

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Intergenerational Programmes: Exploring the Potential Benefits for Preschool Children

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Research Background

Intergenerational (IG) programmes are focused on bringing different generations together for mutual benefit.

In the UK, concerns with the health of an ageing population, generational division resulting from ageism and increasing loneliness have renewed interest in non-kin community IG programmes.

BS3 Community Development runs many intergenerational initiatives, with their non-kin IG programme being delivered by their preschool provision.

This programme involves children aged 3-4 visiting care home residents with dementia twice a week, inspired by the preschool's involvement in the Channel 4 documentary 'Old People's Home for 4 year olds'.

OVERVIEW:

Research on Intergenerational (IG) programmes has focused more attention on older generations than children.

Preschool children and older adults living with dementia are particularly under-researched.

To help inform future practice, this research aimed to explore preschool children's potential outcomes from participation in an IG programme with people living with dementia. This IG programme is run by BS3 Community Development and a local care home.

Using multiple methods to seek the views of preschool children, parents, staff and volunteers, findings revealed that potential outcomes for preschool children include courage, care and empathy.

"Be nice to the older people"
(Noah, child)

"I would say June [is my favourite] because she gives us all the sweeties and is really kind."
(Isabel, child)

"I think it is good for their confidence to walk into another situation that they wouldn't come up against everyday."
(Hazel, staff)

"Because they were [born] very, very long ago, I think."
(Daisy, child)

"He did tell me once one of the residents cuddled and kissed him"
(Parent)

Methodology

As preschool children should be seen as experts in their own lives, it is important to listen to the views of children, as well adults, within research.

Adopting practices from the 'Mosaic Approach', this research used multiple methods to seek the views of preschool children, parents, staff and volunteers involved in the IG programme.

These included:

- Observations of interactions during the IG programme
- Group activities with preschool children
- Surveys with parents
- Interviews with staff and volunteers

Data from all methods were analysed together using a thematic, inductive approach.

Main Findings

Findings from the research suggested that preschool children received potentially beneficial outcomes, including:

Courage - By forming connections with residents living with dementia during activities, preschool children's confidence was encouraged despite their shyness and a lack of verbal communication.

Care - Preschool children were involved in both care-giving and care-receiving. This was displayed through the staff mediated exchange of gifts, such as drawings and sweet treats, between the preschool children and residents living with dementia.

Empathy - Enhanced understanding of the residents living with dementia by preschool children resulted in them acting maturely, knowingly and empathetically within the IG programme. Although there were moments of disconnection, these were part of the process of developing empathetic understanding and stronger connections.

RELEVANCE FOR PRACTICE:

Thoughtful staff mediation, facilitatory activities and fostering generational understanding may help preschool children receive potentially beneficial outcomes.

'Good' connection needs to be viewed as encouraging confidence rather than based on verbal communication.

Continued support needs to be given to enable preschool children to give and receive care and develop empathetic understanding.

Recognising both positive and negative aspects of preschool children's experiences is important for understanding outcomes as relational and part of progress toward stronger connection.

Seeking the views of preschool children is important for broadening understandings of what constitutes beneficial interaction within IG programmes involving people living with dementia.