

Careers & training: How intergenerational qualifications benefit both adults and children alike

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How can early years staff deepen their understanding of intergenerational practice?



Planning a birthday party for a 100-year-old is not on the average nursery practitioner's to-do list. But for early years staff enrolled on the new CACHE-accredited qualifications in intergenerational care and education, it is just one of the fictitious tasks that they might be asked to do.

Apples and Honey Nightingale, the UK's first intergenerational nursery, launched a set of three 'nested qualifications' from its new training arm which opened in January 2022. The first cohorts of the Award and Certificate have graduated, and many are now going on to complete the Level 3 Diploma in Intergenerational Practice.

‘We’ve focused on designing a vocational course for practitioners, as it’s our early years and care staff who have the skills and drive to create and deliver the highest quality of intergenerational sessions,’ explains Judith Ish-Horowicz, principal of Apples and Honey Nightingale and ambassador for AHN Education & Training. ‘They know their children and their grandfriends and what will bring the greatest benefit for them.’

Who is it for?

Kathy O’Brien, co-manager at Apples and Honey Nightingale nursery, has just received CPD accreditation for completing the first two qualifications: the Certificate and the Award. Joined by a range of professionals across care and education, from nursery settings, care homes, hospitals and schools, she describes the course as ‘insightful’ and says it gives you the ‘confidence to set the ball rolling’. Part of O’Brien’s role is to co-ordinate the intergenerational activities that take place at the world-renowned nursery in Clapham, south-west London, which opened on the site of a care home in 2017.

Despite her direct experience working with children and older adults, she says that it was ‘fascinating’ to learn more about the ‘growing intergenerational movement’ across the country and meet people who work closely with older people and have a ‘really good understanding’ of dementia.

‘We’re a co-located site, which seems to have the best results because of the obvious proximity to the residents, the community of parents, care staff and early years practitioners. But there is some wonderful practice taking place across the country, with community groups sharing knowledge of past skills such as boat-making or crocheting with the children,’ she explains.

The online sessions are taught in real time, and the tutors – Joanne Mason, lead teacher in health and social care at Salisbury Sixth Form College, and Emma Rand, senior lecturer in childcare and health and social care at Bristol City College – are there to support the students and answer questions.

The course captures the ‘vital importance’ of working in partnership with the care home and nursery, O’Brien says. ‘Mutual planning is necessary. For example, when planning the 100-year-old birthday party, I had to ensure that intergenerational principles were adhered to; that the activity was mutually beneficial to both parties and that they were both equally involved.’

‘I also learnt about the importance of capturing the impact and evaluating the activity in-the-moment,’ she adds.

Ish-Horowicz says the courses are 'practical' and use 'real examples' of intergenerational activities in practice: videos of gardening, arts and crafts, buddied reading, ballet classes, French lessons, singing and music-making and exercise classes.

The benefits

The benefits of intergenerational work are 'multiple'. Not only do older adults have wisdom to impart and time to listen but they also benefit from taking part in the same activities. 'The skills and learning that we support the children to develop are the same as the skills and knowledge we support the residents to maintain,' Ish-Horowicz explains.

For example, exercise classes focusing on cross body movements that engage both hemispheres of the brain are important for all age groups in developing and in maintaining motor skills. In the same way, singing songs stimulates the memory of older adults and children get a broader repertoire of songs ranging from nursery rhymes to wartime songs, which spark learning opportunities.

'This illustrates how rich an intergenerational curriculum can be,' Ish-Horowicz says. 'Intergenerational engagements are not just "nice to do". There needs to be a close partnership between the care organisation and the early years setting; there needs to be careful planning, observation and evaluation of the programme. And the facilitators have to be aware of accessibility; health and safety; safeguarding; how to use volunteers and how to ensure that there is reciprocity and that the programme is relational and sustainable.'

O'Brien says there are 'huge' benefits for the children. 'It's heartening to see how their communication, empathy and confidence grows, and to watch children that may struggle in the classroom flourish during the intergenerational activities,' she explains.

Career progression

The new qualifications, thought to be the only accredited versions of their kind in the UK, aim to ensure that 'knowledgeable and qualified' practitioners will be able to roll out intergenerational programmes across all settings, including early years, education, health and social care.

'It needs to be included in the opportunities for career progression, as a position of responsibility, and it needs to have the same respect and responsibilities as, for example, safeguarding or special needs lead,' explains Ish-Horowicz.

Sue Egersdorff, co-founder of charity Ready Generations, which has partnered with dementia specialist care provider Belong to run the onsite Nursery in Belong based in Chester, agrees.

She says, 'Intergenerational work has a deep theory base which is not reflected in TV programmes like "Four-year-olds in care homes", which portray it as a lovely thing to do rather than a serious development in approaches to care.'

Course content

While the Award covers the principles and processes of intergenerational work and is great for those who are just dipping their feet into the area, the Certificate is more hands-on. It includes a day onsite at an intergenerational setting, where nursery and care practitioners can reflect on sessions and talk to participants and those delivering the activities. AHN is working in association with Ready Generations so that participants from the North of England can access this element of the course more conveniently.

The Diploma course is for those that are likely to take on the role of intergenerational lead. Early years practitioners study a unit on dementia and age-related conditions, and care home practitioners complete a unit on child development, the early years framework and how to plan experiences that will meet the needs of children. The practical element involves activities in the participant's own establishment. Participants can enrol online or attend a residential summer school.

AHN has also developed a one-day CPD course with charity and training provider Generations Working Together, for those who are new to and interested in intergenerational practice.

CASE STUDY: dementia and age-related conditions



Kathy O'Brien, co-manager at Apples and Honey Nightingale nursery, has set her sights on an activity involving decorating care residents' walking aids with the children. 'One of the participants on the course mentioned Pimp My Zimmer, a craze that took place several years ago,' she says. 'Apparently, people with dementia lose their ability to discriminate colours. Because their walkers are usually grey, they often misplace their hands and fall. One setting came up with a brilliant

activity to decorate the walkers with pompoms, bright foam, ribbons, photos and memorabilia so that they stand out. This was found to prevent falls.

‘We are fortunate to be able to access expert training in dementia and age-related conditions and in all areas of care that are relevant to intergenerational practice through our training arm, which works in partnership with Nightingale Hammerson’s Care Home Education Centre. The Diploma goes into more depth about dementia, and we also have practice of it working on the ground.

‘For practitioners who have concerns around bringing children into contact with dementia patients, it’s about trying to break down the barriers. Once dementia patients are engaged in activities, it’s quite extraordinary to see the change in them.

‘During a soup-making activity recently, each resident held a wooden food item. One resident wouldn’t let go of the carrot, so his carer took him away momentarily. It’s not dissimilar to a toddler tantrum. By the end of the session he was smiling. Another resident lit up when he was handed a wooden lamb chop. The activity clearly brightened up his morning.’

More Information

- ‘UK’s first intergenerational nursery launches accredited intergenerational qualifications’, Nursery World, <https://bit.ly/3tdu4jj>
- Training video, <https://youtu.be/lb9m-zoznds?si=txgJLu2eGvSJg5SK>
- AHN Education & Training, <https://ahneducation.org>
- Ready Generations, <https://readygenerations.co.uk>
- Generations Working Together, www.generationsworkingtogether.org

<https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/features/article/careers-training-how-intergenerational-qualifications-benefit-both-adults-and-children-alike>