



## The Benefits of Intergenerational Environmental Programmes

Intergenerational environmental programmes can be found in almost every type of location and setting. These includes schools, environmental centres, parks and playgrounds, community centres, city streets, vacant lots, fields, farms, and along stream banks.

There is also great diversity in how these programmes are structured. School-based initiatives often incorporate a service-learning component. Initiatives with environmental agencies as partners generally focus on environmental health issues or on issues tied to protecting local natural resources. Programmes also vary depending on the availability of resources, participants, needs of the community.

Activities can fit into three broad categories: promoting environmental awareness, conducting research on environmental issues, and taking action to preserve or improve the environment. However, while unique in some respects, these activities are all integrated.

### Characteristics of intergenerational environmental programmes

Learning is "information rich", "experience rich", and "reflection rich". The age diversity of the groups of participants contributes to the depth and diversity of information and the issues presented for discussion and debate. Cross-generational interaction catalyzes the creative processes and opens ideas for exploration.

These programmes make the environment seem more relevant. The projects help participants to learn how the environment can influence them on a personal level. They also teach important values. Intergenerational environmental projects can instill a sense of "environmental stewardship," a lifelong ethic of community service, and the concept of working hard results in future returns.

Intergenerational environmental education teaches how the environment changes over time. As the physical environment changes, so does the way that people interact with it. Such changes are often difficult to observe during a short-term program. Through intensive intergenerational dialogue, programme participants can piece together a longer-term view of the environment that includes the past and projects into the future.

And lastly, these programs promote inclusiveness and collaboration in local environmental improvement efforts.



## Benefits for the Community

- **Strengthens Community:** Intergenerational programmes bring together diverse groups and networks and help to dispel inaccurate stereotypes. Sharing talents and resources help to create a unified group identity. Children, youth, and older adults are less alienated while the community recognizes that they are contributing members of society.
- **Maximises Human Resources:** Intergenerational community service programmes tend to multiply human resources by engaging older adults and youth as volunteers.
- **Maximises Financial Resources:** When groups representing young and old approach local funders, those funders are more likely to respond positively because they can see broad-based community support. Intergenerational programs can save money and stretch scarce resources by sharing sites and/or resources.
- **Expands Services:** Intergenerational community service programmes can expand the level of services to meet more needs and address more issues.
- **Encourages Cultural Exchange:** Intergenerational programmes promote the transmission of cultural traditions and values from older to younger generations, helping to build a sense of personal and societal identity while encouraging tolerance.
- **Inspires Collaboration:** Intergenerational programmes can unite community members to take action on public policy issues that address human needs across the generations.

## Benefits for Youth and Children

- **Enhances Social Skills:** Interaction with older adults enhances communication skills, promotes self-esteem, develops problem-solving abilities, and fosters friendships across generations. Positive attitudes are developed regarding sense of purpose and community service.
- **Improves Academic Performance:** Intergenerational programmes increase school attendance and performance. Students tutored by older adults make significantly greater gains in achievement test scores than other students.
- **Increases Stability:** Children and youth gain positive role models with whom they can interact on a regular basis. Older adult volunteers help to provide children and youth with consistency.

## Benefits for Older Adults

- **Enhances Socialisation:** Older adults remain productive, useful, and contributing members of society. They increase interaction with children and youth and engage more with one another to prevent isolation in later years.
- **Stimulates Learning:** Older adults learn new innovations and technologies from their younger counterparts.
- **Increases Emotional Support:** Intergenerational programmes afford older adults an opportunity to participate in a meaningful activity. This decreases loneliness, boredom, and depression while increasing self-esteem. Older volunteers report more enriched lives, a rejuvenated sense of purpose, and increased coping skills for their personal struggles.
- **Improves Health:** Helping contributes to the maintenance of good health, and can diminish the effect of psychological and physical diseases and disorders.

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Information drawn from the Environmental Protection Agency of the USA

