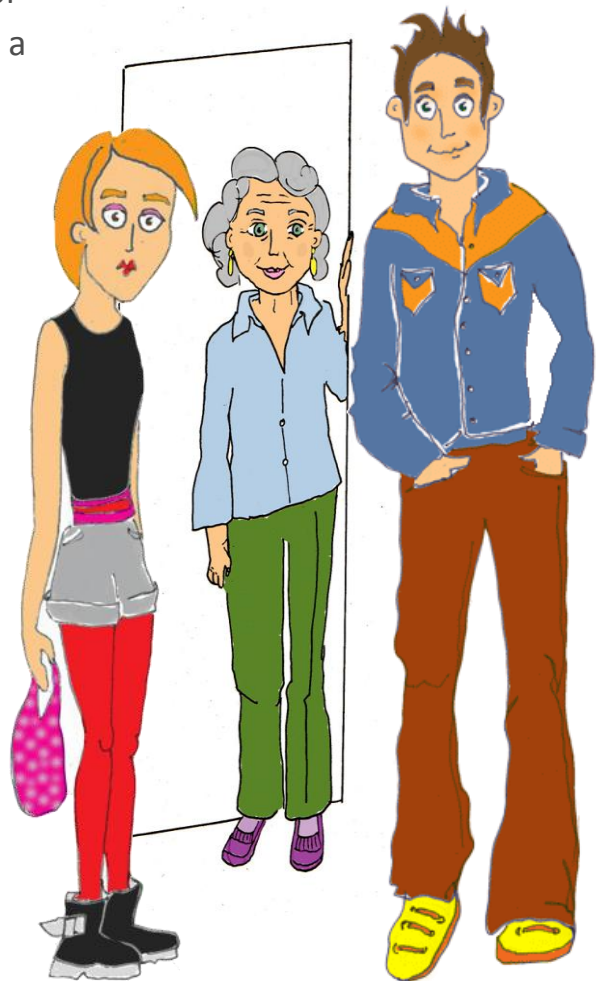


CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Working across the generations (intergenerational practice)

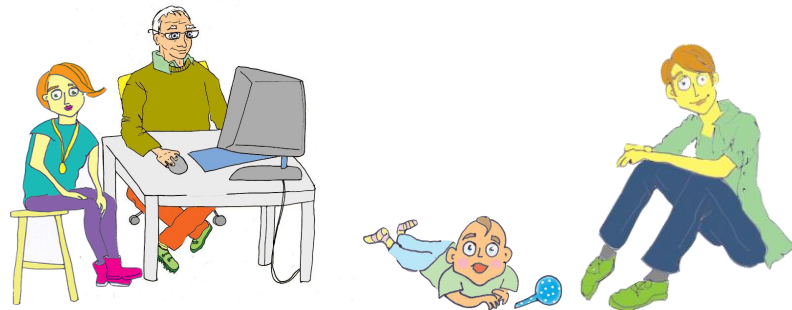
Introduction

This chapter looks at working with people from different generations in the community in a way that promotes understanding and respect, challenges stereotypes associated with age and strengthens communities. It looks at what we can do proactively to build sustainable relationships that promote a sense of security, confidence and well being for all. It encourages youth groups to adopt a life cycle approach in programmes such as health, relationships and sexuality, development, education, physical activities, participation and youth arts etc. It does this by defining what intergenerational work is, offering advice on good practice and highlighting some of the issues it can address including the value of working across the generations and its applicability to youth work. It gives practical guidance on undertaking this approach in your youth work setting and it provides a list of contacts and resources that will help you.



This chapter was developed by Anne Walsh (NYCI), Vicki Titterington (Linking Generations Northern Ireland), Keelin McCarthy (Age Action), and Cathrina Murphy (Postgraduate Scholarship Student, Dublin Institute of Technology) for 'Access All Areas – a Diversity Toolkit for the Youth Work Sector' published by NYCI and Youthnet

In the **Republic of Ireland** under the **Equal Status Act 2000** and the **Equality Act 2004**, it is unlawful to discriminate against a person on the grounds of their age in the provision of goods and services, education, sports, access to public facilities and accommodation. Age in this ground refers to those over 18.



In Northern Ireland **Section 75 (a)** of the **Northern Ireland Act 1998** requires public bodies to have due regard to the need for promoting equality of opportunity across nine equality groups including ageⁱ. In addition **The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006** makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of age in relation to employment, training or education. A review is currently under way which seeks to extend this legislation to cover the provision of goods, services and facilities. The current debate is whether this should apply to all ages or only to those over 18.

Terminology

This resource has been developed to be used by youth workers on the island of Ireland. At times it is necessary to make distinctions between our two jurisdictions and we had to choose a terminology to reflect this. We have chosen for the most part to use Northern Ireland (NI) and Republic of Ireland (ROI). At times we also use North and South. Additionally, for clarity, where information is significantly different we have used coloured boxes:

Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland

Intergenerational practice can be understood as any activity that “aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contributes to building more cohesive communities”ⁱⁱ.

Life cycle approach

The life cycle approach (also sometimes called the life course approach) recognises that ageing is a life-long process that starts in childhood and continues to old age. Different generations in our families, friends and communities are not all different groups of people but rather people at different stages of the same journey through life. Ageing throughout our lives, therefore, is something that is common to us all and should be something that we are all aware of no matter what age. In recognising this, it then becomes important to consider that the decisions we make and how we live our lives when we are younger will have an effect on us as we get older e.g. decisions we make around health, lifestyle, education, employment. The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) in Ireland, carried out by Trinity College Dublin, has published findings to this effect and more information can be found on their website (www.tcd.ie/tilda). Intergenerational work aims to promote the benefits of taking a life cycle approach in encouraging awareness about ageing and increasing greater mutual understanding and solidarity among generations across the life cycle.



Ageism is the discrimination of people because of their age. It can impact on anybody, at any time in their life, and can be experienced by younger as well as older people. It refers to negative opinions and often unrealistic perceptions of older people and the ageing process, or younger people and their youth, resulting in age discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping. Age stereotyping

occurs when fixed beliefs are applied to all members of a particular age group. An example of this would be demonization of young people by the media and the portrayal of older people as weak and vulnerable members of society.

As youth workers, although aware of ageist attitudes towards young people, we may not be aware of our own ageist attitudes towards older people. By using words such as “Senior Citizen”, “Old Folks”, “The Elderly”, “Old Age Pensioners” or “OAPs”, we are ageist. These words portray older people to be somewhat feeble and in need, when in fact many older people are vibrant and active with much to offer society. Unconsciously these words often translate into how we think, speak and act towards older people and can result in us overlooking the skills and experiences older people have to offer. When referring to older people avoid terms that are judgemental which stereotype older people such as those mentioned above. For example, you can use the term older people, which may be vague but does not imply negativity.



We can challenge ageism towards older people by:

- Examining our own attitudes to older people and the terms we use to describe older people.
- Discussing ageist attitudes with young people and question the language they use.
- Being open to friendships with people regardless of age and letting young people know it is okay to have an older friend.

