

Lakewood Advisory Commission
Neighborhoods Committee
Assignment 2019-3:
Kids Visiting Seniors

February 11, 2020

ASSIGNMENT: Research programs that promote visits or other activities between children and the elderly and make recommendations for possible initiatives in Lakewood.

BACKGROUND

Almost half of our senior citizens suffer some degree of social isolation. A recent Brigham Young University (BYU) study highlighted the dangers of being alone or socially isolated, especially as it relates to longevity. “We need to start taking our social relationships as seriously as our health,” said the study’s lead author, Julianne Holt-Lunstad, an associate professor of psychology at BYU.

Per the Lakewood 2025: Moving Forward Together Comprehensive Plan, approximately half of Lakewood’s population is under the age of 40 and the other half is 40 and older. By and large, Lakewood has an aging population. Lakewood’s median age has increased from 26.9 in 1970 to 38.8 in 2013 (Appendix A).

Recent studies and projects have focused on both the effects of social isolation on seniors and the innovative activity of having school or pre-school children visit and interact with seniors. Some cross-generational initiatives even involve pre-schools on the site of a senior living facility. The anecdotal reports indicate two-way benefits and great enjoyment by both the seniors and the kids. A preschool housed within a retirement home is currently operating in Seattle and the children and residents participate in “music, dancing, art, lunch, storytelling or just visiting.” It helps the youngsters reduce their fear of older adults and have opportunities to give and receive unconditional love. Residents report appreciating the spirit and joy of the children bring to their home environment. A bibliography is provided at the end of the document, which lists all studies and articles consulted during our research.

Seniors are not a monolithic block; for example, the social dances that engaged the Silent Generation hold less interest for the Baby Boomers, who are seeking more active experiential learning and activities. Intergenerational programming should consider these factors, as well as issues involving mobility and the disparate needs of the City’s ethnic communities.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH AND KEY FINDINGS

The Neighborhoods Committee began by brainstorming the various possible sources of information and key stakeholders involved. The committee identified a series of key starting research points for interviews and further reading, including:

Senior Living Facilities in the Lakewood Area

The aspiration of this initiative is to help build communities by spanning generations. The committee interviewed several activities directors for Lakewood area senior facilities. Those directors told us about their innovative use of programs to bring young people in to visit their seniors. Social isolation is a real problem and children can definitely help. Jessie Tierney of the Villa Manor Care Center started by saying “With kids and dogs, you can’t go wrong!” Villa Manor has several kids and seniors initiatives highlighted by their 18 years’ experience with high school students from YouthWorks, a national group that provide faith-based missions throughout the country. Villa Manor also has programs with Lakewood and Alameda High Schools where students play games or interact one on one with the seniors,

Norma Olguin is the activities director for Applewood Our House’s five local facilities. She has developed programs like “Adopt a Grandparent” and “Prom Dance” to connect kids with Applewood seniors, but she also will tailor a volunteer experience for any interested student. She visits area schools and explains what can be involved in these experiences, then meets with individuals interested to help them understand the behaviors they will encounter, what to expect. Norma mentioned that they have a connection with Arvada High School. She emphasizes having students walk outside with patients, work on crafts, play games and do other ordinary types of activities. Those interactions really help enliven the seniors. Doing community service volunteering helps high school students with college application consideration and some school club requirements, plus gives them a better sense of their community.

Although various activities directors have developed their own initiatives, they don’t often find the opportunity to share ideas and best practices. Norma mentioned that if a gathering of people doing this type of Kids Visiting Seniors work were to occur, she would be glad to share her lessons learned during her career. Activity director interviews are described in Appendix B.

Clements Community Center

Committee members also met with Peggy Bocard and Dawn Sluder of the Clements Community Center (CCC) to discuss their own internal programs and their perspectives on this assignment’s objectives. Peggy Bocard and Dawn Sluder of Lakewood Parks & Recreation and the CCC, respectively, seem to support the notion that the City should be that which removes barriers-to-entry for individuals and groups who want to start or support programs where kids and Seniors connect and interact, but should not be the formal program organizer or the main source of program energy. We agree with this notion. A recommendation for Council should be

for City Staff to build a webpage, much like they did with our Committee’s recent Veterans Memorials project, which provides resources and best practices (a “checklist” if you will) sourced from the CCC and other municipalities in a convenient manner to anyone who wants to create a kids and Seniors program — and to make an effort to make groups that may take advantage of this resource that it is available.

