Action Kit
TULSA, OKLAHOMA

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ACROSS THE GENERATIONS
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“To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires courage.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

This Action Kit contains information for the people of Tulsa to begin a journey through the changing generational landscape. You are mapping largely uncharted territory. The goal of the Tulsa Across the Generations initiative is a thriving, vibrant city that recognizes, respects, and meets the needs – physical, emotional, and social – of all ages and brings generations together in support of each other.

This is a living, growing document. It includes an extensive survey of current relevant data, thinking, projects, and resources. That material has been summarized into a concise, useable form. This kit also outlines a framework for an intergenerational approach to Legacy Community Building.

Because this is a working document, it’s not as formal as a report. It’s intended as a guide. We invite your ongoing contributions. This is your opportunity to shape a future for Tulsa that will become a model for cities across the country.

Version Date: January, 2012. Check for updated versions at www.legacyproject.org/tulsa
1. Call to Action

By the year 2030, 1 in every 5 Americans will be over 65. This dramatic change in the generational landscape brings with it both challenges and opportunities. The City of Tulsa and the Legacy Project have partnered to create a model that addresses changing demographics, financial realities, environmental imperatives, and the social needs of all generations. It includes a One City, One Book community education and participation program. Tulsa will become a leader for other cities as it recognizes, respects, and meets the needs of all ages and brings generations together in support of each other.

2. Fast Facts

A global and national tour of some demographics related to adults, children and youth, and older adults.

3. Think Pieces

This series of accessible, thought-provoking articles on generational issues by Legacy Project Chair Susan V. Bosak offers new perspectives for discussion and action.

What’s in a Name? Respect and a Reflection of Self
Benefits of Intergenerational Connections
Being Young in Community
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Top 10 Recommended Reading List

4. Other Initiatives

A summary overview of other initiatives undertaken to address changing demographics around the country and the world.
5. An Intergenerational Lens

A look at the promise of intergenerational practice by Dr. Nancy Z. Henkin, Executive Director, The Intergenerational Center at Temple University and Donna M. Butts, Executive Director, Generations United.

6. Legacy Community Building

An introduction to the concept of legacy as a catalyst for change and the principles of Legacy Community Building.

7. Snapshot Tulsa

This summary snapshot of Tulsa starts with a broad look at current relevant Facts & Stats. It moves into a sampling of representative voices that capture some of the recurring themes in the city. It concludes with an overview of some of the city’s Generational Assets that can be used as a foundation for moving forward.

8. Dream It: Action Areas

Dream a better future for Tulsa that brings together all generations. This section will be written with the people of Tulsa. It will synthesize ideas gathered at the Across the Generations Summit with best practices and resources from around the world. It will serve as a foundation for moving forward and taking action. There are eleven Action Areas.

Education and Lifelong Learning
Employment and Economic Development
Healthcare and Healthy Living
Social Supports and Safety
Community Development and Sites for Gathering
Housing and Development/Land Use
Transportation and Mobility
Communication and Connection
Civic Engagement
Policy and Funding
Legacy Leaders

Citations
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Tulsa Across the Generations initiative has evolved from idea to reality because of the efforts of many people who deserve both recognition and heartfelt thanks.

The initiative would not be possible without the vision of Mayor Dewey Bartlett. He is pursuing a big-picture initiative that can have a profound effect on Tulsans of all ages. May you continue to work to make the dreams that started at the summit a reality for all.

Terry Simonson has made things happen over many months through his tireless effort, working many evenings and weekends. He understood and took to heart the possibilities open to the City of Tulsa.

The Across the Generations Summit has a number of generous sponsors: Tulsa Community Foundation; George Kaiser Family Foundation; The Anne and Henry Zarrow Foundation; Williams Companies; Dillon Family Services; Helmerich & Payne; Montereau; AARP; Senior Star Living; Tulsa Nursing Center; and The Villages at Southern Hills.

In particular, we would like to thank The Anne & Henry Zarrow Foundation for donating copies of the book Dream to local schools, libraries, and community groups. Dream is part of One City, One Book, the community education and participation program that’s part of the Across the Generations initiative.

The Across the Generations Summit was organized through the diligent efforts of the steering committee – Mary Brinkley, Tom Clarke, Phil Dessauer, Jerry Dillon, James Jakubovitz, Laura Kenny, Bill Major, Clark Miller, David Murlette, Chandini Sharma, and John Woodworth.

The visioning workshops at the summit have been guided by our expert group of facilitators and notetakers, including – Barbara Bannon, Nicholas Doctor, Charlotte Edmundson, Michelle Farabough, Ashley Fuller, Jennifer Goolsby, Linda Jenkins, Hannibal Johnson, Michael Lapolla, Pamela Pittman, Ellen Ralph, Gary Richetto, Heather Richetto-Rumley, and Steven Walkingstick.

The Legacy Project had two wonderful partners in Dr. Nancy Henkin, Executive Director at The Intergenerational Center at Temple University, Philadelphia, PA and Donna Butts, Executive Director at Generations United, Washington, DC.

Finally, there was a behind-the-scenes support team that helped take care of the multitude of important details. At the City of Tulsa, Kim MacLeod, Pam Listar, Kim Meloy, and Lathen Kamas. At the Legacy Project, Douglas Allan and Janet Riddell.

It takes a village to raise a child, care for an elder, and nurture an idea. Thank you for being our village.
1. CALL TO ACTION

By the year 2030, 1 in every 5 Americans will be over 65. Worldwide, for the first time in history, and probably for the rest of human history, people age 65 and older will outnumber children under age 5.

Demographic and financial imperatives are colliding. On the one hand, is the rapid and dramatic increase in the number of older people. On the other hand is the ongoing effect of the Great Recession. The result is shrinking resources – precisely when we need them most.

Of course, there are other relevant factors in play. Virtually half of recent births in the US are minorities. Yet the population 65 years and older is largely white. Civic leaders need to recognize and act on the new cultural reality to bridge both generational and racial/cultural divides.

A May, 2008 report from the Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa titled The Perfect Storm outlined additional factors in a complex modern reality:

- There is an ongoing lack of living wages for the large population of unskilled/low-skilled people and the growth of income insecurities.
- There is a workforce shortage in skilled jobs from plumbers to nurses. At the other end, there is a need for lower-skilled workers from physical labor jobs to caregivers (which includes childcare workers, homecare/health aides, nursing home aides).
- There are growing challenges to assuring healthy lifestyles and access to quality healthcare.
- The cultural profile and needs of cities is changing as immigration continues to grow.
- There is widespread uncertainty about the environment and how water and food supplies may be affected.
- There is increasing concern about our supply of energy – where it will come from, how we will pay for it, how safe it will be, and who will lead the way.

Each of these factors affects the society in which generations live, and many impact directly on the quality of life families – with young and old – will experience in the near future.

As demographics shift, how can we turn the challenge into an opportunity?

Fewer than half of America’s cities have even begun to address the changing generational landscape. Of those that have, most have taken a rather narrow perspective. Further, this whole area is still very much in its infancy; the fact that we’re living so long is still relatively new.

The City of Tulsa and the Legacy Project have partnered to take a ground-breaking, bigger picture approach – a Legacy Community Building approach founded on community-wide life course, intergenerational practices.
Some cities are known as good places to raise a family, while others are recognized as nice places to retire. Tulsa can become a great city in which to be born, grow up, have a career and raise a family, and then retire and stay connected to family and community.

The ultimate goal of the Tulsa Across the Generations initiative is a thriving, vibrant city that recognizes, respects, and meets the needs – physical, emotional, and social – of all ages and brings generations together in support of each other.

This moment is an opportunity for the citizens of Tulsa to come together, to get past recent conflicts, break out of entrenched thinking, and build new bridges. There is the potential for a significant social shift in attitudes and actions to the benefit of all generations. If developed and implemented strategically and with community unity, the Tulsa model can become an example for cities around the world.

The Tulsa model must take into consideration needs across a person’s lifetime, needs between generations, and even global needs like the environment, the quintessential intergenerational challenge.

The Tulsa model also needs to address larger, systemic change, including age-segregation and ageism. If we can develop a different view of aging – which is really something we do from the moment we’re born – it will become easier to think more about the whole of our lives, rather than fearing and denying getting old. Individuals and communities would then make different choices. This is about making those different choices, and bringing young and old together in new ways.

Too often, the needs of older adults are seen as a drain on communities. But older adults have tremendous potential as resources in the community, as do young people. Unfortunately, most communities operate under an age-segregated framework.

Solutions to chronic social problems like limited housing options, poor schools, and lack of support for families are difficult when each problem is addressed by age-specific rather than whole-community solutions. If young and old can be brought together, the result is greater social supports, and in turn greater effectiveness and even cost savings.

The Across the Generations initiative begins with a city-wide summit to open the dialogue through community leaders and advocates for children, youth, and older adults.

The dialogue started at the summit will be nurtured into action through the ongoing involvement of the community. There’s a community education and participation program – One City, One Book. Over several months, it will encourage young and old throughout Tulsa to come together to dream a new future for the city.

There are six different ways Tulsans can participate in One City, One Book. Families, schools, libraries, community groups are invited to read and discuss the award-winning bestseller Dream: A Tale of Wonder, Wisdom & Wishes by Susan V. Bosak. Dream is told by a wise old star, an elder grandparent/mentor figure. The old star takes the reader on a whirlwind journey through hopes and dreams across a lifetime. The book’s inspiring message is that you’re never too young or too old to dream. It’s a rich, multilayered book that offers something for all ages.

There are tips for doing an interactive intergenerational reading of Dream, and engaging activity ideas to connect children and older adults.

Then, as part of the Legacy Project’s Listen to a Life Essay Contest, children and teens will be encouraged to go into the community to interview grandparents and grandfriends about their life stories. Based on the interview, they submit a 300-word essay. The Grand Prize is a Lenovo ThinkCenter.
computer and $25,000 of EdOptions’ educational products for the winner’s school. A special Legacy Award winner will also be chosen from among the Tulsa entries.

Young Tulsans can further contribute to their community by recording and celebrating the important stories and legacies of older Tulsans through a Life Statement.

The Dream Exhibit, featuring all the original artwork from Dream and the magical Dream Chest, is being hosted by the Tulsa Historical Society Museum. It will include creative ways you can share your dreams for a better future for Tulsa.

For more details and updated information about One City, One Book: http://www.legacyproject.org/tulsa/tulsaocob.html

The Across the Generations initiative ultimately belongs to the people of Tulsa – and it is up to the people of Tulsa to take action.

The concrete and enticing goal is expressed well by former United Nations secretary General Kofi Annan in launching the International Year of Older Adults in the late 1990s:

A society for all ages is multigenerational. It is not fragmentated, with youths, adults and older persons going their separate ways. Rather, it is age-inclusive, with different generations recognizing – and acting upon – their commonality of interest.

To borrow from the Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa’s report The Perfect Storm:

Our communities, our country, the entire world are in a period of huge transition.

Any transitions of great proportion and complexity are extremely difficult, and test the adaptive nature of our human capabilities.

As cultural anthropologist Jennifer James notes, “We can teach the mind and body to adapt, but it is a tough assignment. The key is the ability to think in new ways... We are changing faster than any other generation. The changes are deep and broad. Each of us will be asked to think in new ways.”

What are the new realities we must accept, the new assumptions about daily life, our expectations of ourselves and others? What new thinking skills must be acquired to deal with the complexity and rapidity of change? What sacrifices must be made and what new opportunities will arise? What are priorities for getting started?

Who will be the leaders to get us started and assure our efforts are sustained?

Will you be one?
2. FAST FACTS

A global and national tour of some demographics related to adults, children, youth, and older adults.

**General**

The world population in the early 1800s was 1 billion people. 120 years later, in the 1920s, it was 2 billion people. By 1960, 40 years later, the population was about 3 billion people. Today, 50 years later, we’re at 7 billion people and still growing.

The world’s population is changing. Since 1960, the percentage of the population under 5 years of age has steadily decreased, while the percentage of adults 65 years and older has sharply increased (see graph on following page). For the first time in history, and probably for the rest of human history, people age 65 and older will outnumber children under age 5. An overall older population is driven by declines in fertility and improvements in health and longevity. (National Institute on Aging, 2007)

Life expectancy in the US has increased from 47 years for Americans born in 1900 to 77 years for those born in 2001 (although disparities exist across class and race). (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007)

The chance of meeting a 65 year-old in western affluent countries was 1 in 40 before the Industrial Revolution. It improved to 1 in 25 at the turn of the last century. In 1990, it was 1 in 10. In 2040, it will be 1 in 4. (City of Nashville, 2009)

Virtually half of recent births in the US are minorities. 25% are Hispanic, 13.6% are African American, and 4.2% are Asian. Nearly 1 in 20 births are two or more races.

However, the population 65 years and older is largely white. Minorities make up only 15% of those 85 years and older. (Frey, 2011)

Worldwide in 1950, there were 12 people of working age for every person 65 years or older. By 2010, that number had shrunk to 9. By 2050, this ratio is projected to drop to 4. (Population Reference Bureau, 2010)

As people live longer and have fewer children, family structures are transformed. This leaves many older people with fewer options for care. (National Institute on Aging, 2007)

Changing family structures also affect children. 66% of children 0-17 years live with two married parents. 23% live with only their mothers. 3% live with only their fathers. 4% live with neither of their parents. (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2011)

The Great Recession, which officially began in December, 2007, continues to heavily influence policy, programs, and planning. States continue to cut budgets, and municipalities are also financially distressed. As a result of the recession, there are fewer resources for youth and aging supports and services – precisely at the time they’re needed most. (National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, 2011)

Approximately one-third of US adults are obese. Obesity-related conditions include heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011)

Three behaviors – smoking, poor diet, and physical inactivity – were the root causes of almost 35% of US deaths in 2000. These
behaviors are risk factors that often underlie the development of the nation’s leading chronic disease killers: heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007)

Children and Youth

According to the 2010 census, there are 74.2 million children in the United States, 1.9 million more than in 2000. This number is projected to increase to 87.8 million in 2030. There are approximately equal numbers of children in three age groups: 0-5 (25.5 million), 6-11 (24.3 million), and 12-17 (24.8 million). (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2011)

Since the mid-1960s, children have been decreasing as a proportion of the total US population. In 2010, children made up 24% of the population, down from a peak of 36% at the end of the “baby boom” (1964). Children’s share of the population is projected to remain fairly stable through 2050, when they are projected to make up 23% of the population. (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2011)

Based on 2009 data, 21% of all children 0-17 years live in poverty. (Federal...
It’s estimated that up to 10% of elementary children are “addicted” to video games, with some as young as two years of age. As children connect more to technology, they disconnect more from humanity and nature. (Rowan, 2010)

At 7.5 hours per day average use of entertainment technologies (television, video games, movies, Internet, mobile devices), children are not participating in activities they need to optimize their growth and success. Youth who spend more time with media report lower grades and lower levels of personal contentment. (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010)

As many as half of grade 8 students do not have the literacy skills necessary to secure a job. Literacy is defined as “using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010)

The high school dropout rate for 16-24 year-olds declined from 14% in 1980 to 8% in 2009. A significant part of this decline occurred between 2000 and 2009 (from 11% to 8%). In general, the dropout rates for Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics each declined between 1980 and 2009. However, in each year during that period, the dropout rate was lower for Whites and African Americans than for Hispanics. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011)

The skills of young people need to be effectively matched to job needs in the economy. Most future jobs will not require university education, though clearly that education has value beyond meeting job needs. Preparing 100% of students for the 40% of society’s jobs that require university skills may not meet the needs of young people or society. (Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa, 2008)

Approximately 17% of US children and adolescents aged 2-19 years are obese. Since 1980, obesity prevalence among children and adolescents has almost tripled. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011) The World Health Organization reports that globally, more 21st century children will die from conditions related to obesity than to starvation.

Older Adults

By 2030, the number of Americans age 65 and older is expected to reach 71 million, roughly 20% of the population, or 1 in 5. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007)

The number of oldest old is rising. People age 85 and older are now the fastest-growing segment of the population. (National Institute on Aging, 2007)

There are an estimated 65 million grandparents in the US. By 2020, the number of grandparents is projected to reach 80 million, at which time they will be nearly 1 in 3 adults. (MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2011)

About 1 in 10 households headed by someone who is a grandparent has at least one grandchild living with them. Part of the reason for this is the recession-driven high unemployment among their grandchildren’s parents. 34% of these households had neither parent of the grandchild in the household. About 2.5 million grandparents are responsible for and raising their grandchildren. (MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2011)

The poverty rate for Americans 65 years and older is 9%. (US Census Bureau, 2010)
Adults 55 years and older made up 13% of the US workforce in 2002. They will make up 19% of the workforce by 2050. (Toosi, 2002)

From 1992 to 2003, the average literacy scores of adults ages 50-64 and 65 or older increased. Literacy is defined as “using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010)

The health status of older adults in racial and ethnic minorities lags far behind that of non-minority populations. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007)

The cost of providing healthcare for an older adult is three to five times greater than the cost for someone younger than 65 years. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007) As a result, there’s a tremendous personal and social incentive to support healthy aging – engaging in regular physical activity, eating a healthy diet, not smoking, and getting regular health screenings (e.g. mammograms, colonoscopies).

The top three causes of death for older adults are heart disease (32%), cancer (22%), and stroke (8%). (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007)

Falls are the leading cause of injury deaths and the most common cause of injuries and hospital admissions for trauma among adults age 65 and older. Fall-related injuries cause significant mortality, disability, loss of independence, and early admission to nursing homes. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007)

At least 80% of older Americans are living with at least one chronic condition, and 50% have at least two – including high blood pressure, diabetes, and cancer. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007)

5.4 million Americans have Alzheimer’s – 5.2 million 65 and older; 200,000 with younger-onset Alzheimer’s. Nearly half of people aged 85 and older have the disease. 2 in 3 people with Alzheimer’s are women. By 2050, as many as 16 million Americans will have the disease. (Alzheimer’s Association, 2011) The World Health Organization points out that Alzheimer’s will most likely become one of the leading causes of disability in older adults.

