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Intergenerational Community Development

A practice guide

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Foreword

This report is one of a series of guides produced by the Centre for Intergenerational Practice for practitioners and others either involved or interested in intergenerational work. We would like to give particular thanks to the Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales without whose support this report could not have been produced. We would also wish to thank the people who participated in the case study produced here. Without their active involvement this report would not have been possible.

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Introduction

The demographic profile within the United Kingdom shows a number of consistent and marked trends. People are living increasingly longer, the birth rate is showing a steady decline, and the mean age is increasing steadily – so the number of older people is increasing at the same time as the number of the young is reducing.

In 1996 there were 9.25 million people over the age of 65. This is projected to increase to 12 million by 2021 and to 14.6 million by 2061. Life expectancy is predicted to increase from 74.3 years in 1996 to 79.5 years by 2021 for men, and from 79.5 years in 1996 to 82.6 years by 2021 for women. By the middle of the next century the number of people aged over 75 will have doubled and the number aged over 90 will have more than tripled. At the same time the number of young people aged under 16 is projected to fall steadily from 12 million in 1996 to just over 10 million in 2061.

This major shift in age has occurred at a time when a number of factors have been contributing to the ongoing debate within the UK as to the nature of its future social structures and policies.

Economically the UK has been forced to redefine itself as its traditional heavy industries have contracted massively, leading to unemployment and changes in work practice and security. This has been accompanied by a significant change in the role of women in the workplace.

Traditional family structures have been eroded and children have an increased possibility of being born into single parent families with a raised probability of experiencing poverty. Concerns are being expressed about the effectiveness of the educational system in preparing young people for citizenship, and there is a belief that traditional community structures have been weakened, leading to a breakdown in positive contact between social groupings, particularly the young and the old.

A significant proportion of young people, particularly young men, are growing up disaffected from society. The tradition of the Welfare State in the UK has also been significantly reviewed because of economic and demographic factors. Older people are still too often described in terms of deficit, burden and need, with no recognition of the increased health and vitality that many now enjoy. Against this background of concern, government and other bodies are seeking ways to revitalise communities, and recognising Social Policy as a major vehicle to underpin this.

It is against this background that there has been an increase in developing approaches that can build healthier and more cohesive communities, where community members have a better understanding and respect for the other groups that they live alongside. An area of particular concern has been to understand how relationships between the generations can be developed and supported.

Consequently there has been an increasing interest in approaches to community development that acknowledge the need to build intergenerational connections and

understanding. This guide is intended to help practitioners to develop an intergenerational approach to community development and to understand some of the key issues that need to be considered in developing effective practice.

The guide is divided in to two sections. The first explores the general principles of a community development approach with specific relevance to intergenerational practice. The second is a case study of the intergenerational community action work at the Beth Johnson Foundation, where groups of young and older people are brought together to investigate and challenge ageism, identify issues of concern within their neighbourhoods, and influence local decision makers to make appropriate changes.

Before moving on to a consideration of these community development approaches it is helpful to remind ourselves of the key features that have been identified as characteristic of successful intergenerational projects (Granville 2002). These are:

- When a project is set up, it is essential that participants are clear about what the programme intends to achieve for both the young and old participants. All the programmes analysed were based on the concept of mutual benefit.
- Thorough project management needs to be applied to all intergenerational activity, consisting of clear objectives, target setting, monitoring and evaluation. In this intergenerational programmes are no different from any other project.
- All intergenerational initiatives require careful planning and preparation, involving all the different agencies that are to be engaged in the particular programme.
- In projects where the older and younger generations are brought together for greater understanding, preparation ideally needs to be carried out with the generations separately and clear ground rules established.
- Preparation is essential with other partners who may be indirectly involved in the work, such as care staff in residential homes, and classroom teachers, in order that they support the initiative and understand its aims.
- The role of the generation in-between needs to be clear. In intergenerational work, this is a facilitating function that brings the generations together in meaningful activity. If the purpose of the project is multigenerational, then the needs and aims of each generation need to be considered.
- All projects should be evaluated, both in terms of the process undertaken and of the impact of the intervention.

