

# Bringing Generations Together



Community Well-Being in West Lothian:  
Lessons from MOOD



**MOOD** is a Whitburn-based project which covers West Lothian. MOOD works with people over 55 who are at risk of developing depression and/or other mental health problems. It offers a diverse range of activities and resources to help prevent the onset of mental ill health and to help support individuals and their carers.

The primary aim of the project is to identify and support people in the west of West Lothian who are over the age of 55 and at risk of developing depression or other mental health problems.

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# 1. Introduction



## 1.1 The community well-being exemplar projects

As an indication of its commitment to improving mental health and well-being in Scotland, the Scottish Executive set up the National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-Being, which sits within wider national priorities of health improvement and social inclusion as set out in *Closing the Opportunity Gap* (2003) and *Improving Health in Scotland: The Challenge* (2003).

In 2004, the National Programme provided two year funding to support Community Well-Being Exemplar Projects in four different local areas across Scotland: East Renfrewshire New Community Schools Cluster; Badenoch and Strathspey in Highland; The East End of Glasgow; and West Lothian. The purpose of these projects was to improve community well-being in each of the four local areas. The projects have a shared understanding of community well-being, however, different catalysts and interventions are used to help achieve this. Support for practice development and evaluation of the four projects is provided by the Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health and CHEX.

MOOD is one of the exemplar projects in West Lothian.

## 1.2 Purpose of this paper

This paper explores the intergenerational work of MOOD to identify its impact on community well-being. The paper is intended to:

- Disseminate the learning from the MOOD Community Well-Being Exemplar Project
- Provide reflection on the work of MOOD in the context of the evidence base for community well-being initiatives and to contribute to this evidence base
- Explore MOOD's success in being able to meet its aims
- Consider how projects such as MOOD can contribute to individual and community well-being as a policy priority shared by a number of agencies.

## 1.3 What is community well-being?

One of the aims of democratic government is to promote a flourishing society where the people are happy, healthy, capable and engaged (Marks & Shah, 2004). This state of being happy, healthy, capable and engaged is what is described as well-being.

In the publication *'Creativity and Well-Being: the engage Scotland Visual Arts Education Awards 2005'*, Paul Murray explains:

*"...mental health and well-being are being increasingly regarded as socio-cultural as well as medical and clinical terms. Social care, education, employment and health agencies are recognized as being contributors to individual and community well-being...Our sense of connectedness with our communities, our vitality, our freedom to do things we enjoy, developing our confidence and skills, having good social relationships and being creative are all experiences that contribute to our mental well-being"* (2005:4).



In recent years, there has been a growing interest in well-being generally, and in how a ‘well-being focus’ might influence the future direction of UK policy on the economy, health, education, employment, culture and sustainable development (Callard & Friedli, 2005; Scottish Executive, 2003a; DEFRA 2005; and NIMHE, 2005).

Community well-being adds further dimensions to this: a sense of belonging; actions which have mutual benefits; the feeling that we have something to contribute and opportunity to do so; and the belief that society has the ability to change for the better (nef, 2004). A research report for

the Scottish Executive recognised that community well-being is directly relevant to current priorities and concerns, particularly those related to health, mental health, social inclusion and community development (Scottish Executive, 2003b). This research found that:

*“For communities, well-being was perceived to be about ‘thriving, not just surviving’, being hopeful, healthy and sustainable”* (Scottish Executive, 2003c:1).

Community well-being can be improved or damaged by a range of different influences as shown in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1 Positive and negative influences on well-being**

Positive influences on well-being	Negative influences on well-being
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships (with family, friends, peers through social contact)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative stereotypes attached to the ‘group’ you belong to (for example, young people being seen as troublemakers)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social activities (through hobbies and social interests)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fear (of crime, rejection, stigma and loneliness)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information and advice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guilt (when having difficulties juggling the work/life balance)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to relevant support and services in the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boredom and inactivity (the feeling that life is pointless as there is little to do)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Money (enables people to maintain a level of lifestyle)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of control and choice over the issues that affect you and your family</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choice and involvement (specifically in decisions affecting your welfare and having those views listened to)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited horizons and prospects and loss of motivation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confidence and self-worth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Problems with access to services and supports that may benefit you</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling proud of who you are and the community you are part of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loneliness and social isolation</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having hope and prospects for your life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Living in poor housing and having limited job opportunities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling that you matter and that you have a valuable role in the community</li> </ul>	

*(Adapted from: Scottish Executive, 2003b:5-6)*



## 1.4 Older people and well-being

There are particular risk factors which affect the mental health and well-being of older people, including:

- Living alone and social isolation
- Loss and bereavement
- Poor health, including long term health conditions and sensory impairment
- Difficulty with everyday activities
- Low income, a lack of access to support services, including transport
- Feeling unsafe
- Being in a care-giving role
- The experience of discrimination and stigma
- Lack of opportunity for participation, perceived powerlessness and hopelessness (Cattan & White, 1998).

## 1.5 Intergenerational relations

Tensions within communities between generations are not new. Misunderstandings and misperceptions can arise within a community or a society in the relationships between young people and older people for a number of reasons. For example, as a result of:

- Changing economic patterns in relation to working, income levels and expectations
- Welfare patterns in relation to family size, structure and relationships
- Cultural change in norms, beliefs, expectations and levels of trust

- Population trends: Scotland is experiencing a rise in the number and proportion of older people in the population, a slowing down in birth rates and an increase in economic emigration.

