



As growing numbers of people are brought together through intergenerational work it is inevitable that at times misunderstandings and challenges may occur between generations. As practitioners it is important that we reflect when this happens, in order to understand what has occurred, and consider how we can be proactive in planning for and pre-empting these situations as much as it is possible to do so.

Generations Working Together caught up with Laura Taylor, of Active Stirling to talk about the intergenerational project she runs and some challenges which, with the help of GWT, she has overcome in her practice.

The project

My project is Generations Active Together (GAT) where young people from local high schools PE department deliver physical activity in local care homes.

Each year, GAT runs inhouse activities to prepare the young people for going into local care homes – teaching them physical activity suitable for care home residents, dementia training, talking about stereotypes, tackling ageism. They then come up with exercises and activities that can be done in the care home. It was the first time the young people had been in a care home and the first session with a new school intake.

First session at a new school.

During this first session, a care home resident in her late nineties, living with severe dementia asked one of the minority ethnic pupils taking part, what language they spoke (apparently the resident had lived in Africa and knew Swahili). The pupil did not hear the residents' question at first, although other pupils did. The question wasn't malicious, just curious.

Unfortunately, as a result of the incident, the pupil in question decided not to attend further activities. GAT spoke to the class teacher and explained what had happened. An incident form was completed, and the care home informed. Sadly, as a result, the resident who had made the comment wasn't allowed to attend further activities which was not the outcome that Laura had expected. This caused her to reflect on what happened and consider whether changes should be made in the training she delivers to better prepare pupils for engaging with older adults with dementia or Alzheimer's Disease. How can she further support pupils to understand that some adults may make unsuitable comments or behave inappropriately and out of character.

Reaching out

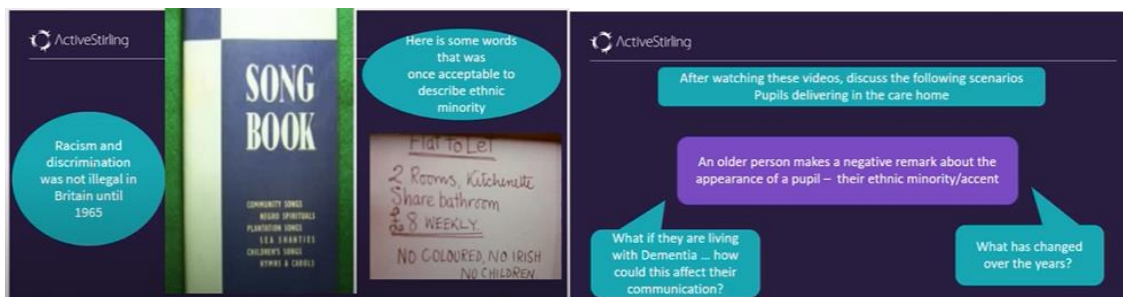
She then got in contact with Simone Tomaz, at Stirling University who she has been working alongside with the GOALD project. Simone and Laura emailed GWT and arranged a meeting with Lorraine George who offered advice and support. Lorraine pointed out that there are lots of scenarios today with sex, gender, race and other issues which differ from when older people were young. So, what could Laura do to proactively reduce this gap in understanding between the generations, to prevent potential misunderstandings and ensure that if something occurred again, she was better prepared?

Improving practice

Laura worked with Lorraine who found some dated publications including a very old Negro songbook, to show the pupils how language, and society norms and values, evolve and change over time. What was once acceptable often becomes no longer acceptable. So, this year, Laura has a section on scenarios which she uses to discuss these kinds of issues with the young people before they start their intergenerational project. Sections include 'what is dementia?'



But importantly, there are a number of slides with scenarios and explanations of how things have changed that may lead to misunderstandings between the generations.



