



Meeting the Challenge: How young people spread kindness and positivity in their community during COVID-19

How young people at Rossie Young People's Trust helped their local community to feel more connected during lockdown

What was the challenge faced by Rossie Young People's Trust?

Rossie supports 10-18 year-olds who have been exposed to multiple adverse childhood experiences, through residential care, secure care and specialist intervention services. Like many care providers, the COVID-19 public health emergency meant Rossie's campus had to make adjustments which had a major impact on young people's day-to-day lives. This included being unable to do outdoor activities, visit home, or see family and friends face-to-face, and, during school hours and in their free time, only being able to spend time with those they live with, no other young people from the campus. This meant a new way needed to be found to support the young people and provide some positivity during these uncertain times.

What change in practice took place?

Through workshops, young people were given the opportunity to learn more about COVID-19 and how to keep themselves and each other safe. Using questionnaires, staff asked the young people about their thoughts on the impact of lockdown and what could be done to help them through the pandemic. Many of the young people said they would like to contribute to the community initiative 'Simmer Doon Soup', in Montrose, Angus, which was giving out kits of soup ingredients and recipes to vulnerable local people in need during lockdown. The young people made 'compassion bags' to be given out with the soup kits. These included treats and activities, from home baking to VE Day recipes, 'cups of tea in a bag', and wildflower seeds for people to plant. They enclosed information about Mental Health Awareness Week, lockdown poems and Pride posters, and also added small gifts to cheer people up, including crafts such as peg people, stained glass windows, badges, and rainbow bracelets and drawings. These items were decided through discussions between the young people and staff as everyone wanted to ensure the bags had items that would put a smile on people's faces. Young people freshly baked the goods in their Home Economics kitchen working alongside staff. They may well be some potential 'Great British Bake Off' stars of the future! Young people also wrote letters to vulnerable people which were delivered alongside the bags to the local doctor's surgery, sheltered housing complexes, family and friends, and to the neighbours of Rossie staff who are vulnerable or self-isolating.

Who was involved in making the change?

Voluntary Action Angus supported Rossie by collecting the young peoples' compassion bags and delivering these to 'Simmer Doon Soup' and Montrose Community Trust to be distributed within the local community. This came about as one of the members of staff, Jan, made contact with Voluntary Action Angus, who then connected her with 'Simmer Doon Soup' to begin the initiative. Montrose Community Trust then noticed the work on social media - they were

running a similar project and shortly afterwards a partnership was created so both organisations could all work collaboratively to support the local community.

What difference did this change make?

As well as having something to do to take their minds off the pandemic, being able to spread kindness in this way helped young people to feel more connected, and that they were making a difference to others during the lockdown. One of the young people said:

"As a kid at Rossie I think it's such a lovely idea especially with COVID-19. I loved feeling like I've made a difference to someone's day especially when people are feeling lonely right now. Love A xox"

The vulnerable people that Rossie's young people wrote to would not otherwise have had any regular human contact during this time, and the letters were so well received - several people have written back and phoned to thank the young people, as well as posting supportive messages on social media sites. Now the young people are being included in plans for a local soup kitchen, which is a community led initiative in partnership with Montrose Community Trust, Simmer Doon Soup and Volunteer Action Angus. Rossie is currently in discussions about the development of this project, and young people will definitely play an active part in ensuring its success.

More information: Jan Philip, Throughcare Worker: jan.philip@rossie.org.uk

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