



# Unifying Generations:

Building the Pathway to  
Intergenerational Solidarity in the UK

UK Report 2022



Edwards



## About Edwards Lifesciences

Edwards Lifesciences is the global leader of patient-focused innovations for structural heart disease and critical care monitoring. We are driven by a passion for patients, dedicated to improving and enhancing lives through partnerships with clinicians and stakeholders across the global healthcare landscape. ■



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## Foreword

Derek Thomas MP,  
St Ives, West Cornwall  
and the Isles of Scilly



By 2030, one in five (21.8%) people in the UK will be aged over 65. This demographic change is often presented as a challenge, with an assumption that older people present solely a burden on our society.

However, people who for decades are driving forward our economy, managing our communities, providing the services we all rely upon and ensuring our healthcare system keeps people healthy, do not suddenly become a burden because they pass retirement age. As this Unifying Generations report demonstrates, the reality is that if our over-65s remain engaged, healthy and valued, they make a significant contribution to our society and to bringing

cohesion within the generations. They are volunteers, carers, mentors and significant financial contributors to their younger generations.

The report also reveals that younger people have a great appreciation of the role of the so-called, 3<sup>rd</sup> generation. While the pandemic has led to isolation and negatively impacted intergenerational interactions, there is a strong desire from all groups to rebuild these relationships as we emerge from this unprecedented period in our modern history.

The report's conclusion makes three recommendations – i) to change perceptions of the important contribution of the older generation;

ii) to encourage mentoring initiatives to allow the passing on of knowledge from older to younger generation; and iii) to introduce schemes to improve digital skills and connectivity for older people to counter isolation and further enhance intergenerational cohesion. I wholeheartedly endorse these recommendations, which I believe will encourage the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation to further enhance their role as the unifiers of the generations. ■



## Executive Summary

Nick Walker,  
Country Sr. Director UK & Ireland,  
Edwards Lifesciences



Not surprisingly, this report demonstrates that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected interactions between generations. This finding is what the survey of 2,100 UK citizens from older and younger generations makes clear. What may be more surprising is that the lack of intergenerational interactions was felt even more significantly by younger people, even though the older generations were those left isolated by this health crisis.

In past time, we have seen claims of generational conflict. This report makes it clear that there is in fact no real conflict, but rather a strong desire for greater unity between generations.

So, why is this subject important to Edwards Lifesciences?

Our company was founded on a classic example of intergenerational solidarity. A retired engineer, Lowell Edwards, partnered with a young surgeon, to pioneer the first successful heart valve replacement. In the intervening 62 years, our focus has been on developing innovative therapies for structural heart disease, which is largely a condition affecting older people. We want these patients to recover fully and rapidly so that they can play that essential role in society. In other words, this initiative springs from our commitment to the patients we serve and illustrates our aspiration to create a community unified in its mission to improve quality of life around the world.

With this report, we aim to celebrate the pivotal role the older generation plays in our society – whether at home, in the workplace, or in the wider community. Their contribution remains underestimated while the younger generation strongly value their skills and support.

The report is a first step of what we call our *Unifying Generations Initiative*. It creates the foundation for future actions to enhance intergenerational solidarity and demonstrates the path towards a unified, age-friendly society. ■

## Introducing Unifying Generations

Demographic changes and medical advances mean that, for the first time, four generations share a longer life span together. By 2030, Age UK predicts that one in five people will be aged 65 or over<sup>1</sup>. This demographic evolution is often perceived as a burden while in fact, older people, and especially the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, play a central role as the unifier of the community, providing significant support to the younger generation. Unfortunately, interactions between generations have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, this report highlights a strong desire to rebuild these bonds. The benefits brought by intergenerational interactions are being underestimated, whereas they can contribute to the recovery of the post-pandemic world. Based on a comprehensive survey into the perceptions and experience of intergenerational solidarity of 2,100 UK citizens, this report provides insights into the role of the older population in society and the power of intergenerational solidarity. It is a first step on a mission of *Unifying Generations*.

