

# *AGE to age:*

*bringing the generations together*



“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember,  
involve me and I learn.”

—Benjamin Franklin



A program of the Northland Foundation

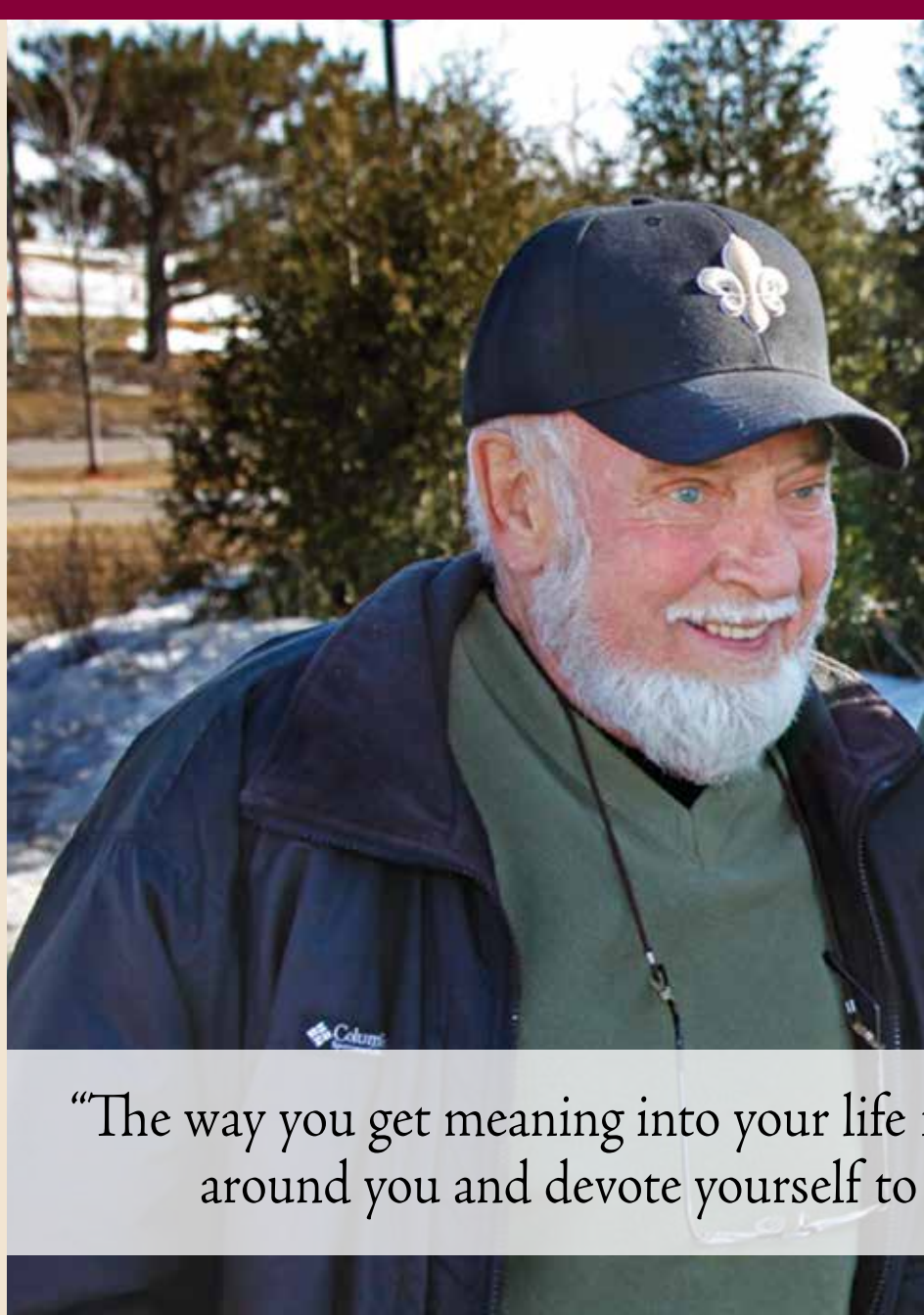


## Mission

The Northland Foundation is a resource for people, businesses, and communities in Northeast Minnesota working toward prosperity through economic and social justice.

Our purpose is to strengthen families, grow a sustainable regional economy, cultivate leadership and philanthropy, and foster respect for all.

