

Bright Sparks Donabate

Kaleidoscope Intergenerational Project

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Fingal County Council, Community
Department

Bright Sparks Pre-school
Seniors & 4 year olds



In Summer 2017 the teachers and community officers all watched the Channel 4 programme “Old Folks Home for 4 year Olds”. A light bulb moment of inspiration. We spoke to the children in class and asked would they like to invite older people into their classroom. “Yes we love grannies was the answer.

Our preschool is part of Fingal County Council’s community centre in Donabate and is an age friendly facility, so the community department officers were extremely supportive in the pilot programme.

Research shows that Intergenerational projects improve the wellbeing of older people on many levels impacting on the community as a whole.

The initial six week pilot programme ran to a 38 week programme involving the seniors visiting the preschool once a week and taking part in lots of activities from art to baking, charity work, storytelling, singing, ukulele playing, library visits, nature trails, local history, Christmas concert, graduation, Easter Egg hunt.

The most important theme was the development of relationships between the grannies and the children and not just in school but also in the community when they met at the shops, Mass, or local festivals. The communication skills of the children improved as they learnt to speak louder, clearer and sometimes repeat things so that the seniors could better hear and understand them.

Over lunch each Thursday, the conversation flowed and subjects such as dinosaurs, heaven, dogs, families, Santa, ghosts, etc were spoken of in a wonderful non-politically correct way. Story books were brought into the children that hadn’t been read in 40 years, old songs were sung, old games brought back to life. During these visits any isolation or loneliness felt by the seniors was banished as positive emotions developed. Together the group travelled the world through their charity work

sending packages to orphanages in Albania celebrating feast days in Bulgaria, Germany and of course Ireland.

From the teachers view we went on to take part in an online Toy Course - **Together Old and Young** - which is a quality programme for service users who wish to take part in intergenerational projects. Through this course we had a most fantastic week in DIT Grangegorman where representatives from Italy, Slovakia, Spain, Ireland, and Northern Ireland, came together to share their knowledge and experiences. It was an incredible, positive experience where connections were made.

Bright Sparks also welcomed representatives from the Red Cross from all over the world, primarily countries savaged by war, who now have an older generation for the first time in a long while. They were interested to see how our young and old worked and played together.

We also took part in a Webinar with the Lego Foundation on intergenerational practices. Video was taken in our setting. Our wonderful group of pre-schoolers have reached out to the world because they “love grannies”

What would a society look like if we were committed to intergenerational programmes today? A kaleidoscope of colour, fun, laughter, and connections.

[Link for webinar](#)

[Link for the webinar with LEGO Foundation](#)

Happy Days Ratoath

Pensioner Playdates

Pensioner Playdates on Newstalk with Ciara Kelly

“What day is it today” asked Fiadh.

“It’s Tuesday” I replied.

“I’m so happy, Tuesday is my favorite day, that’s when we have our play date in the nursing home with the grannies and grandads of Ratoath” Fiadh said.

“Well, today is extra special because we have lady who is on the radio called Ciara coming on our play date too” I said.

This story started almost 2 years ago when a chance conversation in the local nursing home where my dad was a resident happened between myself and Fiona the receptionist of Silver Steam nursing home in Ratoath.

“The residents love children coming to visit” she said.

“Sure I am a Montessori teacher” I replied “I have 42 children that would love to come to visit”. And so the journey began.

Being a community preschool in a small country village, I wanted to build a sense of community into our children and what better way to do this than visit our local nursing home.

We had been practicing for our community Christmas show at the time, so we brought our show to the nursing home. Before we went down one of the nurses visited us to explain to the children what it was like to work there and who we would meet. We did social stories around the different smells, some residents would be in wheelchairs, some residents would forget and ask you the same question over and over again. We had to prepare the children for this, as this was going to be something that some children may never have experienced before.

When we got there the children mingled with the residents and gave lots of high 5s and put on a little fashion show as some were wearing some new Christmas clothes. The residents’ faces just lit up as the children mingled with them, there were no barriers here and no questions were off limits.

“Why do you live here?” asked Jaden.

“Because I’m old” replied Peter.

We sang four songs including one with sign language and we even did a Zumba dance, the atmosphere was electric. The residents were so happy, some were crying with happiness.

After we performed our Christmas show, Mairead the coordinator of the nursing home, invited our Montessori back for a teddys bear's picnic and Nuala, one of the residents, wanted to read the children a story, and she had been practicing every day.

So I asked the children,

"Would you like you go back to and have a play date in the nursing home?"

They all shouted 'oh yes teacher Eilish'.

After the success of the two visits, the children started to ask if they could go back down. We talked to Mairead again and put a plan in place to visit every second week, but those visits soon became every week. So each week when we went down I would ask the children "What would you like to do on your play date today?".

