





INTRODUCTION

We are living longer than we have ever lived in the history of humankind. In 2018, there were approximately 52.4 million adults aged 65+. We can expect this figure to nearly double to 94.7 million by 2060. One study predicts that half of all children born in western societies today will celebrate their 100th birthday (Christensen et al., 2009). Older women outnumber men and the older adult population is becoming more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, geography, sexual and gender identities, and faith (Administration for Community Living, 2020; Fredriksen Goldsen & de Vries, 2019). Half of the United States will be of people of color by 2042 (Generations United, 2013). Intergenerational programs can help unite diverse populations in terms of age, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, and sexual orientation to promote a stronger sense of social cohesion and purpose.

While we are living longer, our society is experiencing profound challenges in education, health, work and retirement, family caregiving, civic engagement, and a sense of belonging. Health, economic, and social inequities are a reality for many individuals and families. Black, Indigenous, and people of color carry a heavier burden of disease, disability, and multimorbidity such as diabetes, major depression, and social isolation. Many have tied these inequities to systemic racism (Gee & Ford, 2011). Ageism and age discrimination affect the young and old (Marchiondo et al. 2016) and is prevalent nationally and globally.

"Intergenerational programs are charting a way to achieve a healthy, equitable, and harmonious society for all."

Age discrimination in the workplace is estimated to cost approximately \$850 billion annually due to lost opportunities for companies to produce goods and services by older workers (AARP, 2020). Internalized ageism is linked with depression, higher risk for cognitive impairment, and it also costs approximately \$63 billion annually in health care expenditures (Levy et al., 2020). We need to reimagine and rebuild communities to ensure healthy development for our growing demographic diversity (Generations United, 2013). Living longer will require that we live healthier and smarter, in harmony with one another and with nature.

The causes and solutions to these issues are multidimensional and complex. Innovative ideas are needed to ensure equal opportunity to education, economic security, health and health care, social and community relations, as well as healthy neighborhoods and safe built environments (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2020). The good news is that there are local and national programs that bring the experience, talents, skills, and passion of different populations together to address these critical issues. This resource is based on a comprehensive review of the literature on intergenerational programs and highlights evidence-based findings on how intergenerational programs benefit everyone. The goals are ambitious and the outcomes are inspiring. Intergenerational programs are charting a way to achieve a healthy, equitable, and harmonious society for all.

WHAT ARE INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES?

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.



FAST FACT

There are approximately 11 million older volunteers every year who contribute approximately 1.9 billion hours of service which is valued at approximately \$45.4 billion (AmeriCorps, 2020). And more than half (54%) of youth ages 13 to 22 volunteer (Youth Service America, 2019). It is clear that individuals want to contribute to society. Intergenerational programs are poised to meet this demand.

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, as shown by the chart on page 11. 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.



FAST FACT

Orientation, planning, training, supervision, and support are all necessary for successful intergenerational programs and must be used to prepare young and old for the experience (Pstross, et al., 2017; McBride, 2011; Hirn, 2007; Jarrott & Smith, 2011).

Intergenerational programs are meaningful, important, and fun. And they need to be thoughtfully developed with theory and informed by evidence. A recent scoping review conducted by Jarrott et al. (2020) identified the following thirteen evidence-based practices to guide quality intergenerational work: incorporate mechanisms for friendship, select or set the environment, provide training to staff or participant group(s), foster empathy, promote cooperation, offer meaningful roles such as mentorship and/or decision making, be mindful of time and scheduling, structure activities for flexibility, ensure authority figures endorse intergenerational contact, use technology, train facilitators to promote interaction, offer something novel, and convey equal group status. Stipends are also effective at recruiting low-income older volunteers (McBride et al., 2011).

WHO BENEFITS FROM INTERGENERATIONAL PRACTICES? EVERYONE.

A growing body of research shows that every age group benefits when different generations come together for a common cause.



BABIES TO PRE-SCHOOL

- Children as young as 9 weeks to 13 months old demonstrate higher levels of interaction and cooperative play with an older adult (Jarrott & Smith, 2011), when compared to children not involved in intergenerational programs.
- Children in pre-school who are partnered with older volunteers show better socioemotional outcomes such as increased tolerance of others, increased empathy, less judgment, and greater social acceptance (Gilchrist, 2014; DeVore et al., 2016; Lux et al., 2020; George & Wagler, 2014).
- Studies also document improved vocabulary and language ability (Heydon, 2017; Detmer et al., 2020; Femia et al., 2008).



