



FACT SHEET: INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS BENEFIT EVERYONE

Intergenerational programs intentionally unite the generations in ways that enrich participants' lives and help address vital social and community issues while building on the positive resources that young and old have to offer each other and to their communities. These programs bring people of different generations together for ongoing, mutually beneficial, planned activities, designed to achieve specified program goals and promote greater understanding and respect between generations. Reciprocity, sustainability, intentionality, training, support, and viewing younger and older people as assets are hallmarks of successful programs.

There are many types of intergenerational programs ranging from mentoring and community service to service learning and workforce development. The goals of these programs are just as varied, and some examples are outlined in the chart on pages 4 and 5. Some programs primarily focus on improving academic outcomes among younger generations with older volunteers as tutors, mentors, allies, and friends. Other programs primarily focus on improving social, health, and economic aspects for older adults with younger generations as partners. While other programs aim to promote healthier lifestyle behaviors for both generations simultaneously, thereby lowering health risks. The possibilities for intergenerational programs are endless.

AN INTERGENERATIONAL LENS CAN BE APPLIED TO WIDE RANGE OF TOPICS SUCH AS:

- Academic Achievement & Enrichment
- Physical, Cognitive, & Mental Health
- Social Isolation & Loneliness
- Cultural Identity
- Environmental Awareness & Action
- Affordable Housing
- Job Readiness & Entrepreneurship
- Neighborhood Revitalization
- Addressing Structural Racism & Inequalities
- Technology Access & Use
- Caregiving
- Food insecurity
- Community Change
- Substance Use
- Ageism

Intergenerational programs unite younger and older generations to enrich participants' lives and help address vital social and community issues.

→ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: **1,000 GRANDMOTHERS**

The International Association for Indigenous Aging and the Michigan Public Health Institute developed and piloted the 1,000 Grandmothers project to reduce childhood deaths in Native communities by working with elder tribal participants, especially grandmothers, to conduct focused mentoring and education for young tribal mothers.

WHY NOW?

The United States is in the midst of a profound demographic transformation with both younger and older people making up an increasing proportion of the population. Additionally, the U.S. population is more diverse and interconnected than in previous centuries. Around the world, communities are enhanced by a growing population of elders. Older volunteers possess a lifetime of experience, skills, and knowledge. Their passion and wisdom can improve the academic, health, and social conditions of a child, teenager, or young adult through mentoring, tutoring, and friendship. Children, youth, and young adults also want more meaningful relationships with adults in their communities through civic engagement and leadership positions. And nearly 8 out of 10 adults want to spend more time with people outside their age group.¹

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic forced all ages to self-isolate, the United States was facing a loneliness epidemic affecting both older and younger generations. The negative



impacts of social isolation and loneliness are well documented, and research suggests that remaining socially engaged can improve these outcomes.² Ninety-two percent of Americans believe intergenerational activities can help reduce loneliness across all ages.³

Overall, the science shows that intergenerational programs lead to positive outcomes among young individuals, older volunteers, as well as teachers and administrators, workplaces, community spaces, families, and neighborhoods.⁴

→ PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: **HONOLULU WALKS**

Honolulu Walks is a youth-led intergenerational initiative of Age-Friendly Honolulu that mobilizes community members from the bookend generations – keiki to kupuna – to explore their built environment and walking culture and create ideas to make Honolulu more age-friendly. Through personal experiences and the photovoice process, program participants share about walkability and foster intergenerational relationships.



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: *NYU INTERGENERATIONAL HOME SHARE*

New York University and New York Foundation for Senior Citizens Intergenerational Home Share Program aims to bolster economic security, health, and a sense of belonging between older homeowners with rooms and graduate students in need of affordable housing with a focus on people of color, first generation students, and low-income older adults.

