

Intergenerational Opportunities in Early Childhood Settings

Timmy walks into the room and upon seeing his elder friend Sue after a two week absence runs up to her and says excitedly, "I didn't think I was going to ever see you again. I missed you." His elder friend responded, "I missed you too." Timmy wraps his arms around Sue's neck and says, "I love you." Sue responds, "I love you too." Later Sue remarked to another elder, "Did you hear what he said? I didn't think he would remember me."



INTRODUCTION

With the number of children in care settings increasing every year and fewer resources available¹, intergenerational programs in early childhood programs have become a growing trend.

Intergenerational programs can pool limited resources for the benefit of children, the community, and older adults. These programs come in different forms: older volunteers entering child care centers, preschools, and other schools to tutor and/or mentor children; children visiting older adults in nursing homes or other care facilities; older adults and children sharing space and interacting on a daily basis; and much more.

This fact sheet will highlight the benefits of intergenerational programming in early childhood; share program examples that show positive results; provide possible partners to get started; and offer resources for more in depth information.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The benefits of intergenerational programs in early childhood settings are numerous.

FOR CHILDREN:

- Increase understanding of the aging process
- Develop a new relationship outside family
- Exhibit better behavior in classroom and other environments

- Learn they can give to others in need
- Learn soft social skills such as manners

FOR OLDER ADULTS:

- Demonstrate their value to society
- Have other people who care about them
- Increase emotional support, giving and receiving
- Expand social roles
- Work part-time, as volunteer or with stipend

FOR COMMUNITY:

- Combine limited resources to address a need
- Implement innovative program ideas
- Create greater volunteer opportunities

WHY?

Intergenerational programs in early childhood education are compelling for those developing or designing good programs. These programs can:

- Bring individuals of different generations together for a common purpose, like education,
- Fill a need that might not otherwise be met, such as tutors in the classroom or child care workers,
- Create opportunities for interaction across generations,
- Enhance social/personal skills for children by over 5 months compared to children in non-intergenerational programs², and
- Build organizational capacity.

“The days I come here are the best days of my week.”

—Older adult, New Hampshire



PROGRAM EXAMPLES

Intergenerational programs in early childhood settings are emerging in communities throughout the country. Most of these programs take place in classroom settings, but more and more programs are taking innovative approaches to bringing older adults and young children, like in a co-located day care center. Here are just a few examples of the programs that currently exist.

OTTER (OLDER TEACHERS TRAINING EARLY READERS (ORLANDO, FL))

- OTTER is an intergenerational program designed to boost the reading skills of at-risk preschool children.
- The program which was launched during the 2004-2005 school year is run by the Foster Grandparent Program of Central Florida and has since doubled its size.
- For more information call 407-298-4180 or visit their website at www.fostergrandparentprogram.org/Foster_Grandpx.html

THE GENERATIONS CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER (SAN FRANCISCO, CA)

- The Generations Child Development Center, a partnership between On Lok Senior Health Services and Wu Yee Children's Services, is a multicultural, bilingual, intergenerational program offering joint activities for preschool children and frail elderly.
- Generations offers a welcoming and interactive environment for preschool children and older adults. The children learn positive attitudes toward aging. The older adults' wellness and

quality of life are enhanced by daily interaction with the preschoolers.

- For more information call 415-292-8888 or visit their website at www.onlok.org/index.asp.

SENIORS4KIDS

- An initiative that bridges the generations by raising the visibility of older adults in support of quality early learning.
- *ELDER* (Energetic Leaders Demanding Education and Results) Captains volunteer their expertise in early learning centers.
- For more information call 202-289-3979 or visit www.seniors4kids.org

LE'LUM'UY'LH CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTRE (COWICHAN VALLEY, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA)

- Le'lum'uy'lh Child Development Centre was created by the Cowichan Tribes, part of the "First Nation" people, in western Canada to better the education of their children.
- Led by their elders, the Cowichan Tribes have concentrated their efforts in education, cultural teachings, language preservation, and childrearing and family supports
- To help preserve their cultural traditions in the coming generations, elder cultural teachers at Le'lum'uy'lh are integrating cultural teachings in their schools through programs like "Elders-in-Residence," in which elders are engaged to teach culture and tradition ranging from language instruction to basket-weaving.
- For more information call 250-746-8119 or visit www.quwutsun.ca

"Whether we're a preschooler or a young teen, a graduating college senior or a retired person, we human beings all want to know that we're acceptable, that our being alive somehow makes a difference in the lives of others."

