



Elders as Resources

INTERGENERATIONAL STRATEGIES SERIES



Communities for All Ages: Planning Across Generations



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The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of UPS, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

Elders as Resources explores successful practices, programs, and policies to mobilize the vast potential of older people to improve the lives of children, youth, families, and communities. This series of publications is intended to make the information available to Making Connections sites, to all units and grantees of the Foundation, and to interested members of the public. The Elders as Resources series was developed by Jessica Strauss, Consultant to the Annie E. Casey Foundation since 1997 and currently Co-Director of Baltimore Community School Connections, a non-profit technical assistance center, and Paula Dressel, formerly Director of Planning, Research, and Development at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and now Vice President of JustPartners, Inc., a Baltimore-based consulting firm.

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Intergenerational Strategies Series
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INTRODUCTION

The United States is in the midst of a demographic revolution that requires a major paradigm shift in social policies and the delivery of health and human services. With both youth and elders making up an increasing proportion of the population, it is critical that children, youth, and older adult advocates join together to create a common agenda - one that emphasizes interdependence and collaboration.

Currently, there are approximately 34 million persons 65 years and older; by 2030 that number will reach more than 70 million. In addition to the increasing size of the older adult population, the gap between the percentage of older adults and children has narrowed; by 2030 each group will constitute approximately 22% of the total population (U.S. Department of Human Services, 1991). This shift is only one part of a set of essential demographic, social, and economic transformations, many of which have already begun. “Minorities” are becoming majorities in many cities. By 2010, it is expected that 40% of teens will be nonwhite or Hispanic (Dryfoos, 1998); by 2050 this will be true for a majority. Similarly, older minorities are increasing as a proportion of the older population, though not at the same rate.

Though these changes present many quandaries for this new century, they also suggest untapped resources to meet the challenges facing children, families, and neighborhoods. The Annie E. Casey Foundation has taken a place-based, family strengthening approach to neighborhood transformation, known as the *Making Connections* initiative, that looks holistically at the community to achieve a set of results for disadvantaged children. Building from this concept, it makes sense to explore a new approach known as *communities for all ages* as a powerful framework for achieving this kind of community change.

The *community for all ages* approach has the potential to improve the quality of life for entire communities — not just individual age groups — and to transform varied age groups from competitors to support systems and political allies. It suggests the power of alliances built around convergent policy interests, such as access to care and social supports, and appropriate physical infrastructure. It suggests that well-supported elders can share the burden of caring for a family, allowing wage-earners to earn and save more. It suggests that elders with opportunities to volunteer and work with children can help ensure that they are cared for, prepared to learn, and supported in their learning. And it suggests avenues of civic engagement for youth and elders together.

WHAT IS MEANT BY *COMMUNITY FOR ALL AGES*?

The “community for all ages” approach defines target *neighborhoods*, rather than specific *populations*, and thus casts a broad focus upon *all* populations within the neighborhood. Within this approach, there is acknowledgement that priorities and issues among groups intersect at many points, as do the programs and policies that address those issues.

Communities for all ages are those that promote the well-being of children, youth, and older adults, strengthen families, and provide opportunities for ongoing, mutually beneficial interaction among age groups. The approach strengthens the quality of life for children by extending the reach of those who have personal resources to offer them. Looking across the range of existing “elder-friendly,” “child/youth-friendly,” and “family-friendly” initiatives, it becomes clear that common themes exist regardless of life stage. Issues of access to quality health and social services, expanding social networks, education/learning, civic engagement (opportunities to serve), appropriate physical infrastructure, and social and family support have been identified as important to the well-being of all ages.

Planning for a *community for all ages* recognizes that elders already serve as resources to children and families, and finds ways to enhance that capability. Successful planning boosts the capacity of elders to serve as assets to children and families by, among other activities, contributing to a family's financial stability and providing child care and permanent care, volunteer services, and civic leadership. The approach also recognizes that young people help support elders in their families and communities.

Mobilizing different age groups — particularly older adults and youth — as resources for each other and for their communities creates access to human and social capital in wisdom, advocacy, skills, and historical and cultural knowledge. This strategy can also serve as an effective vehicle for seeking to bridge race, class, income, and other differences.

