



Telling the Story of Intergenerational Connections at Strathcona Place



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STRATHCONA PLACE 55+ CENTRE





Strathcona Place would be easy to miss if it weren't for the steady stream of people coming and going from its busy location just off 109 Street and University Ave. Many are seniors who live nearby, coming to participate in a fitness class or meet friends for lunch. Others are student interns who help at the front desk, run the café and coordinate outreach programs.



While Strathcona Place programming serves seniors in the community, at its heart, the centre is a place where intergenerational connections are made. "We provide all sorts of opportunities for people of all ages to come together and socialize," says Francisco Yu, Strathcona Place executive director. "Our programs offer a great way to close the gap between generations."

Connecting youth and seniors is a priority for Francisco. "Ageism is an issue both generations face. By bringing youth and seniors together, we're hoping to reduce age discrimination and create opportunities for the generations to learn from and gain respect for each other."

That's what makes the approach to running programs at Strathcona Place so effective. The Edmonton Programming Intergenerational Committee (EPIC) meets weekly to plan events and activities that encourage seniors to come out to Strathcona Place. Louisa Lu, a University of Alberta student, devotes her free time to volunteering at the centre. "I started

out by helping with special events and photography. Then I eventually founded EPIC, our intergenerational group," Louisa says.

"EPIC started out small, maybe five members, but then we got family members and friends involved and it grew really fast," Louisa says. Young volunteers and seniors from the community work together to improve existing programs and create new ones. "EPIC runs our ideas by the seniors, who give us feedback, tidbits and advice. Our partnership is good for Strathcona Place and for the community."

Alvin Baragar, a mathematician and retired University of Alberta professor, regularly attends literature night, one of Strathcona Place's popular intergenerational programs. "I've been coming for at least ten years," says Alvin. He enjoys listening to the young participants read pieces they have been studying in school. "I read things I have written, and encourage the students to read pieces they have written themselves," says Alvin.





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Alvin sees literature night as a chance to help a younger generation develop public speaking skills. “I try to provide a good example for them when I read.” Alvin is quick to note the benefits are mutual. “The young people bring enthusiasm,” he says. “They remind us of what we were like 70 years ago, and they learn from our experiences and see what’s ahead of them.”

EPIC co-leads Louisa and Shelby Singbeil organize the centre’s free board game nights. “Anyone from the community can come in to play a board game. Playing together is a good way to get to know people. I learn how to play games I don’t know, and I have fun teaching seniors games I know,” says Shelby. Participants are welcome to bring their own games, and can purchase treats from the on-site snack café.

“If a senior comes in alone and wants to play a game, a member of EPIC will sit down and play with them, and bring up different topics to get the conversation going,” says Louisa. “It’s all about trying new things, developing relationships and learning from the seniors. We want to hear about their lives and learn from their wisdom.”

A love of flowers inspired more connections between generations. Verna Peter, a retired medical technologist and piano teacher, was one of the first seniors to join the intergenerational gardening group Roots and Shoots. “I noticed that spring was coming on, and I knew a place that flowers would look really nice outside,” says Verna. The centre purchased red geraniums and white petunias, which thrived in the sunny front entrance to the building. Verna enjoyed tending to the flowers throughout the summer, even

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bringing in seeds from her own garden to help fill out the planters. “Of course it took a fair bit of care,” she says.

Shelby helped cultivate the centre’s garden under the guidance of Root and Shoots members. “With the garden, it’s a good chance to talk to some of the seniors. They share their knowledge and tips of what we should plant and how to take care of a garden,” says Shelby. “I’ve gained more respect for seniors. You realize how much they know. By talking to them, they’ll tell you about the jobs they used to have and their hobbies.”

For Francisco, the biggest success in Strathcona Place’s intergenerational programming is the connections seniors make when they participate. Those connections

help prevent isolation. “Once people take that step to visit Strathcona Place, they’ll find many reasons to return. We offer recreation and art programs, multicultural events and learning opportunities. But above all else, we offer a place where friendships are made.”

Francisco credits the success of Strathcona Place’s intergenerational programming to the participants. “We have an energetic and engaged group of seniors who are our whole reason for being here. And our youth volunteers are so dedicated. EPIC is growing bigger each month. We have a core group of about 15 people, and a volunteer group of about 50. We’re happy to see that continue to grow.”





The young members of EPIC say they've developed new skills volunteering at Strathcona Place. "When I first started, I was very timid and I was unsure where I would fit in," says Shelby. "But over the years as EPIC has grown, I've been able to take on more of a leadership role, and I've become less afraid to suggest ideas. I've learned how to go about approaching people to tell them about the events we have here."

Some of the benefits can't be measured. "There's something meaningful about working with people who have so many life experiences. They just want someone to talk to, to have a nice conversation," says Louisa. "To see all of these youth who take time out of their day to come here and spend time with seniors, it's heartwarming."



When asked what keeps him coming back to Strathcona Place, Alvin answers, "Mostly the people."

Verna agrees. "Now here's a good place for lunch. What you get is some good home made food and a good cup of coffee, and a visit with a friend. And you meet new people, of course."

The young volunteers also value the friendships they've made. When asked what the best part is about volunteering at Strathcona Place, Louisa's answer is simple. "Seeing a senior smile."

Strathcona Place 55+ Centre Intergenerational Programs

With a wide variety of intergenerational events and activities, the centre offers something for everyone who visits.

- Literature Night (poetry/reminiscence/drama)
- Roots and Shoots Gardening
- Board Game Night
- Brain Games Computer Learning
- Ageism Education Workshop

For further information, visit www.strathconaplace.com





*For more information on Intergenerational Connections at
Strathcona Place 55+ Centre visit: www.strathconaplace.com*



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