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INTERGENERATIONAL INTERACTIONS:  
USING COMMUNITY FIELD THEORY TO ENGAGE ACROSS GENERATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

As the world's population is becoming increasingly older, how can we create thriving communities that incorporate the needs of all generations? Research on intergenerational topics lists the number of ways that engaging all ages can create beneficial outcomes for wellbeing. At the same time, community development literature suggest that community is enhanced by strengthening the ties between different social fields. Uniting these two areas, this research focuses primarily on the ways that intergenerational frameworks, practices, and programs can relate to community development.

To conduct this research, a study was implemented to understand how an intergenerationally-focused event could foster further community development. The process included archival research and a series of semi-structured key informant interviews of exhibitors who participated in The Intergenerational Friends Fair that took place in June 2019 in State College, Pennsylvania. From the 8 interviews conducted, it was found that collaborative events that took place following the Intergenerational Friends Fair reflected small-scale community engagement across social fields. Exhibitors from the fair discussed their understanding of intergenerational work and its potential to facilitate community building. Additionally, they noted how human and financial resources and collaborative activities could be used strategically to make similar intergenerational programs successful in the future.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Global demographic shifts show that on average, nations are becoming older. With this new reality, the need to consider community development with a perspective that takes into account all age groups is pressing. Related research suggests that involving both young and old in programming and planning has lasting impacts on health and social inclusion. Additionally, generationally-aware planning provides the opportunity to build communities that can last from one generation to the next, and beyond. The strength of intergenerational programming and planning lies in its ability to not just pay attention to the needs of various age groups, but to bring those groups together in ways that fully connect and meaningfully include them in decision making, community activities, and community development efforts. While there is some prior research that discusses the significance of age-inclusive practices in community development work, new or different theoretical frameworks may be useful for analyzing such planning. Interactional field theory can be utilized to consider the connections between groups of a variety of ages and generations within a community, and the ways in which their linkages, or lack thereof, are significant to the formation of successful programmatic efforts and community building capacity.

Shifts in life expectancy that have occurred as a result of improved health outcomes have increased the need to look beyond just the working age population of a given community in decision making. According to Bongaarts (2009), the world's population is rapidly growing, and has nearly doubled between 1950 and 2005, from 2.5 billion to 6.5 billion (para. 1). As infant

mortality rates decrease, and fewer adults die from communicable diseases, a majority of people are living into later and later years of adulthood. While this process has started at different times throughout the world, many countries are reaching the later stages of what is referred to as the “demographic transition”. From this trend comes the idea of the dependency-ratio, wherein a region’s economic success is evaluated in terms of the population of “dependents”, those considered too young or old to contribute to the workforce, to the size of the working age population. However, most significant to intergenerational thinking is the ways by which this shift alters social order. According to Bongaarts (2009), “a changing age distribution has significant social and economic consequences, e.g. for the allocation of education, healthcare and social security resources to the young and old” (paras. 2-3). As a rapidly aging population imposes stress on the allocation of resources, many social issues come to the forefront and need to be addressed for current and future populations. Within this context, the creation of a thriving and sustainable community cannot exist outside of intergenerational considerations.

Intergenerational practice is then inherently related to what Bridger and Luloff (1999) also describe as development in terms of “intergenerational equity”, whereas ‘the current generation must not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their material needs and enjoy a healthy environment’ (p. 378). Whether or not current populations consider or acknowledge the effect they will have on generations in the future, they are making an impact on the following generations’ opportunities one day to live and thrive. Intergenerational equity underlies much of policymaking with regard to natural resource management, as those with the power to make decisions now have the potential to affect citizens in the future. While this paper relates primarily to practices and programs that emanate directly from intergenerational theory, it is significant to note the impact that can be had in many fields, such as economics, demography,



public health, or environmental studies, when considered with an intergenerationally aware mindset or perspective.

The focus of this thesis is one community's efforts towards creating intergenerational connections through citizen-led programming. State College, located in the center of the state of Pennsylvania within the aptly named Centre County, is home to a large population of college students, academics, and retired residents. The Pennsylvania State University's main campus, University Park, is separated from downtown State College by just a single two-lane road, College Avenue. The University and surrounding community are undeniably intertwined in many ways, with much of community's economic and social base coming from the University, as Penn State is the largest employer in the region (Penn State News, 2018). According to Penn State Government and Community Relations, Penn State has a particular mission to the non-academic community as "Pennsylvania's legislatively designed Land-Grant University, which is charged with a tri-partite mission of teaching, research, and service to the Commonwealth" (Penn State Government and Community Relations). A variety of University departments also conduct research and outreach activities with the local population.

One such initiative was the Intergenerational Leadership Institute (ILI) and its subsequent events, specifically the Intergenerational Friends Fair (IFF). Individuals elected to participate in the ILI program, an eight-week short course created by Penn State Extension and Outreach that focused on intergenerational programs and practice. Through this certificate training program for older adults, course "graduates" determined ways that they could utilize their new knowledge about intergenerational programs and practices within their own lives and communities. After being introduced to intergenerational concepts and to the ways that other communities were

applying these ideas to make community change, ILI course graduates decided upon creating their own, unique program.

They wanted to see how an event, and even the initial planning process, could help exhibitors and attendees to develop and expand local intergenerational programs in ways that contribute to community quality of life. ILI course graduates generated the idea of an event that could bring together a number of community stakeholders who were interested in intergenerational practice, or who had organizations that were seen as related to intergenerational work. They called this the Intergenerational Friends Fair, or IFF. The researcher then interviewed a number of the stakeholders who participated in the IFF in order to understand their motivations and the nature of community development activities that followed this event, based on connections that were formed through this program.

The next section of this thesis introduces literature related to intergenerational programs and practices, by defining “intergenerational” and providing information about the overarching goals of such work. Specifically, it will suggest that intergenerational programs and practice are avenues for community development, using the concept of interactional field theory. Following this literature review is a section that describes two examples of intergenerational programs found through archival research. Then, there is a section detailing the methods used by the researcher. After this, the researcher provides a discussion of the themes they found through qualitative research. Concluding the research is a section that emphasizes the significance of community development within an intergenerational mindset, elucidated by a particularly poignant quote.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature and Theory

#### What Exactly is “Intergenerational”?

While the term “intergenerational” has risen in popularity in recent times, it is useful to provide a basic definition before proceeding. Breaking apart the prefix from the root, one comes to a simple interpretation of a nuanced term. According to Kaplan et al. (2017), that which can be defined as “intergenerational” is anything that occurs between generations (p. 13). The authors additionally suggest that the primary focus of the adjective be placed on the prefix “inter”, as the process of engaging between groups, not just engaging within existing groups, is the crux of the term. This specific caveat to the engagement piece ultimately means that something can only be labeled as intergenerational if it not only provides space, programs, and opportunities that are intended for individuals of different ages, but if the moment also facilitates those groups participating together within the context of the built environment, activity, program, etc. Across age groups, individuals should be able to interact not just around each other, but *with* each other, co-creating, playing, learning, or taking part in any collaborative activity for which there is shared interest. Communities are becoming more stratified among generations within the United States as older adults tend to move into retirement communities, and students and the working age population maintain connections with peers. Due to these structures, intergenerational engagement sometimes needs to be more explicitly and consciously created.