Most people survive an average of 4 to 8 years after an Alzheimer’s diagnosis, but some live as long as 20 years. On average, 40% of a person’s years with Alzheimer’s are spent in the most severe stage of the disease – longer than any other stage. (Alzheimer’s Association, 2011)

4% of the general population will be admitted to a nursing home by age 80. For people with Alzheimer’s, 75% will be admitted to a nursing home by age 80. (Alzheimer’s Association, 2011)

More than 8 in 10 Boomers (those born 1946-1964) and 9 in 10 people over 65 years report they want to stay in their current home for as long as possible. (AARP, 2010)

More than 10 million Americans are getting long-term assistance today, either at home or in institutions. (Gleckman, 2009)

Nearly 1.7 million Americans live in nursing homes and 1 million people reside in assisted living facilities. (Ramnarace, 2011) The number of people in nursing homes has been dropping over the last two decades.

The average annual price of a nursing home stay exceeds $78,000. The hourly cost of a home health aide is around $20. (Gleckman, 2009)

Most paid long-term care comes from Medicaid, which doesn’t help individuals until they are impoverished. Less than 10% of
care is paid by private long-term-care insurance, which remains too expensive for most families. (Gleckman, 2009)

Nearly 70% of all 65 year-olds will need some long-term care before they die. 1 out of every 5 will require this help for more than 5 years. (Gleckman, 2009)

More than 8 out of 10 Americans who need personal assistance and other long-term care will get it at home, not in nursing homes. Most is provided by family members who are often unprepared and untrained for this difficult work. (Gleckman, 2009)

In 2009, 42.1 million US family caregivers were caring for an adult with limitations, with 61.6 million providing care at some time during the year. The economic value of this unpaid care is estimated at $450 billion, a 21% increase over 2007. (AARP, 2011)

Americans who provide care for aging parents lose an estimated $3 trillion in wages, pensions, and Social Security benefits when they take time off to do so. (MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2011)

The prevention of cognitive decline and alleviation of end-of-life suffering are key areas where the public health arena can help make significant improvements in quality of life. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007)

There is considerable evidence that links community engagement to longevity, physical health, life satisfaction, and other indicators of psychological well-being of older adults. (AARP, 2005)

23.9% of adults 65 years and older volunteer. The median annual hours these older adults spend on volunteer activities is 90. This is the highest of any age range. (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009)

Boomers (those born 1946-1964) currently have the highest volunteer rate of any age group. They also volunteer at higher rates than past generations did when they were the same age. (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007)

The number of volunteers age 65 years and older will increase 50% by 2020. Harnessing the skills of Boomers, who are generally healthier and have higher levels of education than past elders, will be a tremendous resource for addressing numerous social challenges. (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007)
3. THINK PIECES

This series of accessible articles on generational issues from a social perspective by Legacy Project Chair Susan V. Bosak, MA, offers new perspectives for discussion and action. Excerpts of key ideas are provided here; the complete articles may be accessed on the Legacy Project website, http://www.legacyproject.org

What's in a Name? Respect and a Reflection of Self

The terms and concepts people use both reflect and affect attitudes. If you call someone old and senile, for example, it can affect both their perception of themselves and the way others perceive them.

As a society, we’re more aware today of sexism and racism. However, we’re still very ageist. Since the 1960s, there’s been an effort to eliminate the negative stereotypes of and prejudice toward older people. The way we view older people is affected by history and culture. What served us centuries ago no longer serves us. We’ve changed and the world has changed. We’re living longer and the old ways of looking at the old are no longer helpful or appropriate.

The term “ageism” was coined in 1968 by gerontologist Robert Butler. Ageism has been called the ultimate prejudice, the last discrimination, and the cruelest rejection. All societies use age and gender to classify their members, and they have different expectations for each category. But North Americans have developed a set of prejudices and discriminations against older adults that may be unequalled by any other society. Ageism also affects the young. Children should be particularly sensitive to ageism since being told “you’re too young” is just as bad as being told “you’re too old.”

Most of us are more ageist than we are aware. Even a seemingly harmless comment like, “You don’t look that old” (which is intended as a compliment) carries the message that “most people your age don’t look so great.”

Ageism can be positive as well as negative. It’s just as ageist to say that older people “should” be healthy, engaged, productive, and self-reliant than to say they aren’t. Much less attention has been paid to positive ageism than to negative ageism because positive ageism is less common and it’s not perceived to be as harmful. There are at least eight positive stereotypes that many people associate with older people: kindness, wisdom, dependability, affluence, political power, freedom, eternal youth, and happiness. None of these are any more true than the negative stereotypes. For example, people who were unhappy when they were young tend to still be unhappy when they are older. And, although calling someone a “sweet little old lady” isn’t negative, it does marginalize them.

When, exactly, does being “old” begin? In one study that compared 60 different societies, there were three basic ways of identifying the category of “old”: chronological; change of social/economic role; and change in physical characteristics.

Technically, old age in North America means the period of life following your 65th birthday. Old age has been defined in chronological terms since the passage of Social Security legislation in the 1930s. But studies have shown that there’s no consensus about when “old age” actually begins or
even whether it begins at a fixed chronological age. Even among those who have reached the age of 75, many still maintain that they aren’t old. One survey of Boomers said that they thought old age begins at 79. Or, as statesman Bernard Baruch once wrote, “Old age is always fifteen years older than I am.”

For many, old age begins with a decline in physical or mental ability, rather than with the arrival of a specific birthday. The transition to seeing yourself as old doesn’t occur for the majority of people until age 80 – surprisingly late in life. It’s usually related to poor health and loss of a spouse.

So why is it that people we see as “old” don’t see themselves as “old?” A large majority of older people experience aging as a gentle slope and as a positive experience – despite the modestly negative effects of aging on physical and mental functioning, and despite the widespread myths and stereotypes we hold about aging. Older people think of and describe themselves in terms of the themes and meaning of their life, rather than in terms of age. They express a sense of self that is ageless – an identity that maintains continuity despite the physical and social changes that come with old age.

There’s a lot of debate about what to call old people. No term is without its history and connotations.

The oldest Boomers are just starting to turn 65. Note the absence of the adjective “Baby” – since they aren’t babies anymore. They like to view themselves as being in their “prime time” – a reflection of their ageless self.

“Senior citizen” is a term that comes up when you think of product and service discounts for people over 50 or 55 years of age. Most people today find the term outdated and patronizing. Some don’t mind the simpler term “senior” because it implies more experience (as in a “senior” in high school).

The terms “elderly” and “aged” are often associated with social service and health programs, hospitals, and nursing homes. They’re sometimes used to evoke feelings of sympathy and compassion, and other times used almost synonymously with the word “sickly.”

In contrast to the word “elderly,” the word “elder” suggests respect and wisdom. However, some argue that it’s gender-biased, referring more to men than to women. It may have religious connotations because it can refer to a church position. Also, the term may evoke images of certain cultures, such as Native Americans. When you use a word, you never know exactly what it will bring to mind for someone. If used consistently though, elder could come to be seen as a strong term that may help move our thinking away from overvaluing knowledge and undervaluing wisdom.

“Older adult” and “older people” tend to be the most neutral terms. “Older” is a relative word, since everyone is older than someone else. However, this implies that a person should be defined in relation to younger individuals in society, which some argue adds to the marginalization that’s part of ageism. But the word “adult” does connote respect, independence, and responsibility. Younger people want to be treated as adults; so do older people.

Bottom line: What you call someone is both a measure of how you see them – hopefully with respect – and a measure of how they see themselves – their sense of self. So, older adult or elder may be the terms that bring with them the most power and potential in everyday communication.

Complete article:
http://www.legacyproject.org/guides/whatname.html
Benefits of Intergenerational Connections

In those at either end of the life course – the young and the old – you find striking similarities. We live in a society that values adulthood, and in turn doing – productivity and ongoing activity. The young and the old share a different rhythm. It’s one that focuses not only on doing, but on the power of being. It’s the simplicity of playing with blocks or tending to flowers. The young and the old are most closely connected with the essence of living. They can exist in a moment that’s the grand sum of past, present, and future. Rather than time being the enemy – rushing time or stressing to fit as much into time as possible – time becomes a comfortable companion, a circle rather than a line.

We divide up our communities and our activities by age – young people in schools, older people in retirement communities or facilities. We talk a lot about all the ways we need to help older people. But, perhaps, the old can help us. It’s the experience of life in a multigenerational, interdependent, richly complex community that, more than anything else, teaches us how to be human.

If we can improve the standing of older adults in society, and nurture what they can bring through intergenerational connections, then we can achieve a better community with a better quality of life for all ages.

Historically, young and old connected naturally. Older people taught the young how to be and how to become. Close daily contact between the young and old was a matter of survival. Being with, watching after, and assisting in the care of young children, while demanding in many ways, does not require the full vigor of youth. The physical limitations that can come with getting older actually cement the relationship between old and young. An elder capable of working the land or building a house or strenuous cleaning would have less inclination to spend hours doting on grandchildren, telling them stories, and instructing them in the ways of their people. The physiological changes that accompany old age, which contemporary society looks upon with great disdain, can actually be useful preconditions for valuable intergenerational connections.

There is a back-and-forth reciprocity between all generations. Adults provide support to elders, most often to address health or physical limitations. Elders, in turn, assist adults through experience, emotional support, and participating in the care of children. Elders can help socialize children, teach them empathy and character, and give them an unconditional form of love they can’t find elsewhere. Children, in turn, can be an endless source of joy for elders, share affection and play, and provide assistance with many simple tasks. Children can participate in the work of adults, and provide enjoyment and love. Adults, in turn, provide food, shelter, clothing, and nurturance to children. And so a strong, healthy, intergenerational web of community goes.

Many older adults today are better educated, healthier, and more able than elders of past generations. They can clearly be a tremendous resource. But what about the oldest, frailest of the old? They can be our greatest teachers. They can certainly instruct us with words and stories of times past, and share a lifetime of accumulated wisdom. But what they truly help us learn about is the world and ourselves as they teach us with their very selves, their being. Elders can also teach us about the end of life, which informs the whole of our lives.

Relationships between young and old make us feel connected. They make us feel connected not only to each other, but to something bigger, to the past and to the future, to the flow of life. This connection leads to tangible benefits for all generations.
Benefits to Children

Research shows children need four to six involved, caring adults in their lives to fully develop emotionally and socially. The problem today is that children often get too much peer socialization, too much mediated contact through computers and texting, and not enough one-on-one, personal time with mature adults.

The benefits to children of a close, long-term connection with older adults include:

- Through grandparents, children have a better sense of who they are and where they've come from. They have roots, a history, and a sense of continuity and perspective.
- Intergenerational bonds need not be traditional or biological. Older adult mentors can make a significant difference in a child’s life. The involvement of a reliable, caring adult helps children develop life skills, and builds self-esteem and confidence. One study showed that when a child is mentored by an adult, they are: 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs; 27% less likely to begin using alcohol; 52% less likely to skip school. (Public/Private Ventures, 2000)
- In general, children develop higher self-esteem, better emotional and social skills (including an ability to withstand peer pressure), and can even have better grades in school.
- Children feel special. Especially with grandparents, children are “spoiled” a little. Research tells us that, in moderation, this can be a good thing. Children know that being with their grandparents is special. They don’t expect the rest of the world to treat them the way their grandparents do, so it’s really not “spoiling.” They experience an unconditional type of love that’s not easily found elsewhere.
- Children can get undivided time and attention from an older adult that tired, busy parents often can’t give them.
- An older adult can give children someone safe to talk with and confide in. While children may want to be different from their parents, they often don’t mind being like their grandparents or other older adults. This gives elders a lot of power and ability to influence a troubled or confused child.
- Through sharing in an older adult’s interests, skills, and hobbies, children are introduced to new activities and ideas. Through their life experience, older adults can often bring with them a tremendous amount of patience. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes children pick up from elders tend to stick with them through life more than those picked up from other sources.
- By getting to know “real, live old people” children look beyond the ageist stereotypes. They become more comfortable with aging – which is really something we all do from the moment we’re born. Children are also encouraged to look toward the whole of their lives. They have many models for adulthood, but far fewer for older adulthood. When they can see the whole of their lives, they are more motivated and see greater relevance between what they’re learning in school and their future. Research shows that “planful competence” – the ability to understand the life course and work toward goals – is key to student success in school and in life.

Benefits to Older Adults

The benefits to older adults of a close connection with the young include:

- Elders often feel a sense of “joyful freedom.” As a grandparent, for example, they don’t feel the pressure
they felt as a parent. You get all the benefits and joys of parenthood without many of the drawbacks.

- A relationship with a grandchild or young friend gives older adults a “second chance.” Many people have regrets in their later years about time they didn’t spend with their own children, or mistakes they made as a parent. A new grandchild or young friend is a fresh start.

- Active, involved older adults with close intergenerational connections consistently report much less depression and higher degrees of life satisfaction. They tend to be happier with their present life and more hopeful for the future.

- Frail older adults with physical or cognitive limitations find new life purpose in connections with the young. Research has shown that older adults in nursing homes, for example, eat better, are more alert, and happier when there is an ongoing intergenerational program that allows for real, long-term relationships to develop.

- Young and old can fulfill the role of student and teacher for each other, and it’s not always the older person who does the teaching. Children like to feel needed, and they can teach elders lots of things – like how to find some pretty cool stuff on the Internet! Children can also help older people, particularly those facing health challenges or other losses, see the world anew again, through a child’s eyes.

- Elders have an opportunity to leave a powerful legacy, to make a difference. They can send a message into the future through a grandchild or young friend. Relationships across generations can fulfill our desire for immortality.

**Beyond Just Programs**

The richest forms of human development are most available to those willing and able to interweave their needs and potential with the needs and potential of others, especially those younger or older.

The success of isolated intergenerational projects and programs across the country clearly demonstrates the significant benefits of intergenerational contact to both children and adults.

The challenge now lies in going beyond a project or program here or there to making a larger commitment to intergenerational connections so that they become a part of daily life and the social fabric.

Complete article:  
[http://www.legacyproject.org/guides/intergenbenefits.html](http://www.legacyproject.org/guides/intergenbenefits.html)

**Being Young in Community**

Although social media and online communities are popular with the young, children and teens are in many ways increasingly isolated from real community. In large part this is because they’re isolated from older adults. But young and old need each other. Our society tends to marginalize both groups. A rich, fulfilling community brings together and celebrates all ages.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead once said that connections between the generations are “essential for the mental health and stability of a nation.”

But intergenerational communication can be a breeding ground for misunderstanding. The chronological distance between people means they’ve lived through very different historical periods and may be operating with different communication assumptions, skills, needs, and experiences.
Further, the concept of “generation” is as much a set of experiences as it is a range of years. A relative lack of change makes it easier to bring together the lives of grandparent, parent, and child. But when social change is rapid, as it is today, there are likely to be more separate “generations” created than when the passing years are indistinguishable. Rapid social change fractures children, parents, and grandparents, making intergenerational communication even more difficult.

Intergenerational communication is also affected by ageist stereotypes. Research shows that middle-aged and older people seem to have more complex schemas of older people than do young people, and are also more likely to identify positive traits of older people. So, they are more open to and effective at communicating with older adults. Young people seem to be more likely to rely on various stereotypes of older people and use patronizing “eldertalk.” In our youth-obsessed society, many young people also feel threatened by the thought of their own aging and the fact that they will one day belong to the “other” group (i.e. old people). This may be why some teens and young adults actively avoid interacting with older people.

Children are dependent on their family – their parents and grandparents – and their school to prepare them for adulthood and to participate in their world, their community. The school can be a key place where we begin to rebuild a sense of community. Our social problems cannot be solved by schools alone. But that doesn’t mean schools, with our support, can’t play an important role in making things better, especially for the young. Schools can become models of the larger sense of community we need in our neighborhoods, cities, and nations. Part of this involves giving schools the money, staff, and resources they desperately need. Another part involves a change in approach.

The classroom can become an oasis in a world that does not treat children fairly or encourage community. This can happen in a number of ways.

First, there can be a greater shift to a cooperative rather than competitive approach. There’s a heavy emphasis on the adversarial model in our society – some people are “winners” while most others are “losers.” Every person is out for themselves, and materialism and greed are everywhere. According to many sociologists and psychologists, this heavy emphasis on competition is counter-productive and unhealthy. In other cultures, like the Zuni and Iroquois in North America, the concept of competition is nonexistent. In places like the Israeli kibbutz, cooperation is prized and competition generally avoided. Problem-solving and working together toward common goals benefit everyone.

The second way that schools (and families) can encourage community is through the activities we encourage children to engage in. This means getting children away from the TV and computer. They need to consistently interact with other people, particularly parents, grandparents, mentors, and other adults. Research on early brain development shows that babies and toddlers have a critical need for direct interaction with people, not things, for healthy brain growth. As they get older, children also need to be engaged in active rather than passive activities. Children learn through active, physical and mental play – games, making music, storytelling, experiencing nature.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child gives children a number of rights, including play, adequate nutrition, special protection, housing, health care, and education. Children's play is often not valued by adults, who consider it a mere time filler rather than an essential component of healthy development. We need to encourage children to engage in open-ended,
spontaneous, active, cooperative play that allows them to freely explore, experiment, invent, and learn about themselves, others, and the world.

The third important component to schools helping to build community is educating the young about how to participate in community. Children need more of a background in civics. Civics involves those skills, attitudes, and beliefs needed to be a member of community. It was a course many people in previous generations took – a course about learning to become a useful citizen. Do we know how to participate in community? Who teaches us? A modern civics course might include information on cooperation, conflict resolution, media literacy, issues assessment, political structure, safety, and values such as responsibility, equality, justice, and integrity.

Finally, if schools are to be a model of community, we need to make them an intergenerational place, not an age-segregated enclave. The ultimate goal might be transforming schools into lifelong learning centers in which people of all ages congregate to explore and learn about the world around them. In the short term, we should encourage more family involvement in schools, run a school Grandparents Day, encourage older adults to come into schools to serve as volunteers and mentors, and connect with seniors groups and nursing homes. A true community brings all ages together to benefit everyone.

