Genesis Community: Knitty Noras

Genesis Community runs Knitty Noras workshops in its sheltered housing schemes during which residents get together to chat and knit. The project has been benefiting the wider community since 2007. Knitty Noras began by knitting almost 1,000 blankets for premature babies at local Chase Farm and Barnet hospitals. Later they were involved in the Hats for Africa Campaign, knitted Teddies for Tragedy, and then knitted the biggest stocking in the world, putting them in the Guinness Book of Records. Knitty Noras have visited Scotts Primary School and taught the children to knit. Each child knitted a colourful square, which Knitty Noras knitted together into a blanket for the school’s sickroom. Headteacher, Simon Abeledo, said, “We have some children who find it difficult to communicate with peers and others, and would not consider knitting. And yet there they were, giving grand tours of the school [to the Knitty Noras], chatting away and learning new skills.” The Knitty Noras find their work fulfilling. Sylvia Fox, a Knitty Nora, says, “It is fun to knit together and it also helps the joints in our hands. Knowing that the hospitals and other people are benefiting from our hobby is very rewarding.” Knitty Noras intends to continue its charitable work and is always on the lookout for new initiatives to support.

Judges comments

“Who would have thought that knitting could influence international aid work? With ‘Knitty Noras’ it’s win-win-win. Older people are happier and healthier for taking part in communal knitting. Their creations are put to good use or sold for charity. And this can happen in any part of the country with minimal start-up costs.”

“Many elderly women knit, and I remember some of my aged aunts always surrounded by endless coloured squares for some blanket or other. However, the products they make such as hats for premature babies etc are meeting an immediate need, so there is a real purpose in what they do. Knitting keeps hands active, can be done at an individual’s own pace and the work they do in schools helps break down the barriers. Again, very practical, clearly led by the Knitty Noras themselves and just sounds fun.”
Runners-up

Family Housing Association (Wales): Hazel Court Community Project

Hazel Court is a housing and extra care scheme where residents are involved in many different activities including art classes, book groups, creative writing classes, French and Italian conversation, digital media, craft and sewing, martial arts, chair exercises, pilates, yoga, tai chi, belly dancing and singing. Residents have also come together to work on larger projects. In the winter of 2008/2009, with the help of a local artist, the residents made a mosaic to decorate the entrance to Hazel Court. Some of the residents’ reminiscences have been recorded for a video which has been shown at the National Waterfront Museum, the Ceredigion Museum, and at the scheme’s own Community Day & Exhibition. The choir has 25 regular members and has performed in public twice. Hazel Court has a library which is run entirely by resident volunteers. The varied work of the Community Project has a range of beneficial effects. The residents have fun, feel valued and useful, acquire new skills, and become involved in an active community. Mrs P says that living at Hazel Court is like “always being on holiday”. Mrs F, another tenant, says, “There is so much going on at Hazel Court. It was the best thing we ever did moving here.” The project plans to develop more opportunities for residents to access learning and to interact with young people. At the moment they are looking for funding to start another large-scale art project.

Judges comments

“This really involves the local community which helps to break down barriers between those in residential care, and those still living on their own. I particularly liked how what could have been one off events have grown and developed such as the choir…”

“Drawing the community into Hazel Court to plan events, projects etc, also makes less of a division between ‘them and us’. Above all, it has clearly developed from users own preferences and ideas. If a resident can be quoted as saying it is ‘like always being on holiday’ it is an enormous tribute to Hazel Court.”

Sanctuary Housing: Smiles in the Sun

At the Rosary — a nursing home with a specialist dementia unit — residents enjoy a sensory garden and spending time with pets. The project began when each resident was given a sunflower seed to plant in a pot. These were put into a greenhouse along with some vegetable seedlings. Later in the year, the seedlings were transplanted to a vegetable patch guarded by a scarecrow. The residents also enjoy the company of five chickens, five rabbits and two guinea pigs. The pets are regularly taken around the care home to allow residents to stroke them. The staff say that the look on a resident’s face
when they see rabbit or a guinea pig is very rewarding. The residents have been involved with the development of the vegetable patch and greenhouse, painting fences and making the scarecrow. The staff encourage the residents to go out for a walk in the sensory garden as often as possible. Sometimes residents dip a toe into a paddling pool and the staff make sure that no one goes too long without getting a bit of fresh air. There are plans to get more animals – perhaps a donkey. There are also plans to develop the sensory garden by planting more plants with strong scents and by adding more objects to the garden for the residents to touch and feel.

