

Intergenerational Relationships are becoming more popular these days as people are seeing the benefits that they bring. Relationships and activities between older adults and children serve an important role in the life of children who may not have the benefit of grandparents or elderly person in their lives. By bringing older adults into the classroom and developing lesson plans that foster this emotional growth, early childhood educators are opening the doors to more than one benefit for their students. The older adults involved in these programs benefit as well. By allowing relationships to form, getting out of their same routines and feeling useful in the lives of others, older adults are able to regain self-esteem.

Maple Knoll Communities and The Maple Knoll Montessori Child Center have long seen the benefits of these interactions. The Maple Knoll Montessori Child is a Montessori preprimary program for children 3 through 6 years of age that is located on the campus of Maple Knoll Village, a continuing care retirement community. The Child Center was developed in 1977 as a part of the original plans of Maple Knoll Village to integrate the community on a generational basis to help provide a comfortable environment where persons of varied ages could be present together. The Intergenerational Program provides meaningful and continual activities and experiences that are mutually beneficial and developmentally appropriate for both the younger and older persons involved.

We understand that the older adults living in our community thrive on these activities. Through this program we have realized that:

- Older adults have a need to nurture and children need to be nurtured.
- Children have a need to learn and older adults have the need to teach.
- Older adults want to share cultural customs and children are just beginning to develop their cultural identity.
- Older adults want to leave a legacy and children have a need to be connected to a previous generation.
- The promotion of personal relationship with elders and positive attitudes toward the aging.
- Intergenerational programs help young children develop empathy and give them a concrete understanding of physical disabilities

One parent summed up these experiences by saying “The kids gain so much as well....a grandparent figure, exposure (and reduced fear) to walkers, wheelchairs and people who like to ruffle their hair. These "grand-friends" are kind, patient, and have a wealth of information to impart”. It’s clear that taking the time to build intergenerational relationships among young children and older adults is an important aspect of early childhood education as well as an important part of daily activities for these residents.