Introduction

In October 2021, The Linking Network (TLN) were delighted to be offered Public Health England funding from Public Health and Bradford council, in an exciting project to promote young people’s engagement with older people. The Intergenerational Linking project connected young people aged 11-24 with older people aged 65 and over, living in care homes or sheltered accommodation. The grant covered the period from October 2021 – April 2022. The following report aims to capture the impact of this work.

We read extensively and widely on intergenerational linking to ensure that the Bradford programme could be well informed. There are many definitions and ongoing debate on how intergenerational linking should be defined, structured and approached. At TLN we have decided to use the following definition:

‘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 (Beth Johnson Foundation, 2001).’

Key targets

1. Provide intergenerational opportunities with 6 schools/youth organisations and 6 care homes.

2. Reach young people aged between 11 and 24

3. Work to create a local project advisory group

Gain the views of the local advisory group on existing work to engage children and young people with care homes, their thoughts on what might work well and opportunities for local intergenerational linking
Ethos & Mission

Our Purpose

TLN’s work is structured through four key questions (Who am I? Who are we? Where do we live? How do we all live together?) and intergenerational linking will provide valuable learning opportunities for children to explore the identity of themselves and others and think carefully about how different generations live together in the same community.

Intergenerational practice:

- Improves confidence
- Generates understanding and mutual respect
- Reduces feelings of isolation and disconnection
- Connects communities
The arising intergenerational relationships formed from these interactions will constitute meaningful youth social action, developing young people as well-rounded individuals with an intergenerational volunteering habit, whilst also instilling value within older people and ensuring they are cherished by their communities, supported to deliver their potential and included in society in a meaningful way. The six principles for high quality youth social action as developed by the #iwill campaign were used as guiding principles in the design of this project.

#iwill principles
At a glance

- Christmas cards and gifts
- Photo & video messages
- Letters and posters
- Shared artwork
- Sharing questions and memories
- Visits to play games and chat
- Easter eggs and cards

1340 children and young people
11 schools or youth groups with 11 homes
330 older people
## Intergenerational links in Bradford

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<th>School</th>
<th>Care Home</th>
<th>Year Group</th>
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<td>Beckfoot School</td>
<td>Thompson Court Care Home</td>
<td>2 x Year 10 classes</td>
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<td>Beckfoot Oakbank School</td>
<td>Staveley Court housing</td>
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<td>Oastlers School</td>
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<td>Queensbury Guides</td>
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<td>Mixed ages 10–16</td>
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<td>St. Benedicts Sixth Form</td>
<td>Well Springs Nursing Home</td>
<td>Lower sixth form classes</td>
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<td>Trinity Academy Bradford</td>
<td>Goodwin House sheltered accommodation</td>
<td>Whole school</td>
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The Intergenerational Linking journey

Each link between a school or youth group and care home or sheltered housing unit was unique and bespoke to the context and needs of those participating. However a loose structure was given to support the link, ensuring it was manageable and to keep momentum for the project.

- Initial recruitment conversation with a school, youth group or care home interested in Intergenerational Linking finding out their hopes for the project and needs

- Once a link was found, key staff from the school and older people’s setting met to have a planning meeting.

- Whilst every link was unique and took its own journey, we recommended that the link began with preparation and mutual exchange of information between the younger and older people.

- Young and older people were then supported to make choices about further activities that they engage in.

- Often the work was shared across school with families of the young and older people, across school and with the wider community.
A case study

Once the link had been established, TLN, the lead teacher and the manager met together for a planning meeting. The school were keen for the project to fulfil PSHE objectives including pupils understanding that they can make a difference to the world around them. Well Springs wanted opportunities for the residents to connect with young people.

Initially Christmas cards were exchanged with the pupils sending named, individual cards to every resident in the home. The residents created two large hand-made cards for the pupils at the school to enjoy and display.

In January, the group met again and agreed to ask questions about the residents’ fond memories. Six pupils were filmed asking the residents to discuss 6 questions.

- How much has Bradford changed since you were younger?
- What was your favourite subject at school?
- What was your first job?
- Where is the favourite place you’ve visited?
- What do you remember about the place you grew up in?
- What are the most memorable days of your life?

The home used the questions in group discussions and the manager said that the residents really enjoyed reminiscing.

Here are some of the answers to just one of the questions: What do you remember about the place you grew up in?

Joan – I grew up in Bradford. I can remember toilets being outside and having to go in the rain down the garden path to use it.

Nancy – I grew up in Bingley. Where I lived, it hasn’t altered. It is just the same between Myrtle Park and Southland. They still have the Bingley Show. It’s been going for over 100 years.

Clare – I grew up in Clayton. I remember the churches. We were expected to go to church. When we were little if we missed church, people would remark on the fact that you had missed.

Vicky – I grew up on a farm in Cullingworth. I had lots of fields to play in and land to explore. My school friends used to come and play on the farm.

The drama group are currently working with the residents’ replies and are hoping to have something to present in the summer term.

