**Intergenerational National Network**

Tenth anniversary celebration on 21 March in the Town House, Aberdeen

The Intergenerational National Network first met in March 2007 at the University of Strathclyde. It continues to bring together people from across Scotland and further afield who have an interest in working across generations.

The celebration event was hosted by Aberdeen City Council, who have been consistently supportive throughout the life of the network. It was attended by 40 school pupils and 50 adults. As more than one person commented, this, as well as the beautiful surroundings in the Town House, gave the event a magical atmosphere.

The Lord Provost gave a warm and very personal welcome, talking about all the wonderful intergenerational activity that happens in the city.

We then heard from Gail Cassidy from East Ayrshire Volunteer Centre, another very long-standing member of the network. Unlike many others, she discovered intergenerational practice through youth work, and has run a number of highly successful projects over the past ten years, mostly bringing together school pupils and residents in sheltered housing and care homes, but also working in partnership with many other organisations locally, including libraries and the NHS. The projects have been funded through a number of sources, including Generations Working Together, the Big Lottery, the Robertson Trust, the NHS and Scotrail!

She talked about a recent project, ‘Getting to know you’, and showed a very entertaining film. When Gail leaves her day job, she definitely has a future in Hollywood! Her latest project focuses on the history of the bonnet industry in East Ayrshire.

Councillor Lesley Dunbar, who spoke at the inaugural meeting of the network as an officer of Aberdeen City Council, spoke of intergenerational practice as a social movement. She paid tribute to the energy and enthusiasm that have kept the network going for ten years, and said that she is looking forward to the next ten!

There followed three inspiring presentations from Kingswells Primary School; Harlaw Academy and Ferryhill Primary School. It was impressive to see the puils from Kingswells setting their presentation up on the computer without a teacher in sight! They talked about the links they have developed with Kingsmead Nursing Home. They get together on special occasions such as Halloween, St. Andrew’s Day, Valentine’s Day, Easter, etc. They work with the Silver City Surfers. And a small group learned about dementia before spending time with residents designing a mural based on the residents’ chosen theme of colour and nature. The nursery class is also involved.

The Faculty of Achievement at Harlaw Academy works with pupils to develop their broader skills, including interacting with people of all ages. When they first embarked on intergenerational work, everyone was quite apprehensive, but in retrospect they all agreed that they had had a great time and that it was one of their most pleasurable experiences. They noted particularly the importance of humour in communication and conversations! Pupils had also indicated that they would like to do more cooking, arts and crafts, drama and gardening. The after school group is now undertaking ‘Confidence to cook’ classes. With limited staff time, they invited former pupils to get involved. They are keen to build on all of these very positive experiences.

Ferryhill have also worked with Silver City Surfers. They prepared for their project by thinking and talking about the problems posed by bad eyesight. They then met residents from Whinhill. They particularly enjoyed a session when one of the residents brought in an old record player (‘old technology’!) and they played music. They also visited Aberdeen College to put on make up and to dress up in 1940s clothes. On a more serious level, they addressed on-line shopping and how to do it safely. Finally, they had a session celebrating what they had all experienced and achieved.

In the meantime, the technology had let us down, so, while it was being fixed, we had the opportunity to bring all the pupils back, and for the audience to ask questions. They asked about what they had enjoyed most; what the next steps might be; and what messages they might give to those present today. The answers were both thoughtful and insightful.

Once the technology was up and running once again, we were able to watch two videos from Kingswells before lunch.

After lunch, Alec Thompson-Miller and the Ace Voices choir gave a wonderful a capella rendition of ‘Take time in life’, and encouraged the audience to participate. Alec is working towards the establishment of an intergenerational choir.

The plan for the afternoon was to hold three themed conversations around tables: Ann Roberts leading on ‘The wisdom of grandparents’; Chris Dunhill on community learning; and Ruth Cape on ‘Rural Wisdom’. Because the members of the choir were still with us for half an hour before their bus arrived, Ann asked them to share with us their own thoughts about their own grandparents. Their input was fascinating, funny and moving.

We then returned to the programme and the conversations, before finishing the day with a cup of tea.