



**CLARION  
FUTURES**

**InCommon**

# **Sustaining intergenerational connections at a time of crisis**

**Stories of resilience, adaptability and hope  
from people of all ages at a time when  
we need them most.**



# Foreword

## InCommon

At InCommon, we believe that intergenerational relationships can be a wonderful and enriching part of life for people of all ages, and we aim to create a space for these relationships to grow.

Since 2018 we've been running in-person intergenerational workshops, enabling children and their older neighbours to learn from and connect with one another in meaningful ways. The Covid-19 crisis has been a catalyst for us to reimagine how we facilitate intergenerational connectedness in a digital age, ultimately leading to the launch of our Buddies programme - facilitating connections between isolated family members and neighbours over Zoom or by phone. Between April and June 2020 we've seen relationships blossom and enabled meaningful exchanges during these tough times.

In pulling together this report, we've been encouraged by similar stories of sustained and strengthened relationships across our communities. We hope you find the contents insightful and feel moved to play a part in maintaining intergenerational connections over the coming months, and beyond.

**Laura Macartney, Co-founder**  
**Charlotte Whittaker, Co-founder**  
**InCommon**

## Clarion Futures

Over the last year Clarion Housing Group has been working to develop an Age Friendly Strategy, setting out a range of commitments to ensure that we enable residents to age well within our communities.

We were already commissioning a number of intergenerational projects across our regions, but this new strategic direction has led to a re-doubling of our efforts to ensure we encourage intergenerational connectivity between our residents.

Covid-19 has brought to light the power of communities to overcome crisis and support one another and we therefore asked InCommon to capture some of the new connections that have been emerging with the aim of exploring how we can maintain and enhance them as we journey through the pandemic and beyond.

We hope this report will stimulate more thinking and exchange of ideas on this theme, so that we can work together to ensure anyone living in our communities can age well.

**Matt Parsonage, Head of Communities**  
**Clarion Futures**

The logo for InCommon, featuring the word "InCommon" in a bold, red, sans-serif font. The "i" and "o" in "Common" have a small red dot above them.

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# Introduction

Over recent years, research has highlighted that the UK is a country seriously divided along generational lines, with many people sadly missing out on friendships with people of different ages, especially outside of families.<sup>1</sup> In response to this divide, momentum around intergenerational projects has gathered, with more individuals and policy makers recognising the benefits that intergenerational connection can bring to people of all ages.

Against this context, this report was commissioned by Clarion Futures to give a snapshot of how intergenerational relationships have been affected by the Covid-19 crisis. Covid-19 has undoubtedly created major challenges across the Housing and intergenerational sectors and disrupted the face-to-face communication at the heart of intergenerational relationships. But in parallel, we have witnessed a renewed sense of intergenerational solidarity and practical support, and for some people a new sense of community spirit. As thousands of people experience isolation and loneliness in a new way, there is also a fresh impetus towards tackling these issues that we hope will

outlast the current crisis and provide new momentum for intergenerational work.

In this report, we explore the role of the UK Housing sector in strengthening intergenerational bonds in communities in the next phase of the pandemic. Of course, both the Housing and intergenerational sectors will want to look to international best practice for inspiration over the coming months; for the scope of this report we have focused on the UK context. We start by celebrating the innovation, compassion and flexibility we have found across Housing and intergenerational organisations with a collection of case studies of ways in which people of all ages are connecting despite the challenging circumstances. We go on to share some perspectives from individuals, both in communities and from the sector, on the past few months. Finally, we have offered some ideas for how the Housing sector can contribute to building intergenerationally connected communities that are resilient through times of change and crisis.



# Keeping generations connected

Intergenerational connections work best when there is reciprocity, meaningful interactions and a shared space to come together. Paradoxically, these are the things we need most during times of challenge and change, and yet the hardest to make happen when we're spending most of our time at home during lockdown.

Since February 2020, across the country, intergenerational projects have been forced to suspend their usual ways of working.

This has understandably caused many challenges for people of all ages who participate in these projects, and for the people working at these organisations.

Although new barriers have arisen, we've also seen a remarkable display of creativity, strength and commitment in how generations have been supporting each other at this time. These stories of resilience remind us of our capacity to find relationships and community when we need them most.

## CREATIVITY AT A DISTANCE

### MAGIC ME

Magic Me is an intergenerational arts charity based in East London that brings generations together to build a stronger, safer community.

**Before Covid-19:** Magic Me ran a range of projects, including 'Cocktails in Care Homes', artists' residencies in care homes, and intergenerational arts projects with schools.

