



Think Intergenerational

Connecting generations to support communities

4Children

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Foreword

In the last few decades the picture of family life has changed considerably. With increased geographic mobility within and beyond national borders creating growing distances between extended family members, many of us spend much of our lives within our own age groups with the result that young and old report limited contact with one another. The effect on family relationships and care arrangements leave many feeling isolated while in communities the gap between young and old can lead to misapprehension and even mistrust and fear.

Intergenerational relationships are as important for families as for communities. We know for example that 63% of parents said that their own mum or dad was central in supporting them or their immediate family when they had a baby¹, yet only 15% of children placed by local authorities in foster care are with family and friends foster carer², a proportion of whom are grandparents.

For communities, perceptions of anti-social behaviour and ‘hoody’ culture as a growing threat to society has created increased tension in neighbourhoods, particularly between young and older people who are often the two groups who spend the most time in their local area. As the Beth Johnson Foundation’s report, *Towards more confident communities*, points out: “successive survey research in many countries demonstrates ... that while older people are least likely to be victimised, they consistently report the highest levels of fear of crime. Young people, themselves experiencing high rates of victimisation, are most often seen as the perpetrators of crime.”³

With a history of working for the benefit of both older and younger groups at risk, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation identified ageing as a common priority and in 2008 launched a transnational programme – looking specifically at, and supporting, examples of good practice in the UK and Portugal – to address the most urgent areas for intervention. Given our commitment to supporting meaningful connections between individuals, families and communities, the value of intergenerational relationships emerged as an area of prime concern for the Foundation.

Where analysis has been undertaken, the benefits of intergenerational practice are shown to be wide and varied. Those who participate in activities feel a greater sense of understanding and friendship while at the same time feeling personally valued for their effort and skills; for older groups this often leads to additional physical and mental health improvements and for younger people improvements in learning and employment skills are often cited.⁴ There is a growing need now to encourage contact across generations to promote greater cohesion within communities by combating linear generational divides.

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Families are of course vital to this work – they are where we most often form relationships with those outside our own age group – and families themselves need support to maintain these crucial ties. Respondents to a study we commissioned in 2008 went so far as to say that families were the cornerstone of strong communities, that “without families growing up together, to form a community, you cannot have a community”.⁵

The recent government commissioned review on family justice by David Norgrove⁶ marks a significant step in recognising the importance of the role of grandparents in the lives of children, particularly following family separation. But more can be done. This ‘Think Intergenerational’ report outlines some of the essential changes that still need to be put in place to support the intergenerational relationships that are so precious to families. Changes which, if supported successfully, have the potential to create resilient, happier communities where all ages feel valued. After all, the vision of a ‘big society’ can only be achieved when all its members are involved in its construction – and that includes those of all ages. We are delighted to have supported this work.

Andrew Barnett

Director

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK)

The Family Commission

In April 2009 children and families charity 4Children launched The Family Commission, an 18 month inquiry into family life in Britain. The Commission, chaired by Esther Rantzen CBE, embarked on the task of trying to get beneath the headlines and learn more about the reality of family life today. The Commission asked some big questions:

- What is daily life like for families in the UK?
- What support do families need now and in the future to fulfil their potential?
- How can we build positive family involvement and interactions across communities and generations?
- How should we respond to families who struggle to cope with hardship, health, relationships, employment and finances?
- What should the role of Government, communities and employers be in supporting families?

Throughout the course of the Commission's work, Commissioners and 4Children researchers travelled the country meeting families and visiting the services that provide them with advice and support. The Commission undertook two national surveys and held focus groups across England.

During this work, the importance of intergenerational relationships, both within families and within communities, became obvious.

There is a growing body of evidence and recognition of the significance of intergenerational relationships. However, through the Family Commission research it became clear to us that good practice remained limited and was not mainstreamed within the day to day work of commissioners, professionals or service providers. This publication aims to encourage policy makers and practitioners to take the next step and – think intergenerational.

We are very grateful to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for supporting this work.

Introduction

Strong intergenerational relationships have always been important as a central interconnection at the heart of families and communities. Living within closely tied groups, it is the reciprocity of support between the old and young which has created the foundation of the family and community unit – passing on knowledge and sharing caring responsibilities.

The old and young trade experience and energy – providing a mutual dependency that, at its best, supports the middle generation of bread winners and builds the capacity and confidence of the young for the future. These ties are written throughout history and have been the basis on which much of our society has developed and flourished. It is only in recent generations that significant changes have been seen, beginning with the movement of families to cities for work and compounded by migration trends around the world.

