



## **Intergenerational Programs: The Missing Link in Today's Aging Initiatives**

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### **Executive Summary:**

In 2025, people over 65 years of age will outnumber youth under the age of 13. This fact, combined with other changing population demographics, is prompting a series of global and national initiatives to prepare for and respond to an aging society. Communities and organizations are becoming more “age-friendly”, professionals are looking for ways to reframe aging and raise awareness, schools are inviting older adults into the classrooms, and employers are introducing initiatives to improve multigenerational interactions.

Even with the recognition of the longevity dividend, serious efforts are needed to create intentional, intergenerational engagement. While age-friendly initiatives offer actionable solutions that can be implemented, they do not change the culture of ageism, and therefore are limited in their reach. And although innovative efforts to address and reframe aging are underway, these only target the attitudes of adults. The roots of ageism can be seen in children as young as three years of age, suggesting that earlier intervention is required. Current approaches do not adequately address how ageism and age segregation have played important roles in today's older adults being socially isolated, which often results in diminished physical and cognitive well-being. Finally, there are glaring gaps in the education of young people about the longevity dividend and how they can benefit from it, personally and professionally.

Intergenerational programs provide intentional opportunities for any skipped, non-adjacent generations to engage in activities that support the well-being of all involved.

Strong, organized, and purposeful intergenerational programming addresses all of these issues. Research tells us that intergenerational programs are a vaccination against ageism and a prescription for longevity.

The aging network is uniquely positioned to make intergenerational engagement a priority. When professionals in the longevity field unite generations in strong programs, they:

- Create opportunities for older adults to engage with young people. Intergenerational programs foster purpose and meaning, which can result in improved well-being and friendships, curbing isolation across the life span.

- Reverse ageism by exposing young people to positive stories about long, vibrant lives, which has a ripple effect on families, organizations, and communities.
- Inspire young people about the possibility of entering careers with older adults. After having experienced a rich relationship with someone 65+, youth are more likely to collaborate with and advocate for older adults in their own lives. Intergenerational programs also support young people's academic development by extending classroom learning, as well as socio-emotional development, especially with face-to-face communication skills.
- Empower older adults to become advocates and champions for younger people, improving their lives and experiences while stopping ageism against them.

Intergenerational efforts build and strengthen a culture in which people of all ages are welcomed and supported, helping to move a community forward from being age-friendly to truly age-integrated.

This report offers professionals in aging concrete steps they can take to support intergenerational approaches:

- **Fostering intergenerationally focused leadership** in your community. For example, convening a leadership team or task force that draws from constituencies of diverse ages strengthens all programming.
- **Providing opportunities** for casual and formal intergenerational encounters – from starting a public campaign encouraging people to get to know their neighbors to offering formal programming on a regular basis.
- **Establishing policies, procedures, and practices** that support intergenerational relationships – from having a mandatory line item for intergenerational training and/or programming to including “intergenerational programs” as a focus alongside existing nutrition and transportation programs.
- **Committing to share space and resources** – from opening up your foyer for chamber group practices to building a school with a lifelong learning center targeting adults 65+.
- **Cultivating an atmosphere of age-inclusion** beginning with helping people to identify their commonalities, and including “intergenerational engagement” as a core value in programming.

A comprehensive, multifaceted approach is needed to intergenerational work. Professionals in the longevity field must create the infrastructure. Through intergenerational pathways and opportunities, positive aging truly becomes a life-long journey and age-integrated communities are fostered – places where growing up and growing old is both supported and celebrated.

**Read the entire white paper at [BridgesTogether.org](http://BridgesTogether.org).**