

# AGE to age: bringing generations together

Connecting young people with older adults to build friendship and community



**KIDS PLUS**  
AGE to age Initiative

# LINKING DIFFERENT AGES TOGETHER IS GOOD FOR EVERYONE

It just makes sense, doesn't it? People who have strong, close connections to their friends and neighbors are happier and healthier, and research has shown this to be true. Young people need caring, attentive adults in their lives to teach, guide, and support them. Older people have experience, knowledge, stories, and time to share. People of different generations can learn from

and help each other. AGE to age is a pathway to link youth with older adults for the good of everyone.

Since AGE to age first began in 2008, this community-centered approach to linking children and youth with adults 55+, and the generations-in-between, has taken flight! What started as 10 sites soon expanded to 13 and now

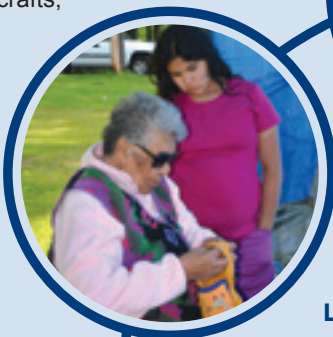
is growing to 18 rural communities, including three Tribal Nations.

AGE to age brings people together to work toward common goals. With a spirit of cooperation, they are making northeastern Minnesota a better place to grow up and grow older.

## Examples of Intergenerational Initiatives

### Culture and Tradition

Sharing traditions and history such as language, crafts, storytelling, ethnic foods, ricing, beading, regalia-making, dancing



### Youth Enrichment and Education

Afterschool classes and activities, homework help, reading programs, writing clubs, learning crafts like knitting and woodworking



### Community Service and Beautification

Volunteering at a food shelf or nursing home, service projects like community clean-up, park improvements, flower planting



Linking older adults with young people to improve community vitality

### Recreation and Gatherings

Community picnics or dinners, game nights, dances, hay rides, holiday parties, fishing outings, parades



### Technology Learning

Training and tech support, with youth helping older adults with smartphone use and apps, email and text, using the internet



### Health and Wellness

Community gardens, farmers markets, health fairs, healthy cooking classes, running and walking clubs, exercise classes



## HOW IT WORKS: OUR PLANNING MODEL

The planning model used to help communities launch AGE to age was first developed by the Northland Foundation in 1992. This process has been used more than 50 times by our KIDS PLUS Program, for many different initiatives. It is based on our belief that people living in the community know best. They know local strengths, challenges, gaps, and opportunities. They are full of ideas for change. With guidance through the steps – and making sure that different ages, sectors, and perspectives are part of the conversation – it is the

residents who create a shared vision and bring it to life.

Our model is rooted in these principles:

- Relationships are the heart of this work, and respect is key to strong relationships.
- Each community has its own unique culture, norms, and traditions.
- To be effective, include education, public safety, community groups, youth development, government, and community members of all ages in the process. Many voices create great outcomes.



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### 1. BUILD A TEAM OF ALL AGES

Bring together young people, older adults, and the ages-in-between to get to know each other and share their ideas. Include people from all sectors, such as education, government, business, and public safety.

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### 2. EXPLORE LOCAL NEEDS AND RESOURCES

Gather information about the community's strengths, resources, needs, challenges, and opportunities. List the formal and informal intergenerational activities that already exist. Where are there gaps?

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### 3. HOLD A SPEAK-OUT

Host an event for all community members to build understanding across the generations. Invite a panel of young people, adults, and elders to share their experiences growing up. Talk about things like, "What was school and life like in the past? What are they like now? What has changed or stayed the same?"

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## Helpful Hints for Success

- Start with a meeting of key stakeholders in the community who can move things forward.
- Find a community-based organization to serve as the hub, such as Community Education.
- Choose a community coordinator to lead local efforts.
- Make personal invitations to older adults and young people to encourage their participation.
- Create a welcoming environment. Provide ice-breakers, food, and fun.
- Make sure everyone has an equal voice and the chance to share ideas.
- Give both youth and older adults opportunities for leadership, both formal and informal.
- Develop a range of activities and projects that appeal to young people and elders. Plan activities that are accessible for people of all abilities.
- Start with smaller projects to jumpstart action and create enthusiasm early on.
- Celebrate successes, and promote that the community is attuned to all ages.



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### 4. CREATE A VISION AND ACTION PLAN

Together, imagine what an ideal community would be like for all ages to live and grow. Write a vision with everyone's input to be the "roadmap" for action. Brainstorm both quick-start projects and longer range plans that will help meet the goals and vision.

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### 5. MOVE TO ACTION

Tap the ideas, talents, energy, and connections of younger and older members alike. Develop and carry out activities, projects, programs, and policy changes that will improve the wellbeing of people of all different ages. Help community leaders to consider all the generations when making decisions.

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### 6. KEEP IT GOING

Support, encourage, and re-energize all the generations to keep the momentum going. Be inclusive and keep inviting new people to join as you make your community a better place to grow up and grow older.

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## CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER ADULTS AND YOUTH

The healthiest, most vibrant communities consider the needs of people of all different ages, backgrounds, socio-economic status, and abilities. Everyone has ideas, talents, and skills they can share. Sometimes they only need to be asked!

Elders may teach youth things like fishing, cooking, woodworking, or Native American language and traditions such as ricing, beading, or drumming.

