

A Community Spirit Delivers Mutual Benefits

by Hannah Fearnley, Head of Charities & Community Engagement at Bryanston

Having and feeling a sense of community and 'belonging' is vital for an effective and rounded education. Such a mindset does not just happen by chance.

It needs to be nurtured and developed among staff and pupils within any school. However, the mutual benefits of true engagement, collaboration and interaction do not end at the school gates. Encouraging children to extend their horizons and to develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge to become caring and considerate members of the wider community is just as important – if not, even more so.

Within the local education community itself, there is also so much to be gained from developing and sharing new experiences and ideas. The collaborative successes and supportive principles of the Blandford Schools' Network continue to demonstrate the advantages of such a collective resolve and have proved particularly beneficial during such a disruptive period for all centres of education.

Prior to the onset of a global pandemic, pupils from Bryanston and The Blandford School joined forces to deliver a spectacular performance of Les Misérables.

It really was an inspirational and fulfilling exercise for all of the pupils involved – not to mention the enjoyment of packed local audiences – and was followed with a successful literacy project



Bryanston pupils with recipe bags for Blandford Food Bank

in the town library.

On a smaller scale, staff and pupils of schools across the Blandford Schools' Network have worked hard to develop and sustain similar connections, including live art workshops and the recent distribution of short films to provide art lessons for local primary schools.

Delivering tangible support for local charities is also a great way to raise awareness of issues and priorities within the local community while also providing a very fulfilling experience for pupils. Recent initiatives here at Bryanston, for example, have seen money raised for the Mosaic, Julia's House and Teddy 20 charities as well as Treads – an informal advice and information and drop-in centre for young people in Blandford – where the funds raised will be used to pay for laptops and school supplies for local children.

For many years, Bryanston's pupils have had weekly meetings with local care home residents to share stories and discuss experiences. **This has proved really beneficial for both generations and, by writing cards and letters, this close community engagement proved to be of particular**

value throughout the national lockdowns.

Senior pupils have also led an initiative to provide 'recipe bags' for people using the Blandford Food Bank that include recipe cards and all the ingredients for popular dishes like spaghetti Bolognese. The next batch will be further enhanced with additional educational and craft packs.

Of course, community engagement is not just a case of creating dialogue and supportive initiatives on your doorstep. In today's digitally connected world, it's also important to ensure pupils have an awareness and understanding of the challenges facing local communities in more deprived corners of the world and have the opportunity to make a difference. That's precisely what our lower sixth form pupils achieved by creating a knitting club to encourage fellow pupils, staff and parents to knit-a-square for a charity in support of orphaned children in South Africa. This follows other recent initiatives to fund the development and staffing of new schools in remote rural areas of Myanmar and Cambodia as well as support for a kindergarten in Sri Lanka.