# Abstract for Workshops/Sessions at the 21<sup>st</sup> AIEJI World Congress of Social Educators

# 1. Title of Workshop/Session

# Elderly People: Teamwork and Intergenerationality as Best Practices

# 2. Description

I have been working at the Fondazione Opera Immacolata Concezione Onlus (OIC) in Padua for 32 years as a social and health educator and coordinator of social cohesion activities across the 12 locations in the Veneto and Friuli regions. The history of OIC, spanning over seventy years, is defined by its ability to welcome and value the elderly, recognizing them as a resource for social cohesion within the entire community from the very beginning. This translates into open residential facilities, continuous exchanges with the local area, and large-scale projects involving public institutions, associations, and volunteer organizations.

OIC supports over 2,200 elderly individuals, employing 1,600 people from more than 45 different nationalities. It is within the OIC philosophy that the "Civitas Vitae" model was created, implemented across three locations, to bring intergenerational experiences to life and build networks with all public and private entities that make up society.

Among the employees, the professional educator performs educational and rehabilitative functions to maintain, recover, and enhance the residual/latent skills of the elderly, working within a team and intergenerational framework. These two best practices -teamwork and intergenerationality- are essential and indispensable in caring for elderly individuals with reduced autonomy.

Intergenerationality involves the engagement of people across different age groups, from children to the elderly, in a "circle of life" where relationships serve as a tool for generating actions aimed at improving quality of life.

The multidisciplinary and interprofessional teamwork approach is an essential tool to maximize the contributions of professionals, supporting the individual through care, assistance, education, rehabilitation, medical and psychological support, and accompaniment toward the end of life.

In this context, the elderly person is at the center: all activities and OIC can be defined as "Person-Centered." The professional educator thus emerges as a key figure, assisting and stimulating the vulnerable elderly, and educating the environment from an inclusion and cohesion perspective, where longevity becomes a resource for shared growth when accepted, nurtured, and valued.

Concrete examples of teamwork and intergenerational experiences will be presented.

# 3. Learning Objectives

The participants will learn about an important experience aimed at improving the quality of life for elderly individuals with reduced autonomy, thanks to the essential practice of teamwork and the indispensable proposal of intergenerationality in residential services.

# 5. Area of Work

Educational and rehabilitative functions with elderly people, teamwork, networking, quality of life.Social educators in working with elderly people

# 6. Target Audience

Social educators in working with elderly people, other social professionals, teachers, family members, coordinators

# 7. Language of the Presentation

English

# 8. Schedule

May 20, 2025, in the morning (Rounds 2 or 3).

# 9. Required Equipment

Projector, notebook, whiteboard, paper and pen for the participants

# **10.** Personal Information

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# SLIDE 1

# Elderly People: Teamwork and Intergenerationality as Best Practices



Good morning everyone,

I am Davide Ceron, I live and work in Italy, I have been a social and health educator since 1992, so I have been doing **"the finest job in the world"** for over 30 years.

I live my profession with the elderly, in residential contexts for self-sufficient and non-self-sufficient people, as an employee of the Fondazione Opera Immacolata Concezione, based in Padua, but with over 12 residences in the Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia regions (northern Italy).

I also have the honor of being the president in Italy of ANEP, the National Association of social and health Educators, a technical-scientific association, a member of Aieji for decades.

The work I present to you today focuses on two "best practices" in working with the elderly, namely TEAMWORK and INTERGENERATIONALITY

But to delve deeper into these two aspects it is essential to talk about the elderly first and then about the reality in which I work.

Forgive my scholastic and hesitant English.

Thank you in advance for your patience.

#### SLIDE 2



#### Life flows.

Unfortunately, we often only talk about older people because their bodies age and their social roles change.

Almost never in positive or proactive terms.

