



Young people, residents and partner agencies involved in the Expanding Futures for Communities project receive their certificates of achievement (foreground: Demi Gleeson (11) and Joe Nagle (10))

Age barriers broken down in Bootle as residents dance, cook and go camping together

Residents from four Bootle neighbourhoods have been celebrating their success in helping to bridge the generation gap and strengthen their community.

With support and funding from Evolve Neighbourhood Regeneration, local children, teenagers, adults and pensioners have come together to organise a series of events for all to enjoy.

The 'Expanding Futures for Communities' project has seen over 80 residents aged from 11 up to 70 taking part in dancing lessons, a three day camping and outdoor pursuits trip, bingo sessions, a canal cruise and a 'Come Dine With Me'-style cooking contest.

The three month project was launched earlier this year in the Queens, Bedford, Worcester and Hawthorne neighbourhoods and has proved so successful that residents have pledged to keep it going, even if they have to fund it themselves.

Barbara Hardwick, aged 70, who has lived on Peel Road, Bootle, for 46 years said: "It's been really great. We came up with the ideas ourselves and presented them to Evolve who gave us the funds to make it happen. I was impressed by the way they just trusted us to get on with it.

"I helped to organise the 'Community Come Dine With Me' project" said Barbara. "This was based on the idea of the TV programme, with three community centres all competing with each other to host a different themed evening. They planned and cooked the meals together, decorated the hall and got dressed up to match their theme. It was fantastic and everyone really themselves, especially at the final event at Bootle Town Hall which was attended by the Mayor.

"This area sometimes gets a bad press for anti social behaviour but it's always just a few troublemakers who steal the headlines" she said. "The decent people around here are trying to turn that reputation around and projects like this can only help."

Ten year old Joe Nagle from Wadham Road was one of around 30 people aged from 10 to 70 who went on the three day camping trip to Rock and River in Lancashire: "It was sound" he said. "We went kayaking, zip-wiring, swimming in the lake and rock climbing. Everyone got on well and helped each other out."

"We cooked all our own food and sat round the camp fire at night telling stories. Some of the older ones were telling us about the war and all the things that went on round here. We've been learning about it in school but hearing about it from people who were really there was boss!"

But telling war stories wasn't all that Viola Street resident Ann Stannard, 70, got up to on the camp: "I'd never been camping in my life before" the plucky grandmother admitted "and I was a bit dubious at first but I soon got stuck in. I abseiled down a 100 foot wall, I went zip-wiring, kayaking and swimming in the lake. I even had a go at archery - you name it, I tried it!"

"My children think I'm mad but the tents were smashing and I loved every minute" added Ann, who has also taken up Bollywood, Hip Hop and Salsa dancing at the Monday night dance club at Bedford Road Community Centre.

Paula Thompson, Evolve's Neighbourhood Investment Manager said: "This has been a really inspiring project that has brought generations together in a way that has surprised everyone. Residents themselves have been in the driving seat all the way, coming up with the ideas and making the projects happen. Evolve has been very happy to fund the projects and we'd like to thank Brian Dowds and the team at Expanding Futures for all their help and support and of course the residents themselves for really showing what can happen when people of all ages work decide to work together like this. It's fantastic to see people's enthusiasm to keep this going into the future and we hope it goes from strength to strength."