



## Research Partnership Invitation: School-Based Intergenerational Engagement

Researchers at the University of Strathclyde are currently seeking primary schools for an exciting intergenerational engagement project. With the aim of positively contributing both to teaching provision and child attainment in the schools involved, the project will place older adult volunteers within schools to help with learning and teaching activities. By assessing the older adults before, during, and after their placements, the project will explore whether they might experience benefits in their health and wellbeing due to their volunteering. The research will begin late 2017/early 2018, however, we are now keen to establish partnerships with schools that would like to be involved in the project.

### What is intergenerational engagement, and why might it be useful?

Scotland is experiencing rapid population ageing, bringing a range of health, economic, and social challenges. Age-related changes in thinking and memory skills are among the most feared aspects of ageing, with implications for quality of life and independence. School-based intergenerational engagement is a promising approach to help maintain or enhance thinking skills, and wider wellbeing, in Scotland's older adults. The approach involves older adults volunteering in local schools, for example to help children improve their reading skills, as in the world-leading Experience Corps® project, with whom we are collaborating (<http://www.aarp.org/experience-corps/>). Such programmes offer a range of benefits, including better cognitive abilities in older people, and improving children's reading. In this project, we aim to develop and deliver intergenerational engagement through local schools, supported by Generations Working Together. We plan to investigate the feasibility of the programme, and the cognitive, social, and health outcomes in the older adult participants. We will also assess the experiences of the older adults, schools, and children participating in the programme.

### What would the project involve?

We are seeking schools who are interested in helping to develop and set up an intergenerational engagement programme in Scotland. The schools will host healthy older adult volunteers, for up to 15

#### The place of useful learning

The University of Strathclyde is a charitable body, registered in Scotland, number SC015263

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hours per week, and would benefit from the volunteers' time and input as a supplement to their teaching delivery. The volunteers (aged approximately 60+ years), from each school's local community, will be randomly assigned either to a wait-list control group (which does not go into schools) or the intervention group (which participates in the school-based intervention). The intervention will involve the volunteers helping with a range of activities within the classroom, which are expected to engage their thinking skills (memory, attention, etc.). We anticipate that the volunteers might help with one-to-one reading, comprehension, and writing skills, and organisational duties in the context of school libraries, and history/field projects, for example. The research will assess any changes in thinking skills, as well as key health and social outcomes, in the older adults participating in the programme over a 12-week period. We will also assess the volunteers' experiences of the intervention, and key outcomes for the schools involved. The study will be conducted in the context of a doctoral project, funded by the University of Strathclyde. In total, the intervention and associated data collection is likely to be spread over approximately 1.5-2 years, at key stages coinciding with the school year.

### **Why get involved?**

The project is anticipated to make an important contribution to the evidence base regarding intergenerational engagement and its development and implementation in Scotland. We recognise that there will be effort required on the part of the schools who contribute to the project, in terms of accommodating volunteers in the schools, and initially supporting them in the context of your individual school. However, research has shown that, while the older adults gain cognitive, physical, and social engagement from their experience, the schools, teachers, and children can also benefit from the input and resources that the volunteers contribute. We therefore anticipate that there will be measurable benefits for everyone involved. We expect to involve a number of schools, in order to achieve the number of participants we require, but all data, including individual school data, will be anonymous. Finally, it is important to note that, before commencing, all our research will be ethically approved.

***If you are interested to find out more about the project, or to express interest, please inform Generations Working Together, or the lead researcher on the project, Dr Louise Brown (University of Strathclyde):***

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