

INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS:

Drawing on the Resources of Youth and Elderly

When looking across the generations, children and the elderly are often viewed as two populations especially in need of services whose needs have little in common. The resources they could offer to each other and the community are often overlooked. Intergenerational programs recognize the needs of both children and the elderly and the opportunity to develop untapped resources within each generation. Some intergenerational programs provide direct services across two or more age groups, while others develop and use the resources of the generations for the community's benefit.

Intergenerational programs generally take one of four forms. Some programs recruit older adults to work with young people, providing positive role models while serving as mentors, tutors, or caregivers. These programs often focus specifically on at-risk youth, children with disabilities, or minority youth. Other programs train children to serve older adults — particularly the frail elderly— by providing companionship or assistance in daily living activities. A third type of program brings youth and elders together to serve others of either generation or, in some cases, the entire community. Finally, the last set of programs serve youth and the elderly in the same facilities. The staff are cross-trained in caring for both generations and developing shared programming.

THE GROWTH IN INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

Intergenerational programs emerged in the 1960s in response to increasing numbers of children being raised without the benefits of ongoing interactions with their grandparents. Developers of the first intergenerational programs, including the federally-funded *Foster Grandparents* program and the *Retired Senior Volunteer Program*, viewed the elderly as untapped resources. They trained elderly volunteers to work in schools with children having academic difficulties. During the 1970s, the intergenerational concept spread to other settings. These included health care, where the elderly were trained to work in hospitals and social service agencies with severely disabled children. Children were also recruited in programs to address the needs of the elderly. These needs might include isolation, loneliness, and boredom, which all contribute to depression among the elderly. Eventually intergenerational programs grew more complex and also began to address other concerns such as changes in family structure, drug abuse, and violence in the home.

WHAT FOUNDATIONS ARE DOING

Foundations fund a variety of intergenerational programs, ranging from the support of intergenerational mentoring

programs to the development of initiatives to gather data on the effects of intergenerational programs on health. The following highlights some of the work in this area.

Direct services for at-risk children and the frail or home-bound elderly:

- In 1995, the Archstone Foundation developed an initiative entitled "Bridging the GAP," to encourage the development of model programs to bring youths and elders together. Two demonstration projects were developed, *The Multi-Cultural Intergenerational Leadership Training Project (MILTP)* and *Bridging the Age Gap (BAG)*. With a grant of \$163,563, the MILTP included leadership training, teens working one-on-one with seniors, intergenerational summer day camp, and community leadership training. With \$111,196, BAG encouraged teenagers to join senior volunteers in community service, including serving the frail elderly. Preliminary evaluation results suggest that teens in both programs had positive, measurable changes in their attitudes, confidence, and decision-making, and the senior volunteers demonstrated improved opinions of teenagers. Archstone also supports one program that trains high school students to document the life stories of disabled elders, and another program that partners children with long-term care residents for weekly visits.
- The Birmingham Foundation provided \$32,000 to Generations Together of the University of Pittsburgh to support a mentoring program which pairs older adult volunteers with families of children with serious mental or developmental disabilities in a South Pittsburgh neighborhood.
- The Columbus Foundation has supported the Heritage Day Health Center in a number of ways over the past several years. Most recently with a grant for renovations of their intergenerational facility which houses both an adult day care program for frail elders and a day care facility for children in homeless shelters, or transitional housing.
- The New York Community Trust made a grant to Casita Maria for \$25,000 to add an intergenerational component to its program serving elderly, Hispanic residents of East Harlem. The program trains young volunteers to assist senior volunteers in providing services to frail elders who need help with housekeeping and shopping.
- The Peninsula Community Foundation supports *Linkages*, a program run by the Stanford Faculty Development Program, which addresses loneliness and isolation among the elderly in assisted living facilities by teaching them how to use e-mail and the Internet. Access to the Internet allows them to keep in better contact with younger members of their family. In addition, *Linkages* will be working with the Boy Scouts and local church groups to pair children with the elderly to design intergenerational web pages.

