never too old to play

older americans month 2012

oam activity guide

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES, USA

AoA
Administration on Aging

Older Americans Month 2012: Never Too Old to Play!

The theme for Older Americans Month 2012—*Never Too Old to Play!*—shines a spotlight on the important role older adults play in sharing experience, wisdom, and understanding with other generations through social activities and civic engagement. It's no secret that there are lifelong health benefits to staying socially and physically active: Such a lifestyle helps people retain mobility, muscle mass, and cognitive abilities as they age.[1] But older adults are not the only ones energized by their engagement in community life.[2] Studies show their interactions with family, friends, and neighbors across generations enrich the lives of everyone involved.[3]

What better way to celebrate Older Americans Month than to bring older Americans together with friends and family of different generations to engage in spirited social activities in a national Day of Play?

About This Toolkit

To make Older Americans Month a truly national celebration, the Administration on Aging is encouraging Aging Network partners and other organizations around the country to host a Day of Play. This event will feature activities designed to bring older adults together with others in your neighborhood to socialize, exercise, and engage. This guide includes numerous suggestions; feel free to tailor any you like to better suit your community! Whether you choose to host one activity or several, this toolkit can help you coordinate your Day of Play.

Find the Best Way to Play

The format for your Day of Play will vary depending on your event goals and activities. Several possibilities are described below.

Get Physical. Exercise is a great way to stay in shape and improve quality of life at all ages, especially later in life. Gentle exercises can improve balance and strengthen muscles without putting too much strain on the body, thus reducing the risk of falls and broken bones. An added bonus: Those who stay fit tend to have more energy. Here are some ideas:

- Wii bowling tournament. Wii bowling is a popular activity among older adults, and a great way to engage elders and young people in a session of invigorating activity that promotes fitness and fosters intergenerational connections. For guidance on how to host a Wii bowling tournament, see the Activity Toolkit at OlderAmericansMonth.org
- Miniature golf. Miniature golf is a wonderful form of light exercise and fun for people of all ages. For your Day of Play consider an outing to a local miniature golf course. Call ahead to see if there is a group rate or senior discount. To make this an intergenerational event ask the older adults to bring along a friend from another generation such as a child or grandchild.
- Choreographed fitness. There are numerous options for fun group exercise activities for older adults. For your Day of Play you may want to arrange lessons in one or more of these exercises in movement:
    - Tai chi is a group activity in which participants move slowly and gently in unison. Tai chi improves balance and strength.
    - Water aerobics is exactly what it sounds like. The gentle resistance of the water in a pool intensifies this low-impact aerobic workout. And exercising in a pool reduces the risk of injuries from falls.
    - Yoga uses stretching and breathing to relax the mind and body, and it's very good for circulation.
    - Dancing improves balance and coordination. Plus, it's a great creative outlet and way to meet new people.

For more information about the value of physical activity, please visit:

Go4Life, an exercise and physical activity campaign from the National Institute on Aging at NIH go4life.niapublications.org

Brain Activities. Older adults may experience a number of changes in the structure and activity of the brain that can affect how we move and think. But emerging studies show that certain actions can train and stimulate the brain, improving its efficiency and perhaps even reducing the risk of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. While we don't know which specific everyday activities may be of benefit, the ones mentioned below are fun ways to engage your brain.

Consider offering some of these events for Older Americans Month:

