

IRELAND – ACTION RESEARCH, CASE STUDIES

1. The Way We Were Project

Introduction

A strong emphasis in the Irish Primary School curriculum is placed on the exploration of the child's cultural and local environment. This emphasis has created a space for older people to contribute either as classroom visitors or partners in intergenerational programmes. Established in 2009, 'The Way We Were' project brings social history and heritage alive and gives children a new understanding of times gone by. In this project, groups of senior volunteers from Third Age exhibit artefacts from earlier times and explain to the children how they were used. Approximately twelve senior volunteers are involved.



Third Age is a national voluntary organisation situated in the village of Summerhill, County Meath, 35 kilometres from Dublin. Third Age was established in 1988 to celebrate 'the third age' in life and to provide creative opportunities for older people to contribute to society. Third Age recognises the value of good relationships between young and old and helps to bring young and old together, enabling mutual communication, teaching and learning between the generations (<http://www.thirdageireland.ie>).

The senior volunteers are invited by schools to present an exhibition of historical artefacts and explain them to the children. The children are prepared by their teachers in advance of the visit by the volunteers. The volunteers, both men and women, then travel to rural and urban schools and work in pairs discussing the artefacts and their use with the children and teachers.

The volunteers dip into their own childhood and show the children items such as their early school report cards, a penny catechism, a baby's bottle, a carbide bicycle lamp, a fire bellows, a fountain pen and ink, and a hot water bottle heated by coals. The star attraction is often the delph chamber pot, which baffles the children who cannot guess its function!

'The Way We Were' project also visits nursing homes where the volunteers facilitate discussion and reminiscence with the residents through the medium of the artefacts.

The findings below are based on a focus group of six senior volunteers with Third Age as well as discussions with staff of the Third Age organisation.

How do the different generations benefit?

Innovative learning and teaching methodologies were energising for the children, volunteers and teachers. The children benefit from the 'active learning' opportunities offered by the concrete objects of an earlier era and the stories of life in the 'old days' offered by the volunteers. Children had fun guessing the purpose of unfamiliar objects as well as the opportunity to 'use' items such as a wind-up phone or a carpet beater. The variety in the types of questions asked was considered an interesting element of the project...***"the children ask you other questions...they ask you about your childhood if they are doing something in History"*** (Volunteer).

Some of the volunteers enjoyed the fact that it was a special event in the school that resulted in more excitement for the children in contrast to projects that ran on a weekly basis which could be seen as part of the normal school routine.

The volunteers were pleased with the enthusiasm of the children and appreciated that their contribution was acknowledged by the school and expressed through the hospitality offered to them on the day. Volunteers liked the immediate and direct positive feedback from the schoolchildren during the artefact presentations. The role of teachers and parents in this project was also valued by the volunteers as teachers and parents often engaged actively during the visit resulting in opportunities for collective learning. They also identified the sociable nature of this project as they travel together in a bus, work in pairs and generally spend a full day away on the project. A noteworthy aspect of this project was its appeal to both male and female volunteers. This project also offered the volunteers the opportunity to extend their own learning of Irish social history and the artefacts. For example the group undertook an educational visit to the National Museum of Country Life in Castlebar, County Mayo. This was also seen as a very enjoyable element of this project.

The project offered opportunities for community development. Cooperation and networking occurred between a community group, local schools and nursing homes in a large geographical area. The learning crossed urban/rural, cultural and intergenerational boundaries which enhanced possibilities for future collaboration. The intercultural nature of the experience was of interest to some of the volunteers who were meeting an increasing number of children from other countries through the exhibition. In some cases the artefacts were more familiar to children from other cultures.

Constraints and challenges

Without the commitment of interest and resources by Third Age the success of the project would be uncertain. Third Age provides training for the senior volunteers in relation to the artefacts, transport to the schools and the benefits of strong links in the surrounding community.

Presenting and discussing the artefacts to large groups of children over a school day is a demanding experience for the volunteers. The level of engagement and interaction with children was high and the volunteers repeated their presentations a number of times over the day.

Attracting volunteers who are interested in visiting schools and presenting and discussing the artefacts is a basic requirement for the continuation of the project.

The ongoing interest and commitment of time by teachers in schools is essential.

Getting access to artefacts that volunteers and others in the community are prepared to donate could be a constraint.

Police vetting was required for all the volunteers working with children which can lead to delays and difficulties in recruiting volunteers in Ireland.

Cost could be a constraint as the volunteers required transport to travel to the schools.

2. 'If you were in my shoes now' project

Introduction



'If you were in my shoes now' was a year-long community participatory arts project that involved the creation of individual felt slippers and the collected stories of 50 participants aged 5 - 86 years.

Nas na Riogha housing association (NnRHA) developed the intergenerational arts project 'If you were in my shoes now' during 2012/13. NnRHA is a voluntary organisation that has developed independent housing for older people in a refurbished convent in the centre of the town of Naas in County Kildare, 30 kilometres from Dublin. (<http://www.nnrha.ie/>). The use of the Arts as an enabler and

the fostering of intergenerational relationships are central to the philosophy of NnRHA. The project received funding from Kildare Arts Office, INTERREG/ Kildare Age Friendly County, and Kildare Leader Partnership.

The project involved the creation of slippers by the participants through the craft of felt making. The participants were a mixed age and social group and included Primary School children, teenagers, young mothers, carers, people with an intellectual disability and retired people. Approximately one third of the participants were male. The project involved a weekly 2-3 hour session and the slippers and stories took approximately eight weeks to complete. The slippers and stories were exhibited in NnRHA and the exhibition also toured to two schools in the locality, a large general hospital, a library and a community arts centre. The exhibition was also brought to Conway in North Wales.

Nine freelance personnel¹ were contracted on the project supported by a number of volunteers from NnRHA under the leadership of the Chairperson of NnRHA (CP). The participants worked collectively under the guidance of a Creative Director (CD) and a Project Coordinator (PC), Felt Artists (FA) and a writer (W) to create an individual pair of slippers and personal stories. The project culminated in a seminar *If You Were in My Shoes Now* held at NnRHA in May 2013. The findings below are based on interviews with the Project Coordinator, Chairperson of NnRHA and a Primary School teacher whose class of 5 year-olds viewed the exhibition. They are also informed by discussion with project participants and information obtained at the seminar.

How do the different generations benefit?

The quality of the relationships that developed among and between the generations was a particular strength of this project. There was real communication between the older people and the children: ***"They got to know each other ... really sweet and lovely relationships ... the children brought a different dynamic, they were less reluctant, fun, they were all used to making, they brought a lovely innocence, vitality ... they said funny things"*** (PC).

¹ Project Creative Director/Producer, Project Coordinator, 2 Felt Artists, 1 Writer, 1 Community Artist, 1 Photographer, 1 Exhibition Designer, 1 Exhibition Tour Technician

The project created specific and broad social empathy across social groups and different life situations which challenged stereotyped views of 'the other': ***"There wasn't any [stigma], the focus was on the project, everything else happened organically"*** (PC).

The social benefits of different generations spending time together and participating in a shared activity was evident: ***"Every session there were extended conversations that we don't often have time for anymore"*** (PC).

These conversations ranged from the children and adults sharing happy memories of buying a special pair of shoes to adults sharing painful experiences of loss and bereavement (PC and W).

The satisfaction of creating something together appealed to all age groups. One of the young boys participating in the project was asked: 'What was the best thing about the project?' and responded: ***"EVERYTHING"***. When asked what was the worst thing about the project he responded: ***"That it had to finish"*** (CP). Participants in all age groups shared a sense of fulfillment from artistic and creative achievement: ***"the creation of something very beautiful and artistic and a piece of writing which means their words are documented forever more"*** (PC).

The project and exhibition took place in a community based supported housing setting for older people. The direct participants had the opportunity to experience both the process and the product, while a broader group had the opportunity to enjoy the artistic product. School children responded very positively to the exhibition. Scouting groups (5-7 years) who also had their own art work on display, visited the slippers exhibition with their parents. The children were fascinated by the stories that accompanied the slippers. The Chairperson of NnaRHA stated: ***"we are proud to continue to reweave the tapestry of the generations. The threads are coming together again"*** (CP).

The project encouraged and fostered a strong sense of volunteering and participation within the community and among the generations. Schools, community groups and volunteers from NnRHA provided important support throughout the project.

Constraints and challenges

Achieving genuine community participation is a challenge: ***"The community dimension is challenging, achieving a balance ... the structure has to be right, getting people on board, building over time a 'community of interest ... having a broad -based steering group of participating organisations helped to achieve that"*** (PC).

There is an infrastructural challenge for a voluntary organisation staffed mainly by volunteers to handle complex arts projects as they require considerable artistic, social, financial and administrative skills.

The suitability of adapting the project for younger children would be a challenge: ***"in its present form anyone under 5 would be challenging but not impossible"*** (PC).

Police vetting was required for the project team and volunteers which can lead to delays and difficulties.

3. The Trauma Teddies project

Introduction

The Trauma Teddies project is an initiative of Third Age and a local Primary School, and is now in its 11th year. The project involves groups of four senior volunteers working with groups of approximately 20 children in a knitting project in the school each week of the academic year. The Trauma Teddies are hand-knitted teddies in bright colours which are carried in the Irish Ambulance Service and are used to comfort children going to hospital. To date over 1,000 teddies have been made. The group has also knitted hats, scarves and gloves for a charity in Belarus. The following information is drawn from the results of a focus group with volunteers involved in the Trauma Teddies project and from the website of Third Age which reported on a visit to the Trauma Teddies project by a leading Irish fashion designer (<http://www.thirdageireland.ie>).



A strong emphasis in the Irish Primary School curriculum is placed on the exploration of the child's local environment as well as social history, heritage and crafts. This emphasis has created a space for older people to contribute, either as classroom visitors or partners in intergenerational programmes. Some volunteers began a series of knitting lessons in the school when it was noticed children no longer learned knitting at school.

How do the different generations benefit?

Developing relationships with children through their interaction on weekly visits to the school was an important benefit for the volunteers: **"We got to know the children, and you meet them on the street and they say: ... 'Hello, Nora' "(Volunteer). "It was lovely to see them sitting together chatting away, each adult had about three young knitters. They were obviously very comfortable together"** (Fashion designer).

Having relationships with children was valued by older people whose grandchildren were older: ... **"my grandchildren are grown up"** ... (Volunteer) or whose grandchildren were living far away **"... great for me, my grandchildren live in the US, it's so special for me"** (Volunteer); ... **"a lot of the children have moved here and don't live near their grandparents so it's really great for them to connect with older people on a regular basis"** (School Principal).

Helping children was also important and one volunteer spoke about a boy with a hearing impairment who liked to knit with her each week as he felt secure with her. The benefit of a

listening ear was highlighted by one volunteer who supported a child when he told her he was bullied.

Learning about the past in an informal way through conversations between children and volunteers while they knitted together was seen as a benefit: ... **"they would just ask what's in the top of their head"** (Volunteer).

Learning from children was another benefit identified by some of the senior volunteers: ... **"it's very interesting talking to the children and I learn a lot from them too"** (Volunteer).

The energy of children was enjoyed by the older people and the importance of fun was identified as an important benefit for some volunteers: ... **"they lift your mood ... it's lovely meeting children"** (Volunteer); **"... if you don't have fun you lose interest, you have to have fun"** (Volunteer).

Opportunities for enjoying social events through the project were appreciated by the volunteers, for example, when the project was launched and the ambulance arrived at the school: **"... it was a great social morning, it was lovely to go down to the school and see the little eyes of the children"** (Volunteer).

Through working as a group, it was clear volunteers can support each other in many ways – enjoying each other's company, having fun together, supporting each other in times of difficulty.

The imparting of a life skill by older people to benefit young children was of immense significance. Children learned to knit and some volunteers brushed up on their knitting skills: ... **"I think it is very important that we pass on these crafts and what better way to pass it on from one generation to the other?"** (Fashion designer).

The project offered the possibility of a break from the classroom routine (children could choose to become involved or not) and teachers and volunteers believed some children became involved in the project for this reason: ... **"it's a nice break from the traditional subjects and I certainly don't object to them missing a small amount of class in order to learn the gift of handcraft"** (School Principal).

The project offered a good opportunity for children to learn how to behave in a courteous and polite manner towards older people: ... **"they realised that we are older than even their teachers and they're quite respectful ... they don't know old people".** ... (Volunteers).

The fact that boys as well as girls participated in the knitting can be seen as positive despite the fact that girls generally outnumbered boys by about 4 to 1.

Constraints and challenges

Meeting only weekly meant it took a considerable period to complete a teddy. Volunteers responded flexibly by continuing the knitting between sessions and by introducing simpler opportunities such as knitting squares to make a blanket.

Getting feedback on the children's experiences of the project was of great interest to the older people involved in the project but could be seen as a challenge in a busy school.

When a project has a direct link with a curriculum goal this may be a contributory factor in its success.

Deciding on appropriate boundaries when relating to children was a worry for some volunteers, for example, the appropriateness of touching a child's arm or taking a child to the toilet. They spoke of their desire for guidelines and this may reflect a wider social concern about child protection. The requirement of police vetting for persons working with children could be a constraint.

A lack of time could be a constraint for some Third Age volunteers who were involved in a number of other projects.

