



Inspiring Communities - Thetford, Norfolk

Who are we?	The Benjamin Foundation Meet Up Café	 The Benjamin Foundation
What does the project do?	The Meet Up Café is a youth drop in venue which also provides a range of learning and family activities	
What have we learnt?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no quick fix to the issues faced by many Thetford residents • That our volunteers make all the difference to the service • That our young people never fail to surprise and amaze us – never under estimate them! 	 
How to find out more?	www.benjaminfoundation.co.uk www.meetupcafe.co.uk Facebook: Thetford Meet Up	
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Intergenerational Volunteering Project

1. Broadening young people's horizons

This Project offered a gate way for young people to get involved in their community and to make a difference. Everything that went into this project the planning, ideas, hard work and delivery was by a team of young volunteers aged 10 to 15. With a little encouragement they were able to voice their own opinions and ideas and then put them into practice. This gave them the freedom to be creative and to not be restricted in anyway, this project was all about giving the young people the power and responsibilities to hopefully help them develop as individuals so they can continue to be positive, and make informed choices throughout their lives.

This showed each volunteer that with hard work and dedication you can achieve almost anything. They really wanted to make a difference to the older generation of Thetford by ensuring they had a Christmas they would never forget. They wanted to prove to them that they do care about their elders and they are not just your typical 'hoody' wearing trouble makers that some young kids are labelled. This project helped them build on new skills and gain valuable experiences of working in a team and building on good communication and people skills. On the evening of the event it was a great opportunity for the young people to see all their hard work and dedication come together for this magical Christmas event. They sang Christmas songs to the guests and encouraged them up onto the dance floor which was incredible to see. They proved that being generations apart doesn't separate them from each other and that for this event the two could come together and enjoy a special Christmas event.

We feel this has broadened the young people's horizons and we hope they can use the skills and experiences they have gained to live happy positive lives and make positive contributions to the community and others.

2. Providing advice and inspiration to young people

Each volunteer was given the freedom to come up with their own ideas and were supported in their choices. They were guided in ensuring that they were made possible within this project. This gave them the inspiration to think about what would make a Christmas event special for the older generation of Thetford.

The young volunteers were inspired to make a difference especially when they knew some older people in their community would be alone at Christmas with no family or presents. At the event the young volunteers carried out an amazing job and they enjoyed it just as much as the guests. The thanks and gratitude they received on the night for all their hard work will hopefully inspire them to contribute their time and efforts into the community and future charity

events. (We have attached some photos and a link to the Eastern Daily Press newspaper article of the event to the email with this report)

3. Raising parents' own aspirations and self-confidence, so that they can support their children to take up opportunities and to make positive, informed choices

This project helped parents to support their children to make a difference by offering a safe, fun environment where their children could be creative and imaginative. The young volunteers were given the freedom to design and deliver everything that was needed to ensure this event was a success. Each volunteer received a special achievement Certificate for their volunteering hours by The Benjamin Foundation and the parents were inspired by their children's dedication and hard work. It raised their own aspirations to support their children with this project by making sure they attended the group sessions each week. Parents also helped with the food prep the day before the event and each parent was proud of what their child had achieved. This project has raised the awareness of the Benjamin Foundation and what The Meet-Up cafe offers to young people in Thetford. With the support and help of the parents this service can continue to make a difference to the community, the youth and the older residents of Thetford.

4. Developing strong social networks in communities, raising community pride in young people and drawing out the talents of the community to support young people

We received great support from local businesses with donated goods for the event and they also offered discount for purchases for the event. It helped to develop the support for strong social networks with businesses, care homes and the community in Thetford. It helped raise the community pride in the young volunteers, by working hard and being dedicated it can make a big difference to people. It has helped the stereotypical view of young people by proving that not all young kids are 'hoody' wearing trouble makers. Each volunteer involved in this event are a credit to the youth of today and we feel this project has given them the inspiration that if they put their mind to anything they can achieve and make a difference.

This project helped the volunteers to be more confident within themselves and to be passionate about what they believe in and that with dedication and hard work they can achieve almost anything.

At the event the Eastern daily Press had a photographer and reporter attend and several volunteers were interviewed and expressed their views and opinions of the project. They had photos taken with the elderly guests and they were printed in the local newspaper the following week. The young volunteers were astounded to be in the newspaper and exceptionally pleased that all their hard work and commitment was being recognised in the community and within the county.

