

# Evaluation of InCommon's online platform and the social impact of InCommon's intergenerational activities

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## Executive Summary

We live in an increasingly age-segregated society, with few opportunities for young and old to interact within the community. This is harmful for all age groups, but especially older people that live in age-specific housing and have limited connections to family or the wider community.

Older people and younger people live further apart than before, weakening social bonds between generations. The share of over-65s who said they belonged to their neighbourhood is falling - from 84% in 1998 to 78% in 2017.<sup>1</sup>

This disconnect has a negative impact on individuals' wellbeing, our sense of community and drives ageist attitudes. Ageism is the most widespread form of discrimination in the UK, with negative attitudes about age beginning to form in children as young as three years old.<sup>2</sup>

According to the World Health Organisation, intergenerational connection is one of the most effective ways of combating ageism and it comes with multiple benefits for all age groups - from increased social participation to a greater appreciation of diversity.<sup>3</sup>

InCommon is a charity with a mission to fix some of these problems. It aims to bridge generational divides and build more inclusive, connected, age-friendly communities for all. InCommon's 'Connect', and 'Social Action' programmes are delivered by the team and connect groups of young people with their older neighbours in retirement housing across London to learn and build friendships together.

InCommon has received funding from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to scale its intergenerational activity by developing an online platform to support local schools and retirement housing across the UK to set up and run intergenerational projects themselves. This has now been branded as the Empower programme.

To demonstrate the impact of InCommon's activities the Housing LIN was asked to conduct an evaluation with two primary aims:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of the online platform as a tool to enable intergenerational activity.
2. To evaluate the social impact of InCommon's intergenerational activity.

### **The effectiveness of InCommon's online platform**

This evaluation found that InCommon's online platform is an effective tool that enables schools and retirement housing to embark on their own intergenerational activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Onward (2021). Age of Alienation: The collapse in community and belonging among young people, and how we should respond. Available at: <https://www.ukonward.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Age-of-Alienation-Onward.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Ageing Better (2023). The facts about ageism. Available at: <https://www.agewithoutlimits.org/what-ageism/ageism-key-stats-facts>

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organisation (2021) Global Report on Ageism. Available at: [Global report on ageism \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/global-report-on-ageism)

The evaluation found that from May 2023 to February 2024:

- **310 individuals** took part in intergenerational activities across **38 visits**.
- Intergenerational sessions typically achieve a **40:60 ratio of older to younger participants**, this split fosters intimate connections and meaningful conversations.
- Intergenerational activity happened **nationwide**, in the following regions: the South East (45%), West Midlands (31%), London (16%), East of England (6%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (South Yorkshire) (2%).

The platform's strengths lie in its high usability rating, efficient onboarding process, and autonomy of users once onboarded. The platform acts as an effective tool to support retirement housing managers to organise activities that create a sense of community at their schemes as well as enabling school leads to offer opportunities for intergenerational connections for pupils that in many cases would otherwise not exist.

InCommon's platform offers a significant opportunity for others to easily set up their own intergenerational activities with help from a supportive InCommon team member. There is also significant scope for InCommon's online platform to be used by the wider older persons housing sector to enable residents across all specialist housing types to reap the benefits of intergenerational connections.

### **The social impact of InCommon's intergenerational activities**

InCommon's intergenerational activities have a positive social impact on participants as well as wider benefits to society including, for our local communities, the NHS and providers of retirement housing themselves.

The economic impact has been estimated for the intergenerational activity carried out in 2022/23 as per the numbers of participants in the latest Impact Report. This was 570 people in total, 220 older people (20 retirement schemes) and 350 younger people (20 schools).

#### *Health and wellbeing outcomes for older participants*

Taking part in InCommon's intergenerational activities has significant health and wellbeing outcomes for older participants such as, reduced loneliness and isolation, increased mental stimulation and increased sense of belonging to a community.

The associated economic impacts are estimated as a result of a reduction in the use of health or health and care services from healthier and happier residents, demonstrating potential savings to the NHS and providers of retirement housing.

- Estimated cost savings to the NHS from avoided use of health and care services due to reduced loneliness and isolation is **£16,700 per year**.
- Estimated cost savings to the individual/NHS from avoided admission to residential care is **£47,448 per year**.
- Estimated cost savings to providers of retirement housing from reduction in voids due to avoided admission to residential care **£1,170 per year**.

### *Social and emotional learning for younger participants*

Younger people experience improved social and emotional learning as a result of increased confidence and relationship building skills and increased opportunities for teachers to connect with pupils.

### *Community cohesion*

InCommon's intergenerational activities strengthen local communities and the community within sheltered housing. Meaningful connections are created, enabling people to feel part of their community and as though they can make a difference to other people's lives. Strong communities have been shown to have reduced instances of crime and are places that people want to live and invest in.

### *Tackling ageism*

The opportunity to engage with people from a different generation is combating ageist attitudes and shaping participants' views on what it means to be an older or younger person.

### *Improved workplace satisfaction*

School leads, retirement housing managers and providers experience increased workplace satisfaction as a result of InCommon's activities. Seeing the positive impact on residents and pupils gives joy to those responsible for bringing the school and scheme together. Scheme managers are supported to fulfil their role in creating a sense of community at the scheme.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, InCommon's intergenerational activities generate a comprehensive and positive social impact, fostering community connections and building friendships that help tackle ageism within society. At the same time they support educational and emotional growth in children and contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of participants across generations.

Healthier and happier older participants also have potential economic benefits, such as savings to healthcare services, to the individual and/or NHS by preventing a move to residential care, as well as for retirement housing providers maintaining tenancies in sheltered/retirement housing.

**The total estimated economic savings across local authorities, the NHS and retirement housing providers from InCommon's 2022/23 intergenerational activities is £65,318 per year.**

With InCommon's online platform facilitating others to create further intergenerational connections throughout the UK, InCommon offers significant opportunities for social impact to reach a wide audience.

# 1. Introduction and background

This is an evaluation report from the Housing Learning & Improvement Network (LIN) based on a brief from InCommon.

InCommon has received funding from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to scale its intergenerational activity by developing an improved online platform to support local intergenerational projects between schools and retirement homes/sheltered housing.

The aims of this evaluation are:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of the online platform as a tool to enable intergenerational activity.
2. To evaluate the social impact of InCommon's intergenerational activity for a range of stakeholders/participants.

## **About InCommon**

InCommon connects groups of young people with their older neighbours in retirement homes/sheltered housing to learn and build friendships together. Their activities aim to help to boost older people's wellbeing, support children's social and emotional learning, and build more age-friendly communities for all.

## **'Direct delivery'**

InCommon delivers intergenerational activity using what it calls 'direct delivery' through two programmes, Connect and Social Action. The 'direct delivery' activities are organised and facilitated by InCommon staff.

Direct delivery is primarily delivered across London. InCommon's staff and offices are London-based.

## **The Connect Programme**

Connect is InCommon's flagship intergenerational programme connecting primary age children with their older neighbours in retirement homes.

Connect programmes last a year and involve taking part in workshops, activities, and creating projects together across the generations.

InCommon primarily run Connect programmes across Greater London and the South East.

## **The Social Action Programme**

InCommon partnered with Clarion Housing and the #iwill campaign to create a programme that enables youth partners to run meaningful intergenerational social action projects in their local communities.

Working in groups, young and old come together to get inspired about a social issue that they care about. They then come up with ideas for an action project around this social issue.

Social Action programmes include: [Generations Swap Cookbook](#), [Exploring LGBTQ+ Connections](#) and [Hand Warmers Against Heating Costs](#).

InCommon currently directly delivers social action programmes in London and supports youth groups across the country with social action.

The Social Action programme is a partnership with Clarion Housing and the #iwill campaign.

### **The Online Platform**

The online platform is a web-based tool that has been developed as part of InCommon's drive to 'scale-up' intergenerational activity, for which it has received funding from UKRI.

The online platform effectively reduces InCommon's role in organising and facilitating the delivery of intergenerational activities.

InCommon still has a role in finding interested parties, but the online platform directly links schools and retirement schemes to set up activities which are then facilitated by the school lead.

The intergenerational activity itself closely resembles the activities undertaken by the Connect programme.

Intergenerational activity delivered by the online platform can be set up anywhere in the UK.

Clarion Housing Group, Orbit Group and Housing 21 are currently using the online platform to set up InCommon intergenerational sessions.

## 2. Methodology

The purpose of this section is to explain the methodology used to address the two evaluation aims. The two aims of this evaluation are:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of the online platform as a tool to enable intergenerational activity.
2. To evaluate the social impact of InCommon's intergenerational activity for a range of stakeholders/participants.

Following a review of evaluation approaches, a mixed method evaluation approach was used to address the aims of the evaluation using quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools.

In relation to research question 1, the Housing LIN worked with InCommon's online platform developer, the Idea Bureau, to identify the quantitative data that could be taken directly from the platform. The data from the platform was identified to measure its effectiveness as a tool to enable intergenerational activity, including measuring the user experience.

The Housing LIN supported with the design of the online platform's post-event feedback survey that users are prompted to complete once an event has taken place. These surveys capture user experience and the results have been analysed for this evaluation.

