

CARE HOME FRIENDS & NEIGHBOURS: INTERGENERATIONAL LINKING



A follow-on report of impact after 18 months



“Discovering the untapped potential and social value of connecting younger people with older people living in care homes.”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Care Home Friends and Neighbours (Care Home FaNs): Intergenerational Linking was a national social action project connecting young people aged 5-14 from schools and youth organisations with older people living in care homes across England. In total, at least 230 organisations (including 116 schools and youth groups, and 114 care homes) took part between 2019 and 2022. An estimated minimum of 4,000 young people and 2,000 older people living in care homes participated, making it the largest intergenerational programme and evaluation project with care homes to ever to take place in England.

The project was led by a partnership from **My Home Life England** and **The Linking Network**, alongside a network of local organisations who ran the project in 11 areas of England.

18 months after the end of the project, follow-up interviews with 7 of the 11 local organisations were undertaken. The aim was to capture how links between schools and care homes had sustained and identify the continued impact of the project and research.

Key findings

'I think there's an appetite. There's an appetite from care homes and there's been appetite from schools... loads of schools wanted to get involved.'

- All 7 organisations spoken to were continuing to deliver intergenerational linking projects, despite the fact that, for the majority of organisations, Care Home FaNs: Intergenerational Linking was their first time delivering intergenerational work. 4 of the 7 organisations had received subsequent funding to directly continue and build upon their Care Home FaNs work.
- Approximately 50% of the original school and care home partnerships across these 7 areas were continuing to link together.
- In addition, brand new partnerships had developed between a new school and new care home, as well as situations where one half of the original partnership had developed a new link with a different school or care home.
- The reported motivating factors for continuing Intergenerational Linking were:
 - To bridge the gap and broaden understanding between generations
 - To establish or enhance links between institutions and local communities
 - To achieve mutual benefits for children and older adults living in care homes
 - As a continuation of existing community projects or work with local care homes
- Intergenerational Linking is also seen as a way of evidencing certain priorities in inspection frameworks, including CQC inspections, Ofsted reports, and Religious Education inspections.
- Organisations had been inspired to incorporate intergenerational practice into their organisation's vision, emphasising its central importance.
- Over the past 18 months, activities had shifted towards face-to-face rather than virtual, following a relaxation of Covid regulations. This had led to a broader range of impact, with greater opportunities for creating space for meaningful connections to develop.
- The project leads (local brokers) were still using the resources produced at the end of the original project, and had continued to meet as a peer-to-peer Sharing Network three times a year.
- While some links had managed to be sustained independently, the project leads still considered the broker role to be fundamental to the successful delivery and sustainability of Intergenerational Linking (a significant learning from the original 2023 evaluation report). This is an important consideration in future intergenerational programmes. The broker role has also evolved to not only be a motivator and relationship-builder, but a trainer/coach in intergenerational best practice, and this model would benefit from more tailored support.

Conclusion

The follow-up interviews 18 months on demonstrate that the original investment into intergenerational practice has led to sustained impact. This includes the local organisations' maintaining and broadening their intergenerational activities, and delivering wide-ranging benefits to younger and older people, including opportunities for sharing skills and knowledge, social interaction and connection, improved health and wellbeing outcomes, a sense of purpose, friendship, joy, active citizenship and a legacy of social action. Intergenerational Linking also supports quality and excellence in care and education settings, and has been cited as evidence against inspection frameworks. This follow-up has revealed the significant, continued impact of the broker-led model, as well as in-person intergenerational activities. These elements have successfully helped to maintain strong connections across generations, and have been built into the local organisations' visions and goals. Additionally, securing further funding and actively participating in cultural events and national developments has amplified the reach and sustainability of intergenerational practices.

INTRODUCTION

Intergenerational practice refers to initiatives that bring together older adults and young people 'in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive, building on the positive resources that the younger and older have to offer each other and those around them.'