## Goals of Intergenerational Work

The results of intergenerational practice, as well as the intention behind the work, are varied. One focus of intergenerational practice has been placed on improving health outcomes, especially for older individuals, by increasing their participation in activities, including those that facilitate involvement with children. According to Kaplan and Liu (2004), “Research by the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, AARP... Youth Services America, and numerous academic institutions shows that volunteers of all ages enjoy a healthier life than those who remain uninvolved in their communities” (p. 27). Community involvement, healthier lives, and purposeful work can be promoted by intergenerational programs. Connected to health metrics are ideas of social inclusion, especially to combat isolation sometimes experienced by older individuals. Aging can be accompanied by isolation, with the passing of friends and spouses, or a decrease in physical mobility that leads to little opportunities for interaction outside of places of residence. Intergenerational programs can be explicitly created to reach those populations most in need of connection, engagement, and purposeful activities.

Proponents of intergenerational practice suggest that their work can help in breaking down barriers created by stereotypes held between different age groups. Bringing together younger people with older people can create a mutual understanding, and conversation around shared values or activities. It is also a way for participants of all ages to learn how other generations perceive and experience their shared community. These experiences hold with them a degree of community memory that is kept with different generations. Kaplan et al. (2017) suggest that “learning to live in a diverse world seems to us a basic principle of sustainability” (p. 100). Sustaining communities requires understanding the past and making sense of the present conditions experienced by all groups and demographic populations. Many young people

do not encounter older people consistently in their lives, and therefore lose access to some of the perspectives that could be gained from intergenerational connections and exchanges.

Intergenerational work can shift negative attitudes or create increased understanding, as in many of these cases, older citizens are then framed as valuable resources. In terms of programs designed to contribute to youth development, with staff or budget limitations, some programs use older citizens as mentors for young people to fill their needs, or to provide youth with relationships that are otherwise inaccessible (Hermann et al., 2005). Older citizens have many skills and experiences that may not be utilized in retirement, and can fill gaps in settings with youth. Engaging older people in community work can lead to what Kaplan and Liu (2004) call “greater effectiveness as community leaders... by increasing their credibility with existing community programs and [by introducing] new ideas more quickly and efficiently into their communities” (p. 28). Active involvement by older citizens, in well-respected roles within their communities, can provide them the social capital to continue to participate in community activities, and to self-determine their skills and areas of growth or of interest.

Age-based stereotypes can also exist against young people, and may be remedied with increased interactions with extra-social age groups. Youth may instead also be viewed as assets within intergenerational work, holding potentially different mobility levels and technological savvy than some older individuals. Many youth-based organizations do promote development of character and active citizenship of young people, but this centers on interactions between and among peers. Vliet (2011) notes that intergenerational work should really provide agency to all ages, and that organizations should see all generations as assets:

A broader and more cost-effective view would allow organizations to support initiatives that combine [their] goals such that elders could share their experiences and expertise to

benefit youth, while youth could reciprocate by, for example, performing household chores or running errands for elders with mobility constraints. (p. 353)

Youth can practice newly attained skills, while elders can provide guidance and “expertise” that may be outside of the network of these youth, especially in age-stratified settings.

Another focus of intergenerational work is to strengthen intergenerational families, and to provide resources for older people, such as grandparents, who serve as primary caregivers. According to Anderson (2019), “in 2016, there were over 7.2 million grandparents nationwide living with their grandchildren under the age of 18. Of that 7.2 million, over 2.5 million were responsible for most of the basic needs of their grandchildren” (US Census Bureau 2017a as cited in Anderson, 2019, p. 2). While there are a multitude of reasons for this being the case, one rising factor is the opioid epidemic within rural communities and across Appalachia and the Midwest. Care for grandchildren may fall under the responsibility of older adults if parents are addicted to opioids, or pass away from drug-related conditions. Generations United (2019) claims that “the overall numbers of children in foster care... began to rise in 2013, and experts say the opioid epidemic is responsible for this trend” (p. 3). Additionally, more and more children in foster care are being placed with relatives (Generations United, 2019, p. 3). One potential confounding variable could be socioeconomic status, as opioid use and the presence of grandparents in a household can be related to poverty. According to 2016 data, “19 percent of grandparents who were responsible for their grandchildren lived in poverty, compared to 11 percent of grandparents who lived with grandchildren, but were not responsible for them” (U.S. Census Bureau 2017b as cited in Anderson, 2019). These statistics demonstrate a need for resources and attention dedicated to intergenerational families.

Co-existing across generations always brings with it general challenges in relating and understanding, but those stresses can be magnified when multiple generations separate child from caregiver. This dynamic has been deemed by Kaplan et al. (2017) “kinship care”, which “is defined as the full-time care, nurturing and protection of children by grandparents, stepparents, or any adult who has a kinship bond with a child” (p. 72). Another term frequently used is “grandfamilies” or what Goodman (2007) refers to as “skipped-generation grandfamilies”, where “grandparents have stepped in”, to raise their grandchildren “when parents are unable” (p. 231). Grandfamilies would be considered one category under the larger umbrella of “kinship care”.

An intergenerational outlook for working with these families could include direct programmatic work to create systems of support, but also relooking at agencies and services that could address the needs of these families, varied as they will be by the uniqueness of each family situation. Kaplan et al. (2017) push for a broad stance on kinship care: “An ambitious but appropriate goal is to work toward creating an integrated web of programs, support systems, interagency collaboration systems, and social policies designed to help grandfamilies navigate the challenges they face” which broadly works towards “strengthening families, strengthening individual agencies, and strengthening service delivery systems” (p. 73). The needs of each family can vary greatly based on access to resources, health and age of caregivers, and numerous other factors, but an intergenerational perspective could foster deeper understanding and support from individuals, organizations and agencies.

Workforce sustainability and shifts in the workplace also have piqued the public interest on issues between and among generations. With shifts in automation and the nature of jobs today, there can sometimes be a generational disconnect in expectations and experiences. Additionally, practitioners and scholars within human resources, career services, and

organizational psychology discuss an unprecedented shift in the workplace based on what Lyons and Kuron (2014) see as four distinct generations participating in the same workforce. Finding ways to go beyond the stereotypes held by generationally stratified groups within the same workplace is one way to make a business more sustainable. Lagacé et al. (2019) suggest that all workers are needed in order to have effective “knowledge sharing”, and, in particular, older workers can contribute to “corporate memory” (p. 202), highlighting workplace practices over time. Intergenerational perspectives and theoretical frameworks can be useful for unraveling not just what is happening in the workplace, but to breakdown more deeply the causes, emotions, and beliefs of the current situation, and how solutions can be co-created across different age groups.

### **Intergenerational Practice as Community Development**

In the context of intergenerational researchers and practitioners, many like to consider all related activities and frameworks within the broader category of intergenerational programs and practice. Bradley and Steinig (2013) define intergenerational programs in the following way:

Programs that by definition increase cooperation, interaction, and exchange between people of different generations, allowing the sharing of talents and resources, and the supporting of each other in relationships that benefit both the individuals and their community. (p. 1)

For those who work primarily or exclusively within intergenerational fields, the connection between their work and community building efforts might be quite clear, as creating interactions and multi-stakeholder cooperation is essential. On the other hand, sometimes the link is not quite



as clear from the perspective of those in different sectors, even those that could benefit from considering their work through an intergenerational lens.

To look at intergenerational programs and practice as a vehicle for community development, however, “community” and “community development” should first be explicitly defined. For this thesis research, Kenneth P. Wilkinson’s three-part definition will be employed to describe community. According to Wilkinson (1999), community is simultaneously a locality, a local society, and a process of locally oriented collective actions (p. 2). Therefore, the work of building and developing a community is an on-going process, but so is maintain the community itself. By facilitating collaborative efforts, a community can be formed, and this community may continuously be strengthened if successful collective actions occur, based around a certain locality and the needs of the local population.

