

Inquiry into Intergenerational Connection

Evidence Submission

Summary

In Summer 2018, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration launched an inquiry into intergenerational connection, the ways in which different generations and ages interact. This paper presents our written response to the inquiry.

In it, we highlight the ways that relationships between generations have changed over the years and some suggestions for why this is, for example:

- The closure of community spaces
- The pervasiveness of technology and social media
- The combined impact of the Brexit vote, student loans, and the discrepancy between average house prices and wages

We also offer our view of some of the barriers to different generations sharing meaningful connection in today's society, including:

- Economic pressures on households
- Greater emphasis on personal identity than on relationships

We provide examples of some of our own projects which have been successful in strengthening ties between the generations, for example our 'Places of Welcome' initiative, and explore the role that intergenerational connection can play in enhancing economic justice between the generations.

Finally we suggest some of the ways that Government (at a national and local level), can support and promote intergenerational connection, for example by adopting a 'relational-by-design' approach to policy.

Introduction

At Church Urban Fund, much of our work is oriented towards building flourishing relationships and flourishing communities, across divides of any kind: generational, cultural, religious or other. We welcome the APPG for Social Integration's Inquiry into Intergenerational Connection, and in this paper seek to share some of the learning we have derived from our engagement in communities across England.

About Church Urban Fund

Our vision is to see people and communities across England flourish and enjoy life in all its fullness.

We believe that communities flourish when people have:

- **Agency** – the ability to make and follow through on choices about the direction of their own lives, and that of the communities and society in which they live
- **Relationships of equality** – within households, communities and society more widely, in which they feel safe to belong, interdependence is acknowledged, and all have opportunities to give and receive
- **Just access to resources** – enough to provide for their wellbeing in a sustainable and dignified way and to participate fully socially, politically and economically

We work relationally, inclusively and effectively to bring about change through three core programmes:

- **Together Network:** A national network that resources local churches and other groups to respond to social and community issues collaboratively.
- **Near Neighbours:** Building social integration by bringing together people of different faiths and ethnic groups, developing leadership skills, and providing opportunities for people to work together to improve their communities.
- **Just Finance Foundation:** Helping shape a fairer finance system, including through financial capability training, work with credit unions, promoting savings, and raising awareness.

Our engagement in local communities across England through this practical, relational work ensures that all we do is rooted in and informed by real life experience.

We have responded to those questions within the consultation on which we are able to provide most evidence.



Changes in the way different age groups interact

Whilst it is difficult to gain accurate quantitative evidence about changes in the level of informal interaction between people of different age groups, we suggest that the following trends are likely to have reduced, or at least changed the nature of such interaction over recent years:

- The **closure of many community buildings** due to lack of funding means there are fewer spaces in local communities in which people of different ages can mix naturally.
- The trend towards **interest-based rather than locality-based social interaction**, meaning that such interaction is more likely to be segregated along age lines.
- The rise of '**leisure as consumption**' (e.g. lifestyle/exercise experiences provided by a business) in contrast to 'leisure as community' (e.g. local people getting together to organise clubs and activities on a voluntary basis), with the former being more popular amongst younger generations.
- The pervasiveness of **communications technology and social media** which, whilst it has opened up new opportunities for certain forms of interaction – seems at the same time to be reducing both the quantity and quality of face-to-face social interaction across and within generations, within and beyond family units.
- Finally, the combined impact of the **Brexit vote, student loans, and the discrepancy between house prices and average earnings**, has brought a political and economic dimension to intergenerational relationships which can be expected to lead to resentment and dissent over time.

However, amidst these changes there are continuities as well as new opportunities for interaction. **Sporting events, churches, and other places of worship**, were identified as the most successful settings for bringing people of different generations together, according to research conducted by the Social Integration Commission. As well as facilitating such interaction amongst their members, places of worship are often venues for activities such as parent/carer and toddler groups, lunch clubs, and community events. Family life remains a key contributor to intergenerational interaction, of course, and technological advancement can also create opportunities for dialogue and interaction across generations as older generations look to younger ones for guidance and support.



Barriers to Intergenerational Connection

For some, the distribution of employment opportunities, the impact of welfare reforms, housing costs, or the lack of social housing are making it very difficult to stay within the communities they come from. The unaffordability of many homes, which has led to a gradual increase in the proportion of renters as opposed to home-owners, has made the flourishing of settled, stable, diverse and mixed-age communities very difficult.

Economic pressures on households can also reduce the time, resources and emotional capacity available to get involved in voluntary activity within local communities, where they would be likely to interact with other generations. This is particularly the case for younger generations who face the biggest challenge in meeting housing costs and achieving a measure of financial security.

