



KEY POINT SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to gather the perceptions of children who experienced intergenerational care services regarding the design of the built environment at the intergenerational care facility.

Designing intergenerational spaces: What to learn from children

Norouzi, N., Chen, J.-C., Jarrott, S., Satari, A., 2022 | HERD: Health Environments Research & Design Journal, Pages in press

Key Concepts/Context

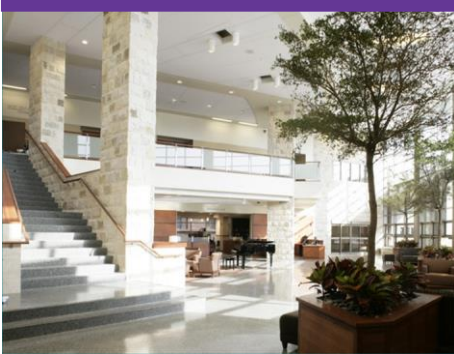
Research on intergenerational care programs where both children and older adults receive services in the same facility often relies on proxy reports from caregivers. The authors of this study sought to elicit perceptions of intergenerational care from the children who experience these environments. The results inform designers of ways to facilitate both structured and informal interactions in these unique facilities.

Methods

In order to give children receiving care in intergenerational care facilities an opportunity to share their perspectives, the PI of this study identified three organizations in different geographic locations, spent time building rapport with the children, and observed facility routines. The PI subsequently conducted interviews with 16 children (14 who attended daycare at the sites and two who attended summer programs). Interviews included questions regarding children's experiences with intergenerational programming. At the end of each interview, children were asked to draw a picture of their favorite intergenerational activity and describe the activity and place depicted. Interview recordings were transcribed, sorted, matched with the respective drawings, and systematically analyzed by the research team whose varied professional perspectives contributed to the triangulation of the various data sources. The research team coded pertinent lines of interview transcripts while examining the drawings. The codes were sorted to identify underlying phenomena, establish connections, and determine themes. The use of observations, interviews, drawings, and detailed documentation of the coding procedures support validity, rigor, and transparency of the research.

Findings

The research team identified four themes from the compiled data. First, outdoor spaces facilitated intergenerational programming. Both interview content and



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drawings demonstrated positive experiences during outdoor activities. Children described activities with older adults and drawings depicted individuals of different ages and abilities (ex. adults, children, and an adult in a wheelchair) interacting. Sharing meals and snacks was a second important theme described. These activities occurred during scheduled times, at special events, and during informal interactions. Some children indicated they liked eating with older adults in a common dining room, whereas other children enjoyed visiting a volunteer-operated ice cream shop where older adults also got ice cream. A third theme identified by children related to environmental features including the need to be quiet at times and drawings depicted activities such as “silent ball” that was coordinated around older adults’ preferences for naps or watching television in a shared space. Children also alluded to limitations related to furnishings by describing the need to stand when visiting older adults because the chairs were too big. Recommendations culled from children’s feedback included areas for different age groups, accommodating varied sizes and abilities when designing spaces for activities, and providing signage that both children and older adults could comprehend. The fourth theme identified by children interviewed alluded to the design of spaces that support brief, informal interactions among generations. Children enjoyed interacting with older adults in reception areas, hallways, or who were walking near classrooms. One facility had a routine where children would walk to the older adult residential wing where residents could leave their doors open as an invitation to interact.

Limitations

Although researchers took great care to conduct age-appropriate interviews, normal developmental elements could hinder the reliability of data collected since the majority of children (14 of 16) were 4-5 years old. The PI was intentional in building rapport with the children and incorporating multiple sources of data to support reliability of findings.

Design Implications

Design recommendations for intergenerational facilities include inviting children to participate in design; outdoor spaces for shared activities; facilities and furnishings for sharing snacks and meals; features that support different levels of interaction for different ability levels; and opportunities for brief and informal contact in varied spaces. Single-generation spaces should accommodate intergenerational activities



and provide alternatives for those who decline to participate. Features such as eating, windows, art, or aquariums invite pause and can support informal interactions.

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