

Neighbourliness Works

Community Letter Writing - Let people know you care by sending a friendly letter. This can be organised by individuals or collectively by a community group or a school as part of their creative writing curriculum. Making connections within your community and across the generations through letter writing can be extremely rewarding particularly during Covid-19 when many people are feeling more isolated than ever.

Cards for Kindness

Thanks to our digital age, some people have forgotten or have never known the joy of receiving and sending a hand-written letter.

Loneliness is something which can affect us all at some point in our lives, whatever our age. Covid-19 has increased a sense of loneliness for many, particularly those in care or nursing homes or confined to their own home.

Making connections with people is important to most of us and receiving a friendly letter can give someone a real boost. Connecting across the generations can also be extremely enriching; we can all learn from our elders and youngsters.



Pupils at Appleby Grammar School sent over 350 handmade Christmas cards in December 2020 to care homes, food banks and people in the local community (distributed by Appleby's Emergency Response Group).

The 6th formers organised a virtual assembly to ask their fellow pupils to make a Christmas card, explaining how many people find Christmas a lonely time especially during Covid-19 when contact with others is restricted. The staff were moved by the children's responses and their lovely messages and expressions of empathy.

Why send cards for kindness?

- Creating connections with others can make us all happy
- Schools and care homes can get involved as part of a creative writing activity

How to go about it

- Easy to set up as an individual or as part of a school or community group
- Organise it yourself or use an existing scheme

What to write

- Examples and ideas can be found [here](#)
- Ensure the safety of those writing and receiving letters with safeguarding measures

How to get started

You can set up a correspondence as an **individual, school, college or community group**. It's very simple.

- Decide whether it's a one-off or a longer-term pen pal correspondence.
- **Community:** Approach your local Community Covid-Response Group to ask if they would deliver cards to those members of the community whom they feel would benefit from some contact, or approach a care home directly. Then contact the local school, college or community groups etc to see if people would like to write to others in the community. Social media is an excellent way to let people know about it.
- **Care home cards:** Use an existing scheme e.g. Healthier Lancashire and South Cumbria's website has cards you can print off and a list of some care homes: www.healthierlsc.co.uk/CardsForKindness. Other care homes can be found on this website: www.cumbria.gov.uk/cumbriacare
- **Care home pen pals:** Arts In Care Homes is an organisation which links pen pals and care homes together. They ask for emailed versions of letters or cards and suggest that if twinning with a local school and care home, consider writing group letters rather than to and from specific individuals as residents of care homes may have to withdraw due to ill health, or may feel pressured to reply. www.artsincarehomes.org.uk/only-connect-pen-pals.

Safeguarding

It is important to protect individual's identities by ensuring anonymity:

- Use first names only.
- Use the address of the care/nursing home, school or college, not personal addresses. If community groups are coordinating a local letter scheme, they can drop the letters off to recipients, explaining that their privacy is protected.
- Don't share images or details that could identify someone.

It is important to ensure the safety of recipients of letters:

- Consider sending emails to care homes who can print them off for residents (to avoid contamination during Covid-19), or store the cards in sealed bags/envelopes and quarantine them for 3 days (with the start date of quarantine on) before handing them over. They can be quarantined for 3 days at the other end.
- Letters should be checked by a member of staff (school or care home) or by the community group before sending and delivering.
- Even if schools are closed due to Covid, children could send emails with their cards/letters to schools to print off, which could then be delivered by the coordinating community group.

What to write

- Send a simple handmade card or get creative and include colourful pictures (but nothing that might identify you or where you live), poems, crosswords, jokes and riddles. (No glitter!)
- Pretend you're having a conversation with a stranger and think about the things you'd talk to them about.
- Letters must be legible, in large print and handwritten.
- So that your letter can chime with anyone, avoid religion and politics.

Resources for Schools: Arts in Care Homes' resource for schools provides topic suggestions including a 13 week postcard challenge for children to develop their creative writing skills.

<https://artsincarehomes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/OnlyConnectPenPals.pdf>.

Children could ask their pen pal what their school was like, whether they were well behaved or naughty and what they liked doing at school, and tell them about their own school.

Resources for Care Homes: Arts in Care Homes gives suggestions on organising letter writing sessions and/or creative writing groups in care homes. <https://artsincarehomes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/onlyconnectresourcepack.pdf>

Example of a pen pal letter

Taken from [Arts in care Homes 'How To' guide](#)

<https://artsincarehomes.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/onlyconnectresourcepack.pdf>



Dear...

How are you? I am really pleased to be writing to you. My name is Nichola and I live in North London. I am 46 years old. I have a sister, who has recently had her second baby. He was born a week ago, so I now have two adorable nephews. I am not very tall, about 5ft 2inches. When I look at photographs with me and my friends together, I am often the shortest one! I have dark brown hair, with some grey coming through. I am very short sighted, so I wear contact lenses or sometimes my glasses with the black frames. I have dark brown eyes. How would you describe yourself?

I was born in Hackney, East London in the Mothers Hospital, which is no longer there. There is now a large, modern hospital nearby called Homerton Hospital. I have always lived in London, apart from the time I spent at University in Leicester. I live in a lovely part of North London called Muswell Hill, where I have lived for 16 years. Where were you born? Have you lived in the same place or moved around?

One of my favourite objects is a photograph of my little nephew in his school uniform, looking very happy. My secret is that sometimes I can be quite shy but I pretend I am not! I work as a Creative Writing Workshop facilitator and poetry teacher. I really enjoy my job because I get to work with lots of really interesting people in different places. I love cheese! What is your favourite food? I daydream a lot and often about being beside the seaside. I would like to travel to the American South and would be happy to return to India and see some of the Southern areas such as Goa and Kerala. What is the favourite place that you have visited?

My friends make me happy and laugh out loud and so does my 6 year old nephew, as he often says the unexpected! What makes you laugh? As I write this letter, I am wearing pink fluffy slipper socks which I am very fond of! This morning, I had coffee and eggs for breakfast and then went to teach my Creative Writing Workshop at Blind Aid. My hobbies are writing my thoughts in a notebook, reading a really good book or poetry, going for coffee and walks with friends and also going to the Theatre and Art Galleries. What do you enjoy doing?

I look forward to hearing from you. Bye for now! Nichola.

For more information please contact ACTion with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01768 425 666 or visit our website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

ACT champions community and rural issues

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