



Intergenerational Connections

For Long-Term Care Homes

During COVID-19



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Intergenerational Connections in Long-Term Care Homes During COVID-19

June first is Intergenerational Day, celebrated in Canada since 2010¹. Intergenerational Day celebrates the richness of intergenerational relationships. It encourages connections between people of different age groups to reduce loneliness and social isolation and encourage age-friendly communities. More than 100 cities in Canada have officially recognized the day! Ontario proclaimed Intergenerational Day in perpetuity in 2015.

Bringing older and younger people together builds connections and strengthens communities. This year, as we adjust to the new norm of physical distancing, the social connection is more important than ever.

Many long-term care (LTC) homes across Ontario offer regular opportunities for intergenerational connections that improve the quality of life of residents. Music programs with children, high school volunteers, and pen-pal programs help enrich residents' lives. Intergenerational connections offer the opportunity for young and old alike to learn from one another.

Initiatives bringing the different generations together offer promise to reduce loneliness and social isolation across our communities. Intergenerational programs that show the most benefits, involve frequent interactions^{i ii} that are of high quality and sustained over timeⁱⁱⁱ.

The Ontario Centre for Learning Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care at Bruyère (CLRI) has developed this resource to summarize some of the creative ways that LTC homes can continue intergenerational initiatives, while respecting physical distancing. Does your home have an intergenerational story you would like to share? We'd love to hear from you at info@clri-ltc.ca.

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¹ Intergenerational Day was founded by i2i Intergenerational Society and five Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) funded student groups from Newfoundland, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia.



Children's Art Work

During the pandemic, groups of community children across the province have shared art with their local care homes. These kind gestures have lifted the spirits of residents by reminding them that people are thinking about them.

- Queen Elizabeth Public School put together a [beautiful video](#) to showcase their art along with students from the school and residents at Bonnechere Manor.
- [Renfrew County LTC homes](#), [MacKenzie Place Long Term Care Centre](#), [The Grove Nursing Home](#) and the [Glebe Centre](#) proudly sharing art received from local children.
- At [Bruyère's LTC homes](#), art received from local children has been given to residents, posted throughout the homes, put on placemats for resident's mealtrays, and made into banners at the main entrances of each of the campuses.

Painted Rocks

Painted rocks have been popping up on the grounds of LTC homes, hospitals and throughout neighbourhoods. Colourfully painted with messages of hope and encouragement, these rocks serve to bring a smile.

- At [Bruyère's Saint-Louis Residence](#) community children have painted rocks to create a 'Gratitude Garden' at the front entrance of the care home.
- [Tri-County Mennoite Homes](#) received painted rocks from the community.

Pen Pal Programs

Pen Pal programs offer a way for children and residents in LTC to build and maintain a connection on an ongoing basis.

- [County of Simcoe: Letters to Seniors Pen Pal Program](#). Check out the [reactions of residents](#) receiving letters.
- [Niagara College Recreation Therapy Pen Pal Project](#) for LTC residents; [Video about the program](#).
- [Jarlett: Royal Rose Place Long-Term Care Home pen pal program](#)
- [Pinecrest Nursing Home Pen Pal Project](#)
- Grade 8 students from a local school sent messages to [Extendicare's New Orchard Lodge's](#) residents.
- Two McMaster University alumni have started an initiative called [Caring and Connecting: Pen Pal Initiative](#), that requests letters from community members and coordinates sending the letters to local LTC homes in Niagara Region.

Residents Giving Back to Younger Generations

Schlegel Villages' The Village of Taunton Mills has residents giving back to the community by providing resources for parents who are home-schooling. They post [videos of residents teaching](#) on a weekly basis: One resident reads storybooks every Monday and another resident has been providing French lessons for young children.



Virtual Visits

We all have basic human needs to connect with other people and the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of just how critical that need is. Creative strategies are needed to help keep our generations connected.

Virtual visits have been a way that many LTC homes are keeping residents connected with their families.

- [Perley Rideau Veterans Health Centre](#) has been conducting more than 250 virtual visits per week.
- Intergenerational virtual visit at the [Elliott Community](#), [Baycrest](#), [Schlegel Villages](#) and [Glebe Centre](#).
- Virtual visits have enabled [Bruyère](#) volunteers to remain connected with residents.

Family Councils Ontario, Ontario Association of Residents' Councils, and Tech Coaches Inc came together to develop a [Virtual Visits Toolkit](#) to help support residents, families and care homes in facilitating virtual visits.

Technology

LTC homes have needed to get technology in place in order to enable virtual visits. A number of local organizations have come together to support and connect residents.

[Connected Canadians](#) is a non-profit organization in Ottawa that supports seniors with free technology training and support, through an intergenerational volunteer-based initiative. During COVID-19, they have held virtual sessions to support local seniors in using technology, as well as provided tablets to local LTC home family members and volunteers to help them to stay connected with the residents.

