

# Learning with Seniors

M. Carmen Gárate  
Molina

An intergenerational  
relations programme

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M. Carmen Gárate Molina

Ajuntament  
de Barcelona

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## Presentation

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Twenty-five years ago, the programme “Aprendre amb la gent gran” (Learning with Seniors) began in the Sants-Montjuïc District, with the aim of breaking down the stereotypes among the different generations. Throughout these twenty-five years, the programme has consolidated itself while expanding its lines of work in anticipation of a necessary and at the same time encouraging future. Thus far, the programme has been implemented in five primary schools, one secondary school, a university school of psychology, a municipal toy library and youth centre, four retirement homes and three municipal recreation centres.

The interaction between two people of disparate ages, between people of different generations, is becoming important for both, as the knowledge and life experience of one can enrich the life of the other and contribute to his/her personal growth. It shortens distances and facilitates an understanding of the diversity of our communities, and beyond that, the diversity of the society in which we live. The contact and bonds between individuals who are at different moments in their respective life cycles demonstrates that age-related distances change, and in fact, there are no major differences: we all have been or will go through the same things in life.

This year, in celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this programme organised by the district, we want to pay tribute to all the senior citizens who have formed part of it. We want to celebrate those of you who have put yourselves into it, instilling your hope and your enthusiasm, as volunteers. Indeed, you are a paradigm at the immediate local level. Yet you are also a benchmark in the organizations and associations in which many of you participate on a daily basis in the district, and all together, it is our duty to defend your rightful place in society. We must reevaluate the importance of your knowledge and your experience, as well as all the time that you devote as volunteers. I would also like to extend our gratitude to the children and the young people, as well as to the educational facilities, retirement homes and community centres that form part of the programme simply because they believe in intergenerational relations. Clearly, all of these individuals and bodies make Sants-Montjuïc a more participative and united district.

On behalf of our district, we encourage you to share your experience and take part in a programme that is open to everyone, “Learning with Seniors”.

**Jaume Asens i Llodrà**

Councillor of the Sants-Montjuïc District

## 25 years recovering and creating relations

When we speak of intergenerational programmes, what is it that we mean? Are we talking about generations? About ages? About ageing? About children and youths? About activities? No, not in essence. We are talking about relations. And that is precisely what the readers of this book will find: the detailed story of an intergenerational programme that ultimately, throughout its 25 years of history, has above all aspired to bring together people and groups of different generations and facilitate their interaction, relations and the bonds.

Intergenerational programmes are relational programmes. Though it might be said that all social programmes are relational, this is not entirely true, as it would depend on the meaning that we attach to the term “social”. Frequently, a social programme is only social because it targets groups of people and because it works for them and aspires to bring about changes and actions that affect a group of people. All things considered, from my point of view, in the case of intergenerational programmes, their nature, which is not only social but also relational, is inevitable: by virtue of their very name, the prefix *inter-* patently indicates that these programmes focus on what occurs between or among the generations and not simply on what the generations are or do. Therein resides the true specificity of an intergenerational programme.

What does it mean to focus on the “between” or “among” different generations? Well, it means taking as the primary motor of the programme the distance between people and groups of people who are at different points in their life cycles (such cycles allude to the combined effects of the passage of time and personal development in a given context), and whose lives take place in keeping with different life course

formats. In other words, it is based on the different ways in which the lives and life paths of some people intertwine with those of their contemporaries, on the one hand; and on the other hand, the manners by which they are interdependent on the social structures within which those people live.

All the same, an important note must be added to what we have just described: taking the generational distance as the motor for a programme does not mean losing sight of the fact that such distance is variable, to the extent that it often seems to disappear. This is precisely acknowledged by some of the participants of the “Learning with Seniors” programme, when they make statements such as: “The young and the old are not so different from one another; ... We all have been or will go through the same thing”. Hence, the set of variable distances and the combination of the differences and the correspondences all together within a historical perspective is also a central element of any intergenerational programme worthy of such a name. And “Learning with Seniors” provides evidence of precisely that in this book, which rather than telling a story, aims to serve as an invitation to practice and promote intergenerational relations. In a word, relations, life courses and life cycles, time and life trajectories, and the similarities and differences, are essential pieces of the puzzle of a solid intergenerational programme; and as such, they are also the fundamental ingredients of a book such as this one.

In addition to those pieces, “Learning with Seniors” adds yet another piece of the puzzle: great emphasis on learning and education. Intergenerational programmes are indeed opportunities to learn; yet it is not strictly knowledge that is learned —as in fact has also occurred in the case of “Learning with Seniors”. Rather, in these

programmes we often learn who we are and who those other people are, those whom we encounter in life and those upon whom we depend to subsist. Here I am referring to the generations that came before us, the generations that enabled us to be born, to begin to walk and to develop our lives; and I am also thinking about the generations that we have engendered, that have come after us and into which we have instilled our attention and projected our present and future hopes and aspirations. For this reason, I recommend paying special attention to the many moments in the book where someone acknowledges that he/she was surprised during the intergenerational meeting. After all, is it not true that to *take by surprise* and to *take in* or learn (*sor-prendre* and *a-prendre*, in Catalan) come from the same Latin root *prendre* (meaning “to take”)? When we are surprised we are taken aback, captivated by something unexpected and we learn; and the other way around, all learned things are new to us, things that take us by surprise, captivating us: “What surprised me most was the bond of trust that developed”. Entering a relationship entails accepting the risk of learning and being surprised, and not only by others, but also being surprised by oneself, as our relationships are what lead us to become who we are. Hence, if we change and expand those relationships, we also change ourselves, as this young university student notes when reflecting on what he has learned after participating in the “Learning with Seniors” program: “I have changed completely and in a very positive way”.

Twenty-five years of history are just what they are. On the one hand, they may seem to be a great deal of time; and on the other hand, they are only just the beginning. Yet there is no doubt that very few intergenerational programmes can say that they have been operative for so many years and that they have done so by preserving the

memory of what has taken place, as can be seen in this book. If “Learning with Seniors” has managed to accomplish this, I believe it is because the programme has found the way to focus on the most essential thing of all—promoting a few hours of interaction—, while flexibly adapting to each institutional and personal context in its six lines of work, and above all, “experience difference as an enrichment”, as noted by some of the professionals of the retirement homes involved in the programme.

When you read the book, you are left with the feeling of having tasted the product of a slow-cooked process, a process born out of the desire to improve senior citizens’ opportunities for a good quality of life as they age, yet which, over time has covered dense ground and has ultimately has demonstrated that in order to have quality of life as they age—in other words, to enjoy the inevitable and human experience of the passage of time, both senior citizens and the rest of us must age in connection with others, in interaction with others. In the case of “Learning with Seniors”, those “others” have above all been people of different generational identities and positions, and they have also been people of different nationalities, ethnicities, educational backgrounds, genders and families. All of this diversity makes “Learning with Seniors” a very unique adventure that is at once highly necessary today, for as the parents of some of the participating children say, “the intergenerational relationship is part of the essence of the human being, yet in our world today, some of this has perhaps been lost”.

### **Mariano Sánchez Martínez**

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Specialist in intergenerational relations

## Introduction

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Historically, The Barcelona City Council has historically provided for senior citizens centres. The centres known as *Casals de jubilats* (“Retirement Centres”) in the past, are the “Casals i espais municipals de gent gran” (Municipal Seniors’ Clubs and Centres or “MSCC”) of today. Through the years, those centres have gradually evolved, in terms of both their infrastructures and the activities they offer, in an effort to keep up with the needs of the city’s senior citizens.

In the 1990s, the wave of early retirement led increasingly more people to ask for some sort of activity. The retired population was younger and had other interests and a different social and cultural level. In other words, the people who came to the municipal seniors’ centres underscored the heterogeneous nature of this social group.

At that time, the Barcelona City Council’s Sants-Montjuïc District was looking into the need to open up new avenues for the social participation of senior citizens, as an addition to the activities that were already being offered by the municipal seniors’ centres.

Those activities would have to take into account diversity, society’s image of elderly people, and most importantly, the image that the senior citizens had of themselves, and the extent to which they wanted to change that image.

Generally speaking, senior citizens interacted with people from other age groups within their family environment (grandchildren, children, brothers and sisters, etc.); however such intergenerational relations seldom took place beyond the family realm. Usually, multigenerational family relations were determined by the biological bond and their connections are based on affection, economics, personal and family problems, housing, etc. At the same time, there was a common feeling of loneliness and

self-marginalisation that kept them from interacting with the members of other generations. Moreover, the negative image of this group generally portrayed by the mass media was by no means helpful, as they seldom made mention of the value that senior citizens could provide to others through their social interaction, whether as individuals or as a group.

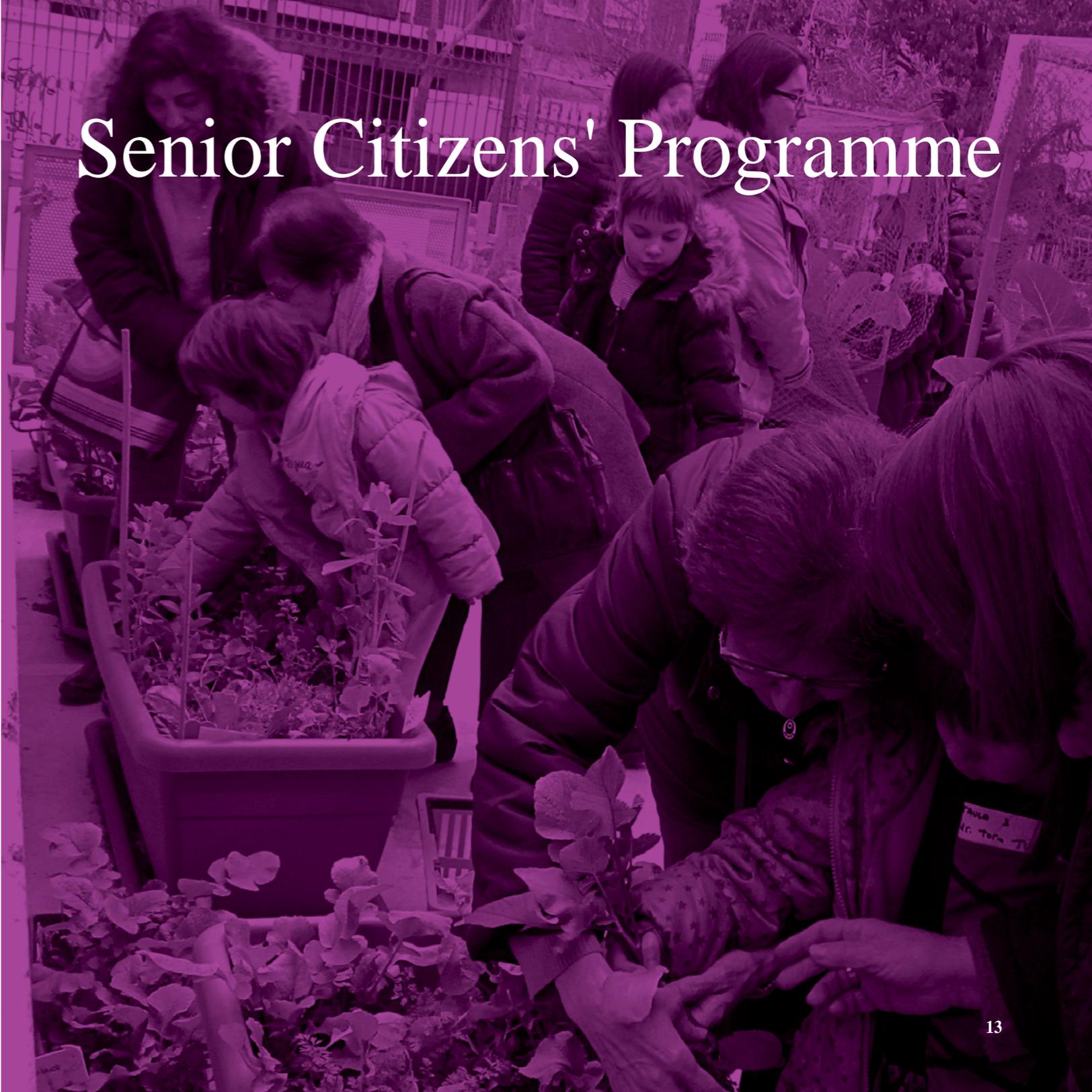
Among other intervention proposals, intergenerational relations activities were considered, as they met some of the objectives that we aimed to achieve, such as participation, personal commitment, being able to share life stories and feelings, involvement in the design of new activities, volunteering and interacting with other age groups, among others. The drawback was that in 1990, at the national level there were not many activities of this type that could provide any sort of base information. Nevertheless, in 1991 as a pilot project, an activity of this nature was implemented with the 6th-grade students (ages 11-12) of a small public primary school and six senior citizens from a municipal seniors’ centre and a municipal retirement home. This marked the beginning of “Learning with Seniors”.

Today, 25 years later, “Learning with Seniors” is an intergenerational relations programme (IP) that operates at five primary schools, one secondary school, the University of Barcelona—with second-year Psychology students—a municipal toy library and youth centre, four retirement homes and three municipal seniors’ centres within the district.

This book is divided into two sections: the first describes the creation of the Senior Citizens’ Programme, and the second explores the “Learning with Seniors” experience. The aim is to share with those interested the beginnings of this intergenerational relations program: its composition, its current mechanics and how “Learning with Seniors” has gradually grown to establish itself and how for the past twenty-five years it has demonstrated that it was a necessary and advantageous programme for all the generations involved.

At the same time, for professionals who work with different age groups, this publication may serve as food for thought and as a source of ideas that may help them to organize other intergenerational activities; and finally for senior citizens in particular, it will afford them insight to the advantages of these programmes, for themselves and for the other generations, hence ultimately spurring them to participate.

# Senior Citizens' Programme



## The beginnings

The Sants-Montjuïc District is divided into three areas: Sants-Hostafrancs-La Bordeta, Poble-sec and Zona Franca. In June 2013, the district had a population of 45,995 people over age 60.<sup>1</sup>

Though this district always offered activities for seniors, in 1990 it was observed that the population of older people was increasingly more heterogeneous and that there was a need to respond to such differences by diversifying the activities that were thus far being offered and by providing new ones. At the proposal of the professionals who were working with elders, the district studied the possibility of organising a programme for seniors in keeping with the needs of the time, assigning specific staff to such projects, with a precise budget and a set of well-defined goals.

A study of the users of municipal seniors' clubs and centres was conducted, and at the same time a separate survey was taken of all the people of age 60, retired or active, who had no association with the MSCCs. This gave us a certain idea of what they were doing and afforded us an approach to what retired people and those anticipating retirement might want to do with their time.

Among other things, the 60-year-olds were asked about their pastimes and hobbies, where they practiced them, and which ones they would like to pursue, and in cases where they did not practice any activities, the reasons behind their inactivity. The activities that they engaged in included entertainment (reading, arts and crafts, board games, etc.), cultural activities (musicals, conferences, etc.) and sports (hiking, gym, swimming, etc.).

1. Department of Statistics. Barcelona City Council.

Source: Reading of the Municipal Population Registry on 30 June 2013. Barcelona City Council.

As regards the activities that they wished to pursue, many mentioned cultural activities (cultural visits, theatre, photography, etc.), followed by sports (swimming, gym, yoga, etc.). Among the reasons behind their inactivity, they cited first of all the lack of time, possibly because they worked, followed by the lack of knowledge of centres that offered such activities and economic problems. Finally, those who engaged in activities often did them in their homes or by themselves, and only a small percentage practiced them at centres or institutions in their neighbourhoods.

The second study was carried out with municipal seniors' centre users, giving us a very precise idea of the reality, much despite the differences between those who attended an old municipal seniors' centre with limited infrastructure for activities and those who frequented a relatively new municipal seniors' centre, located inside of a civic centre where they shared part of the infrastructures and which therefore could offer more activities.

The results confirmed that the youngest group of users, with highest pensions and who lived with their partners tended to use the municipal seniors' centres within civic centres. The oldest municipal seniors' centres were generally frequented by people who lived alone and whose level of education was lower and those who stated that they got bored at home and that they quite possibly sought a place to interact and make friends.

The exploration of the social and family environment indicated that loneliness and/or conflictive coexistence with the family with which the senior citizen lived was the most frequent problem. The unity of the family had been breaking up for a number of years: parents, children and grandparents no longer formed a family unit. Parents no longer lived with their children, and the relationship with the grandchildren was more distant.

Retired people had lost their previous roles from when they had been employed, and many were unable to find another role or gratifying social relationship.

In terms of their cultural and economic status, most of these people had little academic education, few interests and a limited economy. This reality led them to take little interest in finding out about the array of activities available to them, the centres where such activities were offered or the possibility of receiving any sort of aid in cases of precarious economic circumstances.

In the cases of those of advanced ages, the housing situation was another factor that hindered their participation or interaction with others and which further promoted their solitude, as many buildings were not equipped with lifts.

In the healthcare area, it was observed that senior citizens worried a great deal about their illnesses. Nevertheless, they had very limited knowledge of illness prevention and/or health promotion, they were unaware of the deficits that come with age and often confused them with different illnesses. Those who suffered from chronic disease usually lived for the disease, rather than with it. On the whole, their health situation generated greater anxiety for them and limited their possibilities of taking part in activities.

With these premises, in 1991 a technical proposal and a political decision led to the creation of the Senior Citizens' Programme. This marked the start of a new era for senior citizens and set out to foster their participation and their promotion in society. Here, promotion is understood as the personal commitment that each individual makes to himself/herself and to others, to take part in their own future and in that of the other groups of people, which in turn enables better integration into the society in which they live. It was important to get them involved and not

solely as a consumers but also as contributors to the schedule of activities, where possible. New cultural and educational activities were held, in addition to those which promoted social relations. At the same time, the district began to refurbish the oldest seniors' clubs.

A more direct intervention also began with the bodies that formed the district's Senior Citizens Commission, in order to generate work groups and promote their greater involvement and relevance in everything relating to senior citizens. The idea was to spur such institutions to serve as a solid channel of information for this age group.

## Municipal Seniors' Centres and Seniors' clubs

In 1991, the centres in the Sants-Montjuïc District were still governed by the Retirement Centres Regulation of 1987<sup>2</sup> (the first such regulation dated from 1982) and were defined as "centres for the meeting of retired people from the district, where they can carry out all free time activities".

The management body of these centres was the General Assembly, which was entirely made up of club members and the Board of Directors.

This type of management would later be modified at the Cotxeres de Sants Municipal Seniors' Centre, which was inaugurated in 1983, where a new management model began as a pilot project. The Board of Directors disappeared and was replaced by a new governing body known as the "Group Motor", which consisted of one representative of each of the activities offered. Each representative had to be an active participant of his/her corresponding activity. If the activity ceased to be offered, the representation was cancelled and the seat was replaced by another activity user.

2. Retirement Homes. General Regulations for organization and operation. October, 1987

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This structure ensured the dynamic composition of the governing body, as it did not allow for the ongoing presence of anyone who was not truly involved in an activity. This type of management proved to be more participative and faithful to everything related with the dynamics of the centre, as each manager was perfectly aware of the activity that he/she represented and worked with the other representatives to address any needs, changes or problems that might arise. Hence, the representatives worked all together, on equal terms, taking the corresponding decisions without taking away importance from any one. At the same time, the members of the *Grup Motor* (“Steering Committee”) selected a single person to represent the municipal seniors’ centre.

At all times, the Steering Committee was supported and supervised by a technician from the Senior Citizens’ Programme, and the members held meetings twice a month.

This pilot management model was very similar to the current governmental body, the Management Committee.<sup>3</sup>

Today, the district has four municipal seniors’ centres (Cotxeres de Sants, La Capa, Sant Cristòfol and Poble-sec) and a municipal seniors’ club (Polvorí), which are distributed among the three areas of Sants-Montjuïc.

All of those centres have been adapted to the new model established by the Municipal Senior Citizens Centres Improvement Plan. These infrastructures are defined as “municipal public services for senior citizens, which aim to promote the social integration of seniors, prevent social isolation, encourage interaction and foster the active participation of senior citizens in community life.

The objective of the municipal centres is to offer a place for interaction and exchange, a place to receive training, a meeting place where the people can come together and enjoy and maintain good relationships, and where they can share different interests; a place that cares for others and for the environment, and a place that understands and assumes an active role inside and outside of the centre, and which is capable of adapting to the new realities “.<sup>4</sup>

## The Activities

In 1991, most of the activities held at the municipal seniors’ centres aimed to fill free time and were hence of a recreational nature (excursions, board games, petanque, sewing, etc.).

Bearing in mind the possibilities of space and organization, all the municipal seniors’ centres began to offer new activities without losing sight of the more recreational aspect, as noted above. This marked the start of the Aula Oberta (“Open Classroom”) in La Bordeta and Poble-sec, with different activities, such as reading and writing, theatre, traditional Catalan Sardanes dancing, choir, Catalan language, cultural tours, music, and outings to Collserola. There was also an expansion of the existing activities, including yoga, hiking, gym activities, arts and crafts, and others.

Today, all the seniors’ clubs and centres in the Sants-Montjuïc District have a schedule of activities to promote healthy habits and social welfare, lifelong education activities and free-time and recreational activities, responding to the interests of senior citizens, as set forth by the Municipal Senior Citizens Centre Improvement Plan of 2007.

3. Municipal Senior Citizens Centre Improvement Plan, 2007.

4. Municipal Senior Citizens Centre Improvement Plan, 2007, p. 26.

In 1991 the district also implemented two activities outside of the usual schedule of the municipal seniors' centres, targeting all senior citizens, regardless of whether or not they were regular users of the centres, and they were also open to residents of other districts in Barcelona. Among those activities, one was focused on the promotion of health, and another centred on the interaction among people of different generations.

### The Senior Citizens' Health Fortnight

Since it began in 1991 —at this point, 25 years ago—, it has been an annual free activity. The primary aim of this course is not to talk about specific illnesses —although the participants often end up doing so—, but rather to inform and educate the participants, in order to promote physical, psychological and social health. Hence, the course presents conducts and mechanisms that help prevent certain illnesses, reminding the participants of healthy habits, and promoting a wholesome eating habits and physical exercise and maintaining good social relations. The activity also aims to raise awareness of the ageing process and the possible deficits that may appear, as well as the resources that can help improve their state of health —medical, legal, social and consumer. For two weeks, this event is held, featuring conferences, workshops and activities that can improve the quality of life of all who attend.

### Learning with Seniors

This is an intergenerational relations activity for senior citizens, young children, adolescents and youths, which aims to bring participants together within their everyday environments (retirement home, municipal seniors' centre, primary school, secondary school, university and toy library and youth centre). Through the years, this activity has become an intergenerational relations

programme (“IP”), the main focus of this book.

## The Volunteers

In 1991, the figure of the volunteer senior citizen within the seniors' clubs was relatively unknown, except at the Cotxeres de Sants Municipal Seniors' Centre, which had a particular management system—as described above—that promoted this role. Since then, the volunteers have come to play an essential role at these centres, both because they have enabled us to expand the activities that are offered on a voluntary and non-profit basis, and because they provide people with a social space and a role that favours solidarity and their involvement in the community. At present, the senior citizens programme boasts more than 200 volunteers.

In keeping with Spanish State Law 6/1996, on Volunteers, *voluntary work* is understood as “the group of activities of general interest carried out by persons at their free will, in a altruistic and charitable manner, through private or public organizations and in keeping with specific programmes or projects, providing that they are not carried out by virtue of any labour, civil service or trade relationship or any other monetary relationship”.

The Improvement Plan states: “Volunteering, which is understood as a gesture of charity and devotion of personal time to the benefit of other persons, is the current base of the municipal senior citizens' centres and clubs”.<sup>5</sup>

The men and women of the city of Barcelona can serve as volunteers in the Seniors Programme.

5. Pla de Millora dels Casals i Espais de Gent Gran Municipals, 2007, p. 40.

## Benefits of volunteering, as acknowledged by the senior citizens

The senior citizens who volunteer at the different centres affirm that there are countless advantages to their volunteer work. As to the participants of the “Learning with Seniors” programme, in addition to what they state verbally, those advantages are again confirmed in the questionnaires that are completed upon conclusion of the activity, and which can be viewed in the appendix to this book.

Some of the benefits are as follows:

- 1 It greatly increases their self-esteem, to such an extent that it makes them feel secure in other areas of their daily life: “I am more secure in my relationship with my grandchildren”; “I am less ashamed when I have to speak in public”; ...
- 1 For a number of hours of the day, they forget their personal problems and are even capable of facing them in a far more positive manner, as the fact of sharing similar experiences with other people can sometimes minimize one's personal problems.
- 1 It fills a void of loneliness, which becomes a place of satisfaction: “I have met other people and I am really happy”.
- 1 It enables them to participate and find a social place where they are recognised, important and needed: “The kids want to know things about us; ... They want to help us; ... They are interested in learning”.
- 1 They can love and feel loved: “What I liked most was the love that they have shown us”.
- 1 They take their body image more seriously and they also discover skills that they did not know they had: “I didn't think I'd know how to do what they asked me to do”.

- 1 It improves their perception of their state of health (they do more physical exercise, it helps alleviate depressive moods, it helps them to accept chronic illness, etc.): “For a number of hours, I forget my problems”.

Bearing in mind the definition of “active ageing”, it is safe to say beyond a doubt that both voluntary activity at the seniors' centres and in the IP promote “the process of optimizing the opportunities for health, participation and security with the aim of improving people's quality of life as they grow older”.<sup>6</sup>

## Why do senior citizens become volunteers?

Senior citizens who volunteer at municipal centres do so for different reasons: some do so because they have a great deal of free time; others because they feel lonely; others because they want to teach what they know; and still others because they know that they want help other people in some manner.

It is highly common to find people whose life partners have serious problems, people who are suffering from depression due to the death of a close family member or because their children have moved out of the house, etc, and who would like to participate yet do not know how to do so, as their personal situation keeps them from deciding on anything or because they do not have enough information on what they can in fact do. In those cases, the task of the professionals who work with seniors is extremely important, as they can inform the elders and encourage them to take part in an activity that will in turn motivate them to become a volunteer.

6. Definition of “Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations”. WHO, 1999.

Volunteer work is important and diverse. Volunteers may collaborate in the development of the municipal seniors' centres in many different ways: by giving classes in the school subjects of their expertise or preference, such as teaching English, Catalan, reading and writing or general culture, arts and crafts, bobbin lace, introduction to painting, etc. They can also help organise specific activities and assist other professionals, as is the case of the computer work volunteers, who devote time to helping students by reinforcing the contents of previous lessons. Others can take part in work groups and debate specific issues. It is through this volunteer activity that the senior citizen becomes an active, key player.

