

**“You don’t have to be related to be family”:  
An Intergenerational Program in Metro Vancouver**

**by  
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## **Abstract**

This study explores the long-term impact community-based, nonfamilial intergenerational (IG) programs have on the lives of participants as well as identifies key organizational attributes of IG programming. The existing literature on IG programs has mostly focused on short-term outcomes from the perspective of one generation and rarely considers the participants' and program provider experiences jointly. Semi-structured interviews took place with older adult participants (n=4), younger adult participants (n=5), and the program provider of an IG program, Family Match in Metro Vancouver. The findings of this study indicate that mechanisms of generativity initiated by the Family Match program facilitate the development of diverse, long-term, intergenerational volunteer kinships that enrich the participants' lives and actively expand their social support network. Program facilitators and barriers are highlighted, and practical recommendations are provided. Community-based, nonfamilial IG programs contribute to addressing complex social issues by purposefully connecting generations and creating an age-integrated and inclusive community for all.

**Keywords:** Intergenerational Programs; Intergenerational Connections;  
Intergenerational Relationships; Volunteer Kin

*Dedicated to Giuseppina Patille, my beloved Nonna (grandmother)*

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## **Reflexivity/Positionality**

I would like to overtly state my positionality and reflexivity as well as comment on how it informs my approach to this research. By doing this I hope to enhance the credibility of the study's findings and provide readers with the opportunity to assess how my personal identities and life experiences may influence my observations and interpretations of the findings (Malterud, 2001; Tong et al., 2007).

I come from very strong European, specifically Italian Canadian roots where family time, preparing and enjoying meals, sharing life stories, and older generations sharing wisdom with younger generations are all valued. Throughout my childhood, I formed a very strong bond with my Nonna, who this work is dedicated to; she was influential in my life and undoubtedly shaped who I am today. Education was identified by my family as important, especially since both of my grandmothers did not have the opportunity to finish grade school. My parents, working class first generation European Canadian's, valued higher education. However, it was never forced or expected of me to attend university. Even with my mother being a teacher for over 25 years, my parents only had one expectation of me and that was – to try my best. As a female and being well aware of the lack of access to education my grandmothers both experienced, I was highly motivated to attend university right after high school.

During my second year of my undergraduate career in public health, I was first introduced to the field of gerontology. From there, I became inspired and decided to pursue my graduate education in the field of gerontology, focusing on intergenerational connections, relationships, and opportunities. It was clear that this close bond I had shared with my grandparents, especially my Nonna, began to seep into my studies. I quickly learned that this bond I shared with my grandmother was not as common as I anticipated. Rather, it was a privilege to share so much time and love with my grandparents throughout my life. This is when I came to realize that respecting, interacting, and sharing between generations was integral to my daily life.

Since the summer of 2020, I have been working on a project with an intergenerational focus called Intergenerational North Shore (InterGenNS), which aims to

facilitate intergenerational opportunities in local communities for residents as well as support organizations to develop, sustain, and expand intergenerational opportunities. My time working with the InterGenNS Project strengthened my passion for and interest in intergenerational relationships. Experiences in both my personal life and professional career have propelled me to want to better understand the ways in which society interacts with and understands the importance of intergenerational relationships. Since I became aware of the lack of connections across generations, I have been interested in researching the long-term impacts of community-based, non-kin intergenerational programs on participants as well as uncovering the organizational facilitators and barriers to program implementation and maintenance in hopes to provide direction for support of intergenerational programs in North America.

In addition to working on the InterGenNS Project as a Graduate Research Assistant and Intergenerational Program Research and Development Coordinator, I have experienced working with the Aging in the Right Place project as a Graduate Research Assistant and currently as the Vancouver Regional Coordinator. Throughout my academic career I have gained over four years of vast qualitative research experience by conducting many interviews with diverse and vulnerable populations as well as performing varying thematic analyses. I feel very honoured and privileged to dedicate this work to my Nonna and contribute to a field that I am so passionate about.

# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

### 1.1. Background

Due to population aging and longevity in the past couple of decades, there has been an increase in multiple generations living at the same time. It is projected that individuals aged 65 and over will represent 16.7% of the global population by 2050 (United States Census Bureau, 2015). In the Canadian context, it is estimated that older adults will make up 23% of the Canadian population by 2030, which is higher than the global projection (Government of Canada, 2019). In fact, the global average life expectancy increased by 5.5 years between 2000 and 2016 largely due to pivotal advancements in public health (World Health Organization, n.d.). Overall, there is an extended life expectancy, meaning greater surviving generations while at the same time, there are fewer children being born, leaving fewer individuals with siblings (Meil, 2006). This demographic shift that has been identified has been named the “beanpole family structure” (Bengtson et al., 1990; Treas, 1995). Currently, there is a total of six generations living at the same time in North America. However, due to the “beanpole effect”, interaction and relationship development amongst generations are becoming less common. Many social changes have resulted due to the impacts of the beanpole effect that have reduced contact among generations which will be discussed in-detail in *1.1.2 Social Forces Impacting IG Relationships*.

In response, intergenerational (IG) programs have been critical in closing this gap among generations. IG programs yield a wide variety of mutual benefits for both older and younger participants. For example, Caspar et al.’s (2019) findings suggest that youth and older adults both demonstrated positive experiences identified through their levels of engagement and positive affect. In addition, Dumbrell et al. (2007) identified that older adults and younger individuals experienced fellowship, and generally enjoyed spending time with one another. These are among few of the many ways in which IG programs strengthen community and well-being. In the following section, the benefits of IG programs are highlighted and followed by a discussion on the social forces impacting IG

relationships, the outcomes of a generational divided society, and the purpose of this research will be presented.

### **1.1.1. Benefits of IG Programming for all Ages**

Participating in IG programming creates a reciprocal learning environment where participants learn from one another through shared experiences and interactions. These interactions facilitate mutual learning/co-learning and bi-directional mentoring. Through various forms of engagement and interaction between generations a meaning making process is initiated resulting in the development of meaningful relationships and bonds over time. One way for these relationships to grow is through reciprocal giving between generations fostered by mechanisms related to generativity (Knight et al. 2014). Additionally, it has been identified in the literature that IG contact that is frequent and regular whereby activities shared are perceived as pleasant by participants and enable the sharing of life stories, contributes to the development of IG friendships (Jarrott et al., 2019). This meaning making process is rooted in relation to dimensions at both the individual and community levels that foster social well-being between and within generations. Therefore, IG programming creates a strong sense of meaning at the individual level as well as the community-level as opportunities that purposefully bring generations together contribute to an environment that is age-inclusive. An in-depth review of the impacts of IG opportunities will be discussed further in *Chapter 2*.

### **1.1.2. Social Forces Impacting IG Relationships**

#### ***The Role of Age Segregation***

Today, older adults remain the most age segregated group in North America (Moos, 2014). Life in contemporary society is segregated by age meaning that organic IG relations either in the family unit or in the community between old and young are becoming less common. This pervasive social division by age actively encourages people to interact with their age peers, leaving little opportunity for social connections among differing generations in the community to form.



Hagestad and Uhlenburg (2006) stated that there are three dimensions of age segregation in contemporary Western societies: (1) institutional, (2) spatial, and (3) cultural age segregation (Hagestad & Uhlenburg, 2006). Institutional age segregation takes place when “chronological age [is used] as an eligibility criterion for participation” at a social institution or organization (Hagestad & Uhlenburg, 2006, p. 641). To further contextualize institutional age segregation, children and youth spend the majority of their time attending school, with similar aged students while adults spend their days at work, which excludes both young and oftentimes old populations (Hagestad & Uhlenburg, 2006). While children are attending school and adults attend work, older adults remain in the communities as they have limited access to educational and professional institutions (Hagestad & Uhlenburg, 2006). Moreover, spatial age segregation takes place “when individuals of different ages do not occupy the same space and hence cannot engage in face-to-face interaction” (Hagestad & Uhlenburg, 2006, p. 641). Due to modernized and urban life, individuals can easily access the social spaces they frequent daily – education and occupation. Therefore, during mornings and afternoons on weekdays, there is very little opportunity for adults to interact with children or older adults, older adults to interact with children or adults, and children to connect with adults or older adults. An additional aspect of spatial age segregation is age homogenous housing (Hagestad & Uhlenburg, 2006). An example of age homogenous housing can be residential care facilities for older adults or student housing for university and college students. Pertaining to student housing, young adults are attracted to urban areas and live in smaller units due to housing and labour market issues when attending post-secondary school resulting in “studentification”, and “youthification” (Hagestad & Uhlenburg, 2006; Moos, 2016; Revington, 2021; Smith, 2005). In fact, processes like studentification and youthification increase separation and segregation among generations due to the clearly defined spatial and social locations based on age. Lastly, institutional and spatial age segregation are “reflected and reproduced in cultural contrasts” (Hagestad & Uhlenburg, 2006, p. 642). There are clear cultural distinctions based on age cohorts such as entertainment, appearance, language, and customs to name a few which contribute to a “generational gap or divide” based on age differences in society. Therefore, these widespread forms of age segregation are actively contributing to a society

that is generationally divided, leaving an unexplored gap between generations that requires better understanding in order to identify means of reducing this gap.

### ***Shift in Family Structure and Dynamics***

Hagestad and Uhlenburg (2006) suggest that “the family represents the only truly age integrated social institution” (p.649). This information may sound encouraging; however, it is important to consider how the wider social context and social systems can be a more age-integrated space, especially due to changes in family dynamics, roles, and obligations. Within recent years there have been many shifts within the family unit. According to Statistics Canada (2017) 28.2% of Canadians are residing in one-person households, which is the highest among all household types in Canada. Therefore, the majority of Canadians are living alone, without their families. Interestingly, there is a very similar distribution among Canadian couples with children (26.5%) and couples without children (25.8%) (Statistics Canada, 2016). In fact, there were 13,434 fewer births in 2020 than the previous year, which is the greatest decrease by one year recorded and the lowest number of births in any year since 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2021). This demonstrates that currently more Canadians are living alone and without children. Moreover, in Canada “marriage rates have declined, while living in common law, as well as union dissolution through separation and divorce, have become increasingly common” (Statistics Canada, 2019, First section, paragraph 2). These various changes in family structure and roles can impact varying dynamics and relations for family members and the family unit as a whole and in turn increase issues of family fragmentation.

### ***Geographical Separation of Families***

More than ever, it is now socially common for family members to live in distant geographical locations, making it increasingly difficult to sustain close ties between familial generations (Together Old and Young, 2020). Younger and able members of the family are moving away from their familial setting for work or education and leaving older members of the family behind (Revington, 2021). In fact, older adults were 13% more likely to live independently in 2010 compared to 1990, while at the same time co-residence with children has become 13% less likely in 2010 compared to 1990, indicating that organic

exposure to meaningful intergenerational social interaction within family units may be lacking (United Nations, 2017).

### ***COVID-19 and IG Relations***

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the mandatory separation of generations like never before. Regular family visits, dinners, and events were put to a halt. Older adults residing in an institutional setting were forced to interact with their family through a windowpane without hearing their voices or feeling their touch. Most if not all, community-based IG programming was paused. In response to this crisis, many organizations attempted to transition IG opportunities to an online or remote platform consisting of Zoom calls, telephone conversations, and/or letter writing. Many organizations and families depended on technology for social interactions to take place during these times. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated new types of IG opportunities where generations in the family would connect through playing videogames together (Campbell, 2021). It should be noted that access to technology and digital literacy can be a barrier among older adults (Meuser et al., 2021). However, learning about technology and the digital realm can be a unique space for older generations and younger generations to be brought together (Gerardo et al., 2019). Programs like Cyber Seniors, identified in the grey literature provide opportunities for youth to interact with seniors remotely and support them with digital and technological tasks, actively contributing to closing the digital divide that exists between generations through an innovative IG opportunity.

### **1.1.3. Outcomes of a Generationally Divided Society**

The reduction of IG relations due to social forces has resulted in unique social challenges faced by older adults that must not be ignored (Wang et al., 2014). In Canada, 93.2% of seniors live in private dwellings, meaning most Canadian older adults are aging in place (Puxty et al., 2019). In 2011, 31.5% of women aged 65 and over lived alone in private dwellings compared to 16% of senior men and among older adults 85 and over, 36.6% of women lived alone in private dwellings compared to 21.7% of men (Statistics Canada, 2011). This becomes a major concern as The National Seniors Council Report on the Social Isolation for Seniors (2014) indicated that living alone is the number one risk

factor of social isolation among older adults (Government of Canada). Additional risk factors include, being 80 years old and over, living without family, and changing family structures. Due to the various social forces at play, 19% of Canadians 65 and over feel isolated from others (Government of Canada, 2014). Therefore, the increase in older adults living alone, increase in life expectancy, and the disconnection and fragmentation of families are all contributing factors to feelings of isolation and loneliness among Canadian older adults.

Furthermore, the division among generations in the population has resulted in ageism becoming a global concern. In response, the World Health Organization (WHO) has developed a Global Campaign to Combat Ageism. The WHO defines ageism as “the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age” (2021, p. xix). It is important to note that ageism applies to all ages and not just the older adult demographic. Due to social forces such as age segregation, shifts in family structure, and the geographical separation of families at present there is limited exposure and interaction among generations. As a result, generations formulate biases and preconceived notions of the “other” generation based on the gap and division that is present in society, in turn resulting in further division among age groups due to limited exposure and contact. Ageism is woven in the fabric of social systems, which consequently “perpetuate misconceptions and influence the policies we develop and the opportunities we create – or don’t” (WHO, 2021, p. xx). It is imperative that IG programs target a variety of population groups and are implemented to foster a more age-integrated society where meaningful interactions among generations are encouraged in the community.

#### **1.1.4. Purpose of Research**

Most of the existing research that examines IG initiatives and their effects has been conducted in international settings such as Asia, Europe, and the United States (Chen & Silverstein, 2000; Murayama et al., 2019; Santini et al., 2018; Takagi et al, 2007). There is a clear gap within the research that focuses on community-based, nonfamilial IG programs

in the Canadian context and the long-term impact they have on both the younger adult and older adult perspective.

Currently, there is no clear, universal, agreed upon definition of IG programs (Jarrott, 2011; Murayama et al., 2019; Vanderven, 2011). Based on the various identified definitions (Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017; Knight et al., 2014; Murayama et al., 2019; Newman, 1997), a working definition was coined for the particular focus of this study. This working definition defines IG programs as social vehicles that facilitate mutually beneficial ongoing engagement, interaction, and exchange of resources, knowledge, skills, and experiences between older and younger generations in a social space through both purposeful and organic opportunities that include people with varying abilities and identities to form a meaningful connection. A more detailed discussion on different IG definitions is provided in *CHAPTER 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework*.

The main objective of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the role community-based, nonfamilial IG programs have on the lives of participants post-program. The sub-objectives of this research aims to understand how participants experience the following: 1) social engagement, 2) benefits and barriers to voluntary kin relations, 3) mental and physical well-being, 4) community connection and involvement, 5) outlook on life, and 6) the role of COVID-19 on the IG relation. The sub-objectives that relate to the organizational and programmatic-related information include: 1) identification of moderating factors that contribute to the effectiveness of IG programs, 2) insight gained into the longer-term perspectives and impacts of IG programs, 3) fill the gap within the Canadian literature surrounding the impact that IG programs have on participants, and 4) provide recommendations based on the findings of this study.

The research questions for this study are centered on three populations within IG programming, which are the older adult participants, the younger participants, and the provider of the IG program. To gain a rich and holistic understanding of this social phenomenon, I interacted first-hand with participants and the provider to capture their lived experiences and perspectives. The purpose of this research is to better understand how community-based, nonfamilial IG opportunities impact the lives of participants, both

younger and older, as well as to gain a deeper understanding into the organizational attributes of IG programming.

The sub research questions include:

- (1) What are the benefits, challenges, and meaning of participating in an IG program for older adults while in the program and afterwards?
- (2) What are the benefits, challenges, and meaning of participating in an IG program for younger adults while in the program and afterwards?
- (3) What are the benefits and challenges of running, implementing, and maintaining IG programs for program providers?

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

This second chapter will include discussions related to the following: 1) definition of IG relations, 2) history of IG programming, 3) literature review process, 4) types of IG programs, 5) types of activities in IG programs, 6) outcomes of IG program participants, 7) promoting factors of IG programs, 8) challenges of IG programming, 9) role of fictive kin in IG programs, 10) theoretical frameworks applied to IG programming, 11) gaps in the literature, and 12) an overview of *Chapter 2*.

#### **2.1. Definition of IG Relations**

As previously mentioned, there is no consensus on the definition of IG programs. To date, there are many different definitions that aim to explain or describe IG programs. This section will provide an overview of the varying definitions of IG programs. Newman and Smith (1997) describe IG programs as a “human service that provides for systematic and deliberate interaction between persons at the opposite end of the human age continuum” (p. 3). In addition, Cohen-Mansfield and Jensen (2017) defined IG programs as “social vehicles that foster engagement between younger and older generations by offering opportunities to interact in mutually beneficial, planned activities in which there is a sharing of knowledge, skills, and experience” (p. 254). Recently, Murayama et al. (2019) defined IG programs as “a social service that involves the ongoing and purposeful exchange of resources between members of younger and older generations”, drawing inspiration from Newman and Smith (1997) as well as Kaplan et al.’s (2002) definition (p. 2). All the provided definitions highlight the varying focuses within IG programs. This, in fact, is what initiated the development of an IG inclusive working definition by the InterGenNS Project’s Steering Committee, which better reflects the nature of this study. The InterGenNS’s inclusive working IG definition includes programs, opportunities, events, or gathering places that, purposefully or organically, facilitate interaction between/among generations, looking beyond age to include persons with varying abilities, newcomers, and diverse community members. For the purposes of this study, I have

updated and revised the definition to the following working definition: social vehicles that facilitate mutually beneficial ongoing engagement, interaction, and exchange of resources, knowledge, skills, and experiences between older and younger generations in a social space through both purposeful and organic opportunities that include people with varying abilities and identities to form a meaningful connection.

## **2.2. History of IG Programming**

IG connections and relationships formed within the family unit as members of the family who usually lived in close proximity and who would naturally nurture and support one another. In *Chapter 1* it was highlighted that the following social forces contribute to an IG divide in North America: 1) the role of age segregation, 2) shifts in family structure and dynamics, and 3) geographical separation of families. It was not until the 1960's that social scientists began to identify a gap existing and widening between differing generations within and outside families that became of concern (Newman, 1997). As a result of this gap, separation, and lack of interactions between generations, issues related to siloed age-interactions, ageist attitudes, and stereotypes toward older adults arose (Newman, 1997). In the late 1960's and 1970's as a social response, IG programming was born in North America to purposefully create more opportunities for old and young to come together again and recreate the IG relations that had been absent (Newman, 1997). In fact, Newman (1997) argues that in the 1980's and 1990's IG programming was further developed to address more pressing social issues impacting younger and older populations. During this second phase, Newman (1997) reported that IG programs began targeting younger individuals experiencing the following challenges: 1) low self-esteem, 2) bullying, 3) poor school achievement, 4) struggling with literacy, 5) insufficient childcare systems, and 6) teen pregnancy (Newman, 1997). In addition, IG programs were built to support vulnerable older adults with the following: 1) loneliness, 2) isolation, 3) low self-esteem, and 4) inadequate social support systems (Newman, 1997). Therefore, IG programs aim to address complex social issues and challenges by bringing generations together as a vehicle to create a safe, inclusive, and supportive community environment for all ages. Today, IG programs continue to work towards this goal in a variety of mediums, which will be discussed in the following section.



## **2.3. Literature Review Process**

### **2.3.1. Search Process**

A review of empirical literature was completed in the fall of 2020, focusing on IG programs in the Canadian context. Relevant peer-reviewed journal articles were identified by using the following databases: a) Canadian Business & Current Affairs (CBCA) Database Complete, b) AgeLine, and c) PsycINFO. Database searching was completed on June 5th, 2020. A combination of the following keywords were included in searches in all the databases: “*intergenerational programs*”, “*intergenerational relationships*”, “*intergenerational connections*”, *intergeneration\**, *program\**, *evaluation*, *older adults*, and *aging, relation\**. Variations in search phrases were used to ensure that synonyms for the keywords were included, providing the most accurate representation of available articles that surround the research question. The asterisk was used to find various endings of a particular word and the quotations were used for phrase searching ensuring the words within the quotations would remain in that order. The empirical journal articles in the review were selected based on the following criteria: a) publication date ranging between 2005-2020, b) peer-reviewed in academic journals, c) Canadian-based research, d) available in English, e) central focus of the research was on nonfamilial IG programming and related sub-topics that relate to the purpose of this research.

For the purpose of this study, a second literature review took place in June of 2022 in order to capture international empirical evidence between the years of 2005-2022 using the same search strategy, databases, and criteria while being guided by the outlined objectives and purpose of the paper mentioned in *Chapter 1*.

### **2.3.2. Study Screening and Selection**

The titles of the literature items were screened using the keywords to identify a set of full-text articles to be reviewed regarding their relation to the study objectives, purpose, and eligibility criteria, aligning with the screening process outlined by Levac et al. (2010). A total of 3,148 articles were initially identified, of which 3,024 were excluded after eliminating duplicates as well as screening the titles and abstracts. This process resulted in

124 articles that were evaluated based on the inclusion criteria mentioned above. Articles were excluded if: a) full-text was unavailable, b) focus of the study did not relate to IG approaches specifically relating to nonfamilial IG programs, relationships, connections, and evaluation, c) English version was unavailable, d) and was not Canadian-based research. In total, 21 full-text articles were finally selected and reviewed to provide an understanding of the empirical literature that relates to IG programming. These 21 full-text articles will be included in this paper from the literature search that took place in 2020 (See Appendix D).

Pertaining to the second literature review, a total of 7,685 articles were initially identified after following the screening processes outlined by Levac et al. (2010). A total of 7,666 were excluded after eliminating duplicates as well as screening the titles and abstracts. This process resulted in 18 articles that were evaluated based on the inclusion criteria (See Appendix D). The same exclusion indicators as previously mentioned were applied. In total, 18 full-text articles were selected, reviewed, and included in this paper to provide an understanding of the empirical literature that relates to IG programming in a global context.

### **2.3.3. Inclusion of Grey Literature**

It is important to note that an international grey literature review was conducted to complement the empirical literature. The purpose of adding this information to the study was to capture and include specific examples of IG programs or opportunities that may not yet have been empirically reviewed or evaluated. Discussing both empirical and grey literature throughout this paper is an attempt to close the knowledge to practice gap. The search engine Google was used to identify various IG programs. A combination of the following keywords were included in searches: “*intergenerational programs*”, “*intergenerational relationships*”, “*intergenerational connections*”, “*intergenerational opportunity*”, *intergenerational*, “*generations*”, and “*name of continent/country*”. These terms allowed for information pertaining to IG programs in specific geographic regions around the world to be generated in Google. Potential grey literature to be included was screened first by the sitelink, then by site description, and finally by the site content itself.

The grey literature was then selected for inclusion based on the following criteria: 1) traceable online information source, 2) available in English, 3) provided enough information to populate at least half of the literature template, and 4) programs were active in 2021-2022. Exclusion took place if online information was 1) inaccessible, 2) not related to IG programming examples, 3) inadequate and resulted in the inability to fill in at least half of literature template, 4) unavailable in English, and 5) not updated since 2020. The literature template consisted of the following sections: a) name of IG program, b) access link, c) geographical location of IG program, d) delivery mode of IG program, e) type of IG program, f) participant demographics, g) participant numbers, h) activities, and i) brief program description. In total, this critical evaluation process of grey literature pertaining to IG programs around the world resulted in the identification of 113 IG programs out of which 73 were highlighted as best practice/innovative in nature (See Appendix E).

## **2.4. Types of IG Programs**

Types of IG programs have been categorized based on program setting. Eight categories of IG programs will be discussed in this paper: 1) community-based IG programs, 2) school-based IG programs, 3) facility-based IG programs, 4) co-located IG programs, 5) distance-based IG programs, 6) hybrid IG programs, and 7) housing-related IG programs. Before discussing program types in detail, there are few aspects that are worth noting.

Firstly, certain IG programs may take place in more than one setting type. For instance, the IG program: “Read and Make Read’ in France was both a community-based and school-based program as the program could take place in schools, leisure centers, nurseries, or libraries demonstrating that there is not always a single setting where programs occur. Moreover, it is important to highlight how integral partnerships and collaboration between sectors and services are as it relates to IG programming whether it is a partnership between an elementary school and a seniors centre or a long-term care facility and a university. It should also be noted that the role of participants varies in each IG program. For example, community-dwelling older adults or older adults in residential care settings may hold a volunteer role to support children in academics, whereas in other

IG programs youth may be developing and facilitating appropriate and meaningful IG programs that provide cognitive stimulation, social interaction, and physical movement among older adults residing in institutional care or in the community. Additionally, service-learning (a specific type of experiential learning) includes activities of community services in academic curricula which is then incorporated into IG programs in various settings (Aujla & Hamm, 2018). For instance, service-learning was integrated in an IG opportunity that included university students enrolled in a gerontology course at a university in the Midwest as the students and older adults with dementia spent time together by attending an IG art program called, the “Opening Minds Through Art (OMA)” Program (Yamashita, et al., 2013).

#### **2.4.1. Community-based IG Programs**

Community-based programs were identified to take place in the following locations based on grey and academic literature: a) libraries, b) community centres, c) adult day centres, d) youth centres, e) seniors centres (Moody & Phinney, 2012; Penick et al., 2014), f) public parks, g) farms (Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006), h) banquet halls (Dumbrell et al., 2007), i) theatre halls (Anderson et al., 2017), or j) neighbourhoods including homes of older adults (O’Dare et al., 2021). To showcase the breadth and depth of community-based IG programs, two examples will be highlighted from the grey literature. The “Front Step Project” at Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House in British Columbia, Canada brings together foster youth and older adults to form caring relationships through co-designing projects in the community. Whereas the “New Spin Intergenerational Café” in England takes a different approach by welcoming youth and community residing older adults to spend time interacting with a variety of activities that match their interest at a youth centre. It is important to note that community-based programs may involve formal community groups (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020), informal community groups (Snow & Tulk, 2020), community organizations, schools, or universities, which may assist in the logistics and longevity of the programming.

### **2.4.2. School-based IG Programs**

School-based programs were identified to take place in a school-type setting ranging from Early Education Centres to post-secondary education spaces. Many school-based IG programming involves engaging older adults in the school setting by taking on a volunteer role, mentorship role, tutoring role, or participating in interactive co-learning courses or workshops (Agmon et al., 2018; Babcock et al., 2017; Doiron & Lees, 2009; Freeman et al., 2020; Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Heydon, McKee & Susan O’Neill, 2017; Murayama et al., 2014; Santini et al., 2020; Wagner & Luger, 2021). It is important to note that these types of programs often include cognitively able community-dwelling older adults as it requires active mentorship, tutoring, and/or learning to take place with the younger counterpart. However, some of these programs focus on exposing youth/young adults to care-focused career opportunities related to gerontology/geriatric fields where they actively interact with older adults on a regular basis as a part of their schooling and in this respect the younger counterparts take on a more supportive role for the older adults. For instance, the “Health Care Explorers Program” in the United States provides young adults who are out of school, unemployed, and faced with multiple barriers with support in obtaining a career related to gerontology and/or geriatrics which includes hands on IG components. Therefore, school-based IG opportunities are quite broad as they can take place in the school setting but can also directly support career-related opportunities in the field of gerontology.

### **2.4.3. Facility-based IG Programs**

Facility-based IG programs take place in the following settings: a) nursing homes (Kim & Lee, 2017), b) long-term care facilities (Canning et al., 2018), c) assisted living facilities (Gardener & Alegre, 2019; Penick et al., 2014), d) retirement residences (Caspar et al., 2019; Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Yamashita et al., 2013), and e) adult day care facilities (Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018). This type of programming oftentimes includes older adults with specific vulnerabilities such as dementia or cognitive-related issues (Canning et al., 2018; Yamashita et al., 2013). Interestingly, a program in England called “Care Home Friends and Neighbours: Intergenerational Linking” brings together older

adults residing in care facilities with low socioeconomic status youth. Oftentimes the younger counterparts will travel to the facility to participate in the IG program as this allows for ease of program access for older adults which in turn limits barriers to access (Canning et al., 2018; Caspar et al., 2019; Gardener & Alegre, 2019).

#### **2.4.4. Co-located IG Programs**

Co-located programs take place in facilities that allow for services for both older adults and children to take place under one roof creating an IG community in an indoor environment (Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017; Jarrott et al., 2008). Therefore, this creates a natural space for IG interaction to take place as well as formal organized opportunities through programming. It is important to note that the empirical studies that discussed these types of programs were from the United States (Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017; Jarrott et al., 2008; Weintraub & Killian, 2007). IG centres like the Bethlehem Intergenerational Centre (Michigan, United States), Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Intergenerational Centre (Maryland, United States), and the St. Ann Centre for Intergenerational Care (Wisconsin, United States) are notable examples of IG centres identified in the grey literature search. A unique approach that relates very closely to IG centres are multigenerational homes that act as a multifunctional meeting space to bring all ages and abilities together in local neighbourhoods. “Mehrgenerationhaus Maltendorf” in Austria is an example of a multigenerational house that facilitates opportunities for the community to get to know one another better via joint activities that focus on togetherness and fills the gap existing between generations. IG centres and multigenerational homes focus more on multigenerational interactions as they commonly welcome all ages, and do not merely focus on the exchange between younger and older generations.

In addition to the development of IG centres, childcare services are being delivered at care facilities for older adults creating co-located opportunities for IG interactions. An example of this is “Harbour Landing Village” located in Saskatchewan, Canada that offers a range of supports from independent living to palliative care. Co-located opportunities have integrated grade school into care facilities for older adults. Two examples worth highlighting are “iGen” at Sherbrooke Community Centre (Saskatchewan, Canada) and

“Age to Age Classroom” at Windsor Place of Coffeyville (Kansas, United States). Co-located programming consists of a diverse range of opportunities including co-located centres, IG centres, multigenerational community homes, classrooms in care facilities, and childcare in long term care.

#### **2.4.5. Distance-based IG Programs**

Distance-based programs primarily began to take place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The initial literature search that took place in 2020 had not captured the IG program adaptations that took place due to the pandemic; however, the more recent expanded empirical and grey literature research shone light on the shift in IG programming that took place during this public health crisis. The distance-based IG programs identified in the empirical literature and grey literature included telephone, letter writing, and virtual interactions (Carcavilla et al., 2020; Gerardo et al., 2019; Martin, 2019; Meuser et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2022). The focuses of these distance-based IG programs were to facilitate IG dialogue and relationships to mitigate isolation and loneliness among older adults, address misconceptions of aging, and reduce negative attitudes towards generations (Carcavilla et al., 2020; Gerardo et al., 2019; Martin, 2019; Meuser et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2022). The “Black Community Resource Centre (BCRC)” in Montreal, Canada has created an IG program that includes interactive online IG workshops that focus on information and recreation opportunities surrounding aging issues and providing opportunities for elders to be leaders in the Black community. Additionally, the “Sharing Time with Elders (STEP)” Project (Washington, United States) uses Zoom to bring together youth and elders to listen to and document traditional stories that are inspired by the Squaxin Island First Salmon Ceremony. It is possible that with distance-based programming there is an opportunity to include hard-to-reach participants in programming as the program can expand outside of a real-life community and into the online community which can be much more expansive.

#### **2.4.6. Hybrid IG Programs**

Hybrid IG programs combine in-person program delivery and virtual program delivery, enabling participants to choose which format they would like to participate in.

Many IG programs began utilizing this program delivery format as COVID-19 restrictions began to ease as it allows individuals to attend programming based on their comfort level. In fact, a variety of hybrid IG programming both school-based and community-based, was identified in the grey literature. The “Intergenerational Volunteer Program” at VISIONS (New York, United States) is a hybrid community-based IG program that brings together student volunteers and older adults who are visually impaired or blind. This is done virtually or in-person to combat isolation and loneliness. An example of a hybrid school-based IG program is “Friends in Schools Helping (FISH)” Program (Virginia, United States) where adults mentor students who require individualized attention with academic work either in a classroom or online setting. Hybrid programs can be integrated in any type of IG program and allow the participants to actively choose their participation level.

#### **2.4.7. Housing-related IG Opportunities**

##### ***IG Co-housing***

Co-housing is “a housing group which involves a number of independent homes with the addition of common facilities, such as common rooms and open spaces” that support living together in a community as well as independently (Lietaert 2010; Vedel-Petersen et al., 1988, pg. 101). The development of co-housing took place in Denmark in the early 1970’s as lowrise-dense-clustered housing called Sættedammen (Andersen, 1985; Nygaard, 1984). Since then, various co-housing types have evolved and expanded widely outside of Denmark and Europe to many countries (Lang et al., 2018; Tummers, 2016). Recently, there has been research on IG co-housing globally (Czischke 2018; Lang et al., 2018). However, certain countries are slower to adopt IG co-housing or turn to other forms of IG housing (Labit & Dubost, 2016). For instance, Germany adopts the IG co-housing model more so than France as Germany hopes to facilitate IG solidarity between seniors and families as a response to the current “family crisis” in Germany (Labit & Dubost, 2016). Beck (2019) discusses the importance of the common house as an IG co-housing opportunity since this acts as a common space where residents can dine, share activities together, and have meetings all in a non-hierarchical process (Beck, 2019; McCamant & Durrett, 2011). In Zamani, South Africa there is a co-housing opportunity that is based on



co-housing principles, welcoming all ages, and sustainability. This specific co-housing opportunity was built so residents enter the housing through the common house to reinforce the communal and community aspects of this type of living as well as to create a more socially active and inviting living space. Additionally, in Wisconsin, United States the Hope and A Future Neighbourhood housing community was developed for seniors and young families at risk. This housing community was built to facilitate IG connections and relationships based on the indoor and outdoor community spaces including a commercial kitchen, multipurpose room that can seat 100 people at tables, and communal garden to name a few. Co-housing opportunities create a natural IG environment that facilitates organic and planned opportunities for generations to interact with one another where they live.

### ***IG Homesharing***

IG home sharing refers to older adults sharing spare room(s) in their place of residence with younger individuals requiring housing (Housing Innovation Lab, 2018). In addition to the physical space, there is an exchange of service for the older adult providing a living accommodation for the younger individual (Kreickemeier & Martinez, 2001). Younger adults and older adults are oftentimes matched based on their common lifestyles, interests, etc. to create a mutually beneficial living environment as well as foster IG relationships and support (Fox, 2010). The IG homeshare program called “Vivir y Convivir” in Barcelona, Spain focuses on providing shared accommodations between older adults and young university students for at least a one-year period. The exchanges that take place between the older adult and younger individual are company, time, and personal help resulting in no economic exchange between both parties. A unique aspect of this homeshare program is that social workers and counselors are involved in all aspects of the program to ensure both the older adult and the younger individual are comfortable and satisfied. “Ensemble2generations” in France offers both co-housing type and homesharing type housing opportunities where younger adults reside in older adults’ homes, in retirement homes, and in IG buildings. Homesharing allows older adults to age in place while reducing the risk of social isolation and providing opportunities for companionship, safety, and friendship (Gonzales et al., 2020).

## **2.5. Types of Activities in IG Programs**

Types of IG activities discussed in this paper are as follows: 1) arts-focused activities, 2) education-focused activities, 3) companionship and conversation, and 4) additional activity types identified in grey literature. Before discussing the different IG activity types, it must be noted that not all activities are mutually exclusive. For instance, an IG program may integrate an arts-based activity and an education-based activity together. Moreover, certain activities may allow for participants to play an extremely active role in the IG program whereas other activities may be more passive in nature for participants. IG activities must be sensitive to the ability and background of participants to ensure the activity is appropriate, meaningful, engaging, and interesting for all (Caspar et al., 2019; Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020). Generally, IG activities focus on joint interest or commonality among participants to enhance engagement with the program. For instance, a course called Generation to Generation brought generations together to work on solving pressing societal issues that are of concern to all such as adapting to a rapidly aging population (Wagner & Luger, 2021). It is important to note that technology was oftentimes integrated into the activity itself as a facilitator or a communication tool of the IG program rather than being identified as an activity alone (Carcavilla et al., 2020; Freeman et al., 2020; Gerardo et al., 2019; Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017; Heydon, McKee & Susan O'Neill, 2017; Meuser et al., 2021). Certain IG activities are rooted in spiritual or cultural elements that inspire the activity types that are incorporated in the program (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Freeman et al., 2020; Gabel et al., 2016). With the exception of the last activity type, additional activity types identified in grey literature will be presented by each activity type including both empirical and grey literature.

### **2.5.1. Arts-focused Activities**

Several IG activities mentioned in the empirical literature are related to the arts. For example, an informal fibre art group and an “Arts, Health and Seniors (AHS)” program for seniors was able to make IG connections by discussing and sharing art with community members and artists (Moody & Phinney, 2012; Snow & Tulk, 2020). In addition, activities like community theatre, dance, and singing were the central focus of IG programs with the

goal of connecting older and younger adults in a creative and interactive way (Anderson et al., 2017; Canning et al., 2018; Heydon, McKee & Susan O'Neill, 2017; Beynon et al., 2013). Moreover, these art practices can also be a component of an IG event or programming. For instance, at an IG Gala Event university students and older adults participated in sing-alongs and dancing activities (Dumbrell et al., 2007). As well, singing was used as a communication tool for IG programs that focused on developing educational multimodal literacy projects (Heydon, McKee & Susan O'Neill, 2017).

The grey literature identified additional findings pertaining to art-based activities that should be noted. The activities included in IG programs that were art-based included the following: discussing and interpreting music, playing music, doing art through technology, making art of various forms, college-level art class, integrating music and movement, photography, drumming, utilizing different art techniques, painting, singing, crafts, and puppet shows. There are a wide range of art-based activities included in IG programming; however, it seems as though the breadth of art-based activities is showcased more in the grey literature. This could be because there were over 100 different programs within the grey literature search and less than half in the empirical literature. It should also be noted that empirical literature does not always provide program specific information such as activity type.

### **2.5.2. Education-focused Activities**

A variety of education-focused activities were included in IG programs that aimed to enhance understanding surrounding a variety of academic and non-academic topics. Pertaining to the empirical literature, digital media was used to present more literacy options as well as provide an opportunity for participants to learn how to use new tools by sharing experiences through storytelling in an IG environment (Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017; Freeman et al., 2020). Similarly, a variety of service-learning projects were identified that involved university students co-creating projects with older adults as well as pen pal programs that addressed misconceptions surrounding age and aimed to reduce isolation and loneliness during COVID-19 (Martin, 2019; Meuser et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2022). In addition, communication through distance-based channels like letter writing and

videoconferencing took place where grade school students and older adults practiced communicating a new language, literacy, history, and also discussed career experiences (Carcavilla et al., 2020). Certain education-based IG programs were led by older adults where they would host workshops on nutrition and financial education as well as interact with university students to promote IG relationships and improve attitudes towards aging (Gerardo et al., 2019). Moreover, older adults and university students were brought together by enrolling in a university-level course that allows for IG contact and collaboration within the classroom setting, which is pivotal as this involves senior citizens as equal partners in the educational learning process (Agmon et al., 2018; Wagner & Luger, 2021). Moreover, some IG programs include older adults volunteering and assisting young children with reading and literacy skills in a school setting (Doiron & Lees, 2009; Murayama et al., 2014). Mentorship is a possible outcome through IG learning programs, as older adult entrepreneurs would mentor young adults who are unemployed, not receiving education or vocational training to facilitate knowledge sharing for older adults while the younger adults obtained transferrable skills (Santini et al., 2020). Moreover, environmental education was incorporated through farming and gardening activities during an IG program, whereby retired farmers and students worked together in the natural environment to cultivate environmental IG learnings (Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006).