- Providing opportunities for younger people to interact with older people in a positive environment through intergenerational projects or simply sharing facilities/resources.

Different ways of speaking about intergenerational practice

The term ‘intergenerational’ is often regarded as academic and removed from most people’s day to day language or lived reality, especially those who are most likely to be involved in intergenerational practice.

This is evident in the names given to intergenerational initiatives such as:

‘Generations together’ (Age Action Ireland’s intergenerational initiative) and ‘Linking Generations Northern Ireland’ (LGNI is a Northern Ireland initiative managed by Beth Johnson Foundation set up to promote and support the development of intergenerational practice).



Building ‘solidarity between generations’ is also commonly used terminology and the 29th of April each year has been designated the European Day of Solidarity between Generations. You may be doing intergenerational work already without naming it as that. Indeed by its very nature youth work can be described as ‘intergenerational’ in that it involves building positive relationships between people from different generations.

A Dublin Primary School headmaster explains it in this way:

“Adults have always been involved in our school in reading, sculpture and boat making projects but it is only in recent years that this has been labelled ‘intergenerational’. May spent every day here when her children went into school. We had the parents’ room and we had personal development groups, first aid group... knitting classes... exercise, keep-fit. You name it; we’ve done it all here for years. The older residents currently use the computer room for their computer classes and every couple of weeks the kids come in and show them a few tricks and shortcutsⁱⁱⁱ.”

Despite the complexity around terminology, intergenerational practice is an accepted generalised term and for consistency we will use it throughout this chapter.

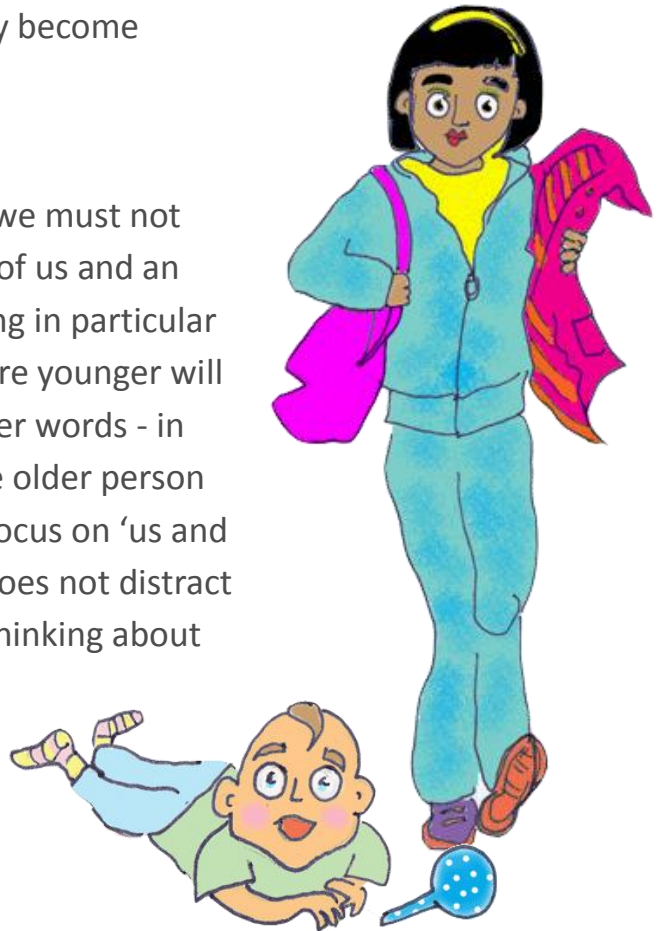
Who are the ‘generations’ in intergenerational practice?

The term intergenerational practice refers to working with ‘younger people’ and ‘older people’ and although it is not easy to define people by their age group as being ‘young’ or ‘old’, intergenerational practice is about bringing together those generations who due to the nature of our society don’t have many opportunities to interact. ‘Younger’ and ‘older’ also implies that there is a middle generation who are not involved. Research suggests that in order to allow relationships to develop between younger and older people, it may be necessary to omit the middle generation from projects, at least initially because the presence of the middle generation can prevent interaction. One project where parents were present resulted in the older participants communicating with the younger people through their parents^{iv}. While intergenerational practice does not replace activities where everyone in a community is engaged and involved such as local festivals and celebrations, tidy town initiatives, street parties, special interest projects etc. successful intergenerational projects and activities can enhance multigenerational events as younger and older people

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are more at ease in each other's company. Research suggests that as intergenerational practice becomes embedded in organisations and communities, it can result in activities becoming multigenerational as the community become involved^v.

When focusing on two age groups, we must not forget that ageing is common to all of us and an issue for all generations – recognising in particular that how we live our life when we are younger will impact on us as we get older. In other words - in our youth we are also becoming the older person we will be. We must ensure that a focus on 'us and them' (older and younger groups) does not distract us from this more complex way of thinking about ageing and the way we live our lives. Intergenerational practice in youth work should seek to address this concept. While much of the practice may start with thinking about bringing older and younger groups together it is important to keep in mind the end goals of supporting personal development alongside enhancing greater community cohesion and adopting a life cycle approach.



The range of intergenerational practice

Intergenerational 'projects' will manifest in a variety of ways. However, intergenerational 'practice' has specific aims and criteria, and intergenerational contact alone is not enough. Intergenerational practice aims to:

- Promote understanding
- Promote respect

- Strengthen communities
- Address ageism

Projects should:

- Ensure participants are engaged on equal status
- Be positive
- Be purposeful
- Involve working towards a common goal
- Be mutually beneficial in its outcomes

The range of intergenerational projects and activities and levels of contact varies immensely and all have a contribution to make in achieving the aims outlined above. The Beth Johnson Foundation has suggested that there is a continuum of contact levels from low level (1) to high level (7) which can lead to sustainable intergenerational practice^{vi}. The following framework is a useful conceptual tool for differentiating between different activities that involve bringing different generations together. It also advances our understanding of the outcomes we can expect from our projects.



| Level | Example of work |
|---|---|
| 1 low contact | Involves participants learning about the lives of other age groups but there is no direct contact |
| 2 | Contact is from a distance such as letter writing, exchanging videos, or sharing artwork |
| 3 | Involves a once-off meeting such as a group of students visiting a nursing home |
| 4 | Involves contact on an annual or periodic basis for an established event such as a Christmas party |
| 5 | Intergenerational projects where generations meet on a regular basis to undertake a shared activity |
| 6 | Contact occurs in intergenerational programmes which have come about as a result of successful lower level contact which in turn lead to intergenerational activities becoming part of general programmes within the organisation |
| 7 high contact and sustainable | Contact occurs because intergenerational practice has become embedded in the community. Activities are designed to accommodate all ages and recreational interests |

Research conducted on intergenerational practice concurs with the Beth Johnson Foundation which maintains that higher level contact is a result of successful lower level contact^{vii}. Higher level contact is where more fundamental change takes place at a community level. This may result in a reduction in anti-social behaviour, greater involvement across the generations within the community, and an enhanced sense of well being.

