

Caritas Intergenerational Project

“the richness of many years of life... is the richness of people, of every single person who has many years of life experience and history behind them”. Pope Francis



Caritas Plymouth
Diocese of Plymouth
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INTERGENERATIONAL LINKING – AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS FAITH THROUGH ACTION

‘The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love’ Galatians 5:6

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Introduction

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) shares some key principles around the dignity of the human person; the importance of family and community; solidarity and the Common Good and the belief that we are all responsible for one another because we all belong to one human family; our responsibility for the rights of others and the good of the wider community; our duty to reach out to those who find themselves in the peripheries of our societies. CST offers us an opportunity to reflect on how we can share our faith through the actions we undertake and how we can live our lives following the example set by Jesus.

Intergenerational linking offers a wonderful opportunity to act for the common good. It enables younger and older people to come together, form new friendships, and share new experiences. The Caritas Plymouth intergenerational linking project worked in partnership with Plymouth CAST to connect schools and care homes across the Diocese of Plymouth. The overarching aim was to encourage and integrate Catholic Social Teaching and initiatives across schools and parishes and enable people to show their faith in action. The project also aimed to empower young people to develop their leadership skills and take ownership of activities, with the hope of helping inspire a long-term habit of engaging with social action. The project enables Care home residents to have an increased sense of purpose, reduce isolation, improved physical activity and wellbeing make a positive contribution to the social and emotional development of young people and learn new skills.

Linking can take many forms, but this project connected schools and care homes. In the first phase of the project eleven schools took part and over 700 children had the opportunity to engage with the project. However, linking can be undertaken by any group or parish and we hope that the testimony of those who participated in the first phase of the project will encourage others to set up a link with a care home – this could be a school link or a parish link (e.g., a confirmation group or pastoral visiting group).

Why do it?

The teachings of Jesus about the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching and drives the ethos and culture behind this project. Intergenerational linking offers an opportunity to promote closeness and generosity across the generations. In 2015, Pope Francis reflected:

‘A Christian community in which closeness and gratuitousness are no longer considered indispensable, would lose its soul with this. Where there is no honor to the elderly, there is no future for the young.’

An intergenerational project offers an opportunity to show evidence in many of the areas relevant to the Catholic Schools Inspection. The Catholic Life and Mission section of the revised Catholic Schools Inspection Framework looks at how faithfully the school responds to the call to live as a Catholic community at the service of the Church’s educational mission. Inspectors will look for evidence that shows how pupils respond to Catholic Social Teaching and how pupils show respect for themselves and others. Inspectors will look for evidence of pupil’s involvement in advocacy work and campaigning and transformational action. Grade descriptors talk of *‘Pupils are actively engaged in responding to the demands of Catholic Social*



Teaching, supporting those in need locally. 'Pupils value the school's chaplaincy provision and actively participate in opportunities provided by the school'. This is reflected further in the provision and leadership sections of Catholic Life and Mission.

There are so many ways in which intergenerational linking can fulfil curriculum requirements across all subjects, not just Religious Education. A few examples would be history and talking to the residents about their experiences and occupations, not just during the war but during the 60's and 70's reflecting the changing landscape of Britain over time. The environment can benefit from gardening projects and art from the sharing of talents. Literacy can link into the choice of reading both children and residents enjoy and writing letters to each other does not just encourage friendship but style and purpose in writing.

Rather than creating an additional project for a school, the intergenerational linking work can be woven in to deliver elements of the national curriculum, depending on what activities are agreed. The main thing is that the young people and residents get a say in what is agreed.

How does it work?

A care home is partnered with a group of young people – they may be a small group, a class or classes from the school or a group from the local parish. Caritas Plymouth can help contact local care homes and find an interested partner in the Diocese of Plymouth. Most important is that the care home is keen and has the capacity to engage. Once the partnership has been initiated, the young people and the older people share some information; this may be in the form of cards, video messages or photographs. Caritas Plymouth can provide lots of resources including ideas for activities, letters to parents etc. Each partnership is free to focus on areas of particular interest or relevance and engage in activities of their choice. Most of the initial activities may be remote but the aim is for the pupils and residents to meet and undertake activities together. The goal is to establish long-term and meaningful relationships between the school and the care home partner.

