“We just clicked!”

A summary of findings from Age UK London’s MiCommunity Project • April 2012

Copies of this summary and the full external evaluation are available to download from:
www.ageuk.org.uk/london

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Age UK London would like to thank the following Age UKs, that were partners in the project:

Age UK Barnet
Age UK Enfield
Age UK Hackney
Age UK Haringey
Age UK Hillingdon
Age UK Kensington & Chelsea
Age UK Redbridge

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Introduction

The overall aim of Age UK London’s MiCommunity Project was to use intergenerational volunteering to build a stronger sense of community and connectedness between young volunteers and older people, bridging differences in age, ethnicity and culture and challenging negative stereotypes.

This took place by facilitating young people (aged 16-19) to share their information technology (IT) skills with older people (aged 60+), many of whom have little or no IT knowledge or skills. It was intended that the project would establish important links and understanding between the two age groups, whilst enabling older people to use digital technology more confidently and promoting volunteering among young people.

Background

The project was funded by the Mayor of London and Reuben Foundation under the Greater London Assembly’s Team London initiative.

Age UK London worked in partnership with seven London Age UKs – Barnet, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Hillingdon, Kensington & Chelsea and Redbridge - plus three Zenos IT Academies1, to deliver the project from 30 June 2011 to 31 May 2012.

Older people are being left out of advances in digital technology and are at risk of being excluded from mainstream society. Increasingly, many services are only available online; information on a range of issues including health and pensions are only available electronically and older people are missing out on a range of social and cultural enrichments.

In addition, a lot of younger people feel misunderstood and alienated. The recently published final report2 on the riots in England in August 2011 illustrates some of these disconnections. The report emphasises the need for people to feel they have a stake in society and for individuals to respect each other and the place they live in.

MiCommunity offered an ideal opportunity to bring older and younger people together in meaningful and constructive ways.

Activities and outcomes

MiCommunity involved four main volunteering activities:

• Local schools’ student volunteering
  The majority of volunteering took place in schools and colleges, where young people volunteered to deliver one-to-one IT training in 4-20 week courses.

• Zenos IT Academy volunteering
  ATA Pearson’s3 three London Zenos IT Academies provided a pool of young volunteers to support IT taster sessions (digital clinics) and short courses in Age UKs and community venues across London.

• Beneficiary (older people) volunteering
  Additional funding obtained in October 2011 opened up volunteering for older people in the project, for example volunteering in schools or sharing their new skills with peers.

• Corporate volunteering
  The additional funding also opened up volunteering to corporate volunteers, for example by providing IT taster sessions.

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1 Croydon, Barking and West London
3 Due to new legislation, Zenos has separated into a training provider arm, Zenos, with the employment opportunities carried out by Pearson In Practice.
At the beginning of the evaluation, a draft Theory of Change was developed with a range of stakeholders. This set out the underlying assumptions about how the outcomes would be achieved, which the evaluation then tested.

A Theory of Change approach was used because it pays attention to what works, for whom and most importantly why, and considers the underlying context and environment in which the changes take place. The advantage of this method is that it informs the spread and replication of ‘what works’.

It found that there were strong motivating factors that initially brought older and younger people together:

- Older people’s recognition that they needed to learn about digital technology if they were not to become socially excluded from mainstream society.
- Younger people’s need to prepare for being ready to enter further education and employment.

In addition to these, there were a number of key delivery mechanisms and contextual factors, as illustrated in the Theory of Change diagram on pages 8-9.

**Expected outcomes**

01
Reduction of negative perceptions that older and younger people have of each other.

02
Increase in understanding of culture and ethnicity amongst participants.

03
Change in participants’ connectedness with their neighbourhood.

04
Increase in levels of personal confidence (amongst participants).

05
Increased life opportunities for older people, regarding their ability to ‘get online’ and use digital technology.

06
Greater knowledge of online community resources.

07
Volunteers satisfied with their experience of participating in the programme.

08
Increased life opportunities for younger people, through the engagement of older volunteers and corporate volunteers in the programme.

09
Greater understanding of the needs of older people as they relate to digital inclusion (corporate volunteers).

10
More positive perceptions of young people’s ability to contribute to their community.
Older people recognise they need digital technology

Young people will want to develop ‘work ready’ skills

Skills transfer will occur between the generations

Young people will have the capacity to teach

Enrichment activities will enable school participation

MiCommunity project: 1790 older and younger people engaged

Older people motivated to learn IT

Younger people getting ‘work ready’

- IT as the vehicle
- One to one tuition
- Learner led
- Young people as volunteers
- Visible school leadership
- Older people’s engagement through the third sector
- Age UKs’ co-ordination role
- Resources and human resources

- Enrichment activities
- Nurturing environment for young and old people
- Workplace schemes and apprenticeships
- Enabling policy and political environment
- Age UK London leadership
- History of intergenerational practice

Rationale and Assumptions

Outcomes

Changing negative perceptions of young and old

Increasing life opportunities

Promoting volunteering

Connecting communities

Success of programme drives scaling up and out

- Community cohesion increases at a personal and institutional level
- Health inequalities improve
- Younger people’s employment and economic opportunities improve
- Social isolation is reduced
- Older people live independently for longer
- A reduction in poverty

Contextual landscape driving the change

Delivery mechanisms
Who was involved?

By the end of March 2012, MiCommunity had generated 5841 volunteer hours. This was carried out by 711 young people (603 in schools and 108 through Zenos), 60 corporate employees and 180 older people. This volunteering benefitted 1019 older people.

