

Intergenerational Relationships in North America

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Intergenerational Relationships

Connections between individuals or groups located at different points across the life cycle

- different generations of a family
- older & younger members of larger society



Key Areas of Focus

- Identify factors impacting intergenerational relationships (i.e., emphasis on relationships with older adults)
- Outline several types of intergenerational programs
- Delineate benefits of promoting intergenerational interaction
- Offer some examples of effective intergenerational programs
- Provide resources for developing quality intergenerational programming
- Propose some recommendations



Factors Impacting Intergenerational Relationships

Family size and composition

- Fertility changes: couples produce fewer children
- Increase in life expectancy

Living arrangements

- With advancing age, proportion of those living alone increases in U.S./Canada
- Co-residence on same property is more popular in Mexico unless children migrate

Outside family, life in North America is often age-segregated

- Daycare/school, healthcare, religious assemblies
- Older adults engage in age-based classes/activities, clubs, meal groups

Decline in trust and neighborliness

- Less likely to socialize with neighbors
- “Bridging networks” are “in crisis” (O-Rourke)

COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted intergenerational relationships

- Social distancing/shelter in place



Intergenerational Programs

- “Programs, policies, and practices that increase cooperation, interaction, and exchange between people of different generations, allowing them to share their talents and resources, and support each other in relationships that benefit both the individuals and their community”
- “Foster ongoing, mutually beneficial, planned activities designed to achieve specific program goals and promote greater understanding and respect between generations” (Generations United)



Types of Intergenerational Programs

- Older adults providing service to children, youth, and families in the community
- Children and youth serve older adults
- Multiple generations joining forces to serve their community
- Children, youth and older adults interact due to sharing physical space or building



Benefits of Intergenerational Programs

- Older adults: less social isolation and loneliness, improved mood and self-esteem, enhanced sense of purpose, greater skills and knowledge, and improvements in cognitive, physical, and mental health. Receive hands-on assistance, make new friends, increase their comfort with younger generations, enhance their sense of generativity or investment in the well-being of future generations, and increased sense of connectedness and community.
- Young participants: increased knowledge, gain confidence in themselves, and enhance their social skills. Receive emotional support, improve school performance and attendance, learn to make better choices that guide them toward success, learn about the past, enjoy making new friends, and improve attitudes toward aging.
- Communities: greater cohesion and inclusivity, increase in civic engagement and volunteerism, revitalization and beautification of public places, cost saving, reduction in parental and caregiver stress, and reductions in ageism and negative stereotypes.



Sample Intergenerational Programs

- Canada
 - Music-based intergenerational program
 - Match elementary schools with long-term care communities
 - Canada HomeShare
 - Provides safe, affordable housing to students and assistance and income for older adults
- Mexico
 - Mexico Nosotros entre libros
 - Volunteers read aloud to students each day, increasing literacy rates
 - Global Intergenerational Week
 - Events promote intergenerational awareness and activities (e.g., board games, university students learn new skills like knitting)



Sample Intergenerational Programs (contd.)

- United States
 - Family Listening/Circle Program
 - Elementary children in 3 tribal communities in New Mexico—engage in community visioning, identify community challenges and organize community action projects
 - Dance for Health
 - Increase physical activity in West Philadelphia
 - Grandpas United
 - Mentorship initiative; grandpas work with local schools and youth courts
 - Intergenerational Day Centers
 - Elder care and childcare services are provided in same location
 - Elder Service Partner Program at Messiah University
 - Sociology of Aging students paired with an older adult with whom they engage in service for the entire semester



Developing and Assessing High Quality Programs

- Generations United recognition for outstanding IG programs
 - Programs of Merit: excel beyond minimum standard of effectiveness
 - Program of Distinction: meet higher standard of innovation, leadership, best practices
- Assessment techniques: interviews, direct observation, attitudinal surveys, cognitive assessments, etc.
 - Intergenerational Observation Scale (Jarrott et al., 2019)
- Comprehensive intergenerational evaluation toolkit (Generations United)
 - Children's Attitudes Toward Elders Scale
 - Elder-Child Interaction Analysis
 - Brief Sense of Community scale
 - Best Practices Checklist



Recommendations

- Encourage local governments and community groups, fraternal organizations, schools, retirement communities, and places of worship to adopt “age integration as a core value.”
- Promote intergenerational initiatives in local communities. Identify community needs and consider ways in which people of all ages might unite to meet the challenge.
- Foster neighborliness and a greater sense of community by developing meaningful community rituals and traditions that people of all ages can enjoy.
- Support greater opportunities for cogeneration, uniting older and young generations in solving problems and bridging divides.
- Facilitate partnerships between intergenerational practitioners and researcher/evaluators to measure participant outcomes and program effectiveness.