ITALY- ACTION RESEARCH, CASE STUDIES

1. Elderly and Children together (Anziani e Bambini insieme)

Introduction

This is a modern IG centre, which hosts a day centre and a nursing home for the elderly and a nursery for children in the 0 – 3 age range. The realization of the project relies upon the integration of these three services and the implementation of activities which involve the participation of both young and old guests.

The centre originated in the project “Elderly and Children together”, which was conceived and realized by

UNICOOP, a cooperative company involved in the management of educational, social and health services in the province of Piacenza (Northern Italy). The aim of the project was to create space, time and opportunities for elderly and children to get in contact with each other and overcome IG barriers. In 2009 the project led to the realization of the IG Centre. Currently there are 39 children attending the nursery part, 54 guests living in the nursing home and 20 elders being hosted in the day care centre.

The motivation behind the whole project lies in the attempt to define a strategy of intervention capable of recovering IG relationships and rediscovering social solidarity. The key element is the IG centre: a social and educational meeting place for the elderly, the children and their families, as well as for the staff and the volunteers involved.

The project was conceived to respond to some specific local needs: the need to renovate an old building, set in very heart of the city and already used as an old people’s home; the need to allocate a new place to host the public day centre for the elderly; the need for a nursery for young children in the centre of the city. The solution was “easily” found: in 2 years the old age home has been renovated and reorganised to host the three services in the same building.

The starting point was the idea that seniors and children can do well together and that the IG contact is a benefit for both. Due to the lack of scientific and cultural references – especially within the Italian setting – this idea originally arose out of intuition, supported by a 20-year professional experience and knowledge of local social services. The main source of inspiration



was the example of some IG projects realized in France (the first one carried out in Lyon since 1993).

How do the different generations benefit?

The seniors and young children get regularly involved in common activities, usually in small groups (maximum 12 people each). These include graphic arts and painting workshops, storytelling and reading activities, cooking workshops, gardening and outdoor activities. They also share common lunches or breaks and occasionally have birthday parties, parties with parents, walks outside in the park or along the tree-lined path.

The opportunity for these interactions puts into effect the idea that "every generation has something to give to the others". On one hand, the interaction with the elders has a positive effect on the process of socialization of the children: they develop the ability to relate to adults outside of their family. **"My daughter recognizes and greets the "gramps" of the centre, addressing them by name. Grandpa Franco is her favourite one"**. (Francesca Cavallini, mother of Bice, 3 years old). **"I am happy to let my daughter introduce me to people who are friends to her, while strangers to me"** (Valentina Sulzani, early childhood services coordinator, reporting the glowing words of another mother).

On the other hand, the seniors, with their pace slowing down, naturally meet the needs for attention of children and can support their social, emotional and cognitive growth. In addition, the contact with the elderly has another educational value: children get used to the disability of elder people. They do not develop prejudices and naturally learn to accept the others, no matter which physical or motor limitation they might have. **"The best example is grandpa Ubaldo's walker, with children pushing and hanging on as it was a cart."** (Elena Giagosti, project coordinator).

Moreover, through the contact with children, the seniors beneficiaries regain possession of their adult identity. Children bring back the memories of their past, help them feel useful in the present and enjoy the wait for tomorrow. **"It's gratifying to see our old guests with the kids: they get infected by their energy, enthusiasm and smiles, and change their mood and attitude toward life"** (Nuccia, healthcare worker). Children fill up the empty time of the elders and give them new objectives so that they are pushed not to give into laziness and to maintain a positive, active and creative vision of life. **"It's the case of grandma Tea, under depression before coming to the centre. Once here, with the kids she was born again and gained a new lease of life. And it is the case of grandpa Franco: he never misses the opportunity to stay with the children, waits for them, looks for them, takes them in his arms"** (Valentina Sulzani, early childhood services coordinator). **"I did not know about the nest when I moved here 2 years ago. It was a discovery and a pleasure I had never felt before. I am alone in the world, no sons or nephews. Now these children are my enthusiasm and my passion. I've become fond of them and in summer, when the nest is closed, I miss them ... and that's okay: I can't imagine another place to live now"** (Franco, senior beneficiary, 80 years old).

Finally, plenty of unplanned interactions happen every day along the corridors, in common spaces, outside in the garden or through a window. They just come from "the unexpected" and spontaneously turn into a greeting, a smile, a laugh or an improvised game. **"The unexpected is the walker of grandfather Ubaldo"** (Elena Giagosti, coordinator) or **"the surprise when former children come to visit the old gramps of the centre"** (Franco, senior beneficiary, 80 years old). This is the tangible sign of the sustainability of the project. The outputs are not limited to games and workshops: they are about building relations and bringing a social and cultural message of IG solidarity inside and outside the centre.

Constraints and challenges

The seniors are not always willing to be involved in activities with children: they have their own pace, depending on their physical or health conditions or even on their moods. For this reason they are never forced to participate in any group activity or are allowed remain on the sidelines as observers. However, this is not an obstacle to the implementation of the activities since many seniors attend the centre, some of them particularly enthusiastic about staying with children.

- Children and seniors establish a real emotional relationship with the implicit risk of a painful separation, which inevitably comes when 4-year children leave the nursery and move to another school. However, the experience has shown that the "emptiness" left by the children in the elderly is soon overcome with the arrival of new children every year. A painful separation could also be experienced by children in case of death of a "grandfather" which they are particularly attached to. These risks are addressed through the supervision of the professionals, aimed at avoiding that seniors and children – depending on their own character and sensitivity – could get carried away and build particularly symbiotic relations. Moreover, children easily learn to distinguish between their "real" grandparents and their senior playmates in the centre.

- The lack of a childcare centre for children over 3 years is a limitation of the project. ***"Unfortunately next year my 3-year old daughter will move to another school and interrupt the experience with the elders of the centre. That's a pity. I think most benefits would have come during the coming years of her growth"*** (Francesca Cavallini, mother of Bice).

More information:

Centro Anziani e Bambini Insieme

Viale Pubblico Passeggio, 24 - 29121 Piacenza

<http://www.cooperativaunicoop.it/index.php?/abi>

<http://www.cooperativaunicoop.it/>

Elena Giagosti (Project coordinator): elenagiagosti@cooperativaunicoop.it

2. Hortus Urbis

Introduction



Hortus Urbis is a city garden and an educational project about sustainability and environmental awareness. It contains plants that were cultivated in the Ancient Rome. The main target group is families including all generations. The project also represents an exchange initiative among the different gardens managed by citizens around Rome.

The origin of the project involved the Park of "Appia Antica" Institution, who proposed to an architect group – Zappata Romana, who had previously done a mapping of the gardens in Rome to create a urban garden. The Park Institution was looking for innovative ideas to save and promote the ancient and large green space around Via Appia Antica, which had been abandoned, in order to open an interesting spot to citizens where children and families could find educational outdoor activities. Zappata Romana asked volunteers already active in shared garden projects in different districts to join in a new group for this new initiative.

The garden provides a solution to a common worry about the sustainability, and the future of the new generations: ***"Taking care of the future means taking care of the future of the land, the environment... I see the gardens as an educational example of an IG pact to restore hope and future of the new generations."*** (Meg, 55 years old, female, volunteer)

The motivation of the volunteers is a sense of responsibility and rewarding concrete work. The garden is located in an area of historical significance, with hundreds of daily visitors, including children and school pupils.

How do the different generations benefit?

The two main benefits recognized by the volunteers and organisers are:

-A common learning, for the children as well as for the volunteers. The educational process is based on practical experience, to learn about gardening, environment and nutrition ***"when you put your hands in the earth you understand how are the different plants, such as food plants, medicinal plants, flowers ...children participate actively in the workshops, they have planted, and taken care of the growing ones, or done small manual work such as wood construction of tools or signs"*** (Matteo, 34 years old, male, organiser).

Through the contact with children visiting the garden the volunteers also acquire new knowledge and pedagogical skills.

Parents also benefit as most of them take part with their youngest children (2-5 years old) in the activities, participating in the workshops.

Education for sustainability is a key concept in all the activities. The final goal is to raise awareness among all the age groups, thanks to the involvement of children. A previously abandoned site has become a dynamic space in which the social relations have big importance.

“this place came back to life, every weekend many families got used to come and hundreds are involved during the events” (Matteo, 34 years old, male, organiser). This leads to an exchange of people from different ages.

Constraints and challenges

The main challenge of the initiative regarding the IG aspect is that the contact among generations -especially the contact between seniors and young children - is informal and takes place in an improvised and non planned way, even if they share the same space.

“The fact of putting together children and adults is creating the need for more planning and organization in education and exchange” (Matteo, 34 years old, male, organiser)

However, there are cases in which seniors interact in some activities with children, even if in most cases it is spontaneous ***“so far we have not planned an educational activity ourselves, but often happens that we senior volunteers take care of the children by showing our work and doing things together” (Meg, 55 years old, female, volunteer).***

The actual educational activities such the workshops in the weekends are organised by the experts. According to Meg (volunteer) ***“the change we should do -but I'm not sure if we can do it- would be to manage the learning activities ourselves, but we're still not experienced. Sometimes we talk about it, it is challenging, not all of us are trained in didactics” (Meg, 55 years old, female, volunteer).***

However, the volunteer recognizes that this could be reinforced through the learning exchanges among the group, amongst people from different backgrounds, knowledge and skills (including coaches, psychologists, architects specialised in participative processes).

There are not many seniors in the group of volunteers (4 out of 10 active senior volunteers) . Furthermore it is thought that some senior volunteers view children with indifference or even as a threat more than as a group that could bring benefits. ***“When there are children those who interact more with them are the 30s and 40s, more than the 60s. It would be interesting to understand the motivation of those who keep more distance from children. Especially this is the case for the seniors who have experience cultivating the land, who have been educated in a vision that the approach to the earth is not a game and then it must be done carefully. Instead of the usual 30s and 40s who grew up in the city they live it more like a game.” (Matteo, 34 years old, male, organiser)***

More information:

Via Appia Antica, 42/50 00179 Roma

<http://www.hortusurbis.it/>

hortus.zappataromana@gmail.com

3. Grandparents in the library (Nonni in biblioteca)

Introduction

In this project senior volunteers who are grandparents of school children organise a library and read and discuss books with children aged 4 to 9 years inside a primary school in a multicultural district of the city of Rome. Volunteers are involved 4 hours weekly. In groups of two the volunteers receive the visit of a class to the library where the children can borrow books. The volunteers also read and discuss books with the children (approx. 400 in total).



The library of the school had been abandoned for years. In 2012 a small group of teachers launched this initiative using the books available in the school and a room that was adapted for this purpose. Thanks to the Parents Association, the teachers were able to recruit 12 senior volunteers among the grandparents of the children.

The main motivation of the project was to offer children a space to become familiar and enjoy books: by renovating a space, making books available (the remarkable collection of books of the Manin Institute) and through IG exchange. The initiative answers to the lack of a library in the neighbourhood and to the need to provide books for those who don't have them at home, since many families came from other countries. The library project also provided opportunities to seize the school activities with the composition of the district population.

The first benefit of the project is the new learning opportunities for children promoting their relationship with books and their interest for knowledge, thanks to grandparent volunteers.

The space in the library create a different atmosphere that the one that children have with teachers in the classroom. It creates the necessary confidence so that kids can explain their experiences, and in this context, seniors can play an important role.

"Children were happy to have a different place and adult" "They have very different backgrounds, and some with many problems; we have more time for these things and it is a great satisfaction when you see changes on them." (Giuliana, senior volunteer, female, 64).

Children become more active, discover new things and are encouraged to talk and express themselves. Thus, it is possible to work directly or indirectly on different abilities of the child. Moreover, seniors can transmit them the critical capacities, to reason and reflect about texts and topics.

«It is important to reason with a child and to give him/her critical thinking skills» (Giuliana, senior volunteer, female, 64).

Furthermore, old volunteers listen to children with interest, and talk about learning from them. ***"children began to talk and tell stories about themselves, the father, the grandfather, their family.... I would stay for hours listening to them"*** (Giuliana, senior volunteer, female, 64).

The volunteers get personal satisfaction from their service; they can contribute with their knowledge and experience, the children are interested in them, which at the same time motivates them even more to continue.

“when you didn't have time to follow your children it's a great benefit for us to build these relations, you can transfer your knowledge” (Carlo, senior volunteer, male, 71).

In many cases the IG exchange is new for them: they don't live with grandparents and children coming from migrant families don't have grandparents in Italy, so they miss their experiences.

“They have different families from ours, we lived altogether with grandparents and there was no TV, the experiences were just told ...they get used and appreciate it” (Giuliana, senior volunteer, female, 64).

“the grandfather, the wise senior, is essential, because these children do not have experience: for them is a discovery, they touch my white hair, my hands, the lines, the veins that come out” “they also need to feel welcomed...it is important to ensure this generational continuity” (Carlo, senior volunteer, male 71)

Constraints and challenges

Even if the library works quite well, the project has faced some constraints and challenges since its beginning:

-Children's participation depends quite a lot on the interest of teacher. Some teachers were very involved while others weren't. In some cases it was seen as a duty, taking time from the formal programme,

“some teachers wondered about the reasons...there are some focused on staying on track with the learning agenda, and who are less attentive to the human aspect: for them the library represents a too big commitment» “in some cases it was even hard to explain why a library” (Alessia, teacher and promoter, female, 42).

