

Apex Park and Recreation District

Arvada, Colorado

The Site

The Apex Community Recreation Center (CRC) is the hub for adult programming in Arvada, Colorado. Situated in a county with one of the largest adult populations in Colorado, the CRC is a key resource for older active adults served by the Apex Park and Recreation District.

Unique Program Models

CRC provides a wide variety of drop-in activities (e.g., games and billiards), fitness programs, arts, education, trips and volunteer programs. Intergenerational programming is a top priority for Apex. Two unique models include:

- **Special Events:** Apex provides numerous special events aligned with notable holidays geared toward engaging family members across generations. Some of these include a Spring Carnival (around Easter), a Winter Pajama Party (around Christmas), and a family Valentine's Day dance. These events all focus on bringing older adults, adults and youth together for fun, seasonally specific experiences.
- **Serving the "Sandwich" Generation:** Defined as middle-aged adults who care for their aging parents and their own children, the "Sandwich Generation" is a particular focus for Apex. Staff have hosted resource fairs that brought in more than 50 vendors to demonstrate options for how to adequately support aging parents. Apex also has provided classes with information about wills/trusts and general elder care.



A young artist has their picture taken next to artwork. Photo Credit: Apex Park and Recreation District

Featured Program - Art for the Young at Heart

For nearly 40 years, Apex has hosted the annual Art for the Young at Heart art show. The show highlights the artwork of adult artists ages 50 and older alongside artwork from local elementary school students. Local elementary school teachers and administrators select young artists from their schools to participate. The focus is to highlight young people with a passion for art who might not normally receive recognition for their talents.

The event includes an opening reception that brings together the artists and their loved ones. The first hour of the reception features refreshments and encourages attendees to walk through the gallery and get to know each other and their work. This provides ample opportunity for intergenerational connections, where artists young and old celebrate and admire each other's creations. Older artists are particularly fond of encouraging the young artists to continue practicing their art as a lifelong leisure pursuit. The reception includes a certificate and recognition for each young artist. Older adult submissions are judged, and prizes are awarded to the top pieces.

Impact

The artwork is displayed on the walls of the CRC for six weeks. During this time, young artists race through the hallways looking for their artwork and excitedly share it with their friends and loved ones. Older adults peruse the artwork to see who won awards and marvel at the skills of the young artists. The art show serves as an example of how a relatively simple intergenerational program can echo throughout the community for an extended time period.

Advice on How to Implement the Program

The program relies on collaboration with the local school district to identify young artists, select the artwork and attend the art show. To be successful, park and recreation professionals must identify the right contacts within the local school district who want to support the program. However, if a park and recreation department already offers youth art programs, it might not need to have such close ties to the school district to make the program happen. Instead, recruiting young artists to participate can be internally handled.

Your Turn

Are you interested in championing the work of artists across generations? What programs or partnerships currently exist that you could leverage to create your own Art for the Young at Heart?

“I have volunteered for Art for the Young at Heart, mostly since I started doing watercolor pictures. I’ve put them in the show, and I actually sold my first picture! It was just wonderful to connect with those kids and see them come in and look at adult stuff as well as their stuff. I love the kids’ work. It is just so much fun and creative.”

- C.M., age 68,
Arvada (Colorado) resident



A young artist has their picture taken next to artwork. Photo Credit: Apex Park and Recreation District



An adult artist smiles next to their artwork. Photo Credit: Apex Park and Recreation District

Town of Erie Parks and Recreation Department

Erie, Colorado

The Site

The Active Adults program in Erie, Colorado, is housed at the Erie Community Center and provides a wide variety of opportunities for older adults to engage with each other and with younger generations. The hub of Active Adults is called the Columbine Room, located in the Erie Community Center, where older adults can drop in anytime from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. free of charge.

Unique Program Models

Active Adults focuses on healthy living, the arts and social connection. It has developed numerous programs to encourage intergenerational connections. Two unique models include:

- ➔ **Skip-Gen Trips:** Short for “Skip a Generation,” these trips are designed for grandparents and grandchildren to do something fun together. When marketing these trips in their program guide, staff aim to catch the eye of grandparents who would then approach youth and their parents or caregivers about the experience. The trips aim to appeal to both generations while reducing the logistical and financial burden of having a grandparent/grandchild experience. So far, Active Adults have offered Skip-Gen trips to Colorado Rockies baseball games, the Butterfly Pavilion in Westminster, Colorado, the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado.
- ➔ **Volunteering:** Active Adults provides daily lunch programs and occasional dinner concerts. Older adults and teens volunteer to set up the room, serve the food and clean up after the meal. Not only do young people volunteer alongside older adults, but they also get to know the broader community of older adults while breaking down barriers, overcoming pre-conceived notions and fostering relationships while sharing a meal.