The place-based nature of this definition is incredibly significant, and it still ties this idea of community to a physical location, rather than an online community or a community linked across the globe by loose ties or commonalities. As the Internet became more popular, so did what Wilson & Peterson (2002) refer to as “online interactions of dispersed groups of people with shared interests” (p. 449). To many, these “communities” are spaces where those with similar interests can come together in ways that feel quite real, despite non-physical connection. While the existence of these “communities” can complicate the ways by which we understand collectives and populations, for the researcher’s purposes, these communities will not be considered. This paper relates primarily to intergenerational practices occurring more broadly in a variety of place-based communities, and some of the specific collaborative efforts that took place within the greater State College, Pennsylvania community. These specific efforts include

the IFF and subsequent partnerships formed by connections between community members that the IFF facilitated.

The physical makeup of community becomes very significant when considering the level of inclusion of built and natural environments. For those with specific mobility needs, it can be extremely difficult to navigate spaces that are designed without a variety of activity and comfort levels in mind. Individuals with chronic physical impairments and health conditions are often not accounted for in ableist planning processes. Furthermore, aging adults with increasing mobility challenges may find increased difficulty in moving through their communities, but they likely view these shifts in different ways, as Rowles and Bernard (2013) suggested, “the discussion of barriers to everyday living has resonance for people as they age who may not seem themselves as disabled or experiencing ongoing physical or mental impairment” (p. 28). The consistently changing and developing needs that individuals experience furthers the need for communities to respond and create public spaces that allow and enable all citizens to participate.

This new emphasis, on building with numerous age groups in mind, is multi-tiered, and according to Rowles and Bernard (2013), demonstrated in “age-friendly cities that take onboard both micro and macro aspects of environment” (p. 28). A combination of large-scale building projects and small neighborhood adjustments can form physical places of generationally-aware communities. Some examples of such projects were discussed by Vliet (2011), ranging from creating “pedestrian-friendly streets with crosswalks” to the design of “public spaces” and “parks” (p. 355) that encourage activities among and between generations. While some of these efforts would be smaller community adjustments, plans for the built environment could take into account all generations from the start of the process.

As community is a process of collective actions, it is closely linked to the behaviors of citizens within a certain locality, and the ways by which they encounter each other. Community development, as a practice of connecting people and resources, can bring people together based on their similar characteristics or shared vision for their community. Bridger and Luloff (1999), describe the community as a “phenomenon”, an event in and of itself: “From the interactional perspective, community is a natural and ubiquitous phenomenon among people who share a common territory and interact with one another on place relevant matters” (p. 383). By forming relationships and interacting within and outside of established networks, communities self-determine how their locality functions and how to connect across lines of difference on those issues that matter most to the collective community. Place relevant matters can encompass a wide variety of community topics, based on the makeup and interests of a specific community, which should include the variety of needs of different age groups.

Vibrant communities connect different groups across common goals and similarities, and further the work of addressing these widespread interests. The community field is the space in which all interactions in the community can be described, and within that field are different subgroups, called social fields (Flint et al., 2010). Strong bonds, or “ties” exist between people in the smaller social fields. These ties are naturally reinforced and based on shared characteristics and interests. Weak ties can be formed across social fields to make the larger community field, which “pursues the broader interests of the general community” (Flint et al, 2010, p. 26). The role of community developers is to pursue the creation and strengthening of these weak ties to engage community members.

Engagement between community members through these weak ties also brings in new information that may not be found in smaller social groups. As new voices and perspectives are

added to community dialogues, a more representative and diverse network of people can tackle problems and create collective visioning and change within their community. Through participatory government processes, inter-agency partnerships or non-governmental community leadership trainings and seminars, new perspectives can highlight areas of growth in community building processes. Within an intergenerational context, there is a clear impetus to connect a variety of social fields in order to foster development that is responsibly engaging of all age groups represented within a community.

### **Levels of Intergenerational Programs & Practice**

Intergenerational programs and practice have a number of purposes, at a relationship, group or community-wide scale. While the specific intentions of programs and practices vary, what is typically considered to be the greatest goal within intergenerational programming is the facilitation of interactions between older and younger people that are co-created, according to Whitehouse et al. (2000, p. 768). Recalling the definition employed by Bradley and Steinig (2013), intergenerational programs focus on the sharing of resources and fostering “relationships that benefit both the individuals and their community” (p. 1). Achieving these objectives does not occur in one-off events, however, as successful intergenerational programs should facilitate lasting interactions that are seen as beneficial to all community members. This may require a series of actions or long-term programs between a number of stakeholders, which could focus on achieving greater “levels” of engagement.

Whitehouse et al. (2000) categorizes the various levels of engagement that are seen in intergenerational work within a leveled hierarchy:

- At the first level, the activities of each generation can be housed in the same physical space but without any significant programmatic interaction...
- At the second level, interaction occurs, but can be described as “unidirectional”, such as younger people being instructed to “aid” older people, without it being a process of participation on both sides.
- At the next level, young and old serve alongside each other to work on a project that “serves a more general community need”
- However the highest level of typology based on the intensity of interactions would be when a learning environment is shared to meet learning goals of individuals in different age groups. (p. 768)

Interactions must clearly benefit all groups involved, and encourage meaningful, collaborative engagement. One group is not to be the “served” group or the “serving” group. Successful intergenerational programs support cooperation across generations and social fields, in a way that can support all members involved to achieve their goals, such as building friendships, feeling that they are valued members of the community, or meeting learning outcomes. A built environment that intentionally promotes active engagement for all generations is a useful place to start thinking about engagement, but it is by no means the end of community building. In the same way, a single event, like a day of service by high schoolers at a senior living community or even an intergenerational fair, should not be the ultimate goal of programming efforts.

While the focus of this thesis is not exclusively on learning or educational environments, the idea of working towards achieving goals collaboratively is at the heart of successful intergenerational work related to community development. Additionally, the program of most

particular interest to this paper, the Intergenerational Friends Fair, took place on an elementary school campus in State College, Pennsylvania. This setting provides certain benefits and resources that can be unique to educational environments, and which are naturally familiar to young people.

## Chapter 3

### Examples of Intergenerational Community Activities & Programs

This section will be used to demonstrate some of the ways that communities have created intergenerational programs based on their own needs and determined objectives. The first example, the Intergenerational Community Action Group, occurred on a smaller scale, involving 13 community members. The Communities for All Ages initiative, on the other hand, was a multi-community program, which included 23 “sites” and required the collaboration of numerous agencies and stakeholders. Although very different in scope, both show the ways that intergenerational goals can be strengthened by community building, and vice versa. Additionally, the two programs reflect the importance of community members having the agency to create and enact plans that are appropriate and relevant to their community context.

#### Intergenerational Community Action Group

One example of a community-level program was the Intergenerational Community Action Group (IGCA) described by Lawrence-Jacobson (2006). Using the framework of “empowerment theory”, and “participatory program planning”, a group of undergraduates and older adults had the opportunity to take an action plan and to create “positive social changes in their communities” (Lawrence-Jacobson, 2006, p. 138). The researcher, Lawrence-Jacobson, who detailed the findings, focused particularly on this intergenerational program within the lens of empowerment theory. Maton (2008) defines empowerment as, “a group-based, participatory, developmental process through which marginalized or oppressed individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and environment, acquire valued resources and basic rights, and

achieve important life goals and reduced societal marginalization” (p. 5). Empowerment theory can be a useful lens with which to consider the ways those who are often disempowered, like transient undergraduate students or the elderly, can gain agency through engagement in community efforts.

