

### INTRODUCTION

As awareness in global environmental problems has increased in recent decades, interest in crafting solutions has also grown. Nearly every state in the U.S. currently has an environmental education program in some form. These initiatives are launched from a variety of settings including environmental centers, schools, parks and recreation facilities, and farms. Current patterns of funding, research, and program design tend to target young people as the primary audience. Yet, considering the doubling of the 65+ population over the coming decades,<sup>1</sup> and other trends such as the recent emphasis placed on post-retirement volunteerism and civic engagement, the environmental education agenda should be anchored not only in school learning but also across settings and across the lifespan.

Though there are some initiatives aimed at reaching and involving older adults, opportunities for them to engage in environmental learning and take part in efforts to sustain natural resources are still sporadic and limited. Considering that both the young and elder populations are often susceptible to the same environmental health hazards, it makes sense to come together for the common goal of improving the environment and bettering possible health for all. This fact sheet highlights the benefits of intergenerational environmental programs and provides program examples that are currently showing positive results.

### BENEFITS OF INTERGENERATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS

By using an intergenerational framework to address environmental issues, communities are able to reap the demonstrated benefits of intergenerational programs while enhancing the natural environment. The following are some of the potential benefits of intergenerational environmental health projects:

- Bring people of all ages together to work towards a common goal - to protect human health and the environment
- Encourage exploration, study, and action to improve the natural environment
- Expand the numbers of environmental stewards who are committed to the environment, feel a sense of responsibility to improve it, and have the skills to take effective action
- Draw attention to the shared environment
- Provide opportunities for collaborative activity to improve the environment



- Demonstrate that participants display an increased readiness to take action to protect and care for the environment
- Help people see the relevance and vital importance of the environment not only to their own well-being, but also to the well-being of their families and communities.

### WHY INTERGENERATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH?

Intergenerational environmental work is compelling for practitioners working in the environmental arena as well as those focused on promoting intergenerational understanding and cooperation. These programs can:

- Broaden awareness and increase participation in new audiences,
- Add meaning to environmental information by showing environmental health risks to families and communities,
- Provide a focal point around which to strengthen relationships across the generations, and
- Build community capacity.

## PROGRAM EXAMPLES

Intergenerational environmental initiatives are emerging in communities throughout the country. Most of these programs involve participants of all ages, specifically children, youth, and older adults and provide critical services to their communities. There are programs in primary schools, universities, cooperative extension programs, community centers, environment centers, and more. The following are just some of the programs that currently exist.

### **Legacy Leadership Institute for the Environment (Legacy Leadership Institute and The Wildlife Trust of North America Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center (CBED), Grasonville, MD)**

- The Wildlife Trust of North America CBEC, in partnership with the University of Maryland Center on Aging, developed the *Legacy Leadership Institute for the Environment* (LLIE), bringing the time and talents of older adults to environmental conservation, restoration, and habitat protection.
- The project provides meaningful lifelong learning and civic engagement opportunities for older adults, enhances the capacity of five environmental centers through volunteer leadership and service, and fosters greater environmental stewardship in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.
- Once trained, the older adult environmental stewardship youth in the arena of environmental health and stewardship.
- For more information contact Marjorie Buchanan at [MarjorieOn@aol.com](mailto:MarjorieOn@aol.com).

### **Habitat Intergenerational Program (HIP) (Habitat Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, Belmont, MA)**

- The Habitat Intergenerational Program (HIP), begun in 1987, is a community of learners of all ages, interests and cultures who are committed to fostering intergenerational relationships, environmental learning, and a sense of environmental stewardship.
- HIP promotes awareness and conservation of the natural environment through educational programs and community service projects coordinated by Massachusetts Audubon's Habitat Wildlife Sanctuary.
- HIP activities bring people of all ages together to conduct environmental service projects such as removing invasive species, helping to rejuvenate a pond and the area around it, restoring walking trails, building blue bird boxes, and much more.
- For more information contact Phyl Solomon at [PHYL87@bellatlantic.net](mailto:PHYL87@bellatlantic.net)

## POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS

- Environmental organizations
- Health organizations (e.g. lung, heart, and diabetes associations)
- Public and private K-12 schools
- Residential education programs
- Youth service organizations (e.g., 4-H, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, scout troops, and after-school programs)
- Adult service organizations (e.g., Rotary, Kiwanis)
- Faith-based organizations
- Day care centers
- Museums
- Historical associations
- Theatre troupes
- Universities
- Farms
- Animal shelters
- Retirement communities
- Senior centers
- Community centers
- Intergenerational organizations (e.g., intergenerational shared site or coalition of intergenerational programs)
- Parks & Recreation Centers
- Corporations and local businesses
- State & local health and environmental agencies