### Objectives of the *Unifying Generations Survey*

- Highlight the value and contribution of the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation in order to drive greater appreciation for their role in society.
- Identify ways in which the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation can contribute more effectively to society.
- Understand the impact of the pandemic on intergenerational interactions.
- Begin to add to the knowledge base on intergenerational solidarity. Based on the results of the survey, and in keeping with its objectives, three chapters were established to form the basis of this report. ■

### Chapter 1

#### The true value of older people in the UK

*The role of older people within the family, the community and the wider society and the level of their contribution. How their contribution is valued by the younger generation.*

### Chapter 2

#### A desire for unifying generations

*A narrative focused on generational division neglects the overwhelming unity between younger and older people that we see in our society. This chapter explores the desire for unity amongst both generations.*

### Chapter 3

#### Recovering from the pandemic – time for action

*After two years which reshaped society, we find ourselves in a position to make significant and lasting changes. The survey provides inspiration for possible actions to be taken to enhance intergenerational interactions and build a more age-friendly society.*

<sup>1</sup> Age UK, Later Life in the United Kingdom 2019 [https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/late\\_life\\_uk\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/late_life_uk_factsheet.pdf)

## Unifying Generations Survey – Methodology

The survey was carried out by *Censuswide*, an international consumer research agency which employs members of the Market Research Society and abides by the ESOMAR principles. The fielded work took place between 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022 and 14<sup>th</sup> April 2022 in six European countries; France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Ireland, and the UK. A total of 12,850 respondents across Europe were surveyed aged 18-40 and 65+,

weighted by age and gender (50/50). 6,425 people surveyed were between the ages of 18 and 40, with a further 6,425 people over the age of 65. Specifically, in the UK a total of 2,100 people responded to the survey, weighted by age and gender (50/50).

Survey respondents were recruited through *Censuswide*'s database by the delivery of an email invitation. An initial vetting

question was used to ensure all respondents were within the target groups of those aged 18-40 or 65+, and demographic questions, including gender and regional location (within country), were then used to ensure a robust sample population spread. Respondents were asked to complete an online questionnaire which comprised of 20 questions, including 14 questions with open ended response options. ■

## Unifying Generations – Advisory Team

Edwards Lifesciences worked closely with a team of experts across Europe to develop the survey and the subsequent UK report.

**Dr Adrienne McCann,**  
Research Manager,  
Innovation Value Institute, Maynooth  
University/Age Friendly Ireland, Ireland



**Prof George Leeson,**  
Professorial Fellow,  
Oxford Institute of Population Ageing,  
University of Oxford, UK



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France



## Chapter 1: The true value of older people

Europe's population is ageing and the UK is no exception. Society often frames the ageing population as an issue. However, we believe that a healthy, active and engaged older population can make a significant contribution to their families, local community and wider society, both from a social and economic perspective.

In contrast to existing perceptions that the older generation are a burden for society, this survey allows a re-evaluation of the role they play and a better measurement of their positive impact on younger generations.

Indeed, according to the survey, **76% of younger generation respondents in the UK say the support provided by the older generation in their daily life is important** with 41% stating it was somewhat important and 35% saying it was very important.

*"We were extremely encouraged by the positive responses from younger people in valuing the role of older people in their lives. This is a strong foundation from which to build closer relations for the future."*

Prof. George Leeson,  
University of Oxford, UK



### Providing social support

The survey results highlighted the significant social contributions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation in terms of caring for others, volunteering and providing support inside and outside of the family.



**23%**  
**provide care**  
to a family member  
(e.g., their partner,  
children,  
grandchildren,  
or other relative)



**17%**  
**provide support**  
to family members  
(e.g., shopping,  
driving or other  
daily tasks)

**Care provided by over-65s, such as looking after grandchildren or cooking, is valued by the younger respondents.**



**27%**  
of 18-40s said it is  
the most important  
or valuable thing  
older people can  
offer to younger  
people



People in rural areas were more likely to provide support to non-family members (15%) than those in urban areas (13%). Similarly, rural dwellers (23%) were more likely to provide support to family members than urban dwellers (21%). Across all ages, women in the UK were more likely to provide care to a family member (34%) compared to men (18%).

