

A Guide for schools about what we've learnt

Si King: "What Old School has demonstrated is that we have a lot of quality relationships going on that combat loneliness, it's as simple as that. It's not rocket science, so give people the infrastructure and the opportunity to do it. Why wouldn't you?"

Dave Myers: "The wonderful thing about Old School is it's a very balanced relationship. Sometimes with a mentoring scheme one person is in charge of the other but on this it's a level playing field, it's mutually beneficial, and that enables both parties to grow together."

"I know that Wez will have a friend as long as I've breath in this body and I hope the same thing goes back the other way." Dave, 71

"I have learnt if I can change, everyone can change." Jacub, 14

"I've become a lot more confident." Charisma, 16



"Older and younger people can interact very well." Marina, 65

"The experience has been uplifting." Alice, 60

"I've learnt that we are all the same no matter what age." Bethany, 16

"We are seeing students growing in emotional intelligence, emotional awareness, self-reflection. The other really key thing for me is that if you look at the attainment, it's got better." Niall MacWilliams, Headteacher

Building relationships, strengthening community

Introduction

Now the BBC's filming and involvement has finished, we at the Oxford Academy are taking the Old School project forward independently. We're extending the pilot further with the aim of creating a universal framework for schools who would like to run their own similar schemes. In the meantime we're sharing the things we've learnt so far, to help schools assess whether an Old School project might be right for them.

Above all, Old School is a partnership programme, partnering senior members of the local community with young people in the school. Community must be at the heart of the work of a school to ensure success for all. Senior members of our community have a wealth of experience and knowledge that can be brought into the school, and as a school we have fantastic facilities and expertise that can support our community members. Our facilities, resources and expertise should be available to all. Building longstanding relationships will strengthen the school and the wider community at the same time.

"This project has already illustrated how much benefit arises from bringing old and young together for a purpose. It underlines the truth of the old African saying that 'it takes a whole village to raise a child' and then adds the revelation that young people are, in a similar way, a vital ingredient for so many people's enjoyment of a fulfilling old age.

'Old School' brilliantly captures the way in which everybody can enjoy the advantages of an extended family and most importantly how a school can with good humour, hard work and inspiration bring that about"

Professor Sir Tim Brighouse, former Commissioner for London Schools

There are significant issues faced by adolescents and the senior members of the community and many of these are common issues.

"The two loneliest groups of people in Britain today are on the one hand the over 70s, and on the other, the 16-24 year olds. If by one simple intervention you can address the problem for both groups, it has to be worth pursuing.

Forming relationships is the only real cure for loneliness and a good relationship is reciprocal. What's nice about this experiment is that it is trying to look at benefits for both sides. That for me is important. A lot of things we do to help old people become more socially engaged are not reciprocal. 'So I'm going to come round and visit you and I'm going to go away again.' And there's no opportunity for youth to be interested in building a relationship."

Professor Christina Victor, external evaluator of the project

The Old School project works hard to tackle these problems. By providing a safe place to visit at any time, senior partners are welcome to chat and catch up with other volunteers. Furthermore, they have full access to the school's IT and other facilities, their junior partner can teach them everything from how to set up an e-mail address to attaching a photo.

For the teenagers, many of them come from larger, single-parent families and have no grandparents around. Having somebody to talk to about life after school and generally be their champion has a great effect on their confidence and self-esteem which, in turn, boosts their academic performance.

Teenagers and senior partners are paired up one-on-one and meet up for a minimum of an hour a week in order to help each other in any way needed, and become part of the wider school community.

The evaluation of the Old School project to date has shown significant impact for the senior and junior partners.

From the scientific tests carried out our senior partners have:

- Become more physically active with direct health benefits
- Increased executive function
- Increased cognitive function
- Increased ability to form new relationships, which is of enormous value in contributing to wellbeing and curing loneliness.

The evaluation of the impact on the junior partners has shown:

- Improved attendance and punctuality
- Improved attitudes to learning and behaviour
- Improved grades
- Increased self esteem

Setting up an Old School Project – What we've learnt from the experience and can share with other schools

This is not a mentoring programme and as such it does not have a prescriptive format. For success, schools need to invest in the planning stages of recruitment of partners, have clear safeguarding procedures, be clear of the longer-term objectives and how the project will be managed and funded. With this there needs to be trust in the senior and junior partners to develop meaningful positive and productive relationships with regular monitoring and listening to the parties involved.

