

# The Community Engagement Companion

## Ideas and tips from managers and activity coordinators

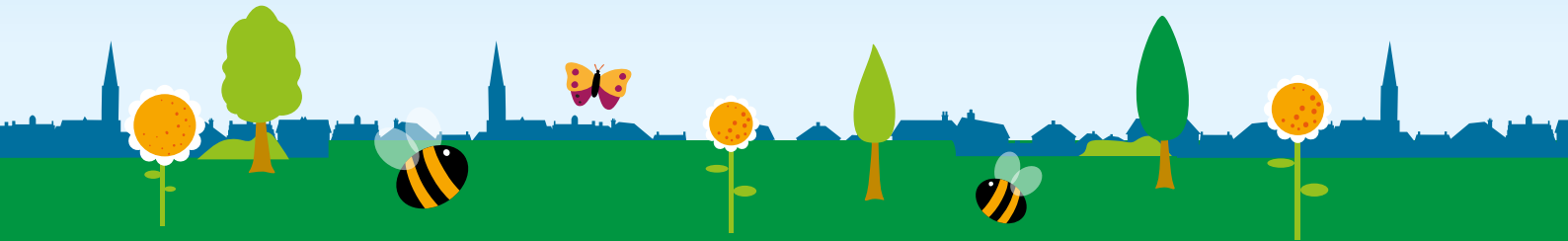


This document was co-created with the care home managers and activity coordinators of the 28 homes taking part in the North West London Care Home Friends and Neighbours (FaNs) project funded by the Mercers' Company. Care Home FaNs is a national programme led by My Home Life England which is hosted at City, University of London. The programme helps care homes to build stronger relationships and connections with local people, places and passions to deliver quality of life for those living, dying, working and visiting care homes.

**This resource offers:**

- Practical tips on engaging with different parts of the community
- Steps towards building community engagement
- Contact details of local resources in North West London
- Contact details of national museums with outreach programmes

Quotes in italics are taken from conversations held in project workshops, peer-to-peer sessions and interviews; quotes are anonymous.



# Practical tips on engaging with different parts of the community

## Volunteers

### Recruiting from schools or organisations

1. Offer to give a presentation. Be clear about what the person(s) volunteering will be expected to do.
2. Describe what will happen when someone starts as a volunteer; describe the process you've planned - an interview, an agreed time commitment, an induction course and on-going support.
3. If it is a school, prepare a letter the school can send to the parents of children who might be volunteering.
4. Covid-19: people can volunteer even when care home doors are closed. See the 'ideas for volunteers' sheet' [at this link](#) for more information.

*'Although it (the planning) is a lot of work, it is definitely worth it.'*

*'Volunteers help with one-to-one engagement and, when residents come from a wide ethnic background, it helps when the volunteer can speak their language.'*

[National Citizen Service](#) (NCS). Volunteers may come with a teacher or via a local NCS Action Group. They can be asked to take on improving a garden or reading with a resident.

*'An NCS volunteer painted a bus stop in our home meaning we could start a project on travel!'*

Volunteers may want an NCS certificate at the end of their time for their 'folder' or CV.

[DBS checks](#) are needed for anyone over 16 years old.

You may be able to recruit volunteers from the visitors and relatives who come into the home.

*'Making visitors really welcome and comfortable inspired one woman to become a volunteer in my care home.'*



## Children visiting from a local nursery

This will work better with planning. Identify a key person in the nursery to meet, arrange a visit and start to build a trusting relationship. It may take time.

*'The nursery has invited us to go for tea, that's really nice, we will go, we are building a connection there.'*

Do a risk assessment of your care home and share it with the nursery to show them that you are prepared.

*'We bought a potty and play mat.'*

## Children visiting from schools

Make it easy for schools to understand what will happen. Seek a meeting with the teacher, having prepared some questions and answers. Show the teacher the risk assessment that you have done.