- [Perley Rideau Veterans Health Centre](#) residents participating in a virtual support session.
- **Bruyère** and the **Perley Rideau Veterans Health Centre** in Ottawa have [volunteer tech mentors](#), enabling residents to connect easily with friends and loved ones from around the world.

A number of organizations have provided donations of iPads to care homes. Here are a couple of highlights of donations received by Ontario LTC homes: [Parisien Manor and St. Joseph's Continuing Care Centre](#), [Baycrest](#), [Eagle Ridge](#), [Crown Ridge Place](#), [Caressant Care Listowel](#) and [Bruyère](#).

[HelpAge Canada](#), in partnership with Connected Canadians, provides a tablet lending program and a toll-free tech support hotline to support seniors.



Window Visits

Window visits offer an opportunity for intergenerational connection in the time of physical distancing. It is important that LTC homes follow the direction from their local Public Health Units.

- [Extendicare Kingston](#): Window visits including four generations.
- [Osgoode Care Centre](#): Window visits including three generations.
- Students from L'École Secondaire Catholique Béatrice-Desloges visited [Bruyère's Saint-Louis Residence](#) to share their talents and show support in the main courtyard.

There are some residents for whom virtual visits and window visits do not work, and can sometimes actually be more distressing and confusing. In these situations, some homes have found success in asking family members to send a video message, or even an audio recording. A video of the grandkids singing a song or doing a dance offers a sure way to bring a smile!



Making it Happen at Your Home:

If you are looking to start an intergenerational initiative at your LTC home, reach out to local schools and community groups. Social media can be an excellent place to find community members who are eager to volunteer and help. Learn from other organizations who are already engaged in these initiatives. Connect with the team at your care home as well, because odds are many of them have children at home looking for meaningful ways to spend their time. This is a prime opportunity to teach children about empathy and community building.

It is more important than ever for us to come together across generations and support one another, learn from each other and strengthen the fabric of our community.



For Further Inspiration:

There are fascinating intergenerational initiatives across the country, many of which have been ongoing for years. We know that the following ideas are not feasible for LTC homes at the moment; we have hope that we will beat COVID-19 and that LTC homes will once again be free to explore these types of initiatives in the future. Perhaps some of the community connections forged as a result of COVID-19 will result in ongoing intergenerational partnerships and programs.

- **Purdy Pavilion**, a Vancouver Coastal Health LTC home had communications and design students from Emily Carr University in Vancouver come together with residents to explore the power of [intergenerational storytelling](#). The [Zeitgeist Storytelling Project](#) provided opportunity for residents to exchange stories. Students worked with residents to create publications of their stories. The program has been renamed *Perspectives* and continues on.
- **Sherbrooke Community Centre** in Saskatchewan has been running an on-site [Intergenerational Classroom](#) (called iGen), where Grade 6 students interact regularly with the residents of the care home. During COVID-19, they have been keeping connections going [virtually](#).
- **The Village of Riverside Glen** in Guelph runs an [Intergenerational Jamboree](#) – a program that brings residents and young children together to make music. This program offers benefits for the residents, the children and even the parents or grandparents that attend the program with the children.
- **Calgary high school students** launched a [positive message and joke hotline](#) for seniors.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ABOUT INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS IN LTC

Ontario CLRI: Experiential Learning in Long-Term Care: A Guidebook for Building Partnerships Between Secondary Schools and Long-Term Care Homes

clri-ltc.ca/resource/experiential-learning-in-long-term-care

BC Care Providers Association: Creating Caring Communities: A Guide to establishing intergenerational programs for schools, care facilities and community groups.

bccare.ca/wp-content/uploads/BCCPA-Intergenerational-Toolkit.pdf

i2i Intergenerational Society: Resources and suggestions for how to celebrate and honour Intergenerational Day.

intergenerational.ca/i2i/ig-day

iGen Ottawa: Ideas for fostering intergenerational connections on Intergenerational Day and year-round.

igenottawa.ca

Seniors and Kids Intergenerational Program: A Brantford-based initiative that brings students together with LTC and retirement home seniors.

goskip.org

References:

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- ⁱⁱ Kocarnik, R. A., Ponzetti, J. J. (1991). The advantages and challenges of intergenerational programs in long term care facilities. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 16 (1/2), 97-107. Accessed online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254363094_The_Advantages_and_Challenges_of_Intergenerational_Programs_in_Long_Term_Care_Facilities
- ⁱⁱⁱ Carson, A. J., Kobayashi, K. M., & Kuehne, V. S. (2012). The Meadows School project: case study of a unique shared site intergenerational program. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 10 (1), 405-417. Accessed online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15350770.2011.618369>