What activities might the intergenerational link involve?

Examples from previous links include:

- Story telling-swapping stories of personal experience/identity
- Learning skills-both generations have skills or talents that would be interesting for the other
- Reading to each other
- Playing numeracy games
- Arts and crafts
- Establishing pen pals
- Talking about personal history or heritage
- Planting seeds or gardening
- Weather watching or birdwatching
- Telling jokes
- Discussing hobbies and sharing examples
- Exploring technology e.g., face filters, voice recording
- Sharing special events or festivals



Outcomes

There is lots of evidence that intergenerational linking can:

- improve young people's confidence
- develop young people's leadership skills
- create opportunities for older people to participate in the lives of younger generations
- reduce isolation for children and older people
- connect care homes to their communities



How do I get started?

Caritas Plymouth can offer a short online training session to share best practice in linking with a care home and lots of resources and suggestions. Please contact us via email caritas@prcdtr.org.uk.

Case Studies

The following section includes case studies from Plymouth CAST schools which participated in the pilot project. We hope these examples will offer inspiration and learning to other schools and parish communities wishing to develop a local link.

St Peter's Plymouth and Underhill Care home

The school made a number of efforts to connect with the care home and sent a video of their Christmas nativity to the residents. Children made Easter cards and bird feeders for the home. When asked what things they would like to do with the care home residents, they said, "Play board games, read stories, chat and find out things about each other."

Although initial contact was slow, in the summer term seven residents came to the school and enjoyed a cream tea and sandwiches which the children had prepared and served to them. Seven children from KS2 then visited the care home. The children prepared questions to ask the residents about their childhood, schooling, if they'd always lived in Plymouth and their own children and grandchildren. The residents thoroughly enjoyed this and the care home later reported that one particular resident who had been very unhappy, had not stopped smiling on the day of the visit. Another resident who had dementia and kept repeating questions was treated beautifully by the children and remained engaged in the conversation.



St Paul's, Plymouth and Erstell Care home

The school made a good start in its link. They delivered a harvest basket for the staff and sent some artwork to the home with a pack of post it notes for residents to comment and send back. Unfortunately the Care Home activities coordinator left which meant that the home did not have capacity to engage for a while.



St Mary's Poole and Magna Care

Two classes shared their work and learning with the care home residents via zoom. The school took part in pebble painting for National Care home Day and an exchange of videos from the care home residents. The residents had fun painting and exchanging the pebbles, not only involving the residents and pupils but the staff and parents too. They found that sharing the artwork got everyone interested and excited. The children sent Christmas cards to the care home. They made Christmas decorations for the community tree outside the care home. St Mary's recorded their nativity performance, and a copy was sent to Magna for the residents to enjoy. The children made cards for the staff and residents, and the teacher delivered these to the home.

St Mary's commissioned workshops in singing, art and drama with some for the care home residents to learn the Beatles song 'A Little Help From my Friends' and to make artwork.



*“As I have loved
you, so must you
love one another”*

John 13:35



Head Teacher ‘I wanted to support what appeared to be a really worthwhile community project. I would like my children to learn more about older people, to link to their community in new ways and to experience volunteering’

St Mary’s, Buckfast and Willow House/Windward Care home

During the first term, the school made a connection with a local care home. The children visited to sing carols to the residents from outside and sent Christmas cards and crafts to the home. However, the care home did not have capacity to engage so Caritas connected the school with a Willow House and its partner Windward Care home who were keen to partner and agreed a diary of weekly visits from a group of children to help in the garden, make bug hotels and some outdoor learning. The plan is that the school will repeat an activity on alternative week so both care homes will be visited. The school have undertaken a growing project with the care homes using the Grow Social scheme which is a campaign for schools to share their gardening with the community. The school has been working with an artist to create a shared piece of artwork around the theme of the Season of Creation.





