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## An intergenerational playgroup in an Australian residential aged-care setting: A qualitative case study

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1 **An intergenerational playgroup in an Australian residential aged-care setting: A qualitative case**  
2 **study**

3 **Abstract**

4 Intergenerational programs are emerging within the aged-care context as they provide a unique  
5 opportunity for older adults living with or without cognitive impairments to connect with children.  
6 One type of intergenerational program is an 'intergenerational playgroup' which creates  
7 opportunities for children to develop their skills, parents to create a local peer support network and  
8 provides older adults at risk of isolation with vital community interaction. The objective of this  
9 research was to evaluate an intergenerational playgroup taking place weekly within a residential  
10 aged care setting. A qualitative case study research design was used to perform five observation  
11 sessions and semi-structured in-depth interviews. All members of the group (older adults and  
12 caregivers) as well as involved staff were invited to participate. Consent from any older adults with  
13 known cognitive impairment was sought from next of kin. Consent for children was provided by  
14 caregivers. A total of 12 clients (n=8 diagnosis of dementia, 4 without dementia; 11 females, 1 male),  
15 three staff members, and 10 caregivers and their children (0-5 years) provided consent to be  
16 observed. Of these, five older adults (all female, 1 with diagnosis of dementia), three staff and five  
17 caregivers participated in interviews. Data were analysed thematically. Four key themes: *Learning*  
18 *from each other; Appreciating experience in the moment; Connecting through play; and A sense of*  
19 *home and belonging* were identified. These themes suggest older adults play an active role in the  
20 dynamics of the playgroup, often being 'in the moment' during play, but also actively reminiscing on  
21 their past experiences of childhood. The sense of an inclusive and supportive community with a  
22 culture of being open to learning and to different perspectives was strong. The findings support the  
23 role of intergenerational playgroups for promoting community engagement with benefits of building  
24 relationships and connectivity for all stakeholders.

25 **Key words:** Children, Ageing, Caregiving, Dementia, Social Gerontology, Loneliness, Culture

1           **What is known about this topic?**

- 2           • Intergenerational programs for bringing older adults and children together are
- 3           growing in popularity
- 4           • Intergenerational programs provide mutual benefits for all stakeholders

5           **What this paper adds?**

- 6           • An intergenerational playgroup located in an Australian residential aged care setting
- 7           promotes connections with the local community
- 8           • Stakeholder interviews and researcher observations provide evidence that the
- 9           relationships built in the playgroup promoted reminiscence, learning and social
- 10          stimulation
- 11          • Planning intergenerational playgroups needs to give careful attention to creating
- 12          inclusive and friendly environments and ensuring that all participants are given
- 13          choice about whether to attend and when to leave

14

1

## 2 **Introduction**

3 Intergenerational programs are social activities intended to promote active aging among older adults  
4 through contact with other generations (Teater, 2016; World Health Organisation, 2002).

5 Intergenerational programs began emerging in the late 1980's (Newman & Brummel, 1989) in the  
6 United States to provide an opportunity for older adults to experience social contact with children in  
7 a variety of different settings; including school students attending an aged-care facility to do  
8 activities, or the co-location of a childcare centre within aged-care services (Posada, 2007; Xaverius  
9 & Matthews, 2003). These intergenerational programs are becoming increasingly considered by  
10 aged care providers (Radforde, Oxlade, Fitzgerald, & Vecchio, 2016; Skropeta, Colvin, & Sladen,  
11 2014) as an opportunity for older adults to reminisce about their past and diminish social isolation  
12 through connecting with children and their caregivers (Posada, 2007; Spruston, 2006). Recently, a  
13 systematic review of different forms of interventions to support respect and social inclusion for  
14 older adults found strong support for intergenerational programs against outcomes of depression  
15 and well-being (Ronzi, Orton, Pope, Valtorta, & Bruce, 2018).