SOCIAL JUSTICE, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

A growing number of programs are focused on diversity, social justice, equity, and inclusion. Black, Indigenous, and people of color, as well as individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses are less likely to be asked to volunteer but when they are asked and engaged, research shows that they report greater psychological, cognitive, social, and academic outcomes compared to their counterparts⁵. The Eisner Foundation has invested resources in Los Angeles County to intergenerational programs that advance equity and justice through mentoring programs, literacy efforts, the performing arts, and medical volunteers.⁶ Some cultures may not use the language of “intergenerational programs” given that multigenerational and intergenerational relations are normative to their customs, values, and traditions. Having a strong sense of belonging and understanding of history and cultural ways of living is protective to health and coping in the face of adversity for tribal elders and youth.⁷ More programs and research are needed in equity, systemic racism, and cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

Intergenerational programs are meaningful, important, and fun - and they are booming across the U.S. and around the world. If you have participated in one or seen one in action, you will likely recall the high levels of energy, enthusiasm, and innovation. Evaluation data suggests they improve academic performance and various dimensions of health, and they bolster a strong sense of community and compassion. Research also shows that every age group is positively impacted by these types of programs. There are also benefits for administrators and staff members of these programs, family members of program participants, and other community residents. We hope you will use this resource to help make the case for intergenerational initiatives in your community. Together, we can help build a world that values and engages all generations.

NEARLY 8 OUT OF 10 ADULTS
want to spend more time with people
outside their age group.



WHO BENEFITS? EVERYONE.

Research has documented a wide range of benefits for everyone involved.

BABIES & PRE-SCHOOL⁸



- Higher levels of interactive play
- Improved abilities with cooperative play
- Improved empathy
- Greater social acceptance
- Better vocabulary and language abilities

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN⁹



- Enhanced reading and writing
- Improved task orientation, short-term memory, problem solving, and accountability
- Increased patience, sensitivity, compassion, respect, and empathy
- Reduced anxiety, sadness, and stress
- Improved mood management
- Healthier diets and nutrition, increased physical activity, less “screen time”

MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILDREN¹⁰



- Improved academic performance
- Healthier family dynamics
- Improved peer relationships
- Decreased depressive symptoms
- Reduced substance use
- Reduced disordered eating
- Enhanced reasoning, problem solving, accountability, conflict resolution
- Decreased bullying and victimization
- Clearer educational aspirations, occupational interests and goals

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS¹¹



- Improved ego integrity, self-confidence, purpose in life
- Improved emotions and mental health
- Enhanced physical health
- Increased levels of collective efficacy, social capital, and social cohesion
- Empowered to make changes in school and neighborhood

YOUNG ADULTS & COLLEGE STUDENTS¹²



- Higher rates of civic engagement
- Entrepreneurial capabilities, occupational skills, and mastery
- Expressed higher levels of self-confidence, efficacy, and self of self
- Gained skills and knowledge for geriatrics and gerontology
- Learned and taught ways to improve the environment

PARENTS & ADULT CHILDREN¹³



- Less worried about aged parents
- Happy about their civic engagement
- Older volunteers brought resources and skills back home to teach grandchildren and children in neighborhood
- Better family communication

OLDER ADULTS¹⁴



- Decreased social isolation
- Improved quality of life and purpose in life
- Improved self-worth, self-esteem, empowerment
- Cognitive health improvement
- Reduced falls and frailty, increased strength, balance, and walking
- Learned new skills, leadership proficiencies, and knowledge

ALL AGES



- Reduced ageism and age discrimination among young and old alike
- Improved mental, physical, and cognitive health unique to each life stage
- Greater sense of belonging and connection with others of different ages.
- More acceptance of people who are different from themselves.

STAFF, CAREGIVERS, & NEIGHBORHOODS¹⁵



- Administrators and staff report positive outcomes such as improved mental health, an increased sense of community, and gaining a sense of energy and purpose during long and hard workdays.
- Informal caregivers receive respite when a younger person cares for their loved one and they too report joy from the experience.
- Family caregivers also report decreased social isolation.
- Some studies have identified an increase in neighborhood trust, social cohesion, and a sense of community.
- Shared site intergenerational programs - settings where children, youth, and older adults participate in services and/or programs at the same time and at the same place - have shown many benefits for staff, families, and organizations.
- Generations also come together for physical improvements to the community such as walking trails, benches, urban parks, green spaces, clearer signage, reduced litter, and recycling options.

MORE INFORMATION

This fact sheet is a companion piece to Generations United's resource [Making the Case for Intergenerational Programs](#). Please refer to that document for more detailed information including the findings from the comprehensive review of the literature on intergenerational programs.

The [Generations United website](#) contains additional information about intergenerational programs and public policies including toolkits to help you get started, examples from our Programs of Distinction, an on-line directory with information on a wide range of intergenerational programs, and much more.

ENDNOTES

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