The underpinning principles of an intergenerational community development approach

The Standing Conference for Community Development (SCCD), states that community development 'is about building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues which affect their lives.' (SCCD, 2003)

It essential that any project sits within the values and principles of community development. These include:

- Challenging inequality
- Promoting social justice
- Supporting community members to gain greater control over decision-making processes
- Participation
- Inclusion
- Informal education
- Sustainability

Unique to intergenerational community development is the need for the project to be of mutual benefit to both generations, and therefore an understanding of ageism, and how this impacts on all participants is essential. (Granville, 2002:10)

Ageism

Ageism is about age and prejudice. (Bytheway, 1995:3) Although age discrimination is more often seen in terms of older people, it should be recognised that young people equally experience age discrimination by adults.

- It is the challenging of negative stereotypes of age for both the young and old which sets intergenerational practice apart from other approaches to community development work.
- Intergenerational community development work fits with the social justice aspect of community development work. It recognises the power imbalances not only between young and old people themselves, but also how society as a whole perceives age.

Context

The very nature of intergenerational practice enables it to fit into many different social contexts, and therefore with different policy areas such as health inequality, fear of crime and citizenship. (Granville, 2002) Knowledge of local and national policies is important to practice in the following ways:

- Gaining access to resources
- Wider Picture
- How is national policy translated at local level
- Identifying hooks
- Partnership work

Community Profiling

You may or may not be new to the geographical area or the area of interest on which your work is focussed. Nonetheless, a community profiling exercise may be invaluable. This exercise allows us to map either a geographical community or one based on an area of interest. It will consider the background of an area and current issues and influences. This enables the project to:

- Gain some understanding of local issues and concerns
- Have insight to historical aspects
- Local media coverage
- Identify agencies working in the area
- Link into network and partnership opportunities
- Avoid duplication
- Identify target areas for work

Most importantly in developing any community programme is the need to engage with potential partners and participants before any programme is initiated. There are many examples of projects that have been imposed on communities rather than developed with them.

Project Planning

Project planning is important in order that the aims and objectives can be established. The very nature of community development work requires the project delivery to be flexible. Successful intergenerational practice requires working with a wide range of partners and it is, therefore, advisable to keep in mind objectives that are SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Timely

Project planning also enables the practitioner to consider:

- Building community development values and principles in to the project design and delivery.
- Accountability, including establishing frameworks for monitoring and evaluation that are inclusive of the views of the participants.

- Issues of sustainability. A major feature of effective community development is how it develops the capacity of participants to continue to engage within their communities after a project has been completed.
- Practical issues such as group size and how the groups will work.

The funding of the project will be a consideration and will impact on the delivery of any project; a publication entitled 'Preparing Successful Bids' specifically aimed at intergenerational work is available from the Beth Johnson Foundation.

Networking

Working in partnership is essential for effective community development work.

- Getting the word out to promote the project and people's engagement
- Talking to people in the community to make their views central to planning and delivery
- Identifying local agendas and how the project can address these
- Establishing working relationships with potential partners
- Identifying potential points of friction or blockage
- Developing support for the project and the worker
- Noting local venues which are accessible

Recruiting and Valuing Participants

Recruitment will vary according to the target audience i.e. older people in the community; older people in residential care, young people at school or those who are currently not in education or employment. However, good practice in recruiting and supporting project participants should be considered and may include:

- Recognition of people's backgrounds and how this may affect participation
- Appropriate promotion and publicity material
- Confidentiality
- Where will personal details be kept, and who will have access?
- Clear communication of the project aims
- Expectations of participants, length of sessions, number of sessions, is the project ongoing?
- Accessibility, this is not just about physical facilities it includes the language used to describe the project, the methods used to enable people to participate etc.
- How will participants be supported?