Needs and Issues

Understanding the origins of intergenerational practice

Intergenerational practice emerged in the United States in the 1960s as a response to a growing distance between the generations. It later developed to tackle social, cultural and economic needs such as school dropout, drug abuse and issues of social exclusion of older people. Although informal intergenerational activities occurred in Ireland for many years through helping and befriending initiatives in schools and youth work, planned intergenerational activities first emerged here in the 1990's.

While familial relationships across the generations in Ireland remain generally positive there is a real sense that relationships across the community are no longer strong. Intergenerational practice is seen as a useful tool in combating this perceived distance between the generations as a result of changes such as family structure, increased mobility and advances in information technology.

People from different generations can experience life quite differently

and there is a perception that different generations increasingly have little in common. Stereotyping from both older and younger generations toward each other is also evident. In a survey conducted in Ireland in 1986, 46% of young people over the age of 15 thought older people regarded them as vandals



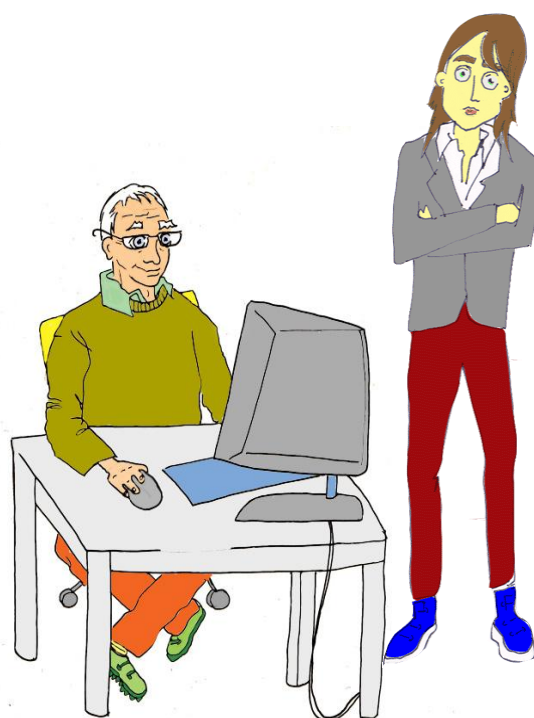
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and 42% thought that older people regarded them as disrespectful and rude^{viii}. Meanwhile, older people are often regarded as grumpy, weak and a burden.

As intergenerational practice has developed, it has become evident that it has significant potential. Each generation have much to offer the other and by bringing the generations proactively together greater social cohesion can be attained. Older people have acquired valuable life skills and insights based on experience and can act as positive role models and provide support and advice. Young people on the other hand, “offer new perspectives”^{ix} in a world where rapid changes in technology and the provision of services via technology can often result in difficulties and isolation for older people. Younger people have the skills to help older people navigate the new technologies and access services which can enhance their lives. Both age groups also have much in common as they experience ageism and stereotyping and can equally be marginalised in decision making. While older people often experience a sense of being of little importance, younger people often experience a sense of being voiceless, ignored and dismissed^x. Older people offer an important link to the past for young people whilst young people are society’s older people of the future.

Skills sharing and the premise of mutual benefit

It is important that the sharing of skills is not based on stereotyping and in fact many older people may be well versed in IT and may have skills other than “knitting” to offer. It is therefore, important to ensure that skill sharing meets the specific needs of each participant in an intergenerational encounter – someone from an older generation may well pass on their ITC



skills to someone younger and someone from a younger generation might share their particular life skills with an older person.

Community

When we talk about building cohesive and stronger communities through intergenerational practice we need to understand that ‘community’ can mean different things to different people. There is much talk of the ‘loss of community’ but many researchers argue that this relates to a nostalgic view of the traditional community and that “perhaps communities are just as prevalent now as we supposed them to be in previous times and other social circumstances, but we are failing to see them, because they take different forms or are more covert”^{xi}. So rather than focussing on the re-establishment of traditional communities, perhaps it is more important to concentrate on finding the value of personal relationships by "supporting... direct, face to face contacts"^{xii}. Whatever our own idea of community is, intergenerational practice has a significant role to play in facilitating these face to face contacts and the building of relationships between the different generations in any community in which we work – whether it is geographical or a special interest group such as an LGBT community, Traveller community, minority ethnic community etc.



Youth work and its role in intergenerational practice

Youth work is significant within community development and is an important site for intergenerational practice. Youth work aims to

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build self-esteem and confidence of young people and help them develop social awareness and a sense of social solidarity. These are key themes of intergenerational practice.

Intergenerational practice also has a role to play in any aspect of youth work where ageing has relevance such as making decisions that will have a long term affect. For example, in your work on health and well being, on promoting positive mental health, on supporting healthy relationships, on drug and alcohol awareness, inter-cultural understanding, global justice, conflict management and vocational training, support or advocacy. This supports the life cycle approach that sees ageing as a continuum from birth to death that should factor into all decisions and practices we adopt. We already do this when we do work on tobacco use, sexual health etc.

Intergenerational practice brings a more conscious awareness to that aspect of our ongoing work and thereby can proactively support positive attitudes around ageing. At the same time, dedicated intergenerational projects can more effectively challenge the negative attitudes that prevail which result in ageism, stereotyping, lack of trust and confidence and isolation.



Young people frequently feel stereotyped by the association of youth with crime and deviance^{xiii}. While older people perceive young people hanging around as a threat and have referred to them as vandals and abusive^{xiv}.

Younger people are keen to change the negative attitudes people have towards them and intergenerational projects can allow this to happen.

Linking in with schools can be an effective way to extend intergenerational work into the community as the integration of formal and non-formal education (youthwork) alongside community development can result in a sustainable programme of intergenerational projects.

In the **Republic of Ireland** the CSPE (Civic, social and political education) module and Transition Year are both opportunities where intergenerational work may feature. For example, many schools offer the 'Log on, Learn' intergenerational computer learning programme in Transition Year. Ensuring an intergenerational focus is present in both formal and non-formal education can help to support efforts to embed the practice in the community.

Before embarking on an intergenerational project it is important to first become aware of our own attitudes and behaviour – reflecting on what we carry with us because of our own social conditioning about age.

