GLOBAL CHILD & MATERNAL HEALTH

An evaluation of the **ParentSkills2Go Intergenerational SEND programme**

September 2026



Background: From My Child and Me to an intergenerational approach

ParentSkills2Go's intergenerational SEND work developed from its wider My Child and Me programme. Originally established during the COVID-19 pandemic, My Child and Me was created in response to the challenges Black mothers were experiencing in looking after their own mental health while supporting their children. The programme takes a culturally informed approach, creating space for families to explore parenting, mental health, child development and their relationships with their children.

As the programme developed, ParentSkills2Go began to identify a need for greater support around special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Some parents were struggling to understand their children's needs or recognise that behaviours they were seeing might be associated with SEND. The programme evolved in response, incorporating information about areas including autism, ADHD and anxiety, alongside opportunities for families to access further specialist advice and support. Building parents' knowledge and confidence to advocate for their children became an important part of this work.

The intergenerational dimension emerged through ParentSkills2Go's existing community relationships. Grandparents were already engaging with the organisation through activities including sewing groups, after-school provision and holiday programmes, and some went on to participate in My Child and Me. Their involvement highlighted both their role in caring for and supporting grandchildren and their own desire to better understand SEND. This led to activity specifically involving grandparents, including online intergenerational sessions that enabled older family members who could not easily travel to take part.

Rather than being designed as a separate programme from the outset, the intergenerational approach therefore grew from ParentSkills2Go's ongoing work with Black families and its responsiveness to needs emerging within the community. It extended the focus beyond parents alone, recognising that children's experiences of SEND are shaped by the wider family networks around them and that grandparents can play an important role within those networks.

The findings that follow draw on an interview with Margaret Taribo, founder of ParentSkills2Go, reflecting on her experiences of the intergenerational work, what she has learned through delivering it, and how that learning could inform future work.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

1. Learning, unlearning and intergenerational repair

One of the clearest themes from Margaret's reflections was the process of learning and unlearning among Black grandparents. For some, gaining a better understanding of SEND prompted reflection not only on how they support their grandchildren now, but on how they had understood and responded to their own children when they were younger.

Margaret described a recurring sense of regret among some grandparents, particularly as new knowledge led them to reconsider experiences from when they were raising their own children. However, she was careful not to frame this as evidence of poor parenting. Instead, she emphasised that people had parented with the knowledge and understanding available to them at the time:

> *"It doesn't necessarily make them bad… you work with what you know."*

The programme creates space for grandparents to revisit some of those experiences without judgement and consider what they might do differently now. Margaret described instances where this reflection had extended into conversations within families, including one grandparent who went back to her adult children and apologised for how she had spoken to them when they were younger.

For Margaret, this willingness to reconsider long-held beliefs is a significant part of intergenerational work, but it cannot be assumed or rushed:

> *"I think it's about unlearning and changing…we have to admit that there's some things as you… the older you get, you can't just change… It takes humility and grace to unlearn things and be patient to learn."*

This suggests that the value of the programme extends beyond simply increasing knowledge of SEND. It creates space for Black grandparents to make sense of past experiences, reconsider long-held understandings and apply new learning within their relationships with children and grandchildren. Margaret also acknowledged that this process may be gradual and that not everyone will change their views.

> *"It's not something that will go quickly. It's just something that we need to keep on talking about… they might not say they're taking it all on board. I've got to accept that."*

2. Culture, faith and changing understandings of SEND among Black older generations

Margaret's reflections showed how understandings of SEND among Black older generations can be shaped by culture, faith, migration and the social conditions in which people have lived. She described grandparents who had grown up without the language now used to describe autism, ADHD and other forms of SEND, and who may therefore interpret children's behaviour through very different frameworks.

These understandings also sit within wider histories. Margaret spoke about older Black people having had to "hustle" through racism and other challenges, and suggested that SEND can become another issue layered onto already complex experiences of navigating family life and unfamiliar systems. For some grandparents, this can make understanding particularly difficult.