Qualitative evaluation tools were also used to better understand how well the online platform and process is working for users. The Housing LIN developed topic guides in collaboration with InCommon which sought to gather evidence for both research questions 1 and 2.

The qualitative research activity that involved a focus on research question 1 involved:

- 3 interviews with school leads
- 2 online focus groups with scheme managers
- 1 interview with a housing provider colleague.

The Housing LIN also observed 3 InCommon sessions that were set up using the online platform and the Digital Platform Programme Manager (PM) observed a couple of sessions and fed back to the Housing LIN. The Housing LIN also spoke with the PM about their views on the online platform.

The evaluation of the online platform was focused on its inception in May 2023 to February 2024.

In relation to research question 2, the Housing LIN used primary and secondary evidence to estimate the social and associated economic impact of InCommon's intergenerational activities for a range of stakeholders.

The primary evidence used for the evaluation of the social impact was taken from InCommon Impact Report 2022/23. The Housing LIN were involved in gathering the evidence for the Impact report.

The method for collecting this evidence involved conducting qualitative research via:

- Surveys of older people/residents, scheme managers, school leads and pupils.
- Interviews/121s with older people, school leads and pupils.
- Online focus groups with scheme managers.



- Observation sessions at a sample of sessions.

The table below provides an overview of the evaluation methods used to collect the primary evidence for research questions 1 and 2.

Table 1. Overview of evaluation methods and the number of research participants.

Method	Residents	Pupils	Scheme managers	School lead	Total
Surveys	55	110	34	42	241
Connect	36	86	5	10	
Social action	9	9	1	4	
Digital Platform	10	15	28	28	
Interviews/121	40	20	7	13	80
Connect	25	16	4	8	
Social action	5	4	1	2	
Digital platform	10	0	2	3	
Focus groups	0	0	2 (7 participants)	0	5 (18 participants)
Connect	0	0	1 (4 participants)	0	
Social action	0	0	0	0	
Digital platform	0	0	2 (7 participants)	0	
Observations	10				10
Connect	6				
Social action	1				
Digital platform	3				

The Housing LIN used secondary evidence in collaboration with the primary evidence to determine the potential social and associated economic impact of InCommon's intergenerational activities.

The secondary evidence was drawn from the Housing LIN's previous experience of the housing for older people sector and conducting similar social impact assessments for other clients. The Housing LIN also conducted an evidence review of external research to support the social impact evaluation.

The social impact generated by InCommon's intergenerational activities is focused on the activities that took place during 2022/2023 as per the Impact report. The table below provides an overview of this data.

Table 2. Data used to measure social impact from InCommon's 2022/23 Impact Report.

InCommon's Impact report 2022/23	Data used
Number of intergenerational workshops	120
Number of older people	220 (20 retirement schemes)
Number of younger people	350 (20 schools)
Total number of older and younger people	571 (total footfall)
Number of hours volunteered by older people	662

### 3. The effectiveness of InCommon's online platform as a tool that enables intergenerational activity

This part of the evaluation report is focused on research question 1 which has been broken down into two elements:

- A. Whether the online platform works as a tool to enable intergenerational activity.
- B. Evaluating the process to set up intergenerational activity on the platform.

#### **A) Whether the online platform works as a tool to enabling intergenerational activity**

##### ***Quantitative evidence***

The online platform collects data about the sessions that have been analysed for this evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the platform in enabling intergenerational activity, i.e. to what extent is the online platform creating opportunities for older and younger people to meet.

This data has been collected since its inception in May 2023 to February 2024. This is shown in Table 3. available on the next page.

Table 3. Online platform, data as of February 2024.

Online platform information		Number / info
Number of retirement schemes	Matched <sup>4</sup> or active <sup>5</sup>	20
	Awaiting a match <sup>6</sup>	8
Number of schools	Matched or active	18
	Awaiting a match	0
Number of young people (footfall <sup>7</sup> and estimate of unique participants <sup>8</sup> )		304 (footfall) Of which 171 are estimated unique participants (c.55% of unique participants)
Number of older people (footfall and estimate of unique participants)		270 (footfall) Of which 139 are estimated unique participants (c.45% of unique participants)
Total number of participants (footfall and estimate of unique participants)		574 (footfall) Of which 310 are estimated unique participants
Number of complete InCommon sessions		38
Number of pending InCommon sessions		2
Number of active matches that had multiple sessions		5 matches took part in multiple sessions. On average, these 5 matches had 3 sessions in the first school term.
Cancellation rate		15 events did not go ahead/were cancelled before scheduling, where two were initially scheduled but cancelled due to health and safety/staffing issues. This represents c.26% of the events recorded on the platform.
Percentage of sheltered scheme residents that take part (estimate based on unique participants)		Approximately 25% (average across all sheltered scheme partners)
Geographic spread		South East (45%) West Midlands (31%) London (16%) Yorkshire and the Humber (South Yorkshire) (2%)

The evidence from the quantitative data indicates that InCommon's online platform successfully enabled an estimated 310 participants to take part in an intergenerational activity from its inception in May 2023 to February 2024. The total footfall was 574 people, this takes account of people that attended the sessions multiple times.

<sup>4</sup>'Matched' platform users have been onboarded onto the platform, matched with another platform user but haven't yet had a InCommon session.

<sup>5</sup> 'Active' platform users have been onboarded onto the platform, matched with another platform user, and had a InCommon session.

<sup>6</sup> 'Awaiting a match' platform users have been onboarded to the platform but haven't been matched with another platform user or had an InCommon session.

<sup>7</sup> Footfall is the total number of attendants which may include people that have attended more than once.

<sup>8</sup> The estimate of unique participants is based on events which featured a school and scheme only once (non-duplicate events) and the largest number of participants that attended for each school/scheme where events were duplicated.

Typically, there is a 40:60 ratio of older to younger people at each session which strengthens the intergenerational activity as the number of younger or older people isn't heavily skewed one way or another. Older and younger participants are given the opportunity to have more 1-2-1's and develop personal relationships.

The success of the platform can also be evidenced by c.13% of the matches taking part in multiple sessions during the first term indicating that participants enjoy the session and want it to continue. This is supported by the qualitative evidence which demonstrated that many participants wished that the InCommon session was even more regular.

The cancellation rate was also low, with 15 events (c.26% of events recorded on the platform) not going ahead. The reason for events not going ahead is due to staff availability or sickness indicating that cancellations are not as a result of having a negative experience using the platform or at a session itself.

The data indicates that the number of matches is anticipated to increase in the next school term as 8 schemes are awaiting a match on the platform.

### **Qualitative evidence**

The evidence from the interviews and focus groups with scheme managers and school leads indicates that the online platform is successfully enabling intergenerational activity to happen.

Many residents report that they rarely spend time with the younger generations, some may not have grandchildren or if they do, they live far away and don't visit often. The same can be said for the school children who spend a limited amount of time with older people. The types of activities that schools and schemes tend to partake in don't usually enable intergenerational connections to occur.

'I live with my grandparents, but they don't speak English, meeting the residents means that I have surrogate grandparents, I can communicate with and learn from' - Pupil

This means that the intergenerational activities that take place as a consequence of using the online platform result in school children and older people participating in joint activities that they may not otherwise have had the opportunity to engage in.

*'The activities we tend to do with children don't offer them opportunities to engage with people from older generations, this is a unique experience for them'* - St Mary and St Michael Catholic Primary School lead

The qualitative research indicates that the intergenerational connections that result from an InCommon session go beyond connections between the school children and scheme residents. Scheme managers and school leads also develop connections and relationships as a result of this opportunity. In an observation at Minerva Lodge in London, the school lead had to say goodbye to the residents as she was relocating for work. It was evident from the observation that the school lead had developed meaningful connections with the residents as she was emotional saying goodbye to residents that she had got to know well and enjoyed spending time with. This was a really moving moment that showed the InCommon's activities aren't only enabling intergenerational relationships between school children and residents but those organising the session too.

There are a number of schools that reported that because of their initial connection using the online platform, they have invited the residents to attend events at the school. This demonstrates that the platform has become a tool for enabling intergenerational activity beyond the sessions themselves; they are a catalyst for further intergenerational activity.

Scheme managers' report that the residents that take part in the intergenerational activities tend to be those that are already relatively engaged in social activities at the scheme. This varies from scheme to scheme, but it tends to be a minority of residents that take part, approximately 15% of residents per scheme take part in the sessions.

Housing LIN evidence from across the UK indicates that the number of residents that participate in communal activities in sheltered housing has been reducing over the years and scheme managers often struggle to keep people engaged. Often this is a result of a change in the profile of residents in sheltered housing becoming more diverse. i.e. 'older' old residents with age related needs living alongside 'younger' old residents with support needs. COVID-19 has also had an impact on community engagement within sheltered housing.

Some scheme managers felt that because the online platform is so easy to use and provides organisational resources, they were able to spend more time encouraging residents beyond the 'usual suspects' to take part. Therefore, the online platform has the potential to enable those that would otherwise not be engaged in sheltered housing communal activities to take part.

