

BIG (Blaenavon Intergenerational Group)

A monthly meeting group at Big Pit brings young and old together to participate in cultural and arts activities. The group is designed and delivered around dementia friendly principles, and activities are occasionally led by group participants and volunteers who are living with dementia themselves.

The project began life when the museum and Blaenavon Town Council decided to work together to address mutual goals around community cohesion and tackling loneliness and isolation, to the backdrop of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. One of the aims of the act is to ensure public bodies in Wales work better with people, communities and each other to prevent health problems.

Since its launch during Dementia Awareness Week 2018, the group has seen around 600 participants take part in cultural and arts activities including photography, poetry writing and a range of art and making sessions. Professional artists have delivered many of these, but group members have also taken the helm and shared their artistic skills with young and older members of the group – whose ages range from 2 to 102!

Regular participants include residents from a local care home, children from an early years day care setting and young people from ‘the Hwb’, the local youth provision. Blaenavon Heritage School’s Little Voices group, who work with the local community to bring about positive change, have been trained as dementia friends as part of the project and help to plan and organise some of the group sessions.

Other partners involved in the project are Bron Afon Community Housing who provide support and signpost residents to the provision and Blaenavon Workmen’s Hall, who ensure that spaces are available for some of the more popular sessions. Many friendships which span generations have started as a result of the group, with young and old taking part in activities outside group sessions.

“Residents talk about these events for days on end afterwards”

Manager of the Arthur Jenkins Care Home, Blaenavon.

‘Some of these young people are disengaged. In the local community they are seen as being a nuisance. All have been involved in anti-social behaviour. But today, they have been engaged in the activities from start to finish, and have all thoroughly enjoyed it. We need to do more of this.’

Youth Co-ordinator, local setting.

[My mother] has just been telling me all about it and I got the impression she had a great afternoon...she was really pleased with her drawings depicting the pit...she’s done more drawing the last couple of days than I’ve seen her do for years! She loves meeting up with people she knows too for a good chat. Thank you all!

Daughter of older group participant who sent comments via Messenger on the evening of the activity. The lady has recently suffered a stroke which has affected her eyesight so she has lost some of her independence.