As well as these practical barriers, our culture tends to emphasise the construction of personal identity through individual achievement and consumption, defining 'success' in very material terms, rather than in terms of the cultivation of healthy relationships and communities. This means that people have to work 'against the grain' in order to prioritise spending time developing intergenerational relationships, within and beyond their families.

Projects which have successfully strengthened ties across generations

We have encountered and supported a number of successful initiatives that have developed and strengthened ties across generations.

- **Places of Welcome:** Our 'Places of Welcome' are safe spaces within communities in which people from all walks of life can build the kinds of mutually supportive relationships that we believe are foundational to personal resilience and wellbeing, and to thriving local communities. There are now over 200 Places of Welcome in towns and cities across England. Rather than focusing on a particular age group, such as the elderly, or young parents, Places of Welcome are open to everyone regardless of age, background or circumstances. They are run by volunteers, many of whom get involved after coming along as guests. Indeed, one of the core principles of Places of Welcome is participation, recognising that every person attending will bring talents experiences and skills which they might share. By generating this sense of belonging and helping people to identify and share their own gifts, regardless of age or ability, projects like this can help people feel socially 'included' and foster strong friendships across generational divides.
- **Faithfully Ageing Better & Feast of Fun:** Another successful intergenerational initiative has been developed by one of our Together Network partners, Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland. Faithfully Ageing Better (a project designed to combat loneliness amongst the elderly) was connected with another of their programmes, Feast of Fun – (a holiday programme providing activities, food and friendship for families) to create a valuable intergenerational experience. For example, older volunteers were recruited to help with the holiday club and alongside the families going on the organised trips, there was also a minibus of older people, making it an intergenerational day out. This has been an exciting development, helping build meaningful and mutually supportive networks of relationships between generations. In particular we found that involving older isolated and lonely people as volunteers at children's clubs and family events in this way made people feel less lonely. They reported feeling useful, energised and fully engaged in activities when volunteering and offering something to the community.



Case Study:

Nick had given up work to care for his wife, and after she died he became isolated: 'In January I barely left the house – if you don't go out you don't have to come back to an empty house', he said. He got involved in helping out with Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland's Feast of Fun holiday club and found that this helped distract him from his grief: 'Being with other people, especially the kids, just takes your mind off everything. I'm getting more out of it than the kids I think.' He was able to use the skills he had to help the children, and this boosted his confidence and self-esteem, to the point of being able to lead a session himself. Being involved with Feast of Fun has led to Nick volunteering with various groups and he is now looking for work as well.

The issue of digital exclusion isolating older people and exacerbating the rift between generations is also an opportunity for intergenerational connection. For example, Rights and Equalities, a Near Neighbours project in Newham, East London, aims to build bridges between local young people and older generations of different faiths, through activities such as young people equipping older people with IT skills.

Another Near Neighbours project, the Intergenerational Leadership Network in London, trains young people to support elderly residents, particularly those with dementia, and is designed to raise awareness of challenges faced by the elderly and to bring the generations together.

What characterises these successful projects is a spirit of cohesive interdependence: younger and older people are coming together in a way that is mutually beneficial and enables them to learn from and encourage one another



Intergenerational Connection & Economic Justice

Our work on bridging ethnic and religious divides in local communities would suggest that dialogue – and more importantly the development of meaningful relationships – across difference has a significant impact in terms of enabling people to empathise with and understand each other. It seems likely that this would be the case too across generations, although one needs to bear in mind that money is considered by most people to be a very personal issue.

Importantly, building intergenerational understanding of differing economic priorities would only help effect the changes needed if it took place across socio-economic as well as generational divides. For example, whilst the children of relatively affluent parents may well find themselves worse off financially than their parents, they are nevertheless likely to have a wider set of options available to them to deal with this than someone in the same generation from a different socio-economic background. It is vitally important that solutions to intergenerational economic inequality are also equitable across other dimensions such as class, ethnicity, gender, and geographical location.

Government's role in promoting and encouraging Intergenerational Connection

There are two core principles which we believe could be applied to **policy making at a local and national level** in order to maximise intergenerational connection and equity, whilst at the same time contributing to other important sustainability and wellbeing outcomes:

- 1) Commit to a 'relational by design'** approach to policy making. Public services and public spaces can be designed in a way that either reduces or maximises opportunities for inter-personal interaction. We believe that the latter is essential if we are to build a more cohesive society in which people can living together well across diversity of all different kinds, including across different age groups.
- 2) Strengthen mechanisms to incentivise full consideration of the future implications of government policies** as cohorts move through the life course, beyond the length of the electoral cycle. For example, little consideration seems to have been given to the impact of the reduced spending power of future generations while they repay increasingly burdensome student debts.

¹. Social Integration Commission (2014) Kingdom United? Thirteen steps to tackle social segregation, http://socialintegrationcommission.org.uk/images/sic_kingdomunited.pdf

