



**Bristol Ageing Better**

**Learning for Life Together Pilot Projects**

**Key Learning**



**LOTTERY FUNDED**

**Learning  
Digest**



## Learning for Life Together Pilot Projects: Key Learning

**September 2016 – August 2017**

When we were applying to the Big Lottery Fund, we identified a project called 'Schools for All Ages', which proposed to encourage isolated and lonely older people to volunteer within local schools. As we tried to get this off the ground, it became clear that a lot of schools already had volunteers and there were a number of organisations already coordinating volunteers to help pupils with their reading.

At the core of the original project was the idea that we build confidence and social connections in lonely and isolated older people by providing opportunities for them to impart their wisdom with people from different generations. We wanted to maintain this spirit, but also to try new ideas that weren't already being delivered in the city. For this reason, we invited bids for new projects that would focus on older people sharing their skills and experiences with younger people.

As you will see in this report, there was clear learning from all three projects which really informed the next stage of projects that we commissioned in early 2018.

**Adam Rees, Bristol Ageing Better Programme Director**

Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership of individuals and organisations working together to reduce isolation and loneliness among older people in Bristol. It is one of fourteen Ageing Better areas that have been funded by the Big Lottery Fund's Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better Programme.

The Learning for Life Together service is one of BAB's sixteen distinct but interconnected initiatives which together aim to make a real difference to the lives of older people in Bristol. The aim is to empower older people who are isolated and who have lost confidence by encouraging and supporting them to share their stories, skills or experiences with younger people within a learning environment.

There are a number of intergenerational initiatives which already exist in Bristol aiming to bring together younger and older people in order to improve respect and understanding between generations. Learning for Life Together builds on this great work by offering specific support to those older people who may initially not feel ready to engage in this kind of activity, but with some support and encouragement can build their confidence by sharing their skills, experiences or stories.

In line with our 'test and learn' approach, in September 2016 we commissioned three pilot projects to trial different intergenerational interventions with the aim of informing future larger scale commissioning.



This report provides an overview of the key learning to emerge from these pilot projects. The three funded projects were:

**Volunteering Matters:** A six-week programme of volunteering in which older people delivered history sessions within a primary school, tying their personal stories and experiences in with the school curriculum.

**Windmill Hill City Farm:** A six-week programme of volunteering in which socially active, non-isolated older people co-designed and co-delivered a programme of intergenerational activities, focused on sharing skills between more isolated older people and children. It was designed to reduce the isolation of the older participants and to prevent the future isolation of the currently-active older volunteers.

**Wyldwood Arts:** A four-month programme in a supported housing facility and a nursing home in which younger people worked with older people to draw out their individual life stories. Together they produced creative ways to express these stories within the community.

**VOLUNTEERING MATTERS**



**WYLDWOOD ARTS**

## Key Learning

### Session structure

- Unstructured intergenerational projects tended to cause delays and confusion about what the activity involved. However projects which were too structured were less empowering for older people as they had a reduced say over the direction and shape of the project.
- It is valuable for intergenerational projects to find a balance between being structured and unstructured, for example having a loose project structure with overarching aims and objectives, within which specific activities can be flexibly co-designed by participants around their knowledge, skills, interests and ideas. This ensures a person-centred approach is maintained throughout.
- Even when activities are designed around the participants' individual skills and interests, they may still need to be flexibly altered or scaled back after the project has commenced.

It is valuable for intergenerational projects to find a balance between being structured and unstructured.



## Session content

- Intergenerational activities do not appeal to everyone and can cause anxiety for some older people. They may be daunted by the idea of interacting with younger people, particularly if they have not done this for many years. They may also feel worried about having 'nothing to give' or not being able to relate to younger generations. They may also feel concerned about being able to 'keep up' with the energy of the younger people.
- Staff and volunteers in intergenerational projects may need to spend time building up participants' confidence and convincing them that they will make a valuable contribution to the project.
- Lack of familiarity with intergenerational projects means it is important to clearly outline what the project involves, why it is being undertaken and why it is a valuable activity to participate in. Lack of clarity about the structure of a project or what is expected of participants can deter some people from participating.
- It may help to show older people photos and/or video footage of the activities in order to demonstrate what would be involved if they participated.
- Those who participated in these pilot projects appeared to enjoy undertaking a specific activity rather than meeting up socially without a clear focus.
- Participant engagement was also fostered by activities being built on week-by-week, rather than repetition of the same activity.

## Building up the confidence to participate

- Participants will have different levels of confidence participating in activities with younger generations and for this reason it works well for different levels of participation to be offered.
- Progressing through these different levels of participation can be a useful way to build participants' confidence. However projects should have contingency plans in case participants are not confident enough to participate in an activity at first.
- Depending on the activity, giving participants the opportunity to rehearse/ practice in front of each other can build their confidence about undertaking the activity with children.



It may help to show older people photos or video footage of the activities in order to demonstrate what it would be like if they participated.



Complementing the national curriculum can help your project add value for schools and bring about a positive working relationship.



## Working within a learning environment

- When working with schools, colleges and universities, be aware that their time will be restricted by exams and term dates. Projects should plan around this in advance to ensure the activities are not too disrupted.
- When young children are involved in the project, strong facilitation and a clear focus is key to activities being a success.
- Connecting the intergenerational activities to topics covered within the national curriculum can bring added value for schools and encourage a positive working relationship.
- Educational establishments have a variety of other pressures, meaning that it is important to be as flexible as possible when working within these environments.
- In order to reduce reliance on teachers to improvise at short-notice, it is useful for projects to develop contingency plans (e.g. extra back-up learning materials) that can be delivered by project staff if necessary to fill in gaps or cover for illness.





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**LOTTERY FUNDED**

Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership working to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people and help them live fulfilling lives.

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