However, there are likely to be more residents living across sheltered schemes that experience loneliness and isolation that may benefit from InCommon sessions. It is recommended that work could be done with scheme managers to explore how to encourage more residents to take part beyond the 'usual suspects'.

## **B) Evaluation of the process to set up intergenerational activity on the platform**

### **The process (September 2023 – December 2023)**

The step-by-step guide below demonstrates the process that InCommon and users of the online platform (scheme managers and school leads) follow to set up an InCommon session using the online platform:

- InCommon identifies and approaches housing the provider to take part in the programme.
- Housing provider identifies schemes that would work best, contacts the scheme manager, and introduces InCommon.
- InCommon have an initial call with the scheme manager to scope out interest.
- Once the scheme is confirmed, InCommon sets up an onboarding call with the scheme manager (setting them up with an account and showing them how to use the platform).<sup>9</sup>
- InCommon identifies local primary schools to approach using Google Maps.
- InCommon approach the local school via an automatic invitation email from the platform with a 'call to action' to set up a call with InCommon.

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that recent updates to the platform allow schools to be matched without confirmation with the corresponding retirement/sheltered housing scheme.

- If there is no response to the initial invitation email, an automated reminder email is sent one week later.
- If there is no response to the second invitation email, InCommon phones the school. Phoning tends to be most effective.
- If the school is interested, InCommon sets up a platform log in for the schools and matches them to the scheme on the platform. To speed up the onboarding this tends to be done in the initial call.
- InCommon updates the scheme that they have a school match and to expect event notifications.
- Once the school and scheme have been onboarded to the platform, the school suggests up to 3 dates that they can visit the scheme.
- The scheme will be able to accept a date, suggest alternative dates or decline the suggested dates depending on availability.
- The school and scheme prepare for the visit. Both carry out the risk assessment on the platform, the scheme can print posters to make residents aware and the school selects the activities.
- The school and scheme can set up a 'consultation meeting' before the visit so they can e-meet each other before the visit.
- The intergenerational activity takes place (usually for 1 hour).
- A post event survey sent to school and scheme via the platform for their feedback.

A 'Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats' analysis has been conducted, this has been summarised in the tables below and is then expanded upon.

Table 4. Strengths.

<b>Strengths</b>
Usability of the platform
School initiating the event works well
The onboarding process: support from InCommon
Autonomy of service users once onboarded
Effective organisation tool that enables intergenerational activity
Process supports school leads to facilitate the session
No concerns with data protection

Table 5. Weaknesses/challenges.

<b>Weaknesses/challenges</b>
Housing provider competing priorities
Matching process is time-consuming for InCommon
Information provision to session organisers/facilitators could be improved
InCommon staff needed to support initial onboarding

Table 6. Opportunities.

Opportunities
Making use of existing relationships
Demonstrate how easy school leads find facilitating a session
Strengthening resources
Communication opportunities on the platform
Expand beyond sheltered housing
Expand into the private retirement housing sector

Table 7. Threats.

Threats
Digital skills and confidence in the workforce
Capacity for scheme managers to provide support

## Strengths

### *Usability of the platform*

The evidence from the evaluation is that a key strength is the usability of the platform for users (scheme managers, school leaders and housing provider staff).

The online platform prompts school leads and scheme managers to complete a post-event feedback survey which has been analysed to identify the user experience. Most platform users rated the usability of the platform highly indicating that users are very satisfied with their experience interacting with the platform. 100% of platform users rated the platform's usability at least 8/10, and 66% rated it 10/10.

The qualitative evidence was overwhelmingly positive about the usability of the platform. No-one had significant issues that were preventing them from using the platform. One scheme manager said, *'I have nothing bad to say about it, it is so easy to use because the design is so simple and straight-forward'*.

The online platform collects user data that demonstrates that the process to set up an InCommon session on the platform is quick and easy. It shows that on average it takes a school lead 4 minutes to set up an event on the platform and it then takes a scheme manager an average of 2.5 days (c.60) hours to accept an event on the platform. Schools tend to organise events 4 weeks in advance. Considering how busy scheme managers are, 2.5 days is quick turnaround.

Participants feel confident using the platform to set up an intergenerational activity because it is straight-forward to use and intuitive. The qualitative evidence suggests that where sessions are not accepted, it is due to timing clashes or sickness rather than difficulties with the platform.

The success of the platform can also be evidenced by c.20% of the matches taking part in multiple sessions during the first term indicating that participants are able to easily learn and remember how to use the platform independently.

#### *School initiating the event*

The qualitative evidence suggests that it works well for the school lead to suggest the dates as it is the school that is visiting the scheme, and they are more likely to have a restricted time window for the visit.

This is supported by the quantitative data which indicates a high success rate (72% of proposed events go ahead) showing that the vast majority of sessions requested by the school lead go on to be accepted by the scheme manager.

#### *The onboarding process: support from InCommon*

The Digital Platform Programme Manager (PM) currently provides support to platform users with the onboarding process. This works well as it speeds up the onboarding process, builds a relationship between InCommon and the platform user and helps the platform user feel comfortable using the platform. The PM has integrated support with onboarding into the initial call with the platform user. During the call, the PM demonstrates how to use the platform and creates the user account for the platform user. This is successful as InCommon have found that it speeds up the onboarding process and sets the platform user up to be independent on the platform. In turn this means it is an effective use of time for the PM as they spend less time chasing individuals to create their accounts and have little input once they are onboarded.

The qualitative evidence indicates that platform users are very satisfied with the support they receive from the PM, and they find it very helpful to have a demo of the platform. The success of this process is demonstrated by the ease at which platform users then use the platform to set up events and communicate with each other. One platform user said, '*Mel is fantastic, it was great to have her talk through how to use the platform*'.

#### *Autonomy of service users once onboarded*

Once given a demo and onboarded to the platform, most platform users require minimal support from InCommon staff to use the platform. The InCommon team and platform users report that very few, if any, errors are made whilst using the system. This is a strength because it enables InCommon to focus on other more time-consuming tasks like matching schools and schemes and expanding the reach of the digital platform.

#### *Effective organisation tool that enables intergenerational activity*

Most platform users find having a dedicated online platform to arrange InCommon sessions useful, because all the information they need is in one place. Many think that otherwise the information would be lost in their emails. Platform users like that they receive email prompts when an activity has taken place on the platform that they need to respond to.

Platform users also reported that the online platform encourages them to take part in an InCommon activity because the admin and organisation is done for them. School leads and scheme managers have busy working lives, and the platform is not seen as an additional burden but a useful organisation tool.



### *Process supports school leads to facilitate the session*

On the whole, the resources on the platform support the school leads to facilitate the session. Having suggested activities helps the school lead as it removes the burden on them to create a plan. It piques their interest in getting involved because there is less organisation for them to do.

Scheme managers have used the flyers from the resources provided on the online platform to promote the session and find them useful to communicate the session/s to the scheme. Scheme managers tend to use the flyers provided as a helpful starting point and customise them to suit their scheme.

It was also reported that the transition to the digital platform had given scheme managers more ownership of the sessions compared to when InCommon organised the session. This enables scheme managers to feel responsible for a programme which they can see first-hand is benefitting their residents which improves work-place satisfaction for some scheme managers.

### *No concerns with data protection*

The qualitative evidence highlighted that data protection was not a concern for platform users when using the online platform. Platform users felt that their data was being used responsibly and did not see this as a barrier to using the platform. This is a key strength as it helps to build trust with using the platform, particularly for those that might be wearier of online tools.

## **Weaknesses/Challenges**

### *Housing provider competing priorities*

One of the challenges for InCommon occurs early on in the process when trying to find housing provider partners to take part and fund the programme. This tends to be because housing associations have competing financial priorities. There is an opportunity to use the evidence of the social impact to demonstrate the benefits for a range of stakeholders and encourage others to take part.

### *Matching process is time-consuming*

InCommon staff identified that the most time-consuming part of the process is matching schools and schemes. This involves a manual Google search to find sites that are located close by. This could potentially be a challenge to coordinate if InCommon was to expand dramatically and there is scope to look at how this might be automated.

### *Information provision to session organisers/facilitators*

Whilst the overall feedback regarding the platform was positive, a small number of session facilitators/organisers stated that they would benefit from receiving additional background information regarding event practicalities such as expected numbers of attendees or information about the venue.

It is worth noting that InCommon have resources available to support facilitators/organisers that can support them run a session, including checklists on the platform. In future onboarding and training sessions, InCommon states that there will be greater emphasis on

the value of the resources. Additionally, InCommon has introduced consultation meetings to provide venue-related information and support to facilitators/organisers.

#### *InCommon staff needed to support initial onboarding*

Whilst a key strength is the support that InCommon provide with onboarding schools and schemes, if this platform is to scale up this could become a challenge as it is a time-consuming process requiring more staff time.

### **Opportunities**

#### *Making use of existing relationships*

Where a school and scheme have an existing relationship, this tends to result in a quicker set up time and more interest from both ends in taking part. There is scope to identify schools and schemes that already have a relationship to speed up the matching process.

