

Gold Soul Intergenerational Social Placement Program

Budget Proposal 2025-2027

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The Gold Soul Intergenerational Social Placement Program has demonstrated success in fostering meaningful connections between undergraduate university students and older people living in residential aged care. With current funding due to end in June 2025, this proposal seeks funding to continue and expand the program throughout 2025-2027, with aims to establish it as a sustainable model across the ACT region and explore innovative approaches including in-home placements with socially isolated older people in the community. The program contributes to the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing priorities, “Health and Social Connection” and “Social participation, arts and culture”, in alignment with the ACT Government’s vision of being an age-friendly city focus areas of “Health” and “Respect, inclusion, and belonging”. Expansion of the program to students living with older people in the community, has the potential alignment with the ACT Government’s vision of being an age-friendly city.

Background and significance

Social isolation and loneliness significantly impact the health and well-being of older people, particularly those in residential aged care, making this a critical global health issue. The Gold Soul Intergenerational Social Placement Program directly addresses several key recommendations from the ACT inquiry into loneliness and social isolation by implementing a structured program that connects university students with older people in residential aged care, to reduce social isolation and improve social connectedness. The program aligns with the inquiry's findings by providing meaningful intergenerational engagement opportunities, training frontline workers, and creating sustainable community-based interventions to combat loneliness among priority populations like older people.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety advocated for sustained intergenerational engagement to build genuine connections, highlighting the need for comprehensive initiatives rather than projects with short-term contact periods. Guidance material for the strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards also highlight the importance of maintaining relationships and connections with the community. Our program provides a structured pathway for students to volunteer in residential care as part of their university degree, improving their communication skills and developing positive attitudes towards ageing whilst reducing social isolation among older people.

Program impact and participant experiences in 2024

The pilot program has demonstrated profound benefits for both students and residents. Students reported increased confidence in interacting with older people and a deeper understanding of aged care needs. As one student reflected: "I feel more comfortable around older people, people with disabilities and dementia...I don't have a problem going and talking to someone, where before I would have been like, what do I say?". Residents experienced meaningful social engagement, with staff noting that the students brought "joy to the residents" and provided "more social interaction that they [residents] don't usually get".

The program facilitated genuine relationship-building through activities like arts and crafts, coffee groups, and one-on-one visits. Compared to intergenerational programs with children, a staff member observed: "The older ones, you can have that actual engagement. You can build a relationship...the uni students, I think they can actually have a relationship [with the residents]". Residents particularly valued the intelligent conversation and companionship, with one noting: "It's something that, unfortunately, is a bit lacking in nursing homes...it's lovely to have young people, young faces, and an intelligent conversation".

Proposed program development and expansion

We propose expanding the program to be available to all residential care providers in the ACT region over 2025-2027. This expansion will involve establishing partnerships with additional aged care providers, recruiting students from diverse disciplines, and developing standardised training and support mechanisms. The program will be integrated into university curricula through Work Integrated Learning units, ensuring sustainable student participation and incentivisation.

Building on our successful pilot, we will develop a comprehensive framework for program implementation that other universities can adopt. This includes establishing protocols for student orientation, ongoing support, and activity planning.

We will also explore innovative approaches such as in-home placements, where students support older people living alone in the community, by consolidating an existing partnership with an aged care partner. The partner would manage the agreements between both students and older people, in consultation with our expert research team. The shared-living agreements and standard tenancy agreement component will outline opportunities for mutually beneficial intergenerational relationships (e.g. commit up to seven hours per week to running errands or spending quality time with their hosts). This initiative seeks to model the successful intergenerational Canadian 'HomeShare' program. One of our highly reputable home care partners has already expressed interest in collaborating with us on this project.

Expected outcomes and benefits

The expanded program is expected to significantly reduce social isolation among older people in residential care and the community. In 2023, we published data showing that 93% of residential care homes identify mental health and well-being benefits from intergenerational programs, with 92.6% noting improved community connection. The introduction of in-home placements in the community provides additional support for vulnerable older people while offering students immersive learning experiences that will assist with the cost of living and housing challenges.

