Suffolk Artlink

Getting together

An online resource for groups wishing to run intergenerational reminiscence projects

Introduction

We all have memories – they make us who we are – and one of the most exciting and rewarding ways of working with memories is to bring different generations together, to share and compare their memories of similar situations.

This is what Suffolk Artlink did with the Art of Play project. They brought together two distinct age groups within the same community, e.g. members of an Over 60's Club with students from the local middle school, to share and explore their memories of childhood play. These stories were collated into a **booklet** and the group then went on to create **animations based on those stories**.

This type of work is known as intergenerational reminiscence work. You may have experienced the enjoyment, satisfaction and value that comes from taking part in this sort of work, and wish to create your own project, or you may be entirely new to the concept, and keen to develop your knowledge and skills in this area. Either way, we hope that you will find Getting Together a useful source of information and guidance.

The Art of Play is indebted to Julie Heathcote, a professional reminiscence facilitator, and Emma Curtis, an award-winning animation artist. Their skills, experience and enthusiasm have contributed greatly to the development of the Art of Play project, and to the creation of Getting Together.

Intergenerational practice

Intergenerational practice brings different generations together and involves them in:-

* talking to each other
* sharing information
* listening to each others' stories
* finding out more about past and present times
* helping each other to learn together
* helping each other to work creatively together.

'It's really nice to find younger people who want to listen to you.'
Top Time member

Why work in an intergenerational way?

An intergenerational approach can promote mutual understanding and respect between generations. It can provide a new way of working and learning new skills, for example: -

* engagement and communication
* empowerment
* listening, sharing and empathy
* the development of social and creative skills
* an appreciation of heritage and legacy.

Intergenerational work is an exciting and rewarding way of developing social cohesion and understanding. For many of the older people involved in the Art of Play it was the first time in many years that they had had the chance to talk with young people living in their area – and for the students it was illuminating to discover the different experiences of childhood.

'My Nan thought it would be a good idea for me to do this.'
Ipswich Academy student

'I feel like I've achieved something.'
Pakefield Community School student

'I hope that perhaps I've given a little to them – but I know that they've given a lot to me … it's really been quite lovely.'
Over 60's Club member

'The children were great – they were interested in what we did at their age.'
Hildesley Court Resident

'It will be a different experience to be friends with other people [the Over 60's]; it will be educational.'
Howard Middle School student

'This has been a very positive project in so far as it helped younger and older generations to get to know one another.'
Over 60's Club member

Prompting and collecting peoples' memories

Your intergenerational project may involve sharing stories and memories. Talking about the past is called 'reminiscence', and it can be enjoyable, informative, empowering and therapeutic.
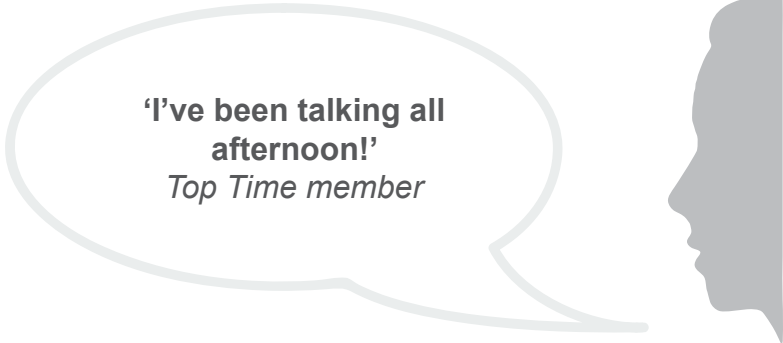
When you are just talking about the past – i.e. there is no end product – you do not need written permission from those taking part. However, there are many ways in which these memories may be used to create an end product, for example: -

✳	writing them down for a booklet
✳	using them in an exhibition
✳	producing a DVD
✳	including them on a website.

You DO need written permission if you intend to: -

✳	record a person's voice
✳	film them
✳	take their photograph
✳	write down their stories for future publication.

You need to get this permission before the material can be made public. There is a sample permission form at the end of this guide, which you are welcome to adapt to your own project. Remember, you need permission from EVERYONE involved, not just the young people, and it must cover collecting written anecdotes and memories, as well as photographs, audio and film footage. It must make it clear how the material will be used, e.g. whether or not it will be published publicly and if so, how.

