



C0066

Creative Pathways to Healthy Aging: Seniors and Youth Engage

Summary

- Research shows that social isolation in seniors contributes to worsening health, such as mental distress, depression, anxiety, and increased pain.
- Saint John's low-income neighborhoods are home to over 400 seniors who live in subsidized housing and almost 4,000 children who live in poverty. This project connected seniors with students from the low socioeconomic areas, to reduce loneliness, increase positive self-regard, and improve well-being in seniors.
- Expressive arts programs were offered for seniors and students in Saint John's low-income, priority neighborhoods: North End and Waterloo Village. Activities in the program were chosen by the four program facilitators, and included fairytale charades, puppets and card making, and song writing.
- 18 seniors and 40 students participated in the program. Data was only measured on the seniors involved. Students were not included in the evaluation due to Covid-19 restrictions and school closures.

HSPP Focus Area

Improving social built environments to foster healthy aging

Project Start & End Date

March 2020 to March 2023

Organization/Agency

Go ahead seniors and InterAction School of the Arts

Location

Greater Saint John

Principal Investigator(s)

[Diane O'Connor](#) and [Judy Murphy](#)

Indicator	Impact / Outcome / Result	Quote
Sense of belonging and Health barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior's level of engagement in the program showed their enjoyment of the program, and their enjoyment in the interaction with the students. Project learning (or themes identified) included: participation in collaboration between seniors and students, interest and engagement in this collaboration, unprompted initiative to collaborate, learning new information from collaboration, difficulties with collaboration, and absence of collaboration. • Seniors reported a desire to continue with the program beyond the end date. They reported missing the connection with the youth during school closures. • Surveys measuring satisfaction with life, loneliness, depression, and anxiety were administered to seniors. Low sample sizes and results of the analysis revealed no statistically significant changes to these indicators. 	<p>"One day due to weather and Covid-19 restrictions, the activities took place with the seniors inside on chairs facing a row of windows and youth outside. When it was time to go, one boy said he felt very sad at having to leave the seniors. As he was about to leave, he placed his hands on the window. The senior, inside, placed her hands on the window to match his. Then everyone joined in, seniors and youth, connected together with their hands."</p>

Methods and Comparison

Surveys measuring levels of thriving and mental health were administered to seniors before and after the program. Qualitative and quantitative surveys were used to measure senior responses to the activities. The activity program facilitators also completed qualitative guided journals after each activity to track the response from the students and seniors to the activities.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

- Seniors enjoyed the connection with the youth and missed the students the days they could not attend the activities.
- Seniors ranked their enjoyment of the program activities as high. The percentage of seniors who indicated enjoying the activities ranged from 41 to 88%, with a median of 74.4% enjoyment.
- Both the students and seniors looked forward to these programs.
- As a result of not being prepared for COVID 19 and school closures, this project recommends preparing for future programs to mitigate the challenges related future critical events. No recommendations were provided by this team.
- Overall, quantitative results did not show statistically significant change in participant levels of life satisfaction, loneliness, anxiety, or depression. Data collection from seniors and students was hampered due to school closures, and Covid-19 restrictions.
- The project team hypothesises that without the program, the levels of loneliness, depression, and life satisfaction would have been lower, due to the effects of Covid on the senior population such as isolation.

Recommendations

Community support from both the seniors' communities and the school liaisons were strong in this project, indicating a motivation from Saint John community members to support this project again the future.

Next Steps

The project lost its host, Go ahead seniors part way through the project which impacted sustainability planning. InterAction School of the Arts became a partner midway through. This project is not interested in pursuing funding opportunities for sustainability or scale up.

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