When resources are allocated to benefit an entire neighborhood, and not just one segment, competition is eased as resources are re-designed to benefit all ages. The various generations become resources for each other, rather than competitors. Programs and policies designed within this approach embrace age-group defined priorities, while moving forward the entire community.

Using age as a lens, it is possible to build upon existing theories to create a community building approach that is life-span focused. Based on our knowledge of social networks, social capital, and community capacity, the following strategies need to be part of this approach:

- expanding social networks and social support, particularly for vulnerable youth, older adults, and families;
- increasing social capital by promoting ties across ages and expanding opportunities for lifelong civic/social engagement;
- integrating a life-course perspective into existing institutions and services; and
- creating policies and promoting norms that foster reciprocity, interdependence, and age-integration.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A CFAA APPROACH?

The *communities for all ages* approach focuses on an environment as a whole, which affects the quality of life for all of the children, youth, families, and elders who live there. Some of the benefits include:

Increased child and family well-being: The presence of well-supported elders in the lives of children and families as volunteers, service providers, and family members means a spreading of the burdens and costs of raising a family. This presence often leads to shared caregiving responsibilities, better access to services, a leveraging of family income, an enhanced ability for the family to earn and save, and assistance for children with schoolwork and with the removal of barriers that may prevent successful learning. Engagement in productive activities and social ties are also positively correlated with successful aging. Sharing knowledge and experience with younger generations has been shown to improve well-being in later years.

Stretching and leveraging of limited resources: The approach is not an “add-on” to traditional methods of community change, but transforms the way that choices are made. Instead of viewing children and elders as separate groups, with entirely separate strengths and needs, this approach views them as related, with shared needs and with strengths that can be employed to help to meet those needs. Children and elders are recognized as members of the same families and social support networks — not unrelated groups competing in isolation for limited resources, but interconnected elements of a unified social fabric. Resources that affect one age group reach others as well.

Policy transformation: When this age-integrated view is applied, resources are freed from traditional constraints limiting them to one group or another. New alliances, perspectives, and resources become available to boost success for children, youth, families, and elders. Matilda White Riley (2000), National Institutes of Health Scientist Emeritus, points out that these newly available assets can be traced to two components of age-integrated thinking and its application: “the absence of age barriers and the presence of cross-age interactions.”

Recognition of natural alliances: A life-span approach to community change - one that brings children, family members, and elders to the table together - allows common perspectives to be recognized and ways to emerge for the generations to support each other and to serve as allies in ensuring that appropriate services, supports, and programs are in place for all.

Increased civic participation: Opportunities and incentives exist for all ages to be more involved in their communities, making communities more responsive to all age groups and combining the assets of each age group in the service of community progress.

Stronger supports and networks: A greater sense of community across age strata and the recognition of shared interests build networks and leads to the growth of supports for all ages.

Two initiatives that attempted to integrate an intergenerational approach into more traditional planning and funding strategies, and which will be explored more fully later in this paper, suggest additional examples of benefits.

CHARLOTTESVILLE: PLANNING TOGETHER ACROSS GENERATIONS

A community planning process in Charlottesville, VA that incorporated an age-integrated approach found that structures, programs, and practices designed to enhance the quality of life for elders will enrich the entire community. For example, one project focused on remodeling a Charlottesville thoroughfare to make it more pedestrian-friendly, with obvious benefits for both children and elders.

In addition, the planning process itself, which required the participation of a diverse cross-section of agencies, organizations, and individuals, created an ongoing network of parties who now bring an intergenerational perspective to their organizations and activities, building bridges across service providers who previously focused on distinct populations and issues. For example, a prominent geriatrician is now working with the assistant superintendent of the Albemarle County schools to develop an aging-related, career-applicable curriculum for high-school students. Youth focus groups helped planners to expand the traditional sources of input.



YONKERS, NEW YORK: INVESTING IN INTERGENERATIONAL STRATEGIES

The Helen A. Benedict Family Foundation found that incorporating an age-integrated approach into its funding strategy meant that programs were designed so that youth and elders could be resources to one another, and that neighborhoods often benefited as well. For example, one program involved older adults assisting in childcare centers. Another involved elders and youth cooking together and learning about nutrition.