**Judges comments**

“A good practical project which encourages residents to go outside, see the small pets and play with them. Also, letting residents ‘paddle’ again encourages them to enjoy some of the sensations we all take for granted. Although it is still fairly new, it has great potential.”

---

**Age Concern Edinburgh Information Technology: Moose in the Hoose**

The Moose in the Hoose project in Edinburgh helps older people to stay in touch with family and friends by introducing them to the internet and email. The project is run by Age Concern at six care homes and one day centre. Tuition and guidance is given by a team of volunteers who are all over 50 themselves. One of the internet’s greatest benefits for older people is the ability to stay in meaningful contact with family members who live abroad. It can be easier for some people to have a decent conversation on a web cam than it is over the phone. For people who have difficulty hearing, a conversation on a web cam where you can see who you are talking to and where you have the help of a volunteer who can repeat the bits you missed can invaluably improve relationships with far away friends and family members. For those friends and family members, it is reassuring to see that their friend or family member is well. Translation services have supported the project to help Pakistani older people. The teaching is given in English as usual and then translated into Urdu. The project hopes to create opportunities for contact between generations by training volunteers from all age groups. There are plans to develop training for specialist areas such as working with people with dementia, and visual and hearing impairments.

**Judges comments**

“More than 6 million people over the age of 65 have never used the internet. All kinds of projects exist now to bring that figure down. ‘Moose in the Hoose’ emphasises older people learning from other older people including in BME communities. The project is built on the simple idea of being motivated and helped by people like you. The impact could be big.”
The Frames of Mind project worked with four older people with dementia to make Life History video packages that express some important things about what defines their lives. The videos represent not only the past experience of these people, but how that experience shapes them and their preferences to this day. With the help of the animation company, Salmagundi, the four participants took lead roles in authoring their own videos, making use of animation, photos, narration, personal belongings and art materials. As well as being beneficial for the wellbeing of the person with dementia, the video is useful when the person’s accommodation changes and introductions need to be made with new staff and carers. The four participants were Doug, Sara, Juan and Joan. Doug talked about his youth and, in particular, about his dog, Major. Sara drew in sand to recount a journey she had made across the Sahara. Juan talked about his early adulthood in Spain and Joan uses her doll collection to talk about children and her husband. The next stage is to create a package so that this project can be replicated across Housing 21’s dementia services.

Judges comments

“A seriousness of approach, a commitment to quality and an imaginative use of the arts mark this out. And it works in such a crucial area. Dementia lacks a clinical treatment and we hear atrocious stories of the inhumane way in which dementia patients are treated. While we wait for new treatments to come on stream, advances can be made in sufferers’ humane treatment and self-expression. ‘Frames of Mind’ does exactly that.”
Age Concern Exeter: Linking Voices

Linking Voices is a world music choir that gives older people new opportunities to make friends and to express themselves. The 46 regular members of the choir meet for two hours each week to sing mill workers songs, water fetching rounds, ancestral chants and chart-toppers. The organisers aim to help people who have few social contacts and who are at risk of becoming lonely and depressed. They make a particular effort to encourage men to come along to the choir meetings because isolated men can sometimes be reluctant to attend conventional day services. The choir members have an opportunity during the tea break to chat and arrange social activities. People have made friends through the choir and enjoy going to the cinema and the theatre together. One of the members is a 60 year-old ex-nurse with severe arthritis and mobility problems. She says, “It has changed my life. I really look forward to it and miss it so much when I can’t attend – it’s the companionship and friendship as well as the joy of singing that I enjoy.” At the moment, the organisers are trying to secure future funding for the project. There is a concert planned for November.