Trail Blazer campers participate in Zumba Gold with Active Adults. Photo Credit: Erie Parks and Recreation Department



Trail Blazer campers play cards with Active Adults. Photo Credit: Erie Parks and Recreation Department

Featured Program – Trail Blazers Summer Camp

Creating opportunities for intergenerational connection does not require reinventing the wheel. Two years ago, Town of Erie Park and Recreation staff collaborated to create a new experience for older adults and young people (ages 12 to 14). As a component of the agency’s five-week Trail Blazers Summer Camp, one hour was set aside every Friday for young and old to spend time together. Each meetup focused on a specific activity, such as lunch and conversation, Zumba Gold, Bingo, pickleball, sewing, card games and one class during which the kids teach the older adults.

Impact

The meetups had a particularly large impact on the youth participants. At the beginning and end of the experience, camp staff asked youth to write down the first five words or phrases that came to their mind when they picture an older person. At the beginning of camp, kids wrote down words like “gray haired,” “fragile” and “cranky.” Their perspective on older adults changed after spending time with them during the camp. At the end of camp, kids described older adults as “sweet,” “caring,” “experienced” and “funny.” Parents even commented on how their child’s favorite activity of camp was meeting each week with the older adults.

“Just being with a younger group and hearing what their lives are like is so beneficial. To me, our world is so split right now — we’re so torn and divisive. The more we can talk to each other, the more we can understand each other. The more we understand each other, the more we can value each other.”

– H.H., age 77,
Erie (Colorado)

Advice on How to Implement the Program

Don’t be afraid to try something new — but do everything you can to set yourself up for success. Trail Blazers staff were thoughtful about the specific activities and which older adults would be most successful engaging with the youth. Leaning into knowledge about both groups is critical for creating positive experiences.

Your Turn

Think about the summer camps your agency offers. Could you recreate this kind of intergenerational opportunity as part of your own camp programming?

Before	After
wrinkle	sweet
white-haired	kind
short	helpful
nervous	wrinkle
rich	willing
wisdom	experienced
beard	at least 65
forgetful	has a lot of stories
wrinkly	has a lot of skills
weak	knowledgeable

Words campers used to describe older adults before and after their camp experience. Photo Credit: Erie Parks and Recreation Department



Trail Blazer campers play pickleball with Active Adults. Photo Credit: Erie Parks and Recreation Department

Eudora Parks and Recreation Department

Eudora, Kansas

The Site

The Eudora, Kansas, Community Center has become the heart of older adult health and wellness for the city and the broader region. The center also is an approved SilverSneakers facility and houses the only gym within the city limits. Providing a variety of programs and services, the center supports opportunities for the community to enhance and promote a healthy lifestyle for all ages.

Unique Program Models

Serving a community of 7,000 residents, the center offers a wide variety of experiences for older adults with a particular focus on connecting generations. Some ways intergenerational connections are achieved include:

- ➔ **Opening Programs to All Ages:** Many of the department's programs do not have age restrictions and are left intentionally broad. This allows participants of all ages to participate and engage with each other. Some of these programs open to all ages include hikes, fitness classes, sensory-friendly aquatics, pickleball, community-wide events and trips (both local and more extended). The trips are particularly effective in creating opportunities for older adults and youth to enjoy shared experiences.
- ➔ **Partnering With the Local Older Adult Foundation:** The Senior Foundation of Eudora was created in 2019 and is dedicated to reaching Eudora's older adult community. The Senior Foundation, established with the support from the Eudora Park and Recreation Department, supports the department largely through promotion of older adult offerings, reaching out to adults experiencing isolation and leading the monthly intergenerational Friday Fun Fellowship program held at the Community Center.