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

- A large body of research has focused on impacts on elementary school children. This area of research is rigorous with randomized control studies and comparative evaluations.
- Students who are partnered with an older volunteer show enhanced learning, reading comprehension and improvement in writing abilities (Gilchrist, 2014; Lee et al., 2012; Gattis et al., 2010, Isaki & Harmon, 2015; Galbraith et al., 2015).
- Evidence also reveals improvements in task orientation (DuBois et al., 2011), short-term memory (Kasseropoulou et al., 2020), problem solving skills and accountability (Gilchrist, 2014; Galbraith et al., 2015; Biggs & Knox, 2014), as well as patience, sensitivity, compassion, respect, and empathy (Gilchrist, 2014; Heyman & Gutheil, 2008; Galbraith et al., 2015; DeVore et al., 2016; Biggs & Knox, 2014).
- Their mental health is also impacted with reduced anxiety and sadness, reduced stress, and improved mood changes (Gilchrist, 2014; Gualano et al., 2018; Marcia et al., 2004; Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017).
- When the program has a physical component, children have better awareness of healthier diets and nutrition, are more physically active, engage less with "screen time" (smart phones, gadgets, and TV) and show improvements with overall well-being (Gilchrist, 2014; Martins et al., 2019; Schroeder et al., 2017; Raposa et al., 2019).



MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

- Students in middle school undergo rapid physical, socio-emotional, and moral development. When middle schoolers are partnered with an older adult, they show improvements in academic performance (DuBois et al., 2011; Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017), family dynamics (Gilchrist, 2014), improved peer relationships (Raposa et al., 2019, Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017), decreased depressive symptoms (Gilchrist, 2014; DuBois et al., 2011; Raposa et al., 2019), reduction in substance use (Raposa et al., 2019; DuBois et al., 2011; Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017) and healthier eating habits (DuBois et al., 2011).
- Children supported by a non-family caring older adult also gain relationship skills, such as reasoning, problem solving, accountability, conflict resolution, and decreased bullying and victimization (Gilchrist, 2014; Raposa et al., 2019; Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017; Biggs, 2014; DuBois et al., 2011).
- They also express clearer educational aspirations, occupational interests and goals (DuBois et al., 2011).



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

- Teenagers gain significant cognitive, emotional, social, and physical benefits because of their involvement in intergenerational programs.
- Teenagers experience improved sense of self and identity (Kim & Lee, 2017), self-confidence (DuBois et al., 2011; Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017), and purpose in life (Barnard, 2014; Knight et al., 2017).
- They are more likely to feel empowered to make changes in their schools and neighborhoods (Ohmer, 2016).
- Because of the socio-emotional exchange with an older adult, teenagers experience improvements with their emotions and mental health (Kim & Lee, 2017; Knight et al., 2017) as well as their physical health (Gilchrist, 2014; DuBois et al., 2011; Schroeder et al., 2017).



YOUNG ADULTS & COLLEGE STUDENTS

- The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a time when individuals focus on themselves to develop knowledge, skills, and self-understanding. They find where they belong in the world in terms of work and their personal relationships.
- Emerging adults who are partnered with older volunteers report improved civic engagement, entrepreneurial capabilities, and occupational skills (Milbourn et al., 2020).
- They also express self-confidence, efficacy, and sense of self (Pstross et al., 2017; Santini et al., 2020; Milbourn et al., 2020; Breck et al., 2018).
- Some even report they gain skills and knowledge in the realms of geriatrics and gerontology (Martins et al., 2019) - the medical, psychological, and social aspects of aging.
- Students also learned about recycling and other ways to improve the environment (D'Abundo et al., 2011).



PARENTS & ADULT CHILDREN

- Parents of children and youth report benefits of bringing younger and older populations together as well.
- Adult children report they are less concerned about their aged parents and feel better about their own civic engagement activities (Morrow-Howell et al., 2008).
- Family members report that older volunteers brought resources, information, and new skills back to the family; and that they had better relationships and communication with them (Morrow-Howell et al., 2008).