At the beginning of 2020, the CCC attempted to pilot an intergenerational program. The plan was to hold a 1-hour Intergenerational Enrichment class over the course of 10 weeks at the CCC, Lakewood Heritage Center, and Carmody Middle School; the classes would have connected adults 55 years and older with middle school-age kids in a fun and interactive environment to teach each other generational skills (eg, youth will teach technological skills to older adults). This may indicate that intergenerational programming is not presently of high interest to seniors who are willing and able to travel to central locations such as the CCC. However, opportunities still exist to address social isolation in institutionalized or homebound seniors.

Jefferson County Public Library System

The Jefferson County Library system is involved in programs that integrate people from different ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds in standard yearly formats. Their most prolific program is their yearly Summer Reading initiative, which pitches readers in a friendly competition against one another. This program often involves planning beginning as soon as the previous summer ends, running through the school year into the spring. This program has been several years in the making, and involves a large number of volunteers and staff to coordinate as there are multiple events in locations across Jefferson County. The library leadership were proud of the growing community involvement with this program, but did state that we were already too late at the time of our meeting (October 2019) to assist with Summer 2020, as planning was already well underway. The Jefferson County Library volunteer coordinator also let us know about smaller programs, such as bi-lingual reading groups, after-school programs, and other initiatives on their various campuses in which they coordinate with schools and other entities.

Although Jefferson County Library leadership were willing to give guidance on program establishment, they indicated that they don’t currently have the bandwidth to take on any additional tasks or lend resources to new program development. They were willing to offer suggestions to us. Some of the more valuable suggestions ranged from acquiring a venue months in advance due to short supply, to focusing on the teen youth demographic for volunteers. Teens are more likely to commit to ongoing programs, more mobile (whether it be through independent or public transportation), and are able to better understand and assist in implementing the goals of these programs (as opposed to children school-age and younger). Library leadership reminded us that programs require commitment and structure, and this may incur a cost to the entity or program participants. Some items relevant to take into consideration with new program formation are:

1. Booking meeting space- likely will be a need for facilities in advance on an ongoing basis for some duration of time

2. Travel to/from meetings- potential for chartering a bus or some other form of transportation
3. Background checks for adults who will be working with children
4. Other safeguards for programs where adults will be unsupervised with children or youth
5. Planning months in advance- may need early commitments from individuals who already know their schedule months in advance
6. Fundraising may be necessary to cover the cost of program implementation

Lakewood Service Organizations Coalition's "Dear Friend Pal" Program

The Lakewood Service Organizations Coalition (LSOC) and Village at Belmar Senior Living Community partnered in 2018 to start the Dear Friend Pal Program (Appendix C). Working with Jefferson County Public Schools, students and seniors write letters to each other to reflect on their lives, tell stories, and share wisdom. The LSOC and school district created meaningful questions to launch the pen pal process, such as, "Tell me a time when you were courageous," or "What is the one big unanswered question you have about life?" In 2018-19, participating schools were Rose Stein Elementary, Creighton Middle, and Emory Elementary schools. The Boys and Girls Club also joined in. The program typically spans six to seven months and ten questions are addressed one at a time in the letters. The plan is to add fifth grade classes from ten additional schools during the current school year. Some further meetings and other benefits grew out of the Friend Pal process, such as one senior who decided to help teach mathematics in the schools. Various senior storytellers have gone into the schools as well. Ultimately, the program allows students and seniors to learn and practice compassion and share life experiences. The organizers stress the importance of having people oversee the letter writing in a coordinator role to ensure that nobody misses out.

Lakewood Rides and Door-Through-Door Transportation

Staff at the CCC praised the efforts and operations of Lakewood Rides, primarily because of their "door-through-door" (DTD) transportation offerings. As opposed to door-to-door transportation, Lakewood Rides offers physical assistance in and out of buildings and homes, and directional assistance within neighborhoods and buildings. For example, while door-to-door transportation may take an individual from their front door to a medical appointment, DTD transportation can bring an individual from their main entrance, assist them onto the bus, drive them to their medical office, and help them find the appropriate appointment room or connect them with someone who can do so. Because of this model, the CCC staff stressed how empowering Lakewood Rides can be for seniors in the Lakewood community, no matter their destination or involvement in City programs.

Key Findings

1. Social isolation is a serious challenge for the health and well-being of Lakewood seniors.
2. Visits and programs with children can help break down some of the social isolation barriers for seniors.
3. The City of Lakewood has broad program offerings for seniors who are willing and able to travel to central locations such as the CCC; however there are opportunities to address unmet needs of institutionalized or homebound seniors.
4. There are a number of innovative “Kids Visiting Seniors” programs or practices now in Lakewood but they do not have widespread visibility.
5. Activities directors in senior care facilities expressed some interest in sharing ideas around best practices and lessons learned regarding kids visiting seniors in particular and combating social isolation in general.