- Trivia competition. You're never too old to play trivia! It's a great way to bring together adults and their younger friends and neighbors for a couple of hours of fun and discovery. AoA has developed a team trivia game for your Day of Play. Players will exercise their minds in a 90-minute competition, where intergenerational groups of four to six people gather to answer trivia questions about culture, major events, and sports. For more on this event, see the Activity Toolkit at OlderAmericansMonth.org
- Crossword puzzles. Crossword puzzles are excellent mental exercises. In the spirit of Older Americans Month, AoA has developed a series of crossword puzzles that you can print and distribute to Day of Play participants. To download and print these themed puzzles, which emphasize the importance of health and activity and test general knowledge, see the Activity Toolkit at OlderAmericansMonth.org
- Traditional games. Games like Scrabble, bridge, and Pokeno are timeless classics and have the potential to be fun intergenerational games. Hold a game night and invite participants to form teams to play these traditional games. Provide a venue, a few decks of cards, a handful of board games, and let the good times roll!
- Continuing education/speaker series. Talk to the older adults you work with and find out what topics interest them. A speaker series as part of your Day of Play might include local professors, authors or others expert in their fields giving presentations on the topics of greatest interest.

To learn more about brain health, please visit:

National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Aging: Memory/Cognitive Health at nia.nih.gov/health/memory-and-cognitive-health

Alzheimer's Association: Brain Health at alz.org/we_can_help_brain_health_maintain_your_brain.asp

Bridge the Generation Gap. Preschoolers, college students, and young adults benefit from interactions with older adults. Unfortunately, many aspects of modern-day life keep these diverse age groups from being a part of each other's lives. Add an intergenerational focus to your Day of Play. Older adults are more likely to be active when they're with younger people, and the engagement also increases their sense of self-worth. In turn, young people can gain valuable knowledge and skills during time spent with older adults; they may also develop a deeper appreciation of different generations and an increased capacity for compassion.[4]

- Community cookbook and potluck meal. Sharing a meal often leads to sharing stories and experiences. As part of your Day of Play invite the older adults you work with and other community members to each prepare a dish for a potluck dinner. If some of the older adults are unable to cook for themselves ask them to provide a recipe and pair them with someone younger who can do the shopping and cooking. Consider collecting the recipes and compiling them into a community cookbook that you can share with participants after the event.

- Photo scavenger hunt. Scavenger hunts are a classic children's activity. A photo scavenger hunt invites older adults to take part again in a game they no doubt remember from childhood, while promoting use of new technology and interaction with people of other generations. Invite Day of Play participants to form teams of mixed ages and go around the neighborhood taking digital photos of themselves doing various activities or seeing specific sights. For a list of photo ideas see the Activity Toolkit at OlderAmericansMonth.org.

- Volunteer activities. Volunteering can be fun, relaxing, and energizing. Be it reading to children, collecting food for the homeless, or working in a community garden, volunteering is a wonderful way for older adults to stay active and meet a diverse range of people. Consider arranging a service activity or other volunteer event as part of your Day of Play. To find volunteer opportunities near you visit Volunteering in America volunteeringinamerica.gov

- Group outing. For a fun activity that is easy to arrange and bound to be appreciated, invite community members of all ages to go together to a public event such as a baseball game, Renaissance fair or other festival or gathering.

- Time capsule. One of the greatest aspects of intergenerational activities is the broad range of perspectives offered. Capture those varying viewpoints and thoughts in a time capsule: Invite participants of different ages to bring an item that represents this moment in time for them. Ask people to talk about the items, and then bury these memorabilia in a time capsule. Set a date when the capsule will be recovered and opened.

- Talent show. Talent shows offer something for everyone: Extroverts with a talent to share will enjoy participating and quieter people will have a good time watching the performances. Locate a venue with a stage, identify a few prominent community members who are willing to be judges, and invite people of all age groups in your community to take part.

To learn more about the benefits of intergenerational activities, please visit: Generations United at gu.org

Get Creative. The process of aging is marked by increasing physical and emotional changes, and a heightened search for meaning and purpose. Creative expression is important for older people of all cultures and ethnicities, regardless of economic status, age, or physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities. The arts can serve as a powerful way to engage older adults in a creative and healing process of self-expression.[5]

- Community quilt. What better way to demonstrate how older Americans bring inspiration and continuity to the fabric of our society than by inviting neighbors to create a community quilt. Participants will bring their own piece of fabric, embroidered or drawn on with their notion of "Never Too Old to Play!" Participants will work together to sew the swatches into a community quilt. The quilt can serve as a decoration for a community center or rotate among the homes of community members.

