

Bridging the generation gap



Participants listen to a member of the younger generation at the Intergenerational Dialogue held Oct. 26. at the Fort Collins Senior Center. The event was designed to bring people of different ages together to discuss issues related to core values, perceptions, and prejudices held. Photos by Olivia Sherwood.

Intergenerational discussion unifies age groups

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Guest Writers

The Fort Collins Senior Center is buzzing with anticipation for the morning's event at 9 a.m. on a Saturday, but not with the crowd you'd expect. 17-year-old Delaney McNally rushes over to sign in the day's participants, while 82-year-old Myles Crowley organizes agendas. The event is meant to be a conversation between high-school students and senior citizens.

Put on by Intergenerational Connect, an organization dedicated to easing conflict and creating a dialogue between Gen-Z and Baby Boomers, this passion project was fueled by McNally, a junior at Loveland High School. She thought of the idea of creating a bond between generations after she felt a strain in her own relationship with her senior grandfather.

When all of her cousins were on their phones, and her grandpa wanted them to put down their phones and talk to him, McNally came up with the concept of "Crate and Connect," which encourages people who want to enjoy one another's presence to put their phones in a crate in order to be free from distractions.

McNally's grandfather passed away a few months ago, but his idea of real human connection between generations lives on through the events her organization puts on.

On this day, a Senior Center room has been filled with about 15 tables, each one intended to seat roughly three seniors, three students and one facilitator, who prompts the conversation.

"It's unfortunately very rare especially for these two generations to have an opportunity to connect and talk to each other," Kaylin Clements, a facilitator, said. "I think that was the purpose of today, to give that opportunity for interaction."

Crowley sees it as a way to "build bridges" in today's world of constant conflict and competition, and create an environment of support and kindness. Although conflict may not be completely resolved, the increasing compassion on both sides brings them closer to reaching common ground.

This event may have one overall purpose, but individuals' purposes for attending vary. For some, such as FCHS senior Deniss Atondo Avalos, the conversation is only an opportunity for extra credit, but for others, there is more at hand.

John and Donnice Cohenour attended the Intergenerational Dialogue in order to connect with their grandchildren,

"It's unfortunately very rare, especially for these two generations, to have an opportunity to connect and talk to each other." — Facilitator Kaylin Clements

who don't seem to ever want to be around them. John said they simply have different interests, and that while his grandkids (aged 10 and 11) care more about pop culture, John and Donnice are more concerned about politics and real world problems. While it appears to most of the younger generation that small talk is the easiest way of getting through a conversation with older generation, it is clear John and Donnice want a deeper, more real connection with their grandkids.

"There is always gonna be differences based on your individual personality," facilitator Emily Myler said.

The event aims to highlight such differences, so Gen Z and Baby Boomers can create a mutual understanding and encourage more conversations.

As today's discussion started, it was clear some of the participants were slightly uncomfortable, as the facilitator began to open a variety of topics, including core values, frustrations, and conflict in our lives. Maddie, a 14-year-old freshman at PHS, squirms in her chair as 79-year-old Marlys McGrath urges her to talk louder, but it doesn't take long

for the conversation to find common ground. Soon the awkward air at the table was lifted and replaced with laughter and understanding.

Maddie seems surprised as McGrath describes what she had to go through just to be taken seriously at her workplace as a woman in the '70s.

"I was doing things no other woman was doing at the time, and now you can," McGrath said.

However it's not all smooth.

It appears both sides have some prejudices, and it seems that not all of

these notions are incorrect. As the conversation moves on to generalizations, both generations agree most assumptions were based on some truth, but also concluded that they hated to be labeled.

The goal is to come to such understandings. "I don't think it's all about disagreement," McNally said. "I think it's a lot about disconnection."

The disconnect can come from simple changes in culture over time.

"The world is different is different now than it was before," Atondo Avalos said. "We go through different experiences."

What started out as more of a forced, prompted conversation, ultimately led to finding common ground and talking about personal experiences to get a glimpse of both sides of a generational conflict.

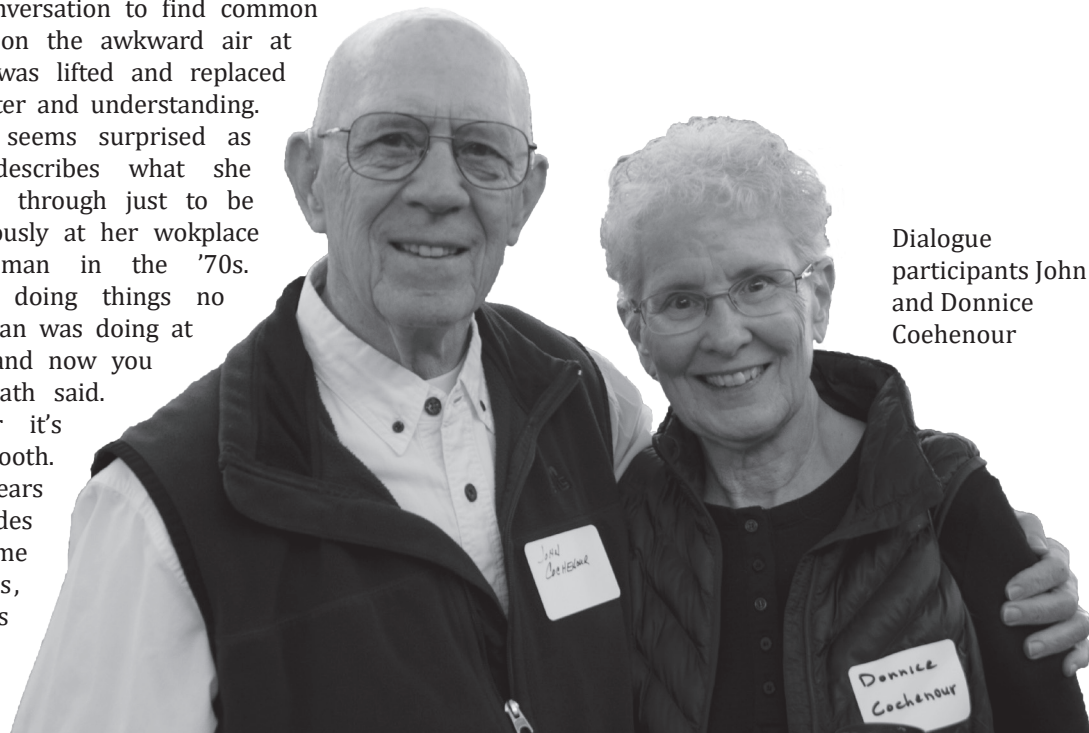
"If you really love someone, you can change or try to understand them," Atondo Avalos said.

Ultimately, the goal of the facilitators at this event is encouraging people to come together.

"What we really want people to do," Myler said, "is kind of build a shared understanding based on talking about your own personal experiences and listening to other people's personal experiences."

The effort put in by facilitators and participants will be carried on by others in future events.

"My hope is that it builds a lot of connections," McNally explained. "And that everyone gets out of their comfort zones and is able to meet new people and get new perspectives."



Dialogue participants John and Donnice Cohenour

