

April 2022



BRIDGING THE GAP

When my twins were around a month old, and I was incredibly sleep-deprived, I remember sobbing to my mother that I must be a horrible mom because everything felt so hard. I had modern conveniences to care for my newborns, unlike my great-grandmother of twins in the early 1900s. How did she manage when I couldn't? My mother replied simply, "she had live-in help with her mother." (My mom ended up staying another day.)

The United States began the 20th century as one of the most age-integrated societies in the world. Grandparents, children, and grandchildren were all living under the same roof. We had one-room schoolhouses with multiple ages learning together. Today, we are one of the most age-segregated with most younger people in school, middle-aged people at work, and older people in age-restricted communities such as assisted living and nursing homes. This restructuring has left us ill-prepared to manage the current demographic change with older adults projected to outnumber children for the first time in history. By 2030, all baby boomers will be older than age 65. This will expand the size of the older population so that 1 in every 5 residents will be retirement age.

Our age-segregated society also has yielded a range of social problems, including wasted human resources, rampant ageism, and an epidemic of loneliness. Younger and older people are the most isolated groups in society—a reality made all the more evident by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It's time for the Shepherd's Centers Network to be among the innovators to help turn the situation around and help model greater cross-generational engagement and interdependence. Intergenerational programs can take many forms. And in this month's newsletter, we highlight a few intergenerational experiences from around the network. These programs bring people of different generations together for mutually beneficial activities that promote greater understanding and respect between generations. There is no one size fits all.

For those who ask how co-generational programs and services advance our mission, just consider the research documenting the benefits, such as improved mental, physical, and cognitive health unique to each life stage; a greater sense of belonging and connection with others of different ages; and more acceptance of people who are different from themselves. Moreover, age diversity positively contributes to organizational performance. Happy, healthy aging and respect for others is fundamental to who we are.

Roughly 30% of Shepherd's Centers say they offer intergenerational programs, and 70% say they have no age restrictions on volunteering. When talking about the intergenerational activities offered by Shepherd's Centers, I stress that the network offers all types: young

helping old, old helping young, and young and old serving side by side. These efforts are in keeping with our mission of by, with, and for older adults. And it is empowerment.

So let's do more to unite the generations and explore options for age-integrating our model. Our society often defines and limits people by age, but when you believe anything is possible, there is nothing that can stop us...not even one's age.

Sarah Cheney

ACROSS THE AGES

Studies show that bringing older adults together with a cross-section of younger ages fosters positive outcomes for both. Each generation has unique insights and experiences that can be tapped to enrich the volunteer experience. When your volunteers share their excitement about your Center's mission with friends and family, they ignite the same passion in another person. That's exactly what happened to Carol, a veteran Meals on Wheels (MOW) driver with the **Northland Shepherd's Center (MO)**.



Carol has been delivering nutritious meals for over 20 years. It all began when her grandfather joined the MOW program in St. Charles, MO, in 1972. Since then, Carol's family has been paying the gift of healthy dinners forward, both her parents and aunt also volunteered for the program for years. In fact, Carol's aunt drove until she was 93 years old. Route 5 is Carol's favorite place to be Monday around noon, as she visits with MOW participants and checks on their well-being.

Carol has shared all of the benefits of caring for others with her daughters. She has suggested that Shepherd's Center should host a "bring your family to volunteer day." When multiple generations are represented in a volunteer program, they learn to find common bonds that strengthen their family and community alike.

GENERATIONS OF LEARNING

Intergenerational programs purposefully unite the generations in ways that enhance participants' lives and help address crucial social and community issues while building on the positive resources that younger and older adults have to offer each other and to their communities.

No one knows this better than Professor Oren Renick, Th.M., J.D., Director of **Mutual Adoption Pact (TX)**, an affiliate program. For years, Oren has been working with students at Texas State University to promote intergenerational service-learning and its impact on community. Oren has been instrumental in creating the curriculum for the **Volunteers on Wheels (VOW) initiative** (also available on the Affiliate E-Exchange).



The VOW curriculum outlines how you can work with universities and colleges to provide educational opportunities that combine learning objectives with a pragmatic way to resolve societal needs, such as providing transportation or shopping for older adults. Students not only learn about issues facing older adults by earning credit in a classroom setting but also volunteer to support older adults to continue living in community. The VOW program successfully brings people of different generations together for ongoing, mutually beneficial activities that promote greater understanding and respect between generations.

Around the network, Shepherd's Center communities are being enhanced by our growing diversity through intergenerational programs that connect younger and older generations. If your Center is looking for a way to expand your volunteer base while providing vital transportation services, VOW may be just the program for your Center.

INTERGENERATIONAL MARKETING

As many Shepherd's Centers look to increase their sphere of influence in communities, understanding how to craft your messages toward your target audience is an important factor. One of the trickiest things about appealing to potential stakeholders is understanding what motivates the generation you are targeting. The reality is that there are no good "one-size-fits-all" marketing strategies.