Benefits of doing intergenerational work

Research provides evidence of the many benefits of intergenerational practice such as:

- Increased self-confidence (this is the most commonly reported advantage cited by all generations involved)
 - Research has found that self-esteem and confidence increases as participants' knowledge and contribution to society is validated and they feel they are 'useful'^{xv}.
- Participation in intergenerational projects often leads to increased participation within the community, in other learning opportunities and volunteering.
- New skills development.
- Mutual understanding can strengthen social cohesion as younger and older participants are more at ease with each other and more likely to stop and speak to each other in the community and greet each other as friends^{xvi}. In this way it has a wider impact on the community than people usually expect.
 - It can result in better use of public space^{xvii}

- Intergenerational projects can bring about a reduction in fear of crime amongst older participants^{xviii}
- Positive interaction between the generations can promote empathy and enables each generation to understand the challenges faced by older/younger people
- Direct positive contact with older people can be effective in changing young people's attitudes about older people and the ageing process thus dispelling myths and stereotypes^{xix}
- Intergenerational projects that explore the life cycle approach have the potential to raise awareness for young people about the impact of their life choice, around health, education, career development etc.
- Taking part in a project often results in older people talking more about their positive experience with young people thus 'drowning out' other voices in the community that would otherwise be negative. It also gives young people an opportunity to dispel myths about themselves that they know are prevalent in the community
- Physical benefits can accrue from projects designed to improve the environment leading to greater satisfaction by all residents of the community.
- Intergenerational practice is a useful tool in addressing Government priorities such as promoting active citizenship, volunteering and building cohesion and social capital.



- Increased active citizenship occurs as participants become more involved in the community and facilities such as schools and community centres are put to better use.
 - One of the benefits of intergenerational practice has been the release of older people's "potential to contribute positively to their community"^{xx}
 - Research indicates that older participants often take on other voluntary roles following participation in intergenerational projects^{xxi}, as do younger people as they "are very committed to making a positive social contribution to their local and national communities"^{xxii}.
 - Intergenerational projects can lead to safer neighbourhoods and more sustainable communities.
- Communities can benefit from Intergenerational projects where projects highlight deficiencies in the community such as:
 - Lack of internet facilities for older people who have no access to computers at home.
 - Inadequate time to cross the local roads due to timing restrictions on traffic lights.
 - Lack of shared community facilities or space where younger and older people can interact informally while they use the same space or facilities.
 - Community development is founded on the process of empowerment, especially of those who may be marginalised such as younger and older people. Younger and older people often feel misunderstood and excluded in decision making. The empowerment of older and younger participants can be achieved by being given an opportunity to have an input, as equals, into the implementation of projects.
 - Intergenerational practice has the potential to raise awareness of serious issues such as elder abuse, stereotyping, isolation and in so doing encourage younger and older people to speak out.

Some comments from people who have previously been involved in intergenerational projects^{xxiii}:

“I now have more respect for older people and feel I have things in common with them.” (younger participant)

“The young people were more obliging than I thought they would be and took time to listen to my point of view.” (older participant)

“I liked the good banter and chat we had with the older people and that they respect us more now.” (younger participant)

“It was very well planned and would be of interest to people of all ages. It broadened my way of thinking.” (older participant)

“As a result of this project relations between our school and local churches have improved, fostering a greater sense of community spirit. Although many older people in our group felt they had no skills to offer, our project helped them see that they did.” (teacher)

“As a social work student on the project it was great to see this happening. I felt the project increased the young people’s support networks.” (social work student)

Intergenerational work and challenging social conditioning

A key aspect of intergenerational work is its focus on challenging stereotypes based on age. Challenging stereotypes entails understanding where they come from. The following section looks at this topic in more detail.

Social conditioning around ageing

In the post-war years academic thinking on ageing was shaped by 1) health and social policy concerns for older people; and 2) the political and economic view that the ageing population was a social problem. A biomedical study of ageing constructed age as a process of decline and dependency which resulted in a needs-based approach to ageing policy. This has resulted in further reinforcing negative stereotypes around ageing where ageing is seen as a problem rather than as an asset. Intergenerational practice works to challenge this notion of ageing and to reconfigure ageing as positive, and rich in assets and opportunities.

Social conditioning and elder abuse

Elder Abuse causes harm or distress to an older person and/or it violates their human rights. It can be a single or repeated act, or lack of action and happens in relationships where there is an expectation of trust. The incidence and perpetuation of elder abuse can occur where there is a climate of ageism - of negative stereotyping - that allows discrimination to flourish. Elder abuse can continue due to a collusion of silence, denial or tacit justification, as a result of isolation, and due to a lack of awareness.

Intergenerational practice seeks to raise awareness, reduce isolation and build confidence. Building confidence to be heard and to speak out about elder abuse (by both younger and older people) would be a positive result of intergenerational practice.



Social conditioning relating to younger people

Younger people are often seen as ‘hanging out’ and subsequently stereotyped as anti-social and vandals. However, research conducted in 2006 on the leisure needs of young people living in areas designated as disadvantaged found that young people actually felt ignored and excluded within their own community and marginalised from the wider community^{xxiv}. Hanging around was often the only leisure option open to them due to a lack of amenities and lack of money to pay for alternative activities^{xxiv}.

Older residents frequently complain about young people ‘hanging around’ and although older people are less likely to become victims of crime than other groups, they do fear crime. Lack of trust of younger people is one factor which can increase fear of crime among older people. This perception can have as much effect on the well-being of older people as the experience of crime itself often results in older people restricting their activities or withdrawing from social life altogether^{xxv}. This puts older people at further risk of social exclusion and isolation^{xxvi}.



Intergenerational practice needs to acknowledge these perceptions and work toward developing new and positive ways for both younger and older people to look at aspects of youth and ageing. Although research suggests that following participation in intergenerational projects newly positive attitudes are directed only towards those on the project and do not necessarily translate to the wider population of younger or older people^{xxvii}, long-term sustainable intergenerational practice (level 7) may have the potential to change this.

In Northern Ireland intergenerational work has been seen as a positive and in some cases an early intervention method for addressing community safety issues. The Department of Justice NI have made a commitment to support and promote intergenerational approaches within their current 'Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities' strategy as a method of addressing anti – social behaviour and fear of crime.

Intergenerational work with different cultures

Intergenerational work with diverse cultural groups can raise a number of issues. As children become more independent and divisions between the generations start to occur (as they do for most families) additional concerns can arise for parents and grandparents from minority ethnic backgrounds:

- The older generations may be concerned that younger people are losing or 'diluting' their cultural heritage
- Some cultures expect greater levels of respect from younger people and can be shocked by our relatively non-hierarchical approach to age in Ireland. This can manifest in a number of ways such as calling older people by their name (in Ireland) rather than their title (in other cultures). Divisions may be especially pronounced for cultural groups where wisdom and decision making resides with older people in the community and accepting any inherent wisdom of, or importance in listening to, young people is very difficult. Respect in some cultures may be shown by not looking older people in the eye which can often be misinterpreted by Irish people as guilt or evasion. This can lead to misunderstandings and both cross-cultural and intergenerational conflict.
- Intergenerational conflict can be difficult to manage when it disrupts the traditional ways of doing things. In Traveller culture it



was traditional for older people to be listened to, especially in dealing with feuds and interfamily conflict. Due to cultural change in the wider community some older Travellers have noticed that their authority is no longer respected as much. Without another culturally relevant 'authority' emerging it has led in some instances to greater levels of fighting as this would be a culturally appropriate alternative to managing conflict amongst some Travellers. Other options are now being implemented by Traveller groups to tackle this issue in a culturally relative way including the need to do intergenerational work.