Step 1: Are your Headteacher and senior team committed to improving opportunities for students and also wanting to be much more engaged with your local community?

This project will take **time, money and commitment** from all those involved. It is vital that the project is considered important at all levels within the school. A member of the leadership team should be responsible for the oversight of the project and be clear of the overall objectives.

Step 2: Do you have a member of staff who can take responsibility for the planning and running of the project?

It would be advisable to have a member of staff that can act as the **Old School co-ordinator**. This is a demanding role which will involve:

- Planning and implementing the programme
- Driving the recruitment strategy
- Meeting and talking with junior and senior partners
- Planning and implementing a training programme for junior and senior partners
- Have oversight of the safeguarding procedures including training and carrying out relevant DBS checks
- Arranging the partnership meetings
- Travel arrangements for senior partners
- Arranging partnership events
- Publicity and fundraising

Step 3: Recruitment

Recruitment is obviously key to the scheme's success – it is vital that both sides **volunteer** for the project and that both have a clear understanding of what the project is. They need to understand the potential benefits for them, and the expectations from them. We found it was really useful to conduct interviews with students and senior partners before matching, to help with the process.

- Junior partners – can be recruited from assemblies, 'drop in', and the use of tutorial time.
- Parents – need to be fully informed about exactly what the scheme involves and assured that all the relevant checks and procedures will be in place to ensure the safety and well-being of their child.
- Senior partners – recruiting them is the most challenging part of this stage as contacts need to be formed beyond the school base. Partners can be recruited face to face in the community (shopping centres, libraries, hairdressers...) or via local charities. From the outset it is important to establish that the senior partners do have the **time to commit, a willingness to work with young people and are good listeners.**

Step 4: Safeguarding

One of the aims of the project is to bring the senior partners in to the school and make them part of everyday school life, therefore it is vital that all safeguarding procedures are carried out thoroughly and that safeguarding is at the heart of the scheme.

- Once recruited all senior partners should have **DBS** carried out as soon as possible. This can be a lengthy process for some and therefore the time needs to be allocated for this in the planning stages.
- All partners and members of staff involved in the project should have thorough **safeguarding training** and the Safeguarding Officer for the school should be involved throughout. We also involved the Local Authority Safeguarding Officers at the outset.
- As part of the safeguarding for the project it is important to offer **help and support** to all involved when needed. Any safeguarding concerns should be passed on to the **Safeguarding Officer.**

Step 5: Partnering

The most successful partnerships are those where the senior and junior partners share similar interests or experiences. Therefore having an opportunity for the partners to all meet and find out more about each other is very helpful. We would recommend having a **partnership day**. The intended outcomes for the day are:

- For the volunteers to meet each other and identify four people that they would like to partner with.
- For them to understand and get clarity of what the Old School project is all about.
- To challenge old paradigms of senior people knowing everything and having nothing to learn from young people.
- To build connections between local community and strengthen the relationships.
- To establish a community of people who will help each other over the length of the project.

We used a variety of activities throughout our day to support this, including a 'Lego bus' communication exercise and 'fruit based speed dating'. The key being to break down embarrassment and barriers and help junior and senior partners discover affinities.

The actions from the day are:

- The Old School co-ordinator, alongside other facilitators, begins the process of pairing the senior with the junior partners. Not everyone will be able to have their first choice – facilitators need to be observant and do their best to decide who would best partner who.

- Once decided, the partnership matches should then be shared and the senior and junior partners have time to talk together.
- As we discovered, pairing is not an exact science and not all partnerships work from the start. Be prepared for this, have time to talk to both sides of the partnership about their concerns. Usually things can be sorted very promptly and new partnerships can be formed.

Step 6: Getting the partnerships started

The Old School co-ordinator working with the senior and junior partners should set up a regular time for the partnerships to meet. Depending on the circumstances in school, this can be during the school day or after school. The initial meetings should be supported, making sure that both sides of the partnership feel comfortable and safe.

- Some partners need support and guidance with the type of things to talk about as they may lack confidence.
- Be clear to both sides of the partnership when and where the meeting will take place. Reminders, for both parties, are helpful.
- The partnerships should discuss together the way they want to take the relationship forward. Some may just want to meet up regularly and chat, others may want to work on a shared interest or learn something new.
- Activities to do together range from recording a podcast and using social media to boxing, dancing and dressmaking.

