

GENERATIONS CONNECT CASE STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, United Neighborhood Houses' (UNH) embarked on a quest to establish a model for intergenerational programming at settlement houses. This work has been shown to reduce feelings of social isolation and loneliness and build stronger community ties—all important in a world full of division. Aiming to create community centers where all generations feel welcomed and heard, UNH chose three settlement houses with which to work to develop the model, the tools, and the resources needed to sustain and replicate intergenerational programming.

UNH bases its intergenerational work on core values and principles developed in partnership with the three settlement houses. Intergenerational work:

-  **BUILDS ON THE STRENGTHS, INTERESTS, AND ASSETS OF PARTICIPANTS**
-  **CREATES CONNECTIONS**
-  **DEVELOPS PARTICIPANT OWNERSHIP**
-  **SUPPORTS MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS**

These core values and principles guide the work that UNH and its intergenerational partners do together.

The following case studies summarize years of work embedding intergenerational practices at three very different sites:

- **BronxWorks:** A multi-service community center where the work was driven by community health staff
- **Sunnyside Community Services:** An older adult center where the work was driven by the Center's director and an off-site director of youth services
- **Queens Community House (QCH):** A public school where the work was driven by afterschool program staff

Their stories highlight processes, tools, and how to overcome challenges associated with beginning and sustaining intergenerational programming. They are meant to inspire and educate, giving key insights from direct service staff about the implementation and impact of intergenerational work in their organizations and the communities they serve.

BRONXWORKS



BACKGROUND

BronxWorks' intergenerational journey in the South Bronx began with UNH's Older Adults Strengthening Communities project, long before the current initiative, which brought together older adults and younger people to work on a community food garden at the E. Roberts Moore Adult Center.* BronxWorks has always served people of all generations, and they were eager to bring them together with greater intention.

BRONXWORKS
INTERGENERATIONAL
COOKING CLASS, 2024

WHAT MADE INTERGENERATIONAL WORK “WORK” AT BRONXWORKS?

FIND PATHWAYS

Sometimes, intergenerational programming starts from existing programming. Other times, new programs allow for a creative implementation. Shortly before BronxWorks joined the intergenerational initiative, the settlement house was awarded a new older adult center contract with NYC Aging. Staff viewed this as a fresh start: the older adult center was opening in the McLaughlin Center where BronxWorks already had programming for multiple generations. What if, as they built out older adult center programming, they were intentional about including people of all ages?

BronxWorks has a longstanding community health department based in the center that oversees programming across the organization. Their job is to infuse lessons about healthy eating and living into everything BronxWorks does. They already had work going that could be shifted to target people of all ages. Opportunities for intergenerational work—like cooking classes and competitions, the farmers market, and the introduction of Summer Youth Employment Program participants (SYEP) to programming—kept piling up, and BronxWorks staff kept their eyes open to see how they could bring people and departments together for everyone’s benefit.

They knew from experience that food is an excellent relationship builder. Everyone needs to eat, and everyone has a relationship with food. People’s relationship with food can be cultural, intellectual, medical—sometimes a combination of all three, but always unique to the person. Given BronxWorks’ expertise in community health, and the community’s desire to learn about and engage around nutrition, the department’s objectives came together perfectly. They’d launch intergenerational programming around food!

TOOL HIGHLIGHT

IS IT INTERGENERATIONAL?

One tool BronxWorks helped develop is the Is It Intergenerational? tool. This tool is a series of notepads that allow a quick and easy way for program staff or even participants to evaluate a program. This tool can be used during the design period, when a program has launched, or after programming is underway!

To access this and all other tools, visit: unhny.org/intergenhub



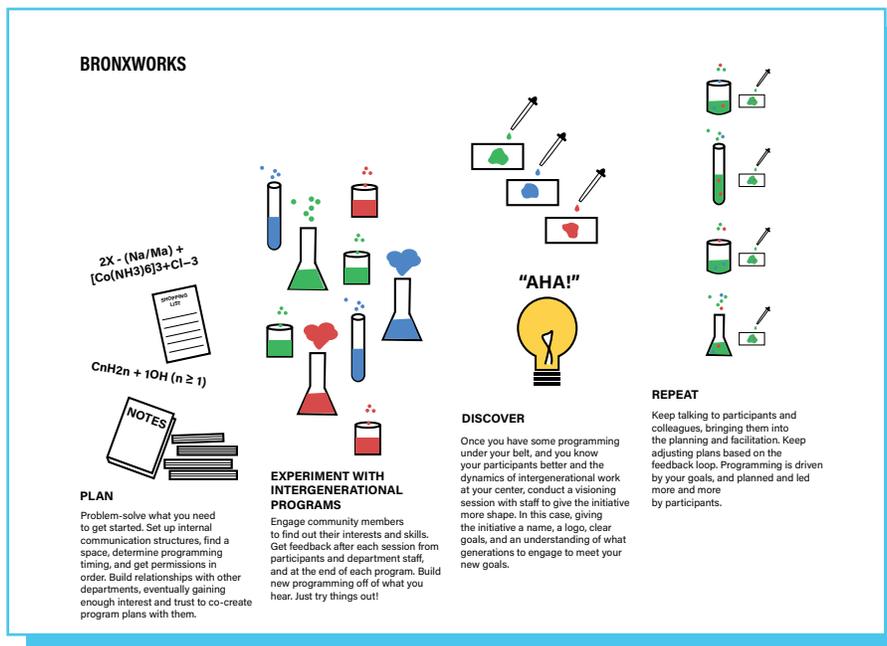
Outside of BronxWork’s flagship McLaughlin Center on Grand Concourse in the Bronx there was already a golden opportunity to leverage food to create a space for intergenerational relationships—a farm stand. Every week, the farm stand sets up outside of the community center and offers people in the neighborhood a chance to purchase farm-fresh goods without having to go far from home. BronxWorks’ SYEP Participants work the farm stand, and their older neighbors quickly responded to outreach to join.

Week after week, older and younger people worked side by side, selling fruits, vegetables, and running cooking demonstrations. And, week after week, relationships deepened. Older people had a chance to share recipes from their country of origin, from their childhood, or passed down from their parents. Younger people got to share recipes in return. Conversations about food grew into conversations about work, college, and what it was like to live in the Bronx.

As the summer passed by and SYEP ended, the youth exchanged information with the older people and kept in touch. Some went to college, with their older colleagues checking in to make sure they were doing well. Others may have gone back to school nearby, returning to volunteer when they could. Relationships were forged simply by creating a space that addressed a community need and being sure to open the space up to people of different generations.



