

CONNECTING ACROSS GENERATIONS IN GILPIN AND CHAFFEE COUNTIES

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health stigma and loneliness are common challenges for both older adults and adolescents. Rural communities encounter technology barriers that can make it difficult to access mental health resources. The generational gap between seniors and youth around mental health and technology can make it increasingly more difficult to find support and seek help when mental health issues arise. Encouraging open conversations about mental health across generations and utilizing technology may improve access to mental health support for both adolescents and older adults in rural areas.

This internship was created to help address these challenges with the goal of increasing our understanding of these issues within each community. These findings may help inform the development of intergenerational programs.

INTERNSHIP GOALS

My goals for this internship were to:

- Evaluate existing intergenerational programs.
- Learn how to collaborate with community partners
- Conduct qualitative interviews with older adults and youth.
- Make recommendations on what elements to include in a new intergenerational program.

MY EDUCATION

I'm currently working towards my PhD in Counseling Psychology. I have a passion for intervention and prevention development and implementation. The effectiveness of any intervention or prevention program relies on tailoring it to the specific community where it will be implemented. This internship has given me direct experience evaluating current programs and gathering community data that will help inform the creation of an intergenerational program.

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE COMMUNITY

"...programs to help you connect and get to know someone as a fellow human being..."
– Female, 66 years old

"...there could be a lot more connection and understanding."
– Female, 15 years old

"We could teach them (seniors) to understand us."
– Genderqueer, 14 years old

"Coach older people with use of technology. Builds confidence and self-esteem for both seniors and youth."
– Female, 73 years old

FINDINGS

Gilpin County

Gilpin County is rural, and most of its residents are isolated from one another. Both older adults and adolescents reported that there is not much to do and there is a lack of transportation and resources. It seems that it is important to create more activities for the community and put effort into community engagement. Youth were particularly concerned about the negative stereotypes older adults may have about them and their technology use. One older adult suggested a remote hybrid option for those who are homebound.

Chaffee County

Chaffee County is a very active community. With a bustling downtown area, there is a strong sense of community. There are lot of established groups and activities. Both older adults and adolescents are often involved in the community. Though Chaffee is rural, there is access to a variety of resources. Outdoor activities were commonly suggested (e.g., hiking, river trips, rock climbing, cross-country skiing). Older adults seemed motivated to connect with the youth.

A common suggestion from both adolescents and older adults in Chaffee and Gilpin was to have the youth help the seniors with technology (e.g., troubleshooting and teaching older adults how to use technology)

WHAT I LEARNED HOW TO DO

Research current intergenerational programs (e.g., Social Call, Grandpa's United, Cyber-Seniors)

Create an interview guide with four main themes:

1. Technology
2. Perspectives on mental health
3. Connecting across generations
4. Intergenerational program ideas

Create a recruitment flyer



Connect with community partners to help recruit participants (e.g., CSU Extension offices, Recreation centers, Ark Valley Helping Hands, Boys & Girls club)

Conduct interviews in Gilpin and Chaffee Counties

Gilpin: 7 youth, 3 older adults

Chaffee: 2 youth, 7 older adults

Evaluate interview responses and identify themes to inform an intergenerational program for each county.

NEXT STEPS

- Utilize findings to begin to develop an intergenerational program.
- Collaborate with community partners to get help executing an intergenerational program.