



## **Intergenerational schemes**

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### **Report for the Reading Loneliness and Social Isolation Steering Group, July 2019**

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## Intergenerational schemes

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- Introduction

Intergenerational volunteering is when young and older people volunteer to get together, taking part in activities, programmes and projects. It can happen without the label being attached, but the key thing is the aim of bringing the generations together and anyone who has seen one of the many recent documentaries such as Channel 4's [Old People's Home for 4 year olds](#) or [Be More Us](#) from the Campaign to End Loneliness, cannot help be moved by the almost magical impact of intergenerational schemes.

- Local examples

#### *Age UK Berkshire – Wokingham Dementia Café*

The service is once monthly all day fun and interactive session for people with dementia and their carers in Wokingham. Mornings are spent doing some seated exercise then there are games, a hot lunch and then in the afternoon an activity of some kind- a singing group/ entertainer/ band. Every quarter the afternoon session is when the local kids come in from the primary group (age 6-8) and do some singing for the group, then sit with them and do games/ chats etc.

The feedback from the carers of people with dementia has been that they have really enjoyed this- many do not see their grandchildren regularly (if they have any) and really enjoy the fun and carefree attitude of the kids, one said 'they make me smile and laugh'. Many also say it reminds them of when they were young.

#### *Reading Community Learning Centre*

All of our classes are in essence intergenerational by default, we don't plan them that way they just happen. We run classes (from English through to sewing, beauty and employability) in a teaching environment which is inclusive for all regardless of age, religion, ethnicity. At present (for the spring term) the age demographics for our learners are:

16% are aged 19-30

45% of our learners are aged 31-40;

21% are aged 41-50

18% are 51 plus

The mixed age group in our classes is wonderful as they are all able to learn so much from each other's life experiences and also share so much that they have in common as women, regardless of where they are from, their religion or how old they are. They all want to learn English or a practical skill such as sewing or beauty and are therefore starting from the same base and learn together the new skills making friendships and supporting each other along the way whilst building up their confidence and reducing their isolation.

#### *Readibus and the National Citizenship Service*

Readibus and the NCS have worked together for a number of years. In 2015, they organised two inter-generational tea parties. The tea parties were an opportunity for some young people (aged 15-17) to volunteer and to meet users of the Readibus service after doing some fundraising in the town centre.

Twelve young people volunteered and fundraised for Readibus over three days in August 2015 and another twelve for one day in November 2015. They asked their family and friends to sponsor them in order to raise money for Readibus. They completed challenges, created their own games in order to foster empathy from members of the general public and raised £199, which was subsequently enhanced by a further £100 sent in by a Mr & Mrs Arnott who had been in the town centre at the time and who had met "two young folk presenting a case for Readibus".

#### *A2 Dominion*

A2 run mother and babies group sessions at the Charles Clore Activity Centre, 139 Appleford Road, Reading RG30 3NT (contact [activitiesteam@a2dominion.co.uk](mailto:activitiesteam@a2dominion.co.uk) or 0118 950 7914) on the first Friday of the month.

Sheila Osborn, Activities Manager says "It works brilliantly as the interaction between the children and older people is fabulous. We have made each session have a theme for example at Easter we made Easter cakes, and one month we are having messy play where we do hand and feet prints (only

Twice a year, they work with Bradfield college on a project where they do singing, crafts, gardening which is a session for 16 -18 year olds to interact with the older people. They also work closely with Cedar school in Aldermaston where they go and see their school play or they come and sing Christmas choirs and songs.

Feedback from local schemes include:

- It is resource-intensive for the community organisation, management time and communication with scheme coordinators should not be underestimated.
- One-off events are great but they don't enable a sustainable legacy. Activities that are regular (with the same cohort of participants) offer the opportunity to strengthen relationships, mutual learning and other longer-term benefits.
- All local schemes reported a lack of success with making videos. There have been technical quality issues and, as a result of participants moving on, photos and video files were lost, with their departure.
- The quality of volunteers and their managers has been variable and this has been exacerbated with the significant churn in staff and coordinators, which has often made follow-up work impossible.

- Schemes that have featured young people coming from places outside Reading have reduced opportunities to continue working with them.
- Some schemes have included a fundraising element which has benefitted the community group itself.
- Schemes can be transformative for young people in terms of developing new skills and confidence.
- Schemes encourage (and sometimes introduce the concept of) volunteering to young people.
- Schemes can be an eye-opener for all participants and foster greater understanding of and between different cultures.

- **Schemes in care homes**

Intergenerational care is thought to have officially started in 1976, when Shimada Masaharu merged a nursery school and care home in Tokyo with great success. This started a wave and soon more intergenerational care facilities opened in Japan and the US, with everyone in the know applauding the positive effects of the practice.

