the month of December. The grants scheme was launched on the 1st October 2023 to mark Positive Ageing Month in NI and the response to the opportunity was overwhelming, with more than 110 grant applications received!

Impact of Grants

These grants act as a catalyst to create sustainable connections in bringing older and younger people together. The impact of these connections is detailed below, but as well as creating new opportunities, it also builds confidence and expertise among facilitators to develop and implement intergenerational projects. In fact, one of our successful grantees stated that the launch of this grant was the reason she finally began to plan an intergenerational event within her own setting, after several years of simply thinking about it!

So many new connections were made with a total of 990 participants, from nursery age to 80+, taking part in intergenerational activities! This report highlights that the benefits and knock on effects have been huge for the people who took part, the community leaders who developed the activities and the groups/organisations and settings that hosted them!

As we've navigated our way through the covid years and all the challenges those brought, these grants for many were an opportunity to return to unrestricted, face to face interactions and rekindle the activities and connections that were formed prior to the lockdowns. For others, it was the perfect to introduce an intergenerational approach to their organisation's regular Christmas activities.

This evaluation report also details the activities and feedback from those involved (208 Participants and 20 group leaders were surveyed).

Some Vital Stats!

Our evaluation responses show that through developing connections with people of another generation in their community and taking part in the Christmas Connections intergenerational activity, participants felt more connected to their community, welcomed and respected and were keen to engage in further intergenerational activity!

- **88%** stated that as a result of their involvement they now felt more connected to their community
- **98%** said they felt welcomed and well-treated
- **94%** stated that as a result they would like to do something with a different age group again



The Headline Findings for Groups & Participants

Intergenerational Benefits

Reducing ageism:

- “Even if we’re different ages, we have something in common.”
- “The old folks were fun to chat to.”
- “The older people were easier to talk to than I first thought.”

Lessening stereotypes:

- “We all feel the same, enjoy getting out, meeting people and chatting.”
- “Young people are not the way they are portrayed.”
- “Not everyone of old age has memory loss.”

More Cohesive Communities:

- “Didn’t know history/culture of local area but were very interested.”
- “I enjoyed getting to talk with the older people within my community.”
- “Enjoyed the opportunity to come together as a community.”

Mutual Benefits and Respect:

- “I would like to say I loved doing this and would love to do it again.”
- “Talking to the children lifted my spirits. We had fun, especially making the decorations and working things out together.”
- “I enjoyed interacting with everyone.”

We loved the feedback from our Christmas Connections participants!



88% of participants felt more connected to their community as a result



98% of participants said they felt welcomed and well treated as a result of taking part!

Comments from the Project Leaders about what they had learned included:



- “The children had a better understanding of the older generation and loved asking questions. Our senior group enjoyed the energy of the children and how they weren't shy in what questions they asked!”
 - “How positive it is for everyone involved, children, residents and staff from both organisations. The parents were keen for their child to participate in this kind of experience.”
- “We learnt how much the resident’s enjoyed engagement with children particularly those who did not have any family involvement. Resident’s moods were much brighter and children were very patient with residents who were repetitive due to their dementia.”

Feedback from the Project Leaders

The projects funded not only provided great learning for the young and old people taking part, but also for those who planned, organised and delivered the initiatives. We have highlighted their feedback under each of the 8 core principles that our intergenerational work adheres to (Pinto et al, 2009).

1. Mutually and reciprocally beneficial - each generation participating learns with and from each other. Project leaders told us:

- “The benefits to everyone involved were invaluable - it has helped minimize feelings of isolation, depression and loneliness. It has helped our residents re-connect with their local community and new friendships have been formed.”

2. Participatory - based on the aspirations and needs of those participating. Project leaders told us:

- “This was our first intergenerational project with a special needs school. We wanted it to be inclusive and after discussion with the school they strongly agreed an activity like this would be extremely beneficial to the students and all involved.”

3. Assets based - working with the generations to help them to discover their strengths. Project leaders told us:

- “Children and residents enjoyed reminiscing and chatting about shared interests and it was nice to watch everyone's creativity come to the forefront and a sense of achievement for their efforts with the finished Christmas wreaths.”

4. Well planned - project leaders told us:

- “We applied for the Christmas grant and organised an event with our local care home. We spoke with their activities co-ordinator and discussed possible activity ideas. We got permission from our parents, completed risk assessments and relevant documents.”