And what happens as children grow into teenagers and young adults? We have to make sure we also involve this age segment in community. Mentors can play an extremely important role here. So can community service. Young people are often looking for opportunities to contribute to community. Even at-risk youth can respond to meaningful, positive community involvement. Researchers have reported that young people develop a sense of personal and social responsibility when they participate in acts of community service. So, not only do the young need to receive help (i.e. mentoring) but they also need to give help (i.e. community service). They need meaningful opportunities to participate in community before they become cynical and lose interest.

As more people live longer, these opportunities may be found in helping older adults who face physical, economic, social or other limitations. Young people could help out immeasurably by giving caregivers a break, helping older adults care for their homes so that they can remain in them longer, teaching an older adult how to use the computer, or even starting a neighborhood walking club to reduce isolation.

Young people under 25 years of age, particularly today, in a world filled with complex choices, also need help to find their way into adulthood and the world of work. This is one very important area in which we need to develop new life maps. Everyone’s life is pretty much mapped out until late adolescence; after that, it’s an open field. It can be extremely difficult and frustrating to find your way in the world. And we “lose” many good people because they can’t find their way, and end up tired and cynical.

Perhaps one key change that needs to be made to our life maps is replacing the linear view of life that equates youth with education, middle age with work, and old age with leisure. A more evolved view should enable people to move in and out of education, work, and leisure throughout their life course. More flexible life pathways provide opportunities for personal fulfillment and community development at every life stage. We need ways to support young people as they establish themselves, lessen the burden on people in their middle years, and foster productivity during older adulthood.
Rebuilding a sense of community involves everyone accepting some responsibility for nurturing younger generations. We need more than just programs, but a restructuring of the way we do things, and the ability to get resources out to the people who need them. The emphasis has to be on building the capacity and knowledge of individuals, young and old, to enhance both personal and social change.

Complete article:  
http://www.legacyproject.org/guides/communityyoung.html

Getting Older in Community

By the year 2030, 1 in every 5 Americans will be over 65. We tend to have a pretty dismal image of old age in our society: decline, disability, depression, death. The myth of aging is everywhere. We’re all affected by it, even if at one level we understand that it’s simply a story we’ve created and may not necessarily correspond to the reality we experience. The myth of aging is a powerful, destructive one that profoundly affects the community we create and the extent to which we involve the old in it. Since (if we’re lucky enough) we’ll be old someday, it’s in our own best interest to address this myth so that we can remain an active and valued part of community as we age.

You can find many media items about the assistance – the “help,” well-intentioned but often patronizing – the young give older adults. But there’s far less attention paid to what people of all ages receive from the old. It’s the experience of life in a complex, interdependent, multigenerational society that, more than anything else, teaches us how to be human.

The fact is that, in general, older adults today are better educated, healthier, and more financially secure than any other previous generation. They’re also more engaged in learning and interested in contributing to their communities. Keeping older people involved in their community can substantially reduce the anticipated drain on financial, health care, and housing resources associated with an aging population.

A key issue in aging is social integration, the extent to which a person is actively connected and engaged with their family and community. Cross-cultural evidence shows that older adults are able to maintain a fairly high level of physical and emotional well-being when they have something considered valuable by others in their society, whether it be customs, skills, knowledge, or economic resources.

Today’s older adults want more than to simply “keep busy.” They want meaning. Meaning has to do with feeling that your life still matters (to yourself, at the very least) and that what you do makes sense. It has to do with the conviction that your life is about something more than simply surviving.

Volunteer activities, for example, have been found to bring new meaning to the lives of men and women at midlife and beyond by allowing them not only to perform useful services but also to function as mentors for those who are younger. Older adults can also participate by helping to care for the young, like their grandchildren, and continuing to be involved in paid labor.

But what about older adults with serious health problems, frail older adults, and the oldest old? The life issues faced by older adults who are well include living with loss, a need for meaningful activities, and the desire to be useful members of society and not be isolated. Frail and functionally limited older adults have the same needs, but require some special consideration for losses of physical strength and perhaps cognitive ability.

Researchers divide older adulthood into three general groups: “young old” (65-74), “old old” (75-84), and the “oldest old”
The oldest old are largely widowed (70%) and mostly women (70%). This age group is growing faster than any other segment of the population. The oldest old have the highest potential for functional disabilities. Over 70% of the oldest old have some limitations in one or more activities of daily living. Yet, nearly 45% still have relatively good health and need little assistance in preparing meals, shopping, managing money, or doing light housework. 25% do need some help with certain activities of daily living, while 30% need substantial help.

Research tells us the vast majority of older adults want to “age in place,” remaining in their own home – even if that home is no longer a comfortable place to live. As many as 8 out of 10 Boomers want to stay in their home for as long as possible.

We humans develop “place attachment,” a socioculturally mediated emotional connection to a particular physical location. In the face of instability and physical changes, illness, and other losses, we engage in an ongoing effort to create and preserve meaning through place-centered activity. We give meaning to places like our home, and our home in turn shapes the meaning available to us as we age.

Don’t underestimate the power of where and how you live to sustain you, especially in the face of increasing physical and emotional losses that come as we get into our 70s, 80s, 90s. Environments not only place demands on individuals, but they also provide opportunities for growth and adaptation. For example, being in a multigenerational environment with family or friends can foster better functioning, whereas helplessness-inducing contexts like a nursing home have the opposite effect.

What makes a good place to grow old? A community that promotes the physical and psychological well-being of community members throughout the life course.

Major systems, such as housing and transportation, should be responsive to the changing needs and capabilities of residents as they get older. The community should also provide opportunities for fulfillment with regard to five major psychosocial developmental tasks of later life (Scharlach, Creating Aging-Friendly Communities, Summer 2009):

1. Continuity – individuals are able to maintain lifelong relationships, activities, and interests even as they get older and may experience more limitations.

2. Compensation – services and products exist to ensure that basic health and social needs of individuals with increasing limitations are met.

3. Connection – relationships become more important as we age. Individuals who have more actual and potential sources of social support have better physical and psychological well-being, and greater resilience in response to illness and other life stressors.

4. Contribution – opportunities to develop and contribute life wisdom. We need to feel as though our life still has value, that we can add something to the world around us – if only a smile or hug.

5. Challenge – the need for stimulation and growth remains important through the life course.

As people search for a “good” way to grow old, they are imagining more varied options. For example, transgenerational design is getting more attention. Aging in place is difficult when that “place” hasn’t been properly designed. Many homes need to be retrofitted to accommodate functional limitations. New homes should be designed for the entire life course, not just for the young.

“Aging in community” has become a broader vision of aging in place. More and more of us live alone, without close family members
living nearby. The need and the desire to come together with others who are approaching older adulthood is growing. People are making plans to buy a house and live together to take care of each other – intentional communal living. Variations include senior cohousing, shared households, and cooperative urban villages.

The Village concept has older adults in a community banding together and paying a monthly fee to obtain services that allow them to remain in their existing home. Remaining in their life-long home preserves neighborhood-based social relationships. It allows older people to stay connected with their community. Yet, to remain connected to their community, they need the support of their community. They need adequate healthcare. For many people growing old is defined by, and is a process of adapting to, declines in physical health. They don’t feel old unless they are physically ill or depressed. Once their health is adversely affected and a person is unable to receive adequate care, a rapid decline often follows. After healthcare, daily living supports are important. Even the oldest old can function to their maximum capabilities when the environment provides the context and supports consistent with their abilities. This includes help with items like transportation, home repairs, housework, meals, and personal care activities like bathing. Finding the needed services and paying for them are critical issues for most of the oldest old. When spouses or children are unable or unwilling to provide support, the oldest old look to neighbors and friends. In one study, 30% identified a friend and 13% identified a neighbor as being able to provide the most assistance. The Village concept formalizes the definition of a “neighbor” so that residents can call a single number to tap into the resources in the community and get whatever help they need.

When it is possible to live with family, multigenerational living often answers needs for all generations. A century ago, children, parents, and grandparents commonly shared homes out of economic necessity. As Western society became more affluent and our cultural values shifted toward independence over connection, multigenerational habitation became less common. We lost something. We lost children learning from their elders, parents getting the physical and emotional support of their parents, and elders feeling useful and connected to their families. We also lost the opportunity to use the family as a testing-ground for one of the biggest human challenges we face: how to get along with other people. Multigenerational living can also address the economic realities facing many families today; living together is cheaper than living apart.

Many of the negatives associated with multigenerational co-habitation, like a loss of privacy and independence, are often the fault of poor design. Good multigenerational design supports the positives of living together and minimizes the negatives.

Even though options like retirement communities offer community living with some supports, they are age-segregated. San Francisco resident Anne Leitch shared this viewpoint in Generations, the American Society on Aging journal (Summer, 2009):

I live in a gated seniors community with all the amenities one could dream of – workshops, handicrafts, exercise. You name it, we have it. And yet I am longing, longing to walk to the corner coffee shop, to hear the sound of children playing, dogs barking. I want to see young people in love, watch mothers with their children in the park, young families, teens in the latest wild outfits. Yes, I’m lucky to have what I do, and I never forget that. But I am excluded from the mainstream of life. I am not elderly and never will be; my mother never was and she died at 92. Many
of us don’t want to be maintained and monitored. We want to belong, not only to each other, with whom we may have only one common denominator, age, but to society in general. We want to be “just like everyone else.” Think up something daring, something challenging, something creative. Segregation by race has come to an end. Now we can put an end to segregation by age. We need each other at every age.

So many parents and grandparents just want to be with their children and grandchildren, to be a daily part of their lives. A morning hello, snippets of conversation and banter throughout the day, a hug before you head off to sleep, those are the things that make a day rich and comforting, especially as you face your own physical and emotional losses. The little things keep you connected to the spirit of life. Don’t underestimate the power of where and how you live to sustain you.

We need homes and communities that are multigenerational. They cannot be fragmented, with youths, adults, and elders going their separate ways. Rather, they should be age-inclusive, with different generations recognizing – and acting upon – their mutual interests in building family and community.

For many of the oldest old, there may come a point where no amount of help allows them to remain in their own home. An assisted living facility or nursing home has traditionally been the next step.

There are real questions about the long-term viability of traditional assisted living and nursing homes. Many of these facilities are old and in need of major renovations. More importantly, they are not providing the type of sanctuary that frail elders need in the last months or years of their lives.

We approach nursing homes much the same way we approach schools: segregation and isolation. Nursing home residents, like children, are often isolated from their communities because of age and capabilities. Like the grade system in schools that favors administration over education, nursing home administrators sort and group residents with similar problems. Whether we’re talking about schools or nursing homes, lives are determined by institutional needs – and we fail in the essential community goals of educating the young and caring for the old. But, as with schools, nursing homes can become models of the larger sense of community we need in our neighborhoods, cities, and nations.

The place we live at the end of a long, full life should be a reward, not a punishment. We can start by putting the “home” back into nursing home. What does “home” mean to you? Comfort? Acceptance? Safety? Personal control? Many of these elements are missing from traditional nursing homes. No matter how old, infirm, or cognitively debilitated a person is, they share the same basic emotional needs as their healthier counterparts. There also remains some part of that person which is still healthy and capable of growth. Some physical decline accompanies aging in even the healthiest of adults. Sensory losses, decreased muscle strength and reflex time, and diminished energy levels are all normal parts of aging. When these declines are coupled with a disease like Alzheimer’s, for example, a person becomes even less able to handle the tasks of daily living. But by creatively addressing the physical and social environment, nursing homes can help maximize the strengths, self-respect, and dignity of all older adults, regardless of their capabilities.

Dr. William Thomas is an out-spoken critic of nursing homes and cofounder in 1991 of the Eden Alternative. It was designed to specifically address the boredom, helplessness, and loneliness experienced by nursing home residents, and allow staff more
flexibility in care. The Eden Alternative has trained over 17,000 Eden Associates and now claims over 300 registered homes, in the US, Canada, Europe, and Australia. Now Thomas is developing the Green House concept. Each self-contained house is designed to accommodate 7-12 residents and a core group of staff members responsible for multiple tasks, ranging from cooking to personal care. There can be 5 to 10 of these houses clustered together or in a community where they are part of a hub nursing care center that is home to the administrative, nursing, and rehabilitation services used by the houses. The Green House project has certainly garnered the most recent attention.

Broader intergenerational connections in nursing homes can also go a long way to creating community and improving the lives of older adults. As we look to the future, we may want to ensure that, for example, every nursing home is a shared site with a daycare. Young and old can then interact every day, forming real relationships.

One study looked at the effects of participation in an intergenerational program on the behavior of nursing home residents with dementia. Analysis showed participation in activities with small children lowered residents' agitation levels. Other studies have shown that residents with dementia appear more alert and active, and smile more when they are around children. They derive benefits from direct interaction, as well as just passively watching children play. As they focus on the children and their needs, older adults tend to forget their own problems and be pulled out of themselves. And children, especially toddlers, enjoy being the center of all the attention.

What if we did away with the entire concept of nursing homes, and replaced it instead with places to support and care for people of all ages? In doing so, we wouldn’t marginalize the old in a single cluster of infirmity. We would also connect the old, who are at a stage in life where they experience many losses, with the vitality of the young – connect them with, in the words of one older person, “friends who won’t die on you.”

Unlike institutions, real communities are collections of people of all ages and stages who cooperate voluntarily in different ways for different reasons. Community is defined by a diverse membership bound together and dedicated to the mutual accomplishment of necessary tasks. Social diversity is as important to the nursing home as it is to a true community. Perhaps nursing homes should become places that also care for and educate children, places where food is consumed, places where we gather and play. Why not have a summer camp for children? What about an after-school program? What about a meeting place for 4-H Clubs, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts? The possibilities are endless and exciting.

Complete article: http://www.legacyproject.org/guides/communityold.html

Rethinking Eldercare

Susan Bosak shares her family’s personal caregiving journey…

“Is he DNR?”

That “do not resuscitate” question was the very first asked by the Emergency doctor at the hospital when the ambulance brought in my father with a severe hemorrhagic stroke. No one had even told me yet what was wrong with Dad, or the prognosis. It’s a question that, for me, set the tone for the way the healthcare system often treats and views frail elders.

Dad is 86 and Mom is 80. With some family and outside supports, they lived independently in the community. They compensated for each other’s weaknesses. Mom has
dementia. Dad was cognitively sharp, enjoying time on his computer and reading. But he had a number of health challenges, including two heart bypass surgeries, mild congestive heart failure, back problems due to collapsed vertebrae, and ulcerative colitis. He’s also almost completely deaf.

On the morning of May 18, 2009, Dad got up early, as usual, and made himself some breakfast. Mom was still asleep. At some point after eating, Dad had a massive hemorrhagic stroke. He fell to the floor and then had a heart attack.

We don’t know how long Dad lay on the floor. We do know that when Mom came out of the bedroom, she found him semi-conscious in a pool of urine and vomit. She couldn’t make sense of what she was seeing. She pressed the speed-dial button on her telephone to reach my cell phone.

I had just finished a presentation to a group of energetic fourth and fifth graders at a school in Cincinnati. When my cell phone rang, all Mom could get out was, “Dad is on the floor.”

I told her to push the panic button on the kitchen counter. And I started driving home.

During that drive back, the Emergency doctor called with his question. I pulled into a McDonald’s parking lot off the US interstate and had one of the most difficult phone calls of my life. The doctor explained what had happened to my father. He was also candid in telling me that he didn’t think Dad would last the 10 hours it would take me to get back home.

To everyone’s surprise, my father survived. The hospital had not engaged in any exceptional measures, but they had saved Dad – with some help from his strong spirit. Modern medicine had done its job, but now the system was left to pick up the pieces. And the system didn’t know what to do with Dad.

In the weeks that followed, it became clear to me that Dad was still Dad. Cognitively, he was fairly intact. He understood what was happening. He could read. I could see his personality. But at some moments he was mentally clearer than others. He can make sounds, but is unable to speak. The aphasia often limits his ability to even give yes/no answers accurately. He has problems swallowing and can only take in thickened liquids fed to him slowly. He has significant weakness on the right side (it took me awhile to figure out why the doctors kept asking whether he’s right-handed) and can’t move on his own, is incontinent and bedridden.

Even if Dad can’t speak, he’s creative in his gestures. I also understand him because I know him and how he thinks. The one thing Dad was able to communicate clearly, with a left-handed hitchhiker gesture: he wanted to go home.

At first, the hospital spoke to us about a nursing home. It was assumed that’s where he should go. But given his high needs, placement would be difficult and the wait would be long. Because he can’t speak or move, he’s most vulnerable. And I have concerns about many of the practices I’ve seen in nursing homes. For me, putting him in a nursing home was equivalent to letting your toddler play in the street – there’s a high likelihood of a bad outcome.

I wanted rehab to help Dad regain as much function as possible. The hospital suggested slow-stream rehab at a local facility. But my research turned up some worrisome stories about the facility. And given all Dad’s medical issues and needs, I feared we would end up moving in with him because he wouldn’t get the care he needed.

The hospital was in a hurry to discharge him – somewhere. He was stable and they needed the bed. The only thing that bought us some time was that Dad’s colitis flared because he was off all his meds. Initially, the hospital insisted it was C. difficile, which
meant my dad’s room suddenly looked like a haz-mat zone. Eventually, it was confirmed that it was colitis. My father was in the hospital for over two months.

Dad insisted he wanted to go home. And I also had to think about what to do with Mom. I had several sleepless nights, and then went for a long walk.

This personal situation cut to the core of what I do. The Legacy Project is an education project for children and adults that’s essentially about bringing meaning to the life course. We help people with growing up and growing old, the value and meaning of aging, and the importance of intergenerational connections to both young and old.

It was time to walk my talk. We told the hospital we were taking Dad home. He and Mom would come to live with us.

We did a very quick and very stressful renovation, while selling my parents’ existing home and packing up all their belongings, and taking care of my father who was still in the hospital.

It was all an exhausting whirlwind. Once the renovating and moving was done, we hoped it would get better. It didn’t.

We’re “on duty” 24/7. We’re saving the government money and keeping two high-needs nursing home beds open for other elders. What we need is the help promised at the hospital when we made one of the biggest decisions of our lives. The reality hasn’t matched the rhetoric. Like so many other families, we have largely been left to fumble through on our own. Even with my knowledge of the aging field, this has been one of the most difficult things I’ve ever done – and one of the most rewarding.

