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**Intergenerational practice: Active participation
across the generations**

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been commissioned to give an overview of intergenerational practice within the context of the UK and more particularly England at the current time, to examine its relevance and potential effectiveness to address key current policy concerns and to make recommendations as to the structures necessary to support its future development.

The literature review underpinning this report has focussed almost exclusively on material from the United Kingdom. There is a wide range of literature now available, particularly from North America but also increasingly from Germany, the Netherlands, France and Spain but these countries have different cultures and emphasis on intergenerational relationships. These can be learnt from, but not automatically assumed to be culturally transmittable. This paper seeks to detail the state of intergenerational practice as it is now in the UK.

For the purpose of this paper we will, however, use the commonly agreed (1) international definition of intergenerational programmes:

“Intergenerational programmes are vehicles for the purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations for individual and social benefits.”

INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMMES – WHERE ARE WE NOW?

In 2002, the Beth Johnson Foundation commissioned a review of intergenerational practice across the UK (2). Over 60 projects were identified and analysed and from this a number of key principles were identified that underpinned successful intergenerational projects. These principles include:

- sound project planning and management
- partnership working
- developing the capacity of communities
- promoting social inclusion
- capturing the commitment of champions
- demonstrating the benefits to participants
- the importance of preparing the generations
- challenging stereotypes and ageism.

The review also highlighted that while there was a gathering interest in intergenerational practice there was a lack of written documentation and evidence and in particular there was limited academic literature except in the field of family related intergenerational work.

In 2005, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) commissioned a report on ‘Intergenerational Relations and Practice in the Development of Sustainable Communities’ (5). This showed that within the UK, with the exception of the Centre for Intergenerational Practice, there was still a lack of published material but there was clear evidence of a significant growth in interest in intergenerational practice and

many more projects producing reports and evaluation studies shared particularly through the medium of the internet.

Such has been the growth in interest in intergenerational programmes that the ODPM report (5) warned, quite properly, against people seeing intergenerational practice as the answer to all of society's problems. It did identify that intergenerational practice had a positive contribution to make to regeneration and renewal (6), providing structures to promote participation and citizenship (7) and the need to promote a culture of mutual respect between the generations (7) (8) (9).

In seeking to understand intergenerational programmes it is important to recognise that these are as diverse as the generations themselves. What emerges from reviewing the published reports is that 'thinking intergenerationally' provides a framework or approach to many of the common circumstances that people are seeking to change in their own communities.

One area of significant development has been in the number of older people volunteering because they want to help the young. This can range from teaching English as a second language to young immigrants (10), mentoring young mothers, pupils who have been excluded, and young offenders (11), the Age Concern Kingston-upon-Thames Learning Mentor Project (12) and the many projects run across the UK by RSVP helping with reading, skills exchange and mentoring. In other areas older people can become an essential resource to the curriculum (13).

Equally, as citizenship has become more important many young people are volunteering to help older people. Young volunteers from Sixty Plus (14) teach IT skills, read and befriend people with visual impairment and teach English as a second language.

However, some of the most important applications of intergenerational practice are where it is contributing to citizenship, community cohesion and challenging intergenerational mistrust and lack of mutual respect and contact. In Leeds the university have run community action projects between local older residents and students to tackle conflict in their shared communities (15).

Community Action @ Leeds Met (CALM)

CALM is a student led, social action volunteer project at Leeds Metropolitan University (LMU). It is independent of LMU and was established in 2001 to dispel the typical student stereotype. The LS6 project came about as a response to the problems that occur due to the large transient student population in the LS6 area. The aim is to build positive relationships between the students and local residents which will encourage tolerance and understanding. Consulting with the community ensures that any project responds to local needs.

Projects have included: Mural painting, DJ workshops, school gardening, sports coaching, graffiti clean-ups, recycling and environmental tidy ups. Student and resident feedback is positive and volunteering helps the students become part of the local community.

