

3G Social Clubs

How shared experience across three generations can forge connection in disconnecting times



THE CARES FAMILY

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1. Executive Summary

For nine and a half years, The Cares Family has been building relationships between young people in their twenties and thirties and their neighbours over the age of 65. In London, Liverpool and Manchester we have connected 22,000 neighbours through 600,000 interactions. 73% of older neighbours involved feel less isolated and 86% are better able to appreciate the world.¹ A majority of older and younger people alike say they feel closer to another generation as a result of being involved.

Knowing the benefits of these interactions, we wanted to test and expand our model, this time bringing together three generations: new parents, their children under the age of five and neighbours over the age of 65.

Becoming a parent is a transformative experience. These changes can be joyful but they're also tough – and isolating. Research conducted by Action For Children found that 52% of new parents felt both lonely and socially isolated.² Clearly initiatives connecting new parents are important. But initiatives that bring parents together often do so in a siloed way, meaning when parents do form new relationships, it's often with people from similar backgrounds. The cost of participation, choice of venues, and recruitment strategies can reduce the diversity of participants and form

new filter bubbles which narrow, rather than expand, experience. That can be harmful not only for individuals, but for wider society too.

With funding granted by the Greater London Authority in December 2019, The Cares Family therefore set out to run an intergenerational project in Haringey and Waltham Forest that would bring people together across lines of difference, to share time, space, laughter and new experiences. In line with our broader organisational goals, our aims for the clubs were to:

- ♥ **Connect new parents, their children and their older neighbours to bridge gaps across social, generational, digital, cultural and attitudinal divides;**
- ♥ **Reduce loneliness and isolation amongst older and younger Londoners alike;**
- ♥ **Improve neighbours' confidence, skills, belonging, purpose and power.**

¹<https://northlondoncares.org.uk/the-difference-we-make>

²<https://www.socialconnectedness.org/never-alone-but-always-lonely-the-social-isolation-of-being-a-new-mother/>

With two well attended pilot sessions under our belt, the Covid-19 pandemic triggered a national lockdown. We quickly developed a number of opportunities for people to connect in new ways, moving in-person events to sessions online and over the phone, and finding ways for people to stay in touch by post. From February to October 2020, we delivered 26 remote 3G clubs, with 100 people participating – aged from seven months to 90 years old.

Based on interviews with parents and older neighbours who participated, and observations and reflections from The Cares Family team, this report is designed to share with others interested in intergenerational work how we adapted and delivered the 3G project when the pandemic hit. It examines the value of bringing three generations together, and how the project could have been improved. Our hope is that by sharing both the joy of the clubs and the lessons we learnt (sometimes the hard way) we will inspire others to forge connections between the generations in the places they call home.

Some of the key findings include:

- ♥ Mutuality is important: key to the success of our intergenerational activities was that no one was labelled a ‘beneficiary’ and no one a ‘volunteer’. As one participant put it, “We all have something to teach, and we all have something to learn. We are not all that different from one another.”
- ♥ Engagement: to engage young children online, activities need to be carefully pitched towards them.
- ♥ It was also important that older neighbours had clear roles in the facilitation. This had a second benefit of increasing some participants’ confidence. One self-proclaimed shy neighbour said that in the past she’d been told she was “no

good with children” and therefore felt there wouldn’t be any role for her at a group like this. However, once she’d read a story to the group, she became animated – and returned again and again.

- ♥ Supporting people to get online, or to use new digital programmes, takes time. On average we spent between 60 and 90 minutes supporting older neighbours one-to-one to feel confident to join sessions online. If you are setting up your own intergenerational project that isn’t face-to-face, this digital set-up time, alongside the time investment needed to conduct outreach and delivery, needs to be factored into your plan.
- ♥ Intergenerational impact: 93% of parents and older neighbours felt more connected to people of a different generation as a result of attending the 3G clubs. One participant fed back that the 3G project was “great in that it gives you an opportunity to connect with people you wouldn’t necessarily connect with. So often we spend time with people similar to ourselves. These groups allow us to go beyond that.” 100% of those surveyed said there was something special about interacting with someone from a different generation.



- ♥ Wider social cohesion impact: 90% of parents surveyed stated that as a result of taking part in this project, they now spend more time with people from a different background. Considering the pandemic has shrunk many people's social circles³, this suggests projects such as these can play an important part in bridging social divides. One participant shared that their involvement, "gave me an opportunity to talk to the outside world to people who had very different lives to me."

2020 was a year of disconnection like no other – and yet the 3G social clubs have enabled new social interactions to take place at a time when connection was hard to find especially for those who lived alone in lockdown or had to adapt work and childcare routines.

We've found that in the trickiest of circumstances, when isolation has become a byword for safety, and many of our usual forms of connection unlawful, people have found new ways to connect and show one another that they care. We've learnt to value our interactions like never before.

Our hope is that The Cares Family, and other organisations and individuals, will build on this year of trials, to ensure that opportunities for intergenerational interaction are open to all. People like Pat, 77, have articulated why it is important: "Joining in has helped me mentally so much. Younger people gain from the interaction with older people too and that's what makes clubs like this so worthwhile."



“Older people have a wider perspective of things; young children are full of vitality. It feels great to bring both together.”

³<https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/covid-19-social-isolation-and-loneliness>

2. Background

The case for intergenerational connection has been proven again and again.

Research shows “children need four to six involved, caring adults in their lives to fully develop emotionally and socially.”⁴ In addition, children who regularly mix with older people see improvements in their language development, reading and social skills⁵ ; in their manners, patience and ability to listen. One study found that children who participated in an intergenerational programme were “more willing to share, help and cooperate.”⁶

For older adults, there are also clear benefits: those “with close intergenerational connections consistently report much less depression, better physical health, and higher degrees of life satisfaction. They tend to be happier with their present life and more hopeful for the future.”⁷

For new parents, connecting with older adults can offer opportunities to talk to people who may have been through a similar

experience, with the benefit of having “come out the other side”. That offers perspective – rather than being bogged down in day to day difficulties.

