


SHORT RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sharing memory and wisdom across generations: A scaffolded community reminiscing programme for adolescents and older adults

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Abstract

The role of memory in supporting adolescents' sense of place and past is not well understood, but older adults offer a wealth of life stories and wisdom that they can share with younger generations. This in-depth pilot study positioned Australian high school students as oral historians to interview older Australians about their lives. Oral historian training and materials were provided, and pre- and post-intervention measures of adolescents' sense of everyday Australian history, well-being, and social connection were collected for an intervention school group ($n = 17$) and a waitlist control school group ($n = 12$). In-depth supplementary memory and well-being data were also collected for six participating older adults. In the intervention condition, scaffolded memory interviews took place during weekly aged care visits across one school term and were followed by an intergenerational celebration and memory book presentation. As hypothesised, older adults imbued their stories with life lessons for adolescents. Although no quantitative changes in participants' well-being emerged, qualitative data revealed the emergence of rich interpersonal relationships and bonding between adolescents and older adults. There were also benefits of the programme for older adults' reports of generativity and adolescents' understanding of everyday Australian history. The findings demonstrate the social and academic benefits of scaffolded intergenerational memory conversations and represent a scalable educational model and materials with downstream community benefits.

Keywords: reminiscing; intergenerational; adolescent; older adult; life story

Shared memory conversations about the personal and collective past are important for individual and national identity and history (Meade *et al.* 2019). As adolescents develop their own life stories, they draw meaning and value from the life memories of their parents and grandparents too (Fivush *et al.* 2008; Lind and Kirkegaard Thomsen 2017). A rich body of psychological research has shown how these 'vicarious' memories strengthen adolescents' family identity and influence well-being in nuanced and important ways (Chen *et al.* 2021; Fivush *et al.* 2011a; Merrill and Fivush 2016). To date, however, no research from these traditions has considered the potential benefits of intergenerational reminiscing to shape broader historical understandings of life in the

past or to promote well-being for adolescents and older adults who do not share a family relationship.

While research on vicarious memories for adolescents has focused on families, oral historians highlight the power of memory to connect individual experiences with broader historical trends (Green 2019) and to learn about people in previous generations or contexts (Perks and Thomson 2016). Oral historians differ from other historians in that they may or may not have formal academic training (Ritchie 2002) and are very often family or community members. Although no research to our knowledge has considered adolescents as oral historians, we highlight the potential for adolescents to enact simplified versions of an oral history interview with older adults across the community.

This interdisciplinary study aimed to draw together insights from psychological and oral history research. We paired adolescents as conversational partners for older Australian adults (age 75+) and tracked the potential benefits of shared memory conversations over one school term. Importantly, we positioned the adolescents as oral historians, framing their conversations with older adults as insights into Australian history. In this brief article, we discuss the psychological and historical works of literature supporting our project, the memory materials and media we used to scaffold adolescents in learning how to be oral historians, and the outcomes of the programme for adolescents' everyday Australian history, older adults' generativity and sharing of lessons, and both groups' well-being and community connection.

Intergenerational reminiscing across the lifespan

Reminiscing serves important functions for speakers and listeners. These include self functions, supporting and reinforcing identity; social functions, supporting bonding, eliciting empathy, and enhancing closeness; and directive functions, providing insights for future action (Bluck *et al.* 2005; Harris *et al.* 2014; Webster 1997).

In psychology, research has examined how parents scaffold child and adolescent memory development via every day reminiscing conversations (Fivush *et al.* 2011b; Salmon and Reese 2016; Van Bergen *et al.* 2009). Adolescence is a key time for the development of personal and collective identity (Klimstra *et al.* 2010), and adolescents who know more 'vicarious' memories of their parents' or grandparents' lives show higher levels of insights into the past, stronger identity formation, and greater family connection (Fivush *et al.* 2008; Lind and Kirkegaard Thomsen 2017; Merrill and Fivush 2016). Richer and more coherent parent memories are also associated with adolescent self-esteem (Chen *et al.* 2021; Duke *et al.* 2008) and well-being (Duke *et al.* 2008; Fivush *et al.* 2011a), although there are equivocal findings for cultural groups who may have experienced historical harms (Chen *et al.* 2021).