- Joyful noise. Making music together is a wonderful way to bridge the generation gap. Gather a few simple instruments for participants to play, such as drums, tambourines, and shakers. Find sheet music and ask a couple of skilled musicians to lead the group and invite the older adults you work with and others in your community to join in the fun and make a joyful noise. See the Generations United Intergenerational Learning Activities guides for more information about hosting an intergenerational music activity: gu.org

- Fly kites. This twist on the OAM 2012 theme and logo is a great way to involve people of all ages and ability levels. Provide kite-making sets—which can be purchased at arts and crafts stores—and invite participants to work as teams to decorate and fly their Older Americans Month kites.
- Paint a mural. Painting a mural provides a creative outlet and an opportunity for people to work together on a project they can appreciate for a long time thereafter Identify a wall—probably one at your facility— that can be painted. Plan an image relating to the importance of civic and social engagement in community life and ask a local artist to provide art direction. Purchase some paint, brushes, rags, trays and other needed materials and let the fun begin.
- Poetry corner. Poetry has the ability to unite and inspire; to make people laugh, cry, hope, and dream. Invite participants to an open mic where they can read their favorite poems, including their own creations. Include a well-known poet or writer from your community to provide feedback to the participants.
- Craft fair. The older adults you work with no doubt have a diverse range of hidden talents. Ask people to share their hobbies—whether it's throwing pottery, scrapbooking, or canning preserves—at a craft fair where participants can show and barter what they have created. Set up booths where others can learn from local experts how to create their own arts and crafts.
- Put on a dance. Dancing is a wonderful way for people to express themselves, and it gives older adults an opportunity to engage in light physical exercise. Consider choreographing a performance with a local dance troupe. For information on organizing such an event, download the Arts and Aging Toolkit at ArtsAndAging.org

For more information about creativity and aging, please visit the National Center for Creative Aging at creativeaging.org

Pick the Right Time and Place

Select a site that is easy for participants to get to and large enough to accommodate everyone. Talk to the venue administrator about any equipment you may need, such as chairs, tables, projectors, and audiovisual equipment.

It is important to keep the interests and schedules of your audience in mind as you plan your Day of Play. For example, if you are hosting an intergenerational activity and want older adults to bring their grandchildren along, don't plan the event during school hours. Here are a few other things to keep in mind:

- Are the venues you prefer available, and do you need to reserve them for your use?
- If it is an outdoor event, can you rely on good weather?
- Does your planned Day of Play conflict with a holiday or other major events? If so, you might consider rescheduling.
- Do you have enough time to plan and publicize the event?

Make a Checklist

Think carefully about the goods, people and materials you might need and allow time to order supplies. Here is a checklist you may want to use:

- Refreshments (consider asking a local business to donate snacks for your event)
- Digital projector
- PA system
- Equipment (e.g., for sports activities)
- Adequate seating
- Writing implements
- Featured entertainers and speakers
- Decorations
- Transportation for event participants
- A rain plan (if you intend to hold your event outdoors)
- Event insurance in case of an injury at the event

Promote Your Day of Play

Once you've scheduled your event it is time to start promoting it. Use the tools available on OlderAmericansMonth.org such as fliers, social media templates, and newsletter inserts to start raising awareness of your Day of Play and recruiting participants. Focus your publicity efforts where your audience spends a lot of time and on the publications and websites they read.

Tell Us About It!

Older Americans Month is all about promoting health and building community. We encourage you to share information about your event with other communities that are celebrating Older Americans Month. Submit pictures and highlights from your event at the Community Corner on OlderAmericansMonth.org, and visit the site to see how others around the country spent the day.