The foundation reported numerous positive outcomes for participants in these intergenerational programs. For children, there was shown to be an increase in self-esteem, belonging, and feeling cared for. Elders were reported to experience an increased sense of purpose and the discovery of new skills or talents, and to display increased advocacy on behalf of both children and elders.

WHAT ARE THE CORE VALUES OF CFAA?

- **Interdependence:** People feel a sense of shared responsibility for one another. The age-old social compact is strong as generations rely on each other for care, support, and nurturing. Elders are viewed as resources to families and communities. Young people feel valued as resources for elders and gain a sense of social efficacy.
- **Reciprocity:** People of all ages have opportunities to both give and receive support; to both teach and learn. Age groups rely on each other for support.
- **Individual worth:** Each individual, regardless of age, race/ethnicity, gender, or other variables, deserves respect and care, is entitled to equal access to the community's resources, and offers an ability to contribute to the community in some way.
- **Diversity:** Efforts are made to foster understanding across diverse groups, which promotes a recognition of shared priorities and untapped resources.
- **Inclusion:** Policies and programs are designed for all members of the community, with the understanding that improvements to overall community quality of life will benefit most members of the community.
- **Equity:** Fairness is reflected in all policies and services. Advocates for the young and the old are not pitted against each other for limited resources, but work together as allies toward the development of mutually beneficial policies and services.
- **Social connectedness:** Social relationships build and deepen the social networks that provide support for all age groups. Formal networks foster opportunities for connection across ages and cultures, thus building a shared sense of community.

WHAT ARE THE CORE ELEMENTS OF A CFAA APPROACH?

- **Support for caregiving families:** Community-based, accessible services support families caring for young children, people with disabilities, and frail older adults, with assistance available to navigate service delivery systems. Various kinds of family structures (for example, kinship care, or gay/lesbian families) are acknowledged and services are available to respond to their unique needs.
- **Access to quality health care and social services across the life course:** Age- and culturally-appropriate health, mental health, and social services are available across the life course, and community activities are designed to respond to the developmental needs of children, youth, and older adults.
- **Opportunities for lifelong learning:** Educational institutions are utilized as centers for lifelong learning. Quality education and opportunities for extended learning are available for all ages, with elders included both as learners and as teachers, tutors, and mentors.
- **Institutions with a life-span perspective:** Policies, seamless services, and programs support lifelong individual development and health, as well as the ability to transition between phases of education, work, and leisure. A seamless continuum of services supports children, youth, adults, and families at all stages of life. Basic needs such as housing, safety, food, and transportation are met across the life course.
- **Opportunities for lifelong civic engagement:** All ages are involved in community planning efforts, and there is a social expectation of service at all stages of life, with a range of opportunities for traditional volunteer, stipended volunteer, and paid work available for all age groups. These opportunities are supported by a solid infrastructure for the recruitment, training, placement, and support of all people engaged in service.

- **Planned efforts to promote meaningful cross-age interaction:** Structured opportunities exist for cross-age and cross-cultural interaction, with no age barriers to participation in community activities. These opportunities allow all ages to identify common issues, engage in community improvement projects, and come to better understand one another and one another’s needs, strengths, and perspectives.
- **Collaboration across systems and organizations:** Partnerships exist across systems serving different age groups, facilitated by age-integrated funding streams that encourage collaborative efforts.
- **Physical infrastructure:** Housing, childcare, transportation, and public buildings are designed to be safe and developmentally appropriate for children and elders.

WHAT MIGHT BE THE CHALLENGES TO A CFAA APPROACH?