Memory conversations also play a critical role in supporting identity and well-being as we age (Harris *et al.* 2022; Marques *et al.* 2023). In Erickson's canonical theory of development, one key characteristic of ageing is increasing concern for the legacy one will leave behind (Slater 2003). Certainly, older adults increasingly report sharing life experiences to teach and inform others around them (Webster 1997). They are also more likely to be driven by notions of generativity: that is, the desire to 'leave a mark' and pass on knowledge that benefits the next generation (Harris *et al.* 2014). Yet they do not always have family close by to share their life stories with. This presents a social problem, with loneliness predicting ill health, depression, and early mortality (Black Dog Institute 2018).

Connections between intergenerational reminiscing and oral history

In modern history, personal recollections provide important insights into the experiences of people in specific communities or generations (Perks and Thomson 2016). These oral

histories ‘bring history to life’, enabling the everyday lives of citizens to be recorded, examined, and explained (Abrams 2010; Thompson 2000). Decades of groundbreaking historical research have shown how oral histories can support empathy for others, revealing details about how lives have changed over time and how people narrate their life stories in different historical contexts (Puri and Thomson 2017).

For adolescents, oral histories may offer a valuable methodology for learning about their own collective past. While historical understanding is often shaped by textbooks, teachers, families, and popular culture (Seixas, 1993), oral histories differ in that they are personal, engender empathy, and enable the listener to connect in a way not otherwise possible (Puri and Thomson 2017). In the Australian National History Curriculum, students are taught to think historically and place themselves in specific Australian contexts (ACARA 2023). In Grade 10, for example, curricula include Australian conflicts and peace efforts; movements for the rights and freedoms of Indigenous Australians; and social changes since 1918 (ACARA 2023). While recorded oral history models exist for Australian schools, presented by museums and local councils, little research, to our knowledge, measures the benefits of direct intergenerational conversations with a non-familial adult.

Readers with expertise in history will note that the memory conversations between older adults and teenagers were not traditional oral history interviews, but modified versions involving stories about the self that touched on themes of celebration, family, challenges, and so on. The structured interview guidelines and optional conversation prompts were designed to elicit rich autobiographical narratives (see Harris *et al.* 2022; Salmon and Reese 2016; Van Bergen *et al.* 2009). These material and conversational scaffolds appeared developmentally important, with adolescents identifying new social tools to connect with their own grandparents. Still, the adolescents were oriented towards these memory conversations as opportunities to connect with their conversational partners *and* gather historical data. Below, we discuss how we trained adolescents in oral history skills and scaffolded this approach to the conversations. We also discuss how we tested for adolescents’ development of historical knowledge in the post-intervention assessment.

The present study

We aimed to pilot a scaffolded intergenerational reminiscing intervention programme for adolescents and older adults. Existing ‘grandfriends’ programmes are typically conducted with younger children (eg Lee-Fay Low *et al.* 2015) and miss a theoretical framework for understanding the benefits incurred via life stories. By integrating theoretical insights from psychology and modern history, we anticipated benefits for older adult generativity, adolescent notions of history, and intergenerational well-being and social connection.

Using a quasi-experimental design, adolescents were allocated to a memory intervention condition or waitlist control. Adolescents in the intervention condition took part in scaffolded training covering the principles and ethics of oral history, as well as theoretically informed interview skills from ‘elaborative reminiscing’ literature in psychology (see Harris *et al.* (2022) for similar training with aged care workers). They conducted weekly memory interviews with older adult partners across one school term, culminating in a celebration and memory book presentation. Adolescents in the control participated in other extra-curricular activities.