BRONXWORKS
INTERGENERATIONAL
FARMSTAND, 2023



FULL IMAGE IN APPENDIX

→ Plan

BronxWorks' path into intergenerational work was not always linear. It involved a lot of question-asking of both participants and staff, testing out programming, evaluating, and then asking again what programs needed. At the very start, Rachel Gill (Associate Vice President, Community Health Programs) and Ailsha Sepulveda (Program Coordinator, Community Health Programs) engaged participants of different ages from cooking classes and the farm stand to see what they'd like to do. They conducted a community needs assessment, small town hall style meetings, and focus groups to hear directly from various age groups about what they'd like to experience in their communities. They talked to staff in other departments about key contract deliverables and how intergenerational programming could help achieve those deliverables while benefiting everyone involved. Youth service providers could count intergenerational programming toward their NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) contracts, and older adult providers could count units of service for NYC Aging contracts.

→ Experiment

To staff, their programming was an experiment, and every good experiment requires data gathering. Rachel, Ailsha, and their team took that to heart and applied that lens with vigor. They asked department staff and community members what they wanted and what they needed, then brainstormed how intergenerational programming could fulfill those wants and needs. They sought to collaborate with community members, as Rachel put it, they wanted to build "some ownership and connection" between the people involved and the programs themselves.

→ Discover

As programming found its legs and took off, BronxWorks continued to ask questions and evaluate. They got feedback from participants to hear what worked, what didn't work, what they would like to see next—and programming grew. Around and around the cycle went, continuing to hone in on what people in the community wanted to participate in and lead, until intergenerational programming became embedded in the community health department.

→ Repeat

BronxWorks continues to follow a cyclical pathway—gather data, try out programming, evaluate it, retool it to better fit community wants and needs, then try it again—and again, and again!

TOOL HIGHLIGHT

INVOLVE YOUR COMMUNITY IN PLANNING

Community engagement is at the core of intergenerational work. Without community members of all ages, there will not be anyone to participate in even the most robust intergenerational programming! So, from the beginning, it is important to consider, as BronxWorks did, how an organization might begin to tap into the community to shape and lead programming. One tool that BronxWorks helped us develop is our *Involve Your Community in Planning* tool. Staff from different departments (for example, youth services and older adult services) can work together on the worksheet, setting goals, creating a list of targeted community members, designing and assigning roles, and then choosing a community engagement format.

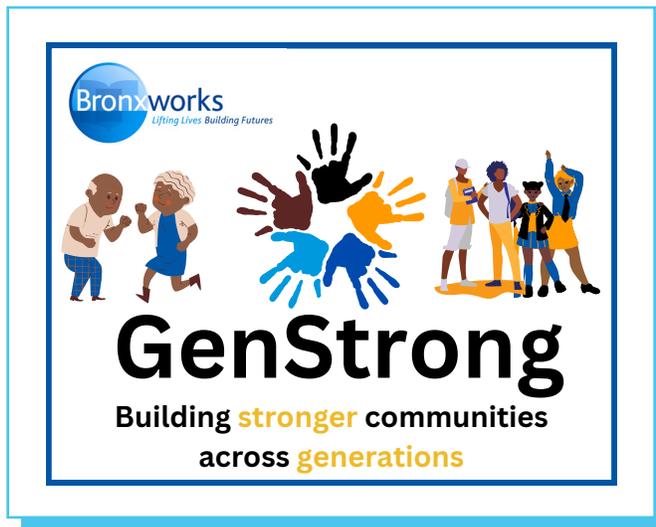
BronxWorks utilized surveys, focus groups, and community meetings/town halls in their early program building. This tool lays out options and gives staff a way to plan their engagement strategy intentionally and effectively.

To access this and all other tools, visit: unhny.org/intergenhub



After imagining the ideal intergenerational center in the future, the staff discussed the steps to achieve the vision. Over the course of this activity, they realized they didn't have a clear enough idea yet of what the overall concept was for their intergenerational program. They decided to have a second meeting, without UNH, to develop this concept internally.

The visioning session gave BronxWorks a "lightbulb moment," leading them to identify a mission for their intergenerational work. The creation of their intergenerational cooking program and farmers market allowed them to market programming and conduct outreach within and outside of their organization. To capture it all, they created a logo associated with their programming. It became a call to staff and participants that people of all ages were welcome, and that there was a place for them to engage meaningfully with their fellow community members.



LOGO FOR BRONXWORKS' INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

IMPACTS

At BronxWorks, intergenerational programming created and strengthened cross-departmental relationships. These collaborations across departments led to the creation of programming that benefits staff and participants alike. Intergenerational work reflects BronxWorks' mission to serve the community across lifespans. It is also useful for meeting contractual obligations, as intergenerational programming can count toward units of service provided to older adults and younger people. BronxWorks staff in the community health department now have stronger connections across the organization, which makes it easier to cultivate programming that will reach a broad audience. They have cooking classes that are attended and often led by older adult and youth program participants. With older adult staff tuned into other departments, older people can be recruited to help with art, cooking, or civic engagement activities.

Rachel Gill shared that this work also strengthens bonds between younger people and older people, which can improve the lives of community members. She said, "The entire program is built in a way that's meant to be shared with others in the community." BronxWorks has seen the growing relationships between younger and older people in their community. Older people who work at the farm stand continue to follow up with the SYEP interns who have since left for college, sharing updates with staff whenever they hear from them and enjoying visits when students are back for breaks.

