

# Intergenerational Programming: A Multidimensional Approach to an Age-Friendly Community



Audrey Tarbutton  
Department of Psychology

## Introduction

Intergenerational programming (IGP) is a method of bringing older adults and children together to participate in activities for their mutual benefit. IGP is shown in the literature to be beneficial for the development of children and includes implications for sustaining the cognitive and emotional functioning of older adults (for a review see: Travis et al., 1996). When participating in group activities with one another, children have the ability to learn unique skills from older adults, and older adults have the ability to mentor the children, exercising the remaining cognitive abilities that they have left (Camp et al., 1997).

Overall, such activities would contribute to the psychological, emotional, and physical health of both children and older adults. Specifically, we seek to implement a multidimensional approach to reviewing IGP in relation to four distinct areas: social interactions among children and older adults, motor skill development, fall prevention, and cognition. In this poster, we briefly review the benefits of IGP in relation to each area, and we also propose an initiative to create a combined care center for older adults and preschool aged children in the greater Grand Rapids area while utilizing the evidence supporting IGP.



## Emotional Benefits for Children

### Long-term benefits:

Femia and colleagues (2008) found that after one year of socializing with older adults in an IGP-based program, children (kindergarten – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade) had a higher level of:

- Social acceptance
- A greater willingness to help
- Greater empathy for older adults
- Slightly more-positive attitudes towards older adults compared to controls.

### Short-term benefits:

Gaggioli and colleagues (2014) found that older adults who took part in an IGP-based program once per week over a three week span had a decreased level of loneliness, with children having a more positive perception of older adults:

Loneliness: Descriptive Statistics and Pre-Post Comparison

		Loneliness		
		Emotional loneliness	Social loneliness	General loneliness
Pretest	Mean (SD)	1.76 (0.48)	3.24 (0.65)	1.88 (0.51)
Posttest	Mean (SD)	1.6 (0.46)	3.25 (0.47)	1.68 (0.51)
t student	t value	2.074*	-0.55	2.195*

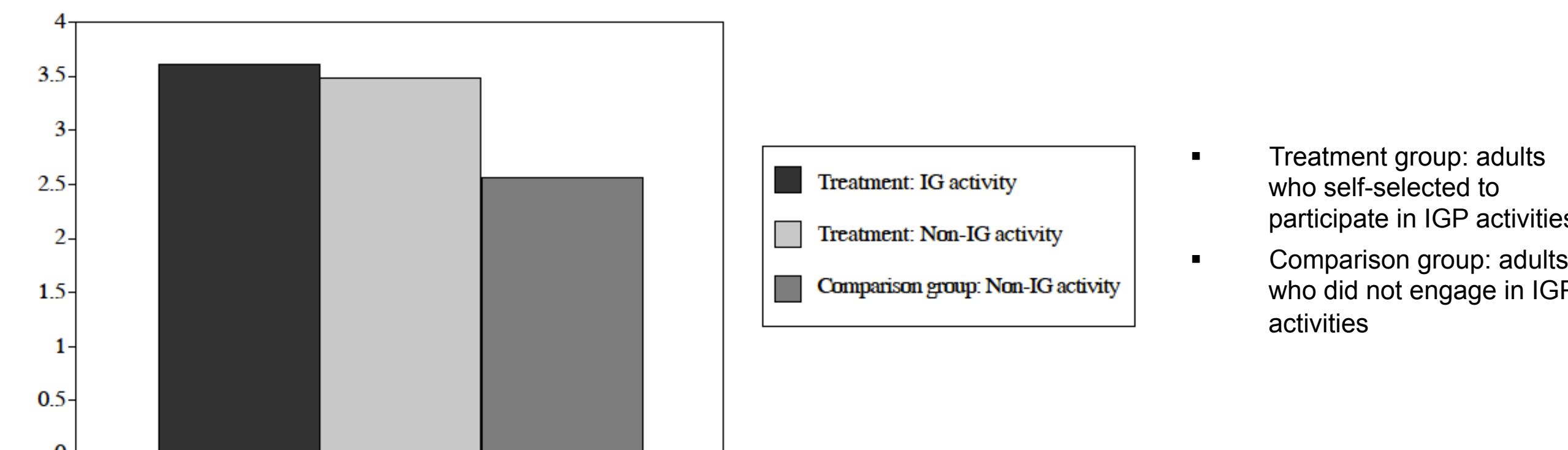
Children's Perception of Elderly: Pre-Post Comparison

