During the spring months, the Engage At Every Age Project hosted a pair of sessions which invited participants from older adult, children and family serving organizations to partake in discussions about the possibilities of developing intergenerational programs in licensed early learning and child care settings.

Thanks to funding from a private trust, over the next 4-years Andrew Fleck Children's Services will be partnering with the Council on Aging of Ottawa and Families Canada and others to develop a demonstration site of best practices for intergenerational programming as a part of licensed early learning and care in three unique settings:

- Co-located as part of a senior's village including long-term care.
- On-campus beside an age-in-place residence.
- Neighborhood based in collaboration with a church congregation.

Our Vision of Intergenerational Programming

- We believe that by inviting older adult participants to partake in the day-to-day interactions within our early learning centres, it enriches the environment, the children's learning experiences and provides older adults with opportunities to engage with the community.
- Children and older adults both benefit holistically from shared interactions.
- An intergenerational program creates a community hub where young and old can connect, and lasting relationships between children, older adults, families and staff are formed.
- Intergenerational programming is a catalyst for continued and sustainable development within the community.

"This isn't about entertainment; it is about building meaningful relationships between the young and the old. Our Intergenerational Programs are where meaningful interactions and "playtime" are commonplace. It is key that the relationships are organic in nature and supported by the staff and educators. Together, children and older adults will decide on how they wish to spend their time. Some Grandfriends will be directly involved with the children while others will be a support to the Educators or the Cook. Some children will snuggle with a Grandfriend to read a story, while others will greet the regular visitor by name and perhaps show them a picture they've made. That is the beauty of choice, that belongs to both the Grandfriend and the child." -

Intergenerational Programming | Andrew Fleck Children's Services

Discussion

After a review of the benefits of intergenerational programming and an overview of the project goals, participants were divided into small groups to give their thoughts on each of the following questions from the perspective of the participants engaging in community-based and co-located intergenerational spaces, where natural connections and relationships between young and old can happen.

1. What do you think are the **key ingredients** needed to successfully implement intergenerational programming from the perspective of either **older adults, children and their families**?
2. What do you believe are the **opportunities** intergenerational programming offers?
3. What do you consider as **barriers for children and older adults to participate and how do we overcome them**?

Key Ingredients

What do you think are the key ingredients needed to successfully implement intergenerational programming from the perspective of children, older adults and their families?

- Knowledgeable community facilitators: need to understand how to make the introductions, maintain the relationships and build on-going connections.
- Activity and Recreational Coordinators play a pivotal role in planning and implementing social programs in Long-term Care: the program would benefit from a similar individual or committee which helps coordinate activities. Activities offered should be based on an assessment of interests of both the older adults and children rather than what the staff think.
- Educators need to be involved in discussions from the beginning:
    - What resources will be available (training, communication, etc.)?
    - What will the older adults be learning/be trained on?
    - Will there be any changes to the program policies?
    - Understanding the roles and responsibilities.
    - Discussing opportunities and solutions to barriers.
- Involving parents in meaningful ways and communicating with them appropriately:
    - Involve parents in focus group discussions.
    - Parents' expectations and concerns – how can we address these?
    - A parental awareness package for on-boarding families.
- Mental Health Training/ Resources to help all involved cope with loss/transition.

Opportunities and Suggested Activities

It was expressed that there is a need for the participants to be engaged in designing activities, being able to plan and share the things that they are interested in. What do you believe are the opportunities intergenerational programming offers? What are some activities you would implement to maximize these opportunities?

Opportunities for other community-based programs, especially when many young families and older adults do not have other family close by:

- Cultural activities, such as: celebrating cultural and religious events, making music and dance, cooking or baking together, language-based activities such as reading together or singing songs.
- Invite parents to special events to include them in the experience of creating new relationships.
- Have a community bulletin board where parents and older adults can see volunteer opportunities and community development initiatives.

- Many participants echoed the ideology presented by AFCS; a desire for unstructured and informal engagement. The element of spontaneity!
  - One participant described a possible interaction of a family bringing a baby to the centre. *A blanket is laid on the floor and the baby can watch and play with other children and older adults.*
- Many expressed that they would like to see outdoor spaces for engaging, and fostering a connection to nature.
  - Outdoor spaces that take advantage of seasonal considerations, visiting parks, ponds to feed ducks, gardening and tending to a green space.
- Look at the Denmark model of intergenerational opportunities - CBC production.
- Further develop ECE programs - build intergenerational programming into curriculum, include literature on how intergenerational programming supports *How Does Learning Happen?* Learn from other organizations and their examples of program delivery.
- Combating ageism:
  - Messages at home through parents' communications.
  - Soul searching.
  - Use stories such as Harry and Walter to frame conversations.
  - Discuss with the staff how to manage and mitigate attitudinal barriers to maximize the experience for learning on both sides.
- Cultural inclusivity between children and older adults, and a mutual exchange of personal stories and artifacts. Invite the older adults to discuss stories from their lives and share lessons from experience with the children: it would be a massive boost to self-esteem and mental health.

