

## Notes from the Essex and Suffolk Twinning Congress AGM 14/10/17

(The business part of the AGM was minuted formally by Felixstowe Association. This is a round up of some of the ideas discussed.)

Cllr. Nick Barber, Mayor of Felixstowe and President of the Felixstowe Association, welcomed visitors and stressed the importance of Twinning for Felixstowe, and the need to carry European links forward to encourage the next generation.

Richard Holland reported on the British German Association and the Bristol Hanover Conference held in Bristol in May. Delegates from across the United Kingdom, including several members of this Congress, attended and participated in the discussions. Considerable enthusiasm was expressed for continuing to maintain and develop links, whatever the political situation, but we all have to move with the times and find more creative ways to develop twinning. Richard commented on the variety of workshops available, the support of the German Embassy and business interests such as Airbus. Several City and Town councils were also represented.

He was followed by a fascinating presentation given by Felixstowe's Level 2 Group. The Level 2 Youth Group had gone together to Salzwedel, a town linked to their German twin Wesel. The challenges were very great, as many of the students had neither opportunity nor aspiration to travel abroad before, and a lot of work went into the preparation. Students were taken out of their comfort zone, and had to deal with all sorts of new experiences. They all slept on the gym floor of a school, which kept the group together, and enjoyed carefully planned activities with German counterparts during the day. It was hugely beneficial for all concerned. Risk assessments and forward planning were essential. As they were not a school group, the regulations were different from those required for Ofsted, but nevertheless very strict. The leaders showed real vision and understanding in their planning. Funding came from a variety of sources, some self-generated. It was most impressive to see what could be achieved in demanding circumstances.

This was followed by group discussions covering several broad areas.

What do groups actually want out of twinning, and how is this matched with aspirations in their partner communities?

How can problems (funding, attracting younger members etc) be turned into opportunities?

Social Media and communication

Connections with schools and colleges

Attracting members as average membership age increases

1. **Language learning.** Many clubs and associations are addressing language skills amongst their members. Conversation classes, run as coffee mornings/social events, are popular. Some have set up French/German circles where members meet specifically to enhance language. Other use the many Internet resources available and work through them together. It may be possible to hire a native speaker/retired teacher to offer tuition. Language learning, improving communication with hosts, was felt to be very important. It would also raise the profile of the group from just being a social network to a group with a purpose.
2. **Social Media and communication.** This was a topic that repeatedly came up. Any organisation that wants to attract younger members has to get a grip on how to understand and use social media. As we are predominantly of a pre-computer generation, it may be hard for some people to understand, but we have to move with the times. There plenty of places where help can be found - public libraries offer classes, for example.
3. This is also an opportunity to develop **links with schools and colleges** - invite 6<sup>th</sup> Form IT students, for example, to run some sessions for basic IT understanding. Obviously they will need rewarding through payment, for example, or maybe the chance to join a future trip.
4. **Facebook** pages are very easy to set up and manage, and can be a useful recruitment tool. Facebook pages can be read anywhere, including your twin communities. Associations can appoint a member to run the facebook page, there is no cost except that person's time.

5. **Skype** can be used to connect discussions between twin towns - meetings can be held simultaneously, all can see and hear each other when planning the next trip etc.
6. **Skype and facebook** both offer independent uses. A local photo club, for example, can set up a photo page in their community and invite people from here to post their photos and discuss them. This is a way to get people together . Social clubs in the different tons can share ideas on facebook
7. **Fund raising.** Events which are open to non-members are often very successful in fund-raising. Barn dances, quiz evenings, talent shows, recitals, murder mystery events etc as well as days out to London can all serve as fund raisers.
8. Work together with **other organisations in your communities** such as Rotary, U3A, sport clubs etc to find new ideas and approaches.
9. Make use of resources such as **Shout Out, Instagram** etc
10. Use your network of professional contacts in the association to offer **Work Experience** placements to youngsters from your twin town. Students over 18 are not subject to the same rules as school students. They can come on their own or in a small group and work for a short time in places like The Town Hall, charity shops, enterprises, the local newspaper, the library and so on. It does need commitment from your association to oversee and monitor what happens, but if successful it can easily be developed. Your students can then go abroad in turn
11. **Avoid criticising your local schools** if they are not able to fall in with your ideals of school trips. All schools have many demands made of them, and twinning trips just may not be appropriate. Instead, offer contacts with in your twin town for **school orchestras, choirs and sports teams** to get together. Hard work, but not impossible.