The program was made up of eight older adults living in an independent and assisted living facility and five undergraduate students. Lawrence-Jacobson (2006) defined the process of engagement as such:

Intergenerational community action”—that is, older adults and youth working together to address a community issue of mutual concern including the ways in which intergenerational activism can contribute to older and younger people’s empowerment and sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the other generation. (p. 138)

These efforts served to build up a sense of power and agency, while building up an intergenerationally-conscious community. Specifically, they met as a group throughout the academic year to build relationships, to identify and discuss community issues, and to create and implement a plan for positive community change around the issues. Ultimately, they focused on strengthening the network between the university and assisted/independent living community. Through their efforts, they supported “internship and service-learning opportunities for nursing, sociology, social work” and other fields at the assisted living center, and “promoted... an ongoing lecture series of professors at the assisted living facility” (Lawrence-Jacobson, 2006, p. 139).

This program demonstrates the impact of small-scale, intergenerationally-focused programs, especially those that allow stakeholders to identify the needs of their own communities and to form and implement their own action plans. Using the lens of empowerment



theory is also another potential tool for grounding real-world practice within a theoretical framework. Additionally, the successful facilitation of interactions between undergraduate students and older adults at nearby retirement communities could be particularly poignant with regard to the State College community that is the focus of this thesis.

### **Communities for All Ages**

Some intergenerational practices and programs take place on a very small scale, while others facilitate community-wide processes of engagement and growth. One such example of a larger effort was created by the Intergenerational Center at Temple University in partnership with 23 “sites” across the country (Henkin et al., 2012). Within these 23 different communities, a broad framework for community building was applied, defined by “collaborative, intergenerational, and effective community change strategies to improve the outcomes for *all* community residents, particularly vulnerable children, families and elders” (Henkin et al., 2012). This network of 23 communities was given resources and support from the Intergenerational Center at Temple University and other local organizations to collectively decide on community goals, put forth an action plan, and evaluate using their own metrics of success.

Each community plan was different, with respect to the needs of their individual communities. The Intergenerational Center at Temple University did encourage four primary strategies, however, namely: “Developing alliances across diverse organizations and systems; engaging community residents of all ages in leadership roles; creating places, practices, and policies that promote interaction across ages; and addressing issues from a life span perspective” (Henkin et al., 2012). These recommendations were all aimed at achieving the *Communities for*

*All Ages* two primary goals of increasing “well-being” and “strengthening community capacity” (Henkin et al., 2012). The strategies used in this *Communities for All Ages* initiative are reminiscent of greater trends in intergenerational practice, specifically as it focuses on leadership development, creative place making and generationally-aware problem solving. The umbrella term of “well-being” relates primarily to health and safety, and provides a fundamental consideration of collective community health. On the other hand, the concept of community capacity creates an inherent link between intergenerational frameworks and community development.

Some communities, like Kalamazoo, MI, and New Rochelle, NY, created partnerships between senior centers and schools. In Yonkers, NY, one initiative that focused on both community leadership and physical wellbeing was the formation of “walking clubs” that were organized by “kinship caregivers” (referenced on page 13 of this thesis). Others came together around policy issues and access to particular resources within their communities. In New Jerusalem, Mississippi, an intergenerational team met with policymakers to “request that surplus weather radios be made available for low income older adults” (Henkin et al., 2012, p. 13). The three examples identified above were just three of numerous initiatives that community members created based on community needs.

The importance of older adult leadership and community agency was found throughout this study. Intergenerational practice as described by *Communities for All Ages* is related to understanding older adults as resources and community assets. Furthermore, one poignant finding from the *Communities for All Ages* initiative relates to the particular generations involved in intergenerational work. Through their research, they posited:

Intergenerational community building is most successful when it engages individuals from ALL stages of life (not just young and old) and intentionally focuses on fostering meaningful relationships from the outset. (Henkin et al., 2012, p. 22)

Much of intergenerational work emphasizes connections between the very old and the very young, thereby suggesting that only the most vulnerable populations would benefit from these practices. On the other hand, this research instead suggests that support and cooperation at all levels is best, especially for community-wide success. Generations in the middle need to be involved as well, as they would increase the collective knowledge and capacity of the group. Additionally, while young adults and middle-aged community members may not be struggling with the same issues as older adults (companionship, health challenges, etc.), or children (mentorship, educational resources) they could benefit from resources related to access to childcare, employment, or other age-specific issues.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology**

Within this thesis research, the researcher hopes to detail the overlap between intergenerational theory in terms of community and social field theories, and then to provide examples of intergenerational programming that relate to these theoretical frameworks. To provide a context for the work, the researcher used archival research, and then gathered original qualitative data through key informant interviews focused on a specific case population. Archival research provided information on existing institutions engaging in intergenerationally-based community development work, while key informant interviews were employed to understand intergenerational programming efforts in the State College area. These key informant interviews provided insight into the motivations of exhibitors who participated in the Intergenerational Friends Fair (IFF) in June 2019, and further community development spurred by the event, which could all be considered one case study.

### **Archival Research**

Archival research was one of the methods chosen by the researcher. Archival research involves previously completed research that can be found in archives, a Special Collections library, or repository (Georgia State University Library). Archival research was selected because of time constraints in completing the research and the availability of existing information on intergenerational programming. Ample research has already been conducted since the latter half of the twentieth century on the significance of intergenerational programming, in addition to guides and recommendations for putting intergenerational theory into practice within the context

of different institutions, events, and communities. This research includes mostly primary sources, but also some secondary sources analyzing trends within intergenerational practice, and the development of frameworks for thinking about intergenerationally-conscious development. Two examples archival research from primary sources were the Intergenerational Community Action Group and the Communities for All Ages initiative described in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

### **The Intergenerational Friends Fair**

The Intergenerational Friends Fair was a daylong event held at the State College Friends School in State College, Pennsylvania on Saturday, June 1st, 2019. The event was a collaborative effort between numerous community members with some type of interest in intergenerational work. Many of the exhibitors present were part of an 8 week leadership program called the Intergenerational Leadership Institute, or ILI. From this program, some “graduates” came to identify community needs that they felt could be addressed through new programs or the formation of groups and nonprofits. According to the Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences and the Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education:

The Intergenerational Leadership Institute certificate training program for older adults was first piloted in 2015 with 10 participants from State College, PA and surrounding communities taking part in an 8-module short course on intergenerational programs and practices. Some participants chose to continue through the certification process which includes taking part in a series of monthly “applications seminar” sessions as well as additional training and networking

opportunities provided by Penn State and partnering organizations. (Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences)

Those who had been previously part of the ILI and who were involved in the Intergenerational Friends Fair created projects based on their own skills, interests and experiences, many of which grew before, during and after the fair into vibrant programs and nonprofits. Exhibitors from a variety of other interest groups within the broader community were present, ranging from a nation-wide youth mentoring program, to Grandfamilies (a support group for grandparents who serve as primary caregivers) to an improvisation group. Over the course of the day, exhibitors facilitated activities with various levels of education and engagement for visitors of all ages, with a total of 120+ people present, taking into account exhibitors and other citizen participants. As the first event of this kind in the area, questions arose regarding any lasting impact of the event.

### **Case Study**

The Intergenerational Friends Fair (IFF) could also be considered a “case”, because the researcher focused on the event and the exhibitors’ related activities over a period of time. IFF-related activities that occurred from June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 (the day of the fair) and the fall of 2019 (when interviews were conducted) were all included in the case study. By choosing to generate a deep understanding of the activities of one particular group within a community, the researcher limited their considerations of other community events and programs, and focused exclusively on the data and conclusions that could be drawn from the specific case.