#### *Demonstrate how easy school leads find facilitation*

The evidence from the observations is that sessions facilitated by either an InCommon facilitator (as is the case for InCommon's direct delivery programmes) or school lead (as is the case for all online platform users) enables intergenerational activity to happen.

The evidence from the school leads that took part in direct delivery is that some feel they would not have the capacity to facilitate a session. However, facilitating the session has not been a concern for school leads that have utilised the online platform.

When a school lead facilitates the session, as is the case through all online platform sessions, the observational evidence is that the school lead builds a better relationship with the residents and the scheme manager compared to in direct delivery sessions. The evidence is that having the school lead facilitate the session brings the school and scheme closer together.

There is an opportunity to showcase how a school lead facilitates a session to those that are hesitant to facilitate. There is scope to phase this process and provide support to school leads by co-facilitating at first.

#### *Strengthening resources*

Whilst overall, the resources work well, school leads are seeking more varied activities to choose from and think there is scope to involve the pupils in the design of the activities. This could involve longer term projects that the pupils and residents work on together.

From a scheme manager perspective, the activities could be more centred on the interests of the residents, which might encourage more residents to take part. This may involve greater input from scheme managers on the interests of their residents and increased partnership working between the school lead and scheme manager. Since the evaluation engagement work took place the initial consultation meetings now encouraging projects leads to discuss mutually beneficial activities that would further engage schools and schemes.

There is also an opportunity to strengthen the communication resources. Scheme managers are seeking more 'age-friendly' flyers that do not stigmatise ageing i.e. removing the word 'older people', focusing more on the benefits of taking part. One scheme manager was not

comfortable using the images of children on the flyers, indicating some more illustrative/graphical images could be used on the flyers.

### *Communication opportunities on the platform*

There is scope to develop a tool that enables platform users to communicate using the platform. Some platform users are interested in a chat function that enables them to have more informal conversations with each other regarding the events. The chat function is something that InCommon have already considered and are looking into.

### *Expand beyond sheltered housing*

At present, InCommon's programmes are solely focused on connecting younger people with sheltered housing residents. There is potentially an opportunity to expand InCommon's programmes to include older people living across a range of specialist housing types, including care homes and extra care housing.

Extra care housing accommodates residents over the age of 55 with a range of care/support needs. Residents are provided with their own self-contained flat but there is 24/7 onsite care if needed. Extra care housing generally provides communal space and seeks to encourage communal activities to reduce social isolation and loneliness amongst residents, including with the wider community. As such extra care housing would be a natural fit for InCommon's intergenerational activities.

Care homes are a residential setting which provides 24-hour care and accommodation where a number of older people live, usually in single rooms with access to shared communal spaces. Care homes can provide personal care; or personal care together with nursing care. There are a range of intergenerational charities/organisations which already connect with care homes which indicates that there is scope for InCommon to introduce its activities within this type of specialist housing.

### *Expand into the private retirement housing sector*

At present, InCommon's programmes are mainly connected to social housing providers. However, there is scope for InCommon to consider partnerships with private sector retirement housing providers. Many private providers are also focused on the health and wellbeing of residents and see this as a core part of their service offer. As such they are likely to be interested in InCommon's platform as a tool that would support them to make their schemes vibrant and attractive places to live.

## **Threats**

### *Digital skills and confidence in the workforce*

The evaluation indicated that using an online platform might be challenging for those with limited digital skills or confidence. There is a potential threat to scaling the platform relating to potentially limited digital skills or confidence amongst scheme managers.

The qualitative evidence demonstrated that one housing association partner has not connected scheme managers that they know find technology daunting and have limited digital skills. It is potentially a barrier to upscaling the online platform if digital support is not provided. At the moment, InCommon staff are described as being very helpful in educating users on how to use the online platform and this should continue.

However, a lack of digital skills and confidence could be a barrier to participating in the first place for some scheme managers. It is recommended that InCommon explore how housing providers are seeking to improve digital skills of staff and residents as part of housing provides digital strategies.

#### *Capacity for scheme managers to provide support*

Over the years, the role of a retirement housing scheme manager in providing 'support' has been significantly reduced, in some cases retirement housing providers see a scheme manager's role as providing housing management support only. This could potentially be a threat for some housing providers. However, it is the Housing LIN's view that the InCommon platform could be marketed as a way of scheme managers providing 'support' but in a way that is very 'hands off'.

### **Case studies**

#### **Case study: Sutton Heights and Wisewood Community Primary School**

The platform has allowed InCommon to scale their reach and support the delivery workshops outside of London. This November, InCommon's activities reached Sheffield when the residents of Clarion Housing's LiveSmart scheme Sutton Heights and pupils from Wisewood Community Primary School took part in their first intergenerational visit.

The school's experience of using InCommon's platform was hassle free which made the process to set up intergenerational activities seamless. InCommon supported the school with the onboarding process which the school lead, Rhianne, found extremely helpful as it removed any apprehension, she may have had with learning to use the platform.

*'The initial video call and demo with Mel was beneficial, she explained really well how to use the platform. The design is so simple to use that I got the hang of it straight away. It makes enabling intergenerational activity a breeze!'*

At the first session, the school councillors from Wisewood Community Primary School were introduced to the residents. With representatives from each year group (year 2-year 6), the mixed age group bonded with their older neighbours through activities such as Kindness word searches and "Two Truths and a Lie".

Conversations naturally flowed and the children and residents asked each other questions to find shared hobbies and interests. When asked about their hobbies, one resident said that she was knitting baby clothes. One child took a keen interest in her knitting as they had never seen it being done before. The older persons showed him some of the techniques and said she was over the moon that he had asked her all about it.

The first visit ran really smoothly, and everyone really enjoyed it. One of the residents shared that she had not felt like joining but was glad that she did as it cheered her up.

The scheme manager: *"It was such a positive experience. Residents commented after that they enjoyed the whole experience of having the children visit their home. They enjoyed having interactions and learning about the children. They also appreciated being able to share their knowledge and skills".*

Since their first visit, the residents have been invited to their school nativity performance. The children have been keen to stay in touch and build their friendships alongside the

visits, by sending the residents Christmas cards. The children are also working on turning their learnings from their first visit into factoids about each resident, which they can share with their classmates.

### **Case study: Dell Court and Henley Montessori School, Henley-in-Arden**

Dell Court, a sheltered housing scheme provided by Orbit and Henley Montessori School was first onboarded on InCommon's online platform in early October 2023, and their first event was confirmed later that month, taking place in early November. They are a success story for the online platform as there was an exceptionally quick turnaround between onboarding and their first session, which took only a week. Since November 2023 they have had 4 sessions together demonstrating how well the platform is working at connecting the two sites, as well as how much they enjoy the activities.

Both scheme manager and school lead put their success down to the ease of use of InCommon's online platform as well as a pre-existing relationship between the sites that both were keen to restart and build upon.

The headteacher Helen said *'the online platform keeps everything all in one place which makes it a good organisation tool. The best thing is that it has enabled us to reconnect with Dell Court'*.

The scheme manager, Liza shares that her working day is very busy with nearly 40 residents to look after. *'Part of my role is to enable a sense of community here, but it can be a challenge with so many competing priorities. The online platform helps me to do fulfil this part of my job description as it is very easy to use and keeps everything all in one place!'*

Dell Court and Henley Montessori school have taken part in various activities together, from Pictionary to Christmas Carols. The latter saw residents getting up to dance with the school children for a Christmas boogie!

## 4. The social impact of InCommon's intergenerational activities

This section is focused on demonstrating the social impact of the intergenerational activities that take place as a result of InCommon's 'direct delivery' programmes, and online platform for a range of stakeholders, including:

- The individuals (older and younger participants) taking part;
- Local authorities (adult social care) and local NHS services;
- Housing providers of participant schemes;
- Local communities where sessions take place.

The evaluation of the social impact of InCommon's intergenerational workshops has identified a range of social impacts which have been separated into key themes. These have been derived from the qualitative research with participants (see methodology for more information).

Where possible, the associated economic impact of the identified social impact has been estimated using secondary evidence and the Housing LIN's expertise and knowledge of the housing for older people sector. The social impact evaluation has used the evidence from InCommon's 2022/2023 Impact Report<sup>10</sup> to make estimations about the potential economic impact associated with InCommon's social impact measures.

Table 8. Data used to measure social and associated economic impact from InCommon's 2022/23 Impact Report.

Impact report 2022/23	Data
Number of intergenerational workshops	120
Number of older people	220 (20 retirement schemes)
Number of younger people	350 (20 schools)
Total number of older and younger people	570
Number of hours volunteered by older people	662

### **The social and associated economic impacts of InCommon's intergenerational workshops**

#### **Mutually beneficial and meaningful intergenerational social bonds**

Meaningful connections are those that are deemed significant and include mutual respect, trust, interest, positive regard and making the other person feel valued.<sup>11</sup>

The evaluation has shown that InCommon sessions enable meaningful connections to develop between all stakeholders that take part, including pupils, residents, scheme managers and school leads.

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<sup>10</sup> [InCommon: Impact Report 2022/23](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Importance of Connection Through Meaningful Relationships \(centerstone.org\)](#).