OLDER ADULTS

- Older volunteers in intergenerational programs report a stronger sense of community, decrease in social isolation, improvements in quality of life, greater life satisfaction, and a stronger sense of purpose, self-worth, self-esteem and empowerment (Giradeau & Bailly, 2019; Gilchrist, 2014; Gualano et al., 2019; Galbraith et al., 2015; Belgrave, 2011; Martins et al., 2019; Mahoney et al., 2020; Parkinson & Turner, 2019; Santini et al., 2018; Lux et al., 2020; Carcavilla et al., 2020; Santini et al., 2020; Breck, 2018; Knight et al., 2017; Andreoletti & Howard, 2018; Zhong et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Gruenewald et al., 2016; George, 2011; Macfarlane et al., 2019; June & Andreoletti, 2020).
- Research also shows that highly engaged volunteers, individuals who contribute more than 200 hours per year, experience improvements in cognitive functioning such as mental alertness, executive functioning, and even the structure of their brains show more volume and activity (Gilchrist, 2014; Gualano et al., 2019; Cichy & Smith, 2011; Martins et al., 2019; Zhong et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2008; Sakurai et al., 2016; Seeman et al., 2020; Carlson et al., 2009; Carlson et al., 2015).
- There is a reduction of falls and frailty, an increase in strength, balance, and walking speed, and instrumental activities of daily living, that is, day-to-day tasks, such as preparing food, housekeeping, doing laundry. They report positive attitudes towards youth and feel they have more agency to address neighborhood problems (Giradeau & Bailly, 2019; Gilchrist, 2014; Gualano et al., 2019; DeVore et al., 2016; Belgrave, 2011; Martins et al., 2019; Barnard, 2014; Breck et al., 2018; Montepare, 2018; Lee et al., 2020; Ohmer, 2016).
- Importantly, older volunteers report less social isolation, more social support, sense of connectedness and community (Giradeau & Bailly, 2019; Gilchrist, 2014; Pstross et al., 2017; Martins et al., 2019; Parkinson & Turner, 2019; Knight et al., 2017; Atkins et al., 2019; Teater, 2016; Zhong et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Nicholson & Shellman, 2013).
- Older volunteers learn new skills, leadership abilities and a sense of achievement (Giradeau & Bailly, 2019; Gilchrist, 2014; Pstross et al., 2017; Cichy & Smith, 2011; Ohmer, 2020; Santini et al., 2020; Leedahl et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Serrano, 2018; Varma et al., 2015).
- Because of these improvements in knowledge and skills, volunteering can be a pathway to additional paid-work opportunities in later life (Gonzales & Nowell, 2017).



AGES 100+

- Programs involving centenarians will likely become more popular
 as life expectancy continues to rise. A program in Chicago brings
 centenarians together with kindergarten students to count to 100
 together (Little Brothers, 2020). They kindle their curiosity by
 answering questions about growing up and growing older passing
 wisdom from one generation to the next.
- "MessAGING with Love" involves a series of interviews conducted by high school students to gain the advice and wisdom of *Kupuna* (elders), most of whom are centenarians, who live within a 1-mile radius of Iolani School in Hawai'i (Youth Service America, 2017). Taylor Hamai was a high school student when she started the program and has continued to study aging and opportunities for intergenerational learning (AARP, 2014).
- When young students have meaningful connections with grandparents and older neighbors or volunteers, they are likely to remain interested in aging and gerontology as they approach college and work.

COMMON OUTCOMES

The outcomes discussed above are uniquely tied to developmental milestones from infancy onward and there are common effects observed. For example, intergenerational programs have led the way to reduce ageism and age discrimination among young and old alike (Burnes et al., 2019; Gonzales et al., 2010; Rubin et al., 2015). Participants report improvements in mental, physical, and cognitive health that are unique to each life stage but are nonetheless common outcomes across the ages. Participants also report a greater sense of belonging and connectedness with others of different ages.

SOCIAL JUSTICE, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

A growing number of programs are focused on diversity, social justice, equity, and inclusion. 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 counterparts (McBride et al., 2011; Morrow-Howell et al., 2008). The Eisner Foundation has invested resources in the Los Angeles County to intergenerational programs that advance equity and justice through mentoring programs, literacy efforts, the performing arts, and medical volunteers (Eisner, 2020). Below are just a few examples of intergenerational programs focused diversity, social justice, equity, and inclusion that we found in the empirical literature. Some cultures may not use the language of "intergenerational programs," given that multigenerational and intergenerational relations are normative to their customs, values, and traditions. More programs and research are needed in these areas of equity, systemic racism, and cultural identity.

