If the test of a community is how it treats its children and elderly, then the intergenerational programs in the Greater Phoenix region have aced it. The “Valley of the Sun” includes more than 3.9 million residents in 25 cities and towns.

Talented and committed cross-sector leaders share responsibility for the Valley’s intergenerational communities. On a regional level, a multidisciplinary leadership team facilitates activity at the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG), which coordinates activity with local governments, nonprofit agencies, places of worship and residents to enhance intergenerational opportunities.

In 2012, with the support of local leaders, MAG launched the Regional Age-Friendly Network to facilitate age-intentional interactions among older adults and younger generations through the Greater Phoenix region. Efforts included the creation of a leadership team and development of pilot sites, and the project’s website, Connect60Plus.com. Local research conducted by MAG revealed a deep yearning within older adults to be better connected with their communities and all generations.

Within the philanthropic community, Arizona Community Foundation has been providing leadership in this area since 2003, through its support of the Communities for All Ages sites. Support includes capacity building, funding, technical assistance and the establishment of a statewide peer-to-peer network for the sites.

The Foundation brought together diverse groups of community leaders, youth and older adults to develop action plans that address common concerns, such as lifelong learning, civic engagement, transportation, housing and individual/family support. Advisory councils in each of the sites recruit residents of all ages – including youth, adults and older adults – to lead the initiatives in their own communities.

The programs nurture a holistic intergenerational community through a number of efforts in education, employment, community services, transportation, health and wellness, grandparents raising grandchildren, community programs and arts.

Funding for intergenerational programs comes from a variety of sources, such as the MetLife Foundation, which funded and provided technical assistance through the City Leaders Institute on Aging in Place with Partners for Livable Communities. The Pfizer Foundation, through Grantmakers in Aging, augmented support through the region’s participation in Community AGEnda, a national pilot project designed to enhance age-friendly communities.

“There is something very special about the people who develop these programs. They see a need, and they develop a plan to fill that need. It’s not a huge budget, it’s not a huge building. It’s a vision. And that vision is for the benefit of our community.”

Ariana Rueda, a 16-year-old volunteer at an intergenerational shared site

Other funding sources include the Arizona Community Foundation which provided support to the Communities for All Ages sites and Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust for its support of the Regional Age-Friendly Network.

Juanita Guidry Copeland, a retired training professional, saw the benefits first-hand. As the Ambassadors of Compassion (AOC) program facilitator, she prepares Maya High School students for the work world. Copeland’s heart warms when she remembers a student overcoming her shyness to gain employment in the high school’s front office as a part-time receptionist. She explained: “Seniors are enhanced when they help young people while the recipients learn from those whose lives have been lived successfully.”