My parents have a quality of life with us they wouldn’t have isolated in a care facility. Mom gets lots of hugs and is less depressed and angry since she moved in with us. We keep her in a simple, familiar routine. She “cleans” and “cooks” in the morning, which mimics her routine through her life. She watches old movies in the afternoon. She enjoys looking out the window at the birds and through old photos. She has visitors, and goes out when the weather is warm. She smiles and jokes with us, often covering her confusion with good humor. She feels safe and loved.

We do an hour of physiotherapy with Dad every day. When we’re not changing his adult diaper (we call it a pad) or feeding him thickened liquids with a teaspoon (taking an hour for each meal), we wander into his room and just hold his hand. He naps when he wants. We record his favourite TV shows – baseball, Golden Girls, and Price Is Right – so that he can watch them when he’s alert.

For me, this is about living a life with meaning and having a death with dignity. The system isn’t set up to accommodate either.

As a society, we fear aging and deny death. There are moral and ethical issues here, and financial choices to be made. But if you want to bring this down to the most selfish of levels, you need to ask yourself: What should my later years be like? Where do I want to end up?

Complete article:
http://www.legacyproject.org/guides/rethinkcare.html

Taking Action on Eldercare

As the population of older adults increases, supporting aging with meaning and dignity becomes more pressing. The systemic changes that need to be made around where frail elders, in particular, live and how they are cared for will take time.

If it takes a village to raise a child, it certainly takes a village to care for a frail elder. There are people out there trying to do the right thing. But the system has to do the right
thing. The system has to do the right thing, so that more people in the system can do the right thing.

Here are some broad strokes for taking action on improving eldercare, particularly for frail elders:

- Research tells us that most older adults want to remain in their home, with family. The place we live becomes part of who we are, and when we lose our sense of place, we lose a huge part of ourselves. Also, elders want and need to be connected to the real world and other generations, not isolated and marginalized in a traditional care facility. Governments and community organizations need to be more responsive to the needs of an aging society. Properly supported homecare, for example, may actually work out to be more economical over the long run.

- Programs should have stable funding so that families have security. And programs shouldn’t be so constraining and bureaucratic that they push people away. They should be designed flexibly so that different families can use them in different ways to meet their needs.

- We need more creative approaches to in-home community support, including roving doctors and specialists who will deal with complex, frail elders in the community. Right now, bureaucracy, rigidity, and liability issues are a barrier to these elders receiving the best possible care.

- Hospitals need to be more responsive and creative in addressing the needs of frail elders. Hospitals are set up for younger adults who often face single, more easily-diagnosed conditions. The hospital environment can hasten the death of a frail elder or prompt such a severe loss in functioning that returning home ceases to be a viable option. Some hospitals are starting to experiment with different ways to manage frail elders.

- We need more living options for elders. Some elders simply cannot stay in their home or with family. We need better alternatives to traditional institutional living, creating communal living variations instead.

- Intergenerational contact shouldn’t be isolated to a “nice” program here or there. It should be woven into the fabric of our society. It should be “just the way we do things.” An elder doing crafts alone can often be demeaning and meaningless. Add a child and the whole dynamic changes – for both the elder and the child.

- As families and as a culture, we have to rethink how we view getting old. Why shouldn’t an elder who is sick, confused, and scared have the right to be in familiar surroundings and have the comforts of their own home? We have to organize the necessary supports to make these simple things the basic human rights of old age.

- Elders can teach us about the end of life, which informs the whole of our lives. As communities, we should think about ways we can create sanctuaries for older adults, particularly the oldest old, that honor their elderhood and connect them to the community in a meaningful way. These “legacy centers” could include living options for older adults mixed with a public park and library to ensure families become part of the circle of care. It could also involve having a local history museum integrated into the site to capture and preserve the stories and life lessons of elders. There is value there that shouldn’t be underestimated.

- As families, we have to structure our lives to respect and accommodate elders. We plan for children – decorating the nursery, signing up even before the baby
is born for the best local daycare, taking maternity/paternity leave. We recognize the challenges and needs of a baby, and figure it out. Why don’t we figure it out for elders? We do little planning, most people generally don’t understand the physical and emotional needs of a frail elder, and society doesn’t give us much flexibility when we’re caring for an elder.

- We need to design better homes. Right now, we design and build Peter Pan homes, for people who will never grow old. But we do grow old. And then we’re stuck with a home we want to stay in, but that won’t work for us. We need both transgenerational and multigenerational home design – homes that allow for something as simple as a wheelchair to fit through the bathroom door, and in which one generation can help another while still maintaining a degree of privacy and independence.

- We need to understand more about the whole of our lives from the start. Life course education at the elementary level would encourage children to start thinking about the whole of their lives, and even their old age. Children must be supported in their natural inclination to make meaning, and should be taught the skills they need to develop a meaningful life story for themselves. Without a meaningful life story in their head, they see little relevance between what they’re learning and their life. They struggle and lose interest. When they have meaning, including knowledge about the whole of the life course, this creates a natural forward momentum and keeps them motivated. They see more of the big picture and the world makes more sense.

- We also need to challenge the aging stereotypes we encounter every day, from ads to birthday cards. We fear getting old and deny death. If as a society we don’t value growing older, caring for elders will never be a priority and we set ourselves up for a dismal future.

Complete article:  
http://www.legacyproject.org/guides/actioncare.html

Aging Education

This is the Age of Aging. It’s the first century in history in which human beings can reasonably expect to live even close to what we presently think of as the entire lifespan.

Today, an American at birth is expected to live 75+ years compared to 47 years in 1900 – an additional 28 or more years. By the year 2030, 1 in every 5 Americans will be over 65. And the older population itself is getting older. Centenarians are actually the fastest-growing age group in the country. Card companies now even make special birthday cards for people who reach this magical age.

Aging is not optional. We are all, in fact, aging from the moment we are born. If we’re lucky, we get old. And yes, we all die. Aging is a lifelong process, and there’s really no set age when people become “old.” The biggest issue regarding aging and getting old is how we look at it – which isn’t very well.

Saying that aging is “good” or “bad” is just as silly and simplistic as saying life is “good” or “bad.” Life can be good and it can be bad. That’s life. And that’s aging. The problem is that we all – old and young – tend to have a negative attitude toward growing old, assign negative characteristics like unattractiveness and illness to being old, do not perceive anything positive about being old, and tend to prefer the company of the young and have limited contact with and knowledge of older people. But as demographics change, it’s in all our best interests to create a new understanding of old age, one that gives us meaning and fulfillment throughout the life course, and create new life maps that help
young and old get the most out of their entire lives.

We can’t stay young forever. Aging is as natural as the changing seasons. But the natural process of aging has been overtaken by chemistry, surgery, and artifice. The media certainly doesn’t promote aging as a process through which we can mature gracefully and positively. That doesn’t sell product. Advertising is full of age-defying and age-correcting products, which promise unending happiness, social mobility, or the transformation of women, in particular, from being old and undesirable to being young and desirable. Is this the legacy we want to pass on to our children?

Because older people are more numerous, more affluent, and better educated than ever before, this demographic shift may work to change attitudes toward aging. We need to understand aging across the life course. Our exploration must be multidisciplinary, reaching into theory, philosophy, scientific research, communication and storytelling, social policy, activism, and self-understanding.

Education is key – both from the perspective of more people understanding aging, and from the perspective of how people will be when they become old. The more educated a person is, the more resources they have, and the more likely they are to be healthy, cognitively active, productive, and have a level of meaning and contentment in their life.

Why should today’s children care about aging? Children’s chances (in a developed nation) of surviving to a very old age are greater than at any time in history. They need to know how to live out that life as healthy, productive, effective individuals. They need to prepare to live their entire lifespan. Young people educated about aging are more likely to live a healthy lifestyle and maximize their chances of living long and living well. This obviously has benefits for the individual, as well as reduces the healthcare burden on society. These people will also be better able to care for aging relatives, neighbors, and friends. Most importantly, they will be less likely to engage in ageist discrimination and more willing to create a better, more supportive social environment.

The question isn’t really whether children should learn about aging – because they are learning about aging and a multitude of other things whether we consciously teach them or not – but what they should learn about the lifelong process we call growing up and getting older. Even before the age of five years, research shows children may have already internalized ideas that lead to ageism (age prejudice/stereotypes) and gerontophobia (fear of aging). Most children say they don’t want to get “old.” They express fears that if they were old, life wouldn’t be much fun and they would soon die (keep in mind that for children, “old” is anyone over 30!). A boy commented that he was “really scared” to get old. It turned out that what he was “really scared” of was getting sick, which he equated with getting old. Children need to develop a more accurate understanding of aging and have positive role models in their life.

Grandparents are living, breathing models of older adulthood and aging. Bringing grandparents, and other older adults, into schools opens the door to exploring life course and aging issues with children. Children at all age levels tend to have limited knowledge about older people. They just don’t know that many older people. The media, combined with the fact that children have so little contact with real older people, results in children having a lot of stereotypes about the old. Some research has shown that children predominantly view older people as passive and not much fun to be with. At the same time though, they also express deep affection for older people. They evidently feel negatively about the physical and behavioral characteristics of age, but feel a positive
affection toward specific older people like a doting grandparent. In other words, children love their grandparents – they just don’t ever want to be like them! So intergenerational contact in itself is not enough. It’s not enough to build a good relationship with “them.” Children also need an educational component so that they come to see themselves as “them.”

As far back as 1961, the White House Conference on Aging endorsed the need for aging education in schools. But progress has been slow. Some materials have become available to help teachers integrate aging education into the curriculum. The biggest barrier is that no one wants to talk about it. Many adults – teachers, parents, and grandparents – are not interested in aging and, in fact, must confront their own fears and stereotypes about aging and older adults. A Grandparents Day event can be an important first step in breaking down this barrier, opening dialogue, and building toward aging/life course education and intergenerational programs.

In general, there are four areas children should explore as part of understanding their entire life course. We need to teach children about:

1. The Aging Process: Growing old is a natural part of human development; there are normal changes that come with aging; older people have certain needs and experience losses as well as gains; and it’s important to develop ways to deal with realities like illness and death.

2. Issues Related to Aging: The myths and stereotypes about growing and being old; the economic, social, and psychological challenges of aging in our society; the isolation and segregation of many older adults; the current and historical role of older adults in our society; the roles and treatment of older people in other cultures and the values they reflect.

3. Older People as Individuals: The families, education, work, and life experiences of grandparents and other older adults; the contributions of older adults now and throughout history.

4. Connections Between Young and Old: Similarities and differences between young and old; what younger people can expect to do with and can expect from older people; how young and old can work together to address common needs; how being old is perceived by the young versus how it’s perceived by the old; how we can look at our lives from a life course perspective and how each individual is unique.

Aging is complex and can be defined in a number of very different ways – chronological, legal, personal, physiological, psychological, and social/cultural. But attitude is key. As we shape children’s attitudes, we must also reshape some of our own.

In terms of attitudes toward aging in general, we need to come to see life as an opportunity for continuous growth and development; recognize that all people are unique; understand that there’s no one way to “get old;” appreciate the strengths and values of older people; and understand that ageist stereotypes are harmful.

In terms of attitudes toward the aging process, we need to understand aging as a continuous process of growing up and becoming older; recognize that the young today can expect to live longer than ever before in history; understand that aging is a complex interaction of genetic, lifestyle, and environmental factors; recognize that individuals can make personal choices that will affect the length and quality of their life; and recognize that aging isn’t just physical, but it’s also psychological and social.

Finally, in terms of societal attitudes, we must understand that advances in medicine,
nutrition, and healthcare make it possible for people to live longer, healthier lives; recognize that longevity is increasing, as is the percentage of the population that is older; recognize that an aging society creates economic and social changes that affect us all; and believe that while an aging society provides challenges, it also offers opportunities.

As we explore aging, we do have to be careful not to split old age into two polarized images – the “ill-derly” versus the “healthy, wealthy, and wise.” This feeds both a false pessimism and a superficial optimism. Said one birthday card on the outside: “Do you know how the well-adjusted age?” Inside was the answer: “Neither do I!” There is a vacuum. Negative images are everywhere, oppressive and depressing; positive images are too confining, idealized, and perhaps unattainable for many. Not everyone’s situation is the same. Many older people can’t retire because they can’t subsist on Social Security alone. They may not have e-mail to stay in contact with their grandchildren, and they may be too tired for lifelong learning. To create genuinely satisfying, realistic images of aging, we have to understand its complexities – with variations dependent on class, culture, income, education, gender, and more.

As we create new life maps, there are no prescribed role models to follow, no guideposts, no rigid rules or obvious rewards. Aging is much more than a problem to be solved. It is about our vision of what it means to live a life. We need to feel as though we are moving toward something worthwhile – not necessarily easy, not straightforward, but worthwhile. We need meaning and hope, both individually and as a society.

A final caution: today’s children can’t necessarily see their own future in the conditions of older people today. No one can say what it will be like to grow old in the middle or late 21st century. What it means to be 50, 60, 70, or 80 years old today is very different from what it meant or was like 100 years ago. We don’t know whether the life of older people in the future will be better or worse. But we can be certain that it will be different. The better prepared the young are, the more educated, the more able they will be to help create new life maps and to handle what comes.

Complete article:
http://www.legacyproject.org/guides/ageducation.html

Top 10 Recommended Reading List

1. Dream: A Tale of Wonder, Wisdom & Wishes by Susan V. Bosak (TCP Press, 2005). Dream is featured as part of Tulsa’s Across Generations One City, One Book community education program. Illustrated by 15 top artists from around the world, the book was developed as a way to open intergenerational dialogue. Tulsans of all ages are invited to share and discuss the story. Dream is told by a wise old star, an elder grandparent/mentor figure. The old star takes the reader on a whirlwind journey through hopes and dreams across a lifetime. The book’s inspiring message is that you’re never too young or too old to dream. It’s a rich, multilayered book that offers something for all ages.
http://www.legacyproject.org/tulsa/tulsaocob.html

2. Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World by Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger (Wiley, 2004). Imagine waking up every morning believing that your actions can make a significant difference in the world. For everyone who has ever yearned for a better life and a better world, this book by two young “changemakers” shares a blueprint for personal and social change.
3. The Big Shift: Navigating the New Stage Beyond Midlife by Marc Freedman (Public Affairs, 2011). Millions of people in their 50s, 60s, and 70s are searching for an answer to the question, “What’s next?” We need new life maps for older adults. This book shares personal thoughts, stories, and a ten-point plan for societal change.

4. Virtual Child: The Terrifying Truth About What Technology is Doing to Children by Cris A. Rowan (Sunshine Coast Occupational Therapy, 2010). The recent explosion in technologies used by children has the potential for serious long-term consequences. Children are not engaging in the essential activities that build developmental foundations for personal growth and human connection.

5. A Bitter Pill: How the Medical System is Failing the Elderly by John Sloan, MD (Greystone Books, 2009). Medical treatment of frail elders is not working. The system is designed for younger patients, and needs a completely new approach for dealing with the increasing numbers of frail, oldest old.

6. Caring for Our Parents: Inspiring Stories of Families Seeking New Solutions to America’s Most Urgent Health Crisis by Howard Gleckman (St. Martin’s Press, 2009). A thoughtful and comprehensive look at how we care for frail elders and younger people with disabilities, and how an irrational, disjointed system serves few needs well. There are better options for delivering and paying for the support every family will need at one point in their life.

7. What are Old People For? How Elders Will Save the World by William Thomas, MD (VanderWyk & Burnham, 2004). There is a new old age waiting to be discovered, ready to be explored. Written by a maverick gerontologist who developed the Eden Alternative and Green House concepts, this book lays out compelling ideas for building a society where aging and longevity are used to improve life for people of all ages.

8. From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Ronald S. Miller (Grand Central Publishing, 1997). Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi introduces the concept of “eldering.” He contends that we are at the cutting edge of the next stage in our evolution and that elders will bring us into this more compassionate, intuitive, and caring era.

9. Endnotes: An Intimate Look at the End of Life by Ruth E. Ray (Columbia University Press, 2008). The “quality of care” we provide for others requires not only an understanding of the relationships that have given a person’s life meaning, but also a willingness to accept and share deeply in the emotional process of the physical and mental changes that come with getting older.

10. Generation to Generation: Reflections on Friendships Between Young and Old edited by Sandra Martz and Shirley Coe (Papier-Mache Press, 1998). This book is dedicated to “the children we once were and the old women we’ll someday be.” Insightful and thought-provoking stories and poems that explore the essential and meaningful connection across generations.
4. OTHER INITIATIVES

Traditional city planning looked at places (i.e. land) on which to develop built spaces that happened to have people in them. As planning approaches evolved, there was more recognition of the needs of the people that were occupying the places and spaces.

We are 7 billion and growing on this planet. As the number of people increases – with greater numbers of older people – and the space available for these people remains limited, recent attention has focused on sustainable, age-friendly, and livable city planning.

Fewer than half of American cities and towns have even begun to address the changing demographic landscape. Most communities are poorly designed for dealing with the dramatic changes as more residents get older.

Many long-established urban communities are themselves aging, with infrastructure deterioration that makes them challenging for older residents. Newer suburban communities, developed primarily with young families in mind, are poorly designed to meet the needs of those residents as they get older.

Residential neighborhoods are usually completely isolated from commercial areas, in part the result of land-use policies and zoning regulations developed a century ago to reduce public health hazards associated with overcrowded and unsanitary urban living. Newer suburban shopping malls are accessible only by car, demand a lot of walking, and have limited accommodations like benches and quiet areas.

Some groups and cities have started working toward developing communities in which people can live their entire lives despite the personal changes that can come with increased age. Communities should support the physical and psychosocial wellbeing of community residents through the life course. Major systems like housing, transportation/mobility, health, and education must be responsive to the changing needs and capabilities of residents as they get older.

This section provides an overview of other relevant initiatives which can help to inform the implementation and success of the Tulsa model.

The approaches of other initiatives varies greatly. There is little consensus on “best practice.” So, Tulsa is mapping largely uncharted territory. The ultimate goal is a thriving, vibrant city that recognizes, respects, and meets the needs – physical, emotional, social – of all ages and brings generations together in support of each other.