		Semantic differential			
		Functionality	Social representation	Attitude	Total
Pretest	Mean (SD)	5.38 (0.86)	4.99 (0.99)	5.52 (0.87)	5.30 (0.72)
Posttest	Mean (SD)	5.88 (0.77)	5.42 (0.91)	5.73 (0.91)	5.67 (0.72)
t student	t value	-4.772**	-3.664**	-1.711	-4.305**

The implications of these studies suggest that IGP can possibly reduce negative stereotypes of older adults beginning from a very early age.

## Cognitive Benefits for Older Adults with Dementia

### Increased affect (Jarrott & Bruno, 2013):



### Increased independence (Camp et al., 1997):

In an IGP-based study examining older adults with dementia and Alzheimer's Disease using Montessori Methods:

- Older adults successfully taught children tasks used to promote independence (i.e. using tools)
- Apathy was reduced
- Children were proud of the skills that they had learned
- Older adults displayed care and patience while teaching the children new skills

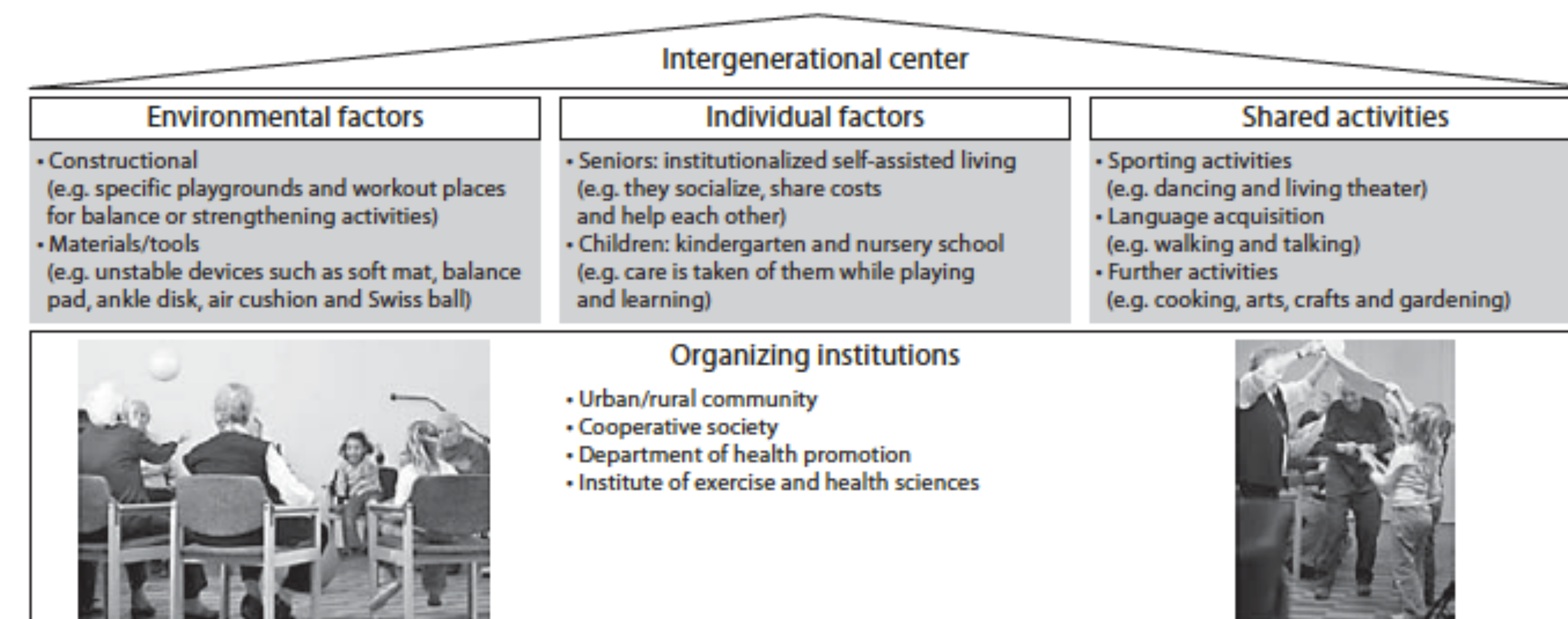
## The Importance of Interaction

In a study conducted by Larkin and Newman (2001), older adults who participated in IGP activities with children found themselves taking on a familial, grand parenting role with the children. The following familial behaviors were observed:

