Lamoni, Iowa
Community Slogan: One Generation

The residents of Lamoni, Iowa have never let their small population (just under 2,500 people) stop them from thinking big and acting even bigger. Indeed, Lamoni serves as a great example of what a small town can do when its residents believe in themselves and their future together.

When a problem needs fixing or an issue needs attending, residents of every age are ready, willing, and able to help out. Responsibility for intergenerational efforts does not fall to any one group in Lamoni, but is a social norm for community life. All ages work together, and every resident has a special role to play. Where else might you find a 99-year-old resident volunteering each day at a local center that sells donated clothing and other items at low cost?

Taking on such an active civic role is not a stretch for most Lamoni residents. You might say intergenerational collaboration is part of the town’s DNA. From the time they’re very young, Lamoni children are exposed to service learning. Schools help partner young people with businesses, civic groups, social clubs, and other youth organizations to work on projects designed to better the community.

One current project, the Lamoni SAFE Coalition, was organized in 1998 to provide quiet, behind-the-scenes support for local families. Through the coalition, high school students, Graceland University students, young adults, middle-age adults, and seniors work together to identify and address local needs. The coalition comprises organizations and groups of every kind, including civic, justice, education, seniors,
public safety, community action, media and communication, faith communities, business, government, and a wealth of others. Each group takes part in monthly meetings and makes networking connections with other members to identify appropriate resources to address identified needs.

Lamoni has numerous strong intergenerational practices benefiting all ages. Graceland University students volunteer with school children, senior adults and local community organizations. High school students teach computer skills to adults. The weekly Lunch Buddies mentoring program brings mentors ranging from Graceland students to city employees, to Optimist Club members, to retired citizens to the local elementary school. Additional intergenerational programs include a Service Learning Club that provides a wide array of services for older adults and Across Ages mentoring that pairs middle school youth with adults aged 55 and over.

The Community Center offers community garden plots for adoption, encouraging participation of mixed-age gardeners tending to their plots. Recognizing the importance of the environment, all residents will gain from a new rain garden that will help create a sustainable urban drainage system.

All these intergenerational connections and programs enhance the lives of Lamoni’s residents.

Describing his community, Lamoni resident Tom Morain says, “What makes Lamoni such a great place to live is community input. If good things are going to happen, it’s because local residents roll up their sleeves and make them happen. That includes the community in its broadest sense. Youth, adults, and senior volunteers do good things for each other and, in return, discover the joy of feeling valued and cared for.”

Cody Shield, who grew up in Lamoni and now attends Graceland University, agrees. “Growing up in Lamoni has been a great experience for me and has given me many opportunities to grow. I feel that all people in Lamoni are given a chance to take a leadership role and serve the community no matter what their age.”