

# Building Communities for All Ages

## Good Intergenerational Practice

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for the Inner East Primary Care Partnership  
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Inner East Primary Care Partnership acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.  
We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people and other peoples of the Kulin nation as the traditional owners  
of the land on which our work in the community takes place. We pay our respects to their Elders past  
and present.

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## Foreword

This resource, designed for local leaders, community organisations and policy makers, describes strategies, challenges, outcomes, and lessons learned from a documented and evaluated body of global intergenerational practice. It is intended to showcase diversity, inspire and provide an evidence base for the creative formulation and implementation of intergenerational projects. The information is based on white and grey literature, guides, reports and toolkits. It demonstrates how intergenerational approaches can add value to communities, promote understanding among generations and mitigate ageism. **Section 1** provides context, definitions, benefits and an overview of different types of intergenerational practices and projects. **Section 2** provides a summary of best practice principles and success factors, along with practical information for the formulation and implementation of these projects and programs. For consistency, 'older people' is the term used to refer to what are variously described as seniors, elders, the elderly and 'olders'. All other terminology used derives from the literature.

*(A)ging adults are one of the best groups to spend time with young children, not only because they can pass on decades of wisdom, but also because they are at a point in life where they have the availability and patience to do so and can provide the kind of stimulation that young children need to thrive.<sup>1</sup>*



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<sup>1</sup> Ashley McGuire, Institute for Family Studies, 2019



# Section 1

## 1. Context

Humans are social beings, so belonging to a community is a key requirement for health and wellbeing. Communities provide a support system, a sense of connection, belonging and fulfilment. Healthy communities are socially cohesive, strongly connected, resilient and have a high level of intergenerational interaction. Prior to the middle of the last century, extended families tended to live in the same town, suburb or even home, and the older generation was an integral part of community and family life.<sup>1</sup> Extended families have become far less common as working adults follow employment opportunities to scattered locations. The gig economy, technological developments, increased work hours and the diminishing role of older people in a family, have contributed to this trend.<sup>2</sup>

Intergenerational interaction is diverse and complex, as there are many ways in which different generations collaborate. These can be difficult to identify as many are undocumented, nor are they necessarily labelled or classified as intergenerational, for example social enterprise, and community and arts projects. Intergenerational projects and programs take a variety of approaches.

Intergenerational practices generally aim to *'bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more cohesive communities.'*<sup>3</sup> They also aim to foster understanding and mutual respect, and challenge ageism.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Whiteland, S. 2013

2 Generations United 2005

3 Centre for Intergenerational Practice 2009

4 Dutton, R. 2018

## 2. Intergenerational practice and ageism

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. Intergenerational practices emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s and projects are as diverse as the cohorts and communities within which they are embedded. From younger people 'doing things to/for' older adults with minimal interaction, they have evolved to projects where exchange, reciprocity and mutual benefits are of the highest concern.<sup>5</sup> These projects create opportunities for non-familial younger and older generations to interact. Some examples include: mentoring; foster grandparenting; service learning; performing and visual arts programs; and shared site or co-located programs.

The transfer of knowledge, skills, values, history and culture from generation to generation in previous times, occurred largely within families.<sup>6</sup> This was a two-way process between elders and children, with children providing contemporary social insights, technological skills, vitality, fun and joy. Extended contact also developed a better shared understanding of what young and old have in common and, just as importantly, how they differ. Today however, learning increasingly occurs outside the family due to geographic dispersal of family members, working patterns and the impact of social, demographic and economic changes in today's globalized world.

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.<sup>7</sup> This lack of contact between generations leads to a lack

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5 Melville, J. 2016

6 Newman, S. & Hatton-Yeo, A. 2008

7 Kocarnik, R. & Ponzetti, J. 1991

of understanding and empathy and contributes to negative stereotypes, misconceptions, and ageist attitudes. Age Concern's report, *Ageism: A benchmark of Public Attitudes in Britain* found that ageism is one of the most commonly experienced forms of discrimination across all age ranges.<sup>1</sup> Supporting this finding, the Australian Human Rights Commission Report *Fact or fiction? Stereotypes of older Australians*<sup>2</sup> found that:

- 2.5 Million older Australians have felt unwanted, excluded or invisible because of their age
- 71% of all Australians feel that age discrimination in Australia is common
- 60% of Australians hold predominantly negative attitudes towards older people
- Age discrimination and invisibility result in a strong and negative emotional response.

The WHO defines ageism as *'the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age'*.<sup>3</sup> Why should we be concerned with ageism? There are many reasons, but the main ones are:

- Everyone is vulnerable to ageism and its impacts are multiple and diverse
- Ageism occurs in institutions, relationships and policies
- Ageism results in discrimination against older and younger workers
- The increasing ratio of retired to employed workers represents an increasing loss of productive capacity and can in part be attributed to ageism
- Ageism, like racism, and sexism is a civil rights issue and should not be tolerated in an egalitarian society.<sup>4</sup>

Ageism towards older people has a negative influence on mental and physical health. A significant body of research shows a direct impact on cognition when older people believe

negative stereotypes. For example, the will to live is decreased, memory is impaired, and the individual is less interested in participating in community life and engaging in healthy preventive behaviours. In terms of the physical well-being of older persons, *'recovery from illness is impaired, cardiovascular reactivity to stress is increased, and longevity is decreased'*.<sup>5</sup>



In recent times, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light some very concerning ageist attitudes towards older people that need to be addressed. Fortunately, research indicates that positive contact between generations can effectively address ageism. 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'*.<sup>6</sup> It goes on to recommend addressing ageism with a combination of intergenerational practices, relevant policies and laws, and educational interventions.