(Beth Johnson Foundation, 2009)

Care Home Friends and Neighbours (Care Home FaNs): Intergenerational Linking was a national social action project connecting young people aged 5-14 from schools and youth organisations with older people living in care homes across England. In total, at least 230 organisations (including 116 schools and youth groups, and 114 care homes) took part between 2019 and 2022. An estimated minimum of 4,000 young people and 2,000 older people living in care homes participated, making it the largest intergenerational programme and evaluation project with care homes to ever to take place in England.

The project was funded through the **#iwill Fund**. The #iwill Fund is made possible thanks to £66 million joint investment from **The National Lottery Community Fund** and the **Department of Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS)** to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities. The **Dunhill Medical Trust** acted as a match funder for the project. The Dunhill Medical Trust represents the interests of older adults now and in the future, by funding research and social change initiatives that support people to lead healthier, more rewarding lives as they age.

This project was led by a partnership between My Home Life England (MHLE) and The Linking Network (TLN). MHLE is an evidence-based and practice-informed initiative (part of City St George's, University of London) that promotes quality of life in care homes and other care settings, by empowering care leaders, improving care experiences and creating sustainable care systems. TLN is a charity working with schools and local communities to help children, young people and adults to explore identity, celebrate diversity, promote community and champion equality. Care Home FaNs is an existing national programme led by MHLE which "makes it easier for care homes to open their doors up to their communities, helping everyone to feel connected through meaningful engagement". Care Home FaNs: Intergenerational Linking thus combined MHLE's expertise with older people and care homes with The Linking Network's expertise with young people and schools and their successful Schools Linking programme.

The project was targeted in 11 less socio-economically advantaged areas of England. The project partners, MHLE and TLN, worked alongside a network of 11 local organisations, one per area, who were well networked locally and had experience working with either young people or older people living in care homes, but not necessarily both. The delivery framework was based on the TLN linking approach; these local organisations each appointed a 'broker' who acted as the local project lead, and was responsible for creating and facilitating 10 intergenerational links between schools and care homes in their local area, with ongoing support from the national team.

The 2023 final project report documented the findings of the evaluation, in order to:

- Communicate the observed impacts of connecting school children and older people living in care homes; and
- Assess the effectiveness of the broker-led model for programme delivery, in order to understand what works well and what could be improved

In addition, it is important to acknowledge the unique environmental context of the original funded project, which took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, and was therefore subject to restrictions and limitations on face-to-face contact. Therefore, as the final project report communicates, adjustments had to be made. These adjustments were referenced both as a source of frustration and a challenge to be overcome, and also as providing a unique context in which the opportunity of social interaction with others, particularly for those living and working in care homes, took on new meaning and value.

This report, written 18 months after the end of the project, presents the findings from follow-up interviews with the local brokers or project leads. The aim of these interviews was to capture:

- How links between schools and care homes have been sustained
- What continued impact participation in the Care Home FaNs: Intergenerational Linking project has had for participants, project leads and their organisations
- What learnings from the project have been taken forward by project leads
- What, if any, future opportunities have emerged as a result of engagement in the project

In the follow-up interviews, project leads also reflected on the implementation of Intergenerational Linking in a post-Covid world.

PROJECT LEAD INTERVIEWS

Of the 11 local area organisations, 10 were still in operation and were contacted as part of the follow-up research. Two local area organisations didn't have capacity for a follow-up interview and, in another local area, the project lead had left their role with no replacement member of staff to contact.

This meant 7 of the areas were able to be interviewed. In most cases this was with the original project lead. Staffing changes meant that, in 2 of the 7 organisations, we instead spoke to alternative members of staff who had originally worked at the periphery of the project.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted online by a member of the Care Home FaNs: Intergenerational Linking core project team. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis and reflection.

Due to the timing of this research and accessibility, it was not possible to speak directly to school or care home staff, or the older and younger participants.

HOW MANY SCHOOLS AND CARE HOMES HAVE CONTINUED TO LINK?

Capturing the precise number of continuing Intergenerational Links was difficult, as some local brokers are now less involved with the schools and care homes following the funded end of the project. However, in all of the local areas interviewed, some of the original school/youth group and care home partnerships were continuing to link together. In some of the local areas, this was more than half of the original number of links.