- **Vested Interests:** Moving toward a more age-integrated society may be seen as threatening to the vested interests of various age groups or the organizations that represent them. Sharing resources could be viewed as “losing ground” and money by certain age groups.
- **Categorical Funding Streams:** Age-segregated funding streams at the local, state, and federal levels exacerbate fragmentation and duplication of services. It is often difficult to fit intergenerational programs into existing youth or aging initiatives and/or to find funding for a life-span approach to service delivery.
- **Lack of Dialogue Across Systems:** Few vehicles exist for various age groups or the organizations that represent them to come together to explore a common agenda. As a result, there is often competition for scarce resources rather than efforts to create comprehensive initiatives that support individuals and families across the life course.
- **Intra- and Inter-Cohort Differences:** Across America, cohort groups that reflect different values, ideals, and beliefs about their roles and responsibilities toward family, community, and society are living side by side. Structured opportunities for cross- and intra-cohort interaction are necessary to foster mutual understanding and avoid conflict.
- **Land Use Planning:** Communities segregate people by income, housing, and transportation. The private sector builds homes for the affluent while government provides a diminishing amount of housing for seniors, the poor, and the disabled. Developers must come to recognize that building flexible structures easily adaptable to residents’ changing physical needs is a cost-effective strategy that would enable people of all ages to live together. Communities can set development priorities with all ages in mind.
- **Attitudinal Barriers:** Limited cross-age interaction and age-related stereotypes have resulted in pervasive ageism. This often deters individuals/organizations from reaching out to other age groups as resources. Deeper issues such as institutionalized racism and gender roles related to caregiving are also at work.
- **Diversity:** It is impossible to take a cookie-cutter approach to promoting *communities for all ages*. Different strategies will have to be employed in marketing *communities for all ages* to specific populations and for implementing programs that are culturally appropriate.
- **Regulations That Inhibit Shared Resources:** There is a proliferation of regulations and policies at the local, state, and federal levels that create disincentives for sharing resources and/or providing services across the life course. Many programs have age requirements for specific services and entitlements.
- **Lack of Research to “Make the Case”:** In order to challenge the status quo, a more compelling and scientifically based argument must be made. Many interventions are not conceptually or scientifically based, and therefore have difficulty demonstrating impact. Pilot projects should be documented and evaluated in order to provide a broader research base.

WHAT MIGHT CFAA LOOK LIKE AS A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING?

An ongoing initiative in Charlottesville, VA suggests promising ways of integrating the *communities for all ages* approach into more conventional community planning strategies.

In 2001, the Jefferson Area Board for Aging (JABA), the Piedmont Housing Alliance, and more than 150 other Charlottesville-area organizations embarked on the process of developing a long-range community plan to help Charlottesville, VA residents, government, for-profit, non-profit, and faith-based sectors of the Thomas Jefferson Planning District identify methods for working together to create a community that supports the “health, happiness, and productivity of its residents from cradle to grave.”

Unlike many community planning efforts, this one started with a central intergenerational theme that grew out of an awareness of the growing interdependence of the generations, the largely untapped potential for intergenerational support, the continuing shortfall of social service and educational dollars, and, in particular, the prospect of a doubling of the senior population by 2025. This perspective resulted in a kickoff conference and several public forums that generated input from 359 community participants, yielding the main issue areas for the planning process. Ninety participants from partner organizations and the community then created a “2020 Community Plan on Aging” to address these issues. The process demonstrates that there is much to be gained by starting with all ages in mind; the plan outlines priorities such as coordinated and accessible healthcare, designing communities to enhance quality of life, offering affordable housing for all ages, and providing support for family caregivers. The 2020 Plan was published in September, 2003.

One of the specific goals of this process was “to engage persons of all ages to explore how the generations can work together for mutual benefit.” During student forums, surveys, and discussions conducted during the 2002-2003 school year, planners solicited input from young people about their interests and concerns and about how these might interface with those of older residents. This input resulted in a chapter within the 2020 Plan titled “Strengthening Intergenerational Connections,” written by two high-school students.

The chapter suggests that overarching intergenerational goals are to increase mutual awareness of shared youth and senior issues, to encourage positive intergenerational interaction that benefits both youth and elders, and to adapt senior and youth programs and community resources to meet the needs of both age groups.

The students summarize their chapter by noting that it is evident the generations share several common issues. Among these are maintaining overall health and well-being, having opportunities for socializing, and having a voice in the community and state. There are also common interests, including helping or being helped by the other generation, sharing activities, facilities, and community efforts, and being part of a community that is accessible and people-friendly.

As the plan moves into the implementation phase, the local family agency is working with JABA to develop a progress report and benchmark system focused on youth-related outcomes. JABA is also working with the agency to coordinate its advocacy approach to local government; to explicitly make connections between the generations related to government funding.