**Now:** During the pandemic, they've launched their 'At Home Together' projects, bringing creativity to the people they work with of all ages. This has included sending out activity packs, with the aim of sharing people's creations with other project participants. Their team is also keeping in touch with the more isolated older people they work with over the phone.

**Challenges:** The fundamental challenge shared by Magic Me, and most intergenerational organisations, is a lack of safety around in-person contact between

people of different ages, which is expected to last for some time.

There is also significant digital exclusion and difficulty accessing devices/data for both the families and older people Magic Me work with. Along with the safeguarding issues of digital contact, these have limited the extent to which Magic Me has decided to deliver projects digitally.

**Opportunities:** The team at Magic Me has been encouraged by seeing spontaneous intergenerational connections being made by schools and families, especially sending cards and letters during lockdown, and hope that this may lead to new momentum for intergenerational connection going forward. Another positive change has been the speed with which many care homes have become digitally connected over recent months, which may leave a legacy of greater opportunities for residents to stay in touch with the wider community digitally afterwards.

## FRIEND IN DEED

Friend in Deed is a Norfolk-based charity that creates friendship across generations.

**Before Covid-19:** Friend in Deed's primary service involves babies and children of all ages visiting care home residents and day centres for older people to reduce loneliness.

**Now:** Friend in Deed has used social media to keep everyone updated on news from their younger/older friends, and organised remote activities such as 'plant a seed with Friend in Deed', making music videos, drawing pictures, making kites and more.

The results of these activities have been shared through a weekly newsletter sent to the care homes.

**Challenges:** Care homes have been locked down to stop the spread of Covid-19.

**Opportunities:** Friend in Deed is making the most of opportunities to connect through non-digital means by post, as well as digitally, with intergenerational Facetime calls. Some existing relationships between families and older people formed through Little Visitors have even grown under lockdown, with families able to offer practical support to their older friends.



“Despite this being a challenging time, it has shown how important these intergenerational friendships are. Many of our Little Visitors and school children have been visiting the same residents for a couple of years. It is clear that everyone can't wait to be reunited but we know that this might take some time. Until then, we will continue to keep these friendships thriving from afar.”

KELLY LINDSAY, DIRECTOR, FRIEND IN DEED

“I've been taking my daughter, Penny (1) to Halsey House, Cromer since the sessions began last May. Myself and the other families of the Little Visitors in North Norfolk stay in touch through a group chat, and have really missed visiting our older friends and seeing each other.

Each week we, like many other Little Visitors across Norfolk, send letters, postcards, drawings and photos to the residents, to make sure they know we are thinking of them and to keep them up to date with how the Little Visitors are changing and growing. It has been especially exciting to tell them about babies taking their first steps, pre-schoolers cooking at home and about our 2.6 challenge raising over £1,000.”

JO, PARENT PARTICIPANT AT FRIEND IN DEED

Image courtesy of Friend in Deed (pre-Covid-19)



# INTERGENERATIONAL NEIGHBOURLINESS

## THE CARES FAMILY

The Cares Family brings older and younger adults together to share time, new experiences and friendship and to build connection and community across the generations.

**Before:** The Cares Family ran face-to-face social clubs across London, Manchester and Liverpool, as well as their 1:1 friendship programme, 'Love Your Neighbour'.

**Now:** Their regular social clubs have gone online, with younger and older neighbours taking part in everything from quizzes to discos together over Zoom. Many 'Love Your Neighbour' relationships are continuing over the phone,

and new friendships are also developing through the 'Phone a friend' project, matching young and old for regular chats during lockdown.

**Challenges:** Covid-19 has exacerbated loneliness for younger people as well as older adults, with 44% of 18-24 year olds feeling lonely during lockdown (24% of all UK adults).<sup>2</sup>

**Opportunities:** Initiatives like online social clubs and creative '#AloneTogether' challenges have reached people of all ages and helped them stay connected, with digital technology enabling meet-ups across the country.

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“With the likelihood of social isolation amongst older people and economic isolation amongst younger people extending over many months, it's more important than ever that the generations build solidarity across the ages, so that everyone can feel the power in mutual relationships; part of our changing world rather than left behind by it. We're already seeing that – in scores of online social clubs, thousands of phone calls, and the sharing of beautiful jokes, games and activities by post.”

