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Active Ageing Good Practices

Promoting Intergenerational Communication and Understanding

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Persistent negative stereotypes on the aging process and the older person are noticeable within the current youth-orientated culture. Older persons may also hold negative stereotypes about the younger generation. These undesirable typecasts co-exist because younger and older persons often have limited contact with each other. Indeed, the younger generation, only gets to engage in communication with the older person within the family unit, rarely outside their own familial structures. Similarly, older persons, residents of long-term care have limited opportunities of interacting with the younger generation.

Given the increasingly age diversities within society, the Department of Gerontology and Dementia Studies, University of Malta engaged students in their field work on a ‘speed greeting’ activity within the community, aimed towards older person/student mutual interactions.

Later the Department of Gerontology and Dementia Studies teamed up with CareMalta Group, (a local market leader in providing quality services in residential care for the older persons and the older persons living with dementia), to launch this initiative within long-term care settings.

Students from within the department, older person residents within care homes/the community, had the opportunity to come together as equal partners and develop common ground for improved intergenerational communication and understanding. Ice breaker questions were designed to direct the discussion around common, shared experiences as opposed to age differences. Difference in experience, emerged during the conversations, which however, reflect individual rather than age differences.

Post-activity, the students, described increased ability to

(a) initiate conversations with older persons with greater confidence, hence overcoming communication barriers;

(b) recognise the diversity of older persons;

and (c) identify commonalities across generations.