Defining a target market is important because everyone is in a unique life stage that will affect their choices. For instance, many Baby Boomers are retiring, career-driven professionals that want to partner with organizations for effectiveness. As they explore their newfound freedom they prefer short-term opportunities, flexible experiences, and possible next chapter career opportunities. Generation-Xers, however, are at the pinnacle of their careers and raising a family. As professionals and parents, they value opportunities that expand their career goals, that offer a variety of schedules, and provide family-friendly connections. And Millennials want to be inspired to affect true social change through multicultural inclusion.

While creating a true intergenerational marketing campaign may require research and planning, providing opportunities for all generations can create a continuum of awareness and support for your mission so that you are no longer the best-kept secret in your community. For more information on what motivates age groups, visit our partner [Sterling Volunteers](#).

NEXT GENERATION

Internships provide your Shepherd's Center with a unique way to observe the work habits of potential employees, collaborate with educational entities, and promote cross-generational relationships. The **Shepherd's Center of Greater Winston-Salem (NC)** has shared the challenges and opportunities facing aging adults in their communities with interns for many semesters. Not only do they host students from local colleges, but also those learning online. The majority of visiting students earn degrees in Social Work or associate degrees in Human Services.



If your Center would like to explore the benefits of engaged interns, you may want to consider a few best practices.

- Create a "letter of engagement." Ideally, this letter should list specific skills or experiences the intern seeks to obtain. Be sure to state the compensation arrangements, paid or unpaid, as well as no full-time employment expectation at the conclusion of the internship.
- During orientation, set forth written educational goals to be accomplished. Assign a mentor to provide guidance, regular feedback, and

periodic check-ins as the internship progresses. It's important the intern feels a sense of connectedness with your team and mission.

- Avoid assigning repetitive tasks that can be learned easily. Create a learning environment that is varied and challenging and incorporates any course requirements. Remember the intern is there for training that is similar to what they would be given in an educational environment.

By following these guidelines, your Center can create an intergenerational experience that is beneficial to not only your Shepherd's Center but also your interns. For more information on standards for establishing an intern program, visit the [Department of Labor](#).

AGES OF IMAGINATION

An upside to the pandemic is that more older adults are connecting with technology. Seventy-three percent of older adults use the internet, up from 14% in 2000. And even for those who use the internet, a Pew Research Center study found that 34% of these older adults report having little to no confidence in being able to perform tasks online. Several Centers are bridging the technology divide through intergenerational connections, among them are **Shepherd's Center of Webster-Kirkwood (MO)** and **Mutual Adoption Pact (TX)**.



Sometimes called Tech Buddies, these intergenerational services tend to focus on younger people helping older adults access and use technology. Activities include everyday tasks such as ordering groceries, participating in telehealth appointments, staying connected with family and friends over video-chat platforms to engaging in stimulating online learning and exercise classes. If you are interested in learning more, reach out to the Centers listed [here](#) and/or the [national office](#). You might also want to check out [Cyber-Seniors](#), an organization with a specialized curriculum for tech training for older adults.

SECOND GENERATION

It is common for us to hear recurring "themes" from folks across the Shepherd's Center network. For example, it is frequently said by individuals in all types of roles, "The nicest people are with Shepherd's Center." A somewhat new recurring "theme" we are hearing is, "My parent(s) were involved with Shepherd's Center and now I'm involved."

Let us introduce you to Marylyn and Luther Wade and Carol Rousy (see photo). I had the joy of meeting them just before the start of the pandemic at **Shepherd's Center of Charlotte (NC)**. Marylyn's father worked with Elbert Cole to help design the Shepherd's Center model. Carol's father also was deeply involved with **KC Shepherd's Center (MO)** in the very beginning, and both have known how amazing Shepherd's Centers are from their parents. The Wades and Carol have all been connected with Shepherd's Center of Charlotte for decades as volunteers, participants, and champions.



Then there is Joyce Downing, Chair of the Board of Directors, at **Shepherd's Center of Raytown (MO)**. Both her parents, Helen and Floyd Anderson were vital leaders at Raytown with Floyd chairing the Board for several terms. And Susan, a volunteer driver at

Shepherd's Center of Kernersville (NC) recently shared that her father helped to start the handy helper program at Kernersville and was involved for years. It says something about Shepherd's Centers when a second generation is as passionate about the mission and steps up to serve and participate. Let us know if you have a second-generation connection by emailing [Sarah](#).



- Congratulations to **Peninsula Shepherd's Center (CA)** and **Mid North Shepherd's Center (IN)** for winning the two drawings for \$100 off their affiliate fees for returning the network survey.
- **Shepherd's Center of Kernersville (NC)** held a ribbon cutting ceremony with the mayor and an open house for the public to show off their new building purchased with the generosity of the community.
- **Mary Beth Sarhatt** has been appointed as the new Director of the **Shepherd's Center of Kalamazoo (MI)**. Welcome to the network!
- **Alissa Celek** has been appointed as the new Director of the **Shepherd's Center of Charlotte (NC)**. Alissa previously served as the Program Manager. Congratulations Alissa!
- The **KC Shepherd's Center (MO)** Meals on Wheels program has grown by 1300% since pre-pandemic, serving 108,710 meals in 93 zip codes to 880 older adults in 2021.

Do you have any exciting news to share with the network? Please reach out to [Sarah](#) so we can all celebrate with you!

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