

## Key messages, reflections and recommendations from TOY Conference

**Community.** Intergenerational dialogue and learning between young children and older people fosters feelings of citizenship, connectedness and involvement in community life. As well as promoting shared spaces, where everyone feels valued and active, interaction between different social groups is also encouraged. Intergenerational learning is a driver for social cohesion and inclusion, it promotes contact and solidarity and stimulates active citizenship.

Despite our focus on the very young and older people in TOY, the reality has been that community members of all ages are all included and therefore the interaction extends beyond the original target generations to involve their families, friends and care givers. We are now seeing *multi*-intergenerational action rather than just *inter*generational action.

**Learning.** Who is learning from whom and what kind of learning are we talking about? If we look at learning from a lifespan perspective one generation is no more important than another. For everyone, learning takes place within emotional, social and cognitive domains.

Intergenerational dialogue is important for the transmission of history, traditions, folklore and life experience. Evidence and experience from the TOY actions also illustrates that by uniting and engaging young children and older people in activities such as: cooking, art, bicycle repair workshop and gardening, levels of self-confidence are raised and seniors become more flexible thinkers and less prone to stereotyping. Children demonstrate, often through non-verbal communication, how to build friendships. Their natural curiosity breaks down assumptions and fears of 'the other' and gives a good example to both seniors and professionals.

**Role of grandparents.** Grandparents have a strong role to play in children's lives and provide affection, time and calm attention to young children.

The recent phenomenon of so-called 'euro-orphans', where children are left in the care of grandparents while their parents migrate to other EU countries for work, has left both the very young and seniors with a new set of concerns. The daily routine of providing front-line child care overshadows the joy of grand-parenting. TOY reminds grandparents that grand-parenting can be inspiring and not just a duty. Furthermore, older people who are not biologically related to children can have an important role as 'social grandparents'. Through friendly intergenerational contact, seniors may be happy to take on the role of a grandparent to an unrelated child.

**Skills and attitudes for working intergenerationally.** The role of intergenerational facilitators are crucial to the success of TOY projects and initiatives. Those working intergenerationally need to be competent and able to critically reflect on areas of knowledge, practice and values. They need to be able to nourish interaction between young and old without overly controlling the contact.

The abilities of individual educators, care givers and volunteers, whilst very important, are not enough to sustain intergenerational practices. They should be supported by changes in local services and amenities; within local authorities; community organisations and training organisations. Leadership attributes such as vision, passion and enthusiasm are also crucial to making intergenerational projects work successfully.

The principle of Together Old and Young is to re-instate what previous generations took for granted; that we should know, live, work and have fun together with people of all ages. TOY strives to change intergenerational learning from being an extra-ordinary experience to being an ordinary experience.