Through our grants to nonprofits, loans to local businesses, KIDS PLUS Program, and other special initiatives, the Northland Foundation is building a strong foundation for the future of our region.



“The way you get meaning into your life is around you and devote yourself to

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# AGE *to age* LESSONS LEARNED

A strategic approach to engaging  
older adults and youth within a community





is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.” – Mitch Albom

Photo-Joe Rossi

### **Bringing the generations together for better communities.**

*AGE to age* is the newest member of the Northland Foundation’s KIDS PLUS family of programs. Launched in fall 2008, this exciting initiative empowers youth, adults, and elders to explore how their generations are both alike and different. The heart of the program, and the key to its success, are the relationships that span generations and link older adults with young people in the rural communities and Indian Reservations of northeastern Minnesota.

*AGE to age* is grassroots; through a guided planning process designed by the Northland Foundation, adults age

55 and older, along with youth, identify unmet local needs and devise their own solutions. Along the way, bonds of friendship form and civic engagement grows by leaps and bounds. The benefits to young people, older adults, and the broader community are far-reaching.

The following pages contain a snapshot of where *AGE to age* began and how it has evolved. It is only a beginning. As the Age Wave crests, growing numbers of older adults are available – and desiring – to give back, while children and youth continue to be in need of guidance from caring adults. Intergenerational collaboration is an incredible resource just waiting to be tapped.



# Why intergenerational and why now

An accumulation of research shows that social and civic participation improves the physical and mental wellbeing of people of all ages, as well as increases community vitality. Youth with strong social ties do better in school and are less likely to engage in negative behaviors. Older adults involved in their community are less at risk of cognitive impairments and depression.

*AGE to age* touches upon all of these elements. It creates an intentional pathway for neighbors – adults 55 and older, children and youth, and adults in between – to forge stronger individual and collective ties and, in the process, to improve their communities.

## Stars align

Since its inception in 1986, the Northland Foundation has prioritized “Connecting Kids and Community” and “Aging with Independence” through its grantmaking and KIDS PLUS Program. When an opportunity arose to partner with Community Experience Partnership – an initiative for U.S. community foundations by The Atlantic Philanthropies, these interests converged into *AGE to age: bringing the generations together*.

Years of regional work with KIDS PLUS and statewide initiatives have resulted in the Foundation’s well-honed organizing model. Experience has also proven the importance of providing community members with ongoing technical and financial support, opportunities for training and celebrating success, and regular “learning community” peer group sessions to share promising strategies.

The Northland Foundation has nurtured longtime relationships with community leaders and volunteers in its rural region. In addition, Northland is known by its funders for walking the talk and achieving results. These three factors: experienced team, community allies, and supportive funders created the perfect context for *AGE to age*.

## Timing is everything

The time is ripe for intergenerational work. The U.S. population is aging at a fast clip – there is no denying that older adults must be recognized as resources. At the same time, providing safe, healthy out-of-school activities for children and youth has never been more critical. Finally, the slow economic recovery has left its mark; communities are eager to explore new solutions to local challenges.

*AGE to age* is riding a wave of interest, involvement, and positive outcomes. It is a concept that has resonated in rural towns and on Indian Reservations, among funders, and with other nonprofit and community organizations. With thoughtful planning, putting all the necessary pieces in place, and taking a respectful approach to partnerships, there is unlimited potential to bring the generations together for community good.





# Overview of the *AGE to age* region



## Regional fast facts

- 18,185 square miles
- 1 urban hub and 67 smaller towns
- 326,225 residents or 18 people/sq. mile
- 20% are 18 and under
- 31% are over the age of 55
- Youth are more than 2x as likely to live in poverty as other Minnesotans
- The initial 10 *AGE to age* sites plus the 3 new sites represent 7 counties, 13 school districts, 3 Indian Reservations, and 18 towns with populations of 400 to 12,000

The seven counties of northeastern Minnesota cover an area that is larger than nine states, yet is home to just 326,000 people. By far, the largest urban center is Duluth (86,265 people) while the rest of the region is dotted with small towns separated by vast rural expanses. Outpacing state and national averages, fully one-third of residents are age 55 and older, while the 18-and-younger age group is roughly one-fifth of the population.

In recent decades this region's vitality has been challenged by significant poverty rates, a shortage of high-paying jobs, the isolation of life in small towns surrounded by miles of sparsely populated land, and limited local resources available for establishing new programs and services to meet changing community needs.