A total of 18 London boroughs were involved in hosting courses and/or digital clinics. Volunteers were drawn from all London boroughs except for the City of London, while older beneficiaries were from 25 (out of 33) boroughs. Volunteers and beneficiaries were from a multitude of ethnic backgrounds. Only 22 per cent of volunteers and 46 per cent of the older beneficiaries considered themselves to be white British. This was consistent with the aim of pairing older and younger people from a range of backgrounds.

39 local schools and colleges and 3 Zenos Academies were engaged across the project, making a total of 42 education and training institutions.

Overall, more females than males engaged in the project and amongst older participants there were more than twice as many women than men.

Gender of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Beneficiaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgendered</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the beneficiaries that completed monitoring forms were over 66 years of age, while the volunteers were mainly aged 16-19 years.

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*Data was collected from those who completed equalities monitoring forms between June 2011 and March 2012 (699 of 951 volunteers and 707 out of 1019 beneficiaries completed forms).
The MiCommunity project has reached, and in most cases, exceeded its original outcome and output targets. If the programme continues and spreads, there is evidence of its potential to have significant longer-term impacts.

Changing negative perceptions between the younger and older generations

By taking part in MiCommunity, younger people and older people challenged the stereotypes they had of each other and changed some of their negative perceptions. This was demonstrated in a number of ways, such as younger people and older people having conversations, showing mutual respect, sharing interests, learning together and through fun and friendships.

“My view has definitely changed. I don’t know, I am more – I only have one grandparent and I tend to think that is what older people are like, whereas meeting all these people I realise they are just like us, I actually have something in common with my partner, and I get on with her and we have a laugh and stuff; I did think that the age gap would not enable me to do that but it has.”
Local school volunteer

The majority of participants felt that by taking part in the project, they understood each other better and were able to recognise the connections that existed between them.

The change in negative perceptions was greater in young people, where it was extended to their view of the majority of older people. The older people involved in the project were more reticent and cautious about how much their changed perceptions of younger people extended beyond their local school volunteers.

Increasing life opportunities

MiCommunity has increased the life opportunities in both the older and younger participants. The main focus for older people has been the ability to get online and use digital technology. For the younger people, MiCommunity gave them a real opportunity to improve their employability skills. Both groups also increased their levels of personal confidence.

The ability to shop around many websites to get the best deals opens up money-saving opportunities, and in the long term increases the potential for reducing pensioner poverty, although many older people still have a fear of fraud if they pay online.

‘You feel you are left behind if you are unable to use a computer. You miss out on social events because now they don’t phone you, or text. I am very into traditional Irish music and there are different sessions, so they would say ‘why don’t you get an email address and I can email you, because that’s the way we’re doing it now?’ And I thought, I have got to get a grip of myself.’
Older person

The project improved young people’s ability to prepare for the job market; all young volunteers were offered a reference and over 70 per cent of those surveyed said that they were satisfied or extremely satisfied that they were able to use the volunteering activity to progress their career.

‘So you have that good feeling about yourself; that self-confidence, thinking, yea, you know what, I can actually teach someone. So if anyone ever told you “You know what? You’re stupid”, you can say (to yourself), doing something like this helps you, gives you that motivation that you are worth something, you are able to teach someone.’
Local school volunteer

There was evidence of the potential of the project to offer considerable gains in deprived communities where segregation of age and culture were marked:

“We are here in the middle of (London borough) in one of the most deprived wards in the country and the need couldn’t be greater because, for these young people, ANYTHING we can do that raises their aspirations, builds their confidence but also brings them into contact with as wide a range of people as possible, can only benefit their future development.”
Head teacher
**Conclusion**

MiCommunity has the potential to create significant and lasting change in communities through improving community cohesion, reducing social isolation in older people and improving their ability to remain independent for longer, improving younger people’s employment prospects and reducing poverty in both generations. A MiCommunity brand should be developed in order to retain the integrity of the model and take account of the delivery mechanisms and contextual factors. This is required to enable sustainability and replication of the model in line with the outcomes achieved and realisation of potential longer-term impact.

**Findings**

**Promoting volunteering**

Taking part in MiCommunity led to many of the young people changing their perceptions of volunteering. For the majority it was a rewarding and worthwhile experience. Their self-esteem improved, and they gained huge satisfaction from passing on their skills to another person and in seeing the difference it made to another person’s life.

‘I think it does encourage you to volunteer, yes on CV, but the good feeling I get after my person tells me ‘you have really helped me today’. It is kind of more, it leaves me really happy when I leave, because I know that even though I don’t know a lot, I have still offered, given her so much of my knowledge.’

Local school volunteer

There was evidence that through volunteering with MiCommunity, many of the young people would volunteer again. Nearly 80 per cent said they would consider volunteering again for another project. One student described the experience as ‘awesome’.

**Connecting communities**

One of the overarching aims of MiCommunity was to build a stronger sense of community and connectedness between generations, partly through developing a greater understanding of different cultures and ethnicities in participants.

There are indications that this connectedness was beginning to happen by the end of the project and that if this continued, the longer-term impact on community cohesion could be significant.

‘After the riots, they (older people) think we are all hooligans and there are a lot of young people out there. This (project) changes their opinion. They say: ‘Oh, you are quite nice, I haven’t seen any naughty people.’ When she goes out and meets her friends she will tell them and so on, and it will have a domino effect and eventually the stereotype will be changed.’

Local school volunteer

MiCommunity also improved participants’ connectedness with their community through the wider use of community buildings. Schools and Age UKs built new relationships, for example by exploring joint projects, adopting a local Age UK as a school’s charity and inviting older people to school events.

‘(The area has) a reputation and a gang culture, which is stopped at the school gate. We have 1200 students in a built up area so it is good for older people from the community to come in and meet our students. (It can lead) to older people feeling more confident around their community.’

School staff member

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