1 Ray, S., Sharp, E. & Abrams, D. 2008

2 Australian Human Rights Commission 2013

3 WHO <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/news/q-a-detail/ageing-ageism>

4 Palmore, E. 2015

5 Nelson, T. 2016

6 WHO Global Report on Ageism 2021. <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combating-ageism/global/report-on-ageism>

### 3. Benefits and outcomes of intergenerational practice

*Intergenerational programs are a vaccination against ageism and a prescription for longevity.<sup>1</sup>*

There are many and diverse potential benefits of positive intergenerational contact. The UK National Foundation for Educational Research report, *Intergenerational Practice: A Review of the Literature*, affirmed the effectiveness of intergenerational practice. It explored the types of outcomes that could be achieved and the diversity of models of intergenerational practice. Overall findings point to:

- the potential to generate positive outcomes for individuals and communities and to contribute to a range of social policy agendas
- four main outcomes for all participants: improved understanding; friendship, enjoyment and confidence
- outcomes for older participants were improved health and wellbeing, reduced isolation and loneliness, and increased sense of self-worth
- for younger participants outcomes were related to acquiring skills and increased self-esteem and confidence
- multiple outcomes for the general community, including improved cohesion, the potential to address other policy areas, increased volunteering and greater involvement of educational institutions.<sup>2</sup>

Benefits and outcomes will vary for each project according to its participants, objectives and context. Magic Me, an arts charity that specialises in intergenerational arts projects in the UK proposes that **the benefits** of these projects include:

- An exchange of experience, skills and knowledge, and positive ways of being and behaving
- An opportunity to discover the real people behind stereotypes
- A chance to value the differences between people and discover common ground
- A change of pace and energy for all participants
- An excuse to play, to experiment, to be creative, and to make a fool of yourself
- Meeting non-family members with the possibility of developing a relationship



<sup>1</sup> Bridges Together 2015. <https://www.bridgestogether.org/tools-resources/research/>

<sup>2</sup> Springate, I., Atkinson, M. & Martin, K. 2008



The table below is a collation of **the main benefits** of intergenerational practice from multiple sources. It points to the potential of intergenerational practice to be beneficial at a number of different levels.<sup>1</sup>

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	

A note of caution; whilst most outcomes of intergenerational practice are positive, there is evidence of the potential for negative outcomes, particularly if stereotypes are reinforced or if older adults are or feel that they are infantilised.

A 2013 study by the Australian Human Rights Commission compiled **the most common negative stereotypes of older adults**.<sup>2</sup> These suggested that older people:

- are lonely or isolated
- are victims of crime
- are forgetful
- are boring
- don't like change
- are likely to be sick
- are bad drivers
- complain a lot
- don't want to work long hours
- prefer not to use technology
- don't like being told what to do by someone younger
- don't contribute to the Australian economy
- are a significant cost to the Australian health system
- don't understand the pressures that younger people face
- have difficulty learning complex tasks
- have difficulty learning new things
- are less likely to contribute at work
- don't care about their appearance
- are grumpy or short-tempered
- don't have sexual relationships

<sup>1</sup> Henkin et al 2012; Bocioaga, A. 2020; Centre for Intergenerational Practice 2009; Generationa United 2007; Martin et al, 2010; Springate et al 2008

<sup>2</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission 2013



## 4. Types of intergenerational activities

This section is intentionally broad with a view to including the full range of intergenerational practice rather than just activities labelled as such. Activity types and projects are highly diverse and heterogeneous in terms of participants, form, scale and context, and there is some overlap amongst the following categories. Projects encompass both multi and intergenerational practices.

In addition to the projects described below, there is a type of project that is less formal and leverages existing community assets. Starting a conversation with established and previously unconnected groups and individuals within the community who are likely to have shared objectives, will often be the only catalyst required for the sharing of resources, information and expertise, joint funding bids and productive intergenerational collaboration to realise common goals. For example, bringing together all environmental, parks, conservation and climate change groups to discuss collective goals and objectives could lead to the development of joint intergenerational projects in areas such as water recycling, clean-ups, planting, educational and advocacy initiatives.

### a. Community cohesion, inclusion, participation and age-friendly places

*Somehow we have to get older people back close to growing children if we are to restore a sense of community, a knowledge of the past, and a sense of the future.<sup>1</sup>*

Intergenerational practice by nature, builds community and addresses ageism. Key factors for cohesive, sustainable and equitable communities are participation and resilience. Both are critical in this era of austerity, ageing populations, global pandemics, social isolation, loneliness and ageism. Intergenerational practice has great potential to foster cohesion and inclusion, and to increase participation. A briefing paper on intergenerational relations and practice in the development of sustainable communities for the UK Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is prefaced with this statement: *‘Young people and older people are central to sustainable communities and to the development of more inclusive public spaces. They make up higher proportions of those living in the UK’s most deprived areas. They are more likely than other groups to lack social capital and access to resources and services, and also lack political representation to participate in public life.’<sup>2</sup>* Researchers in their analysis of the role of intergenerational practice in social policy

developments, found that benefits occur at individual, relational and community levels.<sup>3</sup> For both younger and older generations neighbourhoods are particularly important as they spend more time in them. Despite this, they are often not involved in neighbourhood decision-making processes and do not have access to resources and services.<sup>4</sup> Studies in both the UK and Germany indicate the need for the cooperation of both older and younger people plus third sector agencies for successful initiatives around shared community and age-friendly places and spaces. A comprehensive report on community building in Australia through intergenerational exchange programs, found the benefits to be; contributing to improved school attendance, repairing community facilities, diverting people from anti-social behaviour, building respect and encouraging good citizenship.<sup>5</sup> The Community for All Ages initiative used a lifespan approach in its framework for creating healthy communities in which to grow up and age well.<sup>6</sup> This framework was implemented across 23 sites and emphasises interdependence, reciprocity, collective responsibility and age-inclusiveness.

