

Intergenerational Social Action in Rural Schools

An evaluation



**The Linking
Network**

University of
Kent

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THE DULVERTON TRUST

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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INTRODUCTION

The intergenerational social action project was funded by The Dulverton Trust in partnership with the #iwill fund and aimed to connect around one hundred young people in schools aged 10-14 with older people in their rural locality to explore making a positive difference to their space or community. The project was planned and facilitated by The Linking Network and involved two preparatory sessions with young people, a separate preparatory session with the older participants and then two to three joint intergenerational sessions held at the school. Young people chose the areas of focus (mental health being the most popular) and the older people joined a group/focus of their interest. Discussions were encouraged through a creative approach to the sessions (collage, zine making, drama etc). The project culminated in a listening event where the intergenerational groups shared their thoughts and call for change with an audience of local community leaders.

OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION:

- 1) **Uncover the extent to which this inter-generational programme delivers on the three core aims of the programme:**
 - 1) Break down younger and older generations stereotypical beliefs and expectations of each other
 - 2) Strengthen younger and older generations confidence in interacting across generations, and more generally with people who are different to them in some way (i.e., confidence in contact*)
 - 3) Empower younger and older people to take action for social change in their own rural community.
- 2) **Provide new insights into the most effective format and delivery of intergenerational linking programmes:** recommendations and guidance regarding the most feasible and effective format and delivery of the programme, as well as considerations for future programme development.
- 3) **Identify areas for development and recommendations for future intergenerational linking programmes:** Identify strengths of the programme and areas for future development to further strengthen the effectiveness and take-up of the programme.

DEFINED ROLES IN PROJECT DELIVERY:

University of Kent: University researchers were contracted to complete an objective evaluation of the programme, including survey design, data collection and analysis.

We hope that this evaluation will provide useful insights for further development of this specific intergenerational programme, as well as more general recommendations for the design of other intergenerational programmes.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The intergenerational social action project was funded by The Dulverton Trust in partnership with the #iwill fund and aimed to connect around one hundred young people in schools aged 10-14 with older people in their rural locality to explore making a positive difference to their space or community.

KEY FINDINGS:

AFTER COMPLETING THE INTERGENERATIONAL LINKING PROGRAMME:

52.8%

No. of primary school children who thought younger and older people are similar.

93.4%

No. of secondary students confident in spending time with someone from a different generation.

79.4%

No. of primary students confident about interacting with older people .

71.7%

No. of secondary students confident about making a positive difference in their community.

OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE VIEW OF THE PROJECT:

Younger and older generations told us the intergenerational programme was a valuable and enjoyable learning experience, that allowed them to build meaningful connections with people they wouldn't normally have a chance to meet. The project changed their minds about the other generation and helped them make a positive difference in their community.

INTERGENERATIONAL LINKING SUCCESSFULLY CHALLENGES INTERGENERATIONAL STEREOTYPES AND BUILT CONFIDENCE IN CONTACT

- Intergenerational linking, and the work completed together, provided opportunities to challenge the generations stereotypic expectations of each other.
- Statistically significant increase in perceived similarity across generations among younger pupils, and interviews revealed both younger and older generations felt they were more similar following the programme.
- Statistically significant boost in confidence in contact among primary and secondary pupils: following the intergenerational programme, 93.4% of secondary students and 79.4% of

primary pupils reported feeling confident interacting with someone from a different generation, a significant increase compared with before the programme started.

MEMORABLE AND MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS:

Meaningful interactions are at the heart of intergenerational linking, and younger and older generations recalled rich and meaningful interactions throughout their linking.

INTERGENERATIONAL LINKING EMPOWERS SOCIAL ACTION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES:

- Statistically significant increase in confidence in taking social action among secondary school pupils.
 - No change in confidence among primary school pupils
 - Younger and older generations valued the opportunity to work together on community-related projects and local/national issues. The younger generation especially valued being listened to. Younger and particularly older participants felt inspired to continue this work beyond the project.
-

The intergenerational programme provided opportunities for younger and older generations to work together on local and national issues, and successfully built confidence in their ability to do so effectively.

STRENGTHS OF THE PROGRAMME: FORMAT, FACILITATION AND DELIVERY

Interaction: Younger and older people highlighted the value of working together cooperatively on this project, as way of sparking conversations and bringing people together. Meaningful interactions are the heart of intergenerational contact.

Facilitators: The project facilitators planned and led the project activities, effectively providing encouragement, assistance and guidance, effectively nudging conversations and managing the interactions to ensure they are positive and constructive.

Structure: The carefully planned structure of this intergenerational linking programme was vital to the success of the project. Meaningful conversations were kickstarted by the carefully structured activities which supported these positive interactions and mutual self-disclosure of individual and personal information. These rich conversations that broke down barriers and gradually built meaningful connections between the generations, as participants got to know each other as individuals.

Preparation: Facilitators were prepared with resources, information, and instructions: this was essential so that participants could focus on their interactions and working together, rather than feeling anxious about what was happening next. Teachers highlighted this as a draw of the project: competing demands for school resources (staff time and physical resources), the fact that the project was entirely delivered by Schools Linking, even down to bringing the required resources, was not only appealing, but essential for school involvement.

'they even brought their own biscuits, like they brought the they bought the supplies for the collage making. They brought their own glue and scissors' Δ

Listening event: This was highlighted as a strength of the project and means of drawing in families to the linking process, causing a ripple effect in the local communities.

BARRIERS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **SCAFFOLDING SOCIAL ACTION:** Provide young people with more direction regarding concrete actions that can be taken on issues that are important to them: programme could include a session on how to effectively take action on the issues important to them e.g., writing a letter to the local MP, starting a petition.
- **RECRUITMENT:** Getting the right volunteers is essential, can be achieved through providing more information in recruitment stage.
- **MORE TIME:** All interviewees felt the project would benefit from at least one more session, to allow them to produce their project output and maintain positive interactions.
- **PLANNING AND SCHOOL ORGANISATION: OLDER PEOPLE** felt a stronger presence from the school Senior Leadership Team would heighten the status of the project, establish school commitment to the project and make all involved feel valued and appreciated. School commitment to the project should be established from the start.

THE EVALUATION

THREE STRANDS OF THE EVALUATION

The research questions can be considered across three strands:

Impact on core project outcomes	Most effective format and delivery	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•challenging intergenerational stereotypes•boosting confidence in interactions•empowering social action	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•structure•delivery•facilitators•resources•activities•increasing uptake	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•strengths and weaknesses•suggestions for future development•lessons learned•suggestions for future intergenerational programmes

DATA COLLECTION

Secondary School pupils:

1. **Pupil focus groups** – Eight pupil focus groups (24 pupils in total) were conducted to further examine the three strands of the evaluation.
2. **Survey** – 60 Pupils completed a survey immediately before and after the completion of the intergenerational project. The survey included two questions: **‘How confident do you feel in talking to and spending time with people who are a different generation to you?’** and **‘How confident do you feel in making a positive difference in your community?’** Responses were on a scale of 1 to 5: ‘not at all confident’ (1), ‘slightly confident’ (2), ‘somewhat confident’ (3), ‘fairly confident’ (4) and ‘completely confident’ (5).

Primary School pupils:

3. **Survey** - 45 Primary school pupils completed a survey immediately before and after the completion of the intergenerational project. The survey included three questions: **‘How confident do you feel in talking to older people?’** and **‘How confident do you feel in making the world a better place?’** Responses were on a scale of 1 to 5: ‘not at all confident’ (1), ‘slightly confident’ (2), ‘somewhat confident’ (3), ‘fairly confident’ (4) and ‘completely confident’ (5). **‘Do you think younger and older people are similar or different to each other?’** Response options were: ‘very different’ (1), ‘a little bit different’ (2), ‘a little bit similar’ (3) and ‘very similar’ (4).

Older adults:

4. **In-Depth interview** – 10 older adults, across the three participating secondary schools, took part in the interview (5 males, 5 females, with an age range of 64-79 years, *mean age 70 years and 6 months*).

Teachers:

5. **In-depth interviews** – 2 teacher interviews were conducted to further examine the three strands of research: impact, format and delivery, and recommendations.

ANALYSING THE DATA

Interviews and focus groups were transcribed, anonymised, and analysed to identify core themes and topics, and illustrative statements to bring a richer meaning to our statistical findings.

Data analysis of survey data was conducted using SPSS. A range of analytical approaches were adopted including thematic analysis of qualitative data and descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

We present the following data under each of the core research questions. We combine the survey data and the interviews (pupil, older person, and teacher) in informing our analysis. Where specific data is cited, we indicate the source of that data via the use of asterisks as follows:

Data Source	Key
Pupil focus group	*
Older person interview	◇
Teacher interview	△

CAVEATS

As with all research there are caveats in interpretation of the data. It is important to note throughout this report we are reporting on young people, older people and teachers' *perceptions* of the programme and its impact from their perspective. We consider this the most reliable way of gaining access to the impact of the programme but acknowledge that perceptions are subjective. Utilisation of multiple sources of data (pupils, older people, and teachers), each containing multiple, but similar, questions to answer our central research questions helps ensure robustness of the analysis.

FINDINGS

GENERAL VIEW OF THE INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMME

Young people were excited about the project, felt it was a break from the usual routine, and something 'different' that they could get involved in. One young person said they enjoyed it so much they would have done it out of lessons, in their own time.

*Even if it was after school, I'd still do it... Like I'd take out my own time to do it**

*'Because sometimes you know when you're doing the same timetable all the time, doing lessons all the time, then when you do something a bit different, it stands out a little bit, doesn't it?'**

An indicator of how successful the project was, is the extent to which young people discussed it with their families: interviews revealed that the young people shared their experiences with their families, extending the reach of the project. This was bolstered by the listening event at the end of the project, which a number of families attended. This event provided a unique opportunity to involve families in the intergenerational contact, provide positive feedback for their young person.