The grey literature identified additional findings pertaining to education-based activities that are worth highlighting. There was substantial overlap between the empirical and grey literature findings related to education-based activities in IG programming. The following education-based activities were identified in the grey literature: education on food security, storytelling through traditional and digital means, reading together in a book club, academic mentoring and/or tutoring, life mentorship, students learning how to plan IG activities, young adults gaining practical experience to work in the field of gerontology, writing skills through letter writing, reading activities, public speaking opportunities, completing interviews, documenting stories, online workshops with information on aging and recreation, and providing education on digital literacy and media. Therefore, it seems as though IG programs primarily include activities that are educational in nature over other activity types.

### **2.5.3. Companionship and Conversation**

It should be noted that some IG programs merely focus on interaction, companionship, and relationship building through conversation and experience sharing or reminiscing rather than taking part in specific activities (Kim & Lee, 2017). This allows for meaningful engagement between both parties to take place in-person or remote by spending quality time together. This is something that is usually incorporated in each IG program and is a very important aspect; however, it is not always explicit.

### **2.5.4. Additional Activity Types Identified in Grey Literature**

Uniquely, the grey literature search captured additional types of activities beyond art-based, education-based, and companionship-focused. The types of activities that were identified solely in the grey literature were 1) outdoor/nature-based activities, 2) food-based activities, 3) game-related activities, 4) movement-related activities, and 5) activities to support instrumental acts of daily living (IADLs). An overview of each of the five additional activities identified in the grey literature will now be discussed. Outdoor/nature-based activities include gardening at a communal garden or tending to the local farm/garden located at the IG co-housing opportunities. In addition to this, residents of IG co-housing opportunities would also spend time together while in nature such as bird watching. Food-related activities were also identified including meal sharing, cooking, baking, and communal dining. Most of these activities were specific to co-housing opportunities; however, some took place at community-based and co-located programs. Games-based activities were incorporated through chess, brain games, pool, table tennis, indoor curling, and play with toys. In addition, movement-based activities were integrated in programming such as exercising through dance, Tai Chi, yoga, and walks. Finally, IG programs included activities to support IADLs which consisted of tasks that allow one to function daily in one's community including but not limited to food preparation, housekeeping, doing laundry, shopping for groceries, using the telephone, managing medications, managing finances, and using transportation (O'Donovan & Morris, 2020). IG programs also included activities that related to a variety of IADLs including shopping,

home maintenance, pet care, chores, errands, cooking, maintaining the garden/yardwork, and going on leisure outings.

## **2.6. Outcomes for Participants**

### **2.6.1. Outcomes for Older Adults**

The participation of older adults in IG programs allows them to be active members in the community by creating an outlet that facilitates the voicing of opinions as well as engaging in sharing life experiences with different generations in various contexts (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Freeman et al., 2020; Gerardo et al., 2019; Santini et al., 2020). This engagement enables older adults to express generativity through IG programs (Freeman et al., 2020; Gabel et al., 2016; Martin, 2019; Murayama et al., 2014). The term generativity was first introduced by Erikson's (1950) model of adult psychosocial development which was defined as taking action to establish and guide the next generation by passing down knowledge, values, and morals to find purpose and meaning of the self. IG opportunities provide older adults with an outlet to pass down thoughts, values, and experiences and in turn contributes to strengthening meaningfulness which mediates depressive mood (Murayama et al., 2014). Moreover, Indigenous elders value and play a pivotal role in IG relations specifically passing down cultural and traditional teachings. In an IG format, IG initiatives create an opportunity for elders to pass on culture, tradition, lessons, and knowledge in an IG format to younger generations to achieve cultural continuity and generativity (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Freeman et al., 2020; Gabel et al., 2016).

Participating in IG programs impacts the well-being of older adults as engaging in these opportunities results in increased self-esteem, positive emotions, improved mood, sense of self, social engagement, social connectedness, engagement in activity, motivation to learn, mentoring capacities, social inclusion, leadership, and active aging attitude (Carcavilla et al., 2020; Galbraith et al., 2015; Gerardo et al., 2019; Penick et al., 2014; Santini et al., 2020; Snow & Tulk, 2020). Not to mention, older adults express that participating in IG opportunities allowed them to learn from younger individuals and be

part of something beyond self, which resulting in a pleasure of anticipating for the next time they would see the younger generation (Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006). Older adults mentioned that participating in a school-based IG program allowed for an increased sense of knowledge and provided the opportunity for them to share about what being old was in an IG academic environment (Agmon et al., 2018). This IG program offered older adults the opportunity to share their knowledge and participate meaningfully in higher education settings that they may not have had access to before (Agmon et al., 2018). Importantly, 96% of older adults who shared their home with a younger individual reported feeling less lonely compared to living alone and 86% of older adults sharing their home felt happier than before being involved in the homeshare opportunity (Fox, 2021). It should be noted that functional limitations of older adults can make engaging in certain activities challenging and in turn result in a barrier to engagement (Heydon, McKee & Susan O'Neill, 2017). It is imperative that the activities in the IG program are suitable and accessible for all abilities (Caspar et al., 2019; Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017; Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Jarrott et al., 2019; Knight et al., 2014; Murayama et al., 2019; Newman & Smith, 1997). IG opportunities provide a variety of unique benefits for older adults that can combat health and social challenges that are of concern among this population.

### **2.6.2. Outcomes for Younger Participants**

IG programs provide the opportunity for younger individuals to interact with older adults, which in turn facilitates an increased understanding and awareness of older adults' lives. Through participating in IG programming, younger participants identified the many similarities and commonalities they shared with older adults rather than focusing on the differences (Canning et al., 2018; Gardener & Alegre, 2019).

Additionally, the engagement and discussion with older adults in the IG programs provide the opportunity to break gendered and ageist stereotypes and attitudes that younger participants may hold (Agmon et al., 2018; Gardener & Alegre, 2019; Gerardo et al., 2019). In fact, after younger participants were involved in the IG program, they viewed older adults more positively and capable, and they better understood the perceptions of older adults, demonstrating the powerful impact that these programs have on changing the

perceptions of youth (Caspar et al., 2019; Canning et al., 2018; Gardener & Alegre, 2019; Meuser et al., 2021; Wagner & Luger, 2021). In addition, participating in IG programs enabled younger participants to improve teamwork and transferrable skills as well as the ability to work with a diverse group of individuals (Galbraith et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2022; Santini et al., 2020).

IG programs not only foster positive change in perceptions but also cultivate agency in the younger participants. For instance, after participating in the program there was a significant increase for students to spend time with older adults outside of the family as well as an increased interest in knowing more about their grandparents' history (Babcock et al., 2017). Therefore, the change in students' perceptions in turn resulted in them being change agents by applying what they learned through their involvement with the program to their daily lives (Gardener & Alegre, 2019).

Younger individuals participating in IG programs resulted in increased confidence in communication, wellness, improved mood, enjoyment, character building, ego, positive emotion, better adjustment to school environment, trust in older adults, respect and admiration for older adults, affection, and ability to provide comfort to older adults (Gerardo et al., 2019; Kim & Lee, 2017; Miller et al., 2022; Santini et al., 2020). Canning et al. (2018) and Peterat and Mayer-Smith (2006) identified that younger counterparts looked forward to seeing older adults at the next session. It is important to note that IG programs that include educational components that focus on cognitive deterioration among older adults emphasize primarily negative aspects, which may result in students displaying more negative attitudes toward the gerontology field, highlighting the importance of integrating contact and exposure to older adults when being educated about the field (Yamashita et al., 2013). Therefore, integrating practical aspects can result in more positive attitudes toward older adults as it allows students to interact with older adults first-hand and construct their own perceptions (Miller et al., 2022; Yamashita et al., 2013).

### **2.6.3. Mutual Outcomes for Participants**

Additionally, participating in IG programming creates an IG space or context where participants can interact with and learn from one another through their interactions (Moody



& Phinney, 2012). In fact, mutual learning/co-learning took place in various IG programs through a variety of activities from cultural teachings to navigating a global pandemic (Anderson et al., 2017; Freeman et al., 2020; Meuser et al., 2021). In addition to mutual learning/co-learning, IG programs provide an opportunity for bi-directional mentoring to take place among participants, which may in turn play a role in lifelong learning, expanding identity, or discovering new interests (Santini et al., 2020; Snow & Tulk, 2020). These interactions that take place among generations facilitate meaningful relationships to develop and grow (Caspar et al., 2020; Freeman et al., 2020; Moody & Phinney, 2012; Dumbrell et al., 2007; Beck, 2019). One way for these relationships to grow is through reciprocal giving between generations fostered by mechanisms related to generativity (Knight et al., 2014).

Therefore, IG programs can ignite a meaning making process among differing generations to in turn form relationships and bonds that continue over time (McKee & Scheffel, 2019). IG programs contribute to the development of an age-inclusive community as IG programs actively facilitate community connectedness and community building, expand social networks, social inclusion, social cohesion, and social capital, as well as give rise to social equality (Anderson et al., 2017; Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Moody & Phinney, 2012; Snow & Tulk, 2020). In turn, these programs bring a strong sense of meaning not only at the individual-level but at the community-level as well since IG programs create an IG context/social space, in an age-inclusive environment both inside the program itself and outside of the program into the larger community (Freeman et al., 2020; Moody & Phinney, 2012). As a result, IG programs can enhance feelings of self-worth, empathy, support for others, self-concept, belonging to something bigger, positive attitudes and reduce stereotypical thinking towards opposing generations as well as reduce feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression, contributing to increased well-being and quality of life among the generations in the community for both older adult participants and younger adult participants (Anderson et al., 2017; Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Jarrott, 2011; Meuser et al., 2021). These positive mutual outcomes of IG programs can in turn foster IG solidarity through IG interactions (Labit & Dobust, 2016; Sánchez, García, Díaz, Duaigües, 2011).

## **2.7. Promoting Factors of IG Programs**

### **2.7.1. Facilitators**

A variety of factors have been identified within the empirical literature that contribute to successful IG programs. It is essential that those who are involved in the execution of the IG program are provided with adequate training (Caspar et al., 2019; Galbraith et al., 2015; Jarrott, 2011). Providing this training and education will ensure that the activities are meaningful, appropriate, engaging, and interesting for all participants while keeping their community as well as their culture in mind (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Jarrott et al., 2019). This will actively prevent low levels of involvement because facilitators fail to include participants and make them aware of the program goals and that their participation is voluntary (Ayala et al., 2007; Weintraub & Killian, 2007). Moreover, having strong administrative support assists in the facilitation of training and developing of IG programs (Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Jarrott, 2011). Focusing on developing a high contact IG program is imperative as it has been highlighted as a key facilitator to create more impactful programs (Bales, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000).

Interestingly, the presence of technology is identified as both a facilitator and a barrier to IG programming by Cornect-Benoit et al. (2020). However, incorporating technology or digital elements in IG programming has also been identified as a mediating element of IG relationships as well as acted as a vehicle to bring generations together successfully (Carcavilla et al., 2020; Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017; Heydon, McKee & Susan O'Neill, 2017; Meuser et al., 2021). It is important to note that awareness and guidelines regarding the proper and productive use and access of technology may be an important opportunity to address the engagement gap between older and younger generations (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Meuser et al., 2021).

### **2.7.2. Sustainability**

The sustainability of IG programs is an important factor regarding longevity, maintenance, and growth. Interestingly, programs that align with the structure of an informal community of practice demonstrate sustainability (Snow & Tulk, 2020). In fact,

Jarrott et al., (2019) identified the following key factors to increase IG program sustainability: 1) generations collaborate on IG programming, 2) participants take part in decision making, 3) participants are prepared for and reflect on activities, 4) activities reflect participants' interests and backgrounds, 5) activities are age and role appropriate, 6) activities facilitate meaning-making processes, 7) social and physical environment promotes interaction, 8) participation is voluntary, and 9) facilitator documents and communicates about IG programming. In addition, grounding IG programs in strong pedagogies and community contexts, incorporating rigorous tools designed to measure a variety of outcomes as well as including participants with varying abilities and collaborating within the organization and outside the organization with partners can promote IG program sustainability (Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Kaplan, 2002; Lee et al., 2020; Murayama et al., 2014).

## **2.8. Challenges of IG Programming**

### **2.8.1. Barriers**

There are many factors that present challenges to the development or maintenance of IG programs. For example, resources, accessibility, staff knowledge, and lack of education on the benefits of IG programs as well as indifferent attitudes of staff, participants, and the general public present barriers (Ayala et al., 2007; Beynon et al., 2013). As a result, these barriers hinder the development of IG programs even though there is a substantial interest. A more detailed overview of these challenges will be highlighted in *Chapter 4, Section 4.13 Programmatic Attributes for Sustainability Summary*. In addition, there are concerns regarding health and safety regulations, transportation availability, facility use or spaces, and personal issues which impede the implementation of IG programs at an organizational level (Beynon et al., 2013). Not to mention, organizations highlighted that accessing individuals with the experience to conduct IG programs in a systematic way is extremely difficult (Beynon et al., 2013).

Issues of health status and physical functioning in older adults can make engaging in IG programs difficult for residents in long-term care settings (Heydon, McKee & Susan

O'Neill, 2017). The emotional fear in older adults and younger individuals of the Anishinaabe community of Wiikwemkoong results in hesitation to become involved in IG programs (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020). Moreover, Cornect-Benoit et al. (2020) also identified that policies were viewed as a barrier to people of the Anishinaabe community of Wiikwemkoong regarding the facilitation of IG interactions as policies pertaining to funding were identified as obstructing inclusivity, especially pertaining to generations within the community.

The high prevalence of empirical literature on short-term IG programs poses a barrier to understanding the long-term impacts of IG programs on participants (Agmon et al., 2018; Babcock et al., 2017; Dumbrell et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2020). The sheer diversity of IG programs presents a unique opportunity to better understand the nuances within each program; however, evaluation challenges inhibit progression in this inquiry (Lee et al., 2020).

### **2.8.2. Evaluation Concerns**

The current state of evaluation of IG programs is lacking, and improvement and expansion is required (Babcock et al., 2017; Beynon et al., 2013; Jarrott et al., 2008). Due to the lack of evaluation tools that have indicators that measure outcomes of IG programs, researchers often turn to self-assessment measures and outcome measures that focus on general perceptions and attitude change (Ayala et al., 2007; Babcock et al., 2017; Jarrott, 2011; Jarrott et al., 2019). Majority of the research on impact of IG programs evaluates the effect on only one generation. More evaluation is required on the mutual impact and the mere impact of IG programs on both generations (Lee et al., 2020). Qualitative research methods are used most often when assessing IG programs as they provide in-depth insight into the experiences of participants involved in the programs. However, more quantitative studies are needed to evaluate IG programs as there is a lack of empirical studies due to the lack of standardized quantitative measures and sample sizes that are too small to perform statistics analysis (Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Jarrott, 2011; Lee et al., 2020). Jarrott et al. (2008) expanded the Intergenerational Observational Scale (IOS) by incorporating theory and achieving interrater reliability to measure behaviour and effective outcomes of

the older adults and children that participate in IG programs. This is a step in the right direction towards improving quantitative measures that can be used as an evaluation tool for assessing IG programs. It should also be noted that several studies neglect to mention challenges or limitations of the IG programs, which limits the scope for identifying areas of improvement (Jarrott, 2011). It is imperative that the evaluation of IG programs continues to be an area of future research to ensure that the impact of these programs on generations is accurately evaluated.

## **2.9. Role of Fictive Kin Rather Than Volunteer Kin in IG Programs**

IG programs have the potential to foster fictive kin relations among generations. Johnson (1999) defined fictive kin as “nonkin, imaginary kin, “as if” kin, or “pretend” relatives ... who assume family-like roles” (as cited in Allen et al., 2011, p. 1159). It should be noted that the term fictive kin has been criticized as the word “fictive” itself may allude to illegitimate relationships which can perpetuate stigmatization (Braithwaite et al., 2010). Therefore, using the term “voluntary kin” throughout this paper is more appropriate as this definition aims to capture the “mutuality of selection, rather than [framing this concept in an] asymmetrical” fashion (Braithwaite et al., 2010). Even though the term volunteer kin will be used throughout this paper, findings by Allen et al. (2011) that use the term “fictive kin” should not be excluded as their work contributes immensely to this focus area. The concept of volunteer kin argues that people can construct family or “do” family, demonstrating that family is a fluid and dynamic process that goes beyond the traditional nuclear family and is inclusive and diverse (Allen et al., 2011). This in turn allows people to possess an active role by choosing to incorporate nonrelatives as kin through substitution mechanisms in their biological or legal family to serve a purpose or meet a need, either affective or instrumental (Allen et al., 2011). Allen et al. (2011) identified that “reveal that older adults from both mainstream and marginalized families expanded kin reinterpretation practices as a means of adapting to impermanence in family ties” (p.1156). It has been identified by Voorpostel (2013) that the prevalence of volunteer kin relations is higher among older age groups due to absence of close family, never having married, or being widowed or divorced which were all important predictors of having volunteer kin relations.

Therefore, for older adults to cope with the ever-changing family dynamics, they actively substitute others into their family spheres to reconnect with what had been lost or missing.

Braithwaite et al. (2010) identified four main types of voluntary kin: 1) substitute family, 2) supplemental family, 3) convenience family, and 4) extended family. Substitute family took place when one did not have contact with their biological and legal family members due to death or fragmentation. The second type of voluntary kin is supplemental family whereby one maintains close ties with biological or legal family as well as their voluntary kin; however, those biological or legal ties have been identified as deficient. Voluntary kin as convenience family develops in a specific context, time, or stage of life; therefore, these relationships are bound to time and/or place and evolve through life circumstance and situation. Lastly, extended family kin includes the blending of biological family and volunteer family, which results in a strengthening of both family types. All types of volunteer family identified by Braithwaite et al. (2010) have the potential to be developed through IG programs.

Additionally, Allen et al. (2011) developed a kin reinterpretation typology that describes the fictive kin process for five circumstances. The first typology is named kin promotion whereby non-biological or non-legal kin are promoted to a closer kinship. Second is kin exchange where biological or legal ties are exchanged in the kin hierarchy; therefore, one's sister can represent more of a mother figure (Allen et al., 2011). Kin retention includes close kin ties that are retained despite family fragmentation through divorce (Allen et al., 2011). Fourth is kin loss where the potential for relationship or reinterpretation is lost due to losing physical or psychological contact with the kin member (Allen et al., 2011). The last typology, which relates most closely to non-kin IG relations, is non-kin conversation whereby friends and others are converted to close kin (Allen et al., 2011). IG programs can actively facilitate volunteer kin relations to substitute kin loss mechanisms as well as foster non-kin conversations between generations. For instance, Weintraub & Killian (2007) identified that using kin-like names like grandma and grandpa seem to strengthen feelings of familialism through non-kin conversation.

## **2.10. Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical concepts of generativity and intergroup contact theory, as well as the life course perspective of aging were used to guide the research questions for this study. It should be noted that the theory of generativity (Erikson; 1950; Knight et al., 2014; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) and intergroup contact theory (Allport 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) are the primary theories highlighted in this paper. The life course perspective (Elder, 1998; 2000) was used as an overarching guide. The following theories identified above and their relationship to IG relations will be discussed in detail below.

### **2.10.1. Generativity**

Erikson's (1950) model of adult psychosocial development first introduced the term generativity. Erikson's (1950) model aimed to outline successful involvement in one's relationships, work, and community to achieve healthy aging. Therefore, Erikson (1950) proposed that individuals would go through eight psychosocial developmental stages from infancy to death. The seventh stage relates most to this paper and IG relation which represents mid-life and consists of generativity vs. stagnation. Erikson (1950) described generativity as taking action to establish and guide the next generation by passing down knowledge, values, and morals so one can find purpose and meaning of the self. In contrast, stagnation is where one fails to contribute to the world through relationships, work, or community involvement, resulting in feeling unproductive and disconnected with the generations in their communities (Erikson, 1950). It is important to note that since Erikson introduced his model in 1950, generativity has been studied and expanded on from many perspectives. The definition of generativity that aligns most closely with this study is defined by Rubinstein et al. (2014) as "creat[ing] a point of connection between or among individuals through the transfer of values, knowledge, beliefs, moral values, or other cultural constructs that are partible, moving from one person to another" (p. 549).

One of the most notable contributions to the theory of generativity is the conceptual framework by McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992). McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) created the first multifaceted psychosocial conceptual framework of generativity that

focuses on goals of providing for the next generation. This conceptual framework united and systematically organized the work by Becker (1973), Browning (1975), Kotre (1984), McAdams (1985), and Peterson and Stewart (1990) that related to the theory of generativity (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). McAdams and de St. Aubin's (1992) conceptual framework on generativity includes seven psychosocial, empirical facets: 1) cultural demand, 2) inner desire, 3) concern, 4) belief, 5) commitment, 6) action, and 7) narration. Cultural demand and internal desire are the two motivating factors that drive generativity (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Cultural demand includes developmental expectations that are normative and age-graded, encompassing societal factors that are external to the individual (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Moreover, inner desire can be described as a need, drive, or instinct to produce a desire, creating agency and communion (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Agency is the desire to spend time in assisting others who will outlive the self and communion is being of important use to others (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). The two motivational factors of cultural demand and inner desire come together to create the third facet which is the conscious concern for the next generation. Furthermore, commitment is taking that concern and establishing generative goals and decisions for the next generation. In fact, commitment for future generations can be enhanced or undermined by a belief in the goodness of humankind (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). This added layer of belief is derived from what Erikson (1964) referred to as "belief in the species" (p. 267). Generative commitment initiates generative action which can be expressed by creating (giving birth), maintaining (preservation of good traditions/rituals that link generations to create continuity), or offering (the act of passing on to the next generation) (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). The last facet is narration where the generative individual finds identity, purpose, and meaning of life through life stories. This narrative is constructed and reconstructed throughout the life course including elements from the past, present, and perceived future (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Narration acts as an outlet of expression regarding what the adult plans to do in the future to leave a legacy for future generations. This process identifies a sense of ending of the self; however, through narration one prepares for some of the self to live on through one's generative efforts.



There is interrelation between the psychosocial facets of concern, commitment, belief, action, and narrative facets (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Therefore, the model depicts a multiple perspective view of generativity – people are generative in different ways. In addition, this model is unique as it embeds the adult life in the sociohistorical context; thus, generativity is not located within the individual. Rather, generativity is a relational construct that links the individual and the social world and cultural demand, moving beyond the scope of a micro-level theory (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Therefore, McAdams and de St. Aubin's (1992) conceptual model counters Erikson's (1950) work and aligns more with Kotre's (1984) work regarding the fact that generativity occurs during one's adult life as individuals grow older and cannot be limited to a stage that occurs during mid-life development. In fact, McAdams and de St. Aubin's (1992) work identified that generativity may become more salient in adults as they grow older due to the influence of cultural demand. Therefore, this showcases the relevancy of McAdams and de St. Aubin's (1992) theory as it pertains to the older adult demographic.

The theory of generativity is present in literature on IG relations beyond one's family sphere. For instance, it was identified that sharing and offering facilitates interactions and contributions, which in turn results in the acts of giving and receiving to take place in tandem (Knight et al., 2014). These reciprocal acts that generations share with one another allow older adults to express generativity by taking action (offering) and narrating with younger individuals which contributes to developing their identities through taking part in meaningful mutual activities (Knight et al., 2014; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). It is important to mention the key importance of time as the following psychosocial facets of concern, belief, and commitment for the younger generation must develop in a sociohistorical context. In addition, the empirical literature identifies that IG programs provide older adults with the opportunity to demonstrate and achieve generativity with non-kin younger individuals (Carcavilla et al., 2020; Martin, 2019). Moreover, Murayama et al. (2014) highlighted the important role generativity has in IG relations as generativity was indicated to contribute to strengthening meaningfulness among IG relations. This present study aims to further explore the role that the concept of generativity plays in the development of IG relations.

### **2.10.2. Intergroup Contact Theory**

Beginning in the 1930s, “social scientists proposed that intergroup contact – contact between members of different groups – provides a way to overcome intergroup tensions and conflict” (Christ & Kauff, 2019, p. 145). Allport (1954) first developed the intergroup contact hypothesis which identifies the necessary aspects to promote positive contact between members of differing age groups. This theory has four tenets: 1) equal status, 2) mutual interdependence, 3) acquaintance potential, and 4) institutional support. Thus, Allport (1954) suggests that contact alone may not be enough to improve perspectives between different age groups; however, ensuring these mechanisms are facilitated in the program environment can result in optimal contact between generations.

The first tenet (Allport, 1954), equal status refers to IG programs having no age-based hierarchy where both age groups are learning from one another as well as sharing their skills. The course “Social Activism and Old Age: From Exclusion to Inclusion” at the University of Haifa in Israel brings older adults and younger adult university students together through a university-level course that allows for IG contact and collaboration within the classroom setting, involving senior citizens as equal partners in the educational learning process (Agmon et al., 2018; Wagner & Luger, 2021). Furthermore, this tenet aligns with the work by Cornect-Benoit et al. (2020) which identified that IG opportunities gave rise to equality through intergenerational inclusion.

The second tenet (Allport, 1954) mutual interdependence refers to generations working together to achieve a common goal. This tenet relates closely to IG programs that facilitate mutual learning/co-learning among the participants (Anderson et al., 2017; Freeman et al., 2020; Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017; Meuser et al., 2021). In fact, IG programs that include meaningful mutual activities can facilitate reciprocal acts of sharing between generations (Knight et al., 2014; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Moreover, IG programs provide an opportunity for bi-directional mentoring to take place among participants, which may play a role in mechanisms of mutual interdependence (Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017; Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006; Santini et al., 2020; Snow & Tulk, 2020).

The third tenet (Allport, 1954), acquaintance potential, focuses on the facilitation of ongoing relationships outside of the IG program, which is rarely explicitly addressed in the empirical literature. Although rarely addressed, IG programs allow meaningful relationships to have the potential to develop and grow both in and outside the program setting (Agmon et al., 2018; Beck, 2019; Caspar et al., 2020; Moody & Phinney; 2012).

The fourth tenet identified by Allport (1954) focuses on institutional support of IG programs. Having strong administrative support as well as support from participants, family members, and law/policies assists in the facilitation of training and the development of successful IG programs. This in turn, can address lack of education, knowledge gaps, and personal issues that may exist, which all impede the implementation of IG programs at the organizational level (Beynon et al., 2013; Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Jarrott, 2011). Having strong organizational support can contribute to more collaborating within the organization and outside the organization with partners, which actively promotes the success of IG programs (Murayama et al., 2014; Kaplan, 2002; Lee et al., 2020). Allport's (1954) four tenets align well with the focus of this study as the perspectives of facilitators as well as participants will be included to obtain a holistic picture of the impact and functioning of IG programs.

Since Allport's (1954) hypothesis was developed, Brown and Hewstone (2005), Pettigrew (1998), and Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) have applied intergroup contact theory to a wide variety of groups and settings as well as identified that intergroup contact can diminish intergroup prejudice. Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) meta-analytically tested the three most studied mediators that reduce prejudice. These three mediators included: 1) increasing knowledge of older adults, 2) reducing anxiety about intergroup contact, and 3) increasing empathy and perspective taking. Therefore, IG contact did have the potential to initiate the functioning of these three mediators against prejudice. It is important to note that intergroup contact theory typically looks at the effect intergroup contact has on one group instead of both groups. In *Chapter 2, Section 2.6 Outcomes for Participants* there is an in-depth review of empirical literature that touches on all three mediating factors highlighted by Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) from the perspectives of both generations.

Caspi (1984) first applied the contact hypothesis in a traditional preschool setting to assess the effects of cross-age contact on children. Caspi's (1984) research identified "that children with cross-age contact in school can discriminate age-group categories better and evaluate the elderly more favourably than their counterparts in an age-segregated school" (p. 78). Generations formulate biases and preconceived notions of the "other" generation based on the gap and division that is present in society, in turn resulting in further division among age groups due to limited exposure and contact. Therefore, creating IG opportunities where generations are in contact daily may mediate prejudice between differing groups. IG programs that facilitate IG contact and collaboration result in a better understanding and appreciation for opposing generations, which in turn results in a more positive perspective among generations (Agmon et al., 2018; Wagner & Luger, 2021). Furthermore, it has been identified that high contact IG programs can facilitate impactful programs (Bales et al., 2000; Caspi, 1984).

Researching both younger and older participants' perspectives of IG programs contributes to the further understanding of how intergroup contact theory mechanisms play a role in IG programming. Asking the younger and older participants as well as the provider questions that may relate to Allport's (1954) four tenets and Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) three mediators can contribute to a better understanding of how these mechanisms play a role in IG programs.

### **2.10.3. Life Course Perspective**

The life course concept "refers to age-graded events and social roles in life trajectories that are subject to historical change" (Elder, 2000, p. 50). The life course perspective was developed by Elder in 1998 in hopes to offset the limitations of a human development model that was child-based by replacing it with a growth-oriented focus so the model can apply to development and aging across the life course, organizing the evolution of human lives over time, and relating lives to a dynamic society that emphasizes continuously changing circumstances (Elder, 1998). Life-span concepts of development, the life cycle of human relations, and the relationship perspective were integral aspects to the development of the life course theory (Elder, 2000). The development of the life course

theory changed the human development sphere and family life by proposing a theory that captured age-graded sequences and historical timing of events and/or circumstances that take place through one's life course from birth to end of life.

Elder theorized the life course perspective based on the following key principles: 1) the interplay of human lives and development with changing times and places, 2) the timing of lives, 3) linked lives, 4) human agency in choice making and actions (Elder, 1998). The first key principle recognizes that one's life course is embedded and shaped by historical times and places through one's lifetime (Elder, 2000). These historical changes can result in cohort or period effects depending on certain sociohistorical events or circumstances that may take place such as war, pandemic, or a global recession, which are then linked to that particular time period or age cohort who experienced these major events (Elder, 2000). The second principle highlights the association between age and time. The developmental impact of a life transition or event is directly related to when it occurs in one's lifetime and if this timing aligns with age norms in a sociohistorical context (Elder, 2000). The third concept is linked lives whereby lives are lived interdependently as social and historical influences are expressed throughout the network of shared relationships in one's life (Elder, 2000). Thus, lives are linked to social relations with voluntary kin, biological and legal relations, and friends across one's life course. The final principle is human agency which demonstrates the importance of how individuals actively shape and construct their own life experiences through actions and choices that are made within the constraints and opportunities presented by the sociohistorical context (Elder, 2000). The life course theory demonstrates that humans are forming and reforming their lives through life experiences within a sociohistorical context through a variety of mechanisms.

Researching older adults and their involvement in IG programs by applying the life course perspective contributes to further understanding motivating factors to participation in IG programs through discussions of life history and lived experiences in participants' own sociohistorical contexts. Through the methods employed in this study, specific questions were asked to better understand participants' timing of life experiences and linked lives in their social contexts, as well as how they demonstrate agency. Applying a life course perspective enables me to learn specifically about how participants' life events

relate to family and timing, their social networks and connections, how the relationship with their volunteer kin impacts their lives, and how they decided to actively be involved with the IG program and maintain engagement over time.

## **2.11. Gaps in Literature**

Despite the extensive research on IG programs in general, there is limited research on nonfamilial, community-based IG programs and the long-term impact they have on both older and younger participants. Currently, most of the empirical research assesses the outcomes of IG programs on one generation; therefore, there is a need to examine the program outcomes among both older and younger generations (Lee et al., 2020). Additionally, integrating the perspectives and lived experiences of the provider of the IG program is essential to understanding system barriers to program delivery and how the experience of participants can be improved (Jarrott et al., 2019; Galbraith et al., 2015; Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018). Utilizing qualitative methods to capture the mutual experiences of IG program participants as well as the provider experience will contribute to a richer understanding of IG programs and their impact. This study utilizes theoretical concepts that closely relate to IG relationships through qualitative methodology to address the research gaps identified above by capturing the lived experiences of participants and provider of a nonfamilial, community-based IG program.

## **2.12. Chapter Overview**

For the purpose of this study, IG will be defined as social vehicles that facilitate mutually beneficial ongoing engagement, interaction, and exchange of resources, knowledge, skills, and experiences between older and younger generations in a social space through both purposeful and organic opportunities that include people with varying abilities and identities to form a meaningful connection. The completed literature review includes both empirical and grey literature as an effort to attempt to close the knowledge-to-practice gap that currently exists in this topic area. Types of IG programs such as 1) community-based IG programs, 2) school-based IG programs, 3) facility-based IG programs, 4) co-located IG programs, 5) distance-based IG programs, 6) hybrid IG

programs, and 8) housing-related programs were reviewed in-depth. Furthermore, types of activities in IG programs were discussed including arts-based activities, education-based activities, companionship and conversation, as well as additional activity types which included outdoor/nature-based activities, food-based activities, game-related activities, movement-related activities, and activities to support instrumental acts of daily living (IADLs). Moreover, the impacts of IG programs on older adults and younger adults were highlighted individually as well as jointly to capture mutual outcomes between generations.

Promoting factors as well as challenges for IG programming were identified. Primarily, facilitators and the sustainability of IG programs were discussed. Facilitators included: 1) training and education, 2) strong admin support, 3) high contact between participants, 4) and technology with appropriate guidelines. The identified aspects that contributed to the sustainability of IG programs included utilizing the structure of an informal community of practice, incorporating the key factors indicated by Jarrott, Stremmel, and Naar (2019), grounding the program in the community context, collaborating with a diverse array of partners, and using appropriate evaluation tools. Consequently, barriers and evaluation concerns were highlighted as the main challenges of IG programming. The barriers that presented challenges were as follows: 1) inadequate resources, 2) lack of training and education, 3) negative attitudes of staff, 4) health (mental and physical) and safety regulations, 5) transportation availability, 6) facility use or spaces, 7) difficulty accessing individuals with experience in this area, and 8) short-term nature of programs. The evaluation concerns that were highlighted included a lack of evaluation tools that measure outcomes of IG programs, solely focusing on the experiences of one generation, limited quantitative studies using standardized quantitative measures, small sample size, and existing literature which excludes addressing challenges or limitations.

Incorporating the concept of volunteer kin recognizes that individuals can actively choose to incorporate nonrelatives as kin through substitution mechanisms in their family dynamics to serve a purpose or meet a need either affective or instrumental (Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2011). In addition to this concept, the theory of generativity and intergroup contact theory are the primary theories highlighted in this paper. The life course perspective will also be used as an overarching guiding theory. Incorporating the concept

of voluntary kin and drawing from well-developed theories, this study aims to contribute to the limited research base on community-based, nonfamilial IG programs and the long-term impact they have on both older and younger participants. Integrating the perspectives and lived experiences of the provider as well as participants of the IG program is essential to understanding system barriers to program delivery and to improve the experience of participants.



## **Chapter 3.**

### **Methods**

#### **3.1. Research Design and Approach**

It should be noted that this qualitative research study was an iterative process as it included both inductive and deductive elements. Previous ideologies, paradigms, and theories bring deductive elements to this study and interact with the inductive elements. It is important that readers keep this iterative process in mind when interpreting this study's findings. An in-depth qualitative exploratory design, including semi-structured interviews with older adult participants, younger adult participants, and the provider of the IG program have been used to address the sub-research questions identified at the end of *Chapter 1*.

Semi-structured interviewing has been identified as a particularly useful technique to elicit “thick descriptions” of individuals’ lived experiences and perceptions of their social world (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Utilizing semi-structured interviewing allows for a joint ‘meaning-making’ process between interviewer and interviewee (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). This co-construction process includes my own “beliefs, backgrounds, and feelings [as] ... a part of the knowledge construction process”; therefore, it is essential that as the researcher, I am aware of my own perceptions and assumptions that can influence the research process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p.141). Furthermore, reflexive journaling and memo writing have been used to identify and understand my positionality and how it may be impacting the research process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

Utilizing these qualitative research methods allows for a deeper, richer inquiry, and a holistic understanding of this social phenomenon by interacting first-hand with participants and the provider to go beyond the usual boundaries of understanding to capture their unique lived experiences and perspectives (Watkins, 2012). This study aims to expand knowledge in this area of research as well as fill in the necessary gaps identified, through qualitative inquiry and descriptive accounts of experiences of participants and the provider

guided by theoretical principles of generativity, intergroup contact theory, and the life course perspective.

This study is informed by a constructivist grounded theory approach whereby the research process is flexible and includes a reflexive ‘meaning-making’ process between the participants and the researcher to co-create realities (Charmaz, 2014; Randall & Phoenix, 2009). Thereby the very design utilized in this study positively influences the level of rapport developed between the researcher and participants and also aims to deconstruct hierarchical constructs. It should be noted that the researcher’s reaction to the participants’ responses play an important role in the co-construction of the participants’ stories (Randall & Phoenix, 2009). Therefore, the researcher’s demeanor, expressions, and actions can directly impact how the participants view the researcher, which can in turn impact the participants’ decision to share personal experiences or perceptions. Incorporating a grounded theory approach actively “encourages researchers to remain close to their studied worlds and to develop an integrated set of theoretical concepts from their empirical materials that not only synthesize and interpret them but also show processual relationships” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 508). This qualitative methodology is a suitable approach for this research as it allows for the co-creation of a rich, meaningful, holistic understanding of the impact that IG programs have on participants and providers by capturing their unique lived experiences.

### **3.2. Organization and Program of Inquiry**

The IG program of interest for this study is the Family Match program offered by a non-profit organization called Volunteer Grandparents in Metro Vancouver. Volunteer Grandparents was founded in 1973 to connect children who do not have contact with their biological or legal grandparents and older adults who do not have biological or legal grandchildren or do not have in-person contact with their biological or legal grandchildren. Volunteer Grandparents has now been in operation for 50 years and currently has 170 active members. This community-based organization currently offers the Letters to Seniors program and the Family Match program. The Letters to Seniors program began in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and included all ages where a maximum of 4 letters or

drawings are sent to isolated seniors after being matched based on similar interests and hobbies. Recently, the Letters to Seniors program has expanded into a second phase whereby youth and seniors send letters back and forth in a pen-pal format, thereby forming connections with each other. The Letters to Seniors program was not included in this study as a key aspect of this study is to better understand the inner workings of a long-term intergenerational relationship. The Family Match program incorporates children between the ages of 3 and 14 years old plus older adults aged 50 and over, aiming to meet the social and emotional needs of children and families who do not have accessible biological or legal grandparents. The Family Match program focuses on creating long-term, non-biological relationships between generations in the Metro Vancouver area where the child and older adult spend 2-3 hours together weekly and are committed to one another for at least 1 year. However, it is important to mention that there is no identified “end date” to participation in the program as many of the matches stay connected beyond the one-year commitment due to strong emotional ties between families. Therefore, including participants from the Family Match program in this study aligns best with the purpose and goals of the study as this high contact program aims to facilitate long-term, non-biological relationships within the community. The following sub-sections will discuss detailed aspects of the Family Match program that were gathered from documentation provided by the program provider as well as during interviews with all stakeholders (program participants and provider).

### **3.2.1. Key Aspects of Family Match Program**

The purpose of the Family Match program is to create an opportunity to foster long-term, nonfamilial intergenerational relationships by matching an older adult community member with a family that has at least one child. To date, there are 79 active participants in the Family Match program. The staffing team at Volunteer Grandparents is comprised of an Executive Director (who works with both Volunteer Burnaby and Volunteer Grandparents), a part-time program manager (who is responsible for all programs that Volunteer Grandparents offers), and a Board of Directors (n=7). Older adult participants of the Family Match program are representative of population demographics; however, it should be noted that roughly 80% of older adult participants are single grandmothers, 10% are single grandfathers, and 10% are couples. Families that join the Family Match program

represent the population demographics of Metro Vancouver; however, there are slightly more single parent families, there is low representation of younger participants with physical or cognitive challenges, and Indigenous families.

