



Elders as Resources

INTERGENERATIONAL STRATEGIES SERIES



Making What Difference? How Intergenerational Programs Help Children and Families

Occasional Paper #1



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The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of UPS, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

Elders as Resources explores successful practices, programs, and policies to mobilize the vast potential of older people to improve the lives of children, youth, families, and communities. This series of publications is intended to make the information available to Making Connections sites, to all units and grantees of the Foundation, and to interested members of the public. The Elders as Resources series was developed by Jessica Strauss, Consultant to the Annie E. Casey Foundation since 1997 and currently Co-Director of Baltimore Community School Connections, a non-profit technical assistance center, and Paula Dressel, formerly Director of Planning, Research, and Development at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and now Vice President of JustPartners, Inc., a Baltimore-based consulting firm. Occasional Papers are developed by experts in the field and shared by the Foundation without modification. Occasional Papers are developed by experts in the field and shared by the Foundation without modification.

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Intergenerational Strategies Series
Making *What* Difference?
How Intergenerational Programs Help Children and Families

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INTRODUCTION

This paper responds to a request made on behalf of the Annie E. Casey Foundation regarding the effects of intergenerational program participation on children, youth, families, and communities, particularly those experiencing disadvantage. This request also builds on a recent examination of the intergenerational program research literature, published in the *Journal of Intergenerational Relations* (Kuehne, 2003).

While this paper is not intended to be a comprehensive literature review, efforts were made to locate and examine as many of the published and unpublished research and evaluation results in the field of intergenerational programming as possible. An assortment of electronic and print sources were used to locate reports, including EBSCO, CINAHL, Pubmed, JSTOR, Sociology Abstracts, Social Work Abstracts, PsychLit, ERIC, Dissertation Abstracts international, and Google for general Internet searching. In addition, correspondence was sent to several North American leaders in intergenerational programming, asking for assistance in locating important, unpublished research and evaluation documents that ought to inform the discussion here. Additional individual telephone contacts were made to solicit documents. This paper includes information gleaned from as many of such documents as were appropriate to meeting the objectives as described below. The complete list of references cited in this paper is at the end, and includes both published and unpublished sources. However, the actual number of papers read is much larger than the reference list will reflect.

OBJECTIVES

There were three objectives identified for this paper:

1. Summarize the evidence of positive outcomes from intergenerational program participation, particularly for disadvantaged children, families, and communities.
2. Describe outcomes related to intergenerational program participation that are clearly lacking in the literature.
3. Describe important research questions and areas that should receive further investigation and support.

The first objective will be discussed using sub-sections to assist the reader. Objectives 2 and 3 will be combined and will constitute the second major section of the paper.

Objective 1: Summarize the evidence of positive outcomes from intergenerational program participation, particularly for disadvantaged children, families, and communities

A. Child and Youth Outcomes

Proponents of intergenerational programs have long made claims that program participation makes a positive difference in the lives of those involved. Several specific child and youth outcomes were of particular interest for this paper, including health, academic outcomes (e.g., achievement and graduation rates), and risky adolescent health behaviors (e.g., substance use and pregnancy). Previous examinations of the literature in this area predicted few results and when the search was narrowed to examine only those programs focusing on disadvantaged children, youth, families, and communities, the results were very thin indeed. The sections that follow will indicate

when the participants involved were definitively described by authors as experiencing disadvantage.

i. Health Outcomes

The literature on health outcomes for children and youth related to intergenerational program participation is very small. There are only a very few studies that suggest some findings; much is not yet known.

A national program titled “Family Friends,” established by the National Council on Aging in the mid-1980s, began with older volunteers mentoring parents of children with various disabilities. Now, the program works with families experiencing various forms of challenge and disadvantage, including teen mothers, families reported to authorities for child abuse and neglect, and those raising children with HIV/AIDS. While data supporting the effectiveness of this program are not readily available, evaluation reports suggest that participating families had fewer contacts with physicians and fewer hospitalized days for their children than they did before the program. Parents also describe their children as having improved self-esteem following the program. These findings are based on an evaluation of six Family Friends sites around the U.S. (Rinck & Hunt, 1997).