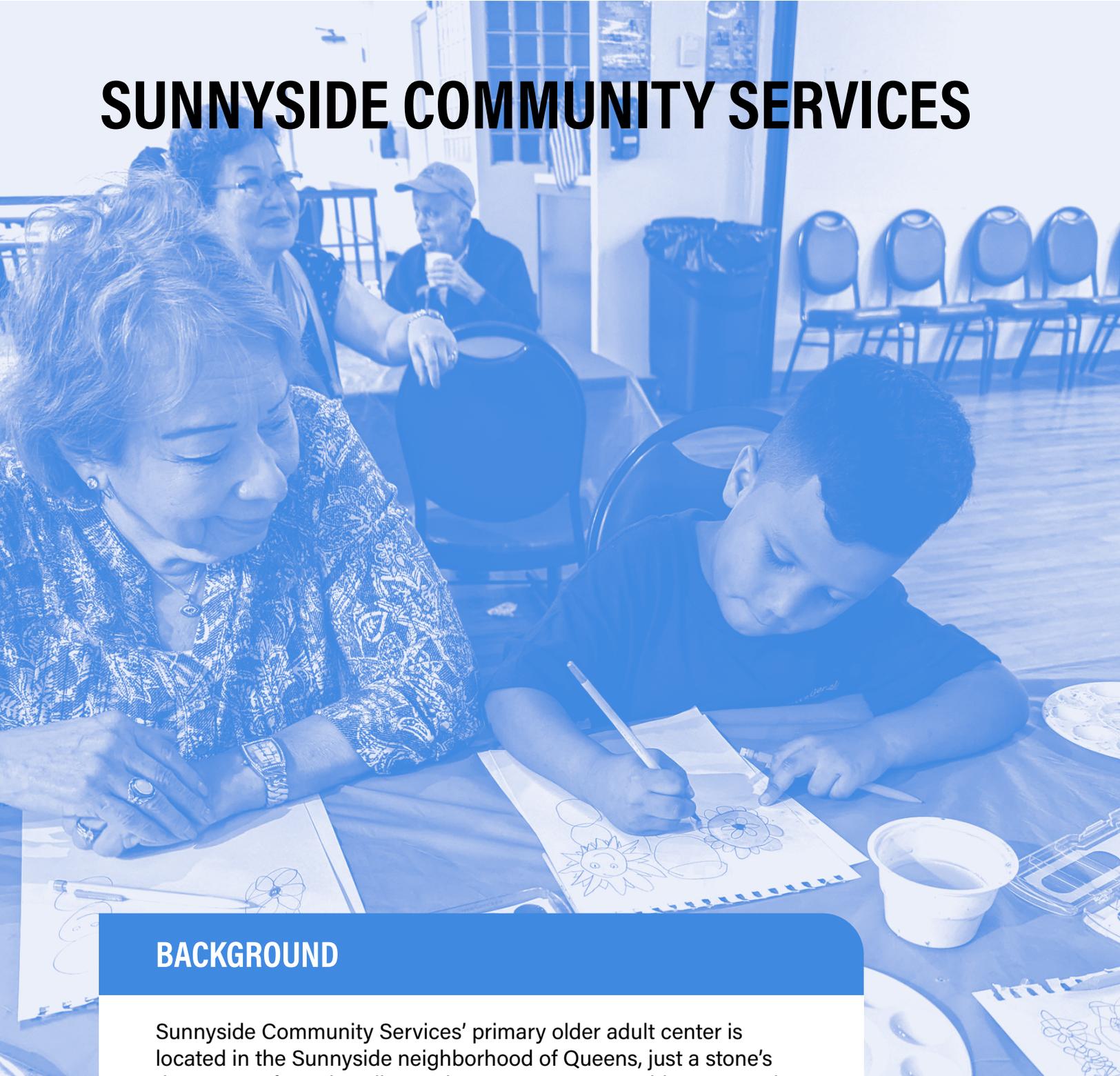
This work taps into the interests of people in the community who feel empowered to share what they're interested in and shape programming that is offered by the settlement house. This creates sustainability for intergenerational programming.

CONCLUSION

As with each of the pilot sites, BronxWorks came into intergenerational work with their own flair. They started by asking questions, digging into the community and into their organization to see where there were needs that could be met through intergenerational programming. Then, they experimented! They tried things out, capitalizing on programming that was already taking place—like the farmer's market, and cooking classes—looking for all the ways they could tap into the strengths and interests of their multigenerational community to bring everyone together in meaningful ways. Throughout the process, they evaluated and continued with programming sustained by community feedback, open to making changes as they went.

At BronxWorks, they've watched relationships build between older and younger people, witnessing the beauty of shared stories, history, culture and food unfold across generations!

SUNNYSIDE COMMUNITY SERVICES



BACKGROUND

Sunnyside Community Services' primary older adult center is located in the Sunnyside neighborhood of Queens, just a stone's throw away from the 7 line 40th Street stop. Sunnyside Community Services (Sunnyside) was no stranger to intergenerational work as they had produced a successful intergenerational program after working with UNH on a previous initiative. They were primed and ready to take on the task of creating an intergenerational community center.

SUNNYSIDE
INTERGENERATIONAL ART
CLASS, 2024

WHAT MADE INTERGENERATIONAL WORK “WORK” AT SUNNYSIDE?

BE CURIOUS

A key to making intergenerational work “work” is to be curious about it. There are more opportunities to bring generations together in a meaningful way than most organizations might think. Are there events that bring multiple generations together? Are there workout classes, art classes, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses that have or could accommodate people from different ages and generations? Then an organization has the minimum required to start weaving into their programming intentional relationship building among generations.

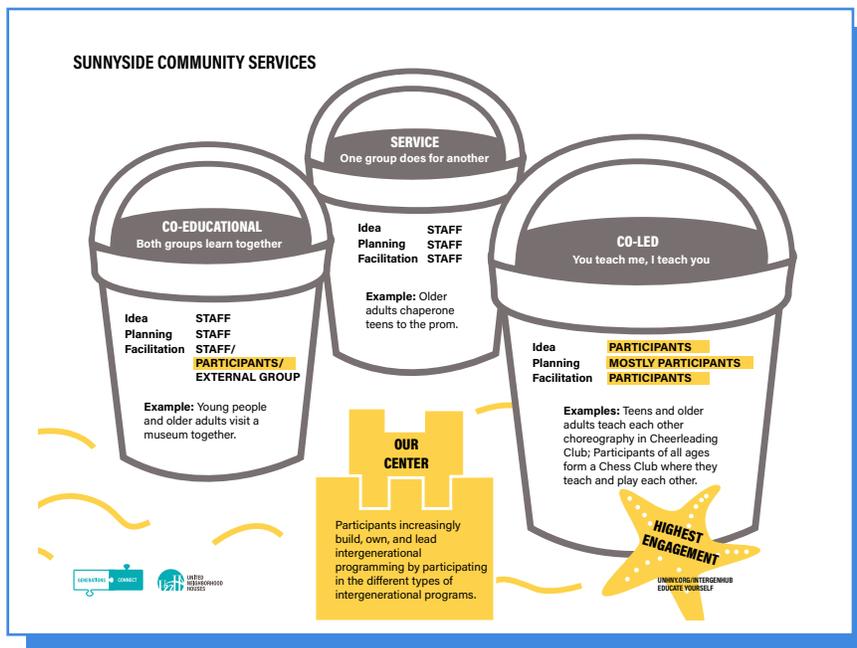
Sunnyside’s intergenerational work began at their older adult center, with two directors from the *Older Adult Programs* and *Youth and Family Programs* departments coming together to build programming that appealed to both age groups. The staff dedicated to this initiative has grown since, as the organization aims to embed intergenerational principles into everything they do. To start, they used “aspirational mapping” to help them on their journey. Aspirational mapping starts with a goal in mind, in Sunnyside’s case that is a community center where people from all ages feel they can connect to others in their community. With the goal defined, staff begin to work backwards to envision the steps to get there. Who needs to be involved? What resources need to be allocated? How can we begin to recruit?