Northeastern Minnesota also has definite advantages, among them the growing segment of adults in the 55-and-over age range – a demographic that is predicted

to skyrocket in the next decade. This is an age group that is eager to stay active and professes a strong desire to reach out to younger generations; all they need is to be asked! By nurturing strong relationships at each site and remaining committed to working with rural communities over the long term, *AGE to age* has bridged geographic distances as well as generational differences.



# Step by step: the phases of AGE to age

*AGE to age has gone through three phases each lasting between 18 months and 3 years. The fourth phase, Expansion and Replication, will take AGE to age to a new level.*

## **Research**

**January 2007 - May 2008**

AGE to age was launched in the wake of a region-wide study conducted by the Northland Foundation. This study examined civic engagement among people 55 and older in rural communities and on Indian Reservations. Consistent with noted psychoanalyst Erik Erikson's concept of "generativity", a majority of the 300 older adult participants expressed concerns about the wellbeing of young people and the future vitality of their rural communities. Research also revealed that formal avenues to connect the generations were limited or nonexistent in most rural areas.

## **Planning**

**June 2008 - October 2009**

AGE to age officially rolled out with a comprehensive planning process in the 10 inaugural sites. Community organizing for the new multi-generational effort was based on the tried-and-tested KIDS PLUS model (see pages 8 and 9). Planning meetings were tailored to each individual site, and community members of all ages had an equal voice in identifying local needs and devising grassroots solutions. The result was individualized three-year action plans developed by each site.

A Regional Learning Community was established to convene representatives from all the sites to share progress, discuss ideas, and support one another's efforts.

## **Implementation Pilot**

**November 2009 - December 2012**

During the three-year Pilot Implementation Phase, the 10 sites activated their action plans. They combined the strengths of youth, older adults, and the ages in between to carry out a wide variety of community- and relationship-building activities. It proved to be a tremendous leadership exchange offering older adults opportunities to pass on their wisdom to the younger generation, while providing youth the chance to share their energy and enthusiasm with elders.

The Regional Learning Community continued to meet quarterly, and teams from all the communities attended annual daylong Summits where they gave progress reports and received training on topics such as leadership, teamwork, and intergenerational understanding.

## **Expansion and Replication**

**June 2012 - December 2015**

The goal of the fourth phase of AGE to age is to sustain and deepen the efforts underway in the 10 original sites while expanding into three new rural communities.

Regional Learning Community meetings will now include the three new AGE to age sites, along with annual Summits. Efforts over the three year timeframe will focus on embedding intergenerational approaches in the now-13 sites and sharing information about AGE to age with state and national audiences.







**McGregor: Internship is a win-win for college student and community**

*“AGE to age reiterated my desire to give back to the community that has given me so much.”* – Anna Carlson, McGregor

**“W**here do I go from here?” is a question most young adults ask themselves, with varying degrees of panic, as they envision life beyond school. Anna Carlson found some answers in the summer of 2012, with positive implications for her future and for her community.

On the cusp of her senior year at Hamline University, Anna was, in her own words, “attempting to get things figured out for life after college.” As part of her quest she was seeking a job that would build her résumé more than her usual summer lifeguarding. When opportunity knocked, Anna answered by accepting a 6-week paid internship with the AGE to age program in her hometown of McGregor.

“I have always believed that separating the generations only leads to misunderstanding, and that communities must do more to bring different age groups together,” said Anna.

Anna was tasked with recruiting older adults to share their time and talents with youth in the McGregor area, whether teaching a skill or just spending time with them. She connected with local groups whose members are mainly age 55 and older, such as the Lion’s Club and Red Hat Society. In a town of only 400 residents, Anna estimates she talked to nearly 250 of them.

“This experience reenergized my passion for community-building,” said Anna.

The work was not always easy. The idea of the program was met with enthusiasm, but Anna had a very short time to spread awareness and engage more volunteers.

Like any good student, Anna analyzed the situation. She pondered how AGE to age could better reach out to older adults in the area, whether that meant opening up other venues to promote intergenerational dialogue, developing a list of volunteer opportunities, or creating an inventory to help potential volunteers assess their sharable skills.

“In a period of weeks, Anna accomplished a lot of groundwork,” stated Cheryl Meld, AGE to age site coordinator and long-time KIDS PLUS coordinator in McGregor, “and her efforts both raised awareness of the program and planted seeds among our older adults to share their time, talents, and friendship with youth.”

