



The Towell House 60th anniversary celebrations – June 2021



Organisation name: Towell Building Trust

Project name: 60th anniversary celebrations

Location: East Belfast, Northern Ireland

Grant amount: £9,730

Award date and duration: May 2018, 1 year

Project context: The Towell Building Trust (TBT) is a not-for-profit charity that runs Towell House, a residential home. Towell House is home to 90 older people in East Belfast. The fund was used to celebrate Towell House' 60th anniversary by hosting events for residents, their families and the local community.

Project aims: The aim of the events was to improve relationships between the home and the local community, to provide a sense of intergenerational connection. They also aimed to build lasting memories for the residents and their families, as well as give the older residents a sense of purpose and excitement.

Project aims

The aim of the celebration events were to:

- Improve relationships between the home and the local community.
- Provide a sense of intergenerational connection.
- Build lasting memories for the residents and their families, as well as give the older residents a sense of purpose and excitement.

About the grant

The grant was used to **celebrate Towell House's 60th anniversary**, through a series of community engagement and social and community connection activities for residents, their families, and the local community. This included organising and hosting activities such as a Gala Ball trip for residents, a Family Fun Day held in the gardens, a 'Music in the Garden' event, and a Christmas lights switch on. The grant was used to **purchase the materials and services needed to run these events**. Towell House had been able to hold these events in the past, however with the grant, they were able to make them bigger and better than before, by funding extra activities and attractions for visitors.

Project set up and delivery

The activities were organised and led by Sarah, the activities and events manager at Towell House, supported by Jane, the admin manager. They were supported by a team of volunteers who all had connections with Towell House (such as a residents' relatives), along with other Towell House staff who were happy to help out and provide assistance during the events.

The **Family Fun Day** was held in June 2018 and attracted into the hundreds of local people. Sarah advertised the event in local schools and churches, as well as via a leaflet drop in the immediate neighbourhood. The grant allowed the expansion of the event, to cover the costs of attractions such as the exotic animal farm and visits from film characters.

As part of the grant, Towell House held a black-tie **Gala Ball** at a local hotel, and free pairs of tickets (paid for by the grant) were offered to 10 residents, each of whom were able to bring a family member with them to attend the ball. Staff from

Towell House were on hand to help the residents with personal care and physical support if needed, so the families could relax and enjoy the evening. This was particularly appreciated by the families.

“At the gala ball, I’d stay with the residents and help them with whatever they needed all night, sometimes they needed some to dance with...I was happy to help!”

Louise, Volunteer



The **Christmas light switch on** event was an opportunity to engage with local primary school children, and the event attracted 2,000 local people. The grant was used to purchase craft materials, for pupils from 6 local primary schools to use to draw Christmas trees as part of a competition. The grant was used more widely to run the event, such as to hire a PA system. The grant helped the organisers to increase the scale of the event as it enabled them to hire security to manage a large number of attendees. The grant also funded a **‘Music in the Garden’ event**, which was an evening of live music for residents and their family to enjoy, with free gift bags.



Existing volunteers and Towell House staff helped at the events, manning stalls, baking and making signs. The staff often helped unpaid outside of their working hours.

The local fire service, police and St John’s Ambulance also supported the various celebration activities.

“The Christmas Lights were ran like a military operation, we all had radios and really clear instructions what we needed to do”

M. Volunteer

The participants of the celebration events included the residents in the home, along with their families and the local community. Everyone interviewed agreed that the events ran successfully and were a fitting celebration for the 60th anniversary celebrations. The relatives of residents and attendees to the events felt they were well run and organised.

Relatives of residents felt their family members had really enjoyed getting to see lots of people and try out new activities and experiences. Julia’s family of around 20 people in total came to the Christmas Lights switch on and felt it was a great opportunity for them to all be together.

Sarah carried out a small survey among attendees of their Music in the Garden event, and all the feedback collated suggested a fantastic day had by all. Survey respondents were asked to rate their enjoyment of the day out of 100, of the 18 respondents, the average score given was 86. Multiple respondents pointed out in the survey the fantastic atmosphere of the day.

“It was lovely to see her wee face light up and for her to see everybody...it put her in a really good place. I just knew she was excited and looking forward to it, it was priceless, instead of just sitting in her room day in, day out.”

