



Bringing Generations Together to Repair the Fabric of Community

Does your grandchild love the Harry Potter books? Maybe your niece has a penchant for giraffe or fairy tales. Has your nephew seen or read the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy?

These and many other interests such as exploring volcanoes in Costa Rica are the impetus for intergenerational trips organized through Elderhostel, America's first educational travel organization for adults 55 and older.

Intergenerational programs are not just "nice". Research by Drs. Rick Moody and Robert Disch of the Brookdale Center on Aging in New York indicate these programs are essential tools for addressing our weakening sense of community in this country, and rebuilding necessary connections among people.

During my education as a Certified Senior Advisor (CSA)[®], we discussed the importance of being *generative* -- finding new ways to connect with younger generations and pass along what we learn during our lives. As a CSA, I encourage my clients to contribute and engage in their communities through volunteering, continuing their education or travel. The Elderhostel program is an excellent example of how to combine all three.

For example, right now through Elderhostel, you and your grandchild can explore Oxford University in England from the perspective of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*. You and your niece can camp and track wild animals on a learning safari in Botswana, or you and your nephew can visit film locations of the *Lord of the Rings* in New Zealand.

And, although traveling with your grandchildren is a personal approach to intergenerational learning, there is a tide of public opportunities, as well.

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Generations United is leading an effort to move beyond just “entertainment” programs that bring generations together to interactive ones. These interactive programs use shared sites and resources such as vans for transportation to make the programs more politically and financially viable. They include childcare centers located in nursing homes, and young people doing chores while the older people make a history class come alive with their personal life stories.

Moody and Disch point out that interactive programs such as these can support public education, ease racial and ethnic tensions and make efficient use of public resources such as schools and senior centers.

Through their programs, Generations United has also found that “children can relieve the isolation, loneliness and boredom of institutionalized seniors. Older adults can provide positive role models for children, sometimes furnishing a caring relationship for children from distressed families.”

In a time when our country is becoming increasingly segregated by age, we have to be intentional and deliberate about creating opportunities for relationships among the generations.

Look at it this way: you may be woefully behind on your video game skills, but you just may be able to compete in a Quidditch match. You may not understand extreme sports, but you can teach someone how to grow a mean tomato in the community garden.

Consider challenging yourself and a member of the younger generation with an adventure in learning this year.

For more information visit:

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Elderhostel

1.877.426.8056

www.elderhostel.org

Brookdale Center on Aging

www.brookdale.org

Generations United

www.gu.org

Agency on Aging

www.aoa.dhhs.gov/NAIC/Notes/intergenerational.html

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