“Across Ages” is a comprehensive intergenerational mentoring program created at Temple University’s Center for Intergenerational Learning (e.g., Taylor et al., 1999). In this program, older adult mentors are matched with middle-school students, offering community service opportunities as well as life skills education. Now being replicated in more than 20 communities nationally, the program has shown that participating students can demonstrate health-related outcomes such as improved sense of well-being and safer, healthier responses to situations involving drug use. Students also showed more positive attitudes toward school, the future, and elders.

“Hope Meadows” is a planned intergenerational community in which families receive rent-free housing in exchange for parenting three to four foster children, most of whom have been in very disadvantaged family situations. Older adults receive housing for reduced rent if they participate in volunteer activities in the community, including playground supervision and tutoring activities. What has been learned from this comprehensive community initiative is that while many such children with “troubled pasts” would otherwise be raised in institutional environments and group homes, Hope Meadows provides them with an adoptive family environment enveloped by a caring community supportive to all its members, both young and old (e.g., Eheart, Power, & Hopping, 2003). While direct improvements to children’s health status are not described, what seems clear from reports thus far is that the current and future health and well-being of Hope Meadows children is brighter than what it would be if the children remained in over-taxed child welfare institutions awaiting adoption for, on average, years at a time (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, April 2001).

ii. Academic Outcomes

There are several studies examining the linkages between intergenerational program participation and academic outcomes for children and youth, including specific skill and knowledge development, academic achievement more broadly, and school attendance. For example, in the national program “Experience Corps,” older adult volunteers come into public schools to mentor and tutor low-income elementary school students. The focus of their activities with the children is literacy and numeracy development, but they also contribute to extracurricular activities for children and their families, and even participate in advocacy on behalf of the schools in which they volunteer. While data were not found to support the reported findings, local evaluations seem to indicate that teachers and other school officials associate program participation with a host of academic improvements, including mastery of basic literacy and numerical concepts, improved reading and math skills, enhanced comprehension, improved study skills, and increased language development. If these results are not impressive enough, there’s more:

Children were reported to have increased self-confidence, improved behavior, more regular attendance, and better socialization skills (Waddock & Freedman, 1998/99).

Improving children's reading ability through intergenerational program participation has also been found elsewhere, and the focus is often children and youth experiencing disadvantage and/or reading below the expected grade level (e.g., Community Service Society, 2000; Ellis, Small-McGinley, & Hart, 1998). It appears that such programs can accomplish more than academic gains, however, and while initially structured to focus on specific academic achievement or skill development, like reading ability, they often affect other areas of development and behavior as well. For example, Friedman (1999) describes a community service project for Florida schoolchildren (K-12) in which improved grades and school attendance, and a decrease in discipline referrals, were reported.

Intergenerational programs attempting to keep disadvantaged youth in school are another area in which some promising results have been found. For example, in a Canadian mentoring program titled "Black Achievers," minority youth are brought together with successful mentors from similar racial and ethnic backgrounds. Based in the Toronto YMCA, the program is reported to strengthen the partnership between home, school, and community. The reported results available thus far describe the program as potentially very motivational for the youth involved; in 1995/96, 96% of youth participants returned to school (Varley, 1998).

Brabazon (1999) describes an ambitious intergenerational work/study program that began by targeting high-school students in New York City who were recruited because of their below-average credit count, poor attendance, or both. Now replicated in other American cities as well, students in this program work 10-12 hours per week in internship sites where at least 50% of their time is spent interacting with older adults. The goals are for the students to gain basic work experience and employment skills, and develop "grandparent-like" relationships with the older adults. This type of relationship is reported to contribute to improving students' self-esteem, life coping skills, motivation, attitude, and planning skills (New York City Department for the Aging, 1990). While the New York City Board of Education generally considers dropout prevention programs to be successful if 50% or more of the participating students increase their attendance or accumulate more academic credits, this program has shown 80-90% of the participating students displaying such academic improvements. In fact, intergenerational work assignments were shown to result in better school attendance than non-intergenerational assignments. There are other important aspects of this program, including the type of school involved and group versus individual work assignments, which are important to consider when replicating the model elsewhere.

