

# Intergenerational Programming in Long-Term Care Homes

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### Bachelor of Social and Community Development Capstone Project

April 2024

## Background

**Question:** How can we implement and improve intergenerational programming in long-term care and retirement residences?

**Importance:** The importance of this study lies in the benefit of intergenerational programming. Previous studies have shown the significant advantages intergenerational programming has on improving cognitive and physical decline, emotional abilities, independence and overall enjoyment of life in the older generation (De Souza et. al., 2022). However, there are few studies that highlight how to successfully implement and improve these programs. This study seeks to answer that question.

## Methods

### Informed Consent

Prior to beginning data collection, informed consent was received from the voluntary participants. Participants were made aware of all ethical considerations, their right to withdraw at any point, their right to anonymity, and that results communication would be taking place.

### Data Collection

This study used non-probability, purposive sampling. Five staff members of long-term care residences were recruited by means of email and phone call, with the requirements being: staff members who were 18 or above, resided in Ontario and played a significant role in the intergenerational programming at their facility.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher via Zoom, then recorded and transcribed via Otter AI.

Transcriptions were then anonymized using pseudonyms, and recordings were housed in a password protected OneDrive folder, with access given only to the researcher and research supervisor. These will be maintained by The School of Community Studies and deleted two years after research.

### Data Analysis

The data collected was then analyzed by discovering patterns in participant responses and further coding to determine common themes relative to the research question.

## Key Findings

Five staff members of long-term care residences were interviewed, with all five members being life-enrichment therapists. Four participants were program facilitators, and one participant was a program director.

The below significant findings were discovered when determining the requirements for successful intergenerational programming.

**1. Activities that are convenient to staff and participants are imperative for success.**

- Activities chosen should be simple, low-cost and easily-understood for both generations.
- Activities should encourage use of motor skills and communication between both generations.
- Many activities are based on the season/holiday in order to maintain engagement and reduce repetition.
- Ensuring there is proper, low-cost transportation to get to-and-from each facility, with limited need for external parties is crucial for accessibility purposes.

*“So, at [facility] we pick programs that are based on whatever age group we’re working with...they had to meet the needs of the children and what they were able to do, but also the needs of the residents as well.” [P4]*

**2. Reducing stigma increases participation in intergenerational programming.**

- Programming assists in proving that the older generation is capable and willing to participate in activities with all age groups.
- Programming contributes to dispelling myths that the older generation being too vulnerable, always sick, or unpleasant to interact with.

**3. Proper communication**

- Healthy communication between staff of both the long-term care facility and school is essential for successful programming.
- Promoting and facilitating appropriate conversation between the older and younger generation is beneficial for both parties.

**4. COVID-19 has caused programming to stop.**

- All five participants discussed that intergenerational programming has seized to be reintroduced following COVID-19. Programming was put on halt for health protection of both vulnerable populations, however although mandates have been lifted, programming has remained paused.

## Discussion

There is significant research highlighting the benefits of intergenerational programming; For example, Castora-Binkley et. al. (n.d), highlight that practicing forms of creativity are related to lower levels of self-reported isolation and loneliness, increase morale and elevate cognitive ability amongst the older generation.

However, many of the studies researching intergenerational programming were conducted prior to COVID-19. This researchers’ study differentiates from other studies as it includes the hinderances that came along with COVID-19 health mandates. The study encouraged participants to disclose the “before and after” of intergenerational programming during a pandemic, the workarounds involved with practicing safe interactions while weighing the benefits of programming vs. the precautionary measures needed to maintain health for all participants involved.

## Implications for policy and/or practice

The implications include reinstating intergenerational programming within these homes as they have been put on a halt since COVID-19. There is a need to revisit policies that have resulted in shutting down intergenerational programming, as the participants strongly believe that the benefits of programming outweigh the risk of infection given the sanitization protocols that were in place prior to the pandemic. These benefits have been proven through various studies, as well as hands-on experience from the participants of this research.

This research can be used to inform the policy and guideline development relative to intergenerational programming in long-term care settings. Health mandates have been lifted in all areas of Ontario, therefore programming should be reintroduced by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

## References

Castora-Binkley, M., Noelker, L., Prohaska, T., & Satariano, W. (n.d.). Impact of arts participation on health outcomes for older adults. *Journal of Aging, Humanities, and the Arts*, 4(4), 352–367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19325614.2010.533396>

De Souza, L. B., Gomes, Y. C., & Moraes, M. G. (2022). The impacts of visual art therapy for elderly with Neurocognitive Disorder: A systematic review. *Dementia & Neuropsychologia*, 16(1), 8–18. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1980-5764-dn-2021-0042>