AREA	Approx number of original Intergenerational Links between schools and care homes that are continuing to link
Area 1	10
Area 2	5 (out of 5)
Area 3	4
Area 4	1
Area 5	1
Area 6	10
Area 7	6

Overall the data indicates that approximately 50% of the original school and care home partnerships are continuing to link together today. Importantly, the picture is broader than this: in addition, many of the brokers spoke of new partnerships that had developed between a brand-new school and brand-new care home, and also situations where one half of the original partnership had developed a new link with a different school or care home. Reasons cited for the latter included the closure of some care homes or changes in management, and the breakdown of communications with schools. So, whilst we can say that approximately 50% of the original links are ongoing, the project has also expanded to reach new schools and care homes.

HOW AND WHY HAVE SCHOOLS AND CARE HOMES CONTINUED TO LINK?

Our project evaluation reported the wide-ranging positive impact of Intergenerational Linking for both young and older people, including opportunities for sharing skills and knowledge, social interaction and connection, improved health and wellbeing outcomes, a sense of purpose, friendship, joy, active citizenship and a legacy of social action. Staff from schools and care homes gave reasons for participation across the following four themes:

1. To bridge the gap and broaden understanding between generations.
2. To establish or enhance links between institution and local community.
3. To achieve mutual benefits for children and older adults living in care homes.
4. As a continuation of existing community projects or work with local care homes.

The brokers reported that these themes continued to be motivating factors for continuing Intergenerational Linking today:

'I think there's an appetite. There's an appetite from care homes and there's been appetite from schools... loads of schools wanted to get involved.'

(Area 2 project lead)

In addition, Intergenerational Linking fits well into the wider life of schools and care homes, including their desire for community engagement, and this was a valuable reason to sustain the partnerships:

'They [school] want to do something community-wise and having a partnership with a care home is quite flexible.'

(Area 5 project lead)

Intergenerational Linking is also seen as a way of evidencing certain priorities in inspection frameworks used in the education and care sector. For example, Intergenerational Linking has been highlighted in CQC reports, Ofsted reports, as well as Religious Education inspections:

'There's an RE schools inspection framework. So schools are inspected for their quality of religious education and part of that is their social action and their values, and actually intergenerational projects enable schools to sort of show to any inspector a whole range of different points that would be valid for that RE inspection framework. It's something that helps the school to demonstrate its value.'

(Area 6 project lead)

'Pupils make a positive contribution to the school and local community. For example, they held an Eid celebration to raise money for earthquake victims, and take part in intergenerational aerobics with local elderly people. Pupils are proud of their school and its place in the community.'

(Heaton St Barnabas' CofE Aided Primary School, Bradford, Ofsted report 2023)

'We saw the provider had formed good links with the local communities and had regular contact and visits from the local primary school children and the local church.'

(Rose Cottage Care Home, Bradford, CQC report, 2023)

In terms of who was involved in the link, many of the continued partnerships between the two settings now involve different younger and older people, as participants have grown older and situations have changed. In some schools, the partnership of Intergenerational Linking is 'passed on' to the next year group:

'The Year 6 children, for example, who take the lead on it, share what they've done with the Year 5's, who then take it on when Year 6 move up.'

(Area 6 project lead)

The project leads shared that many of the benefits evidenced in the 2023 final evaluation report continue to be true today, and remain a motivating factor for being involved. Intergenerational Linking continues to have a positive impact on both the participating younger and older people, as well as for the wider school and care home community, including through opportunities for joy, connection and friendship, improved health and wellbeing outcomes, knowledge exchange, and a legacy of social action. In addition, sustained continuation of the project can be used as evidence in assessment/regulatory quality marks.