16 Whilst mutual benefits are noted for both the families and the older adults participating in  
17 intergenerational programs (Williams, Renehan, Cramer, Lin, & Haralambous, 2012), studies seeking  
18 to understand engagement and changes within the program context, have often focused on the  
19 children's attitudes towards older adults and their living situation (Babcock, MaloneBeach, &  
20 Salomon, 2018), or included only older adults who were cognitively able (Teater, 2016). This  
21 methodological decision may have been because researchers believed that older adults with  
22 cognitive impairment and young children lacked insight or the ability to express their opinion.  
23 However, gaining the perspectives of marginalised and vulnerable participants of intergenerational  
24 programs is important for ensuring these populations are adequately represented in findings of  
25 program evaluations (Ronzi et al., 2018). Similarly, many of the intergenerational programs that are

1 emerging within the aged-care contexts are evaluated using quantitative outcome measures which  
2 may not always capture contextual nuances (Camp & Lee, 2011; Lee, Camp, & Malone, 2007; Low,  
3 Russell, McDonald, & Kauffman, 2015; Posada, 2007).

4 Therefore, the purpose of this study is to qualitatively explore participants' experience of  
5 engagement in an intergenerational playgroup (IGP) located in an Australian residential aged care  
6 facility (RACF). In operation since 2016, the IGP is a lifestyle activity offered at the participating RACF  
7 in affiliation with Playgroup Australia which is a long-established volunteer organisation (Playgroup  
8 Australia, 2013). An IGP is a form of intergenerational program where caregivers of children under 5  
9 can access weekly support and play-based socialisation for their children in an environment where  
10 older adults are also present. The programs are not formal child-care provision as caregivers stay  
11 with the children during the groups but provide children under five a stimulating place to play,  
12 socialise and learn (McShane, Cook, Sinclair, Keam, & Fry, 2016). It has been recognised that  
13 transitioning into RACFs may mean a loss of social connections or relationships for older adults  
14 (Brownie & Horstmanshof, 2011; Brownie, Horstmanshof, & Garbutt, 2014) and the IGP can provide  
15 a means for social connection and support. The study aims to answer the following research  
16 question: *How do participants engage in an intergenerational playgroup (IGP) within the context of a*  
17 *residential aged-care facility (RACF)?*

## 18 **Method**

### 19 **Research Design**

20 Variation in data collection methods beyond quantitative measures is recommended for evaluations  
21 of programs to enable multiple forms of data to contribute to the findings (Liamputtong, 2013). A  
22 qualitative research approach supports understanding the experiences of participants in  
23 intergenerational programs and can reveal rich contextual information. We employed a qualitative  
24 case study methodology (Stake, 1995) with ethnographic methods (Spruston, 2006). Our approach  
25 was constructivist and interpretivist, with ontologically relativist acknowledging the existence of

1 multiple realities. Epistemologically the data are transactional and value mediated. We sought  
2 heterogeneity of participants in our research, thus including older adults with and without cognitive  
3 impairment, the caregivers of children and staff.

4 Case study methodology allows for exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a  
5 variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The IGP is an intrinsic case study being explored within  
6 its context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). Ethnographic methods of observation and prolonged  
7 engagement were incorporated to capture the culture of the IGP, and to learn and be taught by  
8 members rather than study them as 'objects' (Liamputtong, 2013). Hereafter, the older adults that  
9 reside at the participating RACF are referred to as clients.

#### 10 **Sampling**

11 From January 2018, all members of the IGP (including clients, staff, caregivers and their children)  
12 were invited to participate in both the observations and interviews. As a result, purposive intensity  
13 sampling was used (Patton, 2002). Clients were included in the study if they were willing and resided  
14 at the RACF. Clients of the RACF were typical of older adults requiring high care for personal and  
15 daily needs within a RACF, thus cognition and function data was not required for the purposes of this  
16 study. Caregivers that attended with their children expressed they live locally.

