

Having a champion for intergenerational work, who could drive it forward strategically and make others aware of the benefits, was said to be beneficial. The support and commitment of partners allows intergenerational coordinators to draw on their expertise and can help ensure sustainability.

It is important to make sure appropriate funding is available and to be realistic about what can be achieved. Effective strategic planning, the involvement of partners and the mainstreaming of intergenerational activity were said to be critical for sustainability.

Concluding comments

The intergenerational projects selected for this study did not appear to include participants with entrenched negative views about younger or older generations, yet there was still evidence of these activities having an impact on the perceptions of participants despite their positive outlook.

Intergenerational work is complex and not easy to get right. Activities involving young and older people require careful planning and supervision to be successful. The preparation required should not be underestimated.

Many of the key factors for success were those that one would typically expect for any participatory project. Given the potential for reinforcing negative stereotypes, they become particularly crucial in this type of work.

It is vital that staff facilitating intergenerational work have the skills and confidence to deal with the unexpected and be able to react appropriately when issues arise.

Intergenerational work would often not be possible without support from external organisations that have the time and resources to establish and deliver activities. Having an intergenerational officer at LA level to drive this work forward is beneficial.



research summary intergenerational practice: outcomes and effectiveness

Introduction

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), with the National Youth Agency (NYA) and National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), was commissioned by the Local Government Association (LGA) to examine what works in intergenerational practice. Intergenerational practice refers to activities that bring together older adults and young people or children. Five intergenerational projects were selected to cover a range of foci and target groups. Proformas, semi-structured interviews and discussion groups were completed with younger and older participants, providers and relevant local authority (LA) staff. Baseline and endpoint data were collected from three projects. Only endpoint and retrospective data could be gathered from two other projects. Project materials and internal evaluation documents were also collected, where available, and have been included in the analysis.



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Five approaches to intergenerational practice

The five projects focused on football, arts, knife crime, living history and personal and social education. Two were located in schools, one in a health centre, one in a youth drop-in centre, and one at a football club.

Staff with experience of delivering intergenerational work coordinated all of the projects. Two included specific input from a LA intergenerational officer. Three of the projects were new activities, whilst the remaining two were continuing projects.

Each of the five case-study projects had the global aim of improving perceptions and challenging stereotypes of both young and older people. They also had various project-specific aims.

Two of the projects targeted young people who were hard to reach. One targeted a whole year group (year 8). One targeted gifted and talented pupils and another those with an aptitude or interest in art.

In both of these, the schools were specifically targeted in order to bring community groups together.

The majority of older people were over 60. They were recruited in a variety of ways, usually via the project coordinator who either worked for an older people's organisation or had links to older people.

There were variations in the amount and nature of training and preparation participants received prior to engaging in the intergenerational work. In three out of the five projects, sessions were held with the young and older people separately before the two groups were joined together. Much of the 'formal' training was given to the older people.

Nearly all of the projects began with 'getting to know you' activities and some developed codes of conduct with participants. The participants often determined the precise nature of the activities.

On some occasions young people worked with older people on a one-to-one basis, on others they worked in small groups. All but one of the projects, which was run over the course of a whole week, were delivered via weekly sessions held over an average of ten weeks.

Outcomes of intergenerational practice

Prior to undertaking the intergenerational activities the views of young and older people about each other were broadly positive. There was recognition that, although there are stereotypical views, not all people conform to them. This may reflect the type of participants who are likely to volunteer for intergenerational projects and the fact that some had engaged in similar activities beforehand.

The most fundamental outcome for all participants is that they enjoy the activities. They also develop friendships, gain increased understanding of the other age group, gain confidence and develop new skills.

Specific outcomes for young people include positive benefits for academic work and improved relationships with grandparents, as well as small positive increases in their enjoyment of learning, ability to make friends and their participation in community activities.

Additional outcomes experienced by older people relate to their well-being. They include a reduction in isolation, sense of satisfaction and pride when acknowledged by young people in the local community, and increased opportunities for involvement in other activities.

More general outcomes include greater community cohesion. Some young and older people said they are more likely to speak to older or younger people they have not met before, as they understand the other generation better and are more confident in interacting with them.

There is some evidence of potential negative outcomes, if stereotypes are reinforced through activities.

Implementing intergenerational practice: issues and challenges

Challenges centred on recruitment and selection of both young and older people, the activities provided, the organisation and logistics of intergenerational work, and working with partner agencies.

It can be difficult to engage sufficient numbers of older people for intergenerational practice to be effective.

A range of reasons is cited, including older people lacking confidence and having concerns about working with young people.

There were mixed views about the appropriateness of this type of work for different groups of young people. It was suggested that working with hard-to-reach groups, including NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and young people exhibiting challenging behaviour, for example, could be more difficult.

Young and older people were said to have different needs and different motives for attending intergenerational projects. It can, therefore, be a challenge to ensure activities are appropriate and maintain the interest of both groups.

The organisation and logistics of intergenerational work can be challenging. Finding a suitable time and venue for young and older people to work together can be problematic. It can also be difficult to ensure the commitment of partners, and existing pressures of work can hinder the establishment and delivery of intergenerational work. As gatekeepers to participants, partners may not prioritise or promote intergenerational work effectively.

Key features of effective intergenerational practice

The ratio of young people to older people was identified as a key factor for achieving successful outcomes. One-to-one work was preferable. The selection of the older people, ensuring a consistent group of participants and matching older people with young people with similar interests, is also considered important.

Understanding the needs of participants is critical to success. Providers advocate preparation sessions with individual groups before embarking on intergenerational work. Activities need to be tailored to the needs of both groups. Having a mutual or shared interest was said to be critical to success. Involving participants in the planning and design of activities and the use of interactive activities were also highlighted as critical.

The skills of those delivering projects were also identified as important for success. It is important to have a 'hands-on' approach to challenging misconceptions and to agree a code of conduct from the outset. These factors are critical for avoiding the reinforcement of negative stereotypes.

Planning and organisation were said to be crucial elements of intergenerational work. The length and duration of sessions, finding a suitable venue and providing transport for older people were cited as issues.