WHAT MIGHT CFAA LOOK LIKE IF IT INFORMED STATEWIDE PLANNING?

One new initiative that merits special attention as it develops is a three-year project by the Arizona Community Foundation to focus on the challenges and opportunities facing both the younger and older populations in Arizona. Titled *Communities for All Ages*, the project brings together a diverse group of community leaders,

youth, and seniors to form plans of action that address common concerns, such as lifelong learning, transportation, health care, and housing.

The foundation views *communities for all ages* as a catalyst for creating policies and practices that promote healthy living across the lifespan in one community. Believing that communities must develop strategies that address the coming age wave and recognize the unique strengths of each generation, the foundation identified as a key strategy the strengthening of bonds across ages and cultures, and ultimately having older adults and young people be resources to each other and their communities. Intergenerational programmatic strategies, however, are only one focus of the *Communities for All Ages* initiative. Broader issues such as mobility and transportation, health care, land use, housing, and social services also will be examined and solutions identified.

Nine sites were awarded planning grants, engaging in community assessment process to develop a *Communities for All Ages* Plan, and six were funded for implementation beginning Spring of 2005.

Core elements of the initiative's *community for all ages* framework are:

- opportunities for lifelong civic engagement, learning, and productivity;
- planned efforts to promote meaningful cross-age interaction;
- access to quality health care and social services across the life course;
- support for caregiving families;
- collaboration across systems and organizations; and
- focus on a life-span perspective.

Documentation of this process should provide insight for future statewide planning.

WHAT COULD CFAA LOOK LIKE AS A FRAMEWORK FOR CREATING FUNDING STRATEGIES?

This initiative in Westchester County, NY is another example of promising directions for the *communities for all ages* approach within existing work.

Three years ago, the Helen A. Benedict Family Foundation decided to apply an intergenerational funding strategy to make Westchester County both an elder-friendly community and one in which elders are actively involved in improving the community. Specifically, the foundation's mission was: "To create elder-friendly neighborhoods and communities where people can grow old and maintain the maximum possible levels of independence; and to mobilize older people to volunteer their talents and abilities to enhance the quality of life for people of all ages in their communities."

In stepping away from a traditional funding approach and applying a broader lens, the foundation reflected a stated interest in making an impact on the well-being of children and families in the target community. It then sought to influence policymakers to discover new mechanisms to support that goal, and to leverage the resources of other funders toward that goal by offering leadership in that direction.

To those ends, the foundation made a significant grant to the Westchester Community Foundation to create an Intergenerational Fund. This Fund awarded 21 intergenerational grants to 15 organizations interested in implementing programs in which youth and older adults served as resources to each other and to their communities. The Benedict Foundation also made 15 grants to nine regional or national experts to serve as

“field-builders” to local grantees. These field-builders were linked programmatically and strategically with local organizations to help build leadership, knowledge, skills, capacity, and confidence. The provision of technical assistance produced effects well beyond the terms of the specific programmatic grants.

All grantees received training and technical assistance. Workshops on recruiting and training older adults, creating meaningful volunteer opportunities, fund-raising, and evaluation were offered countywide in order to build the capacity of organizations to utilize the resource that older adults represent.

Changes have been observed among policymakers and community leaders.

Programmatically, nonprofits throughout the area now sponsor programs and projects in which elders and youth work together, serve as resources for one another, and together strengthen the fabric of their community. The strategy has also changed the way residents and leaders see their community. Leaders of community projects, neighborhood associations, nonprofit organizations, and city and county government have incorporated an intergenerational outlook into their policies and projects, and express surprise and pleasure at discovering how much elders have to offer children.

Examples of results of the approach include:

- a directory, based upon asset-based mapping, that lists all the educational, health, social service, and faith-based institutions by neighborhood, developed by the Yonkers Elder Friendly Initiative (YEFI);
- a Yonkers Intergenerational Task Force that was established to promote partnerships among neighborhood organizations and citywide agencies, to provide seed money for new projects, and to educate legislators about the value of intergenerational initiatives;
- an intensive older adult recruitment campaign held by RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) that resulted in an increase in the number of older adults serving as volunteers in Yonkers as well as an increase in the number of agencies utilizing older adult volunteers to enhance their services;
- significantly higher reading scores on school-administered standardized tests for students tutored by older volunteers in the SMART program; and
- reduced tensions in certain neighborhoods and between generations as programs brought together often-isolated older adults with often-alienated youth.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER PROMISING PRACTICES WITHIN A CFAA FRAMEWORK?