#### 17 **Recruitment and consent process**

18 We communicated with the IGP coordinator at the RACF to identify clients who could provide  
19 consent, and those that would require next of kin (NOK) to consent. Clients that were able to  
20 provide consent had the information sheet and consent form explained to them during the IGP and  
21 if they wanted to participate, they signed it during the session (sometimes witnessed by a family  
22 member). To maintain confidentiality, the IGP coordinator sent an email to client's NOK outlining the  
23 purpose of the research with the participant information sheet. NOK responded to the email if they  
24 agreed for their details to be shared with us, and then we spoke via phone. If NOK provided phone  
25 consent for the client to participate in the study, a printed consent form and information sheet was

1 posted and returned with a reply-paid envelope. Caregivers provided consent for their children to be  
2 formally observed and actions during the IGP to be documented. Consent forms were provided to  
3 caregivers during the IGP; allowing time for us to explain the study and answer questions. Consent  
4 forms were returned and collected every session. Participants who did not provide consent were not  
5 included in any data collection.

## 6 **Data collection**

7 The lead author XX had prolonged engagement with the IGP from September 2017 with initial visits  
8 to develop rapport with the clients, staff, caregivers and children and gain understanding of the IGP  
9 context. After a break, XX continued to attend the IGP informally in March/April 2018 to re-establish  
10 relationships and begin the recruitment processes. Formal observations took place from May to July  
11 2018 with the researcher being seated either alongside the clients or in the centre of the room as  
12 depicted in figure 1. The researcher did not participate in IGP activities and members of the IGP did  
13 not approach the researcher.

14 **Observations:** The Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) Model (Law et al., 1996) was used to  
15 guide collection of observational data. The PEO conceptual model gives a framework for considering  
16 aspects of the person, the occupations, and the environment (Law et al., 1996). Each domain in the  
17 PEO conceptual model has a transactional influence on experience (Law et al., 1996). As the IGP was  
18 dynamic, the PEO provided an efficient means of capturing the range of experiences taking place.  
19 Five 90-minute observation sessions were conducted over a five-week period using the PEO  
20 conceptual model to analyse and document the transactions that occurred between the person, the  
21 environment and the occupations (Law et al., 1996). A tool was developed to actively and efficiently  
22 document what was being observed without detracting from seeing what was going on. The first  
23 observation sessions focused on observing the people (i.e. verbal and non-verbal interactions,  
24 reactions/nuanced emotion), the second focused on observing the environment (physical, temporal,  
25 spiritual, institutional, cultural, and social) and the third focused on observing the occupations (i.e.  
26 the activities that took place during the IGP). Following these, a further two sessions were



1 completed to concurrently observe transactions across all three domains, to document the dynamic  
2 interactions.

3 **Interviews.** Following the observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with consenting  
4 clients, staff and caregivers. An interview guide was prepared and adjusted following consenting  
5 pilot interviews with two clients with cognitive impairment and a caregiver that attended the IGP  
6 that allowed the lead author to practice interview skills, thus this data were not included in the data  
7 set. The guide was flexible enough to allow probing of responses and natural discussion to take place  
8 between the participant and the interviewer. Questions were tailored for each participant group and  
9 spoke to the research question (see table 1). Interviews with caregivers and staff took place during  
10 the IGP in the café located on the RACF premises. Clients were interviewed in their rooms straight  
11 after the IGP as their experience was recent. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim,  
12 apart from one staff member who provided responses by email. Member checking took place during  
13 the IGP by showing participants their interview transcript. No changes were made to the transcripts  
14 by participants.

15 **\*\* Insert table 1 about here**

### 16 **Data analysis**

17 Observation and interview data were initially analysed separately but used the same process of  
18 thematic analysis (Smith & Firth, 2011). Thematic analysis followed the stages of:

- 19 a) 'sensing the theme' whereby observations/ transcripts were coded line-by-line
- 20 b) reliably and consistently recognising the codes as analysis progressed
- 21 c) developing/grouping codes and
- 22 d) interpreting the information and themes in the context of the case (Smith & Firth, 2011).