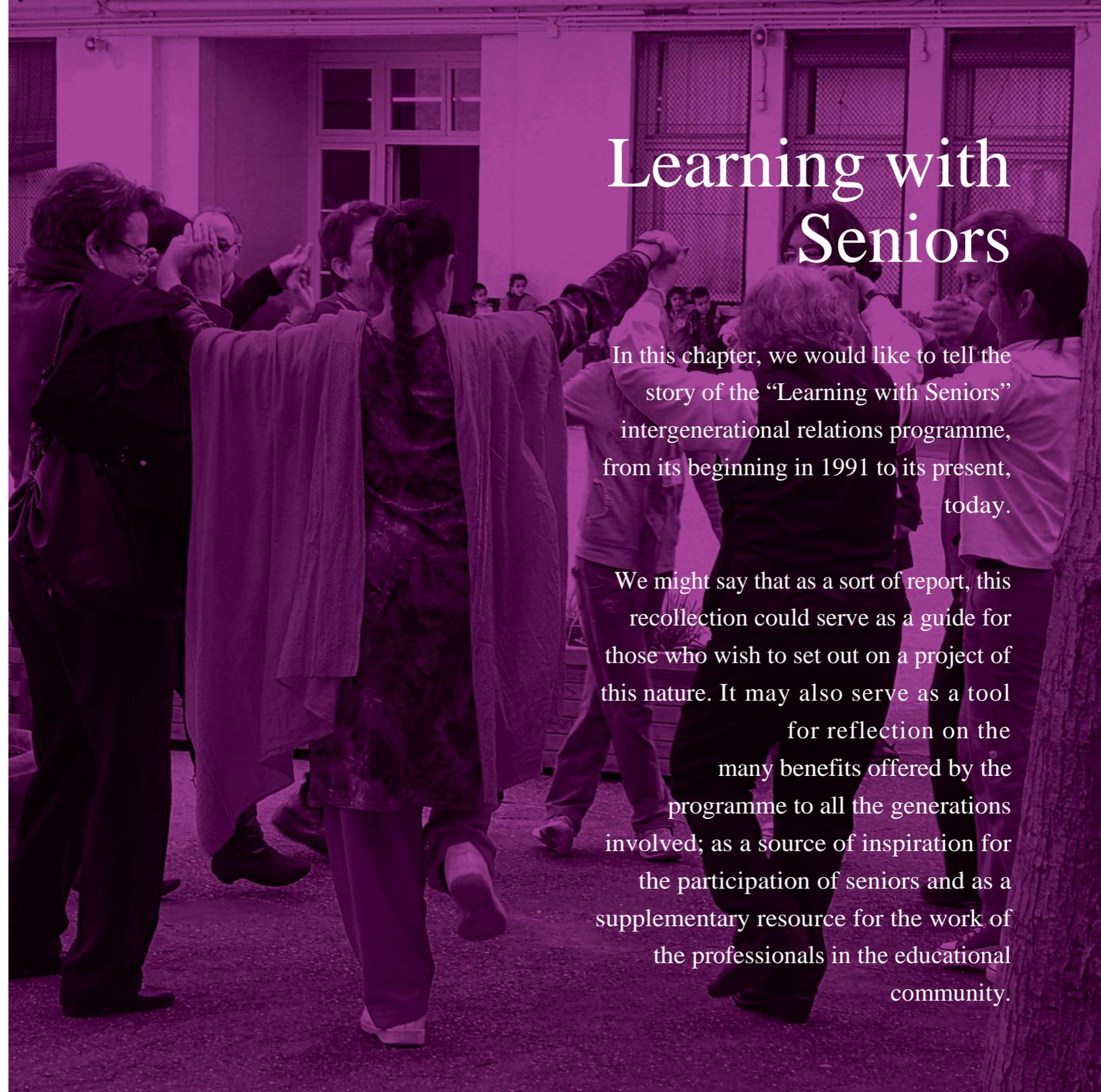
### **How do we get seniors involved in volunteering?**

Those who attend the municipal seniors' centres are informed of the activities available to them at the centre, and at the same time they are given the option of becoming volunteers, both to collaborate with the centre and to participate in intergenerational relations activities. However, the most effective way to spur involvement resides in the explanations of those who are already volunteers when speaking to the seniors in their areas, as the former truly believe that the latter can benefit from them.

# Learning with Seniors

In this chapter, we would like to tell the story of the “Learning with Seniors” intergenerational relations programme, from its beginning in 1991 to its present, today.

We might say that as a sort of report, this recollection could serve as a guide for those who wish to set out on a project of this nature. It may also serve as a tool for reflection on the many benefits offered by the programme to all the generations involved; as a source of inspiration for the participation of seniors and as a supplementary resource for the work of the professionals in the educational community.



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## Why Intergenerational Relations? Rationale

Back in 1990, the increase in the life expectancy rate and the improvement in public health and economic conditions, along with the decline in the birth rate, led to the rise in the absolute number of people over age 60, as well as an increasingly older senior citizen population. According to the Municipal Registry, in June 2013, the city of Barcelona had a population of 432,476 people aged 60 and older, and 45,995 of them were registered in the Sants-Montjuïc District.<sup>7</sup>

Many senior citizens already lived alone or separately from their children and grandchildren, and family interaction was not particularly frequent. Overall, the seniors had a highly positive opinion of their grandchildren: they were family, they loved them and they defined them as “good kids”. Nevertheless, they did not tend to extend this assessment to the rest of the children or youths. Beyond the family circle, senior citizens had few opportunities to interact with these generations and often had very negative preconceptions of them that would be extremely difficult to change, unless they got to know them.

From the other perspective, on the whole, the image that people had of senior citizens was not particularly positive: there were many of them, they lived for a long time and needed many resources, they were not productive (production in this case being construed in the labour sense); they were rigid in their convictions and generally closed to the changes in technology.

In the face of this scenario, we asked ourselves a number of questions: what was the position of the other social groups regarding the contribution of senior citizens, the transmission of social and moral values, experience, history, personal experiences, traditions and feelings?

At the same time, the children and youths of our society were bearing witness to a shift to a productivity-based world that valued competition and promoted individualism, one which attached vast importance to advanced technology and limited interaction and spontaneity. These people were living in a fast-changing reality that offered them an uncertain future and did not allow them to value the past. Most had grandparents and some even had great grandparents, yet they did not generally share the same home, and their interaction was limited and infrequent, just as it was for the seniors. Moreover, the activities in which they engaged did not favour closeness to older people and therefore, their image of seniors was somewhat negative, and compassionate at the very best.

All of these facts appeared to suggest that we needed to work to break down the stereotypes and promote a social change that made rigidity compatible with generosity, technology with popular culture, the new social and moral values with tradition, the origins with the future, lived history with the social changes, individualism with feelings, and competition with personal wealth. With a foundation of respect and freedom, this would set the stage for dialogue, sharing and working together for a fairer and more balanced society.

For older people, there is no reason why ageing should ever have to entail a cut in their rights as citizens. Seniors should have the means to be socially active and the same opportunities as the young people and adults have, to realize themselves as independent people with projects, hopes and enthusiasm.

7. Department of Statistics. Barcelona City Council.

Source: Reading of the Municipal Register of inhabitants, on 30 June 2013.

We must explicitly reject the stereotype that assumes that senior citizens are a burden for society. A “society for all ages” must acknowledge the value of all of its citizens, both for their previous contributions and for their current contributions. Older people should not be respected only for their contribution in the form of their paid work of the past; rather they need to be acknowledged for their contributions as senior citizens who are active in the family setting and in community life.

Our elders are and must be recognised as active citizens, and it is up to the community to provide social spaces that make them visible and that enable them to express themselves as such. In this sense, intergenerational projects are instruments that set out to promote and revalue their civic participation (and hence, break away from the negative stereotypes) and at the same time, bring together the community by establishing new emotional ties among adults, children and young people outside of the family realm.<sup>8</sup>

## The beginnings

We must remember that the Senior Citizens’ Programme was created in 1991 and that one of the activities that it sought to promote was that of intergenerational relations. To determine the existing options, a survey was run in the form of a questionnaire that was distributed among primary school students. We wanted to find out what they thought of their grandparents, and if they would want to meet other seniors with whom they had no biological connections whatsoever, should the situation arise.

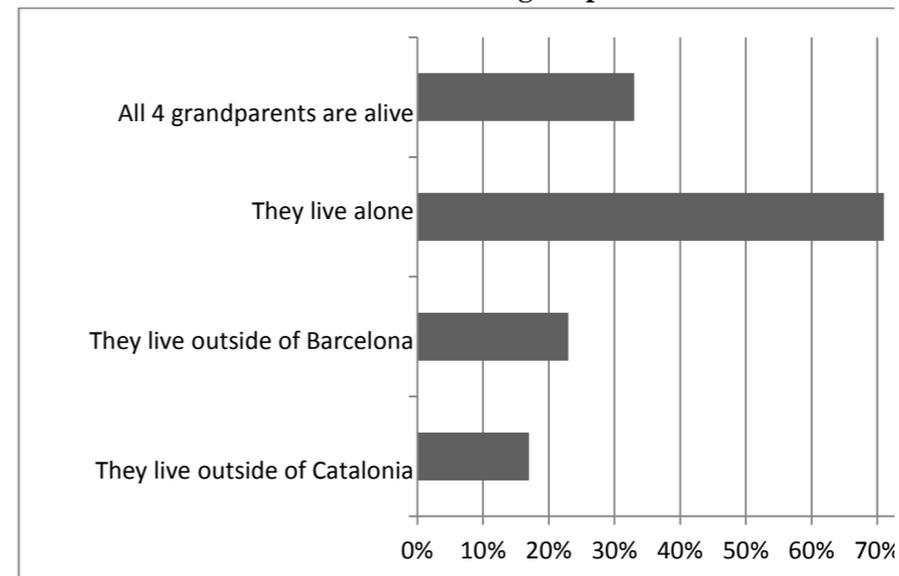
This study was particularly important because we were working under the hypothesis that the children had a very positive opinion of their biological grandparents, yet this did not particularly extend to the rest of the senior population. To introduce this activity into the school programme, fifth-grade (ages 10-11) students were chosen, because their curriculum included the subject of Statistics. The children were at once survey respondents and conductors, and they worked together to obtain the results of their studies. Logically, those results could not be considered totally reliable, although they indeed gave us a general idea of the mentality of the children of the five schools where the survey was given.

As part of the celebration of the first Senior Citizens’ Health Fortnight (1991), a group of children who had run the survey were in charge of presenting the conclusions of their study publicly, in front of the professors, parents and other adults and seniors who attended the event. We included this presentation as part of our activity because we understood that good relationships among the different generations were a good indicator of social health.

In assessing these results according to which most of the children had said they were willing to take part in an activity with senior citizens, we decided to organize a pilot activity bringing together the children of a school and with the seniors of a municipal seniors’ centre and with those of a retirement home. This experiment would tell us whether the children’s opinions of their biological grandparents extended to other seniors, and in cases in which the preconceived notion was not particularly positive, if the relationship established through a few sessions of activity would lead them to change their minds.

## Situation of the grandparents

**Most of the children do not live with their grandparents.**

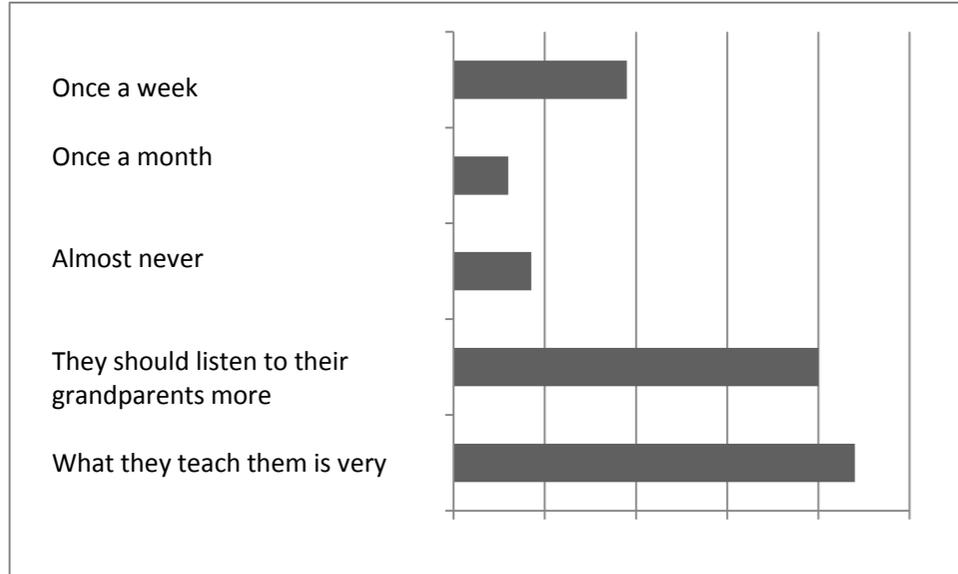


Source: The authors. Study 1990.

8. Gárate, González, Mora. *Guix*. Elements d'Acció Educativa, number 315, June, 2005.

### Relationship with their grandparents

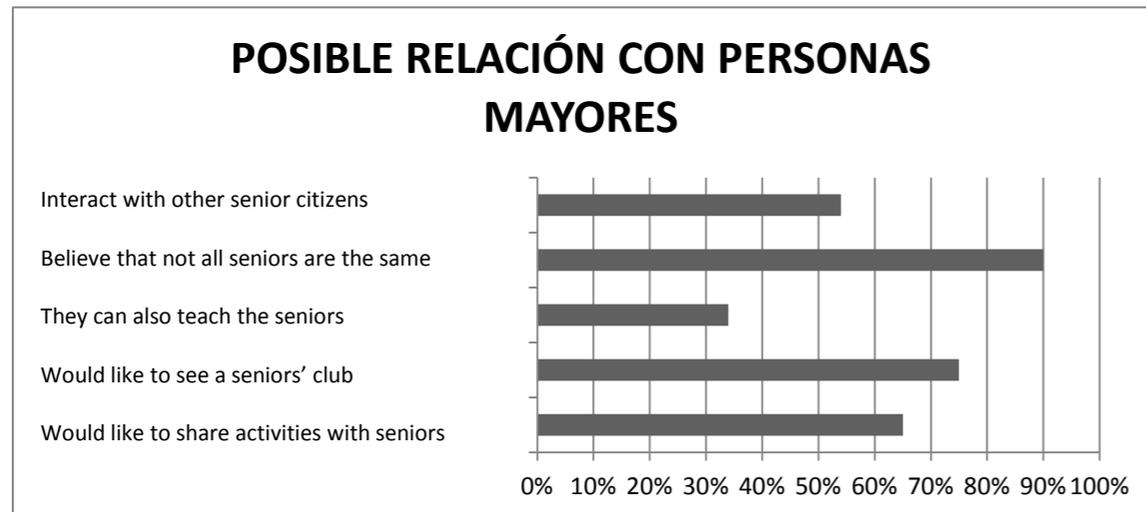
A high percentage saw their grandparents once a week and nearly everyone had a positive opinion of them.



Source: The authors. Study 1990.

### Possible interaction with senior citizens

Most respondents did not classify the senior citizens as a homogeneous group, and more than 60% were willing to participate in activities with seniors with whom they had no biological ties.



Source: The authors. Study 1990.

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It was not easy at the time, nor is it easy today, to work with schools, for a number of reasons. They have increasingly more supplementary activities which, though not mandatory, are definitely important for the children: road-safety education, fire protection, oral hygiene, drug abuse prevention and the promotion of healthy eating habits, among others. Moreover, it was difficult to get the centres to devote several hours to relations between the children and the seniors. We chose one of the five schools that had taken part in the survey, specifically Barrufet School. This was a small and highly active school that had already been enjoying the collaboration of some of the students' grandparents, who gave occasional workshops (cooking, woodworking, sewing, etc.). The principal of the school, along with the faculty, evaluated our proposal and accepted the challenge with interest, yet with some uncertainty as to the results.

As to the seniors, we needed to find a number of them who were interested in meeting the children and interacting with them for several hours. We found a small group of six users of the Cotxeres de Sants Municipal Seniors' Centre who were also willing to accept the challenge of going to the school and having the students visit them at their centre, to join them in some of their activities (yoga, arts and crafts, gym and board games).

Finally, we presented our proposal to the manager of the Josep Miracle Municipal Centre, which consisted of a retirement home and supervised apartments, so that the children could visit it and spend some time there with the residents.

We felt that the inclusion of the visit to the retirement home was important, as the reality of the senior citizens whom we wanted to bring together with the children was not only that of active people with future projects and a good state of health. Even if just a bit, they needed to see the diversity of the portion of our population known as "senior citizens", which encompassed differences in their age, activities, social participation, education and social situation, and included individuals who no longer had their health, their independence, a family or a place to live.

Our theory was that we needed to start by holding a small activity that we could control directly, to ensure a minimum degree of success where possible, so that none of the participants would feel that it had failed.

Following completion of the activity, we would assess the possibility of its continuity, so that it would not be left as a one-off interaction activity between generations.

This marked the start of "Learning with Seniors", a project that brought hope and joy to everyone who took part in it.

Later, the Council of the European Communities declared the year 1993 as the European Year of the Elderly and Solidarity between Generations. Some of the objectives that were considered at the European level were in fact very similar to the goals that we had been working with since the 1990-1991 academic year. At the same time, to commemorate the year, Fundació "la Caixa" published a call for initiatives among generations which allowed for the presentation of intergenerational projects. "This call for initiatives was designed to promote new projects related with solidarity among generations and which were conceived to improve the quality and scope of existing projects, in order to facilitate an increase in human and institutional resources involved in such task and to ensure the continuity of its activities... The aim of these projects is to stimulate solidarity among people of different ages and to help put an end to the isolation of the senior citizens in our society, by creating activities in which they can assume

an active role with people of other ages".<sup>9</sup> "Learning with Seniors" was one of the 658 projects presented in Spain. Ten of the 53 awards went to projects in Catalonia, and "Learning with Seniors" was among them, receiving a considerable economic prize. That endowment would obligate the project to expand and continue.

The prize provided public support to our line of action and enabled us to fulfil our commitment to continuing to work with more effort and greater enthusiasm. This was the dawn of a new era for "Learning with Seniors", which is still very much alive today, yet considerably expanded to take in different age groups.

Throughout the past 25 years, other schools, retirement homes and municipal seniors' centres have joined the programme, which in turn has opened up to include a secondary school, a toy library and youth centre and a university. To conclude this introduction, we must point out that today "Learning with Seniors" is made up of six lines of work, yet all with the same general objectives.

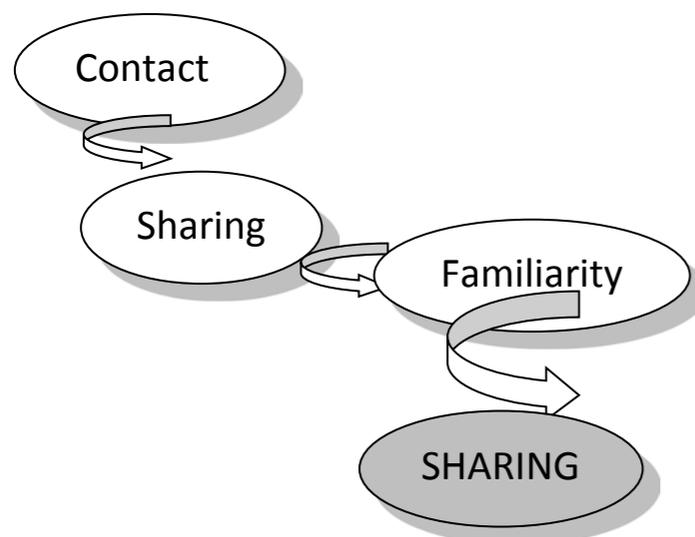
*9. Panorama. Barcelona: Fundació "la Caixa", April and November 1993.*

## Objectives

### General objectives of the “Learning with Seniors” programme

The general objective, common to all the lines of work, was and continues to be to bring senior citizens together with people of other age groups (children, adolescents and young people), through educational and leisure activities, within the framework of their regular daily life (school, toy library, university, recreation centre, retirement home and open places in the district). This approach aims to foster familiarity and mutual understanding, as a possible means to **changing the negative preconceptions that some generally have of others, and hence generate positive changes of attitude** among all the groups.

In a word, the idea is to promote interaction between the generations, so that they learn to value and respect one another.



### Specific objectives for seniors

1 **To end their self-marginalisation due to the fear of rejection.** Many seniors marginalise themselves and therefore socialise very little outside of their family environment. There are different issues that can lead to this situation. For some people it is the result of passivity or lack of hope. For others, it is because they are aware of the negative stereotypes that are associated with them and they do not know how to refute them, as they believe that their contributions will be rejected. Another reason is the lack of knowledge of activities that enable them to participate in society; and finally, in other cases it is because the seniors themselves believe that their life history and their experience is virtually useless in today’s high-tech world.

1 **To increase their self-esteem.** A high percentage of senior citizens suffer from low self-esteem. In other words, they undervalue themselves, they do not tend to accept themselves and they do not love themselves enough. This situation leads them to loneliness and hinders their social interaction and participation. Taking part in these activities can help them to feel better about themselves.

1 **To find a social space where the presence of seniors is valued and necessary.** Intergenerational relations give seniors the opportunity to contribute, to teach and learn, generating more personal satisfaction.

1 **To participate socially as transmitters of the values they have learned, of the popular culture they have absorbed, of history and of experience.** Being able to share the history that a senior citizen has experienced is important for the other generations, as it enables them to compare, evaluate and reflect before taking a decision.

1 **To change prejudices regarding newcomers.** Many people tend to reject others who are different, making it impossible to value people regardless of the colour of their skin or their political ideology or religion. Sharing with children who have just come to the country from other places and cultures around the world fosters acceptance and understanding, while breaking down stereotypes and refuting

false assumptions.

1 **To share cultures and traditions.** Being able to share with the children from other countries their way of living, which is very different from ours, affords them personal enrichment.

1 **To convert the rigidity of their convictions and their apprehension to technological change into elements of exchange, through sharing.** Dialogue and the knowledge of the other generate a more flexible and less rigid attitude, while facilitating an understanding of many of today’s social changes.

1 **To understand and accept new ways of living.** Interaction makes it possible to end stereotypes and prejudices towards the different generations, and the mutual familiarity enables people to understand and accept other ways of living.

### Specific objectives for children

1 **To understand retirement as a social norm that is not associated with inactivity.** It is common for children to confuse retirement with inactivity, a sedentary lifestyle and the lack of future projects. Joint projects help to correct this mistaken notion.

1 **To understand old age as part of the life process, rather than as an illness.** Many children associate old age with illness. Participation in these activities enables them to understand ageing as a normal stage in life where people can experience a number of impairments and limitations, although they should not necessarily be considered equivalent to illnesses.

1 **To find out the abilities of senior citizens and their life stories.** Through interaction, the children will find out first-hand what it is that senior citizens do and what they can do, as well as what their lives were like, how they overcame difficulties, wars and economic and social

problems. This knowledge enables them to reflect on and appreciate what they have.

1 **To make them realize that all people are necessary and that we all must form an active part of the society in which we live.** A rich and fair society bears in mind the contributions of all of its age groups. By sharing activities, the children can become aware of the skills of senior citizens and what they give to society today.

1 **To acknowledge values such as respect, tolerance and solidarity.** By interacting with senior citizens, it is easier for the children to recognize these values, rather than simply reading about theoretical concepts in the classroom.

1 **To identify seniors as the transmitters of tradition and popular culture.** Tradition and popular culture have gradually changed through the years, and it is the senior citizens who can describe what they were like before, as they experienced them first-hand.

1 **To become familiar with part of the Catalan culture, through the Sardana dance.** Many children have recently come over to Catalonia and by learning to dance the traditional Sardana and becoming familiar with everything surrounding it, they have the opportunity to form part of our culture.

### Specific objectives for youths

In the case of young people and adolescents, in addition to the objectives described above, the programme also aspires:

1 **To generate intergenerational bridges.** Familiarity between the generations sometimes enables them to work together.

1 **To value the historical memory.** When faced with the same historical event, each person has a different experience, and the testimony offered by seniors can enrich the information provided in schoolbooks.

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1 **To break down stereotypes and prejudices.** Dialogue and interaction can help break down many of the stereotypes attributed to the different generations.

1 **To acknowledge that senior citizens are necessary.** By interacting with senior citizens, young people become aware of and understand the value of their contributions.

1 **To develop empathy and understanding.** Putting themselves in someone else's position facilitates an understanding and grasp of a behaviour that at first glance may seem negative or lacking in value.

1 **To find points of connection.** Bringing the generations together fosters familiarity, making it easier to find things that unite them and which they can hence share and work on together.

### Specific objectives for the family

1 **To rediscover the grandparents as important members of the family.** The routine nature of interaction between grandchildren and grandparents tends to cause the young people to undervalue their grandparents. Contact with senior citizens outside of the family often leads grandchildren to take an interest in their grandparents' life story, in what they do, in their hopes and in their needs.

### Specific objectives for educational centres (primary and secondary schools, universities, etc.)

1 **To find in this programme a solid tool of support for their educational programmes.** Contact between generations during the class schedule allows the teaching staff to work with students and have them reflect on the benefits of intergenerational relations. This is worked through different school subjects.

### Specific objectives for retirement home facilities

1 **To open up the facilities to schools and to the neighbourhood.** This way, the children can see and understand that retirement homes are not nursing homes or ghettos, and that the people who live in them lead a decent life, despite their own physical impairments and illnesses. At the same time, the residents benefit from the children's company.

### Specific objectives for seniors' clubs

1 **To promote relations between the generations.** By sharing activities, older people and children get to know one another, making it possible to break down some of the stereotypes that affect both generations.

### Target population

The programme currently targets:

1 **Men and women of ages 60 and older and /or pre-retired people over age 55.**

Those who participate in the IPs must be volunteers, as the moment a person receives economic payment, he/she must comply with a number of requirements that hinder spontaneity and creativity, which are essential to these relations.

In order to become a volunteer in the "Learning with Seniors" programme, the person must simply take on the commitment to share his/her personal life story and his/her knowledge to the extent to which he/she wishes, devote the amount of time set forth to be spent at the educational facilities with which the programme works and carry out such activities freely and selflessly. The volunteers do not have to be users of any municipal seniors' club. Rather, they can be residents of any district in Barcelona.

It is relatively infrequent for these people to ask to participate in the "Learning with Seniors" programme on their own initiative, as they do not feel that they have anything to give to the younger generations. They often consider themselves inferior and outdated, and they do not attach any value at all to their contribution.

The fact that they have to go to the school or university leads them to believe that they must have a formal academic education. It is very difficult for them to understand that their contribution is based on their life experience and their opinions of others. Quite frequently, the fear of rejection is yet another impediment that holds them back from getting involved.

Generally speaking, they are not aware that their volunteering would generate important benefits for the group with which they work, as well as for themselves. It is the task of the professionals who organise the programme to explain, individually if need be, that their participation in these activities can enrich their lives greatly. It must be said that once they ultimately decide to take part, they are not willing to stop.

They can work on any of the envisaged lines. They themselves determine the length of their participation (a few days, an academic quarter, the entire academic year, etc.). They do not receive any specific indications or instructions; they simply know that they have to work from a place of respect. They do not have to act like teachers, and they are free to change the course of the activity to promote dialogue and to accommodate the interest shown by the children with whom they are interacting. For example, in a conversation workshop where it is envisaged to discuss what transportation was like in the past, the group could end up discussing the mass media; or in a country dancing workshop, they might end up dancing a paso doble. When working with primary school children, they are asked to avoid issues relating to politics, religion and

sex, as we believe those issues should be addressed by the parents, given the children's ages.

1 **Children of different grades of five primary schools.**

In 1991, the activity was first implemented with primary school fifth grade students and it continued until they reached the eighth grade. At present, the programme begins with fifth graders and continues through the sixth grade, as the students subsequently move on to different secondary schools. There are two schools that have included intergenerational relations in their school curricula, and in those cases we can work with the students of all six grades.

1 **Young students studying their second year of Psychology at the University of Barcelona.**

1 **Adolescents in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Compulsory Secondary Education at a secondary school (equivalent to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, ages 15-16).**

1 **Children of a toy library and youth centre between ages 2 and 12.**

1 **Users of four retirement homes with daytime activity centres and /or supervised apartments.**

1 **Users of three municipal seniors' centres in the Sants-Montjuic District.**

### Where is it carried out?

Essentially, the activities are carried out at the centres and facilities with which the programme pairs its participants (primary and secondary schools, the university, retirement homes, seniors' clubs and the toy library and youth centre), and always during the established class time. It is true that sometimes certain activities are conducted outside of these facilities (tai-chi in a public square, choir in an auditorium, outings outside of the city, etc.), yet in the case of the young children and youths, those activities are always carried out under the responsibility of the professionals of the corresponding educational centre.

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## Lines of work

Through the years, “Learning with Seniors” has developed six different lines of work, all of which share a common objective, yet different mechanics in keeping with the specific age of the generation that shares the time with the seniors.

### Meeting the Seniors

This was the programme’s first line of work and began in the 1991-1992 academic year as a pilot project with sixth-grade students of Barrufet School. The previous year, this school had participated in the survey that among other things, set out to detect whether the children would like to interact with senior citizens with whom they had no biological ties, and it was the students themselves who presented the results of the survey in the First Senior Citizens’ Health Fortnight. It was a small, highly active school that showed great eagerness to work on intergenerational relations. This school shared with us the hypothesis that these sorts of relationships could generate positive changes in both groups.

We met with a teacher, Carme Ruiz, who, with the support of the principal and the other faculty members, became very enthusiastic about the idea and made every necessary effort to take advantage of this opportunity, while assuming the greatest risks to obtain positive results. Had it not been for her involvement, we might not be speaking of “Learning with Seniors” today. Later there were many other professionals from the same school and others who worked with the same commitment and who put time and effort into intergenerational relations.