However, despite the mounting evidence of the benefits of intergenerational connection, and projects like ‘Old People’s Home for Four Year Olds’ receiving mass media attention, the UK has yet to fully take advantage of the opportunities inherent in these relationships.

That’s why, in 2020, with limited opportunity for face-to-face interaction in the community, we brought 3G friendships into people’s homes, safely – to bring these benefits to people of every age and to further make the case for more investment in the power of intergenerational connection by government and charities.

⁴<https://www.legacyproject.org/guides/intergenbenefits.html>

⁵<https://www.lmtservices.co.uk/index.php/updates/item/10-how-the-elderly-can-help-the-young-and-help-themselves>

⁶<https://www.geteduca.com/blog/intergenerational-learning/>

⁷<https://www.legacyproject.org/guides/intergenbenefits.html>



3. What We Did

From the beginning of the project in February, through to the end in October, we delivered:

- ♥ 4 face-to-face clubs (when it was safe to do so)
- ♥ 24 online social clubs via Zoom
- ♥ 2 additional clubs in partnership with People United
- ♥ 8 additional intimate phone-in sessions
- ♥ 105 activity packs to older and younger neighbours who were part of the project.

In London:

- ♥ 80 people joined the clubs.

This broke down as:

- ♥ 25 older neighbours, getting to know local new parents and their children
- ♥ 26 new parents, getting to know their older neighbours and introducing their children to them
- ♥ 29 children, who had the opportunity to hang out with people aged over 65, with the support of their parents
- ♥ Older neighbours attended a total of 69 times
- ♥ New parents attended a total of 52 times
- ♥ Children attended a total of 59 times
- ♥ There were 180 attendances from London-based people in total

Part way through the project, we recognised that taking the clubs online meant we could open them up to people outside London who might be looking for intergenerational interaction in lockdown at no extra cost. So in addition to the above attendees:

- ♥ 20 attendees from outside London participated in the 3G clubs

This broke down as:

- ♥ 8 older neighbours, 6 new parents and 6 children
- ♥ Older neighbours outside London attended a total of 10 times
- ♥ New parents outside London attended a total of 22 times
- ♥ Children outside of London attended 23 times
- ♥ There were 55 attendances from people outside of London in total

In total, across the country the 3G clubs attracted:

- ♥ 33 older neighbours
- ♥ 32 new parents
- ♥ 35 children
- ♥ 79 attendances from older neighbours
- ♥ 74 attendances from new parents
- ♥ 82 attendances from children
- ♥ 234 attendances across all age groups

4. Original Plans



Our initial target for the 3G project was to develop and deliver two fortnightly face-to-face social clubs (one in Haringey, one in Waltham Forest) over six months. Each group's activities would include music, storytelling, craft, age appropriate history tours, games and treasure hunts – simply, anything that would provide participants with shared experiences and help connect them to the changing people and places around them.

In February and early March 2020, we hosted the two face-to-face pilots. We partnered with Broadwater Children's Centre in Haringey, which runs groups for parents and their children. Broadwater Children's Centre had wanted to include older people for some time, and while they had tried to do so before, it had not taken off. We felt this venue would be welcoming and accessible to people from diverse backgrounds and ages, with parents familiar with it through pre- and post-natal services.

Our Waltham Forest pilot was held at the Greenleaf Baptist Church. Through local flyering, online advertising and attending local parent and baby groups, we reached out to new parents, many of whom lived within walking distance from the venue, to invite them to the session. One parent said, "It is really refreshing to have something different to attend where we can connect with others in our local community."

Seven parents, eight children and two older neighbours attended each of the pilots, acting out the classic children's book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. The three generations worked together to create a caterpillar puppet which was used to animate the story read aloud by an older neighbour. The sessions intentionally provided space for every participant to feel welcomed and seen, unstructured time for children to play with one another and their older neighbours, conversations between parents and older neighbours, and opportunities to acknowledge everyone's contributions.

The pilots were just a starting point: neighbours told us they'd been looking for activities like this and were keen to help grow and lead the sessions over the coming months. We had mapped out 30 further clubs for the next six months, building further partnerships with Walthamstow Wetlands and Homemade Community Cafe.

Ideas for the sessions included:

- ♥ Book clubs: recreating children's books using puppets made together
- ♥ Colour parties: creating fancy dress outfits and collaborative artworks – hosted by artist Sue Kreitzman, aged 80
- ♥ Gardening groups: planting sunflowers and cress seeds, eating fresh fruits, and creating a flower collage
- ♥ A singalong run by Mrs H and the Singalong Band
- ♥ Laughing yoga with Suzy Harvey
- ♥ Drama workshops with Erin Hunter
- ♥ A 1930s themed dance party complete with a photo booth



Our plans changed in March 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic took root and The Cares Family was amongst the first community organisations to suspend face-to-face programming with older people. The health of our neighbours is always our first priority.

But we knew that during the pandemic intergenerational connection would be rarer – and even more important – than ever, and that many people were more afraid of social isolation than the virus itself. So we were determined to continue the project in lockdown. Pivoting quickly, we started to run weekly 3G social clubs online via Zoom.

“Talking with younger folk makes me feel more in touch with the way the world is moving on.”

5. Covid-19: A New Normal

These virtual group activities began in April 2020 and ran through to October 2020. We also expanded the reach: rather than just connecting three generations in Haringey and Waltham Forest as first planned, to support more people during the pandemic we also offered 3G clubs to older neighbours involved in The Cares Family's other programmes.

These social clubs offered space for older and younger people to share stories, music and recipes, to learn together and to build connections that bring solace, grounding and joy in difficult times.