Contemporary society is more age-segregated than ever before, resulting in increasing levels of stigma and discrimination associated with other generations. Moreover, young people spend the majority of their formative years within an educational setting, where they mix only with their peer groups and teachers (Age Concern Scotland, 1997).

Awareness of the need to strengthen points of contact and relationships between generations has led to a revival of interest in intergenerational work (Age Concern Scotland, 1997). UNESCO (1999) defines intergenerational work:

*“Intergenerational programmes are vehicles for the purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations for individual and social benefits”* (cited in Hatton-Yeo & Ohsako, 2000)

Granville (2002) observes that the tradition of younger people learning skills from older people has been on the decline in recent decades and that this is cause for concern as older people have a lot to offer their younger counterparts. Currently, understanding of how to re-establish this connection between generations is under debate, however, intergenerational work is considered to be an important tool in seeking to bridge the growing divide between younger and older generations.



Intergenerational initiatives can have a number of overt and implicit goals:

- To challenge prejudices and stereotypes and dispel stigma and myths by promoting better mutual understanding
- To encourage engagement and interaction by focusing on assets, skills and qualities not on problems and issues
- To promote the development of mutually beneficial relationships that reduce social isolation and increase the sense of community well-being
- To enable people to pursue personal valued interests and retain their involvement in their valued aspects of life
- To promote participation as active citizens who have an active role to play in developing a local inclusive community.

These goals contribute to improving mental health and well-being for individuals and for communities (Grams & Albee, 1995; cited in SDC, 2006).

To challenge prejudices and stereotypes and dispel stigma and myths by promoting better mutual understanding.

## 2. The MOOD Project



### 2.1 An introduction to MOOD

MOOD is a Whitburn-based project which covers West Lothian. It was established in the spring of 1999, when a consortium of voluntary agencies in West Lothian identified the need to develop local support services for older people with mental health problems.

MOOD works with people over 55 who are at risk of developing depression and/or other mental health problems. It offers a diverse range of activities and resources to help prevent the onset of mental ill health and to help support individuals and their carers. The project has an open referrals process. The Project Leader assesses the person referred and, where appropriate also puts the person in touch with other relevant agencies.

### 2.2 The aim of MOOD

The primary aim of the project is to identify and support people in the west of West Lothian who are over the age of 55 and at risk of developing depression or mental health problems.

Additional aims of MOOD are to:

- Develop work in the community to bring together older age groups and young people
- Develop a strategy to reduce stigma by promoting awareness of mental health in later life
- Promote social inclusion and encourage participation
- Reduce anti-social behaviour
- Tackle the stigma of mental ill health
- Raise public awareness of mental health difficulties which older people face
- Bridge gaps and break down barriers between generations.

### 2.3 Activities of MOOD

MOOD is run by one full-time Project Leader with support from two sessional workers, two sessional drivers, two volunteers and one part-time (7 hours per week) administrative assistant. In addition, OMUS (a group of older men who participate in a photography group within MOOD) has one part-time co-ordinator (16 hours per week) and four sessional workers who each run different groups.

MOOD groups meet in a variety of places in West Lothian, including community centres, churches, sports centres, sheltered housing and education centres.

A previous report by MOOD (2000) has found that the following key factors contribute to the development of depression and/or other mental health problems in older people locally:

- Inability to leave the house and loneliness
- Lack of relationships with others (children, friends and neighbours)
- Lack of contact with others
- Lack of company of others
- Boredom.



Through its activities MOOD seeks to address these risk factors for poor mental health among older people locally and to strengthen known protective factors for mental health (see Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2000; SDC, 2006).

The activities currently offered to older people include: local history; self-help; cookery; bowls; photography; walking; relaxation; gentle exercise; drop in (which offers games such as scrabble, draughts and dominoes); harmony (sing along); reminiscence; word games; current affairs groups; crafts; and outings. Each group meets weekly for approximately two hours. Transport is provided to get to groups and outings, either by car using the volunteer drivers or adapted minibus. Clients are not charged for this service.

MOOD's intergenerational work seeks to challenge the stigma surrounding mental ill health and raise awareness of the mental health difficulties faced by older people. Activities to address this include:

- Presentations to upper school Personal and Social Development classes on older people's mental health issues, stigma and career options
- Working with local primary schools and getting pupils involved in MOOD groups
- The OMUS photography group giving specialised photography tuition to primary school pupils, the outcome of which was an exhibition of the photography

- Inviting MOOD clients to school concerts/enterprise days.

Over time, MOOD's intergenerational work has developed to enable young people from surrounding schools to volunteer to participate in some of the activities which are on offer for older people. In particular, the young people participated in the OMUS photography group, the harmony group, indoor and outdoor bowls, taking part in the activities, joining in and helping the older people.

## 3. Research



SDC was invited by MOOD to evaluate its intergenerational work. The aim of this research was to establish whether the volunteering experience with MOOD had enhanced individual and/or community well-being and to assess the extent to which the intergenerational work was achieving its aims. In addition, there was an interest in ascertaining whether the experience had improved the self-esteem, confidence, sense of empowerment and well-being of the young people and the older people concerned.