In New Earswick, York, the use of art techniques has been pioneered as a tool to promote intergenerational dialogue as part of a programme funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. An evaluation report is to be published by Staffordshire University on the programme. In Tower Hamlets, 'Magic Me' has been working for over 15 years on pioneering intergenerational projects to promote community cohesion that bring together the generations from different ethnic backgrounds (16) (17).

Magic Me

Magic Me projects bring together young people aged nine plus and older people for mutual benefit and enjoyment. They work with older people through over 50's Clubs and pensioners' groups, sheltered housing schemes and community organisations, nursing homes and day centres. Local school students or other young people are partnered with the older adults and the mixed group come together regularly, usually on a weekly basis.

To enable a real relationship to develop each young person is partnered and works with a regular older partner. The activities are designed to stimulate both age groups, fostering conversation and an exchange of ideas.

Preparing for intergenerational work

Preparation is essential for all participants. Before the first intergenerational meeting, young people take part in training sessions that mix role-play and discussion to explore their fears and preconceptions about older people. They may also practice techniques to use when meeting adults who have hearing or speech impairments, or dementia.

Preparation with the older adults is just as important. Project artists, in liaison with group leaders and activities organisers, meet older people individually or in groups, explaining the aims of Magic Me, and inviting their participation and ideas. Adults are encouraged to air their fears or feelings about young people and their expectations of the project.

People of different cultures

The changing population patterns of London's east end means Magic Me projects often link people from different cultures and contrasting backgrounds. Project artists and managers are given training and support to carry out this invaluable yet often challenging work.

The work of West Walker Primary School, Newcastle (18) regenerating a failing school in a very disadvantaged area by a multi-agency approach to engagement to raise the standards of education through cross generational community involvement to raise self esteem is a powerful example of how effective inclusive approaches can be.

West Walker Primary School

When Norma Redfearn took over the headship of the school in 1986 she found an atmosphere of hopelessness born out of the chronic unemployment in the area:

75 per cent of the pupils were on free school meals and 20 per cent did not attend school. Mrs Redfearn worked with parents, families and children to restore pride and dignity, building on existing talent and in partnership with outside agencies. School-based projects were created e.g. literacy and numeracy (before the national initiatives), a breakfast club, business partnership schemes to develop good timekeeping, honouring homework deadlines etc. She arranged mentoring schemes with workers in local industries and involved architects in joint discussions with parents and children to make a playpark.

For adults, a community wing was set up in a disused part of the school, now known as the West Walker Community Association. From there, multi-agency services offer advice, information and advocacy. There are adult education courses, a crèche, a cafe, computer room, a group for socially isolated women which concentrates on assertiveness skills and confidence building, a group for parents of children with special needs and a full-time social services family support worker:

"We're talking about a local community where people wouldn't cross the main road. It's important that things are offered here, in their own neighbourhood...I'm determined to give these children a sense of success so that they can go out feeling good when they start secondary school."

Inevitably, confidence and SATS levels have soared at the school.

Similarly the 'Two Generations' project to address concerns over community safety in Derbyshire (19) has demonstrated the importance of cross-generational approaches to building better connected projects.

Two Generations

The 'Two Generations' project was designed to tackle anti social behaviour and took place in the Bolsover villages of Doe Lea and Bramley Vale, commencing in August 2005 and reaching a conclusion with a celebration event in October. The project was managed by a multi-agency steering group and involved a group of young people working together with older people to consider stereotypes, discuss issues in the villages and photograph problem areas. They also planned an environmental improvement, choosing to improve the area around the river in Doe Lea with the work undertaken including cutting back the long grass, clearing the river, planting trees and placing tables and benches along the riverbank. The group chose to continue working on environmental improvements in the local area once the Two Generations project came to end, renaming themselves the Doe Lea Valley Community Partnership.