One final, family-based model focused on improving academic outcomes for disadvantaged children explicitly involves parents in improving children's academic readiness. In a study reported by Starkey and Klein (2000), Head Start mothers were given mathematical training and participated in a "family math curriculum" with their pre-schoolers. When compared with similar children who did not participate in the program, the program children showed significantly more extensive mathematical knowledge in several areas, and better school readiness as a result. Including grandparents in this model seems worthy of consideration, especially in family situations where grandparents are actively involved in parenting, or are providing child care for vulnerable working families.

iii. Attitudinal Outcomes

Clearly, the largest area of intergenerational program research related to child and youth outcomes focuses on improving the attitudes of children and adolescents toward older adults. While this literature may be relatively large, it is not clear in its message. For example, while some studies have demonstrated that children's attitudes toward older adults and/or aging more generally improve after intergenerational program experiences (e.g., Bales, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000), other studies report the opposite result (e.g., Barton, 1999). What we seem to

know is that some programs are more likely to affect the attitudes of children and youth toward aging than are others.

Intergenerational program factors that seem to be related to improving the attitudes of children and youth toward aging and older adults include the length of the program experience. For example, Couper, Sheehan & Thomas (1991) did not find that their intergenerational workshop, lasting five hours on a single day, had any positive effect on students' stereotypes of older adults. It also seems that the length of the intergenerational program experience, combined with the ability for program participants to form intergenerational relationships, is an important factor in achieving positive attitudinal change among children and youth (e.g., Bales, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000).

The nature of intergenerational program activities is important to achieving positive attitudinal outcomes as well. In another paper (Kuehne, 2003), four factors related to intergenerational program activities seem key:

1. activities should be related to the individual needs of those in one or, preferably, both participant groups (i.e., young and old);
2. activities can be created for purposes that are both related to the individuals involved and for the benefit of others as well (e.g., community);
3. intergenerational program participants should have a role in planning activities; and
4. a clear link should exist between program goals, activities, and research and/or evaluation outcome measures.

Another factor affecting measurable outcomes in this area seems to be research methodology. There are studies that compare pre- and post-program tests of attitudes, include control or comparison groups, and use relatively robust statistical or qualitative analyses. However, a large amount of the literature in this area still does not include even these relatively basic features. Further, random assignment of participants to program and control groups is very rare – a common weakness of many community-based initiatives. Altogether, it is hard to obtain reliable and positive results from the research and evaluations conducted on attitudinal outcomes.

For all the difficulties in this literature, we do know that intergenerational programs can result in positive experiences for children and youth, and that these experiences can influence positively the views held by young people about older adults. This is worthwhile knowledge, indeed. We also know that attitudinal improvements can be linked indirectly and directly with various health-related outcomes. For example, Hanks and Icenogel (2001) created an intergenerational service-learning opportunity for young and older adults to work together in an Alabama community-based training program. The program was developed to train college-aged workers for an age-diverse employment environment; younger workers were being prepared to enter the multigenerational work force, while older workers were being re-trained for the workforce in mid-life. One of the needs held by both participant groups was to manage conflict effectively in an increasingly age-diverse work environment, given the demographic changes associated with an aging baby boomer cohort. This research study found that the training was well received by both younger and older participants, appropriately focusing on self-esteem building, workplace stress management, resumé development, computer skills, and other specific training. Additionally, involvement in the program improved young adults' attitudes toward older workers more generally.

This study and others focused on attitudinal improvement resulting from intergenerational program participation do not necessarily target children, youth, and families experiencing disadvantage. In fact, when compared with the more profound outcomes demonstrated by programs described in the sub-sections above and the sections to follow, attitudinal change seems more appropriately a secondary or less relevant goal for such persons. The

study just described (Hanks & Icenogel, 2001) shows that changing the attitudes of youth toward older adults is possible while focusing on specific personal skills, workplace health, and knowledge development. This is a lesson also taught to us by Taylor and her colleagues (1999) through the “Across Ages” program, an initiative focused on children in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods. This lesson is worth remembering.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

There are several different types of intergenerational program models that focus on supporting families with low incomes, very young families, and other “at risk” families dealing with inadequate housing, poor nutrition, poor access to health care, and un- or under-employment. In the search for intergenerational programs that work with such families in the context of communities, several examples of regional and national programs surfaced, but the research and evaluation evidence on these programs and their outcomes is difficult to obtain, and so available findings are reported here but have not been verified in detail.