'one of the mums [at the listening event] said they've loved this. She said they come home every Tuesday and talk about what they've done. She said they've really loved this sessions' ◇

'she came up to us when she realised we were part of this project. And she said it's the best thing for her daughter. It's her most favorite bit of the week., and she comes home full of it and, and I think that says quite a lot' ◇

*'I spoke to like, my parents and my siblings because it was just like it was exciting. So they like to hear about what we were doing and I was just telling them about, like, what the people were like, that we were talking with and everything that we're working on together.'**

Older people also had overwhelmingly positive views of the project. They enjoyed it, felt it made a difference in their own and young people's lives, and was a way to bring the generations together. All older people interviewed highlighted the project facilitators as a strength of the project: their hard work, organisation and positive attitude were essential to the success of the project and a real strength.

Teachers were also very vocal about the benefits of the programme and would recommend to other schools.

'would definitely recommend it to other schools' Δ

IMPACT ON CORE OUTCOMES: STEREOTYPES, CONFIDENCE IN CONTACT & SOCIAL ACTION

DOES INTERGENERATIONAL LINKING CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES OF OLDER AND YOUNGER GENERATIONS?

AWARE OF STEREOTYPES:

Both younger and older people were aware of the stereotypes held about their own and the other generation. Older people believed younger people might think they are dodderly, stuck in their ways and not open to ideas.

Younger participants believed the older generation would expect them to be on their phones all the time, or on video games, that they would not be knowledgeable or informed on social issues and would be uncommunicative. They also thought older participants would expect younger people to be badly behaved and engaged in delinquent behaviours. These stereotypes led to heightened anxiety about interacting, though the carefully planned interactions provided opportunities to challenge these stereotypes through group work and interaction:

They maybe regarded us as old people, and that we would have walking sticks and grey hair, if any hair, and false teeth and be short of money and not open to new ideas and not active, that sort of thing'◊

Some older people explicitly referred to covid and how that compounded stereotypes and negative relations between the generations:

'You would see either on Facebook or general chat that the teenagers are all gathering together, no social distancing, they don't care about us spreading COVID. All this sort of stuff. And then likewise, younger children would think older people have it much easier. It was. That sort of. Just not understanding.' ◊

INTERGENERATIONAL LINKING PROGRAMME SUCCESSFULLY CHALLENGED STEREOTYPES:

Intergenerational linking, and the work completed together, provided opportunities to challenge stereotypic expectations.

Both older and younger generations believed the project would provide an opportunity to challenge stereotypes through positive interactions that provide a chance to show each other how inaccurate common stereotypes of older and younger generations are. Younger people viewed intergenerational linking as a chance for older people to get to know all sides of young people, and not rely on one dimensional negative stereotype of them not being serious and being delinquents: intergenerational linking was seen by younger people as a chance to show they are mature, can contribute constructively to discussion, and have good ideas.

*'they realized that we also care about the important big issues in the world**

Young people thought the programme successfully changed how older people thought about the younger generation and, made them realise young people are knowledgeable of and care about big issues in the world around them, and in their local community.

'I think it definitely changed their perspective on like younger people because they might not have had any, like proper experiences with them. Right, like you said, like they might, they might have any younger people and their lives. So getting to know us and then we're working with us and probably just changed what they thought about as well.' *

'I think they were surprised about how much we knew. They were surprised that we knew so much about it.' *

'so I was so surprised that they were so aware of all this, these issues, because I always thought they're kind of adult type topics.' ◇

The interviews with older people confirmed young people's views: as they predicted, older people were surprised by the young people's maturity, their knowledge on the topic, and confidence in expressing their ideas.

'I think their ideas and concerns was far more far better formulated than I expected it to be, which is a credit to them.' ◇

'it surprised me how much that they really cared about what was going on, about the big building, about looking after the environment, the recycling side of things.' ◇

'I wasn't expecting them to know too much about the subject areas that they had raised as ones of concern' ◇

'I thought they'd be more flippant than they were.... They were more serious than I expected and actually focused on some of the issues and I didn't think they would come over as mature and as able to think things through as they were.' ◇

'Blown away by the depth of opinions of the children'◇

As well as being surprised by how knowledgeable the younger people were, the older people were also impressed by the younger generation's confidence and ability to speak on the issues:

'some of the kids particularly were able to speak quite eloquently about the issues they found and the way they were thinking and just had quite a mature approach. ...I was impressed with the way they came over and this sort of self-confidence they had' ◇

*'they realized that we also care about the important big issues in the world'**

One of the stereotypic expectations, and sources of anxiety for older people, was a concern that the younger participants would be unwilling to talk and engage with them. Following the intergenerational programme, older people reported that the younger participants defied expectations by being involved and chatty from the start:

'it changed their views because like, I think we were easy to talk to and they probably didn't expect that I think what they're expecting us to be, probably more closed off.' ◇

Getting out of comfort zone: older and younger people believed the project took them out of their comfort zone, and this was beneficial in 'stretching' them, challenging them, and building better relations between the generations:

'it challenges the young people, doesn't it? Cause we you know, through life, we all have to meet different people at different times.... And the younger you start getting used to that, the better you can you just. It's how you get people, young people, out of their comfort zone, I suppose. And then start to stretch them.' ◇

As well as breaking down stereotypes, older people and younger people felt as a result of the project they had a better understanding of the lives of the other generation. This improved understanding provides a foundation for building empathy and respect.

'we've learned a lot from them...not necessarily about any of the topics, but a lot about how youngsters are alike in school.' ◇

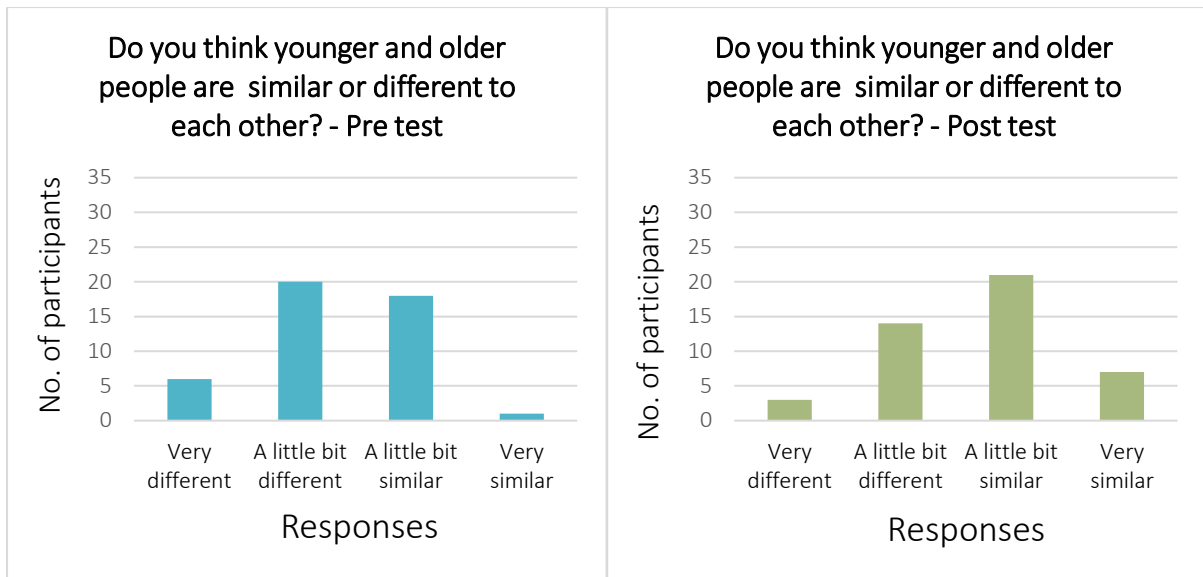
'their lives have been much more complicated than mine was at that age.... You know, I had mum and dad and two siblings, and often they've had marriage change and all sorts of issues like that...There's a sense that they've dealt with quite a lot of personal stuff already.' ◇

INTERGENERATIONAL LINKING PROGRAMME SUCCESSFULLY INCREASED PERCEIVED SIMILARITY ACROSS THE GENERATIONS:

52.8%

No. of primary school children who thought younger and older people are similar, following completion of the programme.

Psychological research tells us that perceived similarity is a key factor in promoting good relations between groups. Primary school pupils were asked about perceived similarity across the generations: There was a significant shift in perceived similarity, after the programme children thought older and younger generations were more similar (*Mean = 2.71*) compared with before the programme (*Mean = 2.31*). Prior to the programme, 35.9% of children thought younger and older people are similar (a little bit similar or very similar). This increased to 52.8% following completion of the intergenerational programme.



Interviews particularly with younger participants highlighted this as a key outcome of the programme. Perceived similarity is enhanced through activities and discussions which provide opportunities to draw out similarities as well as differences.

‘they realized that we also care about the important big issues in the world’*

*‘you’d think they’d be quite different views and that different feelings because, but it’s like we sort of more similar.’ **

*‘when we met the older people, we realized they weren’t actually much different from us.’ **

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER: MEMORABLE AND MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS AT THE HEART OF INTERGENERATIONAL CONTACT

The intergenerational linking programme provided opportunities for meaningful conversations, where individuals shared information about themselves and their lives. As a result, participants really got to know each other on an individual level, breaking down barriers and challenging stereotypes.

Psychological research tells us that meaningful conversations, and self-disclosure, sharing personal information about ourselves, is essential in order for intergroup contact to have a positive impact. Disclosing information about ourselves and listening to members of other groups share with us helps foster meaningful relationships, based on trust. These deeper interactions enhance the effect of contact on attitude change. It was clear from the interviews with older people and younger people that the programme provided opportunities for meaningful conversations, where individuals shared information about themselves and their lives. As a result, participants really got to know each other on an individual level, about their interests, aspirations, their lives, and families. These conversations were clearly memorable for the participants who recounted a number of these throughout the interview.

