



Response by Linking Generations Northern Ireland

Inquiry into Building a United Community

22nd September 2014

1. Background Information

1.1 Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI) is an intergenerational initiative of the Beth Johnson Foundation. The Beth Johnson Foundation is a UK wide charity that works to make a positive impact on the lives of older people, to gain recognition for the valuable role that older people play in society and to challenge age discrimination and stereotyping. We are the only organisation solely advocating the development and promotion of intergenerational practice (IP) as a catalyst for social change in Northern Ireland.

1.2 Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities. Based on our experience and research, we encourage practitioners to focus on activities which promote greater understanding, closer relations and respect between age groups and provide opportunities to address shared problems.

We do this by:

- Developing and promoting opportunities to bring generations together and build capacity within communities to sustain this approach;
- Supporting the statutory, private and voluntary sectors to recognise all-age approaches and embedding them within their strategies, practices and policies;
- Encouraging, lobbying and influencing the government to provide support to all-age approaches to address ageism and age segregation in society.

1.3 LGNI have established themselves as the intergenerational experts in Northern Ireland and are the current organisation of choice when accessing training, support and advice in the development of intergenerational approaches.

1.4 Our vision:

Northern Ireland will be an age-friendly region: age groups will not be segregated and ageism will not exist; all-age approaches will be the norm.

2. Contribution to the Inquiry

2.1 We argue that the consistent emphases over the past forty or more years on working with children and young people should shift to an intergenerational approach. By this, we mean working with age groups together. It is well recognised through decades of development psychology and social psychology literature that children form their opinions, attitudes and behaviours primarily through their interactions and relationships with significant adults. We know that parental influence and neighbourhood influence are critical but yet our approach to tackling good relations problems has almost exclusively focussed on a single age category. The current TBUC strategy repeats this emphasis on working with children and young people. Whilst it mentions that intergenerational approaches are encouraged, the key messages continue to focus on children and young people as though they exist in some kind of bubble!

3. Recommendations based on our experience

3.1 Key findings of Phase 1 of the Review of Good Relations funding highlight the need to **recognise expertise and identify good practice in the field** (see 3.2 below). An appetite for **change is also identified alongside the need for greater collaboration and partnership** working (see 3.3 below). LGNI assert that the use of an all-age (intergenerational) approach has the potential to contribute to addressing these stumbling blocks.

3.2 *Recognising expertise and identifying good practice*

We have worked alongside Cooperation Ireland within their PEACE III funded schools based projects in the North West, Louth/Newry and Mourne and Lisburn/Castlereagh clusters to provide expertise in engaging generations together in good relations activity. The anecdotal feedback from this work and in particular, feedback from teachers, has indicated that the inclusion of adults from family and/or community in sessions in schools creates a range of positive outcomes: Reflections between generations can be a powerful experience as we recognise that we learn from each other; Ageist perceptions about young and old can be tackled through extended intergenerational contact; Schools are able to develop connections with families and communities in a new way and children may be more able to express less judgemental views at home. Unfortunately, most of these outcomes can still only be expressed as 'potential' but we are optimistic that an upcoming evaluation of the North West PEACE III clusters' programme 'Generations for Peace' will be forthcoming.

3.3 *Change and increased collaborative working*

LGNI have been working across NI since 2009 with support from Atlantic Philanthropies (which is ending in the next few months). One of the key things we have learned is that collaboration and partnership is a key feature of

intergenerational practice. Within neighbourhoods and through institutions, we categorise each other on the basis of age. Government, education and health care systems, academia, policy, community organisations, charities and lobbying groups all consistently segregate us on the basis of our age. A consequence of this is that intergenerational practice is necessarily a collaborative venture. Whilst we recognise that single age group work may be beneficial in tackling specific issues, we are calling for a sea-change in good relations practice: all-age lens. The use of the word 'lens' is to iterate that children live their lives in relation to other age groups, as do adults. One cannot be young, unless someone else is old and vice versa.

4. Key points

4.1 In seeking to build a united community, intergenerational (all-age) approaches should become a central feature of practice. This is in recognition that the continued emphasis within practice on working primarily with children and young people in isolation needs to be reconsidered.

4.2 We believe that the use of an indicator that seeks to measure the level of intergenerational engagement in good relations processes would be an excellent start. Placing a requirement for grantees to, at the very least, consider how they can incorporate an intergenerational element to their work would begin a process where we can tackle our intergenerationally transferred problems together.

4.3 We would be delighted to provide a delegation to the committee to answer questions and discuss the potential of intergenerational practice in supporting the building of a united community.

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Additional comment

LGNI is seeking funding to enable us to support good relations practitioners across NI to consider incorporating an intergenerational element in to their work. We applied through the OFMDFM process in February 2014 for this current financial year and we have yet to receive a response. At recent events hosted to discuss the TBUC strategy and its delivery, practitioners have voiced concern that the perceived lack of collaboration within OFMDFM at Ministerial and elected representative level is not only hindering progress in communities, but projects a chaotic and uninspired leadership for these critical issues. We also feel that a long term approach to funding must be key as yearly funding does not promote a sustainable approach to the work.