Recommendations

The City should:

1. Convene a workshop for senior care activities directors and interested others on effective practices to combat social isolation in seniors. Highlight “Kids Visiting Seniors” programs and practices and use local activities directors as some of the speakers.
2. Gather and publish best practices for bringing kids and seniors together to help groups looking to start a new program in Lakewood. This could be added to the Older Adults Services section of the city’s website.
3. Encourage, inform, and assist stakeholders in the community who express interest in starting “Kids Visiting Senior Programs.” We do not recommend that City staff develop a new program as there are plenty of well-designed programs locally and throughout the country from which to learn, and there are citizen stakeholders with an interest to provide more of these programs.

Appendices

A: City of Lakewood Age Distribution, 2013

B: Interviews With Activities Directors at Lakewood Senior Facilities

C: Dear Friend Pal Program

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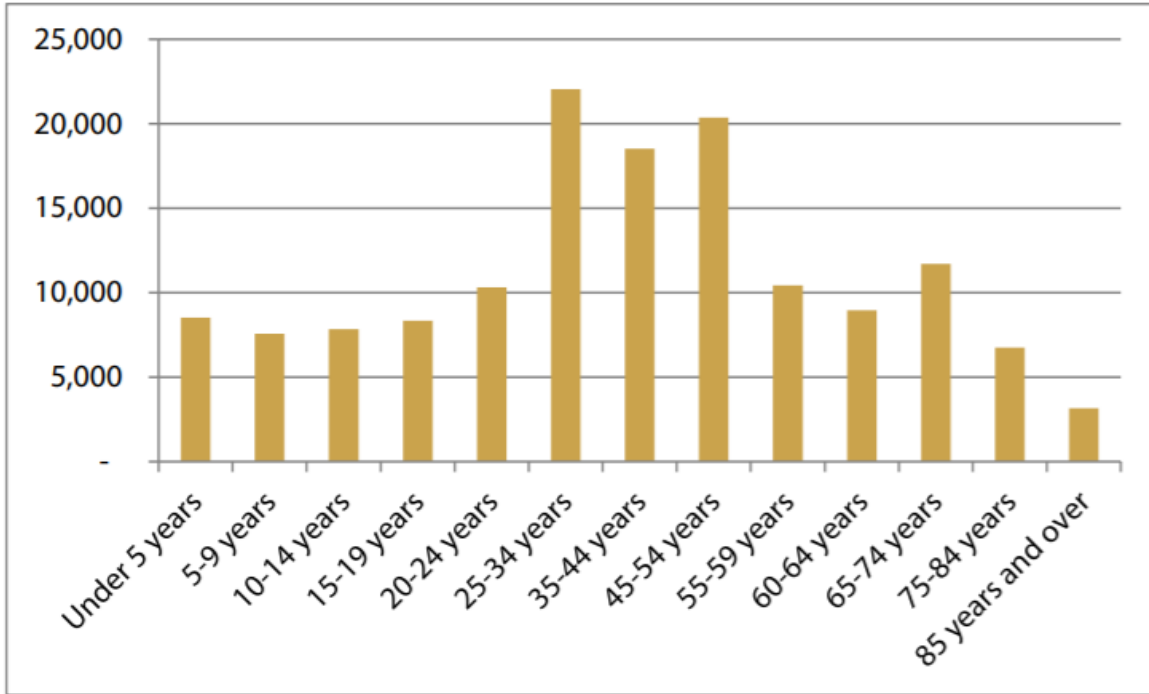
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Appendix A

City of Lakewood Age Distribution, 2013



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 2-d in Lakewood 2025: Moving Forward Together Comprehensive Plan

Appendix B

Interviews With Activities Directors at Lakewood Senior Facilities

Interview with Jessie Tierney, Villa Manor Care Center (<http://villamanorcarecenter.com>)

Do you have any experience with Kids Visiting Seniors?

JT: Oh yeah (chuckling). With kids and dogs, you can't go wrong. We have had 18 years' experience with one group of high school students from YouthWorks (<https://youthworks.com>) who go on faith-based missions in summers. There is a two-day visit to Villa Manor where the students are chaperoned by adults and given an orientation. They are very much supervised. We also have programs with Lakewood High School (the students play Uno with the residents) and Alameda High School. Lastly, we additionally have visits from younger classes. Kids do need to be prepared but usually the kids can feel at ease initially more so than the adults. Social isolation is a serious problem and kids visiting seniors is an important part of addressing that isolation.

We also have a statewide association that helps us learn about programs like this and other professional topics---the Colorado Healthcare Association and Center for Assisted Living (<https://www.cohca.org/>)

One thing I hope for is that our community can realize that senior facilities are often excellent places with dedicated staff who truly care about their residents.