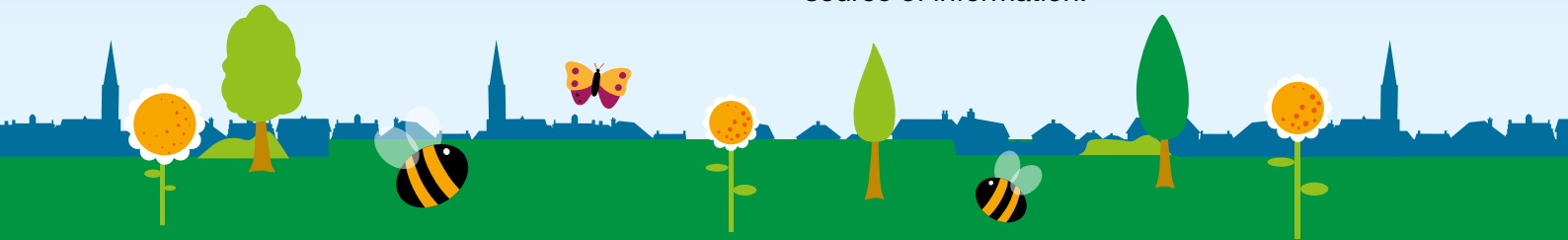
Suggest the children are prepared for meeting residents who live with dementia. The Alzheimer's Society (AS) has a [Memories with Grandma](#) Activity pack for 5 – 11 year olds. There are also general AS dementia films on [You Tube](#).

Buy in fruit and biscuits for the children. Check if any children have food allergies.

The [Intergenerational Linking Project](#) links 5 – 14 year old children with older people living in care homes and has easy-to-make resources.

## Make homes inclusive

Make sure everyone feels welcome and accepted. Participants said not all staff feel comfortable with difference, for example, a resident who is gay or someone from a different ethnic background. This is also applicable when thinking about community engagement. The need for training was recognised. It helps people explore their attitudes and develop their understanding. [Opening Doors](#) is a good source of information.



## Animals

*“Rabbits make good pets”.* Rabbits sit calmly on residents’ laps and like to be petted.

*‘Having rabbits attracted children who brought in their parents - who then got more involved in the home!’*

**TheraPaws** Dogs have been registered to be brought in to care homes. The pets are vaccinated and their owners DBS-checked. Residents love to stroke dogs.

**Henpower** The charity offers crafts and activities on the theme of ‘hens’ as well as providing birds and advice on looking after them. It can be costly but hens will attract local visitors and families so it’s a good way to create new connections with the community.

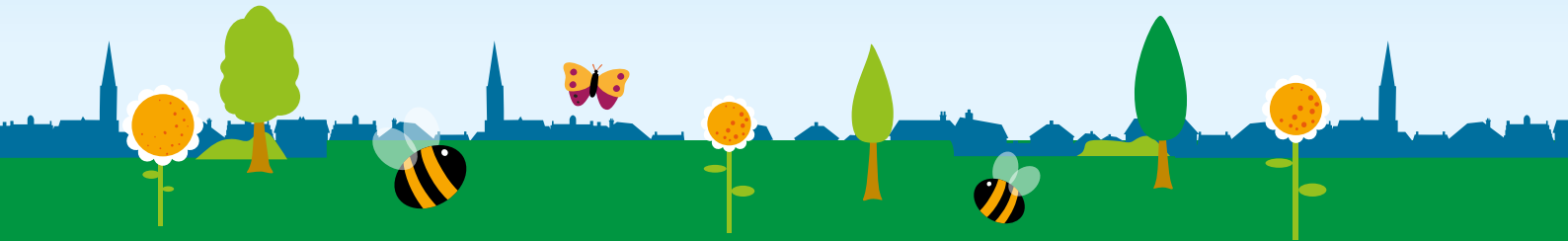
## Churches and faith groups

*‘We get flowers from the church on a Monday and then the residents sit in the communal lounge to arrange them with volunteers.’*

*‘Our home has a pen pal scheme with children in the church’.*

## Start a craft group

An activity coordinator started an ‘Open Craft Group’ offering residents and relatives the chance to make things together. For Christmas, they made ‘snow globes’ (water and glycerine mixed in a jar with sparkles). The plan is now to keep this group going with other craft activities to attract friends and relatives.