### **3.2.2. Program Logistics**

Potential applicants complete an application form that asks questions regarding the following: 1) family history, 2) living environment, 3) personal history, 4) personal interests, and 5) requests for four references. The program manager of Volunteer Grandparents then reviews the application and if it is satisfactory, a screening takes place with the older adult(s) whereby a criminal record check and driver's abstract must be provided and two interview sessions must be completed. The first interview session focuses on the following topics 1) family history, 2) personal values, 3) sexual abuse, 4) educational history, 5) employment history, 6) drugs and alcohol, 7) medical history, 8) social relationships and recreational interests, 9) significant relationships, 10) marriage or common law, 11) personality, and 12) personal history. The second interview asks situational questions to identify how the older adult may respond to certain situations with a child or family. The program manager then meets with the interested family to do an assessment of their needs and goals to identify if they may be a good fit with the potential match. The older adult(s) and best suited family then get matched up by the program manager. It should be noted that in some cases there may be more than one family for the older adult(s) to choose from whereby they may have to select one family out of a few options. An orientation is delivered to both the older adult(s) and the family separately that focuses on the same key aspects including: 1) personal safety, 2) indoor safety, 3) outdoor safety, 4) COVID-19, 5) program policy, 6) style of parenting and grandparenting, 7) discipline, and 8) identifying child abuse and neglect and response. The program manager performs check-ins with both the older adult(s) and the family at the 6-month and 12-month mark in the relationship; however, participants are welcome to contact the program manager at any time if they have any questions or concerns. Once the initial 6-month period is over the older adult(s) and the child are encouraged to spend one-on-one time together if allowed by the family. At the 12-month mark children can sleepover at their match's house if a consent form is signed by the parents.

### **3.2.3. Location of the Family Match Program**

It should be noted that the location of the Family Match program is not fixed, meaning there is fluidity in where matches can connect. It is encouraged that in the first 6 months of the relationship that the family is present when the older adult and the child are interacting to facilitate a strong volunteer kin environment across all generations. Therefore, intergenerational interactions can take place in a variety of contexts including but not limited to the following: 1) public outdoor environments (parks, walking trails, amusement parks), 2) public indoor environments (movie theatres, sport stadiums, the child's school, restaurants), 3) personal outdoor environments (older adults' private boat, one's backyard), and 4) personal indoor environments (homes of participants, vacation homes of participants).

### **3.2.4. Activity Type**

Participants engage in a wide variety of activities together in the settings previously mentioned. Many participants described getting together for a celebratory purpose usually surrounding holidays or birthdays. Participants also shared time together through outings whether that be going for a walk, skiing, kayaking, or a school or sporting event. Additionally, participants expressed that they shared conversations with one another in many settings; however, the richness of the conversation heightened when located in a private setting or the interaction included just the younger individual and older adult(s). Participants described many activities surrounding eating ranging from sharing meals together, to baking together, or going out to eat at a restaurant. Due to the flexible nature of the program and the participants having the ability to personalize activities, many of the participants would decide to spend time in ways that were meaningful for both the older adult and younger individual.

## **3.3. Summary of Matches**

The matches included in this study were unique as they shared long-term relationships that grew and expanded beyond the 1-year participation requirement. Interestingly, there was an intermingling of various cultures and backgrounds within these

matches as none of the matches shared the same backgrounds even if they both identified as Caucasian or Asian descent. Participants' involvement in the program ranged from 5 years to over 15 years whereby the younger participants became involved in the program between the ages of 3 to 11. As each match is unique the relationships developed in various ways. Some relationships grew stronger with time where others faced challenges inhibiting the relationship to blossom further. These aspects will be discussed in detail in *Chapter 4*. Even though volunteer kinship enables individuals to incorporate nonrelatives as kin through substitution mechanisms in their biological or legal family, in this study participants incorporated nonrelatives as kin in their biological family. It should be noted that none of the families included in this study were legal families. Thus, within the text in *Chapter 4* or *Chapter 5* the term biological family is used to denote relatives of both younger and older adult participants. However, to maintain a link to common terms used in the literature, the term “biological and legal family” is used in the headings and sub-headings.

### **3.4. Participant Recruitment and Selection**

A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit 4 older adults and their younger adult counterparts (n=5). Semi-structured interviews with each generation were conducted separately. Participants included in this study are not “active” present participants, rather past participants who remained in touch with one another after the mandatory program commitment length of 1-year. In addition, one program provider was purposively selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. Using a purposive sampling technique, participants are selected in a non-random manner which in turn allows for information-rich cases to be selected that will allow for experiences with IG programming to be shared (Patton, 1990; Sargeant, 2012).

Inclusion criteria for older adult participants, younger participants, and the IG program provider will now be discussed. Older adult participants were eligible to participate in this study if the following criteria was met: 1) at least 55 years of age, 2) can communicate in English fluently, 3) have no severe hearing or cognitive impairment, 4) live in the Metro Vancouver area, 5) participated in the Family Match program, 6) still in

touch with their younger match from the Family Match program. Younger participants must: 1) be at least 16 years of age, 2) communicate in English fluently, 3) live in the Metro Vancouver area, 4) have participated in the Family Match program, and 5) still be in touch with their older match from the program. The provider must work in close contact with the participants of the Family Match program. These criteria are set to ensure participants can communicate effectively with the researcher and fully understand the questions they are being asked. Participant recruitment took place until saturation where no new themes appeared to arise in the study settings (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

All program participants were selected based on referral from the program provider. Recruitment posters were distributed to active participants of the Family Match. The recruitment poster included the study's purpose and contact information. Upon initial contact, I provided interested participants with the consent form explaining the study's purpose, contact information, criteria, confidentiality, and information regarding consent.

### **3.5. Researcher Relationship with Participants**

The direct relationship researchers have with their participants is essential to report as this relationship can impact how participants respond and how researchers understand and interpret the topic of inquiry (Tong, Sainsbury, and Craig, 2007). Before data collection took place, I was in touch with the provider of the Family Match program. However, it is important to note that there were no discussions prior to data collection regarding the specific topic areas included in the interview. Prior to data collection taking place, the provider was aware of the following: 1) my research interests, 2) my research focus, 3) the reasons behind this research personally and in general terms, 4) and study details.

### **3.6. Research Setting**

Data collection for this study could have taken place in the following settings: 1) community organizational space, 2) outdoor neighbourhood environment, 3) public gathering space, 3) private space such as one's home, 4) and a remote platform such as telephone or video conferencing. Providing a variety of flexible settings for data collection

to take place enabled participants to identify which settings align best with their comfort level. Among the 10 total participants (n= 5 younger participants, n=4 older adult participants, and n=1 provider), 1 interview took place at the participant's home and the remaining 9 took place using a remote platform.

### **3.7. Data Collection**

#### **Semi-structured Interviews with Older Adult Participants**

It should be noted that semi-structured interviews with all participants did not take place in any particular order as interviews were conducted based on availability. Semi-structured interviews with older adult participants (n=4) who previously participated in the Family Match program and are still in touch with their younger match were conducted. An interview guide was crafted for the interviews with older adult participants to ensure specific subjects were covered in all interviews (Patton, 1990). This interview guide can be found in Appendix A. The interviews were set to take roughly 60-90 minutes to complete; however, they ended up taking between 52 and 74 minutes. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the benefits and challenges of the Family Match program as well as the meaning of the program to the lives of older adult participants. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were scheduled according to the older adult participants' preferred time and location. All interview participants signed the informed consent form prior to participating in the interview.

#### **Semi-structured Interview with Younger Participants**

Semi-structured interviews with younger participants (n=5) who participated in the Family Match program and are still in touch with their match were conducted. These semi-structured interviews aimed to understand the following: 1) the benefits and challenges faced by younger individuals participating in the Family Match programs, and 2) the meaning of participating in the Family Match program to younger participants. An interview guide was crafted for the interviews with younger participants to ensure specific subjects were covered in all interviews (Patton, 1990). This interview guide can be found for review in Appendix B. The interviews were set to take roughly 60-90 minutes to



complete; however, they ranged from 23 minutes to 84 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were scheduled according to the younger participants' preferred time and location. All interview participants signed the informed consent form prior to participating in the interview.

### **Semi-structured Interviews with the Provider of IG Programs**

A semi-structured interview with the provider of the Family Match program took place as only 1 staff member worked closely with program participants. This interview offers unique perspectives on the benefits and challenges of running, implementing, and maintaining IG programs for program providers. An interview guide was crafted for the provider of the IG program to ensure specific subjects would be covered (Patton, 1990). This interview guide can be found for review in Appendix C. The interview was set to take roughly 60 minutes to complete; however, it ended up taking 94 minutes. The interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview was scheduled according to the preferred time and location of the provider. The program provider signed the informed consent form prior to participating in the interview.

## **3.8. Data Analysis**

Interview data was transcribed and imported into the computer qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 (QSI International). Utilizing this software allowed for thematic analysis to be performed on the interview data whereby common emerging codes, categories, and themes were identified. The data analysis for this study was an iterative process as data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Memo-writing was used to document initial and evolving thoughts and ideas about the data and codes, as well as my interpretations throughout the data collection and analysis process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). This was completed at three main points: 1) post-interview, 2) during the transcription process, and 3) during the data analysis stage. Reflexive journaling was also used throughout the data collection and analysis phase to identify and reflect my own positionality as well as how it might impact the research process and outcome (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). This research study follows a similar analytical process as the six phases of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). The

six phases of thematic analysis include: 1) familiarizing oneself with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) using these codes to search for themes, 4) reviewing these themes and generating a “thematic map” of the analysis, 5) defining, refining, and naming each theme, and 6) producing a final report, including vivid, compelling extract examples, relating the analysis to the research question and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **3.9. Establishing Trustworthiness**

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research contributes to the validity of the findings beyond the parameters typically applied in quantitative research (Given & Saumure, 2012). In qualitative research, “validity is conceptualized through the findings’ ability to reflect aspects of the social world” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 38). In fact, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four criteria to trustworthiness in qualitative research including: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was developed as the researcher touched base with the participants prior to data collection, leaving opportunity for questions and concerns to be addressed, which in turn helped build rapport between myself, the researcher, and the participants. Member checking has been identified as crucial to establishing reliability in qualitative research; therefore, it was imperative that it was incorporated into this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Long & Johnson, 2000). Member checking through clarification questions took place during and after the interview if any aspects seem unclear or the participant required clarification and/or reassurance. I followed-up with several participants who were concerned about sharing their life experiences outside of the interview setting to reassure them of the anonymous nature of the data reporting process, so the participants felt comfortable with what was disclosed.

Peer debriefing occurred throughout the data collection and analysis processes to “stimulate consideration and exploration of additional perspectives and explanations” during the study (Long & Johnson, 2000, p. 35). Therefore, my supervisory committee as well as colleagues contributed to this aspect of rigor by providing their expertise and perspectives. Engaging in peer debriefing allowed for the inclusion of the perspectives of a third-party, which actively reduces the bias I, as the researcher, may bring to the analysis.

Moreover, researcher bias is further limited as this study actively utilizes a research design and approach that facilitates the co-construction of findings among the researcher and participants.

To further enhance the credibility and validity of this study, triangulation of data through data sources and theories took place (Long & Johnson, 2000; Patton, 1990). Data was gathered from older adult participants, younger participants, and the provider of the IG program of interest (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Morse, 2003). Triangulation was further applied through the triangulation of theory as findings are impacted by different assumptions of the theoretical constructs applied to the research (Patton, 1990). Utilizing various forms of triangulation increases the depth and comprehensiveness of the findings and simultaneously fills any gaps or limitations (Morse, 2003).

Establishing transferability, confirmability, and dependability took place by achieving auditability through an audit trail that identified the details of all data sources, collection techniques, assumptions made, decisions taken, interpretations, and influences of the researcher through memo writing, journaling, and using field notes (Long & Johnson, 2000). Auditability contributes to enhanced rigor of the study while demonstrating “thick description” of the research process through documentation, which in turn supports transferability and reliability of the study findings to other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **3.10. Ethical Considerations**

Prior to data collection taking place, all required documents were submitted to Simon Fraser University’s Office of Research Ethics and ethics approval was obtained. Participants may benefit from this study by 1) expressing their views and insights about IG programming, 2) feeling listened to and heard, 3) contributing to the future of IG programming, and 4) reflecting on their personal experiences and gaining unique perspectives of what IG programming means to them. This study may also contribute to better understanding in a general sense, the role that community-based, nonfamilial IG programs play in the lives of participants. Further, the findings of this research study aim

to fill the gap within the Canadian literature surrounding the impact that IG programs have on participants as well as provide recommendations regarding IG programs within North America.

Although this study poses limited risk to participants, potential risks may include inconveniencing participants' time from daily routine activities and/or sharing emotional or traumatic experiences that may elicit a psychological response. To mitigate the first potential risk, data collection took place at a time and location that was most convenient to and comfortable for the participants to create a safe environment. To reduce triggering emotional responses, I reinforced during the interview that the involvement in this study is voluntary, and it is acceptable to withdraw at any time. Throughout the interview I was aware of signs of distress and asked the participant if they would like to stop, take a break, and/or continue at a later point in time when necessary. In addition, I was prepared to provide mental health resources if applicable when identifying potential risks of psychological distress; however, this did not need to take place.

### **3.10.1. Informed Consent**

The participants were provided with a copy of the study's consent form prior to any data collection taking place. The consent form outlined the study's purpose(s), protocols, voluntary participation, and that participation and consent can be withdrawn at any time. Prior to the interview taking place, all participants signed the consent form. I made sure to answer any questions about the study and interview process prior to conducting the interviews.

### **3.10.2. Audio Recording of Interviews**

All semi-structured interviews were audio recorded to develop verbatim transcriptions, which was necessary for the analysis of this study. This information was clearly outlined in the study's consent form and explained to participants. On the same day as the interview, the interview recording was saved to a password-protected file on a password-protected file server at SFU. After the recording is saved onto the server, it was

deleted from the audio recording device. Audio recordings were destroyed immediately after transcription.

### **3.10.3. Maintaining Confidentiality**

All information collected for this study was de-identified to maintain participants' confidentiality. Each participant was given a participant ID number that was used in all audio files, interview transcripts, memos, and final reporting.

### **3.10.4. Retention and Destruction of Data**

A digital list of study participants was developed linking each of their real identities to participant IDs on a password-protected file on SFU's password protected file server. Data obtained in this study is stored in a password-protected file located on SFU's password-protected file server. The code-breaking file will be stored by Dr. Atiya Mahmood for two years in a separate password-protected folder.

### **3.10.5. Dissemination of Results**

The results of this study are reported as a graduate thesis and may be published in an academic journal and/or presented at academic conferences. All participants were provided a summary of the research study findings once the defense was completed successfully (Appendix E). In addition, participants can request access to the full thesis if they wish. The partner organization will be provided with a synopsis of the findings and other knowledge mobilization materials developed based on the research findings after the completion of the thesis. The findings of this study can guide the partner organization if/when the Family Match program is adapted, scale up or out. Based on the findings of this study, IG guidelines were developed for providers to identify key aspects to consider when creating or adapting IG programs that promote successful IG volunteer kinships (Appendix D). The IG guidelines will be disseminated to the InterGenNS Community Group, which includes 20+ organizations in British Columbia, LINKages, Volunteer Grandparents, and Healthy Aging CORE for British Columbia and Canada, and the InterGenNS Resource Hub.

Overall, the findings of this study can contribute to the improvement of IG initiatives in North America as well as act as a call to action for creating, delivering, and refining community-based, nonfamilial IG programs.

## **Chapter 4.**

### **Findings**

This chapter showcases the key findings drawn from the data gathered primarily from the semi-structured interviews with younger and older adult participants in the Family Match program as well as semi-structured interview data from the provider of the Family Match program. To allow for a deeper understanding of the participants included in this study, demographic profiles of younger adult participants, older adult participants, and provider will be presented. Following, the key findings will be discussed. Then, a chapter overview will be presented to conclude the chapter.

#### **4.1. Participant Demographics**

##### **4.1.1. Younger Adult Participant Demographic Breakdown**

A total of 5 younger adults were included in this study. Information on gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, education, and employment were collected among the younger adults, as displayed in Table 4.2. Based on the demographic responses, there was a good representation of gender as 60% identified as male and 40% identified as female. Majority of younger adult participants were between the ages of 16-18 leaving only two participants outside of this category (one fit in the 18-20 age range and the other in the 20-22 age range). All participants either identified as Caucasian (60%) or Asian (40%). However, it should be noted that those who identified as Caucasian were first generation or immigrants to Canada whereby they or their parents were born in Russia, Austria, or Israel. All younger participants identified as being single and never married. Due to the younger participants' ages, majority were still in high school (60%) whereas the two remaining participants completed some college (20%) or were in trade school (20%). Majority of the younger participants were students (80%) and only one identified as working part-time (20%).

**Table 4.1. Younger Adult Demographic Characteristics**

| <b>Variable</b>       | <b>Result</b>                | <b>Total %</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Gender</b>         | Male                         | 60             |
|                       | Female                       | 40             |
| <b>Age</b>            | 16-18                        | 60             |
|                       | 18-20                        | 20             |
|                       | 20-22                        | 20             |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>      | Caucasian                    | 60             |
|                       | Black                        | 0              |
|                       | Asian                        | 40             |
|                       | Indigenous                   | 0              |
|                       | Hispanic or Latino           | 0              |
| <b>Marital Status</b> | Single (never married)       | 100            |
|                       | Married                      | 0              |
|                       | Common Law                   | 0              |
|                       | Divorced                     | 0              |
| <b>Education</b>      | Less than high school degree | 60             |
|                       | High school or equivalent    | 0              |
|                       | Some college but not degree  | 20             |
|                       | Bachelor's degree            | 0              |
|                       | PhD or higher                | 0              |
|                       | Trade school                 | 20             |
| <b>Employment</b>     | Employed full-time           | 0              |
|                       | Employed part-time           | 20             |
|                       | Unemployed                   | 0              |
|                       | Unable to work               | 0              |
|                       | Student                      | 80             |

**4.1.2. Older Adult Participant Demographic Breakdown**

A total of 4 older adults were included in this study. Information on gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, education, and employment were collected among the older adult participants, as displayed in Table 4.3. The older adult participant demographics overall are less diverse than the younger participant demographics. All the participants identified as retired females (100%) and 50% of older adult participants identified as being between the ages of 65-74 and the other 50% identified as being between 75-84 years of age. Majority of older adult participants identified as Caucasian (75%) and only one identified as Asian (25%). None of the older adult participants identified as single as 50% were married, 25% were common law, and 25% were divorced. It should be noted that the older



adult participants included in this study were well educated as 50% completed a bachelor’s degree, 25% a PhD or higher, and 25% have high school education or the equivalent.

**Table 4.2. Older Adult Demographic Characteristics**

| <b>Variable</b>       | <b>Result</b>                | <b>Total %</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Gender</b>         | Male                         | 0              |
|                       | Female                       | 100            |
| <b>Age</b>            | 55-64                        | 0              |
|                       | 65-74                        | 50             |
|                       | 75-84                        | 50             |
|                       | 85+                          | 0              |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>      | Caucasian                    | 75             |
|                       | Black                        | 0              |
|                       | Asian                        | 25             |
|                       | Indigenous                   | 0              |
|                       | Hispanic or Latino           | 0              |
| <b>Marital Status</b> | Single (never married)       | 0              |
|                       | Married                      | 50             |
|                       | Common Law                   | 25             |
|                       | Divorced                     | 25             |
| <b>Education</b>      | Less than high school degree | 0              |
|                       | High school or equivalent    | 25             |
|                       | Some college but not degree  | 0              |
|                       | Bachelor’s degree            | 50             |
|                       | PhD or higher                | 25             |
|                       | Trade school                 | 0              |
| <b>Employment</b>     | Employed full-time           | 0              |
|                       | Employed part-time           | 0              |
|                       | Unemployed                   | 0              |
|                       | Retired                      | 100            |
|                       | Unable to work               | 0              |
|                       | Student                      | 0              |

### **4.1.3. Provider Demographic Characteristics**

A single provider was interviewed for the purpose of this study as one staff member manages and is directly involved with the Family Match program. Information on gender, age, ethnicity, and education was collected from the provider. The provider identified as female, between the ages of 45 and 55, Caucasian, and has a bachelor’s degree as her highest level of education.

## 4.2. Family Match Program Thematic Analysis

Findings from program participants were organized into themes situated within four main categories 1) Ebb and Flow of Relationship: Role of Biological and Volunteer Kin, 2) Generativity, 3) Dyad Relationship Building: Role of External Forces, and 4) Achieving Volunteer Kinship. Emergent substantive themes and subthemes from each of the mentioned categories are presented in Table 4.3. Following this, a summary of program attributes that contribute to or hinder the sustainability of the Family Match program will be discussed utilizing data from the provider interview. It should be noted that older adult and younger adult participants will be referred to as volunteer grandparent/kin and volunteer grandchild/kin in the remaining chapters.

**Table 4.3. Study Themes**

| Thematic/ Concept Linkage  | Categories   | Theme   | Sub Theme(s)  |
|--|--|---|---|
| Volunteer Kinship (Allen et al. 2011; Braithwaite et al., 2010)<br><br>Life Course Perspective (Elder, 2000) | Ebb and Flow of Relationship: Role of Biological/Legal and Volunteer Kin | Choice and Control in Volunteer Kinship Relations                                 | Choice and Control Contributing to Relationship Progression<br><br>Friendship and Volunteer Kinship<br><br>Evolutionary Investment in Biological Relationship<br><br>Volunteer Kin and Boundaries |
|  |  | Beyond Dyad: Relationship between Parent of Young Adult and Volunteer Grandparent | Parental Role in Relationship Building and Maintenance<br><br>Volunteer Grandparent and Parental Role<br><br>Volunteer Grandparent Supports Parent with Child                                     |

|   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
|   |  | Filling New Kinship Roles:<br>Volunteer Kinship                           | <p>“Filling a Void”</p> <p>“Chosen Family”:<br/>Responsiveness to<br/>Volunteer Kinship</p> <p>“They’re Our<br/>Family”</p> <p>Blending of Family<br/>and Beyond</p> <p>Younger<br/>Individual’s<br/>Perception of<br/>Volunteer Kinship</p> |
| Generativity<br>(McAdams and de St.<br>Aubin, 1992)                                     | Generativity   | <p>Introduction to<br/>New Activities</p> <p>Acts of<br/>Generativity</p> |  |
| Intergroup Contact<br>Theory (Allport 1954;<br>Caspi, 1984; Pettigrew<br>& Tropp, 2008) | Role of External<br>Forces in Dyad<br>Relationship<br>Fluctuation<br>(temporal, time,<br>space, technology,<br>history-graded) | Temporal Factors  | <p>The Role of Time in<br/>Volunteer Kinships</p> <p>Concept of “Aging<br/>Out”: Maintenance<br/>and Stability</p> <p>Importance of<br/>Informal Time<br/>Proximity and Time</p>   |
|   |  | The Role of<br>Technology in<br>Relationship<br>Maintenance               |  |
|   |  | The Role of<br>COVID-19   | <p>Modifying Contact</p> <p>Technology and<br/>COVID-19</p> <p>COVID-19 and<br/>Relationship<br/>Distancing</p>  |

|   |                                    |   |   |
|---|------------------------------------|---|---|
| <p>Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport 1954; Caspi, 1984; Pettigrew &amp; Tropp, 2008)</p> <p>Volunteer Kinship (Allen et al. 2011; Braithwaite et al., 2010)</p> <p>Generativity (McAdams and de St. Aubin, 1992)</p> | <p>Achieving Volunteer Kinship</p> | <p>Diversity and Acceptance</p>                           | <p>Learning to Accept Differences</p> <p>Better Understanding of Different Generations</p> <p>Contact with Other Generations</p> <p>Sharing Between and “Bridging” Cultures</p> |
|   |                                    | <p>Positive Emotional Outcomes</p>                        | <p>Contributing Beyond Self and Feeling Valued</p> <p>Support, Personal Development, and Growth</p> <p>Enriched Life</p>  |
|   |                                    | <p>To Flourish or Not to Flourish: Inhibiting Factors</p> | <p>Impact of Family Dynamics</p>  |

### 4.3. Choice and Control in Volunteer Kinships

The theme of choice and control in the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship was identified as an emergent theme from the interviews with participants. Choice is discussed ranging from program aspects to choosing to use boundaries to facilitate or protect certain kin and non-kin relationships.

#### 4.3.1. Choice and Control Contributing to Relationship Progression

There is an element of freedom that comes with unstructured, flexible IG programming that Family Match offers. This type of programming facilitates agency among participants as they can choose to schedule and create their own activities and

encounters that reflect and contribute to the development of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. OA\_P4 highlights the importance of this:

*And I'd rather think up my own [referring to activities]. You know what I mean? Like in terms of an actual "I'll do this. I'll do that". It gives me more flexibility. Whether anything else happens you can say, "okay, well, we won't do it today, we'll do it next time" and things like that. Yeah. I prefer a little less structured modality... It's kind of patronizing to have some 20- or 30-year-old in human resources or whoever they are [laughs]. Actually, you know, saying, you know, telling you what to do. I'm sorry that that's not going to work very well for me.*

Participants of the Family Match program sign up with the purpose of forming a genuine IG connection, where a stranger can potentially fill a volunteer grandparent or grandchild role over time. OA\_P4 expresses the importance of facilitating the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship at one's own pace and in one's own way, which does not include overbearing of program logistics as this may prevent the relationship from developing organically. In fact, one of the younger participants compare Family Match to a similar program in the community and touches on how a structured and rigid program can impact the program experience. YA\_P2 states,

*So, for instance, like when I was little, I was in Big Sisters. Now I'm a Big Sister myself. So, in terms of that program, like I would compare this, like— that seems really structured, like, how they run things. And it [referring to Big Sisters] kind of makes you feel like it's a forced connection. But at the same time, like, I know, [names manager of Volunteer Grandparents] does check ins too, but she does them a little bit differently... It [referring to the Family Match program] was really organic, it felt like it, it didn't even feel like the program was there for me.*

YA\_P2 highlights that when a program of this nature is very rigid and focuses strongly on program expectations, the connection that you are working to build and progress can feel “forced”. Even if the purpose of the program is to form a strong connection, having program criteria that is restrictive and overwhelming can constrict one's choice and ability to facilitate the development of a relationship that truly reflects the participants. In fact, the Family Match program facilitated a strong connection between YA\_P2 and their volunteer grandparent. The program's flexibility is what enabled YA\_P2 to form an “organic” connection with their volunteer grandparent over time, as the programmatic aspects or expectations were not intrusive of the relationship as the choice and progression of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship was the priority. In

turn, YA\_P2 expressed that the relationship between themselves and their volunteer grandparent felt so real that it “didn’t even feel like” they were part of an IG program.

#### **4.3.2. Friendship and Volunteer Kinship**

Participants compare their volunteer kinship to friendship due to the overarching mechanism of choice that accompany these relations. While at the same time, biological family relationships were oftentimes identified as choice-limiting. YA\_P2 reflects on their experience with a similar IG program that focuses on building volunteer kinship relationships regarding the mechanism of choice:

*With Big Sisters, I had one [referring to a younger sister] for maybe two months, and I didn’t like it at all. I had no bad feelings about ending that and finding something else that worked for me. I think that’s the better part. Because how do you do that with your family? Like, yes, you can distance yourself, but you can’t really like choose who you want. It’s like choosing your friends. But I think having that choice and that control over how you choose to progress a relationship is really beneficial, because you cannot do that with your family.*

Biological relationships oftentimes come with strong existing familial ties rooted in history whereas volunteer kinship rarely begins at birth as it is a selective process that involves more choice and agency since one is actively choosing to add this new relationship to one’s life. YA\_P2 voices the challenge of choosing to cut ties with family by saying, “yes, you can distance yourself, but you can’t really like choose who you want”, demonstrating how bound one is to their family history. Whereas when referring to volunteer kinship and choice they say, “it’s like choosing your friends” alluding to the fact that there are similar choice mechanisms at play with volunteer kinship and friendship. This participant sheds light on the aspects of agency, control, and choice that come with volunteer kinship as they were able to ultimately choose how the relationship progresses, which cannot necessarily be done with family.

Interestingly, the comparison of volunteer kinship to friendship expands beyond the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship and into the relationship between the parent of the volunteer grandchild and volunteer grandparent. OA\_P2 shares,

*Yeah... She [referring to the mother of the volunteer grandchildren] calls me grandma [OA\_P2]... So, she’s looking for that kind of the mother figure... I’m*

*kind of more her friend than I'm really being her mom yet I'm taking on some of those mother roles.*

Even though OA\_P2 states that they feel as though the relationship between themselves and the parent of the volunteer grandchild is more like a friendship, they also express that they have the ability to take on some mother-like roles. This highlights OA\_P2's ability to exercise choice and control over the volunteer kinship as they can choose between offering friendship and/or mother-like support to contribute to the development of the relationship.

#### **4.3.3. Evolutionary Investment and Volunteer Kinship**

Participants shared the differences between how one chooses to navigate volunteer kinship and biological familial dynamics. It was identified that in volunteer kinships participants chose to navigate the relationship with more thought compared to their biological relationships. OA\_P3 highlights this subtheme:

*Even if their [referring to biological grandchildren and children] schedules are busy, you know, you will you insert yourself in their lives... This is my blood you know, so, I would not feel like intruding navigating their lives.*

The dialogue above showcases that OA\_P3 feels as though with their biological family it is easy to “insert” themselves into their lives at any point in time. It is as if their biological relation gives OA\_P3 the right to “insert” themselves into the relationship. However, when it comes to the volunteer kinship there is a different process one undergoes as they learn how to navigate this new relationship and enter this already existing family. This new environment encourages the volunteer grandparent to reflect and think of how they will choose to progress the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. This evolutionary investment that is present in biological relationships may enable one to act more assertively towards their biological family and more cautious in volunteer kinship relations where evolutionary investment is not present.

A younger participant (YA\_P2) also brings forward this perspective but through the lens of a volunteer grandchild,

*And that, you know, this view I had of my own family, and specifically, I would say, 'older' in like my society, it's very different. So, for instance, if someone would say, "oh, my gosh, my grandpa was so harsh with me like, he did this". But I'd say, "that makes no sense like, my grandma [referring to their volunteer grandmother] wouldn't care if I came in at 1am, or wouldn't care if I needed a ride, she would pick me up at 2am like, "oh, you're telling me someone would yell at you for this?". So, it's very different relationships, like some people see, specifically because they live with their grandparents, as almost unfortunately a burden. Because they're watching them like hawks, they want to make sure they don't get into any trouble. More than like caring about having a conversation with them, they just want to make sure they don't screw up.*

YA\_P2 reflects on how their friends' relationships with their biological grandparents is deeply rooted in family history and evolutionary investment whereby the behaviour of the biological grandchild directly reflects the image of the biological grandparent. This may result in the biological grandchild feeling restricted and judged by their biological grandparents. Whereas YA\_P2 describes their volunteer grandparent to be more focused on the relationship as there is no pressure of evolutionary investment to constrain the relationship. Instead, YA\_P2 and their volunteer grandparent can jointly create and actively choose the tone of the relationship. However, the biological grandparent-grandchild relationship is constrained as the biological grandparent's priority is evolutionary investment and their family reputation. The findings identified above can be further solidified by the reflections from OA\_P2:

*Again, the friend that I just got off the phone with who's going to be looking after their grandchildren because her daughter's working this week and, the kids are off school [pause]. There's a different, there is a different connection between us [referring to themselves and their husband] and our grandchildren [referring their volunteer grandchildren], and her [referring to the friend] and her [biological] grandchildren. Because she's [referring to the friend] constantly, judging her daughter. And second guessing how she's raising her kids. Because she's, her daughter. She's the product of her nurturing and her raising her kids. Whereas my relationship with [names the mother of the volunteer grandchildren] is more... I'm only experiencing it and helping out when I can. Whereas I think it's quite natural when that's your child, looking after your biological grandchildren. There is a difference. Is it a difference in love? No. It's just a difference in the relationship.*

There is a clear difference in the relationship between volunteer and biological kin that is centered around evolutionary investment. However, this instance is slightly different from above as this showcases the role of evolutionary investment pertaining to the parent-grandparent relationship. For instance, OA\_P2's friend shows that they are a biological



grandmother who seems to be personally impacted by the behaviour of their biological child. As a result, they actively judge their child's actions to cope with the fact that their grandchildren's behaviours and their child's parenting does not align with the expectations of their familial history and evolution. On the other hand, in the volunteer grandparent-parent relationship, OA\_P4 expresses that they focus on supporting and helping the mother of their volunteer grandchildren, rather than judging. Therefore, the volunteer grandparent can focus on supporting the volunteer grandchildren's parent instead of reacting with judgement due to the absence of evolutionary investment.

#### **4.3.4. Volunteer Kin and Boundaries**

Throughout the various interviews that were conducted comparisons between biological kin and familial kin emerged. Being involved in a volunteer kinship has the potential to impact the boundaries in already existing biological relationships and having strong biological ties can in turn impact the boundaries of a volunteer kinship. Participants of the Family Match program enrolled in this program to have access to something they were missing in their life, which may or may not have to do with their relationship with their biological family. Participants share experiences that highlight the use of boundaries in relation to volunteer kinship.

##### ***Separating Volunteer Kinship from Biological/Legal Relationship***

Some participants expressed that they choose not to discuss their involvement with the program with their biological family. Participants are consciously creating a boundary between their biological relations and their volunteer kinship to avoid their biological family from feeling "replaced". OA\_P1 shares,

*I got involved because of me because I wanted exposure to young children. That's the only reason. Yeah, if I had for a minute thought that would upset my grandchildren... I wouldn't have done it... You know, I just don't raise it. I just keep it totally separate... I mean, I certainly wouldn't want them to think that I replaced them with other children. I didn't—I did not do that.*

This participant expresses that they have actively created a boundary between their volunteer kinship and their biological family by choosing to keep their relationship with their volunteer grandchildren "separate" to protect their biological family as they do not

want to cause any additional family conflict or upset. Similarly, one of the younger adult participants expressed during the interview that their family decided to not share with their biological family their involvement with their volunteer grandparents. For example, YA\_P1 states,

*So, like, my grandparents are in [names country], right? Like my biological grandparents. I don't think my mom has like, officially told them that we have grandparents in Vancouver. Like it's kind of like a rough topic, because it's almost like replacing them. Does that make sense?*

YA\_P1's family is using secrecy as a protection mechanism out of fear that their biological family will think that they have replaced them with another set of grandparents. Participants in the Family Match program who are concerned about their biological family's response to the program use boundaries to protect the relationship with both their volunteer kin and their biological family.

Interestingly the mechanism of boundaries can be identified within the volunteer kinship dynamics as well. Boundaries can be used to keep the relationship between the volunteer grandparent and grandchild "separate" from the family dynamics. OA\_P4 shares,

*But I like to keep those [referring to the relationship with the parent and volunteer grandchild] relationships separate. Which is the beauty too. If that was my actual daughter, that would be a lot harder to do. Right?... It is a huge advantage [of a volunteer kin relationship]. Because once [names volunteer granddaughter] kind of became of a certain age, we just have our own relationship. That doesn't have to be linked into the family matrix.*

This volunteer grandparent is expressing that it is more challenging to set boundaries with biological family as with biological family you are intrinsically connected to all the dynamics, making it more difficult to remove yourself when needed. OA\_P4's words highlight an advantage of volunteer kinship whereby one can create and sustain boundaries and even remove oneself from the family matrix to protect and prioritize the relationship development between volunteer grandparent and grandchild.

Moreover, participants share that they keep their volunteer kinship separate from their friends to protect the legitimacy of the volunteer kinship. My conversation with OA\_P2 showcases just that:

*OA\_P2: Well, I mean, yeah. It's interesting, though [pauses] that none of my friends or my brother, consider them our grandchildren. They don't ask about them. They, they'll sit there and talk about their grandchildren. And if I bring something up, it's not followed through. And it doesn't really matter to me what they consider. But it's interesting that nobody thinks of them as our grandchildren. They think of us as a volunteer. You know, you see people once in a while, they don't understand that. You don't have to be related to be family.*

*Interviewer: Okay. So, it's like there's this illegitimacy to it?*

*OA\_P2: Absolutely. Yes. Fakeness. Yes.*

OA\_P2 expresses that both their family and friends who have biological grandchildren view their volunteer grandparent-grandchild kinship as “fake”. This may be because they have biological relations and have not experienced a volunteer kinship firsthand. In response to the unsupportive nature of their friends and family OA\_P2 creates a boundary whereby they refrain from discussing their volunteer kinship. It is possible that OA\_P2's unsupportive friends and family may have been perceived as a threat to the current status of their volunteer relationship whereby boundaries were created to protect both the volunteer kinship and other relations.

### ***Biological/Legal Grandparent's Versus Volunteer Grandparent's Relations: Impact of Relationship Strength***

Younger participants who have an identifiably strong relationship with their biological grandparent may have a harder time connecting with their volunteer kin and vice versa as they actively set a boundary since the grandparent role is “filled”. YA\_P3 shares that they have a close relationship with their biological grandparents despite the geographical distance between them as they connect often to maintain their already existing relationship. YA\_P3 shares,

*Yeah. Oh, we call them like once a week at least... So, yeah. And we visited my maternal ones over summer.*

The conversation above highlights the strong relationship that YA\_P3 shares with their biological grandparents. It is very possible that the close relationship YA\_P3 has with their biological grandparents directly impacted their relationship with their volunteer kin.

When asking YA\_P3 what their relationship is like with their match and if they could confide in their match they said,

*Yeah, no, we never had that, like, super close personal relationship, I would say.*

Since YA\_P3 had a secure relationship with their biological grandparents they chose to call their volunteer grandparents “auntie” and “uncle”. YA\_P3 goes on to explain this further,

*Yeah, that's the thing. Also, because we knew our actual grandparents so, it's kind of wonky to think like we have three sets of grandparents [laughs].*

For YA\_P3 the grandparent role was successfully filled by their biological family; therefore, it seems as though there was no need for the role to be filled further by a volunteer grandparent. In their eyes having another set of grandparents seemed unnecessary and humorous. This point of view could have created a boundary that prevented the volunteer grandparent relationship from growing deeper as the biological relationship took precedence. I explore this concept further with YA\_P3:

*Interviewer: Do you feel like if you didn't have—I know, this is a little hard. But I'm just wondering if you think about it. If you didn't have biological grandparents, like you weren't in contact with them, or you didn't speak the same language or anything like that, do you think you maybe would have approached this relationship a little bit different? A little bit deeper? That maybe you would have been like, more eager to get deeper into it or not really?*

*YA\_P3: Potentially, yeah, I mean, also, it was our parents that orchestrated it. So, if we had no biological grandparents, they probably would have wanted to like, have us call them grandma and grandpa or something [instead of auntie and uncle] and fill that role? Most likely, yeah, I guess, because you want that kind of role in your life.*

YA\_P3 confirms that they feel as though the “grandparent role” is already filled in their life; therefore, they did not see the purpose in the addition of another set of grandparents. However, if they failed to have the role filled, they express that they believe they would have been open to accepting the volunteer grandparent and grandchild role in this context and thereby would have approached the relationship differently. Therefore, the biological grandparent-grandchild relationship was prioritized and YA\_P3 created boundaries within the volunteer kinship inhibiting the relationship to develop into a

volunteer grandparent-grandchild bond. This finding highlights the importance of enrolling participants who truly require the grandparent role to be filled if it fails to be filled within their biological family.

Interestingly, boundaries can also be applied to biological grandparents when a participant has a strong relationship with their volunteer grandparents. For YA\_P1, being close with their volunteer grandparents allows them to apply a boundary where they choose to not strengthen ties with biological grandparents and prioritize the stronger bond. YA\_P1 shares,

*Yeah, like, I guess when you have them [referring to volunteer grandparents] and your, your grandparents want, like, my grandparents in [names country], they want like to be contacted and like, whatnot, you feel less of a need to. Just because you, you have other people [referring to volunteer grandparents] to go to.*

In this case, the grandparent role seems to be filled by the volunteer grandparent rather than the biological grandparents due to distance and limited contact. Even though YA\_P1 has access to their biological grandparents they choose to focus on building a connection with the volunteer grandparents while they set a boundary with their biological grandparents. This finding showcases that biological familial roles do not necessarily take precedence over volunteer kinship as the individual can choose to set boundaries for the weaker relationship whether it is biological or volunteer in nature.