CASE STUDY

'When a group went into a school for afternoon tea, and they were saying one chap had joined the care home recently and hadn't smiled. He didn't want to be there, didn't like it. And then, after visiting the children, and they came to visit the people in the care home, apparently he was smiling and chatting and talking, you know, and there was a lovely picture of this young boy showing him his medal for running. And it was just so. It is that kind of personal contact'

(Area 6 project lead)

CASE STUDY

'So one story that's kind of been developing over the past couple of years or so, I suppose, is that there's one gentleman at one of our care homes and he was struggling to walk. He'd had an issue that meant he'd lost his ability to walk, basically. And then they started connecting with the children, and the children had invited some of the residents to come into the school to take part in an assembly. And this gentleman didn't want to go in in his wheelchair. He really wanted to be able to walk into the assembly and walk into the school.

And this is a really lovely story of him kind of developing his strength back again, with lots of support from staff at the care home. So when it got to that visit, when he was going to the school, he was able to, you know, he had his frame, but he was able to walk into the assembly hall. All the children clapped and cheered and it was a really lovely, really lovely occasion.

It made the news and that kind of thing. And it's a lovely, it's a really, really lovely story. And then it's continued and the children were all at his 100th birthday party. And these children just really idolised this gentleman and he just loved their company and came to some of our celebration events. He's actually really sadly passed away now. And that, actually, that felt like quite a significant moment, like the care home activity staff, you know, she sent us a message to say, specifically to say that, you know, unfortunately he died this week and she wanted to make sure that the children could be told in a, you know, in a way that was appropriate to them.'

(Area 1 project lead)

WHAT LEARNINGS HAVE LOCAL PROJECT LEADS AND ORGANISATIONS TAKEN FORWARD?

Broker-led model

One of the most significant learnings from the original project was the fundamental importance of the broker-led model for Intergenerational Linking. The broker and broker organisation acted as an intermediary, linking together the school and care home and ensured the connection ran as smoothly as possible. Whilst a truly self-sustaining link is the ideal, the 2023 end-of-project report identified that this was *'not a linear path from dependence to independence, but one that is constantly evolving as the context in schools, care homes and the wider community changes.'* (p36)

In the follow-up interviews, some project leads spoke of links that have continued independently and how the enthusiasm and passion from the school and care home leads is vital in making this happen:

'So the same teachers have been involved and it's always been Year 5 and they've continued and they've really run with it. They've been absolutely brilliant.'

(Area 3 project lead)

'They just both [school and care home] have people leading who want to do that little bit more...and it just is working exactly as it should do.'

(Area 5 project lead)

'It seems to be working best when it's the same members of staff that go [to a meet] every time. And those themselves connect, they make a bond, they feel happy talking to each other, that, you know, that works successfully.'

(Area 1 project lead)

However, for most project leads, they felt that the broker role continued to be necessary to ensure sustainability, due to a range of challenges such as staffing changes, funding and capacity, which will be discussed more later:

'If I didn't have capacity and we weren't following up, I think they'd probably all drift away.'

(Area 6 project lead)

'We step back a bit because want them to take ownership, but at least we can advise them on what to do and if they struggle then we would help them. I think the brokerage role is still absolutely crucial, definitely.'

(Area 7 project lead)

'We never kind of think, okay, that's fine, they're off on their own, because at any point, the staff member could leave.'

(Area 1 project lead)

This finding that the project leads still considered the broker role crucial for Intergenerational Linking is an important consideration in other funding designs. Whilst careful planning and training can support the independence of a link, this can't always mitigate against changes in staffing and competing priorities in these settings. It is in these circumstances that the intermediary role of a broker can help maintain momentum of a link to ensure young and older people can continue to meet.

Furthermore, a journal article was published by the core research team in September 2024 which delves deeper into the importance of the broker model in ensuing sustainability of intergenerational links -

[Making Intergenerational Programs 'Stick': Learning from the Care Home FaNs 'Broker model' Linking Schools and Care Homes in England](#)

On a related point, in the 2023 final project report, the findings captured future recommended qualities for Intergenerational Linking brokers: namely, being creative, strategic, aware and self-caring. These qualities were evident in our follow-up discussions with the brokers and were undoubtedly contributing to their successes in their roles.