Please see chapters 2 and 4 for more details on working with young people from minority ethnic backgrounds and young Travellers



Developing intergenerational practice

When developing your intergenerational project/event/initiative there are many elements that need to be considered and good planning and implementation are key to a successful project. The following steps will guide you through developing and delivering an intergenerational project.

Step 1 Project planning

A planning group should be in place to manage the project ideally involving at least one or more partners. This group will create and agree on the structure and delivery of the project. They will take into account the needs of all the participants. It can be helpful to identify and involve someone who is familiar to both younger and older people from the groups you are bringing together. It is also important that younger and older



people are represented on the planning group. These people will be a key contact in the development and delivery of the project and can be invaluable in building trust within their peer group about the proposed project and other participating groups.

The planning group should draw up a programme of the project, detailing session activities and times, so that everyone knows what to expect.

- Be clear to identify common goals and interests and how you will work towards them and what role you each have.

Watch out for these possible pitfalls in your planning:

- Find a suitable time when both or all groups can come together. Different generations are often not available at the same time as they have different schedules and time constraints.
- Find a suitable space where people can come together. Younger and older people tend to socialise in different settings so there may not be a natural shared space that can be used for joint activities or to sustain relationships on an ongoing basis. In the absence of shared space it is a good idea to share each other's spaces. This will allow both groups become familiar with each other's 'space' and dispel myths of certain space being 'no go' or forbidden areas which can often be the case with young people in particular being told they can't go near (or hang out in) certain places in the community.
- When planning a project be aware that there may be drop-offs.

In the **Republic of Ireland** the best routes for making contact with groups in your area is through Family Resource Centres, your local Community Development Programme, your local Community Hall committee who will know which groups meet regularly, especially retirement groups. You can contact national bodies such as Age Action to link in with their members. Age Action run a Generations Together programme to support intergenerational work and provide guidance and training to those who wish to run an intergenerational initiative. Other national groups with links to relevant groups throughout the country are listed at the end of this chapter. Many nursing homes also have an interest in intergenerational work.

In **Northern Ireland** Linking Generations NI are the point of contact for advice on good practice and project development. LGNI would advise accessing older people to participate in projects through contact with local community groups, community networks, churches and membership organisations such older people's forums and Age Sector Platform.

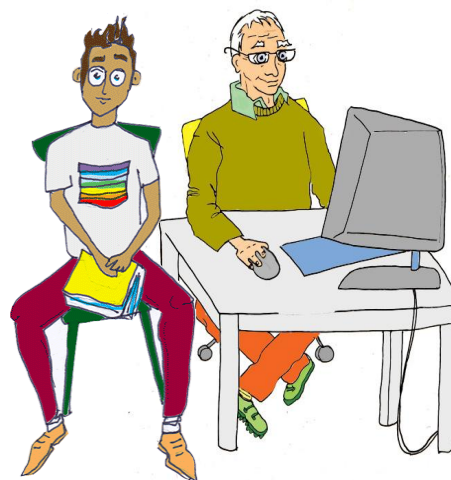
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An example of taking a partnership approach - Digital Age Project

The Digital Age Project brought several organisational partners together to deliver a digital inclusion project focusing on the technological advancement of older people in sheltered accommodation. The partners included Worker's Educational Association (lead partner), LGNI, NI Federation of Housing Associations, AVEC Solutions and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. By adopting an intergenerational and partnership approach it ensured that older people would be enabled to become digitally included and also be more connected to their communities and the resources young people have to offer. LGNI supported the intergenerational element of the project by providing training and advice for facilitators and creating linkages between youth and older peoples groups.

Step 2 Project aims

Ideally, the project should address an issue that all of the participants can connect with. It might be a local community campaign, it might be producing a piece of art work or it might be coming together to address a particular local problem which involves both age groups (such as fear of crime/negative portrayal of young people). If both age groups feel they are working together for a common goal, relationships are more likely to be built. Both groups should have equal participation. Mutual respect between the age groups is an essential part of what should be a two way process. So a project that, for example, involves younger people serving tea or performing for older people might also have the older people providing a similar service for the young.



An example of addressing a shared issues - The BIG Gay Lunch

The Big Gay Lunch' was organised by Gay and Lesbian Youth NI, QueerSpace and Linking Generations NI to bring younger and older members of the LGBT community together to celebrate the 29th April EU Day of Solidarity between Generations. The event offered the opportunity for both age groups to share personal experiences about coming out, sexual health and stigma whilst enjoying food, friendship and fun.

Step 3 Group preparation sessions (single identity work)

Project leaders should meet with each age group separately before the intergenerational project starts to prepare them for meeting up. Information about how each group views the other can be gathered at this session and can inform a 'before and after' type of evaluation. Suggestions for this session might include discussions around these questions:

- What do you think of when you hear the words young people/old/elderly etc?
- How often do you have contact with an older/younger person who isn't a member of your family?
- Drawings of stereotypical images of the other age groups.

Use this opportunity to:

- Understand the needs and abilities of each group.
- Introduce groups in advance to any unfamiliar settings you might be working in and tell them what to expect.



- Introduce groups in advance to all the project leaders so that there are familiar faces present when the groups first meet up. Try to have someone involved who is known and trusted by people in the community.

Step 4 The first session

- Be prepared with any materials, handouts, food etc that you will be using. If there is instruction have handouts as people can easily forget what they have learnt between one session and the next.
- Ensure everyone knows what to expect, and what their contribution is. Give people an opportunity to ask questions.
- Organise transport or give clear directions that gets people from door to door.

The first session should involve ice-breakers and allow time for getting to know each other. The aim is always to provide a positive environment where relationships can develop.

Suggestions for this first session include:

- Review of the single age group session.
- Speed dating format.
- Show and Tell – bring an object and talk about it.
- Arts and crafts.
- Human bingo.

Be aware of and responsive to group dynamics when you bring groups together. This advice from people who have run intergenerational projects may be relevant:

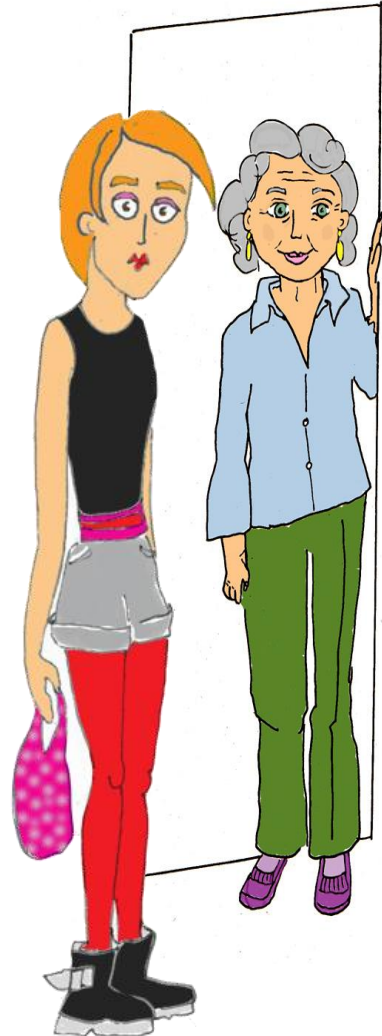
- Make sure that initial introductions and relationship building is managed and not left in the hope that it will happen naturally. People may be uneasy and will tend to stick with their own age groups so mingling does not easily happen.
- When groups meet first treat the ‘visiting’ group as guests.