Mandy, Resident family member

Project impact

Key highlights

Numbers supported

- The activities attracted thousands of visitors throughout the year. For example, the Christmas Light Switch on event attracted 2000 visitors on the day.
- The 90 residents of Towell House attended the events.

Key impacts

- Increased **social contact** with members of the local community across generations
- Boost the **mental health and general wellbeing** of the residents and the volunteers.
- Residents had some fantastic new experiences and memories for the future.

Website

<https://www.facebook.com/towellhouserresidentialhome/>

People’s mental health and wellbeing was better

A key aim of the celebration events for the Towell House team was **to give the residents some new experiences and build new memories**. Staff and families of the residents alike shared several anecdotes of the residents really enjoying their time at the celebration events, and the memory of them living on – with staff at the house still sharing photos of the events with residents.

“The Elvis impersonator sang; the music was so good. My dad saw people dancing, and he got up from his chair and said if they can do it, so can I! He absolutely loved it, it was so nice to see my Dad enjoying it.

Julia, Resident family member

Julia, a daughter of one of the residents, felt that initially her father would be quite reserved and say that he didn't fancy any of the social activities. After some encouragement, it was clear he really enjoyed taking part, getting up to dance at the Music in the Garden event. Mandy, another resident's family member, knew how much her mother was excited to be escorted to the gala ball by her grandson in a tuxedo, and that they all shared a great night together, building lasting memories as a family.

Alongside improving the mood and wellbeing of the residents, **the volunteers reported a positive impact on their confidence and skills** too. One of the volunteers, Rachel, who was involved in organizing the Family Fun Day, admitted that before the event they were a bit nervous. However, fifteen minutes in they were quickly able to relax and just enjoy the day. They **had learnt a lot about organizing events and building relationships with partners (such as the security services)**, as well as some more practical skills like learning to face paint. They look forward to taking on more responsibility at these events in the future. They've also found it to have a positive impact on their own self confidence.

People have had more social contact

The Towell House team were also hoping to **create a more intergenerational community** around the home, through inviting the wider community to celebration events. This occurred through the increase of social contact from the celebration events. The large events such as the Family Fun Day and the Christmas Light's switch on were well-attended by the local community (with 2,000 at the Christmas event). The Christmas Light switch on competition engaged the local primary school children with Towell House. Relatives of residents and volunteers at Towell House agreed that the residents appreciate interacting with children around the home, as they find it energizing and exciting. Many residents have no connections to the local area nor any contact with children, so this is a good opportunity for them. At the Music in the Garden event, Sarah expected the residents to be spending time with their families in the garden, however they spent a lot of time showing the children how to play with traditional toys from their own younger years which surprised her.

“Mum loves being in the company of children. They can be funny, and they don't judge you. They take [the residents] as they find them”

Mandy, Resident family member

Building on the celebration events, **intergenerational engagement has continued.** Children from local schools write letters to the residents, sharing what they are learning about at school. Children sometimes recognise the residents when they are out in the supermarket too, which the residents like because it makes them feel part of the local community. Throughout the pandemic some local people have sent flowers and treats for residents instead. Towell House has been able to use the grant to run events which have increased the connectedness of the home to the wider community.

“Seeing the residents out shopping.... this helps the children see that the residents are not scary, they are just normal human beings. Hopefully these events will have a long-term impact on the children, and they won't forget about the residents here” **Sarah, project lead**

Overall reflections

The popularity of the Christmas lights switch on and the Family Fun Day was so high that they engaged a local security firm to count numbers on the door. In the future they would make the events ticketed as at times it became hard to manage the number of people. This is testament to the hard work they put into advertising and delivering high quality events.

Towell House is now well known for their Christmas Lights and their Family Fun Day events. People in the local community have been ringing asking about the events and when they will start again. Sarah and Jane felt that previously they were not very well known in the area. As a result of the celebration activities, Towell House have built a bigger local profile and forged better links between the home and its residents, and the local community. Their online presence has also grown, with a lot of local people without family connections following the Towell House Facebook page, where staff post pictures of the residents' taking part in activities. The grant has funded a series of celebration events which have been successful in creating closer connections between the home and the local community, and between generations. It has helped to create happy new memories and given the residents a chance to try something new.

About the case study

As part of this case study, IFF Research spoke to Sarah (the events and activities manager), Jane* (the admin manager), along with two volunteers, Louise* and Ben*, and family members of two Towell House residents (Julia* and Mandy*). **Names have been changed.*