## Visit the local charity shop

Good places to find items from the past that can be used in reminiscence sessions. Start a conversation with the shop person. If they have someone in their life who is/was in a care home, a connection might be built that could lead to more things! One care home decorated a 'room from the past' with items including a turntable and records donated by a charity shop 'friend'. Invite that person to a celebration party.

## Build links with local business

An Activity Coordinator described the importance of building relationships with a café so the staff got a chance to learn about the residents' needs and behaviours. They were welcoming to residents using the café after that.

## Don't Dine Alone

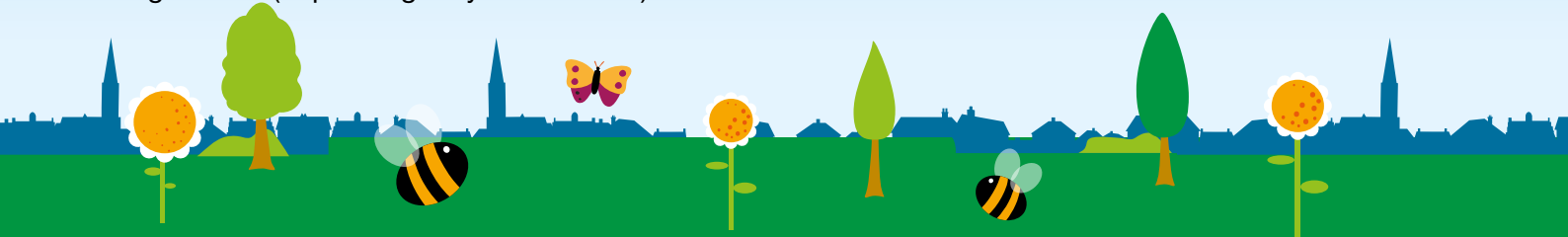
Invite local older people for lunch in the care home, charge or not (depending on your situation).

## Technology

Technology provides welcome contact for residents to keep in touch with relatives and friends. It has been key in maintaining good connections with residents of care homes throughout the pandemic. Some employers provided homes with digital devices, other homes welcomed donations from local people or charities. Staff confidence in dealing with technology varied widely. Additional training would help. Some residents living with dementia seemed to like the focus a screen provided while others did not engage at all.

## Talks and lectures

[Probus Clubs](#) are for retired or semi-retired people from all walks of life. Members may give talks on subjects of interest. [University of the Third Age](#) has local branches and may also offer speakers on different topics.



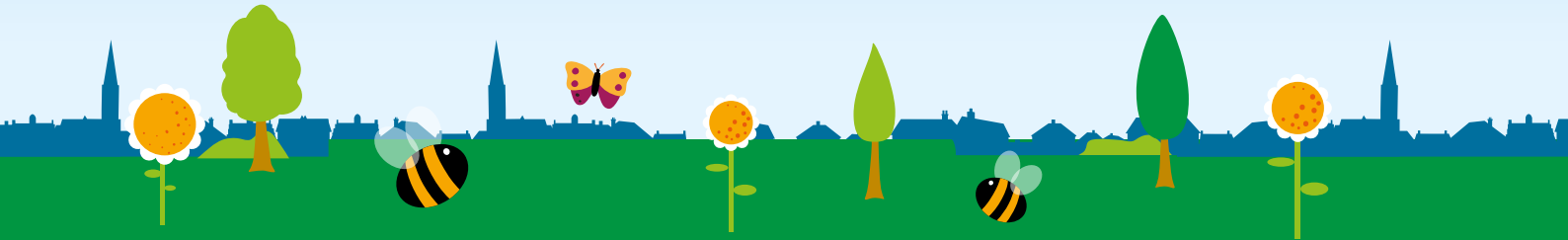
## Steps towards building community connections

To build successful connections, it is important to plan and prepare:

- Find out who is the right person at the organisation to speak to and agree a time to meet that suits them
  - Take information about your care home, including contact details, that you can leave behind
  - Build rapport and trust with that person as you explore how a connection might work
  - Be open minded and flexible
- Invite them for a cup of tea at the care home to meet residents and staff and get a feel for the place
  - Keep a note of what has been discussed. Follow up with the person after a few days.