For example, “Mentoring Matters” is a Massachusetts-based program where, by law, older adult students are provided free tuition in post-secondary institutions. Seniors enrolled at the Worcester State College are able to participate in a three-credit course on intergenerational service, devoting between two and four hours each week to mentoring teen mothers parenting alone or women with substance abuse problems and their children living in a therapeutic community environment (Power & Maluccio, 1989/99). Senior mentors support the teen mothers to find employment, attend school, deal with difficult relationships with families and boyfriends, and work through challenging financial problems. The reported results indicate that participating teen mothers demonstrate reduced social isolation and experience the mentoring relationships as bridges to financial independence and the possibility of a college education.

In the earlier reported “Family Friends” program, in which older adults volunteer in the homes of families raising children with various disabilities, HIV/AIDS, and other challenges, participating families have reported reduced stress from the presence of program-based relationships. In a very small pilot study, the majority of parents also reported fewer concerns about their own fatigue and their child’s condition (e.g., Kuehne, 1989). In a variation of this program model, in which older adults work with families in which a child has a diagnosed mental disorder, the reported findings are similar – parents describe reduced feelings of stress and isolation, along with improved sense of security and self-esteem (cited in Power, 1998/99). It seems that creating a link between stressed and disadvantaged families and community seniors can lead to improved child outcomes as well as strengthened family environments.

Community-focused intergenerational programs often use family members and households as vehicles to strengthen families and effect desired neighborhood and community change. In a comprehensive examination of intergenerational community-building approaches in the Netherlands, Penninx (2002) describes five themes and as many examples of intergenerational programs aiming to foster social cohesion and the community inclusion of vulnerable groups, including young people, and families (young and old) experiencing disadvantage for a variety of reasons. The five themes include:

1. Connecting systems in an integrated community-building approach
2. The need to promote social safety and competence
3. The need to promote independent living for the elderly
4. The need for community support to vulnerable children and young people

5. The need to establish a multicultural society.

One example uses neighborhood reminiscence to integrate diverse cultures and generations. In communities composed of Dutch and immigrant Moroccan and Turkish neighbors, the use of memories and storytelling promotes exchanges, mutual understanding, and respect between community residents. The goal is to enhance social cohesion in the participating communities, building on common neighborhood interests such as safety. Mercken (2003) reports that community changes as a result of the first community's program participation are marked and include: mutual respect and friendships between members of very different age and cultural groups; older adults playing historic games in neighborhood playgrounds with children; and sharing cultural and religious celebrations across the community. Other examples of the Dutch national strategy to foster intergenerational awareness and effective programs are worth considering, especially as evaluation results of such programs are more forthcoming.

In the U.S., "Neighborhoods-2000" provides an example of a school-based intergenerational program begun in 1987 that involved school-aged children with community older adults in curriculum projects and other activities aimed at learning about their community and advocating for community change (Kaplan, 1997). Outcomes associated with this initiative include a sense of "citizenship responsibility" among participants, along with continuity across the generations and across cultures. Participants reported that they felt they were improving their community as well as removing age stereotypes. Implicit in these findings and community-based programs is an important notion that families, neighborhoods, and communities clearly affect intergenerational programs that occur within them; the converse is also true, and we have seen that the potential influences on children, families, and communities can be profound and life-changing.

There are new community-based initiatives that hold much promise, though substantial evaluation and research to document their effectiveness has not yet been available. In Westchester County, N.Y., a county-wide initiative supported by the Helen Benedict Family Foundation is focused on making the county more "elder-friendly" and a place in which older adults are actively involved in community life. Special efforts are being made in the city of Yonkers, largest among cities in the county. An intergenerational task force has been formed there to promote partnerships among community agencies and organizations and participate together in advocacy for intergenerational approaches to community challenges.

On the opposite coast, outreach workers in San Diego attempt to change the focus of organizations focused solely on the needs of children, families, or older adults and encourage them to take a more life-span approach to their work. The catalyst in these efforts is the San Diego County Office of Aging and Independent Services; thus far, both school- and community-based programs have been developed and governments are reconsidering their more traditionally age-based methods of service delivery and funding structures.

Objectives 2 and 3: Describe outcomes related to intergenerational program participation that are clearly lacking in the literature; and Describe important research questions and areas that should receive further investigation and support

In this section of the paper, I will identify my observations of the research and evaluation literatures read, and provide corresponding recommendations for further work.