But it is in the post war generation in the UK where the break from the intergenerational family unit has really taken hold. As expectations and aspiration have risen, so has mobility. Mass higher education has seen a growing number of young people leave the family home and head to university, breaking their tie with their local community and setting up home and family where work demands. As travel and mobility have become easier more people have migrated – setting up their home, and beginning a family, in a new town, city or country.

Fifty years on, the results of these changes are profound. Increasing numbers of people live away from their family members, people live an increasingly age stratified existence and there is an increasing gap between the different generations within communities. Factor in the changes in family structure as more families divorce, co-habit, and live in lone parent and step family households, and the scale of the change and complexity of the family make-up becomes clear.

The implications of these changes are far reaching for all aspects of public policy as well as families themselves. If unchecked, these social changes risk exacerbating many of the substantial challenges faced by families in their everyday lives. The daily struggle to balance work and family responsibilities for an individual can become skills shortages for employers; the lack of supervision of a teenager can grow into concerns about risky or anti-social behaviour for a community; and the lack of support for an elderly grandparent could translate into challenging and costly decisions about care provision for both the family and state. From housing to crime, welfare to employment, the impact of changes in intergenerational relationships may be profound.

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Yet at a time when planners and decision makers are looking for new solutions – of ways to grow the capacity of both families and communities, especially within the context of a tight economic climate – the strength and potential of intergenerational relationships gives us a vital and valuable starting point. Whilst putting the clock back to a different time when generational links were closer is neither possible nor in all cases desirable, we can draw on what we know is important about intergenerational relationships and apply it to today's context. By looking at today's challenges through an intergenerational lens we have the potential to find new ways of supporting families and building communities that are positive and sustainable.

To achieve this, the challenge to us all is to 'think intergenerational'. This publication will build on the work of the Family Commission and will seek to propose practical ways of putting intergenerational relationships at the heart of what we all do.

Chapter 1

Understanding intergenerational relationships

Any consideration of intergenerational relationships needs to take place within the context of changing family relationships.

Family structures have changed dramatically over recent decades with the growth of co-habitation, lone parents, step families and civil partnerships, all of which add to the richness and complexity of family relationships.

Yet it is not just the structure of families that is changing. The shape of families is changing too – families are getting smaller and longer. Decreasing family size means less uncles, aunts and cousins but increased longevity means more generations of the same families alive at any one time. This means that families are becoming thin and long – bean poles – with far more scope for intergenerational relationships. Today a family can routinely encompass an 84 year old great-grandparent, an active 60 year old grandparent, a 40 year old parent and a 13 year old child.

In the UK the population make-up is shifting due to the ageing population. Like many other industrialised countries a combination of falling birth rates and declining mortality rate has resulted in an increasingly older population. As of 2006, there were 3.3 people of working age for every pensioner. By 2031 this will be 2.9. By 2020 one fifth of people will be 65 or over.⁷ The Lancet published a report in 2010 saying that 50% of babies being born today will live until they are 100.⁸ Life expectancy in 1901 was 45 for a man and 49 for a woman. In 2006 it was 77 for men and 81 for women.⁹ There are now more pensioners than children, which historically has been the opposite.

As the age profile extends we are also challenged in our perceptions of being old, with a new generation of active ‘young olders’ in their 60s and 70s becoming the norm. Young people taking part in a focus group in North London told the Family Commission that it is their great grandparents who they see as being ‘old’ and their grandparents as being ‘young’. The age range for a grandparent is vast as their background and current life position. One in 10 grandparents are under 50¹⁰ and 3 in 10 grandparents are under 60, the majority of whom are working.¹¹ At the age of 54 more than half of the adult population are grandparents.¹² The average age to become a grandparent for the first time is between 49 and 52 for women and a couple of years older for men. 50% of grandparents now have a living parent.¹³

Intergenerational dependency

Three, four and five generational families are therefore increasingly alive and kicking. The Family Commission heard repeatedly of the value that many people place in their extended family and that for many it is a vital source of support.