Community engagement takes time:

*'It will take years to engage with the community, to show we're not a closed home, we're also part of the community'.*



## Use [Care Home FaNs resources](#)

Some of these free resources can be modified so local details can be 'added' e.g. for an event.

## Promote the work with social media

Building a Facebook page is a good way to show relatives what is going on and easy to update quickly.

## Appreciate those who help out

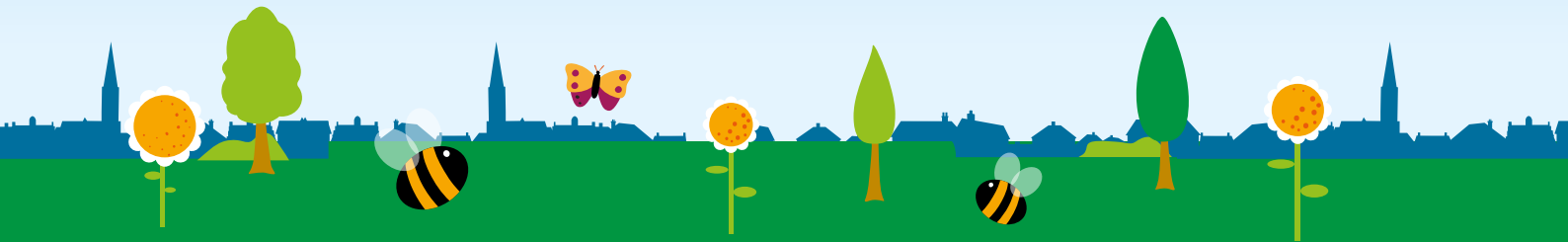
A 'thank you' card from a manager or a Care Home FaNs certificate will make someone know their help is appreciated.

*'We asked a resident with lovely handwriting to fill in the Care Home FaNs certificates.'*

## Collect evidence and 'show off'!

Use scrap books to 'capture' what's going on. Residents and relatives can scribble, draw and add photos to display what has been going on.

Newsletters are brilliant ways to promote what is happening in the home and can be distributed to families and the wider community online and in print. They are also good to show a [Care Quality Commission](#) Inspector. So keep a copy in the file.





## Useful contacts in North West London

Heritage departments of local councils may have outreach staff who link local people with their heritage.

Brent: [museum.archives@brent.gov.uk](mailto:museum.archives@brent.gov.uk)

Hillingdon: [archives@hillingdon.gov.uk](mailto:archives@hillingdon.gov.uk)

Westminster: [archives@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:archives@westminster.gov.uk)

Harrow: [collections@headstonemanor.org](mailto:collections@headstonemanor.org)

Hounslow: [localstudies@hounslow.gov.uk](mailto:localstudies@hounslow.gov.uk)

Kensington and Chelsea:  
[centrallocalenquiries@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:centrallocalenquiries@rbkc.gov.uk)

Camden: [localstudies@camden.gov.uk](mailto:localstudies@camden.gov.uk)

Ealing: [LocalHistoryLibrary@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:LocalHistoryLibrary@ealing.gov.uk)

## [Dementia Action Alliance](#)

An activity coordinator said she found her local group useful for finding information about events and other resources such as dementia cafes.

## Mayors of local councils

Mayors like to know what is going on, so tell them. Invite the Mayor to appear or promote your community initiative. During lockdown, The Mayor of Hounslow supported '[Gift a Geranium](#)'.