It was also good that we were able to talk to the young people as well....it sort of like did break down some barriers. You know, we weren't those funny old frosty people. We were actually human' ◊

'in my conversation with the young lads, I had a little team of about three or four or five 14-year-olds, and they finally expressed to me how difficult it was for them to say when they were feeling upset.' ◊

'they were talking about having these red letter day type thingsand I said, oh, I loved I Went up in the hot air balloon and they were really quite surprised. And I said, 'well, do you not think I should do that?' And they said, 'Well, weren't you scared?' And I thought, well, no. But I think they thought I might fall or something. I think they see you differently.' ◊

These meaningful conversations also allowed the participants to have their preconceived ideas and stereotypes of the other generation challenged in a gentle and constructive manner:

'there is this sort of view that kids nowadays are entitled brats and they don't appreciate... what's been done and these [young people] obviously didn't. They were grateful for, you know, the efforts that the parent was making and made you know, appreciated that they were that, you know the parents were actually making sacrifices for them.' ◊

These conversations were kickstarted by the carefully structured activities which supported these positive interactions and mutual self-disclosure of individual and personal information. This was fundamental to the breaking down of barriers, as the younger and older people felt more comfortable with each other, but also effectively broke down stereotypes and expectations of both younger and older generations.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS:

Some younger people reported by the end of the project they felt very close to the older person they were partnered with, for example one younger person referred to the interaction as *'like it felt like a little family.'* * Another said their older person was like their grandma, while another *'felt at home with them'* *

FEELING RESPECTED AND VALUED:

For younger people, it was particularly important that they felt respected within the interaction: the expectation that they would not be taken seriously was driving much of their anxiety about

'it felt
very
equal'*

interacting with older people. Meanwhile for older people there was a need for their contribution to society to be recognised and valued. The project was successful in reaching both of these objectives: As a result of the carefully designed programme, contrary to expectations, young people felt listened to, and felt their ideas were valued and felt respected. They felt they were being treated as equals in the interaction. This was crucial to the success of the project.

'I think they respected me, I really do, yeah.' *

Meanwhile, older people believed the younger generation gained a new understanding of the role that older people play in society and what they have to offer:

'The fact that it gave these kids a I think a probably a better insight as to how the older generation, how exactly fits into society, but. A better understanding of the older generation than. If you like..... I mean like what they've got to offer.' ◇

Summary: Effective intergenerational contact interventions are characterised by positive and meaningful interactions between generations. The Schools Linking intergenerational programme excels in meeting these aims: younger and older people recalled meaningful and memorable interactions with each other, involving an exchange of personal information that broke down barriers and broke down stereotypes.

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- Older and younger generations stereotypes created significant anxiety about the programme prior to the first session: younger people were initially concerned they would not be taken seriously or listened to; Older people thought younger people would be uncommunicative, not be knowledgeable and would be disruptive.
 - Through the activities and sharing personal information, stereotypes were challenged and fears about the interaction were dispelled.
 - Interviewees shared several meaningful interactions in detail: clearly personal information was shared and had a significant impact.
 - For younger people, it was essential that they felt their ideas were respected; for older people their concern was about young people's engagement with the activity.
-

DOES INTERGENERATIONAL LINKING STRENGTHEN CONFIDENCE IN INTERACTION ACROSS GENERATIONS (I.E. BUILD CONFIDENCE IN CONTACT)

Analysis revealed a statistically significant boost in confidence in contact: as a result of the intergenerational programme younger and older people felt more confident about interacting with the other generation and were more open to future contact.

'Confidence in contact' refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to effectively interact with members of another social group, for example younger people's confidence in their ability to interact with the older generation. Individuals who are confident in contact will have reduced anxiety about future interactions across the divide, will have good empathy and understanding of the needs and experiences of the other group, and will be open to future interactions with members of that group.

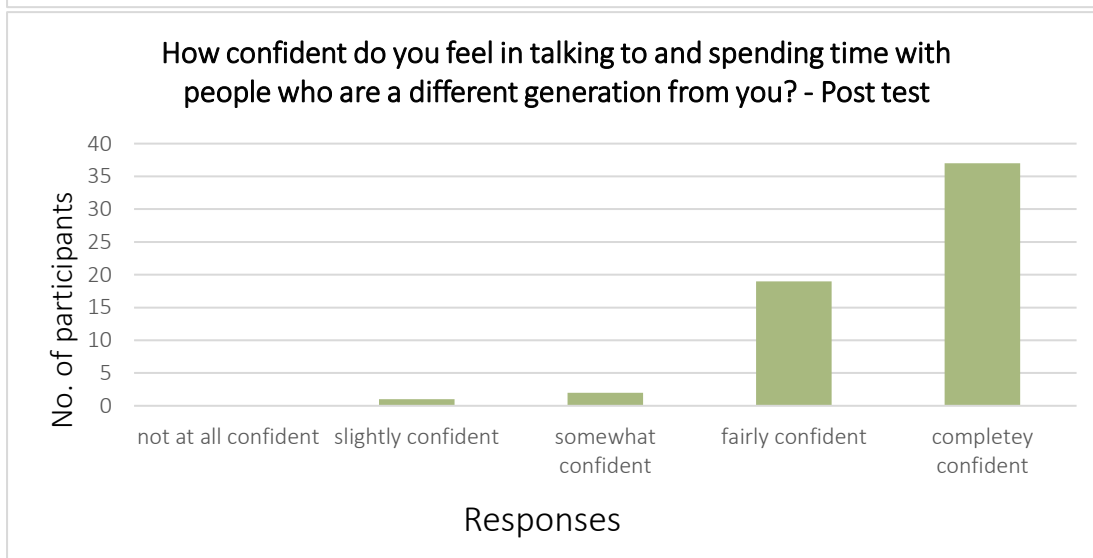
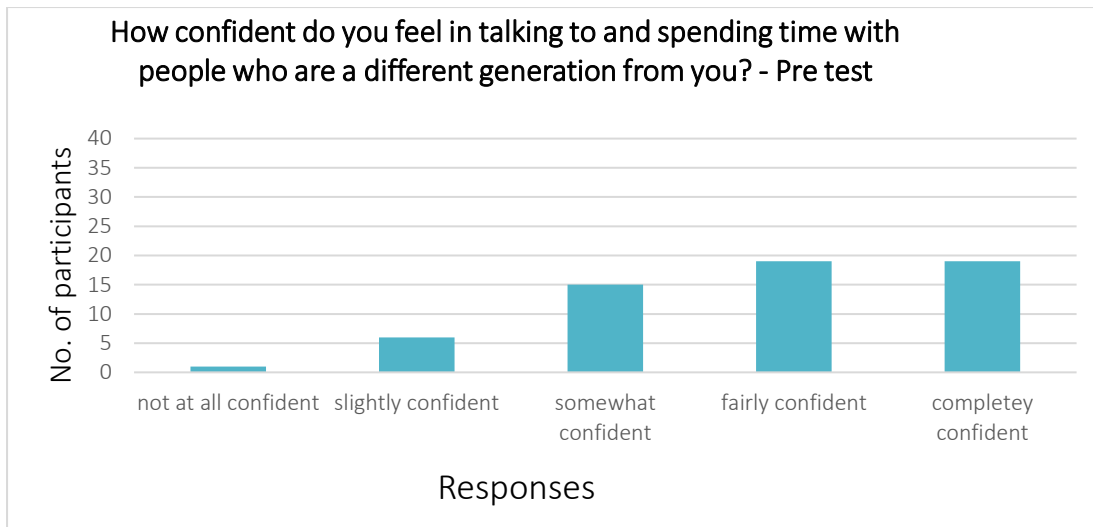
How do we create confidence in contact? Positive and meaningful interactions with members of other groups are an effective tool for boosting confidence in contact.

SURVEY FINDINGS: HOW CONFIDENT DO YOU FEEL IN TALKING TO AND SPENDING TIME WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE FROM A DIFFERENT GENERATION TO YOU?

93.4%

No. of secondary students confident in spending time with someone from a different generation, after intergenerational linking.

