



The West Australian

ED!

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Fun
for all

WHEN YOUNG AND OLD
GET TOGETHER THERE ARE
BENEFITS FOR EVERYONE

Better together

If you have watched *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds* with your family, you will have seen how intergenerational playgroups and activities are valuable for both young and old, writes **Brooke Evans-Butler**

There are many ways that you and your family can interact with, care for, and get to know elderly neighbours or members of your community.

Intergenerational playgroups

If you have younger brothers and sisters, encourage your family to look into intergenerational playgroups in your area.

David Zarb, Playgroup WA CEO, says a traditional playgroup is where children aged 0-5 come with their parents or a carer together with others, meeting once a week to make friends and play. Intergenerational playgroups add seniors to those groups, with an aim to combat loneliness and social isolation.

"We have so many people living in WA whose grandparents or extended family are either in another part of the State, interstate or overseas and they don't get to see each other very often, so we have plenty of children who have very little exposure to senior citizens," David says. "On the flipside of that we have plenty of senior citizens who may have grandchildren but they might be living in another part of the world."

David says Playgroup WA received hundreds of enquiries after the first season of *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds* went to air.

There are various playgroups with an intergenerational focus, including ones at aged care residential facilities and community playgroups that welcome grandparents. We contacted a few to find out how they work and what makes them so valuable for everyone involved.



Barbara Roper, resident at Murdoch Gardens, with a young member of the Care Community's playgroup and his mother.

MURDOCH GARDENS CARE COMMUNITY

Anja Danner, lifestyle co-ordinator, Murdoch Gardens Care Community, says their partnership with Playgroup WA has provided the opportunity for residents at Murdoch Gardens Care Community to enjoy the surprise and delight that young children can bring to their lives.

"Regularly engaging with children can be energising for our residents and can have positive effects on memory," she says. "For our residents who may not often receive visitors, having children come to visit can help to reduce feelings of loneliness or social isolation. For children without grandparents nearby, these relationships also fill an important place in their lives. We have found that the ABC series *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds* has generated a lot of interest and parents are now contacting us wanting to be part of the playgroup."

"Our playgroup at Murdoch Gardens Care Community has been led one of our residents, Barbara Roper, aged 93," Anja adds. "A former teacher, Barbara plans the playgroup sessions with a childhood educator from Playgroup WA and she also discusses the playgroup program as an active member of our home's lifestyle focus group. Barbara's motivation is to enjoy contact with the young mums and the children."

"During my teaching career I spent a lot of time with young children and so felt confident in handling this young group," Barbara says. "I get a lot of pleasure out of this group seeing the enjoyment the children display and also watching the mums engaging with each other. It is a pleasure seeing the older people interact with the young ones."

BOYANUP PLAYGROUP

Jackie Cahill, Boyanup Playgroup president, takes two of her young grandchildren to playgroup, and encourages other grandparents to get involved.

The playgroup is a mix of parents and grandparents bringing young children to sing songs, do activities, play and chat. The playgroup is also joined by the Shire of Capel Libraries' "Reading Fairy", Corenne Lynn.

Jackie says the grandparents attending playgroup are a great support for the younger generation of parents.

"We are not only there for the children; we are there for the younger generation of parents as well," she says. "Some of the parents don't have their own parents close by, so we become surrogate grandparents. It is a win-win for everyone."

Shire of Capel Reading Fairy, Corenne Lynn.
Picture: Shire of Capel

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BRINGING JOY

Perhaps you are part of an extra-curricular activity or group that could also bring some joy to seniors.

Children from Class Act Performers, a performing arts group from Canning Vale, took part in Christmas and Easter visits to Brightwater aged and disability care homes. For Christmas, they participated in Christmas carol concerts and at Easter, they presented Easter Bunny Shows – singing, dancing and delivering Easter eggs.

Skye Colcott, 10, Makai Lewis-Rees, 8, and Indie Lewis-Rees, 10, loved taking part in the Brightwater events.

"It was such an amazing feeling seeing all of the smiles on all of their faces," Skye says. "It was very special. It was also VERY special when they would sing along with us and they were soooo happy, so it made me feel happy too. Some of them even cried happy tears."