The most frequently used words are: Physical and cognitive decline Loss (of abilities, opportunities, meaning, perspective) Inevitability Illness

Resignation Retirement (in a passive sense) Solitude Death Instead, we want to experience dimensions of hope and proactivity, with a realistic yet serene vision of this now long part of life. Why not propose new words? Exercise Rehabilitation Maintenance Relationships Experience Resilience Well-being Health Inclusion

#### SLIDE 3

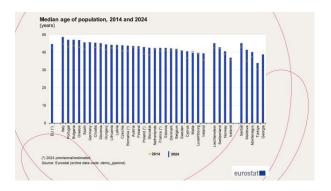


#### Europe is aging:

Projections indicate that by 2100, 1 in 3 people will be aged 65 or over. Life expectancy is increasing, but concerns about quality of life and work are growing. We seek a better quality of life, but there are many differences across states and territories. Across Europe, there are examples of good practices that can be shared and adopted at a continental level.

However, there are positive changes in the attitude towards aging. Healthy aging is considered "Very important" by 60% of the population in 2023, compared to 39% in 2018.

#### But is medicine enough for health? Or can we think of other solutions?



Europe is often referred to as "the old continent."

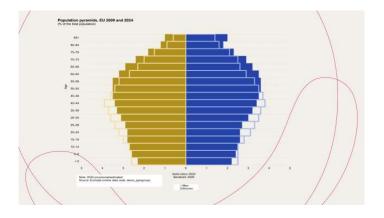
As of early 2024, the EU population was estimated at 449.3 million. Significantly, over one-fifth (21.6%) of this population was aged 65 or older.

The average age across the EU stands at 44.7 years. Children up to the age of 14 represented 14.6% of the EU population.

The working-age population, defined as those up to 64 years old, comprised 63.8%. Notably, the percentage of individuals aged 65 and over has reached 21.6%. This represents a further increase of 0.3 percentage points compared to the previous year and a substantial rise of 2.9 percentage points over the last decade.

Countries with a particularly high proportion of older individuals include Italy, Portugal, Bulgaria, Finland, Greece, and Croatia.

The key takeaway is clear: older people are a significant and important part of our society.



The aging of our population is not a new phenomenon; it's a trend that began several decades ago and is clearly visible in the evolving age structure of our societies.

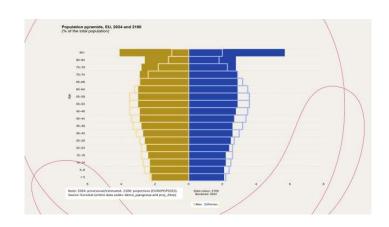
(Acknowledging the Visual) Now, I know demographic charts might seem dry, but these visuals truly speak volumes about us, about our societies, and about our future.

(Explaining the 2024 Pyramid) Looking at the population pyramid for January 2024, we see a distinct shape. It's narrower at the base and takes on a more diamond-like form. This is largely due to the "baby boomer" generation – the result of high birth rates across many European countries in the post-World War II era, the period we know as the "baby boom."

(Connecting to the Present) These "baby boomers" are now moving into retirement age, a shift clearly illustrated when we compare this 2024 pyramid with the one from 2009. The bulge representing the "baby boom" is moving up the population pyramid, resulting in a relatively smaller working-age population and a narrower base of younger individuals.

(Highlighting the Trend) Consequently, the percentage of the population aged 65 and over is steadily increasing. (Explaining Increased Longevity) This growing proportion of older individuals can be largely attributed to increased longevity – a trend of rising life expectancy that has been evident for several decades, at least until 2019. This development is often referred to as "aging at the top" of the population pyramid.

(Explaining Low Fertility) Another crucial factor to consider is the low fertility rate. This process contributes to what we call "aging at the bottom" of the population pyramid.



# SLIDE 6

Eurostat has developed population projections spanning from 2013 to 2100, offering a glimpse into the demographic shifts ahead.

These projections indicate that the EU population is expected to continue growing, reaching a peak of approximately 453.3 million people around the year 2026.