School leads were asked to complete evaluation surveys which found that 93% reported children feel they are making a difference and 86% reported children feel appreciated/valued.

The session activities enable participants to feel seen, heard and known as they support communication and sharing of experiences between the different generations. As evidenced by the observations, these connections are positive and reciprocal with each participant feeling supported by the other in the relationship.

The evaluation observations demonstrated the development of meaningful connections between participants. At the end of the first session between Henley-in-Arden Montessori School and Dell Court, a pupil voluntarily hugged a resident that they had spent time with. The resident's face immediately lit up and she said it was a lovely surprise and it felt good to have a physical interaction that made her feel valued. At another scheme a close relationship has developed between a pupil who is normally quiet and shy and a resident, the pupil is able to open up to the resident and they both look forward to seeing each other. The school leads report that this relationship has notably improved the pupil's confidence outside of the session too.

*'My grandchildren live far away so it means a lot that I can still engage with younger people at these sessions, it makes me feel like I am with family'*. This quote from a sheltered housing resident supports that InCommon sessions enable meaningful connections as the individual feels like they are with family.

There is significant evidence that social support and feeling connected can help people maintain a healthy body mass index, control blood sugars, improve cancer survival, decrease cardiovascular mortality, decrease depressive symptoms, mitigate posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, and improve overall mental health.<sup>12</sup>

The Centre's for Disease, Control and Prevention research suggests that when people are socially connected and have supportive relationships, they are more likely to make healthy choices and to have better mental and physical health outcomes. They are also better able to cope with hard times, stress, anxiety, and depression.<sup>13</sup>

### **Health and wellbeing outcomes for residents**

The evidence from the evaluation indicated that there are a range of health and wellbeing outcomes for residents that take part in InCommon activities.

The resident evaluation survey indicated that:

- 91% feel happier after an InCommon workshop.
- 64% feel a greater sense of belonging to a community.
- 76% of residents feel a greater sense of companionship.

*'If I didn't come here, I wouldn't speak to anyone all day, apart from the TV. I love speaking with the children they make me laugh'* – Resident at a sheltered scheme

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<sup>12</sup> The Connection Prescription: Using the Power of Social Interactions and the Deep Desire for Connectedness to Empower Health and Wellness - PMC (nih.gov)

<sup>13</sup> [How Does Social Connectedness Affect Health? | CDC.](https://www.cdc.gov/socialandbehavioralhealth/2016/05/16/connectedness-affect-health/)

The scheme manager evaluation survey indicated that scheme managers felt that residents benefited in the following ways:

- 83% of scheme managers stated that residents experience reduced loneliness/social isolation.
- 67% stated that residents experience increased mental stimulation.
- 83% stated that residents experience a greater sense of community.
- 83% stated that residents seem happier after an InCommon session.
- 67% states that residents experience enhanced sense of purpose.
- 50% stated that older participants experience increased physical stimulation.

The evidence from the observations is that residents always leave the sessions with a smile on their face.

The following three sections make some assumptions around the economic impact of some of the improved health and wellbeing outcomes for residents.

### **Reduced loneliness and isolation for residents**

The evidence from the evaluation indicated that residents taking part in InCommon activities experience reduced loneliness and isolation.

*'A lot of our residents' experience loneliness, they are living alone and don't have family near them, the InCommon sessions reduce social isolation'* – Dell Court Scheme Manager

Loneliness and isolation are detrimental to our wellbeing. For example, a report by Age UK states that loneliness can be as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and people with a high degree of loneliness are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer's.<sup>14</sup> Research by Sheffield University found that people who are suffering from loneliness make more GP visits in comparison to people who are not lonely.<sup>15</sup>

To estimate the impact of loneliness on healthcare costs, the meta-analysis and modelling carried out by McDaid, Bauer and Park at the Personal Social Services Research Unit of LSE<sup>16</sup> is used. In their model, the authors assess the additional healthcare costs specifically attributable to severe loneliness from various sources: GP visits, hospital admissions, emergency services and other types of outpatient care. Assuming no additional costs before the age of 65, this results in a conservative average cost of £100 per year per person from avoided healthcare costs.

The resident evaluation survey indicated that 76% of residents feel a greater sense of companionship because of an InCommon activity. 83% of scheme managers also stated that residents experience reduced loneliness/social isolation. There is also secondary evidence that supports the evaluation findings. Whear, R., Campbell, F., Rogers, M. et al state that intergenerational interventions combine social interaction and connection across generations that use meaningful and engaged activities to tackle feelings of loneliness and

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<sup>14</sup> Age UK: Testing Promising Approaches to Reducing Loneliness; 2017

<sup>15</sup> University of Sheffield (2021): [People suffering from loneliness make more GP visits, study shows](#).

<sup>16</sup> Making the case for investing in actions to prevent and/or tackle loneliness: a systematic review. Briefing paper. McDaid, Bauer and Park (2017)



social isolation.<sup>17</sup> A review by the Welsh Government found that, broadly speaking, intergenerational interventions make a contribution to reducing social isolation than loneliness.<sup>18</sup>

Using this evidence, the potential economic impact of avoided health and care costs from a reduction in loneliness and isolation amongst residents engaging in InCommon activities has been estimated.

The resident evaluation survey indicated that 76% of residents feel a greater sense of companionship because of an InCommon activity, a greater sense of companionship has been used as a proxy for reduced loneliness and isolation. InCommon's latest Impact Report demonstrated that a total of 220 older people took part in an InCommon session in 2022/23, using 'greater sense of companionship' as a proxy for reduced loneliness and isolation, this suggests that 167 (76%) people that took part felt less lonely as a result of an InCommon session.

For 167 older people, if the project were to run for a one-year period, the potential economic impact from avoid health and care services for 167 residents is estimated to be £16,700 per year.

### **Increased mental stimulation for residents**

The evaluation demonstrated that residents taking part in InCommon activities experience increased mental stimulation. 67% of scheme managers felt that older residents benefited from increased mental stimulation.

There is evidence that suggests that there are several potential benefits related to the subsequent impacts of increased mental stimulation among older people after taking part in InCommon's programme.

For example, findings from the National Institute on Aging's observational studies suggest that some informal mentally stimulating activities may lower the risk of Alzheimer's-related cognitive impairment and dementia.<sup>19</sup>

### **Avoided admission to residential care due to improved health and wellbeing**

The evidence from the evaluation is that taking part in an InCommon programme greatly improves residents' health and wellbeing. The evidence from conversations with housing providers as part of this evaluation is that healthier sheltered housing residents are less likely to be admitted to residential care and therefore remain living in sheltered housing.

Therefore, the evidence from the evaluation suggests that the potential economic benefits of avoided admission to residential care because of improved health and wellbeing of older people are two-fold:

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<sup>17</sup> <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/198298/1/Campbell%20Systematic%20Reviews%20-%202023%20-%20Whear%20-%20PROTOCOL%20What%20is%20the%20effect%20of%20intergenerational%20activities%20on%20the%20wellbeing.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-05/review-key-mechanisms-intergenerational-practices-their-effectiveness-reducing-loneliness-social-isolation.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> [Cognitive Health and Older Adults | National Institute on Aging \(nih.gov\)](#)

1. Avoided cost of using residential care
2. Avoided costs associated with 'void' sheltered housing units for a housing provider

To estimate the potential economic benefit from avoided admission to residential care as a result of residents taking part in InCommon sessions, the Housing LIN has used quantitative void data that is available to the Housing LIN because of its experience working in the sheltered housing sector. This data is used to estimate the average number of voids across the sheltered housing sector per year as a result of a move to residential care.

This initial void estimation is used as a baseline and is then adjusted to take account of the improved health and wellbeing experienced by residents that take part in InCommon activities and reduction in voids as a result of a potentially avoided move to residential care.

Based on the Housing LIN's experience of the sheltered housing sector<sup>20</sup>, 12.5% of sheltered housing units become void per year, and 18% of these voids are as a result of a resident requiring a move to residential care.

Based on the evidence from the evaluation, it has been assumed that amongst sheltered housing providers that take part in InCommon workshops there is a reduction in the percentage of voids as a result of moving to residential care due to improved health and wellbeing of residents.

The improved health and wellbeing of residents is evidenced by the evaluation surveys (see the 'Health and wellbeing outcomes for residents' section as well as secondary evidence). For example, a literature review in a 2014 Generations Working Together report identifies that intergenerational practice is effective in improving the health and wellbeing of older people.<sup>21</sup> The qualitative research with housing providers identified that improved health and wellbeing can prevent a move to residential care, this is supported by the Housing LIN's experience working in the sheltered housing sector.

Using this evidence, it has been assumed that when a sheltered housing scheme takes part in InCommon sessions, 10% (instead of 18%) of voids per year are created as a result of a resident requiring a move to residential care.

For the purpose of these estimations, the Housing LIN assumes that the 220 older people that take part in InCommon activities are occupying 220 units of sheltered housing.

Applying the void estimations to the 220 units of sheltered housing the number of voids per year as a result of moving to residential care is estimated for 220 sheltered housing units that do and do not take part in InCommon activities.

