

Bridging Generations: BAYFEST Intergenerational Theatre Project

The Idea:

In a society marked by increasing generational divides and fear of 'the other', the need for shared experiences across age groups has become more important than ever. The BAYFEST Intergenerational Theatre Project is a collaboration that brings together teens and senior adults to explore intergenerational themes through theatre games and exercises while building bridges between generations. The project has been named for longtime BAYFEST supporter and Board member Janet Hunter, who always championed anything that brought people together across lines of culture, age and interests. Jan passed away this spring, and her friendship will be sorely missed.



Some project values:

- **Confronting and dismantling age-related stereotypes.** Teenagers are often perceived as self-absorbed or rebellious, while older adults may be dismissed as out-of-touch or frail. In a collaborative artistic space, participants come to see each other as individuals rather than age-based caricatures. When a teen hears a senior tell an emotional story from their teenage years, or a senior marvels at a teen's bold creative choices, mutual respect is born.

- **Creating a medium for reciprocal learning.** Seniors can bring a wealth of life experience and skills, historical context, and storytelling ability, while teens contribute current perspectives, technological fluency, and excitement about their future.

- **Combating Isolation and Building Community.** Loneliness and fear can be major concerns among older adults, while teens often struggle with feelings of alienation and identity questioning. Theatre projects provide a structured, collaborative environment where participants are encouraged to express themselves, connect with others, and work toward a shared goal. These relationships frequently extend beyond the rehearsal room, creating intergenerational bonds that endure.

- **Encouraging Empathy and Active Citizenship** Through the act of creating and performing stories—especially those rooted in personal histories or social issues—participants deepen their empathy for different lived experiences. Teens may gain a better understanding of historical events through the eyes of those who lived them, while seniors may be moved to consider contemporary social challenges from the viewpoint of the younger generation. This mutual empathy encourages both age groups to engage more actively and thoughtfully in their communities.

- **Cognitive and Emotional Benefits** Many of the theatre-training exercises and methods we use (from group movement and improv games to word-association and memory exercises) positively enhance cognitive function, engagement, and mood. Just the fact of all the shared laughter and story-sharing in every session has obvious positive effects that keep participants coming back.

• **Key Considerations and Methods**

The BAYFEST Intergenerational Theatre Project has been designed very intentionally, with attention to creating a fun-filled atmosphere of safe and mutual collaboration, inclusive practices, and sensitivity to the diverse needs of both age groups.

- **Collaborative Project Design.**
- **Inclusive and Accessible Environment.**
- **Oral Storytelling and Devised Theatre Techniques.**
- **Writing assignments on personal themes and imagined intergenerational scenarios.**
- **Intergenerational Pairing and Mentorship**
- **Professional Facilitation**
- **Public Performance and Community Engagement**
- **Evaluation and Reflection**

An intergenerational theatre project involving teens and senior adults is more than just a novel performance initiative—it is a community-based social practice that addresses ageism, fosters mutual respect, and strengthens the fabric of community life. It merges the expressive power of theatre with the timeless need for connection across generations. By investing in these projects, we not only enrich the lives of participants but also cultivate a culture that values dialogue, memory, and collaboration across age divides. The stage becomes a space where the wisdom of the past meets the promise of the future—and both generations emerge stronger.

If you are interested in being a part of the next cohort of the Intergenerational Theatre Project or know someone who is, please send us an email: BAYFESTyouthTheatre@gmail.com with “Intergen Project” in the subject line and we will send an application.