### ***Situations When Lines Blur***

Boundaries that one sets are portable which means that certain situations and certain circumstances may result in the moving of already identified boundaries. Situations or circumstances surrounding the protection and safety of the members in the volunteer kinship resulted in the movement of boundaries. YA\_P2 expresses,

*She [referring to the volunteer grandma] wouldn't overstep her boundaries as who like maybe other [biological] family members would stand there and be like, "no, that's ridiculous". If it was a really severe thing, I think she would have overstepped and said, "no, I'm not letting this happen". But something that's a personal decision. I think other family members would have tried to step in, had I gone the other way. But she didn't, she was like, "you know what, that's fair enough, I agree".*

YA\_P2 shares that they have confidence in the boundaries that have been put in place with their volunteer grandmother; however, this same confidence is not expressed pertaining to their biological family. This participant feels if they had made the opposing decision, against what their family wished, they would not have respected the boundaries of a personal decision like their volunteer grandmother did. YA\_P2 showcases that there are certain times and places where set boundaries shift, such as when a “severe thing” takes place where their volunteer grandmother would choose to overstep boundaries to protect the volunteer grandchild or the entire family. Similarly, OA\_P2 shares about a time when they disagreed with the mother of the volunteer grandchildren surrounding COVID-19 vaccinations which resulted in them choosing to shift the boundaries with their volunteer family as it seemed necessary. The quote by OA\_P2 demonstrates the shifting of boundaries as a protection mechanism:

*So, I will when, when I think it's something that's important. I will go into that “you're my daughter now listen to me mode” ... I don't do that very often.*

To protect their volunteer family, OA\_P2 overstepped their boundary by using the words “you're my daughter” to express their concern and the “importance” surrounding COVID-19 and the safety of the family. This act in turn demonstrated how OA\_P2 chose to adjust their boundaries based on their investment in the issue at hand and their ongoing efforts to protect the health and safety of the family. YA\_P2 describes the importance of having someone in your life who is choosing to protect you and your family by overstepping boundaries. YA\_P2 said,

*Because I think it was beneficial not only for me, but also a lot for her [participant is referring to their mother] or, like, for instance, she divorced my father like a year later. But one of her main reasons for even getting the courage to do so, which was due to domestic violence was my grandmother [referring to their volunteer grandmother], because she [referring to their volunteer grandmother] pointed it out to her [referring to their mother] and said, like, “this is not okay”. So, it's having people in your life that are like, yes, maybe they're not related by blood, but they're willing to look out for you not even just for the kid, but the for the family itself.*

YA\_P2's volunteer grandmother chose to overstep their boundaries due to a “severe” situation whereby they identified an unsafe environment for the family. This act of challenging the boundaries in turn facilitated courage within the family to leave the

unsafe situation. YA\_P2's words also showcase the importance of having someone in your life who chooses to challenge these boundaries to protect the greater good of a family that they are not related to by blood but are related to you by choice.

#### **4.4. Beyond Dyad: Relationship Between Parent of Young Adult and Volunteer Grandparent**

The Family Match program fosters volunteer kin relationships beyond the volunteer grandparent-grandchild dyad. Since older adults are matched with a family with a young child, it creates a situation whereby connections can form with more than one family member. Throughout the various interviews a theme emerged around the relationship between the parent of the volunteer grandchild and the volunteer grandparent, demonstrating that the volunteer kinships developed from the Family Match program expand beyond volunteer grandparent-grandchild relations.

##### **4.4.1. Parental Role in Relationship Building and Maintenance**

This theme highlights the important role that the parents play from program entry to program maintenance. It should be noted that the younger participants would not be in the Family Match program without their parents enrolling them between the ages of 3-14. However, the parental influence continues far beyond initial contact as the parental role impacts the progress and the sustainability of the relationship between volunteer grandparent and grandchild. Participants share experiences that demonstrate the impactful role parents play in contributing to a successful or unsuccessful relationship between the volunteer grandchild and grandparent.

##### ***Influential Role of Parents***

Older adult participants expressed the importance of being able to connect with the parents of the volunteer grandchildren as they are the gateway to the family. OA\_P2 said,

*Well, I think the success of the program pivots on the parent, or the parents. When we were given three choices of families, one of the families [pause] just from reading the, the overall description of them, I thought these parents, I'm not going to relate to as well. I don't know why; I can't even remember what it was about*

*them. But I'm not going to relate to them, and therefore I'm not going to be able to integrate into that family as well.*

OA\_P2 chooses to describe the important role the parents play between the volunteer grandparent and grandchild by stating “the success of the program pivots on the parent”, indicating that they possess an influence that either contributes to a successful relationship or inhibits a successful volunteer kinship from developing. This volunteer grandparent demonstrates how the parent acts as the “gatekeeper” whereby you must be welcomed into the family and develop trust with the parents of the volunteer grandchild for the grandparent-grandchild relationship to be a success. In addition, the behaviours of the parents directly influence the behaviour of the volunteer grandchild. For example, OA\_P1 states,

*That's it [how OA\_P1 is addressed] has to do with the parents too you know, like the parents need to be involved... If I'm going to be called grandma or auntie, it comes from the parents.*

The volunteer grandparent is expressing that whether the volunteer grandchild calls them grandma or auntie is facilitated by the parent, especially due to the young age of the children at program enrollment. Thus, the parent also influences the foundation of the relationship between the volunteer grandparent and grandchild whether that is a grandparent-based role or an aunt/uncle-based role from the conception of the relationship. The parents can also influence the progression of the relationship between the volunteer grandparent and grandchild as it is dependent on the parameters set by the parents. OA\_P3 expresses,

*But it's just that, that their schedule and the kind of schedule that we have did not warrant frequent, informal, bonding with them... To just go to the mall that sort of thing. But unfortunately, that didn't happen with us because [names mother of the volunteer grandchildren] and [names the husband of the mother of the volunteer grandchildren] are very serious... But as you know, the circumstances they do not mix if they [referring to the parents of the volunteer grandchildren] do not allow it.*

Since the relationship pivots on the parents especially during the earlier years, the relationship is constrained or facilitated by the rules and parameters set by the parents. In this instance, the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship was constrained by the difficulty of formally scheduling get-togethers. Due to the serious and controlling nature



of the volunteer grandchild's parents, the relationship in turn became restricted, preventing the relationship from developing to where OA\_P3 hoped it would go.

### ***Maintaining Connection Through Parents***

In all matches that were explored, there remained some form of connection between the volunteer grandparent and family. Over time, some of the matches developed a disconnect between the volunteer grandparent and grandchild. However, the connection between the volunteer grandparent and the family remained through the parents. I asked YA\_P3 if they would connect with their volunteer grandparent on the phone to check-in and they replied,

*Very, very occasionally. I think she maybe has called me. Usually she'll, call my mom and say hi to her and then say, "can I speak to [YA\_P3]?"*

In this case, the volunteer grandparent is using the parent as a gateway to the volunteer grandchild in hopes to maintain some form of the connection. This exhibits that the parent plays an influential role in keeping the communication channel open between volunteer grandchild and grandparent throughout the years. Comparably, OA\_P1 says,

*I don't see them [referring to their volunteer grandchildren] but I, I hear, you know, like, [names the older volunteer grandchild] came [by once recently] and I already knew from his father that he was interested in— and from him too about being a [clinical healthcare worker].*

This volunteer grandparent explains that they received updates on their volunteer grandchild through the parents before they received an update from the volunteer grandchild themselves, indicating that the volunteer grandparent and the parents connect more regularly than the volunteer grandparent and the volunteer grandchild. Building a strong foundation between the volunteer grandparent and the family, particularly the parents in the early stages and throughout the relationship may contribute to the sustainability of the relationship through the ebbs and flows of childhood development. This strong foundation between the parent and volunteer grandparent may also allow for the younger individual or older adult to re-integrate themselves in the relationship over time, possibly contributing to relationship longevity.

#### 4.4.2. Volunteer Grandparent and Parental Role

Older adult participants expressed that they have developed a deep connection with the mothers of their volunteer grandchildren. OA\_P3 describes the bond they share with the mother of their volunteer grandchildren:

*I was. We [referring to themselves and husband] were [parental figures for the mother of the volunteer grandchildren]... Not just a little bit as I told you, I feel like, I feel like we have a strong and enduring relationship. Like, even if she's now in [names city], as I told you, you know, she tells me... I think it's because she needed—her parents are in [names country], and she needed, she needed a parent figure, parents' figure. And I think that's, that's where we [referring to themselves and their husband] fit in.*

OA\_P3 feels as though they are like a parental figure to the mother of their volunteer grandchildren. Through the Family Match program, they were able to form a “strong and enduring” relationship where the mother of their volunteer grandchildren can confide in OA\_P3 as they provide the required support, resembling a volunteer mother-daughter relationship. OA\_P3 expressed that they were able to fill a parental role that was missing in the life of the volunteer grandchildren’s mother. However, it is important to address the comment “I think that’s, that’s where we fit in” as OA\_P3 and their volunteer grandchildren did not have the closest relationship. It is possible that this strong relationship between the volunteer grandparent and parent prevented the grandparent-grandchild relationship from developing to its full potential. It is important to highlight that even though the volunteer grandparent-grandchild match was not a complete success, the volunteer grandparent and the mother of the volunteer grandchildren were able to form a unique bond through the Family Match program.

Volunteer relationships between volunteer grandparent and the parent of the volunteer grandchild are not limited to unsuccessful relationships between volunteer grandparent-grandchildren. OA\_P2 states,

*I feel like [names the mother of the children] we [referring to themselves and their husband] call her our bonus daughter... But, I'm surprised... She was going to come over. She had no kids on the weekend. So, she was going to come over on Sunday, but there was the big snowfall, she loved coming over and just being. Like sitting in front of the fire and just being here. And that relationship. I don't know. It's just that's, that's really special.*

OA\_P2 identifies and expresses that they are taking on a mother-like role towards the mother of their volunteer grandchildren as they say, “we call her our bonus daughter”. It is important to note that this is not something that has been internalized as OA\_P2 shares these feelings with her husband. There is also an element of surprise present as OA\_P2 feels grateful that the mother of their volunteer grandchildren wants to come and spend time with them when she has free time. OA\_P2 expresses that it is “really special” to have this additional mother-daughter bond with the mother of their volunteer grandchildren as she is able to provide a safe space for her to “just be” while maintaining a strong volunteer kinship with her grandchildren.

#### **4.4.3. Volunteer Grandparent Supports Parent with Child**

Volunteer grandparents support the parents of the volunteer grandchildren with parenting their children. For instance, OA\_P3 is providing support to the mother of the volunteer grandchild, especially as the mother of the volunteer grandchildren faces challenging times with parenting. Since, OA\_P3 may not be able to support the volunteer grandchildren directly through these challenging times, OA\_P3 can support the volunteer grandchild indirectly by guiding and supporting the mother. On a similar note, YA\_P2 shares how their mother would turn to YA\_P2’s volunteer grandparent for guidance and support on parenting:

*But she [referring to their mother] did go to my grandmother for advice on like, when I would do something, and my grandma [referring to volunteer grandmother] would say a completely different perspective. And that kind of helped calm my mom down in certain things or stop her worries. Like she’d always be worried about grades my mom, my grandma would be like, “you need to stop, you know, things will happen as they happen”. Or worrying about getting into colleges like, “let it be, let it be, she’s already done enough”. So, kind of like distressing my mom too, she has been in that role, she’s had to like multiple times over different instances.*

The support provided by YA\_P2’s volunteer grandma allowed their mother to be more at ease when parenting as their volunteer grandma provided “a completely different perspective”. It should be noted that the cultural backgrounds between the volunteer grandparent-grandchild of this match were quite different. The volunteer grandma put YA\_P2’s mother at ease by providing a new perspective on parenting that was less

stressful. This contribution from YA\_P2's volunteer grandmother may have been especially meaningful for their mother as their biological mother on their maternal side had passed away. Interestingly, YA\_P2 further shares,

*And I think that really did help me because I know a lot of other kids that are grown up in the [names their ethnic-cultural] society and they, they find it really interesting how I was kind of more— like my mom took a very laid-back parenting style similar to my grandma [referring to volunteer grandmother].*

YA\_P2 expresses gratitude towards her volunteer grandmother's efforts in supporting their mother not only for her to have extra parental support but to bring the "laid back parenting style" forward. This not only had a positive impact on their mother's stress but YA\_P2's personal stress as well. Also, YA\_P2 describes how her volunteer grandmother influenced their mother's parenting as they reflect on how other young adults who are a part of their cultural society are not parented in a laid-back fashion but rather strictly, which is customary to the culture.

## **4.5. Filling New Kinship Roles: Volunteer Kinship**

As introduced in previous themes, volunteer kin as it relates to the Family Match program, extends beyond volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationships whereby volunteer grandparents may take on a parental role towards the parents of the volunteer grandchild. It was also identified that some younger participants refer to their match as auntie and uncle instead of grandma or grandpa as those roles were already filled in a satisfactory way through biological connections. This theme will explore the varying dynamics that are at play pertaining to the formation of new volunteer kinship roles.

### **4.5.1. "Filling a Void"**

The IG connections that the Family Match program allows for volunteer kinships to form that can work to fill certain aspects that are missing in one's life. The conversation between myself and OA\_P1 captures this:

*OA\_P1: I haven't asked them [referring to volunteer grandchildren] kind of what they'd say about it all, but they call me grandma... Interestingly enough.*

*Yeah. And, and that is because the parents do. Okay, like the mom and dad both call me grandma.*

*Interviewer: Okay. And how does that make you feel?*

*OA\_P1: Great! And it filled kind of a void because my grandchildren are 3,000 miles away.*

Even though OA\_P1 is not sure how the experience of being involved in the Family Match program impacted their volunteer grandchildren, they are pleased that they have volunteer grandchildren that refer to them as “grandma”. Interestingly, OA\_P1 states that she believes the volunteer grandchildren call her grandma “because the parents do”, further supporting the fact that volunteer kinship titles stem from parental influence as identified in previous themes. OA\_P1’s volunteer kinship with their volunteer grandchildren fills a “void” that cannot be filled by their biological grandchildren due to physical distance. Therefore, this volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship actively fills this missing piece for her.

Having volunteer kinships can not only help fill the void of existing biological relations but can provide individuals with IG relationships that they may not have access to. When asking OA\_P2 how they refer to their match they said,

*You can say grandchildren. And they refer to us as grandma, [OA\_P2] grandpa, [names OA\_P2’s husband]. Yeah, I used to envy my friends who would you know, talk about their grandkids and it’s a different relationship than your children.*

OA\_P2’s children are not planning on having children; therefore, they knew they would not have the opportunity, like their friends, to have biological grandchildren. As a result, OA\_P2 would feel “envious” towards her friends who would discuss their relationship with their grandchildren as this was inaccessible for OA\_P2. However, being involved in the Family Match program, provided OA\_P2 with an opportunity to form a strong and enduring volunteer kinship with their match to fill the void that existed previously. In fact, younger participants express similar experiences as older adult participants. YA\_P5 states,

*I can’t [pause] this is really only specific to my situation, because it might not be for others, but just how I said like, you know, if your biological grandparents might*

*not be able to be around as much not around at all. Then there's somebody else that can kind of fill in those shoes.*

YA\_P5 shares that the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship facilitated by the Family Match program enabled their volunteer grandparent to “fill in those shoes” that were previously not filled by their biological grandparents. This finding demonstrates that, through substitution mechanisms, volunteer kinships allow one to fill a relationship void that exists with biological kin.

### ***Motivation to Join Program***

Older adult participants and younger adult participants explain that they initially became involved with the Family Match program to cope with or fill a void that was identified in their biological family. For older adult participants one of the motivating factors for joining the program was the distance between themselves and their biological grandchildren. The following quote by OA\_P3 captures this experience:

*That was one strong reason, of course. And then as I told you, we [referring to themselves and their husband] felt that why couldn't we share what we couldn't share physically, and often with our blood grandchildren [who live far away]? So, that's why we joined the organization.*

The distance that exists between OA\_P4 and their biological grandchildren inhibits them from physically spending consistent time together. For OA\_P4 and their husband to share what they have to offer to the younger generation, they decided to enroll in the Family Match program in order to actively fill that void that was present due to the physical distance that existed between themselves and their biological grandchildren. Interestingly, OA\_P1 is not only missing the physical connection with their biological grandchildren but the emotional connection as well since they communicate with their biological grandchildren “once in a while”. Enrolling in the Family Match program provided OA\_P1 with the opportunity to connect and communicate with younger individuals in their community through a volunteer grandmother role.

Some older adult participants expressed that they would not have the opportunity to become biological grandparents as their kids were not planning on having children of their own. OA\_P2 shares that when they were raising their child, they looked into the

Family Match program to have a grandparent figure around for their own children; however, they ended up not enrolling as their mother decided to move into town. OA\_P2 reflects on how they may be able to be a part of the program now as an older adult,

*Fast forward, fast forward, we have two sons, neither one of them are going to be having children. And for some reason, I desperately really needed to be a grandmother. And I just, you know, in passing said to my husband, I wonder if that program still around? And, sure enough, it was.*

OA\_P2 could not be a biological grandmother as their “two sons” were not “going to be having children”. However, OA\_P2 expresses that she “desperately really needed to be a grandmother” despite her children’s decision to not have children. This program filled that missing piece of becoming a grandmother for OA\_P2 as they now can experience being a volunteer grandmother. OA\_P4 reflects on a similar situation,

*I was about 51 when I decided to do this [referring to joining the Family Match program], because I had grandparent energy, okay? Knowing that people—I had my daughter when I was 39. Okay, so she was only 11 or so by then 11 or 12. And she’s not going to have children for some time, if ever. And so, I had an opportunity through a volunteer organization [referring to Volunteer Grandparents] to be a grandparent.*

Even though OA\_P4 was a mother of a preteen at the time she joined the Family Match program, she expresses that she had “grandparent energy”. Since her daughter was considering not having children for some time or not at all, she decided to enroll in the Family Match program and use her grandparent energy to form a volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. Interestingly, OA\_P4 further shares how the teen and preteen years with their daughter motivated her to join the Family Match program,

*Yeah. You know, [names daughter] was a bit of grief in her preteen years, too so it was a great [laughs], great bounce back. I wasn’t about to have another child, obviously. In my early 50’s. No, that’s not gonna happen, right? So, so this was another reason that I probably got involved in the program. Just to have a break from the preteen and teen years.*

OA\_P4 thought that they could use their grandparent energy by having a volunteer grandchild to “bounce back” and have a “break” from coping with her daughter’s challenging preteen years. The volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship not only

gave OA\_P4 the opportunity to become a volunteer grandmother but also provided her with an outlet to cope and support with parenting her biological daughter.

For younger participants, they themselves did not decide to enroll in the program as they were too young at the time of enrollment to understand this concept. As mentioned earlier, the younger participants' parents were the driving force behind program enrollment. Even though younger participants did not sign themselves up, they shared and expressed the motivation behind their parents enrolling them into the program. Like older adult participants, the physical distance from biological grandparents was the main motivating factor identified among younger participants when I asked why their parents enrolled them in the program. YA\_P1 shares,

*Yes. I think her [referring to their mother] reason was, we [referring to their siblings] have grandparents in [names country]. And we [referring to their family] never see them. And she [referring to their mother] wanted us to have like people we could go to and have that connection.*

YA\_P1's mother wanted to ensure that their child had the opportunity to form a grandparent-like "connection". Despite the fact that their biological grandparents were alive, the physical distance between the biological grandparents and grandchildren along with other family-related factors inhibited the biological grandparent-grandchild relationship from developing. Therefore, enrolling in the Family Match program allowed YA\_P1 and their siblings to form a volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship to fill that void that existed with their biological grandparents. Interestingly, YA\_P5 shares a similar perspective,

*Because I grew up— my grandparents, they live in another country across the world. So, um, I don't know I guess my mom kind of want me to have a grandparent sort of figure. So, she lined that up.*

YA\_P2 brings forward a different point of view as they describe the loss of their biological grandmother and their biological grandfather's fight with a chronic disease during their childhood:

*So, my mom. So, like, my grandma died when I was quite young, and my grandpa at the time, was going through [names chronic disease]. So, he wasn't— like, there was a lot going on and my mom kind of wanted someone, some other support system in my life, and she had an amazing connection with her own grandmother.*



The “amazing” connection YA\_P2’s mom shared with her biological grandmother motivated her to create a similar experience for her own child, despite various compounding obstacles. With YA\_P2’s biological grandmother having passed away and their grandfather battling a chronic disease, their mother wanted to create a strong support system for YA\_P2. In response, YA\_P2’s mother enrolled YA\_P2 in the Family Match program to create an environment for a volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship to develop. Like, YA\_P2’s experience, YA\_P4’s perspective includes compounding motivating factors that facilitated program entry. The conversation between myself and YA\_P4 showcases this:

*YA\_P4: I think my parents signed me up because my grandparents were, I would say, not the best grandparents and most of them were either dead by that time, or they were either, I guess somewhat unfit, unfriendly... Also, the fact that they weren't in the country, like most of my grandparents were in like, either [names country] or [names country].*

YA\_P4 expresses how there are various motivational factors at play that resulted in their parents enrolling them in the Family Match program. In YA\_P4’s situation, their biological grandparents had either passed away or were deemed “unfit” as well as physically distant since they lived in another country. To cope with the void of distance, unfitness, and/or loss of their biological parents, YA\_P4’s parents enrolled YA\_P4 in the Family Match program so they could experience a volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. These findings suggest that motivational factors that facilitate program enrollment may not be singular but rather compounding in nature.

#### **4.5.2. “Chosen Family”: Responsiveness to Volunteer Kinship**

Older adult participants expressed that the concept of “chosen family” was in fact not new as they experienced volunteer kinships throughout their life course. In the past, older adult participants have connected with community members and formed volunteer kinships in an informal fashion. OA\_P1 shares,

*My son, you know, his best friend, he called me mom. You know, like a lot of his friends call me mom. So, there's, there's that too, you know, even though they were in their late teens, they one of them still calls me mom and they're in their late 40s now.*

OA\_P1 reflects on how certain environments, as well as close personal relationships facilitated through their biological children, enabled volunteer kinships to form. These informal volunteer kinship relations may have contributed to normalizing these relations along OA\_P1's life course and in turn may have made them more open to enrolling in a formal program that focuses on creating volunteer kinship relations. Comparably, OA\_P4 shares their personal involvement with "chosen family" while growing up and how this is not a "new" concept for them:

*Oh, it's great. It's great. I mean, you know, there's having, having kind of grown up in the 60's when I did, we kind of— there was a big generation gap, then, you know? We kind of made our own families through communal living in different situations so the idea of creating families that aren't blood relations, is an easy grasp for me. And something I'm quite willing to do. As you don't always get along with your family. They're [referring to volunteer kinship] just people like anybody else, right?*

OA\_P4 describes their past experiences of "creating" their "own families through communal living" environments with community members. Having diverse informal volunteer kinships throughout one's life course may make formal volunteer kinship opportunities "easier" to "grasp" compared to someone who has never been exposed to this type of relationship. These findings are important to note as one's social and physical environment throughout one's life course may impact how open one may be to enrolling in an IG program such as Family Match.

#### **4.5.3. "They're Our Family"**

Throughout the different interview sessions participants identified with their match as being one family or identified with their match's family, instead of distinguishing their family and their match as two separate entities. Interestingly, the younger participants compare their volunteer kinship with their match to a biological relationship. YA\_P2 expresses their feelings toward their volunteer grandmother,

*Yeah, um, I think because I started so young, it does feel like natural. It's like, "oh, you didn't see a relative for maybe two years of your life, but they came back into town and moved here" it almost feels like she is, my family, but like my real like blood family.*

YA\_P2 shares that they felt their volunteer grandmother resembled the role of a biological family member, even though they knew they were not biologically related. This suggests that volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationships facilitated through a community-based IG program from such a young age may result in the younger adult viewing their volunteer grandparent as though they are in fact their biological grandparent. It appears that the factor of time plays an important role in this type of relationship development as well as the fact that YA\_P2's biological grandmother was inaccessible. These may be key factors in facilitating this point of view. To further capture the emotional connection between the volunteer grandparent and grandchild, I asked YA\_P4 what they experienced from the Family Match program that was unique and they replied,

*A genuine connection. And sometimes I literally forgot that she wasn't like, genetically, like connected with us... Like, even though she looked completely different. I usually, you know, I just treated her completely as like family.*

YA\_P4 reveals that the genuine volunteer grandparent-grandchild connection the Family Match program facilitated actually made them “forget” they were not “genetically” related to their volunteer grandparent. This is quite interesting as the younger participant points out that even though “she looked completely different”, referring to their differences in ethnicity and culture, that the feeling of true family blinded any differing cultural or ethnic identifying factors. YA\_P4, like YA\_P2 is not in touch with their biological grandparent, further affirming the importance of time and a weak connection with the biological grandparent in facilitating a strong volunteer grandparent-grandchild experience through the Family Match program.

It is important to note that volunteer grandparents also describe the feeling of being very much a part of their volunteer grandchildren's family. OA\_P2 expresses,

*Being involved in there, in, their lives, I mean, [names one of the volunteer grandchildren] had their birthday party in our backyard. It's like, I feel like an integral part of their family.*

OA\_P2 not only identifies with their volunteer grandchild's family but states that they feel they are an “integral part of their family”. This indicates that the volunteer grandparent feels as though their role is valued, needed, and meaningful for the volunteer grandchildren and their family. Notably, the older adult participants do not seem to identify

volunteer kinship and biological kinship in a synonymous fashion like some younger adult participants, suggesting that this finding is unique among younger participants.

#### **4.5.4. Blending of Families and Beyond**

As participants disclosed their experiences, it was identified that they not only felt as though they were a part of their match's family but spoke about how volunteer kinships interacted with extended family and close friends. OA\_P2 shares,

*I mean, they're our family. And our kids are part of that, too. So, particularly our older son and [names the mother of the volunteer grandchildren], you know, they text back and forth. And not, not frequently, but they make an effort to see each other when [participant names their son] is in town.*

This participant is not only referring to their volunteer grandchildren's family as their own but discusses how their volunteer kinship has facilitated other relationships to form beyond the Family Match program, namely between the biological mother of the volunteer grandchildren and the biological son of the volunteer grandparents resulting in a multilevel blending of families.

This excerpt showcases YA\_P3 reflecting on a time when they went to a gathering with their biological family to visit with their volunteer kin's extended family:

*YA\_P3: I think they [referring to their volunteer auntie and uncle] definitely said things that were like, made me feel like "I am part of this family". And also, I've met most of [names volunteer auntie] family, I guess, it very much felt like we [referring to themselves and their sibling] are kind of part of this. Like I talked to the other small children in [their volunteer aunties] family, because it's just meaningful that they let us meet like— these are the actual biological friends and family, and we are part of all of their lives.*

YA\_P3 shares that it was especially meaningful to have the opportunity to interact with their volunteer kin's biological family. Even though the purpose of the Family Match program is to connect participants with one another intergenerationally, the program allows matches to also be integrated into one's extended family, beyond the immediate family.

In fact, volunteer kinships can permeate beyond the participants themselves into the participants' social circle. OA\_P4 explains,

*Well, it [referring to the Family Match program] has even a farther reach than that. [names volunteer granddaughter] also talks to her friends about me, as a reference, right? Like, I sort of feel like I know, these girls well as well. I helped one in particular, throughout a lot of her times in trouble too, which was quite significant through high school. So, it kind of branches out in different ways. They're very connected to each other, other girls of their ages so I can share some of my thoughts their way.*

Being a volunteer grandparent enabled OA\_P4 to be exposed and integrated into their volunteer granddaughter's social circle whereby they had the opportunity to support one of their volunteer granddaughter's close friends. This showcases the reach that volunteer kinship can have beyond the program participants and extended family, into the participants' wider social circle that includes close friendships and connections. Uniquely, OA\_P2 shares a situation whereby their informal and formal voluntary kinship relations ended up befriending one another:

*And what's interesting, we [referring to themselves and their husband] kind of collect people— over the years we've collected people. And we— one, one young lady, she's [names the mother of the volunteer grandchildren's] age. When we met, she was originally our pet sitter and we've just become very close to her, and she needed a place to stay while her condo was being finished. So, she lived with us for a year... She calls us mom and dad, and we call her our other daughter. And so of course, our daughters [referring to the mother of the volunteer grandchildren and the pet sitter] now are friends. So, [names pet sitter and mother of the volunteer grandchildren] have become friends.*

OA\_P2 describes how they informally formed a volunteer daughter kinship with their pet sitter and how they also were able to formally develop a volunteer daughter kinship with the mother of their volunteer grandchildren through the Family Match program. As a result, the two volunteer daughters have now “become friends”. This situation showcases that two unique volunteer kinships can evolve into another relationship, such a friendship or a form of sisterhood. These findings suggest that biological family members may not need to be involved in the forming of a volunteer kinship when the participants are adults since OA\_P2 is not connected to the parents of either of their volunteer daughters.

#### 4.5.5. Younger Individual's Perception of Volunteer Kinship

Themes above examine the variety of opinions and perspectives that friends and family have towards the Family Match program. It should be noted that younger participants shared a unique experience when discussing their volunteer grandparents with others. I took the opportunity to ask YA\_P1 about how they explain their relationship with their volunteer grandparents to others and they replied,

*Um, I feel like when I bring it up, I make it. Like, I say, like, "oh", how do I say it? Yeah, I say like, "oh, they're like, adopted grandparents and I like, explain what that is a little bit and I bring it up, like, as if it's like, almost like an alien thing and like, they've never heard of it, of course.*

YA\_P1 expresses that when the concept of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship comes up, they have to think carefully of what to say and use that moment as an educational experience as the participant understands that the concept of volunteer kinship is most likely a foreign concept for their friend. YA\_P1 states it's "almost like an alien thing", using this analogy to capture the unfamiliarity around volunteer kinship to others. The conversation between myself and YA\_P4 discloses a comparable experience; however, YA\_P4 expands on the additional layer of culture and ethnicity:

*YA\_P4: I refer to her [referring to their volunteer grandmother] like to my friends as like my grandma. And when they ask, like, if— she's like— they're like, confused that she's like, a totally, like, different race than me.*

*Interviewer: And do you have to explain that?*

*YA\_P4: Yeah.*

*Interviewer: Do you find that difficult? Do you find that pretty cool that you get to explain that, like, what's your perspective?*

*YA\_P4: I guess I'm pretty neutral. They're pretty understanding. So.*

Younger participants not only have to explain the fact that their grandparent is not biologically related to them, but they also must explain the difference in culture and ethnicity as none of the matches in this study identify by the same ethnicity or culture. Younger participants are contributing to breaking the barriers that exist surrounding the concept of volunteer kinship as they actively educate their peers about their experience with volunteer kinship. YA\_P4 also states that their friends are "pretty understanding" after

they understand the purpose behind volunteer kinship, showcasing an overall positive response from the younger generation. These findings differ quite dramatically from the findings identified by the sub-subtheme “Separating Volunteer Kinship from Biological Relations” as participants expressed that they chose to keep their volunteer kinship separate from their biological family and sometimes friends because they had a difficult time accepting or had a negative response towards the concept of volunteer kinship. This could be because these friends or family members may have a very traditional view of family where they perceive family as only being conducive to biological or legal relations. Not to mention, this could also be due to a historical or period effect whereby individuals of the younger generation are more open to the idea of chosen family.

## **4.6. Generativity**

For the purposes of this study generativity was defined as “creat[ing] a point of connection between or among individuals through the transfer of values, knowledge, beliefs, moral values, or other cultural constructs that are partible, moving from one person to another” (Rubinstein, Girling, de Medeiros, Brazda, & Susan Hannum, 2014, p. 549). Older adults can express generativity through participating in IG programs, like Family Match, further highlighting that the act of generativity between generations is not bound to biological relations but also volunteer kin relations. Generativity is expressed by volunteer grandparents through the introduction of new activities, skills, and experiences as well as through the transferring of values, perspectives, and ideas to their volunteer grandchildren to support them as they develop.

### **4.6.1. Introduction to New Activities**

The volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship that was fostered from the Family Match program enabled volunteer grandparents to express generativity through acts of offering (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) by exposing their volunteer grandchildren to new experiences that were outside of the volunteer grandchild’s usual elements. OA\_P1 expresses how they would spend their time with their volunteer grandchildren,

*Mostly just introducing them to different things than their parents would introduce them to. You know, like taking them to the movies [pause]. So, we had lots of experiences together that were really fun. I introduced them to ice cream cones. They didn't like them [laughs]. It took them a bit— we were down on [names a location in Vancouver] I remember and [named the younger volunteer grandchild], the youngest one made a face... I [also] took the older one skiing with me, introduced him to that.*

OA\_P1 expresses that they exposed their volunteer grandchildren to new activities and environments that were “different” than what they were used to, which diversified and expanded their exposure. Through concern, commitment, and belief in the next generation, OA\_P2 exposed their volunteer grandchildren to new foods, like ice cream, as well as new experiences that they enjoyed, like the movie theatres and skiing. OA\_P2 transferred their personal experiences and knowledge to their volunteer grandchildren by introducing them to new activities, which in turn may have contributed to developing their personal identities as they were exposed to new experiences and could then identify what they liked and disliked. Similarly, my conversation with OA\_P4 showcases their role in exposing their volunteer grandchild and the mother of the volunteer grandchild to new activities:

*Interviewer: You mentioned, like activities, like skiing, kayaking, like these sorts of like fun, adventurous activities. Were these things [your volunteer grandchild] did before they met you or was exposed—*

*OA\_P4: No, no, it wasn't part of kind of what they do in their family or maybe in that culture necessarily, so that was great, and I mean, [the volunteer grandchild's] mom got into doing some kayaking and stuff with us in the early days.*

Through generativity, OA\_P4 taught the volunteer grandchild and their mother new activities and skills such as skiing and kayaking. OA\_P4 states that these activities were not common practice in the family or in the culture that their volunteer grandchild identifies with. Therefore, it is possible that if OA\_P4 had not introduced their volunteer grandchild to these activities, they may not have had the opportunity to develop these skills throughout their childhood and youth, which in turn may have contributed to their personal development. OA\_P4 transferred their personal experiences and knowledge not only to their volunteer grandchild but also to the mother of the volunteer grandchild, demonstrating that generativity is not limited to volunteer grandparent-grandchild relations.



Younger participants describe their perspectives and emotions behind learning the skills to perform new activities and having new experiences with their volunteer grandparents. YA\_P2 expresses,

*When I was a kid, I really wanted to learn how to sew. So, she [referring to their volunteer grandmother] like— we've done so many little projects here and there... [Also] it was fun, baking and doing all these things that my mom didn't really have time for at the time. Um, so getting to introduced to new activities... Like, I never used to do these sports activities. And I was kind of scared, but she [referring to their volunteer grandmother] was someone that encouraged me to do that.*

YA\_P2's volunteer grandmother facilitated many learning opportunities such as teaching them how to sew and bake as well as introduce YA\_P2 to different sporting activities. YA\_P2 shares that they were “kind of scared” when learning how to do sporting activities; however, their volunteer grandma “encouraged” them to step outside of their comfort zone. YA\_P2's volunteer grandma not only spent time with YA\_P2, she taught and passed down activities that YA\_P2's “mom didn't really have time to do”. Instead of YA\_P2 missing out on certain experiences, through generativity their volunteer grandmother was able to facilitate “fun”, new experiences for YA\_P2, which supported their skill development and possibly their personal development.

#### **4.6.2. Acts of Generativity**

It was identified in a variety of interviews that volunteer grandparents provided guidance, support, and advice through transferring knowledge, values, morals, and beliefs to their volunteer grandchildren. OA\_P2 expresses how they transferred learnings from their career through generativity to support their volunteer grandchildren,

*Well, so way, way, way, way back. I was an English, art, and math high school teacher. And so, I've been able to work with [names the eldest volunteer grandson] a little bit. He's so far beyond me now... [names the eldest volunteer granddaughter] I've really worked with her with, with her art.*

Through the volunteer grandparent-grandchild kinship OA\_P2 was able to transfer their knowledge and skills to their volunteer grandchildren by supporting and guiding them in their school subjects and personal interests. OA\_P2's knowledge and skillset in English,

art, and math was transferred to their volunteer grandchildren to help further develop their skills through generativity.

Volunteer grandparents not only support and guide their volunteer grandchildren in school subjects and interests, they also offer support with various life experiences and life circumstances through generativity mechanisms. I took the opportunity to ask OA\_P4 how they spend time and interact with their volunteer grandchild, and they replied,

*Easy to do, because we just spent... hours [together] yesterday [laughs] together doing a debrief, because she's now at the university level, which is a more complex world for her. So, she gets in touch with me, and often, initiates, our contact, which is really cool. And this happened all through her teenage years... which is rare to have happened. So, we've got to the point where now we're sort of— I suggest some baking, we just make some cookies or something, we sit and play card games that she likes and we talk about her life, basically what's on board for her, and she wants to run things by me get my opinion and guidance, which is fabulous, right? She trusts me with that... And I have a lot of medical knowledge, so she often comes to be about that.*

OA\_P4 describes how their volunteer grandchild voluntarily turns to them for various forms of advice and social support. In turn, OA\_P4 shares their knowledge and experience to support their volunteer granddaughter with navigating her “complex world”. OA\_P4 states that it is “really cool” and “rare” that their volunteer grandchild continuously reaches out and looks to receive advice from their volunteer grandparent. OA\_P4's volunteer grandchild seems to value their experience and knowledge pertaining to life experiences as well as certain topics that they have strong understanding in such as medicine. This encourages OA\_P4 to share their “opinion and guidance”, which evokes a positive emotion in the volunteer grandparent as they express that this exchange is “fabulous”. It is important to note that the emphasis is placed on “trust” and interest in the volunteer grandparent for the volunteer grandchild to not only listen to their advice but also to apply the knowledge that was transferred into their daily life. Therefore, it is possible that these aspects may play a central role in generativity among volunteer grandparent-grandchild relations.

OA\_P4 further shares their perspective on their perceived impact of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship as it pertains to generativity. I asked OA\_P4 if they

have been able to pass down schools of thought, values, and morals through their time and experiences with their volunteer grandchild. OA\_P4 replied,

*I've tried to. I mean, that's what you do in a relationship, I think. And especially an elder, you pass down your experience, you know, you just know because you've been there at different points in your life. And I know she listens to me. Let's put it that way. So, yeah, there's every reason to believe that that is the case.*

OA\_P4 expresses that they consciously “pass down [their] experiences” as an elder to support their volunteer grandchild. Through generativity, OA\_P4 can relate to their volunteer grandchild by disclosing similar experiences and personal knowledge which may strengthen their connection as well as facilitate the volunteer grandchild to show interest in and listen to the advice of their volunteer grandparent and potentially apply it to their life. It is important to identify the mechanisms that facilitate interest in the volunteer grandchild to seek and listen to their volunteer grandparent for advice as this is a voluntary act; therefore, all volunteer grandchildren may not respond in the same fashion.