[mayor@brent.gov.uk](mailto:mayor@brent.gov.uk)

[mayor@ealing.gov.uk](mailto:mayor@ealing.gov.uk)

[mayor@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:mayor@harrow.gov.uk)

[Dyarrow@hillingdon.gov.uk](mailto:Dyarrow@hillingdon.gov.uk)

[mayor@hounslow.gov.uk](mailto:mayor@hounslow.gov.uk)

[mayor@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:mayor@rbkc.gov.uk)

[lordmayorsoffice@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:lordmayorsoffice@westminster.gov.uk)

[mayor@camden.gov.uk](mailto:mayor@camden.gov.uk)



## Visit a garden centre

Residents enjoyed a visit to the [Twickenham](#) branch of Squires Garden Centre during a quiet period.  
Tel: 0208 977 9241.

## [Compass Theatre](#)

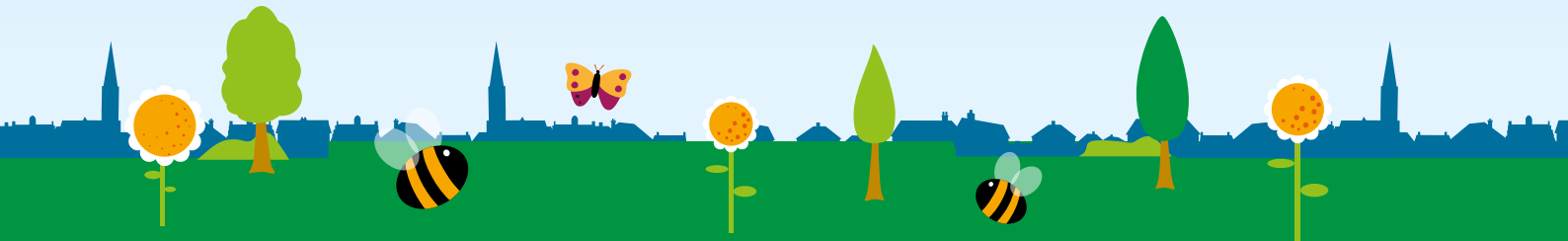
This theatre in Ickenham may offer reduced ticket price for older people for some shows (though this is not mentioned on the website).

## Local drama groups and choirs

These can be inexpensive to attend and make a special outing. Some groups may be willing to do a performance in the home. Local choirs may also be willing to perform.

## [Bus Pass to Broadway](#)

This company of older actors puts on music and dance shows.



## National museums

National museums and galleries may have a remit to connect with the community including people living and working in care homes. Some offer specialist events in the museum or gallery while others will send staff out to care homes to give talks or share collections. Some have funding to undertake specific projects working directly with care home residents, for example, sending in an artist.

It is worth keeping in touch with these organisations to build trust and rapport.

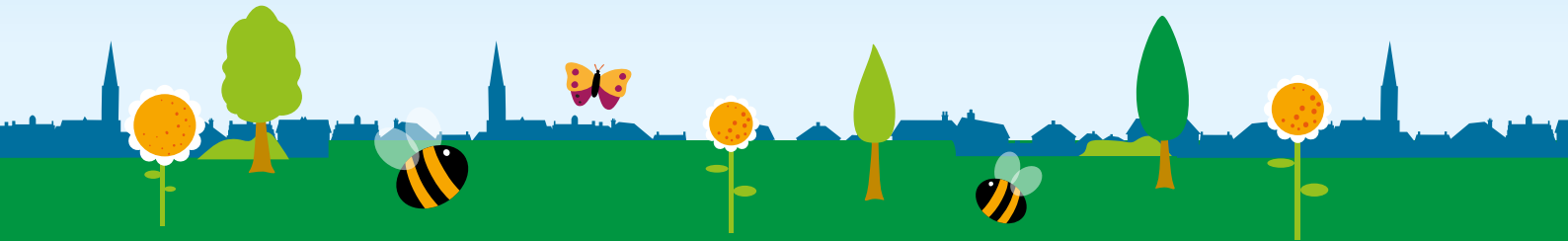
The [Museum of Brands](#) is a collection of everyday items that have been in existence since the Victorian times. Contact via [Alina@museumofbrands.com](mailto:Alina@museumofbrands.com). Tel: 0207 243 9611.