FIND PATHWAYS

For Sunnyside, their path forward included understanding the ways participants of different ages could start to interact within their center. As previously mentioned, Sunnyside staff were no strangers to the power of intergenerational programming. As they reflected on past experiences, they thought about all the pathways community members have into the center and identified three opportunities for building intergenerational connection.

→ Services

Many community members come to Sunnyside seeking out services like tech and exercise classes, case management, and older adult center lunches—staple settlement houses programs. Sunnyside staff already had the service-oriented programming for older people, so why not bring in youth to facilitate it? With connections to local high schools, beauty courses, and Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) participants, Sunnyside provided opportunities for younger people to interact and build relationships with their older neighbors through service-oriented activities. This included students serving meals and sitting with older adults as they ate, and local cosmetology students coming in to provide free haircuts.



FULL IMAGE IN APPENDIX

→ **Co-Educational**

Sunnyside provides a number of extracurricular activities for people of all ages, and as they honed their intergenerational practice, they looked to provide events where younger people and older people could learn together. These events included museum visits, art classes, and movie screenings. The staff may have been the ones leading, but community members across generations were the ones picking up the conversations and learning something new together. Sometimes the best way to build relationships is shoulder to shoulder as well as face to face.

→ **Co-led**

Participants begin to feel like they're part of a community, not just recipients of a service. Sunnyside opens the door for people of all generations to share what they're interested in and lead programs, classes, and events that align with those interests. For example, a younger person approached staff about creating a chess club where they could teach others to play. Staff recruited an older adult who had expressed similar interest in chess. Both community members worked together around their shared passion to plan, coordinate, and execute a weekly chess club that is open to anyone—regardless of age. That club remains a core offering of Sunnyside's intergenerational programming.

The lesson from Sunnyside about how to do this work is to create multiple pathways in. Whether someone wants to just sit in the back and receive a class, wants to engage with their peers, or wants to lead—there's something for everyone, from every age group.

ELEVATOR PITCH

To start programming, staff need to recruit participants. One way of doing this is through an elevator pitch. UNH developed an *Elevator Pitch* worksheet to help organizations narrow down what they want to say about a program in a way that is easy for community members to digest. Sunnyside found that this tool helps when recruiting staff from an outside organization or community members to programming. It is short, sweet, and usually includes a call to action that is easy and can lead to a deeper conversation about what the organization is trying to achieve.

To access this and all other tools, visit: unhny.org/intergenhub



MAKE IT CORE

Intergenerational work should not be relegated to one program, one department, or single events. UNH worked with settlement houses to make it a core practice across each of their organizations.

→ It Starts At the Top

Staff support starts at the top and makes its way to the line staff—starting with Executive Directors (ED) and other executive-level staff believing intergenerational work is important and worthwhile to pursue. For Sunnyside, their ED empowered their Associate Executive Director (AED) to engage with the aspirational mapping and visioning exercises, where buy-in was cultivated at the highest levels, as well as with staff who would be providing the programming. Executive staff encouraged and empowered the department directors to make time for this work. Department directors similarly encouraged and empowered program managers. Managers in turn empowered line staff to take time during their days to think about how the work of their separate departments may intersect with work being done in others.

→ Work across departments

At Sunnyside, Kerly Serrano and Donald Lubin are the pair that were empowered to make this work, work! Kerly is the Director of Older Adult Services and Donald is the Deputy Director of Youth and Family Services, both programs that, prior to UNH's prompting, remained quite separate. However, over the course of not one, but two intergenerational projects, their departments came together more often, and other staff began to see how intergenerational work could benefit everyone.

Working together on intergenerational programming creates a cohesive organizational culture and helps to break down the silos created by funding streams. When departments work together they can share resources, providing

expanded programming that positively impacts all participants. By bringing staff together, the community benefits as creativity flows and new types of services, activities, and opportunities are created. For Donald, it changed the lens through which he saw his work. One of their Associate Executive Directors, Shyvonne Noboa, pointed out that there is a cross-departmental team now, when there hadn't been one before this work began. Before, Donald rarely stepped foot in the senior center and Kerly wasn't involved in youth services. Now, they meet at least weekly, coordinating key programming efforts such as when space in the older adult center is available for youth programming to come in.

→ **Include participants in planning**

Participants supported staff with programming because their interests and passions were at the center of it all. Sometimes, it can be difficult for staff to give up control of programming. At Sunnyside, staff were not only encouraged to do exactly that, but did so willingly. This resulted in programming for and led by participants, giving staff support and oftentimes a much needed break from planning every single piece of programming.

BUILD EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

Internal partnerships were important to align the work of multiple departments and staff at Sunnyside. Once that was settled, they turned externally to organizations and people in their community who could come in, or give participants an opportunity to go out, and enrich programming and community experiences.



INTERGENERATIONAL VISIT TO THE AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM, 2022

At Sunnyside, community partnerships were forged with museums, theaters, and the Flushing Town Hall—cultural institutions important to the community and already set up to serve multiple generations. As the team continued reaching out, more opportunities began to present themselves as new organizations wanted to take part in what Sunnyside was building. A partnership with The Folk Art Museum led to staff from the museum providing intergenerational art instruction at the older adult center, both for participants to create their own art and to educate them about the art displayed at the museum. Their partnership with the Queens Museum led to an intergenerational class on migration, using birds as an example. Younger and older people then created paper birds together. Partnerships were a key part of creating and providing programming for all generations!

**FIND
CREATIVE
SOLUTIONS**

Now, all of this is not to say there weren't challenges in getting the work going. Staff at Sunnyside were quick to share some of the biggest ones, including (1) staffing, (2) scheduling/timing, and (3) finding common ground and shared activities/interests.

With staffing, not everyone across the organization always has the time or bandwidth to brainstorm across departments when they have their own regular programming to see to and contractual obligations to meet. Executive support is critical to create time and space for intergenerational work to develop. Leadership must encourage relationship building between staff from different departments to help them come together around a unified goal or vision. For Sunnyside, this was found in the “elevator pitch” which the youth department and aging department came together to create to distill down what they hoped to achieve into an actionable item.