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- Create opportunities for informal chats between members of each group such as tea breaks etc. This is when genuine relationships start to develop and mutual interest in one another lives happens. Small group work of mixed age groups encourages interaction. It is also important to meet regularly to build relationships over time.

Step 5 Duration of project

The longer the better! A key feature of successful projects is that genuine and lasting friendships were formed between older and younger people. This takes time and the sessions should allow time within the plan for purely social interaction. LGNI advise that sessions should last between 1 and 2 hours. Sessions running weekly or fortnightly seem to work best as it means there is enough contact to keep participants engaged but not too much or too little to lose interest.



Step 6 Evaluation

Evaluating is an important part of any project. (It is compulsory for an LGNI funded project.) Evaluation should be a continuous process throughout the project. LGNI recommend the following:

- Using LGNI evaluation forms (these can also be used in ROI)
- Take plenty of photos
- Note down any interesting comments participants make throughout the project

- Refer to the information gathered during the single age groups (single identity) sessions to provide 'before and after' information

Research has shown that it is sometimes necessary to prompt younger participants to reflect on their experience and interaction with older people in order to articulate any changes in their attitudes toward older people^{xxviii}. This shows the value of adding in a reflective aspect to intergenerational projects. Evaluations where possible, should seek to measure increases in self-esteem and confidence and also if participants themselves attribute this change to their participation in the project.

Note: Success should not be measured by the numbers in attendance but by the experience of the participants involved.



Step 7 Celebration

A celebration event is a great way to recognise the achievements of the project for both participants and workers. Here are some suggestions:

- Contact local papers to see if they will feature your project
- Invite local Councillors, politicians and special guests to the event
- Giving certificates to participants can be a motivating factor

- Use the celebration to launch anything you have produced such as a report, photo album, art work, DVD, booklet
- Celebrate!!

Step 8 Sustainable intergenerational practice

Intergenerational projects often result in a number of outcomes beyond the stated goals of the project. In doing your evaluation it is important to recognise and record un-anticipated outcomes:

- As relationships develop younger and older people can find things in common such as an interest in activities outside of the scope of the project (chess, history, music etc)
- Intergenerational projects can provide older people with a means to contribute to society and give them a renewed sense of purpose thereby building their self-esteem.



However, it is important to see these outcomes in the context of whether they are maintained into the long term and across society. To obtain long term benefits, intergenerational projects need to extend beyond a limited timeframe into sustainable intergenerational practice that is community wide and long term. Therefore, as part of your annual planning with your own group, arrange to meet with a group from another generation to come up with new ideas for projects you might want to do together.

Research indicates that a number of key elements are required to ensure that progression takes place from one-off intergenerational projects to sustainable intergenerational practice. These elements include:

- The need to embed it in an educational or community development context which allows the practice to evolve along the continuum of contact levels and
- The commitment of key people with an understanding of intergenerational practice: teachers, community development workers, youth workers and volunteers who work closely together^{xxix}.

Schools and youth groups that open themselves up to the community can be at the heart of intergenerational practice. By running parent, grandparent and adult education classes and activities alongside school or youth activities, and by making the school or youth centre a community-based asset and opening up the gym, kitchen, art rooms, computer rooms etc to the community and actively encouraging involvement from all generations at a social and educational level, a sustained focus on intergenerational practice in a community can be maintained.



Age-Friendly cities and counties

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has established a Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities that encourages active ageing by optimising opportunities for health, participation and security. The Age-Friendly Programme is applicable to all ages and intergenerational approaches. It can play a significant role in achieving sustainable intergenerational practice at a strategic and practice level. In Ireland, The Age Friendly Cities and Counties

Programme is affiliated with the WHO Global Network of Age Friendly Cities. The initiative in Ireland is aimed at developing age friendly cities and counties in all Local Authorities in the country with the assistance and alliance of local authorities, the health service, the Gardaí, the business community, voluntary organisations and academic institutions. The Programme has already brought about imaginative changes at a local level such as the establishment of Men's Sheds, Bogus Caller Cards, Age Friendly Business Recognition Schemes and lengthened traffic light crossing times. While the Age Friendly Programme currently only targets older people in its consultation process, these fora have identified that intergenerational practice has the potential to resolve some of the issues that are key to developing age friendly communities. As such, your intergenerational projects can have a role to play in making communities more age friendly and you should link in with your own Local Authority to see what is happening under their Age Friendly Programme.



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Participation in decision making

Sustainable intergenerational practice will ensure that different generations take part in decision making processes. This parallels the core principle in youth work that participation is central to young people's rights. By hearing the voices from across generations, everybody's rights can be collectively maintained and strengthened. Participation in decision making processes needs to take place at policy and government levels as well as community level.

Northern Ireland Youth Forum and Age Sector Platform Partnership – an LGNI project

LGNI has brought together two organisations that promote the voice of younger and older people respectively to engage in dialogue on cross generational issues. Since 2009 the partnership has hosted intergenerational events and projects opening dialogue on issues such as ageism, employment, mental health and peace building. Reports of the events hosted by this partnership 'Is it Fair?' and 'Have Your Say' can be viewed on LGNI's website www.centreforip.org.uk/northern-ireland

When Belfast decided to become an Age Friendly city LGNI partnered with the City Council to engage the Youth Forum and Greater Belfast Senior Citizen's Forum in consultation. This process enabled an intergenerational perspective to be included in the Age-Friendly Belfast action plan and strategy. A further development of this project was to take a cross-border focus linking with a similar intergenerational group from Dublin through Age Action Ireland to host a learning exchange trip.

Practical tips

Encouraging engagement

Workers say it often takes some persistence to persuade people to get involved initially. The following advice may help:

- Research shows that people tend to take part in something because they are asked to do so, or are encouraged by someone in the community they trust such as a leader or someone in their peer group. Research would indicate that having a positive opinion of young people prior to being asked may even be a pre-requisite for the participation of older people in intergenerational projects^{xxx}.
- Also, older people often self-impose restrictions on themselves in the activities they take on due to fear of crime and lack of confidence and as such are may need a little persuading to get involved. Also remember, not all older people want to be involved and this should be respected.
- Older people and younger people will undoubtedly look for different things in a project. It's important to meet all needs. Different generations may also appraise each other by different criteria. For example, older people will often comment on the manners of the young people while younger people will talk about whether the older people were 'nice', how capable, and how open they are.
- It can be harder to engage older men in intergenerational projects. Competitions and special interest projects work best.

