

GROWING TOGETHER: An Intergenerational Gardening Project

There's nothing like a bit of fresh air to clear your mind and lift your spirits. Another wonderful tonic for care home residents is sharing activities with children. So, Embracing Age, a charity working with care home residents and Let's Go Outside and Learn, a Community Interest Company working to encourage outdoor learning for all to promote positive wellbeing, decided to join forces and combine their skills and expertise.

Working closely with the staff at Brinsworth House and with funding support from The Richmond Civic Trust and The Restitution Fund, the team devised a year-long project which invited residents at Brinsworth House to participate with children from a local primary school's Green Team, to develop a wildlife friendly garden based in the grounds of the care home.

After taking advice on suitable equipment, raised beds and adapted gardening tools were purchased. This enabled residents of all abilities to take part in the activities. Over the summer of 2019 the residents and children planted flowers and vegetables, nurturing them as they grew. They also made butterfly feeders and insect hotels together using natural materials.

The project team measured the impact of the activities on the residents and the children. This is what they told us:



Participants said that they enjoyed interacting across the generations. One resident commented that the children were, "Lovely to talk to and lovely to listen to," and another, "Excellent afternoon, lovely kids. Couldn't be better."

The feeling was mutual, with one child remarking, "I really liked getting to know the old people, they are really interesting and easy to talk to."

All participants enjoyed being outside and spending time gardening.

One of the children commented "One of the residents told me that they don't really go outside, but perhaps if we are all there, that will encourage them. They can come and see what we are doing."

For some residents the gardening activity was the highlight of their week, "Seeing the flowers bloom." and "Planting and preparing the garden."

Residents agreed to some simple physical strength tests both before and after the project in order to test any physical improvements.

We were delighted when nearly all the residents showed physical improvements in at least one of the areas measured.

Many of the children said the project had helped them to feel relaxed, useful and optimistic about the future, with one child declaring, "I would love to go straight back and do that all over again."

Following on from the success of the project in 2019, and if funding can be found, the project will be repeated next summer working with a new group of children and more of the Brinsworth House residents. The project team also hope that this intergenerational gardening model can be introduced in more care homes as there are clearly benefits to both residents and pupils.