As to the seniors, six people from the Cotxeres de Sants Municipal Seniors' Centre took part. It must be said that they were interested in and curious about this activity, although they were not particularly convinced that it would yield positive results. In fact, they participated more due to their friendship with the technicians who proposed it than out of their own conviction. At the time, the involvement of Narcís de la Pasión, Pau Ribé and Juan Bolea, Teresa Grau, Modest Bertolin and Fina Masip was of paramount importance. Like Carme Ruiz, they all made a great effort and believed that it would be worth it.

This particular municipal seniors’ centre was chosen because it offered many different activities that could be shared with the children and because it was located very close to the school. The proximity of the facilities is important, as there is a high probability that after the shared activities, the participants will run into each other in the street, greet each other, chat for a moment and maintain a certain friendship.

The results were very encouraging: the seniors realised that they were the best agents of change regarding children’s negative preconceptions of people of this generation. The children’s views were no longer conditioned by what people said about seniors, but rather what the seniors actually did. This conviction would lead many other people to take part in the project.

Finally, the Josep Miracle Municipal Facility (retirement home and supervised apartments), represented by its Director Mercè Mas, also accepted the challenge and in contrast to common practice at the time, opened the doors to the children so that they could meet the elders who lived there and gain insight to their daily lives.

## Lines of work and progress through the years

<b>Meeting the Seniors 1990-1991</b>	<b>Escola Barrufet (Pre- and primary school)</b> Since 1991-1992	<b>Escola Jaume I (Pre- and primary school)</b> Since 1993-1994	<b>Institució Montserrat (Pre-, primary and secondary school)</b> Since 1994-1995	<b>Escuela Carles I</b> Since 2010-2011
<b>Sharing Primary School 1993-1994</b>	<b>Escola Barrufet (Pre- and primary school)</b> Since 1993-1994	<b>Escola Jaume I (Pre- and primary)</b> Since 1997-1998	<b>Escola Carles I (Pre- and primary school)</b> Since 2011-2012	
<b>Sharing University 2008-2009</b>	<b>School of Psychology</b> From 2008-2009 to 2013-2014			
<b>Sharing Cultures 2009-2010</b>	<b>Escola Perú (Pre- and primary school)</b> Since 2009-2010			
<b>Sharing Secondary School 2012-2013</b>	<b>IES Montjuïc</b> Since 2012-2013			
<b>Sharing the Garden 2012-2013</b>	<b>Ludoteca Olzinelles (Toy library and youth centre)</b> Since 2012-2013			

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## SHARED OBJECTIVES For both age groups

- 1 To promote a mutual understanding.
- 1 To change any existing prejudices regarding the other generation.
- 1 To foster positive attitudes in both groups.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES Of each age group

### For the seniors

- 1 To put an end to self-marginalisation.
- 1 To increase self-esteem.
- 1 To serve as they conveyors of their own life story.

### For the children

- 1 To understand retirement as a social norm.
- 1 To understand ageing as just another stage of life.
- 1 To see and understand the capabilities of senior citizens as well as their possible lack of independence, their disability and/or their loneliness.

## Mechanics of the activities

### Programming

At the start of the school year, the managers of the IP visited the different participating schools and held meetings with the teachers of the proposed grade levels for the activities. At such time, the teachers were reminded of the programme objectives and the calendar was established, as were the schedule, the activities to be shared by the students and the senior citizens, and the number of children per activity. The schedule of activities was also planned with the retirement homes and seniors' clubs.

### Talk-colloquium

The next step was for the managers of the programme to give a talk to the children and teachers at their school. This initial contact would serve to introduce the "Meeting the Seniors" activity to them and explain what we aimed to achieve, why we were pursuing those goals, and how and where we planned to carry it out.

For approximately one hour, we discussed the concept of ageing as a natural stage in the life process, and we spoke of retirement as a social norm that did not necessarily bear any correlation with illness or inactivity. We then opened up a dialogue, inviting the children to describe their image of senior citizens and what they imagined the seniors thought of them. The answers were very interesting, as they verbalized a number of negative images that they generally projected onto other children. They said that they had a good image of the seniors, yet on the other hand, most believed that the seniors did not have a good image of them. We felt that this expression was not sincere and that it may have been spurred by the presence of the teachers or perhaps because deep down, the children felt it impolite to think badly of others. The bottom line is that in the answers

to the questionnaires that they completed after the conclusion of the activities, most stated that their image of senior citizens had changed. For example, "I didn't think they were so friendly, cheerful, nice, chatty and fun; ... They are not impolite or boring". When explaining to them why we were organising the activities, we spoke of the need to interact in order to know and have arguments to maintain or modify any prejudices that the children and the seniors might have.

In the course of the meeting, the students gradually relaxed and began to offer their thoughts. Many of their comments were particularly interesting, as it was apparent that when they thought of the seniors, they very often considered them in a negative light: "They don't let us play ball in the park"; "Some of them are very nasty". On the other hand, the children demonstrated that their reference older people were their grandparents, whom they held in very high regard: "My grandparents do lots of activities"; "My grandfather knows lots of things and he teaches me".

### Visit to a senior citizens' facility

After a few days, the children visited a municipal facility for seniors (a retirement home with a day activity centre and/or supervised apartments). This visit was extremely important because the aim was to get them to understand, even just minimally, that there are also senior citizens who are not independent and who have certain impairments, social and/or family problems; people who are dependent or who have illnesses; yet despite everything, they also form part of the society in which we live.

At the same time, the youngsters would see that many of the elements of aid that are frequently used (lift assist devices, raised toilets, handrails, alarm bells, colour identification of rooms and hallways, large calendars to know what day it is, eating utensils adapted to their limitations, etc.) that give security and afford greater autonomy to people who are dependent.

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During the visit, some of the children said that they would speak with their grandparents about the assistance devices that they had seen, in case they would like to use them to feel better. “... there is an old person’s bathtub with a sort of seat that goes up and down. There is also a shower with no step, so that people can use it with a wheelchair...”.

At the same time, the children were able to dismiss the notion that retirement homes are closed places where older people are left and abandoned. This was extremely important because today there are many senior citizens who must check into a home for different reasons, and the grandchildren might otherwise feel that they are being abandoned or locked away. Such was the case of one girl who admitted, “I thought they were always locked inside and that they hit them and tied them to the beds”, ... “All the old people are very nice and funny; ... Júlia showed us her room and she had a mirror that she had brought from her house and also a sewing machine; ... they can decorate their rooms however the like. One old man was a Barça football team fan and had lots of posters of the team and other things. He gave us some sports magazines”.

On the set date, the children visited one of these centres. Some of the residents, who were accompanied by facility staff members, showed them around the entire centre. The children were then given the opportunity to ask questions about the lives of the people who lived there (whether they had family, how much they paid to stay there, how they were treated, what their daily schedules were like, whether they could go out to the street, whether they could receive visits, etc.). At the end, they shared a small snack.

The children were truly moved by the exchange and all the professionals were surprised by their spontaneous attitudes towards the most dependent and/or ill people. They gave them hugs and kisses, they helped them to walk, they offered to feed them, they sang songs for them,

and more.

Once all the activities had come to an end, outside of the school hours, a number of children returned to the centre to visit some of the people they had met. “I saw that they are very well taken care of; ... Before, I didn’t know older people needed so much love; ... I was really surprised that even though they are ill or ‘worn out’, they’re happy”.

For the residents it was a holiday. They were not accustomed to receiving visits from children, and they were moved by the children’s happiness and chitchat. Many of the residents wanted to talk, and even people who suffered dementia or serious illness responded to the children’s presence.

### Activities at the Municipal Seniors' Centre

The next day, the children went to the municipal centre and for one morning or one afternoon, they came together with the seniors to take part in activities that they had previously chosen. The activities were carried out in the same place and at the same time as always, and with all the users that practiced them. Hence, the children were able to experience the reality of what the senior citizens usually do; they saw their efforts, their hopes, their future projects, etcetera; and everyone was both an active participant and an observer at the same time. In other words, they were all the stars of the day’s activities.

The children took part in these activities in groups of 5 or 6, and generally shared activities such as arts and crafts, yoga, Catalan Sardana dancing, choir, memory class, gym, billiards, bobbin lace, dominoes, antiques, painting, ... While practicing the activity, many children were surprised at their own lack of skill in doing the things that the elders were teaching them, or they saw that they could not keep up the pace of the seniors. Some of the children said: “I did Sardana dancing and thought it would be boring, but it wasn’t. I

thought the old people would get tired right away, but even though the dances lasted a long time, they didn’t get tired at all. But as to me, I was tired after dancing for five minutes. I liked it a lot; ... They asked to do another Sardana dance and we were tired; ... They were really moving and we were exhausted”.

When they played dominoes, for example, one child pointed out that the senior citizen added up the points very quickly, without using a calculator: “... The older people taught us to count the points in dominoes. Heres’s how you do it: every set of ten is a point; for example, if you get a 25, that’s three points, because the 5 is in the third set of ten; ... They also taught us how to guess what tiles the other players had. It was really interesting”.

At yoga, the kids could not do the same exercises as the adults could do, because they were unable to relax; in the arts and crafts, they could not get the same result with the object they were making because they did not have the patience. The idea was not to lead them to think that the seniors were better than them, but rather to get them to feel the value of tenacity when they saw the way the elders made something again because it had not come out right the first time; the value of patience when they saw them work hard to learn a new exercise and accepted that they could not do it perfectly due to their limitations; or when they saw that the seniors did not get angry when they lost a game. “I thought they wouldn’t do any activity and that they would be kind of angry; ... I didn’t think they really respected kids, but now I know that they all respect us; ... I liked doing the activities with them, dancing the Sardana, talking about their life; ... They’re really good at making paintings and they work really hard at it; ... I didn’t know that there were clubs for older people, and I think it’s really nice and fun to see that older people are so independent, that they don’t get bored”.

For the users of the centre who shared the activities with the children, it was a different and pleasant day. They said that for a while they had felt like they were children again; others were surprised at how polite they were and the respect that the

children showed them; some were happy because they had been able to teach some of the things they knew how to do and they were glad to see the happiness in the children who had learned them.

### Visit to the school

Finally, the senior citizens who had spent time with the children came to visit the school. The children were the hosts and showed them their school, the facilities, the work they did, and they also explained what they were studying. This is always a festive day where each school prepares the welcome activity that they feel most appropriate: classes decorated with murals with photos and writings about their experience with the elders; short theatre skits; group dances; giving of gifts made by the children, etc. In fact, it was precisely the students of Barrufet School during the 1991-1992 academic year who named the programme “Learning with Seniors”, as the kids used it as the title of the mural that they had prepared to welcome the senior citizens on that first visit to their school.

To close the day, all the participants shared a snack. At some schools it was the students themselves who brought in something from home to eat, so that their guests would feel good that the children had prepared it expressly for them. In some cases, if a student was unable to attend school that day, he/she sent in a family member to bring them what the child had prepared. This was an occasion on which the seniors could forget about their diabetes or high blood pressure, and ate everything that the children offered them, so as not to offend them. That day, it was the seniors who were surprised. They were amazed by the affection and respect that the children showed them.

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They were heartened by the children's eagerness to tell them everything about their school and by the fact that the kids wanted to know what school had been like for the seniors when they were young. One girl said, "The old people looked at everything so carefully and said 'look how well organised it is! That's very good!'. And when they saw the gym they were amazed. There was a crash mat leaning on the wall, and one old man got excited and started to climb up it. It was really funny".

Hence, a very positive dialogue began. The seniors were very surprised by the way schools are run today, the many differences in the materials that are used and the contents, the infrastructures, the close rapport between the children and the teachers, the accessibility of the teachers, the lack of authoritarianism, ... "The punishments that they gave us are no longer needed today; ... The children are closer to their teachers; ... It's very nice to share this time with them; ...". For their part, the children were also surprised at how different the seniors' schools had been (boys and girls were separated, children of different years were all in the same classroom together, all the subjects were in a single book, the children received physical punishment, etc.). The students said that they would like to see the seniors more often "to keep learning things about them that we do not know, and so that they learn things from us; ... I think they would be a good influence on us". Some of the seniors said: "I was lucky that in choir they put two boys in front of me; because it's been so long since I last saw my granddaughters, I couldn't resist the urge and two times I caressed the hair of boy standing nearest me; ... you're not the only ones who are surprised; we are as well. Because the image we generally had of you as being disrespectful and apathetic young person has crumbled like a sand castle; ...I was moved by your caring attention and your desire to do things well. We have learned something that we may have forgotten, and that is that we are important for them just as they are for us. Hats off to the idea, which reminds

me of the Bosc School of 1932".

We must underscore that all of this is possible thanks to the interest and willingness of the teachers of the schools. The "Meeting the Seniors" line of work is included by the school freely and voluntarily in its programme, and entails an added workload, as it not only involves four days of interrupted classes, but we also take time with the students after the activity to reflect on what has been done. The teachers then work further with the experience of the exchange in whatever subject that they feel is most appropriate, approaching it from different perspectives. Hence, it might be integrated into ethics class, language class, arts and crafts, social studies, etc., enabling the students to explore feelings, the personal description, the social and cultural values, tradition, etc.

If a given teacher does not wish to do these activities, the principal of the school cannot obligate him/her to do them.

In the 1993-1994 academic year, the primary school Jaume I joined the programme; and for the 1994-1995 year, the primary and secondary school Institució Montserrat joined. Years later, in the 2010-2011 year, Carles I School joined. At present, "Meeting the Seniors" is carried out with these four schools from the district and in collaboration with two municipal seniors' centres —Cotxeres de Sants and Poble- Sec— and with four retirement homes —Pare Batllori, Mossèn Vidal i Aunòs, Centre Parc and the municipal facility, Josep Miracle. At three of the four schools, the programme works with sixth-graders (two lines); and at another school, with fifth-grade students (one line). The activities are always carried out during the school class hours.

Through the years, there were three schools (Gayarre, Pràctiques and Pau Vila) that for different reasons have been left behind. However, the years in which they participated in the programme, they did so with great interest and enthusiasm, and the results were very positive for everyone.

## Evaluation

The evaluation took into consideration direct observation, interviews with the professionals involved, written compositions and/or drawings by the children, students' answers to questionnaires, and the voluntary input of the seniors, parents, teachers and the professionals who worked at the retirement homes (see appendix).

Jordi Carós, a social services psychologist who took part in the first pilot experiment during the 1991-1992 academic year, made the following statements in the general conclusions:

"From the conclusions to which both the children and the seniors arrived on May 25, a very positive impression can be drawn, as it can be said that the objectives set out at the beginning of the project have been achieved. The children and the senior citizens have done things together, activities that many of them had never done before, and in any case they had never done them in the company of seniors or children with whom they had no family ties.

In fact, we had set a highly ambitious goal: to change people's attitudes (specifically, their age-related prejudices). Attitudes consist of three basic interdependent elements. On the one hand, there must be an image of the object in question (cognitive component); for example, that children are "wild bandidos" or that senior citizens are "boring". Based on this image, an evaluation is made, a rating of the object, which is then layered with an affectionate charge, whether positive or negative (affection component): these are the feelings of affection or rejection that children manifest towards senior citizens or the other way around. And finally, that affectionate charge impels us into action, whether such action is getting closer or drawing further away (incitement to action component); the seniors and the kids can engage in activities together, criticize each other, play, etc.

The working hypothesis on which the project was based was that certain attitudes of rejection or interference were due to a lack of knowledge and stereotypes. If they were given the opportunity to interact, the children would be able to modify the cognitions (images, beliefs, etc.) that they had of the seniors and vice versa, as well as the affection and the tendency to action. This hypothesis has been confirmed: since the initial contacts, the children and the seniors were surprised: the children had not expected to be met with the elders' energy, enthusiasm and friendliness, and the seniors had not anticipated the children's politeness and tenderness. The feelings between them were more positive, as can be seen in the bonds that were established and in the way the participants describe their experience.

The written compositions by the students revealed a patent need in both generations for this relationship, and it became clear that it is not so difficult for young and old to understand each other. The children's expressions were so spontaneous that it is obvious that they were not guided in any manner. They believed in the experience and asked for it to continue.

It was also interesting to see what the seniors thought. Nearly all were surprised by the spontaneous affection and interest displayed by the children. They also realised that not all kids undervalue senior citizens, that at least at this school, the students valued their experience and their years as a source for learning.

In addition to the impressions shared in the participants' comments and evaluations, a series of events have taken place, indicating the favourable reception of the initiative. The first was the participation and enthusiasm displayed in relation to everything that was carried out, yet also the new proposals that have emerged and the parallel activities that have been carried out as an addition to the project, despite their not having been scheduled previously.

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Hence, the most motivated children and seniors have come together to share other activities outside of the school schedule, including Sardana dancing, organizing snacks, etc. Others greet each other or stop to chat for a moment when they see each other in the street, and hence maintain a more stable and long-lasting relationship than initially anticipated. These facts suggest that the participation was not strictly formal, but rather that each person's heart was present, spurring on the initiative and spontaneity “.

### Continuing activities

Once the 1991-1992 school year ended, Barrufet School was so pleased with pilot experience that they asked the Seniors' Programme, upon which the intergenerational relations programme depended, to repeat the experience the following year with the 6th-grade students and to continue the activities with the 7th and 8th graders, in order to maintain the relationships established with the pioneer groups. The children also requested this continuity, and the senior citizens who had taken part wished to do it again, as well, for they had found a social context in which they could realize themselves, regardless of their age. Some of their comments included: “to get to know the kids better; ... It's a new experience for them and for us; ... to get to know each other better and be able to talk; ... Before the school year ends, I'll go over to the school gate at midday to see them again; ... When we see each other in the street, the affection is still there; ... When I see Roc, he never fails to hug and kiss me, even if he's with his friends, with his mother or all alone, and you don't know how happy he makes me feel, because for an older person like me, it's uplifting and gives me life”.

As a result, in the 1992-1993 academic year, in addition to the “Meeting the Seniors” activity, we organised what at the time we referred to as “Continuing Activities” with the pioneers.

Workshops were scheduled within the school, where participants engaged in activities such as making toys of the past, sewing, yoga, arts and crafts, woodworking, Sardana dancing, theatre, chess and crocheting. There were outings to the Historical Archive, and different studies were conducted on the district, relations among neighbours, civility, traditions, school and teaching models, and subsequently the participants came together for a dialogue as a means to further enhance the work carried out.

At the end of the school year, the teachers continued to be highly pleased with the programme and scheduled activities for the following year, when the students would be in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

The 1993-1994 academic year marked the third year of intergenerational relations with the senior citizens, and by then the students were 13 or 14 years old. Given that most of the students were the same, a very natural, flowing, spontaneous friendship and mutual esteem had been established.

In this case, we planned activities that involved the participants' reflection on ageing.

First of all, the students interviewed the senior citizens, inquiring about the physical and psychological changes that take place when we grow old, and, where appropriate, the advantages of retirement. Subsequently, they wrote a paper in which they described what they believed senior citizens' life would be like in our country in the future. They reflected on health and on economic, social, family and urban planning aspects. To finish, they offered a description of what they imagined they would be like when they were old. In their writings, they portrayed themselves physically as

having wrinkled skin, white hair, somewhat bald, with glasses, wearing their hair in a bun, with minor health problems (varicose veins, hypertension, toothless, arthritis, etc.), and some saw themselves using crutches or even in hospital. As to their attitude, virtually everyone imagined themselves being active (travelling, strolling along with their life partner, with a youthful and cheerful spirit, chatty, engaging in different activities, etc.). To complete this paper, they drew a self portrait (a drawing based on a recent photo) and another drawing of how they would look as seniors. As regards the physical changes they anticipated, in some of their stories, they wrote: “I am a woman with a wrinkled face, my hair is almost completely white and I have eyestrain; ... With my age, I have shrunk a bit and I walk more slowly than before; ... My eyes used to be big and amber-coloured, and now they have become darker...”; “I use a wheelchair, I am bald and I have no teeth...”. As to their psychological changes or attitude, they said: “I have a young spirit and a fun outlook on life; ... I have already celebrated my 50th wedding anniversary. I'd like to take trips around the world, and every day I go to the centre to do lots of activities; ... I am a cheerful lady who loves to talk”.

As a farewell to these kids who were leaving the school, a small party was held and they were given a booklet in which all the seniors and professionals with whom they had interacted throughout the three years had written them a few words and made them a drawing related with what they had shared in that time. One senior wrote: “I, have almost always been serious and sceptical by nature, I never believed in anything or in almost anyone, as the war of 1936 completely shattered my dearest hopes and dreams regarding the world and its people; and now I am the happiest person in the world, because thanks to you, I once again have the enthusiasm, the spirited excitement and the hope that in the future you will know how to walk the path

of camaraderie, of loyalty, of integrity...”.

Narcís de la Pasión received them, reminding them of the poem that he had dedicated to them when they were in the 6th grade.

Glosa to the Little Ones

*Out of today comes tomorrow.  
You are the germ, the seed;  
you are the harvest yet to be.  
You are young, young,  
but you are a burgeoning bud,  
a wave of desire.*

*Perhaps an era that has just begun,  
the new era yet to come  
the new era that is moving in,  
full of magic and joy  
that will thrust you into life.*

These three years of work were highly important, as they showed us the advantages of the relationship. The students were able to explore in depth the concept of ageing and its reality, and the elders were able to introduce themselves. Children and seniors shared feelings, values, stories and realities that brought them closer together and enabled positive changes of attitude among the members of both generations.

## Sharing Primary School

In the 1993-1994 academic year, the new structure of mandatory secondary schooling (“ESO”) was gradually being implemented throughout Spain, meaning that the children were only in primary school through the 6th grade. As a result, the “Continuance Activities” described above could not be programmed. At the time, Barrufet School requested to hold workshops with the children of all the primary school grades, rather than exclusively with the students of the 6th grade. It was thanks to this desire that a second line of work was developed: “Sharing Primary School”. This expansion marked an important advance in senior citizen participation and in intergenerational relations. Where “Meeting the Seniors” afforded an initial coming together between the children and the elders, this second line of work further promoted more of a relationship and familiarity between the two groups, through workshops that were held at the school and which therefore could come to be shared.

In the 1997-1998 academic year, a second school, Jaume I, joined this line of activity. This school had been participating in the “Meeting the Seniors” activities since 1993-1994 and now wanted to include the participation of the senior citizens officially in the school curriculum, specifically in social and cultural studies, given its inherent association with attitudes. Moreover, like Barrufet School, Jaume I wanted to implement this activity at ever primary school level. This introduction to the school curriculum was extremely significant for “Learning with Seniors”, for it must be borne in mind that although the principal of the school may agree with the initiative, “Meeting the Seniors” could only be carried out if the teacher of the grade in question voluntarily wished to include it in his/her teaching programme; whereas the programming of this second line of activity, “Sharing Primary School”, became mandatory, regardless of the teachers’ interest. It is true that if a teacher did not particularly believe in this exchange or if

he/she considered that the hours devoted to it took away from his/her curricular plan, the personal predisposition was obviously different and the results would not be as positive as when the teachers whole-heartedly believed in the benefits of the workshops to be held.

At Barrufet School, the senior citizens joined the school to give workshops within the regular schedule of workshops that the school had traditionally held for the different class levels. This was not the case of Jaume I School, which had to organize and provide content for a new activity within its educational programme.

The design was drafted jointly by the school’s teachers and the managers of the Intergenerational Relations Programme. At that time, it was presented to the senior citizens who had participated in the previous activities, to ask them for their opinion and possible participation. They accepted this unconditionally and enthusiastically, as the proposal implied a recognition of their participation and personal contribution, albeit the commitment meant working more hours and days, as this activity was envisaged to last throughout the school year.

### Mechanics of the activities

In the month of September, the managers of the IP held different meetings with the principals and faculty members of the schools. The calendar and timetable were established, as were the number of groups and the envisaged number of children in each group, the classrooms or spaces they would be using, the materials they would need and the specific activities they would do as workshops. The activities were jointly decided, bearing in mind the age of the children of each grade level and the options and knowledge offered by the participating seniors (storytelling, building toys from the past, theatre, crocheting, ballroom dancing, recalling traditions, sewing, cooking, board games, arts and crafts, games in the street, Sardana dancing, country dancing, etc.).

## Sharing Primary School

### OBJECTIVES COMMON To both age groups

- 1 To interact and get to know one another.
- 1 To share experiences and value the past and the present.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES of each individual age group

#### For the senior citizens

- 1 To pass on their experiences and their values.
- 1 To understand and accept the new ways of life.

#### For the children

- 1 To learn about and respect the customs of senior citizens.
- 1 To value solidarity and tolerance.
- 1 To know how the way of life has changed.

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Through the years, the activities offered have gradually changed; some were eliminated while new ones were introduced, depending on whether they met the envisaged objectives. For example, the chess workshop was very interesting, yet it did not foster conversation; and country dancing was really fun, but it similarly failed to promote interaction.

At virtually every school grade level, there is almost always a change of teacher, in some cases merely by virtue of the change of school level, and in other cases due to the arrival of new teachers new to the school. For this reason, it was important to remind them of the objectives and to underscore that in order to achieve those goals, interaction and conversation were absolutely essential. Hence, in this sense, the workshop activity was no more than a vehicle to promote that interaction. The intension of the workshop was not to get the children to learn what was initially presented, but rather for them to develop creativity, to bring their feelings and their values to the surface, so that they could share some enjoyable moments and so that everyone had a good time, as it was this way that they would achieve the objectives.

When speaking, it is common for the seniors to refer to their past, to the manners in which things used to be done and in what situations and with what material, among other details. They also typically taken an interest in what the children do and in their interests, so without realizing it, the seniors inadvertently link the past to the present, while working towards the future.

“Sharing Primary School” begins in the month of October and ends in May or June. At Jaume I School, each quarter the activity is implemented with one of the three former stages of primary school. Four to six days are scheduled for each primary school stage, and those sessions are held once a week, for an hour and a half. Some twenty-five senior citizens currently give workshops to all the kids of the six grade levels (approximately 300 students between the ages of 6 and 12

years old).

They work in the classrooms, and the groups are small, so that the communication between the seniors and the children is easy and fluid. In each classroom, there is a teacher to observe the workshop, the attitudes, what is said, the behaviours etc, to facilitate reflection on the experience subsequently with the students and to reach conclusions. The teachers only intervene occasionally, when there is a conflict among the children or when they get very loud. The seniors are never forced to act as teachers: this is one of the conditions previously agreed to.

Barrufet School has set up a programme of workshops in which the parents and grandparents of the students work voluntarily with a number of the teachers. Senior citizens join the group of people who offer the workshops. Throughout virtually the entire school year, they give the workshops three days a week for an hour and a half. They usually teach sewing, crocheting and/or knitting.

In the 2011-2012 academic year, Carles I School also asked to incorporate this line of work into their programme, yet only for the sixth-grade students, as a continuation of “Meeting the Seniors”, which they had done the previous year, in the fifth grade. In approximately sixteen sessions, 10-12 seniors held different workshops that could be modified at any time, in keeping with the interests of the school.

As can be seen, the programme differed from one school to another, in terms of both its number of days per week and the specific activities, which depended on the students’ year of study. Nevertheless, all of these programmes shared a common set of objectives: to spur participant interaction, familiarity with one another and sharing. Hence, it is clear that this intergenerational relations programme was by no means rigid and could be adapted to the needs of each school and particular characteristics of the participants (children and senior citizens), in order to achieve the goals.

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### Sharing Primary School. OBJECTIVES OF JAUME I SCHOOL

Jaume I School added a set of general objectives and other specific objectives related with social and cultural studies. When presenting the project, Iñiqui Azcona, the Director of Studies in 1997, pointed out: "... it isn't a project related with social welfare or care service. Today's world demands that we integrate issues, experiences and knowledge. For this reason, our school has committed to integrating activities with senior citizens in its educational programme: visits, get-togethers, etc. We want seniors to play an active role in the education of our future generations...".

#### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

- 1 To demonstrate that they have received an introduction to an understanding of history and of some of the characteristics of the important eras in the history of humanity.
- 1 To recognise and explain events, places, symbols, monuments, public figures, institutions of both the past and the present that define the country's history.
- 1 To acknowledge, value and comply with the social rules related with respect for oneself and respect for others.
- 1 To respect the moral, social and ethical values of their own culture and of other people, through an exercise about democratic rights and duties in their confidential actions.

#### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- 1 To compare certain basic characteristics related with the evolution of work and the daily lifestyle (eating habits, homes, clothing, customs, energy, transport, etc.) in different historical periods.
- 1 To show an awareness of our rights and duties regarding other people and to behave in accordance with the rules that govern the people's daily life.
- 1 To become aware of the need to make personal contributions to collective life by participating and collaborating with others and using dialogue to resolve conflicts.
- 1 To place value on solidarity and tolerance as cooperative attitudes among people.
- 1 To value and respect some of the customs and ways of life of our ancestors and to understand them as a legacy of our civilisation.

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The fact of starting the workshops with children in the first grade of primary school and continuing them through the sixth grade meant that most of the students and seniors interacted regularly over a long period of time, giving rise to loving and caring friendships that went beyond the specific workshop interaction. The senior citizens watched the children grow up, they became genuinely concerned about their problems and helped them, offering advice and sometimes even establishing rapports with their parents. For their part, the students grew to love the seniors. Though they knew they were not their grandparents, they came to trust and confide in them and also worry about the things that were happening in their lives (whether they were ill, if they missed a day, if they went on holiday, etc.).

## Evaluation

The overall evaluation took into account the direct observation of the activities, as well as interviews with both the teachers and the school principal.

In this line of work, neither the students nor the senior citizens were given the questionnaires, as their answers would most probably be the same each year thanks to the close bonds that they were developing year after year. At the start of this line of work, we were interested in the opinions of the seniors who had committed to the programme at that time, and they answered a questionnaire (see the Appendix). It must be noted that the answers did not differ much from the opinions of the senior citizens who take part in the programme today.

The joint evaluation with the school principals and the continuity through the years has confirmed that this programme is indeed a solid teaching tool.

Some of the teachers' statements indicate that the goals were indeed achieved:

“The work carried out with the senior citizens has achieved

and in some cases, exceeded the envisaged objectives; in an environment of exchange of experiences, a number of tasks have been carried out giving rise to a whole host of positive attitudes among the different participants in the project; [...] The children have acknowledged the existence of other elderly people (apart from those of their families) who have taken an interest in them, [...] In a very free manner, a relationship has developed based on a manual task, the participation in a theatrical play or simply by coming together to play a game designed for the seniors; [...] The children have hence seen that this senior citizen is a person capable of showing them a good time, [...] A setting was generated in which the children exchanged anecdotes, tastes and experiences with the seniors; [...] In some cases very loving relationships have developed on both sides”.

## Sharing University

After so many years, “Learning with Seniors” was already well established as an interesting and beneficial intergenerational relations programme for seniors and children. It had been acknowledged by different institutions and public bodies, including the Fundació “la Caixa” which had awarded the programme in its Call for Intergenerational Initiatives (1993), Menéndez Pelayo International University (1993), the Multidisciplinary Gerontology Centre at Grenoble (1994), the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Educating Cities, in Jerusalem (1999), the Revista Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado (issue number 45, December 2002) and the Social Forum for Education in Catalonia (2005). Nevertheless, a new challenge was opening up. Would it be as enriching for everyone to work with young people? There were a number of valuable experiences that were opening up the university world to the world of senior citizens, and bringing the two worlds closer together. Opening up the university to senior citizens was indeed a great step forward, both because it would enable seniors to

study things that they enjoyed and found interesting, and because of the relationships that are established with their young classmates. In our case, we wanted to foster relations between these two generations based on an open and flexible dialogue, where together they would get to know each other more personally rather than strictly based on the relationships that can arise from the group study of a specific subject.

At the start of 2009, we began talks with Doctor Conchi San Martín, a professor of the School of Psychology at the University of Barcelona, who was teaching a course titled “Memory and representation” to second-year psychology students. An assessment was made of the possibilities of working together and ultimately this new line of work, “Sharing University”, was implemented in April of the same year (the 2008-2009 academic year).

In her presentation of the activity as a seminar, Dr. San Martín said: “One of the most critical communicative barriers is the barrier that emerges from the act of creating stereotypes of the other, whether based on gender, culture, ethnicity or age. This can mean erroneously ascribing a given trait to the other or hindering listening and comprehension due to the mere fact that the other person is “young” or “old”. These aspects are reinforced by the vast ambiguity of the place in society often assigned to senior citizens (sometimes, there is a conveyance of a positive image as a group with experience that deserves respect; yet many other times, the image transmitted is negative, that of a fragile person who only displays deficiencies).

“The creation of shared spaces for exchange among young and old can favour the establishment of real and less stereotyped intergenerational relations that facilitate an unbiased listening. The aim of this seminar is to help establish bridges for communication

between students and seniors, through a process of familiarity and the joint undertaking of different tasks to be carried out in different sessions. This is one of the important aspects in their training as aid-providing people and professionals”.

As an initial experiment, a single day of activity was designed, creating a place for dialogue and thought between young and old, in groups and in different classrooms of the Psychology Department. However, the activity ultimately had to be extended to two days, at the request of most of the participants. The second day was held at the Cotxeres de Sants Municipal Seniors' Centre. The results were highly encouraging, and in the 2009-2010 academic year, “Sharing University” was offered as a seminar within the traditional Spanish Bachelor's Degree programme and subsequently continued as an activity within the harmonised four-year European Bachelor's Degree programme. In 2009, the Fundació Bofill granted funding to “Sharing University”, through a call for proposals for service-learning projects. In 2012, “Sharing University” was accepted by the University of Barcelona as an Innovation and Improvement Project for Teaching Quality under the title “Memories in Dialogue: The Experience of Intergenerational Communication as a Tool for the Acquisition of Cross Skills in the Psychology Degree”.

## Mechanics of the activities

Given that we were working with young people between ages 18 and 28, we had to change the mechanics and contents of the programme, as their reality, interests and concerns are different from those of the children. We worked with a group of 40 students and some 25 senior citizen volunteers.

Different meetings were held to establish the calendar, schedules, the number of groups and the number of students and seniors

## SHARED OBJECTIVES for both age groups

### 1 To generate intergenerational bridges

Dialogue enables people to compare values and ways of being in and experiencing the world from different perspectives, while making them compatible.

### 1 To break down stereotypes

Interaction and familiarity can promote a flexible and non-labelling way of thinking, generating positive changes in terms of both opinion and attitude.

### 1 To exchange knowledge and experiences

Interaction serves to enrich the knowledge and values of the members of both groups, while enabling them to assess circumstances through contrast when having to take decisions.

### 1 To create bonds

Sharing with different generations affords a closer and more genuine knowledge of and familiarity with others, hence enabling the detection of shared points that favour interaction and understanding.

### 1 To understand and help one another from a position of respect and freedom

Bringing different generations together makes it possible to raise awareness of the needs of the other person, enabling people to help one another insofar as they allow for such help, while always upholding the respect for each person and his/her freedom to make decisions.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES for the senior citizens

### 1 To understand and accept new ways of life

Dialogue and interaction with young people affords the seniors insight to their daily lives, their concerns, their current resources, the freedom that they gradually obtain, and on the whole can enable senior citizens to understand the differences between life when they were young and life today.

### 1 To serve as the conveyors of their past

To transmit the past, attach value to the traditions, the way life and the social and moral values of their time, ... Placing importance on this contribution can increase their self-esteem.

### 1 To be less rigid in their own convictions

The contact with the younger generations affords them insight to other realities and can make them more flexible. This can in turn help further their understanding and acceptance of today's realities.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES For the young people

### 1 To understand the need for senior citizens

Bringing the generations together can break down the generational individualism that keeps people from seeing and acknowledging that the contribution of senior citizens is enriching for other generations.

### 1 To value the historical memory

The contact with senior citizens can give young people insight to the history of an era that they may in fact find interesting and want to know more about.

They can come to hear very different versions of the same events from the seniors, depending on the particular situations they have experienced, their political ideology or the geographic area in which they lived. This is an important addition to some of the things they read about in their history books.

### 1 To develop empathy and solidarity

Being able to put oneself in another person's situation affords a greater knowledge of one's own reality and fosters solidarity.

### 1 To see the importance of

**intergenerational practice** as practices of social and educational intervention, yet also of individual and social transformation.

per group, the places where the sessions would be held and the most appropriate activities for each generation. Questionnaires for before and after the activity were also drawn up and would be handed out to the participants before the first shared activity and after the programme, for the individual and group evaluations.

The method used was more designed to spur active participation than to generate a theoretical approach to the issue of discussion. The proposal for thought (at both the individual and group levels) on this relational process would also be one of the key focal points for the mechanics of the seminar. Four sessions were held: two in the classrooms of the School of Psychology and two in the municipals seniors centres (whether at seniors' clubs, civic centres or at the district headquarters). The groups were generally made up of three or four young people and two or three senior citizens.

### First session

The groups were distributed into different classrooms and the session lasted for two hours. Everyone offered answers to a questionnaire that they had previously answered individually, and which included questions about the reality of senior citizens and of young people. We asked them to think about problems that they imagined the other group having and how they might be able to help one another. This thought served to generate dialogue. At this initial meeting it was difficult to get everyone to relax completely and begin to talk openly, particularly in the case of the young people: their shyness, their respect towards the elders and their prejudices hindered them. It must be said that many of the senior citizens who took part had already been working in other lines of "Learning with Seniors" and hence encouraged the young people to open up. In the two hours of the session, the tension and shyness gradually subsided, making for a more relaxed and natural atmosphere.

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One student from each group noted the topics discussed in this first session. At the end of the session, each group agreed on the discussion topics for the subsequent meeting, to ensure that they were of interest to both age groups.

### Second session

The same groups were maintained and continued to explore the issues discussed in the previous session or to open up new ones. By now, everyone knew each other and greeted one another freely and openly. They addressed each other by first name, asking each other what they had done during the week, and it was clear that they were eager to get started. When this session concluded, all the groups came together in a large classroom and shared an initial review of the experience. It was not mandatory to speak in front of the other groups and there was no appointed group spokesperson. Rather, the participants spoke individually on behalf of themselves, offering their impressions and describing how they felt. There was a great deal of participation, yet particularly among the young people, who expressed their surprise at how easy it was to interact with the seniors with whom it had initially seemed that they had little in common. As to the comments made by the seniors, most expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to be at the university and to be able to interact with young people.

### Third session

Both this meeting and the fourth were held at a facility in the Sants- Montjuïc District. Until this time, they had been held at a municipal seniors' centre, at a civic centre and finally at the district headquarters. In each case, the spaces were chosen according to the availability and the number of rooms needed, in keeping with the number of groups. The groups shared different workshops and the formats of the previous sessions were not necessarily maintained, as the idea was to foster more extensive familiarity. Any changes of group were always spurred by the decision of the person who wanted the change, which in most cases was a young person.

Nevertheless, generally speaking, the young people wanted to continue to work with the seniors whom they had met. The workshops could be centred on sewing, ballroom dancing, country dancing, cold cuisine, laughter therapy, watching a video on the Spanish Civil War, analyzing sayings and proverbs or making a collage on a specific theme, among others. It was important to remember that the activity of the workshop continued to serve as a vehicle for interaction and that learning the corresponding techniques was not the most important thing. Hence, there was no disadvantage to selecting an activity that was not initially envisaged if all the members of the group were interested in it.

### Fourth session

In this session, the work that had begun in the previous session was to be completed. Each group chose a spokesperson and together they drew up their conclusions on the four sessions. Next, the discussion was open to anyone else who wished to make a comment on the experience, aside from the spokespeople. At that time, the benefits of the interaction were apparent, as virtually everyone asked to continue, albeit more informally if necessary (a lunch, an outing, etc.). Finally, all attending shared a snack in a relaxed atmosphere. The farewell was very affectionate, as many participants exchanged phone numbers, email addresses, gave each other final pieces of advice, regretted not having more time to get to know each other better and said goodbye, amid hugs and kisses.

Throughout all the sessions, both the students' professor and the directors of the intergenerational relations programme came up to the different groups to see how the session was going, in order to facilitate their subsequent assessment and also to solve any problems or issues that might arise (lack of participation of a given member of the group, excessively taking the floor, need for material, etc.).

## Evaluation

The evaluation was based on direct observation, interviews with the university professional, and also very importantly, on the answers to the questionnaires. There were three clearly differentiated surveys: the questionnaires handed out prior to the first session, which were the same for the two generations and which served as a point of departure for their conversation; the questionnaires of the last day, which were answered by the groups and where all the participants in each group had to come together to agree on their answers; and finally, a third feedback form containing the students' thoughts and which all the students were required to hand in to the professor at the end of the course.

Most of the answers were subjective, which complicated our work when it came to tabulating the responses; nevertheless, it gave us a far more real idea of the thoughts and feelings of those interviewed. The answers provided by the young participants were somewhat extensive; hence, although they were highly interesting, only one passage has been included here (see Appendix). It was surprising that in such a short period of time, the young participants had changed their previous negative preconception of the seniors and valued both their contribution and their experience. It was equally noteworthy to see the manner in which the participants helped and understood each other, having broken down the barriers that usually stood between the two generations.

“My opinion was that because of the repression that they have lived through, elderly people had a far more closed mentality. I thought they wouldn't talk about “taboo” topics, like sex or homosexuality; ... I've got a far better feeling about them now. Their minds are far more open than I thought, and their opinions are logical and well-founded; ... For me, at first, I viewed old age as a loss, given the rupture with the working world, which I associated with a

distancing from social activity. The image I had implied a negative transition to solitude and bewilderment due to the scanty job activity; ... As the topics arose, I realised that I was leaving behind those typical clichés and stereotypes that had inhabited my mind before ...”.

The elders also stated that they had experienced a change of attitude towards the young people. “We want to continue, to keep trying to understand each other; ... They were nothing like the image I had had of them (sitting around the street drinking, drugs, etc).”

“Sharing University” reveals the positive effects of the personal interaction between young and old, and demonstrates that those effects can help to change attitudes to the benefit of the generations involved.

## Sharing Cultures

Overall, we have seen an increasingly greater tendency to reject newcomers from other cultures, and that tendency is also prevalent among senior citizens. The economic recession, their customs, in some cases their clothing, begging, the lack of integration that often makes it difficult to get to know them and the negative news in the mass media all led us to decide to start “Sharing Cultures”.

Our hypothesis was that if we brought seniors into contact with children of different nationalities, perhaps once they met and interacted, and if they developed feelings for one another, some of the seniors' reticence towards immigrants would ease up. At the same time, through game and conversation, the newly arrived children could become familiar with the Catalan culture. This relationship implied the knowledge and application of values that ought to be common to any culture or race; values such as respect, solidarity, tolerance and freedom.

## SHARED OBJECTIVES For both age groups

- 1 To bring children of different nationalities together with seniors, so that they all can learn about other cultures, including our own, and understand them and make them compatible with one another.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES Of each age group

### For the seniors

- 1 To do away with prejudice towards newcomers from other places.
- 1 To share their culture and traditions.
- 1 To learn to be more tolerant.

### For the children

- 1 To become familiar with part of the Catalan culture.
- 1 To learn to dance a Sardana.
- 1 To learn values such as respect and tolerance.

The new line, “Learning with Seniors”, was implemented at the start of the 2009-2010 academic year. We worked with the Perú School (currently Cal Maiol School), where 90% of the students are from abroad. In this case, our project targeted the students of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school. In a classroom of 25 students, there were 15 different nationalities, most of

which were Asian or South American, with a number of children from the African continent and perhaps only two or three Catalan children.

### Mechanics of the activities

In keeping with the process of each of the lines described above, meetings were held with the school principal and teachers to agree on the objectives, set up the calendar, decide on the number of groups, the number of participants per group, the classrooms where the sessions would be held and the material needed. The teachers informed us of a number of personal traits of the children from other countries, such as for example: the Chinese students did not accept physical contact (shaking hands, hugging, a kiss, etc.); other students had just arrived in Barcelona and barely spoke the language. This information was then conveyed to the seniors who were taking part in the programme, so that they would bear in mind those differences when interacting with the children.

To begin, a talk was given at the school with the children and a number of seniors, to explain the aim of the programme, the reason behind it and how it was going to be carried out. Five days of workshops were scheduled to be held, one per week, for an hour and a half. Small groups were formed, consisting of approximately 4-5 children and 2-3 seniors. Also in this line of work, both the students and the senior citizens were asked to respond to a preliminary questionnaire that would serve as the point of departure for the conversation. On the questionnaires, the children were asked their name, their age, how long they had been living in Barcelona, whether they spoke Catalan or whether they understood it but did not speak it. They were also asked about the typical dance of their country, region, town or autonomous community, as well as the instruments used to play the music for such dance, a description of the typical dress (colours, shape, accessories), the specific holidays on

which the people practice the dance, whether a special meal is prepared for that holiday, whether the food has a special name, and what it is made of.

During the five sessions, the idea was to share — through conversation and drawing— the Catalan culture with the different cultures of the children. The seniors described the Sardana dance to the children and explained everything associated with it (the cobla musical ensemble and its instruments, the specific holidays on which people danced the Sardana in the past, the clothing, the typical food that used to be made for those holidays, etc.). The children were asked to provide the same information, yet corresponding to their own countries. In these sessions, once again, the participants of both age groups displayed a genuine interest in one another and in learning together. They not only followed the established script, but also discussed other issues, such as agricultural work, the role of senior citizens in the different countries, the different trades in their cultures, school, the mass media, and without realizing it, they put into practice values such as respect and tolerance towards diversity.

They were given a drawing of a doll which they were to cut out and colour using the colours of the typical clothing of their countries, for presentation later on. In each session, time was devoted to learning to dance the Sardana while singing the lyrics, which the children were also asked to memorise. The closing celebration of this line of the programme was held with the families of the children on the Catalan holiday of Sant Jordi (the day of books and roses), in the school courtyard, where all danced the Sardana that they had learned. It is difficult to describe the image of the children and seniors dancing a Sardana where one could easily see children wearing a sari or a hijab.

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## Evaluation

The evaluation was based on direct observation and the interviews with the teachers and the school principal. It must be said that during the sessions we saw a coming together between the seniors and the children that surpassed the initial objectives: it became apparent that the participants forgot about their ethnicities, religions and /or cultures, and treated one another as equals. It was also surprising to see the expressions of affection, which became very habitual (hugs, kisses, etc.), and more so bearing in mind that due to their culture, many of the students were theoretically closed to this sort of physical contact. The teachers opened our eyes to the fact that many of the children had suffered a double separation from their families. The first separation took place when the parents emigrated and the children were forced to stay behind with their grandparents; and the second when they were reunited with their parents and lost contact with their grandparents. The act of sharing a few hours with seniors reminded them of the figure of their grandparents whom they had left behind in their countries of origin. They identified with the elders with whom they interacted through the programme and they developed feelings of love and affection.

## Sharing Secondary School

This line of work began in the 2012-2013 academic year, thanks to the fact that a teacher from Montjuïc Secondary School who taught the Ethics and Civic Education class approached the La Capa Municipal Seniors' Centre to propose a volunteer activity with adolescents in the tenth grade of secondary school and the users of the centre. The idea was that through practice the students would more easily internalise the theoretical contents of their course regarding the values that it aimed to transmit to them, such as empathy, solidarity, respect and equality, among others. Though it was impossible to carry out the specific volunteer activity that they proposed, we informed them of the existence of the "Learning with Seniors" programme and we offered to open up a new line of work that could be

adapted to their schedules and to the objectives that they aspired to achieve. The professionals of the secondary school assessed the possible benefits to be obtained through an intergenerational exchange, and the idea of embarking on a joint activity was considered.

For "Learning with Seniors", this represented a new challenge for many reasons. First, it was a challenge to work with adolescents within the educational framework, because it is very difficult to get into a secondary school. Second, the chosen seniors' centre had not ever taken part in these intergenerational activities; and third, it was a great opportunity to motivate a group of users to participate in it. This was no easy task, as the seniors were for the most part relatively inactive people of advanced ages with many fears: fear of rejection, as they did not believe much in the advantages of their contribution; fear of not knowing how to convey their own life experiences; and a fear of not being taken into account, among others. They also had negative preconceptions of the adolescents, believing them to be rude people who do not listen, imagining that they would not want to interact with senior citizens, and they even assumed that they were disrespectful. Despite this, different users of the centre were given the opportunity to take part. The programme was described to them and they were encouraged to take part. Finally, twelve senior citizens came forth.

Different meetings were held, ultimately establishing the schedule of activities, the number of sessions, the places where the activities would be carried out, the number of participants per group, the contents of the meetings and the objectives.

## Sharing Secondary School. OBJECTIVES

### SHARED OBJECTIVES For both age groups

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- 1 To bring seniors and adolescents together so that they could get to know each other and share experiences and topics of interest for both groups.
- 1 To break down stereotypes.
- 1 To foster interaction as a vehicle for familiarity and understanding.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES of each age group

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#### For the senior citizens

- 1 To help them to understand changes and to become less rigid in their convictions.
  - 1 To enable them to see young people as responsible and charitable.
  - 1 To enable them to convey their past and their life story.
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#### For the adolescents

- 1 To enable them to get to know the seniors as people with future projects.
- 1 To prompt them to recognize values such as respect, friendship, effort, patience and generosity.
- 1 To spur them to value the historical memory.

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It was decided to hold four sessions of approximately one hour for each of the two groups of 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students of secondary school, as they had two lines of work. Hence, seven students took part in each group, making for a total of fourteen teenagers and twelve seniors. The number of participants was small, enabling us to create small conversation groups (two or three adolescents and two senior citizens), to foster a more naturally flowing conversation, while at the same time obligating the members of the group to take an active involvement. Of the four sessions per line (eight in all), six were held at the municipal retirement centre, and the last two at the secondary school.

Finally, the month of January marked the start of what would become an additional line of work of the “Learning with Seniors” programme, “Sharing Secondary School”.

## Mechanics of the activities

### First session

Presentation of the contents of the project: what we aimed to achieve, why we were doing it, and how and where we planned to do it. The senior citizens had a questionnaire with questions related with their personal situation, which would enable them to introduce themselves and enter into the conversation: their name, where they were born, their age, what they had studied, how old they were when they stopped attending school, what activities they pursued and where they did them, whether they had family and grandchildren and what sort of relationship they had with them, why they wanted to participate in this activity, etc. The young people also brought a list of questions for the seniors, which would foster dialogue among the members of the group.

At first, this was a somewhat tense session where the adolescents in particular were very shy. This, however, did not

mean that they lacked interest; and in some cases, there was the added problem of the language barrier, as there were young people who had only recently come to Barcelona from far-away countries (China, Pakistan, etc.). The seniors, on the other hand, much to the contrary of what we had imagined, were the ones to encourage the young people to participate, by asking them questions and breaking the ice. By the end of the session, the conversation was more spontaneous and interactive.

### Second session

This time, the atmosphere was more relaxed and the participants greeted one another cordially. A monographic topic had been chosen in advance, to enable everyone to prepare for it before coming to the meeting. The first time, the selected topic was communication. The seniors had to describe their communication and the way they received information when they were young (by letter, by telephone through the town switchboard, by telegram, crystal radio, town crier, etc.). The young people were surprised and could not understand how the seniors could have lived in what they considered isolation, in comparison with life today. In exchange, the young people used a PowerPoint presentation to describe the way people communicate today, in other words: describing email, the internet, the Whatsapp mobile phone application, Facebook, Twitter, an Iphone, a tablet pc and the messenger chat, among others. Oddly enough, in this session, the participants ultimately ended up sharing interests, as some of the seniors who had mobile phones asked the young people how to make the best use of them or sought their insight to understand certain applications. It was a warm meeting: some learned while others taught without even realizing it. In the process, the participants established a relationship of help and respect.

### Third session

A joint laughter therapy workshop was held. If there was still any reticence regarding the idea of bringing the two age groups together, with this activity, any apprehension was completely forgotten, as it was a workshop where everyone laughed at himself/herself and shared the laughter of the others. Subsequently, some time was allotted for the exchange of impressions.

### Fourth session

This session was held at the secondary school. The first time, there was a planned visit to the classrooms and to the school facilities; however the young people proposed that everyone sit down in a circle in their classroom, and have a colloquium to discuss the experience as a whole. In this meeting, all the students in the grade level were able to attend and participate in this session, regardless of whether they had taken part in the activities at the seniors’ club. Although there was no scheduled discussion topic, the session was highly enriching, as the young people felt more at ease and were able to ask about issues of interest to them, and the seniors were delighted to answer their questions. The issues discussed included domestic violence against women, unwanted pregnancies, sex and sexually transmitted diseases, drug addiction and respect for parents. Surprisingly, one elderly woman explained her own personal case of domestic violence, and one man told the group that he had had to get married because of an unwanted pregnancy. The time passed very quickly and everyone wanted to continue. On the second visit to the school, the other secondary school group gave a PowerPoint presentation about their countries of origin, as many were from abroad (they presented the geographic locations of their native countries, the currencies, the typical foods, their traditions, etc.), and afterwards, there was a discussion.

These sessions at the secondary school, with the participation of the students who had not taken part in the activities at the seniors’ club, were highly beneficial for both groups, as they brought up issues that had not been discussed at the previous meetings, and the dialogue was enriching for both generations. The activities carried out in the sessions are not necessarily the same in each school year. Rather, they can vary without changing the objectives (new technologies, small video forums, etc.).

## Evaluation

The evaluation was based on direct observation, interviews with the professionals involved and the answers provided by both the adolescents and the seniors on the questionnaires (see Appendix).

The evaluation was highly positive. The senior citizens who were taking part for the first time committed to returning the following year, as they had felt recognised and they valued the importance of their relationship with the adolescents. The young people were also content: “It is a good experience because we interact with older people who you’ve maybe seen in the neighbourhood before and now when you see them, you say hello...”; “I have learned to value older people more and to be thankful for what I have”.

The secondary school believed that these activities provided many different elements for the education of the adolescents to such an extent that since this pilot project, “Sharing Secondary School” has continued to be held in the subsequent school years.

The directors of the intergenerational relations programme once again confirmed the good results of the programme, which included the difference in the senior citizens’ opinions of the adolescents: “To judge them, you’ve got to live with them, although we only had a few days”; ... “I have learned how to relate with young people”; ... “We’ve learned that they know how to behave properly and treat us well”.

## Sharing the Garden

In 2011, the building next to the Olzinelles Municipal Toy Library and Youth Centre was torn down. The idea was to annex that land to expand the courtyard of the youth centre.

The directors of the Seniors' Programme requested to use part of this land to make an urban garden and create an intergenerational space where the senior citizens and the children from the youth centre could come to work. This would become an additional line of work within the "Learning with Seniors" Programme. The district manager accepted the proposal and assigned part of the land to be used exclusively as a garden.

There was a definite desire to take advantage of this opportunity, yet the programme had to be different, even if the general objectives continued to be the same. Given that the children who attended the toy library and youth centre, who were between ages two and twelve, did not attend the centre on a daily basis, any activities to be carried out with them would bear no semblance to those programmed with the schools, but rather had to be held more occasionally, even if they would continue through time. For example, some of the children could not do the watering on all of the envisaged days, although they could participate in planting or harvesting. This new line of work required a more extensive budget than the other lines of the programme, as it required specific material to get started and to maintain it (growing tables with accessories, flower pots and bowls for plantlets, gardening tools, watering cans, soil, seeds and plants, space to store the containers and materials, etc.).

As to the senior citizens who might participate, the programme required a more extensive commitment from them in terms of their time and their work, as the aim was and continues to be, to keep the garden alive all year long.

The directors of the IP joined forces with those of the child care centre to draft a shared plan, which was presented to the

District Manager and subsequently approved. Hence, "Sharing the Garden", the sixth line of work of the "Learning with Seniors" Programme, began at the start of the year 2013 (during academic year 2012-2013).

To begin with, the garden would have four growing tables and eight planters, which could be expanded as necessary. Four senior citizens were assigned to each growing table, to ensure the correct growth of the plants in it. The calendar of activities was established primarily in keeping with the required weather for planting and harvesting and whenever possible coincided with the celebration of important and traditional holidays, in order to promote the attendance of the youth centre with all the children and their family members (spring festival, autumn festival, etc.). Moreover, other activities were scheduled more regularly for smaller groups, such as weekly watering, checking on the plant identification signs, etc. Among the participating seniors, a group of 16 people was formed. In addition to their desire to interact with the children, these seniors were interested in this new line of work: some because they enjoyed growing the garden; and others because they wanted to learn to do so. Before the activity began, both the seniors and the participating professionals received an initial urban gardening course. In two informative and educational sessions, they were informed on how they had to work and what they had to do to maintain the garden. Each participant received a key for direct access to the garden and signed a sheet agreeing to the rules of operation, which specified the tasks and responsibilities assigned to him/her. Throughout the year, meetings were scheduled with the volunteers to monitor the work, solve any minor problems and/or provide suggestions, in relation to both the specific tasks of the garden and the children from the youth centre and amongst themselves.