5. Culturally grounded - tailored to the individual needs, context and attitudes of those participating. Project leaders told us:

- “Need to have purposeful games to help engage everyone.”

6. Strengthening community bonds - promote active citizenship. Project leaders told us:

- “We mixed around our seating plan and the children were side by side with residents at the activities, allowing natural discussion to flow and engagement to take place.”

7. Challenges ageism - Project leaders told us:

- “The children had a better understanding of the older generation and loved asking questions. Our senior group enjoyed the energy of the children and how they weren't shy in what questions they asked!”

8. Cross-disciplinary -providing a vehicle for broadening the experience of professionals and encourage more inclusive working. Project leaders told us:

- “We held a woodcraft workshop with youth local groups. The workshop’s objective was to encourage children to learn about woodwork and make basic wooden items like a stool, bookshelf, crate.”

LGNI are delighted that as a result of involvement....





Foundations of Wellbeing

LGNI's small grants scheme always showcases fantastic work and gives evidence to support the impact of intergenerational approaches to address health and wellbeing, social isolation, loneliness and improve **Community Connections**. **100 %** of participating groups and individuals practiced at least one foundation for wellbeing:

Give:

- All projects involved an element of mutual volunteering: older people share with younger people and younger people with older.

Be Active:

- Many projects involved physical movement - dancing, singing, moving about displays and making things.

Take Notice:

- Participants may have taken more notice of the world because the event was out of the ordinary for them.

Keep Learning:

- Across the projects older people explained things like Christmas traditions, recipes and old games to young people who discovered these 'new' things and in return helped older people learn about their lives and re-discover the enthusiasm of youth.

Connect:

- Participants connected with new people of different ages and expressed huge desire to keep connecting.

The evidenced outcomes of **Christmas Connections grants** activities and alignment with the Foundations of Wellbeing also contributes to the building of an **Age-friendly Northern Ireland** particularly within the themes of respect and social inclusion and social participation. Considering the number of schools and education settings involved, they make a considerable contribution to the **Department for Education's Every School a Good School Policy** by supporting the establishment of school links with the community. The high numbers of Care Home settings involved aligns Christmas Connections grants outcomes with the achievement of The **Department of Health Care Home Standards** relating to Contact with Family, Friends and the Local Community.

The Christmas Connections Activities!

Bushmills Meet and Munch Group



During the three weeks in December, we invited the P7 children from our local primary school to join us to talk about Christmas now and compare it to what the members had grown up with. We made our own Christmas decorations and on the last day had a Christmas Party Lunch. Two members of staff accompanied the children and were involved as well. The atmosphere was amazing once everyone had met up and got chatting. There was laughter and the children became so confident in talking to and looking after the older people. They joined them in the exercise session— they stood and loved the music even though it was more Country & Western

than what they would listen to. On the second day we made paper decorations and old and young helped each other and gave advice! On the last day we had a Christmas lunch together and some of the children helped serve the food. All together it was a wonderful experience for both us and the children. The school staff were so impressed with how the children behaved and what they got out of it that we are planning to continue it when it suits for the children to come to us -hopefully once a month. **30 younger and 20 older people took part.**

Benefits – What we learnt: How well people can interact and how much enjoyment can still be had with no links to social media etc.

Collegeland Nursing Home

We worked with our partner Moy Primary School for a few sessions prior to our Christmas projects and it had been great to have the pupils in the nursing home. Our first session involved Christmas reminiscing and Christmas wishes. We wrote our wishes on wooden baubles and hung them on our Christmas branch. This was a lovely chatting exercise and the baubles were looked at by a number of visitors in the home. Our second session was a celebration of our friendships and we sang carols together and exchanged cards and small gifts. We also chatted about our best Christmases. We will be working together later this year during Reminiscing Week - when we will focus on Going Out. These projects are very beneficial for all involved and I know our residents really look forward to seeing the boys and girls come into the home. **20 younger and 25 older people took part.**



Benefits – What we learnt: The benefits of intergenerational work.