Anchor: Rookie Target Golf

At Bishops Court Sheltered Housing in Newcastle tenants play target golf using oversized clubs and oversized targets. The big golf clubs are easier for frail or arthritic hands to hold and the big targets are easier to hit. The group from the sheltered housing scheme test their skills at chipping and putting when they compete with teams from five other sheltered housing schemes. They also enjoy social activities connected to the golf and they make new friends. Recently, Bishops Court has developed a target golf league and competition has been fierce. The sport creates a feeling of belonging and the experience of being good at something helps the participants to gain confidence. The project’s central aim is for the participants to have fun. Bishops Court wants to develop the project by arranging more social activities to get as many people as possible involved in the league.
The Booth Centre: Booth Centre’s Over 50s Project

The Booth Centre’s Over 50s Project in Manchester helps older homeless people to keep active, make new friends and learn new skills. The Booth Centre is a day centre for homeless people and it acts as the base for the programme of activities. The group’s activities have included indoor curling, digital photography and a three day trip on a narrow boat. The seven people who took part in the canal trip gained helmsman’s qualifications. The group also has reminiscence sessions and these have led to their publishing a booklet called *My Memories*. The group’s photographs are also to be published in a forthcoming booklet. Other planned publications include a guide to free local museums and galleries, and a guide to scenic bus routes which they hope will encourage older people to make use of their free bus passes.

Volunteers notice the difference the project makes to older homeless people’s lives: “It’s great to see them gel as a group, to start to work together, to listen to each other, show respect for each other’s opinions and experiences, and to see them making friends. They have carried on these friendships outside of the sessions and you can see people becoming less isolated.”

The project was set up with funding from Help the Aged and it is now funded by the Lloyds TSB Foundation.

Central and Cecil: Dramatic Watercolour

The Dramatic Watercolour project took people from three sheltered housing schemes in Camden to Sir John Soane’s Museum. The residents visited exhibitions where they looked at Hogarth and Canaletto paintings, and afterwards they painted their own watercolours. Efforts were made by the project’s organisers to involve people who had not previously had much experience of going to galleries or painting.

The project has been the beginning of supportive friendships which have created more lively communities in the sheltered housing schemes. Friendships have been cemented in the conversations about history which naturally followed discussions about the pictures.

This project was part of the Adult Learning Partnership for Camden, which aims to engage people in new learning activities and improve access to informal learning for adults.

Later this year, the residents will be involved in the Big Draw. With the help of Sir John Soane’s Museum and using their new skills, they will create a collaborative piece of art.
Community Integrated Care: Carlingwark News

Carlingwark House is a residential care home run by CIC that produces a monthly newspaper which is put together by residents and staff. The newspaper contains memories, stories and poems from residents alongside recent news from the wider community. The stories in the paper help to open up conversation and people in the home realise that they have shared interests. Working on the paper and seeing it published give the residents a sense of belonging.

A recent edition had stories about New Year in Latvia and Germany. A woman also recounted the time her husband snuck into the French stands when Liverpool played St Etienne at Anfield. Previous features have included interviews with local councillors, and local journalists have visited the home to give advice to the residents and staff who write for the paper.

The Care Commission has taken this work on as a standard of good practice. The next stage is to get enough money together to print the newspaper in colour.

Community Network: Refugee phone groups

The Community Network uses telephone conferencing to help older refugees to make new friends and to build a new life in the UK. Many refugees have escaped persecution, torture and sexual violence only to become lonely when they arrive in this country. The aim of the project is to link Ethiopian people in London over the age of 50 who have escaped persecution and need help to rebuild their lives. Four groups of eight people have been set up and they speak for an hour each month. The discussions are conducted in Amharic and Tigrigna. Facilitators make sure that any group members who raise problems are directed towards appropriate support services. Some of the group members find that the calls greatly improve their wellbeing. Teklemariam Mengistu said, “Being an elderly refugee living on my own, nobody rings me, my door is always shut, and I feel totally isolated. After joining the telephone support group I am now able to converse with people who share common interests and values as me.” Sixteen more groups are to be set up this year and 26 next year. The scheme will be extended to the Somali community. Groups may also be set up for refugees dealing with specific problems, for example HIV/AIDS. Counsellors are being recruited to help set up a telephone support group for victims of torture who now suffer from anxiety and depression.
Gateshead Care Call, Community Based Services, Gateshead Council: Gateshead Community Empowerment through Digital Inclusion Project