> **'I've been talking all afternoon!'**
> *Top Time member*

Tip 1:
A permission form gives the person's written consent for their memories to be used for purposes which should be specified on the form. It should be completed on the day of the memory collecting and a copy given to the person who is giving their consent.

Tip 2:
If you are recording a person's stories via the written word (i.e. not audio or film), try to use their exact words, so that the richness and originality of what they say is retained; if you record a general impression this detail can be lost.

If you're working with a large group, you may need several scribes to take down the stories. It's unlikely that they will be able to capture everything that's said, but if they can jot down the most salient points – and who's said them – then these can always be followed up at a later date. Scribes can also play an important role in getting people to elaborate on their stories, by encouraging them to give details rather than just a general account of something.

Remember that the written word can be more formal than the spoken word – particularly when a person is asked to write down their own story.

Memory prompts

A visual, tactile or audio experience can really help people recall memories – and a memory prompt can also be a real talking point. It's great fun to compile your own memory boxes, and they can also be borrowed from museums (often known as 'loan boxes'); libraries and local archive centres may also have useful resources. You could consider using the following in your project: -

* objects
* photographs
* music
* clothing and costume
* poetry
* sound recordings
* newspapers and magazines
* items with a distinctive smell such as lavender, or items of food and drink.

'Oh, I remember my father using one of these tools, when I was a little boy. I'm ninety now; I don't suppose they're used anymore.'
Hildesley Court resident

'I've loved talking about my childhood – it was idyllic. I've got so many stories but I couldn't write them down for myself, I needed someone to ask me the questions first.'
Over 60's Club member

'Going down memory lane, a lot of things we found out we did we had forgotten – for example, how we coped in those days. The children were able to tell us different things – it was nice to be with them.'
Hildesley Court resident

A 'show and tell' approach can generate conversation and engagement. Encourage everyone to bring in items that are important to them and to tell the story about them.

Working with older people

Careful planning is really important, and before your project even begins you will need to spend some time building relationships with the different groups involved. This will ensure that everyone gets as much as possible from the experience and that your project is as enjoyable and successful as possible.

Preparing older people for the project

Once you have found a suitable group to work with, go and visit them to introduce yourself and explain what the project's about. This initial meeting is really important, as it gives them the chance to meet you and get an idea of who they will be working with – which may make all the difference between having the confidence to commit to the project or rejecting it out of hand.

It is very important that the group of older people fully understand:-

* the reason for the project
* who they will be working with and their ages
* what they will be expected to do
* the practicalities of the project, i.e. where it will take place, (including how to get there), session times and how long the project lasts
* how anything from the project could be used, e.g. printed, used

in a piece of drama, exhibited or published on the internet.

You may need to reassure people, telling them that they do not have to say anything they do not wish to, or that they will be shown how to undertake the creative activity; some may also find the prospect of being filmed threatening or may not appreciate how their story could be used on the internet.
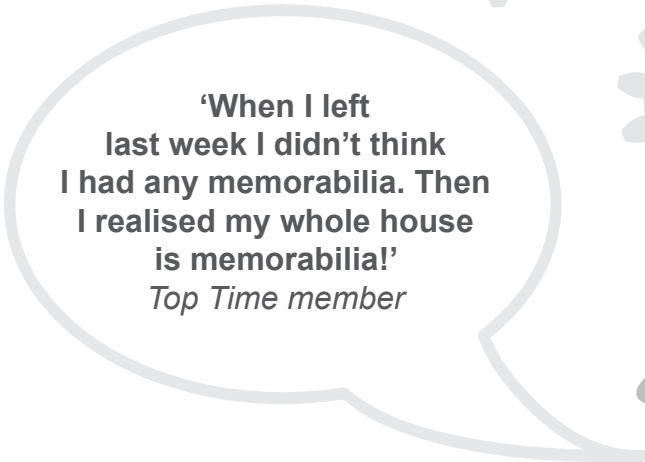
Ensure that you are aware of any particular needs the older people may have, such as hearing and sight issues, wheelchair access and dietary requirements. Some frail older people may need reassurance about transport, or whether they can bring a friend or relative with them.

