

Erin Mendelson on "Spain Intergenerational Study Tour"  
**October 2008**

Our group of international tourists saw an amazing and golden side to many cities and communities throughout Spain. Each destination provided new opportunities to explore the unique culture, food and programs. The mix of activities opened my mind to the diversity that intergenerational work can take on. Without a cookie cutter, Spain has developed fantastic and successful means to defragment its society. Some of my most memorable experiences happened as I listened to and talked to the participants who benefited and perpetuated these healthy intergenerational relationships.



Grandparents exposed their intimate and personal stories of volunteering in preschools. In fact, we followed these women into a kindergarten class where we participated in a lesson in both Spanish and English. As a former kindergarten teacher, I found this amusing and enlightening.



Perhaps the most impressive program was in the Barcelona. The guide led us to an Antonio Gaudi designed office building, La Pedrera, where a well funded intergenerational program flourishes. The Caixa Catalunya is a [Spanish](#) bank that actually shows a heart and interest in the community and contributes office space and the means to community based programs. Breaking the usual rules of corporate greed, Caixa Catalunya pays for quality and professionally supported housing programs between university

students and elderly property owners. These symbiotic relationships satisfy numerous needs. The senior participants receive companionship, a closer first responder in emergencies and daily help. The university students shared with us that they found greater stability, a better environment to study and an opportunity to learn history and about life from these wise mentors.



The tour was exciting and fast paced and agitated my mind to make a difference back home. These seeds of change are most easily distributed to the young minds that I teach throughout the year at a public school on Oahu. My language arts classes deal and discuss social change and topics that



affect them. I discussed the study tour and explained the importance of intergenerational societies to these seventh graders. Another area where I think I can make an impact is with my own consumerism. I will try to support companies that contribute to social programs and make an effort to not show ageism or discrimination in their employment. In many ways, this study tour changed my perspective and understanding of what is lacking in terms of corporate responsibility in the United States. I hope the study tours continue into other countries, and the participants, like me, form a global network.