1 Margaret Mead

2 Pain, R. 2005

3 Buffel et al 2014

4 Pain, R. 2005; Phillipson, C. 2007

5 MacCallum et al, 2010

6 Brown, C, & Henken, N, 2014

The Stanford Center on Longevity found that with age, people's brains improve in areas such as complex problem-solving and emotional skills, which could benefit youth, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Center's report *Hidden in Plain Sight*, views older citizens as an overlooked yet potentially transformative resource, able to foster skills such as teamwork, confidence and organisational competence in youth.



**PROJECT:** A pilot program of activities comprising 22 sessions over six months  
**Participants:** Older adults attending a day care centre, community volunteers and children aged 8-10 years  
**Context:** Japanese community in Tokyo  
**Findings:** A significant reduction in depressive symptoms and improvement in the health-related quality of life of older people. The program provided both an opportunity for mutually beneficial social relations and communication between generations and a meaningful destination for the older adults who may not have otherwise participated in ongoing group activities.

[Kamei et al, 2011]

## b. Shared Interests

*Music is fundamental to the way we learn, the way we feel and the way we develop as human beings. It is one of the most universal ways of expression and communication for humankind.<sup>1</sup>*

At the heart of successful intergenerational activity are shared interests. Common areas of shared interest include: music, choirs, art, theatre, photography, gardening, language, history, cooking and food, environmental projects and death. According to the research, focussing on a shared interest of equal relevance to all participants rather than the intergenerational nature of the activity, maximises commonality rather than difference and is key to the success of these projects.

A collaborative intergenerational performance project involving both a **college and a community choir** with participants ranging in age from 18-71 had very positive outcomes. All 93 participants felt they gained musically and socially, that there was greater mutual respect after the project, and agreed that age was not a factor in any interactions.<sup>2</sup> On a larger scale, the New Horizons music program which now has over 200 groups across North America, started out as a beginner class in instrumental music for older people. The 'open door' and 'unconditional welcome' policy led to multi-age ensembles, collaborations, advocacy for social good and other benefits. Outcomes range from contributing to the developmental education of pre-school and primary school children, mentoring, providing community education training and support networks for university students, advocacy for cultural and educational facilities, and the acknowledgement of the value of life experience through all-age ensembles with older people as leaders and mentors.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mehr et al, 2019

<sup>2</sup> Conway, C. & Hodgman, T. 2008

<sup>3</sup> Sattler, G. 2013

Older adult members of an intergenerational **theatre group** in Canada said they joined in the belief that social activities would prevent or postpone common chronic ageing conditions. University student members of the same group said they were there to learn about community theatre and older adults. An evaluation of this program found that it improved intergenerational relationships, reduced ageism and increased wellbeing through *'building social networks, confidence, and self-esteem, and developed a sense of social justice, empathy and support for others.'*<sup>1</sup>

The Age Exchange Theatre Trust used an archive comprised of interviews with older people from 1983-2005 to develop 30 **remembrance theatre** productions for older people across the UK. Students at the University of Greenwich initially developed three short pieces for a performance at the University. This was followed by a tour of five Sheltered Housing Units. Informal reminiscence sessions were incorporated into the shows and audiences ranged from 15-50 people aged 60+ along with family members, visitors and staff. Performances were held at the Housing Units and transformed everyday settings into festive spaces. Some of the immediate outcomes were fully engaged audiences, intergenerational dialogue, further reminiscences and spontaneous post performance conversations. Additional benefits were greater understanding of and between older people in care settings, sharing of memories in a collective context, validation of memories, and greater knowledge of the local community and its inhabitants by students who said they appreciated having access to ordinary people's lived experiences of particular times in history.<sup>2</sup>

**Museums, cultural institutions and libraries** around the world have a diversity of intergenerational programs available to their communities.<sup>3</sup> Melbourne Museum for example

noted that between 30-50% of visitors aged 60+ visit with grandchildren. Grandfathers spoke of their role as teachers and guides as they fostered the curiosity of their grandchildren and helped them to understand artefacts and displays. They also spoke of the pleasure and joy of seeing artefacts through the eyes of their grandchildren. In a series of videos by the Beyeler Foundation in Basel Switzerland, grandparents and grandchildren visiting the art museum together, talk about their different perceptions of and responses to artworks and artefacts (Swiss German language only).<sup>4</sup>

**Food and cooking** have great potential for intergenerational programs. There is a strong association between food, eating, home and the routines of everyday life such as shopping, preparation, consumption and cleaning up. Food is nourishing and can represent hospitality, caring, sharing, family, security and cultural identity. However, mealtimes for some, can also be times of tension, aggression and unequal power relations. Food is an archetypal topic. Everyone can talk about and share experiences, preferences and recipes, as there are no incorrect opinions. UK Online runs a program called *Baking with Friends* in which younger people who wish to learn baking skills are teamed up with older people who might be isolated and/or lonely.<sup>5</sup>



1 Anderson et al, 2017

2 Lilley, H. & Derbyshire, H. 2013

3 <https://www.museumnext.com/article/what-is-active-ageing-and-how-can-museums-help/>

