



All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration

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Notes from Visit to South London – 20/07/2018

Present (APPG members)

- APPG Chair – Chuka Umunna MP

Present (others)

- One member of staff from the Chair's office
- Three members of staff from The Challenge (the Secretariat)
- Gavin Barlow, Artistic Director & Chief Executive, Meet Me at the Albany
- Cara McAleese, Programme Manager, Meet Me at the Albany
- Amari Harris, Artist and Storyteller, Meet Me at the Albany
- David Slater, Artistic Director, Entelechy Arts and the Albany
- Cllr David Gardner, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Greenwich Council
- Children and staff from Rachel McMillan Nursery School and members of the Meet Me elders group
- Alex Kenmure, Head of Business Development, Good Gym
- One participant in the Good Gym initiative (Jacqueline) and one older person who benefits from Good Gym (Gwynne)
- Rebecca Packwood, Chief Executive, Age Exchange
- David Savill, Artistic Director, Age Exchange

Session One: Meet Me at the Albany

- Since its founding a century ago, Rachel McMillan Nursery School has aimed to enhance the education of children through play – and now this ethos is driving the **intergenerational arts and storytelling activities** which are bringing different age groups together.
- We started by watching artist Amari Harris performing a story to the nursery children outside, with members of the Meet Me elders group joining in from their seats around the edge of the group. The story was a dynamic, engaging one, involving lots of action from the audience, such as hand movements and facial expressions, which provided the basis for the **children and older people to interact and communicate emotions and expressions**.
- This was one example of a story which has been put together by the children and older people together during **joint activity sessions** at the Albany Centre.

- Following the interactive story, the Meet Me elders group gathered in a circle to discuss with Chuka their thoughts on intergenerational connection, and how their experiences with younger children have fostered stronger bonds.
- Some of the older people present suggested that young people today are too preoccupied by **technology**, such as TVs and mobile phones, to spend meaningful time with others, including those of different generations.
- Some of the group spoke about the benefits that younger people can gain from talking to older generations. While younger people do not yet know what it's like to be old, older people know what it's like to be young, and have a wealth of experience to share.
- This year, children from Rachel McMillan Nursery School have visited the Meet Me elders group on a weekly basis, sometimes to play board games together, sometimes to put together a story.
- Members of staff from the nursery and Meet Me elders group said there was a need to expand intergenerational experiences within schools, as a mainstream aspect of education, but that there needs to be **more funding and capacity** to do this than there is at present.

Session Two: Good Gym

- Good Gym, founded in 2009, offers three kinds of options for members to **combine getting fit with doing good**. 'Mission Runs' involve people running to help older people with one-off tasks such as changing a lightbulb or gardening; 'Coach Runs' are centred on people running to spend time with an older person, reducing loneliness; while 'Group Runs' involve multiple people running to do community work.
- We visited the house of an older person, Gwynne, aged 89, who has benefited from the 'Coach Runs' that Jacqueline, also present, has participated in. Alongside them was Alex Kenmure, Head of Business Development at Good Gym, who weaved in broader context on the organisation's intergenerational work to the more personalised discussion that Gwynne and Jacqueline contributed to.
- Alex explained how **Good Gym's model allows for flexibility** – both in the kinds of runs that members can do, and also in how they can integrate the runs into their daily lives easily. Running is something a lot of people want to do anyway, to enhance fitness, and Good Gym provides a way to combine this with social good, at minimal extra effort. **It unites self-interested motives with societal motives.**
- Good Gym average 1,000 runners a week from a membership of more than 8,000, which has created 300-400 pairings of people of different generations. The organisation is run by just 11 members of staff, and their **funding model** is based on **sponsorships, donations, and local authority support**. Members also have the option of donating to an **honesty box** if they are able to afford it. Alex did mention that he doesn't know for sure how long this funding model will continue to be viable for.

- Gwynne gave a great insight into how **loneliness** can strike those in older age. Her **isolation** has worsened since losing her husband three years ago, and then her daughter six months later. While she receives visits from her two sons, she often spends days on end without seeing or talking to another person, including right the way through a bank holiday weekend. The fact that her remaining family lives spread out contributes to a lack of connection.
- Gwynne said how much she appreciates and enjoys the interaction that Good Gym provides, especially in instances when help was given to revamp her garden, which used to be her pride and joy. As well as tackling loneliness, Good Gym can therefore **help restore self-esteem** among older people through **physical tasks**.
- When asked by Chuka about the **contrast in intergenerational connections between when she was a young girl and now**, Gwynne recalled that she grew up surrounded by older relatives, making intergenerational interactions more frequent, compared to today's society in which older and younger people increasingly live more spatially separated lives.