Moreover, a younger participant (YA\_P1) shares their experience from talking to their volunteer grandpa about a certain topic,

*Um, I would say, like, if I bring something up. I can think of an example if you want to hear that. But if I bring something up that I'm interested in, I would hear another perspective from an older adult. And that's valuable for sure and that definitely alters your opinion, on things. Um... My example is just like, um, I was talking to my grandpa [referring to their volunteer grandfather] about, like investments. And like, he had his opinions about that, and they definitely changed my opinions as well. Like just having those conversations.*

After discussing investments with their volunteer grandpa, YA\_P1 states that their opinions and thoughts “changed” through generativity, demonstrating that being exposed to their volunteer grandpa’s opinions in turn shifted their personal opinion and perspective. In fact, YA\_P5 shares how their volunteer grandparents helped them make various decisions in their life,

*They [referring to their volunteer grandparents] would always help. Like, whenever I was at, like big crossroads in my life... It would be hard for me to pick and point at specific ones, because there's been so many... But yeah, just for an example, like from as little as like, choosing which classes I want to take to, I don't know. Deciding whether to make a big move or not. They're always there to like, give me an unbiased, unbiased opinion and advice on both sides.*

YA\_P5 shares that their volunteer grandparents supported them in “so many” circumstances across varying magnitudes from school course selection to making a big move. YA\_P5’s volunteer grandparents were “always there” to provide an “unbiased opinion and advice” to help inform their decisions. The passing down of knowledge, thoughts, and opinions from their volunteer grandparents through generativity supported YA\_P5 to make more informed decisions. Interestingly, YA\_P5, YA\_P1, and the volunteer grandchild of OA\_P4 share the fact that they appreciate the advice they receive from their volunteer grandparents and apply the advice to the circumstances of the discussion. It is very possible that mechanisms of generativity facilitate a voluntary interest among volunteer grandchildren to receive, accept, and apply their volunteer grandparents’ support, advice, and guidance.

## **4.7. Temporal Factors**

The developing and growing of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship is facilitated by time. The amount of time and the type of time that the volunteer grandparent and grandchild share together can directly influence the relationship strength. The passing of time or lack of time spent together can also result in a distance between volunteer grandparent and grandchild; however, connecting through technology during these times of distance may support the integrity of the grandparent-grandchild relationship.

### **4.7.1. The Role of Time in Growing Volunteer Kinship**

Time plays an important role in the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship as volunteer grandparents enter the grandchild’s life at program enrollment (between the ages of 3-14). It is the factor of time that allows this relationship to grow and develop into a volunteer kinship. OA\_P2 highlights how time contributes to the evolution of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship,

*I think I’ve gone from this stranger who’s bringing food all the time and making cookies to a grandmother that they [referring to the volunteer grandchildren] confide in.*

Interestingly, OA\_P2 first refers to themselves as a “stranger” from the perspective of the volunteer grandchildren and identifies that time and contact enabled them to become “a grandmother that they confide in”. This finding demonstrates the important role time plays in the transferring roles from a stranger to a volunteer kin that supports and cares for their volunteer grandchildren and their family. In fact, OA\_P3 shares a similar sentiment,

*[names the mother of the volunteer grandchildren] and family were total strangers, total strangers. And now to have gone through the knowing and the learning and getting to know and getting to understand and getting to support one another. I think that that is the best lesson ever. I mean, they were total strangers.*

OA\_P3 expresses that they have gone through the processes of “learning”, “getting to know”, and “getting to understand” the volunteer grandchildren and their family to ultimately “support one another”. This finding showcases that it takes time to undergo these vital processes and form a genuine volunteer kinship whereby volunteer grandparents share a supportive connection with the volunteer grandchild and their family.

Younger participants provide their thoughts on how the role of time impacts the progression of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. When I asked YA\_P1 to explain how their relationship with their volunteer grandparents has evolved they responded,

*Yeah, I would say exactly like, time has everything to do with it. And the fact that right from the get-go, they [referring to their volunteer grandparents] wanted to know everything about us [referring to them and their siblings], and like, learn as much as they could, in order to, I guess, fulfill— like they wanted to be like— they had never been grandparents, but they like desperately wanted to. And so, they did everything they could to like, do the best job, I guess. And so that was really helpful. And I guess sped, sped things up.*

YA\_P1 expresses that time “has everything” to do with the development of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. YA\_P1 expressed that their volunteer grandparents “wanted to know everything about [them and their siblings]” and “learn as much as they could” so they could fulfill the volunteer grandparent role to the best of their ability. This finding suggests that there is value in the volunteer grandparents showing deep interest in the volunteer grandchildren right from the beginning of the relationship as this may contribute to quickening the progression and contributing to a strong volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. I then asked YA\_P1 if they feel they have a stronger

relationship with their volunteer grandparents compared to their biological grandparents and they replied,

*Yes. Yes. Just because we, we just spend more time together and know each other more.*

YA\_P1 shares that they feel a closer connection to their volunteer grandparents as they spend more time with them and in turn know them better than their biological grandparents. This finding suggests that relationships with the biological family does not directly result in closer relationship ties. In fact, time is what allowed YA\_P1 to form a stronger connection with their volunteer grandparents than with their biological grandparents. Moreover, YA\_P3 further displays the importance of time in becoming comfortable with progression of a relationship with their volunteer kin,

*But I remember one time our grandparents came to this house, and I was, like, horrified to talk to them and then eventually came around, and we had this great relationship!... Nowadays, I'm pretty social. But when I was a little kid, I was horrified of adults that were not my parents. Like separation anxiety, I don't even know. But yeah, at that point, yeah— I've been told, and I vaguely remember, I was like, hiding under the couch or something [laughs]... By the end of the first time, I had already calmed down.*

YA\_P3 expresses that when they were a child, they “were horrified of adults that were not [their] parents”, which in turn made them afraid of their volunteer kin at first. With increased time and exposure, YA\_P3 “eventually came around” and was able to have “this great relationship” with their volunteer auntie and uncle. In fact, my conversation with YA\_P5 further displays the importance of time when progressing a relationship:

*YA\_P5: But yeah, just like, I think the first time we met was just at the house. We just talked, introduced ourselves. I don't think we hung out for very long. With time we started hanging out more and more we would go out for like lunches and stuff... It was just hard for me at the time as a kid. That's really the only challenge I could think of though.*

*Interviewer: So, it was kind of like, the difficulties of like, warming up to the idea? Like, “Who are these people? Why are they here?” Like those sorts of things?*

*YA\_P5: Yeah. Exactly.*

*Interviewer: Okay. Do you think it's important to like, have that consistent contact and exposure for the relationship to progress?*

YA\_P5: *Yeah. Definitely.*

YA\_P5 shares that it was “hard” at first to understand why older adults were in their house and what their role exactly was; however, they expressed how consistent contact between volunteer grandparent and grandchild “definitely” positively impacts the progression of the relationship. In addition, YA\_P4 touches on the positive impact consistent contact can have on relationship development between volunteer grandparent and grandchild:

*Yeah, at one point like, I was like, really, really close to her [referring to their volunteer grandma]. I remember. I think, possibly I was seeing her [referring to their volunteer grandma] like, more than twice a week probably.*

YA\_P4 reflects on when they felt most connected to their volunteer grandmother. Interestingly, the closeness between volunteer grandparent and grandchild was directly related to the consistency and frequency of their interactions. This finding suggests that consistent contact and total time spent contributes to the strength of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship.

### ***Parental Separation Impacts Time***

Time can be constrained due to separation of the volunteer grandchildren’s parents. The very separation of their parents can limit the amount and consistency of time that is shared between the volunteer grandparent and grandchild. OA\_P2 shares,

*And there’s not a lot of time. It’s the— it’s the back and forth between parents that limit time because they’ve got the week that they’re here with their mom.*

Due to the separation of their parents, the volunteer grandchildren have a limited amount of time to spend with their volunteer grandparents. OA\_P4 expresses that “there’s not a lot of time” as there is “the back and forth between parents” as one week the volunteer grandchildren are with one parent and the next with the other. The fact that the volunteer grandchildren must spend time with both of their parents separately rather than together, “limits” the amount of time that they can spend with their volunteer grandparents. This in turn can very well constrain the amount of time and consistency of interactions between volunteer grandparent-grandchild, which is a concern as these factors have been identified as essential to developing a strong volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. To

further capture the impact time has on volunteer kinship development, I asked OA\_P3 if they thought that having more alone time with their volunteer grandchild would have helped the relationship and they replied,

*It would have helped. But because during the time, he [referring to their volunteer grandchild] would just sometimes when we came, for example, he would leave because the father will pick him up for their time together, that sort of thing.*

OA\_P3 shares that they believe spending more time with their volunteer grandchild would have helped the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship; however, this was not possible as their time was limited by the separation between the parents of their volunteer grandchild. OA\_P3 describes a time when they were spending time with their volunteer grandchild and their time got cut short as their “father [came] to pick him up for their time together”. This finding suggests that the separation of volunteer grandchildren’s parents directly limits the time spent between the volunteer grandparent and grandchild as there seems to be a “battle of time”, which may hinder the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship as amount of and consistency of time are key factors to achieving a strong volunteer kinship.

#### **4.7.2. Concept of “Aging Out”: Maintenance and Sustainability**

The idea of “aging out” of the Family Match program or volunteer-grandparent relationship was an emerging subtheme that related to the passing of time. Since the Family Match program does not have a designated or official “end date” there is uncertainty among participants about if their relationship with their match ends when they turn 15 years old. OA\_P4 expresses their experience with their volunteer granddaughter regarding this,

*And even [names volunteer granddaughter] when she was 12, she thought, “oh, no, I’m not going to be able to see grandma anymore, because they only keep kids up to the age of 12”. I had to explain to her that like I’m not going anywhere.*

OA\_P4’s volunteer grandchild thought that the relationship they shared with OA\_P4 was over once she turned 12 years old, when in fact this is not the case. Any family can enroll with a child between the ages of 3 and 14 years old; however, the match can last as long as the volunteer grandparent-grandchild would like as the matches themselves



facilitate the connection in an ongoing and long-term fashion, which OA\_P4 and their volunteer grandchild ended up doing.

Not to mention, OA\_P1 shares their experience of “aging out” of the program and relationship,

*You kind of age out of out of the program, you know, they [referring to their volunteer grandchildren] kind of go their own way. I don't know, I don't know whether other people stay involved for their whole lives—I mean, I consider myself still involved... It's just that thing, you know, where you get involved with your own life. And if you just let it go, you know, it's just kind of a natural process that I know that through Big Brothers and Big Sisters, that happens too. You know, somehow, you know, you just kind of what I call age out of that kind of relationship. Because you're not really related. Your friends.*

OA\_P1 still considers themselves “involved”, even though they identify as having “aged out” out of the program and the relationship. Over time the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship can dissolve as matches begin to meet less frequently and spend more time apart. OA\_P1 expresses uncertainty surrounding if other matches “stay involved for their whole lives” or not. OA\_P1 describes this disconnection over time as a “natural process” that happens in IG programs like Family Match because “you are not really related” instead “you're friends”. This may suggest that biological relationships are more likely to be long-lasting due to the family history and evolutionary investment that ties one to their family, whereas in volunteer kinship the increase of choice and control may make it difficult to maintain that connection long-term and throughout various life stages.

### ***Long-term Connections***

Due to the long-term nature of the Family Match program volunteer-grandparent relations experience peaks and valleys through time and stages of the life course. As a result, I wanted to explore the connection between volunteer grandparent and grandchild over time, despite program involvement or time spent apart. I took the opportunity to ask OA\_P1 if the interactions with their volunteer grandchildren decreasing over time have negatively affected them. Below is their response,

*No, I just accept that. That's the way things go. You know, I mean, they are they're there. I know that I could reach out, reach out to them. And if I needed help, they'd probably come and help me. They're always gonna call me grandma. Because*

*they've done that since they were little. They're probably always gonna think of me that way.*

OA\_P1 shares that they know and accept that their relationships with their volunteer grandchildren will have ups and downs as they say, “that’s the way things go”. Above all, OA\_P1 is happy with the fact that their volunteer grandchildren are there for them and that they can reach out to their volunteer grandparent anytime if needed. Therefore, she still has this additional layer of social support in her life even though the relationship is not as active as it once was. OA\_P1 also discusses the fact that their volunteer grandchildren are “always gonna call [her] grandma”. Even though the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship changes and evolves over the years, OA\_P1 continues to fulfill the volunteer grandma role and receives social support from the volunteer grandchildren and their family.

*It'll always be there [referring to the role of volunteer grandmother]... You know, it's wonderful to know they're there. And that I can talk to them whenever I feel like it, you know, like, I don't have that. I don't have that with my biological grandkids because there's so much distance between us... You know [pause]. I appreciate the way it's gone [referring to their relationship with their volunteer grandchildren]. And, and I know that it's just come to a natural resolution of, of a distant kind of friendship [referring to volunteer grandchildren]. There will always be a connection to the boys [referring to their volunteer grandchildren]. You know, it'll always be there [referring to their relationship volunteer grandchildren]. And whatever we make of it [referring to their volunteer grandchildren]. It might come closer again, as the boys get older [referring to their volunteer grandchildren]. It might not. It's hard to say.*

Even though the grandparent-grandchild relationship is more distant than it once was, OA\_P1 is still able to maintain their volunteer grandparent role due to the strong foundation of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship that was built over the years. Interestingly, the match still fills a void that existed prior to OA\_P1’s involvement in the Family Match program. OA\_P1 expresses that “there will always be that connection...it’ll always be there”, demonstrating long-term relational impact the Family Match program facilitates. OA\_P1’s relationship with their volunteer grandchildren has evolved into “a distant kind of friendship” where there remains an opportunity for the relationship to be “closer again” with time. This finding demonstrates that even if the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship has distanced, the connection remains long-term, maintaining hope that the relationship could be rebuilt.

Even though YA\_P4 is not as close as they once were with their volunteer grandparent, they are still confident in the relationship they have with their volunteer grandparent. YA\_P4 expresses,

*I haven't talked to her [referring to their volunteer grandmother] in a pretty long time, I'd say. Because I've just been caught up with school and you know, everything with that. But I think I would say that I still have a really good relationship with her [referring to their volunteer grandmother].*

Even though YA\_P4 expresses that they have not connected with their volunteer grandmother in some time, the relationship is still strong and intact as they say, "I would say that I still have a really good relationship with her". This finding further solidifies that a strong volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship foundation can lead to a long-term connection despite distance and possible disconnect. YA\_P4 explains that they have been very "caught up with school" identifying the fact that life may 'get in the way' of consistently connecting with their match over time. This finding ties back to the idea that biological relationships may be more long-lasting due to family history and evolutionary investment that limit the amount of choice one has pertaining to their biological family. Although volunteer kinship ties have more choice and control, over time this may result in the distancing of these relationships as there are limited obligations, which may in turn result in the halting the growth of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship.

### ***The Idea of Reaching Out***

Participants identified that they were content and happy with the foundation of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship as well as with the connection they have with their match. I wanted to explore this more by identifying if matches wanted to work on or improve their connection and contact with their match. YA\_P4 highlights the interest they have in reaching out to their volunteer grandparent:

*Yeah, I definitely wish I saw her more. I, I feel like it's mostly my fault, though... Yeah, once my school's over, because right now I'm in like, probably the toughest part. You know, it's like waking up at 5:30 every day, you when you like, come home, like, you're just like, completely drained. And then I go to the gym, and then I'm just like, go to bed, you know. Life is pretty repetitive right now.*

YA\_P4 shares that he misses connecting with his volunteer grandmother as they say, “I wish I saw her more”. Interestingly, YA\_P4 takes ownership and responsibility for the fact that they have not connected with their volunteer grandmother in a long time. This realization facilitated YA\_P4 to plan on connecting with his volunteer grandma “once school is over”. YA\_P5 expresses a similar sentiment of wanting to connect more with their volunteer grandparent; however, they feel constrained to do so:

*I'm happy with the fact that like, I have them [referring to their volunteer grandparents] if I need them, but at the same time it's just—I've been so busy with everything going on in my life, it's been hard to make time to make phone calls. Really. It doesn't just go for them. Because it's very rare for me to have an hour like this to sit down and talk. But when I do have that time, I'm like you know usually doing something else that I haven't got the chance to do in a while... To answer your question, it's like, yeah, I would want to reach out more. But it's just based on the circumstances. It's hard. And I'm happy with where we are.*

Even though YA\_P5 identifies that they wish to connect more with their volunteer grandparents, they feel constrained by their hectic and busy lifestyle. Therefore, when YA\_P5 has free time, they do “something else that [they] haven't got the chance to do in a while” and seeing or connecting with their volunteer grandparent does not seem to fit into their constrained leisure time. The language YA\_P5 uses is not actionable as they say, “I would want to reach out more”. It is possible that if YA\_P5 was unhappy with the state of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship, they would feel the need to act; however, they express being “happy with where [they] are” in the relationship and feel confident in the fact that their volunteer grandparents are always there for them.

Moreover, older adult participants express interest in reaching out to their volunteer grandchildren due to the substantial amount of time that has passed since they last connected. I took the opportunity to ask OA\_P1 if they see themselves reaching out to their volunteer grandchildren at some point and they replied,

*Oh yeah, sure... I should really reach out and see him [referring to their younger volunteer grandson]. He, he's at school. He's either one wanting to be a plumber, or an electrician, one or the other. I think electrician he was very involved in Lego. He loved Lego he built all kinds of stuff on his own, not from plans or anything you know, he invented stuff. But I'm sure things have changed. He's now 17. And of course, they they've learned to drive.*

Discussing the length of time that has gone by since OA\_P1 has connected with their volunteer grandchild makes them realize that a considerable amount of time has passed. In response, OA\_P1 reflects on how much they may have missed and how many changes have taken place from the last time they connected. When asking OA\_P1 if they would be interested in reaching out, it seemed like their response was a new thought as they responded “oh yeah, sure... I should really reach out and see him”. Even though OA\_P1 and YA\_P5 expressed that they would want to reach out to their volunteer kin only YA\_P4 identified an actionable plan to reach out to their match. This finding suggests that participants reflect and feel as though they should or want to connect more closely with their match; however, they may fail to act on the thought possibly due to lack of obligation, extensive flexibility and choice, and mere confidence in the current status of the relationship.

#### **4.7.3. Importance of Informal Time**

My discussions with participants identified an emerging theme surrounding informal time and its impact on the grandparent-grandchild relationship. Since the Family Match program is flexible and the very nature of interactions are controlled by the participants themselves, I was interested in exploring how “informal” or “formal” interactions contributed to the strength of the bond between the volunteer grandparent and grandchild. The excerpt of an exchange between myself and OA\_P4 showcases the impact of informal interactions on their relationship with their volunteer grandchild:

*Interviewer: I also wanted to ask you, since you've had those informal and those formal interactions, do you think that without those informal, in between, like normal daily life kind of discussions or activities, that your relationship wouldn't have been as close as it is?*

*OA\_P4: Oh, definitely not. Because that's what a, you know, an actual grandparent that is involved would be doing. I would think, right? So. Yeah, that's, and I mean, maybe that wouldn't work for a lot of people but yeah, that was the only way I could sort of function into this thing is on a very sort of real basis.*

This finding suggests that informal interactions may contribute to the closeness of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. OA\_P4 expresses that informal acts

enable them to be “an actual grandparent”. They also share that they understand this approach may not work for all but for them, it “was the only way” they could facilitate and sustain a “real” grandparent-grandchild relationship. Furthermore, YA\_P1 uncovers the power of “insignificant moments” and their impact on relationship building,

*Like, your life at the end of the day, like, when you die, I guess your life will be different just because of those very small, insignificant moments. And just because I've known them [referring to their volunteer grandparents] for so long, there's so many of those are, like so many moments that like compound... Like, the very insignificant moments are like life altering. That's what I was trying to explain.*

YA\_P1 conceptualizes informal interactions as “very small insignificant moments”. They express that these very moments are what impact one’s life most. For YA\_P1, simply spending time with their volunteer grandparents has enabled “so many [insignificant] moments” to compound and impact them in a meaningful way. It appears that it is not the formal, extravagant exchanges between volunteer grandparent-grandchild that harness more meaning, but rather the small, informal interactions that are “life altering”. This finding suggests that the concept of time may play a role in the amount of impact that informal interactions have on the relationship between the volunteer grandparent-grandchild. Interestingly, YA\_P4 shares a similar perspective as they describe what was most personally meaningful from their experience,

*I think just going to her [referring to their volunteer grandmother] house and spending time with her and having sleepovers at her house, you know? Yeah, like even though like all the [names sporting venues] were fun. I think the most, the most connecting times were where I'd like, wake up in her house or something, you know?*

YA\_P4 identifies that simply “going to [their volunteer grandmothers] house” for sleepovers and just spending time together allowed for “the most connecting times” more than attending formal activities like sporting events. This solidifies the finding above which suggests that the most meaningful interactions where volunteer grandparent-grandchild connections strengthen are during informal time rather than formal interactions. In particular, this finding also brings forward the concept of personal space and how the volunteer grandchild may feel a deeper and stronger connection to their volunteer grandparent while in their home.

OA\_P3 shares how the absence of informal inter can negatively impact the volunteer-grandparent relationship,

*That's the thing. This is why I feel guilty. It was a rather unusual, it wasn't the, the regular grandparent relationship. You know, for example, there's one member... He was the type who would really babysit. We didn't do any of that... We would have quality meetings. You know like birthdays, holidays. But other than that, we weren't really doing any of the regular grandparenting job of playing with them... [It's] very important [to connect informally] if that could be done.*

While OA\_P3 reflects on their relationship with their volunteer grandchild, they express feelings of “guilt” as they were not able to experience a “regular grandparent relationship” like other matches who shared daily informal interactions together. OA\_P3 expresses that the nature of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship was more formal and rigid as informal, spontaneous, and consistent interactions did not take place. As a result, this volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship was not as strong as other matches. OA\_P3 overtly identifies the importance of informal interactions in a program such as the Family Match program if it “could be done” alluding to the parental constraints that impacted the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. This finding not only showcases the importance of informal connections when building a strong volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship but also highlights the highly influential role parents have in the development and sustainability of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild dyad.

#### **4.7.4. Proximity and Time**

Throughout various interviews there was a relationship identified between proximity of volunteer grandparent and grandchild and the concept of time. The physical distance between volunteer grandparent and volunteer grandchild may contribute to enhancing or constraining the relationship. OA\_P3 shares that their volunteer granddaughter was just starting to get to the age where she was becoming comfortable with OA\_P3 and this was unfortunately when the family decided to move:

*Yeah. So, even if my regret is just that as [names volunteer granddaughter] was growing up, they were leaving, you know, so it would have been different if we were still physically together and to try out the little grandma, granddaughter [relationship] like with my blood, granddaughter... It's just a shame that with*

*[names volunteer granddaughter] that did not materialize because as I said, you know, they left.*

OA\_P3 was looking forward to having the opportunity to form a stronger in-person relationship with their volunteer granddaughter. OA\_P3 feels as though they missed the opportunity to grow and strengthen the relationship with their volunteer granddaughter as the family moved during a pivotal time in the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship development. The distance between the volunteer grandchildren's new residence and the volunteer grandparent's residence prevented the relationship between volunteer grandparent and grandchild from blossoming to its full potential as their time together ended prematurely. In fact, YA\_P5 mentions how physical distance impacted their relationship with their volunteer grandparents:

*And then COVID happened and all that and then right after that about a year ago, we moved out to [names city]... Not, like, not necessarily an impact on the relationship...Like, we wouldn't be able to see each other.*

Even though the physical distance between YA\_P5 and their volunteer grandparents does “not necessarily impact the relationship”, it does impact the fact that they are not able to see each other. The inability to see one another complicates the relationship as the amount of time and consistency of connections are constrained. Interestingly, YA\_P5 expressed that the existing relationship does not feel threatened or damaged due to distance; however, the future development of the relationship may in fact be in question due to the extreme amount of physical distance between volunteer grandparent and grandchild.

Consequently, OA\_P1 expresses how living close to their volunteer grandchildren allows them to spend time together due to their proximity. OA\_P1 states,

*I think it's just important to know that it was a really lovely time in my life that filled me up with joy and, and I really enjoyed the experience I had with them. And I like that they're there. They live close by, and I can I see them once in a while. And know, I feel solid knowing that they are part of my life.*

OA\_P1 reflects positively about their relationship with their volunteer grandchildren. Even though they do not see their volunteer grandchildren as often as they used to, the fact that they live “close by” allows OA\_P3 to see them “once in a while”. If



there was a large physical distance between volunteer grandchild and grandparent, it is possible that this distance could inhibit them from seeing one another, resembling the experience shared by YA\_P5. Unlike OA\_P3, OA\_P1 can feel “solid” knowing that their volunteer grandchildren are a part of their life as they are still able to spend in-person time together, facilitated by their proximity.

#### **4.8. The Role of Technology in Relationship Maintenance**

Participants expressed using technology to maintain relationships during periods of time and/or distance apart. The conversation between myself and OA\_P2 demonstrates the role technology can have in supporting volunteer grandparent-grandchild relations:

*OA\_P2: And one of the things is I can text [names both older volunteer grandchildren] because they have phones, right? So, you know, I'll just sometimes text them to see how school went, or if I know one of them is having a test, I ask how did the tests go? And so that's allowed us to have more of a daily relationship than— because they're, you know, there's a whole week that they're at their dads, and I'm not in contact with them. So, yeah.*

*Interviewer: Okay, so do you find the technology helpful in maintaining that relationship?*

*OA\_P2: Absolutely. Absolutely. And then, this summer, they all went to [names country] together. And the two older ones, really, they kept in touch, they sent photos, they let us know what they were doing. And again, we don't have that with the little ones yet. And that makes a huge difference. Because we're not always there.*

Interestingly, OA\_P2 and their older volunteer grandchildren can “have more of a daily relationship” through texting. Therefore, they can remain in touch through time and physical distance and not let the in-person time they lost based on external circumstances impact the integrity of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. Interim contact using technology may contribute to “maintaining” the already existing volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship and allow the match to cope with the external forces at play that may limit time that the volunteer grandparent and grandchild can spend together. Even though the volunteer grandparents can't “always [be] there” in a literal sense, technology allows them to support and connect with their volunteer grandchild on an ongoing basis. It is important to note that an existing relationship between the volunteer

grandparent and grandchild may impact how technology contributes to the ongoing success of the relationship. In fact, a younger participant shares a similar sentiment,

*In terms of how we maintain that connection like, we text. She's [referring to their volunteer grandmother] always inviting me over... She always texts me about her own life updates and I kind of chime in as well.*

YA\_P2 and their volunteer grandparent “maintain [their] connection” through texting, like OA\_P2 and her volunteer grandchildren. This type of communication creates an ongoing bi-directional communication mechanism where volunteer grandparent and grandchild can plan their next get-together and share “life updates”. YA\_P2 utilizes technology as a coping mechanism to maintain the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship through time, distance, and space. In fact, YA\_P2 uncovers the importance of building a strong volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship before utilizing technology to connect with one another:

*Because we're [referring to themselves and their volunteer grandmother] able to adapt, I think if you've been in like a constant relationship, you're willing to adapt for them. Versus if it's a new one, then I think that would have been a little bit more difficult. Because some people don't do very well on text, so if I hadn't met her [referring to their volunteer grandmother], and then we were texting, I probably would have gotten the feeling that she wasn't interested because she doesn't respond too frequently. Or some texters don't like love being on the phone. So that would be really interesting. I would almost get the sense that she wasn't as interested in a relationship or being a part of someone's life. Because she's just more of an in-person, person and I am to.*

YA\_P2 expresses how in some situations and during certain periods of time they cannot see their volunteer grandparent as regularly. To maintain the relationship, the volunteer grandparent and grandchild “adapt” together by texting one another. Interestingly, YA\_P2 shares “if I hadn’t met her, and then we were texting, I probably would have gotten the feeling that she wasn’t interested because she doesn’t respond too frequently”. It should be noted that how one communicates in-person may be very different from how one engages with technology. YA\_P2 highlights the importance of having a strong existing relationship prior to regularly communicating through technology as the way one engages with technology may be entirely different than how they act in-person. It is possible that if the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship depends too heavily on technology, premature strain may be put on the relationship and risk the integrity of the

connection. This finding solidifies the importance of building a strong in-person volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship prior to engaging with technology as depending on technology to maintain a connection too quickly in the relationship progression may jeopardize the volunteer kinship. It should be noted that the role of technology during COVID-19 will be mentioned in the following section as a sub-theme to the findings related to the COVID-19 context.

## **4.9. The Role of COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic, along with the regulations and restrictions that accompanied the pandemic, directly impacted the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. The COVID-19 pandemic forced participants to identify alternative means to connect with their matches as well as prevented interactions from continuing due to fear of spreading or contracting the COVID-19 virus.

### **4.9.1. Modifying Contact**

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic was still very much ongoing, participants expressed that they were able to remain connected to their matches during these times by modifying their in-person contact. OA\_P2 shares an example of how they were able to still meet and connect with their volunteer grandchildren during the COVID-19 pandemic,

*Oh, it impacted [the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship] tremendously. But we, we had workarounds. They didn't come into the house for a long, long time. But we have a big backyard, we've got a deck... And so, I mean, we also make fun out of it. Because we had— we put a table and chairs at the bottom of the deck. We stayed up on the deck while they played in the backyard. And I think it was [names the older volunteer grandchild] and [names the older volunteer granddaughter] and [participant names their husband] idea we were going to make an elevator, a pulley elevator so, we could send drinks and food down to them. So, they got this piece of wood. And then they did all these strings. They did it once and then it didn't work. And then they took it all apart and they did it again. And so, we still have it somewhere where we lowered the food down to them so they could eat at the table. It was so much fun. So, we— while we didn't see each other as much. When the weather was nice. We did. And then a friend of ours loaned us two big tents that we put in the back, like canopy tents. So, we would sit in one and they would sit in the other so we would be able to visit.*

Even though OA\_P2 and their volunteer grandchildren implemented “workarounds” to see one another, interacting in this way still impacted their relationship “tremendously”. It took some time throughout the course of the pandemic for the volunteer grandchildren to meet in-person with OA\_P2 in an outdoor environment as the in-person meetings needed to coincide with their comfort level. Due to OA\_P2’s access to a large outdoor environment they were able to connect, play, and have “fun” with their volunteer grandchildren while keeping a safe distance apart. This finding showcases the importance of modified contact in maintaining the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship through history-graded events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. To further understand the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, I asked OA\_P2 if being able to see their volunteer grandchildren during the COVID-19 pandemic provided support during these isolating times and they replied,

*Oh, gosh, yes. Oh, my goodness, yes. If we couldn't have seen them, it would have been horrific. We weren't seeing much of anybody; we were pretty much locked in our house in the beginning. Sometimes they would just come drive up and wave through the window. And then we would watch them play in the backyard, and then they'd go home. But at least we got to physically see each other.*

OA\_P2 shares that it would have been “horrific” if they had not seen their volunteer grandchildren during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially because they “were pretty much locked in [their] house” in the beginning. This finding suggests that there may be varying levels of comfort for OA\_P2 when engaging with their volunteer grandchildren that may or may not reflect the different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, at the beginning when it was more severe, OA\_P2 explains that their volunteer grandchildren and their family would “drive up and wave through the window”; however, as restrictions eased, they “would watch them play in the backyard” and engage with them in a more intimate outdoor setting. This finding further solidifies the importance of maintaining contact in the volunteer grandparent-grandchild dyad through history-graded events such as the COVID-19 pandemic as it allows older adults to keep part of their social network intact.

Moreover, my conversation with OA\_P4 highlights how purposefully maintained contact with their volunteer grandchild and their family supported one another with navigating the pandemic:

*Interviewer: And would you say you benefited from having those interactions stay consistent through the pandemic?*

*OA\_P4: Oh, yeah! I can't imagine. People wouldn't, yeah, no, no, they probably broke off any number. And I've heard that from a number of people... So having that, yeah, no, we kept in touch and that was consistent all along. The mom [of their volunteer grandchild] gave us [referring to themselves and their partner] some info. She knew they were giving a vaccine, so [names participants partner] was able to get it earlier than usual. As, as a kind of joint family, we kept better informed about that. It's harder for us to get the vaccine and all sorts of things that went on.*

OA\_P4 shares a similar sentiment to OA\_P2 as they both express that they benefited from continuously interacting with their volunteer grandchild throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and they “can’t imagine” what it would have been like otherwise. They also reflect on the fact that many people “probably broke off” different relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic. OA\_P2 did more than keep in constant touch with their volunteer grandchild but also worked together with the family of the volunteer grandchild to support one another in navigating the healthcare system to ensure they had appropriate access to the COVID-19 vaccination as well as pandemic-related information. It appears that leaning into the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship during COVID-19 enabled OA\_P2 to maintain their relationship strength with their volunteer grandchild and their family as well as facilitated additional support relating to the pandemic.

### ***Fear and COVID-19: Vulnerability of Older Adults***

Younger participants expressed and demonstrated feelings of fear towards their volunteer grandparents’ health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. These feelings of fear resulted in the volunteer grandchildren to alter their behaviour towards their volunteer grandparent. OA\_P2 shares an experience they had with their volunteer grandchild being concerned about their health and well-being,

*But what was really, really sad is, is, you know, in the beginning, particularly when everybody was so vulnerable, and there was no vaccine and the kids really had to be careful, so they had to stay away from us. And so, I'll never forget one time, it*

*was awful. Because [names the mother of the volunteer grandchildren] really drilled it into— because both my husband and I are immune compromised. And them particularly just being away from us being, being six feet away, being not close, not breathing in our direction, all of that. And one day I was walking up the stairs to the deck. And [names one of the younger grandchildren] was at the top and I didn't see her. And when I came up, she went [covered her face] and I thought I was going to cry in front of her. It was like, like, just like I have to protect you. I'm not going to breathe near you.*

Due to the health status of OA\_P2 and her husband, the volunteer grandchildren ensured they practised social distancing measures for the health and safety of their volunteer grandparents. Even though OA\_P2 feels it was important to be cautious, it was hurtful for her to see their volunteer grandchild display so much concern about being in too close to themselves so much so that she “thought she was going to cry”. The vulnerability of the volunteer grandparents during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a change in behaviour among volunteer grandchildren that was cautious in nature to protect the health and well-being of their volunteer grandparents. In fact, YA\_P2 shares how they ensured they did not risk their volunteer grandmother’s safety during the COVID-19 pandemic,

*And so, we [referring to themselves and their volunteer grandmother] were still meeting and doing things, because she knew I was careful. Had I been with a bunch of people she would check in and make sure that I would tell her, “hey, you know what? This week, I hung out with a lot of people, and you know what? I think we should just give it a rest”. Like I would mentally just feel bad about it. And even like, recently, I was quite sick, and I didn't know if it was COVID, it felt like a cold. I told her I was like, “you know what? I'm not coming over”. Like I would be— feel really guilty. Or if I've gone to the club or something [laughs] and I were to go over and I feel I have a cough, I would tell her, “you know what? It's not a good time”. So, it's being mindful of each other during COVID. I think that was like for my own biological grandfather it was a big priority, but for her [referring to their volunteer grandmother] too because she actually did get COVID from other people. So, I didn't want to be another reason she caught it. Yeah, so being super mindful about that.*

YA\_P2 felt the need to protect the health and safety of their volunteer grandmother by being very “careful” and honest. In fact, YA\_P2 would refrain from seeing their volunteer grandmother if they were feeling “sick” or had been with “a bunch of people”. YA\_P2 expresses that they did not want to be the reason that their volunteer grandmother contracted the COVID-19 virus, instead they wanted to protect their health and that meant limiting their contact when necessary. Another younger participant shares a similar

sentiment about restricting contact with their volunteer grandparents during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the sheer vulnerability of older adults. YA\_P5 says,

*Um, just, like COVID hit and so they're elderly, of course. So, you can't really see elders when that whole big craze was going on. So, that kind of, you know, split us apart. And then just again, with all the craze and everything, trying to figure things out, never really made time to talk to one another.*

To protect the safety of their volunteer grandparents during the COVID-19 pandemic, YA\_P5 refrained from seeing their volunteer grandparents. As a result, the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship began to “split... apart” as they stopped communicating which resulted in a distancing of the relationship. It is possible that the lack of contact during the COVID-19 pandemic due to volunteer grandchildren feeling fearful for the health and safety of their volunteer grandparents strained the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship as the amount of time spent together and regularity of interactions were limited.

#### **4.9.2. Technology and COVID-19**

Interestingly, participants shared how technology could be a useful mechanism or was in fact a useful tool to stay in touch with their volunteer kin during a contact-limiting time like the COVID-19 pandemic. My conversation with YA\_P4 demonstrates this:

*Interviewer: Do you think that— I know, it's looking back, but I'm wondering if you think, if you kept in touch during COVID that maybe your relationship would have been stronger? Like using tech or just like—*

*YA\_P4: Yeah. I completely believe so. I feel like if we like video chatted or like, even just texted it that would have been a lot better.*

Unfortunately, YA\_P4 and their volunteer grandparent did not use technology to keep in touch during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, YA\_P4 rapidly expresses that they believe that if they had used “video chat” or “text” with their volunteer grandparent it would have strengthened the relationship. These findings coincide with previous findings that technology may be a useful way to keep volunteer grandparents and grandchildren connected through times of distance or during a history-graded event that limits social contact like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interestingly, YA\_P2 mentioned how technology was used to keep in touch with their volunteer grandmother during the COVID-19 pandemic:

*We were texting give each other updates. I feel like the world had stopped at that point. So, it was like, there's not really any more personal news. It's more like, "oh my gosh, this is like, can't believe this is still happening". So, we do text, but it's more like, it's kind of like with friends, you know, sometimes you text and some people say, "oh, I see this, and I'll reply later, and then it takes few days". So, it's the same with my grandma like, it takes a couple days. Not saying that they don't care. But it's like similar with my friends. But then also, when I've been on long vacation, she's called me on FaceTime and that's been good, too. But in COVID, we didn't really use that we kind of just— we would email each other and text but we weren't— It wasn't a time where we were in a complete conversation for two hours over text. It would be over days.*

YA\_P2 shares how they were able to connect with their volunteer grandparent despite the COVID-19 pandemic, through “text” and “email”. Even though these technological outlets kept the communication channel open between YA\_P2 and their volunteer grandparent, it seems as though communication was less rapid and intimate than in-person communication as technology was primarily used to “update” one another. Although communicating through technology does not seem as favourable as in-person communication or contact, it may be a good way for volunteer grandparents and grandchildren to maintain contact during periods of distance like COVID-19.

#### **4.9.3. COVID-19 and Relationship Distancing**

The COVID-19 pandemic actively inhibited the development of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. Participants share how the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted their volunteer relationship. My conversation with YA\_P3 showcases this:

*YA\_P3: These days there's very little— like we don't speak much.*

*Interviewer: Okay. And that fizzled out, during like predominantly COVID time?*

*YA\_P3: 100%*

*Interviewer: So, if there wasn't COVID, do you think you would be closer?*

*YA\_P3: Yes, definitely [laughs].*



YA\_P3 expresses that the current state of their relationship with their volunteer kin was “100%” attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic. YA\_P3 states that they would “definitely” be closer to their volunteer kin if the COVID-19 pandemic had not happened. This finding supports the results highlighted previously which discuss how COVID-19 constrained the amount of time that volunteer grandparents and grandchildren could spend together, which in turn impacts their relationship. Interestingly, YA\_P5 shares a very similar sentiment to YA\_P3,

*Interviewer: And you mentioned to me like how your relationship has evolved a little bit with your volunteer grandparents. So, when you were younger, it seems that you were closer probably up until you said five years ago?*

*YA\_P5: Yeah, roughly, maybe four just right before COVID.*

*Interviewer: Okay, so do you think COVID had a big impact on the relationship?*

*YA\_P5: Oh, 100%? Yeah.*

Moreover, my conversation with OA\_P3 identifies how the COVID-19 pandemic further distanced the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship:

*Interviewer: I had a question about COVID. So how did that impact your relationship?*

*OA\_P3: Well, COVID they already have moved out to [names city]. Or they were moving out.*

*Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, two years agoish. So, do you think it like created more distance? COVID?*

*OA\_P3: Of course. Oh, my God. Not think. It is. It did, it does.*

These findings demonstrate the importance of emergency preparedness to prevent the dissolving of strong and well-developed volunteer kinships during public health concerns, like the COVID-19 pandemic. It is imperative that organizations like Volunteer Grandparents implement an efficient and effective emergency preparedness plan to ensure that the integrity of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship is not jeopardized through forced times of distance like COVID-19 pandemic.

