As we emerge from a tragic pandemic, let's catalyze action among professionals in the fields that shape the physical housing and communities where we live. This series of case studies shares innovations that are advancing a set of **guiding principles** for built environment professionals–from creative ways to redress inequities and engage the public in participatory planning, to unique housing and community models that enable every resident to thrive.

Photo by Noelle Marcus, Nesterly

Photo by Stillman College

Universities as Age-friendly Partners

By Stephanie Firestone and Julia Glassman

According to UN-Habitat, the world needs to build 96,000 affordable homes every day to address the global housing crisis by 2030. Yet, better utilizing existing housing stock–through options such as shared housing–can make a significant dent in the need to build more housing. With college students often challenged to find affordable housing and many older adults living alone in homes with spare bedrooms, these two groups are increasingly benefitting from living together. Universities are often well-suited to facilitate students living and learning with older adults in nearby communities. Intentionally fostering intergenerational engagement through places and programs can reduce loneliness, mitigate ageist stereotypes, and help both groups to thrive.

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Needs/Challenges

Older adults and **college students** are two demographic groups not usually mentioned in the same breath. Yet, they have increasingly united over the shared misfortune of the affordable housing crisis.

In 2020, 43 percent of students at four-year universities in the U.S. experienced **housing insecurity**, up from 35 percent in 2019. At Humboldt State University one in five college **students are houseless**. This problem **disproportionately affects students of color**. The HOPE Lab, which conducts the largest national survey assessing the basic-needs security of university students, found in 2018 that 55 percent of Black student respondents at two-year institutions and 43 percent at four-year universities faced housing insecurity. Even more impacted were Native American students, with 58 percent of those at four-year universities reporting housing insecurity and 19 percent lacking a place to live.

On top of a **rapid rise in college tuition** rates, the shortage of affordable student housing poses a serious barrier to attaining a college education. Last fall, **demand for on-campus housing** was so high that some colleges and universities like the University of Tampa offered incoming freshmen a break on tuition if they deferred until fall 2022. Other colleges are trying to **bridge this housing gap** by contracting rooms with local hotels close to campus or paying local alumni to board students.

At the same time, **54 million spare bedrooms in the United States sit empty every night**–many in the homes of older adults, who are **increasingly living alone**. Projections show that by 2034 people over age 65 will own one-third of all homes in the country and that more than half of those homes will have only a single occupant. Insufficient fixed incomes and minimal retirement savings, coupled with rising property taxes and home maintenance costs, make for a significant cost burden for older people, who comprise a **growing proportion of the sheltered homeless population**–currently at 23 percent, up from 16.5 percent in 2007.

Another challenge shared by these two generations is that of loneliness, which itself has become a major public health pandemic with an equivalent risk factor to health **as smoking 15 cigarettes a day**. The **World Health Organization** reports that between 20 percent and 34 percent of older people in China, Europe, Latin America, and the United States are lonely; some studies put the loneliness numbers even higher, up to 44 percent in India. Yet older adults are hardly alone in their loneliness. According to a **study from the UK**, young adults (16-24 years old) are currently the loneliest group in Western countries, and a study from Harvard indicates the pandemic has exacerbated this situation, with **61 percent of young adults in the U.S. feeling "serious loneliness."**

Housing and community models that separate members of society by age contribute to this loneliness and the entrenchment of ageist attitudes. Public spaces are rarely designed to facilitate spontaneous interaction across generations, and institutional structures such as assisted living facilities and adult day care facilities are often physically separated from younger age services such as childcare. The 2021 **World Health Organization's Global Report on Ageism** indicates one of the main strategies for preventing ageism is to provide young adults with early intergenerational contact, including educational interventions to enhance empathy, reduce prejudice and discrimination, provide accurate information, and counter stereotypes about certain age groups.

Innovations

Colleges and universities are naturals to become part of the solution. They can proactively create intergenerational connections that address these challenges, and many are already seeing and seizing this opportunity. Institutions of higher learning along with their faculties and students are increasingly providing thought leadership in intergenerational engagement and creating avenues for the two generations to share spaces and both learn and live together.

Living Together

Home sharing is on the rise across the United States and elsewhere, including through a number of programs that match college students with older adults who have spare bedrooms in their homes. Through these arrangements, the older adult gains additional income and help around the house, while the student gets an affordable place to live. And, of course, both benefit from companionship, with the student gaining access to the lived-experience wisdom of the older adult, who in turn takes in the perspectives, present-day knowledge, and insights of their younger roommate. A variety of programs and tools are fostering this trend.

Canada HomeShare, now a flagship program run through the nonprofit, HelpAge Canada, started as a city-funded pilot program at the University of Toronto and has since expanded to partner with five other universities around the country. Canada HomeShare operates by identifying metro areas with affordable housing challenges and a high density of older adults and then reaching out to colleges' counseling and housing offices, city representatives, and other stakeholders to help implement a home-sharing solution. They then create a local advisory group at each site to determine the most effective way to shape the home share program for their specific community.

