



## *Family Support and Intergenerational Programming*

Many of the basic principles of family support—that all families can benefit from formal and informal supports, all family members are valued, families are resources to their own family members, and programs should build upon community strengths—call for an intergenerational focus in all family support programs and policies. But several issues, including funding limitations, have kept efforts to serve seniors separate from childhood and youth programs and from programs that help prevent child abuse and neglect. In a time of diminishing resources for social supports, some programs and policymakers feel they must choose between meeting the needs of families with young children and meeting the needs of seniors and their families.

Without intergenerational programs, however, young people often go without exposure to positive adult role models, and older adults often feel undervalued and have physical and material needs that go unmet. And caregivers—both adults caring for their older relatives and grandparents raising grandchildren—and their families are at increased risk of abuse and neglect when support is not available. Communities are finding that they can't afford not to integrate multiple generations in family support programs.

Family support programs can provide support for those caring for seniors and for grandparents raising grandchildren, seniors caring for or mentoring young people, youths serving seniors, and adults and youth working together to serve another group and/or addressing a social need.

### **Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**

Currently, 3.9 million children are being cared for in 2.5 million grandparent-headed households. There are 1.3 million children being raised solely by their grandparents, and many of these children are under six years old. Their grandparents are serving as a safety net to keep children out of the foster care system. Grandparents are raising

grandchildren due to substance abuse, death of a parent, child abuse and neglect, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, family violence, or incarceration. These grandparents are confronted with obstacles and challenges including no health insurance for the children, lack of affordable or appropriate housing, inability to enroll children in school or provide needed transportation, strained relationships due to custody battles, and personal stress resulting from caring for an infant or young child.

### **Sandwiched Generation**

A significant number of people are caring for their children as well as their parents. This group, referred to as the sandwiched generation, is growing as older adults are living longer and need ongoing support. Twelve to 25 percent of the U.S. labor force has elder care responsibilities.<sup>1</sup> AARP estimates that 54 percent of Americans aged 45 to 55 currently care for children, parents, or both, while 22 percent focus their care exclusively on a parent or in-law.<sup>2</sup>

Studies show elders prefer to receive care from the following, in order from most to least preferred: family, friends and neighbors, and the formal system. They are receiving help with transportation, shopping, personal care, and housework an average of 15 hours per week, mostly from a younger female relative. Some experts say that the best long-term care insurance is having a daughter or daughter-in-law.

### **Need for Contact**

Our current mobile society limits opportunities for seniors and young people, including grandparents and grandchildren, to see one another on a daily basis. A recent survey by AARP<sup>3</sup> indicates that grandparents want to be involved in the lives

1. Bond, J. T., E. Galinsky, and J. E. Swanberg (1998). The 1997 national study of the changing workforce. New York: Families and Work Institute.

2. AARP (2001) In the middle: A report on multicultural boomers coping with family and aging issues (Washington, D.C.)

3. (1999) AARP grandparenting survey (Washington, D.C.)

of their grandchildren and help to pass on values of integrity, success, and ambition.

Programs that increase intergenerational contact are not separate from those that help families and the community accomplish their goals.

Intergenerational programs address a wide range of issues that directly contribute to preventing child neglect, including education, health, social isolation, public safety, and community revitalization. They can include:

- Intergenerational gatherings: Dinners, community picnics, retreats, and other recreational events pave the way for more intensive programming.
- Intergenerational reading programs: Elders can be reading partners for young children. In addition to contributing to reading skills, this builds emotional connections and fosters positive associations with reading. Children and youths can read to older adults whose vision is failing or as a way to develop skills in English as a second language.
- Arts programs: Through visual arts, crafts, drama, music, dance, storytelling and oral history, young and old learn, share experiences, practice new skills, gain respect, and practice teamwork.
- Mutual visiting programs: Elders can visit schools or programs to share their wisdom and share in children’s perspectives. Children can visit senior homes, centers, or other programs.
- Telephone visits and e-mail: When visits are impossible, regular phone visits and access to e-mail can help. In addition to social benefits, these programs promote safety. Programs have paired “latch-key” children with elders, with one calling the other to check in and chat. Others arrange for youths to call seniors to remind them about important appointments.
- Childcare/adult day care: As employees or volunteers in childcare centers, elders may help children with art projects or other activities. Some childcare centers are co-located with facilities for the elderly, allowing for interac-

tion between groups.

- Mentoring programs: Older adults can serve as mentors to children, youth, and college students, helping them to develop the life skills needed to achieve their personal goals and become positive, productive individuals.
- Learning programs: Mentors of all ages can teach specific skills and help ease transitions into new settings or cultures. Topics can include reading and math, computers, or language. For example, older adults could help elementary school children in reading, and the children could help them with the Internet.
- Community service: People of all ages can team up for projects that benefit the community, such as a park clean-up, neighborhood watch, health campaign, or environmental campaign.

When generations come together, everyone benefits from shared time, skills, knowledge, and life perspectives.

### Examples

Action for Boston Community Development, Inc.  
 178 Tremont Street  
 Boston, Massachusetts 02111  
 617/357-6000

This private, nonprofit family support program serves low-income residents through a decentralized, neighborhood-based, city-wide network of programs and services. Launched in 1962 to promote self-help for people and neighborhoods, ABCD involves older Boston residents in initiatives to improve their own well-being while children, youth, and others benefit from the gift of elders’ life experiences. Its programs include a foster grandparents program in which seniors spend 20 hours a week with special-needs children; Family Friends, a program in which older volunteers spend time with children with chronic illnesses and disabilities in their homes; and pregnancy education programs that pair older volunteers with youth to provide stable relationships, relevant information on pregnancy and other issues, and enhanced self-esteem.