The program will contribute to developing an age-friendly healthcare workforce by exposing students to meaningful experiences with older people. This aligns with our findings that intergenerational programs can improve attitudes toward ageing and increase understanding of older people's needs. Furthermore, the expanded program will support residential care providers in meeting social engagement requirements while providing additional support to lifestyle staff.

Over two years, we expect 100 students to complete the social placement program and to provide in-home placements at least four students.

Measuring and evaluating success

The evaluation of the social placement program will adopt a holistic, mixed-methods approach incorporating both quantitative and qualitative measures to provide a comprehensive assessment. Data collection will occur at multiple time points - before, during, and after the program - with evaluations conducted from multiple perspectives, including older people, students, staff members, and organisational stakeholders. The evaluation framework focuses on five key outcomes: health and well-being, education, workforce socio-economic implications, and program fidelity and sustainability. Specific measurement tools will be used pre- and post-program to evaluate benefits to students and staff, and qualitative methods will be used for all participants including older people. The evaluation will incorporate follow-up interviews with participants, and cost-effectiveness analyses to determine economic viability.

Budget justification

Currently, the social placement program is collaborating with three residential care providers. By mid-2025, 20 students will have on average each completed over 100 hours as Lifestyle and Engagement interns. We seek funding to continue providing these sites with four students in the three University of Canberra teaching periods. Continued funding will enable us to establish more partnerships with other sites, providing more

opportunities for students and older people to interact in mutually beneficial ways. Over two years, we will expand the program's implementation and develop an ongoing, cost-effective, reproducible, sustainable model. We will workshop the sustainability of the program with aged care providers so that the Clinical Facilitator role can be phased out. Hence, the program is more cost-effective and sustainable.

Table 1. Budget items

Item	Role	Cost
Project Coordinator	Student recruitment and management, stakeholder engagement, sustainability, reporting	\$56,071.51
Clinical Facilitator	Student education, mentorship, pastoral care	\$34,018.60
Project lead	Project and team oversight, reporting	\$22,880.84 <i>(in-kind)</i>
Internship management	Registering students on InPlace and checking documentation and approvals	13,855.30 <i>(in-kind)</i>
TOTAL		\$90,090.11

Table 2. Funding per financial year

2025-26	2026-27	Total
\$42,392.91	\$47,696.20	\$90,090.11

Timeline

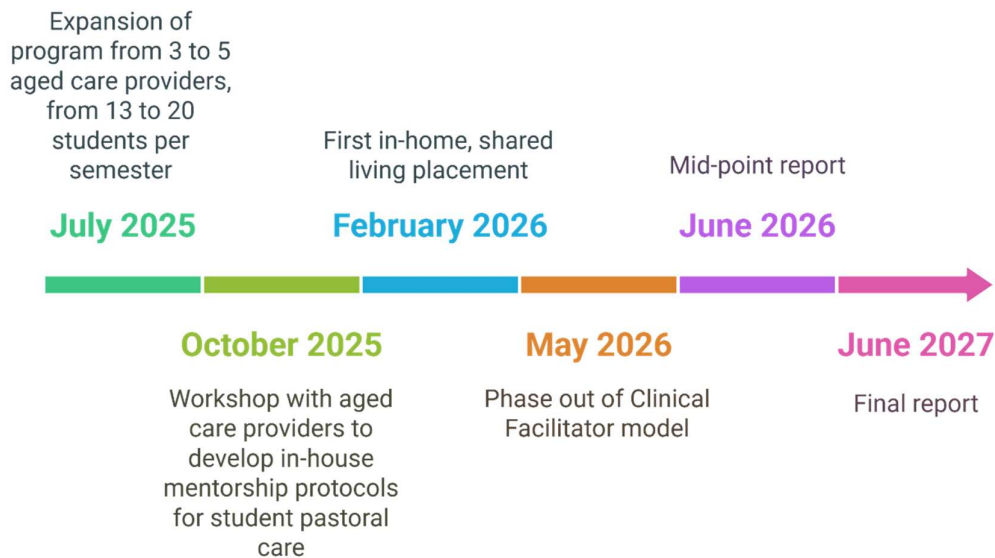


Figure 1. Project timeline July 2025 to June 2027