

FOUR BENEFITS OF INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMMING

By Ashlee Cordell 12/15/2021

With the widespread independent lifestyle of many American families, older loved ones are becoming increasingly separated from their families and other support systems. The COVID-19 pandemic has only increased these challenges. An estimated [27 percent of older adults age 60 years and older live alone in the U.S.](#) and would benefit greatly from social interaction.

According to [Generations United](#), a national organization that focuses on intergenerational collaboration, two in three Americans would like to spend more time with others outside of their age group. Intergenerational programming brings older and younger generations together and has a positive effect on everyone involved. Four major benefits for older adults and communities at large include:

- **Greater sense of connection.** Intergenerational programming [lowers issues of social isolation and loneliness](#) by allowing different generations to come together, learn from one another and form new friendships. The relationships formed between generations also improves communities by combating negative stereotypes and ageism.
- **Increased feeling of purpose.** Intergenerational programming provides new social roles for everyone involved. Each individual, younger and older, is able to serve as a teacher, a mentor or even a grandparent/grandchild to someone who may not otherwise have that tie. These relationships also enhance confidence, self-worth and overall well-being.
- **More learning opportunities.** Intergenerational programming uniquely allows for generations to share stories with each other and pass on traditions. These shared stories and traditions allow for better understanding of lifestyles both similar to and different from one's own.
- **Better mood.** Intergenerational programming creates meaningful connections between individuals that can positively impact mood.

The best way for a loved one to experience these benefits is to simply spend time with others of a different generation. Fortunately, there are a variety of activities that people of all ages can do together. Here are examples of well-known intergenerational programs:

- **Companionship Programs.** Friendly Visitor and Senior Companion Programs across the U.S. use volunteers to provide companionship and support to lonely or isolated older adults. Participants in these programs interact with an older adult friend in-person or over the phone. They offer a wide variety of support, such as assistance with light household chores, general technology support/education, shopping, chatting over coffee or a meal and so on. Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging, for example, offers both the [Senior Companion program](#) and has [opportunities for volunteers](#) to run errands for and make wellness calls to older adults in the greater Cleveland area.
- **Foster Grandparent Program.** The Foster Grandparent Program, offered through AmeriCorps, connects older adults with youth to serve as role models, mentors, tutors and friends to help guide younger generations to a successful future.
- **The Buddy Program.** [The Buddy Program](#), developed by a retired Northwestern physician who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, pairs first-year medical students

with individuals living with early-stage dementia and provides mentorship and social engagement opportunities for both parties over the course of an academic year.

- **Opening Minds through Art (OMA).** [OMA](#), developed at Miami University Scripps Gerontology Center, is an intergenerational art-making program for individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Its abstract, choice-driven nature provides opportunities for creative self-expression and social engagement.

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If a loved one has limited access to nearby family and friends they can see on a regular basis, places like local schools, senior centers and community centers are other great places to find intergenerational activities. Long-term care facilities may also offer intergenerational programs for their residents as well. Check out the [Intergenerational Program Database](#) on the Generations United website for more information on intergenerational programs across the United States. In this directory, there are a variety of both one-time and reoccurring programs.