Ensure suitable chairs are available for older people. This is particularly important if you are working in a school, as the chairs tend to be lower and thus uncomfortable for some older people to sit on.

Make sure there is enough space for walking frames and that, if necessary, the activities can be taken to older people (rather than expecting everyone to sit round the same table). This reduces the need for movement around the room, which they may find difficult.

If you are working with older people in a residential situation ask the staff member in charge for advice, particularly about the length of sessions and the needs of the older people involved.

'When I left last week I didn't think I had any memorabilia. Then I realised my whole house is memorabilia!'
Top Time member

Collecting a biography

Depending on the theme of your project, you may wish to encourage older people to talk about sensitive memories. If this is the case, it's advisable to do some preliminary work to find out what sort of memories might be evoked, e.g. bereavement, loneliness, etc.

This preliminary work is often referred to as collecting a biography. Consider the impact of sharing these memories, both on the individuals themselves and other members of the group, and how you will deal with any sensitive issues that might arise from them.

Maintaining a relationship

Intergenerational work is all about building relationships – not only between the different age groups involved, but also the staff, artists and volunteers working on the project.

Start as you mean to go on – make sure that the participants feel involved and valued from the outset – this will help to build confidence and has the added benefit that people feel committed to the project and less likely to drop out along the way. Attention to detail will help to create a secure and welcoming atmosphere, for example: -

'I'm excited at the prospect of taking part – although I'm not sure what we're letting ourselves in for.'
Hildesley Court resident

'That was the best afternoon I've had in ages.'
Top Time member

* make sure that the older people are aware of meeting dates and times, especially if there is a break between meetings in a long-running project
* refreshment breaks are really important – both as a means of recharging batteries (this work can be very tiring) and as an opportunity for the group to chat amongst themselves
* check the dates of birth of those involved, and use a refreshment break to celebrate any birthdays that fall during the course of the project
* be respectful and appreciative of the stories the individuals share with you.

It is also important to value the time given to the project. You may want to organise an end-of-project event to which everyone is invited or arrange for the younger group to write a thank you note; whichever way you choose, it's important to thank all those who have given their time – and memories – to the project.

'I'd been told about this project, but I really didn't know what it was about – now I'm really excited at the idea of taking part.'
Over 60's Club member

'I'm worried, because I don't know if I can do it.'
Pre-project questionnaire, Pakefield Community School student

'I'm a bit anxious – it might be sad at times, like if they talk about war stories – if they had lost someone.'
Howard Middle School student

'Doesn't time go quickly when you're enjoying yourself?'
Top Time member

'Thank you ever so much for this amazing experience, we wish it could have gone on for longer.'
– card from students at Howard Middle School, Bury St Edmunds to members of the local Over 60's Club

Working with younger people

Some young people may have little or no experience of talking to older people other than within their family groups – so it's important to spend time preparing them for what may be a new experience.

They should be encouraged to consider and discuss their expectations of working with a group of older people, i.e. who they will be working with, their approximate ages, where they come from and any particular needs they may have, such as poor hearing, sight and memory loss.

Younger people should be given as much ownership of the project as practically possible, for example: -

* if the project takes place at their venue, get them to meet and greet the older group when they arrive
* encourage them to develop their own questions for the older group
* help set out any equipment necessary
* hand out refreshments
* develop ideas for the design and presentation of the creative outcome.

Your project may have specific aims and targets that need to be achieved, and until confidence and awareness grows, you may have to manage certain elements of the project yourself. The key is to find a balance between the two approaches.

Preparing younger people to talk to older people

There are many different ways of asking questions; you may choose to start by discussing the differences and encouraging the younger people to develop their skills of asking 'open' questions.

For example, if they ask an older person 'Did you play in the street when you were young?' the obvious response is either 'yes' or 'no'. This is a closed question. However, if the young person asks 'Where did you play when you were young?' this may lead to any number of interesting and detailed answers.

Making a statement and then waiting for a response can also be used as a way of encouraging people to tell their story,

e.g. 'My Gran said she used to play in the street when she was a girl……….'

ACTIVITY 2:

Working in small groups, get the younger people to brainstorm all the words they associate with your project theme. Use these words to create a series of open questions.

