



SA MONTESSORI
quality early childhood education and care

Our dream is to raise social awareness of the deep value of intergenerational care, a transformative model that recognises that children and elders are **Better Together**.

We aim to help the community to see the beauty that emerges when we bring our children and older generations together in care communities that meet their holistic needs and recognise that citizenship begins at birth and never fades.

We are delighted to share the following information to illuminate our vision.

What kinds of activities will be offered at the SA Montessori early learning centre together with ECH clients?

Our environments will be a place where children and elders connect not just during occasional visits, or through token gestures, but in a permanent and meaningful manner. We have given consideration given to the countless ways that the two groups can authentically merge through shared experiences such as gardening, cooking, story-telling and *friendship*.

It is important to note that our intention is for the shared experiences to be varied enough to accommodate a range of different types and levels of involvement. Our aim is to encourage as much participation as possible, but not in a homogenous manner. We wish to ensure that intergenerational engagement happens in many locations, at various times during the day and across the week, with a broad range of topics or skills being explored. This will allow for residents with unique interests, personalities, experiences and energy-levels to be involved in a way that reflects their individual preferences.

The intergenerational opportunities can be grouped into three distinct categories: activities, experiences, and routines or traditions.

Activities

Activities are self-contained tasks that are set up by the educators with the intent of teaching or reinforcing a particular skill or concept. Activities could include artistic tasks such as painting, flower arranging or pottery, or could be educational activities exploring specific subjects, such as using puzzles and physical resources to learn about animals.

We will invite our elders to be instrumental in determining what these activities will be. This will ensure that we are taking the interests of the elders into account and also empowering them with opportunities to share their skills. We may, for example, find that elders with sewing experience wish to teach this process to their young friends.

Experiences



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Experiences are broader and more immersive projects that unfold over time in a natural and evolving way. The urban farm, for instance, will offer countless opportunities for intergenerational experiences as the children and their elders plant, nurture and cultivate the plants before eventually harvesting them for cooking experiences or to sell in a market.

Routines / traditions

The intergenerational routines and traditions will be daily roles or regular events that children and their elders can rely upon as a consistent part of their day to day lives. These will include practical tasks, such as daily cooking to make a shared afternoon tea, as well as more abstract traditions, such as connecting a child to an elder to become 'pen pals' who write to one another regularly.

Excursions

We wish to create a community *within* the village, but we also intend to connect with the local community. Elders and children will accompany one another on outings to nearby places such as the library and Linear Park.

It is our goal that these activities, experiences, traditions and excursions will create a space where children and elders live and learn side-by-side in an atmosphere of companionship, connection and continued growth.



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Are there any issues that need to be overcome?

In our Montessori environments we look at challenges as opportunities, and we always take the perspective of considering the risk-benefit ratio when encountering difficult issues. We know that sometimes it would be ‘easier’ to avoid taking risks, but that also means missing out on the benefits that it would have offered. There is no doubt that there are practical and pedagogical challenges when it comes to integrating early childhood environments into an aged care setting, but the benefits of this journey make it more than worthwhile.

Some of the challenges we expect to face include the logistics of

Physical access / health and safety

It is vital that we ensure that the elders who choose to work with us are able to participate effectively and safely and, likewise, that children can safely and comfortably enter some of the common spaces within the overall facility. This requires considered thinking to ensure that, for instance, the classrooms include comfortable furnishing for our adult visitors. It also requires robust health and safety protocols to protect two groups who may share higher vulnerability to infection.

Screening of volunteers

The elders who engage regularly with the children *within the classroom itself* will be eligible for a *free* Working with Children Check due to their status as ‘volunteers’. This ensures that there is no financial burden to the individual or to the supporting organisations.

We recognise that some elders may occasionally want to participate in the intergenerational experiences *within the classroom* without going through the process of applying for the Working with Children Check. In this case we will simply recommend that they keep their voluntary hours to less than seven days in each calendar year, as infrequent volunteers are not required to undergo criminal history screening.

We believe that elders who we encounter *outside* of the early childhood environment – within the common areas of the buildings and shared spaces such as the urban farm – will *not* need Working with Children Checks because they are not volunteering within the classroom but are simply encountering children in the community. As such, we will treat those engagements as excursions and therefore conduct a risk-assessment that ensures that all interactions are supervised by staff members who do have the appropriate police clearances.

Training

We are aware that we will need to ensure that *staff members* have the right attitude and awareness for the cross-pollination of relationships and ideas to truly flourish. It is not enough for the children and elders to meet one another; the educators, and the professionals who work within the ECH buildings, will also need to be proactively involved in cultivating connections. We therefore intend to ensure that our early years educators are well-versed in principles of positive aged care, particularly in relation to applying Montessori principles with elders. We will also offer professional development opportunities for professionals who work within the ECH building to learn about Montessori.



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What do SA Montessori parents think of the early learning centre being incorporated into a retirement village?

Our SA Montessori families are delighted by our involvement with ECH. The parents who choose our centres tend to share common values, the most uniting of which is a deep appreciation for the importance of family and relationships. It is therefore unsurprising that they are so eager to support a project that is underpinned by the belief that we should be reconnecting communities in a way that creates a strong network of meaningful relationships. We have many families who have commented on how ideal it would be if grandparents and grandchildren occupied the same space and could therefore be connected on a regular basis. Several people have pointed out how this would support *their* dual-roles in caring for their children and for their own parents and create enhanced well-being for the entire family unit.

Are there plans for SA Montessori to work with ECH on any other projects?

SA Montessori is already working with ECH to embed intergenerational experiences into our existing preschool environments. Two of our centres – Jescott Montessori Preschool and Little Oxford Montessori – already host visits from elders on a regular basis. We are also making plans for our children to take excursions to ECH sites for morning teas and cultural celebrations. ECH is also working in partnership with Little Oxford to develop a community garden on a nature play block that adjoins the preschool in Unley. It is also our aim that the site at Smart Road will be the first of many intergenerational environments developed – or *inspired* – by SA Montessori and ECH.