
**EVALUATION OF THE
LINKING GENERATIONS NORTHERN IRELAND
PROGRAMME 2009 - 2011**



Overview of Evaluation Findings

Foreword



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This overview of the evaluation reflects the extent and success of the initiatives undertaken and supported by Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI) between August 2009 and July 2011. It demonstrates that the focus of the projects and activities was very broad, as evidenced by the wide range of organisations and individuals participating. It also illustrates the contribution intergenerational practice can make to building and sustaining vibrant, cohesive communities.

This in turn reflects LGNI's success in convincing people and organisations in the community sector, NGOs and education that intergenerational practice has a part to play in the delivery of their work programmes and strategies. Evidence gathered in the course of the evaluation process suggests that those who have become convinced of the value of working intergenerationally wish to participate in its continued development.

The publication of the evaluation is timely. There is increasing interest in the nature of the relationships between younger and older people. This has centered round the equitable distribution of resources and services at a time of economic retrenchment and of the responsibility generations have towards one another.

This increasing interest is also reflected in the decision by the European Union to designate 2012 as the 'Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity'.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Sarah Cherry and Juniper Consulting for producing an extremely rigorous report, which lends real credence to the achievements of LGNI and to congratulate the LGNI staff on this substantiation of their achievements.

Alan Hatton-Yeo



Introduction

Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI) is the intergenerational initiative managed by the Beth Johnson Foundation which creates opportunities for older and younger people to meet and learn from each other. It promotes the development of intergenerational practice across Northern Ireland by:

- *Raising awareness of the nature and purpose of intergenerational practice;*
- *Managing small grant schemes;*
- *Providing training and support;*
- *Working in partnership with organisations to promote intergenerational practice; and*
- *Providing advice and guidance.*

In 2010 Juniper Consulting was appointed to undertake the evaluation of LGNI. The aim was to measure the success of the programme, the impact it had, identify areas requiring improvement and where objectives were not met. The evaluation covered the period from 2009 to July 2011. The key findings are summarised on the following pages.



Information and Training Seminars

LGNI delivered 13 information and training seminars between November 2009 and February 2011. The seminars were free of charge and aimed to:

- Raise awareness of intergenerational practice and LGNI;
- Demonstrate the wide range of possibilities afforded by intergenerational initiatives;
- Provide basic guidance and training on establishing and running intergenerational projects; and
- Explore possible funding streams for intergenerational initiatives.

The seminars were held at various locations across Northern Ireland and were attended by over 170 people. They attracted a broad range of organisations reflecting the perceived relevance of intergenerational practice to the work of a wide range of organisations and increasing levels of interest across urban and rural areas.

The evaluation forms completed by attendees indicated high levels of satisfaction with the facilitators and the content of the seminars. A large number of attendees also expressed an interest in attending further events and training. The evaluation findings indicated that the seminars successfully raised awareness and understanding of intergenerational practice. Seminar attendees also recognised the benefits of intergenerational practice in addressing issues such as social exclusion, health and wellbeing and fear of crime. The role of the LGNI Development Worker in assisting projects was recognised and valued.

- **13 seminars, 170 attendees**
- **Attended by a range of organisations**
- **Successfully raised awareness and understanding of intergenerational practice**
- **Benefits of intergenerational practice recognised**
- **High levels of satisfaction with the seminars (90%+)**

Feedback comments:

“The information I received was enough. The session was varied and the pace perfect. I also enjoyed seeing the DVDs from projects and the input/ideas from the other participants”

“Very practical and relevant and linked each individual organisation’s work to intergenerational activity”

“Within a fairly short time-frame we covered a lot of ideas and had good opportunity to share experiences”

Small Grants Schemes

LGNI operated three small grants schemes; a regional scheme which was open to all groups across Northern Ireland, and schemes for the Ards and Belfast areas. Fifty projects were funded over two years involving over 1,400 participants. The projects took place in a range of settings (e.g. schools, residential/nursing homes, older people's groups, community associations) and included very diverse groups of participants (e.g. older people with dementia, younger and older people with social and emotional difficulties, health problems and learning difficulties).

Participants and project leaders were asked to complete evaluation forms at the end of the projects. The vast majority of participants and project leaders were very positive about their experiences.

They agreed that:

- The project helped them to learn new things, increase their confidence, and appreciate that they have things in common;
- The project increased their respect for older/younger people and they are now more likely to engage with them;
- Older participants expressed enhanced feelings of well-being, a decrease in loneliness and increased feelings of safety around young people;
- They enjoyed being together and participants got to know each other during the project.

- **3 small grants schemes – Regional, Ards, Belfast**
- **50 projects funded**
- **1,400 participants**
- **Range of benefits for participants – increased confidence, increased respect, improved health and well-being, increased feelings of safety around young people**
- **Projects helped younger and older people get to know each other better**

LGNI Regional Small Grants Scheme

Older participants' reflections:

"None of us are as bad as we think once we get to know each other – this project has shown me that. Great fun."

"The young people were more obliging than I thought they would be and took time to listen to my point of view."