Step 7: Sustainability

Keeping the momentum going is key to the sustainability of the project. The Old School co-ordinator should have oversight of the planned meetings, reviewing and evaluating the process at all times. Opportunities should be provided for the senior partners to get together as a group to discuss how things are going and make any suggestions for improvement.

- The senior partners appreciate the opportunity to meet together and form their own support network, so do provide them with a space and time to do this.
- Getting all partners together to review how things are going every term will enable all those involved to develop the project. As a group it can be easier to share concerns without it being personal, and collectively find a strategy to deal with them.
- As a group the partners should arrange events to raise the profile of the project and also fundraise for it. Examples of activities are Old School Fair, Sports Day, Choir, and Christmas Dinner.
- Keep your community updated on the project. Share it with local newspapers etc. This will develop further interest in the project and provide further volunteers.

Step 8: Funding

The Old School project does require funding to set up and maintain.

The main costs are:

- Providing staff support in order to timetable the meetings of each individual pair, as well as be able to be a point of contact for any of the volunteers who feel they need guidance.
- Cost of DBS checks and organising safeguarding training sessions.
- Helping to grow the project; marketing the scheme to the local community so they know what it is and how to get involved.
- Providing funds to be able to organise wider community events, in which everybody from the local area can get involved.
- Organising transport for the less mobile to ensure that they can share in the experience and are not isolated from their community.

What next?

Now you know the basics of what we learnt from running Old School are you interested in setting up a similar scheme at your own school?

If so, please get in touch with us at The Oxford Academy. We have found running Old School so rewarding we would like to build a community of schools running similar projects.

You can contact us either via the contact form on our [website](#), or directly using this email address: oldschool@theoxfordacademy.org.uk

If you feel that setting up an entire project like ours is a bigger commitment than you would like, then see the BBC's [guide to intergenerational volunteering](#) with further information and links to resources and organisations that can help – there are other ways for your students to be involved through external projects.

The Open University has also set up a [website](#) supporting the scheme with additional content and resources, which you might find of interest.

Finally, the Old School with the Hairy Bikers television series is a useful resource about our experience of intergenerational volunteering. It is available on the [BBC iPlayer](#) for 30 days after broadcast. Subsequent to that the series can be purchased via the [BBC Store](#).

Acknowledgments

Old School with the Hairy Bikers was made by Maverick Television for BBC Two in partnership with The Open University.

The series consultant, and consultant for this guide, was Alan Hatton-Yeo.

Appendix:

What we found were the benefits of Old School

For the senior partners:

- ✓ A feeling of value through having an active contribution to make to the modern world
- ✓ Gaining a greater understanding and contact with modern life
- ✓ Overcoming irrational, media-fuelled, fear of teenagers
- ✓ Learning IT skills to function in and keep up with the modern world
- ✓ Overcoming fears of admitting to physical frailties like deafness and being unsteady
- ✓ Learning to ask for and accepting help
- ✓ Learning new skills
- ✓ Exercising the memory
- ✓ Having a future, not just a past
- ✓ Giving and sharing your lifetime of experience
- ✓ Friendship in the Old School community
- ✓ Opportunities for greater physical and cognitive activity
- ✓ Becoming part of Old School community
- ✓ Attending school events
- ✓ Greater understanding of community resources
- ✓ Greater understanding of young people
- ✓ Opportunity to have a positive impact on your community

For the junior partners:

- ✓ Become more adult through having regular contact with seniors on an equal level
- ✓ Develop more mature relationships with teachers
- ✓ Become more self aware and start to interrogate their own problems
- ✓ Begin to address their problems on their own terms by talking them through with their partners
- ✓ Make friends across the year groups with other students involved in Old School
- ✓ Greater educational engagement. Through partnerships they learn to appreciate that education is a path to what they want, not just what teachers and parents want for them
- ✓ The best way to learn is by teaching someone. Many junior partners feel that having senior partners in their classes and having to explain lessons to them, helps them learn. They also feel important and the fact that senior partners are so interested in their lessons makes them appreciate and value them.
- ✓ Learning to form strong, enduring relationships
- ✓ Protection, guidance and help in breaking the vicious cycle of bullying, especially cyber bullying
- ✓ The ability to build strong relationships is of enormous value in healing childhood trauma and curing loneliness
- ✓ Giving and sharing your experiences and time
- ✓ Friendship in the Old School community
- ✓ Opportunities for new experiences
- ✓ Opportunities for improving achievements in school
- ✓ Greater understanding of community resources
- ✓ Greater understanding of older people
- ✓ Opportunity to have a positive impact on your community