As a baseline, for 220 units of sheltered housing that *do not* take part in InCommon activities, it is estimated that there are likely to be 27 voids per year (12.5%), and 5 (18%) of the 27 voids are due to a resident requiring a move to residential care.

For 220 units of sheltered housing that *do* take part in InCommon activities, it is estimated that there are likely to be 27 voids per year but 3 (10%) of the 27 voids are due to a resident requiring a move to residential care.

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<sup>20</sup> Using quantitative data on void numbers provided by a range of social housing providers that deliver sheltered housing.

<sup>21</sup> <https://generationsworkingtogether.org/downloads/536a04c11694b-GWT%20web%20FINAL.pdf>

Table 9. Estimated number of voids across 220 units of sheltered housing that do and do not take part in InCommon activities.

<b>Sheltered housing units that do not take part in InCommon sessions</b>	<b>Sheltered housing units that do take part in InCommon sessions</b>
220 units	220 units
<b>No of estimated voids per year</b>	<b>No of estimated voids per year</b>
27	27
<b>No. of estimated voids due to a move to residential care</b>	<b>No. of estimated voids due to a move to residential care</b>
5	3

### *Avoided cost of residential care use*

To calculate the cost of residential care, data from PSSRU is used which indicates the cost of residential care is £659 per week or £2,636 per month.<sup>22</sup> Research shows that a person aged 65+ uses an average of 9 months of residential care in their lifetime.<sup>23</sup>

The estimated cost of residential care for 5 people is £13,180 per month and £118,620 for 9 months use during a lifespan for someone admitted into residential care.<sup>24</sup>

The estimated cost of residential care for 3 people is £7,908 per month and £71,172 for an average of 9 months use during a lifespan for someone admitted into residential care.<sup>25</sup>

If a typical year follows the trend outcomes from the intergenerational programme's first year, given that in that year there is a predicted difference of two people likely to not be admitted into residential care, due to the benefits experienced on the intergenerational programme, the expected cost benefit is £47,448 per annum.

<sup>22</sup> Curtis & Burns: [Unit Costs of Health and Social Care 2018](#); PSSRU

<sup>23</sup> Comas-Herrera & Wittenberg (2010): [Expected lifetime costs of social care for people aged 65 and over in England](#); PSSRU, University of Kent

<sup>24</sup> 9 months is the average lifetime usage of residential care for someone aged 65+. Source: Comas-Herrera & Wittenberg (2010).

<sup>25</sup> 9 months is the average lifetime usage of residential care for someone aged 65+. Source: Comas-Herrera & Wittenberg (2010).

Table 10. Estimated cost saving in avoided admissions to residential care due to the health and wellbeing benefits provided by InCommon workshops.

<b>Sheltered housing that do not take part in InCommon sessions</b>	<b>Sheltered housing that do take part in InCommon sessions</b>
<b>Estimated cost of residential care for 5 people per month</b>	<b>Estimated cost of residential care for 3 people per month</b>
£13,180	£7,908
<b>Estimated cost of residential care for 5 people for 9 months<sup>26</sup></b>	<b>Estimated cost of residential care for 3 people for 9 months<sup>27</sup></b>
£118,620	£71,172
<b>Estimated cost saving in avoided admissions to residential care due to the health and wellbeing benefits provided by InCommon workshops</b>	
£47,448 per annum <sup>28</sup>	

#### *Avoided cost associated with 'void' units for a provider of retirement housing*

The evaluation surveys indicated that participating in InCommon's activities improves residents' health and wellbeing. It is the view of housing provider colleagues that contributed to the evaluation that there are financial benefits for their organisations of improving the health and wellbeing of their residents. For example, residents that are supported with their health and wellbeing are less likely to deteriorate and require a move to a care home. The impact on housing providers is that they can hold on to their customers for longer and reduce turnover and potential voids within their retirement schemes.

*'We want people to live in our properties to thrive, residents are more likely to deteriorate and go into a care home if we don't support their health and wellbeing, this is not what we want for our residents but also means we lose customers and there are costs associated with this' – Orbit Housing Association*

The cost of a void is calculated as the loss of rent. The average weekly combined rent (£115pw) and service charge (£20pw) of a sheltered housing property in the UK is estimated to be £135pw.<sup>29</sup>

The estimated cost of 5 voids per year because of a move to residential care is £2,925.

The estimated cost of 3 voids per year because of a move to residential care is £1,755.

The estimated cost savings in void costs for housing providers taking part in InCommon workshops is £1,170 per year.

<sup>26</sup> 9 months is the average lifetime usage of residential care for someone aged 65+. Source: Comas-Herrera & Wittenberg (2010).

<sup>27</sup> 9 months is the average lifetime usage of residential care for someone aged 65+. Source: Comas-Herrera & Wittenberg (2010).

<sup>28</sup> The cost benefit is calculated as per annum, due to the incidence of voids, and voids due to admission into residential care, being measured per year – which form part of the calculation.

<sup>29</sup> [Comparing the cost of care at home, sheltered housing and care homes - Lifted \(liftedcare.com\)](https://www.liftedcare.com/)

Table 11. Estimated cost saving in void costs for housing providers taking part in InCommon workshops.

Sheltered housing that do not take part in InCommon sessions	Sheltered housing that do take part in InCommon sessions
Estimated cost of 5 voids per year	Estimated cost of 3 voids per year
£2,925	£1,755
Estimated cost savings in void costs for housing providers taking part in InCommon workshops	
£1,170 per annum	

### Increased physical activity

The evaluation surveys shows that 50% of scheme managers stated that because of taking part in InCommon's activities, there was an improvement in residents' level of physical stimulation. At one of the observation sessions, one of the residents got up and danced with the children during one of their games. There is evidence that indicates that physical stimulation can reduce the risk of falls among older adults by improving their strength, balance, coordination, and reaction to environmental hazards.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that taking part in InCommon activities supports residents to be more physically active.

### Community cohesion

Community cohesion refers to the social relationships within a community. The evidence from the evaluation implies that InCommon's intergenerational activities strengthen relationships within the local community as well as, to some extent, within a retirement scheme.

In relation to the impact on community cohesion in the local community, the view of scheme managers is that InCommon sessions help to build and strengthen the local community as meaningful connections are made between local people.

The evaluation surveys found that 93% of school leads reported children learn about personal and local history from the residents and 64% of residents feel a greater sense of belonging to a community. Several school leads shared that pupils now greet residents when they see them in the street which makes them feel part of a community.

*'The children understand more about the world around them and other people that live in their local community'* – Wisewood Primary School Lead

*'We have invited the residents to our school fete this summer, we see these sessions as a great opportunity to build our local community'* – Walnut Tree Walk School Lead quote

School leads also indicated that the sessions allow them to develop relationships with the retirement scheme residents and scheme managers which makes them feel more engaged in their local community.

<sup>30</sup> Lu et al (2020): Promoting Fall Prevention among Community Dwelling Older Adults through ActivLife: a Physical and Social Activation; Eindhoven University of Technology.

Community cohesion within the sheltered scheme itself is also impacted to some degree. 100% of scheme manager survey respondents either agree or strongly agree that taking part in InCommon's programmes helps to create a greater sense of community at the scheme.

*'The InCommon sessions make the scheme feel livelier, it's a great excuse for some residents to leave their flat'* – Gawthorne Court Scheme Manager

Scheme managers shared that residents that take part will talk about the sessions for a long time afterwards, which creates a buzz in the scheme and has a lasting impact beyond just the hour that the children are there. The session also gives residents that take part an opportunity to socialise with each other after the session finishes. In turn, this strengthens the bonds and communication between residents.

The evaluation therefore indicates that the InCommon sessions are contributing to improved community cohesion in the local area and within the scheme.

There is evidence that suggests that cohesive communities can create social value. For example, The Local Government Association's Community Cohesion – an Action Guide<sup>31</sup> states that cohesive communities are better able to tackle common problems, provide mutual support and work together for a positive future. It also argues that cohesive communities are places in which people will want to live and invest. The Belong Network argues that people are likely to feel a greater sense of belonging to their area and place a greater trust in local and national institutions if they live in cohesive communities.<sup>32</sup> Research by Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care indicated that communities where people feel connected have less crime, stronger economic growth and children perform better in school.<sup>33</sup>

## **Tackling ageism**

Today, ageism often exists as an ignored form of discrimination. However, it is present across society – from the beauty industry to recruitment processes. In fact, one in three people report experiencing age prejudice or discrimination<sup>34</sup>. The Centre for Ageing Better has produced a report detailing the harms that ageism can cause<sup>35</sup>. Their report details the ways in which ageism can negatively affect mental, physical, and financial wellbeing, as well as the economy. The World Health Organisation cites three strategies that work to reduce ageism: policy and law, educational activities, and, importantly, intergenerational interventions. The WHO writes that these interventions 'can help reduce intergroup prejudice and stereotypes'<sup>36</sup>.