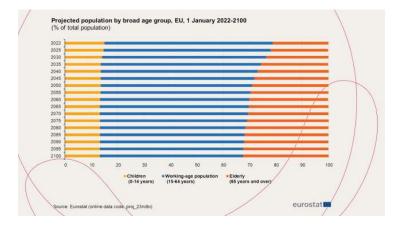
Following this peak, a gradual decline is anticipated, with the EU population projected to reach 419.5 million by the year 2100.

Crucially, the trend of population aging is set to continue and intensify.

Looking ahead to 2100, the traditional population pyramid as we know it is projected to disappear, evolving into a more block-like structure, signifying a much more evenly distributed age structure with a larger proportion of older individuals.

Furthermore, the older population itself will age further. The percentage of individuals aged 80 years or older within the EU population is projected to increase 2.5 times between 2024 and 2100, rising significantly from 6.1% to 15.3%.

# SLIDE 7



# Let's try to locate our lives and our age within this chart

Projections indicate a significant trend continuing through 2100: the proportion of the workingage population is set to decrease.

Concurrently, older individuals will likely represent an ever-increasing share of the total population, potentially reaching up to 32%.

This demographic shift will have a profound impact on the old-age dependency ratio within the EU. This ratio is projected to nearly double, rising from 33.9% in 2024 to a substantial 59.7% by 2100.

Furthermore, the median age of the EU population is expected to increase by 5.5 years, climbing from 44.7 years in 2024 to 50.2 years by the end of the century.

# SLIDE 8

	Life expectancy around the world							
	Country \$	70	80	90	Male 2	Female \$	Both sexes *	
13	Hong Kong	_			82.38	88.17	85.29	
2	Japan	E		-	81.91	88.09	85.03	
B	Switzerland	-	_		82.42	86.02	84.25	
	Singapore	1			82.06	86.15	84.07	
5	Italy			-	81.90	85.97	84.01	
	Spain				81.27	86.68	83.99	
7	Australia				82.08	85.80	83.94	
	Iceland	1			82.15	84.90	83.52	
	South Korea				80.46	86.42	83.50	
	Israel				81.98	84.91	83.49	

Turning our attention specifically to Italy, in 2023, the life expectancy at birth for the resident population stood at 81.1 years for males and 85.2 years for females.

Notably, this indicator for both genders, after the decrease observed in 2020 – a clear consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic – has shown a continuous increase in levels starting from 2021.

Due to the significant gender differences in life expectancy, this crucial indicator is calculated separately for men and women, highlighting these distinct trends.

#### SLIDE 9



The demographic data and future projections paint a clear picture: Europe's older population is growing, demanding thoughtful and adaptive social and healthcare policies. This is a phenomenon unfolding on a scale unlike anything we witnessed decades ago. In this context, I want to share the story of the OIC Foundation, where I work – a journey that began seventy years ago with a direct and compassionate response to an emerging need.

#### <u>SLIDE</u>

Back in 1956, in Padua, the first OIC residence was established. It was a pioneering initiative, born from the desire to offer dignity and welcome to elderly domestic workers facing hardship as their working lives drew to a close.

This marked a shift in the approach to elder care at the time, introducing a new model of support throughout the following decade. The visionaries behind this, were:

Nella Berto, Monsignor Antonio Varotto, and later, Angelo Ferro.

Their philosophy went beyond simply addressing basic necessities; they recognized the profound importance of the emotional, social, and psychological well-being of each individual, striving to create an environment of serenity and support.

Today, the OIC Foundation has grown into one of the most significant organizations in Europe dedicated to elder care, providing comprehensive assistance to residents and their families across a network of residences in the Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia regions.

Our history reflects a continuous commitment to adapting and evolving in response to the changing needs of an aging society.





Building on our initial commitment, the OIC Foundation experienced a significant expansion between 1966 and 1975 with the creation of the Nazareth Center in Padua. This wasn't just a building; it was envisioned as a true community – a 20,000 (twenty thousand) square meter village immersed in green space, thoughtfully designed to foster relationships and social connection for over 400 residents. At Nazareth, everyday life became an opportunity to forge bonds and share moments of joy, enriching the lives of all who called it home.

