



# A Guide to Intergenerational Practice

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# I. Introduction

The purpose of this Guide is to introduce some of the fundamental elements of Intergenerational Practice. It is intended to be of practical use particularly to those working in Voluntary and Community Sectors (VCS), Local Authorities (LAs) and Central Government Departments (CGDs).

It outlines:

- In **Section 2** – What Intergenerational Practice is
- In **Section 3** – How Intergenerational Practice can help
- In **Section 4** – Making Intergenerational Practice work
- In **Section 5** – Other sources of help and support

The Guide is designed to complement existing work and, through the use of case studies and information links, to highlight ways in which differing approaches and experiences of Intergenerational Practice can be drawn upon and adapted for a range of differing local circumstances.



# 2. What Intergenerational Practice is

Intergenerational Practice is used in many forms to achieve practical results in situations relevant to the particular needs of communities. A useful working definition is:

“Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contributes to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive, building on the positive resources that the young and old have to offer each other and those around them”

**Centre for Intergenerational Practice: Beth Johnson Foundation, 2001.**

## Intergenerational Practice in context

Many elements of Intergenerational Practice have been around for decades, but during the 1980s it began to be recognised as being particularly relevant to social problems affecting two vulnerable age groups – younger people and older adults – in terms of low self-esteem, marginalisation and the fragmentation of family and peer networks. By the beginning of the 21st century, Intergenerational Practice was also being seen as a way of addressing tensions between these age groups and varied projects were being established internationally. This growing global interest in Intergenerational Practice found high level support in the UK, where both the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament demonstrated formal commitment, followed in 2009 by the launch of the Generations Together initiative in England.

More recently, the concept of the Big Society has been developing as a major part of the Coalition Government's approach to empowering communities. Although the language of Intergenerational Practice is no longer so prominently or specifically featured in policy statements, the Big Society focuses on involving more people in local community action and increasing neighbourhood groups in every community. Building stronger collaboration between generations is central to this ambition. It's also about devolving power from central government to local councils and communities and giving local people more control over decision-making in their areas. Services more devolved to neighbourhood level is planned to bring a more socially active and responsible society and intergenerational activity has an essential part to play in all this.



# Implementing Intergenerational Practice

Intergenerational Practice can take many forms, linking together a range of processes that build positive relationships between generations, bringing mutual benefits to all involved. One consequence of this can be improved community cohesion but, as later case studies show, the impact may be much wider. It is useful to see its local implementation as a continuum that tracks the levels of contact with and between participating generations.



Adapted with permission from Kaplan, M, *Toward an intergenerational way of life*, Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences, 96 (2), 5-9, 2004.

# 3. How Intergenerational Practice can help

## Case studies

There are many different practical examples of Intergenerational Practice at work all over the United Kingdom. A summary of case studies can be viewed at:

<http://www.centreforip.org.uk/resources/case-studies?r=1&q=>

The following are snapshots of some local approaches adopted:

### Storytelling and Community Cohesion

As part of the Connecting Communities programme, **Stoke-on-Trent City Council** commissioned the Beth Johnson Foundation to carry out work in three areas of the city. This included an Intergenerational story telling programme in which a storyteller was employed to work with a Development Officer to bring together older and younger people and enable them to share their stories and hear the stories of others. From this the younger and older people held an exhibition of their stories at a local museum. The storytelling was the catalyst for younger and older people from different backgrounds to interact and help break down negative social stereotypes.

### Community Media

Community radio was used as a medium to bring younger and older people together in **Manchester** to explore social stereotypes and feelings of belonging for participants. The idea of a 'sense of place' was used to stimulate discussion and share what the ideas of what 'place' meant to them ([www.manchester.gov.uk/senseofplace](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/senseofplace)). Also included were discussions around stereotyping of younger and older people and how they could challenge this together. As part of the project, participants learned a range of media skills such as listening, presenting, facilitating discussion, editing, programming and voice projection.

By the end of the project, participants had devised and broadcast their own radio shows live on ALL FM. This gave them an opportunity to tell listeners about their Sense of Place in Manchester and how they have explored and challenged social stereotypes. This work has continued and evolved as part of the Manchester Generations Together programme.