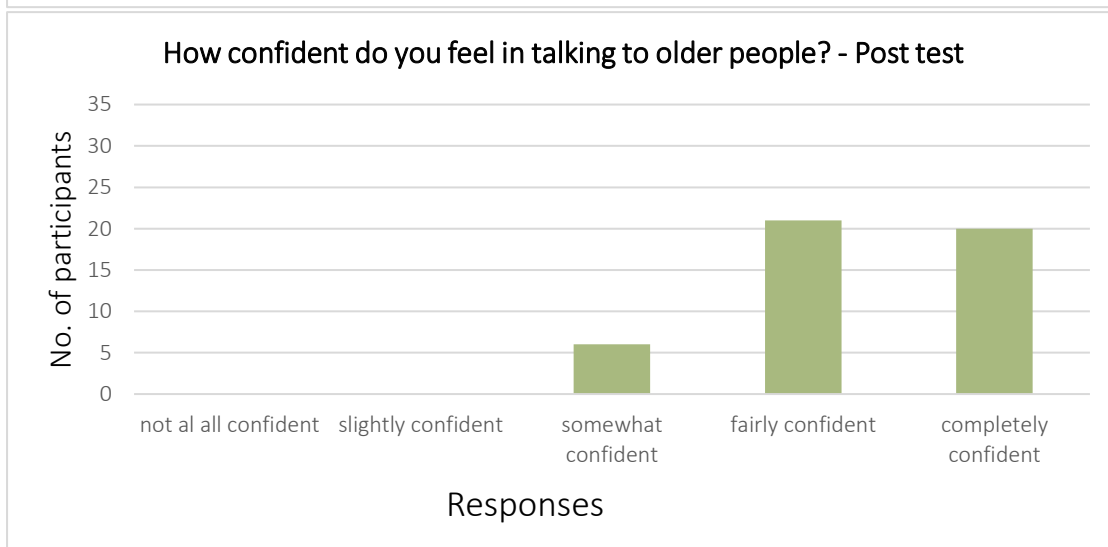
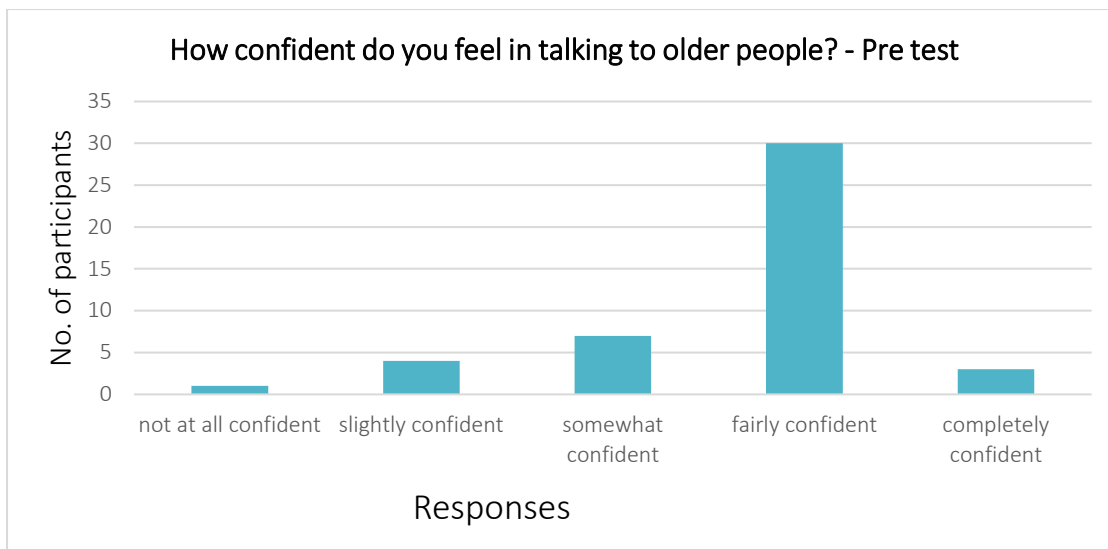
We compared responses on this question prior to, and after young people completed the intergenerational contact programme. For secondary students, our analyses revealed a statistically significant shift in confidence: young people were significantly more confident after completing the programme (*mean response*= 4.56) compared with before the programme started (*mean response* = 3.81). When we look more closely at their responses, we see that prior to the programme, 62% report feeling fairly or completely confident about talking with someone from a different generation to them. Meanwhile following the programme, 93.4% report feeling confident about interacting with someone from a different generation.



Among our primary school pupils, there was also a statistically significant shift in confidence: young

79.4%
 No. of primary students confident about interaction with older people, after intergenerational linking.

people were significantly more confident about interacting with older people after completing the programme (*mean response= 4.30*) compared with before the programme started (*mean response = 3.67*). When we look more closely at their responses, we see that prior to the programme, 62.3% report feeling fairly or completely confident about talking with an older person. Meanwhile following the programme, 79.4% report feeling confident about interacting with older people.



Interviews with older and younger people supported these findings and revealed a significant decrease in anxiety about interacting with the other generation, an increase in openness to future interactions, and boosted confidence in their ability to successfully interact with someone from the other generation.

Initial anxiety: older and younger generations reported that at the beginning of the project they felt a certain amount of anxiety around meeting people from the other generation. This was in part driven by stereotypic beliefs about the other: older people were concerned the younger participants would be unresponsive, not want to interact and would mess around, consistent with typical stereotypic beliefs about the younger generation. This generated a level of anxiety among older people about interacting in the future.

'I thought there would be a lot of shyness, a lot of reticence' ◊

'my main sort of doubt.... was how well that kids would communicate with older people.' ◊

Other concerns, among both younger and older generations, were around whether they would have anything in common, have anything to talk about, and whether the other generation would reject

them. Both older and younger generations believed the other group did not want to interact with them. This perceived lack of interest in contact is a barrier to future interactions:

‘a bit concerned that you know, [they would think] ‘this is an old fogey, why do I need to talk to him?’ sort of thing. ‘He’s not my granddad, but he says he is as old as my granddad. And I don’t normally associate people that old.’ ◇

Meanwhile younger people had concerns the older generations wouldn’t understand them and would take over the project, telling them what to do without listening to them. These anxieties are consistent with typical stereotypes held about younger and older generations and led to feelings of unease ahead of the interaction. This was evident across all schools:

‘a little bit nervous because that maybe people haven’t how that react to younger person didn’t know if they’d go into it with some views already. Like I didn’t know that, like the older generation go into it with the view that our view isn’t as important.’ *

In some cases, younger people’s anxieties about the interaction were based on previous negative experiences with older people. One explained an experience where an older person had blamed them for some vandalism they had come across in the park.

‘I wasn’t nervous, but I had mixed thoughts about it because I’ve had mixed experiences with different old people and I wasn’t sure how that would affect everything’ *

There was also a concern that their views would be so different to each other that it would be difficult to work together or that discussions would be derailed. Ultimately younger people were still excited prior to meeting their older people.

‘at first I thought it might be a bit hard because we never spoke to them or anything before, but I was excited as well.’ *

‘Like I thought they were going to be like, really different to us, right? Really different views and so some thought like that. It might be really awful conversations,’ *

Over the course of the project, and across each session, this anxiety was significantly reduced, and older and younger participants reported they felt more at ease with the other group, more confident in their interactions with the younger/older people involved and about interacting with others again in the future.

‘Little awkward start, but once we had broken down the barriers and, you know, felt more ease, I would say that it would have changed their attitude [towards older people] yes.’ ◇

‘I’d have a bit of tummy butterflies and things, but towards the end of it, no, this is nice. I’ve got to know the girls and things so a lot more comfortable. So I did push myself.’ ◇

Older people specifically highlighted how the project made younger people realise older people don't all have a negative view of them.

'it was quite an eye opener to quite a lot of the students.... That's not just their own family and their own grandparents or whatever, but that others didn't see them in a very negative light.' ♦

Summary: Older and younger generations were initially anxious about interacting with the other generation, but this anxiety decreased over time due to the meaningful interactions supported by the programme.

Confidence in contact was significantly boosted as a result of the programme: following the intergenerational project young people were significantly more confident in interacting with the other generation.

Interviews revealed older people were also more confident in future interactions.

This was driven by reduced anxiety through experiencing positive and meaningful interactions across the generation divide.

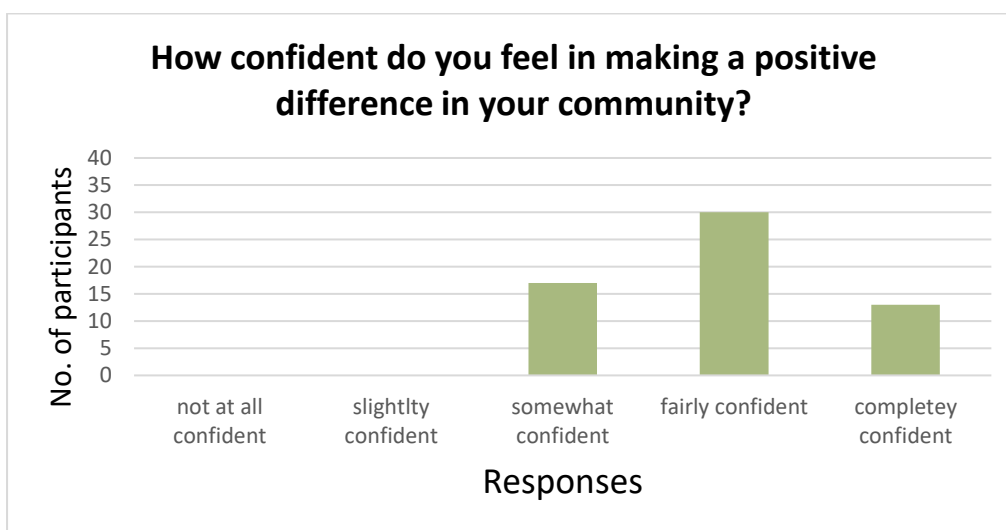
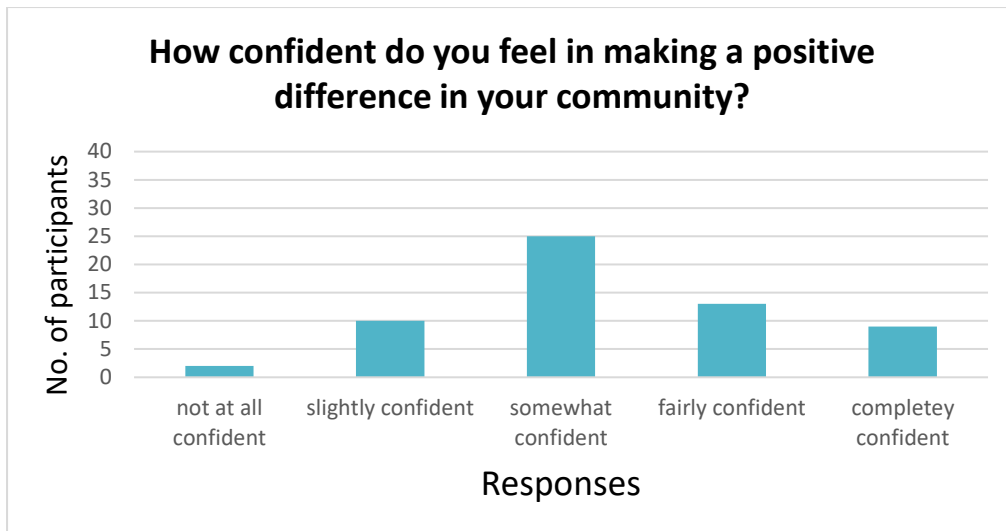
EMPOWERING YOUNGER AND OLDER GENERATIONS TO TAKE ACTION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN THEIR RURAL COMMUNITY

Analysis revealed a statistically significant boost in confidence in social action: as a result of the intergenerational programme younger people felt more confident about taking action on social issues important to them, and in their local community.

