alive

Lighting up later life

Online intergenerational activities

A guide for running activities online with care homes and young people

Alive's aims

Alive is a charity dedicated to improving the quality of life of older people and their carers.

Our vision
A world where older people live lives full of value, meaning and connection.

Our mission
To prioritise health and wellbeing into later life.

Alive:

- **Engages older people creatively through meaningful activity**
- **Trains and supporting carers to enrich the lives of older people**
- **Reduces older people's social isolation by connecting them to their local communities**
- **Speaks up for the rights of older people to those with the power to improve their lives.**

Our values

User-led: We strive to ensure our work meets the needs and aspirations of the older people we serve. We consult regularly with older people and develop and deliver projects and activity in line with their wishes and views.

Dedicated: We deliver, we train, we connect, we influence. We are a group of people who never give up and are fully committed to improving the quality of life of older people.

Adventurous: We are a charity who likes to try and test new approaches, new partnerships, new ways of working and aren't afraid of making mistakes and taking risks.

Community focused
We fully understand the value of belonging and work hard to connect older people to their communities – wherever that may be. We value our own community and strive to create an inclusive and supportive environment amongst our staff, volunteers, and colleagues.

Adaptable: We constantly review, evaluate and adapt our work to ensure it is meeting the needs of those we serve. We are quick to change and find new ways of working when needed.

Compassionate: We love what we do, and who we work with. We are passionate about improving the quality of life of older people in whatever way we can.

Collaborative: We believe in working with others. We make more of an impact when we work together.

Online Intergenerational Activity – A 'How To' guide

Alive have been running intergenerational activity sessions linking care homes with young people since 2012. Most recently this has been through the Access All Ages project, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. The coronavirus pandemic meant we had to adapt to keep those intergenerational connections going, so just like many people, we turned to technology. We started a new way of delivering activity sessions – online over Zoom.

This free guide is intended to share our learnings from this shift in delivery, and give both care homes and schools some key information and top tips to get started connecting online.

Intergenerational Activity - why do it?

Intergenerational activities are social engagements and interactions, bringing together younger and older generations for a common purpose. When we can't bring everyone together in one room, these interactions can move online successfully, with the right equipment and ideas. All activities should be designed to be inclusive, fun, encourage interaction and build connections.

There are many benefits of intergenerational activity, for both older and younger generations:

- Improves social bonds and solidarity between young and old, reducing levels of social isolation.

- Improved wellbeing, the effect of an activity session with young people has been shown to positively impact the mood of some residents and pupils for the rest of the day, if not longer.

- Provides the opportunity to discover so much from each other's lives, learn new things and see the world from another perspective.

- Leads to richer everyday experiences and boosts confidence and self-esteem, through feeling valued by others.

- Challenges the preconceptions about the opposite generation and counteract negative stereotypes and behaviour.

- Leads to more people being active citizens in their community.

- It provides the opportunity to do fun activities, whilst interacting and making new friends!

Overall guidelines

There are some overarching guidelines and principles to take into account when running intergenerational activities.

- Be responsive to the interests of older people and pupils. Participants' interests should shape the content and activities, rather than having activities done 'at' them. This ensures engagement and a meaningful activity session.

- Consider the regularity of sessions – keep activities to at least once a month if not more frequently. Regular contact between both groups allows participants to get to know each other more, and as such encourages a strong, long-lasting, connection.

- Age group of participants – although you obviously want people of any age to connect with other generations in their community, there are differences that become even more apparent in an online activity. Younger children (nursery – Year 2) will only really be able to concentrate in an online session for half an hour maximum. Older residents may also feel fatigued with on screen activity, we would recommend an activity session should last 45minutes – 1 hour.

- Safeguarding – make sure you receive training on safeguarding vulnerable adults and children before starting any activity. Both parties should have their own up to date safeguarding policies, including digital activity. This is particularly important, as online activity sessions are a relatively new area for intergenerational linking. There are many safeguarding courses available, for example through your local County Council or the NSPCC. More information on digital safeguarding can be found here – **https://www.thecatalyst.org.uk/resource-articles/digisafe-digital-safeguarding-guide#**

- At least one member of staff should be present in the room and on the Zoom call at all times. If you are using other online platforms to share photos of videos, these should be moderated by a member of staff.

Online Sessions – Practicalities to consider

Running an activity session online obviously has different requirements and practicalities to bear in mind before you start delivery.

Technical Equipment

How good is your internet connection?