Observation 1

Beginning very generally, there is no question that with the thousands of intergenerational programs currently operating in North America alone, the global evaluation of such programs and research involving program participants has lagged woefully behind. Most intergenerational programs in North America emerged from, and continue to be, largely community-based institutional endeavors that bring together relatively small numbers of participants who are selected because they are diverse in age, among other characteristics. Already, with these program qualities alone, we have challenges to research approaches requiring random assignment, control groups (which requires withholding the program experience from a group of similar participants – often an ethical challenge for human service professionals), and large participant numbers to facilitate rigorous statistical analyses. These research approaches provide more definitive results than all but potentially two of the studies reviewed in this paper!

There are at least two critical problems associated with the state of research and evaluation in this field. First, there is simply not enough of it in any area of intergenerational programming, and we need more of it, even small-scale evaluations that diligently and systematically record program development, intervention, and outcome information. Second, the existing program design, evaluation, and research methods used are, in general, not sufficiently rigorous. Methodological criticisms can be levied on virtually every one of the studies described here; some flaws are very serious, but if we were to apply a research standard used in “mainstream” social science research, we would have an extremely small literature, with a handful of studies reporting equivocal results! A related challenge is that for some community-based intergenerational initiatives that, for example, involve participants as decision-makers regarding program design and even program outcomes, it is still challenging to find appropriate research and evaluation tools to rigorously determine program effectiveness. On the bright side, this situation is improving, and many authors have encouraged intergenerational programmers to apply rigorous research methods to their efforts. There is not a simple “fix” to this problem, however, especially as intergenerational program models are tending to become more complex in their design. Nevertheless, the field needs definitive knowledge on which to build solid practice, demonstrate effectiveness, and ultimately influence policymaking.

Recommendation 1

Any funded intergenerational program should be required to provide rigorous evaluation data demonstrating outcomes associated with the program. If program staff do not possess the skills and knowledge to plan and execute at least a basic evaluation, additional resources should be provided to secure the assistance of persons with such expertise. Further, the evaluation should be planned alongside the program: evaluators should be partners with program developers throughout. This is especially important for intergenerational programs in which participants are also active in program design, implementation, and evaluation.

Observation 2

For researchers and evaluators in the intergenerational programming arena, there is a veritable smorgasbord of potential research needs awaiting them. With the exception of attitudinal research, which has had much attention (and yet remains equivocal in its results), every other area of child, family, and community outcomes associated with intergenerational programs warrants more research and evaluation attention.

For example, we know extremely little about the effects of intergenerational programs on the health of children and youth. Up until now, the programs in this area seem to focus on disadvantaged children and families, specifically a) families parenting children with multiple vulnerabilities or overt health challenges; and b) disadvantaged adolescents making choices regarding risky health behaviors.

Recommendation 2

It would be very helpful to delve more deeply into the two populations described above and examine the impact of various intergenerational approaches on child and youth health outcomes already identified (e.g., sense of well-being, or healthier responses to situations involving drug use) and others as well. Replication of programs like “Across Ages” will assist with this, but expanding the range of potential outcomes may provide important additions to the literature and program knowledge base that could greatly inform program revision and replication in other communities.

Recommendation 3

It is also important to expand the program models and health outcomes examined. For example, if health care agencies serving vulnerable families and communities could become partners in intergenerational community programs, health outcomes relevant to those communities could be identified, program models developed, and results obtained that make best use of the larger scale typically available through such agencies for study design, data gathering, and analyses. Here are two possible areas of research attention:

- If an intergenerational approach were taken to public health programming, we could find out how older adults can effectively work in partnership with health care professionals to educate pregnant adolescents and support them in making healthy prenatal and early parenting choices.
- How can older adults assist vulnerable families to make good nutritional decisions when faced with limited resources? How do those decisions affect children’s physical health and school readiness?

Observation 3

The literature regarding academic outcomes of intergenerational program participation also needs rigor. This area does seem more developed than the area of children’s health, however, with some national programs leading the way. Yet, the data on at least one of those programs were not available for review, so it is difficult to determine the quality of the research and the strength of the conclusions drawn. It still seems reasonable to expect from the research we have seen that intergenerational programs can improve academic outcomes for students of all ages, from pre-schoolers through high-school students. Disadvantaged students seem to stay in school (vs. drop out) and show a variety of academic gains resulting from intergenerational program participation. What is less clear is the degree to which such program models work in various types of communities (e.g., inner city, rural, and urban) and with various ethnic and racial groups. The extent to which students actually finish high school is also unclear from the studies: Staying in school is desirable, but clearly finishing high school is the outcome that stands to make a bigger difference in the lives of disadvantaged youth.

