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RC CLIF Final Report

### iGen Series Final Report

In a world that is more divided than ever, the iGen Series attempted to connect people from across generations and cultures through the power of shared stories. The iGen series was structured as a three-part intergenerational conversation series between younger students, Brandeis undergraduates, and older adults with one goal being to eliminate the knowledge hierarchy: where the perspectives of younger individuals are viewed as less important. The iGen series was also meant to empower participants to share their stories through the aid of a professional and through presentations followed by open discussion. Participants in each generation did receive professional speaking training to empower them to share their stories. Additionally, older adult and Brandeis participants gave elevator pitches to each other in a round-robin format. In the final part of the program, across two days, participants gave 5 to 10-minute presentations to the other two generations.

In implementing the iGen structure, numerous successes and challenges were encountered that influenced the timeline of the program. As soon as the Rich/Collins fellowships were awarded I immediately got to work with creating materials, meeting with community partners, and reaching out to create new partnerships. Pretty quickly, through the Brandeis Hiatt Career Center, I was able to find and hire Susan Kanrich as the professional speaker. I was also able to leverage Jewish Family & Children Services, community partner for Companions to Elders, as a secondary community partner for recruiting older adults. I used Waltham Group, Graduate Student, and Department of Community Service listservs, to recruit Brandeis students.

I also used Instagram, Facebook, and This Week in Service postings as alternative recruitment methods for Brandeis students. Enrollment was also low for Brandeis students which I later determined was attributed to students being overcommitted and too fatigued from Zoom. In a final recruitment attempt I was able to recruit five students; one later dropped out for being too overcommitted.

Working with Michael Sabin, principal of McDevitt Middle School in Waltham, I was able to finalize an initial timeline and establish a plan of action. We anticipated recruitment difficulties from Zoom fatigue and teacher burnout for the middle school students and tried to start recruitment as soon as possible. We initially reached out to three teachers who we thought would have interested students and classes with diverse representation: drama club and student leadership. Initially, we had difficulty getting the teachers to distribute the material to students, but through persistent emails we finally got recruitment to students. Student interest appeared to be low, so I offered to meet with students face-to-face, to encourage them to participate. This attempt also yielded low interest. We also faced difficulty balancing the student break schedule which affected community partner meetings. At the end of April, I had determined to continue forward with the program without the younger students given that the symposium was approaching.

While I was going forward with the programming, I was concurrently working with Lucas Malo and Sam de Melim to find a last second community partner for younger students. A month before the program end-date, I was able to secure a partnership with Africano Waltham.

Before starting the program, I had every participant fill out a Qualtrics survey to evaluate the impact of the program. Given how short notice Africano Waltham agreed to participate, they were unable to fill out the pre-program survey. From the pre-program survey, I determined that a

majority of participants were unfamiliar with the other generations. Therefore, one goal of my program was to engage participants in intergenerational understanding. Throughout the course of the program, I took qualitative notes on participants' engagement, comments, and demeanor.

As part of the program, I incurred unexpected challenges with retention of the older adults and Brandeis students. Initially I recruited nine older adults with the help of JF&CS. One older adult had scheduling conflicts, another asked to be removed from the emails after the first meeting, a third asked to be removed after being uncomfortable filling out a CORI, and a final needed to focus on being a caretaker for their ill spouse. I initially recruited six Brandeis students. Two students asked to be removed after they became too overwhelmed with schoolwork. Unfortunately, none of these complications were a result of the program design, but rather of external circumstances. In light of these complications, numerous attempts were made to recruit more participants of each generation, but at some point, we decided to proceed despite the retention difficulties.

