



Elders as Resources – Program Benefits

Elders as Resources programs must meet the needs of all participants in order to be optimally successful. Some of the benefits for students, older adults and educators are described in this section.

Benefits to Students

Elders as Resources programs address many of the social, psychological and cognitive needs of students.

- Realistic portrayal of older adults. The programs help young students to realize that older men and women -just like themselves - come from different backgrounds and have different personalities. By providing direct experiences with older adults, Elders as Resources programs avoid stereotypes which glamorize or denigrate old age.
- Development of positive attitudes about one's own aging. The program helps students to develop healthy attitudes toward their own aging and realize the lifelong importance of decisions they will make as young adults. Direct experiences with older adults in controlled settings are more effective in changing attitudes than factual information or discussions about aging.
- Evaluation of lifelong decisions. The quality of life young people will experience when they grow old will be influenced by their decisions as young adults. Opportunities exist during intergenerational Elders as Resources projects for students to consider life choices that older persons made during young adulthood. By extension, teachers can encourage students to evaluate their own decisions related to diet, exercise, education and personal relationships which will affect them in later life.
- Experience working with older people. Students today live in a society with a much higher percentage of older adults and will interact with older adults more than any previous generation. Intergenerational programs offer experience working and communicating with older people. This experience and communication can be transferred to future family and work situations involving older adults.
- Transmission of knowledge and values. Older adults interacting in the classroom can help younger students with subjects they are studying and can use their unique backgrounds or expertise to encourage students to learn. For example, an older person might speak from experience about historical events and provide young students with a perspective not found in books. A composition assignment could be especially meaningful if based on the recorded life story of an older person. A program on multicultural awareness would be enhanced by presentations from older members of different ethnic groups.

Benefits to Elders

- Older adults must realize personal benefits from their involvement in Elders as Resources programs in order to maintain their interest and to promote intergenerational involvement among their peers.
- Meaningful roles. Older persons will discover benefits of their own as they participate in Elders as Resources programs. While collaborating with students on educational projects, older persons can provide a valuable service as consultants and mentors for younger students. By offering their knowledge and experience, older persons can satisfy their own needs to be useful and make meaningful contributions to their communities, including children and schools.
- Social and personal rewards. Older adults will find social and personal rewards. Young and old people may realize that they both face issues of ageism. Each group finds itself isolated and misunderstood at times. Working together overcomes social isolation among different age groups, isolation that can lead to misunderstanding.
- Improved self-image. As students increasingly understand older men and women as individuals, older people will find their own sense of worth improved. Since a person's self-concept often is a reflection of the views of other people, the self-images of older participants are enhanced through the supportive social and educational experience of Elders as Resources programs.

Benefits to Educators

- Educators will find a number of personal and professional benefits in Elders as Resources programs.
- Providing dynamic learning activities. Teachers constantly are challenged to develop educational activities that provide accurate information and make learning meaningful and stimulating. Teachers will gain from the presence of older persons working with students on projects exploring history, culture and ideas from different generational points of view.
- Incorporating aging awareness without adding to the curriculum. Teachers do not have to make changes in their curriculums. They may bring older persons into the classroom in different ways and at different levels to enlighten subjects they already teach. Without adding extra units or topics, teachers can incorporate aging education as a secondary outcome, while still meeting course goals.
- Classroom assistance. Teachers will find that elders in the classroom are valuable teaching assistants. Teachers will benefit from the maturity and experience elders bring to students both as partners and mentors.
- Aging awareness among educators. Teachers are not exempt from prejudices toward older people and from fears of their own aging. As in other workplaces, schools will be staffed by progressively older teachers. Elders as Resources programs allow teachers to consider their own attitudes about aging and about older people.
- Promoting the school in the community. Educators should be more responsive to the larger community, including localities where an increasing proportion of residents have no school-age children. Elders as Resources programs promote the school in the community by linking individuals from organizations such as senior centers, senior housing and adult day-care facilities. Other community organizations, such as

local libraries, museums and historical societies, can be included. The result is a greater sense of community within the school, and vice versa.