Young people can help older adults with smartphones or digital photography. Communities can plan vegetable gardens, farmers markets, or family camps. Adults may advise students about career options. Senior or community centers can host all-ages exercise classes. Intergenerational groups can do service projects such as park clean-up or nursing home visits. The ideas are as varied as the people involved.



## BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF GENERATIONS

The enthusiasm of participants of every age to take the framework of AGE to age and make it their own has built unique “communities of generations” in rural northeastern Minnesota.

This work takes time, energy, and resources. Pieces are in place to help AGE to age sites be successful. The Northland Foundation regularly brings together the AGE to age coordinators to share progress, challenges, and promising ideas. Northland also hosts

an annual intergenerational Summit featuring leadership development, team-building, and fun.

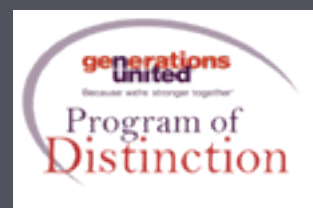
AGE to age has sparked new program models such as Reading Pals, in which older adults support children’s literacy, and Summer Internships that enable college students to do intergenerational work. With dedicated funding partners, we will continue to help our rural region build thriving communities of generations.

## Making an impact

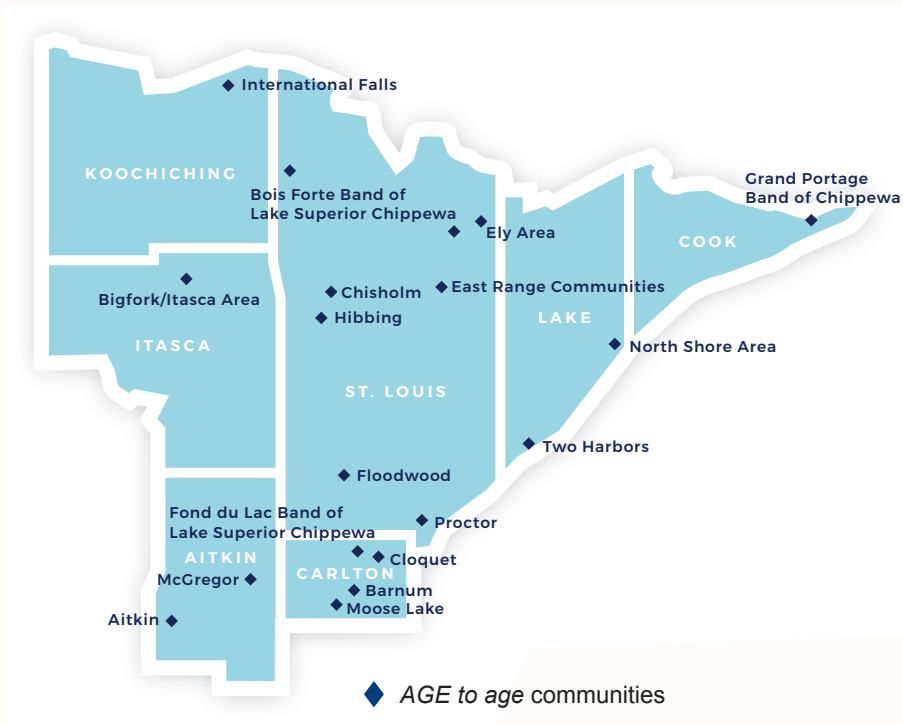
Since AGE to age began in 2008, the Northland Foundation has been tracking its impact. Program evaluation data points to a strong, positive difference in the lives of children, youth, and older adults, as well as enhanced community vitality.

Fully 97% of youth report increased leadership skills and opportunities to volunteer, and 95% of older adults report a renewed sense of purpose and community connections. AGE to age has:

- Engaged 9,475 people across the sites each year: 4,175 youth ages 5-18; 2,415 adults ages 55+; and 2,900 adults ages 19-54.
- Spurred 13,100 hours of annual volunteer service among people of all ages in the AGE to age sites valued at \$361,300 annually.
- Provided 15 to 20 internships for college students each summer to learn about working with people from all generations, while honing their leadership skills and contributing over 3,500 service hours to participating communities.
- Created 18 on-site Community Coordinator positions to provide leadership and rally participation of all generations.
- Designed more than 1000 community-driven activities and projects.
- Raised \$3.6 million in funding from regional, state, and national partners to support local efforts.
- Received one statewide and four national awards, including designation as a Program of Distinction for Intergenerational Excellence by the Washington D.C.-based Generations United.







## NORTHEASTERN MINNESOTA FAST FACTS

- 7 counties covering 18,185 square miles
- 1 urban hub of 86,238 people and 67 smaller towns with populations up to 16,000 and 3 Tribal Nations
- 325,803 total residents, or just 18 people per square mile
- 20% are 18 and under
- 36% are over age 55
- 15% overall live in poverty, with rates as high as 30% in pockets of the region

## GENEROUS PARTNERS

*AGE to age: bringing generations together* is an initiative of the Northland Foundation's KIDS PLUS family of programs, with generous support from funding partners who have helped AGE to age take root, grow, and expand into new communities. On behalf of northeastern Minnesota, we are deeply grateful to the following organizations.

Blandin Foundation

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Otto Bremer Trust

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The Sheltering Arms Foundation



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