The Transformative Power of Intergenerational Community Living

United States
Brenda Eheart

Organization type: nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector
Budget: $500,000 - $1 million
Website: http://www.generationsofhope.org

- At risk youth
- Aging
- Community development
- Intergenerational relations
- Vulnerable populations
- Youth development
- Sustainability

Project Summary

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

GHDC envisions enhancing and extending the lives of vulnerable populations by tapping the transformative power of intergenerational community living. We are currently helping to facilitate the development of Generations of Hope Communities—intentional, intergenerational communities organized around a social challenge that utilize older adults as volunteers. These communities are based on the success of Hope Meadows in Rantoul, Illinois.

About Project

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

Many social problems are too multifaceted and intertwined to be addressed through the narrow programs and dedicated funding streams that often dominate the social service landscape, and our social service systems are too often overwhelmed by the challenges facing our most vulnerable populations: at-risk children and youth, over-burdened families, and disconnected older adults – creating enormous costs to individuals and to society. Children trapped in foster care, mothers exiting incarceration or drug treatment, isolated developmentally disabled youth and adults, disconnected pregnant and parenting teenagers – these are people who often are unlikely to benefit from singular solutions. What these vulnerable groups need most is a fundamental change in their daily circumstances, a different—and arguably less costly—way to live that draws from a continuum of resources to support their development as caring and contributing community members.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

Our nation’s social services are missing a key ingredient necessary for success: enduring relationships critical to strong families and communities. Generations of Hope Communities (GHCs) provide the opportunity to form these relationships in a safe and supportive living environment. GHCs are based on a proven model of intergenerational living where older adults provide indispensable support to vulnerable parents, children, and youth who, in turn, become instrumental in promoting the well-being of the elders as they age. In essence, the members of the community become the first-line of support, eliminating much of the need to access professional social services. The GHC model integrates a set of program strategies and principles that let community members become problem solvers instead of “recipients of service,” gradually reducing the need for professional staff. GHCs have four features that distinguish them from other intergenerational programs and “life-style” communities: residents span three or more generations, housing is geographically contiguous, older adults are involved as volunteers, and the intergenerational community is created to address a specific social challenge. While GHCs are modeled after the 16+ years of success at Hope Meadows, the first GHC, each will be unique due to its location, specific focus, design, and individual residents.

Impact: How does it Work
Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

Hope Meadows, the first GHC, has been successfully operating for over 16 years. The community was created to support families adopting children from foster care and over the years, 90% of the children who have come to Hope Meadows have found permanent homes (adoption or return to family). In addition, 100% of Hope children now in high school are on track to graduate, and all who have remained at Hope Meadows through age 18 have received a high school degree. Costs averted by keeping a child in high school through graduation are estimated at between $300,000 and $500,000 per child. Older adults age 55 and older also live in the community and for reduced-rate rent, volunteer six hours per week to support the children, families, and community. However, the seniors also benefit from this engagement. In a recent survey, 69% of Hope Seniors reported that their health had been affected in a positive way since moving to Hope Meadows. Over a 10-year period, Hope Seniors contributed an average of 274 volunteer hours per week, worth over $3 million. The influence of Hope Meadows also exceeds the boundaries of the community. There continues to be interest from across the country in creating communities based on the GHC model. GHDC is working with organizations to create new GHCs. One new community has recently broken ground and others will soon follow. The model is also being adapted and extended to new social challenges and has the potential to help new vulnerable groups in this country.
the open exchange of ideas related to GHGs), Programming for Three Generations (older adults, families, and children and youth), and Public Policy and Strategic Partnerships.

Results

The GHC approach, utilizing neighbors who are empowered to provide social support and service within the community, is integrative by design and can therefore transcend traditional institutional boundaries to address complex problems. GHGs enable a shift in the focus of social problem-solving from intervention in community to community as intervention. When the promise of Generations of Hope Communities is realized nationwide, a multitude of social challenges will find new solutions.

A GHC is a neighborhood that is both a place where people live and a program to support their needs. It is an intentional, intergenerational neighborhood where older adults provide indispensable support to parents, children, and youth who, in turn, become instrumental in promoting the well-being of the elders as they age. As a program, a GHC is designed to address social problems that are often resistant to intervention from conventional social service systems by utilizing the contributions of all members of the neighborhood, who are supported by a small staff. In a GHC, the focus is on relationships, but other outcomes (safety, belonging, engagement, wellbeing) are also important and evaluated.

What will it take for your project to be successful over the next three years? Please address each year separately, if possible.

Over the next three years, we need additional funders to ensure that our work will continue. We are specifically looking for investments in our new programs: the GHC Collaborative, Programming for Three Generations, and Public Policy and Strategic Partnerships. In addition, we are looking for real estate developers and contractors who are interested in helping to build new intergenerational communities. These goals will be accomplished within the next year. In years two and three, we will continue to build our knowledgebase, through the Collaborative and ongoing research and evaluation activities, and to expand our partnerships in order to create new GHGs.

What would prevent your project from being a success?

Finding available land and the appropriate financing for new GHGs has been a barrier and will continue to limit the replicability of the project unless new funding streams are identified.

How many people will your project serve annually?

101-1000

What is the average monthly household income in your target community, in US Dollars?

Please select

Does your project seek to have an impact on public policy?

Yes

Sustainability

What stage is your project in?

Operating for more than 5 years

Is your initiative connected to an established organization?

Yes

If yes, provide organization name.

Generations of Hope Development Corporation

How long has this organization been operating?

1-5 years

Does your organization have a Board of Directors or an Advisory Board?

Yes

Does your organization have a non-monetary partnerships with NGOs?

Yes

Does your organization have a non-monetary partnerships with businesses?

Yes

Does your organization have a non-monetary partnerships with government?

Yes

Please tell us more about how these partnerships are critical to the success of your innovation.

Approximately 150 words left (1200 characters).

What are the three most important actions needed to grow your initiative or organization?

1. To get funding for the new program initiatives
2. To have more GHGs break ground and begin operations
3. To continue the research and evaluation of the model

The Story

What was the defining moment that you led to this innovation?

Dr. Brenda Eheart founded Hope Meadows, the first GHC, after doing research on adoptive families with her colleagues at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. She saw that these families had the right intentions, but lacked the support necessary to make the adoptions—and the
Tell us about the social innovator behind this idea.

Brenda Krause Eheart has a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She was a professor for 25 years, first at Temple University and then the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She taught and conducted research in the area of vulnerable children and families, published numerous articles, and received several national awards including a Use Your Life Award from Oprah Winfrey, an Excellence in Adoption Award from the George W. Bush administration, the Heinz Award for the Human Condition, and was recently named an Ashoka Fellow. She is the founder of Generations of Hope and Generations of Hope Development Corporation. Between 1994 and 2006 she served as the Executive Director of Generations of Hope and currently serves as the CEO and Executive Director of Generations of Hope Development Corporation.

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