4 <https://vimeo.com/566484222>

5 <https://ageinginnovators.org/tag/intergenerational/page/2/> 2013



A recent and perhaps surprising area of shared interest is **death**. Founded in the UK in 2011, Death Cafes are a not-for-profit social franchise which operate in 51 countries. People, often strangers, gather to discuss death over a cup of tea or coffee. Participants include medical students who wish to learn how to talk about death with their patients and families, academics and people who have had or soon may have a death in the family, or a near death experience.<sup>1</sup> A similar initiative called ‘Dying to Talk’ was set up by Palliative Care Australia to normalise dying and help Australians determine what they want for the end of their lives.<sup>2</sup> Another initiative to encourage people to discuss end of life before it arrives is ‘Death over Dinner’, being run by the Australian Centre for Health Research. It provides guidance, support and resources for people organising their own dinners.<sup>3</sup>



### c. Shared Site

*Generativity means investing in, caring for, and developing the next generation; older adults who did so were three times as likely to be happy as those who did not.*<sup>4</sup>

Shared site or co-located intergenerational programs and projects are defined as those in ‘which multiple generations receive ongoing services and/or programming at the same site, and generally interact through planned and/

or informal intergenerational activities.’<sup>5</sup> These commonly combine preschool age children with residential or day-care for older people. One popular example is *Old People’s Home for 4-year-olds* based on a UK program of the same name which was inspired by an American scheme. Intergenerational community centres are less common.

Shared site intergenerational programs generally have positive outcomes with **multiple benefits** for all stakeholders. Organisations running them benefit from positive publicity, community support, added revenue, a more familial environment, diversification of service offering, shared medical staff, staff retention, no transport issues and older volunteers. Residents benefit from improved self-worth and self-esteem, engagement, satisfaction, health, physical activity, sense of belonging, greater interaction and ongoing learning. Their families are grateful that their elders are positively engaged in meaningful activity. Staff attest to improved morale, the joy of having children onsite and professional development opportunities; and parents of children report that children thrive on individualised attention and have a better understanding of any impairments or limitations in elders.<sup>6</sup>

A policy brief with a focus on adults aged 65+ and children aged under 12 found that when these two generations played together, they shared similar cognitive, social, emotional and physical benefits. Older people who spent time playing with children for example, burn 20% more calories and experience fewer falls than those who do not.

**Different types** of shared site intergenerational programs include: joint trips to nature reserves, botanical gardens, museums, arts centres; service learning (medical, social work, allied healthcare, management, nursing students); two-way mentoring (technology, reading, education); interaction through art, crafts, song,

1 <https://www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/2017/mar/09/death-cafe-learn-talk-dying-patients>

2 <https://dyingtotalk.org.au/about-dying-to-talk/>

3 <https://deathoverdinner.org.au>

4 Harvard Study of Adult Development

5 Goyer, A. & Zuses, R. 1998

6 Jarrott, S. 2011; Jarrott, S. & Bruno, K. 2007; Springate, I. Atkinson, M. & Martin, K. 2008



storytelling, literature, cooking, gardening, conversation and history. Popular with both cohorts, were family style activities where participants build relationships of care and trust over time. Other shared site models include: senior centres located in public schools; after-school teen programs held at senior centres; Head Start (early childhood education, health and nutrition services for low-income families) programs in nursing homes; youth recreation programs in senior housing facilities; community or multigenerational centres with programs for both generations; multi-use park and other outdoor spaces.

An advantage of shared site intergenerational programs is that they are highly flexible and able to be adapted to diverse needs and resources.<sup>1</sup> Many programs offer multiple services including caregiver resource centres, assistive technologies and rehabilitative services. As public funds diminish, it makes good sense to share space, equipment, cross-trained staff and volunteers.<sup>2</sup>

**PROJECT:** Two shared site intergenerational groups evaluated over eight months  
**Participants:** Older adults with mild dementia, diabetes, blindness and depression, and a group of 3-5 year olds  
**Context:** Port Jefferson Community Programs Centre, New York  
**Findings:** A minimum of three contact sessions was required for any significant increase in verbal exchanges. Some of the most meaningful encounters occurred during unstructured activities. Many of the children were either unaware of or ignored cognitive impairments in adults. However they were initially interested in understanding the purpose of objects such as wheelchairs or hearing aids. Once they understood the purpose, they showed no further interest.  
[Hayes, C. 2003]

## d. Mentoring, education, technology and service learning

*Intergenerational mentoring is designed to incorporate multifaceted relationships with the goal of enhanced learning and knowledge sharing opportunities that enable all participants to benefit.<sup>1</sup>*

Education can foster intergenerational collaboration and learning through activities such as mentoring, environmental education and service learning where students apply their skills in situ. Older adults with flexible schedules, knowledge, skills and experience, and an interest in civic engagement are potentially a valuable resource for education.

**Mentoring** is a common intergenerational program and 'enables a purposeful exchange of skills and knowledge to enhance individual and social outcomes.'<sup>2</sup> The mentoring relationship is one in which an older adult offers guidance and support to a younger person, and there is generally a facilitating emotional connection. Mentoring can take place in schools, community centres, faith-based organisations, community programs and not-for-profit organisations.



1 Jarrot, S. & Bruno, K. 2007

2 Pinazo-Hernandis, S. & Tompkins, C, 2008

1 Satterly, B., Cullen, J. & Dyson, D. 2018

2 Cordier et al 2016

Benefits are many and include: increased self-esteem; improved health outcomes; decreased isolation and loneliness; improved academic achievement and socio-emotional skills; fewer behavioural issues; and the acquisition of skills and knowledge.