"It was something different than I'd ever done before. It was great to see the young people so interested in the project."

Younger participants' reflections:

"I now have more respect for older people and have learnt that I have things in common with them."

"I liked the good banter and chat we had with the older people and that they respect us more."

"I hope that when I'm an elderly person there will be a project where children can come and hear my stories. I will talk about this!"

Project leaders also identified a range of benefits for their organisations, for example: increased knowledge of intergenerational practice and its benefits, improved relationships with participants and more knowledge about the issues facing older and younger people.

Project leaders' reflections:

"As a social work student on the project it was great to see this happening. I feel that the project broadened the young people's support networks."

"Excellent partnership working, resident and their support child became 'friends' and had great respect for each other. The close relationships built between children and residents were rewarding to watch. These were genuine, respectful and enjoyable experiences"

"One of the most worthwhile and fulfilling activities we have ever carried out as a school group"

The role of the LGNI Development Worker in assisting projects was acknowledged to be of great value and helped to enhance projects. There was strong interest in undertaking further intergenerational projects and several of the groups have continued to meet and develop further involving younger and older people.

Other Activities

A broad range of other activities have been undertaken by LGNI in order to promote and develop intergenerational practice in Northern Ireland. These have included attending events and conferences, organising events, holding meetings with politicians and key stakeholders, giving a range of presentations and talks, and facilitating workshops. Evaluation findings suggest that LGNI has succeeded in increasing awareness and understanding of intergenerational practice in certain areas, however there is more work to be done.



Relations between the Generations

During Age Awareness week 2010 LGNI organised a discussion between younger and older people in the Long Gallery in Parliament Buildings to examine “Relations between the Generations.” Some sixty participants debated a range of issues producing an assessment of positive and negative experiences and made suggestions regarding how young and old can work together to the benefit of both groups.

Debate

The Northern Ireland Youth Forum approached LGNI for support in organising an intergenerational debate in the Senate Chambers in Parliament Buildings in November 2009. The motion was that “Life today is easier than it was 50 years ago.” After formal speeches the audience had their say and when it came to the vote the decision way that, yes it is easier now!



North / South Events

In May 2011 in partnership with Youthnet LGNI organised a north/south conversation on intergenerational practice at Dundalk Institute of Technology. The aim was to share learning and practice across the island, to consider opportunities for cooperation, raise the profile of intergenerational practice and assess interest in developing an all Ireland network. One practical outcome was the decision to distribute a newsletter. The first “Intergenerational Ireland” was sent in October 2011 and the aim is to make this a quarterly publication.



Youth Awards

The Northern Ireland Youth Awards is a prestigious event in the calendar for the youth sector in Northern Ireland. The Awards ceremony is hosted annually by the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI) and recognises achievements by young people and youth workers across Northern Ireland. LGNI were delighted that the YCNI chose to introduce a new award category for 'intergenerational' in 2010 and that LGNI were involved in the assessment and presentation of this Award.



NICCY and Older People's Advocate

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) Patricia Lewsley and the Older People's Advocate (OPA) Joan Harbison organised two events to promote intergenerational practice. LGNI facilitated contact with groups funded through the small grants programme and they showcased their projects at these events. Recognition of the value of intergenerational practice by NICCY and OPA represented an important step forward in raising the profile of the work.

Washington DC

Vicki Titterington LGNI Coordinator attended the Generations United International Intergenerational Conference 'Rethinking and Revitalizing Intergenerational Connections' held in Washington DC in July with colleagues from the Beth Johnson Foundation. At the conference Vicki facilitated a roundtable discussion on the work of LGNI and fulfilled a required element of her Intergenerational Specialist Certificate with the University of Pittsburgh.



Showcase Events

LGNI held two showcase events in 2011 to celebrate the success of the work delivered through both the Regional and Ards small grants schemes. The events were held in Mossley Mill Newtownabbey and the Queens Hall Newtownards and attended by approximately 250 people in total. The events offered an opportunity for projects to showcase their work and to have this recognised. Jim Shannon MP and Patricia Lewsley (NICCY) both provided support by attending.



The Future for LGNI

The evaluation concluded that LGNI had met all the targets set out for the programme between 2009 and 2011.

A range of recommendations on the future direction of LGNI were presented for consideration in the evaluation report. These related to the continued development of the Information and Training seminars and the small grants programmes. Additional recommendations were made in relation to advocating for and promoting intergenerational practice, communications and future organisational development.

The Atlantic Philanthropies has recently awarded LGNI a second grant through The Beth Johnson Foundation for the period from August 2011 to 2014. This grant will enable LGNI to consolidate and build on the success of the past few years, provide more training seminars and small grants programmes, develop a number of specific targeted programmes, and to continue to raise awareness of and advocate for intergenerational practice in Northern Ireland.

The focus of the work in this new phase will include:

- Social Justice from an Intergenerational perspective
- Generational Equity
- Age Friendly Communities
- Safer shared communities
- Intergenerational aspects of peace building.





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