



Generations game

INSPIRED by the television series *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*, the community-interest social club Young At Heart (YAH) is helping elderly residents to combat loneliness in the East Sussex village of Heathfield.

The community club, which is run at the pavilion of Heathfield Park Cricket Club, provides an active day outside the home for retired adults by bringing young and old together (*above*). YAH works with a rotation of local primary schools, bringing children aged from 3–11 to spend time with YAH's members.

'Loneliness is a massive problem,' says founder Rachel Gibson, a mother of four who works as a private carer. 'My difficulties are always getting someone from their own home out of their armchair to join us.' YAH was started in 2018, after Mrs Gibson planned the club with one of her clients, who sadly wasn't able to see the club open. From only three members, the club has grown, with participants making new friends. Last week, 'five members who hadn't met before went on holiday together,' she reveals.

YAH members and local children do a variety of activities together, including crafts, cooking, singing and music. The YAH members

also help the children with their schoolwork, passing down their knowledge to the next generation. 'The benefits are for all to see,' Mrs Gibson adds. 'The children love it. They form friendships with our members and they learn from members. They all learn from each other.'

YAH is planning to grow, says Mrs Gibson, who notes that the use of the cricket club provides a launchpad to take the charity national. With the season winding to a close, many pavilions and clubhouses will sit empty, and working with YAH in the future might be a way to provide revenue to clubs in the off season. 'The cricket club is generally empty outside the season,' she says. 'We pay them rent, so that helps them. And it shows the children what's available at the cricket club. I'm hoping, with expansion, more cricket clubs can benefit from the same experience.' YAH also does work with the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, she adds.

The plan is to expand in Sussex and then, in the long term, nationally. 'Any backing would always help, either professionally or with volunteers,' Mrs Gibson concludes. 'We're not a charity, we're a community-interest company. Any help, in any way, would be greatly appreciated.'

To find out more, visit www.youngatheart.me.uk