Generations Working Together Intergenerational Practice Micro Grants

Small projects making a difference

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March 2011

Introduction

In spring 2010 Generations Working Together launched its Micro Grants Programme. Providing grants of between £250 and £750 to small local projects, the micro grants aimed to promote intergenerational practice within communities through schools, local voluntary organisations, and a range of other community based organisations and to learn from their experiences.

Over 150 applications were received of which 55 received a micro grant. These projects were spread across Scotland and located in a range of varied and unique communities.

In November and December 2010, Generations Working Together asked each project which had received a grant to complete a short survey, either online or in hard copy, in order to discover the successes and challenges they had encountered and to give an indication of the impact they had made locally.

Out of the 55 projects 50 responded to the survey. Of these three surveys were partially incomplete and two of the projects had not yet finished and were due to be completed in spring and summer 2011.

The survey findings highlighted particular challenges and opportunities for the 9 intergenerational projects based in schools. In order to explore these further, three of these projects were asked to take part in a short additional phone interview.

This report summarises the experiences of the micro grant projects that responded to the survey. It is hoped that the experience of these projects will be used across Scotland to inform and inspire intergenerational practice.

Key findings

The challenges:

- Recruitment
  The biggest challenge faced by the projects was recruiting people to take part. Reasons varied from project to project, sometimes it was because of lack of interest but more often it was because of people's concerns about working with a different age group and finding time for the project to meet.

- Interaction between group members
  Whilst the majority of projects reported no problems between the group members when they were brought together, managing the relationships and ensuring that everyone contributed equally was a challenge for some. One project reported that an individual was asked to leave because of their attitude to the other age group.

- Logistics
  Travel problems were reported, particularly following heavy snows, which made it difficult for those with mobility problems to attend any events and meetings. Other issues included finding a suitable venue and the limited amount of time available at meetings and events.

Specific to schools:

- Timetabling
  Because of various commitments over the school year, including subject based learning, exams and holidays amongst others, projects sometimes found it hard to find time in the day and available classrooms within the school for the project to take place.

The solutions:

- Effective planning
  Key to many of the projects' successes was effective planning. This included not only logistical planning in terms of agreeing timings and venues, but also creating opportunities to meet the people taking part in the project and building in time for them to get to know each other before they started working together.

- Ongoing support and information
  Some projects noted the importance of being able to provide advice and information to participants throughout the process. This helped people to remain involved and maintain their confidence in what they were aiming to achieve.

- Bring in expertise
  Whilst some of the projects had enough expertise within the group not to need to bring in additional support, those who did seek expert help, for example from Local Authority Community Learning and Development staff, felt they greatly benefited from it.

- Flexibility
  Despite effective planning many of the projects faced challenges they could not have anticipated, most noticeably because of the poor weather. Where these occurred many of the projects stated that by staying flexible they were able to overcome them, for example by arranging car pools or changing the timetable to suit new circumstances.

Specific to schools:

- Teacher engagement
  Active involvement of teachers in school based projects was found to key to their success. This included both those directly involved in the project and other teachers with an indirect influence, for example by allowing the young people leave class. Their involvement helped to tackle challenges around timetabling and to inspire the young people.

The benefits:

- Intergenerational relationships
  The strongest outcome across the projects was an improvement in the relationships between the generations. These included changing perceptions between the different age groups, learning from each other, and successful joint working between the age groups.

- Inspiring further work in the future
  Several of the projects felt that their work had been so successful that they planned to re run the project. In some cases this was with the active involvement of the participants.

- Learning
  A large proportion of the projects highlighted learning as a benefit of their project. The projects reported a revitalised interest in learning, the learning of new skills and improved confidence and self-esteem.

- Linking the community and reducing isolation
  By bringing people together who would not normally interact, the different projects reported that they had improved links between the different generations within the community and helped to reduce social isolation.