## Sharing the Garden. OBJECTIVES

### SHARED OBJECTIVES For both age groups

- 1 To learn the basics of garden cultivation.
- 1 To value the importance of the land, the sun and water.
- 1 To enable the participants to become familiar with and taste the different products they grow.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES Of each age group

#### For the seniors

- 1 To share activities, experiences and to develop bonds with the children.
- 1 To participate in tasks and assume responsibilities that make them feel useful, necessary and valued.

#### For the children

- 1 To discover the natural environment.
- 1 To learn to share and work with others.
- 1 To develop values such as patience and respect for people and for nature, and to develop an appreciation for work and responsibility.

1 For each growing table, there will be a specific group of people responsible for keeping it organised and in good condition.

2 The group responsible for each table will agree amongst themselves on the different tasks to be carried out, whether individually or as a group. It is advisable to have a set day for the watering.

3 If anyone has to be outside of Barcelona for several days, he/she will have to agree with his/her table co-workers or mention it to the heads of the programme.

4 Tasks: planting, watering, fertilisation, controlling plagues, picking the products, maintaining and changing nets, handling the tools with care and leaving them in their designated place.

5 The floor of the courtyard must be kept clean. If necessary, it will be swept and/or hosed down. In such case, those carrying out such tasks must make sure that there are no children present in the courtyard.

6 Anyone who wishes to plant something outside of the growing tables must inform the directors of the programme or of the youth centre, to ensure the uniformity of the pots used, to avoid duplicating plants, etc.

7 When engaging in shared activities with the children from the youth centre, it is important to follow the instructions previously given to everyone, so that everyone does the same thing.

8 The harvested products from each table are not to be consumed by the individuals who look after the table. Rather, they will be used in a shared activity with the children from the youth centre, so that everyone will enjoy them together.

9 The garden is not for public use. Access is only open to authorised persons (volunteer senior citizens and the children from the youth centre).

## Activities carried out as an initial experiment

1 At the start of the school year, a moss graffiti was made on one of the walls of the garden space, reading “L’hort d’Olzinelles” (“The Olzinelles Garden”).

1 The children made signs to identify the names of the seeds that were to be planted.

1 **Spring festival.** This festival was organised to welcome the spring, and the children’s families were invited to attend. This was a festive day featuring different activities: hot chocolate, floral makeup workshops, the creation of the springtime mural, and the decoration of activity and plant identification tags for the garden’s four growing tables and eight planters. With the help of the seniors, the children planted the seeds of the different vegetables, aromatic plants and flowers. They took interest in the instructions given to them by the seniors (measurement and depth of the hole for each seed, the distance between the holes, and how and how often they would need to be watered, what to do if it gets too cold or too hot, etc.). The youngest ones played with the soil and everyone went home with a small container full of soil that had been previously planted with flower seeds, so that they could look after the plants and see the process of germination, growth and blooming process.

1 **Harvest.** There were two harvests. This activity awoke great interest in the children, as they saw the results of what they had planted some time before. They were surprised to see all the colours and the way the plants had grown, and they learned how to pull up a plant so as not to harm the plant or the soil. Children and seniors worked together to pick the ripest products (radishes, spinach, lettuce, carrots and tomatoes). After washing them, each child, worked with the seniors to prepare a small morsel to taste, which they then ate together.

1 **Watering the garden.** Once a week, the children, who were divided into their corresponding age groups, went to the garden to water the plants and watch the growth and ripening processes.

During the summer and until the start of the following school year, the seniors continued to look after the garden.

## Evaluation of the activity

Like the other lines of work, the evaluation of this activity was based on direct observation and on the conclusions reached by the professionals of the youth centre and of the IP. The activity was highly positive, and has been continued in subsequent school years, featuring the same activities, and a few new ones have been added. It was not feasible to hand out questionnaires to the children, although we were able to compile the answers of some of the senior citizens who were in charge of the garden (see Appendix).

Initially, the participating seniors were a bit apprehensive about the project, as most did not know how to grow a garden. Throughout the school year, thanks to the instructions they received in the training session, the books they consulted and the help of friends and acquaintances who kept gardens, they lost that fear and were highly content with their work. It could be said that the only difficulty resided in the process of adapting the people in charge of each growing table to those of the other tables. Minor misunderstandings were sorted out as they arose and overall, the seniors formed a united group with shared interests. Most of the people who cared for the garden also took part in other lines of activity of the programme.

As to the relationship between the children and the seniors, it was highly positive, and the participants had enough time together to enjoy the experience together. The seniors explained to the children different things about the plants, the soil, the products they were growing and the importance of water and sunlight, and also prepared and shared with them a salad made with of the vegetables they had grown.

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It was heart warming to see the way four- or five-year-olds learned to cut vegetables or to taste raw spinach for the first time. The children learned and had a great time.

As to the families of the little ones, it must be pointed out that they were surprised by their children's enthusiasm for this activity, and they felt that this was yet another good tool for their life preparation.

In the district, this activity made solid impact as of day one. The neighbours would stop by to see how things were growing; some asked if they could come in to visit the garden; others made suggestions, and all enjoyed seeing the children and the seniors working together in the garden.

The Hort d'Olzinelles (Olzinelles Garden) has become a community and educational place that promotes relations among seniors and children, enabling them to identify important values in one another.

## Overall evaluation of all the lines of work

The evaluation of any programme or activity is extremely important, as it provides us with sufficient information on how it was carried out, while enabling us to detect possible deviations from our objectives. It additionally serves to determine the degree of satisfaction of the participants, the objectives that have been achieved, the changes that need to be made to improve the activities, the problems that have arisen and how they were solved, the incorporation into the subsequent academic year of previously unanticipated activities that have improved the relations, and the review of the expenses of the envisaged budget.

As we have noted above in each line of work, the evaluations are based on the following:

1 **Direct observation.** The directors of the IP and the professionals of the different participating centres and facilities take part in all the activities directly, as this is the

best way to obtain first-hand information on how the activities are carried out and at the time and detect any needed changes to improve the relations.

1 **Interviews** with the professionals involved: teachers, the staff of seniors' clubs, activity monitors at the municipal centre and at the toy library and youth centre. This information is important, as it can confirm whether or not the educational centres and the different facilities have achieved the objectives or inform us of any necessary changes to achieve them.

1 **Compilation of the projects** (papers and drawings) carried out by the children, where they explain or portray their opinions of the activities in which they have participated. In these projects, it is easy to see the manner in which the school has worked on the issue of intergenerational relations, the impact of the activities on the children, the interest or lack thereof, the feelings they have felt, and even any rejection towards a given activity.

1 **The evaluation** that is required of the university students corresponding to the course in which the activity has been included. The second-year Psychology students are forced them to think about the other generation, beyond the actual activity, and this gives us sufficient data to make a positive assessment of the need for them to interact with older people, and on the manners by which the participants can come to understand and help each other.

1 **The answers to the questionnaire** for the children, adolescents, young people, teachers, senior citizens and some of the parents who took part (see Appendix). In other sections, we have made reference to these answers; nevertheless, we must underscore the importance of the parental participation. In many cases, the adults' image of the seniors was also far removed from reality, and there was no interaction between the generations, nor did they create the opportunity for such. Sometimes, this was due to a negative experience within their family environment;

other times it was the result of the lack of interaction outside of the family, or even due to the negative influence of the mass media. Being able to discuss their children's school experience afforded them insight to the actual reality.

All of this feedback provides us with enough information to make the most objective assessment possible. Hence, we can safely make the following statements:

### The children

They meet the elders as a group, yet they believe it is important to differentiate and individualise, rather than "label" an entire group of people as good or bad. They have discovered the opportunities offered by the seniors and through the activities, conversations and workshops, they have realised that they are not "invalid", "useless" or "passive". They have recognised values such as respect, friendship, tolerance, patience and generosity; they have observed feelings and situations of loneliness, isolation, illness and self-marginalisation. They have changed their passive attitude of "it was none of their business" into a genuine interest, an attitude of wanting to know, for example: what they eat, what they do when on holiday, what their life is like, what school was like for them, etc. Others have gained insight to the Catalan culture and/or have learned to respect nature.

In November 2014, at a meeting, three students — Roc Lain, Anna Puig and Marc Sendra— who had formed part of the pioneer group at Barrufet School (1991-1992 academic year), explained that despite the fact that nearly 25 years had gone by, they still remembered the explanations before the first visit with the seniors, the excitement they felt in anticipation of the visit, the activities they enjoyed most, like yoga and billiards, and especially, the work they did, which included a self portrait in which they drew a picture of what they themselves would look

like when they were old. They also proudly recalled that they were the ones who had created the name "Learning with Seniors" on the mural that they had made to receive the seniors for the first time.

They said that at the time they were not aware of the importance of the fact that unknown senior citizens were coming to the school, as they were accustomed to doing workshops with some of their grandparents who came to the school to teach cooking, sewing, woodworking, and other pursuits. They looked back at "Learning with Seniors" as an activity that formed part of normalcy and that was integrated into their educational project. They had not viewed it as a special programme; however, as adults, they were certain that it had been good for their education and life preparation. They recalled the special way of learning and what they learned through interaction with others. In other words, they were able to learn in a pleasant and amusing manner, and they were able to internalise values and behaviour through interaction, rather than only through the theoretical contents of books.

They believe that intergenerational relations outside of the family are necessary today, as children do not have much interaction with older people beyond the immediate family setting. They can mutually teach, learn and enhance each others' lives. Interaction at any age is good, and the more there is, the better. All initiatives that bring people together are positive.

They pointed out that today more value is placed on knowledge than on the wisdom that older people can transmit to the younger generations.

One of the three people interviewed stated that now that he had children, he valued things that he had not valued as a youth. He would like for the biological grandparents of his children to come to his children's school to offer an activity, and he has made the proposal to the school; however, unfortunately, his proposal has always been met with rejection.

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They believe it is important to continue to offer these activities which promote interaction, as it is often easier for children to discuss their concerns with people whom they do not know, people who moreover listen to them, rather than with a member of their own family.

### The adolescents

Generally speaking, they changed their negative preconceptions of senior citizens, they saw different ways of living, they took an interest in the history that the seniors had lived and acknowledged values such as hard work, respect and mutual assistance. They viewed the personal experience of the elders as an important value that helps when taking decisions. They also valued the seniors' work experience and they were surprised to see that the elders had a future project.

### The young people

They expressed that they had different way of listening to the seniors outside of their families, and that they were able to talk to them on the same level. They found that they had points in common, issues that stemmed from the same or similar causes, such as for example, economic problems: the elders were worried about the lack of work or about the precarious nature of the jobs available to the young people, and about the lack of future prospects for them; and the young people pointed out that the elders had serious economic problems due to the low pensions they received. They also felt that they shared loneliness: the seniors described lonely situations due to their scarce contact with their children and family members; and the youths pointed out their parents' failure to understand them, due to a lack of dialogue. These and other aspects generated a mutual understanding, generating empathy and comprehension, among other feelings. They acknowledged the need for the elders and valued the historical memory. They were also

more open to the elders' advice, as they did not feel that it was being imposed on them, nor did they feel questioned, as often occurs when they receive advice from their parents or family members.

### The seniors

They met the children and young people and realised that they could exchange knowledge and experiences with them. They acknowledged that they were not as impolite or as insensitive as they had thought; rather all the contrary: that they valued the elders and knew how to share things with them. They felt accepted and recognised, they lost their fear of rejection and they felt useful. As a result, they ended their own self-marginalisation and their self-esteem increased. The activities enabled them to act as the conveyors of their past, of the popular culture they had lived, which had sometimes been forgotten or unknown to the other generations; and they learned to be more flexible in their ideas and convictions.

### The schools

All the schools believed this programme to be a good enlightening tool that complemented their respective educational programmes.

We interviewed the directors of the different schools (Ana Blasco, Director of Studies at Barrufet, Alex Ruiz de Azua, the Principal of Jaume I, Olga Gil, the Coordinator of Carles I, Nanda Botinas, Principal of Perú School, and Gerard Sendin, a teacher of the second stage of primary school at the Escola Institució Montserrat), and they all felt that the activities carried out were important for their students' education and personal growth.

They confirmed many of the assertions described above by the directors of the IP, and in general, concurred on the following points:

- 1 Many of the values provided by "Learning with Seniors" form part of their educational programmes (respect,

listening, responsibility, patience, diversity and self-management, among others). Barrufet School has been defined as a co-educational school, and one of its values is the relationship between generations. Jaume I School included specific objectives relating to values and rules within the area of Social Studies.

- 1 The children could get to know the elders, learn to respect them and acknowledge their importance; they realised that they could understand them and that they could even help them.

- 1 It enabled the school to open up to the neighbourhood: the seniors could come into the school.

- 1 The proximity of the facilities —seniors' club, school and retirement home— made it possible for the participants to uphold their newly developed friendships: they could greet each other in the street; the children could go to visit a senior citizen in the retirement home and the seniors could go to the gate of the school to see the children again.

- 1 It enabled the children to change their preconceptions of the elderly, and even change their attitude towards their biological grandparents. There were cases of children who had begun to help some of their neighbours, by accompanying them up the stairs to their homes or by carrying their shopping bags for them.

- 1 Students who were usually mischievous, nervous or introverted, became more serene, curious and open when interacting with the seniors, to the point of telling them their problems or worries, as they felt closer to the elders than they did to their teachers.

- 1 The schools with the most students from abroad —Carles I School and Perú School— attached great value to the affectionate bonds that developed between these children and the seniors, as these children who were often left behind in their countries of origin when their parents came over to Spain first suffered the separation from their parents,

followed by the separation from their grandparents. At Perú School, even the Chinese children who do not accept physical contact due to their culture, ended up giving kisses to the elders. The need for love between the seniors and the children has in some cases led a student to "adopt" an elder or the other way around, where a senior has "adopted" a child.

- 1 The visit to the retirement home had great impact on the students; however they connected from a point of emotion and feeling, and most of the teachers were surprised to see the way in which the students generally had no problem helping the most feeble or ailing people into bed and giving them hugs and kisses.

- 1 The compositions subsequently written by the students enabled the teachers to better understand them, as they revealed the feelings generated by their interaction with the elders.

- 1 Through the years, there have been occasional cases of professionals who did not understand the work of the senior citizens at the school, as they obligated them to devote hours, to the detriment of their own established programme. Nevertheless, at the end of the academic year, they have always valued it as a highly positive and enriching experience.

- 1 Through time, when setting up the schedule of workshops, the directors have gradually discovered other options that are different from those already established, and the activities have at times been modified without ever changing the objectives. In the case of Carles I School, the first days of the workshops have been included in the Oral Language class, at the precise time of the cohesion activities, as this forces the students to converse. Hence, the days after the workshops, even though they may have to make an object, the children and senior citizens continue to share more interest in talking and listening than in finishing the envisaged project.

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The representatives of Perú School felt that the learning of the Sardana dance was an added value that afforded the students a closer look at Catalan culture. Over the course of the sessions, the teachers were able to observe in the senior citizens positive changes of attitude in relation to any possible rejection of the foreign students. We tend to be afraid of those who are different from what we are accustomed to seeing and dealing with; however when the seniors went to the school and meet the children from abroad, they saw them in a different light and valued them just as they did the others.

### The toy library and youth centre

Yolanda Moliner, an educator and the head of the facility, said that they included “Sharing the Garden” because “we wanted to foster intergenerational relations between senior citizens and children by working in an area of activity such as that of a garden”.

The professionals feel that this line fosters respect, patience, attention, participation, waiting and listening to the elders, while at the same time affording the children insight to agriculture and healthy eating. They were also surprised that some of the more mischievous or introverted kids were more receptive and calmer when taking part in the activity. They were able to see that two completely different generational groups are capable of sharing a workspace.

### The secondary school

Lourdes Estrada, a the teacher of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade (ages 15-16) at the Institut Montjuïc, believes that the activities carried out at the La Capa Municipal Seniors’ Centre enable them to achieve many of the objectives they have set for themselves. She explained that the adolescents were able to break down their stereotypes of senior citizens; they realised that the elders have

interests, that they are active and that they understand young people. For many students from abroad and who had lost contact with their biological grandparents, this programme afforded them a relationship with older people. They saw the way in which adolescents who did not behave well and who even had disrespectful attitudes at school displayed impeccable conduct at the seniors’ club. The direct contact makes it easier to see the person just as he /she is, rather than the way others have described him/her or the way they think he/she is, and this does away with many prejudices.

They would like to expand the time allocated to the activity. However, this is not possible, for after this activity, the students have a class and cannot arrive late. This is a non-institutionalised activity, which the teacher includes voluntarily in her educational programme, and which hence cannot interfere with the other courses or shorten their class time.

Certain workshops have been changed over time, to ensure that all the participants become more actively involved.

Finally, they felt that the last session was important, as it was attended by all the students of the grade level, even though they had not taken part in the activities. They proposed also inviting to this session the seniors who were not familiar with the activity, as they thought that once they saw what the programme was about, they might decide to participate in it.

### The university

We interviewed Víctor Pérez Dávila, who, as a second-year Psychology student, took part in the second year of “Sharing University” (academic year 2009-2010), and who has now completed his degree.

Víctor had a very vivid memory of the activities that he did, as they enabled him to interact with a group of people

with whom young people usually did not mix.

He believes that “Sharing University” is good for training as a professional. It affords the student contact with other facets of psychology. Everyone associates psychology with the therapeutic, clinical aspect; however, there are many other aspects that are not as well known. Interacting with a part of the population that one does not usually imagine facing as a psychologist can open doors to other fields that one might find more interesting. This was his case, as the experience led him into psychogerontology.

He is sure that it also favours personal growth. It presents an opportunity to see other points of view. It is a place for exchange where the students can freely and calmly speak with people with whom they have virtually no contact, with no prejudices; and that inevitably opens the mind.

He believes that it not only enables the change of the young people’s negative preconception of the elders, but also helps to create an image of this age group that would never have imagined before. The young people with negative stereotypes can change them, and those who do not have negative images can form a positive opinion of them. The same thing can happen to the seniors who take part in the exchange.

With regard to family relationships, he believes that it can also foster an improvement in that realm. He added that there are assigned roles with family ties that are difficult to break. When interacting with people outside of their families yet of ages similar to those of their grandparents, the young people can ask and find out things about their past era that enable them to better understand the older people in their own family settings.

For Víctor, bearing in mind that the old and young did not know each other, the success of “Sharing University” is essentially based on two causes: one, the willingness of

both generations to come together and get to know each other; and two, the context in which the activities are carried out, which he firmly believes is essential (preliminary questionnaire that spurs the participants to put themselves in each other’s position, meet up for a round-table discussion, freedom to select the topic and see each other both at the university and in the neighbourhood).

### The retirement home facilities

We interviewed the management at the different retirement homes: Griselda Ginesta, the Director of the Mossèn Vidal Aunós Retirement Home; Montserrat Cerrillo, the psychologist at the Pare Batllori Retirement Home; Isabel Molina and Teresa Castellanos, the Executive Secretary and psychologist, respectively, of the Centre Parc Retirement Home; and Anna Gris, a community worker at the Josep Miracle Municipal Facility. They all attached great value to the children’s visit to their facilities and for the most part they share the same opinion regarding the positive effects of the exchange for both the residents and the students.

Overall, they concur regarding the following aspects:

- 1 Socially speaking, the retirement homes are not as well accepted as they ought to be and it is good for the children to see them and to see how the seniors live, how they communicate and what activities they do. This makes it possible to do away with certain taboos.

- 1 The retirement homes want to open up to the neighbourhood, and these visits provide a good opportunity to do so: for the residents, because they can communicate with the world outside of the home, and for the children, as they lose their fear of interacting with the people who live there and they can see that these centres are not ghettos, hospitals or asylums, but rather open facilities and that the seniors who live in them are neither locked away nor hidden.

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1 The residents' response to those visits was highly positive. They changed their clothes and tidied up their rooms to present them to their visitors. The children asked all the questions they had and the residents answered them and enthusiastically told them about their lives, while showing them the photos and things that they kept in their rooms.

1 The seniors, who did not usually interact with one another, in fact interacted with the children, becoming talkative and joyful for a number of days.

1 For the residents, the day the children come to visit the retirement home is virtually a holiday: their listless, sad faces change; they light up; and still more so in the cases of those who do not have grandchildren.

1 The proximity to the school is important, as it enables the members of the two age groups to run into one another in the street, and even makes it possible for some of the children to visit the elders outside of the school schedule.

1 At the end of the visit, the residents always ask for the students to come back.

1 It is surprising to see that those suffering advanced stages of dementia, who virtually do not respond to any stimuli, in fact respond when they see the children, or when the children caress them or give them a kiss. There have been cases of people with considerable memory loss who virtually cannot remember anything, and who nevertheless remember the youngsters' visit for several days afterwards. On the whole, these visits produce in the residents of the retirement homes a series of feelings and emotions that they do not experience with their adult visitors.

1 The illnesses or the lack of independence of many of the residents have an impact on the children. Nevertheless, rather than responding with rejection or aversion, they reach out to the elders with attitudes of love and the desire to help

them. In some cases, the children have cried when confronted with these situations; however those reactions were never out of aversion or rejection.

1 Sometimes there have been cases of professionals who initially interpreted the children's visit as an "interference"; yet after seeing the residents' response, they changed their opinions and in fact asked the visitors to return.

1 When they see the facilities, the elements of aid for the senior citizens and the way they live, many children say that they will go home and tell their families and grandparents about it. One girl said: "what a *cool* home! When I grow up, I want to come here; it's like a hotel and I'm going to tell my grandpa about it".

1 They have reduced the time of the tour through the facilities in order to create more time for personal interaction. The children usually share a game or a workshop with the residents or they ask the different residents previously prepared questions about things that are important to the lives of each one of them.

In this case, the residents feel important, the children learn and the professionals can work on memory.

1 All retirement homes receive visits from children at some point, yet those visits are always in order to give a short performance or sing a song; occasional performances that do not allow for interaction, whereas "Meeting the Seniors" achieves the opposite: it fosters a few hours of interaction.

1 Sometimes, these visits enable the staff of the retirement home to get to know their residents. This particularly occurs when communicating with the children, as many of them do not usually participate in anything, whereas when the children come, they take part with great enthusiasm.

1 The day of the residents' visit to the school is a very heart warming day. The children and the elders already know each other and find each other. The elders find themselves immersed in a reality that is far removed from what they

had in their time.

### The municipal senior citizens' centres

The Cotxeres de Sants Municipal Seniors' Centre has been offering these activities since the beginning of this IP, in the 1991-1992 academic year. The promoters of this centre — Maria Rosa Paré and Oriol Carrasco— acknowledge that these activities continue to form part of their programme, as they understand that it is positive for the elders who use the centre, as well as for the children. The kids can get to know the seniors while participating in some of the activities that are held at these facilities. Through them, they can interact, albeit minimally, and see that senior citizens can be active, enthusiastic and have future projects. This is an excellent complement to the visit to the retirement homes, as the children see two very different realities of what life can be like for senior citizens.

For the users of the municipal centre, the exchange gives them joy, they feel useful teaching what they do, and the situation breaks up their daily routines. Overall, the attitude towards these exchanges was highly positive, although on a few occasions, there were seniors who preferred not to share the activity or there was a workshop participant who expressed that it meant having to make an additional effort, as the activity shared by seniors and children could not be carried out in the same manner as usual and had to be modified to some degree.

Thanks to these exchanges, seniors who only engaged in activities at the municipal centre became familiar with "Learning with Seniors" and its different lines of work, and hence took interest in participating in some of them. In fact, there were cases of users of the centre who only did the activities that could be qualified as "sedentary", such as dominoes, for example, and ultimately ended up going to the schools and discovering unknown skills in themselves:

antique toy making, painting and storytelling, among others.

Carles Armengol, the activity coordinator of the La Capa Municipal Seniors' Centre, stated that his centre had been offering the "Sharing Secondary School" activities since the 2012-2013 academic year. At that time, the programme was surrounded by uncertainty, in terms of both participation and the possible results, yet they decided to try it out for different reasons: they wanted to expand the neighbourhood IP in the Zona Franca area, it afforded them the opportunity to work with adolescents for the first time, and it could serve to motivate its users to take part in an activity unknown to them. He explained that the response to the participation was highly positive and he was surprised when a small group of people who usually only came to the centre to have lunch, very closed people who lived alone and never took part in any activities, joined "Sharing Secondary School", as it allowed them to interact with other people of their own age and young people, which in turn mitigated their loneliness.

He confirmed that the seniors began to see the young people in a different light; they felt useful; they saw that they had things to contribute, and it enabled them to offer advice to the adolescents. Their interaction with the young people helped them to better understand their grandchildren and their possible problems.

Esther Macias, the activity coordinator at the Poble-Sec Municipal Seniors' Centre, has been including "Meeting the Seniors" at her centre since the 2011-2012 academic year. She observed that even though they only work with one school, the women who participate in the programme do so with enthusiasm and great interest, and they enjoy all the benefits that we have described above. This group of seniors have expanded their participation and give workshops at the school for two quarters of the year ("Sharing Primary School").

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All the technicians at the seniors' clubs coincide in the fact that these activities can serve to break down negative stereotypes in both generations.

Finally, we want to include in this section a few thoughts of Jordi González, who was the Director of the Programme for Seniors in 1991, and currently continues to be the Director of “Learning with Seniors”.

Though he does not wish to repeat all the benefits of intergenerational relations, which we have seen in the different chapters of this book, he would like to underscore a number of issues of importance when managing an IP:

- 1 “Learning with Seniors” is based on respect for the other from the position of freedom, acceptance and diversity and the promotion of solidarity.

- 1 In order to be a volunteer in any line of the “Learning with Seniors” Programme, there is no need for training of any sort, academic or other. All that is required is the life training that one acquires through years of living and age, and the wish to share one's own life story.

- 1 Any professionals who wish to begin an intergenerational relations activity must believe in the need for these relations, thanks to the benefits that they provide to all the generations with which they envisage working.

- 1 An IP is not an occasional, one-off activity. Rather, it must be envisaged as an ongoing programme, as this will afford greater awareness in many different areas: at the participating centres, in the age groups that interact and in the social setting in which the activities are carried out.

- 1 Learning and exchange must be mutual between the generations that come together.

- 1 When starting an IP, it is advisable to establish realistic and achievable objectives that facilitate the motivation of everyone involved, both professionals and participants (starting with small activities, working with few people, holding them at a single centre, etc.). It is also important to

offer each participating senior citizen the opportunity to do what he/she likes best, so that all participants feel comfortable and sure of themselves.

- 1 It is advisable to avoid routine, particularly when working with seniors who have been participating for some time. For this reason, it is important to provide periodic motivation, through meetings and/or by sending them the opinions of the other participants (children, young people, etc.) or the professionals who take part (teachers, workers from the educational centres and facilities).

- 1 It is not good for the seniors to feel that they are being monitored, yet at the same time, they must not feel alone. **The support of the IP director or activity coordinator is important.**

- 1 The volunteers must be willing to commit to attend; however, they must also have the freedom to do other occasional activities: to go away on holiday for a few days, with the association *Imsero*, to take a course for a few days or attend a concert, among others. Sometimes they stop participating in these intergenerational relations programmes out of the fear of losing their freedom and having to reconcile their attendance at the schools with other activities of interest to them.

- 1 It is important to monitor all the activities carefully, not solely in order to evaluate them through direct observation, but also to detect possible problems, such as excessive leadership, the lack of participation or disagreements among seniors, or a change of strategies in order to improve the relations between the two generations.

- 1 Any senior citizen who would like to know more about it must be given the opportunity to see the activity and if he/she does not like it, he/she should be free to walk away from it with no strings attached.

## Conclusions

Throughout these 25 years, the IPs have emerged around the country increasingly more frequently, more intensely and from different areas, institutions and/or groups: town councils, organizations and associations, universities, and others. Within the spheres of the European Parliament, the United Nations and the WHO, important programmes have been implemented which contemplate the need for intergenerational relations.

