



# Activity Agreements Opportunities for All



## Intergenerational Initiatives

Activity Agreements in Highland are giving young people the opportunity to develop their skills and gain confidence and experience, through participation in projects which bring together people of different generations.

Intergenerational initiatives recognise the importance of building mutually positive relationships between the generations and promote the positive contribution that young people make. This study highlights two examples, the YMCA, *Grantown On Spey* and *The Meeting Place* in Culloden.

Grantown On Spey YMCA delivers a range of activities and projects for the community and works with young people through open youth provision, one-to-one support and 16+ transition work through schools. Young people often come to the YMCA to undertake their Activity Agreement because of the relationship that has already been established with the centre and Co-ordinator Dan Cottam.

Dan takes a needs-led approach to supporting young people undertaking their Activity Agreement with the YMCA. Young people are encouraged to identify an area of interest and supported to develop this into something that benefits the YMCA and the wider community. For example, recently three young people took part in a six-week cookery course working alongside a chef and a youth worker. One of the participants was a young mum who wanted to improve her skills in cooking for her family. The youth worker brought valuable intergenerational learning for this young woman, sharing her own experience of being a mum in the community. The course culminated in the young people hosting a community lunch event, where they were able to demonstrate their skills to the local community.

Another group of young people produced a vintage fashion show, in partnership with Highland Hospice, who run a charity shop in the town. The young participants increased their confidence through approaching local employers to secure clothes, raffle prizes and display their posters. Dan says *"This turned into a real community project, to raise funds for the Hospice. The young people worked alongside around 50 volunteers, from different generations, who each had a skill to share with the young people. The event was a huge success which had a marked impact on the young peoples' confidence and sense of achievement, on top of the skills they had gained. Involving young people in activities which allow them to interact with the community brings opportunities and an improved sense of community identity, vital in such rural locations"*. This project led to one of the young people progressing to volunteer at the hospice shop where they are gaining experience and developing their interpersonal skills.

Dan encourages young people in this rural community to explore such opportunities for progression, through local and family contacts. One young person progressed to a volunteering role with the local bowling club after his granddad supported him to enquire about the possibility. New opportunities to build links with rural communities in the Highlands are continually sought by Dan and the Activity Agreement Co-ordinator Matthew MacIver. For example, volunteers at the Strathspey Railway are keen to take part in intergenerational activities, passing on their engineering skills to local young people.

Alongside the project work, Dan provides time and space for young people time to plan for the future. *"Most of the young people who are on an Activity Agreement here do not know what they want to do with their lives or don't know what their next step should be. It's crucial that our Activity Agreement support gives them the chance to reflect on the employability skills they have gained and plan their next steps"*. Dan provides individual time with young people to help them work on their CV and explore options.

*The Meeting Place* in Culloden supports adults with additional support needs to develop their skills in IT, multimedia and 'e' inclusion. The adults are supported by a team of peer mentors, young people who have an interest in sharing existing skills in this area and strengths such as patience and respect. Through this approach, the peer mentors develop new and transferable skills. Peer mentors are involved in the general running of the centre, including decision making, which reflects the value placed upon them. There is a relationship of mutual respect between the peer mentors and staff, each recognising the mutual benefits of this initiative. Senior peer mentor Jade (would be better if we could attribute this to/get a quote from Shannon) says *"Coming here you feel part of something and you are treated with respect. Everyone is really."*

The peer mentors experience a working environment where they are given responsibilities and also expected to take responsibility for their own timekeeping and attendance. Jade recognises this; *"while we are learning and gaining lots of experience, we are having a taste of working life as we prepare ourselves for moving on"*.

Young people are supported to recognise their own development, through support sessions as a group and individually with the project co-ordinator. This is recorded in detail to allow each individual to capture the skills developed through becoming a peer mentor. This record has also enabled the peer mentors to log volunteering hours with the

*Saltire Awards* scheme and achieve certificates in recognition of their volunteering.

Jade and Shannon undertook a peer mentor role as part of their Activity Agreement. The girls come to *The Meeting Place* three days a week. Both are dedicated and passionate about their roles. Jade began her Activity Agreement needing to improve her confidence and experience. She was interested in working in a helping role but wasn't ready for employment or formal learning. Shannon had disengaged from college and was looking for an informal route to develop her confidence, skills and experience. Both girls feel that, if not for their Activity Agreement, they would likely be sitting at home.

Through participation in such intergenerational activities Jade and Shannon have gained confidence, shared their existing skills and developed new skills. Shannon reflects; "*The learners teach me to be patient. You learn a lot about yourself from working with adults who need more understanding*". They have recently been given the task of preparing and delivering a presentation about their role to local high school pupils. This is something they would never have been able to do before. Young people at *The Meeting Place* were recognised for their contribution in working alongside adult learners in the Highland Third Sector Partnership Awards 2013, winning the Intergenerational Initiative award.

*The Meeting Place* gives peer mentors opportunities for progression and to combine their outside interests. Jade has been recognised for her skills in working with adults and has become a senior mentor, taking on increased responsibilities. She is currently being supported to prepare for progression on to employment in a new branch of *The Meeting Place* due to open soon. Shannon is a keen photographer and has been working with a professional photographer as part of her Activity Agreement, to develop her skills and put together a portfolio. She is able to combine her skills and interest in photography with her volunteering. Shannon says "*coming to the meeting place gives me a sense of achievement. Working with the adults here feels good. The best part of coming here is the people. I still don't know what I want to do with my future but the experience here has given me ideas*". Shannon is currently being supported by her Trusted Professional to prepare for her next steps.