

Reweaving the Tapestry of the Generations

An Intergenerational Learning Tour Through Europe



Acknowledgements



This publication was prepared by Giulia Cortellesi and Margaret Kernan (International Child Development Initiatives – ICDI) on the basis of data collected by all members of the TOY Project Consortium.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.

Suggested citation

The TOY Project Consortium (2013), *Reweaving the tapestry of the generations: An intergenerational learning tour through Europe*, Leiden: The TOY Project.

Design and layout

Patrick McDonald & Derek Doyle



The project TOY – Together Old and Young has been funded with support from the European Commission, Lifelong Learning – Grundtvig Programme. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

What is the TOY Project?

"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, "The Dice: young meet old", the Netherlands

The Together Old and Young Project (TOY) (2012 – 2014) is all about bringing together young children up to nine years with older people so that they can learn together and from each other, socialise and have fun together. This is intergenerational learning. TOY, a two year project is being funded under the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme – Grundtvig and is being implemented by nine partner organisations in seven countries:

Ireland	Dublin Institute of Technology
Italy	Lunaria Retesalute
Netherlands	International Child Development Initiatives
Poland	Comenius Foundation
Portugal	University of Aveiro
Slovenia	Educational Research Institute
Spain	University of Lleida Municipality of Lleida

Since 2012, the TOY project investigated initiatives that involve older people and young children in many artistic, cultural and creative projects as well as in outdoor and nature activities. Publications about TOY's interpretation of intergenerational learning, as well as more information on the project can be found on www.toyproject.net

An Intergenerational Learning Tour Through Europe

In order to find out more about how young children and older people benefit from learning together, the TOY partners visited 21 activities, met the participants and asked them about their experiences. Let's start the trip!

Ireland



The Way We Were

If You Were in my Shoes

Trauma Teddies

Spain



Regina's Tale

Volunteering and Ecology

Portugal



From 8 to 80 years Old

Intergenerational Sports Activity

Recognising You







Arts, Culture and Creativity





Nature and Outdoor Learning




Netherlands

-  *Reading Aloud*
-  *North Leiden School Garden*
-  *All Together Under One Roof*
-  *The Dice: Young Meet Old*





Poland

-  *The Academy of Super Grandmothers and SuperGrandfathers*
-  *Flying Grannies*

Slovenia

-  *From 0 to 100 – Together*
-  *Scouts and Older People Together*
-  *Tree of Generations*

Italy

-  *Tales from a Village*
-  *Older People and Children Together*
-  *Hortus Urbis*
-  *Grandparents in the Library*



Ireland

Creative opportunities for older people and children to contribute to society.

Examples of projects:

The Way We Were project Young children and older people jointly explore local history and heritage through examining artefacts from earlier times.

If You Were in my Shoes project A community participatory arts project involving 5 to 86 year olds.

The Trauma Teddies project Children and senior volunteers knit 'trauma teddies', which are used to comfort children going to hospital in ambulances.



The Netherlands

Active participation of senior volunteers in community projects to plant the seeds for a more inclusive society.

Examples of projects:

Reading Aloud projects Seniors volunteers are active in municipal library-supported initiatives to stimulate young children's love of reading.

North Leiden School Garden Senior volunteers work alongside young children in school gardens.

All Together Under One Roof Very young children and older people with dementia sing songs together in residential care home for the elderly which also houses a childcare centre.

The Dice: Young Meet Old Five and six year-old children from a primary school regularly visit older people in a residential care home for older people to do activities together.



Poland

Grandparents and senior volunteers in action to bring arts and culture to young children.

Examples of projects:

The Academy of Super grandmothers and Super grandfathers A school for grandparents to learn more about their grandparenting role and engage in volunteer work with children.

Flying Grannies Senior volunteers write and perform their stories and poems in children's settings.



Slovenia

Children and seniors learn from each other and have fun together.

Examples of projects:

From 0 to 100 – Together 7 and 8 year-old primary school children do creative activities together with seniors in a care home for older people.

Scouts and Older People Together A scouting group visits a care setting for older people where children and older people learn scouting skills and play games together.

Tree of Generations Children, parents and grandparents are stimulated to share creative leisure time in preschool settings.



Italy

Gardening, arts, culture: all means are used to stimulate intergenerational contact.

Examples of projects:

Tales from a Village A mayor-led multi-generational creative response to a recent earthquake. Children and seniors create a street performance and make a film about 1950s crafts and lifestyles in the village of Poggio Pincenze.

Older People and Children Together An intergenerational centre combining a childcare service for 0 to 3 year-olds and a care setting for the older people.

Hortus Urbis An intergenerational educational urban garden designed to renovate an historical site and stimulate environmental awareness.

Grandparents in the Library Senior volunteers organise a school library and read and discuss books with children.



Spain

Young children and older people offer their skills to serve the future of both generations.

Examples of projects:

Regina's Tale Older people tell stories to young children in the library.

Volunteering and Ecology Children from a community play centre and senior volunteers from a care setting for older people learn about ecology together using ICT as a learning tool.



Portugal

Dialogue between generations to stimulate contact, build meaningful relationships and improve social cohesion.

Examples of projects:

Recognising You Young primary school children exchange letters with older people in a care home for older people.

From 8 to 80 years old Social gatherings and leisure activities are organised between children in a kindergarten and a neighbouring care setting for older people.

Intergenerational Sports Activity A joint outdoor sports activity for a local school children and seniors in a neighbouring care home for older people.