Effective intergenerational activities

Findings outlined in the final project report revealed that the most effective intergenerational activities were often a) linked to seasonal events, b) based on participants' ideas, and c) simple. At the end of the funded project, in-person activities were considered to have more impact, but virtual or remote connections were seen as a good way to start to build and/or maintain connections when physical interactions were not possible. They also played an important, and possibly previously under-rated, role in preparing younger and older people to meet for the first time, as relationships could be built gradually online.

In the subsequent 18 months from the funded end of the project, any remaining restrictions from Covid-19 had been lifted and in-person activities were now considered the 'norm' for Intergenerational Linking. Activities linked to seasonal events continued to be an easy starting point for connection, such as school pupils in Area 5 who celebrated Diwali and invited some of the older people to visit their school to watch an assembly.

However, with this shift towards more in-person Intergenerational Linking, comes the need to learn more about in-person activities, what works well and how to get the most out of a session or series of sessions:

'And I think, as well as for schools, particularly because [my area] was a pilot area, we've started this in the height of the pandemic. So, the impact at that particular time was perhaps slightly limited, because of the nature of what they were able to do.

So, for the schools that, you know, continued this and kept it going, they're now seeing kind of a broader range of impact. Because actually now we, you know, we're meeting face to face. And that's, yeah, it's becoming a lot, a lot bigger thing for them, I suppose.'

(Area 1 project lead)

In the final project evaluation, we found that the most effective activities were those 'designed as a shared experience where the children and older people did or created something together, as opposed to a giver and recipient dynamic' (p40). This follow-up research found that these kinds of sessions continued to be the most effective at creating space for meaningful connections to develop, as they invited conversation and a shared interest, or working towards a common goal:

'You have a different conversation when you're doing something together, don't you? Whereas if you're sitting there and you know your child's got a clip board and they're asking you questions, it's different. When you're making something together - and it's that reciprocity and equality - I think that's also really important.'

(Area 6 project lead)

These activities could be creative, nature based, or centred around another theme, but were most effective when well-planned as a shared experience:

'You can certainly see that there's that bond and connection and joy that comes from them, working and doing different things outside different tasks or activities or creative activities...like unifying element of everything being nature based. And that is a connection between the young and old that, you know, it is a known shared interest.'

(Area 4 project lead)

'He [care home staff member] spoke to a local farm and they brought in alpacas into the care home. And then, of course, the children wanted to come and see that.'

(Area 5 project lead)

Resources

A handbook supporting Intergenerational Linking between schools and care homes was co-produced by the national team with the local project leads and distributed at the end of the project, alongside other supporting resources on the website, including a 10-week series of activities known as the 'Become a Care Home Friend Challenge', which was also shared widely with schools. The local project leads thought that the handbook was a very useful tool to support links, and it was clearly having an ongoing impact on the success, by providing schools and care homes with a clearer structure of how to start linking together and ideas of what activities might work well:

'That's what we didn't have at the beginning. When we started, we didn't have a concrete structure or framework to say, "this is what it's about". And it was really nice this time to be able to say, "this is what we did and here are some examples".'

(Area 3 project lead)

Having a guide that was produced by people with direct experience of Intergenerational Linking has also been successful in breaking down barriers towards taking part, or easing concerns about whether or not Intergenerational Linking is manageable. For example:

'We use the resources in the handbook and things like that when we're trying to get new schools interested, kind of to say to them that this is all really easy.'

(Area 6 local broker)

Support structures

The support structures for the local areas in the Care Home FaNs: Intergenerational Linking project were found to be very beneficial. The local project leads spoken to in the follow-up interviews unanimously felt that some sort of peer-to-peer network should be a staple for any future Intergenerational Linking programme. The 'Sharing Network' which ran through the project has continued for those that wish to join, hosted by The Linking Network. This meets online three times a year and is an opportunity to discuss successes and challenges from ongoing Intergenerational Linking, as well as to share national updates.

The local project leads who attended these sessions continued to find the collaboration useful and important for ongoing success in Intergenerational Linking:

'The network meetings, they've been really helpful because, you know, they've been really good to talk to other people who are still involved.'