The year 1993 was designated the “European Year of the Elderly and Solidarity between Generations”. In 2009, 29th April was institutionalised as the “European Day of Solidarity and Cooperation among Generations”. The year 2012 was declared the “European Year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity”.

In its municipal action programme, (PAM) 2008-2011,10 the Barcelona City Council made the following statement, in reference to senior citizens:

“...we will strengthen programmes... including , “Learning with Seniors”, among others, and we will be implementing new intergenerational initiatives...”; and for the PAM 2013-2016,<sup>11</sup> General Objective 2 incorporates one of the specific objectives, “To reinforce relations and solidarity among generations [...] that promote the deactivation of stereotypes relating to senior citizens”. In working to achieve this objective, the text requires “implementing intergenerational relations beyond the relations between grandparents and grandchildren, and strengthening the ties among senior citizens’ organisations, primary and secondary schools, retirement homes, shelters and labour-related environments, among others, as a strategy for cohesion among the generations and to reduce stereotypes...”.

10. PAM 2008-2011, p. 175.

11. PAM 2013-2016, p. 75.

According to all of these statements, it is clear that the IP “Learning with Seniors” is valid and applicable, that it is necessary and must continue, as it helps improve the quality of life of senior citizens and people of other generations.

We must recall that the mechanics of “Learning with Seniors” can easily be modified without changing the objectives. Hence the organiser has the freedom to tap into any opportunity that may arise to enrich each of the lines of work or actions or to start new ones. The diversity of opinions and the differences in age, ethnic background, feelings and experiences make it possible for different generations to enter into dialogue and work together towards a more giving, unified and participative society; a society for all the ages, where people learn from one another and appreciate and respect one another from the place of diversity and freedom, sharing the present, valuing the past and working to improve the future.

After twenty-five years, this programme not only continues to achieve its goals; it also continues to be open and dynamic, allowing for initiative and spontaneity. It has retrieved something that ought to be normal —interaction— and makes evident the advantages of giving free reign to commitment, awareness and tenderness. We are certain that for the participants, this is an opportunity for personal growth and a social necessity for the community.

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## Considerations

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As I was finishing this publication, I thought about why I was so interested in writing it.

Through these years, alongside my co-workers, we have come across a diverse range of situations: times of doubt, creativity, disenchantment, triumphs and frustrations, many joys and also difficulties, efforts and incomprehension, improvisation and rigorous planning. Yet I believe that all of those moments have been helpful in making “Learning with Seniors” a good, solid IP.

Looking back on the road travelled, I realize that once again, all of these situations confirm the vast importance of personal relations in general and of intergenerational relations in particular.

Today we must acknowledge the advantages of the new technologies. We can easily communicate with anyone, whether the person is nearby or far away, someone we know or someone we do not know. By simply pushing a button, we can learn about something without having to ask anyone; without ever having to get up out of our seat, we can consult a book; and if our spelling is insufficient, we can press another button to have it corrected.

Yet, what about the non-verbal communication that takes place during personal interaction? Where does it stand? The looks, the blushing, the expressions of joy, fear, surprise, boredom or interest, where do they stand? Where does the physical contact of a hug, a kiss or a handshake stand? Face-to-face interaction allows for feelings of understanding, the desire know or learn about other ways of living and thinking, and at the same time, it enables us to share all of the things that can make us better people.

Individualism and the new technologies can easily undermine personal and social development, whereas personal and intergenerational relations do just the opposite: they build it. I believe it is necessary to find the balance between distant communication and personal interaction, for when combined, they can add to the quality of life and enhance the individual and society; yet separately, they take away from the possibilities of enhancement.

When writing this book I did not only want to introduce “Learning with Seniors”, a good intergenerational relations programme that has been promoted by the Sants-Montjuïc District for so many years. I also wanted to offer the readers insight to the programme and invite them to read between the lines, to go beyond the words on the page. I wanted them to think about respect, freedom, diversity and solidarity, and about all the other qualities that are associated with mutual learning among people of different ages, languages, ethnicities and political and/ or religious ideas.

I wanted to share with you these thoughts and encourage you to practice and promote intergenerational relations, because of all of their positive aspects.



## Meeting the Seniors

### Reception mural

A mural made by the students of Barrufet School for the seniors' first visit and which lent the intergenerational programme its name. Academic year 1991-1992.

### Warmth

Non-verbal communication also forms part of intergenerational relations.



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## Meeting the Seniors

### Visit to a retirement home

The visit of the students from Carles I School to the Pare Batllori Retirement Home. The children carefully and attentively help the seniors.

3 April 2014.

### Visit to a school

The senior citizens' visit to Carles I School. It is typical to see a hug or a caress when young and old come together. 15 May 2014.



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## Sharing Primary School

### Learning to sew

It is easy to talk about their experiences while sewing.

Workshops at Barrufet School, 24 November 2014.

### Conversation workshop

The exchange of experiences is enriching for both generations.

Carles I School, 26 January 2015.



## Sharing Primary School

### Workshop on objects from the past and the present

Learning about the past enables us to value the present. Carles I School, 12 February 2015.

### Arts and crafts workshop

What they have to learn is not as important as the understanding and camaraderie that emerges between the elders and the little ones. Workshops at Barrufet School, 25 November 2014.



## Sharing Primary School

### Workshop to learn to do arts and crafts

The participants interact and share Without realizing it and while having fun.

Jaume I Primary School, 18 November 2014.

### Sewing workshop

People can learn and teach together. Carles I School, 16 January 2012.



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## Sharing University

### Conversation group

A conversation among university students and senior citizens. There are no taboo topics, and the dialogue is relaxed and flows naturally.  
School of Psychology, 7 March 2014.



### Senior volunteer group

School of Psychology, 7 March 2014.



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## Sharing Cultures

### Learning to dance the Sardana

The Sardana brings together people of any ethnicity or religious or political ideology.  
Perú School, 4 March 2010.



## Sharing Secondary School

### Conversation group

10<sup>th</sup>- graders conversing with seniors from the La Capa Municipal Seniors' Centre. It was surprising to see their interest in talking and listening.  
Institut Montjuïc, 2 December 2014.



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## Sharing the Garden

### The garden

The garden at the Olzinelles Toy Library and Youth Centre.

### Harvest

Harvest at the Olzinelles

Garden.

Children and seniors can taste the garden products. Olzinelles Toy Library and Youth Centre, February 2015.



## APPENDIX

# Answers to the questionnaires in the different lines of work

This chapter compiles some of the answers to the questions that were posed to most of the participants and professionals involved in the programme at the end of the activities of the different lines of work. Virtually all the questions were open-ended, to allow those interviewed to express more precisely and subjectively what the experience meant to them.

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## Meeting the Seniors

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### Evaluation questionnaire for children (ages 10 to 12)

#### What did you think of the experience of meeting and sharing a few hours with senior citizens?

1 Most felt that it was:

“Interesting, really good, fun, impressive, it was worth it”.

1 They were surprised by some of the things they did:

“I got to see things that I thought they couldn’t do; ... I was really surprised at how well the old people moved when doing light gym; ... I saw how they live”.

1 As to the relationship:

“It isn’t only with your friends that you can have a good time; you can also have a good time with older people; ... I know them better; ... They help us a lot; ... I like seeing them happy; ... I really liked getting to know older people other than my grandparents”.

1 As to the feelings:

“Their last stage of life is really tough and we need to give them lots of love; ... It made me think about the fact that someday I will also be an old person; ... I thought it was a bit sad; ... They remind me of my grandparents”.

#### What did you learn from it?

1 Most of the children made reference to the activities that they shared at the municipal seniors' centre and at the retirement home with the elders:

“I learned to play dominoes, do gym, sew, do yoga and lots of activities”.

1 Regarding stereotypes:

“They’re very nice, friendly, lovely;... They’re not grumpy or impolite or nasty or boring; ... and also some of them can do things just like us. I’ve learned that even though they’re different from us because of their age, they need to be treated equally; ... older people can also have a good time, just like everyone else; ... there are also older people who can do activities that require an strength”.

1 Regarding values:

“We need to respect older people and value them more; ... We need to care for them more. I’ve learned that older people need love, they need to play, and they need happiness; ... and if we treat older people well and with respect, they will also treat us well; ... I’ve learned to value things as they are and to value them much more”.

1 Regarding life at the retirement home:

“They are well taken care of; ... the security and control systems; ... what their life is like; ... that they need to be looked after more carefully because they can’t move about the way we can; ... Not all the older people are well; ... They have to fight to keep their minds working”.

1 Regarding the exchange:

“We’ve learned things about them and they’ve learned things about us; ... to share experiences with older people; ... that together we can have a very nice time and it’s really fun; ... I’ve learned the life stories of the older men and women”.

#### After spending a few hours with seniors on a few different days, has your view of them changed?

1 86% answered “yes”.

1 Regarding breaking down stereotypes:

“I thought they were boring, n a s t y , bitter, grumpy -

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bad, impolite. I didn't think they would be so pleasant, cheerful, nice, talkative, loving, fun; ... I was wrong. They're very nice people; ... Now I've met the senior citizens, and you mustn't prejudge".

1 Regarding the interaction:

"Because each person is different and I shouldn't generalise; ... They have a lot of experience; ... If you're nice to them, they'll also be nice to you; ... They like having fun, just as we kids do; ... yes, because now I know what they're really like; ...I'm really glad to have met them".

1 Those who answered that they had not changed their conception of senior citizens explained that they already knew what they were like:

"I already had a good impression of them; ... I like being with old people; ... I've always had a good relationship with them; ... I knew they were really good people".

#### **What has surprised you or what did you like most about the senior citizens?**

1 Most of the children were surprised:

"That they are good people, friendly, warm, really nice, fun, pleasant, chatty, optimistic, they have a good sense of humour; ... I liked it that they helped us; ... that they know how to paint, go on excursion, dance; ... that some of the people can be super artists even though they can't move about".

1 Regarding the exchange:

"I didn't expect them to be so eager to talk and tell us about their lives; ... that we were able to talk and share with older people other than our grandparents and I didn't think they would have such a sense of humour; ... I was surprised by their keenness to have a good time and the stories they told us at the home; ... that they were very happy to be with us; ... I really liked it that they listened

to us so carefully; ... They taught me lots of things".

1 Regarding their impairments or the fact that they lived in a retirement home:

"Their morale even though they were not well at all; ... The older people are treated very well and they are very well monitored, looked after; ... I really liked the apartments above the retirement home, because I think old people should keep their privacy and feel comfortable; ... They always say "good morning", they show each other respect, they have helpers and they have no conflicts; ... I liked seeing that they have a peaceful life".

#### **What surprised you or what did you like most about the project?**

1 Most said they had learned a great deal.

1 They really valued the interaction they had:

"Connecting with them; ... seeing the way they live, their daily life; ... doing activities with older people; ... playing with them; ... sewing; ... dominoes; ... the way they helped us do the activity; ... I thought it would be boring, and I liked it; ... I really liked helping them; ... being able to work with older people, have such a good time with them; ... going to the retirement home, because I learned lots of things and I was surprised by the "comforts" they have (the toilet and the shower); ... getting to go places where there are people who don't have family or who don't see their family every day".

1 Regarding stereotypes:

"I got to talk with the older people and they are not that different from us, ... the fact that they're cheerful and active when doing the activities; ... They're more understanding than they seem; ... I'd like to point out their keenness to do things and their spirit of improvement; ... I liked learning from their wisdom".

#### **What do you think of the things that the seniors do?**

1 Generally speaking, everyone had positive things to say about them:

"They're very interesting, original, and nice; they're really good;...

Some felt the things they did were normal:

"Some things were boring and other things were fun; ... They were like the things that we do, but they're adapted to their age; ... They like doing things that are slow but fun".

1 They felt it was good:

"That the older people get exercise; ... that they do things to entertain themselves; ... that they have fun playing; ... that we're not the only ones who can do things, that old people can do them too; ... I thought that in the case of old people, since they can't move about much, the games would be really boring, but I was very wrong".

#### **Do your grandparents do activities?**

More than 50% said "no".

#### **If they do not do activities, do you think they ought to do them?**

More than 60% felt that they ought to.

#### **Why?**

1 Those who answered "yes" felt that activities would help them improve or maintain their health and facilitate their interaction with other people of their age:

"To exercise the body; ... They'd improve their health; ... They'd learn to relax; ... They'd always be active; ... cheerful; ... in shape; ... They'd have a great time; ... They wouldn't get bored; ... to meet other people and make friends; ... It's important to do things, and besides, they'd be in company; ... My grandma is always shut away in the house with people who watch over her. She ought to interact more with people her age".

1 Those who answered "no" said that their grandparents were too young to do activities, that they did not need them

or that they had work to do at home; and a small percentage expressed that they wouldn't be able to do activities because they were very ill.

#### **Do you think it would be good to extend this experience to other schools?**

100% said "yes". Most of the answers addressed the fact that other children could meet and develop a greater value for the elders.

#### **Why?**

"To learn lots of things from older people; ... the way old people live and what they do; ... what they're like; ... Other children would learn what it means to grow old; ... It's an experience where you learn to interact with old people; ... so that kids learn that old people are not boring; ... so they know that older people are important and loving; ... They would value older people much more; ... If they did this in other schools, everyone would treat old people well; ... because there are children who don't understand old people; ... so, the other kids from the other schools would understand that older people can also be nice; ... so that they can enjoy this experience, which is so very cool and so lovely; ... Some people say that life is the same whether you're young or old and that's not true, because old people need more help; ... because it's good for their education; ... That way other kids would behave better with elderly people".

#### **Do you think it would be good to continue your relationship with the senior citizens that have taken part in the project?**

All the respondents said "yes".

#### **Why?**

1 Most said that by continuing the relationship:

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“We would know each other better; ... We would all have a great time; ... to help them; ... to have a better relationship with older people; ... That way, we’d understand much more; ... to play and talk with them; ... because I had a great time and I think they did too; ... It’s very rewarding to help seniors; ... I feel good with them”.

1 To learn:

“To learn together; ... they told me things that had happened to them; ... because older people’s lives are very interesting; ... That way we’d have new friendships and we’d also be able to rectify attitudes”.

#### **How could this be done?**

Most of those interviewed asked for joint workshops, visitor exchanges, collaborations and studying neighbourhood-related matters together.

#### **What changes would you make to improve the project?**

1 In general, they would not make any changes:

“None, ... it’s all very good; ... it’s perfect; ... well organised; ... we learn lots of things”.

1 Those who said that they would make changes asked for the following:

“More time; ... more than once a year; ... each week; ... more activities; ... I want them to tell us more interesting things from the past; ... to spend a full day there with the senior citizens and learn more about them”.

#### **Observations**

“I have seen the difference between a retirement home and a seniors’ club; ... Old people are very intelligent and have very nice stories; ... I really enjoyed this project because I have learned a lot about older people’s lives; ... I had a great time; ... I must say that they learned from us too;... I’ve learned to listen; ... I really liked the way the older people counted the domino

tiles; ... I think that older people were very good to us, as we were to them; ... It was a really lovely experience”.

#### **Evaluation questionnaire for the parents**

Response to this questionnaire was voluntary and depended on the information given to the parents by each school. These opinions were also particularly conditioned by what the students told their parents, as well as the parents’ interest in hearing about the activities carried out in the programme.

#### **How well do you know the “Learning with Seniors” project?**

Approximately 60% felt that they knew the programme “well” or “very well”, and 40% felt that they knew “little” or “very little” about it.

#### **Do you think it is an appropriate project to help different generations get to know, understand and respect each other?**

Most of the parents felt that it was “very” appropriate, a small percentage said it was “somewhat” and nobody felt that it was “a little” or “not particularly” appropriate.

#### **Please indicate the three aspects of the project that most caught your attention.**

1 The parents commended the children’s opportunity to interact with and get to know senior citizens:

“The fact that they have shared knowledge, games, activities, workshops; ... the way they can help one another; ... seeing the different needs of the seniors; ... getting a feel for their reality; ... the way they live; ... the opportunity to interact with seniors; ...the opportunity to see different realities from what they are used to seeing; ...It’s also good for the seniors; ... They enjoy the contact with the elders. It is good for everyone; ... the children’s interest,

their excitement and enthusiasm and the way the children bond with them so quickly”.

1 Regarding the learning experience:

“They can learn many things from senior citizens, responsibility, respect and manners; ... the fact that they have learned to respect senior citizens; ... to love the seniors; ... to interact with them;... to share; ... to know them; ... I value the communication and respect; ... the positive perspective that my son has walked away with; ... the kids learn history through their experiences; ... they’ve learned to respect and value the seniors; ... The elders tell them about their experiences and find someone who listens to them, the programme creates a relationship that in the past may have developed more naturally”.

1 Regarding the visit to the retirement home:

“I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that the children went to the retirement home; ... The visit to the home makes them aware of the difficulties; ... the fact that they can see the way they live, the security and the elements of assistance that they have”.

1 Regarding the activities:

“The yoga activity and the dominoes were very interesting for the kids; ... the fact that the seniors came to the school; ... The project might be a bit too short and they can’t do any more activities”.

#### **Please give the project an overall rating.**

More than 50% valued the experience as “very good” and the rest as “good”.

#### **Why?**

“It’s greatly important; ... very important; ... very positive; ... very well conceived; ... interactive; ... enriching, for both the elders and the kids; ... I think it would be good if the project went on throughout the entire school year,

because with only four sessions it’s a bit short; ... There ought to be more continuity; ... They could start a year or two earlier; ... to continue and extend this project; ...It’s a project that ought to be carried out at all the primary schools, because this is an issue that is usually left out in primary school education”.

1 Regarding the values:

“The kids learn to value and respect the seniors; ... This way, the kids learn to value their grandparents; ... It’s very important that the children are aware of the difficulties, the virtues and the value of senior citizens; ... Meeting seniors directly in their environment helps to create a bond, to understand them better, to know what their needs are, their options and their insufficiencies; ... Our children are very excited to know that when working with senior citizens, they learn to help them, and above all, to value and respect them; ... My daughter now has better things to say about seniors”.

1 Regarding the interaction:

“It helps the children to see new realities and it helps the seniors; ... It enables the seniors to feel useful and at the same times, it allows the kids to meet people from a generation for whom life has not been as easy as it is for them; ... They value them much more when they gain insight to their lives; ... It’s a unique coexistence and it should be done more often; ... It serves to become a better person; ... Intergenerational relations are part of the essence of the human being, but in today’s world, some of this has been lost; ... Senior citizens once again feel useful; ... Many life expectations are born from the exchange of experiences, ideas and intergenerational knowledge, especially for the children; ... The relationship between children and senior citizens helps them to grow and learn; ... My son has learned to behave better with older people; ... It enables the students to get involved in social realities that are different from their own. Just because they don’t experience them doesn’t mean that they don’t exist; ...

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It is very important that between generations we learn to help one another, to live our lives better; Everyone can learn from other people; ... Children have seen that senior citizens can also have an active and interesting life; ... My son has not been exposed to seniors in any close or meaningful way. I've always thought that if he had his grandparents, he would be different in many aspects; ... This project also attaches value to age; senior citizens also have things to teach and things to say”.

### Evaluation questionnaire for the senior citizens

#### What did you think of the experience of meeting and sharing a few hours with the boys and girls from the school?

All the participants felt the experience was highly positive:

“I really liked it a lot; ...very good; ... fantastic; ... really lovely; ... rewarding; ... very interesting; ... you feel useful with them; ...

It's important to share at any age”.

#### What did you learn from it?

Most of the participants were surprised by the fact that:

“The children are very friendly; ... helpful, ... angelic, ... well-mannered; ... nice; ... innocent; ... sensitive; ... affectionate; ... they were very attentive with us”.

#### After spending a few hours with the children on a few different days, has your view of them changed?

Those who said “yes”, stated that it had changed their conception of the children:

“I didn't think they were so well-behaved; ... so helpful; ... so sensitive”.

Those who said “no” explained:

“I already had a good opinion of them; ... Kids are always friendly with seniors if you treat them with love, ... I really like kids”.

#### What has surprised you or what did you like most about the kids?

“Their capacity for learning; ... their innocence; ... their friendliness; ... the fact that they were attentive with us the whole time; ... that they helped us with everything; ... the sharing”.

#### And about the project?

They liked realizing that they are valid people and they were very happy with the experience:

“The fact that they saw that we still have interests; ... Both they and we feel useful; ... it's important that they coexist with senior citizens, even if it's just for a short time”.

They rated the experience positively:

“I liked it a lot; ... wonderful; ... the way it was carried out; ... I hope it continues to work this way; ... in these times, it's a really good idea, as there are many children who don't respect us”.

#### What do you think about the things that the children do?

“I think they're great; ... They're really lovely; ... They're positive; ... It helps them to be polite; ... They need attention; ... It felt like I was revisiting my childhood; ... The times change but everything is still the same; ... The teachers are doing a really nice job; ... They're doing some really lovely things to help everyone”.

#### Do you think it would be good to continue to interact with the children who have taken part in the project?

100% said “yes”:

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“To continue to share; ... It's a good opportunity to continue our exchange with them; ... to teach values and so that they can get to know seniors; ... It would be good as long as the children have fun and find it gratifying; ... Some of the kids are from other countries and it might be good for them; ... to see how they grow and the paths they choose”.

#### How could this be done?

Most of those interviewed asked for:

“Shared workshops; ... exchange of visits; ... attending the plays, performances or events that the children and/or seniors offer”.

#### What changes would you make to improve the project?

In general, they said there was no need to make any changes. Those who did feel that changes could be made suggested making more visits or having longer sessions.

### Evaluation questionnaire for the teachers

The teachers' answers give us an idea of the importance of this programme, of how it can be put into practice through different school subjects and how it helps to train the students.

#### How were the activities of the project included within the school curriculum (programme)?

“Within environmental studies; ... in artistic expression—text-based drawing —; ... in the Catalan language area — writing a text—; ... They basically form part of the knowledge of life; ... in class”.

#### How do you rate the children's response?

“Very positively! The exchange of experiences, ideas and knowledge between the two generations gave rise to a broad view of other realities that were generally unknown to many of them; ... I rate it very highly, they responded by cooperating, taking an interest and doing the work with great enthusiasm; ... 100% positive, they showed an interest, a genuine concern for the activities and for the seniors whom they met; ... You need only see the results and excitement that the children felt”.

#### What activity do you think is the most important and why?

“Generally speaking, all the activities were very important and have given them new visions and experiences that will help them grow; ... I can't choose just one, as I think they're all very important; ... The activities at the seniors' club afford more direct interaction, but the retirement home and the visits to the supervised apartments are essential; ... The retirement home makes a great impact and helps to develop tenderness”.

#### What new activity do you think would be worth bringing into the project?

Most of the teachers interviewed asked for more days or more activities: “Rather than incorporating another activity, I think it would be better to work more deeply with the activities that have already been programmed; ... They could hold another seniors' club activities session, take part in more activities and also have another session to see daily life at the retirement home”.

#### What difficulties has participation in the project caused?

In general the answer was “none”, and where a difficulty was acknowledged, it was related with finding the dates to hold the project.

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### **What part of the project do you feel needs to be improved?**

“As to the school, it should give out an information sheet to the families, explaining the project; ... perhaps hold an activity each quarter”.

### **Do you feel that the activities that were held were suitable to achieving the objectives (bringing senior citizens and children together, changing the preconceived ideas that they generally had of each other...)?**

Everyone said “yes”:

“The kids met the seniors and vice versa. They developed values such as respect, tolerance, empathy, love; ... The activities have enabled them to discover a reality that many of them were unaware of; ... because we have brought them together and the children have regarded the elders very highly; ... interacting is great”.

### **Evaluation questionnaire for the professionals of the two retirement homes**

#### **How were the activities of the project included in the curriculum (programme) of your facility?**

“The project forms part of the educational psychology project and activity schedule of the retirement home; .... We include it each year”.

#### **How would you rate the response of the senior citizens?**

“The response was very positive. The project enabled us to work with different values —cooperation, sharing — weeks ahead of time. After the activity, we were able to work on “memory and reminiscence”, which stirs up great emotions; ... We feel it has been extremely positive, as the children bring joy to the residents and for them it is a special day”.

### **What activity do you feel is the most significant and why?**

“Simply sharing the activity: doing a fine motricity workshop at the retirement home; ... At the school they took part in an activity involving lots of interaction between the elders and the kids; ... For us, the most significant thing was going to the school, as that’s when our seniors really had the most contact with the children”.

### **What new activity do you think would be worth bringing into the project?**

We wouldn’t ask for any single specific activity, though we would ask to do more of the same activities:

“Having two visits to the retirement home. On one visit, they would see how the residents live and the need for technical assistance each day (lift assist devices, adapted dishes, cups...). On the second visit, they could work more on a specific arts-and-crafts activity”.

### **What difficulties has participation in the project caused?**

Although they feel that this project is immensely positive, the greatest difficulty for a retirement home is getting out to the school. The other difficulties were related with logistics and the organisation of the professionals: “We can’t get to the school on foot and we have to go by taxi; ... organizing the professionals, because, when the schools come, we need to have lots of professionals working on the activity and we have to put other activities/tasks to one side”.

### **What part of the project do you feel needs to be improved?**

“Maybe the frequency of the visits and the continuity; ... being able to engage in more activities together. They could consider the possibility of doing one each quarter; ... seeking more interaction between the seniors and the kids who come to visit the home”.

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### **Do you feel that the activities that were held were suitable to achieving the objectives (bringing senior citizens and children together, changing the preconceived ideas that they generally had of each other, etc.)?**

The answer was “yes”:

“They help to break down stereotypes on both sides; ... above all, we think it’s important to work with the kids to transmit an optimistic, active and lively conception of senior citizens, to experience difference as something that enhances our lives”.

### **Sharing Primary School**

#### **Evaluation questionnaire for the senior citizens**

#### **Why did you commit to going to the school?**

Many of the participants said it was because they liked children; others replied:

“Because I need to do something; ... to be useful in some way; ... out of solidarity; ... It’s very rewarding to be with them; ... to live something new; ... out of kindness; ... because the project is really important; ... because I like it”.

#### **What did you think of the experience of meeting and sharing a few hours with the kids at their school?**

1 They value it as:

“Really positive, ... very good; ... fantastic; ... really lovely; ... pleasant; ... a very enriching experience for both groups”.

1 Other participants mentioned their personal rewards:

“It is a very personal satisfaction; ... It affords everyone good human relations; ... because it fills me with life and joy; ... It makes me feel young”.

#### **Do you think the children have learned anything from their experience?**

All the participants answered “yes”:

“They’ve learned that older people are also useful; ... to coexist with senior citizens; ... The daily contact is enriching for their lives; ... to communicate; ... that seniors are different from what they thought; ... that not all old people are grumpy; ... Above all, they’ve learned to interact with senior citizens; ... the way we used to play in the past; ... some of the activities like crocheting, dominoes, telling jokes”.

#### **Do you think that your character has changed since you began to go to the school? If you think so, how has it changed?**

“For me, I’ve come alive; ... I’m more open and cheerful; ... I have more patience when dealing with people; ... I’m more open with the little ones and I understand who they really are; ... because I have a duty, but a very pleasing one at that; ... Now I am overcome with immense happiness when I see them; ... It had been a long time since I had dealt with such young children and they accepted me”.

#### **Does it take a great effort for you to do this volunteer work?**

Only 12% answered “yes”.

**Have you felt nervous at any time while in class?** 15% admitted that they had, and the reason had to do with the fact that there are times when some of the kids get restless or do not pay enough attention.

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### **Did you feel comfortable giving the workshops?**

Everyone answered yes:

“There are kids who are very receptive and you feel really useful; ... I felt really good; ... It’s a way to work as a team with the children, and we get on very well; ... it’s a very rewarding job; ... thanks to the positive coexistence with the kids; .... the kids are fabulous”.

### **Would you change anything about the workshops?**

In general, they would not change anything, as they felt they were good. All the same, approximately 10% of the respondents suggested that the length of the workshop, an hour and a half, might be a bit too long.

### **Do you think that the number of children assigned to each senior is appropriate?**

Approximately 85% felt it was appropriate. The rest felt that there should be fewer students, because of their particular activity.

### **Did you feel well received by the school staff?**

Everyone said “yes”:

“They constantly shower us with respect, friendship and kindness; ... they’re all very friendly; ... attentive; ... nice; ... warm”.