## 4.10. Diversity and Acceptance

Participants' engagement in the Family Match program evoked exposure to different ways of life and cultures that were outside of their "norm". Being introduced to new ideas and ways of thinking enabled participants to not only be exposed to something different but accept these differences and be open to diverse perspectives through volunteer kin relationship building. Through the Family Match program, participants gained exposure to and contact with opposing generations where they shared cultures and perspectives through their volunteer kinship.

### 4.10.1. Learning to Accept Differences

Through the Family Match program participants formed volunteer kin relations with individuals who were "different" than themselves or their family. YA\_P3 shares,

*I feel like— well, first of all, um [names their volunteer auntie and uncle], both of them are like, very different people than my family, because they both grew up around here. And my parents are immigrants. And like, it's just taught me a lot about that, like the variety of people around you.*

YA\_P3 identifies that their volunteer auntie and uncle were "very different" than themselves and their family pertaining to personality, cultural identity, and their way of life. YA\_P3 shares how being in a volunteer kinship with individuals who were different than themselves "taught [them] a lot about... the variety of people around [them]" as they were able to engage with them and accept the diversity that existed within their volunteer kinship. Moreover, OA\_P1 also expresses how "different" it was being a part of the volunteer grandchildren's family:

*It was totally different than what I what I was brought up with or what I did. Like they [referring to the volunteer grandchildren's family] don't celebrate Christmas, they don't give each other gifts. They, they they're totally giving people— don't get the wrong idea. It's not that we don't give too but like—I was used to having the birthday parties for my son and all his friends and they had them, the birthday parties but they didn't want me to bring anything or Christmas, you know don't bring any gifts. We don't do that [pause]. Yeah. Probably because of their— I don't know if in [names country], she [referring to parent of volunteer grandchildren] was raised with Christmas. I don't know that, but it just was different, you know, like it was it was just a different way of seeing how people live compared to how I lived you know?... I got used to it when they got used to me. And, you know, it all*

*worked out fine. I mean, we didn't have any— there were no problems with it at all [laughing].*

OA\_P1's volunteer grandchildren and their family did not have the same customs or celebrate the same holidays that OA\_P1 was familiar with. In response, OA\_P1 learned how to engage with their volunteer grandchildren and their family in a new way that was respectful of their cultural differences. OA\_P1 learned and accepted the differences between themselves and the family of their volunteer grandchildren which enabled them to form a strong volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. This process of learning and accepting in turn introduced OA\_P1 to "different way[s] of seeing how people...live compared to how [they] lived". Being involved in this volunteer kinship not only exposed OA\_P1 to a different way of living but allowed them to accept differences as they state, "I got used to it when they got used to me". This finding suggests that both volunteer grandparent and grandchild may go through the process of learning about, adapting to, and accepting the diversity within the relationship which contributes to developing a strong volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship.

In fact, YA\_P2 brings forward an interesting perspective when describing their ties with their volunteer grandparent,

*Um, I think it's people that come from very two different, like, ages are kind of, were raised in very different cultures, but are able to connect with each other based on their differences and willingness to kind of learn about one another's experiences.*

YA\_P2 states that the Family Match program enabled them to connect with their volunteer grandparent "based on their differences" and "willingness to... learn about one another's experiences". This highlights that the differences and diversity that exist between volunteer grandparent and grandchild can contribute to the forming of a strong volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship as both parties must be willing to learn and accept their differences in a bi-directional fashion. In addition, I asked YA\_P5 if this experience taught them about learning to accept people who come from different backgrounds, have different opinions, and are of a different age and they replied,

*Yeah, definitely... Especially like being— this was probably one of my first exposures to that... Just overall, like, being able to connect with someone that isn't*

*exactly like you... Like, it taught me a lot in today's world. Like at work you don't, you don't like everybody that you work with, you know, they're not going to be your best friend. But you need to be able to connect with them and be cool with them because you spend majority of your time with them. [The Family Match program is] where it [referring to the ability to accept differences] got founded, for sure... [It] taught me how to be more like, diverse.*

YA\_P5 shares how their relationship with their volunteer grandparents “was probably one of [their] first exposures” that allowed them “to connect with someone who isn't exactly like you”. This experience “taught” YA\_P5 at a young age that they do not need to look like or be like someone to form a strong relationship. This idea of being able to accept the differences of others was “founded” through YA\_P5's relationship with their volunteer grandparents and their ability to accept diversity and differences in people or ideas which in turn has supported YA\_P5 throughout their daily life. It is important to note that the mere exposure of the opposing generations may not be enough to facilitate a strong bond. The Family Match program creates an opportunity for diverse IG connections and volunteer kinships to form. The acceptance of these diverse IG relationships can contribute to the growth and development of a successful volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship.

#### **4.10.2. Better Understanding of Different Generations**

The Family Match program created an outlet for participants to interact with their different generations. Older individuals interacting with younger individuals and vice versa provided participants with a richer diverse understanding of other generations. This was especially valuable as prior to program entry many participants had limited in-person contact with other generations. In fact, YA\_P1 highlights the importance and impact of having a diverse range of older adults in one's life,

*Yeah, yeah. I think so. Just because I guess I would have, essentially three grandmothers and three grandfathers, then I guess more than I know, that I understand each of each, like I guess I understand the older generation a lot better. More than I actually realize.*

Being involved in the Family Match program has provided YA\_P1 with the experience of having three sets of grandparents, which in turn increased their understanding of the diversity amongst the older adult population. For instance, YA\_P1 shares, “I guess

more than I know...I understand each of each, like I guess I understand the older generation a lot better” demonstrating that they understand “each” grandparent in their own way, more than they may realize. This finding suggests that increasing and diversifying young individuals’ exposure to older adults through volunteer kinship may increase their understanding of the diversity amongst the older adult generation. As a matter of fact, YA\_P2 expresses how their perspective of older adults changed through interacting with their volunteer grandparent:

*But I would say like, now in terms of my perspective of older people, or like seniors, I see them as people that are, like wanting so badly to connect with younger people and are willing to learn. And that, you know, this view I had of my own family, and specifically, I would say, older as in like my society, it’s very different.*

After forming a strong relationship with their volunteer grandma, YA\_P2 sees older adults in a new light. YA\_P2 expresses how they now see that older adults are “wanting so badly to connect with younger people and are willing to learn”, which differs from the previous perspective they had towards older adults. YA\_P2 shares that in their society and culture these behaviours of social connection and learning in later life are not customary. This finding demonstrates how YA\_P2’s experience with their volunteer grandmother diversified their perspective and understanding towards older adults.

To bring forward another perspective, my conversation with YA\_P3 highlights how their experience with the Family Match program allowed them to get over their fear of engaging with adults:

*Interviewer: So how do you think [your involvement in the Family Match program] impacted your perception at all of what older adults could be, look like, are like, since you were around them more?*

*YA\_P3: I think, honestly, I don’t know how fast I would have grown out of that fear of like talking to adults, if not for this program. Because that like exposure therapy, you know? And it is interesting, because now when I meet someone older, I’m like, “oh, you have this whole grandiose life story, like you’ve gone through so much time”. And I am a child [laughs]. Yeah.*

YA\_P3 claims that without the Family Match program they “don’t know how fast [they] would have grown out of [their] fear of ... talking to adults”. Through exposure with their volunteer kin, they were able to become more comfortable with interacting with

adults, including older adults. YA\_P3 shares how their experience with their volunteer kin has enabled them to not only get over their fear but understand and appreciate the diversity within the older generation. I took the opportunity to ask YA\_P5 what they learned about older adults from being exposed to their volunteer grandparent through the Family Match program and they replied,

*Knowing how to, like, treat elder and how elders are right? Because I know I wouldn't have really had exposure to that. So, 100%. Yeah, that definitely did. Almost educated me.*

YA\_P5 expresses that without their involvement in the Family Match program they “wouldn’t have really had exposure” to “elders”. Through their relationship with their volunteer grandparents, YA\_P5 was able to learn how to “treat elders” and learn “how elders are”, which in turn diversified their education about the older adult demographic.

On the other hand, it is important to realize that older adults also gained new perspectives and understandings of the younger generation through their volunteer kinships. OA\_P2 shares,

*They've [referring to volunteer grandchildren] given me great hope for the future. They've, they've changed my— you know, when you retire, you become so I don't know. You become insular you become— but you also are an observer. So, you're reading the newspaper, you're reading, you're hearing all the negatives come out and I think they've been the positive that has shielded me.*

OA\_P2's relationship and interaction with their volunteer grandchildren has “given [them] great hope for the future”. They express how their perspective of the future has changed through time and interaction with their volunteer grandchildren enabled them to rid their concern and negative notions about the younger generation through first-hand experiences. This finding suggests how the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship can enable older adults to not only understand the diversity of younger generations more, but also feel hopeful for the future. Moreover, OA\_P4 shares how their experiences with their volunteer grandchild has enabled them to better understand the variety of challenges the younger generation experiences:

*Yeah, I gotta say that it seems even rougher for [names their volunteer granddaughter] because my daughter didn't grow up on Instagram or Facebook or anything like that. And they just have a 10-to-12-year difference. Is it something*

*to think of young girls growing up in the influence of social media is much, much, much stronger with [names volunteer granddaughter] generation. You know [participant names their daughter] actually met new boys and girls in high school and dated in high school and things weren't all done online. Meeting people can get really sketchy and difficult. So, that's a huge difference in that short time.*

OA\_P4 comments on the strong “influence of social media” on their volunteer grandchild and how the impact of social media has shifted dramatically in a short period of time. The relationship that OA\_P4 shares with their volunteer grandchild allows them to understand the impact that social media has on younger generations today. It is possible that if OA\_P4 was not connected to their volunteer grandchild that they would not understand the impacts of social media on the younger generation. This finding suggests that the volunteer grandparent-grandchild dyad allows older adults to gain an in-depth understanding of the younger generation and their diverse challenges.

#### **4.10.3. Contact with Other Generations**

The Family Match program provides participants with an opportunity to connect with different generations and form a true volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. Participants express that creating an IG volunteer kinship in their community would not have been possible without the Family Match program. I took the opportunity to ask participants how often they would be interacting with other generations if they were not involved in the Family Match program. OA\_P2 replied,

*That's just it. I mean, the only kids on our block, were across the street, and they moved this year. And I, you know, I've seen those kids since they were [names one of the children from across the street] was only four. But I've— seen him since he was a little baby and made him cookies. And, you know, we would talk outside, we, you know, like, they never really came in the house, except to pet the cats once in a while. But that was my only other connection with little guys. You know, other than seeing my friends, grandchildren once in a while, or, you know, I wouldn't have a connection with young people.*

Even though OA\_P2 shares that they knew and occasionally interacted with the kids across the street since they were little, OA\_P2 did not have a very close relationship with them. Without the Family Match program, OA\_P2 “wouldn't have a connection with young people” as their interaction with children was limited to the kids across the street who just moved and “seeing [their] friends' grandchildren once in a while”. This finding

underscores how the social environment is not conducive to organically facilitating IG connections in the community, which in turn highlights the importance of ensuring that community-based, nonfamilial IG programs like Family Match are available in the community as they provide an accessible opportunity for individuals to diversify their social connections with different generations. As a matter of fact, OA\_P4 shares a similar experience to OA\_P2 when I asked what they believe they would have missed if they had not joined the Family Match program,

*Oh, well, the whole bit. I you know, very informally, you know, on your neighbourhood block or whatever, you can meet the children or this, that and the other, but nothing is ever sort of set up formally. It's just by chance that you would have, get to know them. But there wouldn't be that guarantee of the attempt of a relationship, right? Which this program provides... I mean, not, not unless I myself. Gosh, what would I be? Taking some university courses, but then I'd be taking the one for seniors, so forget it, that's not the same interaction. And yes, no, no, it would be hard pressed to be the case, actually.*

OA\_P4 expresses that if they were not enrolled in the Family Match program they would have missed “the whole bit” – alluding to the “guarantee of ... [attempting]... a relationship” with a younger person. OA\_P4 brings up a similar situation to OA\_P2 where they expressed that they would casually and occasionally chat with children “informally... on the neighbourhood block” and as a result “nothing is ever set up formally”, restricting the possibility for an IG relationship to form organically. When I asked OA\_P2 if they thought they would have a close relationship with a younger person without the Family Match program they said, “likely not”. This finding further solidifies that the Family Match program provides an opportunity for community members to form diverse IG relationships as it is “hard pressed” that meaningful IG relationships would naturally transpire in the community setting.

Another perspective is brought forward by OA\_P3 as they have not been in touch with their volunteer grandchildren for quite some time. I took the liberty of asking OA\_P3 if they interact with the younger generation on a regular basis and they responded,

*No, not now. Especially when there's a standstill even in the activities with Volunteer Grandparents. We used to have the yearly get together. Oh, I miss those.*



This finding demonstrates that for OA\_P3 getting together with their volunteer grandchildren was their only regular interaction with younger people. Since the start of COVID-19 and at the time of the interview, Volunteer Grandparents as an organization still had all their events on pause. OA\_P3 expressed that they “miss those” events as they would bring people together who are also a part of the Family Match program and other programs in the Volunteer Grandparent organization. The volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship facilitates IG contact; however, organizations such as Volunteer Grandparents have the potential to expand that reach to a variety of IG connections that exist within the organization itself. The experiences that the volunteer grandparents shared suggest that the Family Match program provided them with the opportunity to connect and form strong, diverse relationships with the younger generation, which is something that did not occur naturally in their community setting. It should be noted that the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship is constantly evolving whereby the relationship can weaken or strengthen through various stages. It is important for the Family Match program to consider how the dissolving of a volunteer kinship may negatively impact the lives of both younger and older generations as they not only lose a relationship, but they may lose their only interaction with the opposing generation.

#### **4.10.4. Sharing Between and “Bridging” Cultures**

Throughout the interview sessions participants expressed that through their relationship with their match they were able to share cultures and even bridge cultures. The Family Match program can contribute towards breaking cultural barriers and enhance the diversity of social connections generationally and culturally. When I asked OA\_P4 if they had any cultural experiences with their volunteer grandchild, they responded,

*Totally, totally. Like, you know, it's, and it's, we love it when we say that to people, and we're out and about because it's, it's clear, it's clear that I'm not [names ethnicity], it's clear that she is [laughs]. And it's so funny. It's so funny... In one place, I forget where we were, but we were— some [names ethnicity] people will go by me, and they'll kind of give me a nod. You know what I mean? They think that my, that my children have married into the [names ethnicity] culture obviously if I've got a granddaughter with me so yeah, that's fun.*

OA\_P2 and their volunteer grandchild seem proud to have a volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship that is culturally diverse as they “love” to say to “people... [when they’re] out and about” that they are grandmother and granddaughter. OA\_P2 expresses that people automatically assume “they [their] children have married into the” culture that their volunteer grandchild identifies with if they have a granddaughter of a different ethnicity. OA\_P2 expresses that breaking cultural barriers through the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship is “fun”. Furthermore, YA\_P2 shares a great example of how their volunteer grandmother learned and accepted their culture,

*And it was really like a bridge between two cultures. She’s done everything for me. She’s attended to [names culture] ceremonies, any [names cultural] dance I did. Really embracing our own [names ethnicity] culture, and like, kind of sharing what she’s kind of grown up with as well... And so, I’m really grateful for having that.*

The volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship created a “bridge between two cultures” whereby the volunteer grandchild was able to learn and understand the culture of their volunteer grandparent and vice versa. YA\_P2 shares how their volunteer grandma “embraced” their culture and did “everything for [them] such as “attending’ their cultural ceremonies and dances. YA\_P2 expresses gratitude towards their volunteer grandmother as their volunteer kinship facilitated a diverse environment whereby different cultural practices could be shared and endured. This finding demonstrates that IG relationships like the volunteer grandparent-grandchild dyad is an excellent opportunity for participants to expose their match to and educate them about their cultural diversity. In fact, YA\_P4 shares their opinion on how the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship is unique,

*The sharing of cultures. That’s I think that’s the number one thing and lifestyles.*

YA\_P4 shares that non-kin relationships, like the relationship they share with their volunteer grandparent, allows for the sharing of cultures and lifestyles. This finding suggests that community-based IG programs like Family Match can enhance participants’ cultural awareness and understanding of diversity through volunteer kinship. Moreover, YA\_P5, expresses how they were able to share cultures with their volunteer grandparents,

*It’s [referring to the Vancouver area] like, very culturally diverse and I was always learning about different cultures. But I’m sure somewhere along the lines too, like, I learned, like, I learned about their [referring to their volunteer grandparents]*

*culture of like, coming over for dinner, they would make us like, [names culture] food and stuff. Right?... Or like, even just like talking about how things are over there [referring to the country their volunteer grandparents are from], and like, just, just sharing, sharing different stuff about our cultures.*

YA\_P5 was able to share their cultural diversity through food and conversations that were focused on their own culture and the culture of their volunteer grandparents. This finding along with the others suggest that the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship facilitated through the Family Match program creates a culturally safe space whereby volunteer kin can share and challenge cultural constructs together, which may contribute to a more diverse and accepting community.

#### **4.11. Positive Emotional Outcomes**

The volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship evoked positive emotions for both volunteer grandchildren and volunteer grandparents. The interactions and connections facilitated by mechanisms of generativity enabled volunteer grandparents to contribute to something beyond themselves, making them feel valued and needed. Through generativity volunteer grandparents support and contribute to the personal development and growth of their volunteer grandchildren. The volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship creates reciprocity among the matches and results in participants experiencing fulfillment and enrichment of life as they expand their family network through volunteer kinship.

##### **4.11.1. Contributing Beyond Self and Feeling Valued**

The Family Match program provided volunteer grandparents with the opportunity to contribute to and become a part of something bigger than themselves. Being an integral part of the volunteer grandchild's life and family in turn made volunteer grandparents feel valued and needed. OA\_P1 expresses how the Family Match program has positively impacted them,

*Oh, certainly in a positive way. Yeah, definitely. Yeah, it's been, been really nice to have, that. Yeah, it's about caring about somebody else, you know, other than yourself.*

Through the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship OA\_P1 was able to not only have a “positive” experience but also have the opportunity to experience “caring for somebody else...other than yourself”. Through acts of generativity, OA\_P1 was able to express care and concern for as well as support their volunteer grandchild. OA\_P1 actively contributed to something beyond themselves which in turn improved their mental health and quality of life. Moreover, I took the liberty of asking OA\_P2 how they feel when interacting with their volunteer grandchildren and they responded,

*You know, you just, it's I feel like I, I feel like we're [referring to themselves and their husband] needed. So that's a good feeling... And I think that they've all had this— a bit of a tumultuous life. The older kids not so much, definitely [names the younger volunteer granddaughter]. And I think the more the more security in her life, the better. And they always say we only need one person who believes in us, who loves us. And I think that [names the mother of the volunteer grandchildren] certainly provides that one person, but I'd like to think that we provide part of it too.*

OA\_P2 expresses that they feel “like [them and their husband are] needed” and “that’s a good feeling”. OA\_P2 feels that they can contribute to their volunteer grandchildren and their family and also “provide” enhanced “security” within the family unit. This finding suggests that OA\_P2 feels valued and accepted within their volunteer grandchildren’s family unit as they view the support and security that they provide for their volunteer grandchildren and their family as “needed”. Additionally, OA\_P3 shares what their involvement in the Family Match program means to them:

*Oh, it meant a lot. As cliché as it may sound, but we really felt special that there is this family and especially [names the mother of the volunteer grandchildren] gravitating towards us and meeting us, needing us... The older generation. It was very fulfilling. That way... This is why we actively went out of our way to volunteer. Because as I said, when you feel like very fulfilled, and satisfied with, with, with your career, and then suddenly that is cut off it's very difficult.*

Like OA\_P2, OA\_P3 described this sense of being “needed” by their volunteer grandchildren’s family. OA\_P3 expresses how being a volunteer grandparent provided them with the opportunity to give back as part of the “older generation” and feel “fulfilled” again after retirement by sharing their knowledge with their volunteer grandchildren and their family through mechanisms of generativity, which positively impacted their quality

of life, like OA\_P1. After asking OA\_P4 how they felt after spending time together with their volunteer grandchildren they replied,

*[laughs] Somewhat exhausted because it's very intense, she's an intense kid... Oh, my goodness. And life is very curious when you're that age, I get it. I get it, right? I was I was there too. So, I gotta make it fun. I try to bring in the elements, I think [20:25 unclear] I do a lot of physical stuff. And a lot of craft stuff and a lot of baking and, you know, I've got a lot of diverse, diverse interests so I involve her in as much of that as I can to lighten it up. But I also feel, you know, at the end of that, like, wow, that was, you know, she's gone away, she's made a couple of decisions based on her and I talking about something that was important.*

Even though, OA\_P2 describes that their time with their volunteer grandchild as “intense” and makes them feel “exhausted”, OA\_P2 supports them through challenging times. However, OA\_P2 reflects on the fact that their volunteer grandchild has made decisions based on these “important” and “intense” conversations because they value OA\_P2’s opinion, concern, and care so much so that these conversations inform their volunteer grandchild’s life decisions. This finding suggests that the experience of supporting volunteer grandchildren does not go without its challenges; however, feeling valued, needed, and having the opportunity to contribute to something bigger than yourself through acts of generativity may outweigh the challenges for volunteer grandparents.

#### **4.11.2. Support, Personal Development, and Growth**

This subtheme demonstrates the positive impact that volunteer grandparents can have on their volunteer grandchildren as they express generativity by contributing to the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. YA\_P2 describes the positive influence that their volunteer grandmother has had on them throughout their life,

*Like her [referring to their volunteer grandmother] and my mom are the two people I go to, so she's kind of been like a central support system for anything, which is great... So had she not been there, I think my mom would have been the one perspective, because when I was in high school used to go to [names volunteer grandmother] about things. So, I would have been raised I think a little bit differently. And I also think I just wouldn't have pushed myself, or tried to take opportunities as much, or just relaxed. In general, I probably would have like, had a lot more breakdowns and stress over little things... So, had I not stayed in touch with her, I wouldn't have had the same like growth I had in my life because she was always the number one, two person I go to for any advice when it comes to anything. So had I not had that. I think I might have just stayed in my comfort zone*

*for a lot of things and not push myself. Yeah, for instance, she was one of the people to tell me like, “oh, when you go to uni, I think it’d be great if you try first year in residence”, because you know, I never lived outside of my house. Even if it at [names university] it’s still a little bit of a different experience. So, I did that. I applied and I had a really good time. And that’s one of the things that she was kind of encouraging me to do, and no one else really was. So, I think if she wasn’t there, I wouldn’t have had, you know, a chance to make new friends or kind of get out on my shy phase in university and try to live a little bit more independently. Things like that.*

YA\_P2’s volunteer grandmother plays a “central” role in their immediate support network. The wisdom and guidance that their volunteer grandmother shares enabled YA\_P2 to “push” themselves, “take opportunities”, and be more “relaxed”, which positively impacted their mental health as they say they believe they would have had “a lot more breakdowns and stress over the little things...had [they] not stayed in touch with” their volunteer grandmother. YA\_P2 attributes their personal “growth” to their volunteer grandmother’s generative acts of support, encouragement, and guidance as they say they “think [they] might have just stayed in their comfort zone...and not push[ed] [themselves] without their volunteer grandmother’s “encouragement”. In fact, YA\_P4 shares a similar sentiment about how they feel about the relationship they share with their volunteer grandmother,

*I felt extremely, like comfortable and safe. That’s what I’d say. Like, she wouldn’t be like any more like— I wouldn’t be any less comfortable around my mom than I was around her... I mean, she, I think, I think she really made me the person I am because I remember, I used to be really shy and everything. But after like meeting her and she loved fun so much. I feel like I just became more confident, more outgoing, and, you know, just more— less afraid of what other people think of me. That’s why I’d say... I think it’s pretty great. I think the fact of having a volunteer grandma has really supported me through my childhood.*

YA\_P4’s volunteer grandmother provided them with “comfort” and “safety” as well as a constant support “through [their] childhood]. Having a volunteer grandmother positively influenced YA\_P4’s life as their volunteer grandmother “really made [them] the person [they are]”. YA\_P4 describes that they “used to be really shy...after meeting her...[they] became more confident, more outgoing...less afraid of what other people think of [them]”, similar to YA\_P2. This finding further solidifies the positive impact that volunteer grandparents have on their volunteer grandchildren as their generative acts

actively contribute to the personal growth and character development of their volunteer grandchildren.

Interestingly, YA\_P3 explains that their relationship with their volunteer kin facilitated the learning of a lifelong skill,

*I think I learned more from [names their volunteer uncle] than [names their volunteer auntie]. About hard work. This man was like 90 or over 90 and he woke up at five every morning to go work on his boats. I mean, just a good work ethic, the importance of that, and where that can get you. Because he started out, not in a good place. His family was like struggling very much growing up and then he got this. He worked for all of his money to have what he has.*

YA\_P4's relationship with their volunteer uncle allowed them to learn about and value "hard work" as they witnessed his "good work ethic, the importance of that, and where it can get you" no matter where you start off. Through YA\_P4's volunteer uncle guiding and demonstrating the positive impact of hard work, YA\_P4 now values hard work as a lifelong skill that has contributed to their personal development and growth.

#### **4.11.3. Enriched Life**

Providing Family Match participants with the opportunity and support to form successful volunteer grandparent-grandchild relations contributed to enriching their lives through positive emotional outcomes as well as by expanding their social network. OA\_P1 shares about how their involvement with their volunteer grandchildren positively impacted their life,

*It was joy, you know, like it was, was just lovely to have them [referring to their volunteer grandchildren] to do things with them and to be involved with young kids. Rather than adults all the time, you know?*

OA\_P1 describes that their relationship with their volunteer grandchildren was "lovely" and full of "joy". Having volunteer grandchildren enriched the life of OA\_P1 as they were able to spend time and form a relationship with young children. Interestingly, OA\_P2 discloses a similar point of view,

*Um, I just, you know, I just look at them [referring to their volunteer grandchildren] and I smile and I just [participant names their husband] and I just*

*look at each other and, you know, just feel warm... It is heartwarming, it is heartwarming.*

OA\_P2 describes that they “smile” when they look at their volunteer grandchildren and “feel warm” as the experience is simply “heartwarming”. This finding suggests that programs like Family Match enrich the lives of the volunteer grandparents as they experience positive feelings of happiness, warmth, and joy. Interestingly, similar positive emotions were expressed by younger participants. YA\_P5 shares,

*To say exactly what emotions I felt, it's hard to tell you. In a broad kind of way, like it would bring up positive emotions, happy emotions. So, like, just the warm, loving, caring feeling that family gives you.*

YA\_P5 states that their time with their volunteer grandparents evoked “positive” and “happy emotions” including feelings of warmth, love, and care. This finding demonstrates that their relationship with their volunteer grandparents has created positive emotional impact. Additionally, YA\_P4 shares how the Family Match program has positively impacted them,

*I think it generally made me happier and to have a more hopeful outcome and outlook in life, you know? That you'll always get better, you know?*

YA\_P4 expressed that their life was enriched by their relationship with their volunteer grandparent as it made them a “happier” and more “hopeful” person. Both volunteer grandparents and volunteer grandchildren shared positive emotions and feelings that were facilitated through their involvement with the Family Match program indicating that community-based, non-kin IG programs such as Family Match can in fact positively enhance the lives of participants.

### ***“It’s Expanded My Family”***

Throughout various interviews participants describe that their involvement with the Family Match program has expanded their social networks in a positive way. When asking OA\_P2 about how the Family Match program has impacted them, they replied,

*Well, first of all its expanded my family and anytime you expand your family, it has to be more positive, right?*



Being enrolled in the Family Match program has not only enabled them to develop a volunteer grandparent relationship with their volunteer grandchildren but has “expanded” their “family”, which this participant perceives as a “positive” outcome. This finding suggests that programs like Family Match can contribute to expanding participants’ social networks and support systems through volunteer kinships. This is succinctly captured in OA\_P4’s quote:

*Oh, my world would have been a lot smaller wouldn't it [laughs]?*

Like volunteer grandparents, younger participants share how their relationship with their volunteer grandparents contribute to a larger support system and family. In fact, YA\_P2 shares their experience with their volunteer grandmother and how it expanded their support system,

*Yeah, um, I think, well, when I was little, I think was just someone to hang out with and have in your life. I don't know about other families, but I think being that we're a small family. It's just me and my mom and my grandpa and as I like said, my grandpas like 95 years and he's not doing any activities, he's relaxing. And he's been like that for a lot of his life. So, I think having a different person to be part of this small family has been great. And that's been more enjoyable, because it's been someone else to hang out with other than just my mom and my grandpa. Someone else to rely on and feel like maybe you do have more people than you think that care about you. And I think that's been the most enjoyable thing knowing that people have your back. And it's more than just like your direct family. It's other people out there.*

YA\_P2 demonstrates the value of having “other people out there” outside of your biological family that you can “hang out with” and “rely on” as it makes YA\_P2 feel like they “have more people than [they] think that care about [them]”. This finding suggests that there are positive impacts associated with having volunteer kin as a part of one’s family since it can contribute to a stronger support system. It may be especially meaningful to YA\_P2 that their volunteer grandparent “has their back” and is able to provide additional social support since they have a “small family”. Interestingly, YA\_P3 shares a similar perspective,

*And also, it probably would have been rather isolating to grow up with only your parents as your family that you see frequently. I think it definitely helped that we had those like, close family, friends, or whatever you call them at that point to kind of stick around...I do think it was a positive impact of knowing that like, “these aren't just my parents, I have other people around”.*

YA\_P3 showcases the value in having people around that are ‘like’ family as it expands one’s social system as they “have other people around” besides their parents. Like YA\_P2, YA\_P3 expresses that it was especially meaningful to have other people who will “stick around” and be a part of your life as just being surrounded by your parents may have been quite “isolating”. This finding demonstrates the positive impact that volunteer kinships can have on enhancing and extending younger individuals’ social support network. Interestingly, YA\_P5 uncovers the importance of family size and facilitating a healthy environment through programs like Family Match,

*Um, I think it’s, I think it’s very, like beneficial for children and, you know, almost necessary [for children to access programs like this] to have like a healthy environment to grow up in. Because family is important... I grew up with like a single mother. And I didn’t have my grandparents here either, so I remember at the time, it was just like, another piece of family from me, which meant a lot to me... And I think, and I think that goes the same for a lot of other kids.*

YA\_P5 expresses that programs like Family Match are “almost necessary” for children who have limited family as it contributes to “a healthy environment”. Being enrolled in the Family Match program provided YA\_P5 with “another piece of family”, which “meant a lot” to them as their family network was limited. Participants’ voices highlight the positive emotional impact that volunteer kinships facilitated by community-based IG programs have on the lives of participants, especially those who have limited social and familial networks.

#### **4.12. To Flourish or Not to Flourish: Inhibiting Factors**

Participants disclose how certain situations and circumstances can inhibit the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship to progress. These situations are centered around the family dynamics of the volunteer grandchild which have been identified to possibly inflict strain on the volunteer grandparent as well as on the volunteer grandparent and grandchild relationship.

#### 4.12.1. Impact of Family Dynamics

The intense and complicated family dynamics, lack of rich engagement, and external factors like COVID-19 can constrict or limit the progression of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. I asked OA\_P2 how they feel after spending time with their volunteer grandchildren and they responded,

*Well, it depends on what it's been like... It can be wild, and again, [names the youngest volunteer grandson] is a fairly difficult child. And so sometimes when I leave, I'm exhausted. He's, he's very difficult, not, not necessarily towards us. But the dynamics, within the kids themselves. And [names the mother of the volunteer grandchildren] is just such a patient, wonderful mother. But, you know, she works full time, too. She tries to give her all to her kids. And I see her wearing herself down. So, I feel, I feel stressed. Sometimes when I leave. I feel like I can't eat— You know, often [names husband] says, "what more can we do? What can we do to help her?" And I don't know. I mean, we take meals over— she hates cooking. None of them [referring to the volunteer grandchildren] eat the same things. I don't get the impression that [names the father of the older volunteer grandchildren] does a lot of cooking. [names the father of the younger volunteer grandchildren] what he does now sadly, we're not in contact with him. Except when we go to court. It's not nice.*

Even though OA\_P2 expresses an overall positive experience with the Family Match program they disclose that the impact is not entirely positive all the time due to the difficult family dynamics. OA\_P2 says, that the challenging family dynamics and seeing their volunteer family struggle can result in them feeling “exhausted” and “stressed”. The above excerpt demonstrates how involved OA\_P2 and their husband are in their volunteer grandchildren’s family dynamics. OA\_P2 wants to do all they can to support their volunteer grandchildren’s family; however, they find themselves saying “what more can we do?” demonstrating the confusion around not knowing what else they can do to support the family. OA\_P2 mentions how they are not in touch with the father of their volunteer grandchildren and refers to being present in court, showcasing their deep involvement and connection to the family dynamics to support the volunteer grandchildren and their mother. I took the opportunity to ask OA\_P3 if they think the family dynamics including the separation of their volunteer grandchildren’s parents impacted their relationship with their volunteer grandchildren. OA\_P3 replied,

*Oh, most definitely... I think it [referring to the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship] would have been better [if the parents of the volunteer grandchildren*

*were not separating]. But when we when we came into the picture, already the dynamics was such that they [the parents of the volunteer grandchildren] were separating.*

The parental separation of OA\_P3's volunteer grandchildren played a large role in the outcome of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. The relationship progression seemed to be constrained by the existing family dynamics as OA\_P3 shares that "when [they] came into the picture, already the dynamics were such that [the parents of the volunteer grandchildren were separating]". Through this time OA\_P3 expresses how everyone was just trying to survive. This finding suggests that the impact of a parental separation may prevent a volunteer kinship from forming to its full potential. It is possible that more time was required between the point of separation and the volunteer grandchildren's family's involvement in the program. The mere name "Family Match" suggests that families will be matched and connected. This program is not a typical program whereby one attends a session for an hour or two and then goes home; "it continues" whereby you as the participant not only enter the existing family dynamics but become a part of it. The role and support from the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents is necessary to ensure that issues pertaining to varying family dynamics are addressed appropriately; however, it is possible that additional support may be required to uphold the well-being of participants.

#### **4.12.1. Safety Concerns and External Support**

Throughout the interviews volunteer grandparents identified certain safety concerns related to family dynamics of their volunteer grandchildren. OA\_P2 shares their experience,

*I called [names the manager of Volunteer Grandparents] and said, I don't know what to do with this, but I think there's something wrong. And she felt awkward too, because she didn't know what to do. And, and how much do we get involved? I really needed somebody to talk to. And I was in the middle of this weird dynamic. Well, eventually what happened is that they [referring to the mother and father of their volunteer grandchildren] separated but it was horrific. And while the organization can't possibly offer that sort of support, there has to be something in place. Because this can't be the only situation that that the organization has come across an awkward situation like this. And so, I ended up having to, to kind of get help to deal with it outside. And it that, was that was the only negative thing I can think of.*

OA\_P2 identified that “something [was] wrong” pertaining to the family dynamics of their volunteer grandchildren’s family. As a result, they were caught “in the middle” and both OA\_P2 and the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents “didn’t know what to do”. In response, OA\_P2 received “help to deal with [this challenging time] outside” of the organization. OA\_P2 states that there “has to be something in place...because this can’t be the only situation that” has taken place where the “organization can’t possibly offer that sort of support”. This finding suggests that Volunteer Grandparents as an organization should have a wide range of resources available to support challenges within the family unit for their participants to take advantage of, if need be, at program entry.

Another participant shares a similar experience as they supported their volunteer grandchildren and their family during a parental separation that was initiated by domestic violence. OA\_P4 makes a comment pertaining to the screening policies of the Family Match program,

*So, it made me wonder how much screening they were doing in terms of the family in some respect. You know what I mean? Because, you know, the police had been called in the past and different things like that. So, that was sort of a hmm?*

Even though the Family Match program does screen both the family and the older adult participants, the screening for the family is less intense as they are not required to provide a criminal record check. OA\_P2 expresses valid concerns surrounding the screening protocol for families who enroll in the program. This finding suggests that implementing a more stringent screening process for families may in turn limit or avoid the challenges that volunteer grandparents experience in relation to family dynamics.

#### **4.12.2. Relationship with Volunteer Grandchild: Central Focus**

For volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationships to be successful, the volunteer grandchild must remain the central focus of the volunteer grandparent throughout the relationship. It is possible that if participants lose sight of their volunteer grandchild and focus more on themselves or another family member, the volunteer grandparent-grandchild dyad can be jeopardized. For example, OA\_P3 explains,

*And I think it's, I think at this point in time if only for [names the mother of the volunteer grandchildren] for us to have one another. I think it's worth all the years of joining Volunteer Grandparents as I said to you, I feel bad about [names volunteer grandchild]. That really is a big regret. We could have done otherwise; we could have been closer but for the dynamics, the circumstances.*

Due to the family dynamic-related issues, OA\_P3 focused more on supporting the mother of their volunteer grandchild through challenging times, which in turn distanced the relationship they had with their volunteer grandchildren. This is something that OA\_P3 is both grateful for and regrets as she was able to form a unique bond with the mother of the volunteer grandchild at the expense of the relationship with their volunteer grandchild. On another note, YA\_P3 states how their volunteer grandmother's self-regarding behaviour inhibited their relationship progression:

*As I as I got older, definitely like. Again, she's a great woman [referring to their volunteer auntie], but [names volunteer auntie] has very little listening skills, I would say, and I am also a neurodivergent child. So, for me, it's like I need very particular things in conversation. And sometimes you just talk to her, and you can tell that there's just nothing there. There's no listening. And that was sometimes a bit unpleasant, but then I kind of understand it. Like she grew up in a family where that was the way you were brought up to live. And like that's the way her life is. It's just people who have kind of superficial conversation and you don't really need to listen to one another... I like to have like, deep, good conversation. And for her, most conversation is kind of small talk. That's the interesting thing. Like she will talk about her own past a fair bit. But other than that, it's just kind of shallow, superficial conversation, which is nice, I guess. But to me, I like to have like a good meaty talk, which is a big difference... I think that if we had had that more like actual deep emotional connection that may have been more beneficial for both of us. I'm not sure though, because now. Yeah, I don't really have that deep emotional connection with my grandparents either. But, yeah, if we had had that, I would have had some external party that isn't just like my school friends, to kind of share those emotions with. That would have been probably good.*

Even though YA\_P3 describes their volunteer kin as “a great woman”, YA\_P3 also expresses that they lack listening skills as when YA\_P3 would talk to their volunteer kin they would realize they were not listening, which was “unpleasant”. YA\_P3 identifies that their volunteer kin's life is surrounded around “small talk” and “superficial conversation” where people “really don't need to listen to one another”. However, this did not seem to mesh well with YA\_P3 as they “like to have deep, good conversation” which never took place due to their volunteer kin's self-regarding behaviour. This in turn constrained the progress of the volunteer kinship and prevented a “deep emotional connection that may

have been beneficial” from forming between YA\_P3 and their volunteer kin. This finding identifies the importance of having the volunteer grandchild be the main focus of the volunteer grandparent as well as highlights the significance of having good listening skills between matches as these aspects contribute to the development of a strong volunteer kinship.