Specific to schools:

- Contributing to other school activities
  A couple of projects noted how intergenerational practice has the potential to link in with wider pieces of work within the school. This included teaching the young people skills they could use in other activities within the school and contributing towards the four capacities of the curriculum for excellence.

- Better links between the school and community
  By involving people from the community, who would not usually get involved in a school based project – in some cases parents – the projects felt that they helped the school to build up relationships and partnerships that could be beneficial in the future and helped people from outside to become more comfortable within the school environment.

The micro grant projects

The micro grants supported a range of projects across Scotland, each unique to its area, community, local people and organiser. They all brought different generations together, but through a wide variety of means and reasons. The different types of project included:

- Environmental projects;
- Historical projects;
- Art projects;
- Music projects;
- Outdoor activity projects; and,
- Social event projects.
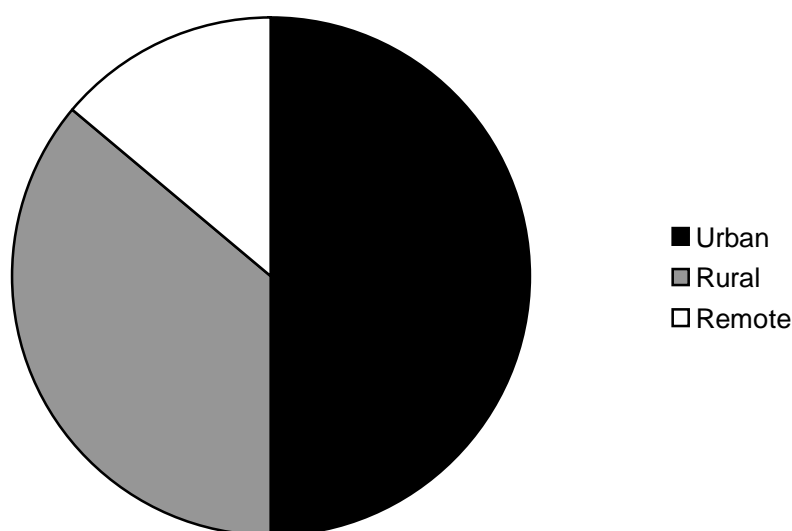
Half of the projects were urban based while 36% were rural and 14% were remote. When asked to describe their communities, a significant number (17) stated that they were close knit while slightly fewer (14) described themselves as fragmented. Sometimes this was because of geographical barriers but a few reported difficulties in communication between different population groups.

> *"There is a sense of trust between children and the adults they come into contact with. Many community based projects are well attended and supported."*

> *"Due to the geographical dispersion of the community this often results in feelings of social isolation. Individuals are often unable to attend social gatherings due to lack of transportation and as a result experience feelings of loneliness and isolation."*
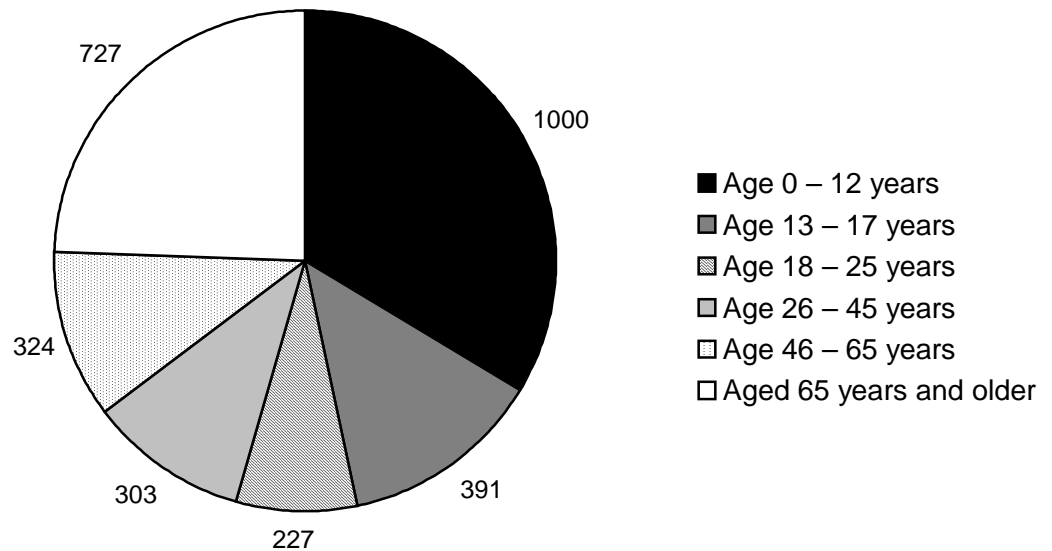
Many were based in areas which were going through a transition period. 10 of the projects stated that the area had a large number of incomers and 6 reported that their communities were experiencing conflict between the older and younger generations. 10 of the projects stated that they were based in areas of high deprivation and unemployment.