We were aware that only about 40% of older people in The Cares Family communities had access to Wifi or smartphones, so all clubs were accessible from landlines too – helping neighbours to cross the digital divide.

As we continued to adapt to the pandemic, so the 3G project adapted too, as we explored new ways for older and younger people to connect in disconnecting times.



5a. 3G Socials

Every Friday throughout the project, The Cares Family hosted a virtual social club with a different theme, at which older neighbours, parents and children under five learned, played and enjoyed some distraction from the pandemic. We started with just one older neighbour, and grew to engage over 100 participants in total.

From April to October, neighbours:

- ♥ Took part in Little Angel Theatre's production of I Want My Hat Back.
- ♥ Dressed as the colours of the rainbow to create an explosion of hope.
- ♥ Re-created the sounds of the forest and the sea with music therapist Claire.
- ♥ Sang and danced to a live performance by Mrs H and The Singalong Band.
- ♥ Listened to neighbours read Dear Zoo, Where's Spot, and The Itsy Bitsy Pumpkin.
- ♥ Made puppets with puppeteer Lori, ranging from frogs to sea creatures.
- ♥ Shared their favourite feel good songs and reflected on gratitudes at Desert Island Discs sessions.
- ♥ Shared experiences about parenting, life and what neighbours would tell their younger selves.
- ♥ Dressed up for a Halloween Spooktacular to share stories and Halloween songs.

The same families and older neighbours returned each week to connect with one another and built lasting friendships, while the group remained welcoming to new joiners throughout.

“Older generations have interesting stories and life experiences. It’s different to a standard toddler group as there are lots of songs, stories and activities for toddlers to be involved with, but there is also another focus. I like that it provides the opportunity to do something a little different to your usual group.”

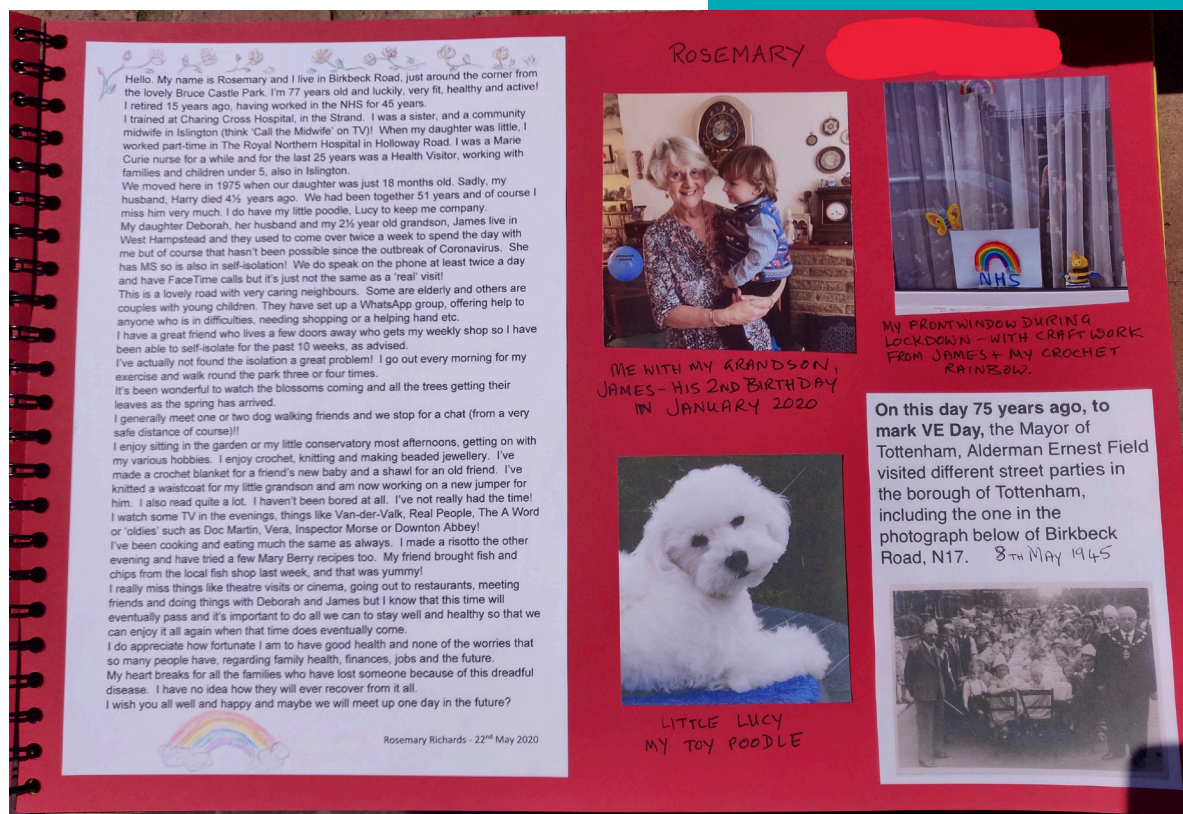
5b. 3G Activity Packs

At the start of lockdown, we didn't have much success engaging people in the re-imagined online clubs so we sent out activity packs to parents and older neighbours we'd met in the early pilots in March.

The packs included #AloneTogether activities for neighbours to enjoy every day, arts and crafts materials, stickers, postcards to send to friends (with stamps) and templates for how to make puppets – as well as formal invitations to the Friday sessions. This helped re-engage people we'd met at pilots, who went on to become regular attendees at the online clubs.



5c. Lockdown Journal



To help keep the community together in between sessions, we created a Lockdown Journal and invited older neighbours, parents and children to add entries of their pandemic experience.