### 3.1 Indicators of community well-being

Indicators of community well-being were devised by SDC to provide a method of assessing impact and success throughout the four Community Well-Being Exemplar Projects (see Table 3.1). Jermyn (2001; cited in Callard & Friedli, 2005) suggests 'success' can be measured and identified in four categories:

- **'Hard' outcomes** - improvements in crime levels, educational attainment, health improvements and increased levels of employment
- **Personal impacts** – increased self-confidence and self-esteem, the acquisition of new skills and improvements in prospects and outlooks
- **Collective/group impacts** – improvement in interpersonal skills, increased social contact and a better understanding and increased toleration of other people

- **Community impacts** – increased community involvement, the development of community identity and pride and an active community.

A number of other studies have developed their own indicators for measuring the success of similar projects. For example, Colter (2001; cited in Callard & Friedli, 2005) uses the following indicators:

- Personal social capital outcomes and practical outcomes that come from participation in the project
- Levels of personal confidence and self-esteem
- Impacts on education
- Impacts on local economics and regeneration
- Impacts on health promotion.

For the purposes of the work reported here, three sets of indicators have been selected as indicators of community well-being: impact on the individual; impact on relations, friends and peers; and impact on communities (See Table 3.1).

**The aim of this research was to establish whether the volunteering experience with MOOD had enhanced individual and/or community well-being.**



**Table 3.1 Indicators of community well-being**

Impact on individuals	Impact on relations, friends & peers	Impact on communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feel happy, safe &amp; well</li> <li>• Changing aspirations</li> <li>• Reduced isolation/social inclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involved</li> <li>• Increased inclusion</li> <li>• Shift in attitudes &amp; aspirations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self determined activities</li> <li>• Increased social cohesion</li> <li>• Mutual support mechanisms</li> <li>• Less destructive behavior against self &amp; others</li> </ul>

### 3.2 Research design

*ActionAid* Reflect is an approach to adult learning and social change currently used in over 60 countries and 350 organizations worldwide. The approach is designed to help people reflect and provides a means to explore thoughts, perceptions and intentions. The Reflect model was chosen as it fitted with both the ethos and purpose of the research in terms of eliciting people’s experiences, feelings and opinions, without placing too much emphasis on literacy and the written word. The body mapping method used in this work (see Figure 3.1) was considered useful in this context as it recognizes the importance of visual media for self expression, promoting the participation of those who would not normally have the ability and/or confidence to share their experiences.

### 3.3 Participants

To gather the information for this report, the researchers visited Croftmalloch Primary School and Burnhouse School in Whitburn, West Lothian and met with four of the MOOD groups involved in the intergenerational projects in West Lothian.

Each of the young people who volunteered with MOOD and the older people who attended the MOOD groups were asked if they would be willing to participate in a body mapping exercise to evaluate the volunteering role of young people within MOOD.

Following the body mapping exercise with the older people from MOOD, the researchers discussed the issues that arose during the body mapping exercise with the older people. This highlighted changes in personal opinions and attitudes of the older people immediately after the body mapping exercise.



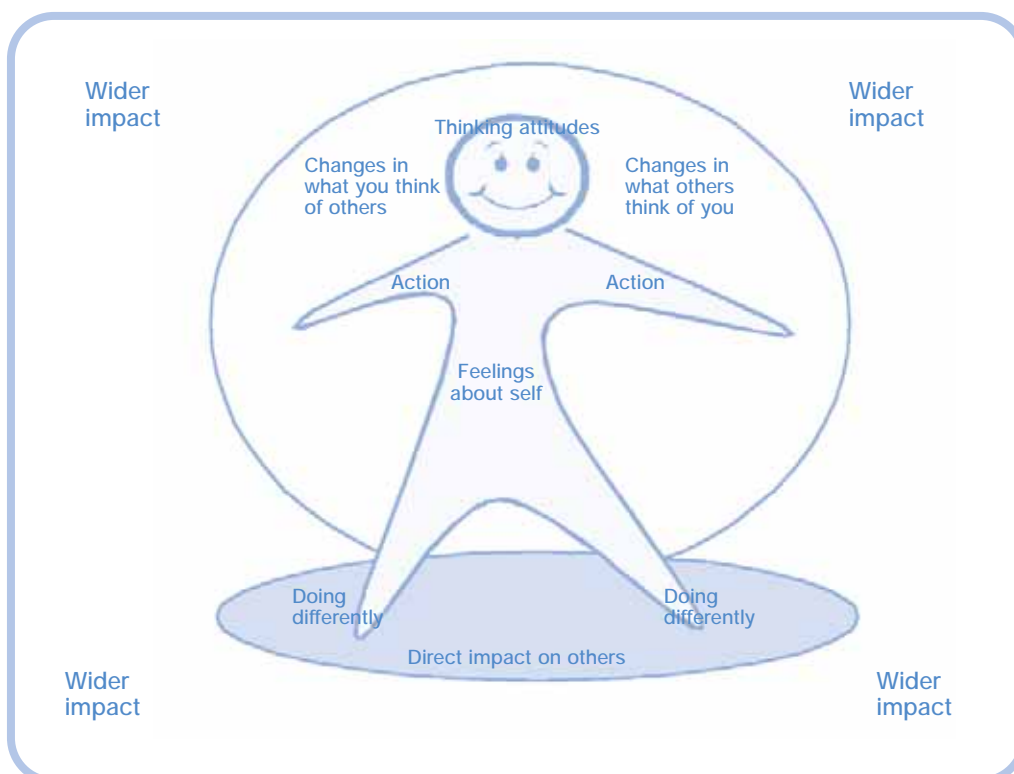
### 3.4 Body mapping

The body mapping method asks participants to draw a map of a body. They are then asked to write words and phrases in their body map about their thoughts, feelings and experiences of the project.