PROGRAM EXAMPLES

- Hope Meadows, a model for intentional intergenerational neighboring, provides support to families adopting children from foster care, most of whom are people of color, with older neighbors as mentors and socially constructed grandparents (Eheart, 2020; Hope Meadows, 2020).
- The Yukon-Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility in Galena, Alaska, is
 intentionally designed to ensure older residents are connected with family,
 friends, and youth, and are able to share histories, traditions, and tribal
 culture (U.S. Department for Housing and Urban Development, n.d.). 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 (Generations
 United & National Indian Child Welfare Association, 2020).
- Darrow and Belgrave (2012) document the positive outcomes of a music therapy program that brings students with intellectual disabilities and older adults with cognitive impairment together to sing music.
- An Intergenerational home sharing program aims to bolster economic security, health, and a sense of belonging between the older neighbors and graduate students with a focus on people of color, first generation students, and lowincome older adults (Gonzales et al. 2019).
- The International Association for Indigenous Aging and the Michigan Public Health Institute aims 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 (International Association for Indigenous Aging, 2020).

SPILL-OVER EFFECTS ON STAFF, CAREGIVERS, AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Administrators and staff report positive outcomes as well, such as improved mental health (Kamei et al., 2020), an increased sense of community (MacKenzie et al., 2011), and gaining a sense of energy and purpose during long and hard workdays (Heyman & Gutheil, 2008). Informal caregivers receive respite when a younger person cares for their loved one and they too report joy from the experience (Heyman & Gutheil, 2008; Guerrero, 2017). Family caregivers also report decreased social isolation (Heyman & Gutheil, 2008). Some studies have identified an increase in neighborhood trust, social cohesion and a sense of community (Ohmer, 2016; Whiteland, 2013; Murayama et al., 2019). 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 (Jarrott & Bruno; Generations United & The Eisner Foundation, 2018). Shared sites include after school programs held at a senior center or child care in a long-term care setting. Multiple generations also come together to make physical improvements to the community such as walking trails, benches, urban parks, green spaces, clearer signage, reduced litter, and recycling options (Kaplan et al., 2020).

NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

Participants do report some negative effects but these tend to be small in number and can be prevented with organizational policies and practices. For example, approximately 6% of older volunteers who tutored elementary school children were disappointed with administration, distressed to see social conditions and felt unable to help, and some were stressed (Morrow-Howell, et al. 2008). Some volunteers also reported conflict of time and scheduling with family activities.

A small number of older volunteers reported contracting the flu from children and teachers before the COVID pandemic (Morrow-Howell, 2008). Many intergenerational programs were paused due to COVID-19 and several intergenerational programs pivoted surprisingly quickly and efficiently to online platforms (Galucia et al., 2020). Online platforms became especially helpful because it expanded access to older volunteers with mobility issues, health, family, or geographic constraints (Cravens & Ellis, 2014). Other programs that delivered food and medicine to homebound individuals developed policies and practices to mitigate infection by following The Centers for Disease and Control (CDC) guidelines to wash hands, wear masks, practice physical distancing, and stay home when feeling ill. Adopting online formats and CDC practices enabled some older volunteers to continue in a COVID context (Galucia et al., 2020; Gordon et al., 2020).

These negative effects should be proactively considered and thoughtfully addressed when implementing programs (e.g. health and safety protocols including required vaccinations for participation).

COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Very few intergenerational programs have conducted a cost benefit analysis. One exception is Experience Corps (EC), a program model that aims to improve academic outcomes among at-risk children, while simultaneously improving the health conditions of older volunteers. A large and rigorous body of research has documented positive outcomes among older adults, children, teachers, and family (Carlson et al., 2015; Fried et al., 2013; Gattis et al., 2010; Hong & Morrow-Howell, 2010; Lee et al., 2010; Morrow-Howell et al., 2008). Experimental and quasiexperimental research has found that older members in EC experienced decreased frailty and falls; fewer depressive symptoms; enhanced memory, strength, balance, walking speed, cortical plasticity, and executive functioning; increased social and psychological engagement; and improved mobility and instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) (Carlson et al., 2015; Fried et al., 2013; Hong & Morrow-Howell, 2010). A randomized field trial of elementary school children offers evidence that the intervention contributed to improvements in students' improved comprehension and reading skills (Gattis et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2010), both of which are key predictors to attending and completing college. Because children in the EC programs have not yet entered or completed high school or college, Frick et al. (2004) apply conservative assumptions to a simulated cost-effective analyses. Their conclusion: because of the gains in academic performance and health, EC is likely cost effective.