Reflection

Developing reflective practice enables the person facilitating the project to:

- Think how your own values influence the project
- Keep within a community development framework
- Monitor and evaluate throughout the process
- Analyse their own practice, group dynamics, relationships between the young and old people etc. and to understand what has and hasn't worked as expected
- Learning from successes and pear shaped moments
- Influence future practice

Resources

The Centre for Intergenerational Practice, based at the Beth Johnson Foundation can be contacted regarding a wide variety of publications, research and support at: www.centreforip.org.uk

Case Study: Intergenerational Community Action Programme, Newcastle under Lyme

The intergenerational community action programme forms one part of the Newcastle Coalfields Intergenerational Community Development Project, managed by the Beth Johnson Foundation. The community action programmes were designed to bring younger and older people together in a mutually beneficial way over a period of time to challenge some of the stereotypes and myths that surround age, and to identify issues of concern within their neighbourhoods and attempt to influence local decision makers to make changes to address these concerns.

The project was initially funded for two years by North Staffordshire Health Action Zone. Subsequently an additional three years funding was secured from the Newcastle-under-Lyme Primary Care Trust through their Health Inequalities Programme.

Approach

The project is based on the values and principles of community development, including challenging inequality and oppression, and promoting social justice by supporting the community members to gain greater control over decision-making processes. Many of the participants have low basic literacy skills and this needed to be considered throughout the process. To enable full engagement Participatory Appraisal Facilitation tools were used in the community action programmes. This technique sits well with the principles of community development work as it:

‘Requires the full involvement of local people and a regard for them by outsiders as main subjects and not as objects of research.’

(Sellers, 1996)

Five areas of good practice are identified by the approach. These are:

- Respect for local perceptions and choices
- A focus on the application of research for future improvements
- The use of visual rather than just written material
- An emphasis on the importance of feedback
- A recognition that information elicited by research belongs to local people (Sellers, 1996)

Key to the approach is the voluntary nature of participation; as this approach will only succeed if people choose to engage. This is particularly relevant when working in residential settings with older people or schools for the young participants as people in these settings could be viewed as a 'captive audience'.

Valuing the programme participants was significant to the success of the project and the overwhelming support it received within the communities. This was achieved by conveying enthusiasm for what they were achieving, supplying refreshments, listening, giving certificates that recognise their contribution and saying thank you.

Getting Started

The project began by profiling the communities within the Newcastle-under-Lyme Coalfield's areas to ascertain background information to the area i.e. history, geography, economics plus other relevant community development work already established. The initial networking assisted with several different processes including introducing the project to the community, local workers and agencies, avoiding duplication and identifying partnership opportunities.

This project operates within two Single Regeneration Budget areas where the Project Co-ordinator was able to attend the monthly wider team meetings that were established to encourage collaborative working.

It was also important for the Project Co-ordinator to meet young and old people in the community on an informal basis to gauge the feeling between the generations. The communities initially targeted were those that registered high on the deprivation figures for Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, and where intergenerational tension was perceived to be strongest.

Project Planning

The community action work followed on from an earlier pilot project carried out by the Beth Johnson Foundation in rural areas. The Project Co-ordinator therefore started with useful information on how to engage schools and the likely timescale for such a process. In terms of a community development approach it was clear that the programme would have to be structured to fit within the school curriculum and day but also flexible enough to allow the group and their ideas to grow and change throughout time. The idea of having an exhibition at the end of each programme has worked excellently with each

of the groups. This gives a focus point in time to work to, and leaves the groups with a real sense of achievement and enables them to plan their own work within the structure of the overall programme.

The Project Co-ordinator kept a reflective diary that initially recorded networking opportunities and actual meetings with people. The diary then developed to record any relevant theory and practice i.e. community development processes, and meetings and details of how the group sessions went. In this way it helps the practitioner think about how the groups work, and what had worked well and what hadn't. The diary also acted as a check to ensure that the principles and values of community development were adhered to and that drifting didn't occur.

Recruitment

To date the project has been school-based and therefore the recruitment of the young people took place within this context. It was crucial to identify a member of staff within the schools who understood the programme and the perceived benefits for both generations alike. From a practitioner's point of view it was important to identify the 'hooks' that would raise the schools interest in the project.