## Mentoring

From intergenerational work that began in 1996, a mentoring programme has been developed by a secondary school and the **North Tyneside** LA. Starting as just one-off reminiscence meetings of older and younger people discussing topics such as the Second World War, a 'Storyline' developed and a programme of short-term projects identified mentoring as an unexpected outcome. In 2005, a Literacy Mentoring programme developed based on earlier work by the Beth Johnson Foundation in Stoke-on-Trent to ease the transition for young people from primary to secondary school. The Intergenerational focus included:

- breaking down barriers and improving communication between generations
- dispelling myths and stereotypes to create more positive images of each generation
- helping younger and older people develop mutual respect
- enabling different generations to utilise, share and benefit from each other's skills and expertise

An Intergenerational Project Officer and link member of school staff met with volunteers each week, usually at break times. More formal monitoring took place each term. The school link met separately with teaching staff and pupils every half-term to gain feedback. A summary of the feedback from each Year Group was drawn together and given to everyone involved in the programme. At the end of the year, the pupils' parents were invited to an event to celebrate the work.

## Befriending

Intergenerational befriending can be a powerful part of Intergenerational Practice. Sixth-formers from Queen's Gate Girls' School met usually in pairs with isolated older people. The project used to focus on a particular sheltered housing scheme, but now increasingly works with people living in their own or rented accommodation. The volunteers visit for about one hour each week of the academic year and it is designed to be a social visit. The younger and older people spend their time firstly getting to know each other, then later sharing interests and histories and talking about the week they have had since they last met.

The school works closely with the volunteers to make sure the older people are invited to local events in which the school is involved, such as concerts, drama performances at local sheltered housing schemes and teas at a nearby church. The school arranges for the volunteers to escort the older person to these events.

The expectation is that the volunteers will be involved for one academic year but many choose to carry on into a second year. Often contact continues through letters and holiday time visits when the young person goes to university. New volunteers can be found for an older person if their pair finishes at the end of the academic year.

# What can be achieved through Intergenerational Practice

Central to its plans for creating the Big Society, the government plans for community groups being set up everywhere, supported by community organisers. It aims to support training for 5,000 community organisers to help groups to organise themselves and to make their communities better places to live, work and play. Significant changes are needed in the relationships between VCS, LA's and CGD's to organise their collaborative roles and relationships in delivering more devolved local services.

Looking at Intergenerational Practice in the wider sense brings recognition that it can play an important part in shaping those services and achieving lasting improvements. Examples include:

- Changing negative perceptions of older and younger people
- Increasing the participation of older people in Life Long Learning
- Enhancing civic participation and active citizenship among both younger and older people
- Reducing levels of crime and fear of crime through greater understanding between generations
- Improving community cohesion and Sense of Place in neighbourhoods
- Increasing health and well being
- Planning urban areas as shared spaces for all ages
- Bringing more positive outcomes to neighbourhoods as places in which to live and grow older.

Intergenerational Practice can be a key to bringing about systemic change. When Intergenerational Practice is applied in the context of one-off, independent projects such as those described in Levels 1 – 3 of the Intergenerational Engagement Continuum, there is clear evidence to demonstrate its positive contribution in terms not only of improved service design and delivery but also to the quality of life experienced at local community level.

However, even more may be achieved if a conscious decision is taken to move activity further along the Continuum Levels 4 – 7 by adopting Intergenerational Practice as one of the management tools for regular use at strategic level. In this way Intergenerational Practice becomes embedded as part of a different way of thinking, planning and working, moving away from fragmented gains towards more holistic system change.



# 4. Making Intergenerational Practice work

## Laying the foundations

Many people already working with communities will have a good understanding of what it needs to produce positive results through applying Intergenerational Practice on the ground locally. However, systemic changes such as those required to deliver on the government's ambitious devolution agenda will necessarily engage many more people who initially may not share this experience and understanding at the day-to-day level. It is therefore useful to set out some of the basic essentials.

The essence of Intergenerational Practice lies in building trusting relationships between all those participating, whether at project level or more strategically. This level of mutual confidence is necessary to ensure that the great potential for reciprocal benefits – the 'win wins' – are realised. A good base of community engagement skills is essential to Intergenerational Practice – skills such as:

- Setting up and running meetings
- Creating and delivering public presentations
- Facilitation
- Communication.