*McGregor summer interns Jill, Anna (center, below, and second from right, above), and Bethany gained valuable experience working with different generations and building community.*



# AGE to age community highlights

*The 10 initial AGE to age sites have achieved great things to date, each developing projects and activities suited to local needs. Five of the ten communities are included in the stories sprinkled throughout this publication, and the remaining five communities are featured on this page. There are literally hundreds of projects, large to small, that teams in these sites have accomplished. As for the three new AGE to age expansion communities, their stories are just beginning to unfold.*



## Grand Portage Reservation

Teaching, respect, and tradition are central themes of *AGE to age* on the Grand Portage Reservation. The Reservation's charter school is a connecting point to join generations together for friendship and sharing – an important part of Ojibwe life that is not always easy to maintain in the busy, modern world. Elders visit the school to read with children, as well as tell stories and pass on traditions like making regalia. Youth in turn teach computer technology and plan special ways, such as a Veterans' Day event, to honor their elders.



## Chisholm

The Iron Range town of Chisholm has “jumped on the *AGE to age* train”. Many partnerships have been forged with organizations such as the American Legion, Chisholm Senior Center, and an assisted living facility to bolster community ties across all age groups. Support from older adults helps young people feel valued and included, and the older folks enjoy fun and a sense of purpose. Monthly events, from a clean-up day to sleigh rides to ice cream socials, are proof positive that Chisholm is embracing every generation.



## Cloquet

In Cloquet, *AGE to age* is bringing a close-knit community even closer. Fun activities such as game nights and baking contests have forged new friendships between younger and older people. The group also took on a major improvement project in Pinehurst Park. In recent years, this local gathering place had become defaced by graffiti. *AGE to age* participants cleaned, painted, built a pergola, planted flowers, added picnic tables, and more. Their town is now a more welcoming place for all generations.



## Floodwood

Older adults in tiny, rural Floodwood had their “hang-out” at the Senior Center. Young people had KIDS PLUS to provide healthy, out-of-school time activities. What was missing was a way for older and younger residents to be together. *AGE to age* has helped change all that. Today, the former Senior Center is called the AGEs Center. It is a hub of activity where older people learn Internet and social media skills from teens, and where children and youth go after school to be among friends of all ages.



## Bois Forte Reservation

The Bois Forte Reservation covers a vast, isolated rural area in northern Minnesota. The two main communities on the Reservation, Nett Lake and Vermilion, are a full 60 miles apart. In the past these two communities had few opportunities to mingle. Through *AGE to age*, not only are youth and elders bonding, sharing traditional activities, and keeping the Ojibwe language and culture alive, but families from the two communities now regularly spend time together in positive activities that promote intergenerational connections and healthy living.





**Proctor: Building friendships and highlighting education**

“ I felt drawn to Sarah. She was a shy kid like I was. Now off at college, she’s more self-confident and outgoing.” – Wilma Challstrom, Proctor

**W**hen she first joined *AGE to age* in her hometown of Proctor, Sarah was a sweet yet quiet, reserved girl. Wilma, a recent retiree from Proctor, related to Sarah’s quiet side and intentionally sought the young woman out for friendship.

As it turned out, Sarah and Wilma didn’t live far from each other. Their friendship grew during and beyond *AGE to age* activities. Sarah enjoys spending time at Wilma’s house having tea and talking. The two of them even teamed up on the winning entry in the *AGE to age* brownie baking contest.

With urging from Wilma and her other *AGE to age* companions, Sarah decided to further her education and is now in her second year of community college.

“*AGE to age* taught me to be braver and more sociable,” Sarah reflected, “and the best thing about it is all the awesome people I met.”

Their story, says the Proctor coordinator, Molly Johnson, is just one of many special friendships and heartwarming outcomes. Just as Sarah completed high school and moved on to pursue higher education, so have the nine other high school graduates who have been involved with *AGE to age* in this small railroad town. Many of these students are the first in their family to attend college.

Johnson says that *AGE to age* has played an important part in helping Proctor youth to reach for educational goals. It is, says Johnson, a three-fold support. First, older adults express the expectation that their young friends can and should go to college and that they will do well. Second, the older generation provides coaching and hands-on help with completing college and financial aid applications. Finally, older-adult mentors offer students moral support when they face difficulties in school and life.

