



Bringing together older and younger generations

- Speaker 1: This is a podcast by Lumina, the perfect space to innovate, collaborate, and grow in health, science, and tech.
- Rebecca Griffin: Professor Annika Fitzgerald, thank you for being with Health Tech Talks today.
- Annika Fitzgerald: Well, thank you so much for having me. It's very exciting to be here and to talk about the work that we've been doing.
- Rebecca Griffin: Your career started as a nurse and then you moved into health services management. You're now a professor of health management at Griffith University and initiator of the university's intergenerational practice research program. You were involved in the pre and post production of the very much loved ABC TV series, Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds, and you're the Founder and Chair of the Australian Institute for Intergenerational Practice. There's so much for us to talk about, including the fabulous ABC TV program, but I'd like to start by understanding what intergenerational practice is.
- Annika Fitzgerald: Sometimes it's easiest for people to understand what intergenerational practice is not, so I'd start there. Intergenerational practice is not a visit. It is much more and much beyond a visit. It's the bringing together of older and younger generations for a very specific purpose, and that purpose needs to be reciprocal. So in terms of learning opportunities, older people learn and younger people learn from each other. It needs to be meaningful and purposeful, and not only that, it's also planned, usually curriculum based, evaluated and evidence based, so it's much more than a visit.
- Rebecca Griffin: And how did this come onto your radar?
- Annika Fitzgerald: Well, in 2013, a long time ago now it seems.
- Rebecca Griffin: It does, doesn't it?
- Annika Fitzgerald: My daughter, who was a childcare worker, and myself were sitting around having afternoon tea in the kitchen table and she was telling me about her day and it just reminded me of my time in aged care. So she was talking about the tasks associated with caring for children and what she was basically saying was here I am, I thought I would be a great influence on children's lives. I had a really fair idea of what I needed to do to be an influence on children's lives, but all I'm



doing is the tasks associated with it, which is usually cleaning the children. That's the major task.

And I kind of was sympathetic to her cause saying, "I understand this because when I was in aged care, I felt the same. I thought I would be privileged to be part of the end of life of many people and so on, and all I was really doing was care of their body rather than caring of their mind." And she said, "Mom, if caring for older people and younger people is so similar, why isn't it together?" And I said, "I don't know, but I'll go and find out." So that was the beginning of all of this.

Rebecca Griffin: What a lovely journey, and to have done that with your daughter.

Annika Fitzgerald: Absolutely, and she's actually still heavily involved with most of the stuff that we are doing, which is really brilliant.

Rebecca Griffin: So what are the benefits of intergenerational practice for our community and what problems can it solve?

Annika Fitzgerald: Basically, a lot of the research still needs to happen to evidence this, but we've got the gut feeling that intergenerational practice actually delays cognitive and physical decline in older people by bringing together younger and older people. And we saw in the ABC series, that that is definitely the case. Now empirically we can't say it is, but we can definitely have that as a basis to do further research into that.

In addition, intergenerational practices supports social and emotional learning of all participants through relational activities and these pedagogy associated with the relational activities, and it actually promotes reciprocity between older and younger people. So it's really important to us that there's a good benefit to both older and younger people so that we don't create this idea that perhaps children are a tool for older people to be entertained or that older people are a tool for children to learn from. We really believe that the connection is of great benefit to both.

We did a little bit of tabletop research to see how the relationship between older people and younger children affects the delinquency of children in their teenage years, and we believe that may be one of the very big socioeconomic outcomes is that it might reduce delinquencies in teenagers. There are other benefits of course, but ultimately it provides an opportunity for younger and older generations to share their experiences and so create an inclusive and age friendly community that is free from prejudice and discrimination.



And some of the alternate things added to this is that when you bring children and older people together, they might consider it as a career choice. So we hope that it influences children at whatever age, so school children or very young children, even later teens will change their mind how they view older people, and of course, reduce the ageism as associated with that. So we cannot actually see any negative things in this, there's only just benefits, and I'm only touching on the surface of this, and we actually think we may be able through the research we are doing point out to even more benefits that we haven't actually thought of yet.

Rebecca Griffin...: You founded the Australian Institute for Intergenerational Practice. The story of how the institute was founded is lovely, and we have talked about that a little before with your daughter, but can we just talk about that one again?

Annika Fitzgerald: Sure. Well, apart from the story with my daughter, very quickly, we did quite a bit of research and the background into this really was if we did this where would it sit under education or under child ... Like child cares under education or under health, aged cares under health? So we did, we started off with looking at that and then make a decision on that, and then we took it from there. But what we found was I always talk about the octopus. We had lots of arms of the octopus, so here there's research into socioeconomic areas, which we did from the business school perspective. And then there is also, of course, clinical benefits, which we did from a psychological perspective.