The evidence from the evaluation indicates that InCommon's intergenerational activities are combating ageist attitudes and shaping participants' views on what it means to be an older or younger person.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/communitycohesionactionguide.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk/research-projects/beyond-us-and-them-research-project/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://settlementatwork.org/resources/connected-communities-healthier-together>

<sup>34</sup> Centre for Ageing Better, Ageism: What's the harms? [Ageism: What's the harm? | Centre for Ageing Better \(ageing-better.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>35</sup> Centre for Ageing Better, Ageism: What's the harms? [Ageism: What's the harm? | Centre for Ageing Better \(ageing-better.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>36</sup> World Health Organisation, [Ageing: Ageism \(who.int\)](#)

The evaluation surveys asked school pupils to use three words to describe the residents that they had met. The words written by the pupils were all positive and a far cry from the negative stereotypes associated with older people that are listed in a Centre for Ageing Better report.<sup>37</sup>

This indicates that engaging with residents via InCommon's activities is having positive impacts on how young people view 'older people', they do not define residents by the negative stereotypes associated with older people that are often perpetuated by society and the media.

Although some young people chose to use the term 'old' to describe the residents this did not appear to have negative connotations. It felt that being 'old' existed alongside the more positive words used and was redefining what it means to be 'old' for younger people that take part.

*'The children learn about what it's like to be an 'older person', they did yoga with one resident which really challenged stereotypes we have about older people' – Hatfield Primary School Lead 'One of the residents taught us how to play golf, it made me realise that you can still play golf when you're old!' – Pupil Table 12.* Words used by school pupils taking part in InCommon activities to describe the residents they met compared to negative stereotypes associated with older people.

Negative stereotypes associated with older people	Words that young people used to describe the residents they met
Boring	Beautiful
Depressing	Caring
Dependent	Clever
Difficult	Creative
Frustrating	Curious
Grumpy	Fun
Ill-natured	Funny
In-active	Grateful
In-competent	Interesting
Less engaged	Kind
Less trusting	Lovely
Less willing to change	Loving
Sad	Old
Slow	Respectful
Ugly	Smart
Unable to learn new skills	Wise

Evidence from the Royal Society for Public Health suggests that negative ideas about ageing begin to develop as young as 6 years old and that friendships across generations are the most effective and reliable form of contact for reducing ageism.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Centre for Ageing Better (2020): [Exploring representations of old age and ageing](#)

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/policy/older-people/that-age-old-question.html#:~:text=The%20findings%20of%20our%20new,challenge%20rather%20than%20an%20opportunity>

## Social and emotional learning outcomes for children

The evidence from the evaluation demonstrated that taking part in InCommon's intergenerational activities has positive impacts on children's social and emotional learning.

School leads were asked to complete evaluation surveys which found that:

- 86% reported increased confidence amongst children.
- 93% reported children feel they are making a difference.
- 79% reported children have an improved understanding of disabilities.
- 93% reported children have improved communication/social skills.
- 86% reported children feel appreciated/valued.
- 100% reported it helps children to develop empathy/kindness.
- 93% reported children learn about personal and local history.

*'The communication skills that the children learn is invaluable, for many they rarely speak with older people outside of their family' – Lessness Heath School*

The pupils learnt a variety of things from the sessions, pupils shared that they learnt about the lives of residents, their interests, personal histories, and personalities. Some poignant things that pupils stated they learnt were:

- that everyone has a different life story.
- to never give up.
- that you can have fun with new people.
- to always be kind.
- older people are interesting.

*'The residents here are so wise, I have learnt so much about the way of the world from them' – Pupil*

The qualitative research demonstrated that the strongest benefit to children is the increase in confidence and communication skills which school leads consider to be vital to child development. One powerful example of this is one pupil who is normally quiet and finds communication difficult. She has developed a strong friendship with one resident who has enabled her to open up and her communication skills have developed more widely as a result. The observation sessions illustrated how children that took part increased in confidence when speaking with the residents as the sessions continued.

*'I live with my grandparents, but they don't speak English, meeting the residents means that I have surrogate grandparents, I can communicate with and learn from' – Pupil*

A Generations United report suggests that taking part in intergenerational activities can improve academic performance amongst younger people because of increased social and behavioural skills.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> [Making the case for intergenerational programs](#); Generations United (2021)



## Relationship building between school leads and pupils

Most school leads stated that attending InCommon sessions has strengthened their relationships with pupils, particularly pupils that are less engaged/struggling at school. Attending the InCommon sessions enable school leads and pupils to get to know each other outside of the classroom and talk more informally.

One school lead reported that her relationship with one pupil who is known for misbehaving has developed to the extent that the school now calls on her if there are ever any behaviour issues and she is now able to understand where the behaviours are rooted and how to help them calm down and address their behaviour.

*'The InCommon sessions have enabled my relationships with more reserved pupils to flourish, we can talk about the sessions and use them as a tool to start conversations and get to know the children'* – Langdon Park School

Research from the American Psychological Association<sup>40</sup> shows that positive pupil-teacher relationships contribute to a range of positive outcomes including, supporting pupils' adjustment to school, improved social skills, better academic performance, lower likelihood of avoiding attending school, pupils are more self-directed and co-operative, and engage more with learning.

## Utilisation of community spaces

The InCommon sessions are held in the communal lounge at sheltered housing schemes at no extra cost to the school or scheme. It can be argued that the InCommon sessions are making good use of a community space, which the qualitative research has identified as being under-used.

Jarorr et al (2008) highlight that there are associated cost benefits for the provider by using their space and facilities for intergenerational programmes. "There is emerging evidence that shared site intergenerational programs are cost effective (Jarrott et al., 2008). Services that are concurrently provided to younger and older persons in a single facility, with the same personnel and under the same roof, can be more cost effective rather than having two separate buildings and two full personnel to deliver similar services (e.g., meals, social engagement, education)."<sup>41</sup>

This indicates that by providing intergenerational activities in one location, rather than taking place at several locations simultaneously, InCommon sessions are enabling cost savings from the avoided hire of communal space.

Based on a typical cost per hour of a venue that can host up to 20-30 people at once, of approximately £160 per hour in London, the cost benefit may be equated to a saving of approximately £160 per one-hour session if held outside of the scheme's event space.

Across a total of 120 workshops, this is an estimated saving of £19,200 per annum.

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<sup>40</sup> American Psychological Association: [Improving Students' Relationships with Teachers to Provide Essential Supports for Learning](#)

<sup>41</sup> [Making the case for intergenerational programs](#); Generations United (2021)

## **Social impact of volunteering**

During 2022/23, older people volunteered 662 hours of their time at an InCommon session. There is evidence to suggest that there are health and wellbeing, as well as economic benefits, as a result of older people volunteering their time.

In relation to health and wellbeing benefits, research carried out by Generations United<sup>42</sup> indicates that older volunteers participating in intergenerational programmes had reported a stronger sense of community, decrease in social isolation and greater life satisfaction.

This is supported by evidence from Matthews & Nazroo (2020) measuring the impact of volunteering amongst older people over two years. It found that older people had lower levels of depression, higher levels of life satisfaction, higher quality of life and lower levels of social isolation. The positive impacts of volunteering were increased when older volunteers felt they received appreciation for their time and effort volunteering.

The qualitative research with residents that took part in InCommon sessions demonstrated that residents feel valued by the younger people that take part in the sessions.

In relation to estimating the economic benefits of volunteering time at InCommon sessions, a method from Befriending Networks<sup>43</sup>, has been used.

The Befriending Networks report<sup>44</sup>, uses the average median wage rate to estimate an economic value per hour of volunteering. The average median wage of £16.20 per hour has been derived from the ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE).<sup>45</sup>

Based on 662 hours of volunteering provided by older residents at InCommon sessions for 2022/23 the value of volunteering hours has been estimated to be £10,724.44 per annum.

## **Increased work satisfaction for housing provider colleagues**

There are anticipated benefits of taking part in InCommon sessions for housing providers as the evaluation has suggested an increase in work-place satisfaction amongst sheltered scheme managers but also housing provider staff with oversight responsibilities of the partnership with InCommon.

One housing provider participant shared that she welled up when reading a case study about the relationship that had developed between a school and scheme as she felt a sense of pride and was happy that she could make the connection happen. The qualitative research with scheme managers found that many look forward to the InCommon sessions and feel it adds a positive experience to their working lives, particularly as the sessions support them in creating more of a community at the scheme.

The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) suggests that increased workplace satisfaction may be linked to increased employee retention and may mitigate costs associated with hiring and training new staff.

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<sup>42</sup> [Making the case for intergenerational programs](#); Generations United (2021)

<sup>43</sup> [The 2023 Befriending Statistics Report— Befriending Networks](#)

<sup>44</sup> [The 2023 Befriending Statistics Report— Befriending Networks](#)

<sup>45</sup> [Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings \(ASHE\) - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

## Helps to identify residents that need support

As a result of taking part in InCommon activities, housing provider staff report that scheme managers can interact more with residents, either by encouraging them to come to the session, at the session itself or after a session. In turn, this enables scheme managers to have informal conversations with residents and this helps to bring issues to the scheme manager's attention and reveals the support requirements of residents.