Furthermore, it is necessary to ensure that sufficient information on the project/activity is available to potential participants to avoid misunderstandings about the project. For example, in recent research on computer skills-sharing projects, where sufficient information was not available during the recruitment process to allow suitable participants to be recruited, it resulted in:

- Participants dropping out of the project.
- Participant's skills not being matched to the level of the course. For example, many older people already have good computer skills and might be looking for higher levels of instruction than are being delivered.

This can put extra pressure on their young person who has prepared a specific lesson and who cannot easily adapt to deliver other information^{xxx}.

Multiple identity

Remember that people cannot be defined by one aspect of their identity. No-one is just younger, or older. They will have an ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, varying abilities or disabilities, different life experiences, belief systems and diverse family circumstances. Take all of this into account when developing your project. Use it to find commonalities, connections, and special interests. Ensure flexibility where necessary (for example around literacy levels, someone's physical ability, or pre-empting disagreements). Take account of various needs - such as cultural practices around food, times etc.



Child protection

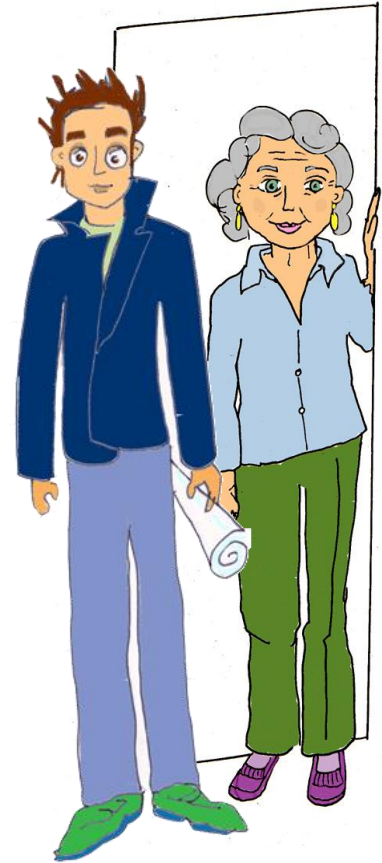
Organisers usually overcome child protection concerns by ensuring that young people are never left alone with the older people on a one-to-one basis. If they are fellow 'participants' in a project Garda vetting is not mandatory for the older people. However, older people may be uncomfortable about having informal contact with young people. Recent research suggests that older people are afraid to chat to young people for many reasons including fear of allegations of improper behaviour. One older participant in the research mentioned speaking to a young boy who said to her "I am not supposed to talk to strangers" and walked away. For her, "it was an awful slap in the face"^{xxxii}.

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Prevent reinforcing stereotypes

Interaction between younger and older people will not always result in challenging negative attitudes. Research suggests that exposing young people to nursing home residents who are mostly passive can result in an increase in negative attitude^{xxxiii}. In order to change negative attitudes it is necessary to provide opportunities for young people to interact with a diversity of older people on equal terms.

Negative attitudes may also be reinforced where an imbalance of power exists between the age groups^{xxxiv}. It is essential to ensure both groups are equal in any intergenerational activity and everyone has a say in what they are going to do. Ensure that each group have something tangible to offer so that they are each given respect.



Evaluation is particularly important in order to pick up undesired outcomes such as an increase in negative attitudes.

Intergenerational projects often result in a gender divide with older men and the boys working together such as competing in the darts and snooker competition, while older women do projects with younger girls such as sharing crafts and skills. It is important not to let these gender divides reinforce gender stereotypes while tackling stereotypes based on age.

See chapter 11 of [Access All Areas – Working with young women and young men to challenge gender stereotypes](#)

Examples of intergenerational practice

The range of intergenerational projects is vast. Many result in publications, calendars, exhibitions etc. Projects that have been run (in ROI and NI) include:

- ICT projects – learning new computer skills, using digital cameras, getting the most out of mobile phones etc.
- Learning to play music, bingo and Wii games
- Taking part in dancing
- Sharing sewing, knitting, and crochet skills
- Learning and playing sports, often in competition with each other - table tennis, chess, snooker, darts, cycling etc
- Sharing cookery skills and household management
- Joint lobbying on common issues
- Involvement in ideas/activities that assist the creation of Age-Friendly Communities
- Quizzes
- Art projects – creative writing, visual arts, silk painting, felting and other textile arts, photography, puppetry
- Local history projects
- Gardening projects
- Special interest projects on themes such as global justice, tackling stereotyping, understanding sectarianism, racism and prejudice, challenging ageism, awareness raising and prevention of elder abuse
- Universities have set up intergenerational projects such as DIT's intergenerational Nutrition project. This project gives students an



opportunity to practise their communication, presentation and history-taking skills with older ‘volunteers’ and in turn students provide older people with advice on diet and nutrition.

- Travellers have set up skills sharing projects to impart traditional skills such as tinsmithing. They have also run intergenerational projects looking at Traveller identity and cultural change over time
- Oral history gathering projects are popular whereby younger people interview older people about the games they played when they were young, the food they ate, the clothes they wore and the toys they had. An unexpected outcome in one oral history project was the younger participants reading a book, an older participant read as a child. A book they were encouraged to read by the older person^{xxxv}
- Running a community festival can be very successful such as:
 - A Halloween festival involving all generations in the community in activities such as sharing local ghosts stories or going on a haunted walk to point out local areas of “ghostly” interest. All age groups making lanterns and masks for a parade has proved very successful in some communities.
 - A community Spring clean-up or Tidy Towns programme which includes fun and games.



Successful intergenerational projects similar to those above have resulted in many benefits including reducing negative stereotypes, challenging ageism, enhancing a sense of self-worth and confidence for both the older and younger participants and a reduction in fear of crime among older people in the community.

Information and reports on the projects/events described above and others mentioned throughout this chapter can be accessed online. **Northern Ireland**

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projects can be accessed via the LGNI website

www.centreforip.org.uk/northern-ireland. **Republic of Ireland** projects can be accessed on www.icsg.ie/intergenerational_mapping_exercise.

In **Northern Ireland** LGNI are happy to discuss your project and provide as much support as they can for its delivery, including training, whether you are receiving funding from them or not. Similarly, Age Action can provide support, guidance and training on intergenerational initiatives being held in the **Republic of Ireland**. They have both produced good practice guides – see links in the resources section at the end of this chapter. Strong cross border links have been made with Linking Generations Northern Ireland and Age Action and they both collaborate closely with NUIG, NYCI, Youthnet and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, given the contribution intergenerational practice has made to community development in various areas, intergenerational practice should be recognised as an integral aspect of community development work and advocated for wherever possible.



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Checklist 13 – How to promote intergenerational practice in youth work

This checklist can help you to identify how you have adopted a life cycle approach, how you challenge ageism, and ensured that intergenerational practice has a place in your service.