This innovative model of care paved the way for further growth, leading to the establishment of additional OIC residences across the Veneto region, in locations like San Giovanni in Monte, Asiago, Thiene, Carmignano di Brenta, and Oderzo.

These images, both from our history and recent renovations, illustrate our enduring dedication to providing welcoming and high-quality environments where connection and well-being flourish.

## SLIDE 11



"The OIC Foundation's 70-year journey reflects a continuous adaptation to the evolving social needs of the Veneto region."

"Responding to new care demands, we established the innovative Santa Chiara residence (1986-1995), inspired by Northern European models. It was a forward-thinking environment where I began my career."

"Our commitment to comprehensive support led to the development of Civitas Vitae Angelo Ferro, a cornerstone for inclusive care within our community."

"We've also consistently modernized our centers to meet the increasing complexities of non-self-sufficiency."

"Underpinning all our work is a deep love for life and respect for individual dignity."

"The OIC Foundation's history is a testament to our enduring commitment to evolve and care with compassion in a changing world."



Driven by our mission, the OIC Foundation expanded its presence in June 2019, undertaking the management of new residences in Treviso and Gorizia (Friuli Venezia Giulia).

In Padua, we inaugurated the largest Community Hospital in the Veneto region, with sixty beds.

Further strengthening our integrated care model, May 2019 saw the opening of the Territorial Rehabilitation Unit (URT) at Civitas Vitae Angelo Ferro, completing our comprehensive healthcare hub in Padua.

This hub stands as a center of excellence for the care of vulnerable individuals, encompassing specialized units for permanent vegetative states, hospice care, the Community Hospital, and the Territorial Rehabilitation Unit.

Here, care is defined by humanization and personalized support, recognizing that every life is a treasure to be cherished.

# SLIDE 13 – video 3':08



Beyond physical needs, our daily care enriches residents' lives with joy and serenity, ensuring high quality of life in their later years.

Our professional teams provide comprehensive support.

Our spacious indoor and outdoor environments, surrounded by nature, enhance well-being. Everyday moments become enriching experiences, creating deep connections between residents and staff.

In this constant embrace of care, the ordinary becomes extraordinary. We continuously evolve our model to integrate intergenerationality, multidimensionality, and polyfunctionality for enhanced well-being in longevity.

(Transition to video) Let's now watch a short video showcasing a day at Civitas Vitae, highlighting teamwork and intergenerational interaction.

#### SLIDE 14



# THE OLDER PERSON AT THE HEART

The older person is not just at the center of our work: they are the very heartbeat of everything we do.

This core principle translates into a constant commitment to offering an environment that transcends mere accommodation, becoming a true home where every individual feels respected and cherished.

This commitment is evident in our spacious indoor and outdoor areas, always accessible and available to all, where each resident can find their own haven of serenity and well-being. Our residential comforts are continuously updated to ensure the highest quality of life.

The following values drive the OIC Foundation:

Listen Understand Respond Welcome Respect Protect Value Train Research Innovate Include Within this framework, the professional educator plays a fundamental role, both for the individual resident and for the working team.

I have personally witnessed the excellent qualitative outcomes of this approach, both for the residents we serve and for the professional team that supports them.

## SLIDE 15



The Indispensable Element: Teamwork

None of what we've discussed would be possible without a fundamental element – seemingly simple to say, yet profoundly complex in its implementation: teamwork.

Knowledge within our field has grown exponentially.

Consequently, working as a team is no longer merely an option; it has become a strategic imperative if we truly aim to provide the best care for older adults. This holds true for every care profession, extending even to administrative roles.

(*Referring to the image*) The image I've chosen depicts teamwork in a different context, but the underlying principle remains the same: collaborative effort is essential to achieve peak performance and optimal outcomes.





Interdisciplinary Teamwork: The Cornerstone of Socio-Healthcare

In the socio-healthcare field, teamwork manifests as the Interdisciplinary Team (Équipe interdisciplinare).