### **4.13. Programmatic Attributes for Sustainability Summary**

This section of *Chapter 4* focuses on programmatic attributes that are drawn from the interviews with the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents (PP\_P1) to gain a deeper understanding of the organizational and programmatic facilitators and challenges.

#### **4.13.1. Program Facilitators**

Interestingly, the key program facilitators discussed by the provider align with many of the participants’ comments and experiences highlighted in previous themes. The program facilitators that contribute to a successful long-term volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship include: 1) Flexibility, Choice, and Control, 2) Amount and Consistency of Time, and 3) Open Communication.

##### ***Flexibility, Choice, and Control***

Since the Family Match program is quite flexible in nature, flexible behaviour among participants actively contributes to a successful experience. The provider shares,

*So, I think just being flexible in nature. Things come up, you have to be flexible and understanding, a good listener. It helps to be creative, too. If the senior has some great ideas of activities they want to do, and the youth is on board, you know, it works out really well.*

It is important that participants are “understanding” and “flexible” as these aspects of the program contribute to the longevity and sustainability of the matches as it allows participants to pivot and problem solve when unexpected events occur. Having the choice, control, and flexibility to engage and meet at a frequency that is necessary to develop a strong relationship, supports the development and growth of the volunteer grandparent-

grandchild relationship. Additionally, the provider highlights how the participants harness choice and agency as they plan activities and decide how they spend time with their match:

*Oh, definitely. Yeah. So, for instance, I have a volunteer, a new match with a senior and a child, that's about five. And so, the senior just checked in, because they're just probably at the two-month or three-month mark. And so, I checked in, and the senior loves to make cards and she loves to bake. And so, she's like, they go, they meet every Friday night, and she said, "I'm bringing you over cookie dough, so we can make some cookies together". That's where she's bringing in what she, she loves and sharing it with the child. So, it's, it's nice. Or you know, or maybe volunteer wants to expose the youth to a new culture, let's say. So, there's a festival going on that the senior loves, you know, has participated in than perhaps they would invite the family or the youth to come to join the festival, right? So, they have a lot of opportunity to provide direction on the activities that they undertake for sure.*

The program manager of Volunteer Grandparents explains that through mechanisms of generativity the volunteer grandparents can bring what they “love” and “share it with [their volunteer grandchild]”, whether it is baking cookies or sharing their culture with their volunteer grandchild by going to a festival as the participants “have a lot of opportunity to provide direction on the activities they undertake”. This sense of agency, choice, and control can facilitate the bond between volunteer grandparent and grandchild to grow at the discretion of the participants.

It should be noted that all volunteer grandparents have a different skillset and range of experiences with younger children. Therefore, not all older adult participants will be comfortable at first with the substantial amount of freedom that the Family Match program offers. The program manager of Volunteer Grandparents shares,

*Because some seniors would like a little bit more direction, if they have less experience with youth, they need a little bit more direction about like, “what should I do, I'm nervous”, and that's why, you know, when I say, I usually encourage the parents to think of an activity when they're initially matched that they know, that child would enjoy or would like to share with the volunteer, and that takes, takes the pressure off. The volunteer goes in kind of knowing a little bit about the interest of the child, but they don't know the family yet. So that just, you know, helps with the getting to know each other.*

In this case, the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents can provide the volunteer grandparent with guidance and “encourages the parents to think of an activity” as they know what their child enjoys and likes best. This flexibility actively “takes the



pressure off’ of the volunteer grandparent and allows them to focus on “getting to know” and engaging with their volunteer grandchild instead of feeling uncomfortable or lost in the process.

### ***Amount and Consistency of Time***

The program manager of Volunteer Grandparents identified the role of time as being integral to the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. Notability, both the amount and consistency of time were key facilitators discussed, which is consistent with what was shared by participants. The provider states,

*So, we usually encourage our volunteers to meet on a regular and consistent basis and we aim for about two to four hours a week, right? And that doesn't mean they can't go on vacation or whatever. Or if they're sick, they can cancel. But that's kind of our visiting guidelines... The best matches, they really like, gradually develop that relationship on a consistent way. So, they're really regular with their visits once a week, you know, that really helps with, with the bonding.*

PP\_P1 expresses that they “encourage...volunteers to meet on a regular and consistent basis... about two to four hours a week”. The provider highlights that the amount of time and the consistency of time spent together is what “really helps...with the bonding” as both seem to contribute to developing an IG connection and commitment that is long lasting. The program manager of Volunteer Grandparents expands on the relationship between time and gradually developing the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship:

*The first at least three months, usually six months that the child is very young, the volunteer is visiting when a parent is present and that way the parent and the grandparents are also developing relationship because we want a true family to be created and not just like our volunteers to be seen as a free screened babysitter. We want that communication to be open between the parent and I think that's the secret of success because you know, sometimes when they use get into their teens are more peer focused right and, but the parents and the grandparents tend to still stay in contact and give each other support through challenging stages, and then usually the youth comes back, right? And, and starts appreciating the relationship a little bit more so that support is given throughout the relationship, which is interesting, right?*

It is essential that the volunteer grandparent becomes integrated into the volunteer grandchild’s family so that a “true family [can] be created”. It is not only the volunteer grandparents and grandchildren that are creating a relationship but the entire family of the volunteer grandchildren including siblings and parents. Interestingly, PP\_P1’s comment

directly relates to the previously discussed subthemes and sub-subtheme of how volunteer grandparents support the parent of the volunteer grandchild with parenting and attempt to maintain connection through the parents. In fact, as the communication between the volunteer grandparent and volunteer grandchild weakens, the parents can actively contribute to the sustainability of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. This finding also demonstrates the various ebbs and flows of a volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship within the context of the Family Match program. Additionally, the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents shares how finding the time for matches to get together is not always easy,

*So sometimes it's challenging for parents and grandparents to make a time to meet that's consistent, you know? Because kids are always going school and they got their extracurricular activities and things like that. So, I think a lot of times people try to pick one regular day. So, let's say Saturday's between 10:00 and 1:00, let's aim for that. And that seems to work out really well if they pick a kind of head instead of kind of going week by week, but everyone you know, you're allowed to do whatever you want whatever works. But that tends to work a bit better when they have a consistent day.*

The provider of the Family Match program suggests that the best way to deal with busy schedules and limited free time is to “pick one regular day” where the matches meet and spend time with one another as “that tends to work better” for the volunteer grandparent-grandchild dyad, especially when trying to meet on a consistent basis. Time, both amount of time and consistency of time, are integral aspects to facilitating a successful volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship.

### ***Open Communication***

The above facilitator highlighted the importance of having an open communication channel between the volunteer grandparent and the parents of the volunteer grandchild. However, the provider states the importance of having open communication on multiple fronts,

*Um, I would say, number one is communication, communication between the parents, a great communication between the youth and the grandparent and great communication between me and the participants. That's kind of number one. Because then you can address things as they are, and they don't boil over.*

Having open communication between the volunteer grandparents and the volunteer grandchildren, the parent of the volunteer grandchild, and the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents can facilitate a successful program experience as well as a successful relationship between the volunteer grandparent and the grandchild. Moreover, PP\_P1 shares how imperative it is to have a strong communication channel between themselves and the volunteer grandparents as it ensures their safety throughout their involvement with the program. The program manager of Volunteer Grandparents states,

*Well, in the orientation, we talk about safety, like personal safety, things like that, right? And that's why I give support, make sure that people ask me questions if they need, you know, they feel you know, I always say "trust your gut", right? And let me know, if something's not sitting well, with you, you know, we could talk about it. So, safety, yes, for sure. Safety is an important part of our training, right? In our orientation I let the volunteers know, the families don't have to go through a criminal record check, right? So, they're vulnerable too, right? Seniors are vulnerable too. I tell the senior "if you ever feel like, something's not right, you know, please check in with me". So, I try to keep open communication, right?*

The current policies of the Family Match program seem to ensure a positive program experience as well as the safety of the volunteer grandchildren and their family over the volunteer grandparent, leaving them “vulnerable”. Having a good communication flow and relationship between the volunteer grandparents and the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents can help to ensure the safety of the volunteer grandparent. This finding highlights the need to further update the screening procedures for the volunteer grandchildren’s family to contribute to a heightened level of safety for the volunteer grandparents.

#### **4.13.2. Program Challenges**

The key program facilitators highlighted by the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents bring to light a diverse range of organizational-, programmatic-, and participant-level barriers. The challenges identified by the provider that constrain successful long-term volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationships include: 1) Capacity of Staff, 2) Navigating COVID-19, 3) Dissolving of Matches, and 4) Selectivity Issues.

## *Capacity of Staff*

The mere capacity of the manager directly impacts how much time and attention they can attribute to different tasks and aspects of their role. The Family Match program and the one other program (Letters to Seniors) that Volunteer Grandparents currently offers is solely run by one part-time staff member. The provider shares,

*So yeah, it's been the same role for the whole, whole time. You know, our programs have changed a little bit. Obviously, we've added the Letters to Seniors Program, which is a huge program now. But I've always had— it's always been just me and with the board, and then I usually hire at least one summer staff, thanks to funding from the government to help support our programs throughout the summer. But it's always yeah, been me during the programming.*

It has “always” been the provider and the board even with the addition of a brand-new program that is now “huge”. The manager of the Volunteer Grandparents states that they “usually hire at least one summer staff...to help support our programs throughout the summer”; however, the reality is that the manager requires more support throughout the year, not only during the summertime, as managing two programs as well as other tasks with the limited capacity of a part-time role is a challenging. It should also be noted that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Volunteer Grandparents offered the School Grandparents program which is still on hold. It is possible that the School Grandparents program will begin soon leaving the provider with three programs to manage, increasing their workload further limiting their capacity. As a matter of fact, the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents is restricted in how they can support or enhance the program due to their limited capacity. The provider states,

*Yeah, so our core funding, I think we get \$42,000 of our funding from from gaming. So that's definitely our core funding. And I think \$32,000 of that [over 75%] goes towards our Family Match Program and I think \$10,000 [just under 25%] is supposed to go to the School Grandparent Program. So that's our core, core funding. And then we don't do any big fundraiser. We just don't have the capacity to do anything like fundraisers, but we do get donations some donations trickle in from the community. And then I also apply for, you know, grants here and there. Like we got the New Horizons grant a couple of times. And you know Foundations, so like, kind of keep my eyes open for what's available in the community and what's good fit with our mission. But we do depend on our core funding, and they want us to kind of depend less on federal funding and get more of a balance kind of revenue, I guess. So, they want us to not reach more than 75% from government funding. So, we are trying to diversify our funding, but that's always challenging. And that's another thing that takes so much time. You put all this time into these applications,*

*right? And then, you know, maybe 10% of them come back as positive. And then you feel like guilty because you didn't do your program. I mean, it's like a constant cycle of like, "oh, my gosh" [laughs].*

Volunteer Grandparents as an organization must rely on their core funding that is under \$50,000 as “they don’t have the capacity to do anything like fundraisers”. The manager does their best to apply and stay on top of grants that are available; however, it is “challenging...as that takes so much time” out of the minimal working hours that are available to the provider. The provider of the Family Match program could better support the program if they had more support with grant writing and events beyond a summer student as the Family Match programs runs year-round. In fact, having additional funding could allow the provider to better support vulnerable populations. The program manager of Volunteer Grandparents highlights the importance of creating a truly inclusive and engaging Family Match program,

*We try to be as inclusive as possible. So, you know, last year, we, as an organization with Volunteer Burnaby, we did a little bit of— we had a few meetings about inclusion, right? And so, we decided to try to target new immigrants, lower income people have barriers to participate in the community, things like that, and specifically target that— those people because maybe they're not aware, right? To bring awareness, basically... So that's, that's kind of our new target. And, you know, and the nice thing about this program is that it's so inclusive, you know, we get single parents, you know, dual parents, we get, you know, one child or we get four children. You know, we really are open to all types of families. When, when I meet the family, they need to have, you know, a little bit of English to correspond with me to answer the questions.*

The Family Match program purposefully aims to include vulnerable populations such as “new immigrants [and people with] lower income” and actively remove barriers that could prevent these subpopulation groups from participating. The Family Match program is very diverse and reflects the demographics of Metro Vancouver; however, the requirement of having “a little bit of English” may in fact prevent reaching new immigrants. Furthermore, I asked the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents what efforts are required to make the Family Match program more accessible and inclusive and they replied,

*Well, I would say a big barrier is the communication. Yeah. So having— because we don't have like, an onsite translator, I just happen to be, you know, for that one family that had very limited English, we had, she was connected to another*

*community group, and they had a translator. And so that translator helped me with kind of gaining insight about the family, but I think that's a barrier is, you know, you have to have basic communication in English.*

Having an onsite translator or an accessible translator would address the barrier of participants requiring English language skills to enroll in the Family Match program. The provider describes how when the organization had access to a translator in one circumstance, they “helped [the provider] with...gaining insight about the family”, which the provider would not have been able to do on their own. This finding demonstrates how limited funding capacity can directly limit the reach and inclusivity of IG programs like Family Match.

Not to mention, the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents shares how their ability to promote the program and create partnerships is also constrained by their capacity,

*I should be spending; I don't know 60% of my time on the Family Match Program and then 20% on admin and then 20% on other programs. But right now, I'm probably spending about 60% of my time on the Letters to Seniors Program and 20% on my time on Family Match. And then the other 20% on like admin and newsletters and things like that. So, it's really—I gotta get back into devoting more of my time into the Family Match Program. It's just hard because there's a constant demand for the Letters to Seniors Program and there's not that constant demand right now for the Family Match program, right?... But I think that's just because I haven't really promoted the program very much. Yeah, since, since we opened. We reopened kind of in May of last year. Because of the pandemic, and so I haven't really done much promotion of the program just because I am just so busy with the other programs...But I can't, you know, that makes me more stretched, right? But I do any promotions targeting seniors, I would put some, some basically posters in the community centers, things like that. Do a little bit of online promotion, you know, a little bit of Facebook, social media, but that doesn't target seniors unless they boost the post and kind of pay.*

The program manager of Volunteer Grandparents is allocating their limited working time to the programs that are of “constant demand”. They express that there is “not that constant demand right now for the Family Match program” as they “haven't really done much promotion...because [they] are so busy with the other programs”. The provider of the Family Match program is expressing that they are doing what they can to manage and support all programs that Volunteer Grandparents offers; however, they are not managing each program as they hoped to due to their limited capacity. In fact, the program manager shares a similar sentiment pertaining to partnerships and collaborations,

*And it, and it takes time. So, I am part of like, the City of Burnaby, and networking seniors— a seniors networking group. So, we so we're not duplicating services, things like that, and people are aware of what we do. So, I tried to stay connected. But then again, that comes down to capacity as well and return them to our meeting, or meeting their takes away from my 22 hours, right [laughs]? So, it's hard. That's one thing that you know, I tend to really try to focus on progressing my, my program, right? But I understand the tremendous value of having partners. So that's one thing I do, I could get involved a lot more in different boards and committees and things like that, but I just don't have the capacity. But there is value there for sure.*

The provider identifies the “value” of forming partnership and networking with other organizations; however, they “don't have the capacity” to do so as they work a maximum of “22 hours”. It appears that the provider of the Family Match program is willing and interested in working towards improving aspects of the program and the organization but is continuously being constrained by their limited capacity.

Interestingly, the provider shares that there is great interest around the country among other organizations to start a program like the Family Match program,

*I often get calls across Canada saying, “I'm so keen, I love your mission, I want to start a chapter here, what do I need to do”? I get those type of emails and calls all the time, right? But some people don't understand the complexity and I just don't have the time to hold people's hands and explain, you know? First you get a little bit of funding ... I mean, I don't— I can't all the people that request that. Yeah. So, we do we do get those type of requests.*

Even though there is great interest pertaining to expansion or replication of the Family Match program, the program manager does not have the capacity to share with interested parties the processes involved. This in turn may limit the implementation of initiatives like this in Canada and may explain why Family Match is the only program of its kind. This finding highlights the current interest in IG, non-kin, community-based programs that facilitate volunteer kin relationships like Family Match. There is also a call to action in moving this interest forward in an actionable way that does not rely solely on the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents.

### ***Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic***

The COVID-19 pandemic presented new and unique challenges to the Family Match program. The manager shares,

*We always before the pandemic, we always had more families applying for the Family Match Program, compared to the volunteers that we can offer. So, I always focused my, you know, promotion and recruitment for volunteers, right? But just as the pandemic was hitting, that was coming into balance for the first time, I was so excited, we were really on a roll and then the pandemic hit and everything was decimated, basically, because the families that were waiting, and a lot of them aged out, and we lost those families, right? And then people were getting discouraged, because it's taking so long we lost track of a lot of the families... So now I have very few families. And I have more volunteer's kind of applying currently. So, it's kind of swung the other way, which is interesting to me.*

During the COVID-19 pandemic there was a shift in participant interest for the Family Match program. Before the COVID-19 pandemic took place, “more families [were] applying for the Family Match program compared to [volunteer grandparents]”. Just before the COVID-19 pandemic, the participant interest “was coming into balance for the first time...and then the pandemic hit, and everything was decimated” as “families that were waiting...aged out” and were no longer eligible for the program or families were no longer getting in touch. As a result, “very few families” remained leaving many volunteer grandparents who were interested in being a part of the program resulting in a complete swing in participant interest. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the distribution of interested participants as well as limited the ability to create matches. The COVID-19 pandemic also shifted how the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents was supporting matches in the program as they prioritized both the health and safety of the participants as well as the relationship growth and development:

*So, we did develop some, some guidelines and we always encourage people to follow the provincial health care directives. People aren't supposed to be, you know, physically meeting, then that's what we expected, right?... We did develop some kind of virtual activities that people could do. We continue to circulate our newsletter but there wasn't a lot of conversations with people, you know, everyone was kind of in shock, right? Not knowing and stuff like that. So, we did try to support our members the best we could, by circulating activities that could be done in a safe manner and communicating, expectations of the matches, you know? And even now, we have some guidelines if you're meeting inside, don't hesitate to wear a mask and things like that. If you feel you need to and if you're meeting, we encourage you to meet outside and public spaces where there's fresh air, and things like that. So, if you're sick, you don't, you know, don't meet obviously, do a personal, you know, health assessment before you meet, things like that. So, we did kind of do an adjustment of, of guidelines based on what the directives were.*

During the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization “developed some guidelines [around COVID-19] ... and encouraged people to follow the provincial health



care directive” to ensure matches were remaining as safe and healthy as possible. The provider shares that the organization “developed some kind of virtual activities...but there wasn’t a lot of conversations with people”, meaning that communication amongst participants had declined. The organization “tried to support [their] members” by providing activities and suggestions that focused on the continued development of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship in a safe way; however, navigating the COVID-19 pandemic posed a great challenge for the provider as well as the organization.

### ***Dissolving of Matches***

Even though matches in the Family Match program are long-term connections, some do eventually ‘dissolve’, usually during the volunteer grandchild’s teen years. The provider states,

*Usually, if they dissolve, it’s when the, the youth maybe it is a teenager, and they’re not as interested or don’t have time to spend with a volunteer, but they usually stay connected partially.*

It is possible that the volunteer grandparent no longer feels needed or a part of the volunteer grandchild’s life when this disconnect takes place. During circumstances like this, volunteer grandparents tend to reach out to the program manager to express their feelings,

*Sometimes I get follow up messages from the volunteer saying, “how is the family I think about so and so on and I miss them so much”, you know? It’s just yeah, there’s just a definite, you know, connection that’s formed.*

This is challenging as the program manager works to support the volunteer grandparent through this difficult transition. This finding highlights that the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship goes through an especially pivotal point in time during the volunteer grandchild’s teen years. It would be beneficial for the Family Match program to have resources or supports in place to help the volunteer grandparent during this challenging transition. In fact, the provider shares that recently they have had,

*Some past volunteers who are requesting to be rematched to another family, because maybe their youth is, you know, in their teens now and they don’t see, see them as much anymore, right? So, they’re looking to maybe engage with another family.*

Even though the volunteer grandparent may no longer have a connection with their volunteer grandchild, they remain hopeful about the process and connection that the Family Match program offers and in turn is encouraged to re-enroll in the program. However, it is important to note that it may not be sustainable or emotionally healthy to constantly have volunteer grandparents reintegrating into the program. It may be helpful for the program or organization to put together a resource for participants that identifies key aspects that contribute to sustainable, long-term volunteer kinship that lasts through challenging times and stages of life.

### ***Selectivity Issues***

The program manager of Volunteer Grandparents stated that some prospective volunteer grandparents identify certain preferences of their potential matches, which makes the matching process rather challenging. Even though only one example of this arose during my interview with the provider, it is an important finding as it is essential that all people can participate in nonfamilial community-based IG programs. The manager shares this important example,

*You know, we've had a couple of autistic families apply, but unfortunately, I've never found a match for them. Because a lot of the volunteers, they have this idea of, you know, that great connection to a family and youth and, you know, easy kind of positive relationship, whereas with someone with autism might be more challenging, you know. So that's another kind of unrepresentative. People, children with disabilities... And sometimes I have volunteers that, you know, maybe they're an EA, right? And they have that experience working with troubled youth or whatever. But then, when they volunteer, they say, "well, you know, what, I, I have this experience, but I prefer, I used that, um, without so many challenges, because that's, you know, I deal with this every day, and I want something different", right?... Sometimes people specify who they wanted to be connected with, and what type of child.*

It is essential that programs like Family Match are truly inclusive to all as all members of communities deserve to engage in community-based, nonfamilial IG programs. It may be necessary to implement a program policy whereby participants cannot 'specify' their preference towards their potential match and the match must be attempted prior to claiming disinterest that is based on preconceived notions, prejudices, and or stereotypes.

#### **4.14. Chapter Overview**

The key findings drawn from all participants are included in this chapter to showcase a holistic perspective of the findings. A detailed summary of younger adult and older adult participants as well as the provider demographics have been outlined to provide the readers with a deeper understanding of the participants included in this study. The findings from the Family Match program participants were organized into themes situated within the following four main categories 1) Ebb and Flow of Relationship: Role of Biological Kin and Volunteer Kin, 2) Generativity, 3) Dyad Relationship Building: Role of External Forces, and 4) Achieving Volunteer Kinship. Each theme as well as its subthemes and sub-sub themes are discussed in-depth whilst incorporating data from the participant semi-structured interviews. Following this, a summary of program attributes that contribute to or hinder the sustainability of the Family Match program is provided, utilizing data from the provider interview.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Due to population aging and longevity in the past couple of decades, there has been an increase in multiple generations living at the same time. However, this does not directly translate into increased interaction between generations as North America is age-segregated, experiencing vast shifts in family structures, and facing geographical separation of families. In response, IG programs like Family Match have been developed to foster a more age-integrated society where meaningful interactions among generations can be developed in the community setting. This chapter begins with a summary of the study's contribution to the current state of existing research. The following section provides: 1) a discussion of central themes and how they relate to the existing literature and theories, 2) practical recommendations, and 3) the strengths and limitations of the study.

#### **5.1. Research Implications**

This study's findings add to the limited research on community-based, nonfamilial IG programs through an exploration of the long-term impacts that these programs have on the lives of both younger and older participants. Furthermore, we gain a deeper understanding into the organizational attributes of IG programming from the provider perspective. While current research exists on the short term impact that IG programs have on the lives of participants, there is a gap in the knowledge base pertaining to the following aspects: (1) long-term impacts of IG programs on participants (Agmon et al., 2018; Babcock et al., 2017; Knight et al., 2014), (2) integration of the perspectives of both younger and older participants (Lee et al., 2020), and (3) inclusion of the provider perspective to understand program delivery and system barriers (Galbraith et al., 2015, Murayama et al., 2014; Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Jarrott et al., 2019). This study addresses these gaps by researching the long-term impacts of community-based, nonfamilial IG programs from the perspectives of different stakeholders involved with the

program, serving as a critical step towards addressing some of the current societal factors that contribute to the divide across generations.

### **5.1.1. Time and Contact**

The Family Match program provides participants with a purposeful way to not only facilitate but maintain intergenerational connections. Participants expressed that forming true bonds with other generations is very difficult to achieve in our age-segregated society and would likely not have taken place without the Family Match program. The concept of time and contact was crosscutting amongst several themes identified in *Chapter 4. Findings*. For the purposes of this study, time spent together and contact are used interchangeably. However, it should be noted that it was not simply the factor of time that contributed to the development of a successful volunteer kinship but rather the interactions between the following: 1) amount of time, 2) consistency of time spent together, and 3) informal time. Additionally, more informal time that participants consistently spent together contributed towards increasing the closeness of their relationship. This finding is consistent with existing research that suggests high contact IG programs facilitate heightened impact (Bales et al., 2000; Caspi, 1984). Interestingly, work by Kemp (2005) demonstrates the importance of time and contact regarding biological grandparent-grandchild dyads as the grandparent-grandchild relationship grew more meaningful and significant with time. This study extends Kemp's (2005) findings beyond biological kin as time and contact have been identified to successfully contribute to the volunteer grandparent-grandchild bond.

Moreover, participants expressed that the informal time they shared with their match propelled the progression of and strengthened the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship from being strangers to volunteer kin (Yamamoto et al., 2018). The informal time spent between volunteer grandparent and grandchild created a very "real" environment whereby matches got to know and get comfortable with one another, which then positively contributed to the progression of the volunteer kinship. On the other hand, participants who did not have the opportunity to interact with their match in an informal way did not experience the same level of strength or depth in their volunteer grandparent-

grandchild relationship as it did not resemble a “regular grandparent relationship”. Research by Jarrott et al. (2019) suggests that IG contact which is frequent and regular whereby activities shared are perceived as pleasant by participants and enable the sharing of life stories, contributes to the development of IG friendships (Jarrott, Stremmel, & Naar, 2019). My study’s findings support the research by Jarrott et al. (2019) and extends it further, to demonstrate how IG friendships can evolve into volunteer kinship (Allen et al., 2011) in programs such as Family Match.

Interestingly, the findings from this study relate closely to Pettigrew and Tropp’s (2008) three mediators of intergroup contact: 1) increasing knowledge of older adults, 2) reducing anxiety about intergroup contact, and 3) increasing empathy and perspective taking. Existing research highlights that IG programs that facilitate IG contact and collaboration result in a better understanding and appreciation for opposing generations, which in turn results in a more positive perspective among generations (Agmon et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2022; Wagner & Luger, 2021; Yamashita et al., 2013). In fact, younger participants of the Family Match program expressed that their connection with their volunteer grandparents not only provided them with exposure to older adults but provided them with more knowledge and a deeper understanding of the diversity among the older adult population, which relates closely to Pettigrew and Tropp’s (2008) the first mediator “increasing knowledge of older adults”. This finding is consistent with previous research which suggests that after younger participants were involved in IG programs, they viewed older adults more positively, as being more capable, and also better understood the perceptions of older adults, demonstrating the powerful impact that these programs have on changing the perceptions of youth (Caspar et al., 2019; Galbraith et al., 2015; Gardener & Alegre, 2019; Penick et al., 2014)

Moreover, the Family Match program provides participants with the opportunity to learn to accept differences through facilitating exposure and contact with people who are different than themselves pertaining to age as well as culture. Interestingly, older adult participants express that the Family Match program allowed them to understand and learn the experiences and challenges that younger adults face today, especially pertaining to the “influence of social media”. Additionally, through time and interaction with their volunteer

grandchildren, volunteer grandparents rid their concern and negative notions about the younger generation through first-hand experiences, which enabled them to understand the diversity of the younger generation and feel hopeful for the future (Knight et al., 2014). Through the Family Match program, participants were exposed to and understood the realities that their match experienced, which relates to Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) third mediator "increasing empathy and perspective taking". This finding further aligns with previous research as older adults express that participating in IG opportunities allowed them to learn from the younger individuals (Allport, 1954; Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006).

For many volunteer grandchildren, their relationship with their volunteer grandparents consisted of their first time interacting with older adults in an intimate way. Volunteer grandchildren express how their experience in the Family Match program taught them how to comfortably interact with a diverse group of individuals, which relates to Pettigrew and Tropp's (2008) second tenet "reducing anxiety about intergroup contact". Interestingly, one participant even shares how their fear of adults and older adults was resolved through interactions with their volunteer kin through the Family Match program. Current literature suggests that participating in IG programs enabled younger participants to improve teamwork and transferrable skills as well as the ability to work with a diverse group of individuals, which is consistent with the findings of this study (Caspar et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2022; Santini et al., 2020). However, this study contributes to the literature as it demonstrates the long-term positive impact that intergroup contact with their volunteer grandparent has on the daily lives of younger participants.

It is possible that exposure to older adults at a young age instilled inclusive values and knowledge among younger participants. This may prevent the development of or combats existing ageist attitudes, which aligns with previous research that suggests that the engagement and discussion with older adults in IG programs provide the opportunity to break gendered and ageist stereotypes and attitudes that younger participants may hold (Carcavilla et al., 2020; Knight et al., 2014; Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006)

It is necessary to note that certain aspects can constrain time and contact shared between volunteer grandparents and grandchildren. The two main factors that were

identified as time constraining included physical distance between matches and parental separation of volunteer grandchildren. Participants that live in close proximity can spend more time together in both planned and organic ways as proximity enhances the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship as the barrier of distance is not present and the facilitator of convenience is (Finkle & Baumeister, 2010; Zajonc, 1968). It is imperative that IG programs work to match participants who live close to one another and work with the matches in the early stages to combat the time constraints inflicted by parental separation or challenging familial dynamics.

In fact, the history-graded event (Elder, 1998) of COVID-19 was an additional contributing factor that created a physical and emotional distance between participants. Younger participants expressed and demonstrated feelings of fear towards their volunteer grandparents' health and safety and volunteer grandparents expressed feelings of vulnerability pertaining to their personal health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. These feelings of fear coupled with COVID-19 mandates resulted in matches altering how they interacted and spent time with one another. Some participants modified their contact with their match to an outdoor or digital space, which supported the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship as contact was maintained and not eliminated due to COVID-19. Using technology to keep matches close during contact-limiting times kept a bi-directional communication channel open between the volunteer grandparent and the volunteer grandchild, which relates to existing research that identified technology or digital elements within IG programming can have mediating elements on IG relationships as well as act as a vehicle to bring generations together successfully (Freeman et al., 2020; Gerardo et al., 2019; Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017; Heydon, McKee & Susan O'Neill, 2017).

However, it should be noted that this type of communication channel is less rapid and intimate and was merely used to "update" one another. Participants who utilized technology to maintain connection with their match were able to sustain their volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship during COVID-19. Participants who did not utilize technology mechanisms to connect with their match during COVID-19 express that they wish they had as they felt it would have kept their relationship more intact. Participants highlighted the benefit of making use of technology to communicate with matches when



in-person contact was not possible; however, in-person contact was identified as preferable. It should be noted that how one communicates in-person may be very different from how one communicates while using technology. It is important to ensure that matches have a strong relationship foundation prior to regularly communicating through technology. It is possible that if the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship depends too heavily on technology prematurely, strain may be put on the relationship and risk the integrity of the connection. Although communicating through technology is not as favourable as in-person communication or contact, it has been deemed a good way for volunteer grandparent and grandchild to maintain contact during periods of distance like COVID-19 as it contributed to relationship maintenance.

### **5.1.2. Development of Fictive Kinship**

The Family Match program provides a direct opportunity for participants to achieve voluntary kinship as matches can actively construct family or “do” family (Allen et al., 2011). The voluntary kinships that are developed through the Family Match program align with Allen, Blieszner, and Roberto’s (2011) conceptualizations of volunteer kin as the voluntary kinships developed through the Family Match program are fluid, dynamic, and go beyond the traditional nuclear family. The Family Match program facilitates the development of volunteer kinships between matches as the program provides participants with the necessary choice, control, and flexibility to progress their relationship jointly and as they see fit. Experiencing this sense of agency and control enabled participants to possess an active role as they chose to incorporate nonrelatives as kin (Allen et al., 2011), which allowed participants to feel as though their volunteer grandparent or volunteer grandchild was in fact part of their family. Interestingly, volunteer grandchildren expressed that being enrolled at such a young age and developing such a close bond made them “forget” that their volunteer grandparent was not “genetically” related to them, even though they were of different cultural backgrounds and ethnicities. In fact, the volunteer kinships contributed towards breaking cultural barriers and enhancing the diversity of social connections generationally and culturally as many volunteer kinships were intergenerational, interracial, and intercultural (Labit & Dobust, 2016; Sánchez et al., 2011). This in turn created a safe space for participants to learn, share, and experience one

another's cultural practices, which further supports the work completed by Allen et al. (2011) as they suggest volunteer kinships are diverse and inclusive in nature.

Participants express that rigidity in the regulation and structure of the program can constrict control and choice, which in turn negatively impacts the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. In fact, participants compare their volunteer kinships to friendship as both types of relationships hold more choice and control than biological relations since they possess an active role by choosing to incorporate nonrelatives as kin (Allen et al., 2011). It is possible that biological relationships are choice constraining due to existing familial hierarchies as well as evolutionary investment and familial history. Volunteer kinships are created family whereas a biological family is not chosen or constructed as it is already existing and predetermined. Participants express that with volunteer kinship more thought goes into interactions as they are not always certain of their place or position; however, with biological relationships participants express minimal reservations towards being assertive and inserting oneself into relationships due to the personal connection to family history, one's evolutionary investment, and linked lives (Elder, 2000). As a result, participants express that biological familial members are personally impacted by other biological family members' actions as they directly impacts their family history and if these actions are deemed negative, the biological family uses judgement as a coping mechanism. In voluntary kin relationships, support is prioritized as volunteer kin are not concerned about their image or how actions of their volunteer family members impact their familial history or family lineage as they are not biologically related (Chopik, 2017).

It was identified that matches not only felt as though their matches were family, but they actively blended their extended and close family with their voluntary kinship. It should be noted that this only took place if the family and friends were supportive towards the voluntary kinship. This finding relates to Braithwaite et al.'s (2010) fourth type of voluntary kin – extended family whereby there is a blending of biological family and volunteer family, which actively strengthens both family types. Interestingly, this study identifies a unique finding whereby participants' volunteer kin and friends form a relationship and one volunteer grandparent and volunteer daughter (mother of volunteer grandchild) form a volunteer sister relationship with the volunteer grandparent's other volunteer daughter.

These findings may suggest that biological family members do not need to be involved in the forming of volunteer kinships amongst adults.

It should be noted that the Family Match program facilitated volunteer kinship beyond volunteer grandparent-grandchild roles. Since volunteer grandparents are matched with a family with a young child, they can form a volunteer kinship with more than one family member. Volunteer grandparents express having a strong and unique bond with the mothers of their volunteer grandchildren where they provide support and guidance pertaining to their volunteer grandchild or personal matters as a parental figure. It is important to highlight that the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship is maintained as the priority because if the relationship between the parent and volunteer grandparent overrides the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship it can result in the loss of the relationship.

Volunteer kinships were developed to “fill a void” that existed in participants’ lives. This relates to the work by Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto (2011) as they suggest individuals incorporate nonrelatives as kin to serve a purpose or meet a need either affective or instrumental. Volunteer grandparents in the family match program enrolled to fill the grandparent role because they did not have grandchildren, or their grandchildren were living too far away for them to completely fill the grandparent role for their biological grandchildren. The parents of the volunteer grandchildren enrolled their children in the Family Match program because they did not have in-person access to their grandparents or their grandparents had passed away. For most participants, the motivation behind developing volunteer kinship relates to volunteer kin as substitute family or supplemental family (Braithwaite et al., 2010). Substitute family took place among participants who did not have contact with their biological family members due to death or fragmentation and supplemental family took place when participants maintained close ties with biological family as well as their voluntary kin; however, those biological ties have been identified as deficient, in this case most commonly due to physical and emotional distance (Braithwaite et al., 2010). It should be noted that one participant had an identifiably close relationship to their biological grandparents, despite physical distance. As a result, instead of calling their volunteer grandparents grandma and grandpa they called them auntie and as there was

no need to substitute or supplement their biological family with volunteer kin since the grandparent role was already filled, which puts into question whether this participant required the program as much as other participants.

The influential role of the volunteer grandchildren's parents should be noted as volunteer grandchildren would not be in the program if it were not for their parents. Parental influence continues far beyond initial contact as the parental role impacts the progress and sustainability of the relationship between volunteer grandchild and grandparent. The parents of the volunteer grandchildren act as the gatekeeper to the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. The parents influence the foundation of the relationship between the volunteer grandparent and grandchild whether that is a grandparent-based role or an aunt-based role from the conception of the relationship. Additionally, the parents also set the parameters and rules of the volunteer kinship, which if limiting and restrictive, can constrain the relationship development as amount of time, consistency, and informal time is limited. Furthermore, if the relationship between the volunteer grandparent and grandchild were to dissolve, a connection between the volunteer grandparent and the family was maintained through the parents. Maintaining a strong foundation between the parent and volunteer grandparent may allow for the younger individual or older adult to re-integrate themselves in the relationship over time possibly contributing to relationship longevity.

Boundaries were used among program participants to ensure that the volunteer kinship did not ruin or threaten the status of their biological familial relations or friendships. Participants used boundaries to protect the status of their biological relationships and friendships if they feared an unsupportive response or experienced an unsupportive response to their involvement with the Family Match program. Participants kept their biological relationships "separate" from their volunteer kinships through secrecy as a protection mechanism to avoid their biological family from feeling "replaced" by their volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. Younger participants who had a strong existing connection with their biological grandparents set a boundary with their volunteer kin as they did not require or need the support of a volunteer grandparent as that role was already "filled". On the contrary, younger participants express that if the volunteer

grandparent role is filled by their volunteer grandparents, they apply a boundary where they choose to not strengthen ties with their biological grandparents. This finding showcases that biological familial roles do not necessarily take precedence over volunteer kinship as the individual is able to choose to set boundaries for the ‘weaker’ relationship whether it is biological or volunteer in nature. It should be noted that boundaries are portable and not fixed, resembling the dynamic nature of volunteer kinships. Noteworthy, volunteer grandparents consciously overstepped their identified boundaries in situations what were deemed unsafe to protect their volunteer kin.

Interestingly, previous research has identified that IG relationships fostered by IG programs have the potential to develop and grow both within and outside of the program setting (Agmon et al., 2018; Beck, 2019; Gaetz, & Blakeborough, 2018). This study provides a new contribution to the existing IG literature as I investigate the long-term impacts of these ongoing IG connections beyond a controlled program setting. Since the Family Match program facilitates a long-term ongoing relationship, there is no “official end date” as matches can continue as long as participants would like. This considerable amount of choice may result in volunteer grandparent-grandchildren relationships to ebb and flow and even possibly dissolve through various changes or stages in life. Participants express that this fizzling out is a “natural process” because “you are not really related”. This may suggest that biological relationships are more likely to be long-lasting due to the family history and evolutionary investment that ties one to their family, whereas in volunteer kinship the increase of choice and control may make it difficult to maintain that connection long-term and throughout various life stages due to the mechanisms of choice and control and lack of obligation. For these participants, volunteer kin may have been convenience family whereby volunteer kinships develop in a specific context, time, or stage of life; therefore, these relationships are bound to time and/or place and evolve through life circumstance and situation (Braithwaite et al., 2010)

Interestingly, even though participants may not be as close as they once were, their volunteer kin roles, the volunteer grandparent-grandchild connection, and the additional social support continues through the strong volunteer grandparent-grandchild foundation that was built over the years. This may be associated with the findings by Weintraub and

Killian (2007) that suggest using kin-like names, like grandma and grandpa strengthens feelings of familism through non-kin conversation. However, it is possible that this strong feeling of familism that is facilitated through kin-like names not only strengthens the relationship but contributes to relationship sustainability. Participants express that their volunteer kin remain their volunteer kin even if they do not connect often, demonstrating the positive long-term impacts volunteer kinships can have on one's social support system.

