

Tales from the TSI Network

Supporting Volunteering For All

All across Scotland

intergenerational volunteering - Volunteer Centre Western Isles



This volunteering journey began with a little seven year old girl whose dad was asked to help out one day at the local Retirement Centre, which is used by groups of all ages but was short of volunteers this particular day. It was the weekly Thursday Lunch Club for retirees, and he said yes but only if he could bring his young daughter Emily along with him after school.

This was the start of an intergenerational volunteering journey for pupils at Stornoway Primary School, with all the support they needed provided by Bellann O'Brien, a Development Worker at Volunteer Centre Western Isles, who used to work in the school.

How Volunteer Centre Western Isles helped

Having established great connections with a number of schools on Lewis (where she often gives talks about volunteering) Bellann heard from a teacher at Stornoway Primary School about Emily's visits to the Retirement Centre with her dad. She would help him tidy up, while also chatting with the older service users and was a wee star in their eyes.

Taking inspiration from young Emily's volunteering, Bellann seized on the opportunity to get her 26 classmates involved, so arranged a talk on volunteering. She devised a session specially for this young group, to improve their understanding of being a volunteer. She used pictures of a variety of people to see if they could recognise the volunteer amongst them. Then they were asked to draw what they thought a volunteer might look like. It was an exercise to highlight that anyone can volunteer.



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Their teacher's feedback was so positive, saying how much the pupils had loved the session with Bellann and that the penny had dropped – they now realised even mum or dad could be a volunteer. When she asked what they were doing in class, she was told enthusiastically that they were running a project on toys, learning about what children had in days gone by compared with today. Realising what a great link it would make, Bellann asked their teacher if they would like to visit the older people at the Retirement Centre. It was a resounding 'yes'. She got in touch with the Thursday Lunch Club who agreed to bring in some of the toys they still had from their youth and speak with the children about the simple playground games they used to enjoy.

As one 78-year-old lady told them: "We had no money for toys like there is today. Instead, we played on the sand dunes, with a top horse and a ball, which we would hit off the wall. We sang and played rounders out on the street until it got dark and were called in by our parents."

Working with a particularly young group of seven-year-olds, Bellann had to carefully tailor her volunteering session to ensure the youngsters remained engaged and benefited from the experience. The pupils were mesmerised and could have sat there all day listening to the stories, as well as telling the older people about their own games of today. It was a rewarding experience for everyone.

Bellann's work with the pupils has helped changed perceptions and understanding of volunteering for the seven year olds. The school's links with the Retirement Centre will continue; returned visits are being arranged. The Volunteer Centre runs its own awards, including the Callanish Award for primary school aged children. This recognises their participation and is a great way to encourage personal development and an ideal stepping stone to the Saltire Awards. As the perfect candidate, Emily has now achieved her Callanish Award recognising her great volunteering input at the Thursday Lunch Club. In this Year of Young People, it's particularly rewarding to see the young pupils loving this intergenerational experience.

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