If interviewing is to be used in the project, different forms of interview could be discussed and younger people given the chance to decide which approach they think would work best.

ACTIVITY 3:

Ask younger people to make up some questions on a given theme and then interview each other in pairs. The experiences of being the interviewer and the respondent can then be discussed.

As discussed earlier in the section on memory prompts, looking at objects and photographs can also be a source of conversation, making it easy to pose questions such as how an object was used, what the person can remember about that time or where a photograph was taken.

'I'd like to do more of this with the Top Time group, because then I'd know more about what happened in the past.'
Ipswich Academy student

Tip 4:
Some objects may be fragile – or hold great sentimental value. It is important that younger people are aware of this and handle items with care and sensitivity.

Once the groups are working together and bringing in their own photographs, you may want to make photocopies so that the original is safeguarded against accidental damage.

Preparing young people to be good listeners

Young people should ask questions in turn so everyone gets the chance to be involved and then listen carefully to the responses given.
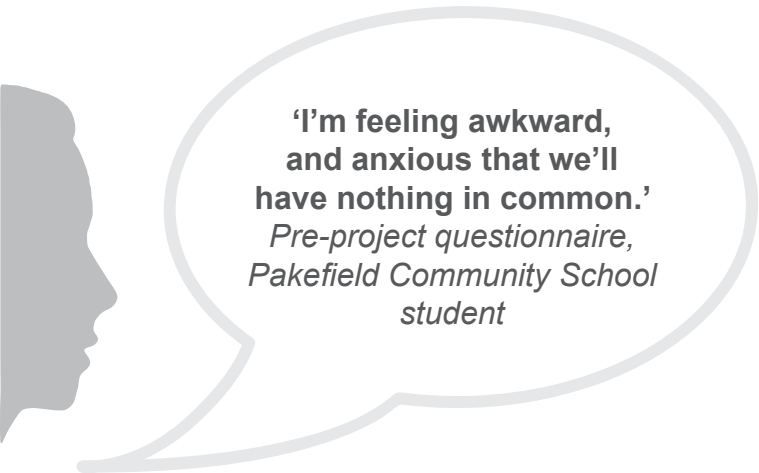
ACTIVITY 4 :

Prepare a series of open questions relating to a particular object. Write a number on the back of each question and place them face down on the table so that the young people cannot see the questions.

Give each young person a number. They must take it in turn to listen to each answer and then ask their question when it comes to their number. If the question has already been answered, they have to make up a further question.

This activity can be used to discuss good listening skills, e.g. eye contact, positive body language, smiling, nodding, not interrupting or fidgeting, showing interest and giving people time to answer.

Dealing with sensitive issues
Sometimes memories and stories can be upsetting, both for the storyteller and the listener. Older people may recall personal bereavements and younger people may be anxious about asking the wrong question and upsetting someone.

'I'm feeling awkward, and anxious that we'll have nothing in common.'
Pre-project questionnaire, Pakefield Community School student

Encourage the younger people to: -

* be aware that some issues may be sensitive
* trust that the other adults involved (project leader, trainer, artist, etc) are aware of these anxieties, understand them and are on hand to help deal with them
* get to know the older people a little before they start to ask personal questions, rather than launching into them at the beginning of the project
* acknowledge that for some people some questions should just be avoided
* reassure older people that they do not have to say anything they do not want to.

Preparing younger people to understand a time line
Older people may talk about a time of which the younger people have no knowledge, or use language that they don't understand – for example, referring to 'half a crown' when discussing how much it cost to go to the pictures.

Looking at a time line can help younger people appreciate the time periods being discussed. For example, if you know that the average age of the older group is 80, then you can create a time line starting at 1930 and work up in increments of five years, adding significant national and international events as they occurred.

This provides an easy reference point for comparing age and experience; as in the example below, the young person can see that a member of the older group was nine years old when war broke out – and then consider what was happening when they were nine years old.

Key events could be added to a time line from 1930 to the present day: a person born in 1930 will have been nine years old at the outbreak of the Second World War and 15 when it finished. During the 'swinging sixties' they will have been in their thirties. Younger people could then place themselves on the time line, such as the year they were born and when they started school.

