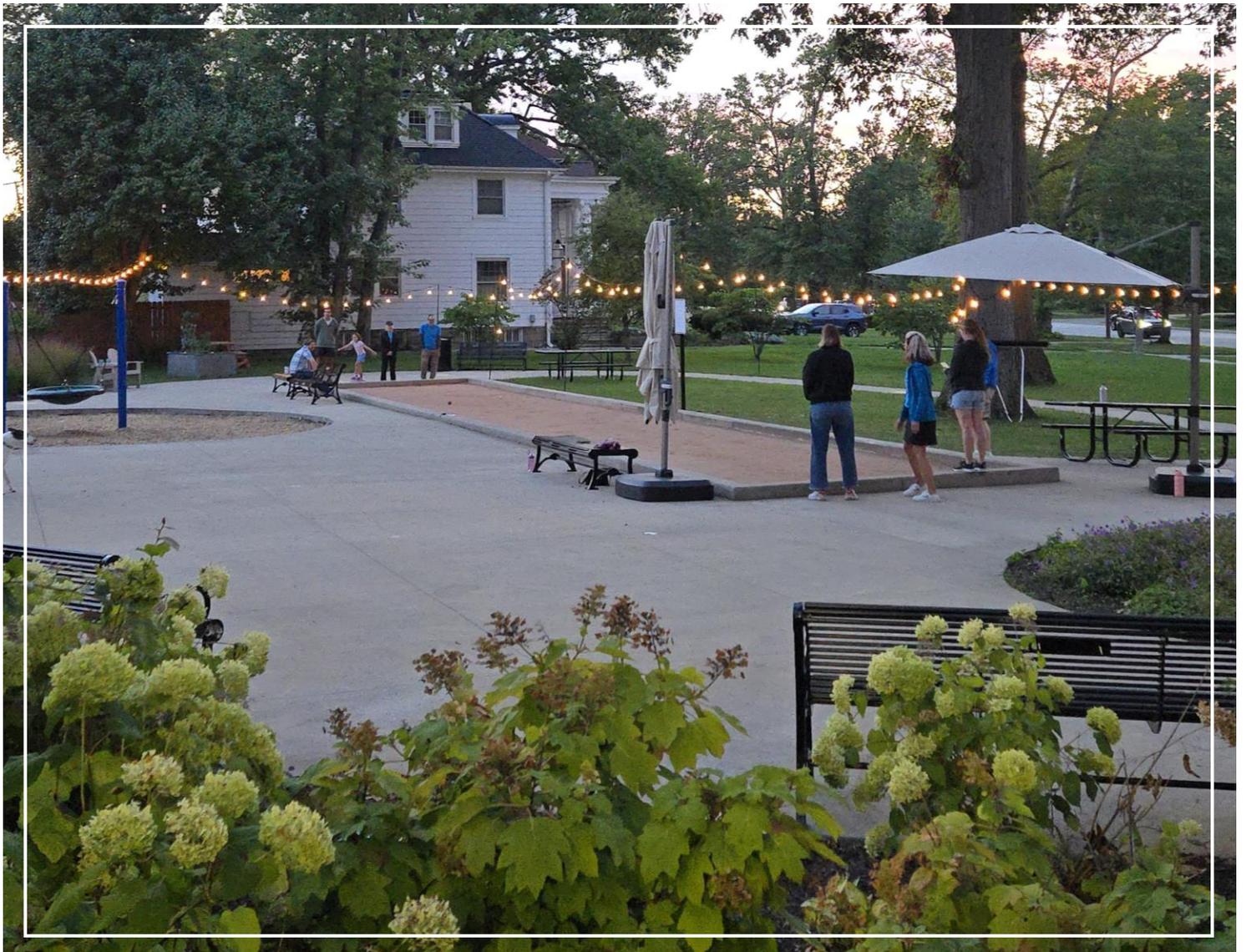




NATIONAL RECREATION  
AND PARK ASSOCIATION

# Finding Common Ground: Creating Space for Intergenerational Play in Lakewood

City of Lakewood's (Ohio) Department of Human Services, and the affiliated Cove Community Center, sought enhancements to their outdoor recreational space. Through their participation in NRPA's Parks and Recreation: A Social Driver of Healthy Aging grant, staff and community members of all ages co-created Common Ground at Cove. This innovative intervention optimized Lakewood's physical, social and programmatic environments for cross-age interaction and play.



Residents of Lakewood, Ohio, play bocce ball in their newly renovated outdoor intergenerational space. Photo courtesy of City of Lakewood (Ohio) Department of Human Services.