St Mary's, Swanage and Clifftop Care home

The children started by sending cut-outs of their hands with things that they like doing to the care home. The residents sent their cut-out hands back the school as a way of introducing themselves to each other. The children made decorations and delivered those to the home for Christmas. The children really wanted to buy a gift for the care team and so they bought bars of Fair-Trade chocolate, which the children enjoyed wrapping and decorating. They have travelled to the care home and sang songs outside from the garden and they made and gave the home an advent wreath. They made an advent calendar with chocolates and individual characters from the nativity for each day of December. The care home staff and residents added a character each day to the backdrop that was displayed in their lobby. The children were very excited when they went to visit the home and spotted the picture growing and to see their work displayed. The residents sent Christmas cards to the children with photos of the things that they have been doing in the care home. The children have enjoyed this and are really looking forward to going into the home to match the handprints with the person's hand and information written on them.

A few children were chosen to go and plant bulbs in the care home garden ready for the spring. Year 6 wrote to each resident - they made postcards with pictures of school pets and told them all about our guineapigs, tortoises and chickens. They made beautiful sun catchers, photocopying a picture onto tracing paper, colouring it in, laminating it and then making a hanger for it. Residents spend a lot of time looking out of their windows and this has been a lovely thing for them to look at.

“All the children said they were keen to take part because they wanted to make a positive difference and do something for their local community. Some mentioned their experience of relatives in care homes, others mentioned family members working in care homes.”

As there were no full school assemblies due to the pandemic, the older children visited the younger classes to tell them what they have been doing. Year 5 have written postcards introduce themselves. End of year singing has been filmed and will be emailed to the care home for the residents to see. There were many SEN children involved who wanted to join in. They particularly enjoyed the creative activities.





“A lot of the children don’t have contact with elderly people and so the opportunity to see them and their enthusiasm and interaction has been lovely.”

The school have asked another care home to join next year for years 3 and 4. A handful of children will go to lunch at the care home every week.

St Mary and St Joseph’s, Wool and Upton Bay Care home

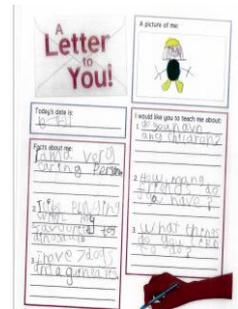
The residents of the care home were very happy to get letters from the children and keen to answer the children’s questions e.g., what games they liked to play as children. The replies were touching and heartfelt stories, including one from a 97-year-old pilot. They sent prayer cards and bookmarks to the care home and created an autumn display to be put in the lobby of the residential home. Having linked together via Zoom, the residents visited the children in their minibus for Children in Need. The children came outside and waved to them, and the residents made some special gifts for them. Letters from the children were read out to the residents. The residents wrote about their own school days and gave the children some advice.

The school linked with the care home for a story telling session. The care home sent the cuddly character toys to the school, and via Zoom, the residents read Winnie the Pooh stories to the children whilst the children listened and took turns to hold up the character toys when they appeared in the story. This was a lovely way for the residents to remember stories from their childhood too.

At Easter time, cards were made for the residents and a big Easter display from Reception class was sent to the home. The school received a lovely card back from the home with messages from some of the residents. This was passed to each class and read to them by the teacher.



Year 1 and Year 4 at St Mary and Joseph’s, Wool are really keen to get to know the care home residents



St Joseph’s, Poole and Richmondwood Care home

St Joseph’s joined the project after Christmas 2022. A group of 12 children volunteered to develop a new link with the care home. The first step was to use the Hands resource for the children to introduce themselves by drawing around their hand and writing something on the picture about themselves and for the care home residents to do the same. The school planned a jubilee face to face meeting with residents using Chatterbox. They will be making a recording for the residents too and they – and the home – have both used social media to promote the value of the project.