As illustrated in Figure 3.1, specific parts of the body maps were allocated to specific areas that the research wanted to address. Therefore, the stomach represents feelings prior to the volunteering; the head represents the participants thinking during the volunteering; the arms and legs

represent changes in personal actions as a result of the volunteering; the darker shape at the bottom represents the direct impacts the project can have/have had on others; the area outside of the head represents changes in how the participants now see other people and how they see them; and the wider area around the body map represents possible wider impacts. By gathering this information, it is possible to establish the impacts the volunteering experience with MOOD has had on individuals, on their relations, friends and peers and the wider community as a whole.

Figure 3.1 The body mapping method





**Table 3.2 Body maps collected**

Source of Body Maps	Number of Maps Completed	Comments on Data Collection
Young people from Croftmalloch Primary School, Whitburn, West Lothian (Primary 6 & 7, aged 10-11 years)	46 maps from individual young people: some body maps were duplicated*	Young people produced their own body map with little intervention from the researchers. Carried out in a classroom setting, therefore, an element of collaboration did occur.
Young people from Burnhouse School, Whitburn, West Lothian (aged 13-15 years)	3 maps from individual young people (3 other young people were unavailable for the body mapping exercise as they were not in attendance at school that day or were in classes they were unable to miss)	Young people who participated were assisted to help articulate feelings and to spell.
Older people from the MOOD Groups, West Lothian (aged over 55 years)	4 maps, each produced by a group of 6 older people	Researchers scribed comments to complete one body map per group, in view of problems articulating and writing individual maps.

\*There was a misunderstanding with the teacher at Croftmalloch Primary School in that she was concerned the young people had not done as well as they might have during the body mapping exercise, with one not wanting to participate and a couple writing negative words and comments about their experiences. As a result, the young people had to redo their body maps and an element of teacher influence was apparent. Therefore, some of the material could not be used in the final analysis for the purpose of this report.



The information was gathered retrospectively from all participants. Ideally, the body mapping exercise would have been conducted over time, with the feelings being added prior to the volunteering, the thinking immediately after the volunteering and the remainder after the volunteering but this was not built into the research process. However, the research was able to draw on questionnaires that the young people completed before and during their involvement with MOOD and the results from the questionnaires were compared with the material from the body mapping to give an indication of changes over time.

### 3.5 Ranking exercise

As a further phase of the research, pupils at Croftmalloch Primary carried out a ranking exercise immediately after the body mapping exercise to highlight what they regarded as benefits of the project and which benefits were most important to them.

This exercise was not undertaken with the young people at Burnhouse School or the older people as the numbers in each of these groups were too small.

From the body mapping exercise, the main benefits of the project were established using what young people had written on their maps. These benefits were then written on a large piece of paper. Each young person was given five coloured stickers to indicate what they thought had been of most benefit to them. In addition, each young person was given a 'smiley face' to stick next to the theme that they regarded as the most important part of the project.

The following sections describe and explore the results from the body mapping exercise.

From the body mapping exercise, the main benefits of the project were established using what young people had written on their maps. These benefits were then written on a large piece of paper. Each young person was given five coloured stickers to indicate what they thought had been of most benefit to them.

## 4. Findings/Learning



### 4.1 Stereotypes

The responses to the body mapping illustrated that older people and younger people can hold stereotyped attitudes to one another.

#### 4.1.1 Stereotypes about older people

The older men advised they had originally been apprehensive about working with younger people and cameras as they were wary that others would make negative assumptions about their intent. It was thought that concerns about child safety were fuelled by negative media portrayals of older men. This stereotype was not held by any of the young people.

#### 4.1.2 Stereotypes about young people

Older people held a number of preconceived stereotypes about what younger people are like and what they do in their spare time, generally considered to be troublesome:

***“Some gather in groups drinking”***  
(older person)

This view was particularly prevalent among the older people when talking about the young people from Burnhouse School, who were regarded as disruptive. A number of older people initially harboured concerns about the participation of this set of young people in MOOD activities.

Older people tended to explain the negative behaviour they attributed to young people as a consequence of their family and/or social circumstances, surroundings and socialisation:

***“Problems relate back to parents”***  
(older person)

#### 4.1.3 Changes in attitudes

As a result of contact with young people through MOOD, the older people described how their attitudes to young people had changed. Older people were surprised at the behaviour and attitude of the younger people they met, which challenged their negative stereotypes.

