Creating a Livable Community

ENGAGING ALL GENERATIONS AND IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

HOUSING

TRANSPORTATION & SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

HEALTH CARE & SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

GENERAL RETAIL & SERVICES

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

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Human beings are social creatures. Our lives are improved by the quantity and quality of our relationships and interactions with others, and a community that fosters these interactions by creating a meaningful and livable environment for all residents will reap the benefits.

Gathering with friends, volunteering with local organizations, creating relationships across all generations — these all have been shown to improve quality of life and quality of community. As recently stated by the Mayo Clinic, "good friends are good for your health"[1] — and a recent report by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) pointed out that those who volunteer tend to be more satisfied with their lives than those who don't, all while contributing to a healthy civil society.[2]

This guide has been created to provide guidance for those at the local level - community leaders, residents, students and more — to identify new ways to address community challenges, implement programs that enhance lives across all generations and create a livable and positive environment for community members.

Creating an intergenerational community

Communities are places that ideally provide adequately for safety, health, education and the basic necessities of life for residents of all ages. According to *Livable Community Indicators for Sustainable Aging in Place,* the concept of livable communities refers to ways in which the physical, social and economic infrastructure promotes or hinders the ability of older adults to age in place.[3]

In a livable community, programs, policies, and practices increase cooperation, interaction, and exchange between people of different generations. Livable communities provide services that allow for individuals of all ages to survive and thrive. In a truly intergenerational community, residents of all ages have ample opportunities to share their expertise and resources, and to support each other and their communities.

Examining communities through this perspective is even more critical today. With an increase in grandfamilies, multigenerational households, and individuals delaying retirement, generations have come to rely on each other within families and within communities. Truly livable communities build on the positive resources that generations can offer one another and that promote intergenerational interdependence.

There are many key components to a livable community. Communities around the country are demonstrating creative solutions to accommodating the needs of their residents and to facing their challenges.

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Housing

Livable communities provide opportunities for all residents to live in safe, affordable housing. Policies can be established that make it easier for all ages to find housing appropriate to their needs. Many communities have found ways to actively engage the generations in determining their housing priorities, and some nationally known builders are now responding to the needs of families who include several generations of residents. Cities and towns also are encouraging housing development in opportunity-rich areas in centers near schools, retail, medical facilities, transportation, and healthy environments. Even some age-segregated elder communities are opening their housing to younger singles and families — to the delight of older residents.

What can you do to view housing as an opportunity to meet the needs of all residents and engage generations?

Assess the needs of your community, and based on those, create an intergenerational response:

Possible solution: **A program that allows youth to provide services that assist older adults in staying in their homes. This might entail groups of students raking, shoveling and doing home repairs.**

Example: The Home Safety Program, a program of the Volunteer Center of the Virginia Peninsula, is a youth led program in which youth visit the homes of older adults who are living independently, perform a safety assessment and provide safety and disaster kits.

Possible solution: **Address the housing needs of populations in your community that do not have adequate housing.**

Example: Grandfamilies housing exists for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. This type of housing creates a supportive, safe, caring community for multigenerational families. Presbyterian Senior Services and West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing partnered to open Grandparent Family Apartments in May 2005. The nation's first new construction project for grandfamilies has 50 apartments in a 66,470 square-foot building. The facility used a complicated mixture of funding sources that enable rent subsidies for qualifying tenants. Features benefit all ages and include on-site services such as case management, counseling, youth activities, support groups, after-school education and tutoring; outdoor green space; laundry rooms on each floor; senior and youth community rooms; and twenty-four hour front door security.

Transportation and Safe Neighborhoods

In communities across the nation, transportation is a critical service that all generations need now and in the future. The ideal of aging in place relies on having adequate transportation options available for all, including a mix of light rail, buses, taxis and on-call vans coupled with streetscapes that provide safety and access for walkers, wheelchairs and strollers. Safe neighborhoods also include neighborhood watch programs and community events where people who live close to each other have a chance to get to know one another.