Photo by Noelle Marcus, Nesterly

Increasingly, technology is also helping to match people for home shares, and **Nesterly**, an online platform created by students at MIT's School of Architecture and Planning with a mission to create mutually beneficial cross-generational connections, connects students with older adults who have spare rooms. The school's team of licensed social workers carefully matches students with older adults who have an open room and are also on call to help mediate any conflicts. Nesterly's founder, Noelle Marcus, said, "We've been able to generate life-changing supplemental income for folks on fixed and limited incomes, widows, people forced into premature retirement, and we're seeing on average–with just someone's first home share–a take-home of $7,200 in just the first nine months."[1] Nesterly's success in the Boston area inspired expansion to Central Ohio and Louisville, Kentucky, and Nesterly hopes to soon provide services in even more states.

2019 Credit Photo by Broadview Senior Living

Photo by Noelle Marcus, Nesterly

STUDENTS GIVING BACK

University-based intergenerational housing programs sometimes incentivize students to participate through reduced rent in exchange for volunteering their time with their older-adult roommate. Some universities, such as Drake University in Iowa, offer unique student volunteer opportunities, such as through the hosting of music concerts and classes for older adults. And some programs offer students reduced rent to live among older adults at retirement facilities. Through the University of Southern California's Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, students living at Kingsley Manor receive free room and board in exchange for socializing with residents two days a week. In The Netherlands, the **Humanitas nursing facility** in Deventer near Amsterdam offers a free apartment in exchange for 30 hours of volunteer work each month; with those hours, students teach older residents everything from typing and social media to graffiti art. The program's innovator, Gea Sijpkes, observes how the in-depth interaction offers students expansive learning and life experience; for example, not only must the younger residents learn to slow down and listen to their older counterparts, but being a part of the lives of older residents who eventually pass on teaches them firsthand about death being a part of life.

GOVERNMENT-LED PROGRAMS

In Spain, the Barcelona City Council collaborated with the Interuniversity Council of Catalonia and the Fundació Roure organization to create the **Viure i Conviure intergenerational housing program**, which services all Catalonian Universities. By providing full funding, the program mitigates any monetary exchange between students and their older adult roommates. Viure i Conviure uses a team of psychologists to create ideal roommate pairings and follows up frequently through phone calls and visits to ensure both parties have the assistance they need. According to the organization, "All stories that go beyond the trial period are success stories to one degree or another." One such story involves a woman named Layla, who had a student, Vicenta, live with her for three years. Vicenta "became like another granddaughter, and today they still keep in touch as if they were family," the organization reports.[2]

In Israel, the Ministry for Social Equality and the Israeli Student Union collaborated to create a program for universities throughout the country. According to the Israel Bureau of Statistics, in 2020 over **97 percent of the population over age 65 lived in a private household**, making this type of shared housing program ideal. Through Kan Garim, or "At Home," students spend at least three nights a week at their host house and socialize with their older-adult roommate for five hours a week in exchange for a room that costs them approximately $80 a month. Facilitating the relationship is a program coordinator who conducts monthly phone calls and frequent home visits. A **qualitative analysis of participant satisfaction** concluded that as a result of the program, older adults felt less lonely, while students felt they benefited by gaining greater knowledge and understanding of the "world" of older adults.

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[1] **Generations United webinar**, August 23, 2022.

[2] Interview with Olga Ibañez and Teresa Rutllán, July 2022.

Learning Together

Collaboration goes well beyond housing. For many years some universities have provided opportunities for older adults in surrounding communities to audit or otherwise participate in a variety of courses. Some universities now extend their educational reach further into the communities. A twenty-year **partnership between Ithaca College and a neighboring retirement facility**, Longview, enables students to not only volunteer at the facility and take classes with its residents but also gain class credits and hands-on experience toward degrees in the health care field. Students in the speech, physical, and occupational therapy programs make regular visits to Longview to provide services for residents, who can also take a shuttle to the college's **Occupational and Physical Therapy Clinic** for treatments.

Photo by Ithaca College

Increasingly, some universities also are using their institutional platforms to address societal disparities— among both older adults and students of color. The **Paula J. Carter Center on Minority Health and Aging** at Lincoln University works to improve the quality of life of Missouri's aging population by developing community programs that promote health literacy, healthy-living behaviors, and a reduction in access-to-care inequities. And a program run through St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota pursues disparities solutions on the individual and research levels simultaneously. Called Katies for Aging and Research Equity, or **KARE**, the initiative supports underrepresented students by preparing them to be the next generation of leaders in **health disparities research** across the lifespan.