'I can't emphasise enough the value of the project in terms of linking young people with the elderly. Their faces just change when they see young people. It's just magical to see. They almost become children again themselves.'

During the summer term, the pupils went to the care home and spent the afternoon with the residents in the garden. The children asked questions, they shared colouring activities and some children performed music to the residents. Although there were no SEN children in the project, there was one child who is shy and a little reticent. However, they blossomed with confidence when meeting the residents at the care home.

When the pupils met the residents face to face, the school made sure that there were ice breakers to make the meeting more enjoyable. They put on music in the background, brought colouring materials for them all to share and together with the children, and devised questions that the children could ask the residents. You can see a video of this on the school website [St Joseph's Catholic Primary School - Mini Vinnie's \(sjcpschool.co.uk\)](http://StJoseph'sCatholicPrimarySchool-MiniVinnie's(sjcpschool.co.uk))

Sacred Heart, Paignton and Primley House

The school sent Christmas cards and over 200 children prepared artwork over the seven decades of the Queen's reign to send to the residents. Each class took a particular decade and learned songs. The school organised zoom calls for each class with residents to ask questions about that particular decade. The artwork was put up in marquees in the care home garden for residents and visitors to enjoy during the Jubilee week. A smaller group of children went on a garden visit for the Jubilee weather permitting and another group will be performing a concert for the residents.



Old age is “a precious treasure that takes shape in the journey of every man and woman's life, whatever their origins, background, or economic or social conditions.”

Pope Francis



Holy Cross Catholic Primary School and Bethany Care home

Holy Cross sent a harvest display to the care home. The children were very excited to get the first email from the home saying how much their display was enjoyed, especially the prayers that the children wrote. The school has done a project with residents drawing hands and describing their life. This was used as a history opportunity with the Foundation stage.

*'Thank you for the reminder
that all good things come from
God'*

Care Home Manager



Care home feedback *"Thank you for the lovely Harvest display you delivered to the home yesterday. It is currently displayed in the residents' lounge and this morning I read the prayers out to them during our morning Devotions. The residents have asked me to thank the children on their behalf. They said that they thought the display was presented very nicely and were impressed with the neat and tidy handwriting and the pictures you created. They enjoyed hearing the prayers and said how wonderfully thoughtful they were in expressing love to those who grow our food and thinking about those we need to harvest it as well as thinking of those who are less well off than ourselves who need food."*

Cathedral School, Plymouth and Nazareth House

The Cathedral school choir learned new songs to have a choir event for the home and engaged in soap making for fundraising. The pupil chaplains made Christmas cards for the home. For the Jubilee celebration, the choir of about 20 children planned to go to the home and singing some songs for the residents.

St Joseph's, Plymouth and Higher Park Lodge

The children sent Christmas cards to the care home and postcards telling the residents what the children like. The school sent the residents giant blank postcards to reciprocate and made efforts to link with the care home but unfortunately the latter did not have capacity to link with the school for much of the year.