**Men's Sheds** originally developed for older men, have begun to incorporate intergenerational mentoring to facilitate better health and social outcomes for both men and boys. The most important factors for success are: meaningful activities; the mentors' approach; a safe environment; screening and training of mentors; and program evaluation. Benefits are mutual, and programs foster male-to-male valuing; mutual respect based on trust; the experience of tradition; and handing on of valid and valued life experiences.<sup>1</sup>

**Environmental education** has begun to incorporate a strategic intergenerational learning approach to raise environmental awareness. Important to success are: actively involving parents, the community and community leaders; action-oriented activities; a focus on local issues; enthusiastic teachers; making it fun; promoting discussion; providing meaningful opportunities to take action; a focus on relationships and tasks; and intergenerational learning as an outcome. Potential benefits include: providing opportunities for collaborative action towards a common goal; encouraging exploration, study and action to benefit the environment; increasing the numbers of environmental stewards; and raising environmental awareness.<sup>2</sup> There is a diversity of programs such as intergenerational: green teams that turn vacant lots into gardens and play areas; clean-up teams for parks and beaches; climate and conservation groups; and community education programs. Organisations participating in this type of program include: primary and secondary schools; colleges and universities; youth and adult service organisation; museums; libraries, historical associations; retirement

communities, faith-based organisations; senior and community centres and local governments.<sup>3</sup>



**Technology** is a common focus for intergenerational programs. Digital literacy for example, involves knowledge around technology along with the social and analytical skills that facilitate the contextualisation, communication and evaluation of information.



**Digital storytelling** or the process of creating a narrative driven by a central narrator and supported by text, photos, audio, graphics and animations, is another focus for intergenerational

1 Cordier et al 2016

2 Steinig, S, & Butts, D, 2009

3 Steinig, S, & Butts, D, 2009

programs.<sup>1</sup> A three-year digital storytelling program in Melbourne that paired university Design students with housing commission tenants aged 55+, resulted in significant benefits for both students and older storytellers.<sup>2</sup>

*I have enjoyed being surrounded by young company. It makes me feel younger and accepted.*

*I enjoyed the company of the student, which is interesting considering the generation gap.*

*The highlight of the whole project was when everyone sat together telling stories about their journey in life without any embellishment.*

**PROJECT:** A multigenerational connection program: digital education  
**Participants:** 29 adults aged 60+ were paired with 11-12-year-old primary school students for two hours per week of activities  
**Context:** A primary school, Israel  
**Findings:** Confidence and competence were increased for both cohorts. Adults credited their empowerment to the children's knowledge and their closeness to them, whilst the children credited it to their own teaching skills, knowledge and perception of how well adults adapted to the computer world. Children also had their technological expertise constantly validated & gained a strong sense of autonomy. The findings support the theory that programs providing the opportunity for negotiation between generational viewpoints will improve overall generational intelligence.  
[Gamliel, T. & Gabay, N. 2003]

**Service learning** is work experience in community service contexts. It is an effective way to create better understanding and respect amongst different generations as they work collaboratively towards achieving an identified community need.

1 Fields, A. 2008  
2 Davis, D. 2011

**PROJECT:** Arts education service-learning  
**Participants:** Six pairs of students taught 12-18 residents over a 15-week period. Students & residents co-designed the program  
**Context:** A local retirement community in Virginia, US  
**Findings:** The program achieved education outcomes, improved the self-esteem of residents, formed intergenerational friendships, reduced stereotypes and culminated in an art exhibition.  
**Outcomes:** Working collaboratively towards a common goal fostered social relationships, trust & respect.

*The most valuable thing I learned from [the retirement centre] was that learning is a lifelong process and art is a great way to reconnect to memories and to form new friendships... The art making was not the most important part, but instead the stories that the residents told and our friendship through art making [Student participant]*  
[Tollefson-Hall, K. & Wightman, W. 2013]

## e. Intergenerational learning, schools and universities

*Wherever there are beginners and experts, old and young, there is some kind of learning going on, some kind of teaching. We are all pupils and we are all teachers.<sup>1</sup>*

Intergenerational learning has been defined as 'a learning partnership based on reciprocity and mutuality involving people of different ages where the generations work together to gain skills, values and knowledge.'<sup>2</sup> The European Map of Intergenerational Learning (EMIL) proposes that it fosters 'reciprocal learning relationships between different generations and helps to develop social capital and social cohesion in our ageing societies'.<sup>3</sup> Intergenerational programs are also known

1 Gilbert Highet  
2 <http://www.enilnet.eu>  
3 <http://www.emil-network.eu/>



to contribute to a culture of lifelong learning, foster positive attitudes among generations, are mutually beneficial, and contribute to social cohesion and solidarity.<sup>1</sup>

In today's complex global context, there are many convincing **reasons to foster intergenerational learning**. These include:

- the necessity of considering older people as assets and resources for their communities in the context of ageing populations
- the benefits of lifelong and intergenerational learning to individuals, communities and ageing workforces
- the value of education for economic success and self-esteem
- the importance of culture in terms of identity, and hence cultural transmission, and building cross-cultural understanding
- building communities with ample social capital and that value civic engagement, volunteering and participation<sup>2</sup>

A **typical school model** involves older adult volunteers who mentor, tutor, advise or coach children aged from 6 to 18, and in exchange gain skills in formal education, current social issues, childhood development and the opportunity to support the learning and development of children. There are many ways of including older volunteers in schools such as: guest speakers, family nights, pen pal programs, book shares and interview sessions.<sup>3</sup>

One very successful **music program** for older people was set up in a high school. The course forms part of the school curriculum and teenage students participate as music students or to gain peer-tutoring credits. Older people can enrol in the course as students like any other. Regular interaction and shared activities and goals have been identified as the success factors. Each person no matter their age, is engaged in learning something new together, with no previous experience as performing musicians.

