



NATIONAL RECREATION  
AND PARK ASSOCIATION

# Sow and Grow Together: Intergenerational Relationships Take Root in Lexington

Through Lexington (Massachusetts) Community Center's participation in NRPA's Parks and Recreation: A Social Driver of Healthy Aging grant, agency staff created new, innovative and intentionally structured activities to encourage engagement and knowledge sharing across generations. Staff used strategies relevant to the local communities to develop Sow and Grow — a gardening summer day camp rooted in intergenerational relationships.



Older adults and youth plant seeds in a raised garden bed. Photo courtesy of Lexington (Massachusetts) Community Center.

## Creating a Welcoming Intergenerational Program for the Community

In 2020, Town of Lexington conducted a community needs assessment to identify opportunities to improve or expand municipal offerings. Key findings indicated community interest and need for enhanced outdoor recreation, programming and therapeutic “all abilities” services. While some multi-generational programs were available, community members desired **tailored intergenerational programs**. To meet this need, Lexington Community Center collaborated with cross-departmental stakeholders, NRPA and intergenerational experts to develop a program in which older adults and youth with different backgrounds and abilities could engage in fun activities while building relationships.

### Town of Lexington, Massachusetts

Lexington, Massachusetts, is a mid-sized town of approximately 35,000 residents and 16.4 square miles. Located slightly inland from historic Boston, Lexington is known as the “birthplace of American Liberty.” Among residents, **43 percent** are 50 years or older and **53 percent** live within a 10-minute walk of a park.



**We have in this town a dedicated therapeutic specialist who allows folks of all ages and all abilities be fully included and participate in all these amazing recreational programs that make our lives full. The knowledgeable staff lets [my six-year-old son and] everybody have fun and enjoy themselves. I think that this is part of a vision for a more ... welcoming world that we want to pass on to the next generation.**

*- Lexington Resident, Parent, Age 45*

### Sow and Grow Summer Day Camps and Community Events



The primary intergenerational program developed for this project was a gardening summer day camp. During program development and implementation stages, the agency partnered with **Lexington Field and Garden Club** and **Chinese Garden Club** to (1) recruit older adults with gardening skills and (2) conduct community outreach. During the **five weekly camps** (meeting 3-4 days/week in June-July 2025), older adults taught introductory gardening skills to youth. Activities were tactile and adaptive, as needed. Community events included a “kick-off” **Garden Party** (June 2025) and a sensory-friendly **Harvest Festival** (October 2025).

- **Participants:** Thirteen Lexington older adults ages **53 to 86** participated in the camps.
- **Activities and Location:** Gardening activities (filling raised garden beds; planting, watering and caring for plants; identifying bugs; going on scavenger hunts) occurred at the Lexington Community Center.
- **Program Impacts:** Among all older adults who participated in this project, **31%** reduced loneliness, **50 percent** reported improved well-being and **55 percent** reported more positive attitudes toward youth. While physical activity levels did not change, **three in five (60%)** older adults from Lexington reported greater mindfulness.
- **What's Next?** Sustain and expand intergenerational offerings by adding multi-age features to outdoor space (ping pong table, shade canopies, fitness equipment).

Older adult prepares a raised garden bed for the day's camp. Photo courtesy of Lexington (Massachusetts) Community Center.



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## Community Impact of Intergenerational Programming



**13** older adults participated in gardening camps.



**23** youth and one young adult participated in gardening camps.



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

## Seeing Sprouts of Interpersonal Growth and Cross-Age Connection



The youth really seem interested in learning about the plants from our adults. They harvested some peppers and basil, and their excitement was evident.”

- Program Lead for Lexington Community Center

Considering Sow and Grow camps and community events, nearly **350** community members of all ages participated in Lexington's intergenerational programming. Staff emphasized **interpersonal growth** as a core indicator of success. When program leaders created space for self-exploration and autonomy, organic cross-age relationships formed. Inclusive program structures and exciting activities were a conduit to connection across age.

## Planting Seeds to Harvest Positive Outcomes

Sow and Grow's positive community impact amplified when programmatic elements were welcoming and accessible to all. Follow these practices to implement intergenerational programs in park and recreation settings:

- **Use Universal Design to Increase All-Age Access:** Intentionally incorporate accessibility into spaces. Lexington used raised garden beds to reduce physical obstacles for those with restricted mobility.
- **Create Sensory-Friendly Intergenerational Spaces:** Consider ways to limit stimulation in program environments. Lexington used attendance caps for events and provided welcoming areas with bubbles or soft music.
- **Celebrate and Champion Local Cultures:** Know your community and understand representation in programs. Lexington partnered with existing community gardening clubs to tailor outreach.
- **Embed Sustainability as a Pathway to Healthy Aging:** Encouraging environmentally friendly practices can facilitate healthy aging. Lexington promoted gardening to steward and sustain healthy environments.



We ensured this program was available to all, regardless of age, ability and language spoken. The garden beds are raised along an accessible pathway, and many of the written materials were available in both English and Mandarin.

-Program Lead for Lexington Community Center

## Conclusion

In collaboration with NRPA, Lexington developed and implemented the Sow and Grow program for their community. This effort was highly effective, resulting in improved social connection and well-being among both older adults and youth. Join us in advancing 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 Lexington with technical assistance and evaluation services.

## To Learn More

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