### **Did you have any problems with the teachers?**

All of the volunteers answered “no”.

### **Did you have any problems with the children or with any child in particular?**

Only one person spoke of a specific problem with a child who sometimes got excessively wild.

### **At any time did you feel that you could not control the group of children?**

A third of those interviewed said “yes” and that they had solved the problem by:

“By asking the teacher to step in; ... by getting a bit serious;... I made them play; ... by calming them down a bit”.

### **Would you like to continue next quarter?**

All the participants wished to continue. Their reasons were as follows:

“Because at our age it’s a great therapy, as they also give us so much; ... I feel really good doing this work; ... because I like working with kids; ... I think the coexistence and interaction between seniors and kids is very good”.

### **If you would like to continue, which workshop would you like to lead?**

In general, those interviewed said they would be happy giving the same workshop that they had been giving thus far. Others said that they would be content to leave that decision to the discretion of the professionals.

### **Are you happy with the work you do?**

Everyone answered “yes”:

“Because I think it is positive; ... I feel at home, calm, relaxed and happy; ... It is very rewarding in every sense; ... because I feel somewhat useful; ... I think it’s a good project that gives good results; ... I feel good about what I am giving”.

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## **Sharing University**

### **Questionnaire for young people (ages 18-28) before their first meeting.**

This initial questionnaire was designed for all the participants and had a dual purpose that was common to both generations:

The first objective is to provide them with a tool to begin their dialogue; and the second is to make them think about the problems they had and about the problems that the other generation had and how they might be able to help each other.

### **What problems do you think senior citizens have today? Economic problems? Social problems? Family problems? Health problems? Relational problems? Others? Explain why you think so.**

#### ***Health***

Most of those interviewed believed that the greatest problem for the seniors was a lack of good health:

“Due to the physical deterioration that comes with the passage of time, ... I would like to know if as they grow old and realize that these problems are increasing, whether their minds are free and at ease or whether they are constantly thinking about death; ... The biggest problem is probably health, which leads to this social conception of them as being weak and fragile”.

#### ***Economic***

“Economic problems, because in general, they either don’t have retirement pensions or the pensions they have are very low, and they probably have to depend economically on the family; ... economic problems that make it difficult for them to keep their independence”.

#### ***Social***

“Another type of problem is the social problem, because things are advancing so quickly and they tend to have a more conservative mentality and don’t understand certain things (for example homosexuality); ... Due to the social changes that are taking place today, I think many seniors feel very lonely regarding their own families, and this stands in the way of a good relationship; ... Many feel that they are in the way; ... social isolation, because the intergenerational differences and our ever-changing society leaves them more isolated, as though they were obsolete and their experience was of no value”.

#### ***Relational***

“The intergenerational distance is increasingly larger, due to the fast pace of the social changes that are taking place; ... Less and less social value is attached to being a member of their generation, and that can affect their relationships with others; ... I’d like to know what their relationships are like and what changes they perceive in relation to those they experienced when they were young”.

#### ***Loneliness***

Finally, they mentioned the problems of loneliness, which they associate with family problems:

“I think they have family problems in the sense that today there are many economic difficulties, so I think they might have trouble being looked after and cared for properly; ... family problems, because some people feel alone and abandoned by their family members, ... family and loneliness problems, as the kids begin to live their own lives, and they also begin to suffer losses (life partner, brother or sister, cousins, etc.); ... loneliness”.

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Only one person felt that they did not have problems:

“Right now, I don’t think they have any problems, because they have solved the problems that worry me the most (money to survive, uncertainty about the future, lack of free time to do things)”.

### **Do you think that you, the young people, can help them in any way?**

Everyone said “yes”.

### **In what area and how?**

1 Most felt that by promoting dialogue and interaction:

“Emotionally and educationally, we can be very helpful to them. By talking to someone, you can help him/her a lot. You can listen to his/her problems and offer moral support; ... try to understand the current situation of senior citizens today, try to get close to them, to create bridges; ... We can help senior citizens by making them feel important, listening to them and really thinking about what they’re saying; ... We can take them more into account, listen to them, take an interest in them, which is also good for us; ... We could help them to understand the needs and behaviour of young people today, like us”.

1 Some believed they could do so by bringing them up to date with the social reality and the new technologies: “Helping them adapt to the new lifestyle, with patience, trying to integrate them into the digital era, ... We can help them to understand all these changes that are happening so quickly, because we have grown up with them (new technologies), ... maybe by making them see life from another point of view, typical of the new system, which is a bit more selfish”.

### **What problems do you think you as a young group have? Economic problems? Social problems? Family problems? Health problems? Relational problems? Others? Explain why you think so.**

#### *Economic problems*

Everyone thought that their economy was their biggest problem: “We’ve been having very intense problems since the economic recession. We don’t know what will happen. The great uncertainty about the future. In theory, it is an economic problem, as we don’t have jobs or any prospects of getting them; ... now, economic problems, as it’s hard for us to find a job and those who do have jobs don’t make enough money to be economically independent; ... We’re very worried about whether what we do and achieve now will guarantee a future of any sort for us, which is what we want and what we are fighting for; ... economic problems, as we were born when things were very good and we always had everything we needed... until now! We will never be able to have our own home and form a family the way our parents did”.

#### *Family and relational problems*

They also mentioned family and relational problems: “The recession has affected everyone’s home and there is more tension, and things are not what they once were; ... family problems, since there are increasingly more destructured families, we’re more independent and we all tend more to do our own thing, and many family values have been lost; ... also relational problems, because everyone is very unstable today, couples don’t last, they don’t hang on the way they once did”.

#### *Values*

A small minority mentioned values: “Ethical, value-related problems, ... an economic crisis plus

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a crisis of values; ... family changes and globalization, where everything is possible, are generating the rupture of many moral limits; ... we can also have identity- or value-related problems because of today’s lifestyle; ... the concern with fitting into some niche in today’s society”.

### **Do you think senior citizens can help you?**

Everyone said “yes”.

### **In what aspects and how?**

1 The vast majority believes that seniors could help them by virtue of their own life experience and the advice they have to offer:

“Above all, in terms of experience, they have lived things that are similar to and different from those that we have lived, and they can probably transmit to us ways of seeing and understanding things from a different perspective; ... With their experience, they can offer us wisdom and knowledge that we can’t learn at home or in school, life values; They’ve lived through political, economic and social changes; ... by giving advice based on their lives, their experiences or simply by talking about those experiences”.

1 Some students made reference to values:

“By telling us things about the past and valuing the importance of things, and above all, instilling in us values like respect; ... They have already lived an entire lifetime, and even though many have not gone to school, possibly what we young people need most are “life values” and that is something they know a lot about; ... valuing things that we no longer attach value to because many of our needs are already covered, whereas 70 years ago they were not. Recovering morals”.

1 Some felt that they could also help them through interaction:

“By sharing their historical memory, their past experiences with issues that concern us today; ... by

recovering aspects that have been cast aside because they no longer seem important to us, when in fact they may well be important (cooking, sewing); ... I like to rely on the enthusiasm and vitality of people who have overcome virtually every aspect of their life; ... I like to see how seniors usually take more initiative and have a greater desire to live life than younger people do; ... We often think that because we are younger and have energy, seniors are old-fashioned. We need to learn how to listen”.

### **Do you value the experience of senior citizens?**

Everyone believed the experience of senior citizens to be highly valuable.

### **Why?**

Generally speaking, they placed great importance on the transmission of knowledge and values: “Experience, by definition, involves learning, and I think it is very important to learn from what others have learned (we can avoid making mistakes, it gives us more points of view, it makes us aware of many different aspects); ... Even though the times may change, we often find ourselves with the same problems, fears, feelings, etc. It is good to bear in mind the experience of people who have lived through other eras; ... because they have lived through many interesting changes and by the time we arrived, everything was done, and they can offer us important advice; ... Although I believe that an individual generates experience when he/she comes into contact with the real world, older people can give us a number of guidelines to follow; ... They have lived through a very different era, they have had to adapt to many changes that humanity has implemented with its progress, and all of that makes for wisdom, knowledge and a very particular and valuable set of ideas about the world.”

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### What issue would you like to explore in the next meeting with the seniors?

As a first option, they said they would like to explore their preconceived idea of the kids of today, and as a second option, they wanted to discuss death. They were also interested in the following:

“I’m mostly interested in historical eras like the Spanish Civil War, the Franco dictatorship and the post-Franco period; ... the recovery of the historical memory; ... political issues; ... the current economic situation; ... how to confront this crisis period according to their experience”.

Finally, they wanted to explore what their lives were like when they were young.

### Why and with what objective?

To share and contrast opinions:

“To share fears, to explore whether young and old are really as different as we think we are or if we actually live similarly in many aspects; ... so that we can help each other, so that these issues cease to be taboo and become accepted and integrated into our lives in a healthier way; ... I enjoy hearing about the daily lives of people who lived in that era, and the fact that they were happy with very few resources, the complete opposite of the situation today”.

### Questionnaire for the senior citizens before the first meeting

**What problems do you think young people have today? Economic problems? Social problems? Family problems? Health problems? Relational problems? Others? Explain why you think so.**

#### *Economic problems*

“Most of those interviewed believed that the most important problem for this group was the that of money, given the scarcity of available jobs:

Due to the recession, they have no job, the salaries are low and housing is expensive; ... if they have a precarious job, they have problems; ... despite their preparation, they are not working, and those who are working are doing so under precarious conditions”.

The situation does not enable them to become independent, and so they rely on their parents.:

“As a general rule, the parents support their children and help them to cover their expenses; ... they are extremely worried about finding a job and making enough money to move out of their parents’ home; ... they are moving out very late”.

Some of the seniors felt that the young people did not know how to administer whatever money they might have:

“Young people do not have an idea of the importance of saving and they don’t value what they have. They spend money on designer clothing; ... It could be that they have economic problems, but most time they bring on those problems themselves, due to the mass consumer society; ... they have little money and do not know how to administer it properly”.

#### *Social problems*

The second type of problems they considered was social problems:

“They live in a very freeing society; it is important that they learn “freedom” without confusing it with “debauchery”; ...

belonging to violent and marginal groups; ... They live well, they have to work hard and fight for what they believe in; ... they don’t want to listen to advice; ... They have little communication and a great deal of separation; ... individualism has been greatly promoted; ... there are no group answers to defend the interests of young people; ... today’s society is unfair, and they know it”.

#### *Family problems*

Regarding the family problems:

“They live with their parents for too long; ... The generational problems become chronic and wear away at the relationship; ... Today we have countless destructured families and that’s something they really notice; ... They should listen to their elder family members and respect them; ... There needs to be more communication and more respect; ... mainly with the parents, who would like to protect the kids from risks, and they perceive this as a threat to their freedom, separated parents, possessive and demanding parents; ... the lack of communication with the parents”.

#### *Health problems*

Overall, they believe that because they are young they have no major health issues, but most of them think that most health problems associated with their age are identified with or stem from addictions:

“Alcohol abuse and tobacco; ... also the start of drug use; ... AIDS and drugs, ... open-air drinking sessions (by the way, when will they clearly say that alcohol is a heavy drug and leads to addiction like other drugs do?); ... It is important to prevent AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, promote the use of condoms; ... They live sedentary lives, with rather unhealthy eating habits, there are large groups at risk of having health problems and/or drug dependence; ... sex; ... I think they have good health; ... They don’t usually have health problems”.

#### *Relational problems*

Some of the participants felt that the new technologies stood in the way of upholding good personal relationships. Others believed that they were family problems; yet in general, they did not feel that they had many problems:

“Massive relations and /or isolation thanks to the new technologies do not facilitate rewarding personal relationships; ... They have very little real interaction because of the mobile phone and the computer; ... The competitive lifestyle isolates people; ... They have little or no communication with their parents and in general, with senior citizens; ... There are very lovely young people and they usually like to interact and make friends; ... There needs to be tolerance, that they help each other; ... I don’t think they have problems interacting, because on the internet they chat and meet people and communicate just fine”.

#### *Other problems*

Generally speaking, as regards some of the answers in the sections above, although new ones were given:

“Aside from the fact that there is a substantially firm youth, the vast majority of young people have not learned the principles of politeness and civility; ... Young people are excessively competitive and perhaps not particularly caring; ... There is no future model capable of really stimulating the young people; ... Their attitude towards life is very individualist and a total disenchantment towards politics and politicians; ... They ought to pay attention to the health campaigns that target their age group (drugs, sex, alcohol, tobacco); ... The cause of it all is modern technology; ... They need love; ...It’s difficult for those who have no schooling or formal preparation”.

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### **Do you think you, the senior citizens, can help young people?**

86% of those interviewed said “yes”. The rest either felt they could not or decided not to answer.

#### **In what aspect and how?**

■ Those who said “yes”:

The majority felt that their experience and advice could help the young people:

“With our experience, we can express our point of view regarding the issues that worry them most. Talking about drugs, AIDS, alcohol, their economic situation; ... by listening to them and at the same time transmitting the values, guidelines and knowledge of life; ... by explaining that in many aspects we have improved while in others we’ve become worse (for example, there is more individualism today); ... by demonstrating that not all older people are cranky, aggressive and nasty; ... with our experience, we can give them helpful advice and little more. They have more culture than we do; ... by sharing a home with young people who can’t afford to pay for a flat; ... Our help consists of making them see that our parameters were more restricted than theirs and that even still that didn’t hinder us; ... by interacting with one another more often”.

■ Those who said “no”:

“No, because there is an age at which advice is not accepted; ... All we can do is stand by them when they need us”.

### **What problems do you think you have as senior citizens? Economic? Social? Family? Health? Relational problems? Others? Explain why you think so.**

#### ***Economic problems***

Virtually all the seniors pointed out economic problems, due to the low pensions:

“Very often the pensions are not enough to cover all of our expenses, low pensions and high housing prices (they are not affordable for everyone); ... yes, the future is uncertain; ... There are people who ought to receive more social aid; ... there are many seniors who are struggling; ... Some get by with their pension, others just barely get by, and if on top of that they feel alone, life can become very cumbersome for them; ... We adapt to what we have and we have to administer it very well”.

#### ***Social problems***

“Tendency to be ostracised by society as “amortised” people. Predominance or fashion of “young”; ... isolation. Often being subjected to social disdain. Today, old age is not a value in itself; ... One of the main problems is loneliness, but with humanity that can be mitigated; ... Very often it is us, the seniors who lock ourselves away and stay at home; ... There is a lack of communication and integration in the area; ... I like forming part of a group, but in this consumer society it’s tough; ... It seems like for some people it’s a sin to be old; ... Everyone goes his/her own way, but socially my old age is good. The civic centres help you to find entertaining activities: sports, swimming, yoga, etc.; ... There is a nice diverse range of available activities: conferences, workshops, guided tours”.

#### ***Family problems***

As to the family problems, most of those interviewed said they had problems with their children:

“As long as you’re useful, everything’s fine, but when you can no longer be of service, then it gets bad and you become a very unpleasant burden, unless you have money; ... loneliness and overburdening by looking after the

grandchildren; ... They don’t call me much, I have to be the one, and if I want to see them, I invite them over for lunch and that way we see each other. Since they think I am strong, they ignore me; ... feeling excluded from the family environment, as they are often too busy. We act as “babysitters” (fortunately), but we are left alone when they have holidays; ... many families listen to each other very little”.

#### ***Health problems***

For the most part, their answers referred to health problems associated with chronic illnesses, which they identified with age, even if they did not seem to feel very ill:

“High cholesterol, diabetes, hypertension and arthritis; ... When you get old, it is normal for health problems to appear; ... We have the typical “if I weren’t”; ... Sometimes you need to associate the state of health with your mood, the lack of love, depressions; ... We have a better quality of life than before; ... We have the means to stay in good health; ... The public health system has provided physical welfare so you can now turn 90 and nobody is surprised. But living healthfully isn’t the same as being kept alive; ... there is an increasing need for the development of the law of dependence”.

#### ***Relational problems***

As to the problems relating to interaction, they were identified with loneliness and distancing from their children, and they believed that they could virtually only interact with people of their age:

“The kids leave you alone, somewhat, when they see that you’re getting on alright, as they aren’t worried. They think you’ll call when you need to; ... The kids only call when they need something; ... If we stay at home cooped up in the house; we don’t interact with anyone, as Sunday visits are not in fashion; ... the scattering of families; ... Interaction is

increasingly more sparse (disappearance of friends and family members due to death, etc.); ... People need to receive love and a hug from other people; ... When you’re alone, you have to seek interaction by going to the schools or recreation centres; ... It’s all fine with the people your own age; ... Older people have lots of interaction with friends of the same age; ... We have a very limited social life, and when we try to have one, we have to fight with very particular, set ways of being that are very difficult to change; ... At a certain age, interaction is only valid among people of the same age; ... I have a great relationship with my social group, but there are no intergenerational relations”.

#### ***Other problems***

Only 50% of those interviewed answered this section, and in general, they cited the problems expressed in different sections above relating to family relations and loneliness:

“Nobody realises it, we don’t even realise it when it happens, but all of a sudden, you cease to be “someone” for those who don’t know you, and that is tough; ... The kids need you to run their errands, to give them money, to sew, to keep something for them at your house because they don’t have space. But they never call you to take you with them someplace. It is true that whenever I have needed them they have been right there and they have helped me; ... a smile, a loving word is important, it makes us feel happy; ... That is the policy of young people and the mass media. The government or council of the “elders of the tribe” no longer exists.

### **Do you think young people can help you?**

Everyone answered yes, except for one person who felt it was the government that ought to be helping them.

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1 Those who said “yes”:

“By understanding our difficulties in general; ... by not viewing senior citizens as a group that needs to be treated in a special way; ... with respect and love and not forgetting that we exist; .... by being understanding and patient; ...by explaining things that we don’t understand. Particularly things relating to basic technology devices: mobile phones, computers; ... by listening to us and allowing us to participate in the social and political institutions as members of society in our own right; ... by behaving nicely with senior citizens; ... they help us if they respect us and take us in; ... with affection, cordiality and I would say, with empathy”.

#### **Do you attach value to your experience as senior citizens?**

Everyone answered “yes”, except for one person who said “no” and another person who did not really know.

1 Those who answered “yes”:

“Yes, because life experience is very valuable; ... We have learned to solve problems and this has served to help us live a little better. Our experience has taught us to enjoy and really value the little things in life; ... All together we can help each other, but the young people need to be the ones to take the first step. Before age sixty, people can be intelligent, clever or dumb, but you only get to be “wise” after a certain age; ... The experience of the years you’ve lived enables you understand some, but not all, of the relations and behaviours of the younger people; ... If they listen to you, something will sink in”.

1 The person who answered “no”:

“Times have changed a lot. Many of our experiences cannot be extrapolated to their generation”.

1 The person who did not know:

“It’s hard to value one’s own experience. Sometimes it only serves to survive. Our experience would be ideal if we could go back in time”.

#### **How do you think young people view you?**

“Poorly. I think they see us as a useless, social burden; ... I think that in general, they don’t even think to consider us; ... They are into their own lives and can’t be bothered with older people, although there are exceptions”.

### **Final evaluation questionnaire for young people and seniors in groups**

This questionnaire was answered by the groups on the last day of the activity. The participants were asked to answer the questions and to include the most salient opinions of the seniors and young people, as well as discussing the different questions and agreeing to their answers as a group.

#### **How would you define this experience of having seniors and young people share a few hours together?**

All of the answers were positive, and both generations attached great value to the interaction:

“It was a very enriching experience; ... pleasant; ... positive; ... communicative; ... productive; ... spontaneous and trust-inspiring, for both sides; ...It was a unique experience, there are no limitations to say whatever you think, and because we are not family, we open up so much more; ... We elders and youths have come together, we’ve exchanged experiences, and seniors and young people got on very well; ... It was really good to be able to come together with a group of people with whom we do not usually spend time, unless we do so with family members; ... It was a great coming together, where we were able to exchange ideas and life experiences, despite the difference in age”.

#### **What have you learned?**

1 The young people said the following:

“We have learned from the experience of the seniors and we were able to appreciate the value of that experience, as they have lived through a very difficult era that we have not seen; ... We’ve learned that seniors are very lively and really want to get out and do things; ... We’ve learned how to do simple tasks like sew”.

1 The seniors felt that:

“We have learned to have a young spirit; ... They have learned to be direct and frank in telling anecdotes or sharing ideas; ... We have seen the way in which young people face issues like jobs, the university; ... to understand the problems of the young people from a closer (first hand) perspective; ... to understand young people a bit better”.

1 Together: “That young people and seniors are not so different and that we have all been through or will go through the same things; ... Despite the age, we respect one another; ... We have created a mutual understanding, we have learned to communicate with and listen to each other”.

#### **Were you surprised by anything?**

1 The young people answered as follows:

“We were surprised by the activity and high energy that the seniors give off. In this sense, they are an inspiration for us; ... the natural flow and spontaneity of our conversation, the fact that we all pay close attention when anyone speaks, the great respect that we all showed each other; ... the fact that the men had learned to sew in the military service; ... the fact that the elders were surprised that the young people did not know how to sew; ... being able to talk about such diverse issues and from such a broad perspective, as they were not closed to anything; ... the difference between the seniors from the city and the seniors from small towns”.

1 The seniors were surprised by:

“They were surprised by the fact that the young people listened so closely, and more so in this day and age, when seniors have the “problem” of feeling that nobody really listens to them (*when going over old times, “telling war stories”*); ... As a senior, I was surprised to find such thrifty young people, as it is often said that young people spend a lot and don’t think about savings or their budget, and it isn’t true; ... everyone’s sincerity in our conversations; ... the bond that we’ve developed in just a few sessions”.

#### **Has your image of young people and/or seniors changed?**

1 The young people:

“Our image of the seniors changed when we saw the high energy that they gave off; ... With each new meeting, our image of them gradually changed, for the better; ... partly, yes and partly no, as we already knew that seniors who are in good health are still very independent (unlike our grandparents, who are older)”.

1 The seniors:

“In general, we had a more negative image of the young people, as we saw them from a distance. Nevertheless, in this seminar, we found them to be really nice, positive and pleasant; ... All together, both young and old agree that we have changed our opinions each other”.

#### **Did you anticipate that you would be able to talk openly about certain issues? Which ones?**

“There were no taboos, we talked about everything as the issue came up, and particularly about society, politics, healthcare; ... about homosexuality and sexuality, in general, as each group’s experiences and thoughts are very different and there was a lot of curiosity as to the perspectives of other people; ...yes, in fact, we expected to talk about everything that we ended up discussing (death, family, retirement homes, everyday life);

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... we talked about lots of things very openly and without any shyness or inhibition at all”.

### **Was there any topic that you did not wish to discuss out of fear of rejection? Which one?**

Everyone said there were none.

### **What did you feel was missing?**

Everyone said they wanted more time for the exchanges:

“We felt we needed more time for the sessions, we wanted more days; ... more hours, we think we needed more time to do more activities and to build closer relationships”.

### **What changes would you make to improve this experience?**

In general, they asked for more time:

“To have a couple sessions more to go into greater depth ... to invest more time if possible; ... I would add more shared activities; ... It might be nice to consider planning a day or two as “theme days”; ... getting together at times when the young people don’t have class, because otherwise it always interferes a lot”.

### **Finally, as a group, could you define this experience with a word, a sentence, a drawing or a photo?**

“An enriching and rewarding experience; ... a magnificent experience; ... It was really positive and I really want to do it again, ... Two distinct groups have found a point of encounter, ... fabulous, wonderful, ... it’s something we definitely need to do again”.

Here is a question that we only asked the senior citizens.

### **Would you like to have another get together with the young people?**

All respondents said “yes”.

### **Why and for what purpose?**

“To interact with other generations and to get to know each other better; ... It was a very interesting and positive exchange for us. With well-mannered and respectful people who wanted to get something out of it; ... so that we can all continue to share ideas; ... for personal realisation, to get to know the young people and their needs, to be able to offer them advice or guidelines; ... they listened to us and they were very interested; ... it was an enriching, rewarding and wonderful experience; ... it was very interesting, but the time we had together was too short”.

### **Observations**

“I think today more than ever, young people need the suggestions and guidelines that we can give them, for at our age, we are more objective and less competitive than the generations closer to them; ... it was a very positive experience. They are fabulous young people with lots of interests; ... together, young and old can create a better society”.

### **Final thought, required of university students**

This questionnaire was drawn up by Conchi San Martín, the professor in charge of the course in which the activity was included, and all the students who took part were required to answer it, as it serves as a final overall consideration. The main instruction they were given was not to answer in a stereotypical manner. In other words, their answers must not be superficial or automatic. The idea is to enable them to think about these encounters, and in order to do so they would have to devote some time to it, recall, evaluate and integrate.

### **About what you have learned personally**

Bearing in mind the encounters that we have held, please think (citing your reasons and providing examples) about the following questions:

### **Do you think your perspective of senior citizens has changed? (please additionally state whether you have any habitual contact/relationship with senior citizens)**

1 Virtually everyone stated that their opinions of senior citizens had changed dramatically, for the better, and that they had broken down the stereotypes:

“It was a way to understand that you can’t generalize; ... I used to think seniors had nothing to do; ... I’ve completely changed my mind for the better; ... I thought they were closed people with lots of prejudices and that they couldn’t adapt to the new times. Obviously, this could be the case of some, but it definitely is not the case of most; ... I was quite surprised by their vitality. They’re open about the topic of sexuality and interpersonal relationships; ... They’re

interested in social and political issues. We were surprised by their knowledge of the new technologies, as many have smartphones; ... The notion of the seniors that most changed in my mind was that I thought they were conservative, and I see that they have ideas that are just as radical and revolutionary as ours, especially regarding political issues; ... When confronting their problems, they’re just as enthusiastic and eager as a young person is; ... They have just as much of a desire to live as any one of us does. Since my grandparents didn’t used to do anything, I didn’t associate old age with major recreational activities like the ones they have”.

1 Regarding the fact that there were no family ties:

“Even though I had intense interaction with my grandparents, the interaction with the seniors in this programme was very different. You really can start from scratch, because there’s no family tie, and you begin to explore a world of interests that I at least knew nothing about; ... With the seniors in my regular life, I don’t discuss young people issues, but with them, because they were strangers, we were able to talk about anything without holding back and with no qualms; ... We don’t have contact with older people even within the family, so our vision was based on intuition and actually stereotypes, due to the lack of familiarity. This seminar was a revelation for us; ... it’s funny they way this one man said he could easily talk about anything with us, with no qualms and with mutual trust, yet his relationship with his grandchildren was more distant, as though their communication was hindered by an excess of respect. That statement made me think about the relationship I had with my grandfather and about the great respect that I showed him”.

1 Only one person said “no”:

“It hasn’t changed too much. I have family members of similar ages and even older, and I understand their points of view”.

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**Do you think that to a certain extent your awareness of reality (needs, interests, problems, worries, e t c .) has changed?**

“When talking with one man about sexism, he made me realize that very often the women are the ones who cling to this concept. This issue piqued my interest; ... for them it is vital to interact with young people to learn and adapt better to today’s changes, like for example the new technologies; ... A person’s identity doesn’t hinge on whether he/she is 20, 40 or 70. People can still be enthusiastic and eager to do things, and old age is not a time of sadness or loneliness the way it’s made out to be socially. Instead, it’s a time of enjoyment; ... The people I met with told us about their problems and worries, and that helped me to better understand the old people in my closest setting; ... We thought about why young people have this stereotypical notion and we think it’s due to a lack of knowledge, rather than a lack of interest. That’s why intergenerational bridges like this seminar help to break down those barriers; ... I think it was completely different from the notion I had before this seminar; ... They made me see that we live in the same world, and we share the same concerns”.

**What have you learned in relation to the topics that came up in your group (for example: approaches to certain issues that you had never thought about before, that you did not know about or that were different from what you expected/ knew before)**

“What surprised me most was the fact that we “could talk about anything”. One of the things that worried me most was death. I was able to look at this issue from a peaceful and understanding perspective, and the way they approached it, they managed to convey to me some very helpful thoughts; ... I found their position on homosexuality surprising. They were really open to the

issue. They said that today, we have much more freedom to think and act. Homosexuality obviously already existed in their time, but it was unfathomable to talk about it. They said each person is free to be whoever he/she wants to be and that nobody should be judged for their sexual orientation; ... The surprising thing wasn’t that we talked openly about certain things. What surprised me most was the bond of trust that we developed in such a short period of time and always with respect; ...I was amazed by some of their political ideas which were so radical that they verged on violence. These are open-minded people who don’t have the prejudices that we think they have; ... More details about the sexist society. In the past, in order for a woman to have power of attorney, she had to receive authorization from her father or her husband. They could force a woman to marry a stranger; ... I was surprised by the degree of independence that they sought in relation to their sons and daughters; ... The underlying idea in all of our conversations was that we have to be faithful to ourselves and act in a way that makes us feel good inside, rather than doing what we are socially expected to do”.