To capture intervention outcomes, pre- and post-intervention assessments were conducted. We also recorded one representative memory conversation for each group. We hypothesised that older adults would orient their life stories towards life lessons, thus representing generativity in the form of ‘teaching and informing’ younger generations (see Harris *et al.* 2014; Slater 2003; Webster 1997). We further hypothesised that adolescents

would report richer concepts of everyday Australian history. No such gains were anticipated for the control. Finally, drawing on intergenerational reminiscing research with families (Fivush *et al.* 2011a; Merrill and Fivush 2016), we anticipated that adolescents and older adults would report enhanced well-being and community connection.

Materials and methods

Participants

Participants included 29 adolescent students from a single metropolitan high school in Sydney, Australia and 6 older adults from an aged care home within walking distance.

Adolescent participants were aged between 12 and 17 years, enrolled in Grades 7–11, and expressed interest in connecting with older adults as part of a school-wide weekly afternoon dedicated to sports and community. One participant was Aboriginal Australian, and participants also reported a wide range of other cultural and ethnic backgrounds including Thai, Chinese, Sri Lankan, and South African. Using a quasi-experimental design, 17 adolescents who had no competing activities were allocated to the memory intervention condition and took part in the programme that school term (13 girls, 2 boys, 2 non-binary, or prefer not to say). A further 12 adolescents who had clashes with specific sports they had chosen formed a waitlist control (10 girls and 2 boys). Participants in the control group were matched by grade, which is a proxy for age, to those in the intervention group. Both adolescents and their parents provided consent.

The six older adults were 75–98 years old, all women, and expressed interest in participating in the programme following an invitation from their aged care recreation team. Data were collected for five of these six, as one participant completed the intervention period but withdrew consent for data collection before the post-intervention assessment (the same older adult was keen to continue participation in the programme itself). Cultural backgrounds included British, Irish, and German. Initially, more than 20 participants expressed interest in taking part but were deemed to have moderate or severe cognitive decline by their aged care staff and were redirected to another activity. We chose not to allocate any older adults from this group to a traditional control group. Although this limited conclusions we could draw about older adult well-being before and after the intervention programme, we did not consider that the other older adults who had expressed interest would be comparable with our participating older adults. Both older adults and their family members provided consent.

Materials and procedure

After obtaining ethical approval, the study commenced in four phases: a pre-intervention assessment, oral historian training for adolescents in the intervention, memory interviews and memory book celebration, and a post-intervention assessment.

Pre-intervention assessment

For adolescents, pre-intervention assessment surveys were completed at school. After reporting demographics, adolescents completed the *Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale*, indicating their agreement with 14 items that reflected their feelings and thoughts over the last two weeks (eg *'I've been feeling confident'*). Responses were given on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = *none of the time* and 5 = *all of the time* (see Clarke *et al.* 2011; McKay and Andretta 2017 for validation).

Adolescents then wrote three life stories using established prompts from McAdams (2006) and answered four open-ended questions about older Australians' lived history.

Life story data extended beyond the scope of this study and are presented in Evans *et al.* ([under consideration](#)). History questions included (i) ‘What do you imagine the biggest challenges were for older adults when they were younger?’, (ii) ‘What do you imagine the biggest joys were for older adults when they were younger?’, (iii) ‘What do you imagine your own life would have been like if you had been born in 2030?’, and (iv) ‘In what ways did life differ from then to now?’.

Finally, to map community connection, adolescents completed the *Inclusion of Other in Self* task (Aron *et al.* 1992). They were presented with five pairs of circles, one labelled ‘self’ and one labelled ‘community’, which increased from no overlap to almost complete overlap. They were asked: ‘Please circle the picture that best describes your relationship with your community. There is no right or wrong!’. A greater connection was indicated by more greatly overlapping circles.

For older adults, a researcher visited the aged care home and offered to help with the pre-intervention survey (eg by reading items out and by scribing). The items administered largely matched those for adolescents; however, the four questions relating to adolescents’ understanding of everyday Australian history were excluded.