71.7%

No. of secondary students confident about making a positive difference in their community, after intergenerational linking.

We compared responses on this question prior to, and after young people completed the intergenerational contact programme. For secondary students, our analyses revealed a statistically significant shift in confidence: young people were significantly more confident after completing the programme (*mean response= 3.93*) compared with before the programme started (*mean response = 3.28*). When we look more closely at their responses, we see that prior to the programme, 36.1% report feeling fairly or completely confident about making a positive difference in their community. Meanwhile following the programme, 71.7% report feeling confident about making a positive difference in their community.



For primary students, there was no shift in their confidence that they could ‘make the world a better place’. (Pretest *Mean* = 3.81; post test *mean* = 3.93).

Interviews showed that the social action element of the project was important to both younger and older generations.

All parties noted there is no room in the school curriculum for discussion of social issues at the level of depth offered by this programme. The project therefore provides a unique opportunity to explore

*‘we don't often get like the opportunity to, like, try and make a change.’**

social issues in depth, explore different perspectives and take or make plans to take social action.

Young people thought the project offered a chance to talk about issues they do not usually get to discuss in school hours, and explore ways they can take action to make a change in their local community:

*'Just got to voice our opinions because like, it's not something that would normally just talk about, it's not just like the average conversation at school, but then like, as the teachers were coming round and there was the head teacher was in and they just got to hear our opinions'**

'We had several discussions about the the global issues affecting the local situation, you know. flooding. And, you know, climate change and rising temperatures right at sea levels, loss of habitat, loss of wildlife, pretty quite wide-ranging discussions. So, but I think it helped them to understand that those global issues had a local impact.' ◊

In some cases, the groups of younger and older people considered issues at a global or national level, but some discussed issues at a local level too. There were a number of examples where groups discussed global issues but zoomed in on these at a local or hyperlocal level, considering the impact within their own community and school, and the action they could take there. Examples included the environment, local services, prescription costs, LGBTQ+ rights, gender equality and cost of living/food banks.

As one young person pointed out: *'there's so much local issues like recycling, so you know you don't have to talk in a national level to relate with people on that in relation to your question, of course.'**

Participants shared some really impactful examples of local social action. One group were unhappy with the LGBTQ+ posters around school which they felt were in some cases too general, and in other cases drew attention to LGBTQ+ as a group. They felt these should be replaced with posters with more specific advice around LGBTQ+ issues and posters that promoted inclusions and equality in general. The group created posters in their groups with the older people, and then were able to put these up in school.

The experience these young people had through the project inspired and equipped them to take part in further volunteering. Others reported that the project increased their collective commitment to social action on their issue.

IMPORTANCE OF INTERGENERATIONAL CONTACT AND SOCIAL ACTION IN A RURAL COMMUNITY:

Older people were surprised by the younger generations' knowledge of local issues, for example pressures on services due to recent housing and building, need for better transport links, poverty (particularly local food banks), facilities and doctors, schools, and other services. Young people felt these additional facilities were important but at the same time they did not want to lose the countryside feel and character of their neighbourhood.

Younger and older people felt there was a need to run programmes such as this in rural areas, because they feel they are often overlooked compared with city schools, in terms of innovative education programmes:

'for small schools like this and many others across the countryside, there may not be as much funding to be able to get this to work, knowing there may not be as many people willing to come in.... useful to have another organization help set up and run this to give students in this school and others a chance at that type of experience.' *

One older person noted that rural schools are often neglected for this type of extra curricular project, perhaps not seen as a 'problem' area needing additional help due to their supposed strong communities. However, the older people also noted the specific needs of young people in rural areas (lack of transport, lack of things to do) and the needs of the schools, with pupils with very varied experiences who can live in a variety of different towns and are bussed into school from a wide catchment area. *'They have a disparate but shared experiences of where they are' ◊*

Particularly with regard to intergenerational contact, younger people thought this was important to facilitate in rural areas, as in cities there are more people and more opportunities for mixing across generations:

'There's just things to do, and there's also less people because in big cities there'll be lots more people of different generations.... in rural places, most of their villages and towns are sort of just not very mixed.' *

Some younger people also thought the interactions with older people went more smoothly and group work was richer because the older and younger generations involved lived in the same community:

'because it's like they're part of our community and share then I think so. It's like easier to relate to them maybe.' *

'I think one of the people spoke about how she goes to the old girls school for like yoga. And that's like probably really close to my house.' *

One teacher thought that the project made the older people feel safer in their community: the project gave them a chance to meet young people and get to know them as individuals. Teachers thought this would help them avoid relying on stereotypic expectations that young people are up to no good, and humanize them, which in turn would help older people feel less intimidated.

'a lot of the older people said that it made them feel a bit safer just in the community.'

Δ

Teachers also noted that this project is particularly useful in rural communities: In a rural community it's likely that local community will have links with the school, or will be seeing young people around, and so it is all the more important to break down that barrier:

'So I think when you've got a school where it really is like everyone in this village has a connection to in high school one way or the other, I think it's really important in rural schools.' Δ

Summary: Older and younger generations valued the focus on social action in a rural community.

They felt the project was richer due to them living in the same community, sharing that connection and being aware of the same local issues.

Both younger and older generations felt there was a particular need for this project in rural communities, where there is more need, where schools are less likely to get funding for these types of projects, and where there are less people and less opportunities for intergenerational contact outside of their families.

INSIGHTS INTO THE MOST EFFECTIVE FORMAT AND DELIVERY OF INTERGENERATIONAL LINKING

RECRUITMENT:

What motivated older generation to take part: There were a number of factors that motivated older people to sign up for the project, including curiosity to meet and learn more about schools and younger people today, contributing to the local community and specifically schools following COVID, and personal requests from community organisations they are already members of. Many older people had a background in education or were involved in other faith or community groups e.g., University of the Third Age (U3A) or the local guild or rotary club, and so were experienced in successfully contributing to community projects.

'I've been asked to and they needed a gap filled and I I've always loved working across the age groups, and thought, yeah, if I can do something positive to help back in the school there.' Δ

'see a lot of the children passing by as they're going to school and don't know, don't see them. I thought be nice to get an insight into that school to see how the children are.' Δ

A number of older people mentioned seeing the school children in the village or walking past their house to school and this more distant interaction piqued their curiosity and made them want to know more about what happens behind the school gates, but also to make a difference and contribute to the school community somehow, particularly as many schools and young people are struggling post-covid.

'I feel that this generation has had a pretty rough deal.... I felt that they were in need of a lot of sort of care and attention and maybe mentoring and that kind of thing that and an opportunity for them to work through some of the chaos that was inflicted on them.' ◇

Some felt the young people in their rural area particularly struggled with transition to secondary school, where they move from a small primary to a large secondary, and this was compounded by covid which led to more isolation, making that transition even more difficult.

Some older people who were new to the area saw the project as a means to meet new people from both the older and the younger generation.

What motivated the younger generation to take part: Some thought the experience would make a good addition to their CV and develop their academic and social skills: *'you gotta get used to be able to talking about civilly instead of just getting annoyed and saying whatever.'* *

Others had previous positive experiences with older people, and this attracted them to the project.

'when I was younger, I used to live with my grandma. So I would like used to speaking to all the people and they're just, they're so lovely.' *

Methods of recruitment – schools and younger generation: A number of different models were used for recruiting young people in schools. This shaped the experience of inter-generational linking and determined who ultimately benefited from the project in the school. One school embedded the programme within their Health and Social Care module. The benefit of this was that young people were highly motivated for the project which was directly related to their studies. It also helped them to provide practical, real-life experience and application of their learning. For the school it also meant the project was not in addition to their regular curriculum and teachers were available to facilitate the project:

'I know from our health and social teacher, one of the issues that we have a lot is that our students don't interact with any older people ...And I thought, just what an opportunity for them. They've got to do all these role plays and things of like helping an older person and like treating them with dignity and treating them with respect. It's like it's just such an opportunity for them to actually learn how to speak to an older person.' Δ

Schools also saw this project as a means of connecting with the local community and enriching their students learning experience, and pushing them out of their comfort zone to develop their social skills and awareness of difference:

'what all schools are trying to do is give subjects real world application.' Δ

'we're looking for anything we can do that kind of enriches our offer beyond just your bog standard.' Δ

To recruit pupils, other schools either recruited members of their School Council or Student Counsellors. In one case, School Council members also invited a friend who wasn't on the school council. The latter seemed an effective means of ensuring motivated students take part in the project, but participation is widened by including their friends.

There was a view that this project might also be particularly beneficial for young people not typically engaged academically, or who struggle academically and so don't usually get a chance to shine in that particular way.

'the group that are doing this subject, which isn't necessarily academically recognised, so to have this is just for their self-esteem, I think is brilliant. I would have carried on working with them... it was good' ◇

Methods of recruitment – older generation: older people were recruited via community organisations, for example U3A, Rotary Club, local church. Some were recruited via direct emails from the chair of such organisations or recruited by friends.