The majority of communities were geographically based but three were based around communities of shared interest and experience. These were projects focused on asylum seekers, carers, and people with disabilities.

Pie chart legend:
- Age 0 – 12 years
- Age 13 – 17 years
- Age 18 – 25 years
- Age 26 – 45 years
- Age 46 – 65 years
- Aged 65 years and older

Values: 1000, 391, 227, 303, 324, 727

The 50 projects involved a total of 2972 people across all ages. 47% (1000) were of school age or younger with 37% of these young people involved through their school. The majority of older people over 25 engaged with the project through existing community groups, local advertising and word of mouth.
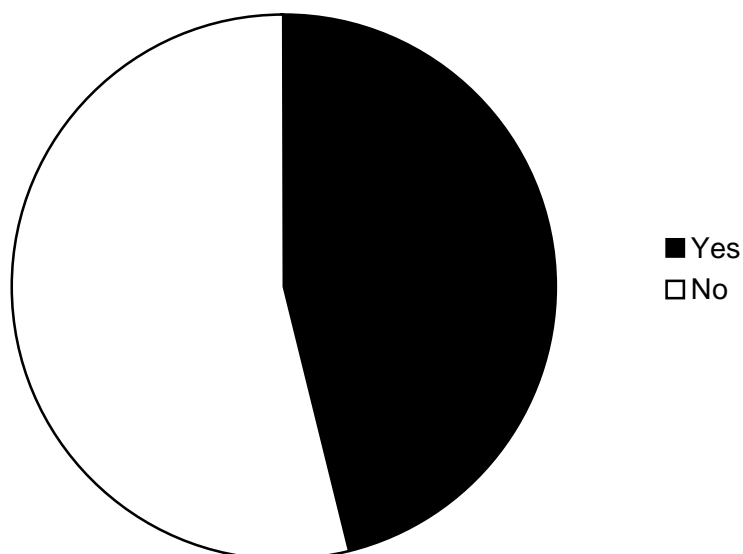
Of the different projects, 27 stated that they had received other sources of funding in addition to the micro grant while 23 stated they did not receive any. Despite not receiving any additional funding these projects involved 53% (1589) of the people engaged in the intergenerational micro grant projects.

Facing the barriers…

One of the biggest challenges encountered was difficulty recruiting the different age groups with around a third of the projects stating they had issues. Nine projects reported problems recruiting older people while two reported challenges engaging with younger people. Seven projects noted problems engaging with both age groups.

There were a number of reasons for the difficulties; the most frequently mentioned challenge was coordinating times when people could meet. Amongst the older people this was usually because they had other commitments. It was particularly noted by the projects working with schools, as there was limited time within the school timetable when the young people were also available. This is explored further in three case studies later on in this report. However some projects also reported problems during the school holidays.

> *"[One of the challenges we faced was] Recruiting over 65s, whilst local groups had originally been enthusiastic about being involved in the project when it came to committing time to the schools many people chose not to be involved. This was mainly due to other commitments they had and fitting around the school's timetables, which were sometimes inflexible"*
>
> *"As the project was by necessity held during school holidays, it was impossible to pick dates and times when everyone could and wanted to be involved."*

The projects found that older people tended to be more worried about taking part in an intergenerational project.