Oral historian training

Adolescents in the intervention condition took part in oral history training delivered by the research team and accompanied by a *Memory Conversation Handbook*, which adolescents were free to keep (see [Figure 1](#)). The training addressed oral history principles, including ‘shared authority’. ‘Shared authority’ describes an ideal relationship between the oral historian and interviewee, wherein the interviewee maintains ‘authority’ over their stories and the oral historian respectfully contextualises these stories in greater historical arcs of continuity and change (Perks and Thomson 2016). This principle was key to positioning adolescents as oral historians who could discover historical data from their conversations with older adults. The training also included tips from oral history interviewing methods and tips for extending memory conversations from the elaborative reminiscing literature in cognitive and developmental psychology. These tips included scaffolds for initiating and sustaining conversation (eg asking open-ended questions and confirming older adult responses), engaging in active listening (eg pausing and waiting), and working with older adults (eg checking audibility and checking for fatigue).

Memory conversations

Over eight two-hour sessions, conducted weekly across one school term, adolescents met their older adult partners at the aged care home cafe to ask about their life stories. Two teachers supervised the activities. Given strict COVID-19 requirements, adolescents and teachers completed Rapid Antigen Tests before entering and wore masks during all sessions.



Figure 1. ‘Memory conversation handbook’ used in oral history training.

Each session had a different theme and groups were free to deviate to related topics if they chose. The lists of conversational themes chosen for the study were childhood stories, family and friends, school and study, working life, celebrations and food, favourite things, and life lessons. Themes were selected by the research team as those which would allow the discussion of different life periods and allow evaluative reflection. Consistent with ethics protocols, we asked older adults to only share memories they would not find distressing. Adolescents were provided palm cards reminding them of the theme and providing possible conversation starters. They were encouraged to take notes, to assist with the construction of a memory book later, and to conclude the conversation whenever appropriate.

For each group, memory conversations from one session were audio recorded, transcribed, and later coded for life lessons: a key form of meaning-making representing a sense of generativity. We further defined life lessons as reflective meaning-making going beyond the experience to include a specific or general lesson for the self or others (McLean and Pratt 2006). These were coded by the first author as present or absent and discussed by the team to ensure agreement. There were no disagreements in lesson coding. Memories with life lessons were then examined qualitatively. We elected not to record every session as we considered this potentially intrusive.

After the programme, adolescents in the intervention condition wrote ‘memory books’ as keepsakes for their older adult partners. Templates were provided for each theme, with sections for the adolescents’ to recall, in their own words, the anecdotes of the older adult they interviewed and to provide their own personal reflection (see Figure 2). Each memory book was printed in hard copy, and adolescents gifted the memory books to their older adult partner at a ‘thank you’ afternoon tea.



Figure 2. Example memory book template and table of contents.

Post-intervention assessment

Post-intervention assessments mirrored pre-intervention assessments. Adolescents and older adults in the memory intervention condition also completed an open-ended evaluation asking about programme benefits and what they had learned in the programme. In both surveys, participants were asked ‘do you feel you have gained anything from sharing your memories with younger/older people in your community? Were there any downsides?’ and ‘has your relationship with younger/older people around you changed after participating in the project? Please elaborate on your response’. Adolescents completed the evaluation in an online survey, whereas older adults gave spoken responses that were transcribed by a researcher. Responses were coded inductively by the first author by reading each participant’s responses and identifying emergent themes and micro-themes. These were then shared with the team who were invited to identify any themes missed by the first author; responses were relatively short, and no such themes were found.

Results

We present findings for the coding of life lessons from the recorded memory conversations, followed by pre- and post-assessment findings for adolescent understandings of everyday Australian history, intergenerational well-being and connectedness, and programme benefits.

