

Panel workshop seeks to raise intergenerational awareness

BY JOHN MESSEDER
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Intergenerational living arrangements can provide homes for those who cannot afford or are unable to live on their own. It also can foster "greater understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more cohesive communities."

Matthew Kaplan, an associate professor of Intergenerational Programs and Aging at Penn State University, offered the suggestion Monday evening at a workshop held to discuss intergenerational housing issues. The workshop was held at the Adams County Agricultural and Natural Resource Center.

Intergenerational programs differ from multi-generational programs primarily by their level of cross-generational involvement.

"It's almost like recreating a community we knew growing up," he said, "(in which) people feel comfortable saying, 'I know you, I know your mom, and I'm going to tell her next time I see her.'"

He explained that programs that seek to bring generations together typically fall on a seven-step continuum ranging from young and old merely

reading about each other but each having no real involvement with the other, to creation of continuing programs that actively and continually involve members of all generations.

"Once people start to know one another, they start seeing themselves differently," Kaplan said.

Often, the need for intergenerational housing appears at the young and old ends of the age scale, and affects the generation in the middle — the Sandwich Generation — as it attempts to provide home for young people in need of lodging while they find work, and older people who may need some assistance in their daily lives.

At the younger end are often college students, either with degrees and looking for work in their chosen fields, or students attempting to better their career opportunities by pursuing a college degree.

"I'm 18-to-25, 26," said Harrisburg Area Community College Student Life Coordinator Jessica Knouse. "I live in my parents basement. I'm saving up to buy a house."

"This is me, this is my life," she added.

She has worked as a long-term substitute teacher, and among her subjects was teaching young people to think

about where they were going to live after high school.

HACC students typically live with parents or relatives or, sometimes, roommates. They often have not chosen a field in which to major, and may have dependents. They may have family support, allowing them to work limited hours and maximize study time, or have little family support and must have full-time jobs while attending school part-time.

Older citizens have a different set of problems, transportation often high on the list. A new bus service scheduled to begin in Gettysburg may help, but potential riders may have to learn to ride the bus.

"What we've got to do now is train people to ride the thing," said Steve Niebler, director of the Adams County Office for Aging. "Hey, we're Americans. We have car keys in our pocket."

Another point mentioned during the discussion were the practicality of 55-and-over housing, which could provide attractive social benefits to residents, but also could wall them off from the rest of the community.

"In general, municipal planning commissions aren't thinking about intergenerational issues," said Judy Chambers.

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Penn State University Extension Educator for Community Development & Land Use. "These are issues we need to get somehow in front of (municipal planners)."

She suggested Monday night's discussion could be an introduction to another housing-related seminar next month. The session, and the remainder of the spring schedule, is sponsored by the Partnership for Land Use Education. The series of free seminars includes:

✓ Feb. 26: Grants for Land Conservation Projects;

✓ March 4: Affordable and Workforce Housing;

✓ March 13: Serving the Latino Community;

✓ March 25: Natural Resource Protection 101; and

✓ March 31: Natural Lands Trust Growing Greener Workshop.

For more information about the PLUE series, contact Judy Chambers, Penn State Extension Adams County, at 717-334-6271 ext. 313 or email her at chambers@psu.edu.

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