***“Young people have not changed since we were young”*** (older person)

One older gentleman commented on the fear and apprehension he associated with young people wearing ‘hoodies’, but through MOOD he came to realise that ‘they are only kids’.

Age Concern Scotland (1997) found that when older people and younger people work together, ageist attitudes tend to be eroded and mutual regard enhanced. What was striking in the MOOD project was that the shift in the attitude of older people was not maintained over time and older people (particularly older women) tended to revert back to negative views of young people immediately following the body mapping exercise.

By contrast, the young people involved tended to move away from their initial negative reactions to older people and maintain this position. In so far as the research could gauge this, such changes in attitude were maintained. The opportunity available to young people to reflect on the whole process as part of their school curriculum may have contributed to this. For older people, the contact with the young volunteers was short term, not part of a longer process and there was little opportunity to reflect on or discuss issues that emerged from the experience.



## 4.2 How we see other each other

The experience with MOOD not only changed the way that older people and younger people saw each other, but also raised awareness of mental health issues. Working with older people gave the younger people some insight into the challenges and problems that can face people in later life.

### 4.2.1 Perceptions about older people

Prior to participating in MOOD, the majority of young people indicated that they had previously thought that older people were 'boring' and had 'little to offer young people'. Moreover, older people had also been aware that younger people held this image of them:

***"[They were] Surprised that we had knowledge and skills to share"***  
(older person)

There were indications that the experience of volunteering with MOOD led to changes in attitudes and perceptions:

***"I [now] see people as a friend with their own special personality and as people I can learn from"***  
(young person, Croftmalloch)

Younger people gave a number of reasons to explain why their perspective had altered:

- They had come to recognize that older people were not much different to them
- They became aware that older people had a wealth of knowledge and skills to share

- It was recognized that older people might have had struggles and difficulties in life (due to health, social and societal restrictions) and were sometimes socially isolated.

### 4.2.2 Perceptions about young people

Older people also experienced a change in their perceptions of younger people:

***"Young people get a bad name but it's only a small minority who cause trouble or it's from a certain area"*** (older person)

***"[I] Wouldn't have believed they [Burnhouse pupils] were awkward children"*** (older person)

Older people found that young people had much to offer their generation, in terms of skills and knowledge in subjects where they themselves tended to be less knowledgeable and confident (such as information technology). As a result of young people feeling that they had something to share, there was a firmer basis for relationships to develop. Older people also came to be aware that young people can have difficulties as a consequence of the way they are viewed by society and portrayed in the media.



#### 4.2.3 Other people's perceptions of me

The body mapping highlighted a number of issues about young people's understanding of how they were perceived. Getting involved in MOOD had been an opportunity for them to demonstrate they could be trusted. This had particular significance for the young people at Burnhouse School, who had been excluded from mainstream schooling as a result of behavioural problems. Volunteering with MOOD offered them a chance to show they could be responsible and helpful and gain recognition of this achievement:

*"I am trusted more"*  
(young person, Burnhouse)

*"The community learns to trust you"*  
(young person, Burnhouse)

Some young people had previously felt that they were misunderstood and treated badly, simply because they were young. However, following their experience with MOOD, the young people felt that the older people now viewed them as individuals with their own personalities, instead of one homogenous group of 'troublesome youngsters':

*"...to start off some people were wary of me but they then put a bit of faith in me"*  
(young person, Croftmalloch)

*"They [older people] see me and treat me as a real person"*  
(young person, Croftmalloch)

All of these experiences are known to contribute to improved mental health and well-being.

#### 4.3 How I think about myself and my place in the world

The mapping also explored key changes in thinking and attitude. Commonly older and young participants reported that their involvement with MOOD had led them to reconsider where they stood in the community and to a realization that there was a wealth of support available, in a variety of formats, including friendships with other age groups.

*"Realized we're not left alone"*  
(older person)

*"...we can live in a non-ageist world...and everyone can live in harmony"*  
(young person, Croftmalloch)

#### 4.4 Improved communication

The volunteering encouraged young people and older people to communicate with each other, sometimes in new ways. Many young people do not get the opportunity to spend time with and communicate with older people. Lack of communication and contact with people from other age groups can contribute to social isolation, mistrust and fear. By encouraging communication through intergenerational work, social isolation can decrease, with the potential for positive impacts on individual mental health and well-being.



The young volunteers found that the experience allowed them to develop their communication skills. They commented that, following the experience, they found it easier to talk to older people. A number of young people also explained that they now feel more confident and less shy as a result.

***“[I] Listen more carefully to older people when they talk to me”***

*(young person, Burnhouse)*

The older people recognised that the young people were good at communicating with older people and that this benefited all generations. By improving communication skills, not only are generations able to communicate effectively, but the educational aspirations and expectations of young people can also be improved. This was highlighted by teachers from Burnhouse School who advised that the young people who had participated had improved their communication skills as a result and that this could only benefit their education.