-Mister Rogers



POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS

To better plan for sustainability of your intergenerational program form a partnership with another interested, committed organization with a similar program purpose and expectations. It is also a good way to share resources³. Possible partners include:

- Preschools
- Elementary Schools
- Child Care Centers
- Senior Centers
- Long-Term Care Facilities
- Head Start
- After-School Programs
- Foster Grandparent Programs
- Senior Housing
- Retirement Communities
- Libraries
- Community Centers
- Multigenerational Centers
- Faith-based Institutions
- and many more

RESOURCES

There are resources available for creating intergenerational programs in early childhood settings. For intergenerational shared site programs Generations United created a how-to-guide: *Under One Roof: A Guide to Starting and Strengthening Intergenerational Shared Site Programs*. Additional shared site resources, as well as other resources are available at www.gu.org. Penn State published a guidebook: *Developing an Intergenerational Program in Your Early Childhood Care and Education Center; A Guidebook for Early Childhood Practitioners* available at intergenerational.cas.psu.edu. *To Help Somebody's Child* is a research and video project conducted by Generations Together at the University of Pittsburgh, it includes a videotape and manual, for more information visit www.gt.pitt.edu For additional resources, including a detailed intergenerational bibliography visit the GU website at www.gu.org.

CONCLUSION

Intergenerational programming in early childhood settings brings young children and older adults together to enrich the lives of both generations and to address a specific need. Children often need tutors or mentors and older adults come in and meet that need. Older adults in a senior center or assisted-living facility could use



companionship or new activities and preschool children can visit them and do activities together. Schools may need additional help in the classrooms and older adults have the skills, enthusiasm, and the time to volunteer or work part-time. Schools, day care centers, assisted-living facilities, community centers, libraries are already in existence. Bringing different groups of people together at these locations helps not only them, but a community that may be otherwise low on financial resources. Intergenerational programs not only meet critical needs in schools and communities, but also help build a future that values all generations.

Generations United (GU)

1333 H Street N.W., Suite 500W, Washington, D.C. 20005-4752

Phone: (202) 289-3979 – Fax: (202) 289-3952

Email: gu@gu.org – Website: www.gu.org

Photo Credits: Jaime L. Renner, Pauline Mizrach, Juliann Joerres and Bob Walcher.

This fact sheet is made possible with grant funding from the **MetLife Foundation**

- 1 Larkin, E. 1999. "The Intergenerational Response to Childcare and After-School Care." *Generations Journal of the American Society on Aging* Vol. XXII, No. 4, 33-36.
- 2 Rosebrook, Dr. V. 2006 "Research Indicates: Intergenerational Interactions Enhance Young Children's Personal/Social Skills." *Together*. *Generations United Newsletter*, Volume 11, Number 2, 2006.
- 3 *Developing an Intergenerational Program in Your Early Childhood Care and Education Center, A Guidebook for Early Childhood Practitioners*. Penn State, College of Agricultural Sciences, 7.

Generations United (GU) is the national membership organization focused solely on improving the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational strategies, programs, and public policies. GU represents more than 100 national, state, and local organizations representing more than 70 million Americans. Since 1986, GU has served as a resource for educating policymakers and the public about the economic, social, and personal imperatives of intergenerational cooperation. GU acts as a catalyst for stimulating collaboration between aging, children, and youth organizations providing a forum to explore areas of common ground while celebrating the richness of each generation.



October 2006 © Copyright, 2006 Generations United. Reprinting permissible provided Generations United is credited and no profits are made.