(Area 3 project lead)

There is opportunity and potential to widen the impact of these meetings and create a large, national network of organisations across the county involved in Intergenerational practice:

'I've been interested for a long time...at establishing a kind of national intergenerational network that we could kind of have shared learning and meetings and kind of really work together collaboratively.'

(Area 2 project lead)

HOW HAS PARTICIPATING IN THE PROJECT IMPACTED ON LOCAL BROKERS AND THEIR ORGANISATIONS?

At the onset of the Care Home FaNs: Intergenerational Linking project, all of the local organisations had some prior experience of working with either older or younger people on other programmes, but for most it was their first experience with intergenerational work. It is therefore a success that all of the organisations (and their brokers) that we spoke to in the follow-up interviews had chosen to continue with Intergenerational Linking, either in a similar form or by incorporating intergenerational practice into an evolved model.

The organisations saw the benefits of Intergenerational Linking through the original project, and this had inspired them to incorporate intergenerational practice into their organisations' visions, emphasising the importance of connecting generations to share knowledge, experiences and skills:

'I think the tangible benefits to older people are enormous and very obvious. Linking with younger people provides that kind of stimulation, that connection, that kind of anti-loneliness that's so important. And as an organisation that are dedicated to supporting older people's mental, physical wellbeing, that clearly is a no brainer that we should be investing in that.'

(Area 2 project lead)

'It's changed our kind of way in which we look at things. So before, we had sort of a priority around children and family life and then we had a priority around ageing and isolation. But actually, with the intergenerational project, we brought those two together. So now it's a part of our core work... because we just recognise the value.'

(Area 6 project lead)

'The weaving in of intergenerational work has definitely been informed by the Care Home FaNs project.'

(Area 4 project lead)

'[Intergenerational] Linking is actually one of the key things that we want the young people [we work with] to have experienced...Intergenerational Linking is a core element in our map of opportunities.'

(Area 7 project lead)

'It's diversified the programmes we can offer to schools...it's helped us to connect to different groups...it's supported some of our work around social action.'

(Area 1 project lead)

Additionally, the brokers themselves felt that the project had given them new confidence in setting up an intergenerational link and ensuring its success for participants:

'It is something that we're putting more focus on. I think those things that have happened, I think it's fair to say it wouldn't have happened if we hadn't taken part in the Care Home FaNs project. It's given us confidence with intergenerational work.'

(Area 4 project lead)

Given the importance of the broker role in supporting and sustaining intergenerational links between schools and care homes, it is therefore important that brokers work alongside organisations for whom intergenerational practice is a key priority. Care Home FaNs: Intergenerational Linking has been a catalyst for these organisations to embed intergenerational practice into their core aims and work, building on tried and tested models for engagement and creating a pathway for continued benefits and social change.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES HAVE EMERGED AS A RESULT OF PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT?

Building Connected Communities

For many project leads, taking part in Care Home FaNs: Intergenerational Linking created the opportunity for building more connected communities in their area, particularly in light of the social isolation that prevailed during the Covid-19 pandemic:

'We've been hugely isolated from other areas of society. So from a generational perspective, it's really important that we relink and that we work to reunite...and particularly around Covid, where there is a lot of negative messaging around different generations...and there's clear reasons why divisions could be entrenched by Covid. And I think that this is the right time to be reweaving and kind of providing that cohesion really.'

(Area 2 project lead)

In addition, Intergenerational Linking often involves connecting across other lines of difference, as well as age, and this was seen as a positive opportunity when carefully managed:

'I just see so many layers of it that work really nicely ... in terms of breaking down stereotypes of other people, bringing people together. Whether that's because you've got children from different ethnic backgrounds in a school going into a care home that's predominantly White (older people)...it's just about building connected communities.'

(Area 5 project lead)

Funding

4 of the 7 organisations we spoke to had received subsequent funding to directly continue and build upon the Intergenerational Linking work from the Care Home FaNs project. Other organisations had more general funding. This enabled organisations to reach and engage more participants in intergenerational work, both in schools and care homes and in other settings (e.g. sheltered accommodation for older adults), as well as developing additional resources, support and training. Funding came from a range of sources, such as the NHS, Living Well with Dementia Fund and local councils.