Then there was the pedagogy and elder pedagogy that we need to develop to how do we know all the people have learned. For example, we just don't know. In fact, we kind of dismiss it that they don't, but perhaps they learn even to take their medications properly, et cetera. How do they memorize it? How do their brains work basically? So that was an arm of the octopus. And then we had some other random arms. One was like career development because we felt sustainability of the program is incredibly important and it's only sustained when you train people to do this properly. So workforce was another arm of the octopus and then another couple of random arms.

So what we thought was we really need to pull this together. We have got all these arms, but we don't have the head of the octopus. So that's what we formed and that is the Australian Institute for Intergenerational Practice. We thought we'd go big and then we may as well go as big as we can, and this it pulls together really the intergenerational work, amazing work that's done in Australia that would never have had a voice anywhere. And if we pull that all together, then we can actually also build that evidence base that we need to convince at least the government that this is a good thing and that it requires a little bit of funding, of course, but also a little bit of thought in how this might be



upscaled within our society, make it a normal thing rather than an oh wow thing. And getting older myself, I would definitely want to be part of such an integrated community, if you like.

So I think that is more or less the story of how the Australian Institute of Intergenerational Practice came to be. It took us a year to set it up. It's a not for profit. It's very important to me that it's not for profit. It's absolutely for purpose, and the purpose really is this upscaling of intergenerational practices around Australia and indeed, around the world we've got quite a few interesting stories to tell about what's happening around the world, and how we are part of that, so it's great.

Rebecca Griffin: Is there any other work like this underway in Australia?

Annika Fitzgerald: No, we are working with others who are doing research or who are focusing on the arms of the octopus, but we are the big body for intergenerational practice in Australia. We have got two other entities that we work very closely with, so part of our philosophy is not to be competitive, but be very collaborative because this is not about us, this is about younger and older people, so it's really important to keep that at the forefront of our minds. There is a very new company in Sydney, but we are working with them and they are very research based, so it's great for us to be able to work with them, and every funding opportunity that they've addressed, we are part of it as well as them being part of our funding opportunities.

So we are working very closely together with them. Then there's also Intergenerational Learning Australia, who is actually ... That is a business. Greg Kronan actually was an ex student of mine, and I've helped him really to set this up. And he is different from us in that his business is looking at mixing older and younger generation via video conferencing. And this was incredibly successful during COVID because we actually provided a point of connection between older people in a nursing home and children in the school, and it's hugely successful and he's doing very well with it. I'm very proud to be part of his work.

Rebecca Griffin: You've talked about what the Institute does as the head of the Octopus. Is the other work that you're doing research and collaboration and bringing people together, is that what you would describe what the institute does?

Annika Fitzgerald: Yes, so the institute does some very specific things. It's looking at certifications or professional development because we really believe that the success of these intergenerational programs are directly related to the quality of facilitation between older and younger people. We would see in the short term professional development, in the long term that this actually ends up being a



degree. So we can work towards this ... Really, this workforce and a career development of the intergenerational care worker. So we really think that that is very important for us to work on.

We also are looking at developing further. We did research and systematic literature review on the framework, and that is akin to the early learning framework. We think it's really important to have standards and we would probably within the next two years, or maybe two and a half years, we'll be looking at an accreditation program so that when parents and carers leave their older people and younger people in the care of a facilitator at a particular organization that they can be sure that that organization is doing the best practice that they possibly can that we've set the standards for. So I think that is really important.

We also have a toolkit, a toolkit that guides people who don't know anything about this into creating their own intergenerational practices and so on, and that toolkit is actually a result from research that we've done earlier. Freely available to anybody, it's on the website, you can download it. But our education professional education program actually takes that and delves much deeper into the why and so on and so forth, so that's important. Most of the research we do, we very deliberately do that it's not commercial so that we can make it freely available to people who need it, so that is part of our philosophy.

We also do consultancy and that consultancy is kind of anywhere from can you have a look at our program and do you think our program fits your framework to I don't know where to start, I've got this old people home and I've got this childcare center, but can you help us set it up to we'd like to evaluate it, what kind of validated tools do you recommend we can evaluate this with? So anything from help to we've done it, but now we actually want to make it substantial and do some research into this.

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Rebecca Griffin: Annika, what about research in this space? We have touched on that, but what work is being done to support a focus on intergenerational practice and how it benefits the entire community in both the short and long term?

Annika Fitzgerald: Yeah, so the government grants that we received were really about that community benefit and one resulted in the toolkit I was talking about earlier. But we've also done some more non-government grants. For example, we had a



grant to help us do some research in western Australia, and also we've got recently a grant that we are doing some work with Kindred, which is in Brisbane.