-Available time: changes have been made in this sense in order to have a little more time for each group, but this has also meant that fewer class groups attended the library.

-According to the view of some of the elderly, the initiative is less flexible than the after-school activities in which they participate as volunteers, and which are more open. In the library there is a structure and plan that has to be followed.

-Donations have led to a classification difficulty: there are pending books waiting for someone who could devote more time to catalogue them. Moreover, volunteers come out with proposals that cannot be applied due to lack of resources and staff, and they neither had the skills to do it.
“The loan service is a difficult task especially if you do not know the library, we keep a register but it is not perfect” (Luciano, senior volunteer, male, 73)

-The risk for the project that if people who have initiated it leave the school, the project finishes, because it depends a lot on their efforts.

More information:

Carlo Di Carlo 3333743930, dicarlo37@hotmail.com

<http://www.danielemanin.org/> <http://www.genitorididonato.it/joomla/>

4. **A territory is told through art, music and theater and traditional crafts (Un territorio si racconta tra arte, musica , teatro e antichi mestiere e sapere**

Introduction

One of the main goals of the project, which took place in Poggio Pincenze, was to make children aware of the importance of collective memory and involve older people as active citizens. Their involvement was also meant as a way to preserve the traditions, history and culture of the town. The project also aimed to build sustainable relations, to fight loneliness of the old people in the town and to strengthen the link between generations.

It is important to remember that the villagers experienced the shock of the major earthquake in 2009, that killed three children. The destruction of the old village and its main square lead to a lack of a meeting point for the villagers as a place to live, play, exchange. ***“Any city or village has a square. If not, the values of the square are missing, even in those in which there are the old people having a coffee and playing cards...Life. It is missing a common space in general”***(Danilo, 34, male, expert).



The initiative started two years ago, when the mayor of the town, who was also the head teacher of the school, met a group of experts in creativity and artistic community projects. They planned a 2-year project, involving seniors and children. The local primary school was involved to support the initiative and embed its activities in the school programs.

The project started in 2011-2012: the children visited the old people in their homes, where they were interviewed by the children themselves. The emerging issues were then chosen by the children: love, religious and cultural traditions, the war memories, the school. These themes were the focus of several workshops organised by the experts, using theatre, music and arts, to involve children and seniors. In May 2012, the project culminated in a performance on the streets of the town, where children and seniors showed the ancient crafts and lifestyles from the 1950s.

The second part of the project, called “ancient crafts, ancient knowledge” took as a starting point the work, the results and the methodology used in the previous activities. The grandparents visited the school to show and explain to the children old crafts and jobs and tell them about their memories. Based on this experience, the children, with the support of the teachers and the artistic experts, created a film showing Poggio Pincenze of nowadays and Poggio Pincenze in the 50s.

The project involved almost 60 pupils (4-10 years), 30 active senior volunteers and 100 senior citizens who joined some of the activities. A team of three experts and the teachers of the school managed the initiative.

How do the different generations benefit?

When the seniors took part in the activities they felt so happy that they did not want the activity finished. They could not wait for the time to meet the kids and tell them the stories. In general, going back to school has made the old people feel younger. ***"We went back to our childhood!" (Pio, male, 70)***

When it is possible to involve an old person without grandchildren this brings even greater satisfaction building a relationship that somehow was lacking. ***"They are not happy, they are more than that!" (Antonella, 47, female, expert).***

A tradition that has been partially lost, that is, the meeting of grandparents and children in which the oldest people told stories of personal experiences or fantasy, has been recovered. Grandparents could tell their personal stories, which made them feel useful and refresh their memory and they could contribute to the education of children, retrieving values that they considered important, such as ***"the respect, the value of nature, family, people..." (senior, female, 65 years old)*** and feel satisfied that children enthusiastically participate.

Children and grandparents became main actors: the children became journalists and grandparents told the stories and taught many things. Children have learned a lot about the life in the past and have compared their life with the elderly life in various subjects (the school, love, and even historical subjects such as the war).

Children have learned new concepts, such as the daily activities from the past and they got to know how to describe them step by step ***"grandparents told us the things that were done in the past ...Arianna's grandfather has told us how the dishes were repaired, with iron, a hole was made and attached with iron and glue ...at that time nothing was thrown out ...they didn't have the Play Station! they made the games with other stuff"*** (focus group of children, 6 to 7 year-olds).

They learnt that life can be different, whether better (once, people were more together, the things were repaired, there were original games, pasta was handmade) or worse (the war, beating children in school ***"teachers slapped on the hands!"*** and so they learned to appreciate what they have. In their activities with the old people children also learned the language of arts and crafts.

Furthermore, children are happy with the experience: When the children were asked if there were anything they didn't like about the activities with the seniors they replied: ***Nothing!*** And the most beautiful? ***All of them!*** (focus group with children 7 to 8 years).

Parents also had a positive evaluation: ***"is like sharing a continuation, share the life of our parents but with the eyes of our children"*** (mothers). Even the teachers and Mayor benefitted personally and professionally: they could link the project topics to school programs on the different subjects (history, geography).

Constraints and challenges

This project – now finished - has faced some challenges, though most of them have been overcome.

-The economical resources are very limited, but this has been addressed by looking for sponsors, getting additional resources from parents, experts and the municipality which as prioritized this project.

-The bad weather has been an adverse factor as it has complicated the shooting of the film and the activities had to be postponed in some occasions.

-Being an isolated little town in the mountain meant that at the beginning there were some concern from old people, because of shyness, and not wanting to be disturbed ... but when this barrier was overcome they became strongly involved and committed.

-At some point, due to the educational needs of formal schooling, the meetings with older people had to be stopped, the seniors were sorry about this and always ask when they could come back.

More information:

Rosella Pezzuti lolellap@yahoo.es

Danilo Maccarone danilo.maccarone@yahoo.it

POLAND – ACTION RESEARCH, CASE STUDIES

NOTE: These initiatives are an absolute exception in Poland – it really time for the Polish researchers to uncover them. In Poland there is no structured form of contacts between older people and children in formal settings.

1. Flying Grannies (Latające Babcie)

Introduction

Flying Grannies are a group of senior volunteers who visit libraries, children's hospitals and children's homes to perform their own poems and stories for children.

The group was initiated in 2009 by Urszula Machcińska, who took part in writing and storytelling course organized by Stowarzyszenie kobiety.lodz.pl (Association women.lodz.pl), local women's organization. She wanted to go on with writing for children and to continue to enjoy the exchange with other women when the course was over. So with the support of Stowarzyszenie kobiety.lodz.pl, she applied for external financing and received the grant. The group belongs to Stowarzyszenie kobiety.lodz.pl volunteers.



The group receive invitations from different institutions in and outside Łódź and visit them occasionally. With some of the institutions (e.g. Fundacja "Dom w Łodzi" – "Home in Łódź" Foundation that runs children's home for seriously ill children and Fundacja Jaś i Małgosia (Hansel and Gretel Foundation) – therapy centre for children with autism) they have close, permanent contact and they visit them on daily basis. In the preschools they also organize and conduct, with the support of psychologist, "empathic workshops" applying Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication.¹ For the purpose of the workshops Flying Grannies write "emphatic stories" that refer to emotions, self-esteem and relations, which are the base for games and play facilitated by psychologist. Flying Grannies have published two books for children.

¹ Nonviolent Communication focuses on three aspects of communication: self-empathy (towards yourself), empathy (towards others), and honest self-expression.

An interesting feature of the project is that it embraces many generations: there are the young children, a teenage girl, Ola, who gives support with the project website, 30-40 year old specialists (psychologist, literary consultant) and seniors: 14 women and 1 men aged 55-75 years.

How do the different generations benefit?

For the volunteers it is important, that also in this phase of their life they can do something that is useful and meaningful for other people, especially those in need, and that is at the same time challenging and satisfying for themselves.

The crucial experience of Flying Grannies is the happiness of children they meet and perform for. Children enjoy very much their performances and are amazed by colourful costumes - ***"They won't let us go!"***

Writing, performing and interacting with children are passions of all group members - ***"We love what we do"***, they say. Flying Grannies bring to reality their dreams about writing and performing: ***"We fulfil our unfulfilled dreams. I wanted to be an actress and it didn't work out, now I feel great being on stage in the same role"***. The joy of developing their own talents is also connected with hard work – "It is a way to perfect your character, you need to accept critique".

Anti-violence and antidiscrimination activities are also important for the members of the group. They participate in local city actions, events, discussions and conferences about these topics. By getting involved in these kinds of actions, they share their wisdom, life-experience and values.

Still, the most important are the direct contacts with children. In a residential children's home for seriously ill children where they are regular guests, each Granny received her own new title from the children e.g. "Cuddle Granny", "Hug Granny". The children that have no biological parents and grandparents build meaningful relationships with these special "grannies"

Constraints and challenges

The biggest challenge is financing and project administration, because it consumes time of the members of the group (they perform all the tasks on the basis of volunteering).

Being involved in so many activities that are not linked with home or work is a big change for many of the group members. "Leaving" the house has a special meaning for women who are traditionally expected to take care of the everyday life at home, and housework, but nothing else. One of the Grannies said: "We just had our fiftieth marriage anniversary. My husband told me: "For fifty years you were at home. And now, after fifty years, you are not there!" There is visible tension in this traditional role model, but first reactions of all the partners of group members, were turning into more positive ones and some of the husbands are actively supporting the group, e.g. in preparing the costumes.

More information:

<http://www.latajacebabcie.pl/>

Urszula Machcińska, ula.machcinska@poczta.onet.pl

2. The Academy of Supergrandmother and Supergrandfather (Akademia Superbabci i Superdziadka)



Introduction

The Academy of Supergrandmother and Supergrandfather (Akademia Superbabci i Superdziadka) in Lublin is a school for grandparents to learn more about their grandparenting role and to engage in volunteer work with children. The Academy has two goals:

- To offer support to grandparents regarding developmental psychology, pedagogy etc., so they can apply knowledge in accompanying their grandchildren, playing with them and fostering their development,
- To offer grandparents chance to take care of themselves – learn about senior health, establish contacts with new people, find new forms of spending time and relaxing.

It became a part of program implemented by another association, Towarzystwo Inicjatyw Twórczych Ę, that wants to promote the idea and facilitate opening new Academies

in new locations. There are already two others: in Białystok and Warsaw. The account below is based on interview with a group of 'supergrandmothers' who visit children's centres.

The leader of the project, Zofia Zaorska (PhD) (69 years) had been teaching adult education in Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (Lublin) and for many years had coordinated the activities of The University of the Third Age in Lublin. When she became a grandmother, she realized that she has been always working with adults and that she needed a place where she could get a support in the new role of grandmother. In 2008 she established the School of Super-grandmother in cooperation with a local NGO and community centre. Already in the first year there was a lot of interest in the activities of the School. Since then every year around 30 new people join the project. Until now, in spite of wide promotion and invitation directed to men, only one man has become involved. Explaining this, the supergrandmothers interviewed assume that it is because children rearing, which is in the focus of the Academy, is alien to men of their age, although they observe that this pattern is different in younger generations.

Senior volunteering is one of the activities offered in School and it is regarded as natural part of the School. There are 20 volunteers that form two groups: a theatre group and a story-tellers group. Both groups consist of present and ex-students of the School. They visit Early Childhood Education Centres (ECEC) settings to meet with children and perform for them.

How do the different generations benefit?

For the seniors involved in volunteering the most important thing is reactions of children – their happiness and astonishment over performances. After one of the performances in preschool, a child asked: **"Are you from the outer space?!"** – it gave the volunteers feeling that they offer to children something very special and it makes them also feel special. The volunteers are happy that they can do something for others: **"We can give so much to children"**. The volunteers gain

also a lot personally: ***"We are more self-confident and cheerful"*** and they go beyond their comfort zone to realize that they actually can do much more than they expected - ***"I have never thought that I would dare to perform!"***; ***"Supergrandmother takes up new challenges and roles she would never imagined"***. They also have a lot of fun during preparations and performances! And they do something that is attractive for their grandchildren: ***"My granddaughter is proud that her grandmother performs in the theatre!"*** They believe that children benefit from these meetings, because they experience something new, which is good for their development. They also point out that many children have no other chances to meet older people that do not belong to their families.

The volunteers also claim that their performances are very calm and serene, there is no scary elements, as often happens in professional theatre shows. The performances are based on widely known fairy-tales, such as "Hansel and Gretel", Polish traditions and poems for children. They create warm atmosphere for exchange after the performance, for which they always take a lot of time.

Constraints and challenges

According to Zofia Zaorska, the biggest challenge is the stereotyped view older people have of themselves. ***"Seniors do not have a need to learn, because they think they are competent enough"***. Often it is only after joining the Academy do they start to reflect on their own behaviour, for example towards their grandchildren. They realize that the way they behave is often rooted in their own experiences and they revise their understanding of adult- child relationship.

A big obstacle is financing. Although the Academy is valued by the local government, it does not receive any financial support from it, apart from possibility of using the room in community centre for the meetings. This means that Academy needs to compete with all the other initiatives on national level in preparing application forms for grants, which very often is beyond abilities of the group. The problems start already with regulations that are usually long and written in technical language, which makes it very difficult to read and understand for older people.

