

# Reach Across the Ages

*From the Life in the Years Initiative*



## ***Background***

Reach Across the Ages is part of Life in the Years, an initiative to increase awareness and support for our nation's elderly. As we developed the Life in the Years initiative we realized how important it is to include our nation's youth, because today's youth will make tomorrow's decisions about how our elderly are cared for. They'll be the policy-makers, business owners, land developers, scientists and caregivers, so it's important for them to have a strong sense of awareness and compassion for the issues around aging.

Reach Across the Ages is a collection of ideas that can be used to create intergenerational activities to renew the connection between our nation's youth and its elderly. It's intended to team youth groups with senior organizations to help educate our next generation about the value of our elderly and to help restore some traditional behaviors and values. The ideas can be great projects to use as a social service or civic responsibility activity and can be valuable in re-shaping the way our society views its elders.

## ***Overview***

It's important for our youth to be connected to the wisdom and traditions of previous generations. In the old days elders passed on family traditions, values, tales and history through the stories they told. They shared their wisdom through these discussions and gained respect in the process. They were revered.

Our culture has changed to a point where our elders are not as often sought out for their wisdom and we seldom ask questions about their lives. We're losing touch with our past and the richness that comes through sharing stories. How many of us can truly say that we asked our grandparents - or even our parents - all the questions we wanted to?

Using these ideas or any others that are effective in creating meaningful engagement and interaction will certainly lead toward developing more awareness and compassion for the youth involved. It will also be a meaningful experience for the seniors. Our goals for Reach Across the Ages are:

- \* Identify creative ways to engage youth groups with elderly
- \* Create and promote successful ideas for others to emulate
- \* Use the Life in the Years music to create awareness about aging
- \* Change the way our society views our elders

## **Here are some creative ideas that came from organizations we're working with:**

### ***Wii Love Seniors***

Seniors get many benefits from playing Wii, such as improved fitness and agility, as well as increased socialization which helps reduce loneliness and depression. Some senior facilities are creating bowling and golf leagues to promote an active and engaged lifestyle, but unfortunately many facilities can't afford the Wii machines and TVs. *Wii Love Seniors* is about encouraging youth groups to partner with local senior organizations to start a Wii program. The 3 basic steps to success are:

1. Create a partnership
2. Organize a joint fundraiser
3. Implement a Wii program

Youth and senior organizations can work together to organize a fundraiser to buy the equipment necessary for a senior facility. The youth organization can also help set up the machines and get the seniors started on their way. They can set up an intergenerational tournament and teams and play on a regular basis. It's a great social awareness activity for the youth participants and will also have a lasting effect on the senior communities they team with.

Here are a couple of videos that talk about seniors using Wii machines:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2DuW-ZQxZo>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kGP89i32IY>

### ***Let's Talk***

*'Let's Talk'* is a fun and enlightening cultural learning activity that stimulates conversation and engages kids and seniors in a way that breaks down barriers and fosters compassion and understanding.

The kids are presented with some of the Life in the Years songs as a way to stimulate discussion and then are asked to develop questions they'd like to ask of an elderly person in their lives. It could be a grandparent, neighbor, or maybe they connect as a group with a local senior organization. Their individual lists of questions are then compiled into a master list they all decide which ones they'd be comfortable asking, then the exercise begins.

Questions like:

*How many boyfriends/girlfriends did you have before you got married?*

*What was the worst trouble you got into as a child?*

*What subject did you hate the most in school?*

*If you could change anything about the world today what would it be?*

*Did you and your friends have nicknames for each other?  
What's the best/worst job you ever had?  
What's the furthest place you ever traveled to?  
What happened to you if you ever lied to your parents?  
What kind of chores did you have to do?  
What did you want to be when you grew up?  
Who is your favorite person in the whole world? Why?*

We've all seen emails about the interesting questions kids ask and this will be no different!

Sharing their stories and lessons as a group after having the conversations is a great way to demonstrate the diversity of experiences. It offers an excellent opportunity to teach them about the values and perspectives of past generations as well as the wisdom and lessons to be learned by listening to our elders.

### ***Every Picture Tells A Story***

Most people have pictures of the special people, places, things or times in their lives. These pictures represent memorable moments and always have stories behind them. Many of us can remember the touching times created by going through an old shoebox of pictures with our families and the interesting conversation it generated.

In 'Every Picture Tells A Story' the kids and seniors choose some of those special pictures and use them as a way to stimulate conversation which leads to meaningful discussion and sharing of experiences. Maybe it's pictures of their favorite baseball players from different eras or their favorite vacation. Whatever it is, there will be a story to share. Be sure to bring a camera to capture another memorable moment!

### ***Pen Pals***

'Pen Pals' doesn't require any face-to-face interaction. It's a return to a time when people organized their thoughts and words and committed them to paper with a pen - imagine that - and sometimes people even drew pictures!

Schools or youth organizations can affiliate with a local senior facility and identify individuals to participate. A short profile of each senior can be provided (age, interests, profession, family info, interesting snippets, etc.) so the students can choose to write to someone they're interested in learning more about and can also share their own stories.

It's a way of communicating that may feel foreign to today's youth, but for seniors it's the way it's always been. Can you imagine the kids having to actually put the pages into an envelope, put a postage stamp on it, and bring it to a 'mailbox'? At least they don't have to lick the stamp anymore!

To include some civic responsibility it can also be combined with a fundraiser to buy something needed by the seniors. Any fundraising should be kept to something reasonable and achievable.

### ***Video Contests***

Music is one of the most effective ways of reaching today's youth so the Life in the Years songs are great tools to use in helping them understand the issues facing our elderly. They'll listen to the messages through music to a much greater degree than they would if it were presented in any other form.

Creating a video/slide show contest based on the Life in the Years songs will facilitate the connection to the messages in the music. It'll cause them to really listen to the lyrics and read the inspiration notes to decide what images would make a compelling video slide show. It's a great way to incorporate music and technology around a meaningful topic and will also inspire discussion about the issues.

You can incorporate a senior organization by teaming the participants with a senior partner who is responsible for selecting a song to use. The process of selecting a song will stimulate conversation and interaction. Also, the senior organization could act as the judges for the competition.

Posting all the videos on a website would also help create visibility to the issues around aging for the families of the participants and the entire community.

---

If you have any ideas to share email them to [info@lifeintheyears.org](mailto:info@lifeintheyears.org) and we'll add them to the list. Also, if you have any feedback on intergenerational programs you've participated in you can share it on our "[I Care About The Elderly](#)" Facebook page.