23 The lead author initially coded all transcriptions and observations. Following this all authors  
24 independently coded a section of one interview transcript from each participant group, to enable

1 comparison and discussion about differences in interpretation. Authors came together to discuss  
2 coding of the observations within the PEO model. Consensus was reached about coding decisions for  
3 both the interview and observational data and they were brought together in the final stages of  
4 analysis (i.e. stage d) to arrive at overarching themes describing the case (Creswell, 1998). A  
5 reflective journal was kept to document similarities and differences across the data set. An audit trail  
6 of decisions was also maintained as new versions of the findings were inductively developed.  
7 Aligning themes from observations and interviews triangulated the data by corroborating similar  
8 findings from different data sources across the participant groups (Liamputtong, 2013).

## 9 **Ethics**

10 The study was approved by the REDACTED. All documentation and interview records remained  
11 confidential and pseudonyms were used in reporting of the findings to ensure the anonymity of the  
12 participants. Formal consent processes were used as described earlier. REDACTED provided written  
13 consent to be named and acknowledged in outcomes from the research.

## 14 **Findings**

### 15 **The context: Intergenerational playgroup (IGP)**

16 Families living in the nearby community can elect to attend the IGP at the RACF and clients are  
17 invited and supported to attend by lifestyle staff. The IGP runs weekly on Mondays for 90 minutes in  
18 the school terms and brings together children (0-5 years), their parent/caregiver, staff and clients.  
19 Altogether, the IGP connects three to four generations, with (on average) ten clients of the RACF,  
20 two staff, ten caregivers (parents, grandparents and carers), and eight children attending each week.  
21 The IGP is held in a large room which has access to toy storage rooms, a corridor that leads back to  
22 clients' rooms, and a bathroom that includes baby change facilities. Two staff members facilitate the  
23 IGP, with one being the coordinator. At times, the IGP is supported by volunteers. The routine  
24 involves free play for 60 minutes where the children have a selection of play equipment. During this  
25 time, clients are given their morning tea and are welcome to continue participating in activities or

1 conversations freely throughout the IGP. After free play, the children are gathered to sit around a  
2 table and are given a snack, while staff and caregivers assist in packing-up the play equipment. After  
3 snack time the children sit in a group to do a shared activity (e.g. game or story) and the IGP  
4 concludes by singing a good-bye song. Caregivers, children and clients are freely able to attend the  
5 IGP throughout the year. Clients chose to attend the IGP and, at times, missed sessions due to other  
6 commitments. Likewise, caregivers and their children attended the IGP on a casual basis resulting in  
7 the IGP having a dynamic and transient nature, as people come and go, and new people join.

## 8 **Participants**

9 A total of 12 clients (n=8 diagnosis of dementia, 11 females, 1 male), three staff members, and 10  
10 caregivers and their children (0-5 years) provided consent to be observed during the IGP. After the  
11 June 2018 holiday break many previous clients and caregivers did not return to the IGP and new  
12 families joined, thus reducing the opportunity to interview all consenting participants. Of the total  
13 number of consenting participants (n=25), 13 participated in interviews. This included five clients (all  
14 female - 1 of which had a diagnosis of dementia), three staff, and five caregivers. The shortest  
15 interview was 4 minutes (caregiver) and the longest was 16.07 (staff) with the average length of the  
16 13 interviews being 9.97 minutes. The interview and observational data contributed to the  
17 development of four themes: (1) Learning from each other; (2) Appreciating experience in the  
18 moment (3); Connecting through play; and (4) A sense of home and community. Direct quotes from  
19 interviews, documented observations and diagrams are provided, as they represent the data and the  
20 IGP context. Each participant group is identified as a client, caregiver or staff. Pseudonyms are used  
21 to protect participant identity.