The Family Commission survey found that 58% of young people said they would go to an extended family member, such as a grandparent, for help or advice.¹⁴ From older people the same message has been heard loud and clear. Indeed, polling shows an increase in grandparents describing themselves as friends or confidants of their grandchildren, from 30% in 2003 to 58% in 2006.¹⁵

We also know that grandparents are playing a crucial support role for many families, day in day out:

- Research from the RIAS 21st Century Grandparenting study has shown that the UK's 14 million grandparents are providing £5.2 billion in free childcare annually
- 200,000 grandparents are also raising their grandchildren themselves as kinship carers¹⁶

Furthermore, statistics show that caring responsibilities are increasingly going beyond childcare. The rise of the 'sandwich generation', usually women who are juggling caring for their older parents and their own children, was one of the early issues the Family Commission sought to grapple with. A recent IPPR study reveals that almost one million people – 550,000 women and 400,000 men – have this dual role, caring for both children and elderly relations, with 62 per cent of female carers also going out to work.¹⁷ In fact, due to the ageing population we are now seeing the rise of the 'club sandwich generation' – in the middle of a four generation family with perhaps an elderly parent to care for, their own children requiring financial or emotional support, and grandchildren to provide regular care for.

Sadly, at the other end of the spectrum one million children lose touch with their grandparents as a result of the separation or divorce of their parents.¹⁸ This has led campaigners to call for grandparents to be extended legal rights to access in such situations. The recently published Family Justice Review interim report¹⁹ recognised the importance of grandparents and whilst not recommending new legal rights for grandparents, it is proposing that grandparental access should form part of Parental Agreements.

Whilst the Family Commission has been told that the extended and intergenerational family is important, there appears to be a gap between the aspirations for the quality of those relationships and the reality of everyday life for many.

Generational mobility

Geographical mobility has dramatically changed over the last few decades, with a greater proportion of the population studying at university and moving around the country to find work. Couples are putting down roots and having children in new locations which mean extended family networks may be far away. Only 12% of graduates live in the same local authority as they were born in – compared with 44% of the general population.²⁰

Research for the Family Commission in 2009 found that half of Britons (49%) only see extended family members (including grandparents) twice a year or less frequently. This goes up to 58% for those who are 55+ and nearly one in three (30%) only see their extended family members once a year or less frequently.²¹ The generations are being separated from each other which results in the loss of family support structures.

However, while the general trend is for younger, better educated people to be mobile, the effects of the 2008-09 recession appear to be complicating the picture. Recent figures show that significant numbers of young people are moving back in with their parents after university to save money, or lived at home while studying at university – the so called ‘Kippers’. A quarter of men aged 25 to 29 now live with their parents, the highest figure in the last 20 years.²²

For those young people that do not live with their parents, as of 2002 (the latest year for which there are figures) only a third of people lived less than 15 minutes away from their parents, around two-thirds lived between 15 minutes and one hour away and 1 in 8 moved more than 200km away.²³

4Children’s research with families who are new to the UK²⁴ has also highlighted that a key factor in the isolation experienced by migrant families is the absence of their wider family circle. For some of these families, friends, neighbours and community elders become ‘surrogates’ providing vital social capital and support in place of relatives; others are less fortunate and feel their separation keenly.

During focus groups with young and older people, 4Children heard repeatedly that both groups were positive about spending more time together, but felt they experienced little contact beyond their own age group. Older people attending our focus group in London felt that there was less contact between the generations in many communities than there used to be and for communities where extended families are dispersed this led to a lack of day to day contact between the generations.

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According to an FPI study, only 5% of families have lived in their current neighbourhood all their lives.²⁵ This follows evidence that the length of residence in an area relates to people's active involvement in their neighbourhood.²⁶ Increased mobility, busy working lives and greater use of cars have led to a perception that we are less likely to get to know those who live around us in the same way that we may have done in the past. The true extent of this proposition is still debated but what seems clearer is that the relative impact of such a change is likely to be greater on the young and elderly – whose lives are more localised.²⁷

At the same time the number of children playing in public places has also fallen. Worries over busy roads and a fear of strangers have led many to restrict their children's mobility and play, opting instead for supervised activities – often indoors. In *No Fear – growing up in a risk adverse society*²⁸, published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the author makes the case that risk adverse behaviour can ironically damage and endanger children's lives and argues for striking a better balance between protecting children from genuine threats and giving them rich, challenging opportunities through which to learn and grow. The status quo can feed a 'stranger danger' culture in which any adult outside of the family is viewed as a potential danger who cannot be trusted.