1 Hatton-Yeo, A. & Oshako, T. 2000

2 Newman, S. & Hatton-Yeo, A. 2008

3 Spudich, D. & Spudich, C. 2010

As students help each other with musical chords or passages, their differences become irrelevant. The activity and goals are shared equally by the cohort, but due to life stage the benefits differ.<sup>4</sup>

**PROJECT:** A sustainable school-based intergenerational program incorporating lifespan education

**Participants:** Five older adult volunteers from the school's community were invited to teach a combined grade 2-3-4 class of 55 students weekly in conjunction with two class teachers and three pre-service teachers for 10 weeks

**Context:** A primary school in Melbourne

**Success Factors:** The unequivocal support from the school principal and teaching staff; motivation and expertise of class teachers in making materials engaging; extra resources for liaison, excursions; expertise of older participants in providing meaningful and engaging learning opportunities; and the close collaboration between all personnel

**Findings:** Older adult volunteers were enriched by their participation and students found that older adults provided meaningful and engaging learning experiences.

[Feldman, S. Mahoney, H. & Seedsman, T. 2003]

## f. Minority cohorts

Some intergenerational projects work with disadvantaged, at-risk and minority cohorts. These might include: older women living in poverty; children with learning difficulties; at-risk youth, frail older adults; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in prison; stroke survivors; persons with dementia; socially isolated older men; victims of domestic violence; LGBTI community; and teenage boys at risk of social exclusion.

The **Indigenous Homework Club** was set up at Port Phillip Prison to provide a 'culturally appropriate environment in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inmates can connect with

4 Loewen, J. 1996



the outside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and culturally competent volunteers.<sup>1</sup> Volunteer tutors were indigenous and non-indigenous students and the program which also aims to address marginalisation and reduce recidivism, is very popular and has a waiting list. Keys to success include: ongoing funding; ensuring the adaptability, dynamism and interest of programs for inmates; the high standard of tutors and ongoing support from prison staff.



In Florida, the **Big Brothers Big Sisters program** matches volunteer mentors aged 55+ with at-risk youth in schools and the community. An evaluation of the program incorporated 16 volunteer mentors in community and school programs and young participants aged 6-18 who were: from single parent households; economically disadvantaged; academically disengaged; behaving unacceptably; suffering low self-esteem; and abusing substances. Relationships were found to be mutually beneficial and despite some chronic health conditions, volunteers showed high overall psychological wellbeing ratings on all dimensions of the Life Satisfaction Rating Scale. For volunteers the most satisfying outcome was knowing that they were making a difference in the life of a young person in need.<sup>2</sup>

**Adult stroke survivors** who live with language and communication difficulties called aphasia, have few opportunities for intergenerational interaction. An event that included talking,

drawing and sharing pictures was organised with four adults with aphasia aged 50-70 and 12 students aged seven. A week prior to the event, the organiser went to the school and discussed stroke, the adult visitors and the event with the children. The event aimed to help the children understand what it means to live with aphasia, provide them with a citizenship experience and to address social isolation and/or self-confidence in communication among stroke survivors with aphasia. The adults were calm and good-natured, fostering learning and normalising what it means to live with disability. The children were interested, engaged, friendly and particularly curious about one stroke survivor's wheelchair. Both cohorts enjoyed the experience and were willing to repeat it. One older adult commented that: *'it's always good to do something different, get involved... we don't get much chance to talk in the real world... it's very easy for someone with stroke to go into themselves and think no one is interested in what we're doing.'*<sup>1</sup>

**PROJECT:** Low income older adults with medical issues living in subsidised housing assist emotionally disturbed youth

**Participants:** Eight socially active adults aged 51-94 with angina, partial blindness, hypertension & depression, and five African American youths aged 12-17. Fortnightly group activities over 11 months

**Context:** An independent living facility for older people, US

**Findings:** After three months all group members responded positively to each other. By program end, attitudes of 70% of older adults towards youth & mental illness had changed positively as had the attitudes of all youth towards older adults. Social skills of youth improved with the acceptance of adults. For some of them, working one-to-one with an adult was a unique experience. Both groups were positive & wished to continue. [Jones, E. Herrick, C. & York, R. 2009]

1 Munro-Harrison, E. Trounson, J. & Ironfield, N. 2016

2 Larkin, E. Sadler, S. & Mahler, J. 2005

1 Lane, K. 2016

## g. Social enterprise

The concept of **social enterprise** whilst fluid and contested, can be defined as *‘the product of individuals, organizations, and networks that challenge conventional structures by addressing failures - and identifying new opportunities - in the institutional arrangements that currently cause the inadequate provision or unequal distribution of social and environmental goods.’*<sup>1</sup> Social enterprise evolved from not-for-profit, co-operative and mainstream business models.<sup>2</sup> Grey and policy literature promote the capacity of social enterprise to build skills, confidence and social networks for individuals and provide services, economic opportunities and promote civic interest for communities.<sup>3</sup> In both Australia and Europe, the focus on social enterprise has been for its potential to support work integration. It is also an organisational type that is able to benefit the hard-to-reach and/or disadvantaged, and to contribute to health and wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> Social enterprises lend themselves to an intergenerational approach in that ***the social cause at the heart of the enterprise acts as the shared interest for the different generations.***

Many older Australians are working less than they would like to or are job seeking. In 2020, amongst those aged 50+ and employed 8.1% or 300,000 were underemployed and 9% or 330,000 were unemployed. At the same time, 830,000 people under 25 are unemployed or underemployed.<sup>5</sup> The School for Social Entrepreneurs asserts that intergenerational partnership will be key in addressing today’s social challenges and to realising ***an ageless society.***



