

## Linking Generations for a Stronger Community

America's rapidly increasing population of older adults represents a vast and under-tapped resource. Their time, energy, and financial resources can make a substantial difference in improving the lives of children and youth. By investing in programs that connect people on both ends of the age spectrum, grantmakers can create opportunities for the young and the old to use their skills and experiences to help each other as well as their communities.

Today, there are more than 36.7 million Americans over 65 years old, representing 12.4 percent of the population. By 2020, one in six Americans—16.6 percent—will be over the age of 65. Many of these older adults are seeking ways to remain active in their communities and find new meaning in their lives. Others need assistance as they deal with the challenges of aging. Young people not only benefit from older adults' volunteer time, but also can provide assistance to older people, or partner with them to address community problems.

In all of these cases, grantmakers can play a critical role by encouraging and supporting innovative intergenerational strategies that connect children and youth with older residents in ways that benefit all.

### Challenges To Be Addressed

People in our communities are usually segregated by age. Children spend their days in schools or childcare centers, while

many older adults live or socialize in age-isolated facilities or programs. This can create unhealthy isolation for older adults and prevent young people from understanding the full cycle of life or experiencing the wisdom of people in their 60s, 70s, 80s and beyond.

A significant number of both children and older adults face serious life challenges. Witness these statistics:

#### Children and Youth

- About 40% of children (29.2 million) in the United States live in low-income families.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2001, over 40% of children ages 3–5 who were not yet in kindergarten were not read to daily by a family member.<sup>2</sup>
- Only 43% of young adults have non-parent adults they can turn to for support and advice.<sup>3</sup>
- Six million middle and high school students are at risk of dropping out of school.<sup>4</sup>

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*“Somehow, we have to get older people back close to growing children if we are to restore a sense of community, a knowledge of the past, and a sense of the future.”*

*Margaret Mead*

<sup>1</sup>Basic Facts About Low-Income Children: Birth to Age 18, January 2006, National Center for Children in Poverty.

<sup>2</sup>America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2005, July 2005, The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.

<sup>3</sup>Percentages of 6th- to 12th-Grade Youth Experiencing Each Asset, (retrieved February 23, 2006) [www.search-institute.org/research/assets/assetreqs.html](http://www.search-institute.org/research/assets/assetreqs.html)

<sup>4</sup>U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Condition of Education*, 2002

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### Older Adults

- About 3.6 million older people (10.2%) were below the poverty level in 2003.<sup>5</sup>
- Approximately 19% of men and 40% of women over 65 live alone.<sup>5</sup>
- More than 2.4 million grandparents are responsible for raising their grandchildren who live with them.<sup>6</sup>

### Vitality For All

Intergenerational programs can address these problems while creating vibrant communities. Evaluations of these programs consistently find that participating children and young people receive extra love and attention, as well as guidance and support from a caring adult. Children and youth gain self-esteem and self-worth, demonstrate improved behavior, show increased involvement in schoolwork, and develop an appreciation for older people.

Similar research has found that older people working with children and youth feel connected, valued, and invested in the future. The older adults describe enhanced life satisfaction, less isolation, more fulfillment and sense of meaning, new skills learned, and new insights about young people.

In addition, families involved in intergenerational programs are more connected to dependable support systems and are more likely to stay together. Communities benefit when neighbors know each other; residents are aware of and appreciate cultural heritage, traditions, and histories; and local organizations are collaborating with each other.

### Intergenerational Programs In Action

Almost any service, program, or space can be enhanced by using an intergenerational approach—from education, to the environment, to health and wellness, to workforce development. There are four basic types of intergenerational programs:

<sup>5</sup>A Profile of Older Americans: 2004, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging.

<sup>6</sup>Grandparents Living with Grandchildren: 2000 – Census 2000 Brief, October 2003, U.S. Census Bureau

### 1.) Older Adults Serving Young People

There is a wide range of programs in which older people can provide critical support to young people and their families. Older adults can offer children and youth tutoring, mentoring, nurturing, or recreation activities, or supplement under-funded school programs like art, music, and physical education. They can “be there” for children in families addressing issues surrounding welfare to work, child abuse, or alcohol and substance abuse. In addition, involving older adults with children and youth can generate greater community support for school and youth programs.