Bhattacharjee (2012) notes the strengths of such research, suggesting:

Case study research can help derive richer, more contextualized, and more authentic interpretation of the phenomenon of interest than most other research methods by virtue of its ability to capture a rich array of contextual data. (p. 93)

It was determined that key informant interviews would be the best way to glean information about the individual exhibitors' expectations for the event and any lasting impact for them or their organizations following the IFF.

### **Key Informant Interviews**

Key informant interviews were employed in this research study, as in-depth answers sought by the research, using a sample size manageable enough to facilitate one-on-one interactions. Key informant interviews are a useful research method when the input of a number of individuals with critical knowledge can help to create a picture of an event or an experience, especially when qualitative data will provide a fuller picture than exclusively quantitative data. In this case, data around program attendance at the IIF, or the number of spin-off events would not have provided sufficient information about community engagement or partnerships that were created.

Exhibitors from the IFF were considered to be key informants because of their knowledge of the process of creating the event, and their firsthand experience of the IFF. These exhibitors volunteered their time and effort to attend planning meetings throughout the spring of 2019 and to facilitate engaging activities and informational sessions on the day of the IFF program, from 10 AM until 4 PM. While all exhibitors had a vested interest in participating, they had a variety of reasons for participating in the inaugural IFF, and also differing perspectives on

intergenerational practice more broadly. The researcher was interested in getting a comprehensive understanding these perspectives and objectives.

Interviewees were contacted via email by the researcher from the list of exhibitors present at the IFF. Dr. Matthew Kaplan also supported the researcher in identifying a variety of exhibitors who could collectively provide a representative sample of the stakeholders involved. From there, the researcher sought to create a sample of approximately 6 exhibitors with varying interests or organizations represented. Due to a high response rate from the emails, however, the researcher was able to complete even more interviews than anticipated. In total, the researcher completed eight interviews with nine key informants, as one of the interviews was completed collaboratively by two individuals representing the same stakeholder cohort.

Interviewees provided informed consent at the time of agreeing to an interview, and were able to refrain from answering any questions during their interviews. Additionally, the researcher received written and verbal consent before using a recording device at the time of the interviews. Following the interview and before the publication of this thesis, interviewees were able to make requests at any time to have their interview responses, or any identifying factors, removed from the record at any time.

These interviews took place in State College, PA during a month and a half long period in the fall of 2019. Interviewees decided upon meeting locations within the general area, with most settling upon coffee shops, but with one selecting a location on Penn State's campus and one choosing a "café" inside a local store. Interviews varied in length from 22 minutes to one hour, depending on the depth of question response and the number of interviewees present. The researcher used a digital recording device during each of the eight interviews, downloaded them to her computer, and then had them transcribed using a transcription provider service. Original



recordings and their respective transcriptions were saved in a folder on the researcher's personal computer.

### **Limitations**

While the researcher recognized a number of strengths to their chosen methods, archival research, key informant interviews, and case-specific research have their limitations. Selecting appropriate research methods, especially within the social sciences, always requires numerous judgment calls on the part of the researcher, specifically as they relate to time and resource constraints.

Archival research can provide context for the work that has previously been conducted by researchers and practitioners, and can help to outline the steps that other researchers have taken to engage within a similar community context. On the other hand, while each community is different, connecting programs and practices that were successful in a certain community or on a specific scale has its risks. Some supporting data may not have as much resonance for research that is being completed with different objectives or stakeholders in mind. In the case of this research, archival data was used to demonstrate the breadth of intergenerational programs and practices occurring in other communities. Some of the archival research was not as closely related to community development initiatives, however, as it was to intergenerational workplaces or health outcomes for older adults.

Additionally, while key informant interviews provide depth and nuance in respondents' answers, this method typically requires researchers to make crucial decisions related to scope and breadth of the research. For this research, specifically, and based on time constraints and the

ability to meet with different stakeholders, the number of interviewees had to be limited to a particular sample size of just 9 interviewees. The researcher chose not to meet with every exhibitor from the Intergenerational Friends Fair, selecting instead who they felt was a representative sample of participants. In limiting the pool in this way, some unique experiences and ideas related to integrational frameworks and community building in State College area were likely missed.

Similarly, by focusing on a program that took place in one community, results cannot necessarily be extrapolated to all communities. The research conducted on the Intergenerational Friends Fair was related to the needs, interests, and culture of the State College community. As Bhattacharjee (2012) notes, “because the inferences [from case-specific studies] are heavily contextualized, it may be difficult to generalize inferences from case research to other contexts or other organizations” (p. 93). While a similar in program that takes place in another location may breed comparable results, it would be dangerous to assume that the findings from this research would be reflective of communities other than that with which the researcher personally engaged.

## Chapter 5

### Interview Analysis and Themes

Through the semi-structured interviews, the researcher sought to gain a greater understanding of how the exhibitors viewed themselves as relating to greater intergenerational frameworks, the ways by which groups engaged individuals in intergenerational activities, and how these programs may have fostered a continued sense of community. After all of the interviews were transcribed by a private, online service, the researcher began a process of coding. The researcher read through all of the transcriptions once, making general notes and taking into account any ideas related to community development, and reasons for the stakeholders' participation. Following this initial read, the researcher went through each transcription again, reviewing notes previously taken and making additional color-coded highlights for ideas that were common throughout. Then, the researcher created a list of potential themes, and looked for evidence of each selected theme in every transcription, while also identifying outliers or contradicting ideas voiced by interviewees. This list of themes was then condensed into a smaller number of just three categories, which were created by identifying similarities and overlaps in the data, and considering frameworks this data could be cohesively understood within.

After coding the eight interviews for themes related to the broader ideas of intergenerational frameworks, engagement in intergenerational activities, and community building, the researcher decided upon three broader categories of themes. These three categories were the *goals of intergenerational work* described by the stakeholders, *evidence of*

*intergenerational community building*, and *strategies for small-scale intergenerational community development*. From these three broader categories six subthemes emerged. The matrix of the three major categories to their respective subthemes is shown below in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Categorized themes and subthemes from key informant interviews

Categories	Goals of Intergenerational Work	Evidence of Intergenerational Community Building	Strategies for Small-Scale Community Development
Sub-themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing Generational Stratification in Society</li> <li>• Engaging over Shared Activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural Processes of Connecting</li> <li>• Acknowledgement of Intergenerational Underpinnings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Human and Financial Resources</li> <li>• Collaborative Activities</li> </ul>

The above chart serves as a roadmap for the analysis found in this section. The three categories that begin each section are followed by anecdotes and quotes from the key informant interviews that explicate the six subthemes. Anonymity of interviewees has been preserved, along with their respective organizations and affiliations.

### **Goals of Intergenerational Work**

The goals of intergenerational work were perceived differently depending on group affiliation and personal experiences. Two major themes that interviewees reflected upon within their goals were *addressing generational stratification in society* and *engaging over shared experiences*. Interestingly, these two goals may be seen as working in cooperation with each other, as shared experiences could be one path towards altering the narrative of age-based stereotypes in a generationally stratified society.

## Addressing Generational Stratification in Society

One interviewee, who works with both older adults and young children talked about the age-based stereotypes he looks to address in his work. He noted, *“That’s why I really value intergenerational work in general because there’s such a stereotype. I hate it whenever people make comments about millennials or boomers or you know, just there’s such a negative perception of aging too.”* The growing use of rhetoric that groups together generations with terms like “millennials” and “boomers” was interpreted as creating age stratification in society. By defining an entire group by certain characteristics, which are often unfavorable, individuality and connection is lost between generations.

