

Using virtual technology to bring together different generations

Linking Generations Northern Ireland

Food for Life Get Togethers' national partners, Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI), have been exploring new ways to use virtual technology to build connections between different generations, using food.

In Summer 2021, LGNI arranged three 'Virtual Get Togethers', linking 81 primary school pupils with 31 local care home residents using virtual technology.



What happened?

LGNI's Development Worker, Lynne Bennett, approached and paired up schools and care homes to take part in the Virtual Get Togethers.

“ I was sceptical at first that virtual would work, but it did! We just have to be inventive and keep the connection going in whatever way we can – Lynne, Development Worker - LGNI ”

Schools and care homes are under a huge amount of pressure at the moment so introducing new activities wasn't straightforward. Lynne was adaptable and took time to understand their different needs and circumstances. She met with the teachers and care home activity coordinators beforehand to arrange suitable dates and times, fitting in sessions around the schools and care homes' different routines.

Sessions were run over Teams or Zoom depending on which platform the groups preferred to use. The groups involved had different technology available to them. For example, Sunnymead Residential Living had a big 43-inch TV screen which helped their residents to be able to concentrate on what was going on and communicate comfortably with the schoolchildren. Other groups used iPads and school whiteboards. Lynne did a trial run with the teacher and activity coordinator before the



first session to make sure the technology worked, think through how to set up the rooms and discuss how the session would run.

Each Virtual Get Together involved three 1-hour sessions. These were arranged on the same day and time a week apart. Each session was focussed on a different activity to help the residents and pupils get to know one another and spark conversation, these included: a show & tell, building fruit skewers, planting herbs and a talent show.



Lynne was brilliant and just amazing with the kids. She kept conversations flowing and engaged all participants, ensuring everyone felt involved. This was not an easy task but one Lynne mastered. The programme was the success it was due to Lynne. Thank you – Lisnadill Primary School



LGNI found that facilitation was key to the success of the sessions. Lynne facilitated each session, ensuring everyone had opportunity and space to speak, whilst bringing lots of enthusiasm! This freed up the care home staff and teachers to help the residents and pupils with their activities – not always straightforward when dealing with a whole class of pupils!

What difference did it make?

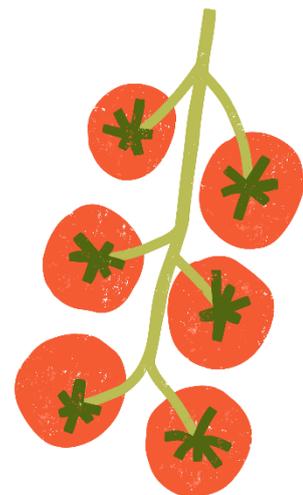


It lifted their mood to no end – they were buzzing for days afterwards. And when each session was coming they couldn't wait to come to do the virtual programme - Kathryn, Activities Coordinator, Sunnymead Residential Living



The sessions provided a vital connection between the care home residents and the younger generation as well as a sense of fun! The impact of these connections went beyond the sessions themselves, giving residents something to look forward to and creating new memories and stories.

Through the activities, the groups were able to learn more about each other and found interests and skills in common. One of the primary school pupils who played in his local football team connected with a resident who had been a professional footballer and played in the same position. Another pupil was able to talk with his Great-Grandad who he hadn't seen since before the pandemic and who dressed up for the occasion!



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The residents, Kathryn and Lynne were amazing and just lovely to the kids. The kids really enjoyed talking to everyone. It meant a lot to them as they got to hear about the past and how times have changed. The residents also made them laugh many times with their stories. It was a wonderful experience and I am delighted that I was asked to participate. I look forward to more inter generation programmes in the future. – Lisnadill Primary School

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The fruit skewers activity gave the children an opportunity to try fruit that some of them had never eaten before and opened up a conversation with the residents about the health benefits of fruit and vegetables.

As well as being an enjoyable experience, Kathryn, Activities Coordinator at Sunnymead Care Home, explained how the sessions with their residents took on a deeper significance:

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It's linking generations, yes, but it means so much more on our part. Out of that programme there were two of our folk who passed away very suddenly after the programme finished so it was very meaningful. Though people may think it's just another wee Get Together, sometimes it's the last get together with the outside world for our folk - Kathryn, Activities Coordinator, Sunnymead Residential Living

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What they learnt?

- Care homes and schools will always have different needs, skills and resources. It's important to take time to understand these and adapt plans to suit them.
- Facilitation is key to the success of virtual intergenerational sessions. Having someone keeping the conversation flowing and leading the session allowed the care home staff and teachers to help the residents and pupils with their activities.
- Find activities that will spark conversation and help the groups to find connections with one another.



For more information, please see:

<https://www.linkinggenerationsni.com/project/virtual-get-togethers-2021/>