Grantmakers can foster the involvement of older adults in helping young people by supporting local programs like these:

- **Experience Corps**, a national initiative in 14 cities, mobilizes older adults to devote 15 hours per week to enhancing the reading and writing skills of students in elementary schools. Older volunteers receive training and support, work in teams, and receive stipends. ([www.experiencecorps.org](http://www.experiencecorps.org))
- **San Pasqual Academy** in Escondido, California, a residential facility for foster youth, engages older adults as mentors. These elders teach independent living skills and help youth transition out of foster care. ([www.sanpasqualacademy.org](http://www.sanpasqualacademy.org))
- **Family Friends** enlists older volunteers in 35 communities to work with children with disabilities or chronic illnesses in their homes and to provide respite for the children's families. ([www.family-friends.org](http://www.family-friends.org))
- **Intergenerational Bridges** in Montgomery County, Maryland, is an after-school mentoring program that pairs newly arrived immigrant children with supportive older adult mentors to assist with the transition to U.S. culture, language acquisition, and personal development, as well as to be friendly, encouraging listeners. ([www.interages.com/programs/bridges.php](http://www.interages.com/programs/bridges.php))

### 2.) Young People Serving Older Adults

Young people can provide an array of helpful services to older people including teaching the use of computers, visiting those who are isolated, and helping with home chores. Reports show that students who volunteer do better in school than

*Just 37% of kids say they have caring neighbors.<sup>3</sup>*



Photograph by L. Roger Turner.

their counterparts who don't volunteer. The young people develop a sense of belonging in their community, and through serving older people, they often gain an appreciation for the wholeness of life and learn that growing old is normal and natural.

Funders may wish to replicate in their own communities programs like the following:

- **The Intergenerational Work/Study Program** coordinated by the New York City Department on Aging places high school students as workers in a wide range of programs serving older people. Students can receive credits in exchange for service. Begun with private funding, this program is now supported with public funds. ([www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/html/volunteering/intergenerational.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/html/volunteering/intergenerational.shtml)).
- **Computer Pals** in Seattle, Washington empowers middle school and high school students as tutors who help older people connect to technology.
- **Project SHINE (Students Helping in the Naturalization of Elders)** recruits and trains students at 22 colleges and universities across the country to teach English to older immigrants and refugees, prepare them to become U.S. citizens, and help them access health care services. ([www.projectshine.org](http://www.projectshine.org))
- **The ManaTEEN Club** in Bradenton, Florida, runs the Home Safety for Seniors program, which involves teens in evaluating older adults' needs and installing in their homes such items as bathtub rails, deadbolts, and smoke alarms.

### 3.) Shared Site Intergenerational Programs

Intergenerational shared sites are programs where children, youth, and older adults receive services at the same site. Both generations interact during regularly scheduled activities, as well as through informal encounters. While the structures vary, these programs generally have two components; one that serves older adults and another that serves children or youth. Because of the close proximity of the two programs, sharing a site offers increased opportunities for intergenerational interaction and relationship building. Shared site programs also offer the unique opportunity to share resources such as a kitchen, office equipment, and staff members across programs.

Grantmakers can foster collaboration and help create programs like these:

- **Grandma's House** is an intergenerational care facility in Orlando, Florida, where older adults in need of long-term care and children with rehabilitative and chronic needs receive collective care. ([www.grandmasgang.com](http://www.grandmasgang.com))
- **Outside Boston**, older learners from **Lasell Village**, a continuing care retirement community on the campus of Lasell College, participate side-by-side with traditional college-age students in intergenerational classes and other campus activities. ([www.lasell.edu/path/village.asp](http://www.lasell.edu/path/village.asp))
- **ONEgeneration** in Van Nuys, California, offers co-located day services for both frail older people and young children. All staff members are cross-trained, and there are at least eight intergenerational activities each day. ([www.onegeneration.org](http://www.onegeneration.org))
- **The Rocori Senior Center** in Cold Spring, Minnesota, is located in the Rocori Middle School. Senior center members sing in the school choir and are living history classroom speakers. They also work in the media center and chaperone dances. ([www.rocori.k12.mn.us/CommunityEd/scinfo1.htm](http://www.rocori.k12.mn.us/CommunityEd/scinfo1.htm))

### 4.) Young and Old Serving the Community Together

Working together, young people and older adults gain appreciation and respect for one another while benefiting their community.