Interview with Norma Olguin, Applewood Our House (several facilities in Lakewood and surrounding area) (<http://applewoodourhouse.com/>)

NO: We have a variety of things we do with students and seniors. This works well for both. We have a Prom Dance, a new "Adopt a Grandpa," different things to get students involved. We work with Arvada High School, for example. I will go and talk to a group of students to discuss the kind of things we do, find some who are interested. I will meet with individual students so they know the kind of behaviors they will encounter, what to expect. We might have them walk outside with the patients, work on crafts, normal kinds of things. The key is the chance to interact, get to know each other. We include some fun activities, like taking the residents out of the building for an ice cream social, something like that. I would be glad to show you one of our facilities and a student/senior activity.

NO (actual visit to Applewood facility): We typically have 16 residents to a facility. Plus a dog, makes a big difference. As far as recruiting children to connect with a resident, Norma will tailor it to the student's and resident's interest. There is always a way to match things up, Good to have various shorter activities with something to highlight it at the end. I sat in on a sittercise activity, where the patients sit in a chair and do exercises and get cupcakes at the end. She puts up an activity white board at the front of the home so a student can look and see a good day to visit. They also do weekly outings

that everyone can participate in. Lastly, the "Adopt a Grandparent" program is a way to create special children/senior bonds.

NO: we (visited the remaining four Applewood facilities): We talk with high school students to find the right place to volunteer/ visit. Often it is the facility closest to where they live. We can use them at any

facility. The student might visit one on one with a senior doing crafts, playing games or puzzles, or talking. With volunteer groups, we might do singing. We prep volunteers but it takes some time to learn how to approach and interact with a senior. We monitor that at the beginning to help things go smoothly. Ideally a student would come to visit once a week. A lot of the experience is learning compassion for the elder.

NO said she doesn't really have the opportunity to interact with other seniors activities directors. That would be nice to exchange ideas and stories. She would be willing to share her experiences. She also mentioned in her Hispanic culture many families may be reluctant to place an elder in a home but she has done public speaking to explain why this may often be the best answer for the patient.

Interview with Allie Mitisek with Eaton Senior Communities (<https://www.eatonsenior.org/>)

AM: I am new to the position but open to kids/seniors types of programs. We have a relationship with the Boys and Girls Clubs and Wheat Ridge high school. I have also brought my four-year-old and eight-year-old to the facility and the residents love the energy and attention of the kids. The eight-year-old participated in a softball game to do some of the activities, like running, that the residents couldn't.

Appendix C

Dear Friend Pal Program



Dear Friend Pal Program

The Dear Friend Pals Program supports youth and literacy in the Lakewood community. The Program offers real life discussions and the sharing of information and stories by seniors that many young people today are not exposed to. Finally, the Program encourages relationship building and helps bridge the generational gap.

Dear Friend Pals is a pen pal program between students and seniors as part of Lakewood Service Organizations Coalition (LSOC). The LSOC along with Village at Belmar Senior Living Community partnered to start the Dear Friend Pal Program in 2018. Partnering with Jefferson County Public Schools to draft meaningful questions that encompass leadership traits, and that incorporate International Baccalaureate learner profile traits. The program supports Superintendent Dr. Jason Glass' new vision and strategic plan called Jeffco Generations that includes students taking an active role in the community.

During the 2018-2019 school year over 100 children and seniors, from all walks of life, including many Lakewood students in the English as a Second Language (ESL) programs participated in the Friend Pal program. Relationships formed, Village at Belmar seniors started volunteering at the local school and the children experienced a literacy program, writing letters and building friendships with older adults. Letters included carefully crafted questions to encourage the seniors to reflect on their lives, providing stories and bits of wisdom for the students to absorb. The students, meanwhile, are working on their literacy skills in writing to the seniors. The program spans 10 questions and typically lasts 6-7 months. Schools participating in the 2018-2019 Dear Friend Pal program included Rose Stein Elementary, Creighton Middle and Emory Elementary School.

LSOC's work is to improve the lives of Lakewood residents through cooperation and coordination of service clubs. Started two years ago, the coalition includes representatives from Kiwanis, Rotary, Optimists and Lions clubs and is part of Mayor Adam Paul's Lakewood Linked initiative to engage community groups and organizations to increase the impact of the work they are already undertaking.

Additional Friend Pal Questions: Cher Cruz 720-226-6651 or Amy Davis 303-351-5455

LAKESWOOD SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS COALITION



Mission: To better serve the needs of the Lakewood community, particularly its young people, by creating stronger individual coalition members, and leveraging the strength of the coalition members to conduct projects that will have a significant positive impact.