The Summer, 2009 issue of Generations, the Journal of the American Society on Aging, edited by Dr. Andrew Scharlach of the University of California, Berkeley, provides a useful outline of the various frameworks for addressing the changing generational landscape. Some initiatives focus primarily on the built environment, working to change a
community’s physical infrastructure with regard to housing, land use, streets, transportation systems, etc. In some cases, this involves new construction (e.g. cohousing projects, new housing tracts, infill development) or the purchase of new vehicles or other equipment. In most cases, particularly given current financial realities, the emphasis is on rehabilitating the existing infrastructure through retrofitting existing housing stock, redevelopment projects designed to integrate commercial and residential use, and road redesign.

Other initiatives focus on enhancing the social infrastructure by improving programs and services, particularly for older people. Naturally-occurring retirement communities (NORCs), Village models, and other forms of housing-based support all attempt to help older people remain in their familiar homes for as long as possible by providing improved access to a variety of supports.

A few initiatives focus primarily on enhancing the availability of social and human capital (i.e. helping older adults to develop neighborhood self-help coalitions).

Finally, a handful of initiatives have attempted to affect real systemic change by, for example, enhancing the power of elders in existing institutional structures or looking at the age-segregation found in virtually all parts of modern urban life.

“Age-friendly” initiatives are typically implemented with older adults in mind, although some reflect the needs and interests of community members of all ages.

Local initiatives also vary significantly in the mechanisms they use to achieve their goals. There are three classic mechanisms of community change: top-down, horizontal, and bottom-up.

In a top-down, centralized approach, a local government department or area agency on aging generally oversees a needs assessment and a strategic planning effort designed to identify problems faced by older residents, which then serves as the basis for efforts to mobilize community organizations and other stakeholders to respond more effectively to those concerns.

A horizontal approach involves building awareness and enhancing collaborative efforts. These initiatives focus on fostering coalitions, combining resources, and supporting local institutions in providing needed programs and services, whether collaboratively or in isolation. Some of these initiatives have a public awareness component, providing information about and for the older population. Other initiatives help individual seniors prepare themselves for their later years or take action to make their physical or social environments more age-friendly.

Bottom-up efforts promote citizen advocacy, helping individuals and community groups to develop the tools to petition government and other existing institutions for the policies and programs they need.

A number of national and global projects have been developed to support these local efforts, providing information, resources, and guidelines.

The University of California at Berkeley’s Center for the Advanced Study of Aging Service offers the website http://agingfriendly.org which features online presentations by experts and best-practice guidelines. They also completed a Compendium of Community Aging Initiatives which describes 121 initiatives across the country, including geographic areas served, lead agency, and accomplishments to date.

http://socialwelfare.berkeley.edu/NewsEvents/_files/Compendium_Final.pdf

AARP offers Livable Communities, an effort to promote and expand communities that work for older adults. A livable community is
defined as “one that has affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options, which together facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents in civic and social life.” AARP has published Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide, which enables local advocates to assess their community’s ability to meet the needs of older adults.

http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/d18311_communities.pdf

AARP has also published A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging.

http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/beyond_50_communities.pdf

A subsequent report, Opportunities for Creating Livable Communities, identifies strategies for overcoming potential barriers to change.

http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/il/2008_02_communities.pdf

Originally funded in 2002 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Community Partnerships for Older Adults offers various resources that communities can use to develop leadership, options, and solutions to meet the needs of older adults.

http://www.partnershipsforolderadults.org

The Center for Civic Partnerships has developed Aging Well in Communities: A Toolkit for Planning, Engagement & Action.

http://www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/services/CHCC/aging-well-toolkit.htm

The following short profiles highlight some prominent initiatives to address changing demographics. Additional, specific information is provided under each Action Area.

World Health Organization
Global Age-Friendly Cities

The World Health Organization (WHO) Global Age-Friendly Cities project originally worked with groups in 33 cities around the world, one of which was in the US (Portland, OR).

The project’s goal was to better understand what characteristics make a city age-friendly and, conversely, what characteristics constitute barriers to age-friendliness.

The WHO report describes active aging as “the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.” In an age-friendly city, policies, services, settings and structures support and enable people to age actively by:

- Recognizing the wide range of capacities and resources among older people.
- Anticipating and responding flexibly to aging-related needs and preferences.
- Respecting their decisions and lifestyle choices.
- Protecting those who are most vulnerable.
- Promoting their inclusion in and contribution to all areas of community life.

The report points out the importance of a life course perspective:

Older people are not a homogeneous group and individual diversity increases with age. Functional capacity (such as muscular strength and cardiovascular output) increases in childhood, peaks in early adulthood, and eventually declines. The rate of decline is largely determined by factors related to lifestyle, as well as external social, environmental, and economic factors.
From an individual and societal perspective, it is important to remember that the speed of decline can be influenced and may be reversible at any age through individual and public policy measures, such as promoting an age-friendly living environment.

Because active aging is a lifelong process, an age-friendly city is not just “elderly-friendly.” Barrier-free buildings and streets enhance the mobility and independence of people with disabilities, young as well as old. Secure neighbourhoods allow children, younger women and older people to venture outside in confidence to participate in physically active leisure and in social activities. Families experience less stress when their older members have the community support and health services they need. The whole community benefits from the participation of older people in volunteer or paid work. Finally, the local economy profits from the patronage of older adult consumers. The operative word in age-friendly social and physical urban settings is enablement.

The WHO identified eight areas of a city that must demonstrate age-friendly characteristics: outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community support and health services.

In June, 2010, the WHO presented New York City with a certificate as the first member of the WHO’s Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities. They recognized New York’s efforts to foster an inclusive and accessible environment that promotes active aging.

New York City established public-private partnerships and obtained the support of the City Council and the Mayor’s Office in the initiative. They completed a comprehensive assessment of NYC’s age-friendliness that included the input of more than 1,500 older adults and experts. They convened sector work groups (e.g. business, civil society, health and social services) to generate recommendations and commitments to improve NYC’s age-friendliness. They are providing training and technical assistance to a wide range of community groups. A high-level public-private Commission for an Age-friendly New York City oversees implementation.

Partners for Livable Communities and Area Agencies on Aging

Partners for Livable Communities has worked in the general field of livable communities for many years. In the early 2000s, they partnered with the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a) on an aging-in-place initiative, which engages local communities in community-planning efforts and related projects designed to improve livability.

In 2004, Partners and n4a selected nine cities and began an 18-month work program. The communities ranged from Martinsville, VA and Battle Creek, MI to Jacksonville, FL and Rochester, NY, and are as diverse in assets and challenges as they are geographically.

In 2006, with support from MetLife Foundation, Partners and n4a conducted a survey of the nation’s cities and counties to determine how they were addressing the needs of their aging populations. The report from this survey, The Maturing of America: Getting Communities on Track for an Aging
Population, found that less than half of American communities have begun planning. 

To help communities, Partners and n4a joined again with additional support from MetLife Foundation to produce a comprehensive toolkit, A Blueprint for Action: Developing Livable Communities for All Ages. 

In June, 2011, a follow-up report was released, The Maturing of America: Communities Moving Forward for an Aging Population. This report concluded that the Great Recession, which officially began in December, 2007, had significantly stalled efforts by communities to address demographic changes. 

Overall, many communities are struggling to maintain the status quo. They often feel, perhaps erroneously, that measures to address aging are just one more financial burden they can’t take on. However, this view is short-sighted and overlooks possible cost-savings of strategies that can benefit both young and old.

Atlanta Region

An article in Generations, the Journal of the American Society on Aging, describes the Atlanta initiative. (Lawler & Berger, Summer 2009)

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) serves as the Atlanta Area Agency on Aging, the metropolitan planning organization, and the regional development center. ARC reexamined what it means to be an area agency on aging in the twenty-first century, reorienting mission, skills, resources, and staff toward the goal of meeting the needs of a demographic shift in the community and using traditional service delivery as a means rather than an end.

ARC’s response is the Atlanta Regional Commission’s Lifelong Communities Initiative, a comprehensive effort to help communities in the metro area respond to a changing population and its diverse needs. The Lifelong Communities Initiative has three goals:

• To promote housing and transportation options.
• To encourage healthy lifestyles.
• To expand information and access.

If older adults are to remain in the community, they must have housing choices and alternatives to the car. They must be able to be active and remain so in various ways. They need access to basic and preventive healthcare. Older adults and their families must also be empowered with information so they can maximize their own resources and plan for their futures.

The Lifelong Communities Initiative evolved from the work of the Aging Atlanta Partnership, which was funded in 2002 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Community Partnerships for Older Adults program. This initial work demonstrated not only the importance of challenging assumptions and piloting unconventional ways of meeting needs, but the critical role that partnerships can and must play in creating substantial and sustainable change. It is in these local interagency partnerships, both large and small, that communities challenge old assumptions and find creative solutions to facilitate aging with dignity and independence.

ARC works in the 10 counties and 67 cities that make up the Atlanta region, pulling together a wide range of professionals who represent a diverse set of skills and expertise in public health, planning and transportation, along with hospital administrators, housing
developers, public safety officers, parks and recreation directors, librarians, and doctors and lawyers. This core group, joining together with community residents and elected officials, first examines local data about the growing older adult population in their community. They next analyze what assets in their community contribute to housing and transportation options, healthy lifestyles, and information and access and then identify key areas on which to focus.

To date, cities and counties in the region have successfully completed in-depth surveys of the housing and transportation preferences of older adults, designing and adopting zoning ordinances to promote development of housing options, piloting transportation voucher programs, adopting comprehensive housing and transportation plans to address land use and mobility concerns related to older adults, and integrating the needs of older pedestrians into downtown redevelopment plans.

Several communities have started walking clubs, have mapped walking and bike trails, and have developed outreach campaigns to promote the importance of physical activity among older adults. Locally based preventive-health collaboratives are increasing access to flu shots, pneumonia vaccines, mammograms, and cholesterol and diabetes screenings.

Local elected officials have been intimately involved in the Lifelong Communities Initiative. Mayors and county commissioners from across the region have offered time, leadership, and resources for the individual community work and the regional call for action.

The work in the Atlanta area is by no means finished. But already some key lessons have emerged:

- Lifelong Communities is not a project with a start and end. To achieve change that matches the scale of the demographic shift and its impact, Lifelong Communities has to be a way of doing business.

- Narrow, specific initial goals are critical to creating action. Having three specific goals and a framework pulling them all together is essential to helping providers, planners, and the broader community understand that lifelong communities are practical and achievable. The framework takes big ideas and breaks them down into manageable pieces that allow local communities to see where they can get started.

- Personal relationships are key to bridging long-term institutional barriers. By definition, creating lifelong communities requires that individuals work across sectors and silos. ARC found that the best way to do this was not through mandate or edict, but rather by building one-on-one relationships. These relationships create shared interest and show individuals and agencies who never thought they had to worry about aging that, in fact, they are a critical part of the solution.

- Champions are essential. It’s impossible to organize this level of community change without active, vocal community leadership. The more often these leaders come from outside the field of aging, the more effective they can be. ARC is constantly working to develop and groom new champions, helping local officials find their part in the work and claim their share of the success.

For more information on the Atlanta initiative:
http://www.atlantaregional.com/aging-resources/lifelong-communities-llc
The University of California Villages Project is an ongoing effort by the Center for the Advanced Study of Aging Services to examine the sustainability and potential effectiveness of the “Village” model, a grassroots community-based approach designed to help individuals to “age in place” through the provision of instrumental assistance, social network-building activities, and opportunities for social engagement. http://cssr.berkeley.edu/research_units/casas/documents/VillageDemographicsReport2010.pdf

Most Villages are modeled after Beacon Hill Village (BHV). As described in an article in Generations, the Journal of the American Society on Aging (McWhinney-Morse, Summer 2009), BHV is a resident-driven, membership association started in 2001 by a group of older adults living in the Beacon Hill neighborhood of Boston. At least 50 of these grassroots neighborhood-based associations have emerged throughout the US, and hundreds of others currently are in formation. In return for annual dues, members of these Villages receive a variety of services and support (e.g. transportation, grocery shopping, referrals to home care and other discounted services, care coordination, volunteer opportunities, social and cultural events) specifically designed to help them age in place and avoid institutionalization.

The BHV model has several distinguishing characteristics:

- Beacon Hill Village is a grassroots membership organization created by and for people age 50 and over, not just the very old, the frail, or the wealthy.
- The philosophy as expressed by the founders is that everyone needs a helping hand of one kind or another from time to time, and that generally those needs increase with age. They also note that it's often the small, nagging problems of daily living that cause older people the greatest despair. A helping hand, a timely intervention from a knowledgeable person, may make the difference between aging in community or not.
- Membership is a very powerful tool. It provides people with a sense of ownership; it encourages active participation in the community; it enables people to speak their minds about their needs and wishes.
- BHV is self-governing. Its board of directors is drawn from its membership, and its small, professional staff execute the board’s policies and organize Village activities. These policies and activities are decided with widespread input and involvement from members.
- BHV is self-supporting. It receives no state or federal assistance. All income is derived from annual membership fees, community contributions, and foundation assistance.
- BHV is for the whole community. Over 20 percent of its members have low or moderate incomes (based on criteria established by federal guidelines). Through BHV’s Membership Plus program, people with modest means may join the Village for greatly reduced fees and participate in all the benefits. In addition, the Membership Plus members receive stipends to use for any programs and services for which there is a charge.
- Beacon Hill Village is for the whole person. In order to promote healthy aging, the Village offers programs and services that address not only medical and housing needs but social, physical, emotional, and intellectual needs as well.

Beacon Hill Village has produced a “how-to” manual to help other grassroots organizations create their own Villages. http://www.beaconhillvillage.org
North Carolina

An article in *Generations*, the Journal of the American Society on Aging, describes an initiative in North Carolina. (Manheimer, Summer 2009)

All 100 counties in North Carolina are responsible for establishing a five-year aging plan outlining the goals for providing services to and tapping the resourcefulness of older adults.

Buncombe County’s Livable and Senior-Friendly Community Planning Task Force, charged with delivering the 2008–2012 plan, drew on the combined efforts of business owners, aging services providers, older-adult volunteers, and other community members. Beth Lazer, a former IBM executive and, in retirement, a community activist, was recruited to chair the task force of the county’s Aging Coordinating Consortium (the association of local aging network organizations locally known as the ACC). Another key member of the task force was Alison Climo, a gerontologist on sabbatical leave from a local college. For each, participation in the community planning process was valuable experience, both professionally and personally.

Climo has had a lifelong chronic illness. She has intimate knowledge about how the physical environment can limit a person’s mobility or make access to places risky or impossible. So when she began to listen to older people expressing their views on lack of accessibility to community events, she identified with them. In an interview about the work of the task force, she says that in the process, she realized, “this is not about chronological age, it’s about functional ability. Some folks in their 80s were getting around just fine, while others much younger experienced serious restrictions.”

For Climo, an environment is age-friendly when you don’t have to think about obstacles and barriers. “It’s also age-neutral,” she explains. “No matter your age, you feel welcomed.”

The task force was encouraged to try an approach that was different from previous five-year aging plans. Instead of a focus solely on the problems of frail and at-risk elders, this planning group had the latitude to take a more expansive, creative approach.

Finding the right framework for the process was truly engaging. In the end, more than 500 community residents participated in the process. By involving a large and diverse aging population in planning, the task force encouraged people to exercise their civic responsibility.

Lazer and Climo realized upfront that older adults, as Lazer puts it, “regardless of age, income, or physical ability, want to contribute and be actively involved in our community.” And, she says, the task force needed to demonstrate from the beginning that all community people could be actively involved. They wanted to debunk the myth that aging is a disease or associated with disability. “Central to how we experience meaning,” says Climo, “is our perception that we have opportunities and choices.” By implication, theirs wasn’t just a five-year “aging” plan, but rather a plan that, if implemented, would make the community a better place for people of all ages.

http://www.coabc.org

Fremont, CA

An article in *Generations*, the Journal of the American Society on Aging, describes an initiative in the city of Fremont, CA. (Shenfil, Summer 2009)

In June 2008, the Fremont City Council unanimously adopted a goal to create a safe and welcoming age-friendly community, as follows:
The City will promote an environment which values senior participation; a place where information and services are easily available for all seniors; where seniors can be mobile and actively involved and where meaningful exchanges between cultures and generations exist and where people come together in support of one another regardless of age.

Establishing this goal, which is based on the city’s chief policy makers’ recognition that it takes the support of the entire community to ensure a high quality of life for older residents, was just one in a series of steps the city has taken since it began participation in Community Partnerships for Older Adults.

While this initiative has helped create greater awareness of aging issues in the community, particular attention has been focused on older adults who are at increased risk because of poverty, race, ethnicity, chronic illness, and advanced age, or who have physical and cognitive needs that require long-term care and supportive services.

In 2004, the City of Fremont collaborated with the Tri-City Elder Coalition, an affiliation of more than 60 community, healthcare, and various governmental agencies, and the neighboring cities of Newark and Union City, to conduct fourteen focus groups in nine languages, reaching out to a growing community of elders from an increasingly diverse population. Since 1980, the population of the Tri-Cities (Fremont, Newark, and Union City) has evolved from predominantly White to a population in which no single racial/ethnic group constitutes a majority. In Fremont, 57 percent of the population now speaks a language other than English at home.

In 2005, the City of Fremont embarked on an 18-month planning process with the goal of creating an aging action plan for the community. The resulting plan came to be known as Pathways to Positive Aging. Leaders of the planning effort said they wanted to create a community engagement process that was inclusive – where everyone had a voice, even if English was not their first language.

Some of the most important lessons that the city learned:

- Fremont learned a lot about the needs of elders, including Boomers, during its planning process. Most critical was a better understanding of how to work on aging issues with the many ethnic and cultural groups that make up the community. Building relationships and trust first with ethnic and cultural groups prior to “conducting business” was critical.

- It was important to make good use of ethnic and cultural media to reach target populations.

- It was helpful to train facilitators who knew the specifics about the language and culture of the group.