Bringing the groups together

Practical issues

Younger people should introduce themselves to older people and be prepared for unfamiliar responses. Some older people may prefer a more formal approach and want to shake hands, or be referred to by their last, and not their first, name. The project leader can ease this introductory period by finding out how people like to be addressed; encouraging the two groups to make and wear their own name badges during the first session may help people to feel more at ease.

Initially, it may be more productive to manage the project by matching older and younger people who you think will work well together – maybe because of a shared interest or a particular style of working. As the project progresses and the group grows in confidence, you can start to swap people around, and natural relationships will emerge by themselves.

'What a fantastic way of getting the community to become closer.'
Over 60's Club member

ACTIVITY 6 :

Playing games and doing creative activities together generate laughter, encourage conversation and promote the sharing of ideas and skills; as such, they really help the different age groups begin to form relationships and become one cohesive group, rather than two separate ones.

Among the many such activities enjoyed during the Art of Play were: -

* **beetle drives**
* **making paper aeroplanes and then competing to see who could throw them furthest**
* **playing old fashioned games**
* **competing in a pancake tossing competition**
* **making paper hats, windmills and figures – that were later used in the animations.**

Some sessions will need to be carefully structured and planned to achieve results, especially if you are working to a time limit. This may also be affected by the needs and ages of the people involved. It is important to remember that not only may the relationships take time to develop but that people work at different speeds, and what is achievable in ten minutes by one person may take someone else thirty to complete.
A fluid, adaptable approach and good preparation can help the project to develop. Spare activities and ideas can help deal with the unexpected, such as people not arriving on time, or more people than anticipated arriving.

Debriefing with other leaders and artists after each session can help to identify areas for change and things that have worked particularly well and should be continued and built upon.

Talking to the young and older participants about how they feel the project is progressing can provide useful thoughts, feelings and information which can aid the evaluation process and inform any necessary changes.

Creative activities

It is one thing to encourage and 'collect' peoples' memories – and quite another to use or present those memories creatively. Yet the memories obviously lend themselves to endless interpretation and can be used to inform numerous creative activities such as film, animation, music making, dance, poetry and creative writing, photography, art and craft work and website design.

The list is almost endless, but here are a few activities you might want to consider: -

* visit a museum or art gallery together
* try out old recipes together
* use old photographs and then take new present day photographs of the same views
* brainstorm words together to make poems or creative writing
* exchange skills; knitting, crochet, patchwork, wood work, photography and using a computer
* play old style games together, such as a beetle drive, or Ludo
* play, discuss and compare favourite music, hairstyles and clothes
* make stories into drama.

Working with artists

Working with a professional artist to create a piece of work based on the shared memories and experiences of the group adds another dimension to the quality and satisfaction of the project.

Whichever genre you choose, be it visual or performance art, the artist will enable the participants to explore ideas, express themselves creatively and produce a piece of work that celebrates the project – and the participants' involvement – and stands in its own right as a creative product.

Artists working in the area of reminiscence and intergenerational work are often known as 'community artists' and generally are well experienced in working with diverse groups. They should be open and flexible to discussing your project and sharing ideas with you, and flexible to changes and additions as the project progresses. However, it's important to remember that the artist is there to bring another element to the project; if s/he merely ends up doing what they are directed to do, a golden opportunity has been missed.

'It was interesting working with a professional artist as she gave us tips for future.'
Pakefield Community School student

'I didn't know what a professional artist was before this project – it was inspirational, educational working with her.'
Howard Middle School student

Finding the right artist for your project

There are numerous databases of community artists and you may begin by an internet search for an artist working in the genre you wish to use.

Arts organisations also compile databases – although they are for information only and should NOT be taken as a recommendation of the individual artist's suitability for your project. For example, Suffolk Artlink maintains a database, which you can visit at **www.suffolkartlink.org.uk**

'Working with a professional artist has made me think of work as an artist.'
Howard Middle School student

Think about other organisations working with artists – if you are looking for a visual artist, then a call to your local art gallery may provide a list of suitable names. Equally, local authority arts databases, arts charities, studio groups – such as an Open Studios group or regional designer-crafts society – can all be useful sources of information.