> *"They're not accepting it. They think that the child is maybe just naughty… It's now left to mum to hold it. And sometimes it's not just the grandparents, it's the grandparents and the spouse."*

At the same time, Margaret was clear that the programme does not approach culture as something that needs to be stripped away or corrected. Instead, the work starts from recognising and respecting what families already bring:

> *"The idea is to celebrate that culture and then using it to say, how can I now use that to support my family?"*

This approach allows conversations about SEND to be grounded in the everyday cultural experiences of families. Margaret gave the example of African food and sensory needs. Rather than simply telling grandparents that an autistic child may experience particular textures differently, conversations explore this through foods families already know. She described, for example, helping grandparents understand why a child might struggle with the texture of okra and exploring alternatives rather than expecting the child to eat it because it is part of the family's usual diet:

> *"Instead of them forcing the child or saying, 'this is what we eat', it's about, how do you understand your child?"*

For Margaret, this reflects a wider principle of working with, rather than against, families' cultural identities. The aim is to introduce new understandings of SEND without suggesting that existing cultural practices or values have no place:

> *"You're coming with your language, with your values, we celebrate that. But then how can we make it better?"*

Faith is also part of this picture. Margaret has worked within both Christian and Muslim communities and described faith leaders as potentially important partners in creating wider understanding of SEND.

3. Grandparents as an overlooked source of influence and support

Margaret's reflections highlighted the significant role that Black grandparents can play in the lives of children with SEND. Grandparents may provide regular care, practical support and emotional connection, and Margaret felt that the particular relationship between grandparents and grandchildren made their understanding of SEND especially important:

> *"There's this thing about grandparents and their grandchildren – it's a different bond."*

For some grandparents, this commitment was visible in the effort they made to participate:

> *"They make a lot of sacrifices, a lot... they have to take the bus, they have to take the train. They want to come. They're elderly. But they're thinking that, I want to do this for this child."*

This willingness to stay involved, alongside the experience and wisdom older generations bring, means grandparents can be an important part of the wider support network around a child. Some are also actively caring for grandchildren or helping their own adult children to navigate SEND, making their understanding particularly consequential.

At the same time, Margaret stressed that grandparents should not only be considered in terms of what they can give. The work also surfaced needs that they themselves have relating to issue ranging form wellbeing and menopause to pensions and developing IT skills. She saw value in creating opportunities that could broaden grandparents' own experiences and connections:

> *"So it's expanding their horizons to give them that. To fill them up basically."*

This points towards a more reciprocal model of intergenerational work, supporting Black grandparents to better understand and support their families, while also creating connection, purpose and space for their own needs and wellbeing.

4. Trust, soft outreach and the value of peer connection

A consistent message from Margaret's reflections was that reaching grandparents requires more than simply offering a SEND programme and expecting people to attend. ParentSkills2Go has often engaged grandparents through what Margaret describes as "soft outreach": building relationships through activities people are already comfortable attending, such as sewing groups, holiday programmes and other community activities, before introducing conversations about SEND.

This matters because SEND can still carry stigma, and people may not immediately feel comfortable discussing concerns about their children or grandchildren. Margaret described trust as something that develops through continued contact, with people often becoming more willing to share their experiences once a relationship has been established:

> *"When they trust you, then they start opening up."*

Margaret also emphasised the importance of who delivers these conversations. Rather than relying only on professionals or formal services, she saw particular value in people learning from others within their own communities:

> *"When they see somebody that is like them in one way or the other, they will relate better."*

Francisca, who was funded by GCMH to undertake this work, provides a strong example of this approach in practice. Having initially engaged with ParentSkills2Go through My Child and Me, she was able to draw on her own learning and experience when connecting with other grandparents, using her existing relationships and position as a peer to help make conversations feel more accessible:

> *"She was able to break down the ice… people came because of her."*

Francisca's role therefore illustrates how trusted peer relationships can extend the reach of community-based SEND work. Her contribution provides a concrete example of how GCMH supported ParentSkills2Go to engage grandparents through a relational, culturally grounded approach. The next theme considers this organisational contribution in more detail, alongside what Margaret's experience suggests about how the model could be developed further.

5. GCMH's contribution to the programme

Margaret's reflections identify Francisca's role as the clearest example of GCMH's contribution to the intergenerational work. Francisca's involvement developed from her own participation in ParentSkills2Go activities. Having learned alongside other families and brought her own grandchildren to activities, she was able to use that experience to engage other Black grandparents from a position of trust and shared understanding.