What we have done with them is to try and build an evidence base, so we are actually doing the same evaluations in different places so that the evaluations rather than just 20 people ends up becoming 200 people, so we are adding to their evidence base and that is really important. It's very exciting some of the work that we are doing at the moment. This work is really important and it's important that we add to what we've already got so that we can be more convincing, which is what research is about.

Rebecca Griffin: So you were involved in the fantastic ABC television series, *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*. It was hugely popular and just a great series. Why was that made and why do you think it was so popular?

Annika Fitzgerald: Well, it's popular because it talks to the heartstrings of people, doesn't it? There's nothing more building enthusiasm than seeing young people and old people together. I was involved with the ABC series, both first and second one as a pre and post production, and also now with the third one. Probably be more involved with that one in terms of evaluations as well, so it's very exciting, but it's also built this little community of people that are so excited about intergenerational practice that we still all talk to one another and so on. And we are really happy to be able to take this and just say this is how important it was for people and take it to the politicians, and we've done that after each and every series. So hopefully we'll do that after series three as well.

So the research that we could do there, of course, was very limited but it was a really good indication, and even if you call it a pilot, it was an excellent pilot to say we need to do much more of this research. And it's very exciting that we've been together with others, such as people from the University of New South Wales and to try and roll this research out at a much larger space so that we can actually get some really significant results from that. So we are very excited that we are working on all of that at the moment.

Rebecca Griffin: Was there an experience between the generations on that show that really inspired you and has stayed with you?

Annika Fitzgerald: Too many. Too many. I mean, the one that comes to my mind the most is with Dodie and Maximillian, and of course, I still see Dodie regularly, so as she's ... She's actually a professor of economics. She's had a huge influence on women and on their superannuation. She was one of the ones making sure women got a superannuation, so she should actually, even for that, be very famous. But she would tell you, she said she can't believe that the 140 papers that she wrote



didn't make her famous, but now she's stopped in the street because Maximillian made her famous. And of course, the interactions between them. I mean, even when we see photos later on, a little snippet, she can go to YouTube and put in Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds, so you can just gorge on the little snippets of interactions between people.

The other one that comes to mind is when this gentleman was talking about his puzzles and the children were amazed that he could do puzzles in two days with 1,000 pieces. And then I thought to myself, but I'm amazed he can do a puzzle, a 1,000 piece puzzle in two days, like I couldn't do that. It's just amazing. So these kind of things, and it brought purpose to his life where he had the only other thing he was doing puzzles, but now the purpose for him was sharing those puzzles and showing kids that you can actually do that and that is just fantastic.

Rebecca Griffin: What attracted you to opening the institute here at the Lumina Development on the Gold Coast where we are chatting today?

Annika Fitzgerald: Well, it was such an opportunity because when you do good things, things just fall in your lap, and this fell in our lap absolutely at the right time, talking to people who knew people that knew people. And the next thing is we are here. This is about ... Lumina is about joining industries, so here we are, we are actually joining aged care industry with childcare industry, so we fit. The fit was just perfect.

Rebecca Griffin: So in the next 12 months, Proxima, which is a pediatric center of excellence, will open its doors here at Lumina, and of course, as we mentioned, you're based here. How will the co-location of these organizations assist with intergenerational practice and what opportunities do you see?

Annika Fitzgerald: Well, we all know from our last two years of experience that whilst it's great to meet via video conferencing, best work is done when you can see each other face to face. So just being co-located actually makes an emphasis on the collaboration that is needed, so we are very excited to be here and we are very thankful that we can be here, so that's really good.

Rebecca Griffin: Annika, finally, what is your hope for intergenerational practice and how that can benefit the health of our elders and the greater community?

Annika Fitzgerald: My background is in health and one of the things that I remember very clearly is that the biggest value statement is about access. That everybody has got equal access to live a happy and healthy life. I think intergenerational practice actually does that, and my hope is that we intergenerational practice people, us, will ... And intergenerational practice at large, will become the norm so that people ...

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We wouldn't have to have this podcast if it was the norm. We don't have to justify it if it was the norm. We don't have to beg for money if it was the norm.

So our hope is to make this the norm and to give that equal access to wellbeing and living well and quality of life to everyone in Australia. And it takes a village to bring up a child. We know that. What we are doing is not new. Absolutely not new. It's actually going back to what used to happen before when all families lived in the one house, and what is new is that we need to find an evidence base that this integration of society is essential for the sustainability of society and that it's an incredibly important part to understand, for children to understand older people, for older people to understand children, and to bring them together for a meaningful and purposeful reason, and I think our hope is to continue that.

Rebecca Griffin: All the very best with your work. It's inspiring and it's been wonderful talking with you today.

Annika Fitzgerald: You're very welcome. Thank you very much.

Rebecca Griffin: So learn more about Lumina and how we work with health tech startups, visit LuminaGoldCoast.com.au, and don't forget to sign up to receive your Lumina opportunities pack today.