During the pilot program, in order to help staff integrate intergenerational work into existing programming, UNH staff spoke with city agencies about intergenerational work and made sure it would count for units of services, or other contract deliverables, allowing reimbursement for staff time spent on intergenerational work. As a result, Intergenerational programming became a way for staff to fulfill their ongoing government contract obligations in a way that benefitted multiple programs and generations!

Staff working on this initiative at Sunnyside insisted that you need a solid sense of “time management, creativeness, and empathy.” Youth programming and older adult programming don't always overlap, so staff have to look for opportunities, even brief ones, that will allow it to work. Sometimes, it involves

encouraging older adults to stay a little later in order to complete an activity or field trip with youth. Other times, it takes advantage of volunteer requirements for high school students, capitalizing on their need for community service hours and making time for them to engage intergenerationally. Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) participants are particularly well-positioned to integrate into programming that will be interesting to them, as they are getting paid for their work at the center.

Finally, it can be challenging to find common ground or interests across the generations. Sometimes it might take several attempts to find something that programming can be built off of. This work involves a lot of relationship building among staff and participants so that staff can begin to notice where interests align and begin to draw out opportunities to bring the youth and older adults together to work on a project. For example, a student named Afnan needed to complete volunteer hours. She was interested in creating connections and conversations between generations. When she spoke with the staff at Sunnyside, they worked together to create a Pen Pals program where high school students and older people wrote letters to each other to start conversations. The older people were immediately interested and letter writing commenced to great success for all generations.

TOOL HIGHLIGHT

LIVING ROOM CONVERSATIONS

Living Room Conversations is another useful tool and opened up the lines of communication between younger people and older people at Sunnyside. Living Room Conversations is a model that provides a topic and a structured step-by-step process to facilitate a balanced conversation led by an older and younger person. Sunnyside youth and older people used this model to spark conversations with each other in the community, and through these open, honest, and structured conversations, began to build relationships and learn more about each other.



To access this and all other tools, visit: unhny.org/intergenhub

IMPACTS

Sunnyside staff reported that intergenerational work “builds a stronger community” for not just participants but staff as well. There’s power in community and community can protect against loneliness and social isolation. For the younger people participating in Sunnyside’s intergenerational programming, their engagement gives them experiences to which they might not otherwise have access. For example, one of their youth participants has grandparents in another country and therefore has never been able to forge a relationship with them. They felt robbed of an important generational connection. Now, they have “community grandparents,” older people who give advice, mentor, and most importantly, have fun with youth. Through evaluation and focus groups with the youth after programming, they often reported feeling a stronger sense of self-efficacy, empathy, and better understanding of aging. Young people shared with staff that previous negative stereotypes they held about older people and aging had been shattered.



UNIVERSAL PRE-K STUDENTS
AND OLDER ADULTS DISCUSS
NUTRITION, 2023

Older adults are being reminded of things they’ve always loved, and trying new things that excite them. One older adult participant at Sunnyside was an artist, but she’d never really had a chance to share her work until she got plugged in at their center. Now, she holds intergenerational art classes where she gets to share her skills and knowledge with young people interested in expressing themselves through art– thereby giving her life a new sense of meaning and purpose.

Intergenerational centers support, “understanding, respect, and collaboration through the ages...no matter what age you are, [or what] position you’re in, or why you’re at Sunnyside. Whether it is receiving services or providing services, the connectivity [of intergenerational work] builds cohesive culture,” according to Donald, who has nurtured intergenerational programming and watched it grow at his settlement house for years.

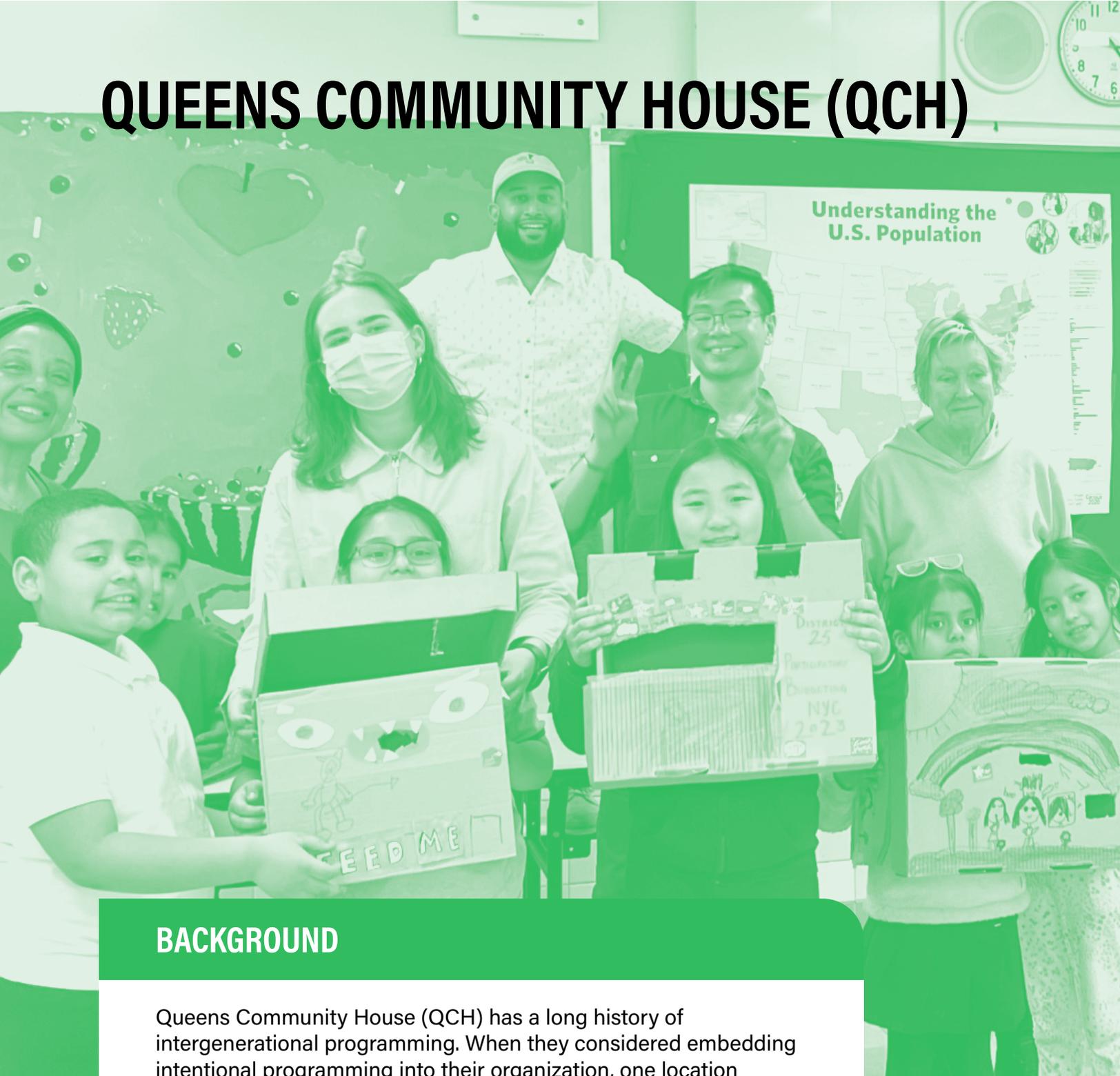
Sunnyside found that intergenerational work combats ageism, breaks down stereotypes, and builds empathy for community, letting everyone—no matter their age—feel included. Staff have found that the more they do, the more community members return wanting more, and that alone justifies the work.