The diary safely made its way around Haringey by bike during the first pandemic lockdown. In a confusing time, it connected the community by providing a space for shared reflection. Neighbours could both read previous entries by their friends and add their own for others to share. New friends saw photos of people they'd heard stories about on Zoom, and via the journal were connected with Rosemary, 77, who'd not been on a Zoom call but who also lived in the local area. Children were able to learn of older people's experiences, while older people were able to hear from children's experiences of home school. Parents shared that the sense of passing a baton offered calm and connection in disconnecting times.



5d. 3G Phone Calls

We were conscious that in an isolating time for all, those without access to the internet may feel particularly disconnected, so we made sure all of our 3G Zoom clubs also worked as phone-in sessions, accessible to anyone with a landline. In addition, we hosted phone-ins at 10am every Friday for anyone who wanted to speak to others in their local community in a challenging time.

During lockdown we also carried out check-in calls to older neighbours to see how they were, to inform them about the 3G clubs, and to see if they needed anything.

On one of the calls, older neighbour Sylvia, shared that she could see the value of a project connecting the generations, as over the past few years she had built a friendship with her next-door neighbours, a mother and young child.

Sylvia lives alone, but she told us that knowing they were next door made her feel less lonely. She missed being able to go to their house for a cup of tea but she was happy that they could still see one another from their gardens.

Sylvia said that what she loved the most was that the young boy had started drawing pictures for her which he would pass through the fence every day.

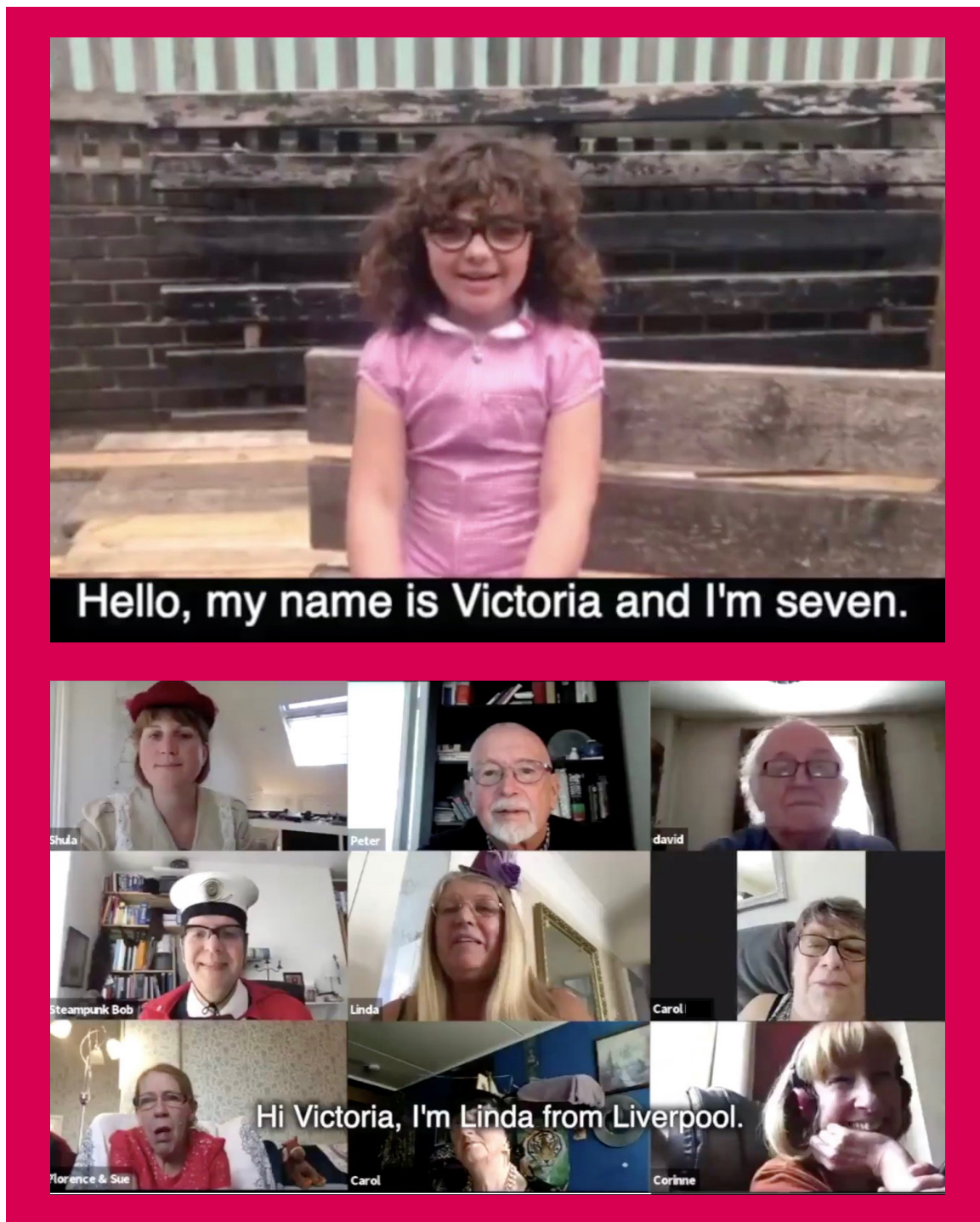


5e. Zoom Clubs With People United

In a special session, we collaborated with artist Steampunk Bob, People United and the Tate Gallery to help three generations share some of their favourite things.

Nine older neighbours shared a Zoom call with Bob where they answered the children's questions which were recorded in advance. Children wanted to know "What do you do to keep your brain active?", and "What is your favourite film?"

The video of the answers was shared with the children at their primary school – [you can watch it here.](#)



5f. Outreach

While we had to pause door-knocking and other face-to-face outreach in the community during the pandemic, over the months of lockdown The Cares Family continued to work with Xenia, Homes for Haringey, Silver Active, Waltham Forest Council and Ageing Better in Camden to promote the 3G project. Monthly programmes were shared with each partner's networks and referrals in both directions were available for anyone who needed a little extra help.