**Linking Intergenerational Networks in Communities**

*South Carolina Department of Education  
1429 Senate Street, Room 906  
Columbia, SC 29201  
Fax: 803/734-5685 Ph: 803/734-8152*

LINC brings youth and older adults together through community safety initiatives, health projects, business enterprises, and more. Any youth or senior may participate: age requirements or limits are only determined by the needs of the community and the nature of the projects.

Seven South Carolina communities participate in LINC. Activities are determined locally and include heritage preservation, oral history, nutrition education, exercise, performing arts, classroom success, literacy, computers, nature study and preservation, community restoration, parenting classes, gardening, farming, composting, and cultural enrichment. LINC is jointly managed by Clemson University, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Bureau of Senior Services, the South Carolina Department of Education, and the United Way of South Carolina.

**Mill Street Loft**  
*455 Maple Street  
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601  
845/471-7477*

Mill Street Loft is a nonprofit arts educational center that has been meeting community needs since 1981. The center's creative, educational, and cultural programs promote communication and interdependence between generations, break stereotypes regarding age and disability, and give older adults a way to share their cultural wisdom. Through Mill Street Loft's Building Bridges program, children ages 6 through 12 and adults 55 and over engage in music, creative movement, drama, storytelling, and the visual arts together.

**Organizations**

**Administration on Aging**  
*330 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201  
202/619-7501  
Fax: 202/260-1012  
[www.aoa.dhhs.gov](http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov)*

The federal focal point and advocate agency for older persons and their concerns. Works to heighten awareness among other federal agencies, organizations, groups, and the public about the valuable contributions that older Americans make to the nation and alerts them to the needs of vulnerable older people.

**Center For Intergenerational Learning**  
*Temple University  
1601 North Broad Street, Room 206  
Philadelphia, PA 19122  
215/204-6970  
Fax: 215/204-6733  
[www.temple.edu/cil](http://www.temple.edu/cil)*

Develops innovative cross-age programs, provides training and technical assistance, and disseminates materials on intergenerational programming. Programs include mentoring for Latina pregnant and parenting teens; improvisational theater for elders and adolescents; respite for families caring for frail elders; and tutoring in language, literacy, and citizenship.

**The Foundation for Grandparenting**  
*California Communication Center  
108 Farnham Road  
Ojai, CA 93023  
[www.grandparenting.org](http://www.grandparenting.org)*

A nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting grandparents and raising grandparent consciousness and identity. Through education, research, programs, communication, and networking, it promotes the benefits of grandparenting and the involvement of grandparents as agents of positive change.

**Generations Together**  
*Univ. Center for Social and Urban Research  
University of Pittsburgh  
121 University Place, Suite 300  
Pittsburgh, PA 15260  
412/648-7150  
Fax: 412/648-7446  
[www.gt.pitt.edu](http://www.gt.pitt.edu)*

Dedicated to creating opportunities nationwide that bring young and old together. Develops program models; provides technical assistance and training; conducts research and program evaluations; authors, publishes, and disseminates information; and supports university/community collaboration and public policy initiatives.

**Generations United**  
 122 C Street, NW, Suite 820  
 Washington, DC 20001  
 202/638-1263  
 Fax: 202/638-7555  
 www.gu.org

A national membership organization focusing on intergenerational strategies, programs, and policies and the mutual well-being of children, youth, and the elderly. Offers information on intergenerational programming, public policies, and resources about intergenerational cooperation.

**National Senior Service Corps**  
 Corporation for National Service  
 1201 New York Avenue, NW  
 Washington, DC 20525  
 202/606-5000  
 www.seniorcorps.org

Through this program of the Corporation for National Service, nearly half a million Americans age 55 and older share their time and talents to help solve local problems—as foster grandparents, senior companions, and volunteers with the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

**Publications**

**Intergenerational Programs:  
 Understanding What We Have Created**  
 by Valerie Kuehne  
 2000, 230 pp.

Focuses on research efforts to design, improve, and evaluate intergenerational activities while examining how they impact children, families, and older adults. Available from:

*Haworth Press*  
 800-HAWORTH  
 www.haworthpressinc.com

**Preparing Participants for Intergenerational Interaction:  
 Training for Success**  
 by Melissa Hawkin, Kenneth Backman,  
 and Francis McGuire  
 1997, 196 pp.

Examines established intergenerational programs and provides training methods for starting a similar program at your center. Available from:

*Haworth Press*  
 800-HAWORTH  
 www.haworthpressinc.com

**Elder Mentor Handbook**  
 by Center for Intergenerational Learning  
 52 pp.

A resource for elder mentors working with at-risk youth. Child development issues, tips for effective communication, and suggested activities are presented in an easy-to-read format. Available from:

*Center for Intergenerational Learning*  
 215/204-6970  
 www.temple.edu/cil/resources

**Young and Old Serving Together: Meeting Community Needs Through Intergenerational Partnerships**  
 by Generations United

Offers strategies for bringing youth and elders together in activities that can benefit the entire community. Available from:

*Generations United*  
 202/638-1263  
 www.gu.org

**Internet**

[www.aoa.dhhs.gov/elderpage.html](http://www.aoa.dhhs.gov/elderpage.html)

An Administration on Aging clearinghouse for Web resources on intergenerational programs, projects, resources, training, and more.

[www.chtop.com/archbroc.htm](http://www.chtop.com/archbroc.htm)

ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center supports service providers and families through training, technical assistance, evaluation, and research.

[www.nnfr.org/igen/rgb.htm](http://www.nnfr.org/igen/rgb.htm)

Intergenerational policies, practices, publications, videos, community programs, and organizations.

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Chapel Hill Training-Outreach Project, 800 Eastown Drive, Suite 105, Chapel Hill, NC 27514, 800/473-1727