At Easter the Sixth Form Students donated Easter Eggs to go with their Easter cards. These were gratefully received by Well Springs who again had hand-crafted a beautiful card to say Thank you and Happy Easter to the school.

Well Springs Nursing Home and St Benedicts are looking forward to arranging some face-to-face meetings in the summer term; possibly a drama show and some joint gardening.
A case study

Preparation:
A meeting was held first with the college and then separately with the older people ensuring both groups were able to say what they hoped to achieve by meeting. The theme they decided to talk about was Ubuntu. We asked the older people to send a brief summary of their own connection with social action to us, which we gathered and passed on to the students and they therefore had time prior to the meeting to look through what had been written and to write down any questions they would like to ask. We also sent the older participants a summary of what the young people were discussing in their philosophy group (Ubuntu – I am who I am because of who we all are) – so the older people had a context and a connection to the group they were speaking to.

The agenda, format of the session and questions that were going to be asked at the live zoom meeting were sent out prior to the meeting. This meant everyone had time to think about the key questions being asked, allowing everyone to fully listen rather than think about the answer they are going to give. It also meant everyone heard and understood these questions. We also arranged a person from The Linking Network to 'chair the meeting' who was also on zoom thus allowing the teacher to listen to the session and support the students.

Highlights included:
The ice breaker was 'What skill would you like to have?' Everyone spoke. The students shared some great answers including 'to have better self discipline', 'to be at peace', 'to be calm' and 'to have the skill of persuasion' The older group enjoyed hearing these creative answers.
The next question was 'What’s the best piece of advice you’ve been given?' Answers from the older people included: 'Life is difficult and when you accept that you get on with life'. 'The Serenity prayer ... accept the things I cannot change, courage to change those things I can change and wisdom to know the difference.' The last piece of advice from the older people was: 'Listening – listen well and listen positively' This advice was well received by the students.
The main part of the session was the older people answering the questions sent by the students prior to the call. Interestingly, when the older people spoke about social action they all said they hadn’t particularly wanted to do it or lead on it but realised no one else was going to so they had to step up. When they spoke about the ‘walk for climate change’ they had arranged in November 2021 they explained they had used the word walk rather than march as they felt that march sounded aggressive and like an army and they wanted to convey something different.

After the meeting had finished, the students said that they had found the session really interesting and asked when the next session could be. The older people were equally pleased to have participated and were more than happy to meet again and had enjoyed reflecting on the ways they had tried to build community through social action during their lives and sharing their thoughts.

The 6th Form Philosophy Club at New College have linked with Global Justice Now Bradford Group since November. Here is their story.
Once the link had been established, TLN, the lead teacher and the manager met together for a planning meeting. The school were keen for the project to help them connect with older people in the local community. The manager at Goodwin House wanted opportunities for the residents to connect with young people and the outside world again after 2 years of covid. All the Forms in school took part in a Christmas card competition and the winning cards were sent to the care home for all residents to see. Also individual, personalised cards and some presents were sent to the 14 residents who had sent information and photos about themselves to the school. The care home manager was particularly delighted that one lady, Joyce, had received a bag of presents as well as the cards because she is blind and has no family. She had put on her interest form that she loves knitting and nattering and there was wool in her bag!

During January, Goodwin House sent a Thank you card and biscuits to the pupils at school. The next exchange began in February, when Year 7 were doing a writing project and sent letters to all the residents of Goodwin House. The children wrote about themselves and asked questions of the older people. Many of the residents replied to their letters and the pupils’ loved receiving them.

The response to the children’s letters was one of delight. The school received an email from one resident’s daughter:

Dear Miss Le Feuvre,
My name is **** and I’m Jack’s daughter.

I just wanted to say thank you so much for the lovely letters the children of class 7D sent my Dad recently. At Christmas, he also received a wonderful array of cards and drawings from the children in year 11. They were all truly beautiful and heart-warming to read.

As you know, the terrible COVID situation left many elderly people feeling very isolated and lonely, my Dad included. The letters from the children really uplifted him and certainly did make him smile. He commented that it was nice to receive a hand written letter. We all enjoyed reading about the children themselves and their hobbies and interests (and what neat hand writing they have). It was so nice of the children to show an interest in Dad’s day to day life and his past. I know he is looking forward to answering their questions, which gives him the opportunity to write back.

Thank you again for encouraging and helping the children write these lovely letters. I can’t tell you what a difference they made to Dad when he read them. In fact he’s talked about them every day since they arrived and it has sparked lots of conversations as a result. He’s had a very hard year as Mum passed away recently. They would have been married 65 years in September. The children’s letters definitely cheered him up and gave him something to focus on.

I’ve attached a link to an article about Dad that was in the Telegraph and Argus a couple of years ago, you may find it interesting. Dad is going to attach a copy to each of the letters he writes. He still writes in Russian and reads his Russian grammar books occasionally, as he says it keeps his brain active.

Thank you again.

