



National Youth Agency



International Practice in the Youth Sector

Executive Summary

Impact, challenges and learning for a
youth led approach

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'The project was a great success in terms of bridging the gap between the two generations and altering the perceived notions both had of each other'.

The Beth Johnson Foundation, in partnership with the National Youth Agency, established a programme to support and develop the role of young people and youth organisations in 'growing' intergenerational practice from a 'youth-led' perspective. Supported by an Intergenerational Youth Learning Network, a programme of eight discrete projects was started in late 2009. On completion in 2010, the projects were evaluated, and the lessons learned will be incorporated into future work of this kind.

Shared outcomes for young and older people

- Seeing other generations in a more positive light
- Gaining respect for the views and abilities of other generations
- Developing meaningful, enjoyable relationships

Specific outcomes for young people

- Enjoyment and fun from sharing new experiences
- Gaining new, and developing existing, skills – including organisational and leadership skills, the ability to work as part of a team, technical, practical and creative skills
- Improving the communication and social skills required for interacting with older people whilst increasing both self-confidence and self-esteem

Specific outcomes for older people

- Having fun, enjoying the involvement in new experiences and social interaction with young people - sharing a sense of achievement.
- Becoming aware of issues common to all generations
- Improving health and wellbeing – becoming more independent through development of new skills, using skills from the past, becoming a role model and feeling valued
- Removing pre-conceptions through better communication skills and sharing experiences

In addition the programme identified the potential to create practical and lasting benefits for the wider community, including the break down of barriers between different ethnic groups and age groups.

Issues for consideration to inform future practice

This programme has provided greater understanding of the challenges and benefits of intergenerational practice in the youth sector. The following "headline" issues are identified as ones that will contribute to the development of further and 'better' practice.

Project planning and youth contribution to planning

- By preparing strategies for both recruitment and interaction at the outset, project roll-out can be achieved more efficiently
- Prior consideration of individual needs and capabilities ensures full participation without a risk to health or well-being
- Allocating responsibility for project planning, organisation, recruitment, fundraising and budgeting to young people results in them taking ownership of the project

Recruitment

- When asking stakeholders and young people to recruit older members of the community to join a project, sufficient time needs to be allowed in order to achieve optimum group composition
- A group that starts out with equal numbers of young and older participants is more likely to retain membership to completion than one that is unbalanced
- The maximum benefit of intergenerational involvement occurs when youth organisations recruit marginalised, disadvantaged or hard to reach young people
- Enlisting and retaining older peoples participation is achieved by 'taking activities to them' and has the added benefit of strengthening links with older people's organisations

Quality of engagement

- Facilitating meetings between participants (young – young, old – old and young – old) before starting a project allows them to address generational preconceptions and specific issues that are important to them
- Setting ground rules at the start of the programme is an invaluable in managing expectations and keeping the project objectives clearly in perspective
- To generate the environment of trust that prompts an exchange of skills and learning, regular contact between young and older participants is essential on short term projects

Communication and sustainability

- Simple, clear communication fosters informed participation, commitment and the desired focus
- Programme and project objectives are achieved when co-ordinators have a sound knowledge of intergenerational principles and practice
- Maintaining motivation throughout the project is critical, particularly where incentives or competitive elements are involved
- Strengthening youth partnership relationships and establishing long-term joint ventures will enable them to deliver benefit to the young, the old and the wider community
- Youth-led programmes should in future include intergenerational practice as an integral part of their strategic planning