

Livable Communities

Intergenerational Intersection

Generations United recognizes that livable communities are critical for all generations. In particular, children, youth, older adults, people with disabilities, and their caregivers need safe and accessible environments, transportation, and housing. They rely on public transit and public services such as libraries and community centers. They are especially vulnerable to crime, including abuse and neglect, gun violence, and other violent crime. At the same time, effective intergenerational policy recognizes children, youth, and seniors can be resources for each other to help promote safe, accessible, and livable homes and communities.

Position Statement

Generations United (GU) is committed to creating truly livable communities. These are strong neighborhoods, villages, towns, and cities – urban and rural – where people are not separated by age, race, or economic status. The best communities offer a range of choices in accessible and affordable transportation and housing for people with diverse needs. Communities that invest in facilities that serve both young and old together not only enrich the lives of their residents, but build toward economic stability through the wise use of local resources. A livable community should also be a safe one. Truly safe communities have lower crime rates and offer secure, healthy environments.

In addition, Generations United supports:

- *Efforts to prepare communities for the aging of the population and how coming demographic changes will affect the*

physical and social fabric of our nation, with an emphasis on making communities livable for all ages.

- *Measures which promote new livable, multigenerational communities.*
- *Efforts to facilitate the communication of different agencies with regulatory authority over services to young and old so that regulatory barriers to shared sites can be eased.*
- *Funding incentives for schools, Head Start, Early Head Start, and child care centers, senior centers and others to create facilities that serve both young and old together.*
- *Conducting a national study to evaluate existing shared sites and initiatives that provide opportunities to create and sustain intergenerational shared sites.*
- *Accessible public transportation initiatives which cater to the needs of children, young people, older adults, and caregivers.*
- *Legislation which recognizes and facilitates flexible work practices that improve work-life balance for all and help prevent intergenerational conflict in the workplace.*
- *Measures which would ameliorate the skills shortage in the human services sector.*
- *Policies to expand the direct care workforce providing services to older adults and children.*
- *Efforts to increase community engagement for people of all ages.*
- *Increased supports for caregivers.*

Background Housing

Throughout the country, families are struggling to keep their homes in the face of the home foreclosure crisis and increased

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Photo credit: Daly City

unemployment or under-employment because of the economic downturn. Grandfamilies, many of whom face housing challenges similar to those of single-parent families and families with children who have disabilities, may have difficulty finding new homes because many senior residences do not allow children. GU supports short- and long-term efforts to keep families in their homes.

Shared Sites

Intergenerational shared sites are programs in which people of different generations are engaged at the same site and interact through planned activities and informal interactions. By delivering services to children, youth, and older adults under one roof, communities can save precious resources while investing in people of all ages. Studies indicate shared sites have substantial benefits for children and older adults. Preschool children involved in intergenerational programs had higher personal/social developmental scores (by 11 months) than preschool children involved in

non-intergenerational programs.³⁴ In schools where older adults were a regular fixture (volunteers working 15 hours per week), children had improved reading scores and fewer behavioral problems than their peers at other schools. Older adults who regularly volunteered with children burned 20 percent more calories per week, were more optimistic, experienced fewer falls, were less reliant on canes, and performed better than peers on a memory test.³⁵

There are regulatory and financial barriers to the development of shared sites. Currently, many regulations and funding streams are designed assuming each facility and program serves a specific generation. Programs that seek to expand services to more than one generation often must navigate and/or reconcile the myriad regulations necessary to access funding streams. A national study evaluating shared sites and initiatives that provide opportunities to create and sustain intergenerational shared sites should be conducted.

Multigenerational Community Development

Since the 1960s, senior-only, “sun city” housing developments have been promoted as the ideal for new retirees seeking less responsibility and more relaxation. Changing demographics are leading some developers to reconsider how they will plan for the communities they will develop over the next ten to twenty years and beyond. A Civic Ventures (2002) survey of today’s aging boomers show 73 percent want to remain in age integrated communities; 78 percent report that volunteering, in particular with children and youth, will be an important part of retirement; and 79 percent intend to keep working in some capacity. At the same time, the most recent U.S. Census study showed multigenerational households experienced the largest percentage increase of any family

structure in the country. When looking toward retirement, boomers are considering not just their own housing needs but those of aging parents, cohabitating adult children, and grandchildren. Policies and regulations that guide and encourage community planning inclusive of the needs of all people including older adults, people with disabilities, and children should be promulgated. This includes increasing access to the pedestrian environment and transit, building healthier and more environmentally friendly communities, and building inclusive communities in general.

Transportation

Only one half of Americans 65 or older have access to public transportation to meet their daily needs. Compared with older drivers, older non-drivers in the United States make 15 percent fewer trips to the doctor, 59 percent fewer shopping trips and visits to restaurants, and 65 percent fewer trips for social, family, and religious activities.³⁶ Children also often rely on car rides to access daily activities like school and sports. Many public transit systems focus on commuters and reduce their services during the day when children and older adults are more likely to travel. Following the reauthorization of funding for surface transportation in 2005, it is vital these programs address the needs of both young and old.

Workforce

The circumstances affecting workforce demand vary by sector, type of position, and the general economy; but workforce shortages currently exist and are projected to worsen, particularly in the health care and education sectors. Providers clearly need to both retain current workers and attract “career switchers.” For many providers, this means accommodating the skills and needs of multiple generations. Nonprofit organizations and public agencies should pay special



Photo credit: Paula Morris

attention to ensuring harmony in a shifting two- or three-generation workforce. Some approaches include:

- *flexible scheduling (good both for older workers who wish for less than full-time work and for parents of young children);*
- *phased retirement (to enable older workers to enter retirement gradually while still being available to pass along valuable institutional memory to younger colleagues);*
- *cafeteria benefit programs that allow individual workers to select the benefits that best fit their situation (for example, caregiving support for older workers with aging parents; sabbaticals for younger and mid-career workers; fitness programs and opportunities to volunteer for all ages);*
- *formal and informal mentoring programs that pair young and old in teams to tackle projects and foster mutual understanding; and*
- *retraining older workers, in combination with redesigning jobs as necessary, in areas of high need such as health care, community and social services, and education.*

Careful policy changes can support employers and workers in assuring a quality workforce of sufficient size to meet the needs of all. These include:

- *supporting Higher Education institutions, particularly community colleges, to provide targeted training and programs geared to “encore jobs” for older adults;*
- *allowing people older than age 50 to draw on their pension funds while working for a nonprofit organization;*
- *allowing people older than age 50 to draw down a portion of their retirement savings to pay for training and education;*
- *removing Social Security penalties for continuing to work;*
- *establishing mechanisms for people over a certain age who work in identified public service sectors to buy into Medicare and/or state health plans;*
- *providing direct support for those who have retired from the military to retrain for civilian service in education and health;*
- *increasing the number of people served by the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP); and*
- *creating fellowship opportunities to help people transition to nonprofit and government service agencies.*

“It is an expression of faith, this yearning to give back, this hungering for a purpose larger than our own, that reveals itself not simply in places of worship, but in senior centers and shelters, schools and hospitals, and any place an American decides.”

President
Obama