> *"The young people were very enthusiastic about the project however it was initially a struggle to convince older members of the community to take part."*

> *"The main challenge I faced was finding some older people willing to work with the younger ones."*

One project mentioned an incident when an older person was asked to leave the project because of their attitude towards the young people.

> *"We found during the planning of the project that the attitude towards the young people from a community member was so negative that, for child protection reasons, we had to ask that member to step down from the project for a season."*

As the person was identified and asked to leave during the planning stage it therefore had a limited impact on the project itself. The project managers stated that overall it was *"a huge success and has achieved the targets we aimed to meet"*.

Most projects, however, found that the relationships between the different age groups were very positive. Whilst there were occasional challenges with managing the interaction, good facilitation helped to address these.

> *"Group dynamics, while always remarkably supportive, made it difficult to create space for each group member with some personalities more dominant. There is a range of needs when it comes to communication and writing in the group, so that was a challenge to create space for people while still facilitating group cohesion."*

Apart from the challenge of getting people involved, and managing and developing the relationships built through the project, the other most frequently mentioned challenges to the projects were practical.

Six people said that they would have welcomed more time, four people would have chosen a different venue (usually because the one they were using was too small), while four people had transport problems. The travel problems were associated with the 2010 heavy winter snowfalls.

Interestingly, although the projects received a relatively small amount of funding through the micro grants programme and less than 50% received other sources of funding, only two projects reported needing more funding. In both cases the funding was for raising awareness and advertising and neither had received other sources of funding other than the micro grant.

Overcoming the challenges…

The key to addressing many of the challenges faced by the projects was, as noted by one, "*lots of communication, patience and persistence".* Also highlighted was the importance of effective planning, as made clear by the incident when an older person was asked to leave one of the projects. Five of the projects mentioned the need for effective planning. This planning included getting to know the people involved and identifying needs in order to better manage group dynamics.

> *"We had an informal conversation with each person to discover what kind of group it was they wanted, engaging people in forming the group directly rather than through support staff. The challenge of group dynamics was also eased through this as we had a good idea of what their needs were."*

> *"Ensuring good communication, planning in advance and being flexible at how staff were deployed."*

> *"The logistical challenges we tackled by planning well in advance and making sure everything was approved, organised and booked with plenty of time for contingencies."*

Seven projects emphasised the need to provide information and reassurance to those taking part before and during the project so that they were clear on what to expect.

> *"I had to reassure the older ones that there would be staff there to oversee it and deal with any discipline issues and anything else that may arise."*

Many were very proactive in how they approached this and arranged exercises and opportunities for people to get to know each other and learn about the project. These ranged from very informal ad hoc events to items that were built into the project programme from the beginning.

> *"To initiate interaction between our members we organised a family quiz night requiring teamwork and varied knowledge across the generations."*

> *"We also used a series of warm up and 'get to know you' drama games which brought the group together and got them having fun together before they started researching the topic."*

> *"We have carried out a series of teambuilding and group work activities to provide the group with the skills to firstly plan then organise the project. We have also provided/set up peer mentoring to assist the pupils both as a group and as individuals to carry out the tasks required to set up this project."*

In addition to the effort that went into the project at the beginning, several of the projects also mentioned the ongoing need, especially with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, to continue to be available to provide support and information throughout the life of the project.

> *"[We] Reflected success back at regular intervals and saw there was enough individual support for the most vulnerable individuals. One of the older people died very suddenly after leaving the workshop one day and this was handled sensitively by the staff, CLD and school."*

When it came to promoting the different projects and encouraging people to become involved, many of the groups worked with established groups, including community groups and clubs, care homes, and schools which made it easier for them to contact people who were willing to take part. In some cases this involved enabling various groups to have a particularly active role in organising and running the projects.

