

GENERATIONS TOGETHER

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LEAP was delighted to be asked to partner with Elders Voice to co-deliver the Generations Together project, and the experience so far has given everyone involved a real sense of what it's like to go through a co-design process.

The first phase of the project involved children from Princess Frederica Primary School (aged 10-11), joining a group of older adults at Elders Voice, for weekly workshops. The aim of the workshops was for the co-designers to come up with an idea for an intergenerational community space. This could literally be anything, and the group began with a completely blank space.

Generations are often kept apart in our society and therefore don't get the chance to get to know one and other. It is assumed that a difference in age prevents them having common ground or a way to relate to each other. This certainly was not the case with our group! The co-designers gelled together very well, and our sessions were energetic, humorous and good fun. Both generations gained a lot from each other throughout the process.

"Generations Together project was a very enjoyable experience because we got to meet new people, make friends with them and also play games together." - Yasmina, Year 6 pupil

"Seeing the children and older people find common ground was one of my favourite parts of the experience. We discovered that, despite our superficial differences, we are more alike than we first thought!" - Anna, Teacher

"I would like to congratulate the parents and the school for the way the children behaved. They were lovely. I was surprised how considerate they were about the needs of the elderly." - Viveen, older participant

Through a series of creative, thought provoking and reflective activities, our group began.

Hands Head Heart

In the early weeks it was about preparation and getting to know each other. What are our likes and dislikes, what are we good at? Using a large, sticky wall, the process was visual and playful. What are the gifts that we bring to the group? We all have something to contribute, a skill or talent. We grouped these skills under the headings: 'Hands', 'Head' and 'Heart'. Identifying what skills we could contribute was an essential part of the process. Are we good at something practical ('hands')? Are we more of a thinker or organiser ('head')? Or did we bring an emotive element, a people orientated aspect to the proceedings ('heart')? The point was that we needed all these elements in our design process and therefore everyone's contribution was valued.



Ideas Generation

Our intergenerational group had become a design team. One rule we followed from the start was 'no idea is a bad idea'. Using a multitude of Post-it notes, it was quantity over quality at this point. We had ideas coming out of our ears! We wrote down the activities and experiences we enjoyed. Some examples that featured a lot were a football match, drawing comics, people watching, scary rides, computer games, being in nature, the sun, travel, the beach and favourite food. Using our senses helped us to drill down further into these ideas, to help us pinpoint what aspect of them we really loved and why. It was the atmosphere and the shared experience in the football stadium, the shared experience of eating, the excitement and live aspect of scary rides. It was about discovering new things and new food when travelling.

It was soon clear that the following three aspects must be present in any ideas that we came up with: atmosphere, shared experience and discovery.



Storytelling

The ability to tell a story is a useful tool when taking part in a co-design project. Through some lively story telling games, we learnt how to expand our ideas further by improvising and adding detail. But of course we reached the stage when we had to hone down our ideas, and this is where the 'dotmocracy' came in! Using sticky dots to vote, everyone chose their three favourite ideas. The three ideas that received the most votes were:

- A mixed age art group that visits galleries, and recreates art from different periods in history through art and drama.
- A series of creative workshops designed by children and older adults that culminates in an arts festival.
- An after school club that thinks it's

a restaurant, where different generations cook and dine together.

Personas

Having previously worked in intergenerational groups, we now worked in our own age groups and created personas for imagined older and younger people. What were their personalities like, their families, cultures, hobbies? Did they have support needs? These personas were always there in the background (on the sticky wall), reminding us to take their needs into account!



The Pop-up Café

Our three intergenerational groups worked hard on turning their ideas into a presentation. The big day came when it was time to pitch their ideas to the local community in return for tea and cake. We were delighted to welcome a great crowd at our Generations Together Pop-up Café. In attendance were members and services users of Elders Voice, Andrew Davies, Head of Commissioning and Lynette Gbedze, Services Manager for Adult Social Care at Brent Council, local Queens Park Councillor Stephen Crabb, and Nicola Christopher, Head of School, Princess Frederica. As our guests settled in and soaked up the atmosphere of the pop-up café, the three intergenerational groups moved around the room like a carousel, presenting their ideas to each table.

The children took the lead on the pitches, with the older people supporting, motivating and encouraging them. They pitched their ideas verbally and used story boards and posters to further illustrate their ideas. The guests were encouraged to ask the design teams questions and give feedback on the groups' ideas. There were lots of questions that cropped up, specifically about budget, advertising, venues and transport, but luckily our groups had begun to think about these essential aspects and gave considered answers. When the voting sheets were collected from the tables, and the votes were all counted and verified, the winners were announced. 'An Afterschool Club That Thinks Its A Restaurant' was the idea that received the most votes. Jon, who compèred the event, reminded us all that this was not just an academic exercise; the winning idea would be brought to life, and our Generations Together design team would be meeting again to make the after school club a reality. Our group will be graduating from co-designers to co-creators!

"Working with these young children was so stimulating! Their ideas and enthusiasm were great - I cannot wait to eat the results of the after school club." - Chris, older participant

"You could see that a lot of time and thought had been put into the ideas. The majority of us chose the after school club restaurant idea. This sounds like a fantastic idea where children and the older generation get together to cook and share a different cuisine each week. I look forward to being invited again and maybe sampling some culinary delights!" - Nicola, Head of School, Princess Frederica

"I really liked the LEAP project because it was lovely to interact with people from a different generation and learn lots about their way of life." - Estela, Year 6 pupil

Project Insights

All the designers involved brought so much energy, talent and commitment,

it made the co-design stage a massive success. **We saw an easy interplay between the designers.** Some brought specific talents to the process however, these skills were given freely. No one tried to dominate or dictate the direction of travel. The designers enjoyed working together; feeding off each other's ideas. The final concept has a little bit of everyone in it, even the quietist of voices.

There were no barriers to participation. If an individual found an activity challenging, their peers would support them and advocate on their behalf. Everyone felt involved and that they had contributed something. Some of the designers even became part of an informal group huddle who, after each session, reflected on how things had progressed. These reflections really helped inform the development of future sessions.

Everyone was learning. There was no 'teaching' happening. The designers were sharing their knowledge and experiences. Jon and Caroline, the teaching assistants and teachers, and all the people helping facilitate the sessions; none of us were exempt from being part of a learning process.

This project is proving that intergenerational groups can work together on serious design projects, where they dictate the direction, the development and delivery of their own ideas, in successful and innovative ways. Intergenerational co-design teams could be the answer to ending age-segregation in the UK.

Find out more about LEAP here: <https://www.leaplondon.co.uk/> and for project updates follow Caroline here: <https://twitter.com/carolinedsouza6>

