

LEE LI MING
PROGRAMME IN
AGEING URBANISM

Intergenerational Activity Centres

A Comparative Study
Between Singapore and
Northern Ireland

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Intergenerational programmes bring together communities of different ages or generations. A common strategy is to work on voluntary services or issues of common concern. Such programmes often combine older and child-friendly considerations, rather than limiting the focus to age-specific problems. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports community-wide benefits among older participants, such as enhanced mobility and independence, increased security, and confidence in leisure and social activities. Adolescents also develop more pro-social behaviour, less negative risk-taking with alcohol and drugs, and overall improvement in psychosocial wellbeing and quality of life. In this writing, we look at case studies based in Singapore and Northern Ireland to compare different examples of how intergenerational spaces and programmes are developed and sustained.

Establishing an intergenerational framework

The intergenerational framework has been applied through different approaches. Singapore's approach utilises spatial co-location of senior and childcare centres, as seen in the case of Kampung Admiralty. Previously covered in Webpost Note 19: "Senior Public Housing in Singapore: Kampung Admiralty", Kampung Admiralty is a one-stop development featuring facilities for residents of all ages under one roof. Intergenerational amenities comprise of a shared food court, a medical centre, senior activity (Photo 1) and childcare centres (Photo 2) that are co-located. The goal is to promote healthy and nurturing environments for the social growth of seniors and children. Co-location is additionally supported by an intergenerational framework which provides structured support and programmes to initiate intergenerational interactions. This includes co-creative activities to strengthen cognition and physical function while allowing seniors to interact and bond with children from the co-located childcare centre.

Meanwhile the Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI) initiative is supported by the local community networks of the Beth Johnson Foundation. The foundation brings together intergenerational local communities through institutional and organisational support. This links communities from schools, orphanages, and senior care centres, among others.

LGNI is currently sustaining its ad-hoc event model by identifying common community needs and making use of existing connections to facilitate joint community programmes.



Photo 1: Kampung Admiralty Senior Care Centre

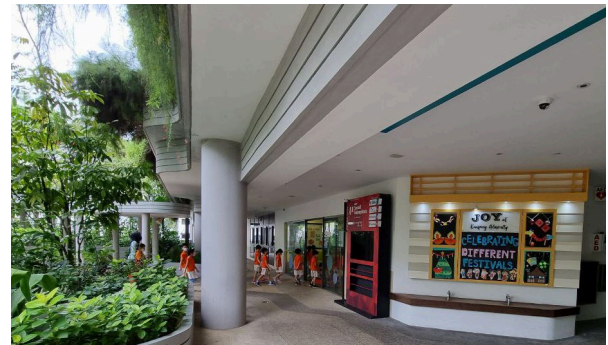


Photo 2: Kampung Admiralty Childcare Centre

NTUC Intergenerational Programme, Singapore

Intergenerational activities are guided through a three-tiered interaction framework (Box 1).

Box 1: NTUC Intergenerational Programme - Three-Tiered Framework

Basic tier

Time Frame: One-off or infrequent programmes, e.g.,

- Festive celebrations
- Non-regular events

Intermediate tier

Time Frame: Monthly or at regular intervals, e.g.,

- Birthday celebrations
- Monthly activities

Advanced tier

Time Frame: Regular, intentionally planned programmes, e.g.,

- Virtual drama productions
- Paper crafts
- Cooking/Baking sessions

Source:

Media Releases—NTUC First Campus & NTUC Health to Enhance Inter-Generational Interaction. (2017, March 27). NTUC Enterprise. Retrieved 4 January 2022, from <http://www.ntucenterprise.sg/media-release/ntuc-first-campus-and-ntuc-health/>

This framework was first piloted in 2016 in two other co-located facilities (MFS@Braddell Heights and Silver Circle Serangoon Central), where the Advanced tier was integrated into the childcare curriculum and seniors' daily activities through child mentoring and activity-based programmes. Senior participants were mostly those with mild to moderate dementia. NTUC found that they appeared to enjoy the interactive sessions, while children displayed varying degrees of learning and empathy. The pilot led to the uptake of the Advanced tier intergenerational programming in other NTUC Healthcare centres and NTUC First Campus, including at Kampung Admiralty. By the end of 2017, a total of 15 senior centres island-wide have been included in this intergenerational programme.