### **Intergenerational Citizens Action Forums (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Miami, Florida)**

- The Intergenerational Citizens Action Forums bring together high school-aged youth and older adult volunteers to learn about public policy issues of mutual concern and, in a non-partisan effort, work to effect public policy change.
- Older adults serve as mentors to the students and help them to organize and conduct forums on key environmental issues.
- After the intergenerational teams define and prioritize critical environmental issues to address, they receive training in how to conduct advocacy campaigns, and then initiate a community organizing campaign aimed at promoting desired community changes.
- The ultimate goal is to develop concrete solutions that can be obtained through legislation or other forms of political action.
- For more information contact Ramona Frischman, Ed.D. at [rfrischman@sbab.dade.k12.fl.us](mailto:rfrischman@sbab.dade.k12.fl.us)

## ADDITIONAL PROGRAM IDEAS

Intergenerational environmental initiatives can be found in almost every location and setting — schools, environmental centers, parks, playgrounds, community centers, retirement communities, city streets, vacant lots, cornfields, farms, and along stream banks. Activities can include promoting environmental awareness, conducting research on environmental issues, and taking action to preserve and/or improve the environment. The following are some possible program ideas:

### AWARENESS & EDUCATION

- Training elders and youth to conduct outreach and education on environmental issues in their communities — such as indoor and outdoor air quality, extreme heat, integrated pest management, community recycling for batteries, mercury thermometers, cell phones or other electronic equipment.
- Collaborating with health professionals or agencies to raise awareness of environmental triggers for chronic conditions such as heart disease, asthma, and diabetes.
- Conducting public service campaigns or intergenerational educational workshops to address environmental issues.
- Disseminating the annual local drinking water quality reports to raise awareness of potential environmental contaminants.
- Educating grandparent support groups and children's groups about environmental hazards.
- Training grandparents and other relatives raising children on how to identify hazards and protect themselves and the children in their care.

### RESEARCH

- Mapping natural resources in effort to track environmental changes.
- Gathering facts from meetings, hearings, and interviews with public officials.
- Interviewing community stakeholders and environmental activists.
- Monitoring water quality or measuring soil pH and drainage.

### ACTION

- Conducting intergenerational environmental health assessments for low socio-economic individuals in the community.
- Coordinating service-learning/community service projects (e.g., trail restoration, urban gardens, water monitoring projects, stream clean-ups).
- Adapting best practice guidelines for integrated pest management (IPM) program for low-income housing and naturally occurring retirement communities.
- Convening an intergenerational forum on environmental health hazards, such as environmental triggers for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and asthma, heart disease or stroke, and preparing a plan of action to address these hazards.
- Planning special events or days of service focused on learning about environmental health issues (e.g., Earth Day, Join Hands Day, Make A Difference Day, Grandparents Day at school).

### ARTS & CULTURE

- Developing performing arts and community art projects (skits, puppetry, rap songs, murals, etc.) to educate the public about an environmental health issue.
- Conducting oral history interviews about the environment and environmental health hazards.
- Planning environment-themed celebrations.
- Documenting photo/video-documentation of local resources through photography or videography.

The web of mutual obligations between generations is  
essential for a civilized society  
— Thomas Jefferson

## HOW-TO GUIDE

Generations United, in collaboration with Penn State Cooperative Extension, with the support of the Environmental Protection Agency, has created a user-friendly how-to guide for individuals and groups who either are, or will be, involved in the development of intergenerational environmental health programs.

*Generations United for Environmental Awareness and Action* provides general information on program development and highlights tips from different projects. Chapters include What do Intergenerational Environmental Initiatives Look Like?; Program Development; Determining Program Impact; Challenges; and Recommendations. This guide is available at no cost online at [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org) or for purchase by contacting Generations United.

## CONCLUSION

Intergenerational environmental programming is as much about nurturing the human-environment connection as it is fostering connections between people. The focus is on ways to bring young people and older adults together to learn about the natural environment, to address significant community needs, and to gain insight into each other's lives. Those involved in these projects



gain a greater sense not only about how the environment is relevant and of vital importance to their own well-being, but how it contributes to the well-being of their family, community, and others. They learn that the environmental realities that affect them on a personal level also affect other individuals. Intergenerational environmental projects have the potential to not only change the lives of current participants, but also to make a tremendous impact in the well-being of future generations.

*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.*



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## References

- <sup>1</sup> Nearly 13 percent of the population, 36.7 million people, is 65 or over (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, 2005).

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