The involvement of facilitators who have a background of working in neighbourhoods and with communities offers the best possible start, and fits comfortably with the aims for building the Big Society. Initial training packages and support can be accessed through the Centre for Intergenerational Practice at [www.centreforip.org.uk](http://www.centreforip.org.uk).

It is important to recognise that communities can be complicated things – just as the individuals living in them are. Communities may define themselves and definitions of community can and do change. People often belong to more than one community and communities are often very diverse. Communities can be:

- Communities of **Place** – people within a defined geographical area and/or
- Communities of **Identity** – as defined by those people, such as ethnic groups, people who share a particular experience, interest or stake in an issue, or characteristics such as young people, faith groups, older people, people with disabilities, ethnic groups, and lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

This complexity, combined with the increasing need to do more effective work on fewer resources, puts even greater value on following some key steps when considering Intergenerational Practice development. At the earliest 'design stage', it makes sense to consider some fundamental questions, including:

- What are you going to do?
- Why are you choosing an Intergenerational Practice approach?
- What form(s) of Intergenerational Practice will work best and why?
- Who will you be working with?
- When and where will you be doing it?
- What outcomes are you seeking?

Intergenerational Practice is relevant across all generations, but a significant majority of work has focused upon the two ends of the life course, younger people and adults above working age. When planning intergenerational work, establishing a clear idea of what is meant by the terms 'age', 'age group' and 'generation' is often neglected. Within Intergenerational Practice 'older people' are commonly defined as 50+ years and 'younger people' as 12 – 25 years old. However, such broad-brush categorisation risks obscuring some vitally important factors. A lot of valuable Intergenerational Practice work is based in primary schools and even the most superficial consideration will demonstrate that the needs, expectations and aspirations of individuals change tremendously across the life course. So another set of preliminary questions will be helpful:

- What is a younger person? What is an older person?
- How are you defining your 'target' age groups and why?
- How do they view their own and one another's ages?
- How does the wider community/society view them?

## Making the business case

Important though these initial 'what', 'who' and 'why' questions are, national and international economic pressures demand increasingly that services be planned and delivered on a 'more for less' basis. More than ever before, it is essential for those considering the use of Intergenerational Practice to be able to demonstrate that it is capable of delivering effectively across the wider economic, environmental and social priorities of local communities. Both the current public spending reforms and the Big Society proposals present challenges and opportunities for Intergenerational Practice. It is therefore important to have a sound rationale for taking forward Intergenerational Practice and to be able to demonstrate tangible positive impacts against the backdrop of budget cuts and competing priorities. These 'hard conversations' will need to consider:

- The level of strategic support there is for Intergenerational Practice, including elected member support
- The level of wider stakeholder support across sectoral boundaries
- Clarity of the Intergenerational Practice outcomes
- The extent to which multiple outcomes are identified and addressed
- The impact of the Intergenerational Practice on resource allocation/value for money and who else might be involved from different departments/organisations
- Whether potential savings/risks have been identified
- What sustainability measures are in place
- Rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluation.



# Some risks in Intergenerational Practice

Intergenerational Practice is a very potent tool for achieving positive outcomes across a wide range of issues that are at the centre of current decision-making for service delivery in communities. But Intergenerational Practice is certainly no magic wand and it is useful to be aware of some of the problems that can occur when working across generations.

## ■ Reinforcing negative stereotypes

Working with younger and older people – those generations most often engaged with Intergenerational Practice – involves contact with and between two groups which suffer significantly from negative stereotyping of one another and from society at large. Young people in particular are often demonised within the media and both groups are often viewed from one perspective; that of the problems and challenges they are seen as posing to society. This is a prejudice with a long history:

“When I was young, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly disrespectful and impatient of restraint”.

**Hesiod, Greek poet, 8th century BCE.**

If younger and older people are being brought together through Intergenerational Practice, at an early stage some stereotype analysis needs to happen. Many examples of Intergenerational Practice work have the specific purpose of dispelling myths about younger and older people and thereby attempt to bring about greater civic participation from all. To do this well, participants must work together to develop an environment of mutual trust and confidentiality and then use this as a platform from which to dispel myths they may have of each other. After this, any wider social stereotype beliefs may be tackled.