More information:

<http://www.superbabcia.org.pl/>

Zofia Zaorska, z.zaorska@wp.pl

PORTUGAL – ACTION RESEARCH, CASE STUDIES

1. From 8 to 80 years old [Dos 8 aos 80]

Introduction

From 8 to 80 years old is an initiative of CIVITAS Aveiro (a non-profit Association to promote, protect and raise awareness on Citizens Rights) to involve schools, institutions and associations from Aveiro in the implementation of IG activities and to remark 2012 as the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations.

As part of this initiative, the kindergarten - Jardim de Infância da Gafanha do Areão - proposed a partnership with the old people's home - Associação Boa Hora - to organize gatherings between a group of children and seniors for the exchange of knowledge, where the old people could take the role of guardians of knowledge and the children could learn with them. Both groups sang songs and taught each other the lyrics, shared their ideas/images about the other generation and shared presents (e.g. an old lady made dolls with fabrics to give to the children, like she used to do in her childhood; and the children prepared cakes, tea and souvenirs for the seniors).



Since 2009 the CIVITAS Aveiro team has been working on creating a more positive image of the old people and exploring the reasons for their institutionalization. They noticed that children often had negative stereotypes about the old people in the institutions, especially those sharing facilities (e.g. the same premises comprise both kindergarten and daycare center for older persons). The challenge in this initiative was to show to the children that older people can be active and they can be guardians of knowledge.

The kindergarten is adjacent to the old people's home; therefore seniors and children can easily socialize and learn together; the facilitator (i.e. early childhood educator) thought they could exploit this situation and implement activities to change the children's perspective of what means to be old and to improve the seniors social and support network. The life experiences of the old people are mostly unknown to the children. The majority of the children have their grandparents at home, still active; so they are not so familiar with older people dependent and/or living in institutions. Most old people are parents of people who had to emigrate for better life conditions during the 1970's, and they are practically on their own. These institutions are a chance for them to have some more comfort, care and social support.

How do the different generations benefit?

All those interviewed (seniors, facilitator and parents) could identify benefits for children of IG contact. These included: learning; respecting and gaining empathy for the older persons; having new friends,

“It is all about the learning of the values of sharing, solidarity, respect and acceptance of the other. It always carries something to teach and learn for both generations.” (Vânia, female, mother of a participant child with 4 years old).

The children love the stories told by the old people, even simple stories about past living conditions (e.g. living with no electricity). It is a way for them to get to know their life experience and get to know how things were in the past. For the children, it is something unreal, very far from their reality. The professionals also state that children can learn to collaborate and how to give and receive through their participation in the activities with older people.

For the old people, the friendship and the involvement that grows among them and the children is the biggest compensation. They feel happy to be in their company and to receive their care and attention. ***“By the moment I arrived in the kindergarten, all of the children hugged and kissed me. To anybody else, only me! I don’t understand why because they don’t even know me.” (Conceição, 86 years old, female, senior beneficiary)***

“I feel happy because I can gather with the children. The conviviality is the most beautiful thing we have among each other.” (José, 59 years old, male, senior beneficiary)

Constraints and challenges

The health and physical conditions of the old people can be an obstacle to their participation, although the institutions keep their partnership and try to develop IG activities. Activities that involve physical effort are not attractive or are difficult to the seniors and the facilitators need to take this into account. Instead, they may plan activities with arts and crafts where the old people can use and improve other skills (more than mobility).

The facilitator also believes that it is very important to work and promote the parents’ trust. They must rely on the professionals, so the children can participate in activities outside the institution. This trust is also very important for the senior’s involvement. Sometimes, they are afraid of what is going to happen and what to expect, even when they are informed of the activity. After they arrive to the kindergarten and see how they are welcome they start to be more open and interact with the children. ***“It happens that when the old people arrive, they seem to be apprehensive. They don’t really know what to expect, even though I went to tell them. After, they see the openness and playfulness from our side (children and early childhood educator), then they let their self-more free.” (Sandra, 51 years old, female, facilitator)***

The rules and structure of the preschool schedule can be very strict and stick to the curricular planning. To implement other initiatives than those that are planned within the preschool curricular programme like IG activities, the early childhood educator has to be motivated, available and take some of her/his free time to accomplish it.

More information:

Ana Paula Teixeira, Jardim de Infância da Gafanha do Areão, 234797974 | ana62teixeira@gmail.com

2. Recognising you [(Re)Conhecer-te]

Introduction

“Recognizing You” is a project for the exchange of letters by post mail between children from a primary school - Escola da Chave - and older people from an old people’s home - Centro Social da Nossa Senhora da Nazaré, both in Gafanha da Nazaré, Aveiro. A group of children and old people write letters to each other with the support of the teacher, a social animator and their family. There are one post mail box in each institution and the facilitators (the teacher, the social animator and the social worker) are in charge of delivering letters. Every three months, the groups get together to talk, play games, cook and share some presents. These moments are organized by the facilitators and sometimes coincide with some celebrations (e.g. Easter season). They also visit each other by their own initiative mostly accompanied by their family members.



The project was initiated by two students from the Master in Preschool Education and Elementary Education of the University of Aveiro as part of their internship, in 2012. It involved 17 children of the 3rd class of the primary school (8 to 9 years old) and a group of 18 seniors from the old people’s home. The idea arose from the need to teach letter-writing skills to the children simultaneously with the aim of an exchange between generations. The project encourages the children and the older people to share experiences and points of view, so the children can have a wider vision from past and the older people can better understand the present and extend their social and support network.

The motivation for this IG project is also related to a desire to open up institutions (the primary school and the old people’s home) to the community. The experience really ‘engaged’ the whole community: the families of the children got involved, and the people in the neighborhood talked about it and the parents of the children from the others classes started to ask about how the project works. In this sense the initiative has really become a multi-generational project.

How do the different generations benefit?

In the professional’s perspective, the older people feel the need to be with younger people and they enjoy the presence of children and youngsters in the institution. It makes them feel better and happier. ***“The little letters from the child are very beautiful. I think she likes me.” (Margarida, 79 years old, female, senior beneficiary)***

For the seniors, it is important to have someone who cares. When they receive the letters or meet with the children (the “adopted” grandchildren), they feel very happy and gain friendship and more affection. ***“It is like a family we have here!” (Fátima, 78 years old, female, senior beneficiary)***

The professionals also make an effort to involve the family by suggesting the older people and the children to take the letter home with the intention to encourage the interactions and the communication with them and their family members.

The social network of the older participants has more chance to expand. The family of the child gets to know the older person and some are invited to spend Christmas, Easter or a Sunday with them. Also, outside the institution children and older people accidentally meet and the children come to say “Hello!” and introduce her “grandmother/grandfather” to their friends. ***“The real grandmother of Carolina (Deolinda’s “adoptive” granddaughter) is very friendly. She comes to visit me once in a while and she brings Carolina with her.” (Deolinda, 82 years old, female, senior beneficiary)***

The professionals also realize that the project has stimulated the seniors to be more open to learning, for example: how to write their names or even how to write a letter. Also, it makes them believe that they might have many skills and knowledge they can teach. However, the seniors have no idea of what they could learn from or with the children, beside the joy they bring.

The children became visibly more aware of the older people’ needs. When they meet, the children always show a sense of protection and a will to help the seniors. ***“In a party we organized, it was very funny to realize how the children were taking care of the older persons. All the time, they were beside them asking if they needed something, to eat or drink.” (Leonor, 49 years old, female, coordinator and facilitator)*** During school holidays, family members helped making gifts and writing letters and accompanying the children on visits to the seniors.

As some older people died (and it happened more than once), the children had to deal with grief and death. From both points of view, professionals and parents, this is a way for children to better understand the vulnerability of being old and realize the life cycle; therefore, the children become more supportive towards the older people. ***“Cristina, my daughter, realizes that there are various ages, stages of our life and time passes very quickly” (Luísa, female, mother of a participant child with 9 years old).***

The children also realize that being old doesn’t mean that you are not capable of doing or teaching things anymore. They know what they were taught by the seniors and what they could teach them. ***“The older persons teach us to play the game bócia and we teach them to play Wii.” (Henrique, 9 years old, boy)***

In the older person’s opinion, the IG contact can make the children realize that they are different from them. It is a way to aware for age differences and let them be more sensitized for ageing and related issues. ***“Being together with people different from themselves makes them realize that we are not equal. I am not like Carolina. I’m an old woman!” (Deolinda, 82 years old, female, senior beneficiary)***

Constraints and challenges

The seniors’ physical and health conditions can be obstacles to the implementation of IG activities; some cannot remember the name of the children or they cannot read or write the letters (e.g. some never learned to read or write, other have sensorial impairments). In these

situations, the support of the facilitator/family is crucial. It is important to have someone who can write or read the letters to the older person.

The professionals also agree that sometimes the older people are not motivated "to do anything". ***"They believe they did what they were supposed to do in their life and they are not worthy anymore. We have to struggle with this idea!"*** (Leonor, 49 years old, female, coordinator and facilitator)

The professionals' lack of time is a constraint. Sometimes they feel they would like to have more time to get involved and follow the development of the project, but their professional obligations leave limited time for other activities. The seniors feel that the school and the exams do not leave much free time for the children to visit them. Although they feel affection for the children, they would like to have more opportunities to be together and get to know each other. ***"Now the girl is in school exams, when she is on holidays then she will have more free time. I understand it!"*** (Deolinda, 82 years old, female, senior beneficiary)

The fact that the children will move to another school next year makes them concerned about the idea of not continuing in the project. The distance and the change of the environment turn into a challenge which means that this group of children may not continue to be part of the project, unless the family members of the children/older person support the link and exchange among old and young.

More information:

Joana Pontes, Centro Social Nossa Senhora da Nazaré

234364707 | sranazare@mail.pt

3. Sport activity integrated in the intergenerational initiatives of Centro Social Santa Joana Princesa [Atividade física integrada nas atividades intergeracionais do Centro Social de Santa Joana Princesa]

Introduction



The institution Centro Social de Santa Joana Princesa comprises different facilities for children and old people, like kindergarten, daycare for children and for older persons and old people's home. Due to the IG composition of the Centre, the facilitators (i.e. early childhood educators and social care practitioner of the old people's home) have planned and developed activities between the groups for more than 10 years, in fact long before they realized the benefits of IG learning. These included getting together for celebrations. In parallel, they began a programme where the seniors visit

some classes in the kindergarten and are integrated in the activities or daily routine of the children. Also, the children visit the seniors in the daycare centre/old people's home. Realizing the joy of children when the older people are playing with them and the contentment of the old people as a result of the funny moments shared with the children, the facilitators continued the joint activities and further stimulated them.

In the day of the data collection, it was implemented a sport activity proposed by the social care practitioner of the old people's home (i.e. social care practitioner) to the early childhood educators, as a way to bring together the children and the seniors to celebrate the institution's anniversary. 11 seniors were divided in groups of 2 or 3 and were in charge of the physical exercises implementation for 110 children between 2 and 8 years old. There were 4 groups of different exercises and the children had the chance to pass by all the stations, some with balls, strength elastics and dumbbells.

How do the different generations benefit?

The professionals believe that promoting IG activities is important for both sides: for the children, it is a way to compensate those who don't have grandparents and give them a reference of what means to be old. ***"They always end up adopting each other and there are always new friendships they create through these contacts and cohabitation."*** (Patrícia, 32 years old, female, facilitator). For the older people, it is rewarding to have the opportunity to be leaders and have the autonomy to implement activities for the children, making them feel more useful.

The seniors identify different aspects they can benefit from the contact with children, such as: happiness, courage, joy, wellbeing and health; brings back good memories from childhood and past times; to learn about technologies. Also the contact does not leave the time to think about

negative issues; ***“I have been also a child and being with them reminds me of past times”*** (Pedro, 56 years old, male, senior beneficiary)

The seniors also understand that the children learn some things with them, such as: how to be better men and women in the future; what they do and how they do it; to respect and get along with people. The parents share the same opinion. ***“I think the cultural and generational conviviality and interaction that happens in the activities with the old people helps my child to be more sensitized to respect the older people.”*** (Catarina, female, mother of a participant child with 5 years old)

For the facilitator, the affection that grows between the participants is the most important benefit of the IG contact. ***“When Claudia, the facilitator, takes us to the children, by the moment we get there, the children clings to me and then all the others run and approach me to give kisses and hugs.”*** (Maria, 86 years old, female, senior beneficiary)

Constraints and challenges

Some constrains are related with environment, for example: the equipment size and the room conditions. Mostly, in the kindergarten, the furniture is adapted for the children, what makes it not adjustable for adults, especially people with mobility difficulties. ***“The space is not like ours, is not appropriate for older people and I cannot put them in risk.”*** (Patrícia, 32 years old, female, facilitator)

Participation and involvement requires availability from the seniors, parents and professionals, which is not always possible. The daily routine is fulfilled with other requests and activities and there is not enough time to reach all the needs and interests of seniors and children. The participation and inclusion of seniors is directly related with their abilities, health and physical conditions. The type of activity must consider the characteristics of the individuals or the group and should be adapted to them, in order to not exclude their participation. ***“Many seniors find themselves with some obstacles, for example: visual difficulties, loss in fine motor skills. By the time I have to plan an activity, I must consider all these aspects.”*** (Patrícia, 32 years old, female, facilitator)

More information:

Susana Esteves, Centro Social Santa Joana Princesa

234 313 154 | susanaesteves.cssjp@gmail.com

SLOVENIA - ACTION RESEARCH, CASE STUDIES

1. "From 0 to 100 – together" ("Od 0 do 100 – skupaj")

Introduction

The activity was held on June 3rd, 2013, in Care home Center, unit Poljane, in Ljubljana, Slovenia. A group of children from elementary school (2nd grade, 7-8 years old) and residents of care home (75 years old and more) were peeling and cutting fruit for the fruit bowl, others were preparing hats (they cut off the model and then draw on it). In the meantime, children took the opportunity to get to know residents more, and residents were happy to answer to their questions. The activity was organised by NOVITA – Association for IG Cooperation.



