

INTERGEN

A PROJECT FOR BRINGING OLDER
VOLUNTEERS INTO SCHOOLS

EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR
1999-2000

Final Report
NOVEMBER 2000

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Executive Summary

- 1.1 INTERGEN is the name of a voluntary project which recruits people over the age of 60 to help in schools. This report describes the pilot INTERGEN project. The evaluation focuses on the first year in which volunteers went into schools.
- 1.2 The overall aims of the project were to reduce the social isolation of older people, increase their engagement in the community, to break down intergenerational stereotypes and bring young and older people closer together.
- 1.3 The project was limited to one area in Sale, and to three schools in this area. The first of these schools to be recruited was the secondary school, and once their commitment to the project was assured, steps were taken to recruit feeder primary schools.
- 1.4 A Steering Group was established, comprising staff from the three schools, and members of local agencies and organisations which could be expected to have an interest in the project.
- 1.5 A voluntary Co-ordinator was appointed to liaise with the schools and the volunteers, to oversee the processes of recruitment, selection and induction, to help with profile raising and to keep records of project activities. The Co-ordinator was also a member of the Steering Group.
- 1.6 The procedure for selecting volunteers was first to approach the schools and find out what they wanted the volunteers would do. These requirements were then matched to the skills of the volunteers, and to their willingness to carry out the tasks.
- 1.7 By September 1999, thirteen volunteers had been selected and were introduced to the schools. These volunteers carried out a variety of tasks, including individual work with readers, developing a garden, helping with geography and art teaching, accompanying a class on a fieldwork week, assisting with choir practices, and working behind the scenes in IT and library departments.
- 1.8 During the year, two volunteers left the project and one joined. All those still working in July 2000 were keen to carry on once the new school year began.
- 1.9 During the operational year the Steering Group met once a term. The volunteers were brought together four times altogether, once for the Induction meeting in September 1999, and then socially at the end of the winter, spring and summer terms.
- 1.10 The project was funded by donations and small local grants, which covered expenses. Bids were made to secure larger funds but these

were not successful. An application for charitable status was made to the Charities Commission in the summer of 2000

1.11 An evaluation of the project was carried out, using observations, interviews with volunteers, Steering Group members and children, and questionnaires. The evaluation came to the following conclusions:

- The schools found the project beneficial in that it helped them think about visitors' needs and enabled children to benefit from the different approach of an older person. They valued the opportunities to provide some individual adult attention for the children, and found that the work of the volunteers helped with the various workloads of the teachers and departments. They appreciated having the different skills of the volunteers to support various aspects of the teaching and behind the scenes work.
- The primary children were reported to have found the work of the volunteers beneficial in that it gave them someone to talk to and work with individually. They also benefited from the various skills the volunteers brought, such as geography, gardening and playing the piano.
- The secondary school children found the work of the volunteer who worked with them beneficial since they were able to relate to him differently from the way they related to teachers. They enjoyed the individual relaxed attention. They also appreciated his skill and felt they learned from him.
- The work done in the year before the project became operational took time but secured a set of procedures and safeguards which allowed the project to run smoothly during its first year.
- The role of the Co-ordinator was created during this first year by the Steering Group, who devised the job description, and the incumbent, who put it into practice. Some aspects of the role were unclear, and a review of the tasks involved and the division of responsibilities between the Co-ordinator and the Steering Group is recommended
- The qualitative evaluation methodology proved adequate for the task of collecting data on this project, and reporting it. However, it was not possible to identify positive changes in "social capital" factors, such as social inclusion, partly because the numbers were so small, and partly because the volunteers as a group were engaged in the community at a fairly high level before they began the project.

1.12 Overall the first year of the project can be judged successful in terms of

- enabling older people to increase their sense of self-worth by contributing to the lives of younger people
- enabling the skills and knowledge of older people to be used effectively to enhance and enrich the learning environments of children.

In addition it provided older people with first-hand knowledge of younger people, school organisation and modern education