A steady internet connection is a fundamental requirement of successful online activity. Consider your broadband speed and wifi connections. There are a few easy steps you can take to troubleshoot a poor internet connection:

Run a speed test on your internet

- **https://www.speedtest.net/**

Research the best internet for your area

- **BT Lines VS Virgin Lines**
- **https://www.cable.co.uk/broadband/check-my-area/**

A trial of your tech equipment will help you identify any potential problems too, some rooms in your home/school may have a stronger connection. Options to increase your wifi include upgrading your router, buying a signal booster to increase signal throughout the home, or using a mobile network. You can find your best option for a mobile network here – **https://www.signalchecker.co.uk/**

What hardware do you need?

Are you planning to use a laptop or tablet for your activity session? To ensure everyone can see the screen, you can display the tablet or laptop screen onto a tv, or use a projector. Laptops, tablets and phones will use the same cable to connect to a tv monitor, but phones and tablets will need to use an extra adapter. Different phones will have different adapters, Apple Connectors, Micro USB or USB C.

Different ages of laptops and televisions will need different types of video cables to connect to your tv:

- **Newer technology will use HDMI Cables**

- **Older technology will use VGA Cables**

If you have one HDMI port and one VGA port you will have to use an adapter.

Cameras and Microphones

When you trial your technology in an online call before activity sessions start, you will be able to see if your camera or microphone do not have a clear picture or sound. Although tablets and laptops have both built-in, sometimes they are poor quality, especially if you are projecting the screen up onto a tv.

Purchasing a separate webcam, connected by a USB cable to your laptop, is an easy fix and they often have a microphone included too.

When you have groups of pupils and older residents, an inbuilt microphone is not necessarily sensitive enough to pick up the voices of everyone in the room. You will find that staff at either end will then end up repeating back to the participants what has been said, interrupting the natural flow of a conversation.

There are two approaches to fixing this problem, depending on whether you are able to purchase extra equipment.

- Using a separate microphone, connected via Bluetooth, means staff can move around the room and ensure everyone's voice is heard.

- Another option is for the young people to take turns approaching and speaking nearer the laptop/tablet. This encourages turn-taking which works very well in an online activity anyway. This may not be appropriate for older people though, or anyone with mobility issues.

If you are not able to project the screen onto a larger tv, it is also worth considering using a Bluetooth speaker linked to your laptop or tablet. This will be easier for people who are hard of hearing, and avoid staff repeating information back to participants.

Using Zoom

There are a few different platforms you can use for online activity. They each have their benefits but this guide will only be looking at Zoom. Alive uses this software to deliver our sessions, so are able to share our learnings from this. There are also other benefits to using Zoom:

- **During lockdown it has become the most popular and secure video calling software.**

- **It offers the best functionality.**

- **It works the best with poor internet connections.**

- **It is easy to use.**

It can be downloaded as an app on tablets and phones, and downloaded on laptops through the following link – **https://zoom.us/download**

You do not need a Zoom account to just join an activity session (termed as a 'Meeting' on Zoom) – all your participants will need is a hyperlink to click on to access the meeting. This is generated by Zoom, when a meeting is created by the organiser, and can be sent out to participants. Organisers have the option of also using a waiting room or passcode for people to be able to enter the meeting, to increase security.

You may need to check or adjust your settings on Zoom if you are using an external webcam or microphone.

Ensure you are familiar with using the software before starting activity online. There are a range of easy to use guides to using Zoom available here – **https://support. zoom.us/hc/en-us**

How many people should take part?

With any intergenerational activity sessions, we would advise no more than 6-8 participants from each group take part, but group size becomes even more important in an online session.

If you don't have individual tablets, then often there are too many participants to all fit on the screen. Staff will need to move the laptop/tablet around in order to see everyone's face. As well as increasing engagement, this acts as a reminder to a Facilitator and to all participants that there are more people who can see and hear them, than they can see on their own screen.

If you have the equipment available, another solution to this would be for each setting to have two technical devices on the Zoom call - one big screen for the incoming images and a smaller 'roving' screen on a tablet, which could be passed around for individual interactions.

Activities

It is important that online activities are relevant and enjoyable for both the older and younger people. It is recommended that before sessions begin you spend some time finding out about the participant's lives, interests and what they would enjoy doing together.

Plan and agree your session activities in advance, so staff know what to expect and can make any preparations required.

Some suggestions for **activity sessions that work well** online are:

- **Show & Tell** - using objects is a great conversation starter and lovely way to get to know someone's identity. The more the residents and young people connect on an individual level, the stronger their relationship to each other will be long-term.

- **Visual activities or games with actions** – if the sound drops out momentarily it doesn't affect the activity as much.

- **Guessing games** - 'what / who am I', quizzes, or drawing games, all enable joint participation

- **Simple interactive games like Bingo.** There are many variations, or ways you could make this more relevant to your participants too.