This demonstrates the growing investment in intergenerational practice from a wider audience, and that the desire to support proven initiatives (like Intergenerational Linking) that support younger and older people's health and wellbeing is of national importance. The potential and appetite to scale-up this model could therefore be huge.

The research outputs from the project continue to support the organisations in demonstrating impact to new audiences and potential funders. The large-scale of the project was also seen as hugely important to the participating organisations:

'Bringing the evidence together about the existing research and then what we've done...having that substantial, independent evaluation...is really helpful for us in terms of going forward and looking for, whether that's funding opportunities, or kind of demonstrating our impact. That's the kind of thing that we couldn't have done alone.'

(Area 4 project lead)

Cultural Events

Some project leads shared that they had had opportunities to bring Intergenerational Linking into other cultural events happening in their area. For example, celebrations of milestones in a district or celebrations of culture. Project leads discussed how different generations would be sharing their memories and experiences of their communities and celebrating this together. These opportunities arose following the success of Intergenerational Linking in these areas.

Communicating with others

The findings of this project were presented at a national webinar in February 2023 which was attended by over 150 people, with nearly another 200 views on YouTube. Following this webinar, members of the national core team and local project leads were invited to speak about Intergenerational Linking at other events, such as a regional webinar in the South West of England, network meetings hosted by Generations Working Together and intergenerational advisory groups through the University of Kent. The wide scope of the initial research attracted a large amount of interest in subsequent months and has given a platform from which to share learning and discuss next steps with others.

National Developments

Since the funded end of Care Home FaNs: Intergenerational Linking there have been developments in other national projects. Intergenerational England has been established – a movement focussed on transforming the social fabric of our society by bridging the intergenerational divide across people, sectors and government. In addition, Creating Intergenerational Communities is a UK pilot programme to develop potential indicators of intergenerational good practice. A number of the local organisations, as well as the national project partners, have been involved with these developments, thus evidencing the ripple effect of the Care Home FaNs: Intergenerational Linking project.

EMERGING CHALLENGES

Communication – broker-led vs independent linking

Though the broker-led model for Intergenerational Linking was found to be sustainable and effective, there were a few emerging issues which surrounded this.

Firstly, whilst any challenges in communication between the school and the care home could be mitigated by the local broker, where links were communicating directly between themselves, the project lead often found it tricky to keep track of what had been happening and how the intergenerational sessions were going. Brokers felt that this knowledge would help guide their support where needed, and would enable them to better share and celebrate what positive intergenerational practice looks like:

'Then I can step away because I've created the link and they understand that it's up to them to organise it, and then when they do something and they don't invite me, I get annoyed!'

(Area 7 project lead)

'The biggest challenge is really communication and just being kept in the loop. But I understand why I'm not their priority. If they've organised something and they've done it, sometimes you'll wish that they'd told you. But then at least if it's being done, it's being done.'

(Area 5 project lead)

Broker as a trainer and coach

Secondly, in the project evaluation, the broker-role was found to be a motivator, a communicator, a relationship-builder and a learner. Their job was to build links and start participants on their intergenerational journey. However, now emerging in these follow-up interviews 18 months on was the role of the broker as a trainer or coach in intergenerational best practice. Sometimes the care home and school staff didn't have the confidence or knowledge to create the circumstances for positive intergenerational connection, and so more guidance could be given here:

'It seems to be working best...when it's the same members of staff that go every time and so those [staff] themselves connect, they make a bond, they feel happy talking to each other. That, you know, that works successfully. Where it perhaps hasn't worked as successfully is when sometimes there's been a different staff member every time...they don't know as well what's happening, or where they're going, or who these people are, or what to expect, and that kind of thing.'