Contracting the artist

Professional artists are well prepared to work to a brief; make sure your artist is aware of the purpose of the project, any specific aims and objectives you have to achieve, and what is required of them to achieve it.

Draw up a contract for the artist, outlining the brief, and stipulating the number of sessions they need to attend, the fee and any additional budget for travel expenses, materials, editing etc.

The contract should also contain information about conducting a CRB disclosure – this will be necessary if they are going to be working with young people or vulnerable adults. For further information about CRB disclosures, visit the SAVO website at **www.savo.co.uk** or call 01473 273273.

Artists should have their own professional liability insurance and, if you are employing them in a freelance capacity, are responsible for their own tax and national insurance contributions; make this clear in the contract.
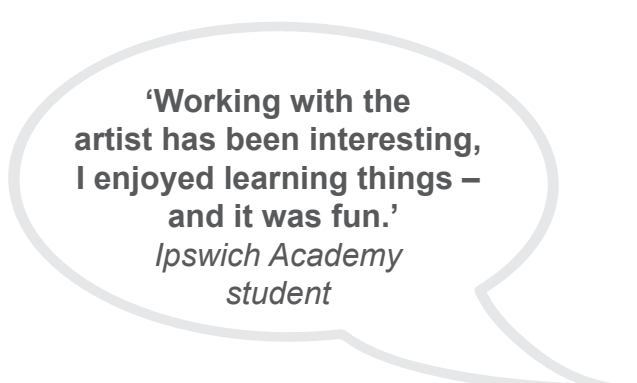
You may choose to make it part of the contract that the artist supplies a plan of the sessions, outlining what activities will take place, their objectives, and how they lead up to completion of the project. This can be a useful tool, not least for discussion about how the project might develop and what is achievable within your time scale – but it should not be regarded as written in stone; circumstances change and you will want the artist to be flexible enough to deal with the unexpected.

You should make TWO copies, and get the artist to sign and return one copy to you.

Involving the artist
Try to involve your artist as much as possible in all of the project. For example, if you have planned a series of reminiscence sessions, followed by a

programme of creative sessions, invite the artist to attend the reminiscence sessions – in this way they will get to know, and be known, by the group, thus building confidence and awareness for when they start the creative sessions.

> **'Working with the artist has been interesting, I enjoyed learning things – and it was fun.'**
> *Ipswich Academy student*

Make sure the artist has all the resources they need to run the creative programme – be that access to a sink for washing dirty paint brushes, an extra pair of hands for assisting with a particular activity, or a trolley for transporting cumbersome equipment to the room; if you have ever tried to carry four laptops, two digital cameras, an armful of tripods and an activity box across a busy playground and up three flights of stairs, you will know what I mean.

Most of all, working with a professional artist should be enjoyable – it should be a creative process that excites the imagination, develops new skills and approaches to work and inspires a sense of inclusivity and achievement.

Taking your project into the future

When projects have established successful working relationships between younger and older people in the community, it is important to think about and plan for how that relationship can be taken forward into the future.

Look at how the relationships might be sustained and how the two groups can continue working together. Otherwise when your project ends the goodwill that has been generated could be lost. This might involve getting the school to commit to a regular visit to the older group, or inviting them into the school for special events. Or it could be that the local library is prepared to foster the relationship, by bringing the two groups together to use their resources, e.g. getting the students to introduce the older group to the IT resources.

For older people, participating in a creative activity can be an eye-opening experience and they may wish to take part in other creative projects. For example, following the Art of Play in Lowestoft, the Hildesley Court residents took part in creative writing sessions, and in Ipswich the two groups were brought together again to participate in a weaving project that resulted in an 8-foot long banner that was exhibited in the local library.

'It's the best thing I have done for years – absolutely wonderful! It loosens you up. I got quite excited.'
Hildesley Court resident

'Working with the Over 60's has made me less shy.'
Howard Middle School student

'I think projects like this really help to build positive relationships between local people, and it will help me in the future.'
Pakefield Community School student

'Talking to the Over 60's has made it easier for me to talk to my grandparents.'
Howard Middle School student

Suggestions for maintaining intergenerational relationships once your project ends:-

* For each group, identify a lead person whose role will be to keep communication between the groups open. This will aid the maintenance of relationships. Regular contact between the lead people will mean that information about activities and events, such as concerts, fairs, special events and fundraising events being held in each group can be shared and opportunities for working together explored. For example, older people could be invited to the young people's group to join in with a special event.