"I love being able to spread joy and kindness."

"It was also really awesome because we got to hear all of their stories and what they did when they were my age. Just seeing them so happy made my day as well as theirs. It was a very rewarding and inspiring experience."

"I love seeing the smiles on the residents' faces when we sing and interact with them," Indie says. "It makes me feel happy that we have made their day brighter. I'm very grateful that we have been given the opportunity to spread happiness and joy to the residents at Brightwater."

"I love visiting the residents at Brightwater. Seeing the excitement and happiness on the residents' faces makes my heart happy," Makai says. "I love to give them all big hugs."

Participants of the playgroup at Mary Chester House enjoying the newly-renovated garden and outdoor patio.



SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Some schools, such as Scotch College, run programs to encourage intergenerational interaction. Does your school have a similar program?

"Our students have a range of opportunities to interact with people from older generations, whether that be through our wellbeing programs, which have a heavy focus on interactions between students across our college through to significant components of our service and citizenship program," says David Kyle, a teacher at Scotch College.

"The outreach aspect of this program includes placements at aged care facilities, letter writing between our older alumni and our students, information technology support and, the most well-known instance, our musicians spending time serenading residents at aged care and other facilities around Perth."

David says one of the most loved opportunities the boys are given is when they take part in Christmas concerts or birthdays.

"At these celebrations the pipers can really bring a smile to the faces of everyone and ensure the festivities get going," he says. "Often the music takes people back to their childhood and stimulates the recollection of all sorts of memories. It is a moment when young people realise the joy and value of giving to others."

The feedback from the students involved has been very positive.

"What I found both enjoyable and profound about my time with the community service pipe band and playing for the older generations was better understanding the powerful, unifying effect music has on us all," says 17-year-old Matthew Kerfoot.

"It's as if as soon as the pipes start playing, the barriers between generations become void. We start to appreciate that we are united by the passion and joy that precipitates from the tunes we play. Certainly, I have grown through this experience and will treasure the memories formed with both my band mates and the elderly people we played for."

"The opportunity to play for older generations and other people in the community is a big thrill of being part of music at Scotch," says Ben Ramsden, 17.

"Knowing that we can provide such joy to others gives us a lot of satisfaction and provides opportunities for connections that aren't always easy to come by."

MARY CHESTER HOUSE INTERGENERATIONAL PLAYGROUP

The Mary Chester House Intergenerational Playgroup is facilitated by Alzheimer's WA. It's been bringing ladies and gentlemen with Alzheimer's together with young children, in a relaxed playgroup setting for 17 years.

Playgroup committee member, Rachel Hutchinson, says she has been attending the playgroup since 2017, when her son Teddy was eight weeks old.

"The playgroup is very special to us, it has become another home," she says. "I am originally from the UK and all my family are over there. I found moving to Perth hard, even though my husband is from here,

meeting people was very difficult. Teddy loves it, especially the garden, and Phoebe (aged one) loves the cuddles."

"We had to close last year due to the pandemic and have only recently re-opened. It was a long and tough year for everyone and we really missed playgroup, so we set up a pen pal activity. This gave the playgroup families a way to catch up with the members via videos, messages and artwork. Due to the closure we lost some members, so we are looking for new families to join."



(Above) Skye, Makai and Indie on one of the Easter visits with Brian Adamson from Brightwater South Lake.

Class Act Performers: (left to right) Skye Colcott, Makai Lewis-Rees and Indie Lewis-Rees.



Scotch College students Matthew Kerfoot, left,

"The opportunity to play for older generations and other people in the community is a big thrill of being part of music at Scotch."

Scotch College student Ben Ramsden

DID YOU KNOW?

Globe Town Project in Fremantle presents an intergenerational arts program called Creative for Life, which brings together different generations so they can understand each other better and also to reduce isolation.

Storytellers, musicians, dancers, photographers, visual artists, writers and drama specialists design activities to encourage young and old to chat and swap ideas.

Perhaps your class could get involved?

Ask your teacher to find out more: globetownproject.com.au/workshops-programs/intergenerational