- The city learned about each group’s norms and values and also the importance of balancing community expectations around planning for the future, with a capability to deliver new or improved services.

- The older adults appreciate being asked to lend their ideas to directions for the future; at the same time, they want to see some immediate action as a result of their participation in the process.

- The city recognized the importance of helping others build the capacity to serve older adults and to strengthen and sustain leadership. A governmental entity like a city can lend credibility to the efforts of emerging ethnic and cultural groups working to serve seniors in their own way.
One interesting success story coming out of Pathways to Positive Aging is the Community Ambassador Program for Seniors (CAPS). It has trained volunteers from seven faith-based and cultural communities: Muslim Support Network, Sikhs Engaged in Volunteer Activities, India Community Center, Taiwanese Senior Help Association, Our Lady of Guadalupe (Latinos), St. Anne’s Catholic Parish (Filipinos), and Centerville Presbyterian Church. Ambassadors receive more than 40 hours of training about available community support services. The CAPS ambassadors bridge the formal network of social services and their respective faith and cultural communities. The program builds the capacity of these organizations to serve older adults in their own communities, in their own language, and within their own cultural norms. And it does so where older adults live, worship, and socialize.

http://www.tceconline.org

Child Friendly

The vast majority of age-related community initiatives have focused on meeting the needs of older adults. Very few have looked specifically at children. The most prominent effort is UNICEF’s Child Friendly Cities. This framework assists any city to become more child-friendly in all aspects of governance, environment, and services.

A Child Friendly City guarantees the right of every young citizen to:

- Influence decisions about their city.
- Express their opinion on the city they want.
- Participate in family, community, and social life.
- Receive basic services such as healthcare, education, and shelter.
- Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation.
- Be protected from exploitation, violence, and abuse.
- Walk safely in the streets on their own.
- Meet friends and play.
- Have green spaces for plants and animals.
- Live in an unpolluted environment.
- Participate in cultural and social events.
- Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender, or disability.

Beyond the obvious legal and moral imperatives, why is it important to consider children in community building? First, children are individual people – they have equal status to adults as members of the human race.

Second, children’s healthy development and active participation are uniquely crucial to the healthy future of any city or society. Because of their developmental stage in the life course, children are often more affected than adults by the conditions under which they live – by poverty, poor housing, environmental pollution.

Similarly, children are more affected by the actions – or inactions – of government than any other group.

Finally, it’s important to avoid the huge costs to society of not attending to children. Research is clear that what happens to children in the early years – within the family, within other forms of care, in the education system, and even before birth in the womb – significantly determines their positive, or negative, growth and development. This, in turn, determines their cost or contribution to society spread over the rest of their lives.
UNICEF points out that governments, including local governments, can lead the process. But building Child Friendly Cities cannot be achieved by government alone. There must be partnerships with children themselves, with families, and with all those who affect children’s lives.
http://www.childfriendlycities.org

Building on the Foundation of Other Initiatives

The Tulsa model can build on the best practices of all the initiatives described here.

It can look at big-picture, systemic change, and include a strong emphasis on intergenerational practice (see the section An Intergenerational Lens).

It can also incorporate a unique psychosocial dimension through Legacy Community Building (see the section Legacy Community Building).

The citizens of Tulsa can work together to use all of this rich information to create a model that works for the community and a model of hope for other cities.

The ultimate goal is a thriving, vibrant city that recognizes, respects, and meets the needs – physical, emotional, social – of all ages and brings generations together in support of each other.
5. AN INTERGENERATIONAL LENS

An intergenerational lens can be applied to any planning process to magnify potential benefits across the entire community. This section outlines the promise of intergenerational practice and has been prepared by Dr. Nancy Z. Henkin, Executive Director, The Intergenerational Center at Temple University, Philadelphia, PA and Donna M. Butts, Executive Director, Generations United, Washington, DC from a Generations United report. (Henkin & Butts, 2010)

Why Now?

We are in the midst of a major demographic revolution. The number of people over 60 is growing at an unprecedented rate and is expected to equal the number of people under 18 by 2030.

In 2010, the first of 78 million Boomers started turning 65. Many are redefining traditional notions of retirement and seeking new ways to remain productive, contributing members of society. These major demographic changes, coupled with increased racial and ethnic diversity, bring both opportunities and challenges related to our quality of life and the nature of intergenerational relationships.

How can we as a society support and empower individuals as they move through a longer life course? How can we ensure that more people at every age are able to be productive citizens who use their skills and talents to contribute to the communities in which they live? Can we change the perception of an aging society from a burden to a benefit?

With high rates of unemployment and home foreclosures, caregiving stresses on families, and increasing social challenges related to poverty, the age-old social compact that ties us together is under major stress. The social compact is based on reciprocity and the belief that society progresses because of the investments past generations have made in carrying knowledge and culture forward. It recognizes that people of all generations – past, present, and future – are bound together as a means to survive and thrive.

Yet funding streams and service delivery systems are age-segregated, making it difficult to think holistically about addressing issues from an intergenerational perspective. Few incentives exist for organizations serving different populations to work together and/or share resources. Competition for scarce resources and a silo-ed approach to problem solving often are barriers to true collective action. Although there is much rhetoric expressed about collaboration, authentic partnerships across the generations are scarce. Now more than ever we need policies and practices that foster our sense of interdependence, promote lifelong contribution, and help us recognize that our fate is intertwined. The development of these policies and practices will require time, commitment to a shared vision, and a willingness to look beyond one’s own generational cohort or constituency to build a healthy society for all.

Intergenerational Practice

Over the past 40 years, the concept of intentionally bringing generations together to serve as resources to each other and to their communities has become increasingly popular as a vehicle for addressing critical
societal needs and strengthening cross-age relationships. Beginning with the Foster Grandparent and RSVP programs in the 1960s, early intergenerational programs focused primarily on dispelling age-related stereotypes, fostering cross-age understanding, reducing social isolation, and providing financial support for low-income elders.

As concern about potential intergenerational conflict grew, Generations United was created in 1986 by leading child, youth, and aging advocates. Generation United’s mission is to foster national collaboration on public policy issues, promote intergenerational programming, and encourage efforts to build a cohesive, caring society.

Throughout the 1980s and beyond, the focus of programs began shifting from reducing generational separation to addressing critical community concerns. Across the country, a variety of innovative programs were developed that brought youth and older adults together to tackle important social issues such as the environment, literacy/education, family support, elder/child care, health, positive youth development, and cross-cultural understanding. Since then, millions of older adults have served as tutors, mentors, health educators, career counselors, respite providers and in many other roles designed to improve the well-being of younger generations. Young people have taught technology skills, delivered meals on wheels, provided chore services to homebound elders, captured oral histories, and taught English to immigrant elders. Together, they have addressed environmental issues, advocated for endangered species, acted as safety patrols in neighborhoods, captured ethnic and cultural traditions through the arts, and conducted health education campaigns.

The breadth and depth of intergenerational work has expanded in recent years. It includes structured programs, shared sites, and support services for grandfamilies – grandparents and other relatives raising children. Though the number of programs has grown, many are relatively small.

Among entrepreneurs, municipalities and some private funders, there has been increased interest in intergenerational shared sites or centers, resulting in the creation of innovative models across the country including, but not limited to, adult/child care centers, senior centers within schools, and Head Start programs in nursing homes. Generations United has mapped over 150 different intergenerational shared site programs across the country. http://www2.gu.org/OURWORK/SharedSpaces.aspx

By definition these programs share space and include two or more generations that take part in planned activities and unplanned interaction. Some facilities share administration, staff, equipment, meals and programs, all of which usually result in cost savings and positive outcomes for participants, greater family satisfaction, and higher staff retention. (Butts, Jarrott, Schroeder, & Perkins, 2006) (Generations United, 2008)

Intergenerational practice has moved beyond its initial focus on non-related older adults and youth to supporting caregiving families, particularly grandfamilies. About 6.5 million children are being raised in households headed by grandparents or other relatives. (US Census Bureau, 2009) Grandparents are raising a total of over 940,000 children without the parents in the home. (US Census Bureau, 2009) These grandparents and other relatives are keeping families together and serving as a safety net, most often keeping children out of the formal foster care system and thereby saving our tax payers billions of dollars. (Generations United, 2007) However, since many grandfamilies face obstacles not encountered by biological parents, support groups and advocacy efforts have been critical to helping these families succeed.
Who Benefits?

Intergenerational practices contribute to the health, well-being, and prosperity of individuals of all ages as well as their families and communities.

Contribution to Healthy Development of Children and Youth

From the Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets (Search Institute, 2011) to the Ready by 21 framework (The Forum for Youth Investment, 2008), positive youth development principles and guidelines suggest important elements needed to improve outcomes for children and youth—such as caring adults, safe places, healthy starts, education for marketable skills, and opportunities to give back. Still, the National Promises Study indicates only three in ten 5 to 17 year-olds receive the developmental resources they need to succeed. (Child Trends, 2006) The Ready by 21 challenge calls on communities and governments to “change the odds for children and youth by changing the way they do business.” (Child Trends, 2006)

Increasingly, older adults are becoming recognized as resources ready to help children and youth gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. Their efforts have shown positive impacts:

- Children in intergenerational programs had higher personal/social developmental scores (by 11 months) than children in non-intergenerational programs. (Rosebrook, 2006, 11/2)
- Youth involved in intergenerational mentoring relationships showed increases in school attendance, positive changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding substance use, as well as improvement in related life skills. (LoSciuto, Townsend, Rajala, & Taylor, 1996, 11/1)
- Over a single school year, students with older adult tutors made over 60% more progress in learning two critical reading skills—sounding out new words and reading comprehension—than similar students without the tutors. (Morrow-Howell, Jonson-Reid, McCrady, Lee, & Spitznagel, 2009)

Contribution to Healthy Aging

In their book Successful Aging, John W. Rowe, MD and Robert L. Kahn, PhD state that people with strong social connections and a sense of purpose live longer and are better able to maintain good mental and physical health. (Rowe & Kahn, 1998)

As Boomers move into the next stage of their life, many are seeking opportunities to learn new things and give back to their communities. Rather than move to adult-only communities, most say they want to continue to live in the age-integrated towns in which they have worked, raised families and played. (Butts, 2003, 42) Intergenerational programs offer older adults a venue to do what many believe their role has traditionally been—to help grow the next generation. This investment by older adults in children and youth pays dividends forward and backward. Research shows:

- Older adults who regularly volunteer with children burned 20% more calories per week, experienced fewer falls, were less reliant on canes and performed better on memory tests than their peers. (Fried, 2004, 81/1)
- Older adults with dementia or other cognitive impairments experience more positive affect during interactions with children than they did during non-intergenerational activities. (Jarrott & Bruno, 2003, 18/1)
- Older people in shared sites who previously would not participate in activities came out of their rooms when children arrived and kept better track of
time in order to know when the children would be arriving. Older participants also had more energy and ate better when they shared their meals with children. (Lewis, 2002, 3/8)

**Contribution to Communities and Local Economies**

Beyond the benefit for individuals and families, intergenerational practices strengthen interconnectedness within a community. Policy makers and community leaders who make it a point to include all generations support everyone’s ability to contribute to their neighborhoods and cities. This engagement builds social capital which has been shown to impact individual health and well-being as well as safety and economic development. (Putnam, 2000)

Intergenerational practices also use resources judiciously and can encourage a thriving economy. They represent “economies of scope” wherein a single intervention or program helps or positively affects multiple issues and populations. For example, a shared child and adult daycare site relieves stress on a middle generation of caregivers by providing quality care in one location, eliminating the time needed for multiple trips to various care facilities supporting greater productivity in the workforce.

**Opportunities Going Forward**

Despite the clear recognition of the value of intergenerational programs, there is still a gap between the promise and the practice of this approach. Silo-ed funding streams, policies that inhibit the growth of shared sites, efforts to pit generations against each other, and advocates struggling to support their particular constituencies all present challenges to the growth of intergenerational practice.

How can we move from a collection of small, separate programs to a major cultural change in the way we think and act? This will require…

**Applying an intergenerational approach to large scale efforts that address current critical community needs.**

Problems require multi-dimensional strategies to achieve sustainable change. Intergenerational programs should not stand alone; they should be connected to a network of organizations dealing with specific issues. An intergenerational approach can add significant value to systemic efforts focused on education, healthcare promotion and delivery, family caregiving, immigrant integration, and the environment. Head Start, Promise Neighborhoods, Race to the Top, Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Initiatives, and the Social Innovation Fund could increase their likelihood of success by including an explicit intergenerational lens into their strategies.

We not only need to raise awareness within federal, state, and local agencies about the value of intergenerational approaches; we must also create incentives for organizations to integrate this approach into the work they do. Inserting language that encourages intergenerational work into funding opportunities is a first step. In addition, support for capacity-building efforts designed to help foster cross-age partnerships, develop age-appropriate opportunities, and effectively engage and support people of different ages in meaningful volunteer work is needed in order to sustain and expand high quality programs over time.

**Marketing intergenerational practices as a tool for economic development and increased global competitiveness.**

Leaders in economic development understand the importance of strong schools, quality healthcare and effective caregiver support systems in attracting new businesses that will need an engaged workforce. When older adults tutor children and create better
learning environments in schools, students become better prepared to face the challenges they will confront at higher grade levels and in the job market. At the same time, access to lifelong learning and retraining helps older adults stay mentally stimulated and acquire new skills and knowledge that make it possible for them to continue in the workforce.

In a global economy, employers need to leverage the skills of all generations to contribute to the productivity and profitability of the workplace. (MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2009) Translating the strongest intergenerational practices into workplace practices increases a company’s competitive advantage by reducing conflict and encouraging employees to recognize, value and respect one another across generations. Some companies have begun to adopt practices that are friendly and engaging to all generations. For example, Cisco Systems focuses on building a culture that maximizes collaboration and, in the process, engages employees of all generations. Sodexo has identified storytelling and communicating through new channels as ways to spark the interest of the different generations in their workplace. (MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2009)

**Moving beyond programs to more systemic, comprehensive efforts at the local level to build communities that support and empower people across the life course.**

Individual programs are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. They need to be part of more comprehensive place-based initiatives that mobilize all generations (not just young and old) to work together for the common good and engage in collective action. This will require local organizations serving specific constituencies to move out of their silos and form authentic, cross-age partnerships. It will take intentional efforts to build diverse social networks and create norms and values that support the sharing of resources and collective action.

Promoting the growth of shared sites, creating a range of opportunities for lifelong civic engagement and learning, using the physical environment to promote health across the life course, and building the leadership skills of people of all ages are all strategies that will move us closer to communities that are good for growing up and growing older. The following examples of intergenerational community building efforts demonstrate the efficacy of this approach.

**Communities for All Ages:** A 24-site national initiative that builds the capacity of communities to address critical issues from a multi-generational perspective and promote the well-being of all age groups. Coordinated by the Intergenerational Center at Temple University and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Ashoka, and eight community/family foundations, Communities for All Ages is demonstrating the value of creating alliances around common issues. From rural towns in Mississippi and Minnesota to urban neighborhoods in Phoenix, Yonkers, Kalamazoo, and San Clemente, residents and representatives from community organizations are working together to prevent obesity, create safe neighborhoods, support at-risk children and families, and help with immigrant integration. [http://www.communitiesforallages.org](http://www.communitiesforallages.org)

**San Diego County:** For more than ten years, Pamela Smith has championed intergenerational practices which positioned San Diego County as an incubator for innovative programs. As the director of the San Diego Area Agency on Aging, the Human Services Agency’s Aging and Independence Services, Smith has led the formation of many partnerships with community-based programs leading to the creation of nationally recognized programs that have served large numbers of youth and...
older adults. Under her leadership, an intergenerational coordinator position was created to support the development of intergenerational programs in the county. She undertook the complex development of two unique intergenerational programs: San Pasqual Academy Neighbors, which houses older adults in homes co-located with group housing for foster youth, and Seniors on Broadway, a senior apartment building that opened on the grounds of a charter school. The county also provided seed grants for 30 start-up intergenerational programs and developed a county-wide directory of programs. Of special note are two nationally recognized programs: the Workforce Academy for Youth, a county job’s program for foster youth which includes an older adult mentor component, and the Legacy Corps Program.

Falcon Heights, Minnesota: In 2001, Sue Gehrz, the then-new Mayor of the City of Falcon Heights, committed to making intergenerational interaction a high priority. Following the events of 9/11, she gathered a diverse group of people ages 12 to 88 to be a part of a dialogue and community planning process. Together they developed action steps to improve the safety of their community. The city went on to lay the foundation for the “Neighborhood Commission” which is now one of four permanent advisory groups to help guide the city government. Intergenerational participation is encouraged in all Falcon Heights activities and programs and the city requires that intergenerational interaction be a public policy goal of the City Council. The city encourages such interaction by waiving city facility fees for intergenerational groups.

Identifying and mobilizing champions from diverse sectors (e.g. government, media, and philanthropy, business) to use their influence to shape a new story that generations are meant to relate to each other through connections, not conflict.

World leaders have played a significant role in promoting the importance of generations working together to promote social change. From Queen Elizabeth II who called for bridging the generation gap in her 2006 Christmas message to Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu who, along with other retired world leaders, formed The Elders in July, 2007. These leaders have used their position to challenge people of all ages to engage with other generations, work on behalf of others and solve global problems.

Unfortunately, leaders in the US are slower to embrace the mantle of “elder.” One exception is anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson who, along with several of her peers, founded Granny Voter in 2004 to challenge older adults to vote on behalf of their grandchildren and children everywhere. Philanthropists and government leaders can create funding opportunities that encourage organizations to act across age sectors and incorporate intergenerational strategies.

Although the challenges we face today are substantial, it is in times like this when we most need to work together for the common good. Promoting reciprocity and interdependence through intergenerational partnerships, programs, and policies not only makes sense but it is critical to the well-being of our nation.
We need to change our relationship with time, each other, and our planet. The communities that make up cities are a great place to start. Cities are so amazing because they’re collaborations across time between people, place, and space. Every city is unique, the product of decades, even centuries, of historical evolution. As you walk through a city’s streets, you walk through time, encountering the built legacy of past generations.