ALEX SMITH, FOUNDER/CEO, THE CARES FAMILY

Image courtesy of The Cares Family





Image courtesy of BuddyHub (pre-Covid-19)

## BUDDYHUB

BuddyHub turns loneliness into happiness by creating meaningful friendships for older adults empowering them to age actively and well.

**Before Covid-19:** BuddyHub has always created new supportive groups called Friendship Wheels around their Members (vulnerable older adults); before Covid-19 these relationships often involved visits and face-to-face contact.

**Now:** During Covid-19 BuddyHub has adapted to abide by social distancing protocols. Their volunteers, who are trained and vetted to provide practical and emotional support to their Members, have found safe ways to continue to help

through picking up prescriptions, going to the shops and doing laundry.

**Challenges:** Some Buddies (volunteers) have needed to self-isolate, which was a challenge for Friendship Wheels, but other Buddies have stepped in to support when needed.

**Opportunities:** BuddyHub say: "It is believed that prehistoric mankind lived together in small, close, intergenerational communities supporting one another for survival. There is an opportunity to learn from our ancestors and try to move closer to a way of living that better resembles those supportive and close intergenerational communities."

"During Covid-19, the strength of our model and the power of community is being evidenced. As we're all in lockdown, we recognize the importance of supportive groups.

Instead of face-to-face visits, Buddies have switched to phone calls and letters with some setting up video chats. Buddies help with shopping, picking up prescriptions and laundry and sourcing materials for hobbies. Members, on the other hand, offer encouraging advice: 'we will all get through this together and it will pass!'"

CATHERINE MCCLLEN, FOUNDER, BUDDYHUB





## ST MONICA TRUST

St Monica Trust run a variety of retirement communities and care homes across Bristol.

**Before Covid-19:** Under normal circumstances St Monica Trust run intergenerational activities across their retirement communities and care homes, including face-to-face sessions with nurseries, schools and universities.

**Now:** St Monica Trust have postponed regular face-to-face sessions and have closed their all-age public spaces. Instead cards have been written from children to

their friends in care homes, virtual school concerts recorded and letters of support sent from around the world.

**Challenges:** Closing the all-age public spaces, previously open to the community, has meant halting the integration of St Monica Trust's newest retirement village into its local community.

**Opportunities:** Increased IT knowledge among staff and residents, many of whom are now using iPads to communicate with relatives and friends.



“While the media continues to forefront the ‘vulnerability’ of older people, especially in current circumstances, intergenerational connection offers a chance to redress the balance and build mutual understanding.”

BEN DUNN, ST MONICA TRUST

## GENERATIONS WORKING TOGETHER

Generations Working Together (GWT) is the nationally recognised centre of excellence supporting the development and integration of intergenerational work across Scotland.

**Before Covid-19:** GWT focuses on promoting, supporting and increasing innovation in intergenerational practice, and influencing national and local policy.

**Now:** They are introducing new resources, online training and providing additional support to care homes, network members and local communities. This includes finding practical ways to reconnect generations through technology, telephone, radio, TV and paper activities. A directory of

safe, simple ideas for intergenerational work has recently been launched.

**Challenges:** Reconnecting the generations hasn't been as easy and as we continue to social distance and stay shielded, we have to look at safe ways in which people can connect online. GWT plans to launch a guide on how generations can connect safely online highlighting which apps are the safest to use.

**Opportunities:** The Scottish Government has allocated additional funding to GWT to amplify the scope of their work, allowing the team to grow and support even more intergenerational projects across the country.

# INNOVATING DURING A CRISIS

## HEALTHY GENERATIONS, ISLINGTON

Healthy Generations is a charity that runs age friendly activities in older people's housing and community spaces in Islington, North London.

**Before Covid-19:** Healthy Generations normally runs a range of different activities, including tech workshops, exercise classes, choirs and tea dances that are hosted in accessible spaces, including libraries, community centres and age-specific housing.

**Now:** In-person delivery stopped before lockdown and they've managed to make a lot of their services available online. They offer weekly online pilates,

chair-based yoga and gentle keep-fit classes, alongside an online class to help with digital literacy. They've also started running online coffee mornings with older tenants in age-specific housing.

**Challenges:** Digital delivery doesn't work for all their services and it's been much easier to reach the 'younger old' living independently than the 'older old' in assisted living.

**Opportunities:** They have innovated in several ways, including creating a befriending network, setting up a new online Dancercise class and an online Alexander Technique class for people with back pain who can't see their physiotherapist.

## DARE TO CARE

Dare to Care Packages sends essentials to vulnerable people and PPE to the NHS across London in response to the Covid-19 lockdown.