CONCLUSION

Intergenerational relationships have the power to impact social isolation and loneliness, and it starts with an organization’s willingness to put in the time and effort to create sustainable programming. Sunnyside Community Services came to their programming through the pathways they identified that looked at the different ways they interact with their community: through “service,” “co-educational,” or “co-led” experiences. These pathways to intergenerational work created a variety of openings for participants to connect and engage with the community center and across generations.

Whether an organization is picking something quick and easy to get off the ground, like Living Room Conversations, or is tapping into the strengths and assets of older and younger people to run classes that align with their interests, intergenerational programming is a powerful way to engage people in the community and have a positive impact on all generations. At Sunnyside, they’ve seen new relationships formed across generations that will have a lasting effect on everyone involved.

QUEENS COMMUNITY HOUSE (QCH)



BACKGROUND

Queens Community House (QCH) has a long history of intergenerational programming. When they considered embedding intentional programming into their organization, one location immediately came to mind: their Beacon program at PS149 in Jackson Heights. Beacons are located in schools and transform the building into community centers outside of school hours. QCH struggled to brand the center as more than just a school, or just an afterschool program, so they jumped at the opportunity to “crack the Beacon nut” and take PS149 from a school to a community center engaging all generations.

QCH INTERGENERATIONAL
ART CLASS, 2023

WHAT MADE INTERGENERATIONAL WORK “WORK” AT QCH?

START BROAD

Queens Community House recognized that going from nothing to fully fleshed out intergenerational programming was too daunting of a task all at once. They started at the Beacon, the school building at the center of their community where they already had a presence. For a long time it was viewed as a child-only space, meant for classes and afterschool programs. QCH envisioned something far more robust. First, they recognized who they did have access to: youth who already frequented the building through afterschool programming. From there, they started to look outward at the community, trying to find people in the immediate vicinity who might be interested in attending/participating in programming outside of school hours.

QCH hosted listening groups, conducted a needs assessment, and solicited input from the community through surveys to try and figure out what they could do that would begin to draw people in. Once they had their broad pools of data, they realized they needed partners in this work.

TOOL HIGHLIGHT

INVOLVE YOUR COMMUNITY IN PLANNING

QCH knew early on they wanted to engage their community to build out programming at the Beacon. They helped develop Involve Your Community In Planning, a tool breaking down goals for engagement and gets staff thinking about who, specifically, they might tap into.

To access this and all other tools, visit: unhny.org/intergenhub



BUILD PARTNER-SHIPS

As they looked for older generations to begin participating in programming at the Beacon, QCH found the answer in their local community. They developed perhaps their most important partnership with a local Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) run by a colleague organization, Self-Help. A NORC is a building or series of buildings where a large percentage of the residents are older people aging in place. Community-based providers are stationed in these buildings in order to support the residents as they age, providing activities, case management, and other services.

At the NORC down the street, QCH found a group of older people who were looking for ways to engage with their community. They wanted to be active, but most of them had no idea that PS149 became a community center once school was out for the day. When they learned this, the group became QCH's greatest allies, joining afterschool programming and taking advantage of other events happening at the Beacon. This group of volunteers worked with youth on civic engagement projects, like informing the community about participatory budgeting, and fun events together like arts and crafts classes. This partnership supported both organizations in their goals—QCH had the older adult volunteers needed to run programming, and the NORC was able to provide their participants with new activities at times they wanted (evening and on weekends) when the NORC is typically closed.

Patrick Lin, Intergenerational Program Specialist, said that you have to, "Trust volunteers. They act like staff because they have the same level of interest and stake in the Beacon Center." While they may have been hesitant at first, taking time to observe and stand on the sidelines, QCH staff noticed that their confidence grew the more they were engaged. Soon enough, the volunteers from the NORC were interested in taking leadership roles to drive programming at the center.

Another partnership QCH forged was with the 34th Avenue Open Streets Coalition. At first, they seemed to be in competition as they were trying to occupy the same space for separate events. Once lines of communication were opened up, however, they realized they had a mutual interest: serving the community in a shared outdoor space. They began to coordinate their monthly events, giving each other the space, and leveraging their separate networks to draw people in. Now, the street outside of the school is a shared space where people of all generations come together for monthly celebrations, meals, and activities.

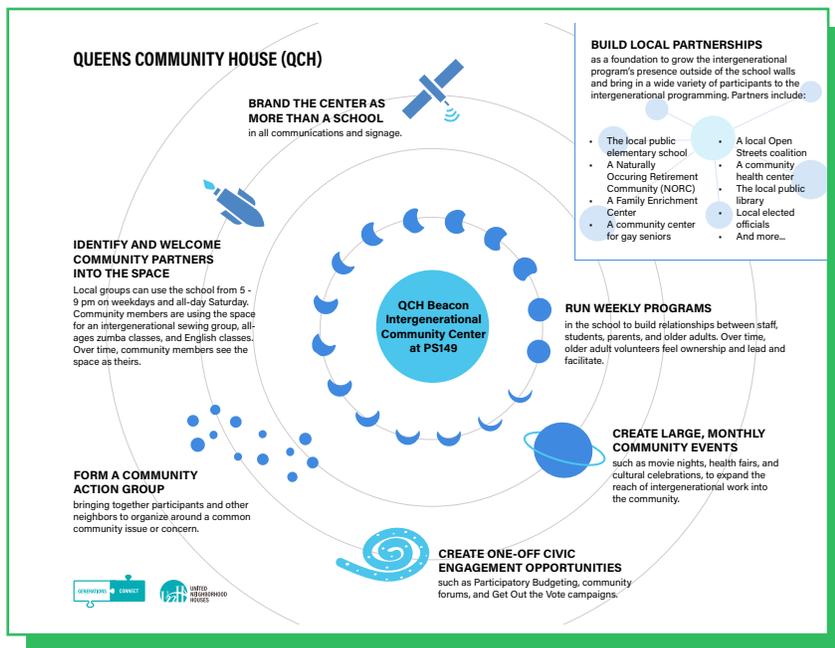
TOOL HIGHLIGHT

IS YOUR ORGANIZATION READY?

