

## Building Communities for all ages: Good Intergenerational Practice

Intergenerational practice 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.'* These practices 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 practice also contributes to addressing ageism.

On 7 September 2021, IEPCP hosted an interactive workshop for local government, community health, aged care providers, neighbourhood houses, libraries, early childhood and education providers, community organisations, community groups and anyone interested in combatting ageism and building cohesive, connected and resilient communities. The workshop was presented and facilitated by ageing expert, Lena Gan.

64 people attended the workshop which was designed to further understanding of evidence-based intergenerational practice through practical application of key principles to specific examples, from formulation to implementation and evaluation.

Participants were provided with an introduction to intergenerational practice, how it is an evidence-based approach to tackling ageism, what the benefits are and general principles on how to design an intergenerational activity. Three project examples were presented to participants – nature/environment, companion animal/pet therapy, and walking labyrinths. Participants worked in small groups of 5 to 6 people, choosing one of the project examples to plan an intergenerational activity.

**This document provides the workshop wisdom to further support the development of intergenerational activities.**

**For more resources to support your intergenerational practice please go to the IEPCP website:**

<https://iepcp.org.au/key-project/intergenerational-practice/>

and

<https://iepcp.org.au/key-project/ageism/>



## Lena's wisdom

### Formulation

- Be careful when using templates and lists as you can be tempted to stop thinking and just tick the boxes. Lists are also never exhaustive – there are always variables that are not on them.
- We all think in stereotypes, assumptions and clichés – try to be aware of your own assumptions and how these might affect your project planning. Remember that you are an integral part of the project and as such, a project variable.
- Keep the needs at the heart of the project. Everything should start at and be built around the needs. Be very clear about the **needs that the project addresses** and keep them at the core of the project. The needs will impact everything else – how potential funders and partners view your project, engagement with participants and project impact.
- Working with a **broad range of partners** allows you to maximise shared resources and leverage the experience of the group.
- Embed ownership of the activity to support impact and **sustainability**

### Implementation

- **Co-design** is important, because it tells participants that you value their input and respect their knowledge and experience. Keep in mind “*the creative capacity of assembled difference*”, the way we interact generates its own creativity. Co-design and consultation can be difficult and time consuming as it challenges our assumptions, our nice, neat, tidy ideas and can be messy. However, it can also be the single most valuable thing about the project as it engages people and gets them talking to each other and to project staff, can be positively surprising and can provide the most creative and innovative ideas.
- Create **conditions** for all participants and ourselves to **show our best selves**. In a supportive and respectful environment where one's input is valued, people tend to be constructive, creative, and respectful. If people are not behaving well, ask yourself what conditions are creating this.
- **Pre-meetings** with the different cohorts you're engaging with in your project are important as they give you an opportunity to strongly engage each cohort, do some myth-busting of the stereotypes each group has, manage expectations, inform participants about the project, answer any questions they may have, provide information to each cohort about the other. For example, the world that older cohorts grew up in is gone.
- Often the **journey** can be as, or more valuable than the end goal.
- Thinking broadly about partners and working with existing organisations is an opportunity to maximise shared resources and knowledge and build trust for future collaborations.
- Story telling is great to integrate into these activities as older people are often not listened to and younger people love stories. It generates engagement, interest, respect and can end in friendship.
- Caring for something that's living is a great aspect to include – it provides purpose and meaning in life.

## Evaluation, Communication & Funding Sources

- When evaluating you need to understand what variables you are measuring and collecting data on and why are you collecting that data. Does it reflect the needs of your project and the outcomes you have in mind? Does it allow you to measure change/impact?
- Baselines are essential they allow you to measure what's changed.
- Embedding ownership leads to sustainability and builds potential.
- The value and impact of your project needs to be communicated, often through the data you're measuring through evaluation. Remember that evaluation is about measuring the impact of your project, what has changed: attitudes, sense of wellbeing, understanding of others, friendships, trust...

## Wisdom from the groups

### Questions

#### *Group 1: Flourishing neighbourhoods:*

*Are there any suggestions for funding opportunities? Other partner suggestions?*

> Funding was addressed in Session 3

When looking for collaborators, go back to the needs you are addressing (ensure they are very specific rather than generic) and ask yourself what potential collaborators would find these needs aligned to theirs ie ask yourself 'what's in it for them?' This is a really important question!

For example, in your project case, I would refine the 'needs addressed' to be more specific then try to identify collaborators. Landscape gardeners, nurseries...