Recommendation 4

Building on what is known and has been demonstrated to work in keeping high-school students at high risk for dropping out of school in school, we should “raise the bar” to examine the degree to which such interventions

actually result in helping such students complete high school. Whether this requires additional methodological strategies to track such students, who may well be quite mobile, or whether studies need to expand participation so that reasonable numbers of students continuing from year to year can be located, such follow-up should be done. We know that high school completion is an important milestone to economic independence via employment and post-secondary opportunities. The extent to which intergenerational programs can assist such students in achieving that milestone is well worth knowing.

Observation 4

It is my observation that intergenerational programs focused on child and youth outcomes do not engage family members as much or as appropriately as they might; similarly, family-based programs often do not engage grandparents as much as they might in their interventions. The voice of a mother whom I interviewed in suburban Chicago still rings in my ears: “That intergenerational program that my son attends? What does it mean to me? Nothing. It’s his program. I have nothing to do with it.” If we want the child and youth outcomes of intergenerational programs to last beyond a few days or weeks, we need to capitalize on the appropriate involvement of families and extended family members, and support them in their vital roles.

Recommendation 5

The research literature on child- and family-based intergenerational programs aimed at improving children’s health and academic outcomes should be carefully examined to determine the extent to which an increased family and intergenerational element could potentially enhance those outcomes. Programmers should be asked to consider potentially appropriate roles for family members and extended kin in their planning as well.

Observation 5

Just as the last question posed in Recommendation 3 links child health to school readiness, academic outcomes associated with intergenerational programs can also link to broader developmental gains, including emotional development, social skills, and positive behavior. It was difficult at times to sort intergenerational program outcomes for children into categories (e.g., health, or academic) because several seemingly successful programs (e.g., Family Friends, Across Ages, and Black Achievers) target outcomes that cross such lines.

Such a “comprehensive” approach to intergenerational programming is found in the literatures focused on family outcomes and community outcomes as well. The Netherlands has made a national strategy of building social cohesion one neighborhood at a time. Their initiatives typically do not identify specific outcomes such as improved child health or academic performance at their outset; rather, communities and neighborhoods often decide on the outcomes that are important to them, based on common individual, family, and community priorities and needs, and within an existing policy-based structure. Britain has similarly found that intergenerational activities can develop community capacity and build social capital (Granville, 2002). And the call to re-define community in the U.S. has been issued from both within the intergenerational field and without (e.g., Henken & Kingson, 1998/99; Gardner, 1991).

Comprehensive community approaches to family and community building are not new ideas for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Foundation has committed itself to “making new connections” – supporting initiatives that put vulnerable families closer to the circumstances that will strengthen them and their communities – and

its recent inquiry into “communities for all ages” is another example of the desire to create living environments that are supportive to all, especially those most vulnerable among us. Almost a decade ago, the Foundation also supported the Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families, together with seven other American foundations. One of the results of this work was reported in a volume published in 1995 by The Aspen Institute, in which research and evaluation issues associated with such comprehensive approaches were outlined and discussed (Connell, Kubisch, Schorr, & Weiss, 1995).

While varied in their implementation, “comprehensive community initiatives” (CCIs) all have as their goal “... promoting positive change in individual, family, and community circumstances in disadvantaged neighborhoods by improving physical, economic, and social conditions” (Kubisch, Weiss, Schorr, & Connell, 1995, p. 1). Typically, CCIs have as their objective to change a host of elements including social supports, health care, economic development, housing, community planning, education, school reform, job training, neighborhood security, and recreation programs. To accomplish the changes desired, authority and responsibility are typically redistributed from traditional governing bodies to the neighborhoods and communities themselves. This approach is congruent with what the Dutch have embraced on a national level.

Intergenerational programs have not yet featured prominently in CCIs, but they seem to possess the qualities to be effective tools in such initiatives since they also bring together diverse groups around similarly comprehensive objectives relevant to the communities in which they are located (e.g., *Across Ages*). Another similarity CCIs and intergenerational programs share is the evaluation challenges due to factors such as the design of such initiatives and the current state of available measures and methods to determine their effectiveness.