We also shared stories through The Cares Family's social networks to encourage people around the country to interact with people of another generation, even from afar.

“It is special because it gives you a very interesting insight into other generations and not just your own.”



5g. Reconnecting In Person

Due to the momentary receding of the pandemic, in October 2020 we were able to run two more small face-to-face clubs. Following government restrictions, the clubs were held outside, with a maximum of six people present.

90-year-old Ed met with Haringey resident Shula and her one-year-old daughter Elo, and spent time catching up as they had not seen each other face-to-face since March. Ed read Elo her favourite children's stories, *We're All Going On A Bear Hunt* and *Car Car Truck Truck*. The small group also looked through their Lockdown Journal together and reflected on the experience they'd shared.

We also ran a small storytelling club where older neighbour Irena, 68, met with Grace, 44, and her one-year-old daughter Sophie. Irena first met Grace and Sophie at the Greenleaf pilot and discovered they live only a few minutes away from each other. Due to her work schedule Grace was unable to attend the Zoom clubs with Sophie but expressed how much she enjoyed being able to see Irena again – and they spoke about meeting up again soon.

“You understand what different generations feel about life: we can all learn from each other to understand each other's points of view.”



6. Impact

The 3G project enabled three generations to share time together on a weekly basis, through an extraordinary time. Neighbours learned from each other and helped one another to feel part of a community when community mattered most.

During interviews with participants after the project, we heard first-hand how the project has given people something to look forward to. In one older neighbour's words:

"You can look at the dark side with what's going on in this pandemic or you can focus on the good. I have no contact with youngsters. I didn't grow up with any cousins, nephews or nieces, aunts, uncles, grandparents. I have one older brother. I'm not a native Londoner so I think it's a great idea to try and mix people. Some good things have come out of this wretched Covid thing. This is one of them – it's forced people in the community to get to know neighbours that they might never have even spoken to."

One older neighbour, Ed – who attended most of the 24 3G sessions over Zoom – told us he looked forward to them every week. Until two years ago, Ed had never lived alone: he had shared a home with family and friends until he moved in with his wife. Ed told us:

"It's been just over a year since my wife passed away, and it was extremely hard for me. I've never been on my own. I met my wife in my twenties, and we were together for almost 70 years. It was really tough learning to get used to living by myself. I speak to my son and daughter often, but I felt very lonely. The 3G project gives me something to look forward to each week. I couldn't believe I was able to download Zoom by myself. My six-year-old grandson, Alfie, has it too so I have been able to use it to see him more often – it has been wonderful. I love coming each week and seeing all the little ones and especially love the music sessions as I enjoy sharing my love of music, especially Michael Bublé. The songs remind me of my wife and when I play them to others, I feel connected to her and it is nice to share that. The clubs are a real highlight of my week."

Ed, 90



2020 marked Ed's 90th birthday and he was looking forward to spending it with his daughter, who lives in Florida. Lockdown restrictions meant he was unable to go. Instead he made plans with his son for the day – but he ensured those plans worked around his 3G social club attendance. On Ed's 90th birthday, he came to our 'Create A Rainbow' social club and celebrated with friends he'd made during the pandemic, including children 89 years his junior who sang him 'Happy Birthday'.

Building connection across generations

Our evaluation survey showed that 93% of participants felt more connected to people of a different generation as a result of attending the 3G clubs.

Grace, 44, who came along to two socials with her one-year-old daughter, Sophie, said:

"I can see around where I live that there's a lot of older people coming from different generations and often your social groups just don't overlap so it was a nice opportunity to meet people in a semi-organised setting and get to know them and to have a chance to bring your children as well. It's always interesting to meet people with different life experiences and stories to tell – and for Sophie, for it to be normal for her. She's only got one grandparent in Britain so it's nice for her."

Grace, 44

Wendy, a retired teaching assistant who no longer had opportunities to spend time with children under five, made intergenerational friendships that we expect to continue. One parent commented that she rarely spends time with a group of people with such a diverse age range: she was pleased to see her child interact with an older generation and said she felt really positive about seeing the delight on an older neighbour's face as she played with her daughter.

Sharing technology skills

This was the first time a lot of older participants had used video-calling technology. In April, we helped older neighbours to download and learn how to access Zoom; each learned new skills that not only opened up access to the social clubs, but which also provided wider agency for neighbours to be able to navigate and feel part of the changing world.



Building a sense of familiarity and community

The 3G social clubs were designed not just to be spaces for fun and distraction, but also a space for older and younger people to share guidance and advice, patience and perspective, and to become more familiar with one another and the wider community.

Evidence from our pre-project survey showed many participants didn't have many connections with people of a different generation before participating in the project, with 82% of parents saying they rarely spent time with people over the age of 65 and 18% of parents saying they never did.

Meanwhile 57% of older neighbours in the pre-programme survey said that they never spent time with under 5s, 22% said they rarely did, another 22% said they often did, and 11% preferred not to say. After the project, 93% of older neighbours and parents said that as a result of taking part in the 3G social clubs, they felt more connected to people of different generations to them. On top of this, 90% of parents surveyed stated that as a result of taking part in this project, they now spend more time with people from a different background. Considering the pandemic, and the fact that many people's social circles shrunk in 2020, we were pleased with this result.

⁸<https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/covid-19-social-isolation-and-loneliness>



“At my age, to be able to learn how to get on to Zoom and be a part of it made me feel like, ‘aye that’s pretty good!’ I like the Friday afternoons. It gives me a chance to see how other people are handling this situation, because we have young mothers with children and we have older people who are on their own. So there’s lots and lots of things we can talk about and I like that. It’s like having a peephole to the rest of the world. I look forward to it every time.”