Traditional city planning looked at places (i.e. land) on which to develop built spaces that happened to have people in them. As planning approaches evolved, there was more recognition of the needs of the people that were occupying the places and spaces. We then recognized that people of different ages can have certain needs. From that evolved age-friendly and livable city planning. We also recognized that built space needed to respect place, the natural environment. So, there has been more emphasis on sustainable planning and design.

An intergenerational lens magnifies potential benefits across the entire community. It shows us that while different ages may have some different needs, those needs can be complementary, compatible and, in fact, may answer each other.

What’s still missing in many communities, and for many individuals, is connection and meaning. We are struggling with increasingly limited resources, financial and otherwise. We are struggling to get along and meet the needs of more people who seem “different” than we are, either because of age or race. We are struggling to stay healthy in a largely unnatural environment. We feel empty and alone – just at the moment when we most need to find our strength and come together.

Legacy Community Building speaks to the meaning and connection that all individuals and communities need to overcome adversity and thrive. It looks at psychosocial factors. It gets to the heart of the matter.

We are all, young and old, part of a larger community, a community that must remember its history to build its future. Community exists before you are born and remains after you are gone. Each part of your life, from childhood to adulthood to elderhood, has a role in taking in or passing on the lessons of the past in order to create a better future.

The Across Generations initiative in Tulsa is a chance to implement Legacy Community Building and develop a model of hope for other cities. The Legacy Project, [www.legacyproject.org](http://www.legacyproject.org), is a national, multigenerational education project.

Researcher, educator, and Legacy Project Chair Susan Bosak views the concept of legacy as a catalyst. In the concept, she sees the potential to not only save money and resources, but more importantly to save lives – making them more meaningful and rich – and save our planet. It’s a bold vision, one we’re asking you to explore with us.

We usually think of legacy as something to be considered at the “end” – of a long career, a good run in politics, a life. But
legacy is something we need to use from the very beginning. Legacy can be a powerful catalyst for change as a connecting concept we use throughout our lives. It's a concept that can connect our life – from childhood through elderhood – to time, to other lives, and ultimately to meaning.

There are five principles underlying Legacy Community Building: Time Shift; Seven Generations; Big Picture Puzzle; Biomimicry; and Wisdom. After introducing each principle, we share orienting Legacy Community Building questions that speak to that principle. These questions can be used to dream and plan a better future.

1. Time Shift

We operate too often in the McMoment – one narrow, artificially-conceived, empty, disconnected experience after another. This is evident all around us, from the age-segregated way in which our society is organized to the short-sighted pressures under which we make many political and business decisions to the consumerism that exalts all that is “new” to the inertia that impedes our protection and care of the planet we inhabit.

Young people today are more engaged with technology than ever before in history. Some argue these technologies are disconnecting them from humanity and nature. Even more worrisome is that today’s latest smartphone, digital camera, or iPad – a miracle of technological ingenuity – becomes tomorrow’s obsolete discard. There is a huge cost to this short-term memory.

Throughout time, elders have been a reminder of what once was, and their stories set the bar over which we were challenged to leap. We need to emphasize the timeless over the transient.

Expanding our time perspective is a useful way of understanding all kinds of events and issues. It becomes particularly useful when we’re trying to understand something as complex as what’s going on in the world at large. So many changes are taking place, in so many places on the planet, that looking at what’s on the Internet or in the news today isn’t much help in getting true knowledge. It’s too much about life in one sensational McMoment to the next sensational McMoment.

As we stumble from one McMoment to another, we feel a lack of connection and in turn a lack of meaning. We are separated from the flow of our own life and a sense of connection to others in the present, the lessons of history, and the imperatives of the future. We are disconnected from each other and from time.

A primary challenge of human beings is living in the present, making choices about the present, but with a larger awareness of time. No one can survive living simply from moment to moment, denying the past and the future. There has to be a rhythm and a connection to something bigger. There has to be a seasonal rhythm and a generational rhythm. Part of this involves planning, but part also involves an intuitive sense of a natural rhythm. There are ripples of rhythms within rhythms, some things being able to be achieved in a short time span, others perhaps taking years. It’s about getting your bearings in eternity.

Legacy Community Building Questions: Is this important enough to matter one year, ten years, or 100 years from now? If the answer is yes, how can we make sure it matters and stands the test of time?

2. Seven Generations

Inundated every day by a barrage of self-centered marketing messages offering instant-gratification, and worn out by the many daily stresses we face, we often have trouble looking much past ourselves.
As we evolve a legacy approach, the easiest way to begin thinking in bigger terms is to look at the seven generations we will know.

With increases in longevity, it’s likely that you will have direct contact with at least seven generations: your own, and then three generations before you – parents, grandparents, great-grandparents – and three generations after you – children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren.

Legacy is the coming together of what you have been given (three generations before, and more), what you can create (your life, your generation, in the present), and what you give back (three generations ahead, and more).

A legacy orientation examines the past for relevant knowledge, experience, and precedent; examines the present context of any problem to be solved; and projects into the future the long-range effects, particularly for successive generations.

Every decision, especially when it comes to planning something as far-reaching and important as a city, should be based on a seven-generation decision-making matrix that looks not only at each generation, but connects items that speak to one generation to items that speak to another generation.

A seven-generation matrix demands that we move out of the age-segregated systems in which we currently operate. Children need to interact with elders daily, and elders need to interact with children daily. Adults need to interact with both. There is a natural and necessary reciprocity between generations.

Through seven-generation thinking, children come to better understand and plan for the whole of their lifetime. Research shows that “planful competence” – the ability to understand the life course and work toward goals – is key to student success in school and in life.

Seven-generation thinking helps adults better understand their lifetime within a circle of lifetimes – from grandparent to parent, from parent to child – which offers a greater sense of connection and more meaning.

As more real and meaningful intergenerational relationships develop in all parts of society, the ability to think in terms of seven generations will come more easily.

Legacy Community Building Questions:
How will this affect the community’s middle generation, three generations before, and three generations after? In other words, how will it affect everyone from the youngest young to the oldest old? How do needs of one generation overlap with another, and how can we connect the generations?

3. Big Picture Puzzle

The world of the twenty-first century is a puzzle unlike any other in history. To borrow a phrase from the US Army War College, we are living in a VUCA world – volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. It’s not the flat, two-dimensional puzzle of days gone by; it’s 3-D and it’s moving. Plus, the pieces can come together in many ways.

Think even bigger for a moment. Far, far away from the center of an unimaginably vast universe is an undistinguished galaxy – the Milky Way. Among the billions of stars in that galaxy, stars that have existed for more time than our minds can fathom, is our sun, which is really a very ordinary star in the grand scheme of things. On the third planet of that star, Earth, a mere speck in the universe, life arose. Currently there are 7 billion lives living their moment in history on Earth. And yours is one.

Put that vastness of eternity together with the complexity we’ve created on the planet, and you have a big picture puzzle – you, in the world, in time and space.
Young or old, we all share a basic need for food and water, and a safe, secure place to live. We all need to feel like we belong – we need a sense of community, of connection. And we need to feel like we matter, that our life means something. For ourselves and our children, we want the ability to make life better.

“Mattering” is all about the big picture puzzle. When we’re born, we don’t automatically “matter.” We all have fundamental human rights, but that’s different than making your life matter. Each of us must make ourself matter, and in so doing evolve our legacy, over the course of our life – your life, in the world, in time and space.

There are those who argue that the question of meaning is “too big.” They suggest that it’s better to just live and enjoy the moment. But our VUCA world makes that impossible. We feel it every day, even if we can’t put a name to it. When we face the inevitable challenges of life – an illness or death, our own old age, a loss of financial security, even a terrorist act or natural disaster – we need to make sense of it. Human beings are meaning-making creatures. It’s how our mind works. To not feed our need for meaning is to deny a fundamental part of ourselves.

Legacy is a big-picture concept that can be a catalyst for a paradigmatic shift in the way we think and organize our society. It recognizes both the pieces of the puzzle and the fact that the pieces have to fit together. It unites me and we. We all have individual needs, an ego – we want to matter in the vast sea of humanity. But we need to see beyond ego, beyond dividers like age and race, to altruism: we can only matter through the ongoing ways in which we touch present and future lives. "We" encompasses past and future, old and young, black and white, and the society we create and perpetuate.

The legacy approach challenges us to keep the big picture – our common goals – in front of us, while at the same time respecting individual pieces and looking for new ways to creatively bring those pieces together. It demands collaboration that unites me and we in a powerful way.

Legacy Community Building Questions:
What’s the common vision uniting individuals in the community? Who is doing what – both in the community and elsewhere? Can more than one need be addressed by one creative idea? How can people work together in new ways to combine resources, do better, get further?

4. Biomimicry

Under biomimicry, nature is a mentor, model, and measure of the structures and systems humans develop. The idea is to study nature’s best ideas – from the forms of trees to the closed-loop systems nature has for recycling all parts of itself – and then imitate these designs and processes to solve human problems.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and if we change our thinking to mimic nature, we will come to respect it more. What do we really need to live full, rich, healthy lives? Rather than being separate or apart from the rest of nature, we are deeply embedded in and utterly depend on the generosity of the biosphere.

The plight of the planet can be a uniting force, a cause that connects.

A documentary filmmaker sought out elders from around the world and asked, “What was it like when you were young?” The answer was chillingly similar: “It used to be so different.”

They talked about the trees that were gone, the fish and birds that had disappeared, the landscape that had been transformed, the technologies that altered the way their peoples interact.
Once, as we bulldozed and built, we soothed ourselves by saying that there’s plenty more where that came from. Around the globe, elders are living records of enormous changes that have occurred in the span of a single human life, attesting to the fact there isn’t plenty more. Some argue that’s the price of progress. But is it progress to use up what should be the rightful legacy of our children or to leave them to deal with problems we have created?

It used to be understood that we have a sacred duty to pass on to future generations a world that is better than the one we came into. We are no longer living up to that obligation.

We have to help each generation understand that they are transient passengers on this planet Earth. It doesn’t belong to them. They are not at liberty to erase humanity’s past nor dim its future.

We need to foster sustainable design and planning. Learning from nature, we also need to encourage organic, grassroots community – community that models itself after the responsive, adaptive evolution of nature. You can’t tell people what to do; you have to let them discover what works for them. Nature also values, in fact depends upon, diversity. As we work to bridge generational divides, we must also work to bridge racial and cultural divides.

Legacy Community Building Questions: For each idea, can you find inspiration from a natural example for how it can be designed or implemented? How can you plan without constraining – plant a seed and allow it to grow? Does your plan reflect sustainable environmental thinking? Are you benefitting from diversity?

5. Wisdom

It’s the intergenerational transmission of values and wisdom – the legacies across generations – that’s so essential to our humanity. Strategies that strengthen connections between generations, and in turn meaning, contribute enormously to our stock of social capital.

In those at either end of the life course – the young and the old – you find striking similarities. We live in a society that values adulthood, and in turn doing – productivity and ongoing activity. The young and the old share a different rhythm. It’s one that focuses not only on doing, but on the power of being. They can exist in a moment that’s the grand sum of past, present, and future. Rather than time being the enemy – rushing time or stressing to fit as much into time as possible – time becomes a comfortable companion, a circle rather than a line.

We divide up our communities and our activities by age – young people in schools, older people in retirement communities or facilities. We talk a lot about all the ways we need to help older people. But, perhaps, the old can help us. It’s the experience of life in a multigenerational, interdependent, richly complex community that, more than anything else, teaches us how to be human.

If we can improve the standing of older adults in society, and nurture what they can bring through intergenerational connections, then we can find wisdom. We need wisdom. We live in a world of information. But that information is only useful in a given Mc Moment. We are unable to connect the dots.

Paul Baltes, of the Max Planck Institute in Berlin, has spent his lifetime investigating wisdom. He defines wisdom as “a state of knowledge about the human condition, about how it comes about, which factors shape it, how one deals with difficult problems, and how one organizes one’s life
in such a manner that when we are old, we judge it to be meaningful.”

Wisdom brings together your ability to think (part natural skill, part education), life experience, and emotional maturity to make good decisions at an individual and societal level. Action is founded in reflection.

Wisdom is what will enable us to deal with the increasingly complex problems facing humanity. Wisdom isn’t simply for wise people, philosophers, and psychologists. It’s for all people and for the future of the world.

Most of today’s most influential thinkers believe that wisdom accumulates with age. And while research indicates that some mental functioning like memory may decline with advanced age, wisdom can still flourish apart from other mental functions. But wisdom isn’t something that happens automatically as the result of age. Hard-won self-knowledge is an essential source of wisdom. Wisdom grows only through accepting your life as the life that had to be. It is the product of resolving the issues of your past combined with a hopefulness for the future. It synthesizes an emotional integration of the past, a philosophical attitude toward life, and acceptance of your own mortality without despair.

Many older adults today are better educated, healthier, and more able than elders of past generations. They can clearly be a tremendous resource. But what about the oldest, frailest of the old? They can be our greatest teachers.

The oldest old can instruct us with stories of times past, and share a lifetime of accumulated wisdom. But we need to learn how to listen. Each elder was a “DO-er” of their time – a politician, scholar, social worker, builder, business owner, survivor. Now, in their “BE-ing,” their very selves, they can teach us not only about the world, but the essence of ourselves. Elders teach us about the end of life, as difficult as it can be, which informs the whole of our lives. To interact and learn from them, we need to learn patience in the midst of a hurried schedule, listening skills in a talking culture, peace in a conflict-filled world.

Even those with dementia have a story to tell. It’s interesting that some native cultures view dementia as a gift. Dementia lifts the boundaries of time and space – people may see their surroundings in new ways, or speak to family members long gone. Perhaps we need to be more willing to see what they’re seeing, hear what they’re hearing.

The word “community” (fellowship, that which is common) has the same etymological Latin and French roots as “communicate” (to impart, to share, to make common). There are many definitions of community, but one common element is interaction or communication as the source and sustenance of community.

The best form of communication is storytelling. It has been said that the universe isn’t made of atoms, but of stories. Stories take information and turn it into wisdom. Stories go beyond the education mandated in schools, to the joy of lifelong learning. We learn who we are, what life is, and what the world is and can be from the stories we pass along.

Legacy Community Building Questions: How can we share a new story to create a different reality? What stories do we need to listen to, particularly from our elders, and what stories do we need to tell, particularly to our children?
7. SNAPSHOT TULSA

This summary snapshot of Tulsa starts with a broad look at current relevant Facts & Stats. It moves into a sampling of representative voices that capture some of the recurring themes we’ve heard from the community as the Legacy Project has researched the city. It concludes with an overview of some of the city’s Generational Assets that can be used as a foundation for moving forward.

Facts & Stats

Like the rest of the United States, Tulsa’s population will change dramatically over the next 30 years. The trends indicate Tulsa will be made up of smaller households, will have a more diverse population of domestic and international immigrants, will have an increase in the older population, and will experience increased competition for young people and laborers from other cities. (City of Tulsa, July 2010)

The Tulsa Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) covers a seven-county region that includes the City of Tulsa and surrounding suburban communities including Broken Arrow, Owasso, Sapulpa, Jenks, Bixby, Sand Springs, and Claremore. The total estimated Spring, 2010 Tulsa MSA population is 934,615. The projection for 2015 is 996,520, an increase of 6.6%. (Tulsa Metro Chamber, 2011)

Tulsa County is made up of the City of Tulsa, and neighboring suburban communities including Broken Arrow, Owasso, Jenks, Bixby, and Sand Springs. The total estimated Spring, 2010 Tulsa County population is 603,820. The projection for 2015 is 643,136, an increase of 6.5%. (Tulsa Metro Chamber, 2011)

The total estimated Spring, 2010 population of the City of Tulsa itself is 397,937, 48.8% male and 51.2% female. The projection for 2015 is 411,767, an increase of 3.5%. (Tulsa Metro Chamber, 2011)

Per capita income in the Tulsa MSA for 2010 was $40,014, close to the US average of $40,358. (Tulsa Metro Chamber, 2011) As in many other cities, Tulsa is experiencing the hourglass effect – more rich, more poor, and fewer in the middle.

30.9% of Tulsa MSA residents volunteer, ranking 32 out of the 75 mid-sized American cities. The average is 29.3 hours per resident, ranking 60 out of the 75 cities. (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2010)

Tulsa’s unemployment rate for June, 2011 was estimated at 6.7%. This is lower than the national average of 9.2%. (US Department of Labor, 2011)

Nearly 1 in every 5 Tulsans, 19.5%, reported incomes in 2009 below the poverty level. (US Census Bureau, 2010)

For Tulsa County, 22.2% of children and youth under 18 years, and 8% of those 65 years or older, are living below the poverty level. (US Census Bureau, 2010)

Tulsa County infant mortality rate is 8.7 infant deaths per 1,000 births. The national average is 6.8. (Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa, 2010)

Six prevalent strategic health issues affect the Tulsa area: childhood and adolescent obesity; nutritional access; safe, affordable, and healthy housing; mental health; tobacco use; and access to healthcare. (Tulsa Health Department, 2010)
The life expectancy for Tulsa County residents is about 2.5 years below the national average. The life expectancy for men in Tulsa County is 73.3 years and for women is 78.2 years, with greater needs for healthcare in the final years. Both are below national expectancies of 75.8 for men and 80.8 for women. Leading causes of death are heart disease, cancer, stroke and chronic respiratory disease, which are largely related to lifestyle and culture. (Kulkarni, Levin-Rector, Ezzati, & Murray, 2011, Vol 9)

City of Tulsa population by race/ethnicity: White 68.0%; African American 15.3%; Hispanic 11.9%; American Indian 3.0%; Asian 2.2%. The projection for 2015: White 67.4% (up 2.6%); African American 13.6% (down 8.0%); Hispanic 14.4% (up 25.6%); American Indian 2.3% (down 21.6%); Asian 2.3% (up 6.9%). (Tulsa Metro Chamber, 2011)

The Hispanic population will contribute significantly to Tulsa’s future growth. Hispanic newcomers are typically younger than the average resident. Nationally, the median age of the Hispanic population is 27 years, compared to 31 years for the population as a whole. (City of Tulsa, July 2010)

Tulsa Public Schools has 84 schools. Jenks Public Schools (9 schools total) and Union Public Schools (17 schools total) each have a few schools within City of Tulsa boundaries.