**Other things you have learned /thought about that you would like to mention**

“One important topic was their experience of the post-war period, after the Spanish Civil War, and we saw the differences between living in a city and living in the country, and the differences due to the economic situation. The knowledge that we gained from people’s actual lives was very different from the information we obtain through academic sources. In formal education, the Spanish Civil War and the post-war period are presented in terms of the political, economic and social areas, but there is no place in those sources for the personal stories that endow that information with a human value that further enriches the

knowledge. Knowing their personal history gives us a better understanding of our own; ... One of the issues that troubled me most and that I would like to emphasise was death. I didn’t know how to open up the topic to discuss how the seniors might imagine the last days of their life. Anyway, I introduced the topic and I got a number of answers preceded by very positive attitudes. I realised that in fact I had the same uncertainty that they had. They didn’t feel closer to death than I do, for example; ... I think getting old is a matter of attitude; ... Our meetings helped me to rethink the things that have happened to us in life, get our experiences in order and reach some interesting conclusions. This was one of the best experiences I have ever had and I recommend doing it if possible, because it is amazingly enriching; ... It made me think about how lucky we are to live our life with freedom and the opportunity to go to school; ... We were surprised to find out that one of their worries was the young people of today. After the tough childhood they had, with the social repression and violence, it was funny that they would worry about us. Even though our life is difficult in other aspects, it is worlds apart from the lack of freedom and other human rights that they had to contend with before”.

**Regarding their perception of what the seniors learned**

**Indicate whether there was an issue that you thought surprised the seniors during the course of your meetings (for example: approaches, activities and/or your questions...).**

“They were surprised to see that we saved money; ... I think they were surprised that young people are well informed and that we have more culture and experience than they had at our age; ... They did not expect to see that

the young people in our group had a rather traditional mentality similar to their own, when it came to interpersonal relationships; ... We showed them different attitudes towards different issues, like for example, the values of society, those of today and those of their generation, but there were not many surprises; ... They were very taken aback that we had no notion of how to sew. We didn’t even know what finger to put the thimble on; ... the fact that the young people wanted to get to know them”.

**Would you say that there was any change in the way that the seniors looked at and listened to you?**

“It seems like their perception of us has also changed. They thought we were arrogant, capricious and irresponsible. They realise that we are not a generation that has gone bad; ... We do think that their perspective has changed. They understand our desire to build our future or our capacity to be critical about society; ... Even though they initially already had a fairly good image of us, we have opened up to discuss lots of things with them, even things about our private lives, and for that reason I think the way they look at and listen to us is changing , but for the better; ... I’m sure that they have learned from our points of view, just as we have learned from theirs; ... in certain aspects, y e s , I think they have changed their perspective and their approach when listening to young people, becoming unbiased; ... I was surprised to hear that they did not talk to their grandchildren about the same things that they talked about with us; ... They have a positive opinion of us, even though they believe that many young people are selfish, impolite and disrespectful; ... These sorts of meetings between young and old help to change both their view of us and our view of them”.

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## Regarding the learning in the interaction and as a result of it

### **In what aspects/issues did you agree and in what others do you feel you disagreed? Please describe what you did when there was disagreement in the group.**

#### *Agreement*

“On topics like politics, religion and love... we came to agree, yet with slight differences; ...In our group there were no disagreements; ... On issues of politics, work, today’s economy, our perspectives were very similar; ... We had similar opinions on things like sexuality, education and politics; ... Our opinions coincided regarding the economic crisis and the challenge of subsistence of both seniors and young people; ... We all agreed on the issue of sexuality; ... Their experience of sexuality was rooted in repression and the lack of information; ... Old and young agreed that education and communication are the way to preventing sexually transmitted diseases and having a healthier and more gratifying sex life”.

#### *Disagreement*

“Regarding the measures of protest. Some of the young people agreed with measures of political pressure and even violence in justified cases, and the seniors emphatically rejected violence as a measure of protest; ... Yes, there was some disagreement regarding today’s values and those of the past, but we always reached a conclusion; ... Sometimes there were discrepancies even among the young people and among the seniors, but nobody ever attempted to convince others or sought to impose his /her opinion. We felt this was extremely valuable, as this is the way to approach a constructive dialogue from a place of respect;

... Where we did not agree was on the point of religion and the Church. Some people were faithful followers, and others had been believers in the past. The discussion was very deep, and at all times everyone’s opinions were respected; ... There was some disagreement as to the role of women. One statement, ‘the housework and child raising were the woman’s tasks, and if she wanted to and had the time to work, she did’ led to a heated debate; ... Perhaps the greatest disagreement was on the issue of the independence of Catalonia, where some defended it and others did not”.

### **Please note whether you felt/interacted differently through the course of the sessions (for example: more inhibited at first, more attentive, more confident, etc.).**

#### *Inhibited*

“At first, I preferred to listen and observe. After the first session, the conversation flowed more easily, and we even ran out of time because we kept talking; ... Initially, I was more distant, but with each session it became more pleasant for me, because a connection of trust developed very quickly and easily; ... I felt a bit inhibited and shy at first, but thanks to the open and friendly environment, I was able to express all of the things that I felt uncertain about; ... At the onset, it was a big shock for me ; ... generally speaking, as the sessions went by, I went from being more on guard and observant to feeling confident and secure”.

#### *No problems*

“I was very comfortable as of the very first moment. I may have felt a little embarrassed at first, but within just a few minutes we broke the ice and our conversation began to flow freely and joyfully. We talked with more and more confidence; ... Right from the start, we felt very much at

ease, though it is true that as the sessions progressed, our confidence increased; ... In the sessions at the university, I felt very comfortable, I felt I was in a very relaxed atmosphere (it was ours). At Sants I felt the same. They received us very affectionately and we developed a friendship; ... At no time whatsoever did we sense any sort of discomfort; ... Things became very easy between the two age groups, and as of the first session, our mutual understanding and trust increased a lot and our conversations got deeper and deeper”.

### **Please rate the communication in your group (for example: flowing/difficult, etc.). Would you say that it changed with the different sessions?**

On the whole, all of the students expressed that their conversations were good and flowed naturally as of the first session, although that conversation became more intense and trusting through the course of the different sessions:

“Our communication was generally easy and open. They weren’t debate-like talks where people took specific stances with a critical vision. Rather, they were times to share and exchange personal experiences which gave rise to thoughts that we then shared and which expanded our knowledge of each person’s perspective; ... At first, I was really careful of the way I was speaking, of the way I treated the others, as each person is a world in itself, but then, when we saw that they did not respond to the stereotypes of older people, we relaxed and became more confident and spoke more naturally; ...The confidence came up after the first session and became more obvious in the following sessions; ... There was a great mutual understanding among all the members of the group; ... Actually, my group made me feel really at ease. There were no complicated issues, no prejudices or negative impressions”.

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## General evaluations

### **What did you like most or what do you feel was the most valuable part of these exchanges?**

“The freedom of giving our points of view and our opinions, and being respected even though we might think differently; ... the environment of trust and understanding that gradually developed; ... seeing the look of satisfaction on the faces of the seniors when they saw that the young people were treating them as equals and listening to them and really thinking about what they were saying; ... It was an enriching experience. With their life stories, you can see and understand why they are the way they are”.

1 Regarding the change in the way they view others:

“I really value the fact that I had the chance to change my opinion of this age group; ... What I value most from this experience is that I have walked away with a different image of this part of society; ... the fact of being able to face certain stereotypes and /or prejudices on the way older people live; ... the elders’ desire to progress and the many things that motivate them and lead them to face the world with a serenity and harmony, which I think is admirable”.

1 Some people valued this interaction with the senior citizens outside of their families:

“One of the things we value most from these meetings was the opportunity to meet older people outside of our families. We gained insight to a world that would otherwise continue to be unknown and distant; ... What I value most is getting to know seniors other than my grandparents”.

1 They also valued it as an important point for their academic education:

“Doing a seminar at the university on older people is very important for us, as future psychologists; ...

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I think it was wonderful to be able to talk with and listen to older people, because as psychology students, we don't have many opportunities to establish human contact (professional training sessions) senior citizens".

### **What would you have liked to explore more deeply?**

Everyone except for one person acknowledged that they would have liked to have more time to explore different issues more deeply:

"There should have been six sessions to go into each of the issues more deeply and to get to know the seniors better; ... talking about the war, the post-war and sexuality; ... doing more activities, as more points of contact and new knowledge would have come up, ... but for some of the issues, we didn't have enough time; ... what their life was like, how much it had changed and if it had changed for the better or for the worse, but we didn't have time; ... on the way of life during the Spanish Civil War and the post-war period (given their age, most of them experienced the post-war period firsthand)".

### **Were there any issues about which you felt uncomfortable or that you found difficult to discuss?**

■ In general, there was no discomfort:

"None; ... I thought I'd feel uncomfortable talking about sexuality, but much to my surprise, that wasn't the case. There was trust and closeness, and I felt very comfortable; ... There was no situation that made me feel at all tense, as each group decided what they were going to talk about and how to go about it; ... So, fortunately I never felt that way; ... I only felt just slightly inhibited in the first session".

■ Those who admitted that they had felt certain discomfort stated:

"I felt uncomfortable at the start of the meetings, as I didn't

like the idea of talking about my life with strangers. That discomfort gradually waned as the different sessions were held; ... a bit uncomfortable when they wanted to go into personal issues; ... I would have liked to be able to tell them about my situation with my partner, because they are more understanding and open than the people in my life, but I didn't do it".

### **Do you think that these types of exchanges /experiences can help you as a person/professional? Why?**

Everyone agreed that these exchanges had been very positive and beneficial for them, both personally and professionally.

■ In the personal area, they expressed:

"As a person, it helped me to change my outlook on senior citizens and to get over certain prejudices that I had about them; ... Personally, I've become aware of the freedom that we have today, the freedom to think, reason and act; ... I have learned to analyse and adapt to each person so that the conversation is as natural and flowing as possible; ... It gives us a vision that our old age will not be a sad stage at the end of life, but rather a different stage that can also be enjoyed; ... As a person, these sessions really helped me to feel capable of speaking totally naturally with a segment of society with which I had never considered talking".

■ In the professional sense:

"In the professional realm, obviously this sort of experience is essential to our future profession, as it is based on contact and interaction with people; ... It is fundamental to know how to listen to and communicate with another person, as many problems are caused by miscommunication; ... It can help because it is important for any psychologist to know how to talk to people, and this has helped us to open ourselves more; ... Professionally, you learn to establish dialogue with people you don't know; ... Just being with people helps you to develop skills like assertiveness,

active listening, empathy and respect for diversity and difference; ... While working towards our degree, we ought to have more classes like this one, with a dynamic approach, which brings us close to people from a practical and simple perspective; ... Of course it is, because we don't have these sorts of opportunities very often during our university studies; ... These types of activities make us grow and they are enriching for us, both personally and professionally, because they make you understand life processes. Knowing how to listen rather than just offering solutions; ... These types of tasks promote understanding".

### **What things do you think we could improve for future exchanges? Do you think the hours shared were sufficient/too few/too many?**

■ In general, the students felt that the sessions were very well organised and had clear objectives. As to improvements, they suggested:

"They could hold sessions of theme talks, where the seniors and the students provided photographic support material; ... I would limit the topics to explore the chosen topic more in depth; ... Use one of the sessions to form senior-student pairs, because in round-table discussions the people with the most charisma tend to speak the most and eclipse others who cannot say everything they would like to say".

■ With reference to the number of hours shared, everyone asked for them to be extended:

"They should extend the number of meetings, as that could generate an environment of trust that would enable the participants to go more into depth in certain topics, like the feelings people get when they think about death, for example; ... There should be six sessions: three sessions for thought and debate, two workshops, and one session for conclusions; ... I would have liked to have

had more time to talk about more things and do more activities; ... I would also add more sessions, as the activity ends just when it seems like the participants have developed a greater affinity; ... The number of hours together were too few".

### **Can you suggest some workshops or activities that depend more on your knowledge or experience than on that of the seniors?**

The answers were highly diverse, although there were four people who said that they would hold an activity related with computers and the new technologies:

"They could do a Trivial Pursuit game, with questions that take in the aspects of daily life that most reflect the interests, worries and ideas of both age groups. The participants themselves could take charge of the production of the game; but we would need more sessions; although it could serve for subsequent seminars. It shouldn't be a competitive game, but rather collaborative, to enable people to come together and to avoid rivalries; ... a workshop to create sentences. In other words, to prepare a number of incomplete sentences (for example: "young people really like...") that would have to be completed by the members of the group based on what they have learned about the others in the preceding sessions. That would provide a fun and entertaining way to exchange experiences, thoughts and feelings; ... We could teach them the street slang that young people use today. They could teach us to bake or to do easy cooking, crocheting or ironing; ... A karaoke activity might be really fun".

### **Other suggestions. Add any other aspects you feel appropriate in relation to your thoughts and assessment of the exchange.**

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The answers to this question were very much associated with their academic education:

“It is a very enriching idea... surprising; ... very rewarding and I have learned a lot from it; ... At university, you almost never come across an idea as enterprising as this one;... You learn to respect the opinions, turns, ideas and beliefs of others; ... This seminar gives you the chance to learn things that you don’t learn at university; ... **Interacting with older people is an opportunity to learn and prepare yourself both as a person and as a professional;** ... Since I started my studies, I had never had the chance to work with a person, not even in any of the practice sessions, and I think these meetings were really good for our training. They should offer lots more of them, as our profession is based on dealing with people; ... It is very important to understand the life history of any person to understand his/her modus operandi; ... As a personal thought, I have to say from the bottom of my heart that it was really great to do these activities with older people, as they have very important things to say and it is not fair that they are cast aside because of their age; ... It was a very nice and pleasant experience, and above all, highly recommendable for any student who has the opportunity to select this seminar”.

## Sharing Secondary School

### Evaluation questionnaire for adolescents (ages 15 and 16)

Only nine of the fourteen participants answered this questionnaire.

#### **What did you think of the experience of meeting and sharing a few hours with senior citizens?**

Everyone agreed that it was a good experience:

“I thought it was great, because we learned new things; ... It’s nice to interact with older people who you have maybe seen in the neighbourhood and now you can say hello; ... I thought it was very good; ... I liked it a lot; ... It was great”.

#### **What did you learn from it?**

Everyone reported that they had learned something:

“To respect old people; ... to understand them; ... how to coexist with older people; ... how they used to communicate; ... all the hardship they suffered when they were young; ... I’ve learned that senior citizens can actually be lots of fun; ... I found out about the way they lived in the past; ... for example, the celebrities of those times, the mass media, etcetera; ... lots of things”.

#### **Has the time you’ve spent with the seniors led you to change your perspective of them?**

In general, the students answered “yes”. Those who answered “no” justified their response by saying that they had already had a positive opinion of them.

#### **Why?**

1 Those who said “yes”:

“I think I had the wrong idea of them; ... I didn’t have much

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contact with seniors; ... I thought older people were always serious; ... Before, I didn’t know how to treat them and now I know; ... They’re different from what I imagined”.

1 Those who said “no”:

“I have the same opinion now as the one I had before I went there, because I’ve always respected senior citizens; ... I already knew that not all old people are old fashioned or cranky; ... No, because I am already surrounded by my grandparents and great aunts and uncles, who are all old”.

#### **What surprised you or what did you like most about the seniors?**

“That they are very open; ... that they are very cheerful and active. I really liked their stories; ... their attitudes towards the new generation; ... They are nice, and most of them are very good natured. They talk about everything; ... I was surprised that they were so eager to learn things about the new technologies; ... the laughter therapy workshop; ... many things; ... They have a good sense of humour”.

#### **And about the project?**

Virtually everyone was pleasantly surprised by the laughter therapy workshop:

“It is a great opportunity for young people and older people to interact; ... It allowed us to learn new things; ... lots of things; ... the laughter therapy workshop; ... this experience was very lovely; ... it is an interesting project”.

#### **What do you think about the things that the seniors do?**

“They’re really good; ... Old people get a little bit tiresome sometimes, because they warn you about too many things, but it’s true that they worry about us; ... they’re well because they interact with people, they get exercise; ... They learn about the latest stuff, they watch TV, they go for walks, etcetera; ... Well, they pass the time as well

as they can; ... good; ... They’re boring”.

#### **Do your grandparents have activities?**

Most respondents either did not answer the question or said that they did not have grandparents.

#### **If they do not do activities, do you think they ought to do them?**

All the respondents felt that they ought to do them.

#### **Why?**

Those who felt that they ought to do activities made the following observations: “It’s necessary; ... That way they would have fun and have a happier life; ... It’s a form of entertainment and a way to have fun”.

**Do you think it would be good to continue your relationship with the senior citizens that have taken part in the project?** 100% of the students answered affirmatively.

#### **Why?**

“Because that way the young people would know the old people better and they would learn values; ... to stop the bad thoughts between the two generations and gradually check on our lifestyles; ... You learn from them; ... Now we know each other and it would really be nice to talk to them; ... because we’ve made good friends and we learn a lot from each other”.

#### **How could this be done?**

In general, they would like to exchange visits, and also share workshops, collaborations and attend any performances or events that the young people and/or seniors organise.

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### **What changes would you make to improve the project?**

“I would have activities; ... The only improvement I would make would be to change groups ,to get to know all the senior citizens; ... Nothing; ... I don’t know”.

### **Evaluation questionnaire for the parents**

The parents voluntarily answered the questionnaire, and only three people did so. Nevertheless, we believe that their opinions are important. As to the other parents who did not answer the questionnaire, we do not know if it was due to a lack of interest or a lack of information.

### **How well do you know the “Learning with Seniors” project?**

Those who answered stated that they knew it “well” or “very well”.

### **Do you think it is an appropriate project to help different generations to get to know, understand and respect each other?**

The parents answered that they felt it was “very appropriate” or “a little appropriate”.

### **Please indicate the three aspects of the project that most caught your attention**

“Presenting the knowledge and experiences of the two generations. It is an innovative project. It does away with the seniors’ “ill feelings” about the young people; ... the different generations’ capacity to communicate with one another. The excitement and enthusiasm with which our son told us about the conversations; ... the interest that we saw in both the kids and the seniors; ... I never imagined a project like this would be carried out. It is new for us”.

### **Give the project an overall rating**

The parents rated it as either “good” or “very good”.

### **Why?**

“I think they have learned about the way people lived in the past and we hope they have made the best use of those days to find out other things; ... I think the senior citizens only interact with the children when they are in a family setting, and vice versa; ... It’s a new experience for the student”.

### **Evaluation questionnaire for the seniors**

In this case, all twelve participating senior citizens answered the questionnaire.

### **What did you think of the experience of meeting and sharing a few hours with the young people from the secondary school?**

“The exchange was a good experience;... very pleasant... rewarding... comforting... great; ... I got to see their eagerness to understand us; ... I liked being able to ask them questions about their countries; ... I found it to be very different from what I did in school when I was young; ... fabulous. I would do it again every week. On a scale of 1 to 10, I give it a 10; ... great, I’m really pleased; ... We’ll have to do it again next year”.

### **What have you learned from it?**

“That they know how to behave and that they respect us a lot; ... I think we’ve learned a lot of good things from the young people, and I think that they have also learned from us; ...that they really know how to listen; ... things that we had no idea that they were thinking about; ... trying to understand them when I am with them; ... This is a youth period like my own. There is a little of everything; ... I learned

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to listen to them; ... You can learn from young people. I have learned a lot from them; ... that there are some very nice young people out there”.

### **Has the time you’ve spent with the young people led you to change your perspective of them?**

Two people said it had not and the rest said it had.

### **Why?**

1 Those who said that their opinions had not changed pointed out that their previous opinions were already positive:“Because of the interaction that I have with young people, I already know that they were wonderful; ... my grandchildren are great”.

1 Those who answered affirmatively:

“They are better than I thought they were; ... When we come together, we learn from one another; ... I didn’t think they were particularly formal in their ways; ... I thought young people wanted nothing to do with older people; ... They know lots of things that we do not know because we were unable to go to school; ... They are very polite and want to study a lot; ... Not all young people are the same. These youths know how to behave; ... They are good; ... They were respectful; ... I thought they weren’t interested in us, but they certainly know how to listen”.

### **What has surprised you or pleased you the most about the young people?**

“They know how to be respectful and they have made us change our former preconceptions of young people; ... I was surprised to be able to feel good there. I liked their behaviour; ... their communication with us; ... They are very open; ... their politeness when they spoke to us; ... We feel more equal to them. As though we were younger; ... their friendliness; ... their explanations in response to our questions”.

### **And about the project?**

“It was great; ... the bond that developed between the young people and the seniors, because we all found the way to share our respective experience; ... we feel very close to them; ... It’s really good to be able to value the exchange; ... There was a lot of mutual understanding; ... I was able to share and listen; ... It’s good for the young people and for the seniors; ... I like the project because the interaction with the kids is really nice; ... I was surprised by the rapport with them; ... the descriptions of their countries and I told them about my childhood; ... We need to spend more time with the young people; ... It was wonderful and fantastic”.

### **What do you think about the things that the young people do?**

“Some of the things I don’t like, for example, the fact that they come home so late at night and I also don’t like it that they drink, although not everyone does; ... the fact that the young people have a lot of freedom; ... I personally have nothing against them, as the kids I met are all great; ... They’re very nice, and when they want to be, they are very attentive; ... They need to enjoy but they need to remember that they have to be careful”.

### **Do you think it would be good to continue the interaction with the young people who have taken part in the project?**

All the participants said “yes”.

### **Why?**

“Selfishly, I must say it was very rewarding; ... I think it s very interesting and it doesn’t really matter if the same kids come back or if we have the exchange with other kids; ... They properly answered all the questions we had, just as we did for them; ... It was great because of the friendship; ...

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I would get to know them better; ... for the communication and exchange of values;... in order to continue to cultivate the relationship; ... It reminds me of when I was young; ... I want to share”.

#### **How could it be done?**

They would like to hold workshops together, have an exchange of visits and study neighbourhood-related matters together.

#### **What changes would you make to improve the project?**

1 Those who said that they would not make any changes:

“I think it is fine just the way it was run; ... I would do it the way it was just done; ... no changes, for me it was perfect; ... I would leave it just as it is”.

1 Those who said they would make changes:

“The sessions should take place more often, as they learn and so do we;... more days at the school; ... more hours; ... It was really great, but I'd make it longer each day; ... more weeks; ... I wouldn't change the groups each day, as that way we could get to know them better”.

#### **Observations**

The observations were all expressions of appreciation for the opportunity to take part in these activities.

### **Evaluation questionnaire for the teachers**

Both teachers answered the questionnaires.

#### **How were the activities of the project included within the school curriculum (programme)?**

“Within the area of ethics and civil education, as a practice activity to give the students the opportunity to exercise the values of listening, respect, putting themselves in someone else's position, and intergenerational communication”.

#### **How do you rate the young people's response?**

“Really good; At first they were a bit inhibited and waiting to see what it would be like, and they ended up really getting into it; ... positive. Working on values is one of the most important classes in this life!”

#### **What activity do you think was the most interesting and why?**

“Any activity that facilitates communication between kids and senior citizens, whether on a more cognitive level (conversations) or on a more emotional level (laughter therapy); ... They were all very interesting, and the students really loved the laughter therapy, as it helped them to bond.”

#### **What new activity do you think would be worth bringing into the project?**

“I thought all the activities were really ideal; ... more sessions or longer sessions; ... I think the activities were correct and appropriate”.

#### **What difficulties has participation in the project caused?**

“None”

#### **What part of the project do you feel needs to be improved?**

“I would include other non-verbal activities (musical, for example, dance, etc.); ... more time during the sessions”.

#### **Do you feel that the activities that were held were suitable to achieving the objectives (bringing senior citizens and children together, changing the preconceived ideas that they generally had of each other...)?**

“Yes”.

#### **Why?**

“Because everything that facilitates communication and mutual understanding helps to overcome prejudice and stereotypes; ... It has improved their communication and the images they had of each other”.

#### **Observations**

“We really look forward to continuing the project next year; ... We want to continue with this initiative, as we find it really appropriate and well conceived”.

### **Sharing the Garden**

#### **Evaluation questionnaire for the participating senior citizens**

#### **Why did you decide to participate in the Olzinelles Garden?**

“I was curious to see how the children would participate; ... I like children and gardening; ... I like everything to do with the soil, plants, flowers, trees, etc. I used to have an organic garden on my terrace; ... It's a fantastic idea; ... to try something new”.

#### **How would you rate the experience of these months?**

The all rated it as either “very good” or “good”.

#### **Why?**

“I got to be in contact with the children and I was able to share the garden products with them; ... Over the course of these months, in addition to learning, I felt really good and I felt very motivated; ... It has enabled me to do my favourite hobby and at the same time, I got to enjoy the kids when planting the seeds, picking the vegetables and helping them to make salads to taste our produce; ... I have learned

a few things that I didn't know about gardens; ... It gave me the opportunity to be there and share with the kids and I think they liked it a lot”.

#### **Did you have any problem (lack of information, misunderstandings with your colleagues, difficulty accessing the garden or others)?**

Everyone said “no”.

#### **Do you have any information as to what the local people in the neighbourhood think of this garden?**

Bearing in mind that most of the seniors were local residents in the neighbourhood, they did have information on the opinions of many of the neighbours.

#### **What?**

“Many of the local residents like it a lot and have asked if the garden will always be there. They often come to see the results, through the fence. They mostly like the fact that the children are the main characters of the project, as it is very important to teach children how to grow a garden, that they learn to enjoy it and to pick the vegetables and then eat them; ... When some of the local seniors saw us in the garden, they asked us to give them some classes to teach them to cultivate plants at their houses; ... Some people, as they passed, mentioned that there ought to be more gardens like this one, and they also said that they enjoyed seeing the children and watching the way the plants grew; ... They're happy with it; ... They like it”.

#### **What would you change about the project to improve it?**

In general, they did not feel that anything needed to be changed:

“All I might do is put some fruit-bearing plants, so that the children could taste them. I would also plant strawberries; ...

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I'd take the flowers out of the planters and leave the aromatic plants there; ... Rather than planting seeds, I'd put in plantlets, so that they take root faster in the soil, but everything is great as it is”.

**What has your participation in this project meant for you?**

“Above all, I enjoyed sharing with other people and with the children; ... a great joy to see the children with us; ... I have learned from it; ... It has been very important for me and I expect to continue to participate in all the projects that they organise, ... I have found great companionship among everyone; ... It was very nice; ... a great experience”.

**Do you want to continue next year?**

All the participants were willing to continue.

**Why?**

“I like taking part, and moreover, I can grow as a person and this activity enables me to be active at all times; ... to learn more and value what we eat; ... I liked it and I enjoy with the children; ... It was very rewarding; ... It has really brought me to life; ... I feel better and I want to do it; ... When I go over to water the plants, I am excited to see what is growing and what we have planted”.

## Acknowledgements

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In 1991, the Senior Citizens' Programme of Barcelona's Sants-Montjuïc District set in motion a number of activities for intergenerational relations, forming "Learning with Seniors". In this book, you will see how this programme has progressed through its 25 years of life. You will become aware of the growing social and relational need among different generations and the ways in which that interaction enables senior citizens, children, adolescents and young adults to share their life stories.

And you will also see how this mutual knowledge generates a personal and social enrichment that enables the effective resurgence and practice of lost values.

## **M. Carmen Gárate Molina**

Úbeda, 1950

Holding a Diploma in Nursing and a Master's Degree in Social Gerontology, in 1989 M. Carmen Gárate Molina left her hospital job and embarked on a new professional path in Barcelona's Sants-Montjuïc District, where she joined the Seniors' Programme.

In 1991, her interest in personal relations and the growing social need to bring generations together would enable her to join forces with all the professionals of the team, to create an intergenerational relations programme that is now celebrating its 25th anniversary.