Within this model, all team members share:

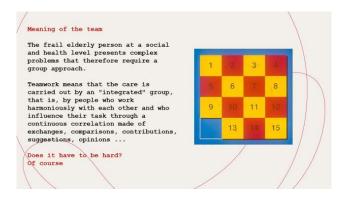
Common goals and frameworks Consistent organizational methods Clear division of labor Effective coordination activities Decisions are made collectively, at the Team level.

Working effectively within an interdisciplinary team requires both flexibility and an openness to dialogue and differing perspectives. It's crucial to be mindful of role boundaries and avoid unnecessary substitution.

The social and healthcare educator is an integral part of this team, interacting with all other professionals with the dual aim of promoting the well-being of the individual and fostering a positive working environment for the entire group.

This approach is inherent to our profession, and therefore, we must receive and actively seek thorough training to effectively care for both the individual and the team.

SLIDE 17



Meaning of the teamwork

The frail elderly person at a social and health level presents complex problems that therefore require a group approach.

Teamwork means that the care is carried out by an "integrated" group, that is, by people who work harmoniously with each other and who influence their task through a continuous correlation made of exchanges, comparisons, contributions, suggestions, opinions ...

Does it have to be hard? Of course!

SLIDE 18



The Shadow Side of Teamwork But let's be honest, teamwork can also have its... less productive aspects. Feeling lonely? Dislike working independently? Loathe making decisions? Call a meeting! You'll get to see people, draw diagrams, feel important, form working groups, impress colleagues, offer unhelpful advice... All on company time, of course.

Team meetings: An alternative to actual work!



Navigating the Unexpected: Essential Rules for Effective Teamwork

Even within the best working groups, unforeseen challenges and complexities can arise.

Therefore, establishing clear guidelines for effective teamwork is crucial. Here are some essential principles for navigating team dynamics:

Respect others, acknowledging the inherent value each individual brings.

Recognize your own limitations, understanding that others can help you overcome them and improve overall performance.

Acknowledge your own temporary role and replaceability – everyone is valuable, but no one is indispensable.

Appreciate the contributions of your colleagues.

Practice active listening and strive for understanding.

Express your opinions freely and openly.

Be open to accepting diverse viewpoints.

Foster open communication and a spirit of collaboration.

Maintain self-control.

# SLIDE 20 – video 4':20



# The Power of Collaborative Teamwork

Mastering effective teamwork is a crucial professional challenge and a hallmark of expertise in our field. It allows us to break free from the isolation often associated with individual professions. We share the entire process together, including the frustrations and setbacks, fostering a sense of

collective responsibility.

This collaborative approach helps to reduce burnout among team members.

It simplifies the process of tackling the complex challenges inherent in the socio-healthcare sector. We share the burden of managing the most demanding and sometimes inappropriate requests.

It cultivates an environment dedicated to the well-being of both the individuals we care for and those who provide the care.

We establish a foundational base of shared knowledge, underscoring the importance of basic training and ongoing inter-professional development.

We become less territorial and more open to shared success.

We are better equipped to face complex challenges collaboratively.

We explore new solutions by overcoming preconceived notions and embracing diverse perspectives. We truly experience the meaning of being colleagues, fostering mutual support and understanding.

The following video summarizes the activities of Civitas Vitae in 2024 – a clear testament to the power of multiple teams working in synergy.

SLIDE 21



# The Foundation for Working with Older Adults

The fundamental groundwork for effectively working with older adults rests on:

MOTIVATION: This must be nurtured and allowed to grow strong and deep.

COMPETENCE (The Lifeblood): This needs to be provided wisely and consistently.

LOVE FOR THE WORK (The Indispensable Water): This is essential for the "plant" to survive and bear "fruit."

However, this crucial "water" – the love for the work – cannot be found in books, nor is it provided through courses, diplomas, or degrees...

With thanks to the insights of my colleague Alberto Cester, Geriatrician and Physiatrist.

## SLIDE 22



# IDENTITY, MISSION, AND VALUES

How do we effectively promote dignity, ensure well-being and welcome, and respond to the needs of our most vulnerable individuals?