One older participant noted the value of approaching local community organisations e.g., U3A to recruit 'community minded' people for the project. However, this approach does appear to have some drawbacks:

People can be 'dragooned' into it, and can sometimes end up at the first meeting with very little knowledge of what exactly they have signed up for:

'to be honest with you, before I actually went along to the first meeting, I didn't have a clue. 'What it was about?' I knew it was to do with the kids at school and sort of and vaguely that it was something to do with the older people in in the community, what the connection was until I went along, I didn't know. ' ◇

Older people can feel pressured to sign up to represent their organisation and may not necessarily be best placed to deliver the project effectively. To compensate for those participants who opt-out of the project at that point, clear training and explanations about the project activities and expectations in the first meeting, and over-recruitment, is recommended.

Older people recognised the stereotypic beliefs younger and older generations held about each other, and believed this project would provide an opportunity to break down barriers between the generations. A number of older people cited this specifically as their motivation to join the project:

'We're very judgmental about younger children, teenagers in particular, and they're quite judgmental about us too.... The more you can you can connect with them, then you can break those barriers down. That's what we thought and just that we're interested in.' ◇

STRONG FACILITATION A STRENGTH OF THE PROJECT:

'It [icebreaker] did break the barriers down a bit.' ◇

Younger and older generations alike highlighted the value of the organisation of the activities, and the ice breaker tasks that were used in the first meeting between the younger and older participants. Many older interviewees thought these discussion tasks provided an opportunity for them to get to

know each other, and to share information about themselves. The set questions also smoothed over any awkwardness in the initial interactions as it provided a structure for the discussion and helped to avoid awkward silences. The questions were 'low risk' and innocuous, meaning all could engage. Younger people also reported that the ice breakers helped to generate conversation in the beginning, supporting them in getting to know each other and the older people in the group, effectively reducing their anxiety and making them feel more relaxed about the interaction.

One younger person commented that having these at the start of the session meant they could then go on to talk about their chosen social issue with ease, and without having to get to know each other alongside those topic-based discussions.

'that [ice breakers] seemed to work very well, because the children seem very relaxed with us.' ♦

'I feel like it'd be all over the place [if not have ice breakers and dedicated getting to know you time] because you'd be because you'd be given this task to complete, but then you'd also be trying to get to know each other and you just would and not doing the task.' *

'And because like it was quite chatty at first. So it wasn't awkward or anything, like we talked like, future jobs and stuff, what you want to do when you are older so it kind of, like, got us a bit like closer I think.' *

The icebreaker questions were also good for bringing to light and managing similarities and differences on non-controversial and safe subjects, as well as getting to know each other, for example they discussed different places they wanted to go in the world and explored these 'safe' similarities and differences, before going on to discuss more serious social issues.

PROJECT/ACTIVITY PROVIDED JOINT FOCUS:

The interactive and cooperative nature of the tasks were essential for young people to feel valued and respected – the project provided opportunities for both older and younger generations to share their ideas, be heard, and feel valued and respected. This element was particularly important for young people.

A number of older and younger people noted that by focusing on a joint activity, this took the pressure off individuals to talk, and so opened up young people in particular to share personal experiences and feelings with the group, allowing the generations to get to know each other.

Cooperative tasks were more effective at facilitating discussion: The selected activities worked well when they involved different tasks that could be shared out according to team members strengths and required cooperation between the group members:

*'the project itself I think is what helped us to bond together' **

'I think it was just discussing what we're doing and how we're going to do it. We, although we were working individuals, we also worked as a team and I think it was the team work that that really helped.... And I think the other thing that really helped was the fact that we were doing something together, these colleges, the way that that operated.' ◇

The project design also meant tasks could be divided up among the group that played to the group members strengths, allowing them all to contribute equally to the task. For example, one person might search for words, another cut out, another come up with ideas:

'I think that works very well. That was a good idea of whoever came up with the idea. So the activity could play to different strengths, you know within the group there would be different strengths and there would be something for them all to do.' ◇

Likewise, where older people felt they had less to contribute in terms of creativity, the younger generation were seen to really come into their own on that element of the task. This created a sense of equal status within the interaction that younger and older people valued:

'one thing that did help break things down was that our skills that making the collage were basically equal. I was an adult but I wasn't brilliant... I was on the same level as them and I think that helped. You know, they realized that he's not as brilliant as we might have thought he is.' ◇

'We'd be doing arty things. Now that's not my forte at all. So we said, well you girls can do this cos you're creative. So you make up the posters, and we give them little prompts as to what they wanted to put on this posters or what the particular topic was..... so they were very creative in that way, which was really nice' ◇

Contrary to initial concerns about not being listened to, through the discussion tasks and activities, younger people felt valued and respected, and the stereotypic expectations that older people would be closed minded and not open to younger generations ideas could be challenged in a real way.

*'it felt very equal' **

Need to ensure time for discussion: While all interviewees enjoyed the activities, some thought the nature of the tasks reduced time available for discussion, as young people would become focused on individual tasks, example cutting out. While the approach of assigning individual tasks may be efficient and necessary if there are many absences over the sessions, it does reduce the interaction required between group members.

VALUE OF TOPICS BEING CHOSEN BY YOUNG PEOPLE:

Older and younger generations believed it was essential to the success of the project that the specific topics discussed were chosen by young people. This was important as it gave younger people a sense of ownership, and also, they chose topics they felt comfortable discussing and perhaps even ‘experts’ in, which made them more confident going into discussions and better able to contribute. It was also important that they be encouraged to contribute as much as they wanted or felt able to.

‘the children had prepared the issues that they wanted to discuss. It was their issues. So they owned the issues and they felt passionately about them.’ ♦

‘it wasn't national curriculum. You know, this was something that they had chosen to discuss and talk about and work with.... of course they were going to be animated. They chose it. They could get up and walk about and talk to each other just as much you know as they chose to’ ♦

VALUE OF THE LISTENING/OPEN EVENT: A CLEAR HIGHLIGHT OF THE PROGRAMME

Both younger and older generations saw this event as the highlight of the programme. This was seen as a chance for the young people to showcase their work, develop their presentation skills, and hear what others had been working on – this was consistently highlighted by younger and older people as the best part of the whole experience.

The event is also an opportunity to provide younger people with positive feedback, from their teachers, the older people, and invited guests, who were, for example, members of community organisations, or school governors, members of local council.

The listening event also provides younger people with a chance to meet more older people, across the age divide, and people of influence in the local community with whom they can share their ideas and views. This is likely to further strengthen their positive attitudes towards older people, and further challenge their stereotypes as they begin to know more older people.

The listening event seemed to work particularly well when external visitors were invited who had some knowledge of local issues, the specific issues the groups are looking at OR in education. The external visitors were then able to draw on this expertise to generate interest and discussion, and even make suggestions for further social action. Older people actually had a crucial role to play in inviting external visitors/community groups to the listening event.

Many of the older people were recruited through community or special interest groups that they were members of, and a number had a wide network of people they worked with or new in the local community. A number of older people provided examples of how they were able to draw on that network to enrich or extend the project. This included inviting their relevant contacts in the local community to the listening event, connecting the school with local organisations, and also taking young people’s needs/points back to their own organisation.

'I invited a representative from the Community Foundation for Calderdale to come to the, to the final presentation.' ♦

Young people very much appreciated the external experts coming into school and listening to their ideas and offering to help them make changes or take action/contribute to society and community. One group of young people talked in detail about the individuals that their older person invited to the event – this was really meaningful for them and had a huge impact on their sense of self-worth and confidence in their ideas. They felt valued. But they also remembered a lot of details and information that they learned from this contact, who ran a local foodbank.

*'I became a better person from seeing that'**

Older people felt there was a real opportunity at the listening event to build links between the school and local community:

'there's opportunities, you know, with the final presentation to draw people in and get them closer, you know, to the schools, I suppose.' ♦

Others could see the benefit of developing links between their own charitable organisations and the school and young people and thought inter gen linking could be a means by which to involve young people in their organisation or decision making. For example.

'I invited a representative to come because I just thought that in the decision making within the Community Foundation, it would be helpful to at least understand what young people were thinking about and what they saw issues and where perhaps as a foundation we could say, well, that issue we could help with by, you know funding a certain charity when organizations or something.' ♦

'I sort of got a tear in my eye when I was hearing about how the how some of the kids were struggling and the families were struggling, which is why I've chosen the cost of living topic and I'm involved with the local food bankI was made aware that some of the children weren't aware of support that was available, so I was able to contact the school and to suggest that they provided information about the support that the Food Bank and other agencies can give, and I was able to get the Chair of the [local] Food Bank to come to the listening event. ...spoke to them and I understand they've got some sort of arrangement with the school now and part of the school does actually hand out bags.' *

*'It made me feel as if I was part of something very valuable' **

The listening event also made older people feel their contribution was valued.

Listening event, a means to extend the project to young people's families:

Inviting families to the listening event was a highly effective way of involving families in the project, as they then had an opportunity to meet the older people, receive positive feedback about their children, and provide positive feedback to their own child. This was particularly the case for those

younger people who were not as academic in school, and so parents may not often have an opportunity to see them shine in this way:

'So I was sort of able to talk to the parent about the child's. How impressed there was and you know, give a bit of positive feedback.' ◊

'they [family] don't really see our work much like what we do in school and stuff.' *

'Just like sitting there, seeing what we've been working on, he's heard me talking about it, but he didn't actually know what we've been doing.... when he actually saw we've been doing it was quite interested.' *

Creative outputs of the project:

Young people in particular appreciated the professional production of the end-product e.g., the zines, posters, creative work, videos. Producing a tangible piece of work and putting it together into a professional looking binding or book, is important for raising the importance of their ideas, the work and ultimately the project, and what they have achieved.

'they were so chuffed with their booklets. They were so pleased with those and a couple of pictures of them in there. It was really good. Yeah, they loved it.' ◊

'It was so impressive when you saw it together. Umm, a mix of photos of us and these collages and... it raised its importance and I'm sure the children felt the same. That this was something they had done. It looked really impressive.' ◊

'I think the kids were very proud of it because, at their age, that they created it themselves, you know, and they were, they were obviously quite chuffed ... I was myself, actually.' ◊

Seeing all the young people's work come together had a big impact on the younger and older people, who really valued it and were impressed with it, also for someone to have gone to the effort of producing it made them feel like their work was worthwhile – and worth publishing in a book.