Public image

How we present our service to our community

- | | | | |
|--|------------|---------------|-----------|
| • We use positive images that promote solidarity between generations | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • Our service promotes opportunities for different generations to meet with and build positive relationships with each other | YES | PARTLY | NO |

Programme planning and delivery

Our programmes are designed and delivered to include the diverse needs and identities of different generations

- | | | | |
|---|------------|---------------|-----------|
| • We gather information on the groups of people from different generations in the community that we can interact and collaborate with | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • We gather information on any intergenerational initiatives in the community that we can get involved in | YES | PARTLY | NO |

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- | | | | |
|---|------------|---------------|-----------|
| • Our service provides intergenerational programs which respond to the specific needs of the different generational groups involved | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • Our service seeks to find ways to share facilities in ways that allow the different age groups in the community to meet | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • We provide opportunities to look at aspects of ageing and to challenge stereotyping | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • We implement strategies to increase our intergenerational work | YES | PARTLY | NO |

Professional development

Our staff and volunteers are trained and supported to deliver an inclusive youth service

- | | | | |
|---|------------|---------------|-----------|
| • Staff and volunteers model non-ageist language and behaviour in their work | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • Staff and volunteers challenge any ageist comments or behaviour from people in their groups | YES | PARTLY | NO |
| • Staff and volunteers develop their understanding of and raise awareness about elder abuse | YES | PARTLY | NO |

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Policies and procedures

We have a written commitment to deliver an equal and inclusive service

- Our service has policies and procedures in place that deal with ageist comments or behaviour
- YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

Participation

We make sure we include the voices of marginalised people at all levels of our youth service

- Our service discusses with young people and older people their needs in relation to our intergenerational work
- YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

Useful Contacts

Linking Generations Northern Ireland

43-45 Frances Street

Newtownards

BT23 7DX

Tel: 028 - 91813022

Email: Info@lgni.org.uk

Website: www.centreforip.org.uk/northern-ireland



Linking Generations NI



@LinkGenNI

Generations Together

Age Action

30 to 31 Lower Camden Street

Dublin 2

Tel: 01 - 4756989

Email: generationstogether@ageaction.ie

Website: www.ageaction.ie/generations-together

This chapter was developed by Anne Walsh (NYCI), Vicki Titterington (Linking Generations Northern Ireland), Keelin McCarthy (Age Action), and Cathrina Murphy (Postgraduate Scholarship Student, Dublin Institute of Technology) for 'Access All Areas – a Diversity Toolkit for the Youth Work Sector' published by NYCI and Youthnet

Resources

The Beth Johnson Foundation

The Beth Johnson Foundation is a UK wide charity that works to make a positive impact on the lives of older people, to gain recognition for the valuable role that older people play in society and to challenge age discrimination and stereotyping. They do this by bringing together research, policy and best practice. Intergenerational Practice is a strong element of their work through the Centre for Intergenerational Practice. The Centre aims to support the development and promotion of intergenerational practice as a catalyst for social change based around the 'Age Friendly' concept. For more information go to www.bjf.org.uk

Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI)

LGNI are the intergenerational initiative promoting and supporting the development of Intergenerational Practice throughout Northern Ireland. They have created a good practice guide drawing on their experience of developing and supporting intergenerational work over the past five years in Northern Ireland. This guide incorporates recommendations from the groups that LGNI have worked with over the past few years and can be found in their most recent publication on the LGNI website 'The Story so Far' along with good practice examples of projects and partnerships. They also have a range of published evaluation documents which can be accessed at www.centreforip.org.uk/northern-ireland including research called '**A Review of Intergenerational Approaches to Community Safety in NI**' and a range of community project case studies.

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Intergenerational programmes in Ireland: An initial overview

The Irish Centre for Social Gerontology in the National University of Ireland, Galway in collaboration with Age Action Ireland and The Beth Johnson Foundation have put together a report on intergenerational projects in the Republic of Ireland. The report not only gathers necessary information about intergenerational activities in Ireland, but also helps to identify examples of best practice in relation to intergenerational programmes. It can be accessed on www.icsg.ie/intergenerational_mapping_exercise.

Age friendly cities and communities

The WHO has produced a guide and checklist for cities/communities to assess their positions and create action plans which take positive steps towards becoming more age-friendly. To view this checklist go to: www.who.int/ageing/publications/Age_friendly_cities_checklist.pdf. For more information on The Age Friendly Cities and Counties initiative in Ireland and how you can get involved in your county go to: www.agefriendlycounties.com

29th April is European Day for Solidarity between Generations

This day has been designated by the European Union each year and offers a platform to raise awareness and celebrate best practice at the community, organisational and policy level. A number of intergenerational activities take place around this time and initiatives such as LGNI and Generations Together advocate the celebration of this day throughout the relevant sectors. For more information on this European Day go to: www.age-platform.eu/age-policy-work/solidarity-between-generations/campaign

The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), Trinity College Dublin

TILDA is a large-scale, nationally representative, longitudinal study on ageing in Ireland, the aim of which is to make Ireland the best place in the world to grow old. TILDA collects information on all aspects of health, economic and social circumstances from people aged 50 and over in a series of data collection waves once every two years. This study aims to provide an accurate picture of the characteristics, needs and contributions of older persons in Ireland that will feed into other areas such as policy, the voluntary sector (engaged in activities that seek to enhance the social integration of older citizens) and many private sector companies in the insurance and services industries.

Over 8,500 people took part in the first wave of TILDA in 2009 and 2010, the results of which are published and can be found here: www.tcd.ie/tilda/

European Map for Intergenerational Learning (EMIL) is a collaborative learning network that aims to provide a general overview of the role and status of intergenerational learning in Europe. They collect, exchange, and distribute ideas and resources about intergenerational learning and support regional, European and global networking strategies. They also bring together a range of partnerships promoting and supporting intergenerational learning in all its varied forms across Europe. To find out more and to view their map of intergenerational learning partners in Europe go to: www.emil-network.eu/

Training and small grants

- LGNI offer a range of intergenerational specialist services such as training, development support, small grant opportunities and the distribution of a newsletter. They are also keen to collaborate with others on project partnerships and proposals. To find out more about any of these services join their contact list, check out the LGNI website www.centreforip.org.uk/northern-ireland, find them on Facebook 'Linking Generations NI' or follow them on Twitter @LinkGenNI.

- Age Action also offer training and support for intergenerational initiatives and circulate a regular newsletter with news and events. Where additional funding becomes obtainable in the Generations Together Programme, opportunities to apply for small grant schemes may also become available. To find out more information or to sign up for the newsletter, please contact Generations Together at the details above.

Sourcing Local Groups in your Area

When looking for participants or local groups to take part in an intergenerational activity, the following places are a good place to start:

- Family Resource Centres: www.familyresource.ie
- Local and Community Development Programmes: www.ildn.ie and www.pobal.ie.
- Age Action: www.ageaction.ie
- Active Retirement Ireland: www.activeirl.ie
- Tidy towns committees: www.tidytowns.ie/links.php?id=65

References and Further Reading

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- ^{xxx} Murphy, p. 160.
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