**Older people in the UK are particularly engaged in terms of volunteering.** Seventeen percent (17%) of over-65s volunteer in a charity and 19% volunteer within their local community. **This equates to approximately 2 million people nationwide.** Across all ages, urban dwellers (16%) were slightly more likely than those in rural areas (13%) to volunteer in charities.

According to a UK-wide foodbank charity, the volunteering contribution of over-75s to the organisation is worth the equivalent of £3.37m in impact.

#### Providing financial support

The financial contribution made by over-65s in the UK was found to be even more significant. **Fifty-seven percent (57%) provide financial support to the younger generations within their family.**

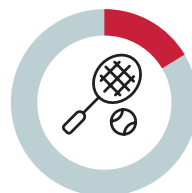
This contribution was to help with:



**25%**  
Holidays  
and leisure



**22%**  
Education



**17%**  
Sports and  
hobbies

- Over-65s from Greater London were most likely to provide financial support to younger generations (72%) and they were also most likely to provide support for education (35%).
- Over-65s from the East Midlands (37%), the North West (30%), and the North East (27%) were most likely to provide support for household goods.

#### Experts' insights

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> generation play a key role in society – perhaps even more so than society realises.** The results from this survey only strengthen existing research which highlights the value of the contribution brought by the over-65s within the UK, both socially and economically. Once retired, older people have the freedom to decide how to allocate their time. They provide care and support to others; they volunteer in charities or in their community, and they provide advice and coaching.

**The financial contribution brought by the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation within their families is significant.** The survey demonstrates that this financial support is used to cover essential needs such as education and household goods but also leisure and holidays which can support wellbeing.

**Supporting the older generation can in turn help society at large.** Helping to maintain older people healthy and active is essential so that they can fulfil their role as “unifiers” within their family, community and more broadly to society. ■

## Chapter 2: A desire for *Unifying Generations*

Divisions between generations have been widely reported in recent times, with the expected growth of the ageing population often described as being a “demographic challenge.” However, this narrative creates a false impression which does not reflect the positive contribution of the senior population and may be a barrier to deeper cohesion. In fact, the survey demonstrates that there is no such conflict between generations, but a strong desire for more intergenerational interactions.

### Willingness to build more intergenerational interactions

Respondents amongst both the younger and older generation across the UK were about **11 times more likely to think closer interactions between different generations are a good thing (76%) rather than a bad thing (7%).**

Seventy-nine percent (79%) of the over-65s and 71% of the younger generation thought that closer intergenerational interactions were a good thing.



**Across all ages, family is the area UK respondents think would benefit most from better intergenerational interactions (44%) . This was followed by community (37%) and care (32%).**

- Community was selected as the most important benefit in the North East (34%) and Wales (34%). All other regions selected family.

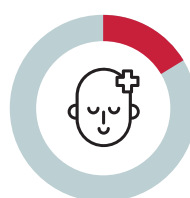
### The power of intergenerational friendship

A number of benefits from intergenerational interactions were highlighted by survey respondents, which suggest a broad spectrum of opinions on the subject, undoubtedly influenced by personal circumstances.

The most important benefits of intergenerational interactions were:



**25%**  
Companionship  
or friendship



**16%**  
Mental and  
emotional wellbeing



**15%**  
Learning

*“The study suggests that intergenerational interactions are both present in society and valued by all age groups. It’s important that policies and strategies are developed that help maintain and strengthen these relations going forward.”*

Prof. George Leeson, University of Oxford, UK

According to the younger respondents, **companionship or friendship is the most valuable benefit younger people could offer an older person (43%), followed by mental and emotional wellbeing (37%).**

The desire for companionship or friendship between generations is striking. According to the survey, over 50% of respondents across all age groups reported having a friend of a different generation to them.

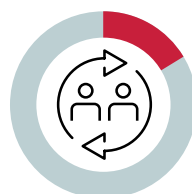
- Almost 2 in 5 (38%) said that they would be open to being friends with people of a different generation.
- Urban dwellers (56%) were more likely to have an intergenerational friend than rural dwellers (48%).