## 22 **Theme 1: Learning from each other**

23 The IGP provided stimulation for both the children and the clients through opportunity for  
24 reminiscence and facilitating moments of learning. Clients involved in the IGP were observed  
25 speaking with each other about their pastimes and recognising how times have changed compared

1 to their own upbringing or raising their own children. This was evident when comparing behaviours  
2 observed in children at the IGP with that of their own children:

3 They're...very astute, they know exactly what they're doing at that age and when I had my  
4 children they were wrapped up in blankets and looked after, but these kids are their own  
5 people. (Agnes-client)

6 I'm quite happy going there and enjoying the children and...see different little things that  
7 they do, and I think I've been through that or mine used to do that. (Victoria-client)

8 The IGP provided an opportunity for the clients to think about their own experiences of childhood  
9 and this stimulation of memories was observed by caregivers also:

10 Oh yes, you can remember lots of little things...my father used to take us for rides on his  
11 pushbike, he made this little seat that he would put on the front bar and he used to take us  
12 for rides on this pushbike. (Nelly-client)

13 I think it takes them [clients] back to...when they had their own children and their  
14 grandkids...even the ones that can't be motivated by anything the children do, they enjoy it,  
15 and I think also watching them grow. (Kathleen-caregiver)

16 The IGP demonstrated the cycle of life (birth to death) and allowed parents to reflect on how the  
17 relationships formed were meaningful.

18 One of them [clients] passed away so that's going to be the downside of it, not that she  
19 [daughter] is old enough to realise yet, but I was in tears. (Bridgette-caregiver)

20 I've enjoyed the company of the elder residents here so that's a good thing. (Jocelyn –  
21 caregiver)

22 Caregivers valued learning practical strategies regarding children's behaviours. Carly who brings her  
23 two grandsons to the IGP commented on how the sharing of advice was valued:

24 ...you know all the things change over the years so everyone has different ideas on raising  
25 kids ... chatting to some of the mums and things they do... you go home and think oh that's a  
26 good idea I'll try that... It's been a long while since I've had my kids so ... I think we all learn  
27 from each other. (Carly-caregiver)

28 The IGP was also perceived as providing opportunity for the children to develop skills as observed by  
29 Emma (client):

30 It's been a great help to [her]. She's nearly three, and she wouldn't speak and now she  
31 speaks, and answers and talks, and can sing all the songs... (Emma-client)

## 32 **Theme 2: Appreciating experience in the moment**

33 The IGP gave opportunity for clients to watch the children 'grow-up' and the clients appreciated

1 when they witnessed a child in a moment of learning. Through observation of the environment, it  
2 became evident that the physical space contributed to these appreciative moments occurring as  
3 clients were in an 'arena-like' seating arrangement, allowing them to be a spectator of the IGP as  
4 things unfolded in the moment (see figure 1):

5 \*INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

6 Oh I feel very happy...because I see the children enjoying themselves and you can see  
7 they're concentrating and they like the toys, and they like dressing up and doing things and I  
8 think that's important. (Emma-client)

9 oh seeing them, just seeing them, what they do... (Sally-client)

10 ...I love children and I love people anyway, and I go down there because I enjoy the  
11 relaxation, I suppose, watching the children, and seeing what they're doing sort of thing. You  
12 know, you can see them thinking and ... they're not even 2-years old, some of them are only  
13 about 14-months old and they know exactly what's going on- they are their own little  
14 person. (Agnes-client)

15 For most clients, watching the children grow-up had significance for them as they appreciated seeing  
16 the children become more autonomous through expressing their views:

17 Well it's just that we enjoy the company and watching the children play and you...can see  
18 the difference in them from week to week, difference in their attitudes and things...I've  
19 enjoyed going. (Nelly-client)

20 Oh yes, you can see them growing up doing different things. [If they] don't want to do that,  
21 they'll sit back [and] don't wanna join in that part of the game... (Victoria-client)

22

23 As well as giving the clients a good vantage point from which to observe, the seating  
24 arrangement also created opportunity for the children to approach the clients during play. This  
25 encouraged opportunity for discussion and connectedness between caregivers and the clients. Many  
26 clients expressed that they did not have opportunity to fulfil a grandparent role in their personal life  
27 and that the IGP provided a good substitute. Likewise, caregivers felt the IGP provided their children  
28 with an adopted grandparent:

29 Oh it's lovely, because they're like our grandchildren. (Nelly-client)

30 Staff were active in facilitating the relationships between clients and the IGP members as a way of  
31 encouraging fulfilling roles in each other's lives:

1 I enjoy looking at all the interaction and seeing the residents and the children interacting.  
2 Seeing how much joy the [clients] get out of it and the children, it's just amazing - yeah they  
3 just come alive, and it also just gives the [clients] opportunity to interact with children like  
4 that because if the [clients] don't have you know, relatives here as well, it gives [them] and  
5 children the bond like grandparents...I love it, it's great. (Brittany-staff)  
6

### 7 **Theme 3: Connecting through play**

8 This theme acknowledges how play was a medium for intergenerational interactions and  
9 connection. During observations, a moment of connection between child and older adult was  
10 documented:

11 A new family including two children and their grandparent joined [the IGP] today. Upon  
12 entering the room, the young boy looked around the room (perhaps noticing there were no  
13 other boys in the room at the time) and spotted "Brian" (client) sitting on the far edge of the  
14 room. The young boy ("Peter") immediately approached Brian standing right in front of his  
15 chair and pointed at his glasses. There was silence and Brian responded by pointing at  
16 Peter's glasses. It was in that moment they smiled at each other, as if a mutual agreement to  
17 be friends had taken place. No words, just actions and a smile. For the remainder of the  
18 playgroup, they played a throwing and catching ball game, 'tag' and didn't leave each other's  
19 side. It was later in conversation with Peter's grandparent that I discovered Peter had only  
20 recently gotten glasses and so naturally when he saw Brian, their commonality sparked their  
21 friendship. (researcher observation)

22 Many caregivers expressed how the play environment at the IGP allowed their child to further  
23 develop their motor and social skills. In doing so, they felt their child was building confidence and  
24 becoming more autonomous:

25 She [child] is quite shy so it's been interesting that as we've been coming she'll go to certain  
26 people and throw them the ball and stuff like that... I want to bring her to something like this  
27 that you know makes her a bit more confident. She's got a few [clients] that she knows that  
28 come regularly and ... she'll throw balls to them and interact with them ...she's gotten a lot  
29 more confident since she's been coming here...so she's coming a little bit out of her shell.  
30 (Bridgette-caregiver)

31 Yeah I think they've [children] come out of their shell a lot more because they used to be  
32 very shy, they still are shy but they can go off and play like they don't have to have me there  
33 every second...they will talk to other people now more than they did before they used to  
34 come in here so, yeah I think it's good for them. (Nikki-caregiver)

35 The idea of feeling safe enough to interact with others was also described by staff member Sophie in  
36 relation to the clients who attended.

37 Well to increase their [clients] social interaction, some people [clients] who are really  
38 isolated would actually come to that activity... (Sophie-staff)

1 In some cases, it was observed that clients would express a wish to leave the IGP due to being  
2 overwhelmed by the sensory experience, in which case, staff would assist them to leave.

3 They [clients] look forward to attending and come regularly. They interact with the children,  
4 verbally and with gestures, such as smiling or waving. I do not have any concerns as  
5 residents are always invited so they come if they wish, and we ensure they know they will be  
6 assisted to leave whenever they feel that they would like to go. (Angela-staff)

7 Similarly, caregiver Jocelyn observed that the experience was suboptimal when the groups were  
8 larger:

9 When it's a big group, it's really difficult to have that interaction. (Jocelyn, caregiver)

10 Song time was a particularly important activity observed during the IGP that allowed all group  
11 members to come together despite their age or level of function. In this way, song time acted as a  
12 leveller and participants connected through singing, which lifted energy and enabled group  
13 expression.