**Now:** Dare to Care sends care packages with a week-long supply of food, hygiene products, a treat and a handwritten note from volunteers. Their beneficiaries include vulnerable women with frequent address changes, migrants and refugees, older people and immunocompromised people.

They also provide PPE to key workers.

**Challenges:** Identifying and reaching the most isolated, designing a system that can match real-time needs and supplies.

**Opportunities:** Dare to Care has harnessed desire among younger people to support their communities practically. Without intending to be an intergenerational project, they are facilitating new relationships between makers, organisers, and self-isolators of all ages.

"In our case, we have found young people to be a major source of inspiration and support. Our PPE production and development effort are led by 18-year-old Dhires Nathwani, engaging makers as young as 11-year-old to use technology like 3D printing to produce thousands of PPE every week. The raw passion, willpower, and technological know-how of young people work perfectly as we collate data and coordinate deliveries to the right places, through our experiences as social entrepreneurs, public health professionals, and campaigners; this is especially inspiring in face of a dire and complex situation."

JOSEPHINE LIANG, CO-FOUNDER, DARE TO CARE PACKAGES



# HOUSING CONNECTING GENERATIONS

## SOUTH YORKSHIRE HOUSING ASSOCIATION (SYHA)

SYHA is a Housing Association based in Sheffield that supports their customers to settle at home, live well and realise their potential.

**Before Covid-19:** Through their Age Better in Sheffield programme, SYHA was working with partners across Sheffield to deliver 1:1 and group activities that brought older people together to spark intergenerational connections.

**Now:** With face-to-face activities paused for the time being, SYHA is instead offering an arts-based virtual programme called

'Moments of Joy'. The programme includes professional musicians and dancers attending extra care schemes, a wellbeing activity pack being delivered to 2,500 older people and a telephone befriending service for isolated residents

**Challenges:** Many of the established Age Better activities have had to be put on hold and customers miss the social link that comes from group activity.

**Opportunities:** The 'Moments of Joy' programme has been a real hit and will continue into the future, with lots of new volunteers who might want to continue.

## CLARION FUTURES

Clarion Futures help residents to develop their future and maximise the opportunities available to them.

**Before Covid-19:** Clarion Futures commission, support and run projects internally across areas of Communities, Jobs & Training and Money & Digital.

**Now:** There has been a shift towards responsive funding and supporting vulnerable groups in new ways. Like many Housing Associations, calls have been made to over 12,000 older residents, and also to

under-25s in a new tenancy. They are also making emergency support grants to partners to help them respond to Covid-19 in their communities.

**Challenges:** Identifying new gaps in provision where delivery can no longer happen and finding virtual solutions that can get started quickly.

**Opportunities:** Connecting with residents on a 1:1 basis can be a rewarding experience for staff members and could be part of Clarion Future's intergenerational strategy going forward.



Photo courtesy of St Monica Trust

“Making calls to a few of our residents has been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had during my time working for Clarion. We're all feeling the effects of lockdown and it's nice to speak to someone different on the phone.”

YVONNE OGDEN,  
NEIGHBOURHOOD INVESTMENT  
MANAGER, CLARION FUTURES



# Community and sector voices

Alongside celebrating what organisations are doing in response to Covid-19, we want to capture how people are experiencing intergenerational connection in their communities through this period.

We know that most intergenerational connections exist outside of formal projects, and want to celebrate how people of different ages have supported each other

and developed new relationships through the early phase of the pandemic.

The following pages present insights shared by individuals: responses from Clarion Housing residents who took part in a survey; the views of people who have taken part in some of the projects featured in the report; and the perspectives of some of those working in the sector.

## COMMUNITY SURVEY

Clarion Voice conducted a survey which received 248 responses from Clarion Housing residents.

The survey asked 3 questions, with some of the responses broken down into the following questions below:

1. Are there any projects in your area connecting people of different ages?
2. Are you and your neighbours helping each other out in new ways?
3. How do you think we will maintain connections and community spirit after this period?

## INTERGENERATIONAL PROJECTS

### 1. Are you aware of any projects in your area connecting people of different ages?



Some residents were aware of intergenerational projects, often run between schools and care homes, or through religious or community organisations. In general, it was felt that these had not been able to continue in any form since the Covid-19 crisis began. However, we did hear about some informal ways in which intergenerational connections were being maintained, or initiated for the first time during lockdown.

