

Seniors Teaching Seniors: Connecting to Technology and Each Other in Chula Vista

City of Chula Vista (California) sought a solution to many older adults in the community seeking to learn more, develop new skills and build confidence around using technology. The Chula Vista team envisioned a way to meet this need through an innovative partnership with local schools and high school students. Through their participation in NRPA's Parks and Recreation: A Social Driver of Healthy Aging grant, agency staff met with those in different age groups and developed a youth-led digital literacy program.



Community older adults and youth participate in technology classes. Photo courtesy of City of Chula Vista (California).

Developing a Youth-Led Digital Literacy Class to Improve Older Adults' Tech Skills and Connections

In response to community input, the recreation team at City of Chula Vista was aware many older adults in their service area felt underequipped or uncomfortable using technology. To address this need, Chula Vista partnered with school-based stakeholders, NRPA and intergenerational experts to design a youth-led class in which older adults would engage in **digital literacy skills-building** activities. As a first step in this process, staff conducted community outreach and hosted age-specific listening sessions to gather pertinent information from prospective older adult participants and youth instructors. This formative work elevated program activities, setting Chula Vista up for successful intergenerational programming.

City of Chula Vista, California

Chula Vista, California, is a metropolitan community of approximately 275,000 residents and 49.6 square miles. Located slightly south of San Diego, Chula Vista is known as the “lemon capital of the world.” Among residents, **30 percent** are 50 years or older and **70 percent** live within a 10-minute walk of a park.



Working out of our community center, we have a lot of different opportunities that we can offer for programs ... we have control over the space and how we can program it. Also, with the community center, [we have relationships] with the surrounding schools and kids in the community ... it's a perfect setting.

-Chula Vista Program Lead

Seniors Teaching Seniors Classes and Community Events



Older adult and youth residents chat. Photo courtesy of City of Chula Vista (California).

For this project, Chula Vista partnered with five local schools to offer three monthly digital literacy classes titled **Seniors Teaching Seniors**. Prior to programming, the agency held separate focus groups with older adults and high school seniors to determine interests and logistical needs for each age group. Based on input, students were credited with **volunteer hours** in exchange for leading classes. Classes were held on Tuesdays and Saturdays throughout September, October and November 2025. Community events included the **focus groups** (July 2025) and **end-of-class celebrations** (Fall 2025).

- **Participants:** Twenty-nine Chula Vista older adults ages **60 to 96** participated in the program.
- **Activities and Location:** Digital literacy classes focused on introductory smart device skills, including earning points for uploading flowers to apps for identification and content creation using TikTok. Sessions were held at Chula Vista's Norman Community Center with field trips to local recreational settings (Balboa Park).
- **Program Impacts:** Among all older adults who participated in this project, **31 percent** reported reduced loneliness, **50 percent** reported improved wellness and **55 percent** reported more positive attitudes towards youth. Two in three older adults felt more comfortable with simple skills like connecting to Wi-Fi and searching online (**63%**). Reports of improved comfort also increased with more difficult skills like viewing (**88%**) and sharing social media (**75%**), with **50 percent** reporting increased comfort with the most complex skill (content creation).
- **What's Next?** Staff are committed to continuing this school-based partnership and plan to expand programming.

Community Impact of Intergenerational Programming



29 older adults participated in digital literacy classes.



23 youth participated in digital literacy classes.



47 older adults and youth attended focus groups and events.

Plug Into Fun and Cross-Age Learning when Teaching Tech



The kids and the seniors went on their apps and downloaded rules to bocce ball and went out and played bocce ball ... probably the biggest thing I like to see with intergenerational programming is each side working together and growing together. And with that, lifelong learning.

-Chula Vista Program Lead

Considering Seniors Teaching Seniors classes and focus groups, nearly **100** older adults and high school students participated in Chula Vista's intergenerational programming. Staff identified **bi-directional learning** and **fun** as key elements of success. When students used gamification to teach digital skills, this allowed for relationship-building and made technology more accessible.

Rebooting Intergenerational Connections with Purpose

The positive impact of Chula Vista's Seniors Teaching Seniors program is evidence by its reciprocal nature. Follow these practices to implement digital skills-building intergenerational programs in park and recreation settings:

- **Lift Up the Voices of Older Adults and Youth:** Creating space for people of similar ages to meet and discuss relevant topics helps identify age-specific needs. Before programming, Chula Vista conducted separate focus groups for each age group.
- **Partner with Schools and Make Programs a Win-Win:** When working with students as the primary program instructors, school-based partnerships are highly recommended. Chula Vista students received volunteer school credit for their time.
- **Improve Digital Literacy as a Pathway to Healthy Aging:** In a cultural landscape that is increasingly reliant on technology, digital skills-building can promote healthy aging. Chula Vista promoted youth-led digital literacy classes to share cross-generational knowledge and build authentic connections.

Conclusion

Collaborating with NRPA, Chula Vista developed and implemented the Seniors Teaching Seniors program. This successful school-partnered effort improved digital literacy, social connection and well-being among participants. Join us in advancing tech-based intergenerational programming for all!

About NRPA

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is the leading not-for-profit organization dedicated to building strong, vibrant and resilient communities through the power of parks and recreation. NRPA advances this vision by investing in and championing the work of park and recreation professionals as a catalyst for positive change in service of parks for all, climate-readiness, and overall health and well-being. NRPA supported Chula Vista with technical assistance and evaluation services.



[There is a need for] intergenerational programming, and not only for the older adults ... the teens have also shown great interest in getting to know the seniors. It's important too that the classes are a win-win for all participants. [During class], teens and the older adults learned from each other at a variety of levels. A great experience for both. Teens also get volunteer credits to graduate.

-Chula Vista Program Lead

To learn More

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