> *"The tutors and parent committee worked together with other parents, community friends and contacts to organise the project."*

Four of the projects stated that they worked closely with organisations such as Local Authorities who had specialist staff and stated that their experience and expertise had a very positive effect on involving people in the project and in running it. A few (4) said that they promoted their work through PR and advertising, such as by putting up posters and placing ads. Six projects stated that they used word of mouth. One of the projects arranged public meetings to assess interest before starting the project.

> *"[We] Made local media aware of the event and arranged for photographers to attend."*

> *"Public meetings were held to gauge the interest and to see if it was viable."*

The most frequently mentioned strategy for addressing challenges, highlighted by eight of the projects, was flexibility. This could mean a range of responses, from arranging car pools to help older people attend the project when they were snowed in to being flexible about meeting times. Some projects benefited from the flexibility of key individuals who helped out with the project. One school based project faced delays when snow forced the schools to close for a week, however they were able to report that, "*fortunately the artist was happy to work to a flexible timetable.*"

Making a difference…

The benefit most frequently mentioned was the development and improvement of the relationships between the different generations, with 20 of the surveys noting that this was a particular success of their project. The evolving relations had a number of different aspects. Some projects referred to changing perceptions between the different age groups, others were pleased by what the different ages learned from each other, and the majority noted how successfully the age groups worked together.

> *"The young people were pleasantly surprised by the attitude of the older members of the community. They were kind to them."*

> *"The children learned from the older people and the older people learned computer skills from the children."*

> *"Successful joint working between over 65s and primary school children to explore the topic of life in Musselburgh in the 1950s/60s and role models."*

A few of the projects reported that, because of their initial success, there was a will amongst both age groups for the project to continue in some form and several were already planning for the future.

> *"The groups are continuing to work and fundraise together. They plan to use the remaining grant funding to have another learning session during the December (2010) holidays."*

Several of the groups felt that the project had been a success in stimulating learning amongst those taking part, with 13 seeing this as a key achievement. In some cases this involved revitalising an interest in learning, in others learning new skills, and in some this learning was broader, improving not only skills and knowledge but also confidence and self-esteem.

> *"Increased interest in reading and sharing stories within the family home."*

> *"All of the group members have been proud of their achievements in writing stories and poems, some surprised at their capacity in something they have never done before."*

> *"The main group involved in the project have a range of social, emotional and learning needs. Through this project they developed a range of knowledge and skills by working with experienced adults. They gained a sense of achievement and pride, building up confidence and self esteem."*

Enjoyment from taking part was also seen as an important element of success by 12 of the projects. Indeed, for many this was the key reason why the project felt they had been successful.

Eight noted that their project had created better links in the community as a result of bringing together the different age groups, with four more feeling they had achieved a reduction in the isolation of some community members. This reduction in isolation was usually amongst the older members and those who experienced barriers to being more active within their community, such as carers and people with disabilities.

> *"We achieved bringing different age groups together providing children with the knowledge of planting seeds, watching them grow and planting the garden which allowed children to have sensory experiences."*

> *"Links with communities of people who would not otherwise have had anything to do with each other."*

> *"It was [also] described as a "cathartic experience" and an opportunity to focus on the positive aspects of being a carer rather than just the negative picture which is often portrayed. Another carer remarked on the "fun and friendship" and that the experience "gave you a bit of confidence".*

The final key sign of success mentioned by five of the projects was an increased profile within the community. In two cases this led to the project recruiting new volunteers.

Intergenerational practice and the curriculum

It was clear when reviewing the surveys that schools faced particular challenges and opportunities to taking forward intergenerational projects. Three schools based projects agreed to a phone interview to further explore these. The phone interviews also allowed the projects to provide additional information about the difference that the project had made.

School project 1:

This primary school project involved bringing older people as 'buddies' into several schools. The buddies spoke to the young people about the history of the local area and helped them to create an exhibition for the new local museum that other young people in the area could enjoy.

