

Communities for All Ages: Intergenerational Practice

This resource is for local leaders, community organisations and policy makers. It provides a snapshot of the key elements of intergenerational practice based on documented and evaluated global evidence as provided in *Building communities for all ages: Good intergenerational practice*.

Intergenerational projects and programs have a track record for being agents of social change; building more inclusive and cohesive communities, helping to overcome fears and prejudices, fostering friendships and providing opportunities to share knowledge and in doing so, generate self-esteem and confidence. Many children today are growing up with little interaction with older adults and many seniors are isolated from their communities and feel aimless, useless, hopeless and lonely.¹ This lack of contact between generations leads to a lack of understanding and empathy and contributes to negative stereotypes, misconceptions, and ageist attitudes. The WHO states that intergenerational strategies *'are among the most effective interventions to reduce ageism against older people, and they also show promise for reducing ageism against younger people.'*²



Benefits of intergenerational practice

Intergenerational practice by its very nature, builds community and addresses ageism. The benefits are many and include:

- the potential to generate positive outcomes for individuals and communities and to contribute to a range of social policy agendas
- improved understanding; friendship, enjoyment and confidence for all participants
- improved health and wellbeing, reduced isolation, and increased sense of self-worth for adults
- skills acquisition and increased self-esteem and confidence for younger participants
- improved community cohesion, potential to address other policy areas such as increased volunteering and greater involvement of educational institutions benefitting the general community³

For older adults	For children & youth	For both	Wider benefits
Improved health, social & emotional wellbeing	Improved literacy & academic achievement	Increased mutual understanding & respect	Increased understanding Reduced ageism
Increased physical, mental & creative activity	Improved problem solving, social & communication skills	Challenge to negative attitudes & stereotypes	Improved community cohesion & participation
Improved mobility & flexibility Fewer falls	Discovery that older people are interesting & were once young	Exchange of knowledge, life skills & learning	Greater organisational exchange, partnership & collaboration
Improved brain function & mood Reduced depression	Exposure to differently abled & those of diverse backgrounds	Friendship & empathy Enriched experience Happiness & satisfaction	Shared spaces, facilities & resources Reduced costs
Sense of belonging Mitigation of loneliness or social isolation	More work experience opportunities for youth	Improved confidence, mood & self-esteem	Improved trust & engagement across age, ethnicity & class
Increased social activity	Increased stability	Sense of inclusion	Enhanced social capital
Greater sense of purpose & motivation	Less negative behaviour	Enjoyment & fun in interactive activities	Increased social capacity
Renewed sense of self-worth & of being valued	Increased empathy	Improved skills & learning new skills	Greater range of opportunities for all ages
Remembering old skills & learning new ones	Acquisition of new skills	Sense of belonging in the community	Shared collective memories
Lifelong learning	Improved resilience	Sense of achievement	Active citizenship
Joy & wonder		Social acceptance	(Sources ⁴)

Types of intergenerational activities

Intergenerational activity types and projects are highly diverse and heterogeneous in terms of participants, form, scale and context. Projects encompass both multi and intergenerational practices and fall into the following types:

- **Community:** The benefits of community building through intergenerational exchange programs, include contributing to improved school attendance, participation, repairing community facilities, diverting people from anti-social behaviour, building respect and encouraging good citizenship⁵
- **Shared interest:** At the heart of successful intergenerational activity are shared interests
- **Shared site:** *'multiple generations receive ongoing services and/or programming at the same site, and generally interact through planned and/or informal intergenerational activities'*⁶
- **Mentoring, education, technology and service learning** are all areas that foster mutually beneficial intergenerational collaboration and respect
- **Intergenerational learning** is *'a learning partnership based on reciprocity and mutuality involving people of different ages where the generations work together to gain skills, values and knowledge.'*⁷ It contributes to a culture of lifelong learning, fosters positive attitudes among generations, is mutually beneficial, and contributes to social cohesion and solidarity⁸
- Some intergenerational projects work with **disadvantaged, at-risk and minority** cohorts such as adult stroke survivors, children with learning difficulties and at-risk youth
- **Social enterprise:** Individuals, organisations and networks address inadequate provision or unequal distribution of social and environmental goods. The social cause at the heart of the enterprise acts as the shared interest for the different generations
- **Home sharing** is another great way to foster intergenerational understanding whilst developing options for older people and those with a disability to remain in their homes.

Key principles & success factors

Recruitment

- Provide adequate information for potential participants
- Match participants using shared interests
- Spend time to break down participants misconceptions of each other

Preparation of participants

- Be clear about your role, the role of all participants and intended outcomes and goals
- Agree on a code of conduct and ground rules at the outset
- Understand participants' needs and capacities and build rapport and trust
- Ensure that all participants understand that their contributions are valued
- Use clear and accessible communication

Activities

- Tailor to suit all participants, aims and context, pace, duration, health and energy levels
- Co-design: facilitate participant involvement in the planning and design of the project
- Create conditions for all participants to be their best selves
- Create tangible outcomes, celebrate achievements and manage expectations

Delivery

- Provide adequate staffing with the requisite skills, knowledge & training
- Ensure that staff bring enthusiasm and commitment to the project
- Encourage staff to challenge ageism and common misconceptions

Organisation and logistics

- Focus on developing meaningful relationships and understanding
- Build in sufficient time for planning and organisation
- Ensure the venue is appropriate and comfortable for all participants including the differently abled (mobility, sight, hearing, cognition)
- Provide transport where required as this can be a barrier to participation

Partnerships

- Partner with organisations from the wider community with similar values who are prepared to make an ongoing commitment
- Leverage existing relationships and maximise the potential of the third sector; share resources and expertise, create alliances and build trust

Funding and sustainability

- Take a long-term, sustainable and strategic approach driven by needs not funds
- Be realistic about what can be achieved within time-frames and budgets
- Monitor, evaluate and document short, medium and long-term outcomes
- Communicate and celebrate



Common pitfalls

- Not having a shared interest that is mutually beneficial for both younger and older people
- Inadequate preparation of younger and older groups prior to their meeting and working together
- Ignoring the experiences, perceptions, concerns and beliefs of participants
- Inadequate funding and/or resourcing
- Inadequate, inflexible or limited project planning
- Partners not fully committed or active
- Coordinator inexperienced in working with younger and older people in community settings
- Failure to consider the time-commitment involved for participants
- Taking a short term, one-off approach that doesn't foster longer-term benefits
- Failure to consider the life stage of participants and the impact on the interaction of the groups
- Failure to include or consult with participants in the design and development of the project
- Activities poorly developed and/or not evidence-based

Notes

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