Co-creative activities are foundational to intergeneration interaction. These include, e.g., baking courses, arts and craft sessions that are introduced (Box 2). The goal is to inculcate in participating children the values of empathy, compassion, and respect for seniors, and to empower seniors by promoting a stronger sense of purpose through mentoring children.

Box 2: Intergenerational Programme Activities

This comprises several components:

Basic Tier : Grandparents Day



Photo 3: Grandparents Day Kampung Admiralty, November 2019. (Source: Tan Tock Seng Hospital)

Pre-schoolers from My First Skool and seniors from the Active Ageing Hub co-located in Kampung Admiralty made handmade cards for Grandparents' Day in November 2019.

Intermediate Tier: Virtual Museum Programme



Photo 4: National Museum Virtual Visit (Photo Credit: Tan Tock Seng Hospital)

The intergenerational programme also hosted online museum visits with the Growing Up gallery at the National Museum of Singapore. This provided a unique opportunity for seniors and

children to exchange pen pal cards to share what life in Singapore was like in the past and compare it to the remote home-based learning experience of children during the pandemic.

Advanced Tier: Virtual Drama Productions



Photo 5: Virtual Drama Production
(Photo Credit: Tan Tock Seng Hospital)

New bi-weekly meetings were introduced through Zoom for seniors and children from Kampung Admiralty to prepare for this Virtual Drama Production. Scripts were written in collaboration based on My First Skool's learning syllabus and both children and seniors participated and recorded character lines. This resulted in various storytelling projects like 'The Monkey's Birthday Surprise' and 'The Hare and The Tortoise' productions.

Source:

NTUC Health. (2021). Forging Inter-Generational Relationships— Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Singapore.
<http://www.ttsh.com.sg:80/Community-Health/Central-Health-Stories/Pages/Forging-Inter-Generational-Relationships-By%20NTUC-Health.aspx>

COVID-19 Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic has put the intergenerational programme framework through a stress test. Social distancing measures brought challenges. Co-location

could not support joint physical activities due to its high risk on the health of seniors and young children. Inter-generational activities were moved online (Photo 6). This did not weaken intergenerational interaction due to the existing relationship between them prior to the pandemic.



Photo 6: Online Language Classes
(Photo Credit: NTUC Health)

Linking Generations Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

LGNI was founded in 2009 by The Beth Johnson Foundation. The goal is to build age-friendly communities by bringing generations together as a catalyst for positive social change. Intergenerational programmes include activities to encourage relationship-building by working on shared problems and exchanging of resources between participants. A framework of interdependence is created between participants for mutual aid, e.g., technical skills and social relations.

LGNI Structure

The Beth Johnson Foundation provides the framework and administrative

support required to bring different intergenerational groups of people together. LGNI initiatives are funded, supported, and evaluated by various philanthropic foundations and governmental departments.

This support has led to several initiatives over the years within specific communities to address their respective needs (Box 3). An example is the programme that looks to foster social inclusion for orphans and seniors without familial support where these seniors would work directly with local orphanages and social organisations. After a successful pilot, the programmes can become institutionalised and integrated into the local network if organisations involved decide to adopt them as part of their annual plans or long-term activities.

Box 3: Linking Generations Northern Ireland Initiatives

The Digital Age Project



Image 7: Linking Generations Northern Ireland Digital Age Project (Photo Credit: Linking Generations Northern Ireland)

(2015 - 2017)

25 10-week courses

Online educational toolkit to promote digital inclusion and intergenerational engagement for older people living in

sheltered accommodation, addressing social isolation.