This program also encountered numerous unexpected successes as a result of both planning and chance. The first unexpected success was in the public speaking workshops with Susan Kanrich. Both the Brandeis students and older adults were extremely engaged, asked numerous questions, and had tons of smiles. The level of success was unexpected because I anticipated the participants to know much of the information Susan was talking about, but she was able to engage the participants and have them actively contribute to the discussion. Evidence of engagement was seen when one of the participants called me asking for Susan's contact information to inquire about further questions. Another unexpected success occurred during the third meeting when the older adults met the Brandeis students and participated in rotating elevator pitches. Prior to elevator pitches, each participant was given four criteria to give

constructive feedback on: engagement; intonation/articulation; overall understanding, such as chronology and vocabulary; and purpose, such as was the lesson easily understood. Susan and I randomly visited breakout rooms to assess the conversation and provide general comments to keep the conversation going. We found participants to be actively engaged listeners, taking notes when listening to the other's elevator pitch, and receptive to constructive feedback. Additionally, participants initially had difficulty giving the elevator pitch but grew more comfortable quickly. After bringing participants into the main room and listening to them share things they learned, I was pleasantly impressed with the positive feedback from participants. Participants commented that the practice was helpful, they enjoyed hearing the stories of other participants, and they liked the rotations. Future programming will involve two rotations – three partnerships – instead of the four that this program had because there was not enough time at the end to hear from every participant and some had to leave during closing remarks.

Another unexpected success was through the partnership with Africano Waltham, the extent of which I learned after a conversation with the organizer, Juliet Najjumba. I came to learn that many of the Africano Waltham participants are from Uganda. Ugandan culture, I came to learn, is largely private, which makes sharing personal stories and about oneself difficult for job interviews. This program gave those participants an opportunity to break that mold and challenge themselves. Juliet expressed the value of this program for her participants after our second meeting which made me confident that the positive impact of this program extends past my initial assessment.

The presentations were also successful despite some challenges which I do not see as hindering the success of the overall program. The Africano participants all presented on the same day because they were the largest group with about 14 presentations. The presentations were

supposed to be five to ten minutes long, but many Africano participants only presented for two to three minutes. A guided question and discussion section ensured that each participant was given sufficient time. The second day of presentations was also successful as the Brandeis students and older adults adhered to time. On the second day, some participants took too long, and the presentations went over time. In the future I will be stricter about the presentation timing. I was pleasantly surprised to see participants implementing the feedback discussed in previous meetings. Susan and I both commented on the transformations we saw in each individual from the start to end of the program in terms of confidence and presentation skill.

A final success of this program was connecting generations through their stories, an initial goal of this program. A lot of the participant stories were relatable as was evidenced through the discussion, but even those that weren't relatable, the questions asked by participants made them feel connected and understanding of the topics. Three themes I noticed were interwoven through the discussion topics and contributed to the intergenerational connections: adaptability, accepting the things we cannot change, and appreciating where we are in the moment. Whether the topics were emotionally charged, experiential, or surface level, the lessons these participants learned from the passed connected them in profound ways.

The next stage of ensuring the longevity of the iGen series is to have a meeting with two Waltham Groups who can run the event as the first inter-house program. I have reached out to Companions to Elders and Kids Connections to introduce them to the program and propose that they takeover planning. They both have the community partnerships and volunteers to sustain the program. Companions to Elders is community partners with JF&CS, a community partner this program already uses. Companions to Elders works with students who would be perfect for this

program. Both groups work with Brandeis students who I anticipate would be more than interested to participate in this program.

Overall, receiving this fellowship has been lifechanging from a personal growth perspective. I learned the intricacies of communicating with participants and community partnerships to maintain relationships and retain the participants through the numerous challenges this program entailed. I was also challenged with persevering over program challenges and self-doubt. Through the help of my fellow cohort, Sam de Melim, and Lucas Malo for validating my struggles and providing support to overcome them I was able to finish this program with great success. I look forward to the future of this program and how it will adapt to the changing world. Each generation has something to share and that was demonstrated in this program. When one gives people a platform to share their stories, one gains a more profound appreciation for life.

## Final Budget Report

<u>Item + Unit Number</u>	<u>Unit Cost</u>
• CORI Approvals (4)	\$200
- CORI approval was for instances when older adults would be one-on-one with younger students. Given that younger students were never in an isolated setting, due to late participation, CORI approval was relaxed. Additionally, overall enrollment was fewer than proposed, resulting in less CORI approvals needed than originally proposed.	
• Public Speaking Instructor (3)	\$600
• Catering (1)	\$50.75
- Due to COVID-19 restrictions, no in-person events were held which resulted in an inability to cater food as initially proposed. Alternatively, snacks were provided to Brandeis participants to enjoy during the presentation days.	