The risk is that with inappropriate facilitation that essential environment of trust will not be created and the negative views can be reinforced rather than dispelled. The Centre for Intergenerational Practice offers training to support all aspects of Intergenerational Practice, including bespoke packages, across all sectors. Further information on training can be found by accessing the Centre for Intergenerational Practice website at <http://www.centreforip.org.uk/training>.

## ■ Romancing the past

Reminiscence programmes are a regular feature of Intergenerational Practice, representing a popular base upon which to build better mutual understanding between generations. But they can also lead to assumptions that it was better in the past and it is bad now:

“The reason people find it so hard to be happy is that they always see the past better than it was, the present worse than it is and the future less resolved than it will be”

**Marcel Pagnol, French novelist, playwright and film-maker, 1895 – 1974.**

This stems partly from Intergenerational Practice focusing on problems within communities rather than building on their strengths. To co-ordinate Intergenerational Practice best, at some stage there must be an analysis of the community carried out. This will help to understand local issues and to recognise the perspectives that local people from different generations may bring with them from their different life experiences.

## ■ Culture

People from different cultural backgrounds will often have different experience and expectations around how younger people should act around older people and the differences may also reflect the gender of those involved. In some cases, the definitions of what constitutes 'young', 'adult' and 'old' people will differ quite widely. If Intergenerational Practice is being co-ordinated with a range of people from different backgrounds, their cultural heritage should be factored in and different customs recognised.

## ■ Safety and confidentiality

Intergenerational Practice will often involve close personal contact between the participants – in many ways this is one of the great strengths of the approach. Within this context, it is of course essential that it takes place within an environment that ensures the physical safety and mental well being of those taking part, as well as the confidentiality of any personal information that may be shared.

The use of criminal record checks is currently under review, as is the Vetting and Barring Scheme. Further information on the status of these can be found at the website of the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) [www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk). As well as these national schemes, most LA's, schools' public bodies and VCS organisations will have appropriate structures in place – checking these should always form part of an Intergenerational Practice risk assessment.

There is also a Risk Assessment Toolkit, written by a colleague from the London Borough of Camden that may prove useful on the Centre for Intergenerational Practice website [www.centreforip.org.uk](http://www.centreforip.org.uk). Volunteering England is also a good source for information and holds a number of examples of CRB working that can be accessed through [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk).

## ■ Monitoring and Evaluation

In the 'more for less' environment, the competition for resources is becoming increasingly fierce within and between organisations. Consequently, demonstrating the wider benefits of any policy action is more crucial than ever. In common with many areas of social action based in communities, those advocating Intergenerational Practice at local level will need to address the perceived tensions between what have become known as 'hard' (quantitative) and 'soft' (qualitative) outcomes. Examples of relevant research studies in this context, together with evaluation guides and toolkits, can be found at [www.centreforip.org.uk](http://www.centreforip.org.uk).



# 5. Other sources of help and support

## The Centre for Intergenerational Practice

The Centre has an extensive library covering a range of IP topics that can be accessed through [www.centreforip.org.uk](http://www.centreforip.org.uk).

The Centre offers specialist intergenerational consultancy and evaluation services, bespoke training and development, in addition to a set of core training modules. This is delivered through its team of experienced consultants, trainers and researchers, and is tailored to your organisational needs. For further information on these services please contact us via [generations@bjf.org.uk](mailto:generations@bjf.org.uk)

The Approved Provider Standard (APS) is a UK benchmark for organisations providing intergenerational programmes. It has been designed and developed by the Centre for Intergenerational Practice to provide a realistic and credible basis for assessing core practice by organisations of any size and to take account of the rich diversity of intergenerational programmes.

The APS gives organisations a quality management framework that is needed to monitor and improve on the delivery of your intergenerational programmes of work.

Details may be found on the above website and enquiries can be made by post to:

The Centre for Intergenerational Practice  
Beth Johnson Foundation  
Parkfield House  
64 Princes Road  
Hartshill  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST4 7JL

or by email to:

[generations@bjf.org.uk](mailto:generations@bjf.org.uk)

## Other sources

A toolkits and guides library includes resources developed across all sectors; VCS, LA's and CGD's and can be accessed via the Centre for Intergenerational Practice website:

<http://www.centreforip.org.uk/resources/toolkits-and-guides>



We would be happy to hear from anyone who wants to find out more about our work. Whether you are seeking advice on one of our specialisms or are interested in one of our services, please get in touch.

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