If our ultimate goal with every intervention, project, and initiative is to build a more inclusive community – one where every person feels welcomed, respected, and supported – then our focus cannot solely be on older adults. We must also reach out to other generations, particularly children and young people, to truly achieve our ethical mission and vision:

Moving from the concept of a "Nursing Home" to a "Service Center and Intergenerational Connection Network."

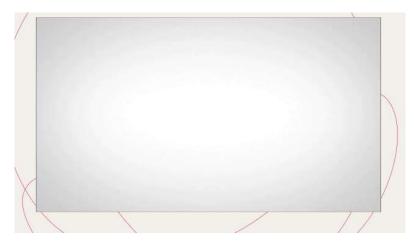
Shifting from bureaucratic-healthcare formulas for the elderly to the unwavering valorization of human dignity at all ages.

Transitioning from unnecessarily prolonged hospitalizations to open rehabilitation settings.

Evolving from simply delivering care services to "taking care" with competence and heart, with intellect and love.

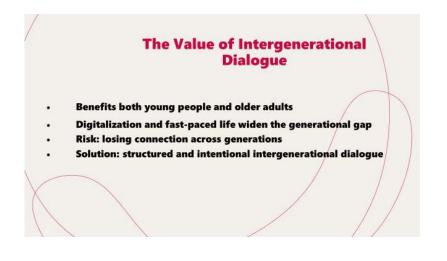
Transforming from functional silos to integrated social cohesion infrastructures.

# SLIDE 23 – VIDEO 4':21



Before we delve into our intergenerational projects, let's watch a third video that will offer us some initial insights.

SLIDE 24



The Power of Intergenerational Connections

Intergenerational relationships offer significant benefits for both children, adolescents, and older adults.

We live in an increasingly dynamic and technological society, where the generational gap is widening, often leading to misunderstandings and even conflict.

We risk losing crucial contact and connection between individuals and across generations.

However, by fostering structured and shared dialogue between different generations, we can unlock the key to a richer and more harmonious development, both individually and as a society.

#### Slide 25



#### Intergenerational Dialogue: Bridging Experiences

Intergenerational dialogue acts as a bridge connecting the lives and experiences of different generations, fostering valuable exchange and comparison. We immediately think of grandparents and grandchildren.

Children and adolescents require constant attention and support, which can often be lacking. Older adults, on the other hand, are often at a stage in life where they have ample time to dedicate to the younger generation, providing the kind of stimulation they need to thrive.

The settings where intergenerational dialogue can flourish are diverse: the family, the community, the local area, associations, and institutions.

#### SLIDE 26



Elderly people and Loneliness

In an increasingly digitalized and individualistic world, we are witnessing an erosion of social cohesion. Loneliness is a significant social and healthcare problem with detrimental effects on the physical and mental well-being of older adults here in Italy and across the globe.

Social isolation can lead to neurological damage, contributing to the loss of cognitive functions and practical abilities, and increasing the risk of various forms of dementia.

Loneliness can also accelerate the body's aging process, acting as a major risk factor for numerous diseases prevalent among our older population.

Intergenerational exchange offers a promising avenue to combat this isolation. Young people, with their energy and vitality, can provide valuable companionship and new stimuli, while older adults offer a unique perspective on life events, both past and present, and play a vital role in transmitting important cultural and personal values.

# SLIDE 27 - 28



Slide Title: The Mutual Benefits of Intergenerational Relationships

**Presentation Points:** 

Intergenerational relationships yield numerous advantages for both young people and older adults.

Children and Adolescents Gain:

The support they need, including emotional support.

The acquisition of new knowledge and values.

Improved social skills.

The development of critical thinking.

Opportunities for social interaction and exchange.

The development of positive attitudes towards older age.

Older Adults Gain:

A reduction in isolation and depression.

An overall improvement in emotional and physical well-being.

The chance to interact with energetic and vital individuals.

The opportunity to stay updated on societal innovations and trends.