The [Museum of London](#) contains artefacts and fascinating stories about the capital and the people who have or are living in London.

[The RAF Museum](#) shares the story of the Royal Air Force, past, present and future. There are 'handling sessions' at the Museum or these can be arranged to take place in a care home. Residents can see, touch, smell and hear objects that tell the story of RAF Hendon.

[The Royal Collection](#) is one of the largest and most important art collections in the world, and one of the last great European royal collections to remain intact. It can run sessions in care homes using pictures from the collection to inspire discussion.

[The British Library](#) is a major research library, with items in many languages and in many formats, both print and digital: books, manuscripts, newspapers and sound recordings. As part of the *Unlocking Our Sound* Heritage project, they have created a coastal themed therapy video for those with early to moderate stage dementia. The session ends with relaxation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zv7Z3z3xhgc>

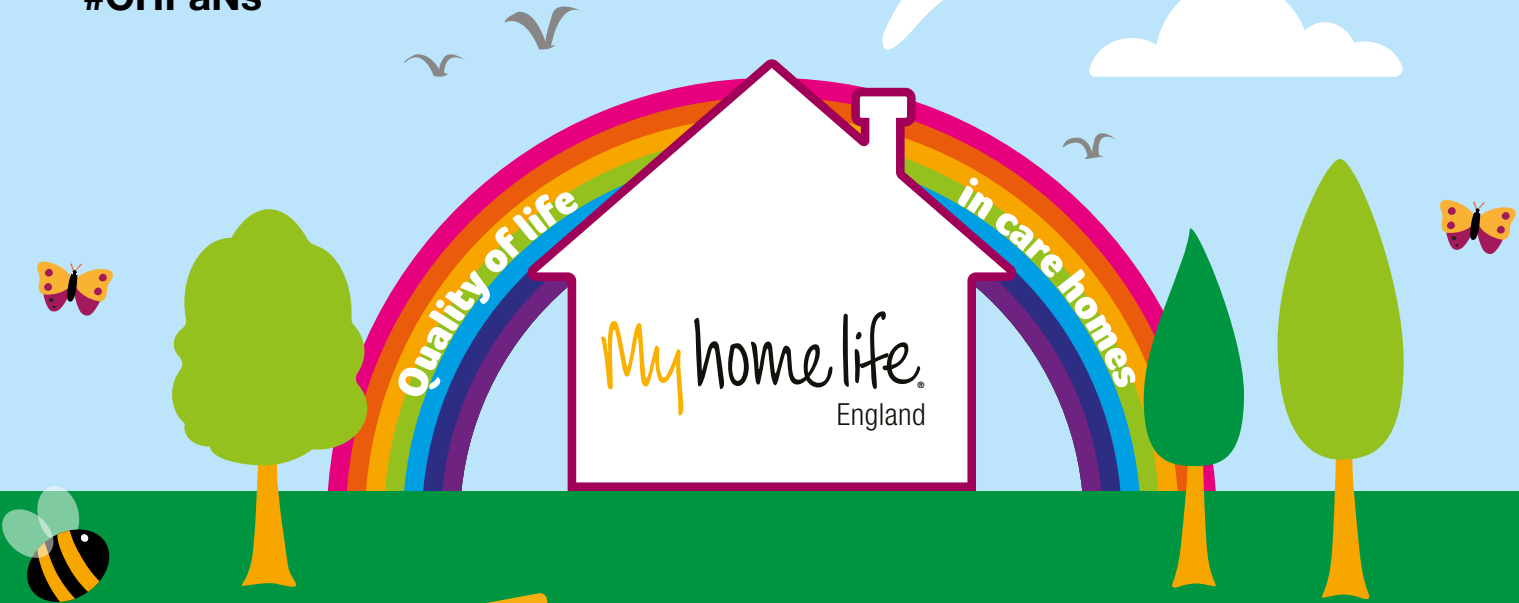


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[carehomefans.org](http://carehomefans.org)



*Life is better with good friends  
and neighbours*