As a potential way of addressing such issues, the interviewee found that increasing one-on-one engagement between multiple age groups facilitated breaking down the mental and social division. This interviewee discussed the trends of separation that start from an early age:

*We segment ourselves so much throughout life, kids the same age go to school together. Then in my world, people who are like semiretired all kind of do volunteer work together. I mean it’s not that I don’t interact with young people or old people because I’m kind of semi in the middle but it’s just really a cool phenomenon to have intergenerational programs.*

He discussed the divisions inherent to our society, as educational settings tend to emphasize learning that occurs between and among children of the same age. Moving through the world, some of these divisions might become a little more flexible around the working-age population, but then become stratified again for many as they reach retirement. He, as a younger adult, found himself to be in a novel place at the intersection of a few generations. The speaker noted that many volunteers he encounters are older

adults, and that he interacts with older people more than many working-age adults, in addition to young children.

On the other hand, one interviewee described the necessity of understanding trends that relate to different age groups in order to make programming more inclusive. Through his work with different age groups, he suggested that generalizations can enhance collaboration and understanding:

*And profiling is another word you hear, but a lot of it is true and makes sense. I know if I'm going to work with kids who are fourth grade through seventh grade I may need to make accommodations. I may need to be able to lift them up off the ground, give them something to stand on when they use tools ... And if you start working with seniors they'll have some vision problems... and other things. There are some realities that travel with generations.*

This stakeholder instructs children and adults on woodworking skills, and found that he needed to make adjustments, or “accommodations” for activities to run smoothly. With different generations can come truly different ability and engagement levels, and therefore, practitioners may need to think critically about how to include all parties in their activities. To the stakeholder, a socially loaded term like “profiling” can relate in a smaller sense to his age diverse work by creating *expectations* for his participants and their capabilities as related to physical tasks.

## Engaging Over Shared Activities

One interviewee provided an account of a strategic approach to multi-generational engagement. As someone who runs educational programming, her goal is to bring families together through learning. When creating physical learning activities for her program, she acts to ensure that multiple generations can and should be involved. She suggests that other programs that provide hands-on education for a broad range of ages should, “...*find a way to make sure that you needed to have four hands, that the young person couldn't do it by themselves and that the grownup couldn't do it for the child.*” This interviewee noted that it can take some work on the part of the organizer to make multiple age groups fully engaged and that conscious, intergenerational facilitation is an effective tool for making those interactions occur. A little prompting might be necessary, by making an activity too challenging for it to be completely independently, requiring multiple age groups to participate. She also mentioned that these changed were not supported by complex pedagogy or theory, but just by tips and tricks learned through practice and recommendations that could easily be translated to different types of intergenerational activities.

One interviewee, who recruits older adult volunteers to work with young people highlighted just how enjoyable the work of bringing generations together can be. He became visibly excited and enthused when talking about the relationship he supported between a retired man and young boy. He gushed: “*It's so fun because here's this man who's in his sixties just kind of becoming kid again. And there's just a real special connection that he has with his little, and his little has with him.*” Their relationship brings things to both of them, be it reminiscing and joy, or just being heard. Just as the older man participates in activities and ideas in a new way, he authentically meets the child where he is at this point in his growth and development.

The interviewee suggested that much of the shared learning between the pair comes in the form of storytelling, as they find commonality in shared, or similar, experiences. While they have encountered different trends in their lifetimes in terms of technology, politics and history, both can understand the ways that certain events have made them feel, especially as it relates to stress, relationships, and everyday obstacles. He gave one anecdote of an older volunteer relating to his young friend on typical elementary school drama:

*But Mark was nine at one point and Mark knows what it's like to be nine and to have girls in the class that want him to be his boyfriend or don't. He was just sharing a story about that.*

The interviewee emphasized the commonalities of the man and the young boy, and their ability to connect through talking about the things they are encountering in their lives, or the incidents that were once extremely important to them. Sharing their stories did not take extensive facilitation, but it was a simple point of relation for the two who are at very different stages of their lives. Both have had stressful moments, and the older man, Mark, can identify how large such moments can loom in the psyche of a young child. By showing that he can empathize, and even by giving advice based on his own experiences, he can form an authentic connection with the boy. The boy, on the other hand, can act as a friend and confidant, by listening to these stories, and also seeing how similar he may be to someone generations older than him.



## **Intergenerational Community Building**

Intergenerational community building was another larger idea that was brought forward within the interviews. Most interviewees did not see the IFF as a “one off” event, and hoped to at least make it an annual gathering, although many looked forward to creating smaller partnership programs before a year had passed. Building a community of intergenerationally-focused people was something that came quite spontaneously to many, who just perceived their new friendships and networks as *natural processes of connecting*. Then, once they found ways of relating and identifying shared interests quite organically, they were able to identify how their activities related to a larger framework or intergenerational movement, in what the researcher has termed *acknowledgement of intergenerational underpinnings*.

### **Natural Processes of Connecting**

A large theme found in the interviews was a sort of naturally evolving process of connecting individuals and organizations, and a vested interest that exhibitors had in building up community networks. Two interviewees noted the ways by which the base of people they collaborated with continued to grow as relationships were made: “*So there’s that community building again... one thing snowballed into another.*” They described meeting one person at the IFF and striking up casual conversation. From there, they discussed the types of work their individual programs do, finding common themes, values and activities. Finally, they considered ways the groups could collaborate and created additions to existing activities or even wholly new programs that were the shared efforts of multiple programs. This “community building” came

just by bringing people with overlapping goals and interests together, particularly around intergenerational topics and activities.

The process of “snowballing”, although seemingly casual and inherent to networking, relates to social science methodology like snowball methods of recruitment. Using a snowball method, participants in a study recommend others that the researcher could reach out to, quickly building up the pool of research participants, and increasing the sample size for the researcher (Bhattacharjee). A similar process of connecting networks was interpreted by these two interviewees.

Additionally, one interviewee noted the inherent goal of forming relationships and connections to measure the IFF’s success. They described their own shifting understanding of programmatic goals: *“So I used to be like, wow, there’s not 500 people coming. Dang, that’s terrible. Now I’m like, hey, you know what? We had a hundred quality relationships. That is fine, fine, fine.”* While some perceived the event as not garnering enough attendance or attention for their respective organizations, others mentioned different potential metrics of success. Any way increasing interest and efforts towards connecting people and strengthening networks at any level was an achievement for some exhibitors. In particular, the interviewee found that an increase in “quality relationships” was a simple, but slightly more nuanced, metric of success as compared to anticipated program attendance.

As the first event of this kind in the area, it was felt by some that bringing people together, no matter the number, was a significant accomplishment. On the other hand, a few who saw such great potential in the community building that could be done through this forum were disappointed by turnout, and wished that the program had been scheduled when there were less activities occurring simultaneously throughout the community. Some noted that another large

youth program and a race were taking place that day. Others also claimed that the community has so many events, that it is challenging to take all conflicts into account. This discrepancy alone highlighted some of the differing goals of stakeholders, such as those who were trying to advertise for a particular upcoming event, versus those who were looking to create new relationships and bonds across organizations.

### **Acknowledgement of Intergenerational Underpinnings**

Interviewees suggested that their understanding of their own respective sectors, organizations, and social groups was enhanced by a new understanding of intergenerational theory and practice. By participating in the IFF and collaborating with other groups, they came to see how their groups fit into a larger framework of intergenerational programs and practical applications.