### The value of mentoring and knowledge sharing

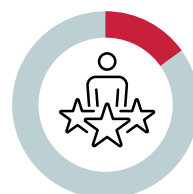
Younger respondents seem to value mentoring skills from the older generation. **Listening and giving advice (45%) is what younger generation respondents consider to be the most important or valuable thing older people can offer to them.** Educational support (16%) and professional mentoring (15%) also appeared in the ranking as valuable benefits.



**45%**  
Listening and  
giving advice



**16%**  
Educational  
support



**15%**  
Professional  
mentoring

**Twenty-four percent (24%) of younger people say that mentoring/ educational schemes provided by government would help them to do more with older people.**

### The digital gap

The digital generation gap refers to the assumed gap between the younger and the older generations due to young people's ability to adapt to new technologies more successfully than older generations. The survey shows that learning new technology and digital media skills is the key thing older respondents would most want to learn from younger people. **Forty percent (40%) of the older generation in the UK state they would most like to learn new technology and digital media skills from younger people.** This came far above current trends (14%), environmental awareness (13%) and new ways of working (10%).

*"Sharing of digital skills and knowledge is an area where younger people can play a leading role in bringing forth intergenerational solidarity and bridging the divide between generations."*

Prof. George Leeson, University of Oxford, UK

*“The Unifying Generations Survey gives an accurate picture of the current situation of intergenerational solidarity across the UK. The results of this survey show a strong desire for more intergenerational interaction within both younger and older generations – this should be evidence used to encourage social organisations to promote intergenerational solidarity at local and national levels.”*

Chris Walsh BA, MCIM,  
Chief Executive, WiseAge UK

### Experts' insights

**The older generation undervalue their own contribution – that could be a form of internalised ageism that needs to be addressed.** Perhaps as a result of negative media perceptions, the older generation may feel they are not capable of contributing to society in areas in which they are well equipped to do so. More needs to be done to empower older people to continue to provide this significant contribution.

**We should look beyond tangible benefits and value the friendship itself.** We often talk in terms of ‘give’ and ‘take’ when it comes to intergenerational solidarity, but one of the most encouraging results from the UK results of this survey was a willingness to engage in relations purely for one’s own enjoyment. Intergenerational friendships could play a huge role in social inclusion, that then filters down into social cohesion. Encouraging these friendships could change the face of society and promote intergenerational solidarity.

**There are expectations from both age groups towards institutions, governments and businesses to develop mentoring programmes.** Older people have expertise and stories that should be shared and learned from. It could be that older generations are simply not being given enough opportunities to share their knowledge, and more needs to be done to create platforms for this to occur (for example, inviting older generations to schools to talk about historic periods they lived through).

**Older people have practical skills to offer that may have been lost over the years.** Even if some skills are not as widely used as they used to be, it does not mean they do not have merit. In fact, as we move towards a more sustainable future, practical skills such as repairing clothes that are more typically possessed by the older generation could become increasingly useful. It is important to create spaces to share these skills.

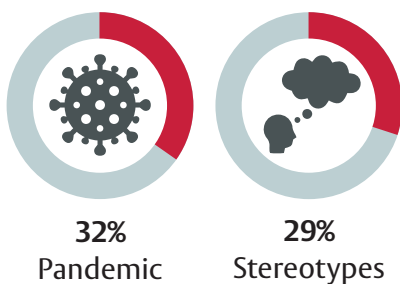
**There is significant scope for action within digital skills.** Using social media and digital devices has become second nature to younger generations, and acts as an important knowledge gap that can be filled by younger people. Increasing digital skills will not only allow older generations to create closer connections with different generations, but it will also make their voice heard. The development of training programmes can help the older generation learn to use technology. ■



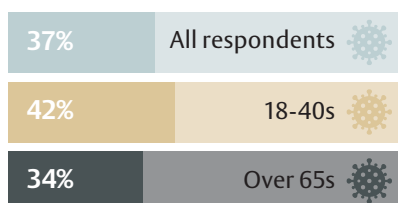
## Chapter 3: Recovering from the pandemic – time for action

The pandemic has impacted all generations and especially the older generation, who had to isolate for a long period of time. As a result, intergenerational interactions were negatively impacted – a sentiment expressed in the results of this survey. Fewer opportunities to connect with family and friends undoubtedly contributed to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Yet, the desire for unifying generations and the value young and older people have for each other has been firmly established through this survey – suggesting that now is the time to make real and lasting societal changes to improve solidarity between generations.