1 Skill Centre for Social Entrepreneurship, Oxford University 2009

2 Munoz, S. Farmer, J. Winterton, R. & Barraket, J. 2010

3 Productivity Commission 2010

4 Munoz, S. Farmer, J. Winterton, R. & Barraket, J. 2010

5 <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/8539-australian-unemployment-age-gender-estimates-september-2020-202010120546>



*Lively*, an Australian organisation, develops mutually beneficial programs that **bring young and older people together around technology**. Their purpose is to foster understanding across generations and to break down ageist stereotypes. Some additional outcomes are social connectedness for older people and employment for young people who are trained and employed to provide technology assistance, photo archiving and help at home for older citizens who might need it.<sup>1</sup>



## h. Generations living together

*Ageing in place provides seniors with independence and choice to live in a community that suits their needs and wants.*<sup>2</sup>

Societal change in many countries is an outcome of ageing populations and a decrease in traditional household structures and employment patterns within families. To address the consequent need to adapt infrastructure and services, the German government put out a call in 2006 for innovative neighbourhood projects with an **intergenerational living approach**. Two of these projects with an underlying premise that ‘urban neighbourhoods that are stable and diverse as well as differentiated and distinct become bedrocks for city cohesion’, were evaluated. It became clear that all generations were attracted to a diverse supply of different accommodation types, quality public space and community services. The evaluators also found

that the early involvement of residents improves the quality of neighbourhood projects and often results in their taking a high level of responsibility for the projects.<sup>3</sup>

In Germany, unlike in many countries, the cooperative housing model provides secure, affordable housing and high-quality homes and neighbourhoods. Members buy shares, enjoy security of tenure, regulated rents and in some cases additional services.

One model of intergenerational living is **home sharing**. Older householders who may benefit from companionship and some assistance at home, are brought together with younger people who are willing to help in return for affordable or rent-free accommodation. Assistance can take the form of activities such as cooking, shopping, cleaning and gardening along with companionship. The **Homeshare Australia and New Zealand Alliance** coordinates and assists in matching potential co-habitants. Although the organisation does not specifically claim to be intergenerational, its key purposes are to develop options for older people and those with a disability to remain in their homes and to foster intergenerational understanding.<sup>4</sup>



1 <https://lively.org.au/about-us/>

2 Isabelle Kikirekov

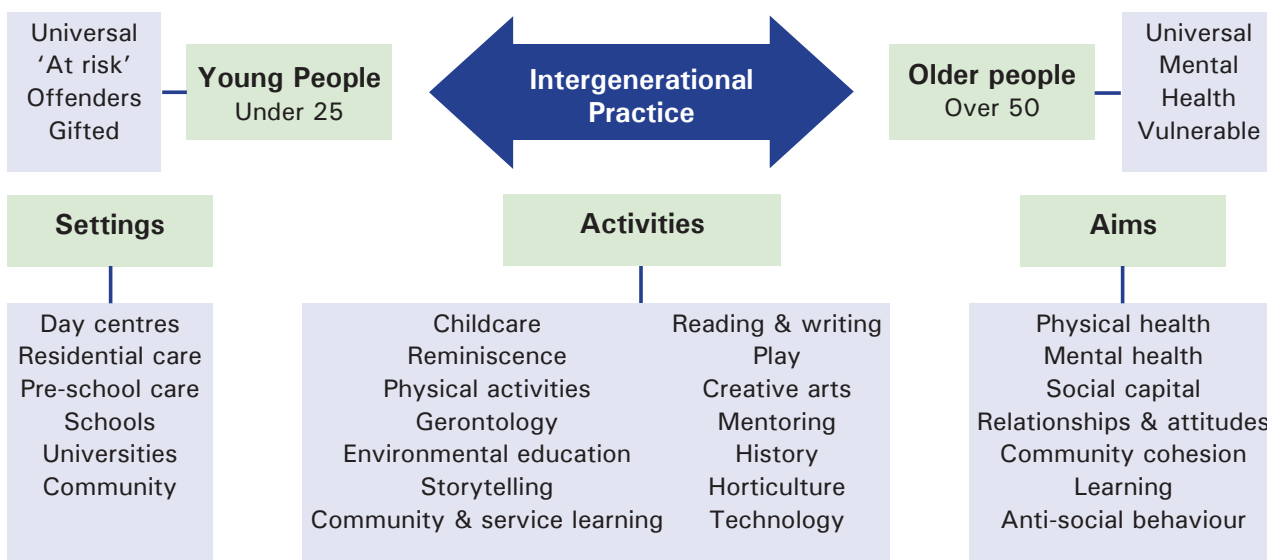
3 Ammann, J. & Heckenroth, M. 2012

4 <https://homeshare.org.au/about-homeshare/>

## Section 2

### 5. Principles, success factors and pitfalls

As we have seen in the previous section, intergenerational practice is highly diverse making it difficult to generalise. The diagram below from an extensive review of UK and international literature on intergenerational practice provides an overview.<sup>1</sup>



In general, the review found that the aims of intergenerational practice relate to improvement in physical and mental health; social capital; relationships and attitudes; community cohesion; learning and anti-social behaviour. In the UK, projects aim to benefit all participants equally and are less focussed on benefitting older adults with particular health issues such as dementia. Common settings in the UK are schools, community centres and subsidised housing.