Local students participate at Friday Fun Fellowship. Photo Credit: Eudora Parks and Recreation Department

Featured Program - Friday Fun Fellowship

Friday Fun Fellowship is a partnership between the department and the Senior Foundation of Eudora. The event is held every second Friday from 1 to 3 p.m. The agenda is created by the Senior Foundation with guest presenters featured during the first hour and games/trivia led by park and recreation staff during the second hour. The program is regularly intergenerational because featured speakers commonly are students and teachers from the local school district. Past youth-led presentations include students in a workforce development program, the school choir, art students demonstrating their work, wildlife/hunting club students and young people teaching the older adults about technology. The relationship with the school district culminated in the Friday Fun Fellowship attendees participating in the local high school's homecoming football game festivities.

Impact

Friday Fun Fellowship not only engages older adults and younger community members, but it also provides an opportunity for diverse groups of older adults to interact. There is great diversity within the older adult community. Some enjoy more social and passive forms of recreation (e.g., playing cards/games and talking over coffee), while other — often younger — older adults are more focused on fitness and exercise. Friday Fun Fellowship brings these two groups together to show up and share in a positive experience.

Advice on How to Implement the Program

Having a local senior foundation was instrumental in getting the program off the ground. However, a similar program is possible with the leadership of a few committed residents. Leaning on their input, plan a full year of once-a-month activities featuring topics that would be interesting to older adults. Be sure to leverage contacts at youth-serving organizations — such as those within your park and recreation department and the local school district. Start small and see how the program grows. Adapt as necessary, and do not be surprised to see how this kind of fellowship program will thrive.

Your Turn

Does your agency have the physical space and relationships to host a similar fellowship program? What kinds of topics would be of interest to older adults in your community? How can you prioritize engaging with youth and younger adults to make this program intergenerational? With coordination and a bit of creativity, this kind of Friday Fun Fellowship program is within reach.

“I think that kids and seniors like to play. We have always witnessed this with the group. The seniors and those kids that came loved to play and visit.”

- R.H., age 75,
Eudora (Kansas) resident



Friday Fun Fellowship program participants enjoy an activity. Photo Credit: Eudora Parks and Recreation Department



City of Ontario Recreation and Community Services Department

Ontario, California

The Site

The Ontario Senior Center provides programs, activities and classes to adults ages 50 and older. The Senior Center offers extended hours until 8 p.m. to accommodate diverse schedules.

Unique Program Models

The Senior Center offers a robust range of programming for older adults in the community. Engaging older adults with younger generations is an area of recent growth. Unique program models include:

- **Podcasting:** Older adults have recorded a podcast in collaboration with the Recreation and Community Services' Teen Action Committee. Teens asked older adults questions about their lives, stories, achievements and goals. Older adults asked teens similar questions in return. Through this recorded dialogue, both groups saw how their life experiences have aligned and diverged, while developing a deeper appreciation for each other's worldviews.
- **Interacting With Staff:** Much of the Senior Center staff is under the age of 30. This provides ample opportunities for younger staff to be a primary way older adult participants engage with younger generations. This dynamic is particularly prominent in the Active Seniors on the Go fitness program. These classes are all led and planned by much younger staff, leading to regular engagement between generations.
- **Excursions:** The Senior Center regularly sponsors trips to local attractions (e.g., Medieval Times, pumpkin patches and aerial trams) at reduced prices. Staff encourage older adults to bring younger loved ones along. These intergenerational experiences have been transformational for many older adults:

“My whole family went to Medieval Times! My daughter and husband were able to meet people who I hang around with every day at the Senior Center. We were able to meet other people, even the staff kids, too! I'm telling you, it's just very touching.”

- A.H., age 63,
Ontario (California) resident

Featured Program - Mexican Folklorico Dance

The City of Ontario has a large population of people of Mexican heritage. To celebrate this, the Senior Center hosts a Mexican Folklorico Dance class for adults ages 18 and older. At the class, participants learn the choreography of traditional Mexican ballet Folklorico dances, the cultural background of the dances and the ability to work as a team.

The class provides constant opportunities for younger adults to dance alongside older adults. The most recent session featured participants ranging from 18 to 70 years old. Dancers perform throughout the year at city-wide events, showcases and parades. At these events, the adult dancers regularly share the stage with Folklorico dancers who are as young as four years old.

