

Intergenerational Work in Leeds Schools
a presentation to the Leeds Neighbourhood for All Ages Network
February 14, 2006

Building Bridges: Winner of the Euro-cities Award for Innovation 2007!

Building Bridges is a programme using "Circle Time" in Leeds Primary Schools to encourage children and local older people to get to know each other, learn from each other, enjoy each other's company and get beyond the stereotypes that children and older people may have about each other.

One of the most successful Building Bridges projects has taken place at Whitkirk Primary School. Pupils and local older people (known as Silver Friends in the school) have featured in national and local newspapers and recently were commended in the Stan Kenyon awards for Leeds schools.

At the Network meeting on February 14th Sean Duggan, Link Learning Mentor at Education Leeds, Jean Hartburn Learning Mentor at Whitkirk Primary and Jack Quarmbly, one of Whitkirk Primary's "Silver Friends" introduced a short and very moving film showing children and older people together in Circle time at Whitkirk, laughing, talking and listening to one another. Children's behaviour and interest improves, and older people feel connected and involved- everyone benefits.

Sean spoke about his work to promote this very rewarding approach throughout the city, with training sessions and support for schools. It is hoped that up to 20 Leeds Primary Schools will be "Building Bridges" with local older people by March 2007.

Points to remember include:

- Older people don't always want to talk about the past
- Current issues are important
- Encourage interaction, no good having on all singing and dancing end product if nobody knows each other's names
- Involve participants in the planning
- It can take up to 6 months to set up and launch a Building Bridges group
- Training is essential
- Encourage Partnership working
- An enthusiastic Head Teacher can make the difference between a successful project and a failure, It takes dedicated time by a member of school staff, eg Learning Mentor- and commitment from Senior Staff in the school
- Make participants feel valued
- Participants should have a reminder of the product
- The most successful groups involve older people from the local community
- Once the Building Bridges programme has been completed there are lots of ways the older people can remain involved in the life of the school

Issues to consider:

- Health and attendance of participants
- Contacting school staff

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The Building Bridges Book by Penny Vine is available from Positive Press at £15