Funders make it possible for the young and old to work together in programs like these:

- **Habitat Intergenerational Program (HIP)** in Belmont, Massachusetts, brings together older adults and youth to provide environmental community services including: removing invasive species, helping to rejuvenate a pond, restoring walking trails, and using native plants to create wildlife habitat areas at schools. ([www.massaudubon.org/Nature\\_Connection/Sanctuaries/Habitat/index.php](http://www.massaudubon.org/Nature_Connection/Sanctuaries/Habitat/index.php))
- **Full Circle Theater**, a troupe of younger and older improvisational actors in Philadelphia, provides interactive workshops on conflict resolution, men's and women's health, AIDS education and prevention, violence prevention, and avoiding the use of tobacco. ([www.fullcircletheater.org](http://www.fullcircletheater.org))
- **Arizona Intergenerational Advocacy Partnership** brings a group of seniors and students together annually for a day and a half to study issues of mutual interest and

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## NATIONAL RESOURCES

### Generations United

for more background or information on any program in this briefing  
[www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org) or contact  
202-289-3979 or [gu@gu.org](mailto:gu@gu.org)

### Temple University Center for Intergenerational Learning

for tools, training, model programs  
[www.templecil.org](http://www.templecil.org)

### Experience Corps

for tutoring and mentoring programs  
[www.experiencecorps.org](http://www.experiencecorps.org)

### Penn State University Intergenerational Programs and Aging

for activities, curriculum, and research  
<http://agexted.cas.psu.edu/FCS/mk/>



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*work in teams to find ways to create change within the community. Recommendations and advocacy strategies from the conferences are presented to the Governor's Advisory Council on Aging and media outlets. ([www.aaaphx.org/main/asmata.asp](http://www.aaaphx.org/main/asmata.asp))*

### **Plan and Implement Carefully**

Although intergenerational programs can reap incredible rewards for communities, they are not easy. The majority of youth-serving organizations do not have a thorough understanding of older people, and most organizations working with older adults are unaware of the concerns of today's schools, childcare programs, and youth-serving organizations. Careful preparation and planning are key to successful intergenerational programs. Funders can assure success for all involved by supporting intergenerational initiatives with the qualities that research and experience indicate yield positive results.

### **Qualities of Successful Intergenerational Programs**

- Clear and meaningful roles for all participants.
- Opportunities for participants to build on existing skills or learn new ones.
- Meaningful contact between participants that intentionally fosters relationships.
- Relevant activities that are developmentally appropriate and meet real community needs.
- Opportunities for participants to both give to and receive from other generations.
- Early training and orientation for youth and older adults, both separate and together.
- Staff and administrative buy-in of all partnering organizations.
- Opportunities for feedback, reflection, and evaluation.
- Celebration of accomplishments and acknowledgement of the contributions made by all.

The EngAGEment Initiative, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, is a pilot program to introduce new funders to aging through a partnership between GIA and Regional Associations of Grantmakers.

*“How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because someday in your life you will have been all of these.”*

*George Washington Carver*

## **Getting Started In Your Community**

- Learn of intergenerational initiatives in your community by contacting Generations United, the United Way, your schools, and local large multi-service organizations.
- Obtain your United Way's community needs assessment and identify intergenerational strategies that could address some of the needs.
- Ask children and youth-serving organizations you fund how they involve older adults and how they might engage them in the future to build the capacity of their programs.
- Fund training sessions for grantees or the larger community on developing intergenerational strategies.
- Support collaboration between organizations serving children and youth and those serving older people such as senior housing and retirement communities, AARP, senior centers, RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program), and Foster Grandparents.
- Create an intergenerational project fund in partnership with other funders, that incorporates the qualities of successful intergenerational programs.
- Include intergenerational language in your grant guidelines or requests for proposals.

### **Credits**

Published by Grantmakers In Aging in 2006  
Authored by Sheri Steinig, Generations United  
Edited by John Beilenson, Strategic Communications & Planning  
Designed by Kristi Kuder, Hold That Thought! Co.  
Coordinated by The Philanthropic Group

### **Contact GIA**

Grantmakers In Aging  
7333 Paragon Road, Suite 220  
Dayton, OH 45459  
Tel: 937-435-3156  
Fax: 937-435-3733  
E-mail: [info@GIAging.org](mailto:info@GIAging.org)  
[www.GIAging.org](http://www.GIAging.org)