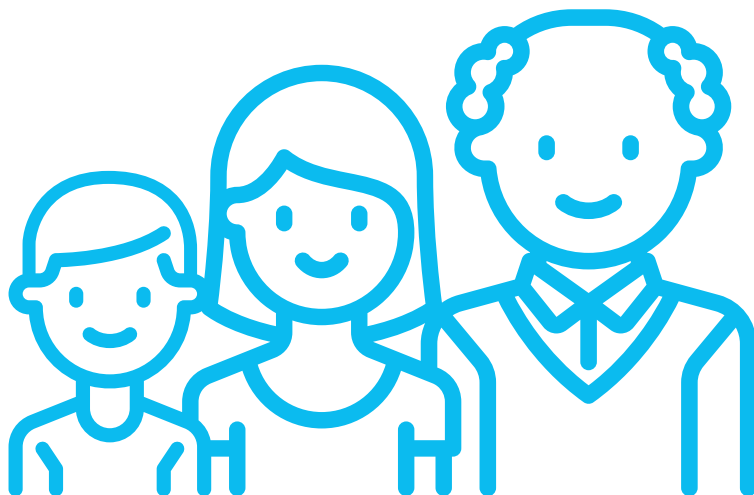


A Guide For Older People



St Monica Trust

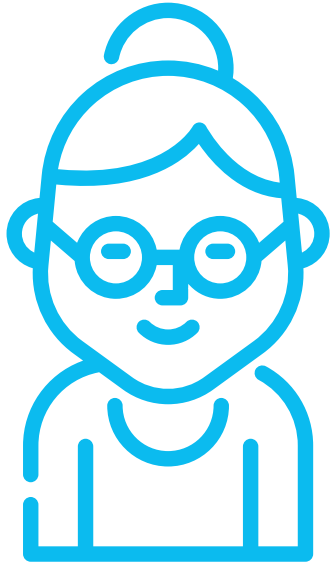


Intergenerational Activity

How to be part of it and why

A little background

There's no feeling in the world quite like companionship, don't you agree? It makes us feel wanted, appreciated and improves our quality of life. That friendly face you can talk to. The chance to meet new people. Being connected to your community. Here at the St Monica Trust, we're helping to bring that sense of involvement to more people, young and old.



The idea of helping people be with, and interact with others isn't new to us. We've been doing it for years. Whether they are our residents, customers or others living around the Bristol area.

We've found there are many wonderful ways of bringing people together. From organising community events and setting up befriending schemes, to offering all kinds of activities, groups and initiatives. One special project involves young musicians from the Bristol Pre-Conservatoire writing pieces of music to tell stories of our residents' lives.

This example of interaction between children and older adults brings so many unique benefits to everyone involved. Of course,



“Social engagement between generations is a key factor for the well-being of all.”
TOY, 2017ⁱ

our care homes and villages have always encouraged young people to come in and share their talents, enthusiasm and sheer vitality with residents. But over recent years we've been looking at different ways of using intergenerational activity so it can be even more fulfilling for those involved.



In 2017 we travelled to the Netherlands to visit leading-edge intergenerational buildings and initiatives. It was so inspirational. Then, later that same year, the St Monica Trust was chosen to be the setting for a groundbreaking social experiment filmed by CPL Productions for Channel 4. **‘Old People’s Home for 4 Year Olds’** showed how bringing together retirement community residents and pre-school children helped transform the lives of the participants for the better. Perhaps you saw it? It was wonderful – very enlightening and emotional.

Little did we know just how captivating this adventure would turn out to be!

About this Guide

We have put this guide together to share with older people, particularly anyone living in retirement communities and care homes.

Perhaps you work or live in a retirement community or care home, know someone who does, or are simply interested in this fascinating subject. Whatever your situation, why not make a cup of tea, put your feet up and enjoy. You'll read about:

- Why intergenerational activity is so important.
- The huge physical and mental benefits it can have.
- Why and how you should insist on it.
- How you can kick-start some activities of your own.
- Some inspiring success stories.



First things first

So what exactly is 'Intergenerational Activity'? It may sound like a bit of a mouthful, but it's actually very simple.

Intergenerational activities are social engagements and interactions, bringing together younger and older generations for a common purpose. They build on the strengths that different generations have to offer, nurture understanding and mutual respect, and challenge ageism. Both parties have the opportunity to give as well as receive, and to feel a sense of ownership and achievement. And it aims to put a smile on everyone's face.

What it isn't is a group of nursery children coming into a care home and singing a song in front of residents. This can be great but intergenerational activity is much more than that. All the activities should be designed to be inclusive, fun and encourage interaction.



"Intergenerational practice is inclusive and builds on the positive resources that younger and older people have to offer each other and those around them."