“These are just some of the life lessons that older people can teach to youth, most of whom are just beginning to gain the experience they need to navigate the world beyond high school,” Johnson added.

Today Sarah is eyeing a number of options for her future, including dentistry and English, after she transfers to a four-year university in the fall. She is happy to know she can always chat about it with Wilma over a hot cup of tea.

*Through AGE to age, Sarah expanded her world and her friendships, whether it was a baking contest with Wilma (above) or attending a Regional Summit with her peers (below).*



# Community organizing model

The organizing model used for *AGE to age* was first developed in 1992 by the Northland Foundation for its operating program, KIDS PLUS, and refined over time through the Foundation's work establishing 26 "KIDS PLUS Communities" in northeastern Minnesota. It also served as the framework for two statewide programs: the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative, launched in 2003, and the Minnesota Thrive Initiative, piloted beginning in 2007.

The planning process is rooted in the belief that local citizens are best-suited to identify and seek solutions to local issues. In addition, several guiding principles are essential to success.

- Respect is the foundation for all relationships and efforts.
- Each community has its own unique culture, norms, and traditions.
- Effective grassroots efforts bring together all relevant sectors from the community.

- Evaluation is ongoing, using community feedback to adjust and improve along the way.
- Making and sustaining change requires commitment, resources, time, and effort.

With *AGE to age*, this asset-based model has helped create a new avenue for older adults and youth to take an active role in shaping civic life in their communities.



## **BUILD AN INTERGENERATIONAL TEAM**

Bring together older adults with young people, along with a diverse cross-section of community representatives (education, government, business, public safety, etc.) to build relationships, pool their ideas and energy, and drive grassroots responses to local needs.

## **CONDUCT FACT FINDING**

Engage older adults, young people, and the generations-in-between in gathering information about their community's resources, needs, and opportunities. Have them identify existing informal and formal intergenerational activities.

## **HOLD A SPEAK OUT**

Coordinate an intergenerational community dialogue to build understanding among the generations. Feature a panel of youth, adults, and elders to share their experiences growing up in the area. Explore questions such as, "What was school and life like in the past and present? What has changed in the community and what has stayed the same?"



## Helpful hints to enhance success

- Hold an initial community meeting with key stakeholders.
- Identify a community-based organization to serve as the hub.
- Select a community coordinator to provide local leadership.
- Extend personal invitations to older adults and young people to participate.
- Create a welcoming, interactive environment. Include icebreakers, food, and fun.
- Make sure everyone has an equal voice at the table.
- Create formal and informal leadership opportunities for youth and older adults.
- Develop a range of activities and projects that appeal to youth and older adults.
- Provide seed funding for smaller-scale projects to jumpstart action and momentum.
- Celebrate successes and promote the power of intergenerational efforts.



### CREATE A VISION AND ACTION PLAN

Facilitate the group in imagining their ideal community for people of all ages to live and grow; create a written vision based on their feedback that will serve as a roadmap for action. Have them brainstorm a list of quick-start projects and longer range plans to achieve stated goals, and choose a group name that expresses their efforts (e.g. Gathering Generations for Greatness, Ageless Friendships, Helping Unite Generations).

### MOVE TO ACTION

Tap the talents and energy of youth, adults, and elders to develop and implement activities, projects, programs, and policy changes that will enhance community vitality and wellbeing among people of all ages.



### KEEP IT GOING

Rally, support, and re-energize residents of all generations to help maintain their momentum in making their community a better place for growing up and growing older.

# Examples of local intergenerational initiatives



## Youth Enrichment and Education

Afterschool classes, homework help, reading programs, writing clubs for children and youth with support of older adults



## Community Service and Beautification Efforts

Service projects (e.g. clean-up, park improvement, flower planting, volunteering at a food shelf or nursing home) that join the generations to improve community



## Culture and Tradition Activities

Traditional Native American teachings (e.g. ricing, regalia-making, beading, language) local history projects, storytelling, and crafts that elders share with youth



## Recreation and Community Gatherings

Game nights, dances, community dinners, holiday parties, hay rides, and other activities all ages can enjoy



## Health and Wellness

Community gardens, farmers' markets, health fairs, healthy cooking classes, and running and walking clubs for all ages

AGE to age has been instrumental in changing perspectives and contradicting negative stereotypes about different generations. The age groups offer one another complementary strengths and skills. By working together, they are a dynamic force.

