



ESKATON KIDS CONNECTION

[AN ESKATON INTERGENERATIONAL INITIATIVE]

"ONE NATION, UNDER AGE"

SYNOPSIS

Eskaton Kids Connection partners Eskaton's community living residents with local elementary and secondary school children to promote positive relationships between generations. With the theme "One Nation, Under Age," the program features a wide array of mutually beneficial learning opportunities, as well as social, cultural and entertainment components. Documented benefits of this program, as all pieces of the Eskaton Intergenerational Initiative, include healthier older adults; mutual respect, sensitivity, socialization and sense of purpose; shared knowledge and learning; and, of course, happiness.

Successful beyond everyone's initial expectations, the simple intergenerational program, which began in 2009, continues to grow in numbers of participants and scope. The structured activities range from arts and crafts, reading and interviews, to singing and lunch breaks. Chatting, snacking and the occasional hair braiding fill the less formal time. From personal, social and probably anthropological perspectives, the friendly interaction is extraordinary.

Our relationship with the local Twin Rivers School District currently connects over 500 elementary and secondary schoolchildren from 18 classrooms with "buddies" who reside in fourteen Eskaton communities. With expansion plans for on schedule, the program will continue to grow, eventually doubling and tripling in size to more than 1,500 children making friends with as many older adults in all 30 Eskaton communities. Dramatic, positive results are recorded in healthier outcomes for residents, advanced learning skills for students, and generous media-to-public awareness.

The Kids Connection program is the brainchildren of Betsy Donovan, Eskaton vice president, operations, and her sister Bobbi Donovan, a veteran school teacher at Kohler Elementary School in the Sacramento area's Twin Rivers Unified School District.

GOALS

- Encourage mutual respect and understanding (*generativity*) between younger children and older adults.
 - Create intergenerational learning opportunities.
 - Increase [Eskaton's] resident socialization and satisfaction, and ultimately impact healthier living and longevity.
 - Introduce children to new educational stimuli and social experiences.
 - Build Eskaton's identity as a vibrant organization involved in creative, multi-age endeavors; and further distinguish the organization's social accountability.
 - Augment schools' community service and civic engagement.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

For Eskaton staff and school teachers: Along with your own original educational and entertaining activities, and practical and logistical plans, also consider these approaches to achieve desired goals:

1. Introduce new EDUCATION experiences and opportunities.

- For students: Teach about the aging process, how everyone is aging – and that some of us just have more experience (such as our Eskaton buddies); improve reading and writing skills.
- For residents: Provide instruction on basic computer skills for entertaining, non-threatening purpose, to communicate with students.
- For both: Use email and Skype to communicate between in-person gatherings.

2. Promote SOCIALIZATION and social skills.

- For students: Create safe and welcoming environment to nurture intergenerational relations; present fun opportunities for students to enjoy “show and tell” experiences; expose students to “formal” dining etiquette and other social skills and behavior.
- For residents: Provide opportunities for residents to help students prepare and present stories to group; empower residents to advise students on social skills.
- For everyone: Share personal stories and experience; celebrate big holidays (including Valentine’s Day and Veterans Day); create colorful name badges with photos to simplify identification.

3. Encourage intergenerational, MUTUAL RESPECT and understanding ... or *generativity*.

- For students: Remind students to sharing experiences and knowledge works both ways -- they can learn plenty from the older adults, and their buddies can learn from them as well. Encourage students to write notes or emails to share happenings with their older adult buddies between gatherings; schedule Skype sessions in class.
- For residents: Feature activities for older adults to impart their knowledge and experience to educate (and impress students), such as geography, history, cultural diversity, grammar, numbers, puzzles and so forth.
- For everyone: Introduce projects that encourage collaboration and teamwork -- such as arts and crafts, gingerbread houses, interviewing one another – to build respect, understanding and empathy ... and break down barriers and generational stereotypes. Recycling projects are an excellent opportunity to encourage resource conservation – the essence of *generativity* (generations working together to help one another).

4. Create opportunities to strengthen FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS.

- For students: Encourage students to bring writing and art projects home; create assignments that invite participation of parents, such as helping with interview questions; ask students with grandparents to conduct similar interviews.
- For residents: Invite family members to watch activities and to ask residents to share details about their buddies and each gathering.
- For everyone: Take group and 'buddy' photos for residents and students with family members.

5. Generate PUBLIC AWARENESS through positive media coverage.

- For Eskaton staff and teachers: Identify local media (neighborhood newspapers) to include in outreach; work with Eskaton Public Relations Department or school district media relations office, respectively, to advise regional broadcast and print media of select events, such as introductory gatherings, Skype sessions, holiday festivities and other visual opportunities.
- For Eskaton staff and teachers: Take plenty of photographs to display as posters and to feature online and in publications.

6. Inspire REPLICATION by chronicling and documenting; and measuring and evaluating.

- For Eskaton staff and teachers: With the launch of any new program, such as "One Nation, Under Age," support and/or opportunities for replication improve immensely when benefits and results are well-documented. This includes recording details of successful activities, including challenges that were overcome; chronicling "testimonials" and anecdotes from participants; photographing key events; and maintaining a file of news coverage.

TESTIMONIALS AND ANECDOTES

Examples of what program participants are saying about “One Nation, Under Age”:

- “All of my students absolutely love their Eskaton buddies, and look forward to seeing them and writing them. Anytime I say the word *Eskaton*, my students start beaming with happiness! It is truly a wonderful experience.”
Allison Perry, Kohler Elementary School Teacher
- “When I am 100 years old, I am going to be a buddy!”
Briana Pruitt, 6
- “These students are the most well-behaved, caring first-graders I have ever known ...”
Marjorie Lloyd, 100
- “This is one of the most enjoyable and rewarding educational programs in which I have been involved. My students are developing relationships with their buddies that transcend cultural, economic and generational barriers.”
Bobbi Donovan, teacher
- “Reminds me of when my kids were young and had so much energy!”
Jeanette Colley, 89
- “I like seeing what the kids are learning today in school and comparing it to what it was like when I was that age.”
Alda Massmann, 92
- “I can’t believe how much Victor’s reading has improved!”
Betty McKinnon, 92
- “This program dramatically enriches the lives of our residents. The ecstatic laughs and bright smiles brought to the residents’ faces when their buddies run up to give them a hug says it all.”
Adam Hill, activity coordinator for assisted living at Eskaton Village Carmichael
- “We need to take better care of our buddies!” (in response to the passing of one of the buddies)
Aniya Keonna, 6
- “I’m gonna draw a picture of Mrs. Sei so she can remember what she looked like when she was little.”
Aniya Keonna, 6

Random comments overheard:

- “I think I have a new best friend.” *resident*
- This is a very nice place, huh, I wish I could live here.” *student*
- “This is the best day ever, I love it here.” *student*
- “How will the children get home safely?” *resident and former school teacher*

RESOURCES

- Eskaton website – see Innovation, Eskaton Initiatives (www.eskaton.org)
- Twin Rivers Unified School District (www.twinriversusd.org)
- The Intergenerational School in Cleveland, Ohio (www.tisonline.org)
- Generations United (www.gu.org)
- The Intergenerational Center at Temple University (www.templeigc.org)

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