Top Tips from Participating Schools

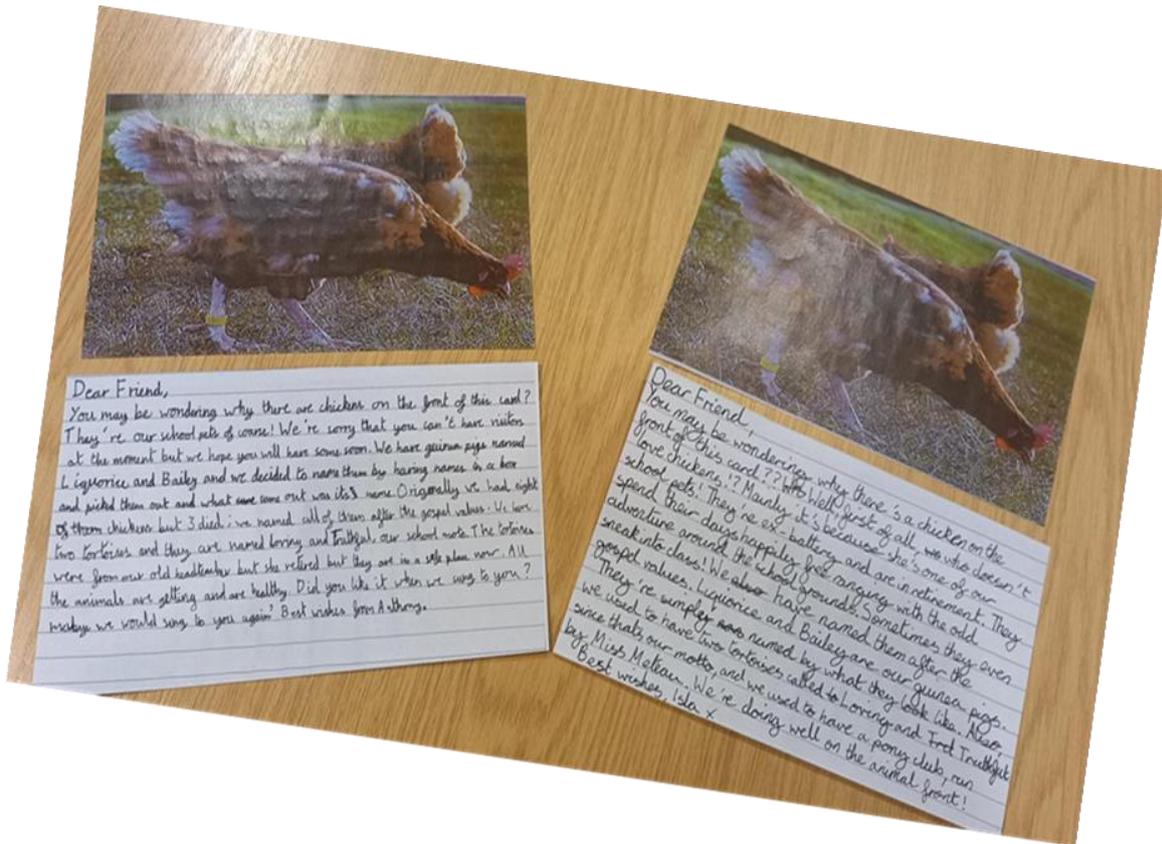
What advice would you give to another school coming into the project?

- Find a very local care home and maybe not too big. It is advisable to have a good link with them and to be sure that they have a willingness to participate. You have to be proactive.
- Definitely go for it. It is one of the best projects we've done.
- Keep it simple – children wanted to go and play board games.
- Open it up to the children for their ideas.
- Be realistic about what you can achieve. Make an action plan.
- Persevere. Often it wasn't easy as there was no reciprocation, but worth doing when you get there. Ask for Caritas support for links.
- Gardening was challenging as bulbs were bought for the children to plant in the autumn, but due to rain the activity didn't happen. Looking back, earlier organisation to do it in September rather than leaving it until November may have helped and had more involvement from the children.
- Having the residents for a cream tea was easy as it was in the school. The DT project in school was making sandwiches.
- Getting the children on board is very easy. They were enthusiastic and excited about the project from the beginning.
- When the pupils met the residents face to face, make sure that there are ice breakers to make the meeting more enjoyable.

More help and information

Caritas Plymouth has lots of information and materials for parishes and schools who might be interested in developing a link with a local care home or another form of intergenerational linking. Please get in touch with your questions and we would be happy to help. You can contact us on 01364645421 or email caritas@prcdtr.org.uk.

“The Church becomes a place where generations are called to share God’s loving plan, in a relationship of a mutual exchange of the gifts of the Holy Spirit”. Pope Francis



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Proudly supporting youth social action



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Remarkable research for healthy ageing THE DUNHILL MEDICAL TRUST