Impact

For many participants, the class builds confidence and affirms cultural identity. It also provides a powerful intergenerational experience. One woman shared how her five-year-old niece danced alongside her 60-year-old mother. The two, while separated by 55 years, were united in their love of the art. The Folklórico program not only teaches dance movements, but it also teaches larger lessons about a deeper connection to culture and each other — regardless of age.



Two folklorico participants practice dancing. Photo Credit: Ontario Recreation and Community Services Department

Advice on How to Implement the Program

The class is offered on a contract basis. Do not be afraid to bring in someone who has the talent and passion to share their skills. Contractors can help to quickly fill gaps in department programs, especially when specialized skills/knowledge are required.

Your Turn

Do you offer programs featuring your region's cultural identity? How might those programs be adapted to be intergenerational? Celebrating shared culture is an excellent way to bridge generations.



Folklorico participants dance together. Photo Credit: Ontario Recreation and Community Services Department

Whitewater Department of Parks and Recreation

Whitewater, Wisconsin

The Site

Seniors in the Park is a lively and dynamic program in Whitewater, Wisconsin, that seeks to promote and enhance the aging community. Based in the Starin Park Community Building, Seniors in the Park provides programs that challenge the mind, enhance physical well-being, create connections and – most importantly – put fun at the forefront.

Unique Program Models

Seniors in the Park and the broader City of Whitewater Department of Parks and Recreation have a growing focus on intergenerational programming. Some of their unique intergenerational models include:

- **Technology Programs:** Whitewater has a large student population. The department engages students from the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater and local high schools to teach older adults about technology. Students show older adults how to use their smartphones, tablets and how to digitally organize photos. This leads to ample opportunities for different generations to share pictures and stories about their lives.
- **Scholarly Scoop:** During the fall and spring semesters, faculty and students from the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater give guest presentations on a wide range of topics. They share their research and answer questions from the attendees. The talks are intellectually stimulating and an opportunity for participants to connect with younger guest presenters.
- **Summer Camp Reading:** As part of the Innovators Kids Camp, participants (ages 5 to 11) walk to the community building and the older adults read to them. If the kids are confident readers, they read to the older adults. Afterward, ice cream is served, and kids and older adults have the opportunity to talk and laugh together.



Polar Plunge volunteers take a dip into the cold water. Photo Credit: Whitewater Parks and Recreation Department



Polar Plunge participants prepare to jump into the cold water. Photo Credit: Whitewater Parks and Recreation Department

Featured Program - Polar Plunge

Finding an event that brings the whole community together is not always easy, especially in a college town. With the town-and-gown dynamic, there are many groups – students, professionals, families and older adults – that do not often overlap. The department has found success bringing these various groups together through special events; one of these events is the Polar Plunge.

The Polar Plunge has been around for more than 25 years and is a community-wide effort to raise money for the Wisconsin Special Olympics. Taking place in the chilly months of February or early March, the event includes a boisterous jump into freezing cold water, a community chili cookoff, cardboard boat races and a free community swim in the indoor aquatics center. The chili cookoff is led by Seniors in the Park. Half of the proceeds from the cookoff support the Special Olympics and the other half support older adult programming. Older adult volunteers lead the setup, serving and cleanup for the event. Additionally, many of the cookoff participants are older adults.

Impact

Participants in the cookoff and all other Polar Plunge activities span the age spectrum. Kids, adults and older adults all participate together alongside college students and community members. This kind of special event brings the community together and provides plenty of opportunity for intergenerational contact.

Advice on How to Implement the Program

To make a large-scale event like the Polar Plunge a success, be sure to partner with local schools — including any local universities — and develop a robust planning committee. These partnerships bring their voices onto the planning committee to help guide the creation and promotion of the event.

Your Turn

What kinds of popular community-wide events does your agency sponsor? Are there ways to layer-in older adult-led initiatives that can elevate the presence of older adults at the event and provide opportunities for intergenerational connections? In Whitewater, this took the form of a chili cookoff. What might it look like in your area?

“When you get older, you can feel like you’re just an old person, but when you get to [interact] with the kids, they suddenly bring out the youth in you.”

K.F., age 61,
Elkhorn (Wisconsin) resident



Examples of Polar Plunge activities include the Chili Cookoff, boat races and other community events. Photo Credit: Whitewater Parks and Recreation Department