**When asking respondents what the main barriers were preventing further interactions between generations, the pandemic came up first.**



Thirty-seven percent (37%) of respondents believe younger and older people are further apart since the COVID-19 pandemic.



Thirty-five percent (35%) of respondents admitted they spend less time with people of a different generation who are outside of their household since the pandemic.

*“The realisation that COVID-19 has had a big impact on intergenerational interactions, should remind us of the important role senior people can play as carers, volunteers and mentors to help rebuild these relationships.”*

Chris Walsh BA, MCIM, Chief Exec, WiseAge UK

### The need to create opportunities

The survey reveals that some practical solutions could be implemented to create more opportunities for generations to meet and, therefore, help society recover from the pandemic.

The six things that younger generation respondents said would most help them to do more for/with older generations are:

1. More physical spaces to meet people from older generations **35%**
2. Better presence of older generations on social media or use of messaging platforms or the Internet **27%**
3. Mentoring or educational schemes provided by national or local government **24%**
4. Cultural or historical knowledge provided by older people through clubs or societies **22%**
5. Intergenerational housing (different ages living in shared housing developments or communities) **19%**
6. Business advice or mentoring schemes offered by businesses **14%**

### Experts' insights

**There are opportunities to apply the skills and knowledge of older generations to help address contemporary issues.** As we go through difficult periods, it is important to consider the experience of older generations in battling tough times. For instance, the experience of living through tough economic periods or reducing waste could be shared as examples of living sustainably and helping to address problems, such as climate change.

**The impact of COVID-19 on intergenerational interactions demonstrates the importance of interacting in the digital world.** With extended periods of isolation between families and friends, the only way to connect with one another was through the digital realm. While there has been evidence to suggest that digital skills amongst older generations did improve during this period, the survey suggests that further progress can be made. In many aspects of modern life, it is impossible to interact without digital access – and it is important older generations do not feel cut off.

**Intergenerational housing could provide solutions.** Arguably, one of the reasons intergenerational divides were exacerbated during the pandemic is that, increasingly, different generations in the UK do not live together. Intergenerational housing has the potential to solve problems – not only could it promote solidarity, but also combat the rising cost of living and housing problems in major cities. ■

## Case study – Rosemary Fletcher



**Rosemary Fletcher, 73**  
Stirling, Scotland

*"I don't do coffee mornings,"* Rosemary Fletcher remarks when asked about her continuing commitment to volunteering at the age of 73.

Volunteering is nothing new to Rosemary. A retired occupational therapist from Stirling in Scotland,

she began 35 years ago when the scouts were looking for volunteers. *"I was the mother who put up my hand, and scouting became my saviour when my marriage broke up 25 years ago,"* she explains. She is currently Appointments Secretary for the local District, and is also involved in supporting and training new leaders.

Since retirement, she has been taking her commitment to another level. She leads RSVP Forth Valley, a programme from the charity, Volunteering Matters, which encourages senior people to use their experience to help the local community across Stirling, Falkirk and Clackmannanshire council areas. RSVP Forth Valley is supported by 90 volunteers, most of them

above the age of 65. Their work includes knitting and walking groups, school volunteers and NHS support, for which Rosemary's career in the NHS has proved to be very useful.

