



Written by
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Linking care homes with local schools

- Prepare thoroughly for a visit
- Work together on the day
- Value each person
- Enable connections
- Come together and end well
- Thank everyone and evaluate

Background

An Anna Chaplain is ideally placed in the community to create opportunities for young and old to meet across the generations in interactive projects involving churches, care homes and local schools. Residents and children alike feel energised and valued. Children enjoy showing residents what they have made, while residents become active participants as they share memories, bringing interest and joy into children's lives. Experiences described here are pre-pandemic, but as care homes open up, visits from groups of local children will be possible again, with careful risk assessments.

1. Prepare thoroughly for a visit to the care home by a group of pupils

Choose a theme with a catchy title that will appeal to both pupils and the care home community. Consider having a seasonal theme. Consult carefully with care home managers and teachers so that the end result captures everyone's imagination. One example is pupils work on creative projects and take their handiwork to show residents on the day; a project in a shoebox is easy for children to make and then show each resident, who might pop it on their lap. Other approaches might include dance, music or drama on the theme. Circulate detailed information about practical issues: the programme, venue, timings, risk assessments, permissions for photos, etc.

2. Work together on the day pupils visit the care home

On the day, arrive early and make last-minute checks. Give a warm welcome, speaking clearly, explaining what will happen. Make sure all participants (children, residents, care staff, teachers and relatives) are put at ease. Give everyone a name badge. Beforehand, ask one or two volunteers to be your eyes and ears, so any practical needs can be met quickly. Your original plan will change, probably several times – but all will be well if the time is led with gentle humour, a flexible approach and a supportive team.

3. Value each person and what they have to offer during the visit

Where children have brought art or craft work to show, interview each, listening and admiring what they have created. Most children can speak a few words confidently in public, but make it clear there is no pressure if this is not what they want to do. Afterwards, if they are happy, encourage the children to move round the room so each resident can see what the child has made up close and share their memories and stories. Some children and residents will need more support than others in starting a conversation.

4. Unearth treasure in enabling connections between pupils and residents

A project of the Anna Chaplaincy team in Alton was called Happy Returns; it celebrated everyone's birthday, inspired by the Queen's 90th. Year 6 children from a local primary school were invited by their teacher to make a model or sculpture of a birthday cake fit for a queen. Each child came up with their unique interpretation: cakes made of cardboard, paper and play dough. There was even a handbag cake! One was beautifully decorated with photos of the Queen, another with flags of the Commonwealth, another with the Union Jack. Residents shared stories of birthday memories from the war when relatives were away at the front, and sugar and other treats were rationed, each memory unique and often laced with wisdom and humour.

5. Come together and end well

On one visit in Alton, everyone was invited to sing 'Daisy Daisy', a song a resident loved and was easy for the children to pick up. Young and old alike joined in the singing with real pleasure. This was followed by the Lord's Prayer, before finally singing 'He's got the whole world in his hands', which pointed everyone heavenwards with a lightness of touch that didn't upset anyone there who was of another faith or none.

6. Thank everyone and evaluate

Afterwards, take time to thank all those who have played any kind of role, large or small. Care managers and school staff can be invited to review what happened so improvements can be made if there is appetite to come together again. Write up reflections from individual residents and children in their own words, including photos. This feedback can be used widely in the community in displays and articles: in church magazines, the care home newsletter or at school. In this way, even those who didn't attend can share in the pleasure that was experienced and some may be tempted to hold similar events in the future.

Further resources:

Care Home FaNS: Intergenerational Linking is a project of My Home Life England and The Linking Network that's linking together young people aged 5–14 with older people living in care homes:
myhomelife.org.uk/community-engagement/intergenerational-linking

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