Two interviewees described the process of recognizing activities as intergenerational. They noted: *“And there’s the intergenerational connection, too, because they did it inadvertently, see just what we were talking about before. See it’s not something you go out and say ‘I want to do this intergenerational thing.’”* Intergenerational themes and frameworks were considered to be implicit or inherent components of the work being done by their program. The connections were made often “inadvertently”, and it took their participation in the Intergenerational Leadership Institute (ILI) to give the name of “intergenerational” to the work they were interested in doing. Once they were able to label and contextualized their work, it allowed them to see their activities as part of a greater network and enhanced their vision, but

they did not set out to participate in the ILI knowing exactly the scope of intergenerational thinking.

One interviewee noted a simple interpretation of intergenerational work:

*As far as I'm concerned personally, I think any interaction that I'm having with the parent generation and the child generation is intergenerational and it's worthwhile for me to do that. I think and I benefit a great deal from the interactions I have with the parent generation and the children generation.*

As someone older than both the parents and children he engages with through his organization, he thought that all of the work he does could qualify as “intergenerational” because, quite astutely, it occurs between generations.

A final interviewee acknowledged an interest in his organization developing nationally with more intention placed on intergenerational thinking. He remarked:

*My visionary idea, dream or hope, would be that it'd be really great to create some kind of context and format of programming that could eventually support intergenerational mentoring in [his youth mentoring programming] cross the country. Because I think there's a real value to that, that it's different. There's a different kind of relationship that can be formed when you get those older adults in as the mentors.*

He found there to be reason to promote added curricula for his organization that could help contextualize the organization within a larger intergenerational framework.

Although the efforts of his program are inherently intergenerational, especially as he is working on expanding their recruitment of older volunteers, his ideas suggest that clearly

articulating a greater purpose and connection to other similar programs would be a strategic way of expanding upon his organization's mission.

### **Strategies for Small-Scale Community Development**

Interviewees described how they were able to put their goals and intergenerational interests into action, and also what obstacles and challenges they encountered in the process. The exhibitors who were interviewed noted the ways they applied their own skills in new contexts and identified the strengths they had as a group in order to create impactful programming. On the other hand, they also highlighted the places they lacked, and how far their *use of human and financial resources* could take their programs without additional supports. In order to enhance their own efforts, and to pool together resources with other exhibitors, a few interviewees described the *collaborative events* they created with other exhibitors at a time following the IFF. These efforts were also key to the researcher's understanding of what small-scale community building could look like within this particular intergenerational context.

### **Use of Human and Financial Resources**

Interviewees remarked upon the ways by which the passion or skill set of individuals impacted the success and future growth of smaller clubs and groups. In addition to human capital, they also described the financial resources they had, which varied greatly between national organizations and more passion-based programs that were typically staffed by retired volunteers. One retired woman detailed her transition from her formal work as a teacher into nonprofit work at a small store that sells fair trade products. She interpreted the ways she utilized

her pre-existing skillset in new and creative ways: *“I’m not a natural seller, but I am a seller of information and education, so it’s a natural fit for me to sort of tell the stories about the artisans and fair trade and why it’s important.”* Although her formal education was not in nonprofit management, she recognized how her abilities could be translated to volunteer spaces. She felt comfortable “educating” others about fair trade activities and connecting with customers over the sharing of information.

Many of the stakeholders demonstrated forms of participation in intergenerational activities that were a pairing of interest and ability, as they found ways to use past training where they felt they could make an impact. One interviewee described how they were told to *“find a need”* in starting new programs and events during their time in the ILI course. By identifying challenges, they experienced within their lives or the greater community, they created objectives for their programs and dedicated their time to planning and goal-setting within their own resource constraints.

While retired respondents demonstrated a vested interest in work being done with their programs and organizations, some had different expectations for resource and time commitments. A few noted that they were more interested in big picture planning and creative brainstorming, rather than smaller details they would have been more concerned with during their time in the workforce. With respect to building a program, one respondent spoke for herself and her two retired counterparts, acknowledging *“wanting to be part of it but I did [grant writing] 30 years ago, I don’t want to do that anymore... We’re not into that level. But at the same time, we want to see these things work.”* Without being financially compensated for their work, and in many cases, searching for funding sources, their interests were based primarily on things they naturally cared about and goals they were excited to accomplish. They remarked

upon the limits of their own resources, and their wish to be connected with other institutions and individuals who could provide monetary support or the time and energy that someone could dedicate to their creative projects if this was a fulltime job.

The same respondents highlighted their focus: *“We want to come up with the creative ideas and pass them on.”* These two women saw their new volunteer work and engagement as an artistic outlet and a space for innovative thinking. They could also identify the ways they could see it becoming burdensome if it took up a significant amount of their time. In identifying the ways by which a program could help fulfill a need in their community, they also recognized their own interests and needs as community members and retired volunteers. After assessing their resource constraints and foci, they identified the benefits of a partnership. They hoped to engage with someone younger, or someone with different skillsets, who could help them take their projects from idea phase to fruition.

In considering those with different or enhanced skillsets, respondents also noted the skills that organizers had that provided them with the ability to cement the success of event or programs. Speaking about the coordinator of the Intergenerational Friend’s Fair and his skills in relationship-building and modeling behaviors, one respondent noted: *“It’s because of him. If you just dissect his temperament and his personality and his values, it’s a great model for the kind of leader I think we need in this field of intergenerational work.”* This interviewee described the skills of the Intergenerational Friends Fair’s coordinator as a key factor to the event’s success, and how the coordinator’s way of understanding each stakeholder’s relation to the larger intergenerational objectives was crucial.

## Collaborative Activities

Using the skills and resources emphasizes on individuals and organizations became even more significant within collaborative activities and events that brought together multiple programs. Collaborative activities used in tandem with effectively using human and financial capital, allowed groups to share resources and overcome some of the obstacles of event and program planning that are significant to a smaller team. A few stakeholders provided examples of activities and programs they co-created with others whom they met through the planning of the IFF.

An educational woodworking nonprofit partnered with a chapter of a national program that connects youth with adult mentors. The leader of the mentorship program reflected on the joining of the groups:

*We did partner with him and his "doing good with wood" group and we did an event over the summer where we had youth service Bureau kids and [mentorship program] matches come and make wooden kazoos at Spring Creek park.*

The program he heads collaborated with the leader of the woodworking nonprofit, and together they had a successful event. During this event, the few members of the woodworking nonprofit used their skills to provide a new educational opportunity to children and mentors, thereby enhancing and increasing the activities available to these pairs. The mentorship program provided an engaged and inherently intergenerational audience, and they worked to bring a program together in a public space. The leader of the woodworking group also recalled making wooden corn hole boards that the group could use, providing them with a new game and giving the woodworking group an opportunity to advertise their program.



Another collaborative event demonstrated the ability of programs to go beyond the scope of their own goals. Such events can serve as an opportunity to connect to even more individuals who are interested in related work, but not currently within existing relationships, or networks. During a cooperative event by which a nonprofit that sells fair trade products partnered with the woodworking organization, the leader of the fair trade store met an individual who works with a senior living community. They brainstormed their ideas together, and decided to make an event by which residents of the senior living community would engage with university international students around shared cooking and a meal. Through this idea, they reached out to another member of the community, who is involved in the “global engagement community” in residence at Penn State, thereby expanding the scope of their idea and increasing their network to include other key stakeholders.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusions**

The qualitative data gained from the interviews suggests that intergenerationally-minded community building can find success at the grassroots level. By engaging a variety of stakeholders with organizational and personal interests in programs that work across generations, intentional community development can be achieved. This may take time, and comes with balancing the needs of individuals and organizations with any larger, community-wide goals. Depending on resources and genuine interest, some stakeholders will be satisfied with smaller-scale activities, while others hope to create and sustain larger networks across their communities.