## 4.5 Engaging with others

### 4.5.1 Feeling valued

***“They would have done anything for us”***

*(older person)*

***“Just seeing them being glad to see us... to see them laugh with us... to see them be so nice to others”***

*(young person, Croftmalloch)*

***“All people are interesting and fun when you listen to them”***

*(young person, Croftmalloch)*

***“They [the older people] like to hear what we have been doing and see if things have changed”***

*(young person, Croftmalloch)*

Attachment to networks within the community is known to be a protective factor for good mental health

(Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2000). It is also one of the areas where older people may be most at risk, as a result of isolation and exclusion. In this respect, MOOD has proved itself to be very effective. Teachers and psychiatrists involved with the OMUS group commented on the noticeable improvement in the mental health of the older men involved, in terms of their optimism and sense of achievement and purpose.

The young people at Burnhouse School felt that their contribution to MOOD activities had resulted in their feeling valued and accepted as individuals:

***“Older people appreciated our help”***

*(young person, Burnhouse)*

The volunteering experience made the young people from Burnhouse feel involved in the community and valued for their contribution and positive about what they had to offer. From discussions with the teachers at Burnhouse School, it was apparent that the young people's behaviour had improved as a result of the experience. Subsequently, one young person at Burnhouse was able to move back to mainstream school and another started a new college course. Volunteering with MOOD is regarded as a major factor in contributing to these outcomes. All of the



young people from Burnhouse viewed the experience as positive and wanted the volunteering to feature as a regular option for others at the school.

Both the older people and younger people came to a better understanding of each other:

***“Got to know their perspective”***  
(older person)

***“Got to understand older people better”***  
(young person, Burnhouse)

Communication was seen as the key to understanding:

***“As long as you talk to the children, it’s ok”*** (older person)

As a result of improved communication and on-going contact between each of the generations, intergenerational relationships have greatly improved. One young person summed up the change in attitudes:

***“I will go to older people more for advice as I can see they know a lot more than I thought”*** (young person, Croftmalloch)

#### 4.5.2 Reconnection with childhood

A benefit of the volunteering experience for the older people involved was that the whole experience reconnected them with their childhood by reminding them of what their lives used to be like and invoking memories of their childhoods. These memories brought a renewed awareness of the importance they attached to their own experiences when they were younger and an appreciation of being a young person nowadays. One effect of this was the

break down of the dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and the dissolution of barriers between generations. Older people also recounted how contact with the young volunteers enabled them to think back to positive times in their life and this helped lift their mood.

#### 4.6 Ripple effects in the local community

From the body mapping exercise, it would seem that older people (both elderly relatives and older people within the community in general) benefited significantly from the intergenerational work in West Lothian.

Following the volunteering experience, the majority of young people commented on how their actions had changed in terms of visiting elderly relatives and neighbours and helping older people more frequently.

The young people advised they now played football, computer games and cards more often with their elderly relatives since volunteering with the intergenerational projects.

***“I now enjoy going to see elderly folks because they always have something to say and exciting stories to tell”***  
(young person, Croftmalloch)

***“I hang out with my papa more than I used to and now I appreciate him more”***  
(young person, Croftmalloch)

***“I visit the elderly in my family more and I enjoy it”*** (young person, Croftmalloch)

In addition to the increase in visiting and helping older people, a number of general comments were made by the young people



about improvements in the relations between the generations. For example:

***“Like to spend time with them”***  
(young person, Croftmalloch)

***“Say more things to them”***  
(young person, Croftmalloch)

The consensus among the young people was that their volunteering with MOOD led them to feel better about themselves. A number also suggested that the older people involved would no longer feel scared of young people and would now be able to communicate openly in the community in general, not just in the comfort of the project.

A number of young people also suggested that their behaviour had improved as a result of becoming involved in MOOD and, as

noted above, several young people from Burnhouse School were subsequently able to re-enter mainstream school or move on to further education. This would suggest that the volunteering opportunities presented by MOOD to bring generations together and enable participants to gain confidence and respect has the potential to address wider societal issues.

The ranking exercise undertaken by young people at Croftmalloch Primary illustrates their understanding of the wider implications for young people (see Table 4.1) and gives an indication of what they took from the volunteering experience (whilst this ranking exercise was only carried out at Croftmalloch, the results echoed the views and feelings described by the young people at Burnhouse).

**Table 4.1 Results of ranking exercise**

Learning	No. Reporting this benefit	No. who ranked this benefit as a priority
Old and young having fun together	46	21
Understanding older people	30	9
Respect for older people	29	2
Can be friends with older people	16	6
Learn new things	13	0
Creates a caring and safe community	12	0
Older people can have respect for younger people	8	1
They are just like me*	0	0

\* Although the indicator ‘they are just like me’ was generated by the young people, a number of young people explained that they did not vote for it in the ranking exercise as they had forgot what it meant.



Unsurprisingly, the young people thought the biggest benefit was that older and younger people could have fun together, with 21 young people out of 46 identifying that as their personal priority. Comments made by the young people illustrated how much fun they had had and how enjoyable they had found the company of older people.

In addition, young people found that projects like MOOD have the potential to help people understand each other better. The young people thought it was important that they now had a better understanding of older people, with 9 highlighting this as a priority for them. The realisation that they can be friends with older people was also seen as beneficial, prioritized by 6 young people. Other important issues were that MOOD helped them to respect older people (2 young people volunteered this as a priority); and that older people can have respect for young people (one young person highlighted this as a priority).

The older people also believed that the affect that MOOD has had on the young people may have an impact on them in later life, in terms of communication skills, interpersonal skills and the ability to respect others.