#### *Group 4: Pet Therapy:*

*Is this realistic? (from group members who don't work in the sector). We feel these sorts of programs would be best run if participant orgs were co-located, but what is the best way to support a program like this if there were two independent orgs? Sustainability needs to be considered.*

> Yes, it is easier if participant organisations are co-located or close, however there are often volunteers willing to provide transport. For example, in one neighbourhood, a group of residents realised that there was no convenient transport for older people to a community centre on the weekends, so they organised to borrow a minibus from an organisation that only used it during the week. Volunteer drivers were scheduled, and this became a huge success.

#### *Group 7: Community Education:*

*How do we make this truly multigenerational and a project that is not one-off learning?*

> Yes, there are challenges re schools as community hubs due to security issues. That being said, these can be overcome with a committed school principal. Again, it's about ensuring that the 'needs' being addressed are specific and strong enough to foster that commitment. Options are to run the program outdoors and involve U3A, schools, libraries, community centres, senior citizens centres

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and such organisations to ensure sustainability. Libraries are a great resource and are often very active in intergenerational work and well connected into the community.

## *Group 8: Walking meditation labyrinth:*

*What is the ideal timeframe? Ideally, we would love 12 months, but it can potentially take longer.*

> There is no ideal timeframe. It depends on so many of the other project variables such as: funding, collaborators, participants, location, staff... You will have noticed in the Westmead video that the project took some years to get organised. Twelve months is not unrealistic in that for a project to be well planned, there is always lead time then time to gauge interest, negotiate location, staffing, participants, materials and other details and draw all of the threads together.

## *Group 11: Companion chickens:*

*Has anyone done a hatching-program before and how did it work?*

> If you are really interested, you could contact the people in the UK who have run these. They are generally responsive to interest and are only an email away. There are many of these programs in the UK as they have been very successful.

## Reporting back

*What did you learn from working through this speculative project and what tips might you pass on to others intending to develop an intergenerational project? What obstacles came up?*

- **Plan plan plan!**
- Give yourself **time and don't be afraid to change the plan.**

## Aims/Scope

- What are we trying to achieve? Always put this at the heart of a project.
- It's important to be clear from the beginning what we would **like to achieve** and also, what the **limitations** are – and to communicate this.
- Clearly define **roles**.
- Ensure that you can respond to the question **'What's in it for them?'**. This will help communication with your collaborators, funders, participants, and the community.

## Logistics

- Choosing the right location / setting is important to make sure its **accessible** and comfortable.
- Mobility of the seniors and any other impairments.
- Working with children checks.
- Transportation.
- Getting buy in from the participants.
- The location and facility.

## Skills

- Having a strong team to work with, with voices and opinions heard and respected. Team members with different backgrounds and experience. Having a lead facilitator (and champion) on the project (delegating tasks, following up etc).

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- Being systematic about your approach - but organic with the development. Need both people who are detail orientated and big picture.
- Have a project officer to coordinate, build relationships and pull in the right stakeholders.

## Co-design

- What are the interests of your community? **Listening** and implementing what your community wants, rather than what you think they want?
- Intergenerational projects need time to involve the multiple groups that could be involved.
- Learning the value of **including everyone** from different groups. Importance of involvement of consultation, and collaboration. Every age group has something to offer.
- **Respecting** each other's ideas and inputs, ensure all participants feel included.
- Be **genuine** and listen.
- Allow enough time and expertise to ensure it is **not tokenistic**. Reflecting authentically with the needs and interests of all groups, to ensure we are not just limited to our own experiences.
- Invest in **co-design** but don't be tokenistic. Think about incorporating concrete outcomes, something participants can keep. Consulting and listening to cohorts involved is vital for the project to work. Talk to the groups about who they might like to work with.
- **Deliberative Engagement**: when you consult with and respond with the different stakeholders, over the continuum of the project.

## Sustainability

- Incorporate succession planning to help with **sustainability** - can your volunteers become leaders? Grow **sustainability** within the community.

## Activities

- **Images** are a good way to work with both younger and older people. They are engaging, fun and a good conversation starter.
- Keep it **simple and fun!** This is very important. If it is not fun, then you have to ask yourself what is in it for the participants?
- **Storytelling** is an engaging activity for young and old. The young are fascinated by anything new as they are starting out in life. Olders often find it hard to find anyone to listen to them as the 'working' generations are too busy working – meeting deadlines, developing careers and caring for families. This activity leverages the fact that young and olders have 'time'.
- It is often quite easy to **incorporate an activity** like a 'school project' or an indigenous theme into intergenerational projects. This adds an educational and/or **mind broadening dimension** and provides additional outcomes at little or no cost and can engage teachers/schools.