Interviewees suggested that this process of community-building can and should be quite natural, allowing for groups to come to understand their shared goals, and to interpret the ways they exist within intergenerational frameworks together and independently. Additionally, the skills and resources of individuals, such as time, passion, funding, and education factor into the ability to sustain a community that takes intergenerational considerations into account. With this in mind, programs identified wanting the flexibility to identify their own needs and interests, but wanted supportive structures that could show them how to find and utilize funding sources. Similarly, the unique skills of individuals were seen as keys to the success of these programs, and stakeholders mentioned hoping to find others who could fill in the gaps in the human capital of their own programs.

Collaborative activities between programs were shown as spaces for greater impact and community building. These moments demonstrated effort towards sustaining relationships

beyond the IFF, and the willingness of programs to reach out and to create partnerships with programs with missions that could align. Partnerships and collaboration also helped to address some of the constraints felt by smaller groups and organizations by sharing human capital.

These findings also supported other research which has suggested that intergenerational programming can offer compelling opportunities for retirees to find purposeful engagement in the community. Individuals want to think critically about the needs of their community and build creative solutions. They cannot take on these tasks alone, however, and the findings also suggested that further consideration could be given to funding sources and the building up of resources and networks that could support and sustain such engagement of retirees and general volunteers. Further research could be conducted to gain a better understanding of the nature of collaborative programs across larger agencies and organizations, and how such efforts could provide access to more resources, as shown at the community level.

In support of the theoretical framework used, the IFF program showed that connecting across lines of similarity is a simple way of building up community networks by creating a larger community field. Exhibitors at the IFF were part of different social fields, be they fields of interest or fields based on their respective professions. While their participation in the initial IFF showed a vested interest in intergenerational work in some regard, forthcoming events reflected their ability to work across groups in furthering their respective goals.

Collaborative events exemplified a willingness on the part of community members to think creatively in strengthening the weak bonds that had been formed across social fields through the IFF. The collaborative events that followed showed active engagement in working to create activities and opportunities that “pursue[e] the broader interests of the general community” (Flint, et al.). Adults at the mentorship program were able to expose their mentees

to woodshop, while hobbyist woodworkers could share their expertise. Additionally, working across social fields allowed community members to be exposed to new, non-redundant information that existed outside of pre-existing groups. The experiences and insights of different generations were brought into conversation with each other, increasing the ability learn and innovate together. Once exhibitors at the IFF were able to expand their own networks through communicating with others, they co-created opportunities that allowed them to connect their networks while sharing resources like time, professional training, and experience.

Where does this leave us now? After considering intergenerational programs within an academic and research-based framework, it seems crucial to step back and reflect on the greater purpose and potential impact of intergenerational work with regard to community development. One statement from an interviewee seemed particularly poignant and resonated with the researcher:

*I think if we can create relationships that span generations then there will be more understanding of old people by young people who may understand there are reasons to maintain funding for certain programs, government programs, and old people might think differently about younger people, and understand that the national debt is a real problem, and climate change is, and just because it isn't going to affect me as much as it's going to affect you... I should care about that because I care about you.*

Building intergenerational communities, or networks of strong and weak ties, is just about building relationships. On a large scale, it can be quite transformative, helping to tackle huge issues like climate change, student debt, and healthcare. By starting small, however, and forming authentic relationships, hopefully we can understand the real

experiences of others outside of our demographic groups. Ultimately, then we can build thriving communities because we can recognize the needs of all members of the community and collectively works towards realizing our goals.

## Appendix A

### Key Informant Interview Protocol

1. What prompted your participation in the Intergenerational Friends Fair (IFF)?
2. What was your expectation for the event itself, or for any impact outside of the event?
3. How did the IFF, or any activity following the event, compare to those expectations?
4. How does the term “intergenerational” connect to you or the organization you represent?
5. What, if any, do you see as the significance of intergenerational practice within your work?

## Appendix B

### Study Participant Recruitment Email

Subject:

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Kate Sweeney, and I am reaching out to you based on your participation in the Intergenerational Friends Fair (IFF) in June. I am currently an undergraduate student at Penn State University working on my thesis for the Schreyer Honors College and I am studying Community, Environment, & Development and English.

As my thesis is related to community development and intergenerational practice, I am wondering if you would be willing to speak with me regarding your experiences. This one time interview would take place within the fall in the State College area. If you are interested, we can set up a time and a place that is mutually agreeable. I would love to speak with you all, but it would also be fine if just one or two of you would like to express your group's experiences and ideas. Please let me know if you have any questions, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Kate Sweeney

## Appendix C

## Advertisement for Intergenerational Friends Fair



# Intergenerational Friends Fair

at State College Friends School  
1900 University Drive

- . Make a wooden Kazoo
- . Weave a bracelet
- . Play a drum in the drum circle
- . Learn a new game
- . Play "Stump your Relative"

Exhibits, interactive workshops  
for every age!

**This is a FREE event, open to all.**

Activities for all ages!  
Bring the whole family.  
Bring a friend or two.

**Saturday**  
**June 1st**  
**10 - 4**

- Boxed lunches available
- Taco Truck on site



Sponsored by Penn State Intergenerational Leadership Institute and State College Friends School, with participation by numerous community organizations.





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## ACADEMIC VITA

# Kate Sweeney

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### EDUCATION

#### **The Pennsylvania State University**

*Schreyer Honors College, Paterno Fellows Program*

*College of Agricultural Sciences, College of the Liberal Arts*

Bachelor of Science in Community, Environment, & Development

Bachelor of Arts in English

**University Park, PA**

*May 2020*

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### SERVICE & LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

#### **Penn State Alternative Breaks**

*Executive Director*

**University Park, PA**

*April 2019-March 2020*

- Managed the planning and operation of 20 service-learning trips to create impactful experiences for hundreds of university student volunteers.
- Evaluated and implemented sited leader training curriculum for weekly site leader meetings.
- Developed new protocol to improve participant interview practices and assess biases in process.
- Collaborated with public relations director to advertise to a population that represents the diversity of our campus.
- Co-created events with local nonprofits to foster continued engagement with the local community.

*Site Development Director*

*April 2018-March 2019*

- Coordinated with 5 nonprofit organizations to plan logistics of Alternative Break trips.
- Led meeting of 16 student site leaders about the formulation of achievable trip outcomes, providing them the tools to develop their individual trips.

*Site Leader*

*April 2017-March 2018*

- Planned and coordinated service-learning trips for groups of 9 students to Alabama, Cleveland, and Baltimore on the topics of race relations, urban renewal, and urban education, respectively.
- Facilitated discussions on complex social justice topics such as race relations and gentrification.

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### COMMUNITY RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

#### **College of Agricultural Sciences, Penn State University**

*Researcher for Community, Environment, & Development (CED) Major*

**State College, PA**

*June 2019-January 2020*

- Develop and implement focus group protocol to evaluate department's strategies for marketing the CED major to honors students.
- Utilize collected data to create recommendations for advertising to prospective students.

*Researcher in Agricultural Economics & Sociology*

*July 2018-December 2018*

- Coded survey responses of land and business owners impacted by unconventional energy development.
- Organized collected data into written analysis of the success of natural gas task forces from the perspective of local residents.