- Positive encouragement, for the children and for teachers
- Modeling of skills for children to imitate
- Bonding with particular children
- Prompting language development (e.g., new vocabulary, other languages)
- Preparing food and helping with housekeeping tasks
- Encouraging good manners
- Assisting children with personal hygiene
- Offering hospitality to visitors
- A sense of humor and appreciation for young people

## Joint Activities, Balance, and Strength

28 to 35% of individuals over the age of 65 sustain at least one fall over a one-year period as a result of decreased motor functioning (Granacher, 2011). IGP can help reduce the risk of falls for older adults by increasing balance, strength, and coordination through shared activities with children.



## The Proposed Program

Our IGP-focused facility would model after a long-term care center for dependent older adults that would include a memory care unit, as well as an assisted living and skilled nursing facility. Within the long-term care center, we would include a daycare center for children ages six weeks to five years. Parents would drop off their children at the daycare center during daytime hours.

Groups of older adults with and without cognitive impairments would be scheduled to participate in activities with the children several times per day. Activities would be planned and monitored by child and adult care staff.

Some of these activities may include:

- Completing crafts
- Playing games
- Reading
- Cooking and baking activities
- Completion of activities of daily living
- Group exercise activities



## Program Benefits

- Promotes independence, physical health, and well-being
- Reduces negative stereotypes
- Positive mentoring for children
- Decreases risk of falls among older adults
- Promotes positive social interactions
- Fosters and preserves adequate motor skill development

## Practical Considerations

### Social dynamics:

Intergenerational communication is maximized when activities are centered around an achievable task (as opposed to task-oriented activities). Activities must also be developmentally appropriate for both groups.

### Care providers:

Direct care workers must foster collaboration among groups of children and older adults. Employees also need to be licensed and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certified, and must be able to meet the emotional and physical needs of both populations.

### Group exercise precautions:

Group exercise activities must be monitored by certified personal trainers in order to ensure the safety of both the children and older adults. They must also be available to teach proper exercise techniques.

### Funding:

Consideration must be given to Medicare and Medicaid requirements.

## References

- Camp, C. J., Judge, K. S., Bye, C. A., Fox, K. M., Bowden, J., Bell, M., Velencic, K., & Mattern, J. M. (1997). An intergenerational program for persons with dementia using Montessori methods. *The Gerontologist*, 37(5), 688-692.
- Femia, E. E., Zarit, S. H., Blair, C., Jarrott, S. E., & Bruno, K. (2008). Intergenerational preschool experiences and the young child: Potential benefits to development. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23(2), 272-287.
- Gaggioli, A., Morganti, L., Bonfiglio, S., Scaratti, C., Cipresso, P., Serino, S., & Riva, G. (2014). Intergenerational group reminiscence: A potentially effective intervention to enhance elderly psychosocial wellbeing and to improve children's perception of aging. *Educational Gerontology*, 40(7), 486-498.
- Granacher, U., Muehlbauer, T., Gollhofer, A., Kressig, R. W., & Zahner, L. (2011). An intergenerational approach in the promotion of balance and strength for fall prevention - A mini-review. *Gerontology*, 57(4), 304-315.
- Jarrott, S. E., & Bruno, K. (2003). Intergenerational activities involving persons with dementia: An observational assessment. *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias*, 18(1), 31-37.
- Larkin, E., Newman, S. (2001). Benefits of intergenerational staffing in preschools. *Educational Gerontology*, 27(5), 375-385.

For further information, contact Audrey Tarbutton at tarbutta@mail.gvsu.edu