Session Three: Age Exchange

- Age Exchange was founded in 1983, is staffed predominantly by volunteers, and provides a community hub and library for older people to **enhance wellbeing, reduce isolation and loneliness, and promote intergenerational understanding**. As well as offering reminiscence support to those living with dementia, they put on a range of **intergenerational arts projects**.
- During our visit, we watched a presentation by Artistic Director, David Savill, on **three recent performing arts projects** that they have created to foster intergenerational connection. These were:
 - **“Children of The Great War”** – A production in which young people worked with the immediate descendants of First World War soldiers and VAD nurses to create a play based on the family histories of the war, as shared by the elders. It was performed by the decedents themselves and local schoolchildren from Lewisham and Greenwich.
 - **“When the Pied Piper Played”** – A performance in which children of Holy Cross School in Lewisham worked with wartime evacuees to create a play inspired by their wartime experiences. The play included composed music by Eliot Lloyd Short, who worked on the original production of “War Horse”.
 - **“A Movement of Ordinary People”** – A recently completed project with Amnesty International and students from St Ursula’s Convent School in Greenwich. Students worked with Amnesty and Age Exchange to create a film documentary based on the lives of two prisoners of conscience and two campaigners. The film was produced to mark the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- David explained how the performing arts are such a powerful tool for intergenerational connection because they not only involve people of different ages talking about their experiences, but immersing themselves in these experiences, and putting themselves in the shoes of others through their own performance. The stories that people from different generations create together allow them to reimagine their commonality, and enable young people to understand how people of the past lived, suffered, and felt.
- By drawing on the memories of older people to create performances, Age Exchange are able to **combine their intergenerational work with support for older people living with dementia**. Speaking to younger people about the past helps these individuals with their memory, and is good for cognitive stimulation.
- During the ‘Children of the Great War’ project, young people also created a phone app to archive the experiences and photos that the descendants of First World War soldiers shared with them.
- The **sensitive topics of the performances**, such as the First World War and human rights, also help in allowing different generations to connect emotionally. These connections are also strengthened due to the fact that younger and older people are equal in their interactions when creating stories – it is not a case of the older participants simply telling the young people their stories in a one-directional way.
- Age Exchange have **partnered with a range of different organisations** in putting together projects, ranging from housing associations, local authorities, schools, care providers, museums, and the Royal Small Arms Employment Factory.
- David explained how their **projects are often on an ad-hoc basis**, dependent on external demand for projects focused on particular issues, such as the First World War, and on funding from sources such as the Arts Council Heritage Lottery Fund, fundraising, and small grants from local authorities.
- There used to be much more scope for **work within schools** due to higher levels of local authority funding for projects of this type, and a less constrained curriculum. However, projects are mainly after-school now due to greater restrictions in both of these areas.
- Highlighting the unpredictability and insecurity of funding led David, Chuka and the group to consider a fundamental question – **when intergenerational connection can only be fostered on a one-off project by project basis, how do you build a society-wide social infrastructure in which long-lasting bonds are built between people of different ages?**
- David said **intergenerational work is the hardest kind of project to secure funding for** out of the different initiatives pursued by Age Exchange. Projects designed to enhance the wellbeing of older people specifically, e.g. by improving dementia care, are easier to fund.
- The stop-start nature of intergenerational projects also makes it **difficult to conduct thorough impact assessments** on the effectiveness of projects. However, showing evidence of effectiveness is usually a key part of funding applications, so organisations like Age Exchange are often caught in a chicken and egg situation.

- **Measuring the success of social cohesion is a hard task** in general, compared to other areas such as public health and dementia support. It involves a large subjective element, and is something that needs to be built over the long-term, so cannot always be demonstrated by immediate statistics.

Next Steps

- The APPG on Social Integration will be visiting a number of other projects throughout the UK to learn more about intergenerational connection.
 - We will be visiting the **West Midlands** on Thursday, 6th September, to meet with Caroline Spelman MP, and visit intergenerational projects in her Meriden constituency as well as the wider West Midlands area.
 - We are also planning further visits in the **south London** area, to Apples and Honey Nightingale House, the first intergenerational nursery in the UK, and to South London Cares, part of The Cares Family which brings young professionals and older people together through a range of activities and events.
- Together with the invaluable insights gained from the visit to Manchester (21.06.18) and the visits in south London described in these notes, these trips will help inform the **interim and final reports** of the APPG's inquiry into intergenerational connection. We are planning to publish the interim report at the end of 2018, and the final report in the Spring of 2019.