

Best Practices Report: Seniors Housing Innovative Intergenerational Projects

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By 2017, 10% of the U.S. population will be 70 years old or over, and the population in this age range will increase by four million people over the next five years. As the demand for housing continues to increase, and leading-edge baby boomers get old enough to begin to demand seniors housing, forward-looking developers are responding creatively to seniors' lifestyles and preferences. One notable trend is towards development of intergenerational housing projects, along with seniors developments that are closely integrated into a inter-generational neighborhood.

As seniors are retiring later and staying active longer, the option to stay integrated in their existing community or to live in a intergenerational development appeals to seniors even as they need increased services and support. Historically, most seniors housing has been campus-oriented, providing meals, amenities, and programming within the gates of the development. However, as general trends in development focus on infill building, walkability, and creating lively and active neighborhoods, some innovative seniors housing projects have focused on integrating residents in seniors housing projects into the broader community of their towns and cities while still maintaining the safety of aging residents who need extra attention and care.

These case studies illustrate key trends from successful seniors housing developments that RCLCO is tracking in order to work with our clients to integrate these principles into new projects or reposition existing communities.

Seniors and College Students Can Thrive in One Community—Merrill Gardens at the University and The Corydon, Seattle, Washington

In Seattle, Washington, Merrill Gardens and Pillar Properties recently redeveloped a two-acre parcel just north of downtown and adjacent to the University of Washington. In total, the project has 123 independent and assisted living rental units with 144 residents; 103 non-age-restricted units, which are currently 95% leased; and 22,500 square feet of retail space. The outdoor amenity space is shared by residents of Merrill Gardens and The Corydon and hosts events such as outdoor movie nights, bocce ball tournaments, and University of Washington band performances. Residents living in The Corydon are even able to purchase a meal plan at Merrill Gardens. By coupling seniors housing and market-rate housing adjacent to a university, the apartments capture both the older Baby Boomer and Eisenhower generations as well as the younger Generation Y—two markets with quickly growing rental demand.



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Furthermore, the proximity of the buildings allows a few older residents who do not want to live in the seniors units all the time the ability to maintain a primary apartment at The Corydon while transitioning to respite care when necessary. While Merrill Gardens produces roughly 70% of the revenue, the market-rate apartments provide an intergenerational mix of residents that brings life and vitality to the university area and an opportunity for cross-generational relationships.

Seniors Housing Can Naturally Bring the Outside Community In—Moldaw Residences at Taube Koret Campus for Jewish Life, Palo Alto, California

In 2009, the Taube Koret Campus opened an 8.5-acre intergenerational community, bringing together a Jewish Community Center, the Moldaw Residences, a preschool and early childhood education center, and a few cafés and shops organized like a town square around green space. As a gathering point for families in the Palo Alto neighborhood, the community center provides a natural environment for generations to interact and for seniors to remain active members of their community. Also, with membership to the community center included, seniors have access to many more educational programs, wellness classes, and amenities than a seniors community alone could provide.



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The 193 seniors residences provide a range of independent and assisted living as well as memory support. In order to ensure that all seniors can be fully immersed in the campus, the entire campus is situated in a public area. This particularly benefits independent living residents who enjoy accessing the cultural arts center, fitness center, and other intergenerational activities, which helps them to continue leading engaged and vibrant lifestyles. Currently, 139 of the units are occupied.

Intergenerational Communities Benefit Foster Children, Families, and Aging Seniors—Hope House at Hope Meadows, Rantoul, Illinois

Hope Meadows, which opened in 1994, created an innovative model of community-oriented seniors living by housing 33 foster children, nine families, and 46 aging seniors in the small town of Rantoul, Illinois. While families provide primary care for the foster children, seniors volunteer in roles such as tutors, babysitters, gardeners, and meal providers while living in a cottage home with reduced rent.



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This model for seniors living provides seniors with a sense of purpose as they help foster children and families, as well as providing children with much-needed mentorship. As many of these seniors have required additional support and care as they have aged, Hope Meadows is adding eight single-level apartments arranged around a large common room with a live-in caretaker so that seniors can remain connected to the families and children while receiving assistance with tasks of everyday living. The project is financed by two \$500,000 grants from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Due to its success, the model has been replicated in Portland, Oregon, and Easthampton, Massachusetts.

Preserving a Historical Church Provides Affordable Housing for Seniors— Buena Vista Terrace, San Francisco, California

Formerly a Christian Science church, Buena Vista Terrace currently serves 58 seniors in studio and one-bedroom apartment units. As a HUD and locally funded project, residents must have incomes at or below 50% of the area median in order to live in Buena Vista Terrace. Given the very high cost of housing in San Francisco, many households are priced out of the city as they age, but Buena Vista Terrace allows seniors to stay in their own neighborhood in an easily accessible and walkable area. Furthermore, constructing seniors housing here also saved the Romanesque Revival church built in 1915 that had become an architectural treasure to the surrounding community. When Buena Vista Terrace opened in 2007, 1,600 applications were submitted for 40 units. While pent-up demand for this product in this location (and at an affordable price) would have allowed any product to be successful, the innovative reuse approach gave the asset a veneer of “cool.” Although the development itself is not intergenerational, it is closely integrated into the culturally diverse and urban Haight-Ashbury neighborhood.



*Photo Credit: Luke Thomas Photography
for TNDC*

RCLCO's research on seniors housing preferences suggests that across the spectrum of seniors housing products, integrating seniors into the larger community provides housing for community-minded seniors; stability for transient communities; arts and wellness programs for a town; and intergenerational relationships for children, families, and aging seniors. In fact, better integrating seniors housing into the fabric of the community, and creating innovative and architecturally interesting projects, helps reduce any stigma of seniors housing and encourages earlier consideration of this lifestyle alternative.

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