The project reported few challenges, the only significant one being tackling the question of disclosure without putting the 'buddies' off taking part in the project. After taking advice they decided not to put the 'buddies' through the disclosure process. They noted that, although in past projects they had problems finding time within the curriculum for the activities to take place, this was not an issue in this instance. They attributed this to the active involvement and buy in of the teachers themselves, whose commitment was a key feature in the project's success including providing an inspiration to the pupils. Their active involvement and support also helped to keep costs low. The commitment and flexibility of the older 'buddies' was also a significant contributing factor.

The project organiser found that having a new face in the school helped personalise the issues and inspire the young people in a subject that might otherwise have been perceived as dry and boring. They reported one incident when a buddy began talking to a very rowdy class, which, to the project organiser's surprise, quieted down instantly to listen to the buddy. The organiser noted that the young people got a confidence boost by being involved in something unique and different from what other classes were doing. It gave them a sense of pride and ownership, and that it helped the young people to see the community in a new way. Many did not know the history of the area and older people were able to introduce them to this. Finally, the exhibition created for new local museum by pupils enabled them to contribute to their community in a way that may otherwise not have been possible.

School project 2:

This high school project involved young people from the school working with older people to bring about reciprocal benefits in a project based on culture and heritage, including hosting a day of entertainment and hospitality for elderly citizens.

As indicated by the survey the biggest challenge faced by the project was negotiating around exams and other timetables, and sometimes getting the young people out of class to take part. Again the positive involvement of teachers was key to overcoming these challenges. Part of the positive involvement of teachers came from the recognition of the links between the project and the responsible citizens element of the curriculum for excellence.

Another key aspect of the project was that it linked with an ongoing programme within the school on developing leadership skills and community involvement. This meant that one of the benefits of the project was that the skills learnt by the young people, could be used for other projects and areas of work, as well as being useful out with the school. These skills were wide ranging, including planning and organising, taking charge of making telephone calls, arranging consent and permission forms, forming and taking an active part in a committee, and running workshops both within and outside the school.

The project received positive feedback from the older people and developed links with the community that could be drawn upon for other projects, creating better and stronger school and community partnerships.

School project 3:

This primary school project brought several young people and their families together in the school to read as a group. In most cases this involved a parent and child but in a few cases it also involved grandparents.

The biggest challenge encountered by the project was finding a suitable venue within the school for the project to meet but minor rescheduling enabled the project to address this. The project organiser noted that the project helped to engage families in reading. They reported that, as a result of their involvement in the project, one family bought the books so that they continue reading at home. The project gave the young people opportunities to take part in activities in a different environment, away from the classroom where other personalities may dominate, and as a result the young people became more confident at reading out loud to the group over the course of the project.

Perhaps the strongest outcome of the project noted by the organiser was that it got parents more involved in the school. The teacher noted that sometimes parents and family have limited involvement in schools and as a result school can be seen as an intimidating environment. It enabled parents and families to see their children in a setting, which they were not familiar with, and helped them to become more comfortable and better able to understand their children's experiences at the school.

Because of the success of the project, the teacher involved stated that they are aiming to develop it further, talking with families and head teacher about how to develop the project further.

Evolving and improving

The final question of the survey asked the projects what, if anything, they would do differently. A small number of projects (5) were so pleased by the outcome of the micro grants that they stated that they would not make any changes to the project except to extend it and involve more people.

> *"I would run the project again doing nothing differently but could do this with a larger group over a longer period as it was so successful."*

The majority did have changes that they would make. Some of these were to improve the existing project whilst others focused on how the project could evolve in the future. The most frequently mentioned change that the projects would make was to build in more time, sometimes for the main body of the project, sometimes for planning and sometimes to make changes to the timetable and therefore make the more accessible.