The Gateshead Community Empowerment through Digital Inclusion Project helps residents at 25 sheltered housing schemes to learn how to use new technology. The project has installed wireless internet in the communal lounges of the sheltered schemes and it has purchased laptops for use by residents. Age Concern Gateshead supplied IT trainers to offer residents training and one-to-one support. Seventy-five per cent of the residents who went to the initial meetings returned for the courses. They were shown how online shopping can be useful for people with mobility issues, and how Skype and email can be used to stay in touch with family and friends. Sheltered scheme residents and pupils from local Ryton Comprehensive School were brought together to interact and to learn from each other. The courses have also provided an opportunity for residents to make friends. There are plans to extend the scheme to 11 more sheltered housing schemes. Gateshead Council, Age Concern, the Gateshead Housing Company and a private IT company have made a joint bid for funding from the Digital Participation Fund. If this bid is successful then they will be able to provide residents with more equipment and training. This will include using an easy-to-understand computer system called ‘alex’ consisting of clearly-labelled, one-click buttons which allow inexperienced users to quickly access common functions such as ‘web’, ‘email’, ‘office’ and ‘photo’.

Housing 21 Dementia Voice: Growing with Dementia

At Tresham Day Centre, Housing 21 Dementia Voice has helped service users to turn part of the garden into a vegetable patch. The service users plan which vegetables to plant. At the moment these include early potatoes, onions, salad crops, leeks, carrots, cucumbers, strawberries, courgette, cauliflowers, peppers and tomatoes. They then plan what to cook each week based on which of their crops are ready to eat. The choice of plants has to be ‘dementia friendly’: only plants that can be picked, prepared and eaten on the same day are grown. If crops are stored for too long, people are likely to forget having grown them. Service users meet monthly to make decisions and to allocate watering, weeding and other maintenance tasks. Growing vegetables helps service users to stay healthy and the involvement of local businesses and interest groups in the project provides an opportunity to connect with the wider community. The service users’ involvement managing the vegetable patch blurs the distinction between them and the staff. Some previously withdrawn people have become more engaged and are excited about the project. Two service users with experience of animal husbandry have been planning a chicken coop and run. They will be receiving advice from a local City Farm and soon the day centre will have its
own supply of fresh eggs. There is also a plan to start having open days so that produce can be sold to the local community.

**Midland Heart: Magic Moments**

Residents at Midland Heart’s extra care and sheltered housing schemes are offered the chance to experience exhilarating Magic Moments. The project took 130 people on helicopter flights which took in views of the castles at Warwick and at Kenilworth. Three hundred people have been taken to Albrighton Moat and Sensory Gardens where they fished for carp, played croquet and picnicked in landscaped gardens. Other residents have enjoyed canal boat trips, cruising to the Norwegian Fjords on the QE2 and a ride on the Orient Express’ Northern Belle. Trips to the West End, the seaside and the Ashes, and the experience of scuba diving, abseiling and looping-the-loop in an aeroplane have all been fun for residents who might usually spend a lot of time at home. Staying active helps residents to stay fitter and happier for longer. One 92 year-old woman looped-the-loop in a Slingsby aeroplane and later enjoyed telling her grandchildren about the experience. She said, “It’s a bit different to when I tell them I’ve been to the hairdressers and had a game of cards with the lady at the end of the corridor.” Magic Moments is also developing activities based in the schemes for people who don’t feel quite so adventurous. Some enthusiastic residents are being trained so that they can give support and encouragement to their peers.

**Orbit South: Sheltered Activity Scheme**

Orbit South runs a varied programme of events and activities for residents of nine sheltered housing schemes. Each scheme has held a Nintendo Wii competition. Residents matched skills at bowling, boxing and tennis until one was crowned Champion of Champions. Residents have also raised money for Children in Need by holding quizzes, cake sales and raffles. A tea dance that should have been an opportunity to unwind became a disco after indefatigable residents told the DJ to up the tempo. Each scheme has computers that allow residents to use Skype, email and buy things online. When a local MP came to visit, web cams were used to link up the schemes so that no one missed out. Residents stay fit with chair aerobics classes, and a plan to enter a forthcoming gardening competition should keep everybody active. Residents have made friends in other schemes and also with other older people in the local community. They have started suggesting their own ideas for events and some activities happen with minimal support from staff. Using Skype to contact far flung relatives for free has been a huge success in the schemes. There are plans to expand the available IT training. It is hoped that this will provide an opportunity for the residents to interact with young people.
**Places for People: Look at Me**