The majority of the project worked with young people aged 12-16, it was essential to have an overview of the changes within the school curriculum i.e. the introduction of citizenship, the role of PSHE and at what stage SATS would be taken. It was also a case of listening to what the school currently offered and where they thought the gaps might be. The Project Co-ordinator found that although one of the schools offered services to older people they were not targeted specifically as the intergenerational programmes suggested, and therefore the schools felt that they were gaining new insight and learning for themselves.

Once the schools had agreed to run with the programmes the teaching staff would identify young people from the specific geographical area that we would work in. However, as mentioned in the section on approach it was essential to meet with the young people, to explain the programme, and stress that participation in the group would be voluntary. The groups on average consisted of 10 young people.

The older people who participated in the programme were recruited in a variety of ways within the community. However, it was important to identify the community champions within each community. There is often a complaint heard within community development work that the same few people do all the work. Nonetheless, it must be understood that these people often have an incredible knowledge of the local area and can often signpost to areas where recruitment may take place and encourage others from in that community to participate.

Successful recruitment opportunities took place at the community information shops, sheltered accommodation complexes, churches, groups and societies, plus asking people at the schools etc if they know of people who would be interested. Perhaps the

most successful recruitment sessions have been when the older people are given practical examples to work on, i.e. asking them to record all the changes they can remember taking place in the neighbourhood in their lifetime, stating that the only difference between this and an intergenerational session would be having young people sitting beside them adding their comments and asking about their experiences. This served the purpose of introducing the style and content of the sessions in a non-threatening way.

It really was a case of going out and talking to people face to face, leaflets and adverts in the media received very little response from people in these particular neighbourhoods. Similarly, it is essential that access issues are considered i.e. the way information is presented, plus facilities for people with disabilities. This may also include laying on transport. On average 8 older people attended each programme.

Programme Delivery

This is an example of the programme delivery for one of the community action groups. Initially separate meetings were held for the younger and older people. These were used to investigate the perceptions that they held about each other, these comments were recorded in order that comparisons could be made at the end of the programme. Discussions were held around how the group would operate and considerations that they may have to take into account if everyone was to feel comfortable and part of the process. These sessions also gave an opportunity to put people's minds at rest, and answer any questions regarding the project at how it was to work.

The group then embarked on their 15 intergenerational sessions taking place every fortnightly for one hour, from October 2002-March 2002, covering the following topics:

- Session 1: Meeting with older participants to introduce the programme and explore negative and positive images of young people.
- Session 2: Meeting with young participants to introduce the programme and explore negative and positive images of older people.
- Session 3: First intergenerational meeting, introductions, group agreement, asking how it feels to be 'put into a box' because of your age?
- Session 4: Things we like about the village, mapping the neighbourhood (where we meet friends, where we go when the sun is shining, where we feel at ease, careful etc), what makes our blood boil?
- Session 5: Photographing the village of things we like and those we would change.
- Session 6: Exploring photographs, identifying where they have been taken in relation to the street map.

- Session 7: Identify and prioritise changes (ie. litter and graffiti on the gravestones) through democratic voting system.
- Session 8: Explore cause and effect of issues.
- Session 9: Is there anyone we can invite who could help us to bring change around these issues?
- Session 10: Working in partnership with relevant agencies to discuss issues.
- Session 11: Impact ranking (participatory appraisal method) of possible solutions.
- Session 12: Prepare for exhibition. Who can we invite to see our work in our environment and on our terms?
- Session 13: Preparation for exhibition.
- Session 14: Exhibition and celebration (peers, family, friends, local community workers, teaching staff, local and county councillors, and local dignitaries).
- Session 15: Evaluation carried out throughout the programme, this session was also used as a final evaluation for the whole group. Limited number of 1:1 interviews conducted post-programme.

Evaluation is placed here at the end of the programme however, it must be stressed that this was an ongoing process, the participatory facilitation techniques on the whole proved very useful for continuously recording information that could be used for both monitoring and evaluation i.e. the mapping exercise demonstrates an increased understanding of how each of the generations use their 'space' in the community.