#### The experience of [Apples & Honey Nightingale](#), London

The advantages of intergenerational care can change from person to person. Judith Ish-Horowicz, founder and Principal of Apples & Honey Nightingale, a nursery located within Nightingale House- a Jewish care home in South London shared some of the advantages she has seen working first hand in *Nightingale*, along with personal examples of these advantages:

*“Many have not had children - they were growing up during the second world war when so many young men were killed, and they never found a life partner, had children and, of course, grand and great-grandchildren. Now they have the chance to become the 'grandma' they couldn't otherwise be.*

*They are often confined to the home because of poor mobility, health or cognitive impairment through dementia. This way, the home becomes a proper cross-generational community and they can feel as if they are still part of the real world.*

*It gives them a sense of purpose as the children relate to them without judgement and with ease and share their secrets. The residents have time to listen in a way that most people don't.*

*Many of the residents have said that they look forward to being with the children more than anything else and one actually said that, from being really depressed, it has given her a reason to live.”*

As well as the myriad of advantages to elderly residents, intergenerational care can also be incredibly beneficial to the children taking part which is something often overlooked in studies. Judith also shared some of the advantages she has experienced:

*“Many children do not have extended family living nearby. Some are international families whose grandparents live in USA or Australia etc. Some families have had to relocate for work, so they don't get the opportunity to mix regularly with elderly people who can give them that uncritical love of a grandparent.*

*Being with people who have lived so long and have so many stories to tell gives the children a sense of being a part of a long line of history, we use the expression 'L'dor vador' which is Hebrew for 'From generation to generation'. It gives them a sense of time and place that is important for feeling secure and safe.*

*The children seem to mature more quickly and to be more responsible. They are careful when moving around the residents and are actively concerned for their well-being. They benefit from the attention of people who have time to listen to them and to share stories."*

See also [Reading Healthwatch's Care Homes Report](#)

A new report from United for All Ages, [The next generation: how intergenerational interaction improves life chances for children and young people](#) identifies a range of additional benefits for young people:

- **Starting early**

Meaningful play and development of communication skills are linked to the early years curriculum, with positive impacts on children's wellbeing, language skills, social interaction and empathy.

- **Raising attainment**

Children involved in intergenerational projects have better reading and communications skills, are more school ready, and demonstrate more empathy.

- **Changing attitudes**

Ageism stops many people from maximising the opportunities of the ageing society, but intergenerational projects that build relationships between young and older people change attitudes towards ageing through shared experiences and bonding across generations.

- **Solving tough issues**

From improving health to tackling poverty, promoting social mobility to reducing crime and waste, intergenerational projects can help solve some of the issues facing the next generation.

- **Shaping the future**

Engaging the next generation of care and childcare students in intergenerational interaction through their college placements in with providers of care for older and young people is creating a lasting impact across three generations while promoting recruitment and retention for providers.

- **Success factors**

Many psychological research projects have examined the nature of social contact between different age groups, but evidence from these has never been synthesised to inform the design of intergenerational contact programmes. Consequently, practitioners have not benefited from optimal use of evidence which could reliably inform practice and policy. [Making Intergenerational Connections – an Evidence Review](#) from Age UK and Kent University considered a wide variety of schemes internationally, undertaken for Age UK in 2017, aims to address the evidence-practice gap.

The review revealed that particular aspects of intergenerational contact programmes affect their likelihood of success, and therefore should be considered when planning intergenerational programmes.

#### *Programme design and preparation*

- Use groups of equal numbers of people of different ages
- Locate the project in a neutral environment
- Provide frequent contact between participants
- Use a pre-intervention tool (extended or imagined contact)
- Use extended contact as a post programme intervention

#### *Content/activity design*

- Content/activity design - Choose an activity that requires cooperation between age groups and reduces competition
- Sharing goals between the two groups is one way of encouraging cooperation
- Design activities that encourage sharing of personal information
- Allow or encourage the groups to learn about each other as individuals

#### *Evaluation - When possible evaluate the programme*

- Identify the outcomes the programme aims to achieve
- Find or create measures to gauge the outcomes
- When possible use a control group
- When using a control group, randomly assign participants
- Treat participant feedback confidentially

Qualitative outcomes to measure can include: improved understanding the role and benefits of volunteering; improved understanding of other people's cultures, challenges and perspectives; skills learnt and developed; changes in attitude to and behaviours in one's own life.

#### *Features to avoid*

- Patronising communication towards any participant
- Communication from older adults that is overtly personal
- Unequal groups (either size, or status)
- Situations where individuals can avoid contact altogether
- Situations where one group is dominant over the other
- Environments unfamiliar to, or uncomfortable for, either group
- Situations or tasks that confirm negative stereotypes of either group
- Observers or onlookers who are not participating in the programme

#### *Points to consider*

- Stereotypes are often widely recognised across society and may be harder and slower to change than individuals' personal attitudes about older people and age.