Whilst the impact of this trend on younger people may be in missing out on opportunities, for some older people it may compound a growing isolation and loneliness. Over 60% of women and 32% of men aged 75+ live alone. One million older people are socially isolated and this number is projected to rise to 2.2 million over the next 15 years.²⁹

Perceptions across the age range

With many older people reporting feeling isolated, lonely and scared to go out, especially after dark, the convenient scapegoat is too often the young. However new evidence from the Family Commission suggests counter-intuitively that young people are more worried about the behaviour of their peers than some older people.

Findings from the Family Commission survey suggest that younger people are in fact more self aware of the risks and problems associated with their age group and are more concerned for older people than they are given credit for.

Respondents were asked what they thought the 'biggest strains' on teenagers were:

- 48% of the young people said they thought it was 'risky behaviour'
- 37% of older people gave the same answer

Respondents were also asked whether they were worried about 'bad influences' on young people:

- 51% of young people worried about bad influences
- In comparison, only 27% of older people's felt the same³⁰

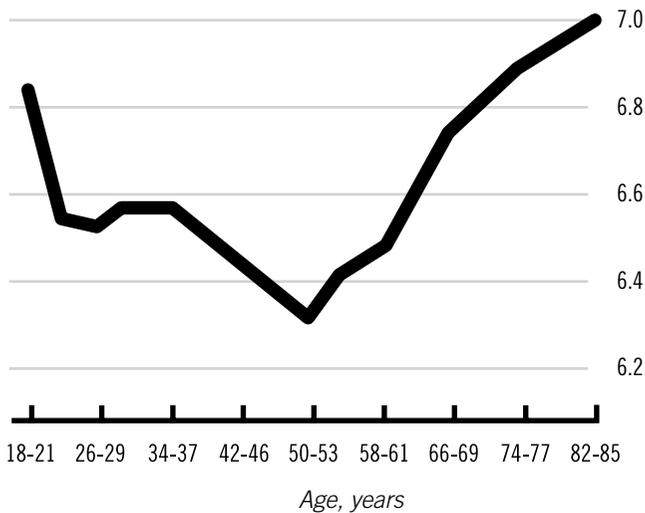
Commonality across the age range

Whilst trends may be reinforcing the differences and separations between the younger and older generations in our communities, the reality is they often have much more in common than we imagine.

- Academic research has shown that the two generations have the highest levels of happiness of the life stages. The curve of life satisfaction published by Blanchflower and Oswald³¹ shows that older and younger people are the happiest members of society, with well-being reaching a minimum around the age of 40 before increasing again. Stone et al. (below) found well-being hit the bottom in the early 50s.

The U-bend

Self reported well-being, on a scale of 1-10



Source: Arthur A. Stone et al., PNAS paper, 'A snapshot of the age distribution of psychological well-being in the United States', 2010, www.pnas.org/content/early/2010/05/04/1003744107.abstract

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- Both generations are heavy users of public services, particularly those at the lower end of the income spectrum. This means that both are potentially vulnerable to local service cuts resulting from current spending decisions, particularly with regard to local public transport; and cultural and leisure services including libraries, swimming pools and community centres. It has been estimated that the £6bn of spending reductions being made by local authorities will hit children and the elderly hardest – with £1.4bn of adult social care budgets being reprioritised³² and £500m of cuts to children’s services.³³
- Both are at greatest risk from age discrimination. Recent research from the Employers Forum on Age³⁴ showed that 35% of people said they had faced discrimination when applying for a job or promotion of which the largest proportion (17%) said this was age-based discrimination.
- As we have highlighted, the younger and the older generations are also the ones with more spare time to become actively involved in their communities and it is in this area that there are particularly opportunities for developments. For people retiring in 2005, men will spend 30.7% of their adult life in retirement and for women it will be 36.4%.³⁵ This is a significant proportion of adult life spent in retirement and a lot of useful time we can utilise.

These shared experiences offer the possibility of a new form of a social solidarity between the oldest and youngest members of society. By building such understanding and empathy, with a new focus on commonality rather than difference, enriched intergenerational relationships can develop, building new bonds within the community.

Chapter 2

Strengthening families: the importance of ‘thinking intergenerational’

As we have highlighted, intergenerational relationships are at the heart of the family – providing important ‘anchor points’ of stability as families grow and change over time. As families evolve, it is the experience and wisdom of the older generation that can offer perspective and knowledge – traditionally updated and challenged by the younger generation who ‘test out’ its validity and relevance in the changing context.