Memory conversations

A life lesson was present for three of the five older adults. Typically, these lessons were rich and elaborate, extended over several narrative turns, and formed a large part of the older adult’s story. One reflected on her mother’s experiences in poverty (*‘Mum went through the depression I suppose, and the war – so things weren’t easy to get’*), stating that people are too wasteful today. Another reflected on the importance of effort: *‘I thought I wasn’t going to be any good at [sewing] because I messed up my final work and I knew I was going to lose marks ... That was a disappointment and it put me off but then I decided after I got married, you know, things were expensive and I could try and do better and I just kept at it, and I got very proficient at it, so it’s a matter of achieving what you want. You just have to keep at it all the time. ... You don’t throw the towel in’*.

Interestingly, two older adults did not imbue their recorded memories with a lesson; indeed, one often turned the conversation back to the adolescents (*‘I think I just drifted into something – clerical work, really. ... Isn’t that a lovely shirt you’re wearing?’*). In all groups, however, conversations also revealed moments of bonding. These moments often traversed the present and past, with older adults taking moments to ask students about their schooling and interests. In some cases, they also shared humour. In one case, students laughed with their older adult about her experience being bogged in the mud while sheep mustering. In another, an older adult made jokes about girlfriends:

- Student 1: Any particular memorable parts about university? [...]
 Older adult: Um, no. Nothing. Oh, I met my husband there ... we started being friendly because I already had a boyfriend and I cast him off and um, then we became friends and then we went down to teacher’s college there together.
 Student 1: Oh, you met your husband there!
 Older adult: Tom, what about you, any nice girls at high school you like?
 Student 3: None
 Older adult: Wow! They better get their running shoes on, don’t you reckon? Time is passing you by.
 Student 3: Yes-sir! [cheeky tone]

Understanding of everyday Australian history

While older adults were consistent in the micro-contextualisation of their own life stories in broader political and sociocultural landscapes, and often moved between these two levels in their memory conversations, adolescents' understanding of everyday Australian history shifted in contextualisation across the programme. Before the intervention programme, adolescents described challenges of the past in terms of broad political power structures. One reported in the pre-intervention assessment that they '*... think one of the most challenging things for the young people of that time would have been all the backwards beliefs of the time (misogyny, homophobia, racism other things)*', for example, while another suggested that '*problems that older adults may have experienced when they were young may include: non-diversity, racism, sexism and wars*'.

After the intervention programme, adolescents in the control group continued to report historical challenges in broad political terms, often in a more abbreviated form (perhaps in recognition of having seen the same questions before). For adolescent interventions, however, responses were nuanced, specific, and often extrapolated from anecdotes of their older adult partner. For example, one adolescent reported: '*When adults were younger, I think the biggest challenge was becoming separate from their parents. Lesley mentioned that their father decided she wouldn't do nursing, and so I wonder if everyone's lives were like this. It would've been difficult to escape parental influence, and even more so to start making decisions as an independent adult*'. Another stated that '*The biggest challenge for older adults when they grew up was the tense political climate at the time which caused wars between countries. These wars caused mass destruction and separated families, like what Barbara experienced, and this has affected many of the older adults in Australia today*'. Many adolescents guessed before the programme that older adults enjoyed travelling or seeing friends in their youth: afterwards, they reported '*having children*'.

Well-being and community connectedness

Adolescent well-being and community connectedness were analysed using two repeated-measures analysis of variances (ANOVAs). An ANOVA is a statistical method used to test whether there are differences between groups or observations on a dependent measure (or outcome variable). Here, we tested for differences between *conditions* (ie intervention vs. control) and across time (ie pre-intervention vs. post-intervention assessment). The first ANOVA tested for differences in well-being scores, and the second tested for differences in community connectedness scores. The *p*-value indicated statistical significance: in psychology, $p < 0.05$ is considered evidence for a significant difference. All necessary statistical assumptions to conduct the two ANOVAs were met.