(Area 1 project lead)

One broker spoke of care home staff and school staff also being participants themselves, and acknowledging the trauma that some of these individuals had previously faced in their personal lives, particularly with associations of care homes as places of illness and dying:

'I think that's where we need to be holding space for enabling kind of wider people to know how to interact with care homes, and how to interact with elderly people, because it's something that as a society, we find it really difficult to look at.'

(Area 2 project lead)

It is clear therefore that equipping teachers and care home staff with the knowledge and skills to drive forward Intergenerational Linking with passion is important:

'This is young children in a school, and this is vulnerable adults living at a care home. So it really needs that championing from somebody with the organisation.'

(Area 1 project lead)

The need to further develop coaching, training and support within the broker-led model is therefore a priority to take forward for future Intergenerational Linking models.

LEGACY IMPACT FOR THE PARTNER ORGANISATIONS AND FUNDERS

The Dunhill Medical Trust

This was the first time that the Trust had funded a large programme with two delivery organisations having responsibility for the programme's creation, delivery and evaluation. The model proved successful as a means of developing a cohort of grantees to achieve successful impact. The learnings from this programme have been replicated with two further programmes, each with multiple delivery partners providing expertise; our Technology for an Ageing Population Panel of Inquiry (TAPPI) involved the TEC Services Association, the Housing LIN, Co-Production Works and the University of Cambridge working with six test-beds to develop the knowledge and tools needed to improve the way technology is used to support people living independently.

The Capability Development Programme is being delivered by a faculty comprising Moore Kingston Smith Nonprofit Advisory and colleagues from the University of Birmingham, School of Social Policy and Society supported by guest faculty speakers. The programme is aimed at community facing organisations working with older people to help them develop the learning and skills to bring about transformational change to their organisation in the areas of research, impact, sustainability, and efficiency. The programme is delivered through the DMT Academy via a series of webinars and standalone video content.

The Linking Network

For The Linking Network, the project was hugely influential in exploring another aspect of connecting across difference. Intergenerational Linking remains a core piece of our work, particularly in Bradford and we find that our two programmes, Schools Linking and Intergenerational Linking, complement each other. Together they offer schools valuable opportunities for children and young people to explore their own and others identities, be comfortable with difference and contribute to more cohesive societies.

We continue to network with other organisations involved in intergenerational practice across the education and health and social care sector as well as the voluntary sector and other bodies. Being able to share best practice with others has had a valuable continued impact on our work. The Linking Network is proud to be a learning organisation and we benefitted greatly from the multi-partnership working in the Care Home FaNs: Intergenerational Linking project.

My Home Life England

An essential part of My Home Life England's work recognises the importance of community connections for people living in care settings, and involvement in this project has enabled us to demonstrate the great value in supporting care homes to invest in an intergenerational link.

The opportunity to build on our previous Care Home Friends and Neighbours initiatives and lead wide-scale research which supports the quality of life of older people living in care homes has supported our own sustainability and growth. The research adds to, and strengthens, our best practice evidence-base supporting quality in care services. It has also enabled us to forge new connections; with new funders, research bodies, health and social care organisations, and intergenerational and community organisations. We remain committed to supporting community engagement initiatives and are seeking further funding to support sustained dialogue between care homes and their local communities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the follow-up interviews 18 months on demonstrate that the original investment into intergenerational practice has led to sustained impact. This includes the local organisations' maintaining and broadening their intergenerational activities, and delivering wide-ranging benefits to younger and older people, including opportunities for sharing skills and knowledge, social interaction and connection, improved health and wellbeing outcomes, a sense of purpose, friendship, joy, active citizenship and a legacy of social action. Intergenerational Linking also supports quality and excellence in care and education settings, and has been cited as evidence against inspection frameworks. This follow-up has revealed the significant, continued impact of the broker-led model, as well as in-person intergenerational activities. These elements have successfully helped to maintain strong connections across generations, and have been built into the local organisations' visions and goals. Additionally, securing further funding and actively participating in cultural events and national developments has amplified the reach and sustainability of intergenerational practices.

The full 2023 research report, resources and other outputs are available at:

myhomelife.org.uk/intergenerational-linking

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