The 10 initial AGE to age sites have engaged in hundreds of activities and projects, varying in scope from simple gatherings with snacks, games, or crafts to undertaking major community improvements. Listed above is just a small sampling of the array of collaborations between the generations, organized by common themes.

Older adults may realize their leadership potential by supporting the healthy development of children and youth in ways such as:

- Engaging with and guiding youth in community and volunteer projects.
- Providing friendship and mentoring.
- Helping with homework and encouraging educational achievement.
- Encouraging youth to take on leadership and service roles.
- Passing on knowledge, wisdom, history, and traditions.

Young people may adopt informal and formal leadership and service learning roles, including:

- Teaching older adults new technology, computer, and social media skills.
- Sharing their youthful enthusiasm, humor, and creativity.
- Volunteering for community events, beautification, and service projects.
- Serving as mentors and examples to their peers.
- Visiting residents in nursing homes and assisted living facilities.





### Fond du Lac Reservation: Instilling pride, confidence, and healthy living

“The grandfathers and the grandmothers  
are in the children; teach them well.” – Ojibwe proverb

**O**n the Fond du Lac Reservation, *AGE to age* is creating new ways for the young to learn from the wisdom of their elders. Youth are being taught a healthy way of living through the teachings and encouragement of caring elders. The revival of the summer Family Camp is one example of how the *AGE to age* team on Fond du Lac is linking young people, adults, and older adults for the benefit of all.

Family Camps are a longtime tradition of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa that, in recent years, fewer families on the Reservation had participated in. At Camp, families come together over a four-day period to enjoy fishing, music, conversation around the fire, making knockers for ricing, and simply having fun. The Fond du Lac *AGE to age* team has spent the last two summers helping to bring back this tradition. Two college students, Dara and Emily, worked with the other Band members to promote and enhance the camp experience. One of the interns, Dara Topping, described a special camp activity.

*“Each person received five tickets per day to nominate someone who was seen doing a kindness. The person who gave the ‘goodwill ticket’ put their own name along with the name of the do-gooder on the ticket. Winning tickets were drawn daily, with the nominator then telling the group what kindness they had spotted the nominee doing.”*

*“It was very touching to see high school and middle school students blushing and beaming at the accolades they received from their esteemed elders and peers. Our people were guiding each other with kindness and compassion. It felt good to have been involved in such an event that helped build community among the diverse age groups.”*

Word of the Camp’s happy atmosphere is spreading; 117 people attended the first year, and by the second year that number exceeded 200. Reinvigorating the Family Camp, along with many other *AGE to age* efforts in Fond du Lac, is linking the generations to give young people confidence and pride in their lives.

“Youth on our Reservation sometimes face challenging situations with the potential to put them at-risk,” said Debra Topping, the site coordinator for Fond du Lac. “*AGE to age* is really helping our young people, with the support of elders, to make positive choices.”

*Fond du Lac Reservation has engaged more band members of all ages with traditions such as maple syrup making (above) and the summer Family Camp (below).*





# AGE to age outcomes

## Community impact

During the three-year Pilot Implementation Phase, *AGE to age* has:

- Created 10 on-site leadership positions (community coordinators) to rally local support for intergenerational efforts.
- Engaged 6,000 people across the 10 initial sites: 2,800 youth ages 5-18; 1,800 adults 55-plus; and 1,400 adults 19-54.
- Spurred 6,720 hours of annual volunteer service among older adults in the 10 sites valued at more than \$420,000 during the past three years.
- Leveraged \$425,000 in local cash and in-kind contributions to support projects and activities in the ten *AGE to age* sites.
- Designed over 300 new activities and projects which tap older adults' knowledge and skills to help young people thrive.
- Raised \$1.6 million in funding support from regional, state, and national partners for *AGE to age*.
- Generated increased public awareness on the importance of intergenerational connections, and showcasing the contributions of older adults and youth through over 100 stories in community and regional newspapers.
- Promoted intergenerational community-building through 21 presentations at state and national conferences on the *AGE to age* program model.

It is clear that *AGE to age* has made a positive difference in the lives of children, youth, and older adults while enhancing the vitality of the participating rural communities and Indian Reservations. The following data was collected through extensive evaluation, conducted in concert with communities, over the course of the Pilot Implementation Phase.