Beth Johnson Foundation, 2009.

Why we need it

Nowadays, older people have much less opportunity to spend time with children than they used to. It's such a shame. This means that both generations are losing out on a very special relationship. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Once upon a time, older generations were much more involved with younger people, and vice versa. But times change. Parents are having children later in life, and living greater distances from *their* parents. Not to mention that lives seem busier nowadays. It means that children and grandparents miss out on time together.

Add to this the fact that our lives are becoming more segregated. For instance, accommodation for older people is, more often than not, set apart from where younger generations live.

All these things can drive a wedge between the two generations. Isolation can begin to creep in. Along with a poorer understanding and awareness of each other. It's a downward spiral where negative stereotypes and attitudes can take hold all too easily.

We're following the lead of many countries around the world that have acknowledged this decline.

“We need intergenerationality to be a normal part of our society. We need younger children to mix with older people. We need all ages to mix together, to learn from each other, to help each other.”

Zoe Wyrko, Consultant Geriatrician for 'Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds'.¹

¹ UK Channel 4 programme (<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/old-peoples-home-for-4-year-olds>)

Its positive effects

It's lovely to see young and old come together doing activities together. It can have a tremendous effect on everybody involved, including the local community. But don't take our word for it. We have evidence from a large number of studies to back it up!



Its positive effects

Some key benefits – as highlighted by research and evaluation studies

For older adults

- The feeling of invigoration, better general health and well-being.
- Being more up-to-date with trends.
- An increase in physical, mental and creative activity.
- Improvement in brain function.ⁱⁱ
- Feeling less isolated, empty or lonely.
- More opportunities for social inclusion.
- Rediscovering the joy of interacting with children of different ages.

For children and young people

- Learning values and norms, and how to interact with older people from different backgrounds.
- Development of teamworking skills.
- The chance to discover that older people have been young once – and that they led interesting lives!
- Learning about the realities of the life cycle in a natural, non-school environment.

“Intergenerational programs are a vaccination against ageism and a prescription for longevity.”
Bridges Together²

² <https://www.bridgestogether.org/tools-resources/research/>



For both generations

- Richer everyday experiences.
- The chance to discover so much from each other.
- Learn new things and see the world from another perspective.
- Enjoy fun activities while interacting.
- Boost confidence, self-esteem and mood.
- Feel useful and valued, and enjoy a sense of achievement.
- Challenge preconceptions about the opposite generation and counteract negative stereotypes and behaviour.
- The ability to share cultural experiences.
- Increased understanding and respect.
- The opportunity to make new friends!

The wider benefits

- A better connection between generations helping to build bridges and close gaps.
- An improved social bond and solidarity between young and old.
- Can reduce levels or fear of crime through better understanding of younger people.
- Provides excellent opportunities to pass on collective community and life memories to children.
- Leads to more people being active citizens in their community.
- Results in sharing of spaces, facilities and resources.
- Increased satisfaction with home and neighbourhood.

Success stories

During the summer of 2017 a nursery school moved into our Cote Lane Retirement Village for a 6-week experiment filmed by Channel 4. The result – ‘Old People’s Home for 4 Year Olds’ – touched the lives of everyone involved.

Some people may have been sceptical about inviting ten four-year-olds from local nurseries into their retirement home. Imagine the havoc! Nevertheless, the eleven St Monica Trust residents braced themselves and prepared to take part in regular activities with the children, ending with an intergenerational sports day! To see whether any changes experienced by the older volunteers could be measured, they undertook tests at the beginning and then at the end of the six weeks.

The experience was shown on television in two episodes, watched by nearly 3 million people. It proved to be extraordinary and moving. The four-year-olds were open and non-judgemental, full of vitality and enthusiasm. Their confidence and social skills grew every week, too. Both generations laughed, learned and talked together, and it became clear that they had so much in common. It wasn’t long before friendships began blossoming across the wide age gap.



“This has been a very happy six weeks. Being with the children has been like having a shot of adrenalin which bucked us all up!”

And the test results carried out on the residents at the end of the experiment? Well, they proved remarkable. They indicated positive changes across the eleven older adults in mood, physical strength, mobility, and levels of physical activity: **“The experiment has worked. We’ve shown that we can produce measurable change in the older adults in a relatively short period of time.”** (Consultant Geriatrician).³

³ UK Channel 4 programme (<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/old-peoples-home-for-4-year-olds>)

No one was more surprised than resident Hamish, who had been unsure about the experiment from the start. One of his fellow residents said: “There is a noticeable difference in Hamish. He didn’t think he’d be happy interacting with children but he is.”

Once the cameras stopped rolling, many of the close relationships continued. It’s so lovely to see the children and adults still meeting up regularly. Another example of how impactful intergenerational activity can be.