Increased self-esteem and a renewed sense of purpose and motivation in life.



#### Role of the social and health Educator

- Create safe and inclusive spaces
- Plan time and resources effectively
- Define goals and outcomes
- Encourage participation
  Evaluate and adapt
- Be open to spontaneity and human connect

Implementing Intergenerational Exchange: Practical Approaches

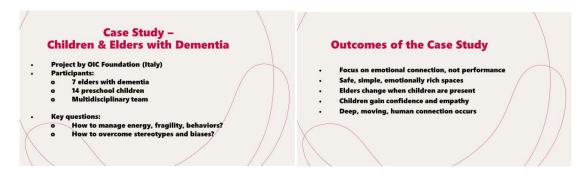
Implementing intergenerational exchange is not difficult within family settings and small communities, in schools, and through specific projects such as: creative workshops, board games, urban gardening, walks, technology use, and community events (festivals, local fairs, markets, etc.).

However, a care facility for the elderly that is not open to the wider community risks fostering relationships within its walls but not genuine intergenerational connections.

Within the OIC Foundation residences, we implement numerous intergenerational activities where the professional educator plays a key role in facilitating exchange between participants by:

Creating opportunities Structuring available spaces Scheduling the timing Allocating resources effectively Setting measurable objectives Verifying the achieved results While careful planning is certainly important, equally crucial is an openness to the relationship itself and to the unpredictable developments that arise from the exchange and interaction between individuals. We utilize specific techniques, of course, but ultimately, we work with people, not machines or objects.

#### SLIDE 31 - 32



Intergenerational Meeting (Dementia & Early Childhood)

I'd like to highlight a specific OIC Foundation project, detailed in an article by our educator Silvia (link available: <u>https://www.luoghicura.it/operatori/professioni/2025/03/un-progetto-intergenerazionale-con-anziani-con-demenza-e-bambini-della-scuola-materna-racconto-di-unesperienza/</u>).

This involved seven older adults living with dementia and behavioral challenges interacting with fourteen young children in their first year of nursery school, facilitated by a multidisciplinary team.

Addressing the Challenge: Initially, the interaction between these two seemingly disparate groups might appear complex. However, the project demonstrated its feasibility with careful planning and support. The Power of Connection: The encounter had a remarkable transformative effect on the elderly participants. The children's presence seemed to alleviate their fatigue and discomfort, replacing boredom with joy and bringing a sense of lightness.

A Relationship-Centered Approach: The key to success was creating a highly protected environment and structuring simple, shared activities. The focus was not on achieving specific tasks ("performance") but on fostering genuine connection and interaction between individuals.

**Emotional Resonance**: Despite their cognitive difficulties, the individuals with dementia retained a significant capacity to perceive and express emotions, responding deeply to the children's presence. **Gradual Engagement**: The children's approach to the older adults was initially cautious but evolved into spontaneous and natural interaction. Reciprocal exchange occurred, with children feeling competent in shared activities like drawing, and the elderly enjoying being guided in these experiences.

A Profound Outcome: Ultimately, the encounters, despite the different paces and temperaments of the participants, were deeply moving and beautiful – a testament to the human need for connection and the powerful impact of intergenerational relationships, a true "balm for the soul."

This project underscores the OIC Foundation's commitment to innovative approaches in elder care, recognizing the profound benefits of intergenerational engagement, even with individuals facing significant cognitive challenges.

Slide 33

#### **Future Perspectives and Conclusions**

Intergenerational work is a valuable, underused resource

- Enhances well-being and life quality
- Encourages societal interdependence
  A powerful tool for educators worldwide

https://www.luoghicura.it/operatori/professioni/2025/03/ un-progetto-intergenerazionale-con-anziani-con-demenza-e-bambini-dellascuola-materna-racconto-di-unesperienza/

For educators worldwide, intergenerational work represents a powerful and underused tool. It not only enhances the quality of life for both young and old, but it also reminds us of the deep interdependence between generations—something every society needs to thrive.

# Slide 34

Suggestion and Thanks!