Look at Me is a photographic collaboration between female residents of Guildford Grange Extra Care scheme and photographer Monica Fernandez. Monica photographed the residents in settings and poses of the residents’ own choosing. They produced a set of ‘before and after’ photographs: the ‘before’ shots were simple, natural portraits capturing the women’s beauty; in the ‘after’ shots, make-up and costume were used to explore the contemporary pressure on age to conform to the ideal of youth. The photos make a serious point about this baleful trend but they are also very amusing, especially for the women themselves, their family and their friends. Under Monica’s guidance, the residents took their own photographs. These were used in an exhibition at the scheme. One of the residents is now a keen and competent digital photographer. The women were involved in the interviews for selecting a suitable photographer. The project was an opening for a great deal of discussion at the scheme, both about the project’s theme and the opportunity to do similar things in the future. The project is part of a larger piece of research by the University of Sheffield and next year there will be an exhibition of the photographs. The project might be extended to include a wider group of residents, staff and families. A future exhibition may also involve work by a writer. (Image copyright 2010 University of Sheffield. Please do not re-use without permission).

**Sanctuary Housing: Chalkwell Lodge**

The residents of Chalkwell Lodge, who all have enduring mental health issues, enjoy activities involving nature, animals, art and creativity. The supported housing scheme accommodates people whose needs cannot be met in mainstream housing because their mental health conditions leave them isolated and prone to self neglect. The residents tend vegetable patches and fruit trees. They hope to grow enough this year to set up a stall to raise money for their amenity fund. There are four chickens, a rabbit and a dog at the scheme. The residents felt that it was a great achievement when the chickens began to lay eggs. The scheme also has an art room where residents can draw quietly with support from staff. Their pictures are displayed around the scheme and this improves residents’ feeling of self worth. Thanks to these activities, the older residents of the scheme feel more motivated and more able to enjoy life. Many have had sustained periods of stable mental health. Watching the progress of the garden and the animals helps the residents to have hope for the future. There are plans to turn part of the garden into a small holding and to start keeping a pig. There are also plans to grow more fruit and vegetables as a way of improving the residents’ health at low cost.
**Sentinel Housing Association: Fun and Technology**

At Wickham Court sheltered housing, residents and local schoolchildren have been enjoying the benefits of technology together. Recycled IT equipment was bought inexpensively and now there are fortnightly IT sessions attended by residents and four schoolchildren. Residents who are not interested in learning about technology are allowed to drop in during these sessions to drink coffee and chat in a relaxed atmosphere. Family and friends send photographs which can be downloaded and printed, and the residents have learnt how to shop online. The children’s help has been very useful and the residents are now less fearful and more understanding of the younger generation. The project has been an opportunity for the residents to have fun, learn new skills and make new friends. There is a plan for the residents to teach the children about gardening. The residents will also be visiting the school in July to attend a ‘Silver Surfers’ event. It is hoped that the project will be made permanent. In the future the project will include more specific activities: for example, the residents will be tracing their family trees. There is also plan to elect a ‘Champion’ from the project who will visit other sheltered housing schemes to spread the word about the success of the project.

**The Wallace Collection: Out of the Frame**

Staff from the Wallace Collection visit day centres, care homes and sheltered housing schemes to show reproductions of paintings to older people who are unable to visit galleries themselves. They also offer ‘tea and tour’ sessions to older people who are able to travel to the Wallace Collection to see the original works.

The residents are usually shown the pictures in their communal lounge. The TV is turned off and residents are invited to talk about the pictures. They also ask questions about the pictures and sometimes the conversation drifts away from the artworks on to something more general. For people with dementia, the pictures can trigger a memory which provides an opportunity to reminisce. The residents are also given objects to handle and sometimes they try on replicas of garments depicted in the paintings. The pictures give the residents something unusual to talk about. The staff of the care homes say that they have found out more about the people they care for from the conversations which the pictures have stimulated.

Staff from the Collection have a plan to involve local schools. Exploring the theme of ‘time’, the older people and schoolchildren will be given a chance to examine the gallery’s collection of clocks.