Creggan Pre-School and Training Trust

All ages came together for a Christmas Party. Younger children enjoyed a magic show while the Older people cooked a nutritious Christmas brunch having the opportunity to experience new skills and socialise. They then had a seated Christmas party followed with a Christmas quiz where everyone had a chat about their favourite Christmas toy, Christmas food, Christmas song etc. Everyone got their photo professionally taken with a secret visit from Santa himself.

16 younger and 20 older people took part.



Benefits – What we learnt: Older people enjoyed meeting people of a different age group, they are lonely, and some feel isolated.

Garrison Community Group

We held our very first intergenerational event on 11th December 2023. Garrison Community Group run a weekly coffee morning & we invited pupils from Little Smarties Preschool to come & make a Christmas decoration with an elderly person, this was facilitated by a local artist Jane who holds craft classes etc for all age groups. Jane came dressed as the head elf & provided much entertainment for both age groups prior to them commencing the Christmas craft activity. We also had some of the elders read Christmas stories to the children & the children sang their songs they were preparing for their own Christmas event. Everyone who attended thoroughly enjoyed the morning, many of the elders don't have grandchildren & really enjoyed the company of the children & especially the singing.



10 younger and 30 older people took part.

Benefits – What we learnt: The real need for bringing the generations together.

Home Start – Newry, Mourne & Down



The aim of the project was to build upon our intergenerational work that we embarked upon in the Autumn of 2023. We had a relationship with a few of the care facilities in the Kilkeel area and had previously attended to provide music and rhyme sessions with the residents and our children and parents. We wanted to provide a Christmas themed visit with Christmas music, singing and to bring a gift for the residents. We went to Brooklands care home on the 8th December and had a wonderful event. The residents and the children loved the Christmas activities and bringing gifts for the residents. The children and parents benefitted from the

social interaction from a different generation and there seemed to be an increased understanding and awareness of capabilities and vulnerabilities with an increased respect for a different generation from the parents. The residents loved the interaction, the fun and the cuddles.

23 younger and 37 older people took part.

Benefits – What we learnt: We knew that everyone would enjoy the sessions, I think we underestimated how much!



Jolly Rodgers Day Nursery

We applied for the Christmas grant and organised an event with our local care home. Our two pre-school classes took part in the visit alongside the residents of the local home. It was really beneficial for the children; it was a new experience in our local community. Some of the children do not have family living here locally, so it was a new opportunity to mix with generations and gain this experience of interaction. It was a special celebration as it focused on Christmas and a time of joy. There was a great atmosphere and the residents really seemed to

engage and participate. The staff of the care home were able to tell us the residents had been looking forward to the visit and they had arts/crafts sessions prior to the visit to prepare gifts for the children. These were then exchanged with the children who had made cards prior to the visit. We mixed around our seating plan and the children were side by side with residents at the activities, allowing natural discussion to flow and engagement to take place.

29 younger and 31 older people took part.

Benefits – What we learnt: How positive it is for everyone involved, children, residents and staff from both organisations. The parents were keen for their child to participate in this kind of experience.

Lislea Men's Shed

We held a woodcraft workshop with youth local groups. The workshop's objective was to encourage children to learn about woodwork and make basic wooden items like a stool, bookshelf, crate. We felt having the basic skill to build and fix things would be the best skill that would be of benefit for their whole life. Two groups of 10 children participated in the mid-week evening event which was held on consecutive days. The participating children were encouraged to learn from mistakes by finding solutions as we believe skills and technicality will be developed with practice. The principal of



the local primary school where many of the children attend contacted us after the event and said how much the children enjoyed the evening and asked if we could hold a similar event in the school sometime in the summer months when she felt many more pupils who attend.

20 younger and 15 older people took part.

Benefits – What we learnt: Girls are just as interested in learning woodwork skills as boys.

Newcroft Lodge

Residents in Newcroft Lodge took part in a project with residents from Holywood Primary School. Residents and Pupils (6 of each in total) had a morning of Christmas crafts and reminiscence. They discussed what they had done at Christmas both now and when the residents were younger. Children and residents listened to Christmas music and went around to the resident's lounge once crafts were made to decorate the Christmas tree and display around the room. Residents and Pupils enjoyed festive snacks and residents wrapped selection boxes and gifted these to the children. Children returned a second day and a joint carol service was held. The residents and pupils performed together for staff and other residents.



12 younger and 12 older people took part.