- “My street has a WhatsApp group (with visits to people not on WhatsApp), started during lockdown.”
- “Daily wave at 8pm from doorsteps or balconies. We (couple in our 30s) chat to our neighbours (couple in their 80s who are isolating) from our balcony.”
- “Volunteers help with shopping and practical tasks.”

## COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Are you and your neighbours helping each other out in new ways?



For some, the past few months have felt like a renewal of local community, with 48% of people answering that they and their neighbours were helping each other in new ways. Relationships have been (re-)established with neighbours through socially distanced chats and the Clap for Carers, and many people are supporting each other practically. People told us about new or renewed relationships, many of which were intergenerational.

However, it's also important to note that more than half the people asked did not feel neighbours were helping each other in new ways; many people are not feeling more part of their community than they did before and the most isolated individuals may not be reached.

- “We use the group email to make sure everyone is ok and have offered help to those who need it. We are talking, at a distance, with people we wouldn't normally engage with.”
- “There has been a large number of people shopping for others, and different services of collections for books, puzzles etc.”
- “Some residents have posted notes through letterboxes to say they will pick up groceries, medication etc. if you are self-isolating.”
- “I became a Royal Volunteer to support the community and NHS. I have got to know so many new people in my immediate area.”

**“It feels good to know that we can still bring joy even when we can't visit physically.”**

LUCY, INCOMMON BUDDIES PARENT



## AFTER THE PANDEMIC

### How do you think we will maintain connections and community spirit after this period?

This question elicited a range of responses. Some people felt that 'everyone will go back to their normal ways' or that 'there was none [community spirit] to begin with'. It was not uncommon for people to feel sceptical that any real changes would come from the pandemic in the longer term.

However, some people were more optimistic. Suggestions and hopes for how new connections could be maintained included:

- "Setting up community groups and events."
- "[Clarion] should do what you are doing by ringing the elderly - that shouldn't stop."
- "I hope that people will be kinder to each other - not so judgemental."
- "We should do the same as before but be more proactive with issues."
- "By looking out for each other, making sure everyone is ok and have all they need, and putting them in touch with people who can help if they have problems."

Another important element that emerged was the impact the pandemic has had on the centrally important issue of family for many people; both in terms of spending more time within households, keeping in touch with family in new ways, and the challenge of distance and particularly providing practical support from afar.

Overall, the survey, as well as research conversations with the community organisations featured as case studies, suggest that there is an appetite for greater community connection, with hope that increased local participation will be sustained, as well as some scepticism that things will really change after lockdown lifts. We would argue that intergenerational relationships are a key part of building back strong communities post-Covid, but this will not happen automatically, and the Housing sector has a role to play in creating the best possible conditions for thriving communities.

"It's very important to me to keep in touch with my family. I have a large family and we all use WhatsApp and email to keep in touch - it's been a lifeline really because I do really feel better when I know how they are all doing."

IRIS, OLDER RESIDENT, HACKNEY, LONDON

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"There are a lot of younger families on one half of the estate, and older residents on the other. It would be good as a community to put on a few events to help bring the estate together a bit more and to maintain new relationships that have developed."

RICHARD TOWES, OLDER CLARION RESIDENT

## THE VIEW FROM THE SECTOR

In our research with those working in the Housing and intergenerational sectors, we heard that many feel it is important to find ways to support people to sustain their intergenerational relationships through this

acute crisis, but also to consider how to build stronger communities in the recovery phase, with renewed bonds between people of all ages.

United for All Ages promotes and supports intergenerational action, bringing older and younger people together.

“Meaningful intergenerational relationships will take a long time to recover from the crisis. Intergenerational justice and fairness will be severely tested by Covid-19 as most of the people likely to die and be seriously ill will be aged over 70 while most of those likely to suffer economically (jobs/income) will be younger. That economic impact will continue to be felt by those on low incomes, younger people and women for years to come as mass unemployment returns to the UK.”

**STEPHEN BURKE, DIRECTOR, UNITED FOR ALL AGES**

Orbit is a national Housing Association with a mission to build thriving communities.

“During these uncertain and anxious times for many, intergenerational connections are increasingly important. The elderly being the most ‘vulnerable’ are isolated and social distancing only exacerbates the problem. Intergenerational projects that reach people in their homes can bring benefits of increased wellbeing and a sense of belonging and connection to the wider community.”

**ROSIE WARD, ASSOCIATE PLACEMAKING AND PARTNERSHIP MANAGER, ORBIT HOUSING GROUP**

**“Meaningful intergenerational relationships will take a long time to recover from this crisis.”**

The Housing Association Charitable Trust (HACT) is an innovation agency for UK social housing.

