

Bringing the Generations Together

One of life's most joyous and uncomplicated relationships is that between a senior and a child.

Children make friends easily and enthusiastically, unburdened by society's attitudes. They accept elderly people naturally, and build their relationships on what each other has to offer, be it wisdom, special talents, or simply mutual admiration.

For seniors, especially those who live in a long-term care home or other care centre, this kind of artless acceptance goes a long way towards helping them strengthen their self-esteem...even for residents who are mentally or physically frail. Visits from children bring cheer and optimism into a home, and break the routine.

From the other perspective, research tells us that when children are given opportunities early in life to enjoy time with seniors, they develop respect for the elderly, as well as a positive perception of growing old that later helps them through their own aging process.

Extendicare appreciates the value of the relationship between old and young, as do schools. It's interesting that many schools include gerontology – the study of aging and its special problems – in their social study and family study programs. However, elementary and high school teachers, as well as long-term care home staff, know that while knowledge may improve people's attitudes, real-life experiences work much better, and the effect lasts longer. That's why the two groups often team up to plan special activities for seniors and children.

Extendicare's 'inter-generational' programs include the following:

Adopt-a-Grandparent: Long-term care home program staff and teachers work together to organize activities that help students and residents form a long-term relationship. Pen-pal correspondence, one-on-one visits, seasonal celebrations and other special events give both parties opportunities and time to form lasting friendships.

Co-op Students: Many high schools help students develop their skills and make career decisions by sending them to a long-term care home to gain on-the-job experience. Residents benefit from the extra activities these students are able to provide.

Oral History/Cultural Journalism: High school, college and university students who are interested in social sciences, history and journalism, often look specifically for opportunities to work with seniors in long-term care homes because they enjoy hearing and learning about the experiences and lifestyles that today's elderly have lived through. Extendicare opens its doors to these students wherever possible.

Seasonal Events: Other long-term care home activities that bring children together with residents include choirs; Christmas and Halloween celebrations; staff visiting with their children; visits from Girl Guides, Brownies, Cubs, and other boys' and girls' clubs; and "moms and tots" programs.

During the school year, residents and their families can look forward to seeing more children in the halls of Extendicare long-term care homes. Those homes that are located close to schools will be able to take extra advantage of inter-generational programs.

If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact the program manager, or the administrator of your long-term care home.