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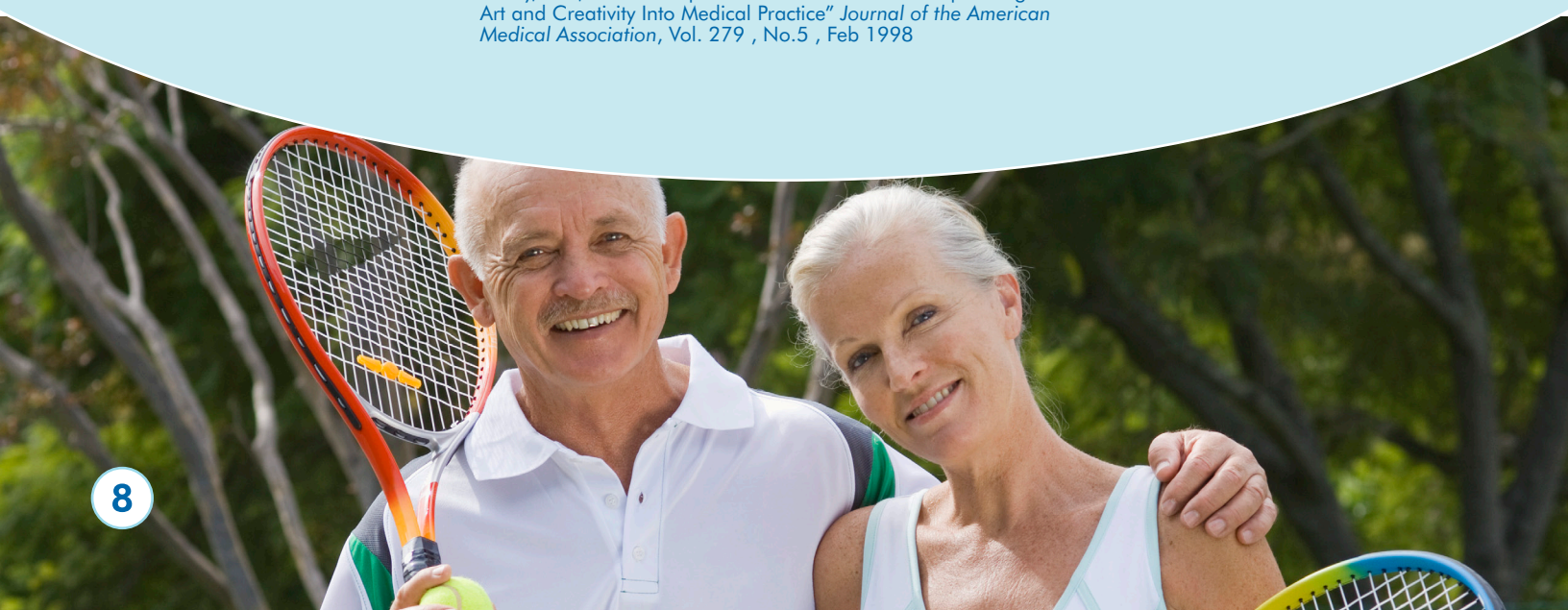
[1] Pressman, S.D. et al. "Association of Enjoyable Leisure Activities With Psychological and Physical Well-Being." *Psychosomatic Medicine*, September 2009, 71(7): 725–732.

[2] Yarnal, Careen and Qian, Xinyi. "Older-Adult Playfulness: An Innovative Construct and Measurement for Healthy Aging Research." *American Journal of Play*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Summer 2011.

[3] Piliavin, Jane Allyn and Siegl, Erica "Health Benefits of Volunteering in the Wisconsin Longitutinal Study." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* Vol. 48 No. 4, Dec 2007

[4] Butts, Donna M. "Intergenerational Service Learning and Volunteering" *Philanthropy Across the Generations*. 2003

[5] Willy, Ron, "The Therapeutic Value of the Arts: Incorporating Art and Creativity Into Medical Practice" *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 279 , No.5 , Feb 1998



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