“The past couple of months have highlighted how important a well-connected community is, and that citizens can and will do amazing things for one another when given the support and trust to do so. As local anchor institutions within communities, social housing organisations have an incredibly important part to play in promoting and nurturing community-led and intergenerational activity.

Over the coming months HACT and the Centre for Excellence in Community Investment will be working with the sector to amplify this work, support cross-sector collaboration and highlight the important role every part of our businesses can play in developing age friendly communities.”

**DR ROB SUGDEN, HEAD OF COMMUNITIES, HACT**

# “There is a significant and inspiring aid response to Covid-19 taking place in communities.”

The Connection Coalition has been formed in response to the Covid-19 crisis by organisations who share a commitment to ensuring that physical distancing doesn't create a crisis of disconnection, social isolation and loneliness.

“There is a significant and inspiring aid response to Covid-19 taking place in communities up and down the country with local organising taking place on streets. But we know that while isolation

brings with it the risk of loneliness, meaningful connection and people being with people, are the keys to staving off loneliness. Our diverse experience and work show us that by bringing people together to share time, have fun and build relationships it is possible to avoid the sting of loneliness in young and old alike.”

IONA LAWRENCE, CONNECTION COALITION

The Housing LIN is a sharing network for people in housing, health and social care promoting solutions that enable everyone to live well in good quality housing.

“Now is the time for us to change the culture of leadership to allow room for collaborative approaches and the lived experience of people to come through as a means to effect change. The Housing LIN has led the way in exploring different models of intergenerational living, and this is one area where we hope to see a step change going forward.”

JEREMY PORTEUS, THE HOUSING LIN

## LEARNING FROM COMMUNITY AND SECTOR VOICES

**Challenges:** While some people are optimistic about the revival of community spirit during Covid-19, others have not experienced this, and instead feel isolated and cut off in their homes. The risks of infection and the difficulties of digital technology make this period a concerning one for organisations supporting intergenerational connections, with many projects paused for the foreseeable future. Families and friends are also experiencing disruption to their intergenerational relationships, with many commenting on grandparents missing grandchildren.

**Opportunities:** In some communities, there has been a re-discovery of connections at a local level (many of which are naturally intergenerational), and a renewed sense of community spirit. There is an opportunity to harness this energy to create stronger, more cohesive communities over the coming months.

**Learnings:** Over 80% of people did not think there were any intergenerational projects happening in their area. Although many intergenerational relationships do not come from formal projects, they can be a valuable tool towards building links between people of different ages. There would need to be a significant expansion of intergenerational work for most of the population to have the option to take part.



# Moving forward

We hope that telling the stories of how organisations have adapted to Covid-19 to continue connecting people of all ages can provide others with the same goal with some ideas and inspiration.

It also feels worthwhile to draw together some of the shared challenges, opportunities and learnings around some key themes that came out during our research.



## NARRATIVES OF CONFLICT AND SOLIDARITY

**Challenge:** The UK was already significantly divided on age lines, and this division could easily deepen through this crisis.<sup>3</sup> One threat is that negative narratives emerge about the needs of one generation being preferred at the expense of another in the response; particularly as younger people's interests are seen as more linked to the economy, while on the whole older people are more directly affected by Covid-19.

**Opportunity:** Positively, we have seen and heard strong messages of solidarity between people of different ages so far. Many people (young and old) have stepped up to offer practical help to others, and many people who are at lower personal risk from the virus have willingly changed their lives to protect others.

**Learnings:** There are ways to talk about the crisis and response that highlight goals and benefits shared across generations. Many people think in terms of their families rather than their peer group, and are receptive to narratives of solidarity. It is also important to recognise the nuances of the picture, e.g. younger people can be high risk for Covid-19; older people may work or be economically affected.



## THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

**Challenges:** Staying connected to the world and keeping in touch from a distance ideally require a level of tech literacy. There is real generational inequality in levels of tech confidence; older people facing multiple disadvantages (financial, socioeconomic, health) are the least likely to be digitally included.

**Opportunities:** The situation is providing motivation for people to get online for the first time, or explore new kinds of technology. For some people who were already isolated, increased use of technology like WhatsApp, social media or video calls can offer more frequent, informal contact and richer interaction with the world..

**Learnings:** Projects aiming to get people online need to enable access to devices and affordable access to the internet, as well as building user confidence. For the moment it is crucial to have non-digital access to projects to avoid excluding the most isolated; in parallel greater digital inclusion will naturally be a top priority.