## Benefits to youth

- Created new opportunities for youth to volunteer
- Increased leadership skills of youth
- Developed meaningful relationships with caring older adults
- Increased young people's motivation to do better in school

## Benefits to older adults

- Strengthened connection to community
- Created new opportunities to help children and youth thrive

- Improved physical and emotional wellbeing
- Renewed sense of purpose and value

*AGE to age* has made significant strides in reducing isolation and enhancing social connections among older adults and young people in this rural region. People of different generations who used to walk separate paths are now engaged in projects that draw upon their unique strengths, allow them to learn from each other, and enable them to work together for the betterment of their towns and Reservations.

By bringing people from different age groups together and building their connections, *AGE to age* has created an intergenerational cadre of volunteers who are invested in their communities. It has also raised community awareness of the power of collaboration and the inherent value of community members of all ages.







**Moose Lake: Making a difference one older adult, one community at a time**

“I will never stop doing what I am doing when I see the difference it has made for young people – and for me.” – Rita Baresh, Moose Lake

**M**oose Lake may be a small town, but the response of its residents to *AGE to age* has been huge. Of a population of 2,239 residents, nearly 200 people of all ages and walks of life, representing 42 different organizations have helped stage a community renaissance.

City government, the school district, community education, and dozens of other local groups have come together in an array of projects that have tapped into civic pride and enhanced community connectedness in Moose Lake.

Health and wellbeing for all ages has been an *AGE to age* focus area in Moose Lake. They not only organized a weekly Farmers' Market but also encouraged residents to shop there by giving out discount tokens for fresh produce. Moose Lake *AGE to age* participants are also purchasing an awning for the exterior of the hockey arena where the market is held.

Besides the Farmers' Market, the county's Master Gardener has presented information on growing and preserving food. Fruit trees and a garden were planted at the school for use in the school lunch program. An intergenerational health fair is being held this spring.

These and many other efforts have required extensive cooperation between different generations as well as community groups who had not necessarily collaborated in the past. A shining example of the energy that has taken hold in Moose Lake is 72-year-old volunteer, Rita Baresh. Rita gives more than 130 hours per month to *AGE to age*, KIDS PLUS, and other volunteer endeavors that benefit young people in the community.

“Rita always has a smile on her face,” said site coordinator, Vicki Radzak, “and her sincere care for children and teens is an inspiration not only to me but to many people.”

The enthusiasm of folks like Rita, and Moose Lake's widespread community support is sustaining *AGE to age's* momentum and shaping a new community outlook.

“*AGE to age* is helping our city to look at itself through a multigenerational lens and actively engage older adults and youth in community improvement,” stated Moose Lake's Mayor, Ted Shaw.

*Moose Lake residents like Rita (above, left) and Lauren (above, right) are improving their community's health and wellbeing thanks to projects such as the weekly Farmers' Market.*



# Fundamentals of intergenerational community work

More than two decades of KIDS PLUS community work has affirmed a number of key lessons that have proven fundamental to the success of *AGE to age*.

## **Older adults and youth are valuable community resources.**

Older adults and youth are tremendous yet often-underutilized community resources. Their active involvement helps both sides of the generational spectrum see themselves as leaders and helps communities view them as valued contributors.

## **Respect and relationship-building are top priorities.**

Through *AGE to age* activities, older adults and youth learn about one another and develop mutually beneficial relationships. As friendships grow, fears diminish between and among younger and older people.

## **Community coordinators provide vital local leadership.**

A local coordinator who is knowledgeable about community is essential. In partnership with their intergenerational teams, coordinators provide key leadership for planning and implementation. They play a major role in connecting people of all ages to opportunities that fit their unique talents and interests.

## **Community leaders and partners help generate broad awareness.**

Engaging local leaders e.g. school superintendents, community education directors, mayors, etc., broadens the awareness of intergenerational opportunities. Local leaders can also provide access to resources. *AGE to age* serves as a catalyst for forming new partnerships and helps leaders consider an intergenerational view in decision-making.

## **College interns add a new dimension to local intergenerational initiatives.**

Eight *AGE to age* sites hosted 14 college students for paid summer internships. The students honed their leadership skills, developed their understanding of community organizing, and improved their ability to work with people from different age groups. These young adults injected creativity and fresh perspectives into local efforts.

## **Grassroots efforts require a multi-year commitment.**

Change takes time. Five years of technical assistance and financial support help participating sites create sustainable efforts. The first years are dedicated to organizing and getting plans off the ground. By year three or four, communities have achieved tangible results and increased their capacity to take on bigger projects. During year five, communities are able to embed what is working and envision future possibilities.