More information on the 21 case studies on the TOY website www.toyproject.net

Sharing Experiences: The Best Reward

1 What does being 91 years old mean to a 5-year-old?

Through new and frequent contact with children, older people declare they feel valued, and have a contribution to make to society. This feeling also brings them new energy and enhanced general health and wellbeing. Both generations also gain from having fun together in shared activities and through this interaction they learn about the others' life worlds and challenge cultural stereotypes about issues like age or gender.

Enhanced wellbeing for all

"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, coordinator and facilitator, "Recognising You", Portugal**

"Volunteering with children gives me a lot of pleasure. I bring them as much joy as I receive from them."

—**Rita, senior volunteer, 74 years old, "Voorlees Middag", the Netherlands**

"We are more self-confident and cheerful"

—**senior volunteer, Academy of Super Grandmothers and Super Grandfathers, Poland**

Challenging stereotypes

"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, organiser of a workshop, project "From 0 to 100

- Together", Slovenia

Having fun together

"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, "Tree of Generations", Slovenia



Cultivating Together

2 Learning together increases solidarity between young and old

Solidarity between generations stands out as one of the major benefits both old and young have gained through learning together. This is a process that takes time. Across the initiatives the same motivation is shared: institutions should be more open to the community so that actions like children visiting care for older people homes become a regular practice.

.....

"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 intergenerational pact to restore hope and future for the new generations."

—Meg, senior volunteer, 55 years old, "Hortus Urbis", Italy

.....

"It is very special to have access to homes of people from other cultures. We often are confronted with prejudices about these people. The generalisations are challenged thanks to this experience, because I know I wouldn't have had contact with non-native Dutch if I didn't do this work."

—Renata, senior volunteer, 56 years old, "Voorlees Express", the Netherlands

“

*It is all about the learning of the values
of sharing, solidarity, respect and
acceptance of the other.*

—Vânia, mother of a 4 year old participant “From
8 to 80 years old”, Portugal

”



All the Wisdom in a Tiny Worm

3 Older people are guardians of knowledge

Teaching skills and sharing their hobbies such as introducing children to local history through examining artefacts or gardening, food production and cooking skills show how useful older people's life experience can be for children.

.....

"Grandparents told us the things that were done in the past. Arianna's grandfather told us how the dishes were repaired, because at that time nothing was thrown out. They didn't have Play Station! They played games with other stuff." –

Group of 6 to 7 year-old children in, "A territory is told through art, music and theatre and traditional crafts", Italy

.....

"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. 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 old, "School garden Leiden Noord", the Netherlands

“

During life, people acquire knowledge and it is positive to have the chance to transmit it as part of history to the younger ones.

—José Luis, senior volunteer, 72 years old, “Volunteering and ecology”, Spain

”



Time to Connect, Face to Face

4 Grandparents have a strong role to play in children's lives

There is no doubt about the value for children's learning and development of having a grandparent figure in their lives. The older people involved in intergenerational initiatives believe that through these activities, they can provide affection, bring structure, time as well as calm attention to young children.

.....

"When you are a parent, you are so overwhelmed with other things that you don't have time to really spend moments with your child. And now we have this opportunity. This is the biggest privilege of being a grandparent."

—Darja, grandparent 56 years old, "Tree of generations", Slovenia

.....

"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, "The Trauma Teddies", Ireland

“ 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, volunteer, 65 years old,
“Project Voorlees Express”, the Netherlands ”



Creating Knowledge Together

5 Both children and older people can contribute

Young children and older people can create knowledge and learn together. An important conclusion from the TOY project is that understandings of learning should be broadened to include contributions of both young children and older people. Through their interactions and relations with each other, young children and older people can be co-creators of knowledge and build relationships of learning.

.....

“Cristina, my daughter, realises that there are various ages or stages of our life and that time passes by very quickly.”

—Luísa, mother of 9 year-old participant, “Recognising You”, Portugal

.....

“I think I learn from children how nature can surprise you so now I look at things with different eyes, from a different perspective.”

—Heleen, senior volunteer and location coordinator,
66 years old, “School garden Leiden Noord”, the Netherlands

"The children brought a different dynamic, they were less reluctant. They were all used to making things. They brought in a lovely innocence and vitality. And they said funny things."

—coordinator, "If You Were in My Shoes", Ireland



Together Old and Young: It's a Success Story!

Leaders, coordinators, practitioners and senior volunteers are committed to intergenerational practice and open to innovation in learning. They show a flexible, playful and non-judgmental attitude. This is crucial for the success of an intergenerational learning project.

Good planning and preparation is also vital. This includes talking with both age groups about what to expect from the other group and reflecting on the experience and learning. If the wishes of both children and older people are included in planning the next activities, they will participate with even greater pleasure.

Mediators such as early childhood education and care or social care practitioners, teachers, senior volunteers and parents can be interpreters, building a bridge between generations.

“You need to stimulate contact, be a good role model, be able to provide activities that ‘work’ for both age groups, and be knowledgeable about the interests, abilities and development of both generations.” —Leila, coordinator, “The Dice: Young Meet Old” The Netherlands

Given that many age groups, including parents, family members and professionals of all ages are actively involved in the learning practices explored in seven European countries, it is important to underline that many generations can be involved and benefit in learning together.

*"We are proud to continue to reweave
the tapestry of the generations. The
threads are coming together again"*

— chairperson of NnRHA, "If You Were in My Shoes", Ireland



Together Old and Young (TOY) promotes bringing young children and older people together. Through sharing experiences they have fun, learn from each other and develop meaningful relationships.