Outcomes

Many issues have been identified for change from the community action programmes to date including alcohol, appearance, vandalism, transport etc. Those issues, which the group chose to work on over a longer period of time, include park improvements, litter and graffiti on gravestones, establishing a nature reserve and activities for young people.

Clearly, not all of the issues could be addressed over this short period of time and therefore effective partnership work was essential for sustainability. For example, working alongside agencies such as the Single Regeneration Budget community development team, the Newcastle Countryside Project and the Neighbourhood Management Initiative has ensured that these issues are taken forward and implemented.

The programmes have witnessed an increase in understanding between the generations who participated in the programmes. Moving from very stereotypical comments at the start of the programmes i.e. that young people don't care what happens to their

communities, and that older people are miserable and don't listen, through to more positive comments that are based around knowing individuals.

What the Participants Thought:

'It gave me a chance to be with 13 year olds and find out what they are like.'

'They made us see that old people aren't just grumpy, they can be funny and they aren't much different from us.'

'I learnt more about the community and the people who live there.'

'We often talk for the young people without them pulling us up.'

'Thought things out, watched things happen.'

'It is difficult to relate to young people today but this allows us to do it.'

'They all belong [young people].'

'Exhibition was great.'

'Those that are not your star turns are better at the programme.'

'I think they were very nice, kind and sharing especially [Older persons name] was nice.'

How the Programme could be improved

Consistently throughout the community action programmes the participants identified that rather than influencing local decision makers regarding issues in their neighbourhood, they would like to be part of carrying out those changes themselves:

'Yeah, we should carry on and do something about the nature reserve'

This is something to consider for future programmes however the positive outcome from this was the willingness of the group members to engage in further community activities.

Learning

There were many successes within the project however, it was also important to learn from what went wrong. Some of the glitches were easily rectified during the programme. For example, observing when the group dynamics weren't quite right, sometimes the groups were too big, the best sized groups turned out for this programme to be between four and five people. If the groups were too large this meant that there were often a couple of people dominating the group discussions resulting in the remainder of the group withdrawing.

However, there were other circumstances that were unforeseen, for example when the group was invited to a sheltered accommodation complex and the following night two of the young men from the group had slipped in and caused a disturbance. The young men were excluded from school however; the repercussions were felt in the group for some time. This resulted in one older person making an honest but ageist statement that no young person should ever be let into the complex again. Due to the nature of the debating that had previously taken place in the group the young people conveyed that they were not all the same, and eventually the group held their exhibition at the same complex.

Problems also arose when voluntary participation was not adhered to. For example, one session clashed with P.E. which was a favourite lesson for two of the young men in the group, instead of accepting that this was their preferred choice they were taken out of P.E. by the teaching staff and forced to join in under duress. They weren't happy to say the least and had told the teaching staff on previous occasion that they did not want to miss this lesson. This detracted from the approach that was focussed on choice and responsibility.

Learning from the programme also had to be seen within the wider context of the community and the impact it was having. Several of the programmes have resulted in young people attending meetings that they previously had no knowledge of or felt excluded from, the older people were able for example to support the young people in attending the local neighbourhood forum and having their say about local issues. It has been central to the process not to view the community development work as a five minute fix, however, the short term nature of the funding makes looking at such factors of how people go on to engage in their communities as vital to sustainability. Some of the older people have gone on to participate in further intergenerational programmes on the project, others have returned to work or have taken on roles such as school governors. The partnerships built with community members and local agencies enabled this to happen.

Summary

The intergenerational programmes have proved an effective vehicle for learning in an informal environment. The outcomes indicate that learning has taken place around challenging ageist perceptions and stereotypes. There is also clear evidence of success in engaging young and older people in local decision making processes. The intergenerational community development approach as a whole has enabled group members to gain confidence and self-esteem over the life of the programmes and both young and participants have gone on to become engaged in other areas of work.

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Registered Charity 271526

ISBN: 0-907875-22-X