Health promotion:

- In 1995, the Foundation for Seacoast Health made a grant to support a collaborative intergenerational health promotion program within the York, Maine School System. The program has since been turned over to the school system.
- The Kansas Health Foundation has made a number of grants to intergenerational programs over the last few years including \$100,000 to the Kansas State University Research and Extension Office to encourage intergenerational programming among the 129 Personal Actions To Health (PATH) coalitions. The PATH coalitions consist of older adults who are engaged in improving their own health and the health of other older adults in their communities.
- In conjunction with the Hawaii Department of Health, The Executive Office on Aging, the Keiki Booster Coalition, media, Maui Community College and the HMSA health plan, the HMSA Foundation in Hawaii provides support of an intergenerational immunization project. By having the elderly share first-hand knowledge of diseases such as polio and the flu, the program hopes to increase immunizations among younger members of their families. The program also expects the involvement of seniors to motivate them to receive their own immunizations.

Research:

- The Archstone Foundation and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provided a joint grant of \$98,535 to the University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health for “Grandparents: America’s Hidden Child Care System?” — a collaborative project to study problems associated with families in which grandparents are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren.

GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

In addition to programs that bring the young and the elderly together by design are the growing number of grandparents who have become the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. Approximately four million children currently live in a household headed by a grandparent, with 1.5 million having the grandparent as the primary caregiver.

The re-introduction of children into the lives of these grandparents poses a number of challenges. For low income grandparents, the addition of children can be an unexpected financial burden. Their incomes may not support the additional expenses of raising children. Full-time parenting can also be an emotional burden on grandparents. Often they have had to assume this parental role because of the parents’ abandonment, child abuse, death, illness, incarceration, neglect, substance abuse, or teenage pregnancy.

Seniors are more likely to suffer from one or more chronic illnesses and may not have the stamina to care for both their grandchildren and themselves. When faced with financial, emotional, and physical difficulties, some may struggle with a lack of patience to deal with their grandchildren’s problems. This loss of patience may lead to abuse and neglect. Because of these challenges, programs have been developed to support grandparents raising grandchildren.

For example:

- The Columbus Foundation made a grant of \$25,000 to the Light Center, Inc. for an empowerment program for grandparents raising grandchildren. The grant funds a weekly program of support, training, resources, and referral services. It also helps grandparents connect with others in the same situation.
- Generations United received \$105,000 from The Retirement Research Foundation to support its *Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Grandchildren Program*. The program includes: 1) a survey of practitioners on the concerns of the elderly raising their grandchildren 2) a workplace survey to find practices that support grandparents raising grandchildren, 3) the education of federal policymakers about the needs and concerns of these grandparents, and 4) the tracking of state and local public policy initiatives addressing their concerns. Generations United is also working with the Brookdale Foundation to replicate its *Relatives As Parents Program*.
- The New York Community Trust is supporting Fordham University’s Graduate School of Social Service with \$54,000 to collaborate with the Harlem Interfaith Counseling Service to develop the *Grandparent Empowerment Movement*. The program trains grandparents to be peer leaders. The curriculum will focus on coping skills, child development, AIDS, drug addiction, entitlement procedures, and group leadership skills. Grandparents will complete a seven week-course and then train others.

RESOURCES**SELECTED PUBLICATIONS**

American Association of Retired Persons
Intergenerational Projects Idea Book.
(Washington, DC: 1993)

Generations United
Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children: An Intergenerational Agenda.
(Washington, DC: 1998)

Scannell, T. and A. Roberts
Young and Old Serving Together: Meeting Community Needs Through Intergenerational Partnerships.
Generations United.
(Washington, DC: 1994).

Wilson, J. O.
Connecting the Generations: A Guide to Intergenerational Resources
Generations Together: An Intergenerational Studies Program.
(Pittsburgh, PA: Undated).

SELECTED ORGANIZATIONS

AARP Grandparent Information Center
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Center on Aging, Health & Humanities
The George Washington University
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Center for Intergenerational Learning
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Generations Together
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