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## Breaking down solitudes

by Madalina Hubert

For five weeks in the fall and three weeks in the spring, students from Kidston Elementary Public School in Vernon, British Columbia move into a retirement residence. Through the Meadows School Project, their lessons unfold at the Coldstream Retirement Residence, a local seniors' assisted living centre.

"The project was conceived as a means to re-connect youth and seniors in a way that would break down stereotypical thinking, and build empathy and understanding," says local teacher Sharon MacKenzie. She founded the intergenerational immersion program in 2000.

MacKenzie noticed that students developed a stronger work ethic and sense of belonging to a greater group, with some considering careers in the caring professions. The seniors also felt significant improvements in their health and attitudes. Some women cancelled doctor appointments for hair appointments to look good for their young friends, MacKenzie says.

"The project helps shrink the generation gap between elementary students and seniors in the Greater Vernon area," says Walt Duncan, District 42, Vancouver Mainland, who served with MacKenzie on the board of the Allan Brooks Nature Centre in Vernon and visited her class several times.

Lucy McCormick, an RTO/ERO member, was a direct beneficiary of the project when she lived at the retirement residence before she passed away two years ago.



PHOTO COURTESY SHARON MACKENZIE

### Banjo buddies at the Coldstream Retirement Residence in Vernon, B.C.

With the help of Buddy Crawford, a retired teacher from Ontario, MacKenzie has established the i2i Intergenerational Society promoting intergenerational learning opportunities and has devised a toolkit, released in March 2008, to help educators develop similar projects.

MacKenzie and Crawford are now working on bringing this project to Ontario and are looking to RTO/ERO members to help.

Visit [www.intergenerational.ca](http://www.intergenerational.ca) for more information.