The success of the project was recorded against the following outcome targets:

- 20 per cent reduction in calls for service relating to anti social behaviour to CAN Rangers and police in Bramley Vale/Doe Lea area based on data from April 2005 to December 2005 compared to the same period in 2004.
- Change in perceptions and attitudes of young and older people towards each other.
- Improved community cohesion.
- Ongoing inter-generational projects in the Bramley Vale and Doe Lea area.
- Inclusion of both groups in future mainstream local activities eg local youth group, lunch club etc.

Over the past few years there has been an explosion of intergenerational projects across England. From 'Active Ageing and Community Safety' projects in schools (20) to projects to promote cultural understanding such as 'A Journey through our History' by the Jamaica Society in Leeds (21), and award-winning citizenship initiatives with the sixth form at Gladys Aylward School working alongside local older people. Projects such as Age Exchange 'A Time to Share' to capture the changing history of an area to ensure people don't lose their past and understand where their roots lie (22). The diversity and richness of intergenerational work has flourished in recent years and in this lays both its strength and its weakness.

Post-16 Citizenship activity at Gladys Aylward School

The intergenerational citizenship module was introduced into the sixth form in 2002. It relies on a close partnership between the school and the local branch of Age Concern. Together the ex-deputy head of the school and the local Age Concern coordinator devised a programme involving all 120 Year 12 students and about 30 older volunteers from the community. The programme takes six weeks and runs during Core Time in the second half of the autumn term of Year 12. It involves discussion of local issues in small groups, following a keynote input by a local expert.

The project involving the older volunteers came about as a result of health targets required for neighbourhood renewal funding. The local coordinator for Age Concern recognised the power of citizenship education in schools as a way of breaking down barriers between the old and the young, and in particular, diffusing the fear that many older people have of the young. She was involved in the initial plans for the project and for recruiting, training and supporting the volunteers.

Every Monday morning for six weeks after the autumn half term break, the whole of Year 12 gather for an input on a series of issues identified through discussion with students at the start of the academic year. The topics are of local interest and are introduced by a local expert, such as a Councilor, an MP or a charity worker. The inputs are followed by structured discussions, facilitated by a member of staff and involving small mixed groups of older volunteers and students.

Community placements

In the spring term, students are offered the opportunity to take up community placements and/or to further develop some action around one of the issues that has particularly interested them. Youth Action Volunteers for Enfield (YAVE) find placements and supervise students while they are out of school. Some of the placements are facilitated by the older volunteers.

PROJECTS NOT SYSTEMS

'... in the Netherlands there is no lack of interesting intergenerational initiatives. But in spite of enthusiastic reactions of participants and project managers, there are still too many one time, ad hoc projects, at both the local and regional levels organised by numerous organisations that have hardly any contact with each other.' Penninx (8)

Although there has been no rigorous research to date in the UK on the long term impact of intergenerational programmes the documentation and evaluation undertaken to date illustrate that intergenerational practice does have a significant impact on participants and their attitudes to each other. It expands the practice of community development to become more inclusive and positively challenge ageism. It creates valuable roles for people as volunteers, activists and citizens. It provides a mechanism for people to connect across the generations to build better mutual respect and understanding.

Within the UK we have also been fortunate that the growth of intergenerational practice in recent years has been supported and encouraged by some complementary development of infrastructure. The Age Concern Intergenerational Network has provided training, advice and guidance to its members. The Centre for Intergenerational Practice (CIP) has developed to become a nationally and internationally regarded centre of expertise (23, 24) providing training, resources and website, newsletters, publications, conferences and service directories.

CIP now manages a second centre in Wales directly funded by the Welsh Assembly as part of their strategy for older people and supports the newly launched Northern Ireland Centre for Intergenerational Practice. CIP hosts the International Consortium for Intergenerational Programmes and with eight European partners has recently achieved funding through the SOCRATES programme for a two year European study of Intergenerational Learning across Europe. In terms of driving up quality and understanding it has piloted an Approved Provider Standard which is to be fully launched with support from the Ellerman Foundation in the first quarter of 2007. CIP, in partnership with the University of Lampeter, will be launching an accredited intergenerational distance learning course in 2007.