- Short programmes can still be successful if carefully designed
- Aim to create intergenerational friendships
- Be aware of, and aim to reduce, anxieties about interacting with each other
- Be aware of, and aim to reduce, young adults' anxieties about their own ageing
- Care homes and nurseries coming together

- **Resources and ideas**

### **For older people**

Reading Voluntary Action updates their list of [Volunteering Opportunities](#) at least weekly.

Across the UK, if you are an older person looking to team up with a younger one contact [Volunteering Matters](#), who run a host of volunteering schemes, many working with young people, specifically for the over 50s.

Or search the major volunteering aggregators, like [Do-It](#), specifying helping young people in the advanced search options.

### **For young people**

Reading Voluntary Action updates their list of [Volunteering Opportunities](#) at least weekly.

Across the UK, if you are aged 6-25, girl or boy, you could join the [Scouts](#) and get involved in their [A Million Hands](#) project, working with older people with dementia. If you are a girl 5-25 you could check whether your local branch of [Girlguiding](#) is running any intergenerational schemes.

If you are really inspired then [O2 Think Big](#) provide grants for 13-25 year olds to create your own social action project. If you want to start something in your community you can apply for £300 to get you going.

Another avenue to explore for 15-17 year olds is the [National Citizenship Service](#).

If you are a young person over 18 looking to team up with an older one contact [Age UK](#), or pledge your time with Radio 1's [#1millionhours](#) project.

If you are over 18 and want to get fit or enjoy running, you could even run to visit an older person who can act as your personal coach with [Good Gym](#). Or if that's your idea of hell you can do befriending work from the comfort of your own home by being a telephone friend with [The Silver Line](#).

And for general links on youth volunteering for 10-20 year olds check out the [#iwill](#) campaign's [resource page](#). They want to make social action part of life for young people. Don't forget too, you can speak to your school about setting up an intergenerational project - there are useful links for them below.

Writing Back is a volunteer, letter-writing project that matches University of Leeds students as pen pals with older, Yorkshire residents. [Leeds Uni Writing Back](#)

National Citizens Service hosted by The Challenge invites local organisations to inspire the next generation, and get involved with their summer programme this year. They have a number of partnerships that involve working alongside teams of young people aged 16-17, along with DBS-cleared NCS staff. [NCS The Challenge](#)

### **For schools**

[Reading Voluntary Action](#) is always keen to hear from schools wanting to develop new volunteering projects.

[Envision](#) also works with secondary schools to support 16-17 year olds through their social action programmes.

Young Citizens has [resources](#) for primary and secondary schools who want to get their pupils involved in social action.

[Youth and Philanthropy Initiative](#) (YPI) run a whole-year-group philanthropy programme where one team from each school wins £3,000 to direct to their favourite local charity

[First Give](#) runs a similar scheme, providing free resources for a secondary school year group who can then compete for grant money for a charity.

[UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award](#) is a whole-school approach to getting young people out to change the world for the better.

If you were so inspired by the BBC series [Old School with the Hairy Bikers](#) that you'd be interested in setting up a similar project of your own, then download this [PDF](#) to find out how The Oxford Academy did it.

### **For local voluntary and community organisations (VCOs)**

Reading Voluntary Action's [Ready Friends project](#) aims to support local VCOs to start up and develop projects aimed at reducing social isolation and loneliness and would be keen to help develop intergenerational projects involving volunteers and VCOs – RVA can help with everything from developing an idea and finding volunteers and funding to setting up the first event and demonstrating its impact on people's lives.

The Ready Friends webpages include sections listing the [main befriending organisations](#) and the current [volunteer befriending opportunities](#) in Reading, which anyone from age 18 can contact to talk about joining as a volunteer befriender.

The Ready Friends Toolkit was launched in May 2019 to support local people wanting to take action on loneliness and contains information, ideas and resources. [The online toolkit](#) is complemented by an [8-page booklet](#), which you can share, download and print off.

Reading Borough Council's [Reading Services Guide](#) has information on local organisations and events, many of which will include opportunities for intergenerational activity.



- **Conclusion**

The substantial evidence base and resources available suggest that intergenerational activity impacts on all those involved and that it's legacy can be profound and long-lasting, with significant benefits for the individual and society as a whole.

Reading boasts a number of intergenerational schemes at any one time, but there is always room for more, and many of them are short-term funded. It is likely that potential funders would respond well to applications for new projects, given the national coverage some existing schemes have enjoyed.

Local strategic and service planners in the statutory, commercial and community sectors would do well to consider an intergenerational angle and partnerships in new developments, including town planning, housing, health, children's and adult social care.

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