Ed, 90

Anecdotal evidence tells us that those same parents now have meaningful relationships with older people nearby. Meanwhile, neighbours may also feel closer to the general community around them. After the first pilot at GreenLeaf Baptist Church, two parents asked for flyers for the club to post through older neighbours' doors. They'd previously seen these neighbours, but never had a specific reason to speak to them or to get to know them. Now there was.

One of our parents, Laila, who attended the pilot, bumped into one of the older neighbours she met at the club in the street, and told us how lovely it was to feel a new sense of community. "This is what the project is all about – building friendships and getting to know your community better", she told us.

Parenting advice across the generations

A highlight of the 3G social clubs was an event in which new parents had the opportunity to ask older neighbours for advice on parenting. Jennifer, 34, expressed how much she enjoyed listening to her older neighbours sharing their stories and how comforting it was when older neighbour Anna said: "We never have it all figured out. Life is a constant journey, especially with parenting – you are forever learning."

Older neighbours without children also attended this club and spoke about their thoughts on the younger generation. Tony, 70, informed everyone that when it comes to those younger than us, "We need to listen to them sometimes as well, because they can teach us a thing or two." Peter, 83, shared with the group, "It's why I mix with younger people, I always hope they have words of wisdom to pass on to me." He talked about how he could be so busy at times when he was bringing up his son, that he kept a notebook with him so that if ever a particular thought popped into his head that he wanted

to remember he would try his best to jot it down. He offered that as advice to the new parents that day.

Anna shared a piece of wisdom with the younger generation: "be kind and don't judge other people because you haven't walked in their shoes. Things are not cut and dried. They're not black and white. They're nuanced, they're shades of grey. Don't think once you get older you have all the answers." Older neighbour Jill added "take each day at a time."

Supporting local artists

In September, the OECD reported that along with the tourism industry, "cultural and creative sectors are among the most affected by the current crisis, with jobs at risk ranging from 0.8 to 5.5% of employment across OECD regions."⁹

In a catastrophic time for many freelancers in the arts the project supported local artists including a music therapist, a puppeteer and a singalong band. Music therapist Claire emailed after facilitating to say: "Intergenerational work is such important work. It's so important to bring different age groups together. I've definitely seen the benefits of this approach."

⁹<https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/culture-shock-covid-19-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors-08da9e0e/>



7. Evaluation

To learn more about how people felt about the project, what had worked well and what could be improved, we surveyed 15 people who participated. Although this is a very small sample, the responses were enlightening.

Respondents cited a variety of reasons for getting involved, including:

- ♥ “I like meeting other people and seeing the children.”
- ♥ “Wanting to help people who were isolated because of Covid.”
- ♥ “An interesting activity for my toddler.”
- ♥ “The opportunity to meet people I may not have met under ‘normal’ circumstances.”
- ♥ “It came at a good time for me. It gave me an opportunity to talk to people who had very different lives to me. I enjoyed the opportunity.”
- ♥ “I like being active in my community. I was able to meet other people and also spend time with children and parents which I don’t do often.”

We also learnt:

- ♥ 93% of participants felt more connected to people of a different generation as a result of attending the 3G clubs.
- ♥ 80% said they would be keen to attend a face-to-face 3G social club when safe to do so.
- ♥ 100% of respondents said they felt a special connection between the three generations.

- ♥ 90% of parents surveyed said that as a result of taking part they now spend more time with people from a different background.

We also asked people what their favourite thing about being involved in the 3G project was. Responses included:

- ♥ “Seeing people enjoying themselves.”
- ♥ “Meeting the children as we do not have any of our own, and children are such good fun!”
- ♥ “The variety of themes and activities and also the chance to have a chat to people and hear a bit about their lives and stories.”
- ♥ “It was very educational and good to look at what other people are going through. Some kids were very bright and contributing to the sessions.”
- ♥ “Talking to the group did me a world of good – made me feel less alone.”
- ♥ “Entertainment was good – great for the young’uns.”
- ♥ “It’s really good to have groups like this, I felt alone when my daughter was small, there weren’t things like this around.”

When asked what their least favourite thing about being involved was, 90% of respondents said nothing or no comment.

Those who did respond said:

- ♥ “The music session went on a bit too long.”
- ♥ “Knowing how long I should talk for could be difficult. It wasn’t always as easy to sense others’ reactions in the same way you’d be able to in person, therefore I tried to ensure I didn’t go on for too long when I was telling a story.”

100% said there was something special about interacting with someone from a different generation:

- ♥ “I believe every generation has something to give and learn from.”
- ♥ “We can learn things, including how to listen.”
- ♥ “It is special because it gives you a very interesting insight into other generations and not just your own.”

- ♥ “I think that older generations have so many interesting stories and life experiences. It is different to a standard toddler group as [there] you will focus on the children’s development. This is a nice change as there are lots of songs, stories and activities for toddlers, but there is also another focus.”
- ♥ “We all have something to teach, and we all have something to learn. We are not all that different from one another.”
- ♥ “It’s a wonderful way to connect with the younger generation and learn through them. It reminded me of my five-year-old grandson who I have missed giving a hug.”
- ♥ “It’s very good to have these interactions. Older people have things to offer. They can tell stories from when they were young and have input from their own experiences. These clubs are great, especially now, as they break up the day. I appreciate them a lot.”



