Montgomery County, Maryland: Honoring Diversity, Engaging the Generations

Thinking intergenerationally may be old hat to Montgomery County, Maryland, but nothing about its intergenerational programs and initiatives are old or outdated. This is a community where new ideas and ways to integrate the generations are continually being sought and implemented.

It’s been 30 years since the county executive formed the Intergenerational Committee to advocate and plan for a system in which older adults and younger generations could enhance each other’s lives. That committee led to the formation of the Montgomery County Intergenerational Resource Center, a partnership that included the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Montgomery County Public Schools, and Interages, a nonprofit. This was the first time in Montgomery County history that a nonprofit, the public schools and county government joined together to make a difference in the community.

And what a difference such collaboration has made. Today this highly diverse county of almost one million residents offers myriad ways for all generations to connect with each other. It also has formal agendas to help ensure all residents can live their entire lives in Montgomery County.

“While spending time with people from Sunrise, I most liked hearing about their early lives and hobbies. One woman told me about how she had traveled all around the world and visited many of the most famous places….I hope I can live a life as full as hers.”
Maddie Hamill, Elementary School Student
Intergenerational opportunities abound. For example, the public schools work with several nonprofit organizations to bring older adults in to tutor and mentor students. In turn, the schools offer students service-learning opportunities where they can help out older residents. In addition, the county’s libraries, recreation department, arts and humanities council, community college and other county entities continually work to connect the generations in thoughtful ways. The county also has the region’s first intentionally built “shared site” for children and older adults with disabilities.

A major element of the county’s intergenerational efforts is the JCA Heyman Interages Center. The name change came in 2011 when, after 26 successful years of operation, the original Interages was consolidated within the Jewish Council for the Aging. During its tenure, the organization has led the way in intergenerational programming and expertise for the county while improving the lives of thousands of children, adults, and seniors. It also has the distinction of being the third oldest intergenerational program in the United States.

As Montgomery County residents of every age have discovered, theirs is a community that cares about its people and does all it can to create a welcome home for all.

“THese relationships keep us going and touch our hearts. When we’re doing things intergenerationally, everyone benefits, everyone learns. As Joey is fond of saying, ‘Mentoring was the best thing I ever did for myself.’”

Ms. Lois Baker and Ms. Joey Potter, Older Adults