Through her GCMH-funded role, Francisca contacted grandparents, encouraged participation, shared her own experiences and learning, supported recruitment to sessions and connected families back to Margaret where further support was needed. Margaret described the breadth of this contribution:

> *"She's been able to bring people in. She's been able to talk to people. She's been able to share her own story."*

Francisca also brought her own cultural knowledge and perspective to the work, including insights from her Ghanaian background. For Margaret, however, one of her most important qualities was her willingness to continue learning rather than positioning herself as someone who already had all the answers:

> *"She's got that humility to learn… she wants to know, she wants to understand."*

Francisca's journey from participant, to learner, to advocate and peer connector therefore offers useful learning for GCMH. Rather than GCMH's contribution being primarily the introduction of external professional expertise, its value here has been in enabling a trusted member of the community to build relationships, share knowledge and create routes into support.

Margaret was clear that she would like to see this approach extended, including by identifying and supporting more trusted community members who could play a role similar to Francisca.

> *"It will be great to have somebody like her, more people like her that could actually relate."*

She saw particular potential to train grandparents themselves to hold informal conversations with other older people. Margaret envisaged informal round-table conversations within existing community groups, building on relationships that are already there.

Learning across the findings

Altogether, the findings show that the value of the intergenerational work lies in doing more than increasing grandparents' knowledge of SEND. Margaret's reflections show how engagement with grandparents can create space to revisit long-held understandings of children, parenting and disability, and in some cases to reconsider experiences within their own families. This process of learning and unlearning takes time and requires spaces in which people can reflect without feeling blamed or judged.

The findings also demonstrate the importance of how these conversations are approached. Culture and faith are not peripheral to how SEND is understood within families. Effective engagement therefore needs to start from people's existing language, values and experiences, while creating opportunities to explore different ways of understanding and supporting children. Margaret's examples show what this can look like in practice, from discussing sensory needs through culturally familiar foods to working through trusted faith and community settings.

Grandparents themselves also need to be understood in a more rounded way. They can be highly influential within the family networks surrounding children with SEND, providing care, advice, emotional support and practical help. Increasing their understanding can therefore strengthen the support available around both children and parents. However, intergenerational work should not view grandparents simply as an additional resource for families. Margaret's reflections on isolation, wellbeing and opportunities for connection point towards a reciprocal approach, in which grandparents themselves should gain something meaningful from participating.

Across the findings, trust emerges as a central mechanism. Margaret's view of a "soft outreach" demonstrates the value of meeting people through relationships and spaces they already know, rather than expecting engagement to begin with a formal SEND service or programme.

Francisca's role brings these strands together and represents one of the most significant findings from the evaluation. The GCMH-funded role was not simply an additional contribution alongside the intergenerational work; it was central to how that work reached and engaged Black grandparents. Francisca provided a bridge between ParentSkills2Go and the grandparents it wanted to reach: making direct contact, encouraging people to participate, sharing her own experiences, helping to establish trust and connecting families back to Margaret when further support was needed.

This is important when understanding GCMH's contribution. GCMH did not simply provide funding around the programme; its investment created the capacity for a trusted Black grandparent to become part of the programme's engagement and delivery infrastructure.

Looking ahead: what is needed next?

The question for the next phase is not simply whether ParentSkills2Go should deliver more intergenerational sessions. It is how the role GCMH funded through Francisca can be built upon deliberately and sustainably.

Margaret has already articulated a direction. She sees potential to train grandparents and other trusted community members to hold informal "soft sessions" within older people's groups, friendship networks, faith communities and other spaces where relationships already exist.

The immediate challenge is capacity. Margaret repeatedly described the limitations of trying to develop and deliver the work largely herself. Any expansion should therefore avoid simply asking Margaret to reach more communities or expecting grandparents to undertake substantial unpaid work. Developing the approach would require resource for recruitment, training, coordination, relationship-building and ongoing support.

There is a clear potential role for GCMH in helping to develop this next phase. GCMH could work with Margaret and Francisca to capture what has made Francisca's role effective and translate this into a more intentional community peer connector model. This could include defining the connector role; co-developing appropriate training and resources; testing the approach with a small group of Black grandparents or other trusted community members; supporting evaluation and learning; and identifying funding to sustain the model.

The opportunity, therefore, is to bring the infrastructure, evaluation, partnership development and funding support needed to help turn this learning into a sustainable next phase.