

What are the benefits of Intergenerational Programs?

By The Goodman Group

We've probably all heard about the challenges of the so-called "**generation gap**," which tends to emphasize the differences between and among different age groups. By contrast, there's a whole new movement that recognizes the value and importance of bringing generations together through intergenerational programs. How does that work, and how well does it work? Here are just six of the many benefits these programs are bringing to participants of all ages!

1. **Energize older adults and give a sense of purpose, especially when they're sharing their experience and skills.** Working with children can even have health benefits for the elderly. According to **Generations Unlimited**, older adults who regularly volunteer with children **burn more calories per week, experience fewer falls, and do better on memory tests than their peers.**
2. **Reduces a sense of isolation for older adults and potentially relieves or lessens depression.** We know that **loneliness and depression** are a big concern for today's seniors. By providing a venue for seniors to interact with younger generations, they afford the opportunity to build lasting relationships. That's what happened at our **Buddy Program in Billings, Montana**. As one of the participating teachers put it, "Originally, the program began as a way to share what was happening in the younger generation and show how technology is now helping today's students learn with seniors. But it actually grew from this original idea. Friendships were built!"
3. **All generations learn new skills.** Older adults can learn new technologies from the younger generation and youth can benefit from mature mentoring from their wise friends. **In an earlier blog**, we talked about how "intergenerational mentoring works to break down the generational barriers between today's youth and seniors. Through spending time and participating in activities together, some of the benefits for students and seniors can be a higher sense of purpose and self-esteem. It is truly a mutually beneficial learning experience."
4. **Helps younger generations understand aging and face their own more positively.** One example is The Learning Center at **The Palms of Largo**, a community managed by The Goodman Group in Florida. Here kids and their "grandfriends" interact daily. The children see residents using assistive devices like walkers and wheelchairs on a regular basis, dispelling any concerns or fears they may have. It also "gives teachers the opportunity to explain what those devices are for and how they help. It lets the kids know that there's nothing to be afraid of or uncomfortable about aging or disabilities. It also reassures them that their older friends are being well cared for and loved." **Read more about The Learning Center here.**

5. **Dispels negative stereotypes and encourages bonding among generations.** Speaking about an intergenerational theater production, **one executive director told the story** of how someone with dementia became very close with two shy seven-year-old twin girls. “When they got paired with this resident, they immediately bonded with her. She became a grandma to them and they would not let go of her leg. She was on cloud nine.”

6. **For children and youth who don’t have grandparents or other seniors in their families, engaging with older adults fills a social gap.** According to **Forbes**, intergenerational programs may be “our kids’ best chance to learn from a caring older adult who not only has 'been there and done that,' but has a biological and instinctive need to give the next generation the best opportunity to succeed.”

These are just a few of the benefits that intergenerational programs and events offer. If you’re interested in learning more, you can find many resources at **Generations United**.