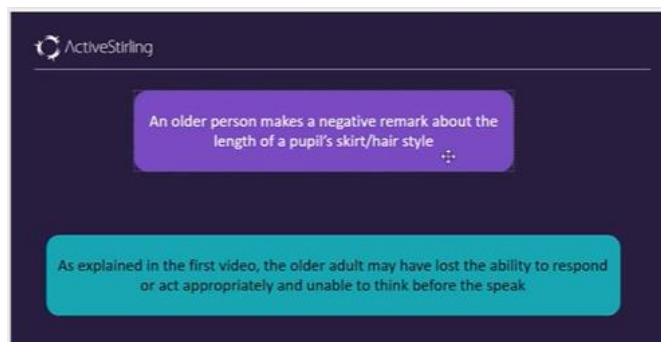
There is also a scenario if an older person misgenders a pupil.



And indeed, if an older person makes a remark about sexuality choices.

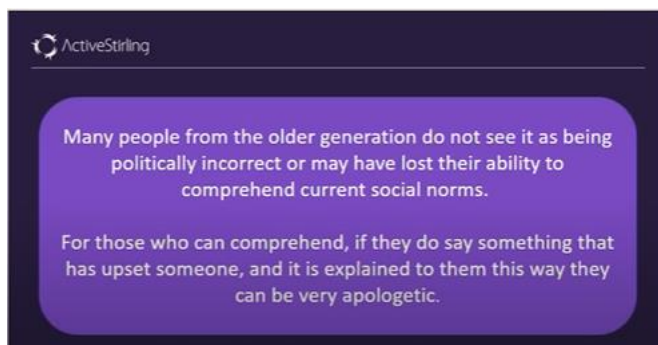


Laura explains that when she discussed this with her group this year, the young people were shocked to find out that homosexuality was still a criminal offence in Northern Ireland in 1982.

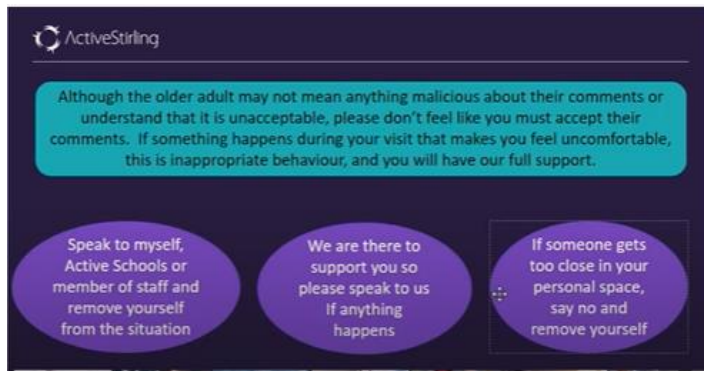


Comments about appearances may happen – and so this slide was included too – just as an opportunity for the young people to prepare for various scenarios which may occur.

Laura explains 'Some people living with dementia do not have a filter and so it's important to explain this to the young people.' Equally, some older people do not see it as being politically incorrect – but once explained, they can be very apologetic.'



Laura also included a plan of action for the young people, if a scenario did occur.



So, Laura was keen that the scenario was also switched – so what to do if a young person said something inappropriate about an older person.



These 'scenarios' helped Laura find space to have these discussions with the young people before meeting the older people and ensured that it wasn't just older people being in the wrong but that the young people may hold stereotypical views of older people.

Laura now includes 'How confident do you feel in knowing what to do if something happens during an intergenerational session?' in her evaluation which she asks at the beginning and end of the programme to measure the impact of changing the briefing sessions.

As Laura says 'I could have just stopped the sessions all together but instead I reached out to GWT and got some support. Things do go wrong but this year, we've managed to adapt the programme to prepare the pupils for it which is the positive out of it. It's nothing that I've done or that's wrong with the project, it's just that society is changing and, in a way, society is going to be changing for years. We've learned from our mistakes and improved our preparation with both generations. It's a wonderful and happy project – just that one misunderstanding in five years – but enough for me to do something about it.'

Thanks to Laura for talking to us. You can find out more about [GAT here](#).