## LOCALITY

**Challenges:** Many projects that rely on staff or volunteers travelling were unable to operate due to lockdown restrictions, and this is likely to remain difficult.

**Opportunities:** Projects with strong local roots have been central to coordinating the Covid-19 response. Many people engaged with local projects for the first time, either to volunteer or receive support, and more people were speaking to their neighbours and supporting one another practically, especially through new mutual aid groups.

**Learnings:** People of all ages have shown willingness to get involved in supporting their local community both informally and in projects when there are opportunities.



## ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

**Challenges:** Lockdown has brought increased boredom, anxiety and loneliness to many people of all ages across the UK.

**Opportunities:** Societal understanding of loneliness as an issue is high. This has led to some increased volunteer engagement with organisations that combat loneliness, (including intergenerational projects) and renewed focus on the issue from Government with the 'Let's talk loneliness' campaign.

**Learnings:** Older people who are more used to isolation can offer insights on developing resilience to younger generations. New ways of working open opportunities of involving people who are ordinarily housebound going forward. Quality of emotional connection, rather than number of connections, is increasingly at the heart of efforts to combat loneliness.



## EXACERBATING EXISTING INEQUALITY

**Challenges:** Covid-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities in society and there is every expectation that this will worsen during the next phase of the crisis, as the economic effects are felt. Unemployment and reduced employment in the gig economy has worsened poverty for many. Along with overcrowded housing and lack of access to outdoor space, this has created a tale of two lockdowns, with some people seeing far more negative impact on their family life, education, health and wellbeing.

**Opportunities:** The crisis has shone a light on the impact of inequalities. Some areas have seen a substantial increase in community engagement which could be harnessed going forward to bring lasting improvement. There is also a new recognition of the importance of liveable spaces, and access to outside space in communities.

**Learnings:** Intergenerational coalitions and projects can be part of alleviating need and working towards structural change as the country moves forward after the initial Covid-19 crisis.

## CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Housing Associations have a valuable role to play during this crisis as trusted organisations in their communities, with direct links to many people of all ages who are isolated and cut off from their usual support networks and activities. Housing can use this position to support intergenerational connection by considering the following priorities when delivering and commissioning community investment work:

**Digital inclusion:** One of the key barriers to accessing intergenerational projects is digital exclusion, which affects all age groups but in particular older tenants. The suspension of offline, community-based activities has highlighted the need for services that can help to close this generational gap in digital literacy. The most isolated and vulnerable members of society are also the most likely to be digitally excluded. Housing associations are well placed to identify and support people struggling to get online - digital access can provide a way to stay connected to their own social networks and a wide range of community services and organisations.

**Purpose and reciprocity:** Making a meaningful contribution to the world around us is important for our sense of wellbeing, and it's more important than

ever to create accessible ways for people of all ages to give back to their community. Housing can be part of building reciprocity into community relationships by developing intergenerational projects that are equally beneficial for older and younger people, and by encouraging more partnerships between youth organisations and older people's projects. The pandemic has been disempowering for many older people who have been shielding, or relying more than usual on the support of others. It's imperative that we find new ways to encourage and value older people's contributions going forward.

**Innovation:** We've seen that it is possible to nurture new and existing intergenerational relationships during lockdown, and the sector is showing great creativity in doing so. Continued innovation will be required as physical distancing and safety measures suggest it won't be easy to do in-person intergenerational work for some time. Collaboration across the Housing sector can help share ideas that are working, and join up initiatives that are happening organically on the ground.





Image courtesy of South Yorkshire Housing Association

**Grief and deprivation:** The country is sadly likely to see further widespread suffering, with people experiencing grief, unemployment, increases in poverty and challenges readjusting to life after lockdown. Social landlords have an opportunity to lead the way in a compassionate response, finding practical ways to support tenants of all ages coming through this crisis and recognising the longer term impact on health and wellbeing. There is a wealth of experience and resilience among older generations that can be shared, and investing in intergenerational relationships can be one way to help people through this period of pain and recovery.

**Revitalised community life:** Housing as a sector is uniquely placed to transform increased engagement in the local community from emergency response to ongoing community life. By listening to what people care about at a local level, and providing volunteering opportunities, spaces and programmes from community gardens to digital hubs, Housing can help create the conditions for the intergenerational relationships we've seen emerge in the community response to Covid-19 to continue to grow as part of thriving community life.