#### 14 **Theme 4: A sense of home and community**

15 The IGP was more than just a social activity provided in a RACF, but enabled clients to be treated  
16 'like family' by members of the community.

17 ...we've seen residents' [clients] joy- it just comes out- they're smiling, they're laughing and  
18 it's just like old times for them as well, they get the opportunity to play like it would have  
19 been when their grandchildren were little...it's the whole sense of community as well ...  
20 they're [clients] getting involved on that level. (Brittany-staff)

21 The IGP provided a safe and accepting space that allowed members of the group to 'catch-up' and  
22 have a time where they could relax and engage in social relationships beyond the boundaries of their  
23 homes.

24 it's a really hard job being a mum and being at home ... for some of the mums that are at  
25 home it can be really isolating and really lonely, so when you have things like this...you get to  
26 meet new people, talk to people and just pretty much have adult interactions rather than  
27 toddler. (Bridgette-caregiver)

28 Yeah, I really enjoy it, I mean some days are absolute chaos but so is home some days so...I  
29 think everyone sort of gets to know everyone and they all ... look out for each other's kids  
30 and it's quite friendly, nice atmosphere to be in. (Carly-caregiver)

1 Creating a place where everyone belongs is at the heart of the IGP. The sense of home and  
2 community was consistent throughout the changes that took place in the group, as people from the  
3 community left the group and new people joined. The dynamic and adaptive nature of the IGP is  
4 reflective of the members' commitment to the group, resilience and their support and acceptance of  
5 each person's stage in the lifespan.

6 ...It suits me, I'm quite happy with it. Some of the other parents and children like it. I used to  
7 have one little kid come up to me every week ... he's not there anymore he's grown up, at  
8 school I think now, that's how they are grow up [and] develop. (Victoria-client)

9 Staff acknowledged they supported the changing members of the group, utilised age-appropriate  
10 resources, and challenged the stigma surrounding RACF in the community and possibly  
11 misperceptions of the RACF environment.

12 ...I think to also break the gap that...a lot of people don't like coming to [RACFs] because they  
13 see old people and death really, and to see it as a happy environment is really good. (Sophie-  
14 staff)

## 15 **Discussion**

16 The findings which integrate the interplay between data collection approaches have provided  
17 valuable insights about the IGP operating within a RACF. They provide an in-depth contextual  
18 understanding of participants' engagement in an IGP from the perspective of clients, staff and  
19 caregivers of the children attending and provide further support for IGPs with children aged 0-5  
20 years being located within RACF. Intergenerational programs provide a supportive environment for  
21 growth and development across the lifespan, to create connection to community and to form  
22 relationships that transcend age (Larronde, 1983; Waggoner, 1996). There is a good fit with the  
23 values of relationship-centred care where relationships are central to the delivery and outcomes of  
24 care (Soklalridis et al, 2016). Intergenerational programs provide a context where children and older  
25 adults can develop 'grandparent-like' relationships (Eggers & Hensley, 2004; Low et al., 2015), in a  
26 range of contexts including RACFs where older adults are receiving care (Skropeta et al., 2014;  
27 Travers et al., 2016). The connections, roles and relationships that are formed through meaningful



1 activity within the intergenerational setting support older adults in fostering reminiscence, passing  
2 on wisdom, sharing life experience, and contributing to the community (Pratt, 2013).

3           The environmental context of the IGP evaluated in this study highlights that the provision of  
4 lifestyle activities by RACFs that are socially oriented and invite the community to connect with older  
5 adults provides benefits of social connectivity. Given the lack of social connectedness for older  
6 adults living in RACFs and prevalence of loneliness (Brownie & Horstmanshof, 2011) it is a really  
7 important outcome. People with dementia living in RACFs need a range of options to meet the  
8 varied needs of individuals (Travers et al., 2016) with social group opportunities positively  
9 influencing older adults' well-being and health (Haslam et al., 2010; Ronzi et al., 2018). This case of  
10 an IGP located within an RACF provides an example of how the social needs of older people may be  
11 addressed in a way that also builds social capital with the wider community.

