

## Sharing to learn

You're never going to believe this, but I'm turning into a history nerd! And not just me; our whole class are getting into history. We all used to hate it - that endless procession of kings and queens, with wars and treaties thrown in to give us more to learn. But this year, inspired by something she heard on the radio about solidarity between generations, our teacher came up with an amazing idea. Once a fortnight a pensioner comes in to talk to us about what life was like when they were our age. They bring the past to life with all their fascinating anecdotes – and it's not just “good-old-days” nostalgia either; we've learned about rationing and austerity in the forties and fifties, all the social changes in the sixties, and the oil crisis and the birth of the green movement in the seventies. What makes it special is that they all actually lived through these things: one of them even went to see The Beatles and brought in the ticket to show us. It's hard to imagine a time when lots of people didn't have phones in their houses or even a TV, but their talks make it somehow easier to understand why the world is as it is today.

All the pensioners are coming in voluntarily; they're not being paid. But it's not all one-way traffic, and that's the beauty of this scheme. Our teacher realised that we could do our bit too.

While we've all grown up with computers and electronics, for many older people using a computer is as alien as, say, playing football in the street would be for us. They feel they've got to learn to use IT or they'll just be left behind. Even on telly everyone is always talking about going online, and some of them just feel lost. So we've each been assigned tutees, whom we go and visit and help to use the computer. It's funny how many of them are frightened that if they press the wrong button, everything will collapse or explode or something. We show them that it's not like that at all. All we're really doing is teaching them to overcome their fear, but you get a kick out of helping them to write e-mails, fill in online forms or order food from the supermarket. I even showed someone how to use Skype to talk to her granddaughter in Australia the other day. She was so grateful I thought she was going to cry! So we're learning about the past and doing something really worthwhile at the same time. Perhaps the only downside is that we're also eating an inordinate amount of cakes and biscuits!