## Evaluation

- Don't be afraid to '**take a step backwards**'. This is the principle behind action research: when you receive a new piece of information, then take it into account before moving forward. Don't just blaze away with the initial idea if it is not going to get optimal results, as that is how things can go terribly wrong.
- Evaluation doesn't need to be complex. It is often subjective with these projects. Just ensure you **know what you are measuring and why**. For example, are you measuring change in attitude, learning, fitness levels, confidence, self-esteem, sense of wellbeing...? Participants will give honest feedback if they feel valued. Focus on the needs and end goal. Share what you learned with others.

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- Record the process, **capture the story** of the journey – this can be very powerful.
- Thinking about **how to share and present information effectively** (story book, videos) to also help with funding.
- Hard to measure benefits – if you haven't collected the right data.
- Come back together at the end to **reminisce** and consolidate lasting relationships in community.
- Using other groups and programs for baseline information. What to do and what not to do.
- **'Most Significant Change'** Concept can be used in narrating and recording stories, then sharing to a wider audience.



## Wisdom from the chat

- Landline on ABC shows some wonderful projects about Community of IP in rural and regional Australia in their Lifestories segment
- Zeta Burns, 93-year-old hillbilly singer from QLD, yodelling Queen, going strong
- Indigenous and CALD communities need to be included every step of the way
- Maroondah ran a 12-week pet therapy program in 2018 in partnership with Animal Aid and seven residential care facilities. Happy to share insights into this program, my email is richard.joseph@maroondah.vic.gov.au
- For CALD Communities, where the older generation is overseas, children in Australia lack the love of grandparents and extended family [takes a village to raise a child concept]. So, these IG Community projects are vital.

## Evaluation of the workshop

1. How much did you enjoy today's workshop?	Median rating 8.5/10
2. How much did this workshop improve your understanding of intergenerational practice?	7.9/10
3. After attending this workshop, do you feel more confident about designing, implementing, and evaluating intergenerational activities?	7.9/10
4. How likely are you to apply what you learned in your work?	8.4/10

### 5. Are you currently (or recently) involved with any intergenerational activities - if so, please share some information about them

- Year 10 IT students assisting older people with new tech devices, on an individual, interest/needs-basis. 8 weeks, 45minutes per week. Started as a practical program, but the

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outcomes were so much more than that - students gaining communication and work skills, interaction between generations, change of perceptions in both cohorts of the other, empathy and care displayed, friendships formed that went beyond the program.....I could go on and on.

- Revitalise Boronia intergenerational project. This project will be co-designed with community and is still in planning phase.
- Yes - I have launched an intergenerational program within the Maroondah Community: GenConnect An 8-week program bridging the gap between generations. Linking Croydon Child Care 0-5yr old's with older people in the community who maybe facing into loneliness or social isolation. We had run 3 weeks until the most recent lockdown but will pick up the program again when the restrictions ease.
- I work with local high school having on campus activities with seniors - such as games mornings / Christmas in July, / high tea for Mothers Day. The students also attended our community centre.
- As a volunteer, I am involved in a reading program at a local primary school.
- Yes prior to COVID we were involved in an intergenerational supported playgroup program, which started as a pilot 3 years ago however has continued to grow and develop with the members running the program with Yarra Ranges Council staff support.
- We have the following action in our healthy ageing action plan this year: Promote the benefits of intergenerational playgroups and support the establishment of new groups through the identification of available space and networking opportunities with other groups.
- Yes - currently working with Council Social Support Team and kindergartens on developing an intergenerational activity.
- Music across the ages, in Covid via zoom.
- In a very limited capacity in my early years' service- connecting senior citizens from families with other children in the groups.
- Pre-COVID we had an intergenerational music program.
- Yes, I am on the age-friendly advisory committee for Banyule Council and I am currently helping to organise intergenerational activities for when we reopen. Things outdoors like Tai Chi.
- Library storytimes and positive ageing activities through Council initiatives.
- Yes. Working on an intergenerational program for young people (12-18) and older people to connect. Idea is for a cooking program, IT support at local library, and community garden.
- Imbedded in the health plan. Working on developing projects with local secondary college.

## 6. Is there anything more you would like to learn about intergenerational practice?

- Would be great to hear of more local case studies and other successful intergenerational projects that we can learn from
- Examples of intergenerational activities with proven success for others to adopt/scale
- Would love to hear more examples of intergenerational activities on the three domains
- Any pairings that have worked particularly well. Innovative, sustainable and successful past programs
- How to engage more community groups and keep it sustainable
- Like more time to explore in depth
- Some clarity around when Working with Children's checks are required would be handy