

Danceworks Generations

builds relationships between students from Milwaukee schools and older adults from assisted living and adult day programs through dance and visual arts instruction.



The 2020-21 year had its own unique set of challenges for Danceworks' Generations Program. Beyond virtual learning, teaching artists needed to figure out how to make connections between potentially memory impaired adults and youth participants without the luxury of shared space. Six sites met once a week for an hour over 12 weeks. Teaching artists and program coordinators spent many additional hours pre-packing individual supply kits for site and home deliveries. They also facilitated exchanges of art projects, dance-o-grams and postcards. Despite these challenges, the Generations staff prevailed and created a beautiful intergenerational community of artists.

One project that stands out is a paper airplane activity. Youth and adult participants decorated sheets of paper that were then folded and eventually tossed from a (socially distant) balcony to the seniors. The joy could be seen even through the masks of all present. In addition to this shared experience, a cumulative slideshow was created and shown each week so that participants could see one another and their work. Students got to know each other through postcards and photos.

Despite only one site meeting in-person, our virtual participants were not deterred. They made connections and cheered for one another in dance battles and proudly held up their art projects for all to see.

A classroom teacher from Bruce Gudalupe community school shared this experience: "One of my students has some emotional trauma. He had never shared details about his father. But in one of the activities, he wished his dad would come back home. He actually drew a picture of his dad and shared it. This was a

Danceworks Generations's primary goals are:

- To improve effective and appropriate communication skills across generations.
- To improve critical thinking skills by making correlations across art forms.
- To improve empowerment through creating intergenerational relationships that build community.

major step forward for him. His guidance counselor and I were so happy that he shared this." Another teacher shared that she often "found her students doing the dances at recess." and that Danceworks helped create a culture of trust and respect and spread kindness."

Danceworks Generations was held at six sites: St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care-Bucyrus Campus (2 groups of adults and 1 youth), Bruce Guadalupe Community School, United Community Center (no classes were able to take place for adults but art and dance was shared from BGCS), and Granville School. Generations served 30 seniors (65+), 7 adults with cognitive or other disability, and 75 2nd and 3rd graders. Of those served, 22% were African American, 64% were Latinx and 13% were caucasian.

Our teaching artists ranked outcomes based on the program goals at 80% overall for each goal. All six participating sites had overwhelmingly positive feedback and all shared their desire to return for the next school year.

Teaching artists and classroom teachers both indicated that they hoped for a return to in-person and shared programming for the 2021-22 year as virtual connections, while still

important, are more challenging to make. One site in particular had frequent technology glitches that often disrupted the flow of class. However, all teachers noticed an overall positive change in attitude and outlook of all participants.

Danceworks teaching artists further noticed an increased ability in adult socialization and students' ability to focus for longer periods of time. There were simply so many moments of beautiful connection: holding the hand of an adult when a cancer diagnosis was confirmed, seeing clients use both sides of their body instead of one and watching students of all ages take ownership of their art making.

Generations truly overcame the challenges presented by 2020-21 and is poised to come back bigger and better. The coming year looks to be one of the largest programs in the history of Generations.