FACILITATORS, TRAINING AND PREPARATION ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESS OF PROJECT:

Training: Older people highlighted the need for the training and preparation that the facilitators provided to the older people. Facilitators needed to provide essential training for older people so that they know what to expect and what is involved, get tips on engaging young people in the discussions and tasks and in handling sensitive issues.

'And I must admit that sort of fear [that young people would not engage] was a bit borne out because the two. Kids that we had in our group. You it was like getting blood out of a stone sometimes to get an answer to a question. But you know, over time that they came out and they actually they were quite good kids.' ◊

Facilitators: All older people emphasised the crucial role played by the facilitators had in the project, from providing information and training, to organising the rooms, and crucially for ably facilitating the discussions in the sessions. Facilitators were particularly useful for those groups that were struggling at times with ideas and discussion:

'she'd she'd sit, squat down at the side of the table and sort of asked them questions...so she was very good. She went round all the tables like that. She was a very bubbly person.' ◊

'she presented very charismatically. I think very enthusiastically.... they were certainly driving it and very enthusiastic.' ◊

'She kept the whole thing together. ...Kept the whole thing cohesive' ◊

Younger people thought the facilitators were useful for making sure everyone was able to contribute to discussion and the interaction ran smoothly. By facilitating the discussions, this helped to connect the younger and older people and in turn create a feeling of community:

'they came around the tables and there was like helping us and stuff and there was, including everyone in the groups and stuff like that.' *

'I think if they [facilitators] weren't there wouldn't have been as like a community and I feel like it would have been a bit more separate.' ◊

Planning and organisation: Overall, interviewees thought the programme was well-organised and organised in such a way that everyone felt comfortable with each other. Older people recognised the importance of extensive planning and organisation and communication in order for these types of initiatives to run effectively.

The use of ice breakers followed by structured discussion and tasks facilitated meaningful interactions and group work that brought the different generations together:

'I've done these things myself. It was very carefully planned.... I think that groundwork was absolutely essential.' ◊

'it was well set up..... we felt comfortable with each other...and I think that's important. I think it has to be you know, the groundwork has to be done.' *

'So the groundwork as in all the organisation making you, all the visitors, you know feel comfortable, knew what was involved.... the students feel comfortable as well. So that you know we all knew what we were doing' ◊

Older people recognised the importance of careful planning and organisation in order for the interactions to run more smoothly, so that everyone could concentrate on the task at hand, their interactions and make the most of the time available: the facilitators and the meticulous organisation was essential in order for meaningful connections to develop in such a short time.

Creating a comfortable environment: Every single older person and young person talked about the importance of the biscuits and refreshments. The interviewees specifically highlighted the importance

of these in putting people at ease, at motivating young people in particular, and for breaking down barriers. These are essential and definitely had a role to play as an equaliser, a talking point and creating a comfortable environment for everyone.

NUMBER OF OLDER PEOPLE IN EACH GROUP IMPORTANT:

When considering the most effective format of intergenerational linking, one immediate concern is the makeup of the working groups, as this impacts on the intergroup contact experience. The number of older people in a group impacted how enjoyable the contact experience was and determined the number of older people that young people met. We know that the more positive interactions we have with different members of other social groups, the more positive our attitudes to that group will be.

Some young people had a number of older people assigned to their group, while others had only one. Those younger people who had two older people assigned to their group felt it was beneficial for them, as it helped keep conversations going:

*'because there was two of them, they could speak together about their experiences and then share it with us. Yeah. So it was much easier.'**

Some younger people who were assigned only one older person in their group thought it would have been better to have two, particularly if they were a larger group (e.g., 3+ younger people). This would help the older person manage the group, but also give them a chance to meet more than one older person. Another solution to this could be to rotate older people around groups for at least one session. However, this may also limit the potential for meaningful interactions and deeper connections that can be built with the same older person over time.

Younger people held mixed views on what was the best approach:

'it may be a lot better to just stay with, well, two people just so you can build that bond over a few weeks and get more comfortable talking.' *

'That's why we're rather rotate around to talk to multiple people, to see more fuel, backgrounds and motives.' *

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Lack of information for older people, particularly if miss earlier briefing session:

Missed briefing: older people particularly felt they would have liked more information, and if they joined the programme late, they felt they were 'on the back foot' throughout as they didn't have the same information as the other participants:

'I did certainly feel going into it because I had missed the first meeting I was going in, not really knowing much about what was going on at all, and I think certainly, everything could have been better prepared.' ◊

Listening event: The need for further information or structure was keenly felt with regards to the listening event. A number of older people thought the listening event could have been even more impactful if it had been better organised and made better use of the time available.

'there was a missed opportunity.... first we got there and we're told to go and sit on our tables and then the visitors came in and they were put on our tables. Nobody given us any instructions. We had no idea how the afternoon was going to work' ◊

More detailed information needed at recruitment stage: A number of older people reported other older participants leaving the programme because it 'wasn't what they expected' or signed up for. A number of older people highlighted how problematic this is, and potentially upsetting for young people who may feel rejected. Indeed, a few young people did comment on their older person who left, with no explanation provided.

'Some men who'd apparently signed up early on now, whether that was because they hadn't had enough or didn't know what they were letting themselves in for, or the groups or the tables they found themselves on and didn't think this was an area they could relate to or wish to relate to' ◊

'But you know, by doing that, what does that say to the children can't. Be bothered with it.' ◊

'to start with, I didn't know what it involved. I thought it was going to be, you were going to go to school and talk about your life, your experiences or whatever, which is fine. So it was interesting to know that we weren't doing that, we were just working with the kids and also... it would have been good to know. I think this might have put some potential applicants off. It would have been good to know what the commitment was beforehand, so you know you'll be asked to go to for one hour events or three. Because I don't know that that was given in the initial [information], I think you maybe thought you were signed up to going to school once a week for a year or something like that.' ◊

Providing clear information on the project prior to meeting the first intergenerational meeting could help to avoid drop-outs mid-programme: a few older people did say they had no idea what the project entailed before signing up. This may be an artefact of the recruitment process; whereby older people learn about the project via their community organisation or other third parties. Further information on time commitment would also be useful at an early point in the recruitment process.

When older people leave the programme it's important to explain why they have left, as the younger people jump to conclusions and feel rejected by the older person.

Getting the right older people as volunteers: older and younger people emphasised the importance of getting the right volunteers for the project. Some noted the importance of, in future, diversifying the older generation recruits, particularly if the programmes were run in a diverse city context. The older people felt there were not particular skills or experience needed, but commitment and motivation were essential:

'you've got to get the right volunteers in.' ◇

'a lovely good cross section, the quiet and the confident. You need a jolly good mixture, but reliability is the greatest ability. And if they're not buying into it wholeheartedly, forget it.' ◇

'I think you do need people from different backgrounds.' ◇

One older person commented that many of the older participants were retired professionals, and so to reflect the communities and background of the young people future programmes would need to diversify the older recruits.

Needing more time: The older people felt there was a lot to try and pack in – this was a consistent finding across the older and younger people interviewed. The general consensus among older and younger generation was that one additional session would reduce the stress and pressure to produce something in such a limited time, and allow more time for discussion:

'[we were] under a bit of pressure to get something cut out and done, actually, because the time you have these, I think we had two working sessions and the feedback session. you came in and you had some activity talking between, you know, with the children and then had to get on and do something.... There wasn't a lot of time for it.' ◇

'a couple of times I thought I wish I had a bit more time,' ◇

'I would have liked slightly more meetings than slightly closer together if that was possible because it I thought there was too big a gap..., it would have been better sort of fortnightly, something like that to keep the momentum going.' ◇

'I feel like we could have had a little bit longer with them. You know it, I feel like it was like such a short amount of time.' *

Apparent lack of senior leadership support in schools: It was noted by some older people that there was a lack of interest or support visible from senior leaders in schools.

'There didn't seem to be any. Buy in from the senior leadership.... but there was no engagement of senior management through the course or. At the afternoon and I think that's appalling.' ◇

'I think [buy-in from senior leadership] it gives it a bit more credence' ◇

Older people believed more visible support from senior leadership in schools would not only help to make children understand the value of what they are doing, but also make the older people feel valued as well. Older people recognised schools were very pressed from time, but they did feel they

had given up their own time to support the school and enrich the children's learning experience and felt that this could have been recognised through more involvement of teachers.

'I felt the school was not overly interested in the project.' ◊

'the setup was disappointing in that there were very few members of staff there and I thought that was a bit poor actually and I can understand that teachers you know, they know they weren't all sitting knitting in the staff room.... there should have been senior team there really' ◊

'they will see that as having value if they've got the other teachers there. Otherwise they may think well, this isn't really worth doing and there's no point to this.' ◊

The perceived lack of organisation in schools on some occasions appears to also have contributed to the impression that schools were not committed to the project. A number of older people found it frustrating that schools often seemed unaware of the scheduled events, and time was then wasted locating people and rooms. A number of older people took this as a signal of their lack of commitment to the project, though all recognised how stretched schools are:

'So we didn't get the full benefit of all the time we might have' ◊

'each time we arrived there was confusion and waiting and waiting for a room' ◊

'are you taking us seriously?' ◊

It should be noted that young people themselves did not particularly notice any perceived lack of teacher involvement. Where teachers did come into the sessions, young people commented on how beneficial this was for them:

*'Just got to voice our opinions because like, it's not something that would normally just talk about like it's not just like the average conversation at school, but then like, as the teachers were coming round and there was all like where the head teacher was in and they just got to hear, like, our opinions, like with the older people as well and each other.'** ◊

Social action element: concrete outcomes, All participants were excited and enthused by the social action side of the project. However, a number of older and younger interviewees felt the project ended 'abruptly' and would have liked more information on what they can do next. Some older people were disappointed at the lack of concrete outcomes, while some felt more advice was needed on 'next steps' to support young people to take further action on their chosen issue. Some older people wanted to continue to work with the school on the next steps but felt there was no outlet or interest from the school for this.

