

Bridging the Generations

Youth2Seniors brings together children and seniors to learn from one another while working on projects that help others in the community.



Hilda Lockton, left, and Michaela Connors show off the stuffed elephant they created for a child at STARRY Emergency Shelter during a Bears Handmade by United Generations workshop.

Photo courtesy of Youth2Seniors

by Adelle Connors
Community contributor

At Youth2Seniors, participants are catalysts for creating the kinds of relationships that bridge generations and engage both seniors and children. A Central Texas nonprofit, Youth2Seniors was formalized just two years ago in order to create intergenerational bonds between youth and seniors through free programs and events conducted in assisted-living facilities.

Guiding principles include providing volunteer opportunities to young children, providing enriching experiences to seniors, and breaking down generational barriers.

In volunteering, the youth of Youth2Seniors discover that volunteering is not only important, but fun, and through these volunteer opportunities they may forge lasting relationships with elders. For seniors, participation in Youth2Seniors programs encourages giving back to the community while learning alongside youth.

Youth2Seniors' impact in the community has grown exponentially each year. In 2012, the Bears Handmade by United Generations (Bear H.U.G.s) program, where seniors and youth work together to build stuffed animals for distribution to needy children.

One group of seniors asked if they could take the toys to the children at Helping Hands Home. Youth2Seniors arranged for a field trip to deliver the bears.

What we do

Intergenerational art classes partner

children as young as 4 with seniors, working on arts and crafts while learning from one another.

During Youth2Seniors giving programs, younger and older participants work together to serve a group in need. Past giving programs have included building stuffed animals, making fleece blankets and supporting Austin's Empty Bowl Project.

Special programs and quarterly events sponsored by Youth2Seniors are all unique.

This spring they helped to plant gardens, made several "Easter Elephant" appearances and assisted Rotary-Austin Centennial with its Adoption Match event.

On Oct. 26, Youth2Seniors will hold its biggest community awareness and fundraising event: Intergenerational Day. The event includes activities for all age groups – making a family tree, testing age IQs, a photo booth, silent auction, craft stations and more. Participants can

even volunteer "on the spot" by building a bear to donate.

How to help

All Youth2Seniors programs are free to participants and depend solely on upon volunteer support. There are many ways to get involved in Youth2Seniors.

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Participate: Sign up as an adult volunteer or youth participant and join the group at an upcoming event.

To register, visit the calendar page at youth2seniors.org or contact volunteer@youth2seniors.org.

Donate talent: Youth2Seniors seeks talented volunteers, such as art class leaders, photographers and videographers, and others.

Contact volunteer@youth2seniors.org.

Financial support: For \$75, Youth2Seniors can conduct an art class for 16 youth and seniors.

Building a bear for a child in need costs \$10. Sponsors are being sought for Intergenerational Day and donations are needed for the silent auction.

Interested parties should contact adelle@Youth2seniors.org.



Alycia Gleason, left, and Gigi Hyché make "ojos de dios" in a Youth2Seniors Intergenerational Art Class.

Photo courtesy of Youth2Seniors

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The Easter Elephant, which has become a staple of Youth2Seniors Easter program, is born.

Adelle Connors' grandmother was in an assisted living facility, and the family wanted to surprise her for Easter, but there were no Easter Bunny costumes to be found. One shop offered an elephant costume. On Easter Day, the family showed up with the Easter Elephant and entertained many of the residents. The Easter Elephant started off with one visit and delivered 50 eggs. Now it averages four visits a year and distributes more than 850 eggs.

PERFECT FIT THE GENERATIONS UNITE

It is difficult to describe the sense of joy experienced in watching a 5-year-old and an octogenarian learn a new skill together, or in a 95-year-old providing dating wisdom to someone 80-plus years younger, or seeing a child listening intently as a senior shares stories from childhood. One of Youth2Seniors' most active participants, Lorene Crowell, 95, said it best when describing what she likes most about Youth2Seniors programs: "Of course we like the arts and activities, but that is not the most important part. What we really like is that someone from outside our community takes the time to come in and appreciate us as individuals. Often times our interaction is limited to family, friends and caregivers, and it means so much when another group comes in and appreciates us as the people we are."



The Youth2Seniors Board of Directors with the Easter Elephant (a.k.a., Adelle Connors).

Photo courtesy of Youth2Seniors

AND ANOTHER THING ...



Photo courtesy of Youth2Seniors

A Very Special Participant

Molly Rothschild and Ed Palmer dye silk pillow cases during an art class sponsored by Youth2Seniors. This is a very special picture for two reasons: First, there are very few men in assisted living and they rarely come to the classes, but Ed came to the tie-dyeing class. More importantly, his wife passed away four days before this picture was taken, and he

was a blessing to our class that day. — Adelle Connors

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