> *"There is never enough time of course but we feel participants are only starting to get into their stride, especially with the word of mouth recruitment."*

> *"We would work at a different time of the year when the school is facing fewer pressures."*

Another frequently mentioned change that the projects raised was to involve more people and engage those already involved in more aspects of the project. It was clear from the surveys that the projects felt that greater involvement would have a range of benefits including: engaging more people both in terms of increasing numbers and attracting those who the project organisers felt would most benefit from it, creating an increased feeling of ownership for the project and finally enabling those involved to develop and learn new and existing skills.

> *"We would involve each generation in pre-project planning and consultation to ensure that it was something they were keen to get involved in."*

> *"I would encourage more group working within different areas of the town encouraging young people from poorer areas to become involved and break down barriers of rejection and negativity and work on building self esteem."*

> *"The one thing we would change would be to have more of the parents and teachers involved in the music making as we found this to be a big challenge. They would encourage the young people to take part and express themselves but felt too embarrassed to join in themselves."*

One of the projects noted the importance of understanding the individuals who were involved and tailoring the project to their needs.

> *"Be more aware of the skills level of the students and ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to best support them."*

Other changes included raising more funds for the project through local fundraising, changing the venue to ensure that it was more accessible with increased capacity, decreasing the number of people in the project so that they could better support those involved, and bringing in more volunteers and staff to help support the project.

Conclusion

"We have a lot of community organisations working together - thanks to projects like ours and grants like yours."

It was clear from the micro grant survey that intergenerational practice can thrive and bring benefits in a number of different settings. Whilst all the different projects were unique and individual to their local area they all shared a common theme of helping to build relationships between the different generations and most felt that they had achieved this goal.

Perhaps most importantly the micro grants projects show what can be achieved with a small amount of money and ingenuity. With only a few hundred pounds each the projects worked with nearly three thousand people, giving them new experiences, new opportunities for learning, and engaging them with their community. And, despite the challenges faced, the majority reported a very positive and rewarding experience.

Within schools, the projects found that intergenerational practice could contribute to the curriculum for excellence, helping young people to learn and apply new skills, and could help to build links between the school and community and with parents and families.

Several of the projects were planning to repeat and expand the project based on their experiences. This alone is a strong indication of the positive response to the micro grant projects.

This report has summarised the key challenges, solutions and benefits faced by the 50 community based intergenerational projects. We hope that the findings detailed in this report will be of benefit to other small intergenerational projects.

Annex 1: The survey

Generations Working Together wants to learn from your experience of running an intergenerational project. Please complete this short survey to let us and others in Scotland know about your project.

1. Project
Name: _____

2. Did your project receive funding from any sources other than the Generations Working Together Mini Grant?   YES ☐   NO ☐

3. Would you describe the area your project is based in as:

URBAN? ☐

RURAL? ☐

REMOTE? ☐

4. a) How would you describe the community your project is based in?

   e.g. "Close knit", "Fragmented" or "In conflict"

   b) Why would you describe the community as above?

5. How many of those taking part in your project were:

Age 0 – 12 years: _____   Age 26 – 45 _____

Age 13 – 17 years: _____   Age 46 – 65 _____

Age 18 – 25 years: _____   Aged 65 and older: _____

Please turn over the page to complete this survey…

6. What were the challenges you faced during the project?

You could consider:

- *How easy was it to get people involved?*
- *What was the venue like?*
- *Did everyone get on with each other?*

7. How did you respond to these challenges?

8. What did the project achieve?

9. If you ran this project again what, if anything, would you do differently and why?

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY

Annex 2: The phone interview

1. Do you think the intergenerational project helped people to become successful learners? If yes please describe why.

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2. Do you think the intergenerational project helped people to become confident? If yes please describe why.

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3. Do you think the intergenerational project helped people to become responsible citizens? If yes please describe why.

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4. Do you think the intergenerational project helped people to become effective at taking part? If yes please describe why.

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5. What do you think are the advantages of schools being involved in intergenerational projects?

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6. What challenges do intergenerational projects in schools face?

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