Shane Scarff (Youth Worker)
The Benjamin Foundation

Transcript of Eastern Daily Press Article:



Thetford children volunteer to cook christmas dinner for elderly people at the Meet Up Cafe.

Two generations come together in the name of community spirit at Christmas

Saturday, 18 December, 2010
18:00 PM

Increasingly we are all being asked to help out in our neighbourhoods, look out for one another in difficult times, and spend more time volunteering.

REBECCA GOUGH found out how two groups came together in the spirit of Christmas and communities to do just that.

They ranged from nine-years-old to those in their nineties and despite the obvious age gap there were smiles on everyone's faces.

This was a very special Christmas dinner organised by a dozen or so youngsters from a youth centre in Thetford for a group of elderly people living just yards away.

The entire party, from the planning and delivery to decorations, cooking and entertainment was organised by a dedicated team of volunteers between nine and 15-years-old as part of an Inter-generational Volunteering Project.

The idea is simple and aims to bring people of all ages together to promote greater understanding and respect between generations. But it is also more than that and at the heart of it is a great deal of good old-fashioned community spirit.

It is something the war-generations will know all about, is even more important at Christmas, and echoes thoughts of David Cameron's Big Society concept which aims to bring more power to the people, as it were.

Without even realising it, the youngsters came together at Thetford's Meet Up Cafe, on the Redcastle Furze Estate, to integrate themselves into their community and break down barriers between the two generations.

Fifteen-year-old Tom Gallagher, who regularly attends the cafe and took part in the Christmas dinner on Thursday said: "When we went to visit them I think they were expecting us to be in hoodies but working with them showed them we're not all chavs and we can just be genuine people. All the organising has been hard work but it's rewarding."

Abigail Lloyd, 11, summed up the event and said: "Sometimes they are alone at home and haven't got anybody to celebrate Christmas with so they need cheerful people around them. If you make them happy you feel good inside and know you've done something really nice."

James Piesse, 13, added: "It's good to help people because when they're sad you bring happiness into their lives."

"When you're talking to them they get to know you and are more friendly."

The young and older people all enjoyed a "home cooked" meal of turkey with all the trimmings, brimming mugs of tea and coffee and listened to a classical singer as well as Christmas carols from the volunteers themselves.

Shirley Hurr, 63, of Cannons Walk, said: "What they've done tonight is superb because we can talk to children on the same level. Helping people was the way we were brought up. We've got to help one another out."

Lettie Hatchfield, 90, also of Cannons Walk, said she was glad to get out of the house.

She added: "So often you get cut off from everybody and often people don't want to know you. Often young people won't talk to elderly people."

"We don't get out at night times much, more often it's during the day."

All too often there is a lack of understanding between the young and old which can be easily solved with a little communication.

Publicity and marketing officer at Age UK Norfolk, Gemma Pendleton, said: "I think the benefits for young children who may not have grandparents, or whose grandparents may be younger than you'd expect, are huge and the elderly people just light up being around young people."

"It's about bringing back that feeling of community spirit by seeing if you can help someone by popping to the shop for a pint of milk or picking up a supply of leaflets from our offices to drop in to them."

“A lot of the services they may have received in the past from the county council are under threat so it’s important they know what else is out there for them.”

The Meet Up Café, on the town’s Redcastle Furze estate, is run by The Benjamin Foundation, a Norfolk charity which aims to provide practical help and support for families, young people and children experiencing difficulties in their lives.

Service manager at the cafe, Terry Jermy, said although the idea of empowering the community was positive, the delivery would need work.

“One of the reasons they wanted to do something for the elderly is because they thought they hated them,” he said.

“They wanted an opportunity to work together and food is a very good way of doing that. Doing things for the community is crucial but in places like the Redcastle estate you’ve got to give them the skills to help themselves.

“They ask if they’re doing it right and there’s a fear of doing it wrong so some people don’t do it in the first place. With time though they realise they can do it.”

Pictures of the Event:



Love and
A very Big Hug to all our waiters + waitresses
x x x x

Hello

Wishing you a Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year

Just to say a Big Thank You
from me and all my friends. It was
such a great time we did all enjoy ourselves.
it was wonderful Thank you for Thinking
of us

Wishing you all Every Happiness Joy Peace
or Good Health in 2011

Love From Phyllis Right xxx