Throughout the Family Commission research families told 4Children that:

- Families are a huge resource and need to be recognised as ‘part of the solution’
- Public services need to do more to recognise the intergenerational family
- Intergenerational families need help and support in their caring and work responsibilities and should not be seen as cheap alternative to formal or professional care

As we have shown, support across the generations has always been a particularly important part of the traditional pattern of caring within families – for both young and old. For some families this remains the case. Three, four or even five generational families therefore represent a vast potential resource to offer stability, emotional and practical support. Grandparents now undertake billions of pounds worth of childcare for their grandchildren³⁶ and for some families, the support of the extended family goes beyond the ‘day to day’ to providing a life line at times of real crisis.

Some innovative services recognise this and seek to utilise the resources that exist within families, even in those with real problems. Family Group Conferencing is one such approach, with a growing evidence base.

Family Group Conferencing

Family Group Conferencing (FGC) is a way of bringing family and close friends together to try to achieve the best outcomes for a child considered to be 'at risk' or 'in need' (and their family). It is a process, culminating in a meeting, which involves the whole family in setting out a plan for providing practical help and support to move forward.

The key to its success is that the family is involved in the decision making, drawing on the extended family and friends as a resource. FGC can be used in the early stages of a family struggling to cope but is most frequently used alongside the statutory child protection process or care proceedings. It has also been used where children have been bullied or with young people involved in criminal or anti-social behaviour. Unlike classic social work practice, at FGC it is the family and friends who are in the driving seat, identifying issues and proposing solutions, supported by a professional facilitator.

During the research for the Family Commission 4Children met some families who have been through the process of having FGC who were great ambassadors and advocates for the approach. FGCs already have a successful history in some local authorities in England, including the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham who had their work on FGCs evaluated in 2005-06.³⁷ The evaluation report highlights the achievements of the project including calculating that 51 of the 119 children for whom conferences were held were prevented from entering the 'formal' care system – either remaining with their parent/s or living with kinship carers. The report also notes extremely high satisfaction levels with the process from children, parents, extended family members and the professionals working with them.

When parents are struggling, grandparents can often be a vital source of support and may be in position to provide respite care. In some cases this can lead to full 'kinship care' which keeps children within their family, siblings together, and saves local authorities around £40,000 a year for each child who does not enter the care system.

Grandparent ‘kinship carers’

Bill and Sarah have already raised three children of their own. However, when one of their daughters was unable to carry on with the care of her child, as grandparents they felt it was their duty to take over full time care of their grandson, Dan.

Dan is now 13 and has been looked after by his grandparents since he was aged 5. He has an older half brother who was taken into foster care and who he sees every six months or so. Bill and Sarah are responsible for Dan’s care, upbringing, schooling and day to day needs. Because of the trauma he experienced in his early years he has fallen slightly behind at school and needs private tutoring to help him catch up with work.

The grandparents also have two other grandchildren who do not live locally who they see every couple of months. While it can be very tiring looking after their grandson they love doing it and feel looking after him “does keep you young” and in touch with youth culture.

We have also heard from many grandparents who say that they need better help and support to take on this responsibility. Whilst for many grandparents the opportunity to spend time with their grandchildren, whether minding or caring for them, is a pleasure and a source of great enjoyment, for some grandparents it can be a struggle. The estimated 200,000 grandparents raising their grandchildren as kinship carers are often in difficult family circumstances and with little or no support. Children brought up in kinship care have similar multiple adversity experiences to those in ‘stranger’ foster care.³⁸

Many grandparents told the Commission about the difficulties they experiences in providing kinship care. Data shows that more than a third live below the poverty line and three quarters experience financial hardship. One grandparent caring for her two grandchildren in Liverpool told the Family Commission that she had been told repeatedly by social services that she was not entitled to any financial support – except child benefit – despite having to leave her job in order to be a full time carer. She had had to rely on a local charity for Christmas presents and furniture for her grandchildren.³⁹

Chapter 3

Strengthening intergenerational communities

Building the capacity of the community to encourage people of different ages to interact and feel actively involved in their local neighbourhood has real potential to strengthen communities. Strong networks within the family and the wider community help to foster stronger relationships between people of different ages, and give a sense of belonging. They can also help to overcome the increasing levels of disconnection with other generations that some say they feel. One participant at a focus group, who was in her 50s, commented to us that she didn't have children herself, her friends were around her age, and she mostly worked with middle aged people. People like her, she felt, find it hard to have much contact with younger or older people outside their own extended families.⁴⁰

There are many positive examples of local interventions to build intergenerational relationships. By reclaiming local community spaces and public services and ensuring local authorities have a duty to consider intergenerational relationships when looking at implementing policy at a local level, cross-generation interactions can flourish.