"Sing songs" Lauren would say.

"Baby Shark" Karl would exclaim loudly.

"No let's do the parachute" Lewis would say.

Sometimes we would only do one activity. Sometimes we would do them all. Sometimes we would just sit together in each other's company and chat, and have tea and chocolate biscuits.

Kitty would ask the children "Do you like chocolate?"

They would all shout "YES". She told them when she was their age, she only got chocolate at Christmas. "What" said Rian "only at Christmas, that's terrible" he said.

Each week as we went down, friendships were forming and both the residents and children's faces would light up when the two generations came together. Each week I noticed the same child would seek out the same resident first to say hello.

Albert told me when the children came in, it would make his worries fade away. It gave him something to look forward too as they would light up the place.

Anna the head of nursing said "The happy feeling the children bring lasts right through the day. On a Tuesday morning, the residents will talk about the children coming to visit at their breakfast and after they have gone, it gives them something to talk about for the rest of the day."

There are no barriers between the two generations. Both have amazing patience with each other. As well as the physical benefits of becoming more active in their presence, psychologically the loneliness and loss of sense of purpose that older people can experience are to some degree lessened by having contact with the children. The children were also benefiting as they were more caring towards older people and more considerate, more understanding of the ageing process, which in turn leads to greater resilience.

Who would have thought a 2.5 year old's best friend would be a 92 year old who also loves dinosaurs. It is so heartwarming to witness, and it brightens up the day to be part of this lovely experience.

We take pictures over the month and then we print them off and place them into our learning journals in the Montessori. We then have a conversation with the children about why these play dates are so important to them and what was the favorite part of their visits. We also get the children to draw pictures. The early research on our pensioner playdates shows the transformative power that simply being around the children has for the older people

But the reaction from our children in the Montessori is always

"We love our pensioner playdates"

[Newstalk video](#)

[Newstalk podcast](#)

Mellow Springs Finglas

Some reflections from the programme as experienced by Mellow Springs

Mellow Spring and Odinswood

We couldn't wait to get started once we made contact with Odinswood day centre. A group of 4 preschool children and 8 afterschool children headed off on the 29th of August. We arrived at the door of what was now renamed as "Rachael's granny's house" although the anticipation was noticeable, but excitement was electric.

As soon as we went inside, we knew it was going to be a great success. Some children were a little shy but some began pairing up with older people immediately and friendships began to form. Of course, chocolate biscuits helped the process. Week after week the overall relationships built, but some amazing friendships were clearly forming. Children referred to their favourite people as "Granny" or "Granddad" and each week looked out for the same person. We could see on our arrival the older people were looking out for their favourites too. Each Wednesday afternoon we looked at the photos after the weekly visit, we could see the bonds building through the facial expressions and body language of both old and young.

The strength of the bonds and the enjoyments experienced by everyone was very evident when one Wednesday we couldn't go because we had a TOY contact day and the staff from the day care centre also attended. I arrived back to the centre at about 5pm and was greeted by two sisters who said, *"its Wednesday, we were waiting all day and the granny's must have missed us"*. Next one of the younger children said *"why are we not going to your granny's house today, I miss the grannies"*. One of the other preschool children was leaving with her Dad and she asked her Dad *"what day is it"* he said *"Wednesday"* she looked at me and said, *"it's the granny and grandpa club on Wednesday, we didn't go"*. (I had told them but they forgot)

The following week we returned to the day centre and children eagerly greeted their older people with hugs. One of the children was upset and said *"I can't find my granny, she has a red cardigan"* once we found the *"granny"* the child smiled and hugged her, she sat up beside her and they began chatting. She was wearing a blue cardigan on that day.

One of our children is polish and doesn't have any grandparents in Ireland, her parents comment each week that the child loves going to the grandparent house, she has a very special bond with one of the ladies. Every Wednesday evening, she goes home and skypes her grand mother and tells her about her day with her *"other grandmother"*. This child doesn't attend the creche on a Wednesday but after the first visit asked her parents if she can come in just to go to Odinswood. Her parents are so pleased with her reaction to visits that they bring her in for the two hours.

During the afternoon the children and older people played bingo. Each team consisted of a child and older person. One of the older children sat between two women and repeated each item for the women as they told her they couldn't hear. Later when we got back to the creche she told me *"I loved helping the grannies to win in bingo and that's what happens when you get older- your ears don't work good anymore and you need someone to tell you things"*

It is a great success for all involved.

It's a Small World, Raheny

It's a Small World Montessori School and Raheny House Nursing Home

INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMME

[Click here to read the social stories of the children's experiences](#)