



Intergenerational Programs

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An intergenerational program is a planned interaction between different age groups, that provides close communications, sharing of feelings or ideas, and cooperative activities that can be of benefit to both age groups (Cox et. al, 2006).

"Somehow we have to get older people back close to growing children if we are to restore a sense of community, a knowledge of the past, and a sense of the future."

~ Margaret Mead

Seniors have incredible knowledge and countless skill-sets that have been acquired throughout their lifetime. As such, they are an asset to any community and many cities already utilize their elders through intergenerational programs that are available to youth. These programs are vital opportunities for seniors to become involved in their neighborhoods and get their sense of social inclusion back. Furthermore, intergenerational programs are a chance for seniors to learn something from their younger counterparts, as youth also have much to offer these experiences (Mackenzie, 2010). In this way, intergenerational programs are progressive and fundamental for all communities.

Social Inclusion For Seniors



Photo Credit: Mackenzie

There are a great deal of benefits to intergenerational programs. Visible improvements are usually immediately seen in the mental, physical, and social health of senior participants (BC Care Providers Association, 2009). Intergenerational programs allow seniors to exercise their competence, enjoy respect and esteem, and establish and maintain supportive relationships (World Health Organization, 2007).

Figure 1: Intergenerational programs have improved the mental health of seniors in many rural communities.

By allowing seniors to offer their knowledge and mentor children, communities become complete, as classic values are shared with future generations (Mackenzie, 2010). Moreover, seniors can pass on traditional practices and knowledge, while youth participants offer insight about new concepts and assist seniors in navigating through a rapidly changing world (World Health Organization, 2007).



Photo Credit: Generations United

Figure 2: Intergenerational programs keep seniors mentally and physically active!



Photo Credit: Generations United

Figure 3: Everyone has something to offer an intergenerational program.

How to Get Started

Countless resources are available online to assist rural communities in bringing intergenerational programs to their community. Here are some things to keep in mind when planning activities (Penn State, 2003):

- *Avoid Stereotypes*: allow participants to enter the program with a clear mind and do not let preconceived notions hinder the activity.
- *Design Developmentally Appropriate Activities*: remember who is participating and be sensitive to all participants abilities.
- *Emphasize Learning*: incorporate activities that allow each participant to offer something valuable to the program.

Everyone can benefit from and contribute to intergenerational programs and this simple form of social contact can have profound, positive and long-term effects for all (Generations United, 2013).

Programs That Work

Intergenerational programs can be short-term or long-term, and small or large in scale (BC Care Providers Association, 2009). Furthermore, rural communities are unique because the activities they adopt can embrace their agricultural roots. Looking at examples from across North America, here are a few locations that have thriving intergenerational programs:

1. Alzheimer Society in London, ON: Artful Minds Art Program, Garden Club Gardening Program, First Nations Seniors Inclusion Program.
2. Harmony Hall Centre for Seniors in Toronto, ON: Literacy & ESL Programs, including Reading Buddies with local elementary schools.
3. FRIDGE Program in Laurence County, PA: weekend retreats regarding family communication and healthy eating.
4. Volunteers for Intergenerational Programs Society in Burnaby, BC: Volunteer Grandparent Program.



Photo Credit: Generations United

Figure 4: Agricultural programs in rural communities can embrace local culture.

"Wherever there are beginners and experts, old and young, there is some kind of learning going on, some kind of teaching. We are all pupils and we are all teachers."

~ Gilbert Highet



Figure 5: Wheelchair accessibility allows activities to be accessible to all..

Photo Credit: Generations United

Transportation, walkability and accessibility must be considered.

Other Considerations

Numerous external factors contribute to whether or not an intergenerational program will have the ability to thrive. Senior participation has been shown to be more likely when there are many different program options, and if the programs are located close to home (World Health Organization, 2007). Seniors enjoy independence in their daily activities and the physical environment can either facilitate or hinder them from fulfilling these desires (Hodge, 2008). Transportation, walkability and accessibility must also be considered when planning an intergenerational program. In addition, washrooms, rest areas and wheelchair accessibility are crucial for senior participation, as these amenities give seniors peace of mind in social situations (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors).



Photo Credit: Generations United

Figure 6: Outdoor activities must be easily accessible.

Final Thoughts

Intergenerational programs allow seniors to be independently involved in their communities. Social participation and inclusion grant opportunities for seniors to once again have a sense of purpose that may have been missing from their life (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors). According to the Creating Caring Communities Toolkit (2009), rural communities can expect to see a strengthening of their community by becoming more age-friendly, through the breaking down of age stereotypes. From this, a promotion of understanding, respect, and a sharing of ideas provides a mutual teaching for the “young of ageing, and for the aged about youth” (BC Care Providers Association, p. 2). The Intergenerational Society of Canada argues that intergenerational programs develop rich and sustainable connections between generations and this type of connection is ideal for any rural community (i2i Intergenerational Society Website).

For a complete list of resources on how to bring intergenerational programs to your community, please visit the sources listed on the back of this pamphlet.

Sources:

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