* Establish a 'buddy' scheme – students befriend an older person and keep in contact with them. This could include visiting, emailing and by post.

* Organise joint events such as a tea party which brings people from the two groups together

* Organise regular visits of younger people to the group of older people.

'**The feeling I have [at the end of the project] is one of fulfilment in learning about how far our education has come since my school days. The students have been so courteous, kind and understanding. It has been a real pleasure to have been part of this experience – we are never too old to learn.** '

Over 60's Club member

'**It was really enjoyable to work with the Top Time group and I hope that there is a way that we can carry this on.**'
Ipswich Academy student

'**I'm amazed, because I didn't think I could do those things – both the animations and make the relationships.**'
Post-project questionnaire, Howard Middle School student

Conclusion

Working in an intergenerational way can add an unforgettable dimension for everyone taking part; younger and older participants should come away from the project feeling richer in some way by having been involved.

We hope you have found this resource helpful – please remember that it is intended only as a general guide and Suffolk Artlink cannot be held responsible for how you decide to run your project.

There are countless ways in which you can run enjoyable, creative and satisfying intergenerational reminiscence projects – we hope that this guide has inspired you to get together and develop your own.

'If they can be this nice at this age, think what they can be like when they grow up … they have to learn something by us coming here and I think they're great.'
Over 60's Club member

'Very absorbing – I looked forward to it – you think of things you think you have forgotten about: I am pleasantly surprised about how it has come together.'
Hildesley Court Resident

'I call these sessions Happy Fridays.'
Ipswich Academy student

'It was eye-opening; you found out about how people used to live and what they used to do and how lucky you are to have all the things you have now … and what they used to make entertainment for themselves.'
Ipswich Academy student

'I had no idea what to expect, but I have learnt so much from these children.'
Over 60's Club member.

'In living memory I've never had children listen to me like they have today.'
Top Time Member

'It's lovely to have made that connection with the children – and that connection lasts.'
Hildesley Court resident

'I wish I could do it every week again'
Ipswich Academy student.

'Other peoples' memories are priceless.'
Ipswich Academy student.

'My friend thought the animation we made was fab – I'm really famous.'
Top Time member

'We could exchange ideas and things not done in school, like needlework and practical things – and they could teach me about computers and texting.'
Top Time member

Acknowledgements

Schools and community groups involved in the Art of Play were: -

Members of the Top Time group at Gainsborough Library and students from Ipswich Academy, Ipswich. October 2011 to March 2012

Residents from Hildesley Court sheltered housing unit and students from Pakefield Community School, Lowestoft. April 2012 to September 2012

Members of the Howard Estate Over 60's Club and students from Howard Middle School. November 2012 to March 2013

Reminiscence facilitator: Julie Heathcote
Animation artist: Emma Curtis
Project leader: Candida Wingate
Additional photography: Jonathan Bowers and Ian Hulland

The Baring Foundation

Partnership with Older People
for a better quality of life

HAVEBURY
HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Suffolk
County Council

Photograph Permission

Your child/ward has been invited to take part in an intergenerational reminiscence project, developed by <<insert name of organisation>>.

<<insert name of organisation>> records creative sessions through written word, photographs and film/audio footage. The images, film/audio footage and written word may appear in our printed publications such as newsletters, press releases and flyers, on our website, used in displays, exhibitions, film showings and for training purposes.

To comply with the Data Protection Act 1998, permission must be granted before any images/film footage are taken and used. Please note that individual names will not appear in any print or film footage. Please be assured that your child will not be excluded from the activity, should you wish to refuse permission.

I ……………………………………………………………………………………...............…
(please insert you name in CAPITAL LETTERS)
give permission for photographs, film/audio footage and/or written word to be taken of

……………………………………………………………………………….….….............
(please insert the name of your child/ward in CAPITAL LETTERS)

and used as above by <<insert name of organisation>> and other interested parties.

Signed: ……………………………………………………….......……. Date: …………......

If you would like to know more about the project, or <<insert name of organisation>> in general, please feel free to contact:

Enter contact details