“These last few weeks have tested us all, individually and as a society, and have revealed the importance of our sense of place. We have never relied more heavily on our localities, and the intergenerational nature of our neighbourhoods has played a significant role in creating mutual aid and support networks.

It is remarkable to see so many people helping each other out in new ways, and sustaining this sense of community spirit should be at the heart of our rebuilding plans going forward. The Housing sector can play an important part in this and can help to drive forward initiatives that create age friendly neighbourhoods.

A huge thank you to everyone who has contributed to this report, with a special thanks to Charlotte and Laura whose passion for intergenerational, connected communities has led to this coming together so quickly. We hope that the case studies can inspire new ways of thinking in our communities and that the recommendations can drive us to work together to achieve greater impact as we emerge from the pandemic.”

Sarah Mitton, Age Friendly Communities Manager, Clarion Futures

# AN INTERGENERATIONAL RECOVERY: HOW HOUSING CAN HELP

As the country recovers from Covid-19, the Housing sector has an opportunity to come together to create the conditions for intergenerational relationships to flourish and to shape positive narratives as part of the public policy environment.

**Shaping the narrative:** With a national platform, voices across the Housing sector can help tell stories of intergenerational solidarity and celebrate relationships and mutual support between people of different ages. Narratives that pit the needs of one age group against another can deepen existing divides, and shift focus away from shared concerns for social justice and community priorities. While it's important to address age-specific issues and inequalities, we should avoid the rhetoric of a zero-sum game. Housing can lead the way by using these unifying narratives in their contact with tenants, external communications and participation in wider campaigns.

**Supporting intergenerational projects:** As a major investor in communities, the Housing sector has an opportunity to

embed intergenerational projects during the recovery phase. Housing Associations can commission and deliver intergenerational projects and organisations to help bring people back together after a period of distancing. Equally, they can support initiatives that work with people of all ages without a specific intergenerational aim, which create the conditions for natural intergenerational relationships to flourish.

**Creating age friendly communities:** Housing Associations play a significant role in placemaking and building communities. In this, there are opportunities to choose policies that are age friendly, i.e. consider the needs of people of all ages (genuinely age friendly policies include the whole life course, not just older age). Whether it is creating physical spaces that are accessible, enjoyable and welcoming to all ages, building new homes to HAPPI standards,<sup>4</sup> or offering inclusive employment and digital training, Housing can be a driving force behind making our neighbourhoods work better for people of all ages.

**Shaping a narrative that unites generations**



**Supporting intergenerational projects**



**Creating age friendly communities**



# Have your say: contribute to the next phase of the project

This report has only captured a tiny fraction of the creativity and ways in which intergenerational connections are continuing and even growing through this turbulent period.

We want to hear about projects or initiatives in your community that have been bringing people together despite the need for physical distancing.

You can enter the information on this [online form](#) until the start of July, when we will

draw together the responses we've received and publish them as an appendix to the report.

If you'd like more information about contributing, have any questions about the report, or want to continue the conversation in any way please get in touch:

E: [hello@incommonliving.com](mailto:hello@incommonliving.com)

W: [www.incommonliving.com](http://www.incommonliving.com)

T: [@incommonlondon](https://twitter.com/incommonlondon)

## QUESTIONS FOR THE SUBMISSION

- What project/initiative can you tell us about?
- How does this project connect people of different ages?
- How has this project been affected by Covid-19?
- What challenges has this project faced whilst sustaining intergenerational connections at a time of crisis and what has been learnt from this?
- What opportunities are there for the project going forward?

### References:

<sup>1</sup> E.g. APPG report on Social Integration, *Healing the Generational Divide: Interim report into intergenerational connection*, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> [www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/almost-a-quarter-of-adults-living-under-lockdown-in-the-uk-have-experienced-loneliness](http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/almost-a-quarter-of-adults-living-under-lockdown-in-the-uk-have-experienced-loneliness)

<sup>3</sup> See also APPG report on Social Integration, *Social Connection in the COVID-19 Crisis*, 2020

<sup>4</sup> HAPPI (Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation) produces design standards for age friendly housing, see: [www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design-building/HAPPI/](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design-building/HAPPI/)

# Thanks and acknowledgements

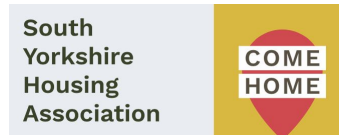
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THE CARES FAMILY



Healthy Generations



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Image courtesy of Friend In Deed (pre-Covid-19)



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