More and more people want to mix it up!

A large surveyⁱⁱⁱ recently carried out in America found two thirds of adults would like to spend more time with people from other age groups. And three quarters wanted more opportunities in their community to meet and get to know people of different ages.

Isn't that incredible? It seems more people than perhaps we realise are looking for an opportunity to mix with different age groups. So if you live in your own home, retirement community or village, and think you could benefit, here are some questions to ask and ways to make it happen.

Questions to ask

- 1 What intergenerational activities are going on where you live or thinking of moving to?
- 2 Are younger people naturally included in the life of the village, home or wherever you live?
- 3 What expertise and support is available to support intergenerational activities and projects?
- 4 Are some of the outdoor and communal spaces equipped, attractive and welcoming for children and young people?
- 5 What skills, knowledge or attributes have you got that you'd like to share with the younger generation?
- 6 What would you like the younger generation to share with you?
- 7 What mutual interests could lead to informal intergenerational meet-ups, joint activities, or wider community projects?






How to increase your intergenerational activity



Of course, things may not necessarily have 'intergenerational' in the title! There could well be lots of projects and initiatives in your area that are attractive and geared up for all different kinds of people to interact with one another.

Essential objectives

What intergenerational activities aim to achieve

-  Joint participation: ages working together.
-  Benefits for everyone.
-  Appropriate support available.
-  The physical, mental and emotional safety of participants.
-  Building confidence and mutual trust.
-  Protecting confidentiality.
-  Equal status for all involved.



Your intergenerational activity checklist

Organising activities to bring young and old together? Here's a handy checklist to walk you through some common pitfalls.

- Younger people may be inhibited by their peers, who may consider contact with older people 'uncool'. Be sensitive to this.
- Take steps to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes.
- Try not to 'romance the past' by suggesting it was better than it was.^{iv}
- Be aware of differences in expectations, needs and preferences. This may be influenced by such things as people's cultural backgrounds, abilities and gender.
- Make everyone feel at ease – it can be a little nerve-racking taking part in group activities!
- Take steps not to cause younger people to feel anxious about their own ageing and mortality.
- Focus on strengths within your local community rather than weaknesses.
- Ask for feedback from everyone involved. It'll make for better sessions in the future.
- Not everyone wants to be involved. Make sure people have a choice.

Learning from what has worked before

Ideas to make your initiative a success!



Do your homework! Good planning and preparation is a must. Have discussions beforehand about what each group wants out of the activities.



Aim to have equal numbers of younger and older people. This way, no group will feel outnumbered.



Make developing relationships your goal. Getting people to chat to each other and work together is great for this.



Bring in an expert for extra support. A local community development officer, for example, or a teacher. They have great experience of working with different age groups and abilities, and can bring a new dimension to the project.



What your initiative needs to include



Arrange regular contact and provide plenty of opportunities for one-to-one interactions. This helps friendships to develop.



Shared discussions about how activities will benefit all age groups involved. Young people particularly value contributing to decisions about topics and activities.^v



'Getting to know you' exercises and discussions around common life experiences will help people bond more quickly.



Personal stories and experiences. But don't overdo it. Some studies found that if storytelling about past times by an older person becomes too personal, then it can turn younger people off.^{vi}



Meet somewhere that is relaxing and comfortable for young and old.



Plan activities that people are passionate about.



Make sure there's equality and co-operation. By that we mean joint development of activities, shared outcomes and goals.



Partner with other people or organisations from the wider community.

A few ideas to get you started

1. Share together, grow together

Sharing hobbies and recreation time is a great way of forming strong bonds. Try your hand at table tennis, painting, exercise classes or cooking. Perhaps share experiences and celebrations; traditional, cultural or religious. Or just come together to discuss a TV programme or film, or make each other a healthy snack from homegrown produce.



Discovery Lunches:

for example, a blindfold lunch to discover what it's like living with sight-loss.



IG-Q Conversation Cards.

Together, design a set of cards with thought-provoking questions suitable for people of all ages. For instance: "What's your favourite thing in the world", or "If you were a politician what would be your top priority for making the world a better place?"



"It's really healthy to actually have a mix of society. If at any age you only mix with people like yourself you forget about what else is going on around you."

Zoe Wyrko, Consultant Geriatrician for 'Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds'

2. Befriending and companionship

Look around your community. There are many people who could inspire an intergenerational project. Poets, musicians, local colleges, the library, even your local allotment society.^{vii} They all have something valuable to contribute.



Young people helping older people to access activities by **accompanying** them to local clubs or groups.



Groups form a 'buddy up partnership' and visit each other on a regular basis to

get to know each other, share company and activities and expand horizons.