In this way there is the potential to build a new form of local communitarianism with an ambition to turn our parks, public spaces and village halls into busy, vibrant hubs, used by all generations together. This spirit of community-led change has the potential to add something tangible to the Government's Big Society agenda, which has been struggling to define itself.

By interacting more and getting to know someone of a different generation, mutual respect and trust can develop. A wide range of projects are underway to bring together young people and other members of the community to build trust and understanding, develop community solutions to issues which concern both groups, promote health and well-being and resolve tensions by helping to address negative perceptions of young and older people alike. These can help challenge preconceived opinions each generation holds of the other and find common ground and interests, and we think that they should be built upon. However, the projects remain 'bespoke', such as a week or month of intergenerational activities organised by a local authority, rather than being mainstream practice, and many may be vulnerable to spending reductions at a local level as a result.

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These programmes currently fall into one of four main categories as described below.

1. Models which involve older people providing support, advice and time to younger people and their families.

Older people as mentors

Examples around the country demonstrate the valuable role of mentors and the potential for involving older people as advisors and confidantes.

Perhaps the most enlightening thing that can happen for a young person is to learn that older people are just like them, they were children once and that they have had experiences and seen a lot over their life times which young people could learn from. This is indeed what young people said to us: "they understand us ... they have been what we have been through".⁴¹

An older male role model can have a real life changing influence, in particular for disadvantaged children and children without a strong male figure in their lives. An Oxford University study found that a grandparent's active involvement was significantly associated with better adjusted adolescents, citing 'fewer emotional and behaviour problems, and fewer peer problems.'⁴² Older people have a lot of strong qualities that young people could benefit from gaining including responsibility, independence, resilience, citizenship and financial management.

A quarter of people interviewed by Sky Sports said they did not currently have a role model, with almost all of those admitting they would like to have one. The majority of young people (87%) who have a role model say this person helps them to feel more confident.⁴³ In some societies a group of local elders provide guidance and wisdom for the community, especially to young people. By encouraging a system to develop through local community centres, youth clubs and intergenerational centres this knowledge could be shared.

Evidence suggests that the payback for older people for this kind of engagement is high. In countries where older people are accorded great respect, such as in Japan, life satisfaction is highest amongst the over 65s.⁴⁴

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2. Programmes that involve children and young people in supporting, engaging and caring for older members of the community.

Intergenerational practice in this category has become particularly popular and prevalent around knowledge transfer on the use of information technology. Children and young people are growing up in a society where internet and mobile phone usage is second nature; they are experts with tangible skills which some groups of older people desperately need. With 'digital exclusion' leading to growing disadvantages, this is an area of intergenerational practice from which older people can quickly gain very tangible benefits. Young people can develop their skills, self-esteem and community links at the same time.

Intergenerational IT classes

Age UK Oxfordshire, working with Oxford Brookes Careers Centre and funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation⁴⁵, have brought together university students with older people at the Northway Community Centre to provide free IT classes. With only 38% of over 65s having ever used the internet, many older learners in Oxfordshire and other places are missing out. The Careers Centre sees real benefits for the students too, including developing communication skills, increasing confidence and building new relationships.

BT Internet Rangers

Telecoms company BT has been running a scheme which aims to build digital inclusion by encouraging school children to share their computer skills with older people within their family or community. The programme's website www.btinternetangers.co.uk includes downloadable lesson plans, teaching resources and toolkits for young people (and their schools) to use.

The programme, which includes annual awards, has seen young people from across the UK recognised for their contribution. The winner of the 2010 Internet Ranger England award, Jenny (15), said: "I'm really pleased I am able to pass on my IT skills to older people because it's a way of updating people's lives so they don't feel stuck in the past. The worst bit for them is the fear of new technology – but once they get past that they realise it's so easy to use."⁴⁶

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3. Models which bring older and young people together to form partnerships, working towards a common objective.

Examples of such projects include Common Ground in Manchester through which younger people and older people worked together to redesign a park in Wythenshawe and to shape how a community centre runs in Moss Side.⁴⁷ And the Independent Futures 'say no to abuse' project brought young and old together to write a leaflet which gives advice for vulnerable adults who are suffering from or at risk of abuse and neglect.⁴⁸

4. Models aimed at building mutual interaction, often through the creation of shared space.

Public space is free and accessible to all regardless of wealth and offers a place for people to come together across age and social boundaries. Communal areas like parks and town squares are at the heart of local communities and by increasing access and making these places more attractive local people can take advantage of the opportunities they offer.