8. Lessons Learnt

In the extraordinary circumstances, delivering this project wasn't easy. Here are just some of the things we learnt:

Outreach:

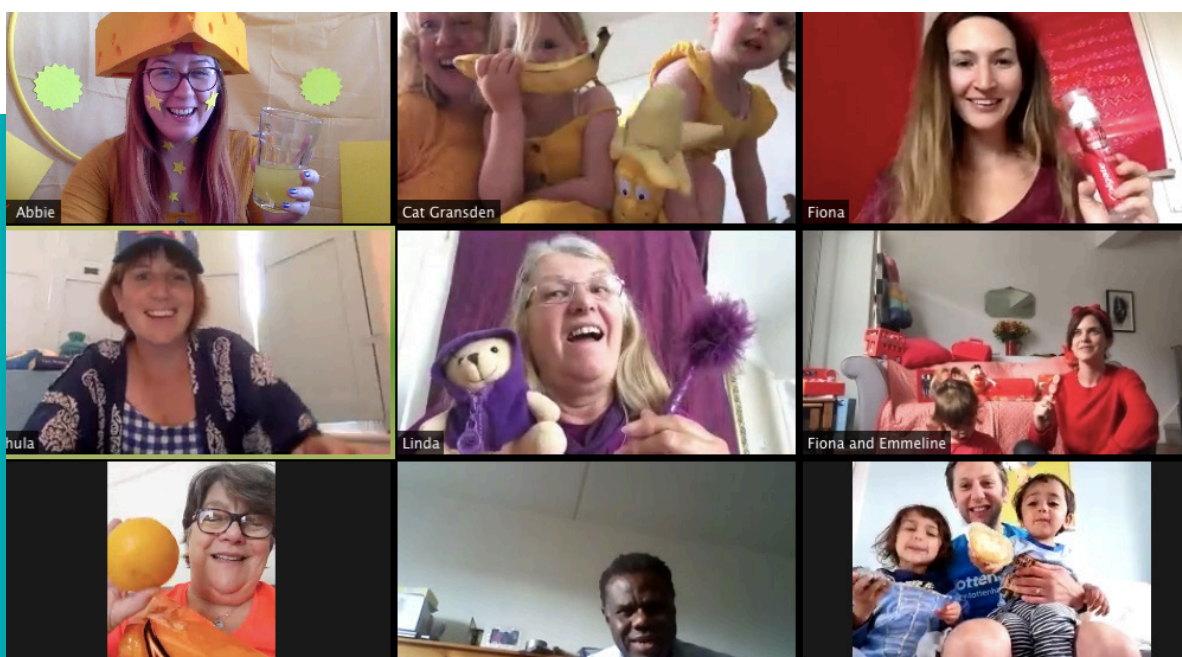
It is possible to attract people of every generation to online social clubs, but you need to invest considerable time to find and support those people to attend. Once we lost the option for face-to-face trust-building, attracting new parents was a struggle. Although new parents did join, we had to continually adapt our approach. We learnt to:

Engage facilitators with a following: Waltham Forest Council's Connecting Community Managers kindly promoted the clubs to their 16,600 followers on Twitter each month. While this got the word out, it didn't draw anyone in. Engaging facilitators to lead sessions who were already well known in the area, and who then promoted sessions

to their networks, was more successful. For example, Mrs H and The Singalong Band had a good following in Waltham Forest and helped engage new participants.

Build trust: We found that face-to-face outreach at a coffee morning and a tie-dyeing session helped build trust. As parents became more familiar with the clubs, their posts and validation on social media brought new families to the group. We thought going via GPs and through social prescribing would be effective – but we had less success with this one-step removed approach.

Outreach works with a 'little and often' approach: If we were repeating the project again, we would dedicate more time to outreach and set quarterly targets, with scheduled days aimed at advertising on parents' forums and through partnerships. If it was safe to, we would have invested more time meeting people in-person.



Running the sessions:

- ♥ Plan for things not going to plan: Getting the right balance of people at clubs is important. During some sessions we had eight parents and children, and just one older neighbour, when many had said they'd be attending – and vice versa. These clubs were still worthwhile but could be tricky to manage – for instance, if we'd sent a book in the post for an older neighbour to read to children in the club, but that neighbour didn't then show up. We learned to always have a back-up plan and to adapt in real time.
- ♥ Technical issues? Humour goes a long way: As we all learnt in 2020, factors such as unstable internet and delayed responses after someone speaks can lead to people talking at the same time or missing key parts of a conversation. We brought these glitches to the heart of sessions, acknowledging interruptions with humour (as we would during face-to-face sessions). It was also an opportunity for connection: we were all learning new technologies together. Everyone had permission to make mistakes.
- ♥ Adapting from face-to-face interaction: At a face-to-face social club there is an opportunity for the children to play with each other, and for the older neighbours and parents then to have a chat and get to know one another. At the same time, older neighbours have the opportunity to engage with the children, and support them with activities physically. This is clearly not the case over Zoom: instead of children being able to run around and get involved with an activity, everything happens through a screen. If the child is not stimulated, they will get bored and agitated.



9. Tips for Running Intergenerational Sessions Online

Help neighbours to download and understand Zoom ahead of the sessions:

- ♥ Finding time outside of the sessions to support neighbours onto Zoom is crucial in ensuring you're not reaching only the most digitally connected people. We found it took on average 60 to 90 minutes, one-to-one, to support neighbours to download Zoom, step-by-step.
- ♥ Some neighbours had difficulty connecting to audio. We'd recommend running through audio settings with neighbours new to Zoom outside of the main sessions – especially if you only have one person facilitating.
- ♥ Keep the Zoom link the same for each club, so you can reassure people they will always know how to join the fun.

Create a dial-in option on Zoom:

- ♥ For those who didn't have access to a laptop or Zoom we set up a way to call in from mobiles or landlines.
- ♥ We didn't know how well this would work especially as some of our sessions were very visual.
- ♥ However, one older neighbour enjoyed engaging with everyone every

week – without the dial-in option he would have been excluded from the intergenerational interactions.

- ♥ When neighbours could not see the rest of the group, but everyone else could see each other, we were concerned that people might feel they had missed out on sessions' creative elements. We sought to rectify this by sending resources, and pictures of what had been created, to people via the post between gatherings.
- ♥ Dial-in only clubs work well with older people and people in their twenties and thirties, but less well with small children, so keeping a mix of interaction types is important.