The activity was initiated as a part of the project "From 0 to 100 – together" (co-financed by EU, program Youth in Action), that responds to the need to restore the active collaboration of young and old generations, as well as to provide activities for spending high quality, healthy and creative free time together. The main goal was to deepen the relationship among children and residents of care home, to get to know each other better, to have fun, and to develop creativity of all.

NOVITA organizes activities of IG learning because of the perceived growing separation of generations. This is especially significant for children and seniors in Ljubljana and its surroundings. More and more children do not have contact with their grandparents (families moved to Ljubljana because of work, grandparents live far away), living together (3 generations) is also not very common in Ljubljana. ***"We often experience that children do not know what 'oldness' is or what it means, children have many negative associations connected with that word, for example death, illness, shaking hands, retirement, wheelchair, forgetting."*** (Tadeja, 29 years old, organizer of a workshop).

How do the different generations benefit?

We identify benefits for children in the context of getting to know more about the older generation, in the context of changing their views towards seniors: ***"I liked today's activity very much because old people are so friendly!"*** (Gregor, 7 years old) ***"I liked this workshop because here are so many friendly people!"*** (Petja, 8 years old)

In such activities, children develop a sense for others, for solidarity, they become aware of what older people are capable to do: ***“Teachers in school told us we should help seniors where they will need help.”*** (Matija, 7 years old). In general, teachers tell children they will go to the care home and that they will spend some time with residents. Children are asked to help residents, to ask them questions, and to act nicely and respectfully towards them. After the activity, the organizer (Association NOVITA) sometimes asks children to write a short paragraph about their feelings, experiences. In some cases, organizer goes to the school and evaluates activity together with children.

With help from seniors and their demonstrations, children can learn new skills, for example peel an apple, kiwi, or how to cut fruit: ***“At the beginning, a boy wasn’t able to peel and cut fruit, but with my help he now knows how to do it and now he is able to help his mum in the kitchen.”*** (Štefka, 80 years old)

Children gain an insight in this period of life; have an opportunity to experience what it means to be old: ***“Children have an opportunity to see how people live when they are old.”*** (Tadeja, 29 years old, organizer) ***“One little boy asked me, how old I am. I said ‘91 years old’. And he asked ‘Is this a lot? How do you feel?’ And I say I feel OK, just sometimes some part of my body hurts me, but in general I’m OK. And then he said ‘You look very good.’(Zdenka, 91 years old) “It’s very good that children are visiting us. They can see that oldness isn’t ‘scary’.”*** (Štefka, 80 years old)

For seniors, IG activities have many positive impacts on their wellbeing and health: ***“They spent time effectively, creatively. This impacts their health – physically and psychologically. When they are with children, they are not lonely.”*** (Tadeja, 29 years old, organizer) ***“When children come, it’s like a holiday, literally like a holiday! We can speak a whole week about one meeting with children. They bring new and fresh energy in our care home!”*** (Ana, 85 years old) ***“I’ve seen ladies with dementia how their eyes were shining. They could be very ‘rough’ sometimes, but today they were gentle. They ‘melt’ when they see children.”*** (Ana, 85 years old) ***“You sometimes think you are all alone and forgotten from others, pushed away off happening in your neighbourhood, and then these children come who are so friendly, so kind, they bring you the joy of life!”*** (Zdenka, 91 years old)

Constraints and challenges

Constraints, identified by organizer, are occasional lack of motivation: ***“Weather plays an important role – seniors are very weather-sensitive.”*** (Tadeja, 29 years old, organizer) Mobility of seniors is also recognized as a constraint: ***“Many seniors are on wheelchairs and we cannot plan to have activity in the city centre, for example. And they also don’t like to go out – here in care home, they know exactly where something is. In the city, they are not so confident.”*** (Tadeja, 29 years old, organizer) Middle generation’s (parents’) prejudices and stereotypes about seniors are seen as constraint, but they could be a challenge to overcome, too: ***“Some parents do not understand what kind of experiences their children can gain in those activities. Some parents do not want their child to be involved in IG activities.”*** (Tadeja, 29 years old, organizer). From policy makers’ side, the unrecognized importance of IG learning for both generations is also seen as a constraint: ***“You can read many things in the news, but it’s different situation in practice. Those activities are not supported enough (financially) by policy makers.”*** (Tadeja, 29 years old, organizer)

One of challenges could be to connect IG learning activities with regular school curriculum: ***“A challenge for next school year is to implement at least 5 IG learning activities in subject like ‘ethics’ or ‘learning about the society’.***

More information:

NOVITA – Association for Intergenerational Cooperation

Webpage: www.drustvo-novita.org

Webpage in English: <http://www.drustvo-novita.org/NOVITA/Anglesko.html>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/DrustvoNovita.org>

Contact: Tadeja Krajnc, tadeja.krajnc@drustvo-novita.org

2. Learning scout skills and playing traditional games (Spoznavanje taborniških veščin in starih iger ter spretnosti)

Introduction

The activity was held on June 6th, 2013, in Care home Ljubljana - Šiška, in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The activity was planned to improve the quality of life of residents in care home and to provide scouts with new experiences. Since it was rainy and very windy, the majority of activities took place inside, but some residents (mainly men) and scouts had opportunity to try out archery and mini golf. The activity was organised by Scout group Rod Rožnik.



The activity was initiated by Scout group Rod Rožnik as an answer to care home's invitation to improve the quality of life of their residents. Also, Scout group Rod Rožnik is trying to connect as much as possible with organizations, associations, individuals from the local community. Rod Rožnik's vision is to develop scout's personality in a very broad sense – not only as an expert of scout skills, but also as a person with values of e. g. solidarity, mutual

assistance/help, volunteering, open mindedness, equal opportunity for everyone, friendship, honesty and integrity. Their belief is that this learning process should start from the very beginning of one's life. They also think older people can teach their members for example old games, which are new to scouts, and they can contribute to develop personal qualities of scouts, such as patience and mutual respect.

Motivation for this activity arose from positive experience of one of the scouts. She was involved in IG activities before and she wanted other scouts to also get such kind of experience. Her idea was to upgrade her experience and expand it, make it more interactive, involve as many scouts as she could, and involve residents as active participants who can teach young children how to play old games (games with cards, chess, table games, mini golf).

The idea for this activity was inspired by the belief that everyone can learn from anyone. The care home saw scouts with their activities (e. g. archery, knots, singing to the accompaniment of guitar) as a good opportunity for enriching everyday routine of residents. Scout group saw residents of care home as a good opportunity for learning new games, for developing new personal qualities.

How do the different generations benefit?

Children, involved in this activity, identify benefit in terms of learning new skills, activities:

"A man from the care home showed me how to target a hole when I was playing mini golf." (Rok, 9 years old)

"I didn't know how to play remi¹ but a lady from the care home teaches me." (Mala, 7 years old)

Children see the opportunity to have fun with seniors:

"I liked everything, it was fun to play table games with them, and it was good that we got an opportunity to spend time with them." (Mala, 7 years old)

Children think seniors can teach them mainly hand crafts and old sport games:

"They² know how to crochet, how to make embroidery, they know how to sew and this are skills they can teach us." (Bina, 9 years old; Mala, 7 years old)

Residents of care home do not have many opportunities to meet children. When children come to the care home, they only carry out their performance and then they leave. Seniors also said that ***"it's difficult to have contacts with children here in care home, because we do not have materials and space to show children what we know and can, and such kind of activities as today's weren't offered to us before."*** (Mara, 75 years old)

Seniors were very pleased with visit of scouts: ***"They were so friendly and they asked a lot, they wanted to get to know as many as possible from us."*** (Mara, 75 years old) ***"It's good to speak with younger than you; it feels like you are younger than you really are."*** (Antonija, 91 years old)

Seniors think they would need more meetings with children, more opportunities to get to know each other, ***"because the difference among them is too large"***. (Antonija, 91 years old) When this is established, then something can happen on a regular basis, they said.

The main impression we got from the observation is the lack of experiences of IG learning. This kind of activity was the first activity (as participants in the focus group said) when they have an opportunity to actually talk to children, to sit next to each other, to do something together. Because of lack of experiences they do not recognise many benefits they could gain from learning from children or what they can 'give' to children. Hopefully, the experience they got in this activity will lead to develop regular IG learning activities in care home and to have more direct contacts with children.

Constraints and challenges

The physical and health conditions of the seniors can be obstacles in the implementation of IG activities: ***"...their physical and health conditions limit the range of activities you could do with seniors."*** (Urša, 31 years old, chairwoman of the scout group)

The established everyday routine of seniors could also be a constraint – a lady was playing cards with girls for a while, she taught them how to play remi in a different way and girls were excited. At 17.00 she left because of a TV series, she watches every day.

¹ Game with cards.

² Seniors.

A further limitation could be the lack of opportunities to talk to and connect with children (from preschools/elementary schools) on a personal level when they come to the care home - children only carry out their performance and then they leave. A crucial role in this is to connect social workers in care home and teachers in preschools/elementary schools) to plan and prepare more opportunities for both target groups to connect, to spend time together, to get to know each other. And as we identified, scouts can also play an important role in seniors' lives, so connecting social workers in care home and leaders in scout group is also essential.

The staff from care home expressed a wish that this activity will happen in the mornings, which is not possible from scout group's perspective, because children are in school then. The Social worker initially thought seniors would be too tired in the afternoon, but they showed the opposite - the participation was above all expectations. We hope they will organise more activities also in the afternoons: ***"The day doesn't finish after lunch!"*** (Urša, 31 years old, chairwoman of the scout group)

Challenges are to promote such activities more and to include younger children, ***"especially those who don't have regular connections with their grandparents or they even don't have them."*** (Urša, 31 years old, chairwoman of the scout group)

From the scout group's perspective a challenge is ***"to overcome the fear of the unknown"*** (Urša, 31 years old, chairwoman of the scout group) in order to develop his/her own personality and to let new experiences to happen.

More information:

Scout group Rod Rožnik

Webpage: <http://rr.rutka.net/>

Contact: rod.roznik.lj@gmail.com

3. "Tree of generations" - IG project for a creative joint leisure time ("Drevo generacij" - medgeneracijski projekt za ustvarjalno skupno preživljanje prostega časa)

Introduction

The activity was held on June 13th, 2013, in the Tacen playground, in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The activity was carried out within the project 'Tree of generations' – an IG project for a creative joint leisure time, co-financed by Municipality of Ljubljana. The project is implemented by Institute IZRIS, at different locations of Preschool Jelka throughout the school year. The project started in May 2011.

The activity, at which we were present, was attended by children from Preschool Jelka, their parents and grandparents.

This activity (as all others within the project 'Tree of generations') was initiated with a vision to connect children, parents and grandparents in sharing knowledge and activities, where they engage with each other. **"For children, grandparents represent 'a constant' in their life. They know many interesting/different recipes, they know how to plant and grow vegetables, how to prepare herb tea etc. and they can transfer a lot of this knowledge and skills to grandchildren."** (Neja, 41 years old, organizer). That is why the connection among them is seen as very important.

The main motivation for particularly this activity (Preparing a healthy snack) was to teach children about health, how to develop healthy habits, how to prepare a healthy snack: **"By those kinds of activities, we can prevent children from any kind of addictions, we develop healthy habits, healthy relations."** (Neja, 41 years old, organizer) This activity was developed as a continuation of previous activities: **"We had activities like planting a tree, making herb gardens, house for herbs, composter, ... Preparing a healthy snack seemed to be a logical continuation."** (Neja, 41 years old, organizer)

The idea for this activity (and for all other activities within the project 'Tree of generations') was inspired from the belief that IG cooperation/learning **"creates opportunities for transfer of positive 'things' among generations."** (Neja, 41 years old, organizer). It was also inspired from the fact that grandparents usually would like to do something with their grandchildren, but they do not know how/what. In these activities, they can get an inspiration, what they can do with their grandchildren at home. **"Great emphasis is placed on repetition of activities in the home environment - we plan such activities that are easily repeatable in the home environment."** (Neja, 41 years old, organizer)

How do the different generations benefit?