Barriers

What do you consider as barriers for older adults and children to participate and how do we overcome them?

Physical Barriers:

Transportation Logistics: In some cases, older adult participants who are either no longer driving or have mobility restrictions may encounter difficulty making their way to the centre. Having a plan in place to address the logistics of transportation for older adult participants is important. It was suggested that we ensure older adults are aware of accessible transportation opportunities, such as the para-transpo pass and the taxi coupon program. Other suggestions included a volunteer network of drivers, and carpooling within the older adult participant group.

Legislative & Policy Barriers:

Ethics and Regulations: Ensure that the program abides by the *Code of Ethics* and the regulations within the *Child Care and Early Years Act* – involve representatives from the Ministry of Education during the implementation process.

Outbreak Management: Have clear outbreak policies and involve Ottawa Public Health Services in conversations about managing outbreaks in all setting and especially in shared space centres.

Vulnerable Sector Background Checks: As having cleared a Vulnerable Sector Check with Ottawa Police Services is a Ministry of Education requirement for individuals who will be frequently engaging with children, it is important to discuss background checks in a way that is respectful and inoffensive to the older adult participants, and offer assistance navigating the application process.

Orientations: A proper orientation process which provides training and reviews policies is important to provide safe and valuable experiences for children and older adults. Stage the setting with consideration that some children may not have experience with older adults. Alternatively, older adults may also need transition spaces and time to integrate due to noise levels, personal comfort levels with children and individual needs.

Social & Emotional Barriers

Engaging Men: From the experience of some older adult services, engaging older adult men and the fathers of children may prove to be more difficult than involving older adult women and mothers of children. It has been suggested that hosting meal-based gatherings, would be an effective way of providing a comfortable setting for all, encourage socialization and regular involvement.

Comfort with Physical Contact: We believe in supporting children's autonomy and being respectful of when children are feeling uncomfortable with physical contact. The importance of respecting the children's right to refuse interaction has to be communicated

to the program participants. At the same time, the older adults need to feel safe around children smaller than themselves, especially if mobility and a risk of falling are issues. Children may be too physically active: jumping, climbing onto and putting strain on the older adults. Respecting the older adults' communication about their personal limitations and sensitivity toward the children will be reinforced through educator modeling.

Varieties of Engagement: The program should clearly state to prospective participants that interactions with the children are not the only means of engagement, and that there are opportunities to support the day-to-day operation of the centre through cooking, grounds keeping, gardening and handiwork. Older adults will undergo an orientation using a "buddy system" which assigns them a more experienced partner or staff member they can consult. The volunteer committee should facilitate relationships within the network of older adult participants.

Children's Right to Refuse: It will be important to facilitate the negotiation and reinforcing of personal space and sense of safety between the children and older adults. Sometimes children may not want to participate if they haven't slept well or are not in the frame of mind to participate. It is important to retain spaces where children can play if they do not wish to interact. There will also need to be lots of space to support children's physical needs.

Next Steps

Over the next four years, we aim to:

1) Establish and formalize a **collaborative and sustainable working relationship** between organizations serving the child care and older adult populations.

2) Establish a **sustainable model of intergenerational programming**, that is respectful of the needs of both children and older adults.

3) Provide **three distinctly different demonstration sites** for the sector to learn from and adapt to their own context.

4) Create a **comprehensive resource manual and how-to policy/ procedure guide**, available at no cost to expand this model across the sector.

5) Influence **national conversations** to lead the expansion of this model of intergenerational programming.

Based on the feedback received, we look forward to continuing the conversations to Engage At Every Age. What our participants had to say after the meeting:

"This project holds such possibility--for its participants and as a success model for bringing older adults and younger children together in three different contexts, to inform the efforts of other organizations in Ottawa and beyond."

"Very enlightening. And important to move forward building meaningful relationships between young and old."

"I am very interested in learning more about the project as it evolves and would be pleased to be involved if my experience and input can be of assistance. I am very interested in intergenerational programming and am excited to see this initiative in the Ottawa community."

"I would love to attend more webinars and training opportunities."

"It is one of our key priority areas."

"Providing our senior members in the Ottawa Region with opportunities to connect with youth in our community."

"Enriching the lives of older adults, especially those living in residential care or who are isolated in their communities."

We look forward to further discussing the possibilities for the Engage At Every Age Project with you all. A warm thank you to everyone who registered, attended, and shared their feedback during the introductory conference. We appreciate the opportunity to hear your thoughts and opinions to support future project planning.

Thank you!