12           It is well known that playgroups offer opportunities for building community capacity and  
13 relationships (McShane et al., 2016), particularly for families who have recently relocated to a new  
14 area and are yet to meet new people (Strange, Fisher, Howat, & Wood, 2014). In addition to  
15 meeting the connectivity needs for some of the participating older adults, this study also found  
16 benefits for the caregivers and children who attended the playgroup and adds to the growing body  
17 of evidence for the value of relationships and personal growth gained from the intergenerational  
18 contact for families attending IGPs (Skropeta et al., 2014).

19           Our case study involved careful observations of the transactions between the people, the  
20 occupations and the environment (Law et al., 1996). The environment and occupations need to be  
21 structured in a way that is not infantilising for the older adults (Salari, 2002) but provided moments  
22 of connection which are meaningful. Use of person-centred care and respectful, dignified practices  
23 in activity provision for the older adults (Brooker & Woolley, 2007), provide a safe, supportive  
24 culture with ingredients of mutual respect, and a desire to develop relationships and learn from each  
25 other. Staff did need to monitor the arousal levels of the clients and giving them opportunity to

1 leave if the stimulation became overwhelming and/or they asked to leave. With recent concerns in  
2 Australia with the quality of residential aged care with many documented instances of abuse and  
3 neglect highlighting the need for programs that maximise quality of life for the older person.

#### 4 **Recommendations for practice and research**

5 The findings of this study about one IGP can inform future service design because its structure and  
6 intent gave opportunity for communities to be welcomed into RACFs. Ongoing evaluation of  
7 different models of IGPs is imperative to ensure they continue to provide the positive outcomes that  
8 are currently being reported and observed in the media and literature (Playgroup Australia, 2020).  
9 Physical design and development of cultural expectations of intergenerational programs to ensure  
10 age appropriateness, optimal engagement and positive outcomes is an area worthy of further  
11 attention and research (Kaplan, Haider, Cohen, & Turner, 2007). It is also recommended that service  
12 providers are mindful of individual social and activity programming needs as intergenerational  
13 programs may not be appropriate for all and individuals must have the right to choice and control  
14 over attendance (Travers et al., 2016).

#### 15 **Study Rigour**

16 Prolonged engagement in the field by the lead author XXX was a strength of the study and is  
17 important for case study methodology (Stake, 1995). A reflective journal was maintained to  
18 document novel experiences, and create deep and insightful understanding of the case (Stake,  
19 1995). Other strategies to ensure rigour of the research included multiple researchers involved in  
20 data analysis, the keeping of an audit trail of analytic decisions made, and triangulation of both data  
21 collection methods and data from different participant groups (Liamputtong, 2013).

#### 22 **Study Limitations**

23 Although all members of the IGP were invited to participate in the study, not all provided consent.  
24 Lack of responses to invitations was more prevalent for those clients that required consent from

1 next of kin. The open nature of the IGP resulted in inconsistent attendance of participants, thus not  
2 all participants were consistently observed and some left before they could be interviewed. Even  
3 though there were men participating in the IGP who gave consent, they did not provide an  
4 interview, meaning only data from female clients were gathered. The length of interviews was  
5 relatively short, but consistent with other similar studies with IGP participants (Skropeta et al.,  
6 2014). The findings of the present study are not generalisable to all contexts due to the specificity of  
7 the case; however, findings could be transferable to similar contexts.

### 8 **Conclusion**

9 This study highlights the importance of intergenerational programs in residential aged-care settings  
10 for developing a strong sense of connectedness among all participants and through the  
11 consideration of the environmental context. The IGP that was the case being studied was a person-  
12 centred lifestyle activity that supported client and community engagement. Clients living with and  
13 without cognitive impairments were valued group members and provided new relationships for the  
14 caregivers and their children. The IGP provided an insightful case for how an intergenerational  
15 program can create an inclusive cultural and social community within RACFs.

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