Another intriguing model involves siting a retirement community right on a college campus, an approach that combines the two concepts of learning together and living together. Stillman College, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, is **converting a former female dormitory into a living and learning center for active older adults**, who will be able to regularly engage with students, faculty, and staff throughout the college campus. Winsborough Hall is listed on the National Register for Historic Sites, having begun Stillman's transition from a male ministry college to a fully co-educational institution of higher learning. It was also a haven for students protesting segregation in Tuscaloosa with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1964. A gift from GAF, North America's largest roofing and waterproofing manufacturer, provided non-federal matching funds for the school's Historic Preservation grant program applications.

Photo by Stillman College

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³ Conversation with Ashley Wade, Executive Director of Broadview Senior Living, July 2022.

Photo by Broadview Senior Living

At the State University of New York (SUNY), the success of a class auditing program for older adults prompted a decision by SUNY-Purchase College to develop unused land on its campus for a fully operational senior living community; the facility is currently under construction. **Broadview Senior Living** residents will take part in campus classes and events, and the community will include a "Learning Commons" space dedicated to collaboration with students and fully equipped with a coffee bar, meal area, studio, and classrooms where regular classes will be held to increase interactions among the students and older adults.[3] Boasting the tagline "Think Wide Open," Broadview aims to "cross borders between generations, break down stereotypes, and form mutually beneficial and lasting friendships."

University Contributions to Age-Friendly Community Initiatives

Thanks to the World Health Organization's **Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities**, age-friendly community programs that help support healthy aging are proliferating in countries around the world. In many places, universities have contributed to the development of these community-based programs. At Iowa State University's Interior Design Department, Professor Daejin Kim and a team of students examined the homes of older adults residing in Charles City. They visited homes, created a list of recommendations for aging in place modifications, and **presented their findings to the broader community**. Katie Nolte, the City's director of housing who helped facilitate the project, is now utilizing the students' findings to hire a private contractor and make modifications to the homes of the participants.

Iowa State Research project from Daejin Kim

In Ontario, Canada, Trent University's Centre for Aging and Society is conducting a study of five different sites around Ontario to identify barriers and modes of support for "**sustainable rural age-friendly programming**." Finally, in some localities, the university was the catalyst for city-wide age-friendly programs. For example, Portland State University provided leadership in establishing **Age-friendly Portland**, which became a national age friendly-community leader.

AARP's Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities (NAFSC) works with a variety of universities and colleges to help advance age-friendly work in their nearby communities. According to the network's manager, Bill Armbruster, the university partnerships create a knowledge hub for sharing new ideas and transferring them into the community. NAFSC recently created a collaborative among academics from around the country to foster shared learning with and from one another.

The philanthropic community has also been at the center of some university-led, age-friendly community initiatives. In Northern New Jersey, The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation and The Grotta Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater MetroWest New Jersey seeded and continue to support a network of age-friendly community initiatives. This network has grown into the Age-Friendly North Jersey alliance and is energizing a statewide movement. Emily Greenfield, a professor at Rutgers University's School of Social Work, explained that the university's involvement started as a small, applied research study in 2015 and has now become a driver of the state's overall advocacy for better age-friendly policy and programming. Working in partnership, the university and philanthropies has helped the **age-friendly community initiatives** lead innovations in domains including transportation and walkability, housing, health and wellness, and more. And PhD and master's students have authored reports covering such topics as how the initiatives are organized through cross-sector partnerships as well as the role of the initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Photo by Photo by Broadview Senior Living

Age-Friendly Universities

Under another model, universities take a range of actions to make their own campuses more age-friendly. The **Age-Friendly University (AFU) Global Network** was founded at **Dublin City University (DCU) by Professor Brían MacCraith** as a way to continue to enhance the university's engagement with older adults. DCU created a list of **10 unique principles** to serve as a guide to help universities recognize a variety of older-adult educational needs, help them take classes towards a "second career," ensure that university research best reflects the needs of older adults, and enhance older adults' access to health and wellness campus resources. Christine O'Kelly, AFU Global Network Coordinator, says her goal is to help universities overcome working in silos and "coalesce what they are doing for aging."[4] Since its establishment, 51 universities across the globe have registered as part of the network, reflecting a desire to better serve and engage older adult community members.

Successes and Replicability

There is simply not enough housing supply to meet demand in many cities around the world, and as a consequence, housing prices globally have **risen at their fastest rate in 40 years**. In most countries, the cost of housing has grown much faster than incomes, and by 2025, 1.6 billion people are expected to be affected by the **global housing shortage**.

With large numbers of students in one place needing affordable housing and universities often already having both student-housing offices as well as professionals in the social work and psychology fields available to provide assistance, institutions of higher learning can be ideal partners in addressing the housing crisis. There are **tens of thousands of officially accredited or recognized higher education institutions** across the globe. Through approaches centered on living together and learning together, and by creating spaces that foster engagement between students and older adults, creative programs can also reduce isolation and loneliness and enrich the lives of students and older adults alike.

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[4] Interview with Christine O'Kelly, AFU Global Network Coordinator, September 2022.