Before organizations can get started with intergenerational work, it is important to understand the underlying organizational culture and where it does and doesn't align with intergenerational principles. Is Your Organization Ready can help organizations see where their strengths lie and where they might need to put in more work.

To access this and all other tools, visit: unhny.org/intergenhub





FULL IMAGE IN APPENDIX

FIND PATHWAYS

QCH found that the best way to conceptualize their goal for the Beacon was to see the school as part of a solar system. If the Beacon is the sun at the center, what pieces throughout the rest of the solar system needed to be considered to make it a successful community center? They broke down what they needed to do into buckets that all orbit the school at the center of the system. These tasks did not happen sequentially, but in parallel.

→ Run weekly programming

QCH realized they needed to start running weekly programming in the school to build relationships among staff, students, parents, and older adults. This meant afterschool art classes, inviting community members into student clubs, and hosting support groups that welcomed people of all ages.

→ Identify and welcome community partners into the space

When QCH invited members of the community and other organizations into the school space from 5pm - 9pm on weekdays, and all day on Saturdays, magic began to happen. As with all Beacons, partnerships were built with the understanding that programming should be accessible to people of all ages. Community members used the space for intergenerational sewing groups, all-ages zumba classes, and English classes. The invitation to come in and inhabit the center allowed community members to see the space as theirs.

→ Create large, monthly community events

QCH didn't just focus on bringing old and young together, but took a lifespan approach to programming at the Beacon. This meant opening up the space for community movie nights, health fairs, and cultural celebrations that would attract folks who might not otherwise attend programming at a community center.

→ **Brand the center as more than a school**

QCH worked to visually brand the center as a community asset. They erected a community event board inside, created posters, and worked with the school to create spaces inside that weren't only for children. They also developed and hung signage on the outside of the school to catch the eye of community members. Even something such as bigger chairs and easier wheelchair access could make the difference between the school being just a school, or being something more for the community.



SIGNAGE FOR THE INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNITY CENTER

→ **Form a community action group**

QCH brought together participants and other neighbors to organize around common community issues or concerns. As people began to see the center as more than just a school, community members got to know each other. The street outside of the school became a place where community action happened—like addressing affordable housing, which QCH did by having visible signs about it when community members picked up their children.

→ **Create one-off civic engagement opportunities**

Finally, with all of these other pieces orbiting the center, QCH was able to garner interest in civic engagement activities. They led a successful inter-and-multi-generational campaign to bring awareness to participatory budgeting. Children helped decorate ballot boxes, adults and older people explained the process to them, and everyone was engaged in making decisions about their community.

IMPACTS

Harry Dwoskin, Assistant Beacon Director at PS149, said he's seen a positive impact of older people interacting with younger people to whom they're not related. It has added a new pool of role models who provide wisdom, knowledge, and fun for students! He aspires to a vision of a true community center at the Beacon, one they've begun to achieve.

Harry went on to point out the importance of bidirectional learning, not just a shared space. In intergenerational scenarios, everyone comes away learning something. Harry said, "We always think that younger folks learn so much from older folks, but through the programs, older folks learn a lot from the younger folks, namely technology. But in our arts and crafts, it is equal levels of sharing and learning. Older folks teach about arts and crafts stuff. Younger folks teach the older folks about what is trending today."

Anna Dioguardi Moyano, Director of Community Building, shared a story from their E-Basics tech assistance program. The E-Basics program provides space for anyone dealing with technological issues to come and talk to a young person who can help them troubleshoot a particular issue or just teach them how to use their tech. It can be an iPad, smart phone, laptop—bring it and the teen will do their best to help with it. This program is very service-based, with a younger person serving an older person. However, Anna found that when QCH gave students and participants the time and space, the program became more than just an older person receiving something from a younger person. One older person in particular kept coming back week after week, always bringing a tech question, but often lingering to keep talking with the teen who helped her. Eventually, a relationship began to blossom. Conversations started with tech help and then moved into job hunts, college applications, and life questions. For some, what began as a service-based program became a relationship building one, with lifelong friendships being forged even as students left for college.

QCH also found that in intergenerational spaces, older people were given more opportunities to drive and lead programming. They could take on co-facilitating an afterschool club, lead a sewing program, or teach dance. This provided older people a chance to give back to their community and gave staff a chance to step back and offer programming beyond what is in their contracts. What QCH found, too, was that the older people would encourage their younger compatriots to join them in leading or creating programming—collaborating on things that interest people across generations.

Patrick Lin, Intergenerational Program Specialist, said, "We acknowledge that we all come from different ages, different generations. But when we're in an intergenerational group, I like to encourage everyone that we're all of the same generation."

Finally, QCH saw firsthand how intentional intergenerational programming can impact the community at large. Multiple staff shared stories of participants from across generations seeing

each other on the street. One child in particular was excited to see their older adult friend and ran up to her, eager to take her hand and introduce her to his parents. Intergenerational work brings neighbors together.

QCH’s hard work, with UNH’s support, led to the development of a Beacon Guide that could be used at other Beacon program sites QCH manages to help them work toward what they created at PS149. This guide shares how important it is to provide programming that attracts all ages, taps into the strengths and assets of community members, and how partnerships can make a school a community center. The Beacon Guide is publicly available for anyone who might be interested in growing their afterschool program into a community center. At the center of the Jackson Heights universe, there is a school that once housed an afterschool program and now is a true Beacon to the community—a place where people of all ages come to get help, share wisdom, and have fun.

CONCLUSION

QCH started their intergenerational journey with a clear goal: turn PS149 into a true Beacon Community Center, taking it beyond just an afterschool program. To do this, they leaned heavily on their community and partnerships they formed to provide programming both in and outside the building. They made it clear through signage and word of mouth that the school building was open to everyone after school hours and tapped into community members to run programming during those times. They created what they hope will be a blueprint for other Beacons, and other community centers looking to engage their participants in “bi-directional” intergenerational relationships.



