

Written By Chris Brain – Manager Jasmine Court Sheltered Housing Scheme.

Emily Sinclair (founder of the Time to Talk Befriending charity) approached me to see if a group of young volunteers from Albion in the Community (AITC) could visit and get involved with activities at Jasmine Court.

Emily provided the volunteers with training to inspire them and help them improve their communication skills. She talked at length with the young people about the effects of loneliness in old age, which inspired them to undertake an intergenerational project which the charity can use in the future for campaigning.

The focus was on motivating youngsters to help reduce social isolation and loneliness amongst older people and to build bridges between generations.

Matt Walker (Team Leader from AITC) and a group of young volunteers aged 16 & 17 then approached me and talked more about the National Citizenship Social Action Project they were working on.

The keenness that these young people showed in wanting to make a difference to other people's lives was really refreshing.

We discussed how the young people could join the tenants' bingo afternoon on Wednesday. The young people were also keen to organise their own tea and cake morning the following day. I was invited by Matt as a panel member alongside representatives of Albion in the Community Team to receive, assess and guide their initial presentation. The confidence and organisational abilities they showed were a credit to them.

Wednesday Bingo: Tracey Walters is writing this as she was present and spoke to Matt directly.

Thursday Tea & Cake Morning:

The young volunteers brought along a truly wondrous selection of mouth-watering homemade cakes which were thoroughly enjoyed by all. They set up activities including card games, draughts, giant Ludo and Wii bowling. Some tenants brought things with them to share with the youngsters, including photos, artwork and stories from their lives.

Tenant quotes so far – not to be used until agreed with the tenants – more to follow.

*"I spoke to the youngsters about my time in the war and national service. They had little knowledge of this significant time in our history, so it was great to have the opportunity to share it with them. I learnt from the youngsters too; about the subjects they are studying and their plans for their future. I was particularly amazed by one girl's plan to spend a gap year as a volunteer at an orphanage in Ghana. This is not something that I could ever have done and I have great respect for her wanting to do such a brave thing. I think both I and the young people gained a better understanding of each other through our chats. They were talkative, chatty and polite, asked interesting questions and were a really nice bunch. It was very refreshing and I enjoyed myself." **Bill***

*"I showed the youngsters the artwork I have done over many years and the stories I have written about the Romany community and personal experiences of it. Being able to share my interest with these young people made me very happy" **Katie***

*"I had a great time. All the volunteers were so nice. It was absolutely brilliant. It was lovely to laugh and joke with the young volunteers when we played Wii bowling. I made one boy have hysterical laughter. It was so funny." **Bette***

It has been an absolute pleasure to be involved with this project. The young volunteers prepared themselves well, engaged superbly with the tenants and showed great interest in the stories and history they had to share. The interactions between young volunteers and tenants were a joy to see and there was surprise, respect and laughter on both sides.

This has been a significant event for several reasons.

Firstly, the planning, involvement and communication between Albion in the Community, the Volunteer Team, Time to Talk Befriending and the Scheme Manager have shown that collaboration between organisations to achieve a common goal, can produce be significantly positive outcome.

Secondly, this activity encouraged a few tenants who are usually reluctant to participate in social activities, and in some cases are fairly isolated, to join in and experience something new.

Finally, the atmosphere throughout the morning was wonderfully relaxed, friendly, jolly and fully of laughter.

Every single tenant who attended this activity has spoken highly of the young volunteers and the fun they had with them. They are very keen to have activities like this at the scheme again.

This has to be one of the best events there has been at Jasmine Court since my time here as Scheme Manager. I am extremely keen for such collaborations to happen regularly and encourage others to take advantage of such opportunities.

Chris Brain, Scheme Manager