By investing in our public spaces, communities can be reawakened and regenerated to get families, children and older people mixing. This is not only good for health – getting people exercising and out of the house – it is also good for mental stability and community relations. Communities need to be encouraged and supported to put on events in parks, civic buildings and other public spaces that encompass a range of activities for all ages.

Think intergenerational for housing

Housing also has a potentially important role to play. Whilst in some communities there has been a shift towards segmented housing provision targeted at older people, families or young professionals, planners and developers of the future should consider how new housing stock can provide the mixed communities that will facilitate intergenerational relationships.

The International Longevity Centre recently called for greater consideration to be given to how the localism agenda might impact the aspiration to build ‘neighbourhoods for all ages’.⁴⁹ It is clear at the very least that with the number of new homes being built at a historically low levels as a result of the 2008-09 recession and with central Government being less prescriptive with building and planning regulations, new build communities are unlikely to make a significant contribution to this aim in the immediate future. Therefore the existing housing stock cannot be ignored. New ways of ensuring that we have the homes we need during this time of huge demographic change will be needed. Innovation is currently small scale but potentially exciting.

Homeshare

Innovative schemes such as Homeshare⁵⁰ can be of benefit to both isolated older people and young people.

Homeshare is a simple way of helping people to help each other. A Homeshare involves two people with different sets of needs, both of whom also having something to offer. First, people who have a home that they are willing to share but are at a stage in their life where they need some help and support. These people are known as ‘Householders’. Second, people who need accommodation and who are willing to give some help in exchange for somewhere to stay. These people are known as ‘Homesharers’.

By putting these two people together Homeshare manages to find the Householder the help, support and security they need. At the same time Homeshare finds the Homesharer a place to call home, possibly rent free and maybe in an area or property that would have been financially out of their reach.

Both people, their families and communities benefit from the arrangement and the costs are very low.

There are currently eleven Homeshare Programmes in England in West Sussex, Oxford, Wiltshire, Bristol, Somerset, East Sussex and London.

Intergenerational centres at the heart of the community

The Family Commission was consistently told of the importance of centres in the community for people to meet and find friendship and support. This is as much the case for parents of young children as it is for older people.

Central to intergenerational relations is the empowerment and engagement of the generations together. Helping each group feel comfortable with the other which in turn promotes better outcomes for all. In doing so we can create 'active communities and citizenship' with older and younger people coming together to find ways of reducing crime in their communities and encouraging cross generational citizenship and representation on local community groups, councils and boards.

There are lots of opportunities for a strong intergenerational network to develop. Old and young people working on school local geography and history projects together, older volunteers supporting young parents, people from different generations working together to transform a neighbourhood park, volunteers mentoring students in school. Through intergenerational work people can flourish and reach their full potential.

Transforming Children's Centres into intergenerational Family Centres

Opening up Sure Start Children's Centres to families with older children and embracing a wider section of the community – whether as volunteers or as participants in activities – offers the opportunity to build intergenerational relationships. One example of this is the trail-blazing Acacia Intergenerational Centre in Merton, south London.⁵¹

In the past intergenerational projects have struggled to qualify for funding streams that were often segmented by age, i.e. services for under 5s (such as Sure Start), youth and older people. With the removal of ring-fencing for many grants and spending areas this problem should be reduced. Local authorities looking for ways to improve value for money and maximise the freedom afforded to them by the reduction of central direction should consider the contribution that could be made through intergenerational approaches.

Chapter 4

Rethinking intergeneration: a high level priority

A new approach that ‘thinks intergenerational’ offers us new opportunities to rethink many of our public policy challenges at a key time of economic restraint. This is not to imply that intergenerational approaches are better just because they are cheaper – on the contrary, changing the way we do things sometimes requires upfront investment. However, at a time when central and local Government are undertaking widespread reviews of their strategic priorities and programmes, all our evidence suggests that by thinking intergenerational we could find solutions that are both effective and sustainable, and offer savings in the longer term.

By improving intergenerational relationships within families and communities, there is an opportunity to strengthen local support networks and thus build long term resilience and ability to cope. These aspects will be as important for families striving to cope with the stresses of family life and events as for communities’ ability to flourish. Strong communities are based on generations coming together to help each other. Enabling this to happen will be key.