In the ANOVA conducted for well-being, there was a small but significant effect of condition, $F = 6.67$, $p = 0.017$. Averaged across time, well-being scores were slightly higher for participants in the intervention condition ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.57$) than the control condition ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.70$). Interestingly, however, the effects of time and time \times condition were both non-significant, both $F_s < 0.11$, both $p_s > 0.75$. This meant that the slightly greater well-being of participants in the intervention condition was a pre-existing difference and not a consequence of the programme.

In the ANOVA conducted for community connectedness, the five pairs of circles from the *Inclusion of Other in Self* task were labelled from 0 to 5 to indicate the degree of overlap between the 'Self' and 'Community' circles (0 = 'no overlap', 5 = 'total overlap'). There were no main effects or interactions for community connectedness, all $F_s < 1.38$, all $p_s > 0.05$, meaning that adolescents' community connectedness did not significantly differ by condition and did not significantly change across time.

Table 1. Older adult well-being and community connectedness

	Pre-intervention M (SD)	Post-intervention M (SD)
Well-being	3.95 (0.97)	4.02 (0.89)
Community connectedness	3.88 (1.44)	3.80 (1.92)

Older adult well-being scores pre- and post-intervention were similar, as was connectedness (see Table 1). Given our small sample, we did not test these inferentially.

Programme benefits

Two themes emerged in both adolescent and older adult responses about programme benefits: one related to life lessons and one to intergenerational joy and bonding. A third theme related to adolescents' connections with their grandparents.

With regard to life lessons, older adults were intentional in sharing their insights about life and expressed hopes these experiences would help the adolescents navigate future challenges: *'Well I hope what I told them might help them later on. You know, I went through the trials and tribulations - more so than the young people now - but we were happy because we didn't know any different'*. Adolescents reported lessons related to themselves, the past, and relationships: *'I learnt things about myself during our conversation with Betty about her tips for us... she said to save our money and to value the things we have in our life'*; *'I learnt how special spending time with someone is. Even small amounts of time can really make a big difference in someone's life'*.

With regard to joy and bonding, both adolescents and older adults described how their memory conversations had become reciprocal. One older adult explained, *'I loved talking about my life... And I found it very interesting with the girls that I had because they sort of talked to me about what they're doing as well... with their education and what they want to do in life'*, while another stated: *'Well, I just like going down... and chatting and having a coffee! Because if you sit in your room, you get lonely and isolated, whereas if you come to chat, you hear about their world and tell them about your world too'*. While both adolescents and older adults were conscious of generational differences, adolescents also identified new similarities that promoted bonding: *'I found that it's enjoyable to talk to people outside of my generation as it gives me a better insight on what life was like... I feel our lives relate closely in many ways and that has allowed me to connect'*.

The final theme related to adolescents' connections with their own grandparents. Two described how the programme had given them new ways to connect, *'On the drive home from these sessions I've talked to my grandma about her career. Before this, I hadn't found an opportunity to talk to her at length about her own life, but as my grandma's experiences related to that of the lady I interviewed, she's shared more of her life'*; *'I told my grandma about this project and she began to tell me about her life more, she went into depth about her childhood'*.

Others described new insights into their family histories, *'I spoke to my parents and my grandma about their life stories and discovered that my grandma doesn't know her exact age. She was born near the time of the partition to the divide of countries and complications of getting her birth certificate is hard... I still think of this story'*. Interestingly, one was prompted to challenge the silences of the past: *'I spoke to my grandfather about his experience in moving to Australia and how he was not able to speak of his Kendo background that he trained in Japan once he came to Australia. He told me that this was because there was an incident in the second world war when a Japanese soldier used Kendo to kill an enemy soldier, so when he came to Australia he could not speak of his Kendo background because of Australia's treatment of the Japanese'*.

