

Schools are all part of the community

Nicola Dingle, from Pinewood School, observes the positive effect of working together as a community beyond the school gates.

When looking back on 2020 we will certainly remember the sadness and suffering that so many felt, but we will also undoubtedly remember the overwhelming sense of community that has spread throughout the UK. Villages joining together to shop for those not able to leave their homes, individuals taking time out to ring someone who may be feeling isolated or living on their own, the streets lined with people on a Thursday night showing appreciation for all those who were working to keep our country safe and well. These are just a few examples of the many acts of kindness that took place throughout the year.

This sense of community offers benefits to all those involved, be it those receiving help or indeed those giving it – something easily forgotten when going about our busy day to day lives. The idea that this renewed sense of community will outlive Covid-19 is certainly something to strive for.

Schools have long recognised this importance of teaching children about the world outside of the school gates and illustrating the important role that each and every one of us plays in today's world, as such this should be, and in many schools is, a fundamental part of school life.

For more than eight years Pinewood has supported St. John's School in Shonda, Mombasa. The contribution that the school makes is watched closely by Pinewood children and indeed their parents; they are able to see first-hand how their fundraising efforts and contributions are directly impacting the lives of those who find themselves living in a more challenging environment. Last year saw one of the pupils, Amos Ongwe, achieve the highest ever marks in the end of year exams. That puts Amos in the top two per cent of all children in Kenya, a wonderful achievement. They have also built a new building to house a computer lab and an additional classroom, and carried out 69 eye tests for children and adults, providing eye care to those who need it. In 2019 the Pinewood carol service alone raised a fantastic £1,345 for Shonda and whilst this year's service was unable to go ahead, the school still raised these much needed funds through the generosity of the Pinewood community.

Sadly though, it is not just the overseas community that is in need of help and there are many causes close to home that are also in need of support. This Christmas saw gift appeals across the country receive more than double

the quantity of contributions that they have had in previous years – a remarkable effort from so many to ensure that children in the UK all had a special festive season, despite their individual circumstances. Pinewood supported the Gateway church gift appeal in Swindon, who were delighted to receive more than 3,000 gifts, far above their initial target of 500.

Developing that drive to support others starts early, whether that is through an early years cake sale or, as children get older, house charity events. All of these events reinforce the fact that putting your energy into supporting others is a rewarding and positive experience. Allowing children to lead on fundraising efforts can also be a way to develop entrepreneurial skills, as well as building confidence and empathy. When Bourton church was in need of urgent structural repairs, Pinewood took action and an initiative called 'Grow Your Tenner' was born. Every child in years five to eight was given a £10 note to take home over the holidays and after the holidays, the children had to pay back the money, along with any additional revenue that they had been able to make from it. The children excelled themselves and Pinewood raised more than £5,700 for the church. Whether it was washing cars, holding concerts, making dog biscuits or selling cookie kits, they used their imagination and initiative to support a cause close to their hearts.

Equally, whilst raising money is invaluable in

so many ways, it is often time rather than money that can really make a difference. Loneliness is something that can affect people of all ages, but studies show that 45% of adults today feel occasionally, or sometimes often lonely – this is approximately 25million people and over half a million people in the UK go at least five or six days a week without seeing or speaking to anyone at all. As part of the Year 8 Leavers' programme, Pinewood children have in the past gone to a local community drop-in centre and spent time with older members of the community who were looking for companionship. Just giving up an hour of their time makes a lasting impression on those they meet. Closer to home though, just having children pick up the phone and ring their grandparents once a week will be happily received.

Children learn by example and as we work our way through what looks like another challenging year, let us remember to focus on our community, look to it when we are in need of help and offer help when we are in a position to do so.

"Alone, we can do so little; together, we can do so much" (Helen Keller)

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Pupils washed cars, to raise funds for the Bourton church restoration project