***“There may be impacts on kids later on in life” (older person)***

This was specifically believed to be the case for the young people from Burnhouse School, where improvements in behaviour and interpersonal skills in the young people has already been witnessed.

The older people also acknowledged that by improving communication between generations and promoting respect and tolerance for others, MOOD would have an affect on family relations in terms of relationships and support systems:

***“...it is bound to have a spin off in family relations as there's now a lot more extended family, it makes the kids care” (older person)***

#### 4.7 The challenges

The older people were more likely to revert back to preconceived stereotypes of young people, that of 'troublesome youth' than their younger counterparts and this was particularly the case among the older women.

One of the groups for older men that participated in the body mapping was OMUS and in this project, contact with the younger people was maintained over a longer period of time than in other groups. For example, OMUS held exhibitions of their photography to which the young people were invited. In addition, OMUS is also preparing photographs for archive collections at a local library. This long-term contact and engagement with young people is likely to have provided greater opportunity for relationships to develop and for those involved to reflect on their attitudes and assumptions about other age groups. The womens group did not have the same opportunity built into their activities.

## 5. Conclusion



MOOD works to promote and protect the mental health and well-being of older people, using a range of different activities and approaches. The research reported here has considered one particular aspect of the MOOD project - its intergenerational work.

This paper has illustrated how, on a relatively small scale, the work of the MOOD project is able to make a valuable contribution to address a range of community and social issues that are local and national policy priorities, including those related to health and mental health, education, social work, social inclusion and community development. MOOD has also been able to challenge stereotypes and barriers between generations and promote mutual respect, values and acceptance.

There are strong arguments to support interventions and initiatives to build bridges between generations in terms of promoting the well-being of local communities. This report has sought to explore some of the consequences and challenges of such activity using participatory research methods to understand the experiences of those involved.

Overall, the intergenerational experience had more of an impact on the younger people, especially those from Burnhouse School. The younger people who took part moved further in terms of changing their attitudes, perceptions and actions towards other generations than the older people involved. There are a number of reasons why this could be the case. Firstly, younger people were encouraged to give thought to the process, the benefits they took from it and the implications. Whereas older people were only involved in a one-off event as they had less

opportunity to explore what the experience meant for them, they seemed to derive less benefit. By contrast, the older men involved in OMUS had regular contact with young people over a period of time and this has been of considerable benefit.

Young people were able to challenge how they thought about older people as a result of interacting with them. This led younger people to acknowledge older people's skills and knowledge to realise that the only difference between generations is age. Hatton-Yeo upholds the need for *"social policy to be rooted in engaging the whole community in a way that is both positive and recognizes the mutuality of the relationships of different groups to one another"* (2000:1).

Comments from the participants in this study support these conclusions, highlighting the benefits of such projects:

***"Brings the world together"*** (older person)

***"Brings together generations"***  
(young person, Croftmalloch)

***"We can be friends with all"***  
(young person, Croftmalloch)

Improvements in communication and interactions between older and younger people is important in working to create a sense of community. Through projects such as MOOD, social interdependence can be fostered and the concept of responsible and tolerant citizenship and of civic responsibility is promoted. This type of work can have a ripple effect in terms of improving mental health, spreading out from the individuals who are directly involved into wider community relations, leading to enhanced levels of community well-being.

## 6. Recommendations



### 6.1 Further research

There is opportunity to conduct further research on a number of issues arising from this project:

- Additional long-term action research to examine the relationships between intergenerational volunteering, individual mental health and community well-being
- Future research would benefit greatly from being user-led, both by young people and older people involved in the projects
- MOOD would benefit from additional research on its impact on the wider community, such as the friends and family of both the clients of MOOD and the young people involved
- Given one of the aims of MOOD is to challenge stigma and raise public awareness of mental health in later life, evaluation of MOOD's effectiveness in this regard would be valuable.

### 6.2 Implications for policy

Projects such as MOOD need to be seen as part of core activity to promote community well-being, not as 'add ons'. Whilst MOOD is a relatively small community-based service that is heavily reliant on volunteers, it has a potentially huge impact, both on individuals and the wider community. Currently, support and funding is ad-hoc, inconsistent and unorganised, coming from a wide variety of different sources, few of which are linked. There is a requirement for strategic support and development of such projects to secure their long-term future.

### 6.3 Engaging the generations

The change which was seen in the young people's attitudes and views of older people was the result of the activities being embedded in a longer-term process of reflection and analysis. For projects such as MOOD to achieve a sustainable impact in raising awareness and challenging stigma, it is all the more important to ensure there is a clear strategic purpose supported by reflective practice to support social change.

Intergenerational volunteering needs to be seen as part of a process of dialogue and exchange among different age groups rather than as a series of single events. A challenge for MOOD is to continue to seek the genuine engagement of the older people it works with. The following core values of community engagement (PAULO, 2003) may provide a helpful framework for MOOD in further developing its practice:

- Social justice
- Self-determination
- Working and learning together
- Sustainable communities
- Participation
- Reflective practice.