#### a. Principles and success factors of effective intergenerational practice

The following summary of principles for effective intergenerational practice has been collated from multiple sources.<sup>2</sup>

##### Recruitment

- Provide adequate information for potential participants
  - Aim for a one-to-one ratio of older and younger participants
  - Ensure consistency and stability in groups where possible
  - Match participants on the basis of shared interests
  - Recruiting older participants: allow enough time to find participants; highlight the value of their participation; spend time breaking down misconceptions about young people; adjust commitment expectations to availability
  - Recruiting older men<sup>3</sup>: propose activities with specific outcomes deemed valuable and/or useful
  - Recruiting younger participants: spend time breaking down misconceptions about older people.
- NB: younger people from minority or disadvantaged groups may need extra effort to recruit.

<sup>1</sup> Springate, I. Atkinson, M. & Martin, K. 2008

<sup>2</sup> Dutton, R. 2018; Davidson-Knight, A. 2012; Martin, K. Springate, I. & Atkinson, M. 2010; Gilfoy, K. 2009; Pinto et al 2009; Springate, I. Atkinson, M. & Martin, K. 2008

<sup>3</sup> Older men are particularly difficult to engage



## Preparation of participants

- Be clear about your role and the role of all participants
- Be clear about intended outcomes and goals
- Agree on a code of conduct and ground rules at the outset
- Spend time building rapport and trust
- Understand participants' needs and capacities
- Ensure that all participants understand that their contributions are valued
- Communication must be clear and accessible to all involved. How you frame the project and its objectives will determine whether and how participants engage with it. Remember that older people dislike being defined by their chronological age. Common interests and objectives are what engages both young and older people
- Ensure that participants under 18 have permission to participate
- Be aware of and manage negative perceptions and ageist attitudes and avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes. For example, older people may feel intimidated by younger people, or younger people may believe older people are uninteresting

## Activities

- Ensure that activities are suitable for both cohorts and based on shared interest
- 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
- Ensure activities are interactive and have a focus on fostering meaningful relationships
- Create conditions for all participants to be their best selves
- Create tangible outcomes and celebrate achievements
- Manage expectations

## Delivery

- Provide adequate staffing to facilitate delivery
- Ensure staff have the requisite skills, knowledge and training
- Ensure that staff bring enthusiasm and commitment to the project
- Encourage staff to challenge ageism and common misconceptions, and to foster understanding
- Prepare for potential issues such as personality clashes

## Organisation and logistics

- Focus on developing meaningful relationships and understanding
- Build in sufficient time for planning and organisation
- Ensure equality in participation
- Ensure buy-in at all levels of stakeholder
- 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
- Consider health and safety aspects of the project
- Build in monitoring, evaluation and communication of short, medium and long-term outcomes

## Partnerships

- Nominate a champion to drive the work where possible
- Partner with organisations from the wider community with similar values who are prepared to make an ongoing commitment.

- Take a long-term approach to partnerships
- Leverage existing relationships and maximise the potential of the third sector; share resources and expertise, create alliances and build trust
- Be mindful of challenges for partners such as workloads, competing activities and priorities

## Funding and sustainability

- Take a long-term, sustainable and strategic approach driven by needs not funds
- Ensure adequate funding and resources for the scope of the project
- Be realistic about what can be achieved within time-frames and budgets
- Consider how projects could become an ongoing program
- Monitor, evaluate and document short, medium and long-term outcomes
- Communicate and celebrate

## b. Common pitfalls<sup>1</sup>

- Inadequate preparation of younger and older groups prior to their meeting and working together OR working with one group more than the other
- Not having a shared interest that is mutually beneficial for both younger and older people
- Ignoring the experiences, perceptions, concerns and beliefs of participants. For example, not taking into account prejudices, stereotypes, mistrust or participant concerns
- Attempting to recruit people for initiatives that lack strong interest for them
- Inadequate, inflexible or limited project planning
- Partners not being fully committed or active
- Coordinator inexperienced in working with younger and older people in community settings
- Failure to consider the appropriateness of the approach in achieving the aims, and the time-commitment involved for participants
- Taking a short term, one-off approach that doesn't foster longer-term benefits
- Inadequate funding and/or resourcing
- 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



<sup>1</sup> Manchester's Generations Together Program 2009-11; Pinto, T., Hatton-Yeo, A., Marreel, I. 2009



## 6. Conclusion

The benefits and importance of intergenerational collaboration to society, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals cannot be underestimated. At a societal level intergenerational collaboration can reduce ageism, encourage good citizenship and volunteering, improve lifespan awareness, build respect and social capital, and discourage anti-social behaviour. It is also a significant contributor to strong, resilient, connected, cohesive communities, building connections between generations in an increasingly fragmented society. At an individual level it can improve quality of life, health and wellbeing, encourage physical, social and cognitive activity, build self-esteem and confidence, and reduce social isolation. Intergenerational programs '*build a sense of community among generations*' and contribute to their social sustainability, and so in theory minimise the need for welfare.



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## 8. Useful resources: guides, reports, reviews and fact sheets

### a. General

- Intergenerational practice: a review of the literature 2008. <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LIG01/LIG01.pdf>
- Intergenerational practice: outcomes and effectiveness 2010. <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/intergenerational-practice-outcomes-and-effectiveness>
- Intergenerational Programs Database. Generations United. <https://www.gu.org/ig-program-database/>
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- Holding Hands! Intergenerational Programs Connecting Generations 2015. [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewiV-a6--f\\_xAhU9wzGhUmFB20QFjABegQIBBAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mdpi.com%2F2071-1050%2F13%2F10%2F5564%2Fpdf&usg=AOvVaw2\\_LwNoZr32jm58-Zo9Yml3](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewiV-a6--f_xAhU9wzGhUmFB20QFjABegQIBBAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mdpi.com%2F2071-1050%2F13%2F10%2F5564%2Fpdf&usg=AOvVaw2_LwNoZr32jm58-Zo9Yml3)
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