## ***AGE to age* creates a new pathway to bring generations together.**

Rural communities rarely if ever have existing programs that so intentionally join the generations. *AGE to age* forges a new path to bring people 55 and older together with children and youth, along with the generations-in-between, for civic good.







**Itasca Area: Giving through service and gaining hope**

“Young people want and need to be accountable to someone who cares.” – Susan Jordahl-Bubacz, Itasca Area

**W**ith an average of just 16.6 persons per square mile, Itasca County is definitely rural. It is also a region of widespread poverty due, in part, to years of double-digit unemployment. The local *AGE to age* coordinator, however, describes area communities in glowing terms such as “motivated” and “amazing”.

*AGE to age* is leveraging the Itasca area’s higher-than-average population of older adults as a mighty resource for change. Their efforts are igniting bright ideas, excitement, and hope amongst young people.

“Many of our kids struggle with the limitations of living in a place that is so rural and low-income; well over half of all the youth in our program receive free and reduced lunch,” explained the local coordinator, Susan Jordahl-Bubacz.

“With *AGE to age*, they can just be kids having fun, yet – without realizing it – they are blossoming under the mentoring and guidance that the older adults provide,” she said.

Nearly 400 young people, elders, and adults in communities scattered throughout this large rural county have participated in scores of local activities, many centered on helping those in need. Groups have volunteered at a local food shelf; advocated for the homeless; made pottery for an Empty Bowl fundraiser; visited nursing home residents; and established a gardening, canning, and healthy foods program.

Under the guise of giving back to their community, older adults in Itasca County experience the joy of sharing their friendship and values with youth, while young people gain self-confidence and important life skills.

“The kids just light up when they get an ‘Atta boy’ or ‘Atta girl’ from their elders,” stated Jordahl-Bubacz. “How cool is that?”

Amazing may be the perfect descriptor for Itasca Area, after all.

*Itasca Area community members are giving back through service projects such as making pottery for an Empty Bowl fundraiser and establishing a community garden.*



## Program distinctions

*AGE to age* has received state and national recognition, earned in partnership with countless community members in northeastern Minnesota.

2010

Received the Excellence and Innovation Award from Aging Services of Minnesota

2011

Honored with the Intergenerational Innovation Award from Generations United

2012

One of seven finalists in the country for the Eisner Prize for Intergenerational Excellence from the California-based Eisner Foundation

2012

Named a Program of Distinction, which is the U.S. intergenerational community's 'seal of approval' by Generations United



*"We congratulate the Northland Foundation for their dedication to intergenerational practices. Achieving this recognition is a major accomplishment and says a program employs best practices and effectively serves the surrounding community."*

—Donna Butts, Executive Director, Generations United

# Moving forward

*AGE to age* has been warmly embraced by rural communities and Indian Reservations. This success is grounded in taking a strategic, respectful, and culturally appropriate approach to engaging older adults and youth in each community. The Northland Foundation's roles are to convene, support, guide, and celebrate the work of participants. It is community members' sense of ownership and enthusiasm about bringing the generations together that creates true, lasting change.

## What comes next: Expansion and Replication goals

- ♦ Implement the *AGE to age* initiative in three new rural communities
- ♦ Continue to initiate special intergenerational projects that build upon the foundation that *AGE to age* has laid, such as engaging college students in leadership and programming at the *AGE to age* sites; helping young children, age three to grade 3, to strengthen literacy and reading skills with the support of older adults; and promoting health and wellness through intergenerational relationship-building

- ♦ Sustain and deepen the intergenerational efforts underway in the 10 initial sites
- ♦ Maintain the regional Learning Community, which promotes sharing among peers and provides training to participating sites
- ♦ Share information and lessons learned with state and national audiences through publications, presentations, technical assistance, and training

It is the Northland Foundation's hope that this intergenerational model will continue to inspire others to actively engage older adults and youth to foster relationships and improve their community.

## In conclusion

The magic of *AGE to age* is the purposeful joining of older and younger generations for community improvement. The positive results achieved to date underscore that this initiative is answering previously unmet needs among older adults and young people. *AGE to age* is sparking new energy in communities to make "home" a better place to grow up and grow older.







## Funding Partners

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community**experience**  
PARTNERSHIP

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