

2007-2008 Building Bridges Impact Summary

“Building Bridges” is a community-based program to foster the value of intergenerational relationships, sharing, caring, and learning. In the 2007-2008 school year, Building Bridges brought forty-eight schools, nursing homes, senior housing, youth groups, and churches together to help bridge the generations between young and old. About 2,800 youth (from kindergarten to high school) and seniors participated in the program through a variety of intergenerational projects.

Intergenerational Projects:

- Aging Awareness
- Intergenerational Arts
- Pen Pals
- Living History
- Intergenerational Fitness
- Caring for Seniors
- Learning Across Cultures and Ages
- Storytelling
- Intergenerational Reading
- Sharing & Learning
- Intergenerational Messages
- Intergenerational Games
- Intergenerational Crafts



A total of 330 students responded to the evaluations. The results show that Building Bridges provided opportunities for

generations to share and learn from each other. Building Bridges not only helped youth learn to have respect for older adults and developed affection, concern, caring, and appreciation for older adults, but also increased older adult's social interaction.

Program Impact Highlights

Elementary School Students

- Students show more appreciation, caring, compassion, empathy, and respect for the elderly.
- Students learned life experiences and histories and interacted better with the elderly.
- Building Bridges is a beneficial program to strengthen community bonds.
- Students who participated in the Pen Pal project with frequent and consistent interactions or correspondence with seniors showed better (19.1% increase) writing skills and understood older people better (16 % increase).
- 92% of respondents felt they show how they care about older people and were happy to share with them.
- 90.7% of respondents learned how they respect older people.
- 84% of respondents felt they make older people happy and less lonely.
- 88% of respondents rated Building Bridges as an excellent program.

High School Students

- High school students showed an overwhelming knowledge increase on growing older, the aging process, and interaction with them.
- Students developed positive attitudes toward growing old and learned to communicate with the elderly better.
- Helped high school students learn to be polite, caring, and patient and explore career opportunities in a nursing field.
- Building Bridges helped them feel more comfortable and confident to visit older adults.
- As a result of the program, students related their experience more with their family and future. They think more about their parents, grandparents, careers, and when they grow older what they would like to do.
- According to pre and post tests, high school students showed an overwhelming knowledge increase and had better understanding about growing older, how the aging process affects older adult's daily living, and how to interact with them.



The Elderly

Building Bridges also benefited older adults.

For instance, the program helped lift some older adult's spirits who participated in the program regularly. They were happy to share their life stories and were eager for students to visit again, especially with frequent interactions.

Some residents who had a chance to visit their pen pals appreciated the opportunities with students. They thought that was a great experience for them too.

Home bound seniors who received cards, crafts, and letters from young children or students were happy to hear from youth which meant a lot to those who did not have family around.

Comments from Participants and Partners

Youth

“This was one of my favorite days of my life!! Since my grandma died a few months ago, Jackie was like another grandma to me because she is sweet, loving, caring, and really nice!!”

“It’s a good program. Building Bridges helps us to learn about what other people’s lives were like long ago.”

“I felt that Building Bridges helped me to be more understanding of older people and know that they can learn new things.”

“Building Bridges is a great program for older people that do not have any one. So you guys made that empty space in their heart full again.”

“I will use my experience from Building Bridges to not stereotype old people. Also to spread information about how elderly people are of use.”

“Building Bridges helped me build my character and help those that needed a friend or someone to talk to.”

“I learned that they are not all the same, most old people don’t live in a nursing home, a lot of old people are connected with their family.”

“I learned that you have to be gentle with older people. I also learned that older people are very different. One last thing I learned was that older people are very wise.”

“I liked Building Bridges. It helps you get to know the other generation and helps you make friends.”

“Building Bridges helped me communicate with old people easier.”

“I feel that this program is a very good learning experience, definitely for individuals that don’t spend much time with the elderly.”

“Older people love young people. Be patient, polite, respectful, and show them that you care.”

“Building Bridges helped me realize and learn about the past. It has been meaningful.”

“I did not like the smell of the facility but I liked talking with residents and seeing their faces light up.”

“It wasn’t scary to meet old people. They were really talkative and wanted to volunteer information. They could easily relate to events going on during our lives.”

“Older people have a good sense of humor still and they like to talk about their younger

years and they are funny.”

“I learned that old people need love too, they are still people.”

“I want to use the Building Bridges information to help older people and be more patient.”

“Building Bridges helped me become closer to Claudia and have appreciation for elderly people.”

“I want to use the learning experience to teach people to show respect to older people.”

“The experience will help me have a better relationship with my grandparents and great-grandpa.”

“Older people really inspire me to do better things in life.”

“I think the Building Bridges program was awesome!”



Older Adults

“Building Bridges helps children see how education can improve their life.”

“Building Bridges is a good program for children to help them to understand kindness, faith and hope and good to know that someone else cares.”

“The Building Bridges program makes a real connection between caring seniors and caring children that engage one another, in heart, soul and mind.”

“It is a good program for encouraging children. Teach them to love people, not to hate people.”

“A wonderful program, Building Bridges is what the program is all about.”

“The Building Bridges is a great program. It helps our children grow.”

“I love receiving the darling pictures that the kids draw. It makes me feel warm and special.”

“I love Building Bridges because of the generation gap that I was able to communicate with the 5-9 year olds.”

“My comment is that we as adults should keep our children talking and exploring our minds and theirs. The joy, motivation and happiness that I have found in answering the children’s letters, gave me the greatest pleasure in giving all that I have to give.”

“I think it is a wonderful program and enjoy it tremendously. I think it helps the children understand older people better.”

“Building Bridges is an extremely good program.”

Schools

“Building Bridges is so easy to implement. The students feel important and needed.”

“Love the program – encourage communication between the generations. Students showed more empathy for older people.”

“I like the consistency of letters coming each month. We loved our culminating visit to meet pals!”

“Students show more openness to others who have differences.”



Senior Organizations

“Some seniors look forward to the planned activities with the students. The seniors form a bond with the group of students at the beginning of the program and they stay with them until the end.”

“The Building Bridges program helped our seniors feel less isolated and depressed.”

“We greatly appreciated being a part of this great program. We would love to continue working with you as well. The residents so enjoyed getting the items, and many still have them hanging on their doors or in their rooms. They would always get so excited when something new would come! Thanks again for letting us be a part of this wonderful program.”

For more information, contact

Nina Chen, Ph.D.
Human Development Specialist
University of Missouri Extension
816-252-5051
chenn@missouri.edu

2007-08impact summary/nc