## Case study

### **Case study: Colmer Court and Southway Junior, London**

One of InCommon's longest running intergenerational platform programmes in Burgess Hill, Sussex. The retirement home and school were connected as part of InCommon's pilot in June 2022 and they have been meeting ever since.

On June 14th 2022, residents of Colmer Court, a LiveSmart scheme provided by Clarion Housing and pupils from Southway Junior School in Burgess Hill took part in their first intergenerational visit. There was a great turnout, with 24 people coming together for fun, games, and educational activities. Some of the activities included human bingo and the children drawing their older friends as superheroes! One of the residents said her superpower was knitting and the children drew a knitted scarf as her cape and knitting needles as her hands with wool shooting out.

The first visit ran really smoothly, and everyone really enjoyed it. One of the residents shared that it was the best afternoon they had in a long time. Some of the children said they were really glad they did not go swimming and went to visit the older people instead!

Since their first visit, the children have enjoyed 5 more visits to the scheme. Through regular visits, the relationship between the children and residents has strengthened. After their third visit, the teacher from Southway Junior said *"A really lovely session, the children and residents now know each other so chat away easily and thoroughly enjoyed making the cards together. Our pupils really look forward to visiting."*

In addition to intergenerational activities at the scheme, the residents of Colmer Court have been invited to performances at Southway Junior School including their end of year school performance and Christmas Carol service. Five residents attended the end of year performance and the relationship between the school and the scheme has grown even stronger.

The relationship has continued past the initial pilot phase and the number of participants has grown. In October 2023, at the start of the new academic year, a new group of school children from Southway Junior met the residents of Colmer Court. The teacher said: *"We took a new group of children who will attend all visits this school year. We had 14 children and 7 old people which was great as the children could be in pairs with an adult. Pictionary was a great hit! Lovely to see 5 residents we the teachers know and 2 new ones."*

So far 30 children from Southway Junior and over 10 residents from Colmer Court have engaged in the programmes and attendance numbers continue to grow. At their most recent visit on 6th December 2023, 9 residents participated (3 of which were joining for their first time).

## 5. Summary and conclusion

This evaluation report for InCommon has sought to address the two evaluation aims as set out in the proposal. These are:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of the online platform as a tool to enable intergenerational activity.
2. To evaluate the social impact of InCommon's intergenerational activity for a range of stakeholders/participants.

The intention is for this evaluation report to be shared with UKRI as evidence for the scaling of InCommon's intergenerational activity through an improved online platform to support local intergenerational projects between schools and retirement homes.

This section provides a summary of the evaluation of the online platform and the social impact of the activities resulting from InCommon's workshops whether organised via the online platform or by InCommon's 'direct delivery' programmes.

### **The evaluation of the effectiveness of the online platform as a tool to enable intergenerational activity**

InCommon's online platform has demonstrated significant success, as evidenced by quantitative and qualitative data. The platform has facilitated the participation of an estimated 310 individuals in intergenerational activities, with an overall footfall of 574 younger and older people. InCommon's activities experience an almost equal 60:40 ratio of younger to older participants. This ratio fosters meaningful conversations across generations.

The platform's strengths lie in its high usability rating, efficient onboarding process, and autonomy of users once onboarded. The evidence highlights the platform's effectiveness as an organisational tool for arranging intergenerational activities, with users praising its convenience and the minimal support required post-onboarding.

However, the evaluation identified weaknesses and challenges, such as the time consuming matching process, housing associations' competing priorities, and the need for InCommon staff support during initial onboarding. These areas present opportunities for improvement, such as exploring automation for the matching process.

Opportunities for growth include leveraging existing relationships for quicker onboarding, showcasing the ease of facilitation by school leads using the online platform, and enhancing resources to accommodate varied activities. The potential expansion into other types of older persons accommodation and the development of communication tools on the platform present additional avenues for growth.

The evaluation identifies a potential threat to upscaling from the digital skills and confidence within the workforce. Limited digital skills among scheme managers could pose a barrier to participation and platform adoption. It is recommended that InCommon continues to provide support and explores partnerships with housing providers to improve digital literacy among staff and residents.

In conclusion, InCommon's platform exhibits several strengths that contribute to its success, with identified weaknesses offering opportunities for improvement. The platform's adaptability and responsiveness to challenges will be crucial for sustained growth and

effectiveness in fostering intergenerational activities. Ongoing efforts to address digital skill barriers will be pivotal in ensuring inclusivity and expanding the platform's reach. Overall, the platform is an effective tool that supports others to create intergenerational connections.

### **The evaluation of the social impact of InCommon's intergenerational activity for a range of stakeholders/participants**

The evaluation of InCommon's intergenerational activities identified a range of social impacts for a variety of stakeholders and where possible, economic impact has been demonstrated using secondary evidence and the Housing LIN's experience of the older persons housing sector.

In relation to older residents, the social impact is derived from improved health and wellbeing indicators such as, reduced loneliness and isolation, increased mental stimulation and feeling part of a community. The associated economic impacts have been estimated as a result of a reduction in the use of health and care services from healthier residents, demonstrating potential savings to the NHS and housing providers.

In relation to younger people, the social impact is gained from improved social and emotional learning as a result of increased confidence and relationship building skills and increased opportunities for teachers to connect with pupils.

InCommon's intergenerational activities are combating ageist attitudes and re-shaping participants' views on what it means to be an older or younger person.

The social impact on the local community is also demonstrated following the meaningful connections that are created at InCommon sessions which enable people to feel part of their community and as though they make a difference to other people's lives. Strong communities have been shown to have reduced instances of crime and are places that people want to live and invest in.

There are social impacts that have potential benefits to housing providers. Improved health and wellbeing of residents is linked to maintaining tenancies within sheltered housing. The evidence also suggests improved workforce satisfaction and support with enabling a sense of community within the scheme.

In conclusion, InCommon's activities generate a comprehensive and positive social impact, fostering community connections, supporting educational and emotional growth in children, and contributing to the overall wellbeing of participants across generations. The social and associated economic impacts are summarised in Table 13. on the next page.

Table 13. The social and associated economic impacts of InCommon's intergenerational workshops.

Social impact	Associated economic impact
Health and wellbeing outcomes for residents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loneliness and social isolation</li> <li>Mental stimulation</li> <li>Physical activity</li> <li>Sense of community</li> </ul>	Cost savings to NHS from avoided use of health and care services due to reduced loneliness and isolation = £16,700 per year
Avoided admission to residential care due to improved health and wellbeing	Cost savings from avoided admission to residential care = £47,448 per year
	Cost saving from avoided costs associated with a void housing providers = £1,170 per year
Utilisation of community spaces	Cost saving from avoided use of paid-for community spaces = £19,200 per year
Social value of volunteering	662 hours of volunteering provided by older residents = £10,724 per year
Mutually beneficial and meaningful intergenerational social bonds	-
Increased work satisfaction for housing provider colleagues	-
Identifying residents that need support	-
Community Cohesion (in the scheme and local community)	-
Tackling Ageism	-
Social and emotional learning outcomes for young people	-
Relationship building between school leads and pupils	-
<b>Total associated economic impact<sup>46</sup></b>	<b>£95,242 per year</b>

To conclude, InCommon's intergenerational activities generate a comprehensive and positive social impact, fostering community connections and building friendships that help tackle ageism within society. As well as supporting educational and emotional growth in children and contributing to the overall health and wellbeing of participants across generations.

Healthier and happier older participants also has potential economic benefit, such as from savings to healthcare services, preventing a move to residential care, as well as for retirement housing providers maintaining tenancies in sheltered/retirement housing.

**In total, the estimated economic impact associated with the social impacts derived from InCommon's 2022/2023 intergenerational activities is £95,242 per year.**

With InCommon's online platform facilitating others to create further intergenerational connections throughout the UK, InCommon offers significant opportunity for social impact to reach a wide audience.

<sup>46</sup> The associated economic impact is derived from the first 5 rows in the table. This includes cost savings to the NHS, providers of retirement housing, from avoided residential care, paid-for community space and volunteering.

## 6. About InCommon

InCommon is a charity bringing generations together. We connect groups of young people with their older neighbours to learn and build friendships together.

All of our activities are about building more connected, inclusive and age-friendly communities.

We believe that we should all be able to stay part of our communities as we grow older. We want to foster social connections across generations and live in a world that supports us all - young and old - to live happy, healthy, fulfilling lives.

We partner with schools, youth groups, housing associations and other community organisations to connect people of different ages in meaningful ways that benefit everyone taking part.

**InCommon**

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X (Twitter): <https://twitter.com/incommonlondon>

## 7. About the Housing LIN

This report has been written by Lois Beech and Darius Ghadiali from the Housing LIN.

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 20,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population and for people with care & support needs. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist, supported and accessible housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people to live independently in a home of their choice,
- provide insight and intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice to support sector learning and improvement,
- showcase what's best in specialist, supported and accessible housing, and feature innovative projects and services that demonstrate how the lives of people have been transformed, and
- support commissioners and providers to review their existing provision and develop, test out and deliver solutions so that they are best placed to respond to their customers' changing needs and aspirations.

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