Children identify benefits in the frame of learning new skills, activities: **"I like that granny and granddad have both knowledge about many things and they teach me a lot! They teach me how to cook, how to do things at home, how to plant and grow vegetables, they also help me doing my homework."** (Ela, 7 years old)

Children recognize the opportunity to have fun with grandparents: **"They are funny and make jokes."** (Tinca, 5 years old); children recognize important personal qualities in grandparents: **"I like my grandparents because they are patient, friendly and smart."** (Ela, 7 years old). It's also important for children to have contacts with their grandparents to reduce stress children might be facing, **"It's good for children to have contacts with grandparents, because we're more**

relaxed than their parents are, and then also children become more relaxed." (Chris, 65 years old)

It seems that grandparents are able to take more time for their grandchildren than parents can: ***"We have more time now as we had it when our children were younger*** (Darja, 56 years old; Marija, 66 years old). ***"When you are a parent, you are so overwhelmed with other things that you don't have time to really spent moments with your child. And now we have this opportunity. This is the biggest privilege of being a grandparent."*** (Darja, 56 years old) Because of time, which grandparents have more than parents, grandparents think they can provide children with different experiences as parents can: ***"We can make some of their hidden wishes come true."*** (Marija, 66 years old) ***"I'm from the UK and I teach them English, we bring them out of the city, we're trying to make them 'non-apartment kids'."*** (Chris, 65 years old). ***"We go to the forest together, we can explain them what is growing in the garden, and we're telling them stories about our life as children, about their parents' life as children."*** (Darja, 56 years old)

Senior beneficiaries feel that their grandchildren bring new energy to them, they make them feel younger and they make their leisure time more efficient ***"Grandchildren makes me feel younger, they bring new energy to our home every time they come, and when we are playing together, time just flies!"*** (Marija, 66 years old; Peter, 66 years old) ***"We can be a child again, the main philosophy when spending time with grandchildren is 'don't worry, be happy'."*** (Darja, 56 years old) ***"We can be childish again, simple things can be fun again, and doing things over and over again can be fun."*** (Chris, 65 years old)

Senior beneficiaries also think that grandchildren contribute to better health condition, mainly because of energy they bring: ***"I had a cancer and when I had a chance to spend time with my grandchildren, it felt like I don't have any problems. I also think that spending time with my grandchildren has helped me overcome cancer."*** (Peter, 66 years old)

Constraints and challenges

When planning and implementing IG learning activities, it is very important to collaborate with public institutions as preschools, elementary schools, namely from the equal opportunities' perspective: ***"We notice that some parents/grandparents encourage children more than others, they go together to different activities, they spent time together with grandparents, but some children don't have such experiences. If we organize IG activities in preschools/elementary schools, every child has a chance to experience such situations."*** (Neja, 41 years old, organizer) It seems that IG learning activities are not so visible among parents and grandparents, but if they are organised in public institutions, much more children and grandparents can benefit from them.

Seniors see the main constraint in the commitment to respond to children's/grandchildren's needs and, consequently, in organizing their time in accordance with children's/grandchildren's needs: ***"If Darja got a phone call that there is a problem, she got to respond to. She could say no, she's not on a 24-hour call. We also can't decide when we are going on holidays because we need to see when they are going. There is no real or legal obligation, but it's family, you got to do it. That's the restriction. Our life is not specifically planned around grandchildren but it's a significant influence."*** (Chris, 65 years old)

On the other hand, there is also a positive side, a challenge: ***"When I was young, my mother helped me a lot with children, and now I said to myself 'it's my turn'. But it's more difficult now as it was when I was young."*** (Darja, 56 years old) ***"But it's always fun when we are together."***

(Chris, 65 years old) ***“Time passes so fast and all of a sudden they will grow up and I don’t want to miss this period of their lives.”*** (Darja, 56 years old)

More information: Institute IZRIIS – Information Research Institute for Training and Counseling

Institute IZRIIS – Information Research Institute for Training and Counseling

Webpage: <http://www.izriis.si/index.php>

Contact: Neja Samar Brenčič, neja.samar-brencic@izriis.si

SPAIN - ACTION RESEARCH, CASE STUDIES

1. Volunteering and ecology

Introduction

The main goal of this activity is to promote IG relationships, with the aim of bringing people of different age groups closer and enriching links and mutual knowledge. In this case, information and communication technologies (ICTs) were used as tools of interaction on the topic of ecology between the different age groups. The groups involved were 3 to 8 year-old children from the Cappont Play Centre and seniors from the Santa Cecilia care home for the elderly, both of which are in Lleida.



Most of the children using the playground come from immigrant families and have little contact in their families with older people. At the same time, many seniors in the old people's home had little contact with immigrants. In order to find senior volunteers to participate in this project, a meeting with the elders of care homes for retired people and the elderly was held to explain the project and what their contribution would be. At the same time, the educators of the children's play centre presented the project to the families to know if there were people interested in it. The answers were positive.

The activities leader carried out training sessions with the group of voluntary seniors. They in turn, with the support of activities leader carried out the workshop with children on the subject of voluntary worker and ecology using ICTs as a tool. On the Web page (www.actividadintergeneracional.com/voluntari_cat.html) we can find the videos, games, didactic explanations and interactive questions and answers that were used in this project.

How did the different generations benefit?

In order to investigate this initiative, we interviewed an advisor on social action of La Caixa Foundation, a coordinator of Lleida Municipality and a member of TASCA, a local organization which advises on the design and management of educational, cultural and social projects. Moreover, we also interviewed a representative of the Cappont playground.

The following motivations and perceived benefits of the project were identified by the organizers and sponsors.

- the need to open retired homes to community
- to value the social capital of elder people
- to improving the community social cohesion
- to enrich learning process of young and seniors
- to work with children regarding the importance of respecting environment.

The young participants were positive about the activity:

"I want to repeat the activity" (Yaris, 5 years)

"I've learnt a lot and I had fun" The seniors also reported positively on the activity,

"I liked their games and that they explain us how to clean the Earth" (Alejandro, 7 years old)

"Train memory, physical and motor activity. Not being blocked at home, not becoming mentally old, make an effort to do something, and as a whole, feeling useful." (Magda, 57 years old)

"Satisfaction as they can feel more useful for society and feel solidarity" (Conchita, 67 years old)

"Children seem happy when finishing the activities and they do not have prejudices" (Blai, 72, senior volunteer). ***"Children are curious about us but in fact I have learnt some things about their culture"***. (male, 74, senior volunteer)

"Grandpas are transfers of knowledge and experiences" (Lourdes, 57 years old)

"Flow their knowledge correctly for the everyday activities in this world full of aggressiveness and teach their life philosophy" (Félix, 65 years old)

"People along life acquire knowledge and it is positive having the chance to transmit them as part of history to the younger ones. They can share and compare personal experiences" (José Luis, 72 years old)

Constraints and Challenges

The following constraints and challenges were identified by interviewees:

- Work on self esteem.
- Need to open up retired homes to the neighbourhoods.
- Financial crisis.
- Need to promote a change of attitude towards the elderly and challenge the stereotype of the old age.
- Need to cheer up seniors, through an active and healthy life, promoting creativity and maintaining an innovative spirit.

2. Regina's Tale

Introduction



Regina's tale is a space in Balafia's playground (Lleida), where seniors and children share knowledge and experiences through the telling of stories (with images and puppets) and produce art work linked to the stories. The involved organizations are Balafia neighbours association, Balafia playground and a retired home from the neighbourhood. The activity takes place in the playground and in a local library, part of Balafia's social housing scheme, enables the participation of children from the neighbourhood who do not participate in the children's play

centre and stimulates the participation of seniors from the neighbourhood in the lives of young children. The overall goals of this activity are to improve social cohesion in the community; enrich children and seniors learning processes; stimulate positive self esteem amongst seniors. Twenty four children aged between 3 and 8 years are involved, and 3 senior volunteers, two male and one female.

Everything started when Regina, a retired pre-school educator and grandmother who took her grandchildren to the children's play centre, talked to the educators there and that she get involved. The initiative of telling tales to children was born. In order to be able to carry out the activity the families of the children who usually went to the children's play centre were contacted and it was also explained to the neighbourhood association and the retired home association in case they wanted to take part.

A meeting was organized between the seniors, the educators and Regina discuss the activity was about, which methodology would be followed and what would be done. It was also important to decide on and agree which values should be transmitted to the children.

The stories are linked to spaces and places of Lleida as well as to the neighbourhood where the children live. These are classic and traditional stories, but often, to introduce the story they told their most personal experiences. After the story telling all participants, seniors and children illustrate the story in drawings and paintings which are hung on the walls of the children's play centre.

How do the different generations benefit?

The identified benefits include:

- Transmitting values and ways of life,
- break stereotypes,
- create a space of affective contact with the elderly
- soften the path of active work life to the retirement
- improve health

- being active
- feel useful
- avoid loneliness

This is how the senior volunteers captured their feelings about being involved:

"It is necessary to spend my free time doing something, not being alone. Now I have duties to go out and things to explain." (Jose Luis, 74, senior volunteer)

"People do not value what we can really provide, they should not be surprised about what we can do". (Felix, 65, senior volunteer)

"We have low educational level as we were born during post civil war period. In other countries of Europe the idea of old people can be different, (they are) better valued and more positive, we must to take advantage of these experiences (others countries, etc.)." (female, 70, senior volunteer)

"It's positive for old people since it gives life to them and they like telling stories a lot." (Teresa, 34 years old)

"I've always been a teacher, and it has been totally vocational, so during all my entire life, while health respects me, I need to be in contact with children, being a teacher is part of me. Being and becoming old doesn't mean that I lose my vocation" (Regina, 68 years old)

"Grandpas should be instructed about kids capacities and in that way create activities suitable with kids knowledge" (Quim, 43 years old)

"Willingness, empathy and communication competence of volunteers is very important" / "A dynamic organization is required, attractive and that knowledge is appropriate to children" (Mireia, 30 años)

"If someone has never told a tale, maybe it should be necessary some help during the tasks. It must be difficult for someone who has never spoken to an audience" (Yolanda, 40 years old)

"Playing computer games is fun for them since many of them don't have the chance to do it by themselves" (Mireia, 30 years old)

"They are people without ties, they have no family around since the majority of them are from other countries, they have travelled a lot and with this activities kids can contact old people" (Quim, 44 years old)

"Kids create ties and a social relationship with the elders and this enriches them" / "Elders find themselves tied again with the world" (Yolanda, 40 years old)

Constraints and challenges:

We identified the presence of stereotypical attitudes towards seniors, such as: "seniors don't know about modern things", "they aren't active members of society". ***"Activities are for the purpose that kids see that grandpas can follow properly their way of life"*** (Lourdes, 57 years old)

"What makes me feel sad is that when you think in general terms, old people are not valued properly for all that they can contribute to society. People think that these kind of activities are good to entertain kids and elders spend their time, but people don't understand that they can contribute to learning, not just having fun and not being bored" (Helena, 67 years old)

Moreover, another challenging factor is represented by the low self esteem of seniors, and seniors not feeling valued.

THE NETHERLANDS – ACTION RESEARCH, CASE STUDIES

1. The Dice: Young Meet Old (Jong Ontmoet Old)

Introduction

Since 2012, 5 and 6 year-old children from a primary school in the city of Leiden have been regularly visiting a nearby residential old people's home, Lorentzhof where they jointly participate in nonformal learning activities. The initiative is called the *Dice*, named after one of the "getting to know you" games the two age-groups play together. *The Dice: Young Meet Old* is a collaboration between



three organizations: Libertas, a large care and welfare organization in Leiden, Roomburg primary school and Lorentzhof residential care home for old people, one of the homes Libertas manages in Leiden. Most of the residents in Lorentzhof are 75 years and older. The account which follows is based on observations of two of the intergenerational activities which took place on two different days as well as interviews ICDI staff held with the range of participants during April and May 2013. These included senior beneficiaries (residents in Lorentzhof), young children, the initiative coordinator and other mediators of the interaction between young and old.

In 2012 Libertas were looking for ideas for an initiative which would bring together care and wellbeing and involve different age groups in the community. Much around the same time the Roomburg primary school was looking for a way to put into practice the notion of *Active Citizenship and Social Integration*, something that all schools in the Netherlands are obliged to promote. So when Leila, one of Libertas' children's social workers, asked the Roomburg school director if she was interested in collaborating with a local care home for old people and jointly planning a project which would benefit both age groups, this seemed like a perfect opportunity to bring together the school and the community.

Leila, originally from Brazil though already living in the Netherlands 28 years, described her personal motivation and enthusiasm as follows: ***"In the Western world, children live in a separate world from older people. Apart from family members, they don't come into contact with older people. So this is a way of bringing them into contact with older people, other than***

grandparents. For older people it brings something new, brings life to them". (Leila, coordinator).

Leila planned a series of four one-hour visits of the children to Lorentzhof residential care home together with the Activities Coordinator in the Lorentzhof home and the class teacher from the primary school. The cycle of visits is repeated: between February and April a group of 10 children visit on four occasions– and then between May and July the second half of the class get their turn. Each visit has a different focus: introductory games and getting to know each other; singing songs together; cake decorating and an art and craft activity.

How do the different generations benefit?

When we asked the coordinators about the benefits to both age groups they talked about the enjoyment and mutual understanding it brings about. **"Older people find it so nice to have contact with children. You see it when the children come in. They say 'how nice'. It also brings to mind their own childhood"**. (Jolanda, Activities coordinator, Lorentzhof)

Leila added that she also thought that older people are **"brought up-to-date"** and **"learn that life is different today than in the past"**. During the activities they get better insight into children of today which helps counter the stereotypical view of children as being just rude or impolite (Leila, coordinator). This activity was also viewed as giving the older people an important role, **"rather than just being cared for"** (Petra, class teacher).