When the COVID-19 lockdown hit and senior people were told to isolate, Rosemary feared that her volunteering days were at an end. However, within a month her local GP health centre called asking her to bring together a group of volunteers to help cope with the new challenges of managing access to the centre during a pandemic. She agreed without hesitation; and used the opportunity to demonstrate intergenerational solidarity. Amongst the volunteers she recruited were members of her scout group who had aspirations of

a career in medicine. It gave them real-life experience of the health system while providing the surgery with much-needed support. Rosemary did not stop there. She also supported the Stockton-on-Tees based charity Catalyst,

carrying out a survey of how charitable groups were coping with the pandemic, making up to 12 video calls a day. It's little wonder, therefore, that Rosemary's decades of volunteering received the

ultimate acknowledgement of an MBE in the 2021 New Year's Honours. For Rosemary, she believes that her award is a recognition for all RSVP volunteers. *"I couldn't do it without out them,"* she concludes. ■

## Case study – Ros Ede



**Ros Ede, 77**  
Third Time Retiree and  
Passionate Volunteer of 17 years  
Torbay, England

Shortly after retirement, Ros learned about Street Pastors; volunteers who care, listen and support vulnerable people on the streets late at night, especially the homeless. Ros soon set to work to spread the word which ultimately led to the setup of Torbay Street Pastors. Many people said it wouldn't work. 7 years, 130 volunteers and 22 locations later; and with enough funding, Ros felt it was important to pass on a job that could now be paid. This led to her retiring for the second time.

Wondering what to do next, Ros was approached to attend a meeting about supporting

vulnerable women, especially the women they had met at night. This meeting sparked the idea of a drop-in for women who have been affected by the trauma of domestic abuse/violence and need emotional support, advice, and information. And so, Ros set to work - again!

The now well-known Ladies Lounge has evolved into a referral only safe place for women who have experienced domestic abuse/violence and is volunteer-run. Ros, as a leader, provided training that has helped to grow the community to 22 volunteers, most of retirement age. All 22 volunteers provide a welcoming environment, engaging with vulnerable women in conversation and signposting them towards specialist service providers. It provides an opportunity for women to meet other vulnerable women, where they can talk and share experiences and ultimately feel less isolated.

*"When vulnerable women meet others who arrived at Ladies Lounge from similar experiences of domestic abuse and violence,*

*its helps those more vulnerable to see the potential positive outcome, Ros points out. "This helps them to recover and gives them motivation to find their independence. It's a lovely thing to see and so when it comes to volunteering you get far more out of it than you put in."*

Ladies Lounge is now part of Standing Tall, a group of community organisations that understand the impact that domestic abuse and sexual violence have on an individual and their families and who are working together to provide services to people in the area who have experienced them.

*"You always get more than you give when you look after other people. Ros comments. "There is such a sense of counting your own blessings, it helps prioritise what is valuable in life."*

Ros has now 'retired' for the third time from leading Ladies Lounge. However, she continues volunteering with them for 6.5 hours a week and spends more time with her husband, two children, and three grandchildren. ■

## Conclusions

The *Unifying Generations Survey* results are in stark contrast to the prevailing narrative of intergenerational conflict and an older generation posing a challenge to society. Instead, the survey gives a clear picture of the pivotal social and economic contribution brought by the senior population, a contribution that is greatly valued by the younger generation. Far from there being conflict between generations, there is compelling evidence of intergenerational cohesion and a wish for greater interactions in the future.

The results also point to three initial actions that can be taken to enable greater intergenerational interactions and empower older people, and especially the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, to play a stronger role as a unifier.

They are:

- 1. Transform perceptions** – The survey results provide one important tool for a multi-stakeholder campaign which communicates a more realistic narrative of the positive, unifying role of older people and the overwhelming desire for greater intergenerational solidarity.
- 2. Mentoring and knowledge sharing** – The younger generation have made clear their desire to learn from the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation via mentoring and knowledge sharing. Business, academics, senior organisations and policy makers should work together to create more opportunities for older people to mentor and pass on their knowledge, experience and skills to younger people through educational initiatives.
- 3. Digital Interaction** – However, the wish for learning is not one way. The older generation recognise that younger people can support them in becoming better-connected digitally. The pandemic confinement demonstrated that generations can be more isolated from each other if they cannot connect via social or digital channels. The introduction of schemes which allow older people to build their digital skills and connectivity will reduce their isolation and ensure ever greater intergenerational cohesion.

If we can all play a role in correcting perceptions and enabling greater interactions between generations, we can help to create a more cohesive society for people of all ages. ■

## Contacts

For more information about *Unifying Generations* and access to the full survey results:

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