'the project invited all these people to listen to what these children wanted to say. And then there's this, this dead end. And that is a shame.' ◊

Some interviewees had expected more 'concrete outcomes', that is to make a significant change in the community as a result of the project. A number of older people and younger people were left asking 'what next?'. This meant that those older people who felt let down by the lack of concrete outcomes also felt the project had been less successful in meeting its aims.

There was one example where the older person reached out to the local councillor to let them know some of the ideas they had for local provision for young people. Older people were ready and willing to help the younger people take the next steps in making change, but this was met by a number of barriers. This included, for example, the local councillor who suggested they write them a letter, but this wasn't achievable for the young people.

Others thought a more realistic approach needed to be adopted, in terms of what outcomes are achievable from this project. One older person understood the point was to raise young people's confidence in their ability to make a difference in their community:

'You might change a little bit, but you know....these are 12-13 year olds who've had what, 7 hours at the most doing something. [that's] not going to change the world. What it might do, though, is change an awful lot for them, which is brilliant. It would be lovely to think that in a few years time, you know, they sit back and [remember] when I was at school, I did these posters and they put them all around the school. It would be lovely, wouldn't it? And that's enough. They can remember that they can do it.' ◊

One older person noted that there really isn't another outlet for young people to explore social issues and social action. This underlines the critical need for projects like this to develop young people's confidence in social action in their local community:

'because they wouldn't have time to do that in any other space... I mean things like youth clubs have disappeared completely around here, and anyway half of them would have to travel to one.... And you know that's really very difficult. So the fact that there was time spent on these issues, which obviously came up very quickly in the first session, umm, I think that that was really good.' ◊

Need to be aware of risk of creating greater expectations on schools: There was also a tension around school-specific recommendations that may have come out of group discussions: Among the older people, there was some disappointment that these recommendations were not picked up by the school. Meanwhile, teachers reported some trepidation about 'recommendations' for schools that may come out of the project, where the likelihood of schools delivering on those recommendations was very low. This is due to schools being very stretched in both capacities, and also the tightness of the curriculum. There is a potential for schools to feel 'targeted' by recommendations. One teacher suggested that the project should ensure a range of recommendations or ideas are shared, including ideas or suggestions that can be enacted by young people themselves, or external organisations.

'we've all identified that mental health concern, but I I'm already doing everything I can in school for mental health, you know?' Δ

'open us up a little bit to people thinking they could just be like, well, do this and do that and do that.' Δ

There is a case for managing expectations around what is achievable as a result of the project or, providing advice and training on 'next steps' so that younger and older people can implement changes or take action after completing the programme. For example, a session on how young people

themselves can take things into their own hands – support them in developing their own strategies for social action, teach them about letter writing, campaigns etc.

Potential to only benefit a small number of children: One teacher noted that, depending on how the programme was run in a school, it was potentially a lot of work, and budget, on an initiative that only a few children benefit from.

'it was quite a teacher intensive from our point of view and if you were going to do a cost benefit analysis of against it, then we'd have to look at that very carefully.' Δ

Misperceptions these conversations 'off topic' and not purpose of the programme: The interviewees, particularly the older generation participants, shared a number of examples that illustrated how they went 'off topic' and asked the young people probing questions about their lives and hopes and ambitions. Interviewees offered these up as incidental conversations, side conversations that were not the core aim of the study. But asking these questions opened up opportunities to find points of comparison, as the older people then shared information about their own lives and childhoods, and the participants got to know each other as individuals.

A number of comments from the older participants revealed they were under the impression that *the output* was the main objective of the project:

'I did like chatting to the to them, I really did. Because we found it quite difficult to stay on task.... because we just tended to talk.... I have to drag them. Back and say, look, we're supposed to be doing this,' ◊

This reveals a misconception that talking is a 'distraction' from the main task. One older person noted that they also felt there was too much focus on the output, rather than the discussion:

'I think the children got very involved in being able to write down their thoughts and their drawings. And there wasn't as much discussion as I was expecting' ◊

Interestingly this was also reflected in the young people: Some didn't like the activity element and wanted more time talking.

*'because everybody was looking down on their scissors, sticking on this stuff out and you just blocked the progression of the conversation of your folks.'**

In one case, the way the activity played out, everyone had their own individual task, and so it stifled and limited opportunities for conversation, as noted by the younger people and older people:

'Everyone had their own individual poster things that they made themselves, so it was just them focusing. There wasn't nearly as much talking going on, which I thought was the main part of it, and I enjoyed that least.' *

'it could be better with less focus on the collage and not talking.... maybe just like, let's find out what we have in common and let's yeah, tiny but less focus on the collage so I can get back to know each other.' *

Older and younger generations could not always contribute equally to the tasks: The group work was most successful when both parties felt heard and were able to contribute equally. Where it went less

well, this was where either the young people were difficult to engage and largely quiet or one-word answers, or where the older person was perceived as 'taking over' and insisting on their ideas being part of the resulting output.

'The feel like the content that was a problem with the fact that, like all our all her ideas needed to be done and like it was like she thought she was like our superior in a way. So I don't remember much, but yeah, but she was always trying to get her ideas across and make sure that they definitely went into the final drama piece that we did.' *

This group reflected that the older person had the 'power' in their group and so they had to defer to and include their ideas. Where it went better, young people believed their older person wasn't trying to 'force their ideas on them'. It will be important in future programmes to ensure this is avoided through training, facilitation and matching of older people to groups.

Recommendations:

Current structure is working well: Beginning with meetings with older and younger people separately prior to bringing the groups together. The structure of the intergenerational contact sessions, starting with low-risk ice-breaker tasks, which can engage everyone regardless of their knowledge or ability, then moving to discussion of social issues selected by the younger participants, is highly effective. This approach efficiently lays the groundwork for positive and meaningful interactions.

It is important that young people select the issues that are discussed, as this empowers them and ensures they are knowledgeable about the topics.

Training for older people:

More detailed briefing session: Continue to train older people prior to linking, including: effective and responsive listening, importance of valuing young people's ideas and dealing with self-disclosures. This should include **catchup training for those who miss early briefing.**

Training should also cover the value of informal conversations within the meetings: while the 'outcome' is important, the discussions between young and old people, and getting to know each other, is equally important.

Social action training: Some older people felt the programme could have had more concrete outcomes. This could be a case of managing expectations of the older people or, providing additional sections in the programme on next steps to make changes in their community so that young people themselves can go forward with their campaign or ideas for change.

Tailoring groups and older people: Working in pairs of older people seemed to work especially well when the young people were less talkative, or when the older people were less experienced working with young people or in a school setting. However, for those who are more experienced, being on their own with a group was not daunting at all. This suggests in future, efforts could be made to determine level of experience of the older person and their confidence in an education setting, so that they can be strategically placed with groups of young people.

Meet more than one older person: Where groups cannot be assigned two older people, could consider rotating older people around the groups. This would give younger people an opportunity to meet more members of the other generation which, research tells us, will further reduce stereotyping and ageist attitudes. It should be acknowledged however that this may lead to a more superficial relationship than if they had the same older person throughout the programme.

Clarify value of interaction and conversation, as well as the output: It will be important in future to ensure there is time and energy put into conversation, and individuals are not entirely focused on creating their outputs (e.g., collage, poster) at the detriment of interaction across generations. This can be achieved through training for older people which explains the value of conversation and discussion and in the design of tasks that require cooperation.

Build on success of the listening event: A key strength of the project is the listening event. This event met a few important outcomes: it reinforced young people's learning, connected them with the wider community, provided opportunities for positive reinforcement from teachers, family, and external visitors, and was a chance to extend the project out to young people's families.

Areas for future development to capitalise on this event include extending the network of external visitors, ensuring there is a good PA system for presenters, reminding older people to provide positive feedback, which was very much appreciated by the young people.

Provide reassurance: Younger people and older people seemed to want reassurance that the other generation had enjoyed the session and meeting them. Even though older people might have told them this, across all schools' young people seemed left wondering 'did they enjoy it?' This is important for reinforcing the impact of the intergenerational contact experience and should be factored into the programme. Younger people also appeared to be unaware of the how much the older people enjoyed it: it is important to be mindful of the need to make sure it is clear that the older people enjoyed and benefited from the project too. This could be communicated to older people in training.

It would be useful to also share with the younger people older people's journey on this project too: the emotions they feel, how this changed over the course of the project. This would provide another point of connection as they are emotionally on the same journey through the project.

SLT Support: Clearer expectations of schools in terms of senior leadership team involvement and follow up with the pupils and older people (e.g., letter of thanks, house points, letter of commendation).

Encourage notetaking and summaries week on week: On a practical level, a few of the older participants reported that they found it hard to keep track of what the group was doing/where got up to for the next session:

'I think for me because my memory is getting a bit dicey, especially short term. I would have liked a debrief where I wrote for once two things down.... And it would have helped with that gap between the sessions.' ♦

Groups could be encouraged to write a short summary each week of what they have achieved and next steps. This will be particularly useful for older people to keep track of progress and activities.

More information provided at recruitment stage: Through the interviews it transpired that some older people had little information prior to the initial meeting but were pleasantly surprised to learn

they would be working with young people on a project. One way to avoid this next time could be to perhaps produce recruitment flyers or documents that can be easily shared by the community organisations older people are being recruited from. The specific information seems to get lost in the recruitment process, could have recruited more people if the exact nature of the project and time commitment was made clearer.