Benefits – What we learnt: We learnt how much the resident's enjoyed engagement with children particularly those who did not have any family involvement. Residents' moods were much brighter, and children were very patient with residents who were repetitive due to their dementia.

North Lurgan Play Group



We held a grandparent Stay and play which allowed grandparents to visit our setting with their grandchildren from the ages 3-4 and participate in an arts & craft session, enjoy entertainment with a Santa and Elf visit and converse and socialise with other grandparents and young children from the local community. Overall, the session was a huge success with lots of compliments from the grandparents as this morning allowed them to bond with the young children and socialise with other adults from the local area. **23 younger and 30 older people took part.**

Benefits – What we learnt: That the adults really enjoyed mixing with other age groups and having the opportunity to visit their grandchild's playgroup.

Oakfield Primary School

We are a medium sized primary school & nursery unit in Carrickfergus. We have already established links with our local nursing home, Carrickfergus Manor. As part of this project, we planned two events. Firstly, on Monday 18.12.23 a group of Oakfield school choir pupils went to do some carol singing at the home. We had to remain outside and sing from there as there had been a COVID outbreak in the home. The nursing home staff opened the doors wide and we could see a large group of residents sitting at a social distance enjoying our music. There was a lovely positive atmosphere full of festive cheer. Then on Tuesday 19.12.23 our School Council members delivered goody bags for nursing home residents. **15 younger and 15 older people took part.**



Benefits – What we learnt: Sometimes things do not work out as expected - need for flexibility!

Radius Housing – Spelga Mews



Following Covid19, vital intergenerational links had been lost and we need to re-establish these links for the benefit of our residents who all have a diagnosis of dementia. This is our first intergenerational project with a special needs school. We wanted it to be inclusive and after discussion with the school they agreed strongly an activity like this would be extremely beneficial to the students. 7 residents and 9 pupils came together on the 8th and 19th of December to complete a craft project of Christmas wreaths and a carol service followed by a coffee morning for all involved. The benefits to everyone involved were invaluable - it has helped minimize feelings of isolation, depression and loneliness. It has helped our residents re-connect with their local community and new friendships have been formed.

9 younger and 7 older people took part.

Benefits – What we learnt: It's important to be inclusive and have two groups with additional needs come together. It was nice to bridge the generations and see past everyone's disabilities and watch them learn from each other.

Radius Housing – Floating Support

We had the P6 & P7 Children from Whitehead primary school come along to our weekly coffee morning in Whitehead Methodist church. The children enjoyed making crystal art Christmas decorations with our elderly group. The children loved the interaction and at times were very competitive in seeing who could finish their decoration first! We also had the children perform their carol singing. Everyone enjoyed listening to the children singing. After the event we had Juice and nibbles for everyone to enjoy. We had the tables set so the children could sit randomly with our senior group. Our hall was alive with chat and laughter. The headmaster from the primary school came along and said a few words. He told us all that the children had really benefitted from interacting with our senior group and came back to school buzzing and couldn't wait to tell everyone about their day.

42 younger and 25 older people took part.



Benefits – What we learnt: The children had a better understanding of the older generation and loved asking questions. Our senior group enjoyed the energy of the children and how they weren't shy in what questions they asked!

Railway Lodge Care Home



The groups involved were Stevensons youth club and Railway Lodge care home. On the night when we arrived at the youth club, they had lovely Christmas decorated tables set up and we all mixed age groups at each table and enjoyed lovely food and tea and chatted, reminiscing about Christmas past and present with lots of stories and smiles and laughs. We enjoyed playing Christmas bingo where the interaction was great, the youth helping the residents of Railway lodge and it was so competitive they all wanted to win a prize. I think both the groups benefited from this activity as they met new friends.

12 younger and 10 older people took part.

Benefits – What we learnt: How much both generations bonded well together and are so interested in chatting and finding out about each other have fun and can't wait till next time.

Rasharkin Primary School PTA

Our intergenerational 'Community Christmas' event took place in the school assembly hall of Rasharkin primary School on Friday 15th December. We were delighted that so many members of our community who were invited came to enjoy this event with our pupils. We invited parents and grandparents of students in Primary three, four and five to meet with the pupils and staff and play games together before sharing Christmas Dinner together. A great time was had by all as we came together for Christmas dinner, listened to some music and played games, such as a Christmas Beetle drive, first to bring me..., Christmas Pictionary, etc. **28 younger and 22 older people took part.**



Benefits – What we learnt: Need to have purposeful games to help engage everyone.