Adopt-a-Grandfriend.

Older people pair up with school/youth group members based on interests and talents. Pairs can keep in regular contact through visits, phone or letter.



Example



Idea

A few ideas to get you started

3. Community events

It's touching to see young and old working together to do something positive for the community around them. Litter picking, walking groups, drama and singing workshops, improving health and well-being... Bringing these two ages together can have big results!



North London Cares hosts a free weekly **intergenerational social club** in Camden in which they have activities ranging from drawing classes, demonstrations, science lessons, and public speaking.



Host an intergenerational quiz or some games afternoons.



Campaign for more age interaction in your neighbourhood. Bring together a team of younger and older local 'movers and shakers' to work together on shared goals. Perhaps starting with a community celebration or awareness event. Projects could involve lobbying decision makers and encouraging the local community to create more opportunities for age groups to mix.



4. Get creative in the community!

Nothing brings people together like being creative. Imagine joining forces to create a shared community garden, wildflower bed or vegetable patch? Or putting on a concert, producing a film or presentation about local history? And who doesn't like producing arts and crafts?



Producing and selling creations for good causes: for example making greetings cards together to sell at (or on behalf of) the local hospice.



A playpark for all ages! Encourage intergenerational engagement in an informal setting. This has already proved popular and successful in Tokyo.



A few ideas to get you started

5. Learn more with a mentor

There's always something new to learn, whether you're seven, or seventy-seven. That's why teaching, learning or swapping skills and knowledge can be so energising!



Skills swapping sessions.

Share knitting skills, patterns and ideas (it's so popular with every age group!). Learn or share some IT skills, like how to get more from using your mobile phone. Ever wanted to play, say, backgammon? Now's your chance to learn.



English language conversation buddy.

Try café meet-ups with local foreign youngsters. Or chat via Skype with youngsters abroad who are learning English.



Intergenerational Sustainable Skills Cafés Project in Liverpool gives older members of the community a space to share cultural traditions and skills in an informal manner with younger members.

Useful resources

Ideas for activities

Intergenerational Activity List

(i2i, 2009) *An informal list with lots of ideas.*
<http://intergenerational.ca/i2i/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ed-asner-wishlist.pdf>

Intergenerational Activities Sourcebook

(Pennsylvania State University, 2003)
<https://aeese.psu.edu/extension/intergenerational/curricula-and-activities/intergenerational-activities-sourcebook>

Intergenerational Quiz Toolkit

(Generations Working Together)
Includes a video, planning checklist, parent information sheet and other tools.
<https://generationsworkingtogether.org/resources/intergenerational-quiz/>

Intergenerational Volunteering (BBC)

A BBC 'Do Something Great' information sheet.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3vPtzxD0PthCS4yYSb9sDxg/intergenerational-volunteering>

Reweaving the Tapestry of the Generations: An Intergenerational Learning Tour Through Europe

(The TOY Project, 2013) *Examples of learning activities.* http://www.toyproject.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/english_fixed.pdf

Together Old and Young (TOY)

in Action (The TOY Project, 2014)
<http://www.toyproject.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Toy-in-action-english.pdf>

Hear from people enjoying the benefits of intergenerational activity

Intergenerational Learning Programme

(Council for the Third Age, Singapore, 2016)
 A project matching up older and younger people within fun group learning sessions.
<https://youtu.be/1b-qEgs6Cdk>

Information and advice

A Guide to Intergenerational Practice

(Beth Johnson Foundation, 2011)
<http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/Libraries/Documents/Guide-to-Intergenerational-Practice.pdf>

Connecting Generations: A Guide to Best Practice

(The Scottish Centre for Intergenerational Practice, 2009) *Packed full of practical information and learning from a wide range of successful projects in Scotland.*
http://generationsworkingtogether.org/downloads/504dec477cf8-Connecting_Generations_-_A_guide_to_best_practice_15_Aug_2011.pdf

to Intergenerational Activity

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- iii **I Need You, You Need Me: The Young, The Old, and What We Can Achieve Together.** Generations United/Eisner Foundation (2017).
- iv **A Guide to Intergenerational Practice.** Beth Johnson Foundation (2011).
- v **Generations Working Together: Learning Through Intergenerational Practice.** Generations Working Together (2013).
- vi **Making Intergenerational Connections – an Evidence Review.** Drury, L., Abrams, D., and Swift, H., published by AgeUK (2017).
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St Monica Trust

The St Monica Trust is a Bristol-based charity with a reputation for providing high quality accommodation and innovative care for older and disabled people. Established by the Wills family in 1925, we have retirement villages and care homes across Bristol and North Somerset.

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St Monica Trust September 2018

This guide is available online at
www.stmonicastrust.org.uk/guide

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