Recommendation 6

It would be useful to examine in more detail the potential benefits of linking the program, research, and evaluation literatures from the arena of community development with that of intergenerational programs. There seem to be some growing similarities between the goals of both types of approaches in assisting and supporting vulnerable families within their neighborhoods and communities. Intergenerational program researchers may well learn from CCI researchers some rigorous methods to measure successful outcomes; CCI researchers may appreciate better the role that older adults can play in their initiatives to support the outcomes both groups hope to obtain through their community efforts.

This seems an especially worthwhile endeavor in part because of the findings of the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, completed by 30,000 people in 40 American communities (2001). The survey results revealed that levels of “civic engagement,” or the degree to which community members trust, socialize with, and join others in their community, predicted the quality of community life and residents’ happiness more than did education or income levels. Rather than working in parallel in communities, programmers and researchers in community development and intergenerational fields should compare notes and learn from one another, potentially refining both their program models and the obtainable results as they collaborate. The families we are all striving to help stand to gain!

Recommendation 7

More intergenerational programs that take a comprehensive approach to outcomes, including their rigorous research and evaluation, should be funded. This may mean that multidisciplinary linkages, at both the program and research levels, should be sought and forged.

Observation 6

Intergenerational programs are often replicated in other communities without careful examination of culturally based assumptions and other factors (e.g., economic or religious factors) that would make simple program duplication potentially unwise. When programs that are developed for one community are expanded to others, even “taken to scale” nationally, it is rare to discover in published papers any acknowledgement that assumptions were checked in the process. This is symptomatic of research and evaluation that tends to focus more on the outcomes (e.g., the program works, or doesn’t work) than on why or how a program works or does not work. Questions should be asked that reveal the types of communities in which program models might best be replicated; questions that ask programmers and researchers to explain how program models would be implemented and assessed in a new environment should also be posed. This applies across all outcomes examined here, including child and youth health, academic outcomes, and those related to families and communities.

Recommendation 8

When programs are funded for replication, questions like those identified above should be asked and sufficient answers provided before full funding is released.

Observation 7

Across the board, intergenerational program evaluations and research studies typically take a snapshot of their outcomes at one point in time. The need for experimental programs and corresponding short-term research and evaluation is clear: that may well represent the cutting edge of knowledge development! Yet, several authors have noted the need for following children, youth, families, and communities over time to determine the durability of outcomes that seem solid and improve the sustainability and effectiveness of program approaches beyond the experimental phase. This could assist with institutionalizing intergenerational programs into social program funding structures, rather than keeping them on the margins of mainstream policy and related governmental funding, where they will always struggle to be effective and well researched.

Recommendation 9: Pulling it together

The move toward more longitudinal support for intergenerational programs should be viewed as a serious commitment to both the program models selected for funding and ongoing, rigorous research. Community engagement is critical for such endeavors to be sustainable over a long period. Outcomes should be comprehensive rather than singular in their focus and should include input from those involved in order for the civic engagement and community development processes to take root. That means that solid research and evaluation will need to start at the beginning of the program, and programmers and researchers will need to work together with community members to define the program and how success will be measured over time. Assumptions related to program models will need to be carefully examined in order to be certain that what is planned is appropriate for the participating community and its members. Funding over several years, even perhaps a decade, is required to do this well, and it is worth doing.

CONCLUSION

This paper was intended to identify what is known about intergenerational program participation and its outcomes on children, youth, families, and communities, particularly those experiencing disadvantage. Observations about the literature were gleaned through the preparations for this paper and almost 20 years of intergenerational program research and evaluation. Recommendations for future efforts were presented so that we can look forward and imagine how, in another decade, we can be far ahead of where we currently are in this field.

There are many opportunities currently before the Annie E. Casey Foundation to contribute to children, families, and communities around the U.S. through intergenerational approaches that include rigorous research and evaluation. It is my sincere belief that the time has come to think big: pulling together what we already know, building on current knowledge, and engaging and supporting vulnerable families and communities in improving their lives across a number of areas seem to be the most promising ways for the outcomes we all want to be sustainable, perhaps even into future generations. The Foundation has, over the past few years, shown national and international leadership by embracing the goal of developing families and building communities. Leaders from the intergenerational programming, policy, and research areas agree with this approach, and countries like the Netherlands and Britain have come to similar conclusions. This is a goal worth all of our best efforts.

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