South West College, Dungannon

Students led the activity who are working towards their Diploma in Childcare. This was part of their assignment where they were evaluating the construction of childhood. For this event we invited local older people in and a primary school class (P3) who also invited their grandparents to attend. Alongside some Christmas cheer, through music and food, the groups reviewed how the town has changed across the generations and considered what we like about school, the town, games etc. We had a musical activity with an intergenerational band singing and children loved participating in this. Older people included in their evaluation how much they had enjoyed being able to come together and experience some social time with different generations. **31 younger and 69 older people took part.**

Benefits – What we learnt: This was our first big intergenerational event post covid and it was a reminder of the importance of intergenerational activities for all generations. The young people whom we work with got a lot from the event and I believe that it will impact positively on tackling ageism.

Southern Regional College

We collected items for hampers and invited in local community groups for coffee and craft and banter, the feedback was fabulous. The students gained great understanding and friendships across generations were formed. The groups visiting asked for another morning soon.

25 younger and 25 older people took part.



Benefits – What we learnt: That students are better in practical situations than in the classroom. It creates enthusiasm and the students and participants really enjoyed the experience.

Spectrum Centre



12 young participants (ages 7-11) from Spectrums Art Den after school club attended a Christmas craft party event with 10 residents from Winchester Court in the Court's communal social space on Thursday 7th Dec. Spectrum artists Lauren and Nikki worked with ADO Sally to put together a fun Christmas wreath decoration activity suitable for all ages. Sally and Winchester Court manager Julie put together a fabulous party spread of treats! Spectrum hadn't organised such a get together since lockdown and this small grant was just the incentive we needed to get back started again.

14 younger and 14 older people took part.

Benefits – What we learnt: Logistics of getting 12 excited children from A-B, encouraging both sets of participants to mix at a pace and level they were happy with, that its useful to have an activity that keeps hands busy whilst the chat flows.

St Ronan's College

We hosted 20 MenShed members, their facilitator, bookkeeper and 10 of the pupils who have recently completed a project to a Christmas celebration dinner. We also extended an invite to Clan na Gale's Friendly Club committee (pensioners lunch group) as we would like to extend our relationship with this group as they are directly beside the school. The event consisted of Christmas lunch and activities with prizes for the participants. The benefits of an activity like this are many - we included a group of pupils who are completing a Prince's Trust award in organizing and hosting the event - they benefit for the experience but also the sense of giving back to our community.

10 younger and 52 older people took part.

Benefits – What we learnt: My biggest take away was how much our pupils loved heling to organize and host the event and how much pride they too in it.



St Patrick's Primary School



Santa drive which encouraged children's parents and grandparents to come together and play cards.

70 younger and 30 older people took part.

Benefits – What we learnt: Chatting to other parents.

Tassagh Cultural Rural Neighbourhood Group

We had a Christmas party and a visit from Santa with presents for all ages. We used our own music system to cut the cost. To be involved in this party was an honour to see the excitement involved was truly amazing. The Christmas party brought back happy memories of parties years ago for many of the different generations there. A very happy occasion for all attending and making memories to cherish for years to come. This is a milestone to build on for the future bringing generations together is a vital part in society as we need to keep alive the old stories of how they celebrated Christmas.

20 younger and 42 older people took part.



Benefits – What we learnt: We learnt that bringing all ages together engages them into chatting learning ideas, sharing stories making friends and having fun. It encourages the young and not so young to avail of resources and put them to the benefit of the environs around.

Summary

All these fantastic Christmas Connections projects have been inspiring and testament to the commitment of local communities building intergenerational and Age-friendly communities. They took place as part of the Public Health Agency funded small grant scheme which encourages people of all ages to get together at Christmas as a way of increasing community wellbeing. This report shows that a little bit of funding goes a long way, when added to the existing resources and assets already found within our communities. We hope to see more groups and individuals coming together to share, recognise and value the contribution of all the generations who live here.

A big thank you to all of the people, organisations and settings across NI that made the activity in this report happen! We could not do the work we do without these Intergenerational Champions!



Linking Generations Northern Ireland