In our direct discussions with the senior beneficiaries themselves, similar issues were highlighted. **"I think that children tend to shy away from elderlythat old lady with all those wrinkles'...they look at you strangely. When you have contact with one another you become more comfortable with one another...the contact helps [older people] to become more tolerant of young children. There are elderly people who think young children just make a lot of noise, who find them difficult"** (Mia, 94 years, senior beneficiary).

The children we interviewed had mixed feelings about the contact with the seniors. One girl (5 years) said, **"I was a bit scared of the old people ...They had very scary teeth. They were a bit weird. But also friendly. We were helping them, and so was the teacher"**. When asked about what they enjoyed most about the cupcake decorating activity, the children mentioned decorating and eating cakes and the chance to play on the playground equipment in the garden area of the old people's home.

For the senior residents of Lorentzhof, the visits of the children offered a welcome distraction from felt boredom in the home, as noted by one senior beneficiary **"not much happens here, so children coming is special"** (Mia, 94 years, senior beneficiary). Fun, humour, suspense and the unexpected was important in this diversion and played a big part in the mutual enjoyment and success of the activity.

Being confronted with young children's way of thinking interested and amused the senior beneficiaries. Mia gave an example of a young boy asking how old she was. He'd heard another lady was 83 and therefore 11 years younger than she was, he concluded **"then you'll die first"**. There was also great hilarity amongst both seniors and children in their play with language while joking with one of the names of the seniors. A break in the organized game with a drink and a snack offered a pause in the excitement, and a chance for interaction between individual children and elderly people. Inez (senior beneficiary, 85 years) seemed to be very touched by the **"very sweet girl"** who had been sitting next to her and who showed concern and asked her **"are you alright"** when she need water to alleviate a coughing fit. One child referring to earlier discussion about some of the older people looking a bit scary – said **"Mr. de Wit was not scary – we did become friends a bit. But I like my school friends better"**.

Other aspects of learning mentioned in our interviews with participants included: Children learning how to address older people politely; children learning what kinds of questions they can ask to express interest in another; children and seniors learning patience; seniors learning how to adapt to all the individual characters of the children.

Constraints and challenges

One of the challenges of this initiative has been adapting to the different rhythms and needs of the two age-groups. Thinking about a good length of activity, the right frequency – but also knowing how and when to step in and intervene if things are perceived to be “getting out of hand”. The first two issues had been points of discussion in the evaluation of the initiative at the end of the first year.

Both age groups – young and old - appreciated variety in the planned activities and it was recognized that this needs thought and planning. Although the initiative had been evaluated from an organizational point of view, there had been minimal consultation with both seniors and young children about their perspectives, concerns and wishes about the activity. A further point of attention concerned the preparation with the children. Given that they were being confronted with people who look and act differently to what many of them were/are used to, perhaps they would have benefited from more in-depth discussion in the security of their own classroom about what it means to be old. This could take place both before and after the visits.

The second activity we observed – the introduction and getting to know you games – seemed to work better. There was a clear opening and closure to the visit (which seemed missing in the first activity observed); Lorentzhof staff assumed a more active guiding role; there was time for fun and laughter in the whole group and one-to-one interactions between the different generations.

As a concluding point it is important to mention that all adults interviewed valued the interest of the TOY project in this initiative and were happy to have the opportunity to reflect on benefits and challenges of intergenerational learning.

More information:

Leila Paixao, l.paixao@libertasleiden.nl

2. Very young children and older people with dementia singing songs together

Introduction



Locating a childcare centre in a residential old people's home offers opportunities for meetings and joint activities between young and old. This fairly unique situation in the Netherlands is happening in one of the locations of B4Kids/Estro childcare organization in Leiden (Prikkebeen), which rents space in Robijnhof residential home. Robijnhof is managed by the Leiden based welfare organization Libertas. In May 2013, ICDI staff visited Robijnhof to observe one of the shared activities between the two organizations. This was the

biweekly visit of the babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers from Prikkebeen to the unit in Robijnhof reserved for residents with dementia. This summary is an account of what was observed as well as conversations with various staff involved, both in the child centre and in the dementia unit about intergenerational contact in general between young and old in the building.

Commenting on the broader context of young families hurried day to day lives Liora, Location manager of Robijnhof, remarks that there is less time for interaction with older people. From the childcare centre's point of view the overall aim of this initiative is that children have contact with older people, that they get used to it, and not experience it as strange. It is hoped that through the contact between the generations in Robijnhof, they will have respect for old people. Two forms of interaction between the generations occur in the Robijnhof centre: the organized 45 minute-visits of a group of 10 children between ages approximately 5 months to 3 years to the closed unit where residents with dementia live. The most frequent shared activity during these visits is song-singing accompanied by drinks and biscuits.

A second form of interaction takes place via the spontaneous, informal meetings between young and old in the indoor and outdoor areas in Robijnhof. One of the walls of the childcare unit is actually a floor to ceiling window which gives the children a direct view to an area where activities are organized on a daily basis for the 'regular' residents (those who do not have dementia). Additionally, on average once a month, some of the older residents might drop by the childcare room to read a story to the children or have lunch with them. Alternatively the staff in the childcare centre might bring the children to join in a party or a festival organized for the older people.

How do the different generations benefit?

Everyone interviewed agreed that the visit of the babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers to the dementia unit had a positive effect on the wellbeing of the seniors. Importantly, this was expressed as wellbeing in the here and now. ***"You notice that the old people brighten, their mood changes when they see the children"*** (Anouk, childcare professional). ***"They are just***

looking at the children, laughing, they want to touch them - though the children don't necessarily like that" (Liora, Location manager). Annita (carer in dementia unit) describes the relief from sadness that the visits provide. **"Nobody here is going to be cured, recover. Sometimes it is just sad ...But this sadness, you don't see that when the children are here."**

Everyone interviewed agreed that the visit of the babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers to the dementia unit had a positive effect on the wellbeing of the seniors. Importantly, this was expressed as wellbeing in the here and now. "You notice that the old people brighten, their mood changes when they see the children" (Anouk, childcare professional). "They are just looking at the children, laughing, and touching- though the children don't necessarily like that" (Liora, Location manager). Annita (carer in dementia unit) describes the relief from sadness that the visits provide. "Nobody here is going to be cured, recover. Sometimes it is just sad .But this sadness, you don't see that when the children are here."

Annita and Diane, carers in the dementia unit observed that in the daily life in the unit the seniors often direct negative feelings at each other. But as soon as they have something else to occupy them, such as the visits of the young children, their attention is no longer on themselves, **"These seniors respond favourably to either young animals or young children, something to cuddle - they are stimulated in a positive way"** (Diane, carer, Dementia Unit).

A further reported benefit for the seniors with dementia was that it gives a feeling of security, given their tendency to live in the past, **"The seniors miss their parents, the house where they used to live...what we try to do here is to create a feeling of safety, live what they experienced at home"**. The sense of security is created by singing of children's songs from the past as well as seeing young children arrive in the Unit.

Feeling safe in a familiar environment was also important for the young children's well being. They often stay close by to the childcare professionals during the visit. Drinks and biscuits also contribute to the attractiveness of the activity and helped to create a cozy and homely atmosphere. Whilst many of the children are not yet talking, their body language and reactions indicated to Anouk (childcare professional) that they enjoy the visits. The opportunity of going up to the third floor in a lift as a further element of excitement and adventure for the children in the visit.

In the lively song singing session ICDI staff observed, which was accompanied on the guitar by a senior volunteer, the children were initially very cautious, they first observed very intently the group of 10 women and 3 men who participated in the activity that day, before gradually relaxing and responding to the interaction with the seniors.

Constraints and challenges

A number of constraints and difficulties were brought up. Firstly, discussions about the *learning* element of intergenerational practice in the context of this activity raised some questions. As mentioned above the activity was viewed from the seniors side primarily in terms of enjoyment in the here and now, **"Our residents don't learn any more, can't learn ... If the old people enjoy the visit, then we have met our goal"** (Annita, carer, Dementia Unit). From the children's point of view, staff speculated that there may be a learning element **"how you get on with older people, how you talk [to them], deal with them, pick up norms and values"**, but it was not possible to say if these learning goals had been attained.

As reported by childcare centre staff, parents' priority is that the staff are being nice to their children, that they have a good relationship with them. Anouk (childcare professional) noted also that the parents do really like that their children can look through the transparent wall and see what's happening in the seniors daily club activities.

The childcare staff raised one key constraint and challenge in the way the activity is being organized currently. This was the perceived lack of openness and enthusiasm of one of activity leaders to actively engage both with the children and the seniors during activities, and an unwillingness to take on board childcare staff's views about how the activity could be run so it was more interesting and enjoyable both for children and seniors. Creating the right atmosphere in the joint activity with the seniors was critical and they seemed somewhat frustrated that enough attention was being paid to this. Childcare staff were on the other hand very open to pursuing more opportunities for spontaneous interactions between young children and the other senior residents in Robijnhof and remained convinced in principle that contact between young and old benefited both age groups.

More information:

<http://www.kinderopvang-prikkebeen.nl/over-ons/prikkebeen/>

3. Senior volunteers read aloud to young children and their families (Voorlees Middag en VoorleesExpress)

Introduction

Adults reading illustrated story books to children from an early age is highly valued in Dutch society, whether at home, in ECEC centres and primary schools or in the public library. An important reason for this is that children develop key early literacy skills when trusted adults read and talk about stories with them. These skills include: becoming familiar with story format, understanding that words have a meaning, learning new words, being able to handle books properly and eventually learning to read independently.



Sharing books is also about helping children making sense of common experiences which may be puzzling, exciting, or scary for children. Importantly it is also about children discovering that reading and books can be playful and fun.

In the summaries which follow we describe two initiatives in which senior volunteers are involved in reading aloud to young children in the Netherlands: the weekly **Voorlees Middag or Story reading session in the public libraries** in Leiden and a countrywide initiative called **VoorleesExpress**, where volunteers visit families at home on a weekly basis over a period of 20 weeks to introduce the bedtime story reading ritual to parents and children in families where children are a risk of educational disadvantage.

Story reading session in the Library: The story behind the initiative

Traditionally, in the Netherlands, primary school children finish school at 12.00 on Wednesdays and many of them go to the city library with their parents or grandparents. In the library children can often find someone who will read aloud to them. This is what happens every Wednesday from September to July in the Library and Centre for Arts and Culture in Leiden (BplusC). The Voorlees Middag takes place for half an hour it is intended for children from 3 to 8 years old. During this time, a volunteer selects some children's books and reads them aloud to children in a separate room with chairs with colourful pillows. We observed the activity two times in April and May 2013 and we interviewed Saskia, Child specialist in the BplusC library and coordinator of the Voorlees Middag, and Rita, a senior volunteer.

Since 2010, when the economic and financial crisis hit and the cuts to the cultural sector became more severe, librarians were no longer able to spend time reading aloud stories to children and the library decided to involve volunteers to keep the activity alive. A call for volunteers was published and many people showed their interest in getting involved. The library selected two of them: Rita (74 years old) and Niel. Since 2011, they have been reading aloud to children taking turns every second week, with the active logistical support by the staff of the library.

Rita signed up for this opportunity after ten years of active volunteering with UNICEF Netherlands. **"I like very much children and I like reading so I thought it was a nice combination"** (Rita, senior volunteer). Her motivation to read stories to children comes from her personal experience. She has two daughters and five grandchildren who are now adults and she used to read for them. Rita likes to read to children and with children because she is **"always curious and interested in them. I think they are renewing, creative and innovating. They say things that other people don't say and they say things we maybe said once but we don't say anymore... Young children always have new ideas"** (Rita, senior volunteer).

How do the different generations benefit?

The aim of the Voorlees Middag is to improve literacy skills among young children through reading because **"if you start reading and like reading when you are young, it's more likely that you will still like it when you are 40. And it can help you a lot during your life and your studies"** (Saskia, project coordinator). **"I think that young children don't read at all or don't read enough, ... so I think this project is very important from an educational point of view"** (Rita, senior volunteer).

The library has two locations in Leiden with very different characteristics: the central library, located in the centre of the city, where many expat and Dutch children from well educated parents take part in the Voorlees Middag and a second location in Leiden-Noord, a district where most of the residents are of migrant background with a low level of education. The Voorlees Middag plays a different role in this second location, where the aim is also to reach parents through their children and to stimulate reading as a daily practice at home in order to improve literacy skills in the whole family.

The Voorlees Middag is not designed to be an intergenerational activity as such but in practice it is also a moment of informal contact between three generations: the senior volunteers, the children and their parents. When we asked Saskia and Rita what is the added value of a senior volunteer reading stories to children compared to a younger person, they both agreed that the reading can be successfully performed by volunteers of all ages. But, the difference is in the kind of relationship children build with the person who reads stories to them. **"Children have a lot of feelings for older people, they are like their grandparents. Often children feel safe quicker with older people, because they are patient and less in a rush"**(Saskia, project coordinator). Moreover, the senior volunteer is often identified as a grandmother ("oma" in Dutch) and this figure **"is warm and safe because it is familiar and children feel comfortable"** (Rita, senior volunteer). In some case this role played by the senior volunteer is particularly important as some expat or migrant children don't have grandparents in the Netherlands and probably have a very limited chance to interact with older people. In these cases senior volunteers tend to build a stronger relationship with children and children tend to respond to senior volunteers in a more emotional way. When children enter the room, Rita welcomes them, puts herself at their level going down on her knees and introduces herself as Oma Rita. Some of them are happy to shake their hands with her, some other just smile at her and go directly to take a sit. **"I introduce myself as Oma Rita. I see they have more respect and affection this way... you know, there are many children who don't have their grandparents around and we are not a country like Spain or Italy where enlarged family are strong and people can always go to the grandfather or the grandmother. This could be the added value of a senior person doing this job"** (Rita, senior volunteer).