Supporters: Local IT institutions, schools, youth organisations, senior citizen shelters

An age-friendly school project

(2014 - 2015)

Local service providers coach and facilitate the programme. IT classes, intergenerational sports day, cooking classes and drama productions. To create a successful model of an age-friendly school. A group of older people engaged with a class of children aged 9–10 and developed a programme of activities to make their area more age-friendly

Supporters: Primary School, Community Association

Celebrating Age – 29 April: EU Day of Solidarity Between Generations

(2009 -)

Small grants are given to support community initiatives such as performances, storytelling sessions, crafting and physical activities. To raise awareness of the importance of engagement across the generations, and to offer a platform for showcasing good practices and activities that promote intergenerational solidarity.

Supporters: Public Health Agency (Funding), Community organisations

Source:

The Beth Johnson Foundation, A review of recent activities (p. 60). (2016). The Beth Johnson Foundation.

Discussion on intergenerational Frameworks

One of the key success factors of intergenerational programmes is strong top-down support that taps on existing networks to catalyse community partnerships and engage community stakeholders. Even so, Singapore and Northern Ireland adopts different approaches to managing their frameworks.

Kampung Admiralty success factors:

- Top-down cooperation and funding by government and public service agencies
- Top-down Structured framework for activity-based approach (based on activity frequency)
- Spatial co-location of intergenerational facilities

LGNI success factors:

- Top-down support from a large private charity (providing connections to community associations and local institutions)
- Bottom-up community initiatives for skill sharing and resource exchange
- Social network-based connection between intergenerational facilities

While the LGNI intergenerational programme adopts a bottom-up community co-creation approach, Singapore's Intergenerational Programme adopts a top-down framework, which structures intergenerational-based activities. Both bring about their unique set of successes and benefits.

Singapore Successes and Benefits

In 2018, about 260 people, including seniors and children were evacuated after a small fire started in Kampung Admiralty. Seniors from the NTUC Health Active Ageing Hub heard the fire alarm and took immediate action to help evacuate the children from the nearby preschool, showing how the spatial co-location of intergenerational programmes have helped to forge closer ties, with mutual benefits (*The Straits Times* 2018, December 26).

For many of the seniors whose grandchildren are grown up, the structured long-term programme provides them with an opportunity to relive their nurturing experience while sharing life stories with the pre-schoolers. Parents also noted that their children have become more caring and understanding after the programme, learning to look after their grandparents, while the older generation has also picked up some ideas for interacting with children in their family (NTUC First Campus and NTUC Health in an interview with *The Straits Times* 2017, March 27).

LGNI Successes and Benefits

Feedback for LGNI's programmes have generally been very positive. Participants shared that the programmes fostered open communication and understanding between the different generations. Programmes also built the confidence of participants and meaningful connections; participants would recognise and greet each other in their respective neighbourhoods (The Beth Johnson Foundation, 2016).

Challenges

Despite the many benefits of establishing an intergenerational programme, there are still challenges to achieving successful and sustainable outcomes. One such challenge is the impact of COVID-19 on safe programme facilitation. The need to protect vulnerable seniors and young children have made it difficult to encourage the voluntary uptake of intergenerational programmes among NTUC's senior and childcare centres. This is due to the limited number of activities available online. The centres must overcome such challenges by thinking of new ways to engage intergenerational communities in activities by firstly facilitating the uptake of new technologies to adapt productions and interactive activities for online safe-distancing measures.

Meanwhile, without the convenience of co-location, LGNI has recognised the need to establish a stronger framework of expansion based on an evidence-based methodology. This is due to challenges with sustaining funding and community support for long-term programmes given the ad-hoc nature of its collaborative models. This can be done by setting medium- and long-term objectives while planning for resources needed. An evaluation framework can also determine if community needs have been met.

Conclusion

Regardless of their individual pros and cons, the intergenerational model has proven to be beneficial for the community by bridging the gap between seniors and children, improving overall social wellness. Seniors and children in involved

communities have grown closer and shown initiative to continue acknowledging and helping each other out beyond the scheduled activities.

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