➤ **What can you do to view transportation and safe neighborhoods as an opportunity to meet the needs of all residents and engage generations?**

Assess the needs of your community, and based on those, create an intergenerational response:

Possible solution: **Utilize teenagers and young adults to help older members of the community learn how to use public transportation and feel confident walking in their neighborhoods.**

Example: In St. Augustine, Florida, through the Council on Aging, teenagers developed a transportation program to help seniors in the community read bus maps and timetables, understand the transfer system, and overcome their fear of using public transportation. This program also established a bond between the older adults and teenagers that helped build empathy for each other.

Possible solution: **Utilize seniors to assist children in arriving to school safely and create a warm, nurturing, and safe environment for all ages built on relationships; provide transportation to seniors who can provide volunteer services at schools, thereby having extra adults on the buses while creating an opportunity for additional community support in the schools.**

Example: In Hesston, Kansas, older adults are utilized as crossing guards to help students cross busy intersections. In Chanute, Kansas, older volunteers greet students at the front door of their elementary, middle and high schools, and wish them a wonderful day at school, with a smile, handshake or high-five.

Health Care and Supportive Services

Few issues are more important to older adults and families than the availability and affordability of quality health care services. Livable communities require adequate medical facilities, trained medical personnel, community education, wellness programs, and doctors and specialists that have expertise and are able to care for and accommodate the schedules of residents of all ages. Livable communities also require support services to assist all residents who are juggling many roles in their daily lives.

➤ What can you do to view health care and supportive services as an opportunity to meet the needs of all residents and engage generations?

Assess the needs of your community, and based on those, create an intergenerational response:

Possible solution: Utilizing youth in helping address daily needs of older adults, whether in providing respite care for caregivers, helping older adults maintain an independent home by doing home inspections, or meeting a specific need of an older individual such as reading mail once a week to an older adult who has vision challenges.

Example: Time Out Caregiver Respite Program, a program through The Intergenerational Center at Temple University, has created a semester-long work opportunity for students who provide respite services for a family, regular companionship, and supervision for an older adult.

Example: The St. Louis Meal Runners program teams high school students and older volunteers to deliver meals to homebound older adults, thereby creating teams that are stronger together — the students do the heavy lifting and packing of meal carriers and coolers, and the older volunteers do the driving. All participants benefit through the development of intergenerational relationships, while providing a needed community service.

Possible solution: Create a shared space — an opportunity for residents of multiple generations to interact daily while meeting their physical and social needs.

Example: At the JEWEL Program (a partnership between Mount Kisco Day Care Center and My Second Home/Family Services of Westchester), daily formal and informal interactions occur between the children who are in day care and the older adults who are a part of a non-residential day program. The older adults benefit not only from their wellness activities, personal care, transportation and nutrition, but also by the engagement with children on a daily basis.

General Retail and Services

Residents often want to grow old in their community and enjoy the convenience of knowing people while also having their needs met within close proximity to their home. For a community to meet the needs of all residents, ideally there are stores to buy necessities, opportunities to purchase healthy foods, restaurants and community activities.

➤ **What can you do to view general retail and services as an opportunity to meet the needs of all residents and engage generations?**

Assess the needs of your community, and based on those, create an intergenerational response:

Possible solution: **Recognizing the importance of healthy eating and how it directly correlates to healthy and long lives, connects children, youth and older adult residents through gardening and cooking.**

Example: The Marion Street Intergenerational Garden in Washington, DC is a place where gardeners of all ages take part in an opportunity to learn, create and participate in a gardening experience. This garden has become an outdoor classroom for residents of all ages and a collaborative effort of many groups, led by City Blossoms, a non-profit dedicated to kid-driven, community engagement and creative green spaces.

Example: Bring the entire community together through a Farmers Market. The Encino Farmers Market, in California, is not only a certified farmer's market with fruits, vegetables, flowers and plants, but also a donation boutique where toys, clothing, cosmetics, paper goods and more are contributed by the community. The market is open year round, and it's a fun way for all residents to spend time together.