In fact, even if the relationship has distanced, the connection remains long-term and there is also room and space for the relationship to rebuild due to the choice and control that the participants of the program possess. However, the idea of wanting to connect and taking actionable steps to do so have been identified as differing. Participants who are content with the status of their volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship ponder the idea of "reaching out" but do not necessarily take actionable steps to do so, possibly due to existing boundaries. Interestingly, the aspects of choice, control, and flexibility act as facilitators early in the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship; however, a significant amount of flexibility, choice, and the role of boundaries in mature stages of the relationship may hinder re-connection, especially if the connection has distanced. It should also be noted that if emotional distance is coupled with physical distance between the volunteer grandchild and grandparent, the future progression of the relationship may be in question.

### **5.1.3. Generativity and Positive Outcomes**

The Family Match program provides older adults with an opportunity to express generativity, which relates to existing empirical literature highlighting that IG programs enable older adults to demonstrate and achieve generativity with younger individuals (Gabel et al., 2016; Martin, 2019; Murayama et al., 2014). The findings of this study further solidify that generativity is not bound to biological relations but can also take place in non-kin relationships between old and young and additionally through volunteer kin relations. McAdams and de St. Aubin's (1992) work found that generativity may become more salient among adults as they grow older due to the influence of cultural demand, which was consistent with the findings of this study. Interestingly, volunteer grandparents revealed

having “grandparent energy”, “desperately wanting to be a grandmother”, and “being envious” of their peers with grandchildren, which links to cultural demand as they convey wanting to align their developmental expectations with the normative and age-graded societal factors of grandparenthood.

Generativity is expressed by volunteer grandparents through the introduction of new activities and experiences as well as the transferring of values, perspectives, and ideas to their volunteer grandchildren to support them throughout their development. This finding aligns with previous research which identified that older adults who express generativity by acting and narrating with younger individuals contribute to developing their identities through mutually meaningful activities (Knight et al., 2014; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Volunteer grandparents purposefully introduced new activities to their volunteer grandchildren that fell outside of their norm or culture such as going to the movies, experiencing new foods, and teaching new outdoor activities such as kayaking or skiing. In fact, volunteer grandparents provided generative action through offering as they felt concern for, commitment to, and belief in their volunteer grandchildren. Volunteer grandparents not only provided their volunteer grandchildren with the opportunity to learn new skills through activities but also provided them with offering and narrating through guidance, support, and advice by way of generative transfers of knowledge, values, morals, and beliefs, which in turn informed the volunteer grandchildren’s actions and/or changed their perspectives on certain topics or issues (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Through generativity, volunteer grandparents support and contribute to the personal development and growth of their volunteer grandchildren which has long-term positive impacts on their lives today. It should be noted that acts of generativity may initiate trust between the volunteer grandparent and grandchild which encourages the volunteer grandchild to listen to, value, and act on the teachings of their volunteer grandparent as they identify the concern and commitment that their volunteer grandparents feel towards them. It is possible that this trust between volunteer grandparent and grandchild is facilitated through mechanisms of generativity and plays a key role in successful volunteer kinship.

Volunteer grandchildren share how their time and volunteer kinship with their volunteer grandparents enabled them to feel happier, more confident, less stressed,

supported, comforted, adaptive, and courageous, and also grow as a person. These positive outcomes experienced by volunteer grandchildren align with the findings of previous literature that identifies that IG programs can improve the overall wellness of younger participants (Miller et al., 2022), as well as contribute to skill and character development, mood and enjoyment, and positive behaviours (Galbraith, 2015; Kim & Lee, 2017) which improves their ability to adjust to environments (Kim & Lee, 2017). Participants also express gaining transferable skills such as the ability to work with and communicate with diverse groups in addition to the importance of hard work, which was fostered through mechanisms of generativity from their volunteer kin. Similar findings pertaining to IG programs and generativity facilitating transferable skills has been found in work by Santini et al. (2020). It is important to highlight that these positive outcomes and skills that volunteer grandchildren experience from mechanisms of generativity facilitated by the Family Match program are applied to the lives of volunteer grandchildren today, 5 – 20 years since they enrolled in the program which demonstrates their long-term impact.

Through mechanisms of generativity, volunteer grandparents contributed to something bigger than themselves where they were “needed” and valued while being active and engaged members of the community, evoking positive emotional outcomes, aligning with previous research findings (Doiron & Lees, 2009; Gerardo et al., 2019; Moody & Phinney, 2012). Providing older adults with the opportunity to be generative has been identified in previous research to positively impact the well-being of older adults by increasing self-esteem, positive emotions, mood, sense of self, social engagement, social connectedness, engagement in activity, motivation to learn, mentorship capacities, social inclusion, leadership active aging attitude as well as mediated depressive mood, which is consistent with the findings of this study (Carcavilla et al., 2020; Murayama et al., 2014; Penick et al., 2014).

Both volunteer grandparents and volunteer grandchildren expressed a variety of both positive and happy emotions using the words “joy”, “heartwarming”, “hopeful”, and “loving” to describe their relationship with their match. In fact, work by Caspar et al. (2019) and Dumbrell et al. (2007) identified that IG programming facilitates positive experiences and outcomes for younger and older participants which can in turn foster IG solidarity and



an overall more age-integrated and inclusive community (Labit & Dobust, 2016; Sánchez et al., 2011). In fact, previous research identifies that IG programs actively facilitate community connectedness and community building, expand social networks, social inclusion, social cohesion, social capital, and also give rise to social equality (Anderson et al., 2017; Moody & Phinney, 2012; Snow & Tulk, 2020), which aligns with the findings of this study as participants express that the Family Match program contributed to the expanding of their family and social networks. It should be noted that this outcome was especially impactful for volunteer grandchildren who had a small family unit and had a single parent as their volunteer kin contributed to them feeling like they had “other people out there” and/or “another piece of family” beyond their biological family who they could spend time with and “rely on”. The volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship in turn made them feel like they had more people who “cared about” them, creating a “healthy environment” to grow up in.

Previous empirical research by Knight et al. (2014) suggests that IG programs facilitate sharing and offerings through interactions and contributions, which in turn results in the acts of giving and receiving to take place in tandem. The findings of this study point to generativity as the mechanism that enhances the meaningfulness of the volunteer grandparent grandchild relationship, which is consistent with work by Murayama et al. (2014). Through mechanisms of generativity, facilitated by cultural demand and inner desire, volunteer grandparents can provide the volunteer grandchild with offerings of support and guidance to enhance their personal development and growth as their volunteer grandparent exhibits investment in them. In exchange, volunteer grandchildren trust and accept their volunteer grandparents’ sharing of their opinions and experiences which in turn positively impacts the volunteer grandparent as they can contribute to something beyond themselves and feel “needed”. Both volunteer grandparent and grandchild mutually experience the positive outcomes of an expanded social support system through achieving volunteer kinship. In fact, Allport’s (1954) fourth tenet of mutual interdependence suggests that generations work together to achieve a common goal, which in this case is volunteer kinship. It is possible that generativity acts as the driving force to facilitate reciprocal exchanges, bi-directional mentoring, and mutual learning between younger and

older participants (Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017; Knight et al., 2014; Meuser et al., 2021; Santini et al., 2020; Snow & Tulk, 2020) to achieve the common goal of volunteer kinship.

## **5.2. Conceptual Contributions: Applying the Life Course Perspective**

Applying the life course perspective to the older adults involved in the Family Match program contributed to a deeper conceptual understanding of the motivating factors to participate within participants own sociohistorical context. Findings from this study relate closely to Elder's (1998) key principles of the life course perspective: 1) the interplay of human lives and development with changing times and places, 2) the timing of lives, 3) linked lives, and 4) human agency in choice making and actions.

The first key principle recognizes that one's life course is embedded and shaped by historical times and places through one's lifetime (Elder, 2000). Participants express that the concept of "chosen family" was not new to them as they connected with community members and formed volunteer kinships in an informal and formal fashion throughout their life course. It is possible that previous volunteer kin experiences contributed to normalizing these relations and in turn made older adult participants more open to enrolling in the Family Match program.

Participants describe grandparenthood as an age norm in their sociohistorical context. Participants who had living family described experiencing physical and emotional distance from their loved ones due to living in distant geographical locations, highlighting the difficulty of sustaining close ties between familial generations (Together Old and Young, 2020). In fact, many of the older participants express that their children and grandchildren moved away from their familial setting for work or education, leaving them behind (Revington, 2021). Older participants also shared that their children were not interested in having children, which coincides with the statistics that showcase more Canadians are not having children. In fact, there were 13,434 fewer births in 2020 than during the previous year, which is the greatest decrease by one year recorded and the lowest number of births in any year since 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2021). As a result, many older adult participants could not be the grandparent that they envisioned due to geographical

distance or not having biological grandchildren. Identifying this inconsistency between their personal familial situation and the age norms may have propelled older adult participants to enroll in the Family Match program to fill a void that previously existed.

Traditionally, the principle of linked lives refers to the generational dimension of time embedded in one's sociohistorical context, including the lives of biological family members from differing generations (Gilligan et al., 2018; Macmillian & Copher, 2005). This study's findings demonstrate how the linking of lives can take place beyond the biological family unit as the linking of lives took place amongst volunteer kinships. Bengston et al. (2005) identified that through linked lives of individuals within a family unit, events or circumstances that take place may have a reverberating impact on the lives of other biological family members (as cited in Gilligan et al., 2018). Interestingly, findings from this study suggest that the reverberating effects of one's family unit may not be restricted to biological relations but rather expand into volunteer kinship relations as volunteer grandparents were emotionally impacted by the altering family dynamics within the volunteer grandchildren's family unit.

Older adults exhibit human agency as they shape and re-shape their life experiences through the choices that they make in their sociohistorical context (Elder, 2000). For older adult participants in the Family Match program, they chose to enroll in the Family Match program as it aligned with the opportunities that were present in their sociohistorical context. Taking part in the Family Match program and being a volunteer grandparent enabled older adult participants to actively decide to change their social and relational situations embedded within their sociohistorical context to meet their goals. Applying the life course perspective to the older adult participants contributes to understanding how older adult participants decide to enroll and remain involved in an IG program like Family Match given their sociohistorical context.

### **5.3. Practical Recommendations**

This study uncovered key aspects that facilitate or hinder achieving sustainable volunteer kinship through the Family Match program. Community-based, nonfamilial IG

programs should be developed and structured in a flexible way that enhances participants' choice, agency, and control. This in turn enables participants to jointly progress the IG relationship as they see fit. A sustainable volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship is achieved through open communication between provider, volunteer grandchildren, volunteer grandparent, and parents of volunteer grandchildren as well as spending substantial, consistent, and informal time together that is deemed meaningful (Bales et al., 2000). In fact, the Family Match program aligns with the 9 key factors that increase program sustainability identified by Jarrott et al. (2019): 1) generations collaborate on IG programming, 2) participants take part in decision making, 3) participants are prepared for and reflect on activities, 4) activities reflect participants interests and backgrounds, 5) activities are age and role appropriate, 6) activities facilitate meaning-making processes, 7) social and physical environment promotes interaction, 8) participation is voluntary, and 9) facilitator documents and communicates about IG programming.

Moreover, ensuring that the communication styles of the participants align is a key indicator of volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship success as this directly impacts the planning of contact and decisions around how time is shared and spent. This study identified the essential role that the parents of the volunteer grandchildren play in the success of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. On the other hand, it is necessary that the parents of the volunteer grandchildren have a strong relationship with the volunteer grandparents to further support that formation of a long-term trusting relationship. If the parents of the volunteer grandchildren do not trust the volunteer grandparent, they can prevent the relationship from developing to its full potential by limiting the amount and type of time volunteer grandparent and grandchild can spend together as they are the gateway to a sustainable and successful volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship.

Even though it has been identified by Family Match participants that aging out of the program is a natural process of the program, there should be measures in place to support volunteer grandparents and the volunteer grandchildren's family through this challenging time and stage of life. Moreover, it has been identified that family dynamics can strain the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship as volunteer grandparents

become invested in the family dynamics, which can in turn cloud the judgement of the volunteer grandparent as they focus on other aspects of the family instead of prioritizing their relationship with their volunteer grandchildren. In fact, the very nature of the Family Match program results in volunteer grandparents being exposed to the very intimate family dynamics of their volunteer grandchild's family, which can be very unsettling and result in negative outcomes for volunteer grandparents. It is suggested that Volunteer Grandparents as an organization provide a wide range of resources on hand for their participants to take advantage of when navigating difficult family dynamics and situations. It is also recommended that implementing a more stringent screening process for families may in turn limit or avoid the challenges that volunteer grandparents experience in relation to family dynamics.

Additionally, participants shared how the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted their volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. During the COVID-19 pandemic the provider of the Family Match program did their best to ensure the health and safety of participants as well as support the IG relationships; however, this was a challenge as the provider was not prepared to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic on top of regular duties and tasks. It is imperative that Volunteer Grandparents as an organization implement emergency response policies inspired by the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the integrity of volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationships can be maintained. Furthermore, the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents shared that some prospective older adult participants expressed specific criteria for their potential matches, which makes the matching process rather challenging. It is necessary that IG programs, like Family Match and the activities in the IG program, are suitable for all abilities (Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017, Murayama et al., 2019; Newman & Smith, 1997). To create a more inclusive program, it may be necessary to implement into the program policies that clearly state that potential volunteer grandparents are not able to 'specify' their preference towards their potential match and that the match must be attempted prior to expressing disinterest based on preconceived notions, prejudices, and or stereotypes.

The largest contributing factor limiting the success of the Family Match program was the capacity of the program manager. All programs offered by Volunteer Grandparents are run by one part-time staff member, even with the addition of a brand-new program during COVID-19. As a result, the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents is limited in respect to the time and attention that can be given to the many aspects of their role. It has been identified in previous research that having strong administrative and organization support assists in the successful development, facilitation, and collaboration of IG programs, which Family Match is lacking (Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Jarrott, 2011; Kaplan, 2002; Lee et al., 2020; Murayama et al., 2014). Despite the manager's interest and dedication towards the following: 1) completing grants, 2) developing partnerships, 3) networking, 4) expanding program promotion, and 5) expanding the program to be more inclusive and available to non-English speakers, they are constrained due to their limited capacity. To provide more support to the Family Match provider, university or college students in related disciplines could complete their placements with Volunteer Grandparents during the fall and spring terms to support the manager in grant writing, administrative tasks, as well as creating a mass database for participants and newsletters. This way, the manager can have additional support year-round and can work towards creating a more inclusive program, obtain feedback from youth as well as their parents and volunteer grandparents, track participants more efficiently, use grant money to access translation services and create accessible materials, and facilitate events that current and potential members can attend. In addition to this, enhanced support from the board as well as the executive director may provide the manager with the additional support they require. Implementing a strategy or plan such as this may reduce the burden of the provider while enhancing the program experience for participants.

#### **5.4. Strengths and Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study that can be addressed by future research. This study included one perspective of volunteer grandchildren and volunteer grandparent, even when there was more than one volunteer grandchild or volunteer grandparent involved in the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. As a result, this study may not have captured the entirety of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship.

Additionally, this study identified the important and significant role parents play in the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship; however, parents of volunteer grandchildren were not included as study participants. It is recommended that future research include the perspectives of not only all volunteer grandchildren and volunteer grandparents but parents of the volunteer grandchildren as well. Moreover, this study uncovered that the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship was impacted by a history-graded event, COVID-19, which may have skewed the data but may have also highlighted the realities of relationship gaps in a sociohistorical space. It should also be noted that participants selected the data collection method that most aligned with their comfort level. Interviews were conducted either in-person or on Zoom using video, providing the participants the choice of sharing their experiences in a modality that best suited their needs to facilitate the collection of rich data. It is possible that recall bias may limit the findings of this study as participants were retrospectively sharing memories and experiences from the past 5–15 years. However, interviewing both volunteer grandparents and grandchildren helped mitigate this to some extent and improved the study's reliability by asking both parties similar questions of the information from both groups of participants. It should also be noted that the older adult participants in this study were predominately female, Caucasian, well-educated, active community members. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted with this in mind. Even though this study has a small sample of 10 participants, using a purposive sampling strategy to recruit participants who had stayed in touch post-program resulted in the selection of dyads who provided rich data on the long-term impact of a nonfamilial, community-based IG program for the first time. To further improve the diversity and richness of data it is recommended that future research recruit participants from a diversity of backgrounds and circumstances such as: 1) low-income, 2) minoritized, 3) old-old, 4) male identifying older adults. Though the sample is small in size, this study provides useful insight into the long-term impacts of community-based, nonfamilial IG programs from both the perspectives of younger adults, older adults, as well as the program provider. This study is the first of its kind to capture information on strengths and limitations of an IG program from three different perspectives. This in turn has helped to advance empirical research in this area of research as well as provide practical

recommendations for program providers. This type of in-depth case study of an IG program lays a strong foundation for larger studies on this important topic area.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to better understand how community-based, nonfamilial IG opportunities impact the lives of participants long-term, as well as gain a deeper understanding into the organizational attributes of IG programming. The data from this study demonstrates the reality of biological IG relationships today as a result of family fragmentation, geographical separation of families, and the mere reduction in birth rates in North America. In response, IG programs, like Family Match address these complex social issues and challenges by re-connecting generations to create a safe, inclusive, and supportive community environment for all. In fact, the Family Match program takes on an untraditional program structure as the program is participant-led, which enables participants to form strong bonds at their own pace through flexibility, agency, choice, and control mechanisms. As the Family Match program processes strongly on family cohesion, it facilitates the development of volunteer kinships on multiple levels – between volunteer grandparent-grandchild and parent of volunteer grandchild and volunteer grandparent. As a result, participants fill a familial void in their lives through volunteer kinship.

The findings of this study further showcase that generativity is not bound to biological relations but can also take place between volunteer kin relations facilitated by an IG program. In fact, this study points to generativity as the factor that enhances the trust and meaningfulness of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild relationship. Through mechanisms of generativity, the volunteer grandparent provides the volunteer grandchild with support and guidance that enhances their personal development and growth, as well as transferrable skills which volunteer grandchildren identify as valuable and relevant in their daily lives, demonstrating long-term impact. It is possible that generativity acts as the driving force to facilitate reciprocal exchanges, bi-directional mentoring, and mutual learning between younger and older participants to achieve the common goal of volunteer kinship.



Temporal factors consisting of the interactions between: 1) amount of time, 2) consistency of time spent together, and 3) informal time contribute to a strong foundation of the volunteer grandparent-grandchild dyad which facilitates long-term connections. Despite participants expressing not being as close as they once were, their volunteer kin roles, the volunteer grandparent-grandchild connection, and the additional social support are maintained through the strong volunteer grandparent-grandchild foundation that was built over the years. Limiting time constraining aspects such as physical distance, parental separation of volunteer grandchildren, and time constraining behaviours from parents of volunteer grandchildren is essential for program success. Utilizing technology to maintain communication during times of physical distance can contribute to the maintenance of volunteer kinships facilitated by IG programs.

The Family Match program empowered older adult community members to exercise human agency to form meaningful IG relationships where they actively aligned their sociohistorical context with their identified age norms, experienced the linking of lives beyond the biological family. This study demonstrates the important role that IG programs, like Family Match have on actively contributing to awareness and understanding of others culture, age, and ethnicity. The Family Match program creates a safe space where individuals can learn to accept differences, better understand other generations through contact and exposure, and share and bridge cultures, creating a more inclusive community. Implementing the recommended changes outlined in this study to the Family Match program could further refine the Family Match program. In turn, the revised Family Match program may act as a best practice IG program model that could be implemented and sustained throughout North America. Creating a national IG program model inspired by the Family Match program can facilitate long-term intergenerational relations, develop strong support networks, and contribute to a more age-integrated society.

It is necessary that Volunteer Grandparents as an organization consider the practical recommendations outlined in this study. The limited capacity of the program manager of Volunteer Grandparents must be addressed to optimize the participant experience. Efforts to obtain university or college students year-round to complete their placements at Volunteer Grandparents can support the manager in grant writing, task load, and creating

a mass database for participants and newsletters. In addition to this, enhanced support from the board as well as the executive director may provide the manager with the additional support, they require to run Volunteer Grandparents in a more efficient and effective manner. It is essential that resources and policy are developed to address and enhance the following aspects of the Family Match program: 1) dissolving of relationships, 2) complex family dynamics, 3) screening process for families and older adults, 4) organizational emergency response, 5) inclusion and accessibility. It should be noted that these recommended resources and policy directions be considered across IG programs that have the potential to facilitate volunteer kinships.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, this study addresses an important gap in the research on IG programs. This study brings together the perspectives of younger adults, older adults, and the program provider to highlight the long-term impacts of community-based, nonfamilial IG programming on the well-being and social connection between volunteer grandparents and grandchildren. This study broadens the understanding of the impact that IG programs have on both participants and program providers. This case study showcases how community-based, nonfamilial IG programs can contribute to addressing complex social issues by bringing together generations and cultures, facilitating volunteer kinships, and initiating the development of age-integrated and inclusive community for all.

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## **Appendix A.**

### **Interview Guide for Older Adult Participants**

Description: Interviews with 4-6 older adults (55+) to gain insight into their perceptions and experiences of participating in IG programming.

Research Question: How do community-based, nonfamilial IG programs impact the lives of older adult participants?

#### Opening Statement

I would like to thank you for taking the time out of your day to let me interview you. The purpose of this interview is to discuss your perspectives and experience with “Family Match”. I am interviewing you as part of my thesis for my Masters in Gerontology. The purpose of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the role IG programs, like “Family Match”, has on the lives of participants like yourself.

I would like to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers. You are the expert here. The interview will take roughly 60-90 minutes. If there are any questions that make you uncomfortable, please let me know. You do not have to answer them. We can stop the interview at any point. Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential. I will be recording the interview and taking notes throughout to assist in the data analysis process. Thank you for reading and signing the consent form prior to the start of the interview.

Would you like to review the consent form again together?

Before we begin, we will take a few moments to complete this short demographic questionnaire.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which gender do you identify with?
  - a. Man



- b. Woman
- c. Non-binary
- d. Prefer to self-describe:

\_\_\_\_\_

- e. Prefer not to answer

3. How would you best describe yourself?

- a. Caucasian
- b. Black
- c. Asian
- d. Indigenous
- e. Hispanic or Latino
- f. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Prefer not to say

4. What is your marital status?

- a. Single (never married)
- b. Married
- c. Common law
- d. Divorced
- e. Widowed
- f. Prefer not to say

5. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- a. Less than high school degree
- b. High school or equivalent (e.g. GED)
- c. Some college but no degree
- d. Bachelor degree
- e. Ph. D or higher
- f. Trade school
- g. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- h. Prefer not to say

6. What is your current employment status?

- a. Employed full-time
- b. Employed part-time
- c. Unemployed
- d. Retired
- e. Unable to work
- f. Student
- g. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- h. Prefer not to say

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

## Interview Questions:

1. What does the word “IG” mean to you?
  - a. What does it include?
  - b. What does it look like?
2. How do you think IG interactions and relations in society have changed over the last decades?
  - a. What factors do you think have contributed to this change?
3. Can you please share with me how you became involved in the Family Match program?
  - a. What specific factors drew you to this program?
  - b. Why do you think these factors led you to this program?
  - c. When were you an active participant in this program?
4. Can you describe to me how you interacted/spent time with your match in this program? (what do you do, what do you talk about, what do you share, more conversational or meaningful, etc.)
  - a. Can you describe to me how you feel when interacting with your match?
  - b. Can you describe to me how you feel after a program session takes place?
  - c. What did being involved in this IG program mean to you?
    - i. Can you describe how the IG program has impacted you today (social activity, mental and physical well-being, quality of life, purpose, connection)?
    - ii. What do you get from this program you can’t get in other programs?
  - d. Can you share with me how your relationship with your match has evolved since the end of the program?
5. What have you learned from interacting with your match that you may have not gained if you were not a part of the Family Match program?
  - a. How have your perceptions of the younger generation changed over time?
    - i. What shifts in perspectives did you have?
  - b. What type of relationship would you say you have with your match?
6. Can you describe how the Family Match program has allowed you to share with or contribute to the younger generation?
  - a. What were you able to share with the younger generations (interests, hobbies, backgrounds, culture, experiences, knowledge, etc.)
  - b. Please share with me the similarities and differences between yourself and the younger generation that you have identified.

7. What was the biggest surprise you experienced from being involved in Family Match (while in the program and after)?
  - a. What do you find most enjoyable about it?
  - b. What do you find the least enjoyable?
  - c. What do you benefit from the most?
  - d. What is the biggest challenge?
  - e. If you could change something about it, what would it be?
8. How do you think you would feel if you didn't keep in touch?
9. If you were involved in this program during COVID-19, can you share with me how you were involved during this program and what it did for you? If you weren't involved at this time, can you share with me how you may have interacted with your match? If you did not interact with your match, how do you think interacting with your match during this time would have impacted you?
10. Can you please share with me about the younger generations you interact with on a regular basis outside of your match?
11. That is the end of the interview.
  - a. Is there anything you would like to add?
  - b. Is there is anything you wish I would have asked?
12. Before you go, I'd like to quickly ask if you would be interested in receiving the results of this study?

## **Appendix B.**

### **Interview Guide for Younger Participants**

Description: 4-6 semi-structured interviews with younger participants (16+) to gain insight of their perceptions and experiences of participating in IG programming.

Research Question: How do community-based, nonfamilial IG programs impact the lives of younger participants?

#### Opening Statement

I would like to thank you for taking the time out of your day to let me interview you. The purpose of this interview is to discuss your perspectives and experience with “Family Match”. I am interviewing you as part of my thesis for my Masters in Gerontology. The purpose of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the role IG programs, like “Family Match”, has on the lives of participants like yourself.

I would like to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers. You are the expert here. The interview will take roughly 60-90 minutes. If there are any questions that make you uncomfortable, please let me know. You do not have to answer them. We can stop the interview at any point. Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential. I will be recording the interview and taking notes throughout to assist in the data analysis process. Thank you for reading and signing the consent form prior to the start of the interview.

Would you like to review the consent form again together?

Before we begin, we will take a few moments to complete this short demographic questionnaire.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which gender do you identify with?
  - a. Man
  - b. Woman
  - c. Non-binary
  - d. Prefer to self-describe:  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Prefer not to answer
3. How would you best describe yourself?
  - a. Caucasian
  - b. Black
  - c. Asian
  - d. Indigenous
  - e. Hispanic or Latino
  - f. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Prefer not to say
  - h. Not applicable
4. What is your marital status?
  - a. Single (never married)
  - b. Married
  - c. Common law
  - d. Divorced
  - e. Widowed
  - f. Prefer not to say
  - g. Not applicable
5. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
  - a. Less than high school degree
  - b. High school or equivalent (e.g. GED)
  - c. Some college but no degree
  - d. Bachelor degree
  - e. Ph. D or higher
  - f. Trade school
  - g. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - h. Prefer not to say
6. What is your current employment status?
  - a. Employed full-time
  - b. Employed part-time
  - c. Unemployed
  - d. Retired
  - e. Unable to work
  - f. Student

- g. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- h. Prefer not to say
- i. Not applicable

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

## Interview Questions:

1. What does the word “IG” mean to you?
  - a. What does it include?
  - b. What does it look like?
2. Can you please share with me how you became involved in the Family Match program?
  - a. What specific factors drew you to this program? Why?
  - b. When were you an active participant in this program?
  - c. What is your general perspective of programs like this?
3. Can you describe to me how you interacted/spent time with your match in this program? (what do you do, what do you talk about, what do you share, more conversational or meaningful, etc.)
  - a. Can you describe to me how you feel when interacting with your match?
  - b. Can you describe to me how you feel after a program session takes place?
  - c. What does did being involved in this program mean to you?
    - i. Can you describe how the IG program has impacted you today (social activity, mental and physical well-being, quality of life, purpose, connection)?
    - ii. What do you get from this program you can’t get in other programs?
  - d. Can you share with me how your relationship with your match has evolved since the end of the program?
4. What have you learned from interacting with your match that you may have not gained if you were not a part of the Family Match program?
  - a. How have your perceptions of the older generation changed over time?
    - i. What shifts in perspectives did you have?
  - b. What type of relationship would you say you have with your match?
5. Can you describe how the Family Match program has allowed you to share with or contribute to the older generation?
  - a. What were you able to share with the older generation?
  - b. Please share with me the similarities and differences between yourself and the older generation that you have identified.
6. What was the biggest surprise you experienced from being involved in Family Match (while in the program and after)?
  - a. What do you find most enjoyable about it?
  - b. What aspect has been the most personally meaningful?
  - c. What do you find the least enjoyable?
  - d. What do you benefit from the most?
  - e. What is the biggest challenge?

- f. If you could change something about it, what would it be?
7. If you were involved in this program during COVID-19, can you share with me how you were involved during this program and what it did for you? If you weren't involved at this time, can you share with me how you may have interacted with your match? If you did not interact with your match, how do you think interacting with your match during this time would have impacted you?
  8. How do you think you would feel if you didn't keep in touch?
  9. Can you please share with me about the older generations you interact with on a regular basis outside of your match?
  10. That is the end of the interview.
    - a. Is there anything you would like to add?
    - b. Is there anything you wish I would have asked?
  11. Before you go, I'd like to quickly ask if you would be interested in receiving the results of this study?



## **Appendix C.**

### **Interview Guide for IG Program Providers/Facilitators**

Description: Interviews with roughly 1-2 providers/facilitators of IG programs that run in the Metro Vancouver area.

Research Question: What are the provider's/facilitator's experiences with community-based, nonfamilial IG programs?

#### Opening Statement

I would like to thank you for taking the time out of your day to let me interview you. The focus of the interview is to discuss your perspectives, experience, and involvement as a provider/facilitator of an IG program in Metro Vancouver. I am interviewing you as part of my thesis for my Masters in Gerontology. The purpose of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of your experience facilitating and/or providing community-based, nonfamilial IG programs in the community.

I would like to remind you that there are no right or wrong answers. You are the expert here. The interview will take roughly 60-90 minutes. If there are any questions that make you uncomfortable, please let me know. You do not have to answer them. We can stop the interview at any point. Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential. I will be recording the interview and taking notes throughout to assist in the data analysis process. Thank you for reading and signing the consent form prior to the start of the interview.

Would you like to review the consent form again together?

Before we begin, we will take a few moments to complete this short demographic questionnaire.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which gender do you identify with?
  - a. Man
  - b. Woman
  - c. Non-binary
  - d. Prefer to self-describe:  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Prefer not to answer
3. How would you best describe yourself?
  - a. Caucasian
  - b. Black
  - c. Asian
  - d. Indigenous
  - e. Hispanic or Latino
  - f. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Prefer not to say
4. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
  - a. Less than high school degree
  - b. High school or equivalent (e.g. GED)
  - c. Some college but no degree
  - d. Bachelor degree
  - e. Ph. D or higher
  - f. Trade school
  - g. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - h. Prefer not to say

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?



## Interview Questions:

1. Can you please briefly share your educational and work background?
  - a. What led you to this role/focus area?
2. Can you please tell me how long you have been with this organization?
  - a. How long have you been administering/in charge of this program?
3. Can you tell me about the IG program(s) offered at your organization?
  - a. What was the purpose of development and/or what gap or need was it designed to address?
    - i. Are long-term connections a main goal?
    - ii. How is that facilitated?
  - b. Is there a framework or model that the program and services are built upon?
    - i. Is the current model sustainable? Why or why not?
  - c. What is the funding source?
  - d. What activities are included in these programs/services?
  - e. Where does the program take place?
    - i. What was the experience with space access?
  - f. How has the IG program changed over time? (improvements, innovations, etc.)
4. What population do these programs and services aim to serve?
  - a. Why is this identified as the specific target population?
  - b. What are the eligibility requirements for program participants?
    - i. What factors might make someone ineligible to be a participant?
    - ii. Screening?
    - iii. Safety?
  - c. What is the cost of the programs/services to participants?
  - d. What is the duration of the programs/services?
  - e. Can you describe policies or guidelines participants are required to follow?
5. What are the demographics and characteristics of the participants? (*age, gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, disability, Indigenous status, immigrant status*)
  - a. Are any demographics overrepresented in the participants served?
  - b. Are there specific demographics (older persons or younger people) who might have difficulty accessing the programs and services?
    - i. What is being done to address this?
6. In your opinion, what impact/outcomes does the IG program(s) and services have on the lives of participants?
  - a. How satisfied are participants with the programs and services?
    - i. How is this data collected?
    - ii. How is the data evaluated?
  - b. How does a participant involved in the programming and services compare to those who have not been able to access?

- c. Please describe how involved are participants in the program plan or activities?
7. What is the staffing model of the IG program(s)?
    - a. How does staff engage with participants?
    - b. Has staff had training on how to effectively deliver IG programs?
      - i. What types of training do staff receive?
      - ii. Are staff taught how to appropriately work with physical and cognitive disabilities as well as language and cultural differences?
  8. How has COVID-19 impacted the IG program(s)?
    - a. What have been some adaptations that have been made?
  9. Do you collaborate with any other organizations on a regular basis to help provide IG program(s)? If so, which ones?
    - a. What is your opinion of those relationships?
      - i. How have working relationships evolved over time?
    - b. How effective are partnerships in meeting the needs of the participants?
  10. What are the benefits of running, implementing, and maintaining IG programs for a program provider like yourself?
    - a. Can you describe factors of the IG program that contribute to its success?
    - b. Probe: facilitators, sustainability, etc.
  11. Is there something you wish you could expand on or incorporate in IG program(s) and services but are currently unable to?
    - a. Why is this important and why are you unable to provide this currently?
    - b. What are the challenges of running, implementing, and maintaining IG programs for a program provider like yourself?
    - c. What barriers are you/have you experienced (organizational/participant-level)
      - i. Probe: funding, evaluation, etc.
      - ii. Family dynamics?
      - iii. Matching?
    - d. Why do you think some matches stayed connected and others may not have?
  12. That is the end of the interview.
    - a. Is there anything you would like to add?
    - b. Is there is anything you wish I would have asked?
  13. Before you go, I'd like to quickly ask if you would be interested in receiving the results of this study?

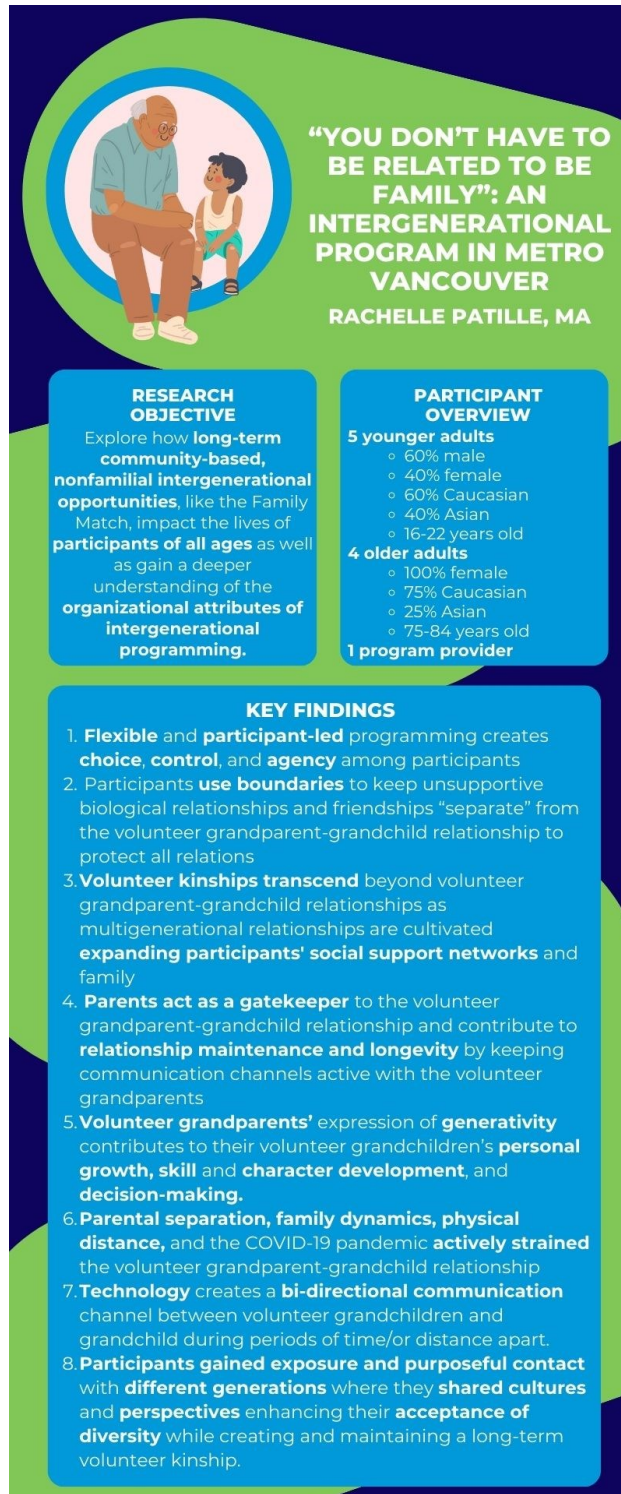
# Appendix D.

## Intergenerational Program Guidelines

| Intergenerational Program Guidelines  | Questions to Help You Get Started!   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are materials accessible?</li> <li>• Are any sub-populations "left out"?</li> <li>• Are all participants screened in an equitable way?</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are materials accessible to all participants?</li> <li>• Are any sub-populations "left out"?</li> <li>• Are all participants screened in an equitable way?</li> </ul>   |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have measures in place to support your participants in the time of an emergency?</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have measures in place to support your participants in the time of an emergency?</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have diverse partnerships that support program recruitment, sustainability, management, and evaluation?</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>3</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have diverse partnerships that support program recruitment, sustainability, management/capacity, and evaluation?</li> </ul>  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you use the support of your participants (current and past) to support the program ?</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you use the support of your participants (current and past) to support the program ?</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you provide guidelines, tools, or lessons learned to support intergenerational volunteer kinships through challenging aspects of the relationship?</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>5</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the programs rigidity limit participant agency and autonomy?</li> <li>• Do you provide guidelines, tools, or lessons learned to support intergenerational volunteer kinships through challenging aspects of the relationship?</li> </ul>         |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the program facilitate an adequate amount of consistent (weekly), -in-person informal time to be spent between participants?</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the program facilitate an adequate amount of consistent (weekly), -in-person informal time to be spent between participants?</li> <li>• Do participants live close to one another?</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do participants have the means to connect through technology to keep communication channels open during times of distance?</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>7</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do participants have the means to connect through technology to keep communication channels open during times of distance?</li> </ul>   |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>8</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do activities facilitate acts of generativity that evoke reciprocal giving?</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do activities facilitate acts of generativity that evoke reciprocal giving?</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are communication channels between the program organization and participants cater to diverse communication styles?</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>9</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there open and clear communication channels between the program organization and all participants that cater to diverse communication styles?</li> <li>• Does the program provider check-in with all participants on a regular basis ?</li> </ul> |
|  <p style="text-align: center;"><b>10</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the program provide opportunities for older adults to form a relationship with parents of younger participants?</li> </ul> |  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the program provide opportunities for older adults to form a relationship with parents of younger participants?</li> </ul>                               |

## Appendix E.

### Infographic Summarizing Research for Participants



## **Appendix F.**

### **Empirical Data Chart**

**Description:**

This resource provides a summary of all the empirical data included in both literature reviews that were completed as a part of this study. First, data from the 2020 literature search is provided. Following, data from 2022 literature search is showcased.

**Filename:**

Empirical Data Chart.docx

## **Appendix G.**

### **Grey Literature Data Chart**

**Description:**

This chart provides a detailed summary of 113 intergenerational programs that have been identified on the web, globally. The 73 programs highlighted yellow have been identified as best practice and innovative in nature.

**Filename:**

Grey Literature Data Chart.xlsx