Discussion

Our study aimed to pilot a scaffolded intergenerational reminiscing intervention programme for adolescents and non-familial older adults. We first hypothesised that older adults would imbue their stories with life lessons, thus representing a sense of generativity (Harris *et al.* 2014; Webster and Cappeliez 1993). Both adolescents and older adults reported life lessons as a key benefit of the programme. Several recorded conversations also included lessons, but not all. Given that our study was a pilot, it was also not possible to determine the frequency of life lessons in older adults' life stories and whether variation in lesson telling reflects the topic, the capacity for reflection and insight that the older adult brings to the conversation, the needs of the adolescent listeners, or a combination of all three factors. We suggest that future studies capture conversations across a range of topics to answer these questions. Given that generativity predicts a range of positive health outcomes (Slater 2003), we also suggest that future intervention designs consider the integration of explicit prompts for teaching and informing (see Marques *et al.* 2023).

We next hypothesised that adolescents would come to report richer concepts of everyday Australian history, demonstrating an integration of memory with cultural understandings of identities and lives. Comparisons of adolescents' pre- and post-intervention assessments revealed more nuanced understandings of the past for those who had taken part in the programme, with older adults' everyday experiences provided to illustrate these understandings. While pre-intervention assessments referred to racism, sexism, and homophobia, post-intervention assessments were more empathetic: referring to family and community. Erll (2011, p. 315) argues that the family operates 'as a kind of switchboard between the individual memory and larger frames of collective remembrance'. In our findings, non-familial intergenerational conversations also provide adolescents with a switchboard between individual memory and historical arcs, or texture their understandings of the past and offer them personal experiences to reconcile with greater historical narratives. It was beyond the capacity of the current pilot to determine how historical empathy might emerge more or less strongly for different groups, and we recommend that future research considers how demographic similarities or differences between adolescents and older adults might impact these outcomes.

Finally, we hypothesised that adolescents and older adults would show greater well-being and community connectedness. Interestingly, while no change in either adolescent or older adult well-being or connectedness scores was observed across time, both adolescents and older adults reported qualitative benefits of the programme for joy and intergenerational bonding. Some adolescents also reported benefits for their relationships and interactions with their own grandparents. Older adults frequently report a need for social connection (Bowling and Gabriel 2004); thus, even these more specific and nuanced programme benefits are likely to be valuable. Given the multitude of other life factors that may also affect well-being and connectedness scores, we recommend that future studies continue to capture these more nuanced programme benefits. We further recommend that future research aim to tease out whether the benefits of the programme for adolescents' relationships and interactions with their own grandparents are due to a growing interest in stories from the past, the oral historian training, the memory scaffolding tools used in the programme, or both.

As an unexpected finding, adolescent well-being was slightly higher in the intervention group than in the control group at both pre- and post-intervention assessments. Although we attempted to match our intervention and control participants as closely as possible, it is possible that the students who elected to be part of the intervention already had stronger family connections, a sense of identity, or possessed more coherent memories of older adults in their lives. Indeed, this may have explained their strong interest in the project

and elevated well-being scores. While control group participants had also expressed an interest in the project, it is possible that their greater involvement in sports made this interest less potent. To minimise pre-existing group differences, future studies may benefit from deriving the waitlist control group from the pool of students who elected to join the study and ensuring that groups are matched in both age and gender.

Conclusion

Older adults offer wisdom to share with younger generations, yet opportunities may be limited. For adolescents, in turn, ‘vicarious’ memories of others represent a valuable means of learning about the shared past. Our pilot offers one potential approach to facilitating intergenerational memory conversations between older adults and school students in the community. By positioning adolescents as oral historians, with programmatic scaffolding and structure to support them in eliciting older adults’ life stories, we found benefits both for adolescents’ understandings of everyday Australian life and for intergenerational connecting and bonding. We found no statistical change in well-being scores or community connectedness scores but reported benefits for joy. Further, some adolescents reported benefits for their relationships with their own grandparents. We highlight the importance of intervention measures that can capture more nuanced and localised benefits of intergenerational memory conversations, over and above broader well-being scores, and offer several potential avenues for future research to explore.

Data availability statement. The data that support the findings of this study are available by contacting the first (corresponding) author. Restrictions apply to the availability and reuse of these data, which are due to ethics approvals for the school participants.

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