The students found the newspaper article fascinating – who knew Jack was a spy during the cold war!
Feedback from participants

“Paul has had an amazing morning, the little things that make a difference to someone’s life. A big thank you to the Art department for sending Paul away with some materials and different skill techniques to use. When we returned to the home he sat in the sun and completed his painting. Thank you again”
(Care home)

“I just wanted to say thank you so much for the lovely letters the children of class 7D sent my Dad recently, they were all truly beautiful and heart-warming to read. As you know, the terrible COVID situation left many elderly people feeling very isolated and lonely, my Dad included. The letters from the children really uplifted him and certainly did make him smile”.
From the daughter of a sheltered housing resident.

“We had a call from Eileen’s daughter today who said she had a lump in her throat when reading the cards and thanked us very much.” Email from a teacher who sent Christmas cards to a home.

“I am delighted that Joyce has received a bag of presents as well as the cards because she is blind and has no family”.
(Home manager)

“Great first project! Thanks so much.” (Teacher)
“Yes thank you very much. Looking forward to the next project in the New Year”
(Home manager)
What has helped a link to work well?

Gathering contextual information from schools, youth groups and care homes in the initial stages was important (e.g. year group, needs of residents, what they hoped to get out of the project.) This enabled the local broker from TLN to support the link in the most appropriate way.

The local broker from TLN provided a lot of logistical and admin support for some links. This involved arranging meetings and picking up cards/ messages etc and exchanging them. In the time pressured environments of schools, youth groups and care homes, this support was greatly received and contributed to the success of a link.

Supporting with preparatory work, particularly for children, was important. This involved helping children to understand more about older people and care homes, what to expect and how to behave. Lesson resources and suggested book lists were created by experienced teachers at TLN.

Whilst the project aimed to keep young and older people’s voices at the forefront, staff in schools, youth groups and care homes valued some structure and ideas, particularly in the early stages as confidence was growing among participants.
What has helped a link to work well?

Smaller activities to start with helped to launch Intergenerational linking, enabling young and older people to find out more about each other, whilst remaining manageable for those involved. Examples of the suggested activities can be found on TLN’s website here.

Using key calendar days for intergenerational activities worked well as these were already being celebrated in schools, youth groups and care homes. E.g. Christmas, Easter, World Book Day, Remembrance Day.

Having flexibility was key; every link was different and having a diverse selection of activities was vital. Video calls and virtual connections worked well for some but not others. Some links engaged with craft activities but for others this wasn’t for them.

Whilst TLN has vast experience of teaching and working with schools, young people and community, Intergenerational Linking with Secondary schools was a new project. Therefore, professional development for the local broker was vital in order to support the links appropriately. This involved connecting with local and national organisations and accessing training e.g. Age UK, Bradford Care Association, Generations Working Together.
What challenges have occurred and how have these been overcome?
The backdrop of Covid-19 has had a significant impact on Intergenerational Linking and has understandably led to some challenges. A number of key contacts for the school and care home have become ill with covid during this time frame which has resulted in meetings being cancelled and work on the programme delayed. Some care homes were having to ‘lock down’ with residents staying in their rooms rather than being in the communal area. This brought an additional workload for the care home staff and therefore created a delay in engagement with the programme.
Schools were still focused on a catch up curriculum and so struggled to engage as fully as they would wish. In addition some schools had re-instated bubbles and this reduced the opportunities when young people could meet to discuss Intergenerational linking e.g. lunch time clubs, after school.
Staff shortages and absence in schools and care homes have meant that it has been hard to contact people. Phone messages and emails often do not get a reply because people are so busy.
There have been a number of staff changes at the care homes we have been working with that has not been directly connected with Covid. When the activity worker at the care home leaves this results in having to start a new relationship with the teacher and ourselves at TLN, as well as catching the new worker up with the purpose of this programme.
When it is the manager who has left the care home, this results in TLN having to secure a new agreement on engagement with this intergenerational programme.

There is an ongoing challenge when working in larger secondary schools in ensuring staff are aware of any other intergenerational work that may be happening or has happened in the past. There is also a challenge of engaging with different curriculum departments to work on one programme e.g. the music department and Health Social Care BTEC.

The role of local broker from TLN has been vital to fulfil admin tasks and help the links to continue and thrive during these obstacles and difficult times.
What next?

The funding for this project has meant that as an organisation, TLN has been able to develop its thinking about intergenerational work going forward.

Intergenerational Linking now forms part of TLN’s core work with the aim that schools will have Schools Linking in one year group and Intergenerational Linking in another thus creating a complete approach to community cohesion.

TLN now look to widen the Intergenerational Linking offer in Bradford, engaging with schools, youth groups, care homes, sheltered accommodation and older people’s community groups.

As restrictions begin to ease, there is a real appetite to resume some in-person intergenerational activities alongside the remote activities that have been developed. TLN aim to continue to develop its knowledge about intergenerational best practice, liaising with other organisations to share expertise.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Bradford for Everyone for the support and encouragement in enabling us to develop intergenerational linking across the Bradford District.