What is clear from all our research and consultation is that there needs to be a new public mindset which welcomes intergenerational relationships and recognises the myriad benefits they can bring.

For national Government this means an inter-Departmental approach which sees families and communities in the round – with intergenerational thinking at the heart of public policy from health, caring and community cohesion to the reduction of poverty and crime.

For local decision makers this means adopting an intergenerational approach at the heart of all thinking and policies – from local community planning and housing to support services, community development, and local engagement and budgeting.

And for local services, this means reaching out beyond the confines of the traditional service to engage with wider members of the family and community – both young and old. From involving older generations in Children’s Centres and schools to considering the resource of the extended family at times of crisis. As well as this we can help support ‘intergenerational support networks’.

By valuing this approach we have the potential to strengthen families, build communities and benefit wider society. Through intergenerational work people can flourish and reach their full potential. Central to the spirit of localism and community empowerment, there are also likely to be financial savings as problems such as anti-social behaviour are identified and resolved before they escalate.

Chapter 5

Summary of recommendations

These recommendations seek to develop and promote intergenerational relationships within the family, community and nationally to create a ‘think intergenerational’ mindset capable of enhancing the positive power of bringing generations together, for the good of all.

Think ‘Intergenerational Family’

- That extended families are recognised at the heart of public services to ensure we maximise the potential resource from within the family, in these times of austerity
- That the caring role of extended families is recognised at every level, including acknowledgment and support for intergenerational carers and those caring for younger and older relatives
- That where kinship care is appropriate it is fully supported as a positive choice of family support and care, with adequate support and back up for extended family members
- That the Government accepts the recommendation from the Family Justice Review interim report that grandparental access should form part of Parenting Agreements

Think ‘Intergenerational Society’

- That intergenerational approaches are recognised as a local priority for all aspects of public services by local authorities and other decision makers
- That building intergenerational communities is considered an aspect of Big Society priorities and good practice examples are highlighted and disseminated
- That building strong intergenerational relationships is recognised as a key priority for those making decisions about the development of public spaces and in the handing over of community assets
- That innovative intergenerational housing schemes are explored and evaluated and good practice is disseminated. This may offer some useful answers to long-term housing and caring challenges.
- That pilot intergenerational Centres and other ‘Hubs’ are encouraged and supported as mechanisms for building strong networks of intergenerational mentoring, activities and support in communities. Local authorities should consider how they can maximise the opportunity afforded by reduced ring-fencing to encourage these initiatives.

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About 4Children

National children's charity 4Children has been shaping and influencing national policy for more than 25 years. We strive to place every child's and parent's needs at the heart of the community in developing and delivering innovative, integrated 0–19 support.

Our expanding programmes of universal and preventative services are finding new solutions to offer children, young people and families the support they need to flourish.

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- Support needs to be joined up and universal, with targeted support where required
- Prevention is better than cure
- Support is needed throughout childhood: from 0–19

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About Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational and social interests. Based in Lisbon with branches in London and Paris, the Foundation is in a privileged position to support transnational work tackling contemporary issues facing Europe. The purpose of the UK Branch in London is to connect and enrich the experiences of individuals, families and communities with a special interest in supporting those who are the most disadvantaged.

In 2008, the Foundation launched an initiative on ageing and social cohesion, with a number of activities developed with colleagues in Lisbon. This initiative represents the latest development of a wide portfolio of work which we hope will contribute to a growing understanding of the impact of demographic ageing to our society.

Think Intergenerational

Strong intergenerational relationships have always been important as a central interconnection at the heart of families and communities – passing on knowledge, sharing caring responsibilities, supporting bread winners and building the capacity of the young for the future.

Yet in recent decades, as expectations and aspiration have risen, so has mobility. Increasing numbers of people live away from family members and there is an increasing gap between the different generations within communities. From housing to crime, welfare to employment, the impact of changes in intergenerational relationships can be profound – exacerbating many of the substantial challenges faced by families in their everyday lives.

At a time when planners and decision makers are looking for new solutions to grow the capacity of both families and communities, the strength and potential of intergenerational relationships is a vital and valuable starting point. By looking at today's challenges through an intergenerational lens we have the potential to find new ways of supporting families and building communities that are positive and sustainable.

To achieve this, the challenge to us all is to 'think intergenerational'. This publication proposes practical ways to do so.