Social Integration

Residents of all ages enjoy the opportunity to be stimulated, engaged and involved with fellow community members. Communities have an opportunity to intentionally connect the generations to enhance each other's lives, as well as that of the larger community. Through these interactions, relationships are formed, stereotypes and biases are reduced and communities are maximizing the strengths of their residents.
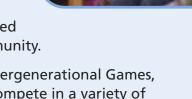
What can you do through social integration as an opportunity to meet the needs of all residents and engage generations?

Assess the needs of your community, and based on those, create an intergenerational response:

Possible solution: **Create opportunities to bring the generations together for learning or for fun.**

Example: The Allegheny County Library Association has held book clubs for high school students and older adults aimed at fostering intergenerational discussion and connections.

Example: At Oberlin College, students in a first year seminar course assess the question, "Is there an art to dying well, and should our understanding of death shape the way we live?" and extend their classroom experience through regular conversations with assigned partners from the Kendal at Oberlin retirement community.

Example: Annually, the County of San Diego holds Intergenerational Games, which pairs older adults with children and youth to compete in a variety of events. The goal of the Games is to bring the generations together to have fun while encouraging healthy and active lifestyles.

While all communities are unique, and have varying degrees of resources, every community can actively engage residents across the generations in addressing community challenges. Most importantly — there are simple ways to get this started. For example, appoint an intergenerational community advisory council that includes members of all generations. Such a council offers multiple perspectives and unique solutions. Communities can also ask groups requesting use of community space and resources how many generations will be involved in the activity before granting permission. Additionally, local governments can regularly recognize and honor the strong champions who help create their livable communities. All residents — including youth and older adults — along with non-profits, corporations, local government, civic leaders and funders can start, expand and grow intergenerational programs, policies and practices. Why?

Because we are stronger together.

Additional Resources

- MetLife Foundation/Generations United Best Communities Awards Publication 2013 http://www.gu.org/OURWORK/Programs/BestIntergenerationalCommunities.aspx

- MetLife Foundation/Generations United Best Communities Awards Publication 2012

- Viable Futures Toolkit: Sustainable Communities for All Ages, developed by JustPartners Inc. www.viablefuturescenters.org

- A Blueprint for Action: Developing a Livable Community for All Ages, developed by Partners for Livable Communities and National Association of Area Agencies on Aging. www.n4a.org and www.livable.com

- Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide, developed by the World Health Organization. www.who.int

- Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide, developed by AARP. www.aarp.org

- Communities for All Ages. www.communitiesforallages.com

- Beth Johnson Foundation Centre for Intergenerational Practice. http://www.centreforip.org.uk/

MetLife Mature Market Institute Resources

- Livable Community Indicators for Sustainable Aging in Place

- Aging in Place 2.0

- Aging in Place Workbook

- Housing Trends Update for the 55+ Market

- MatureMarketInstitute.com

Endnotes

1 Mayo Clinic, *Friendships: Enrich your life and improve your health,* April 2011

2 OECD, *Index for a Better Life*

3 Stanford Center of Longevity and MetLife Mature Market Institute, *Livable Community Indicators for Sustainable Aging in Place,* March 2013.

A proper community…

is a commonwealth: a place, a resource, an

economy. It answers the needs, practical as

well as social and spiritual, of its members —

among them the need to need one another.

— Wendell Berry

The MetLife Mature Market Institute®

The MetLife Mature Market Institute is Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's (MetLife) center of expertise in aging, longevity and the generations and is a recognized thought leader by business, the media, opinion leaders and the public. The Institute's groundbreaking research, insights, strategic partnerships and consumer education expand the knowledge and choices for those in, approaching or working with the mature market. For more information, please visit: **MatureMarketInstitute.com**.

Generations United

Formed in 1986, Generations United is the national membership organization focused solely on improving the lives of children, youth, and older people through intergenerational strategies, programs, and public policies. Generations United serves as a resource for educating policymakers and the public about the economic, social, and personal imperatives of intergenerational cooperation. For more information, visit **www.gu.org**.