Put people at ease before they join:

Joining a Zoom session of strangers can be intimidating. Before starting clubs, we would have an initial call with participants to get to know them, explain how we structured the sessions, and to reassure people that if they just wanted to listen it was fine to do so. We also made people aware of the Zoom 'chat' function, so if they needed to leave the group early or ask a question they could do so by sending a message privately or to the group.

Timing:

- ♥ Keep clubs to a maximum of 45 minutes to avoid ants in pants (or nappies).
- ♥ Breaking the club into sections worked well to keep people engaged.
- ♥ Choosing a time to suit all ages can be a challenge. One parent was very keen on being involved but the club always clashed with her son's nap time. Other times, parents needed to leave because their child was hungry or craving some run around time. We found sticking to the same time week to week was effective.

Share first names (not surnames):

- ♥ At our face-to-face pilots, everyone would wear a sticker with their first name. Online, names are automatically displayed. As a facilitator, it's important to ask everyone to remove their surname (for safeguarding purposes – especially

if you're going to share images of the sessions online). We also asked parents to include their child's first name on screen too, so everyone had easy access to each other's names: this helped to create a sense of familiarity.

- ♥ Offer older neighbours roles in the facilitation. To keep small children engaged, clubs were often pitched with activities small children would enjoy. To ensure the older neighbours were also engaged – and crucially, not patronised – we would give older people the chance to take an active role in the facilitation. For example, some neighbours enjoyed reading stories to the children – so we sent them books in the post ahead of sessions. At a face-to-face club, one neighbour was nervous at first as she didn't have much experience with children so we suggested she serve drinks and then read the story to the group which helped her to grow in confidence.



Music matters:

- ♥ We found playing an instrument and welcoming and saying goodbye to the group with a singalong was effective in creating a warm environment. At the end of each online session we played 'You've Got A Friend In Me' from Toy Story.
- ♥ Several parents told us that this was now their child's favourite song and they looked forward to listening to it each week.
- ♥ Desert Island Discs was a particularly popular activity. We asked everyone to choose their favourite 'feel good' song, gave people a chance to talk about why they had chosen the song, and then listened to a 60 second snippet (keep it snappy, when we played the whole song, one older neighbour fed back that they felt the music went on too long). This format offered opportunities for universal expressions of connection including dancing, singing and conversation.

Pick a theme:

Having a theme and a planned structure for every session was important. Another social club which was especially popular was 'Create A Rainbow'. We asked everyone attending to come to the session as a colour from the rainbow – dressing in that colour and finding things around the house that matched. People loved seeing their neighbours' efforts. Some parents and children who couldn't make the club completed the activity in their own time and shared photos with the group.

Make use of breakout rooms:

With larger groups there were fewer opportunities for intimate conversations. We therefore provided time for break-outs which enabled smaller groups to introduce themselves and

get to know one another on a more personal level, or to catch up. If you only have one facilitator these rooms cannot be monitored simultaneously, but the facilitator can go in and out of these rooms to check how people are doing.

Older neighbour Pat, 77, told us she loved the breakout rooms as "sometimes you just want to have a good chat and get to know one another."

Activity packs:

To drum up interest, create and send activity packs to everyone involved or anyone who is interested in getting involved. Our packs included a programme of events for that month, in addition to arts and crafts materials related to club's content so everyone had the opportunity to be creative – regardless of what they had in the house or which materials they could afford to buy.

Interaction is key:

Give everyone an opportunity to talk – and as a facilitator ensure you're aware of who hasn't yet contributed.

One activity popular with all ages was the 'Guess What's Behind This' game. Based on the theme of the club (e.g. animals), we would draw an object which we showed to the group and then, with a couple of clues, ask everyone to guess which animal was behind the object. Once older neighbours had worked it out, they would keep the answer to themselves but offer children their own clues to support them in working out the great mystery.

10. Conclusion

Our aim with the 3G project was to explore how The Cares Family model worked with three generations. The pandemic altered plans and ways of working. As physical distance became necessary all in-person outreach and groups were paused. But as people became separated, the desire for people to know their neighbours increased.

The 3G project, and indeed The Cares Family more widely, responded to this paradox proactively. We sent play packs and Lockdown Journals to neighbours in the post, and created special spaces for people to connect and build memories together online. Knowing the extent of the digital divide, we made sure people could participate on the phone too. Those new connections had a significant impact on the people who were part of them.

Firstly, in a time when anxiety, depression and loneliness increased dramatically across the country¹⁰, the sessions provided fun, shared experiences that helped people feel connected. Artists, musicians and puppeteers kept young children engaged, provided extra content for home-schooling parents, and gave older people a chance to contribute. One parent told us how much her three-year-old looked forward to Friday sessions, getting excited and asking about them every Monday.

Secondly, the clubs offered people a sense of purpose. People showed up to support each other and to contribute to something bigger than themselves – a community. Older neighbours read stories to the children and parents comforted older neighbours who were isolating, while older people comforted new parents struggling with the loneliness of a pandemic. People dressed-up, sang and

shared stories with one another. Jill, 70, said her highlight was “seeing little Joel come out of his shell. I really loved watching him grow and get more and more into the clubs and be more confident.”

Thirdly, participants were able hear different perspectives and experiences – helping to forge solace and togetherness in a time of fear. Older Londoner Caesar said, “the clubs bring us all together and we can learn from one another. We all have something to teach, and we all have something to learn. We are not all that different from one another.”

While building these connections involved challenges that we could not have imagined, we did anticipate the result: universally, participants said they felt a special connection between the three generations. We encourage everyone – community organisations, businesses, government and individuals in neighbourhoods everywhere to explore, as we did in 2020, the lasting power of those connections.

¹⁰<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/june2020#introduction>



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