- **Themes** – tie sessions in with class activities/care home events, for example, studying the Romans or VE Day.

- **Using the 'Share screen' function in Zoom** to show both groups a photograph that prompts sharing stories or life experiences.

- **Fancy dress and props!** Anything to liven up what the participants can see onscreen. This can be as simple as Christmas jumpers, or as complicated as making your own Viking helmet to wear! Go with the flow and theme of activities.

What doesn't work?

- **Music and singing as a group** – involving participants in joint singing or playing music is difficult on Zoom or any other online platforms. There are likely to be sound delays due to the difference in each participants internet connection. Unless you mute everyone, they will hear music at slightly different times and there is likely to be an echo.

- **Attempting to engage with the whole group in a conversation or discussion** - people will talk over each other, or the quieter voices in the room don't get heard. Also a webcam may not have everyone in shot. Conversation and communication works better when done with individuals taking turns.

Top Tips

✓ Communicate regularly with your partner school or care home. It is hugely beneficial to meet with them online prior to activities starting. This allows you to get to know each other, discuss session expectations, and trial the technology. Once regular activities begin, keep in regular contact in between the online sessions, to maintain a strong link and clear communication. Everyone should have the same vision for the session outcomes.

✓ For ongoing activity sessions, make sure you meet regularly online, once a month as a minimum. If you are unable to meet one month, there are other ways to connect – through sending artwork, letters, videos or messages to each other, for example. There is the option to do this digitally, though secure sharing sites such as Seesaw.

✓ Have a structure to sessions, although keep it flexible. Being directed by the participants and letting people go off on tangents can often lead to unexpected outcomes and fun interactions.

✓ Staff members should actively take part in the session, they will learn more about the participants and increase their understanding of both age groups.

✓ Run a 'Get to know you' activity prior to sessions starting online, then participants are able to put a face to a name and know something about each person.

✓ Take notes about the participants for reference. Try and find out as much as you can about them and you can better personalise the interaction. Everyone loves it when people remember things about them, children and care home residents are no exception.

✔ Run sessions in rooms that are quiet and free from distractions

✔ Have a back up plan for your session, e.g. a visual game or song with actions, if technical difficulties arrive and you are waiting for things to be sorted out.

✔ Try to choose residents who do not have much social contact, online or otherwise, and will be able to meaningfully engage in the activity.

✔ Don't worry if exactly the same residents or young people can't attend each activity, the emphasis is on allowing connections between the generations to occur in the first place.

✔ Ask for feedback from everyone involved. It'll make for better sessions in the future.

Case Study

Harnham Croft Care Home and Harnham Infants School

Residents at Harnham Croft care home in Salisbury partnered with pupils in Year One at Harnham Infants School as part of Alive's Access All Ages project.

The pupils and residents formed a lovely bond, visiting each other every month for a variety of activities together. However, when the coronavirus pandemic began and lockdowns and school closures were introduced, they had to suspend their visits. As the first lockdown restrictions began to ease and schools re-opened in September 2020, this partnership were the first to re-start sessions online. As they were the first partnership to take part in this new form of delivery, there was a great deal of learning as we go from everyone, but always with positivity and enthusiasm for the next session.

Through ongoing consultations with both parties, we found a flexible approach of using live online activity sessions over Zoom, in addition to some hands-on practical activities in between, has allowed everyone to reconnect again. In addition to seeing each other on screen, they have also collaborated on shared art activities, such as creating a mural for Remembrance Day. They therefore have a mix of planned practical activities, and 'in the moment' online activities.

Given the children's young age, their concentration span for online sessions is around 30 minutes. Feedback from the teacher highlighted that the pupils would like to be in contact with the residents more frequently than once a month, now their sessions are shorter.

We started using the online platform 'Seesaw' as a way for the pupils and residents to securely send messages, photos or videos to each other in between sessions. During lockdown some schools started using platforms such as Seesaw to share classwork, so being able to use this technology in this project has been a really positive addition.

Teaching and care staff send photos of the craft activities they have been doing, usually themed around events at the school or care home. During the second school closure in 2021, every pupil in the year group sent a video or photo to the residents over Seesaw, with songs, drawings or messages to keep people's spirits up.

Despite the pandemic and it's challenges, through adapting and trying a new approach the residents and pupils are now able to see each other on-screen, reconnect, share their experiences, play games and just have a lot of fun again!

"

The session was wonderful. All the children were so happy to reconnect with the home and had lots of fun, they haven't stopped talking about it. You've been in our hearts and our prayers throughout lockdown and we've really missed seeing everyone.

- Class teacher

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