## Enhancing the Built Environment to Support Diversity of Programs for Multiple Generations

Cove Community Center, a convening space that was formerly a place of worship, is a landmark feature in City of Lakewood. In response to community input, stakeholders converted the main building into a centralized community center, now housing both older adult and youth services. When Cove Community Center opened its doors in 2022, it was a model for metamorphosis. Yet one transformative new pathway was not considered: Cove's **outdoor space required infrastructure updates**. To meet this need, Lakewood collaborated with cross-sector partners to renovate the space into a recreational setting for all ages. This work envisioned space as the foundation on which to scaffold intergenerational programs.

### City of Lakewood, Ohio

Lakewood, Ohio, is a densely populated city of approximately 50,000 residents and 5.5 square miles. Located on the southern shore of Lake Erie, Lakewood is known as a “streetcar suburb” of Cleveland. Among residents, **32 percent** are 50 years or older and **72 percent** live within a 10-minute walk of a park.



**We have a unique space. It's a church that's been repurposed to a community center with a beautiful green space on the north lawn. It's a meeting place for everyone. We named it Common Ground because we want people to come and meet in the middle to discuss things, raising your children or having grandchildren ... it's a welcoming space.**

*-Lakewood Program Lead*

### Common Ground at Cove and Community Events



Staff members pose at the gateway and sign to their new intergenerational outdoor space. Photo courtesy of City of Lakewood (Ohio) Department of Health Services.

For this project, Lakewood renovated its outdoor space and offered a range of intergenerational programs. Infrastructure enhancements included installing **shade canopies**, all-ages **seating** (chairs with arm and back rests rather than stand-alone park benches), a **nature zone and mud garden** (for mixed-age play), improved **bocce ball courts** and new **signage**. Staff recruited program participants through Cove's existing/interconnected older adult and youth services. Program structures (offered in summer and fall 2025) varied. Community events included a celebratory **Ice Cream Social** (August 2025) with a “Makers Market” craft fair. Craft vendors spanned the age spectrum — from youth to those young at heart!

- **Participants:** Seventy-eight Lakewood older adults, ages **61 to 84** participated in the program.
- **Activities and Location:** Intergenerational activities were offered in convening spaces (bocce ball league, book club, garden club) or during the “Help 2 Others (H2O)” (manicures, painting garden rocks) summer day camp.
- **Program Impacts:** Among all older adults who participated in this project, **31 percent** reported reduced loneliness, **50 percent** reported improved well-being and **55 percent** reported more positive attitudes toward youth. Approximately **one-quarter** of older adults from Lakewood reported increased feelings of community belonging and weekly physical activity, with **19 percent** and **27 percent** reporting positive changes, respectively.
- **What's Next?** Although this organic experience is difficult to replicate, staff are committed to expanding programs.



## Community Impact of Intergenerational Programming



**78** older adults participated in programs.



**110** young adults and youth participated in programs.



**300** community members of all ages attended events.

## Co-Creating a Vibrant Community Wellness Hub for All



The youth would come and paint rocks and created decorations to go with wind chimes in the garden ... all these things that just made the space colorful. And we would get comments in the evening programs like, “Wow, this space is so much more alive.” The space had community, not just a building.

*-Lakewood Program Lead*

Considering the wide array of activities (bocce ball, gardening, H2O camp) and the Ice Cream Social, nearly **500** community members of all ages participated in Lakewood’s intergenerational programming. Staff, older adults and youth co-created the space as an accessible, welcoming and colorful community hub — an ideal place to address age differences and find “common ground.”

## Placemaking for All Ages Supports Programs and Play

Common Ground at Cove serves as a community-anchored model placemaking for all ages. Follow these practices to create intergenerational space in park and recreation settings:

- **Create a Welcoming and Safe Space for All** : Understand community needs for physical, social and emotional safety. Lakewood addressed physical obstacles with comfortable and shaded seating. Additionally, Lakewood hosted foster care visitations, often involving grandparent and/or kinship care, in the comfort of Cove’s outdoor space.
- **Build Cross-Age Connections With Intentional Design Elements**: Map community space to identify ways to connect infrastructure most heavily used by each generation. Lakewood intentionally placed their nature play zone next to the bocce ball pit to support cross-age play.
- **Tailor Programs and Places as Needed**: Some older adults prefer observational or passive (rather than highly interactive) activities. Lakewood offered varied programming and settings (indoor book club, walking paths around play spaces), to allow for engagement by choice.



You see multiple generations playing ... we tried to be very intentional so that it wasn’t geared toward older people or the younger [people] ... we wanted to build it where you ... have to intersect, and you can you feel invited to either [activity]. You can be playing bocce, and your kids can be playing.

*-Lakewood Program Lead*

## Conclusion

With support from NRPA, Lakewood incorporated creative renovations to update Cove’s outdoor space. This visionary work created space for greater social connection and well-being among community members of all ages. Built environment lessons can be transferred to local park and recreation settings. Join us in boldly advancing intergenerational spaces for all!

## To Learn More

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## 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 Lakewood with technical assistance and evaluation services.



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