

Report on

Re-engaging the Generations: Intergenerational Programming in Social Services

National University of Singapore, Singapore

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Organised by The Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Analysis

Study Group of Family and Life Cycles Changes
National University of Singapore

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Brief Report

The three-day workshop was organized by the Asian MetaCentre for Population and Sustainable Development Analysis and the study group of family and life cycle changes, National University of Singapore. As the first of its kind to be launched in Southeast Asia, it has attracted participation from both government and non-governmental agencies in 10 countries, including U.S., Sweden, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Japan.

The workshop aimed to heighten the awareness of the needs for intergenerational programming in the social services, to build local capacity to plan, implement and evaluate intergenerational program models; and to produce publications addressing issues on intergenerational programming in the region. Two scholars and practitioners prominent in the intergenerational programming field in the U.S. – Professor Matthew Kaplan from Pennsylvania State University and Dr Nancy Henkin from Temple University were invited to lead the workshop.

The workshop began with an opening speech from the Guest-of –Honour, Mr Heng Chee How, mayor of the Central Singapore District. He expressed great interest in ideas to promote intergenerational cohesion and recognized the needs for promoting intergenerational initiatives in the communities, noting that the increasing number of healthy elderly in our aging society, with their life experiences and maturity, are valuable as resources to help nurture the younger generations.

The three sessions that followed reinforced the significance and need for intergenerational programming on local, national and policy basis. In the first session, speaking from the U.S. perspective, Dr Nancy Henkin, for example, claimed that only four percent of the elderly are staying in nursing homes in America, there is clearly a need to re-think the meaning of retirement. Following her, Dr Bostrom's presentation about retired men volunteering as granddad in compulsory school in Sweden provided a good example of how the retirees could be linked with children through the school setting.

The presentations in session two discussed the situations of intergenerational relations and linkages in Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines. From demographic, policy and

social-economical perspectives, the presentations signaled the need for more coherent efforts to link the generations in the societies.

Session three showcased a number of initiatives in the region. These included:

- a. Programs in Japan and China which use the concept of social currencies to foster mutual help between the generations
- b. Age-integrated facilities combining day care and/or nursing home services for the elderly and child care and/or student care in Japan, Singapore and the Philippines;
- c. The community centre concept where both the old and young in the community congregate to initiate projects to benefit the community in Malaysia;
- d. Independent elderly in low-cost housing's interaction with youth in the neighborhood in the Philippines.

With an overview and understanding of the present situations and levels of intergenerational activities available in the region, the workshop followed to focus on hands-on sessions facilitated by Professor Matthew Kaplan and Dr Nancy Henkin. The hands-on sessions started with an overview of intergenerational programming. This included an introduction to the depth of engagement continuum from level 1 where there is no physical contact but learning about aging at a distance, to level 7 where intergenerational interaction is a natural way of life in the family and community, and there is basically no need for intended initiatives. Dr Kaplan also discussed theories relating to the field, such as life span development in human development theories, perspectives from community development and culture (anthropology). These theories are significant in providing an interdisciplinary framework to the discipline of intergenerational programming.

Following that, the facilitators led the participants on the 'how-to' of developing an intergenerational program which suits the community needs. This involves assessing the needs of the community and resources available, selecting an appropriate approach, clarifying the goals and objectives and determining the "depth" that is sought in an intergenerational interaction; designing an evaluation to assess whether the objectives are attained. There were also discussions on how to prepare and train staff, ways to build community connections through the program, how to implement and maintain a program. Participants brainstormed in small groups and shared their ideas with the large group during the lively exchange. Towards the end of the workshop, participants formed groups based on interest clusters and worked towards developing an action plan. The proposals included school-based programs, fun and hobby intergenerational play groups, Intergenerational centers by retired university professors (in the Philippines) and a neighborhood link.

The three-day workshop concluded with a site visit to the Tampines 3-in-1 center where the participants obtained a first-hand experience about how a program is running and the impact on the old, the young and the community. On the whole, the participants benefited greatly from learning about new perspectives in linking the generations and expressed interest in continuing the discussions, strengthening the networking through future conferences and bringing the action plan to a concrete visualization in their own countries.