#### 6.4 Encouraging older volunteers

Whilst older people do have the opportunity to volunteer with young people through OMUS, consideration should be given to the further development of such options. One of the main aims of MOOD is to reduce social isolation of older people and engaging them as volunteers would not only be enjoyable, but would continue to help break down barriers of isolation between the generations and reduce loneliness. It would create opportunities for older people to feel valued, to utilise their skills and experience and pass these on to younger generations.

#### 6.5 Volunteering in mainstream special school

All of the young people from Burnhouse viewed the experience of volunteering with MOOD as positive and wanted this to be routinely available. The results of this project would suggest there is opportunity for strategic development of volunteering within special schools, in view of the significant reported impact on the young people in terms of their well-being, behaviour and sense of worth.

Projects such as MOOD need to be seen as part of core activity to promote community well-being, not as 'add ons'. Whilst MOOD is a relatively small community-based service that is heavily reliant on volunteers, it has potentially huge impact, both on individuals and the wider community.

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**MOOD**

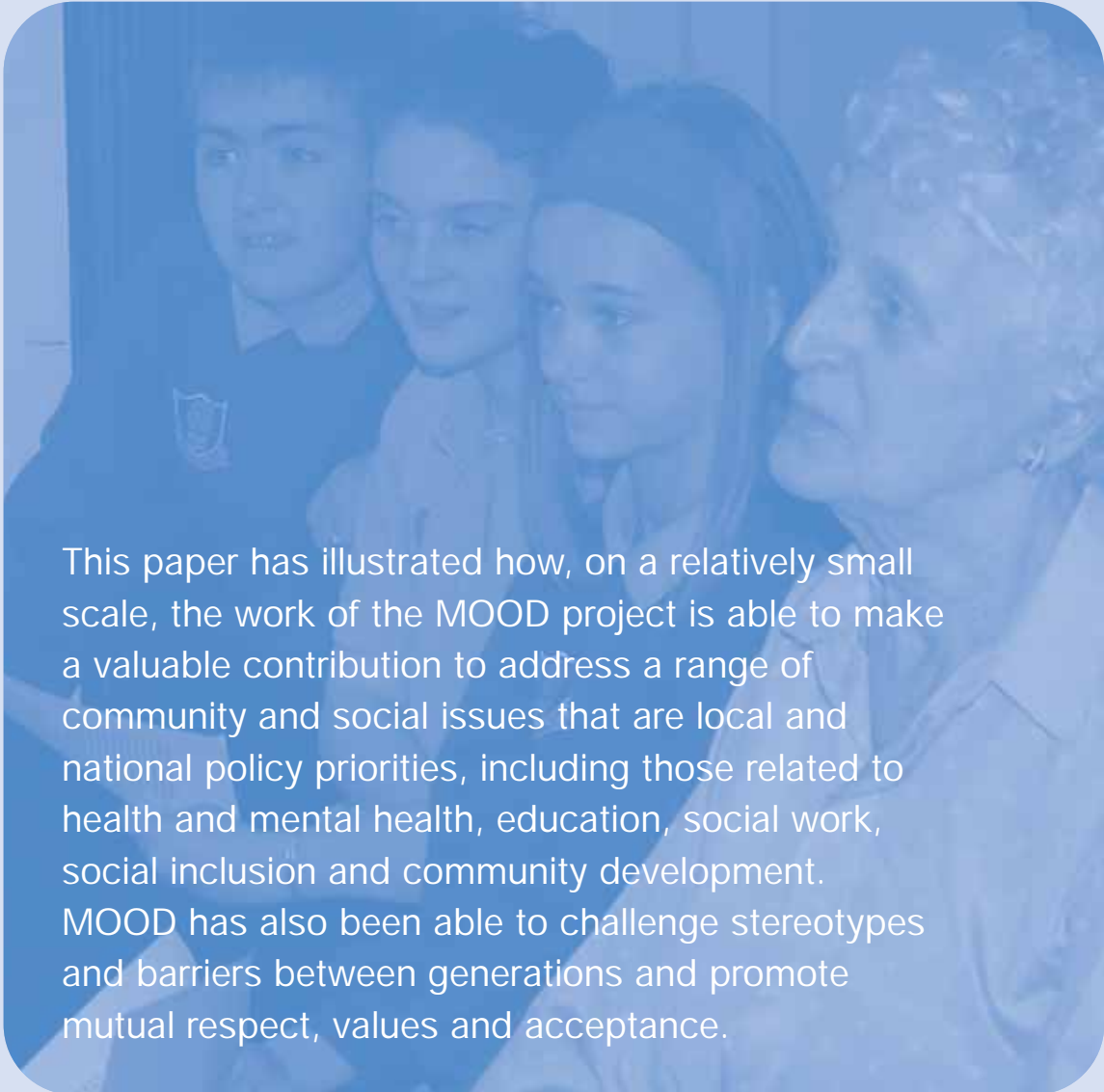
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A photograph showing four individuals of varying ages—two young women, one middle-aged woman, and one older woman—gathered around a table, looking at a document. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the image area.

This paper has illustrated how, on a relatively small scale, the work of the MOOD project is able to make a valuable contribution to address a range of community and social issues that are local and national policy priorities, including those related to health and mental health, education, social work, social inclusion and community development. MOOD has also been able to challenge stereotypes and barriers between generations and promote mutual respect, values and acceptance.