On the other hand, senior volunteers also benefit from their contact with young children and this is one of the motivations behind Rita's choice to volunteer in this activity: **"Volunteering with children gives me a lot of pleasure. I bring them pleasure and they bring me a lot of**

pleasure" (Rita, senior volunteer). The project coordinator elaborated more on the benefits of intergenerational contact for senior volunteers and in her opinion senior volunteers get an insight in how children grow up nowadays and **"they learn how to stay young. They can learn from the unique way children have to explain the world"**(Saskia, project coordinator).

The interaction with parents is on the other hand is very limited. Often they are in the room together with their children but they don't have a specific role. They are not actively involved in the reading as the children are. In the opinion of the two interviewees, the role of the parents is to be like a "filter" for their children **"they decide for their children to come or not to the Voorlees Middag. If parents like it and see that children like it too, then they will come back"** (Rita, senior volunteer).

Constraints and challenges

One of the challenges of this initiative is the unpredictability of the audience, different children can appear each week and the volunteers don't know how many children will attend. When we were there for our observation in May, nine children were present, three girls and two boys aged between 3 and 5 years, and one girl and three boys aged between 6 and 8 years. Also the socio-economic and cultural background of children may differ significantly. The variety of the audience requires the volunteers to have a very good understanding of child development, especially cognitive development of children in the different ages, and to apply it to reading. For this reason, Saskia is planning to pilot a separate reading session for very young children, from 2 to 4 years old. It will be launched in September 2013 and will initially take place on Tuesday or Friday morning once a month.

The informal nature of the activity appears to be both a strength and a weakness. The activity is free and accessible to all. On the other hand the unpredictability of the audience and the irregular attendance of children may undermine the level and quality of the contact between the generations. It may also have a negative impact on the motivation of volunteers and on the potential benefits that reading sessions can have on children. The Voorlees Middag has never been formally evaluated by the library and the opinions of the volunteers, parents and children have never been collected and taken into consideration. The various beneficiaries and facilitators involved may experience the activity in quite different ways and could offer suggestions to improve it.

More information:

Saskia Heijnen, S.Heijnen@bplusc.nl

VoorleesExpress: the Story behind the initiative

The VoorleesExpress programme is a joint initiative of BPlusC Library and the community education focused organization: Jeugd en Samenleving Rijnland (JES) in Leiden. It targets parents and children aged 2 to 10 years who would benefit from extra support in early literacy development in their own home. Dutch may often not be the home language in these families and they may be isolated from the community.

As with the Reading Aloud activity, VoorleesExpress was not explicitly designed as an intergenerational project – though it could also be described as a multi-generational project in the sense that it involves many age groups, both children and parents within the target families and volunteers vary in age from 18 years to 70 years.

The overall aims are: to stimulate language development of children particularly those from migrant families and those with parents with low level of education; introduce the bedtime story reading ritual in these families; stimulate contact and understanding between different groups in the community; broaden the social network of both volunteer story readers and families; connect families to other educational, cultural and social services in the community. We interviewed two volunteers Marion (53 years), Carla (65 years) and one volunteer coordinator, Renata (56 years) in May and June 2013. The following is based on our discussions as well as additional information about the programme provided by JES.

How do the different generations benefit?

In our interviews we were interested in exploring the particular characteristics and approaches of older volunteers (55 years+) versus younger volunteers. Diverse views and experiences were expressed. Marion (53 years) felt that being older was an advantage ***"In the cultures where the families I visit come from someone who is older is valued because of life experience, so they are quickly included to listen to you and follow your advice. They often say that to their children. 'This lady is older, so you must respect her'."***

Renata felt that senior volunteers are more secure in their contact with children and are more aware of the importance of their (volunteers) role with respect to the transfer of norms and values. On the other hand she believed that the younger volunteers, through their youth, are more attractive to children and more 'in tune with children'. Carla talked about the benefits to children of a secure, calm presence an older volunteer can offer to children. She also emphasized the importance of time for children. ***"You also have a sort of grandparent function. For almost all children that is wonderful. You are there for an hour. You are there for the children. It is always a party. You can also set limits"*** (Carla, 65 years). The importance of structure and ritual is also emphasized as a key benefit of the VoorleesExpress. ***"Every Friday evening, they know you are coming...they like to have a ritual. Every visit, it is the same structure"*** (Marion, 53 years). Importantly, both the children and parents experience that books are something to enjoy.

The volunteers themselves felt valued in their role by both children and parents, especially mothers. They were often greeted by cheers from the children on arrival. Mothers, many of whom were socially isolated appreciated the informal advice provided by the volunteers about general childrearing matters. In this regard the older volunteers also felt had a 'social' grandparenting role offering some stability and continuity in families where natural grandparents are far away in the family's countries of origin.

When we asked volunteers about how they benefited or developed as result of participating in this programme they mentioned the opportunity to have contact with people from a different cultural background from themselves and learning about daily home-life of families from these cultures. Countries of origin of the families the volunteers had visited included: Syria, Sudan, Morocco, Somalia, Iraq, Turkey. ***"It is very special to have access to homes of people from other cultures. We often are confronted with prejudices about these people in our society. The generalizations are challenged by this experience ... I also think I wouldn't have contact with non-native Dutch if I didn't do this work"*** (Renata, 56 years).

The senior volunteers also recognized that they learned from the children. Regularly visiting children gave them insight into their life world, how they think, their questions. Additionally, as noted by Renata, children ***"hold a mirror up to you. They show you who you are. They confront you with yourself. So you can learn lots from them"***.

Constraints and challenges

Overall, all three volunteers were very positive about the Voorleesprogramme and the potential contribution it made to supporting young children and their families in integrating into Dutch life in general and coping with school. Interestingly they differed in their views and experiences as to whether the programme succeeded in its long-term goal that parents would be able to take over the role of reading stories to children, once the 20 week period with the volunteer had ended. Although this is not the intention in the Programme some of the volunteers have stayed in contact with the families once the 20 week programme ended feeling that they would benefit from the continued support. ***“I don’t see any problem in continuing the contact if both parties continue to enjoy it and the needs is there from both sides, then why not?”*** (Renata, 56 years)

A challenge for potential volunteers in the VoorleesExpress was identified as the weekly commitment required from volunteers. Speaking from her own experience Carla also mentioned she found it more difficult that she expected to be able to connect with the families from other cultures: the gap between cultures is big and the language a problem. All three volunteers mentioned that communication with the children could be difficult if they understood no Dutch. At the same time they valued the progress in language development when it happened, and also seeing the pride the mothers felt in the progress.

More information:

<http://www.jesrijnland.nl/partner/voorleesexpress-partner.html>

Jolanda Borst, J.Borst@jesrijnland.nl

Ingrid Zuure Yang, I.ZuureYang@jesrijnland.nl

4. North Leiden School Garden: seniors and children discovering nature (Schooltuin Leiden Noord)

Introduction

Having contact with nature is viewed as a crucial aspect of children's lives. This can be a challenge in urban settings and especially in families with two working parents with a little time for outdoor activities or amongst families where there is a lack of awareness of the importance of nature and the outdoors for children. In the Netherlands, in order to fill this gap, primary schools and after-school centres organize gardening activities for their pupils. In almost every city it is possible to find well organized school gardens (*schooltuinen* in Dutch), owned by the local authority and run by active volunteers who welcome tens and sometimes hundreds of children every week and introduce them to nature. In the city of Leiden, there are five different school gardens, all located outside the city centre. The account which follows is based on observations of two gardening sessions which took place in the garden De Distelvlinder (Tuin van Noord) during the month of June and July 2013 as well



as interviews ICDI staff carried out with volunteers, the activity coordinator and some children participating to the activities, and the senior education officer in Leiden municipality responsible for nature and environmental education (NME) who is also a volunteer.

Within the Municipality of Leiden, the Department Natuur en Milieueducatie (nature and environment education) is the institution responsible for all the educational activities in the field of nature, which include parks, outdoor playgrounds, children's farms, school gardens and a nature and environment resource centre. Volunteers are responsible for the development and facilitation of most of the education and leisure activities that take place in these locations which involve both children and adults.

School gardens are open to children, their teachers, and families seven months a year from April to October. The day to day running of the school gardens requires a lot of time and energy and the majority of volunteers are retired seniors. Each school garden has a location coordinator, who is also a volunteer and has the important role to oversee the planning of the activities taking place in the location, place the orders for tools, seeds and plants and organise the volunteers into workgroups. The garden we visited, De Distelvlinder, dates back to 1937. On entering the school garden you are struck by the tidiness and the organised layout of the cultivated allotments, each of which are further divided into smaller individual or small group plots for the children

participating in the gardening activities. These are labelled with personalised wooden name boards made by the children. The garden also has a beehive, a gazebo and a terrace. Central in the complex is the herb garden, which is used as a display garden to teach children which herbs can be used in natural medicines and in cooking. The garden also has a round seating area where volunteers introduce the activities of the day to the children.

In 2013, the garden De Distelvlinder hosted students from the 6th to the 8th grade (9-11 years old) from six primary schools and young children from 4 to 8 years old from two after-school centres. The children are responsible for their own plot during the school terms and in the summer when the garden stays open to welcome children and their families who want to follow up on their plants during the holidays. All children follow the gardening lessons organised by volunteers and try to reproduce the display garden in their own plot. Planting and harvesting activities are scheduled following the seasonal calendar of plants and flowers and all children bring home the produce e.g.: beautiful marigolds, green beans, potatoes. The cycle of nature, the life cycle of plants, the useful role of insects and worms are presented to young and older children, who can put their hands in the ground, and in doing so, learn to love and value nature.

"When children come to the garden for the first time and put their hands in the ground they see a worm and scream: a worm a worm! Then we tell them a worm is useful for the garden because they make holes and rotten leaves. So the next time they come the children count the worms they find: oh I have two worms, you have only one..." (Heleen, senior volunteer and location coordinator, 66 years)

How do the different generations benefit?

School gardens are not designed to be an intergenerational activity but they happen to be so because most of the volunteers are senior citizens who love both gardening and children and decide to devote their free time to introducing young citizens to nature. Out of the seven volunteers we met during our visits, five are over 55 years, of which two are older than 75 years. They all have volunteered in the garden for a long time, some of them are active in De Distelvlinder for 9 years. In general, most of the volunteers have an academic background and like the idea of giving something back to society now that they are retired.

Volunteers are not used to reflecting on their experience in terms of intergenerational contact and exchange with children. During our visit it was the first time they were asked to focus their attention on this specific aspect. ***"We are the grandparents somehow. We don't want it because we want to feel young but children see us as grandparents"*** (Heleen, senior volunteer and location coordinator, 66 years).

Senior volunteers wish to transmit their passion and respect for nature to children, as they already do to their grandchildren. And at the same time, they benefit from the contact with the younger generations because they are invited to have a fresh look at things that may be taken for granted (by adults). ***"I think I learn from children the surprise nature can give you... I can look to things with different eyes, from a different perspective"*** (Heleen, senior volunteer and location coordinator, 66 years).

The power of children to stimulate seniors to look at things from a different angle and to leave their safe position in favour of a more original perspective is also described by Marian, education officer, NME Municipality of Leiden) ***"Children often don't have prejudices and are spontaneous, good for older people to challenge their pre-conceived notions in interaction with nature. Older people can also improve their (inter-generational) communication skills, see how they can pass more information and create more interest when they agree to lose some of their hierarchic attitude towards the youngsters"*** Children, on the other hand, learn gardening skills and are

strongly supported to develop a respectful attitudes towards nature in all its aspects. They also benefit from spending time outdoors, which is unfortunately not so common in their lives. **“I like to come here because I like to play outside, to be outside”** (Focus group interview with children from afterschool centre, 4-6 years).

Moreover, the contact with adult volunteers and especially seniors gives children the chance to learn how to relate with respect and courtesy to adults who are not part of their family. This issue is reported by the volunteer and the overall coordinator as particularly relevant for children coming from disadvantaged neighborhoods and with migrant backgrounds. Nevertheless, all volunteers active in the garden are Dutch. It seems that no specific attempts have been made to involve some non-Dutch volunteers in the activities and only little attention has been paid to finding some more effective intercultural ways to foster communication between adults and children. **“With the Dutch school we more or less know the reactions of children and how to cope with them. But the non-Dutch children, sometimes is difficult for us. The culture... We had a course on that but it didn't help a lot. It is difficult to put it in practice”** (Heleen, senior volunteer and location coordinator, 66 years).

Constraints and challenges

In general the school gardens function very well and can draw on the many years of experience of volunteers that have helped in improving the activities year after year. Nevertheless, more schools and after-school centres and volunteers could be involved and more attention could be given to the inclusion of volunteers and children with migrant backgrounds.

More information:

<http://www.schooltuinenleiden.nl/>