Several recent and ongoing initiatives in the U.S. and elsewhere strive to create age-integrated communities. Some of the most promising are described here.

- The Lifespan Respite Care Act of 2003, which was passed by the Senate and is currently under consideration by the House, would help to coordinate respite services to families caring for a child or adult with special needs. Three states — Oregon, Nebraska, and Wisconsin — have already passed Lifespan Respite Acts that create state and local infrastructures for developing, providing, coordinating, and improving access to life-span respite services. Grants are given to communities that bring together various social service organizations to examine the needs of caregiving families and develop innovative respite initiatives.
- A growing number of shared sites where multiple generations receive services and interact on an ongoing basis have emerged over the past several years. These include co-located adult and child day care centers, senior centers in schools, after-school programs in senior centers, and intergenerational community/recreation centers. Sharing human, financial, and space resources is clearly cost-effective, but the value

of shared sites goes far beyond. Different generations sharing space produces an environment in which cross-age interaction and mutual trust becomes the norm.

- Hope Meadows is a former military base in Rantoul, IL that has been transformed into a closely knit, age-integrated neighborhood designed to support foster children. Foster children are placed in the care of families who live rent-free in exchange for parenting three or four children. These families are then supported by older adults who receive reduced rent for providing a range of volunteer services, such as supervising the playground, working as crossing guards, or coordinating enrichment activities and tutoring at the Intergenerational Center.
- The Evergreen Institute in Bloomington, IN involved 1,000 people of all ages in community research into what is necessary to create a healthy environment for all ages. Household surveys, ethnographic field work, and creative writing projects involving youth and elders pointed to design principles including neighborliness; an environment for growth, learning, and autonomy; a positive image; diverse and affordable housing options; and an intergenerational community. These principles ground a series of community initiatives including: reverse mortgage and home modifications programs; a mixed-use, mixed-income senior housing project; sidewalk and other urban amenity improvements; and a health cooperative combining preventive care and voluntarism.
- The San Diego (CA) County Office of Aging and Independent Services has become a catalyst for bringing generations together to meet community needs. Trained outreach workers intentionally join existing collaborations that are focused on children, youth, and families in order to infuse a life-span perspective into their efforts. An intergenerational coordinator fosters partnerships between organizations serving youth and those serving older adults and coordinates training in intergenerational program development. As a result, a wide range of school- and community-based programs has emerged. On a systemic level, county departments have begun exploring how they can integrate services and spend funds differently, and educators, human services practitioners, and health providers are thinking more holistically about their community.
- In the Netherlands, a neighborhood-oriented strategy for improving intergenerational communication and connections has been underway for the past three years. Community workers facilitate a developmental process involving youth and older adults who separately discuss how the neighborhood could better meet their needs, work together to identify areas of common interest and build trust, and then develop specific intergenerational projects that fit within existing policy frameworks such as education, parenting support, child/youth care, and care for older people (Penninx in Kaplan, Henkin, and Kusano, 2002). Within this process, young and old enter each other's living environments and are actively engaged in changing the way residents and social service practitioners of all ages think and work.

CONCLUSION: A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

The next few years represent a window of opportunity for children/youth and aging advocates. There is no doubt that the 77 million baby boomers moving into retirement will have a major impact on the way families and communities function. According to a new poll by Peter D. Hart Associates (2002), Americans age 50-75 are "turning out in record numbers to serve their communities and planning to make volunteering and public service a cornerstone of their later years." Young people are similarly enriched by volunteering, offering the many assets of youth to support the elderly. Together, youth and seniors can add significant value to the quality of life of their communities. Together, their advocates can ensure that policies benefit both generations, that programs provide opportunities for meaningful interaction, and that the community is improved for all. It would appear that making this kind of connection is essential for the future of our most vulnerable children, youth, and families.

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