CELEBRATING “PI DAY”
AT PS149, 2024

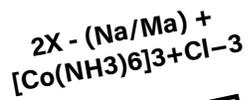
SUMMARY

Intergenerational programming is an antidote to social isolation and loneliness, offering a way for communities to come together to build stronger connections. BronxWorks saw older and younger people coming together around food, sharing culture and experiences with each other through cooking and vending produce at a farmer’s market. Sunnyside Community Services watched as younger people joined with participants at their older adult center to create clubs, learn and support one another, and go on adventures together. Queens Community House turned a school into a community center after hours, broadening their programming through community partnerships, and catering to people of all ages—creating an intentional space for intergenerational relationships to build.

UNH partnered with these settlement houses to pilot intergenerational programming in different settings and build a series of tools, resources and a professional development curriculum to help staff at other organizations—settlement houses or otherwise—bring intentional intergenerational programming into their center for the benefit of the organization, participants, and the community as a whole.

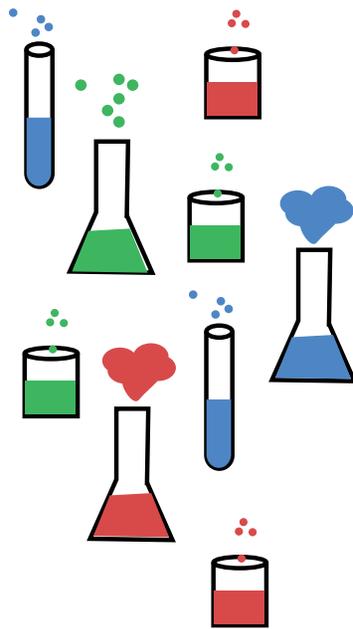
APPENDIX: SITE PATHWAYS

BRONXWORKS



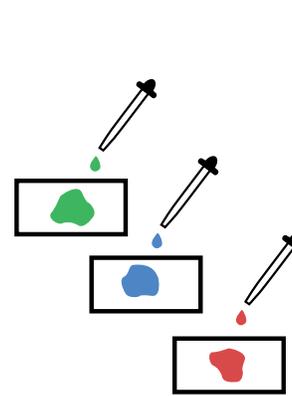
PLAN

Problem-solve what you need to get started. Set up internal communication structures, find a space, determine programming timing, and get permissions in order. Build relationships with other departments, eventually gaining enough interest and trust to co-create program plans with them.



EXPERIMENT WITH INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

Engage community members to find out their interests and skills. Get feedback after each session from participants and department staff, and at the end of each program. Build new programming off of what you hear. Just try things out!



"AHA!"

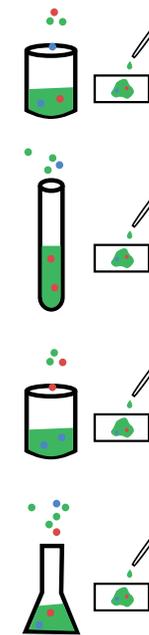


DISCOVER

Once you have some programming under your belt, and you know your participants better and the dynamics of intergenerational work at your center, conduct a visioning session with staff to give the initiative more shape. In this case, giving the initiative a name, a logo, clear goals, and an understanding of what generations to engage to meet your new goals.

REPEAT

Keep talking to participants and colleagues, bringing them into the planning and facilitation. Keep adjusting plans based on the feedback loop. Programming is driven by your goals, and planned and led more and more by participants.



UNHNY.ORG/INTERGENHUB
EDUCATE YOURSELF

SUNNYSIDE COMMUNITY SERVICES

CO-EDUCATIONAL
Both groups learn together

Idea	STAFF
Planning	STAFF
Facilitation	STAFF/ PARTICIPANTS/ EXTERNAL GROUP

Example: Young people and older adults visit a museum together.

SERVICE
One group does for another

Idea	STAFF
Planning	STAFF
Facilitation	STAFF

Example: Older adults chaperone teens to the prom.

CO-LED
You teach me, I teach you

Idea	PARTICIPANTS
Planning	MOSTLY PARTICIPANTS
Facilitation	PARTICIPANTS

Examples: Teens and older adults teach each other choreography in Cheerleading Club; Participants of all ages form a Chess Club where they teach and play each other.

OUR CENTER

Participants increasingly build, own, and lead intergenerational programming by participating in the different types of intergenerational programs.

HIGHEST ENGAGEMENT

UNHNY.ORG/INTERGENHUB
EDUCATE YOURSELF



QUEENS COMMUNITY HOUSE (QCH)

BRAND THE CENTER AS MORE THAN A SCHOOL
in all communications and signage.

IDENTIFY AND WELCOME COMMUNITY PARTNERS INTO THE SPACE

Local groups can use the school from 5 - 9 pm on weekdays and all-day Saturday. Community members are using the space for an intergenerational sewing group, all-ages zumba classes, and English classes. Over time, community members see the space as theirs.

FORM A COMMUNITY ACTION GROUP

bringing together participants and other neighbors to organize around a common community issue or concern.

QCH Beacon Intergenerational Community Center at PS149

BUILD LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

as a foundation to grow the intergenerational program's presence outside of the school walls and bring in a wide variety of participants to the intergenerational programming. Partners include:

- The local public elementary school
- A Naturally Occuring Retirement Community (NORC)
- A Family Enrichment Center
- A community center for gay seniors
- A local Open Streets coalition
- A community health center
- The local public library
- Local elected officials
- And more...

RUN WEEKLY PROGRAMS

in the school to build relationships between staff, students, parents, and older adults. Over time, older adult volunteers feel ownership and lead and facilitate.

CREATE LARGE, MONTHLY COMMUNITY EVENTS

such as movie nights, health fairs, and cultural celebrations, to expand the reach of intergenerational work into the community.

CREATE ONE-OFF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

such as Participatory Budgeting, community forums, and Get Out the Vote campaigns.

UNHNY.ORG/INTERGENHUB
EDUCATE YOURSELF



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

UNH would like to thank our organizational and funding partners who have made this work and case study possible.



**The Florence V.
Burden Foundation**



LEARN MORE

If you are interested in learning more about how intergenerational programming can work at your organization, please reach out to Terry Kaelber (tkaelber@unhny.org) and Katie Cardwell (kcardwell@unhny.org) to hear more.