But even given this existing infrastructure we need to actively face the same challenge as the Netherlands. How to move from projects that are better supported and disseminated but still disconnected to a strategic framework to promote the systematic understanding and development of intergenerational practice within an overall framework of providing community cohesion, neighbourhood renewal, citizenship and active participation?

There is now a growing evidence base, primarily from practitioners of the potential of intergenerational approaches. The challenge is to describe and implement a strategic framework to support the systematic and coherent development of intergenerational programmes whilst rooting these in the needs and aspirations of local communities. In her report for the ODPM, Pain (5) states in her recommendations:

'The goal to work towards is that intergenerational practice becomes an established and accepted part of regeneration and renewal projects.'

And later:

'The development of social capital, participation and local action are complex processes and to foster and support them. Intergenerational programmes will ideally be long term, sustainable and involve local people genuinely at every stage. Furthermore intergenerational practice should adhere to good practice in participatory community development.'

The IPPR (25) in their forthcoming report 'Freedom's Orphans: Raising Youth in a Changing World' state that changes in the family, local communities and the economy have combined to cause deep inequalities in the transition to modern adult life and leave increasingly larger numbers of young people incapable of growing up safely and successfully.

The recently published government white paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' (26) describe the importance of enabling citizens and communities to play their part. The Russell Commission (27) and Opportunity Age (28) also promote the importance of the young and old as active engaged citizens participating in their communities.

What, therefore, needs to be put in place to enable intergenerational practice to be a strategic agent of change to provide a clear role for the young and old to support each other to be successful, build greater respect and understanding and play an active role in neighbourhood renewal and building healthy communities?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Systems need to be established to draw together current intergenerational practice to develop guidance materials, resources and evidence to support communities, practitioners, funders and policy makers. It is recommended that models used to develop existing infrastructure organisations such as the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation and Volunteering England should inform this development and it should ideally be grounded in existing structures such as the Centre for Intergenerational Practice, as appropriate.
- A number of specific demonstration projects need to be commissioned to develop learning and understanding around underdeveloped or priority areas of intergenerational work. As learning models these should be undertaken with the active involvement of the commissioning body and the outcomes disseminated widely. Projects to be commissioned should include:
 - Intergenerational community participation by hard to reach groups.
 - Intergenerational projects to develop safer communities.
 - Whole neighbourhood approaches to connecting the young and old to establish contact and better understanding.

- Intergenerational voluntary activity particularly by young people.
- Evaluation toolkits and training should be developed and implemented with projects to enable them to more critically assess the impact of their programmes.
- The current Approved Provider Standard for intergenerational projects (29) should be aligned with the standard provided by the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation to provide an integrated quality system.
- Training and resources should be developed for community workers, youth workers and project workers with older people on ageism and inclusion to give them the skills and confidence to engage with a wider cross-sector of their communities.
- Local authorities should be given support and advice to develop intergenerational strategies across their policy responsibilities to improve impact and efficient use of budgets such as the programmes being piloted by authorities such as Worcestershire (30) and Derbyshire (31).
- A systematic exploration needs to be undertaken of current policy and how intergenerational approaches could be used, where appropriate, to improve implementation and impact.
- Regional networks need to be established and resourced to enable practitioners and policy makers to share learning and support and to locate intergenerational practice within regional plans.
- Guidance needs to be developed on CRB checks and risk assessment to enable projects to be both safe and responsive. There is some concern at the moment that an excessive insistence by schools and education authorities on police checks could become a barrier to community activities involving supervised groups of young and old people (32).
- Intergenerational practice should not be promoted as the answer to everything but instead seen as challenging ageism and placing value on the role and importance of younger and older people in promoting active citizenship and healthier, better connected neighbourhoods.

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