In 2010-2011, Tulsa Public Schools had a total of 41,224 students: White 29.6%; African American 30.9%; Hispanic 24.7%; Native American 8.0%; Asian 1.3%. (Tulsa Public Schools)

Tulsa Public Schools’ poverty rate for 2009-2010 was 83.1%, defined as students qualifying for free or reduced-price school meals. (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2010)

In 2009-2010, Tulsa Public Schools had a Total Academic Performance Index (API) of 920. API scores range from 0-1500, with 1092 as the state average for regular education students. API is a numeric score that measures school and district performance based on a variety of educational indicators. (No Child Left Behind Act Annual Report Card).

Between 2007 and 2030 in the state of Oklahoma, the 18-64 year-old population is expected to remain nearly flat. Youth 0-17 years will increase by 9.5%. Older adults 65 years and over will increase 60%, and older adults 85 years and over will increase 50%. By 2030, Tulsa will reflect the national demographic breakdown: nearly 1 in every 5 Tulsans will be over 65 years of age. (Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa, 2008)

Voices from the Community

“How much does it cost?” (a reference to the financial realities facing the city)

“For decades, Tulsa was known as the Oil Capital of the World. Energy is key to moving the city forward. Everything from traditional oil and natural gas production to segueing that into the alternative energy arena. With the education centers of The University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University, The University of Tulsa, Tulsa Community College and the Career Tech system, Tulsa could become the energy-education capital of the world. That would be a home run.”

“We are behind in terms of being a ‘green’ city. We lack an easily accessible public transportation system, have a low recycling rate, and don’t have a year-round farmers’ market, to name a few issues.”

“The environment could use more attention in Tulsa. The city is very philanthropic, but in the current economic climate, the emphasis is
on human services rather than environmental projects."

“The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot was the worst of the so-called race riots in twentieth century America. A legacy of mistrust persists. Some of the dynamics here today – discernable residential segregation, a general lack of diversity and inclusion in decision-making positions – are bound up with deep psychological wounds not yet fully healed. While we must certainly span generations in a unified, seamless way, we must likewise span the vast gulf of race too long ignored. In both instances, building bridges across social divides is a prudent investment in our social capital infrastructure.”

“People of color often feel excluded. We have issues of community hunger that need sustainable solutions. The poor are getting poorer in North Tulsa. People die here 14 years earlier than other parts of the city.”

“In this part of Tulsa, called Little Mexico, we’ve done everything to reach out to our Hispanic neighbors, even distributed fliers in Spanish and invited a translator to our community meetings. But nobody came.”

“There are real gaps serving people in the margins, people we need to fill in the gaps in our workforce. We can’t pretend that illegal immigrants don’t exist.”

“There is greater racial diversity and poverty among younger Tulsans. The older, mostly white, population is growing and is more economically diverse. These two groups are often isolated in terms of where they live and pursue their daily activities.”

“We need to include the needs of the oldest old who have outlived their family and are isolated, as well as the grandparent who has to raise another family.”

“Isolation due to the lack of transportation is a big problem for older Tulsans, and transportation is a frustration in general because there’s been a lot of talk and no improvements.”

“There’s only one affordable housing project a year for seniors. That’s not enough to keep up with the need.”

“Programs for seniors can’t keep up with the demand. There is not enough staff or resources. The city also has a fragmented healthcare system, and there are only two gerontologists in Tulsa.”

“We need more aging in place supports. Care transitions between hospital and home are lacking. We also need to educate people to do more long-term care planning before a health crisis occurs.”

“I wish I could brag as much about the city’s public schools as I can about the suburban and private schools.”

“Children and youth need to be more connected with the communities they live in. They need more adult interaction and attention. They need more real-world based learning.”

“We have to get past the recent political conflicts in City Hall. We need clear and responsive leadership. And we need to come together ourselves if we want to do something this big and important.”

“Tulsa is blessed with a spirit that literally calls and drives people to action when such is needed, not only by means of financial resources but in contribution of time, talents, and service.”

“PLANITULSA was a good consultative process that established a direction for the city. But it’s not moving ahead very quickly. We need less talk and more action. We’ve had so many plans and reports recently. My biggest fear with this new Across Generations initiative is that nothing will happen.”

“Tulsa needs more of a sense of belonging, a sense of place for everyone. What binds us
together as a city and community? We need to be able to move forward together."

**Generational Assets**

Every city has a history, conflicts, and challenges. It’s part of the ongoing social evolution of humanity. Once in a while, a moment of opportunity presents itself to leap beyond what is to what can be.

For Tulsa, one of those moments is the Across Generations initiative. This initiative can allow the city to reperspective, regroup, and renew. Tulsa has many assets on which it can build. How can Tulsa develop and leverage these assets, and be creative in dreaming a better city for all ages?

The following is an overview of some of the key assets in Tulsa related to the generations. Additional information on relevant assets is provided under each of the Action Areas.

According to RelocateAmerica 2011, Tulsa is in the **Top 100 places to live** in the US. It offers a low cost of living, quick commutes, a stable housing market, and a growing number of cultural/recreational assets like the BOK Center, ONEOK Field, and various museums.

AARP recently named Tulsa as one of the **10 best cities to retire** in America based primarily on affordability, with some livability factors also taken into consideration.

The **Tulsa Metro Chamber** is ranked among the top in the country. It has received the Chamber of the Year award from the American Chamber of Commerce Executives three times, most recently in 2010.

[http://www3.tulsachamber.com](http://www3.tulsachamber.com)

**Tulsa’s Young Professionals** is a program of the Metro Chamber designed to develop Tulsa’s next generation of leaders and encourage young people to pursue careers in the Tulsa area. It has grown to over 7,000 members and has become one of the top national programs of its kind.

[http://www.typros.org](http://www.typros.org)

Tulsa’s main industries include aerospace, energy, manufacturing, and healthcare.

The City of Tulsa has implemented a **citizen survey process**. Surveys are distributed to 200 households in each of the nine City Council districts asking residents what they think about all aspects of local government. An upcoming survey will include intergenerational questions. The results of the citizen survey will help the City of Tulsa determine budget decisions and other actions that need to be taken in order to provide more efficient and effective services.

The **Tulsa Community Foundation** is the nation’s largest community foundation with $4.4 billion in assets, $2 billion more than New York. There is a strong philanthropic base in Tulsa supporting local social and educational programs.

[http://www.tulsacf.org](http://www.tulsacf.org)

Tulsa has one of the largest heritages of art deco art and architecture in the US. It tends to be a city that values **preserving its history**.

**Reconciliation Park** includes sculptures representing figures from the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot and the Tower of Reconciliation and storyboard panels telling the African American story.

[http://www.jhfcenter.org](http://www.jhfcenter.org)

**Family & Children’s Services** provides an array of family services and mental health services for adults and children across the lifespan. They have 11 facilities and more than 50 school and community partner locations throughout the Tulsa area. Last year, they provided services to 1 in 6 Tulsans.

[http://www.fcsok.org](http://www.fcsok.org)

**Youth Services** of Tulsa provides programs and services to meet the diverse needs of
youth. These include an Emergency Shelter, Safe Place program, and counselling as well as positive development programs like Transitional Living, Youth Court, and Art Studios.

http://www.yst.org

The Tulsa City-County Library has 24 branches plus a genealogy branch. Programs include Your Library Connection and Homebound which focus on older adults and disabled persons, and Plan4College Centers which provide families and students with a one-stop-shop for college information. The Bookmobile promotes the joy of reading to families and children who live in poverty.

http://www.tulsalibrary.org

The Arts & Humanities Council of Tulsa has a wide range of education programs for children and adults to inspire creativity, promote lifelong learning, and enhance life quality. Their longest-running program, Artists-in-the-Schools, reaches more than 120,000 youth from mostly at-risk and underserved communities each year. Community Arts Partnerships serve over 4,000 children and youth. Youth Arts After School visits 20 sites that reach over 500 children. The new Visual Arts Center in the Brady Arts District in downtown Tulsa will offer expanded arts education programs with dedicated classroom, gallery, and studio space.

http://www.ahct.org

Tulsa has 15 institutions of higher education in the area, including Oklahoma University – Tulsa, Oklahoma State University – Tulsa, University of Tulsa, Oral Roberts University, Rogers State University, and Tulsa Community College.

The Higher Education Forum was established in 2009 to link nine postsecondary institutions to local high schools through service learning projects, internships, and career exploration to improve student achievement and develop stronger communities. The forum is pursuing collaborative and innovative strategies to coordinate, integrate, and support the education pipeline.


The Tulsa County Mentoring Coalition is made up of 16 key non-profit organizations, government agencies, and K-12 and higher education groups – including Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oklahoma, Camp Fire USA, Junior Achievement, Tulsa Public Schools, Union Public Schools, and YMCA/YWCA. Tulsa Mayor Dewey Bartlett and his wife Victoria Bartlett lead the coalition with the Mentoring to the Max program. The goal is to increase both the supply of mentors and the breadth of youth served.

http://www.csctulsa.org/files/file/Case%20for%20a%20Tulsa%20County%20Mentoring%20Coalition.pdf

The Community Service Council provides leadership for community-based planning and mobilization of resources to best meet the health and human service needs of individuals and families across the lifespan.

http://www.csctulsa.org

In 2010, the Community Service Council and the Metropolitan Human Services Commission facilitated the creation of the Tulsa County P-20 Council. It focuses on assuring successful transitions at critical points along the developmental growth pathway. It promotes and aligns multiple education, health, and social support resources to best advance human capital development from prenatal through postsecondary and employment, and on to sustained lifelong well-being.

http://www.csctulsa.org/content.php?p=195

The Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI) conceptualizes schools as the hub of the community. A community school supports the “whole” child, which includes the family. It is both a place and a network of supportive partnerships between the school
and the community. Some schools include a community health clinic. Others are the host site for the local seniors nutrition program under which seniors come each day to get a hot meal; while at the school, these seniors have opportunities to interact with students. There is also a Seniors in Schools program in six of the community schools. Under this program, selected students meet with seniors twice a month, have lunch, and engage in an intergenerational activity. Students who participate in Seniors in Schools have better attendance, grades, and fewer behavioral problems. Overall, more than 9,000 students and their families are impacted by the 18 community elementary schools in low-income neighborhoods throughout the Tulsa area. Each community school can decide how to best meet the needs of its local neighborhood. A 2009 study showed a significant student achievement improvement under the community school model. The program is being expanded this year.

http://www.csctulsa.org/content.php?p=29

Conexiones is designed to enhance the academic success of Hispanic students. It focuses on critical transition points from birth to workforce engagement, with an emphasis on addressing the comprehensive needs of students.

http://www.csctulsa.org/content.php?p=30

Tulsa Educare provides high-quality early childhood education and care to low-income families in Tulsa. They currently have two facilities and are constructing a third. The centers have ample areas for play and learning, as well as spaces for family-related activities including one-on-one counselling and support groups for mothers, fathers, and grandparents.

http://www.educaretulsa.org

The Zarrow Campus is a shared site combining a Jewish Community Center, Community Day School (42 K-5 students), and Retirement & Health Care Center. They have some intergenerational programs linking the school and retirement center.

Grace Living Center offers 24-hour nursing care for its older adult residents, as well as respite and hospice care. It is an Eden Alternative site, a concept developed by gerontologist Dr. William Thomas. Incorporated into the center is a set of classrooms that offer two pre-K classes and a kindergarten class as part of Jenks Public Schools. Special daily activities, with an emphasis on reading, take place between the children and elders. Elders have a higher quality of life, increased physical and psychological wellness, and meaningful purpose through the intergenerational relationships that develop. Jenks Public Schools has followed students from Grace Living Center and they score higher in reading, math, and science, and have fewer behavioral problems.

LIFE Senior Services is a “one stop” source that helps older adults and their families by providing information, education, and services that encourage continued independence, quality of life, and dignity. Case management professionals can visit a senior, matching their needs with community resources to help them remain independent and safe in their home. Adult Day Services are available for adults who are socially isolated, have a physical impairment, Alzheimer’s disease or other dementia, or experience depression or other mental health disorders. Caregiver support and community education are available. Two LIFE Senior Centers offer breakfast, brunch or lunch, as well as music, classes of all kinds, movies, cards, games, projects, exercise, and community outings. Several apartment communities offer affordable housing for low-income seniors. The SeniorLine provides Tulsa area seniors with a single phone number to connect to hundreds of services and programs. LIFE Senior Services also publishes the free Vintage Newsmagazine (circulation 80,000) designed for older adults.
and their families to stay informed and involved.

http://www.seniorline.org

LIFE Senior Services has a comprehensive database of senior housing options in Tulsa, community services, and relevant local information for seniors. It makes the annual *Vintage Guide to Housing & Services* available to seniors and their families online and in printed form.


The 2-1-1 Helpline, under the Community Service Council, serves the Tulsa area by connecting residents to a database of thousands of community and government services. Calls related to services for seniors are referred to the LIFE Senior Services SeniorLine.

**RSVP Tulsa** connects approximately 1,600 local volunteers 55 years and older to meaningful community service. This includes some intergenerational programs. In Knittin' Kittens, older adults teach younger beginners how to knit and crochet items which are then donated to those in need. Grandfriends visit early childhood classrooms once a month, once a week or more for 2-3 hours to share interests with the children. Reading Buddies go into Union Public Schools 1-2 times per week to support children as they read aloud. For older adults with limited mobility, there's a pen pal program in which they can exchange letters with students, and then meet in person.

http://www.rsvptulsa.org
8. DREAM IT: ACTION AREAS

It’s time to get to work. The Tulsa Across the Generations initiative can become a model for the rest of the country. It can build on current assets in Tulsa and best practices from around the world. It can undertake big-picture, systemic change. It can include a strong emphasis on intergenerational practice and incorporate a unique psychosocial dimension through Legacy Community Building.

One City, One Book is the community education and participation program that’s part of the Tulsa Across the Generations initiative. It will open a dialogue with all ages in Tulsa. The book *Dream* by Susan V. Bosak is central to that program.

The last line in *Dream* is, “Dream a dream… your very own dream.” If there were a next page in the book, it would be your dream. The Action Areas are the framework for the citizens of Tulsa to come together to dream a better future for the city that benefits all generations. What’s your dream for the city? What does your next page look like?

There are eleven Action Areas:

- Education and Lifelong Learning
- Employment and Economic Development
- Healthcare and Healthy Living
- Social Supports and Safety
- Community Development and Sites for Gathering
- Housing and Development/Land Use
- Transportation and Mobility
- Communication and Connection
- Civic Engagement
- Policy and Funding
- Legacy Leaders Youth Council and Elder Council

Taken together, the Action Areas address all issues related to the changing demographic landscape.

This section of the Action Kit is unfinished – because we need you to help finish it. After the Across the Generations Summit on October 10, 2011, ideas will continue to be collected based on the needs of Tulsans and will be synthesized with best practices from around the world so that collaborative Action Groups can begin to make progress in each of the Action Areas.

This completed section, with ideas and resources for each Action Area, will be posted at [http://www.legacyproject.org/tulsa](http://www.legacyproject.org/tulsa).

To work toward effective action, *Think* statements provide reminders and a foundation for discussion. *Explore* questions are rooted in intergenerational Legacy Community Building and can be used to help guide creative, out-of-the-box discussion.

**Think**

The ultimate goal is a thriving, vibrant city that recognizes, respects, and meets the needs – physical, emotional, social – of all ages and brings generations together in support of each other.

Aging is something we do from the moment we’re born. It’s not about chronological age – it’s about physical/cognitive functional ability.

Older people are not a homogeneous group and individual diversity increases with age.
Virtually half of recent births in the US are minorities. Yet the population 65 years and older is largely white. There are opportunities to bridge both generational and racial/cultural divides.

Harnessing the skills of Boomers, who are generally healthier and have higher levels of education than past elders, will be a tremendous resource for addressing numerous social challenges.

If we can improve the standing of older adults in society, and nurture what they can bring through intergenerational connections, then we can achieve a better community with a better quality of life for all ages.

Research shows that children need 4-6 involved, mature adults in their lives to fully develop emotionally and socially.

Children and older adults share needs for dignity, growth and challenge, quality of life, connection, and meaning.

An intergenerational lens magnifies potential benefits across the entire community. While different ages may have some different needs, those needs can be complementary, compatible and, in fact, may answer each other.

Go beyond ageism and age-segregation. Chronic social problems are more difficult with age-specific thinking; whole-community thinking makes more real solutions possible. If young and old can be brought together, the result is greater social supports, and in turn greater effectiveness and even cost savings.

As we create new life maps, there are no prescribed role models to follow, no guideposts, no rigid rules or obvious rewards. Aging is much more than a problem to be solved. It is about our vision of what it means to live a life and what we want our later years to be like.

Challenge assumptions, look to solve more than one problem with one solution, forge intergroup collaborations, dream creative new approaches.

Explore

Time Shift: Is this important enough to matter one year, ten years, or 100 years from now? If the answer is yes, how can we make sure it matters and stands the test of time?

Seven Generations: How will this affect the community’s middle generation, three generations before, and three generations after? In other words, how will it affect everyone from the youngest young to the oldest old? How do needs of one generation overlap with another, and how can we connect the generations?

Big Picture Puzzle: What’s the common vision uniting individuals in the community? Who is doing what – both in the community and elsewhere? Can more than one need be addressed by one creative idea? How can people work together in new ways to combine resources, do better, get further?

Biomimicry: For each idea, can you find inspiration from a natural example for how it can be designed or implemented? How can you plan without constraining – plant a seed and allow it to grow? Does your plan reflect sustainable environmental thinking? Are you benefitting from diversity?

Wisdom: How can we share a new story to create a different reality? What stories do we need to listen to, particularly from our elders, and what stories do we need to tell, particularly to our children?

Check updated versions of this Action Kit at http://www.legacyproject.org/tulsa
CITATIONS


Tulsa Health Department. (2010). *Pathways to Health: Community Health Improvement Plan*. Tulsa, OK: Tulsa Health Department.