There is emerging evidence that shared site intergenerational programs are cost effective (Jarrott et al., 2008). Services that are concurrently provided to younger and older persons in a single facility, with the same personnel and under the same roof, can be more cost effective rather than having two separate buildings and two full personnel to deliver similar services (e.g., meals, social engagement, education).

RESOURCES

Connecting Generations in Senior Housing:
A Program Implementation Toolkit

Tried and True: A Guide to Successful Intergenerational Activities at Shared Site Programs

I Need You, You Need Me:

The Young, the Old, and What
We Can Achieve Together

All in Together:

Creating Spaces Where
Young and Old Thrive

The Intergenerational Activities Sourcebook

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.

TARGETED OUTCOMES BY INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

OUTCOMES	YOUNGER GENERATIONS	OLDER GENERATIONS
Academic Achievement		
Socio-emotional learning	•	
Reading or math comprehension	•	
Ability to self-regulate	•	
Student classroom behaviors	•	
High school graduation	•	
College attendance/completion	•	
Patient-centered health service delivery	•	
Prevention of Substance Use (alcohol, drugs, tobacco)	•	•
Physical Health		
Prevention/reduction of obesity	•	•
Increased physical activity	•	•
Chronic conditions (e.g., hypertension)		•
Prevention/reduction in falls		•
Cognitive Health		
Executive functioning	•	•
Memory	•	•
Verbal learning	•	•
Neuroplasticity		•
Psychological Health		
Self-esteem	•	•
Self-confidence	•	•
Locus of control		•
Social Isolation		•
Generativity		•
Anxiety	•	•
Reduced fear/anxiety with regard to aging	•	•
Life Satisfaction		•
Hopelessness		•
Depression		•
Social Wellbeing		
Civic Engagement	•	•
Attitudes: Openness towards diversity (age, race, disability)	•	•
Attitudes towards aging	•	•
Sense of community	•	•
Increased skills in empathy and communication	•	•
Increased social activities		•
Overall Health and Quality of Life		•
Housing Security		•
Nature (e.g., recycling, gardening)	•	•

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Generations United gratefully acknowledges RRF Foundation for Aging for its support of this document. Very special thank you to Dr. Ernest Gonzales, Associate Professor at New York University, Silver School of Social Work, and his colleagues Rachel Kruchten and Cliff Whetung for researching and writing this document. We also extend our gratitude to Dr. Matt Kaplan, Penn State University, Dr. Lori Marks, Link Generations, and Dr. Anita Rogers, Generations United Senior Fellow for their thoughtful review and providing invaluable feedback. Thank you also to Generations United staff Emily Patrick, Sheri Steinig, and Donna Butts for guiding this project. And a very special thank you to all the researchers and practitioners working to document and evaluate their great intergenerational work; we could not do this without you.

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Design & Layout: Six Half Dozen

This document was supported by a grant from RRF Foundation for Aging.



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The mission of Generations United is to improve the lives of children, youth and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies and programs for the enduring benefit of all. For over three decades, Generations United has catalyzed cooperation and collaboration among generations, evoking the vibrancy, energy and sheer productivity that result when people of all ages come together. We believe that we can only be successful in the face of our complex future if age diversity is regarded as a national asset and fully leveraged. To learn more about Generations United, please visit www.gu.org.



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During the last 42 years, RRF Foundation for Aging, formerly The Retirement Research Foundation, has awarded nearly 5,000 grants worth almost \$250 million—all dedicated to improving the quality of life for all of us as we age. RRF's grantmaking focuses on four priority areas—caregiving, economic security in later life, housing, and social and intergenerational connectedness. These issues are fundamental to allowing all of us to age where we want to and how we want to. RRF was one of the first private foundations to focus exclusively on aging issues, and continues to support a range of advocacy, direct service, research, training, and organizational capacity building efforts, both in the Chicago area and nationally. To learn more about RRF Foundation for Aging, please visit www.rrf.org.

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For further information, please contact:

Generations United Phone: (202) 289-3979 Email: gu@gu.org www.gu.org

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