

Social Connectedness for Seniors

The Connectors Project

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Background

30% of Canadian seniors are at risk of becoming socially isolated.

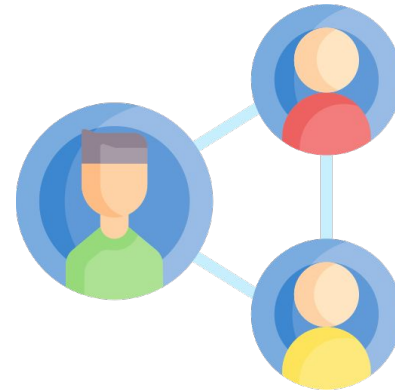
More likely to be in the **Top 5%** of healthcare service users.

Premature mortality

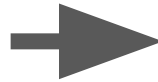
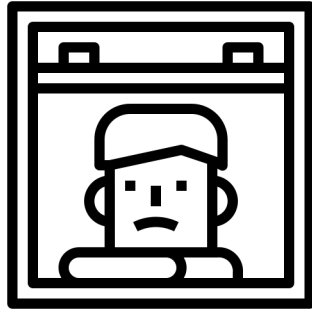
Limited mobility

Increased loneliness

There is a need for social connection.



Social Connectedness and Community Programs



Senior experiences of social isolation are exacerbated during COVID-19

- Physical distancing measures
- Technology Literacy

Community centres are well positioned to increase social connectedness

- Resources
- Relationships

Research Questions

What does social connectedness mean to seniors?

How have seniors experienced
social connectedness?

How can these experiences be incorporated into
community programs?

Methodology

1

What does social connectedness mean to seniors?

2

How have seniors experienced social connectedness?

3

How can these experiences be incorporated into community programs?

Focus Groups

- ESS seniors
- General seniors
- ESS Staff



Brainstorming Sessions

- Focus group participants
- ESS Director and Manager



5 Design Principles

Design principles are high-level considerations that you can refer to when creating social connection programming.

Social connection programming...

1

Creates a comfortable environment for sharing.

2

Cultivates familiarity through consistency.

3

Gives space for conversation.

4

Results in a sense of belonging.

5

Is accessible.



Create a comfortable environment

- Connect with others as an outlet for sharing feelings
- Cannot share feelings without first feeling comfortable
- Who else is in the group? What role do they play in providing comfort?
- Group size



It takes somebody who knows how to handle people. It's not just being a leader, but you have to know how to make everybody comfortable.





Cultivate familiarity through consistency

- Consistency → same people, same day, same time, regular basis
- Encourages familiarity with others
- Helps to initiate connection



“Every Friday night, a good friend of mine calls and we talk for half an hour, 45 minutes, which is great.”





Give space for conversation

- Dedicate time and space for conversation
- Increased interactivity and number of opportunities for connection
- Crucial for online programs



Since COVID, we all have a hour and a half coffee meeting, a half hour after we have our class...we get a chance to talk about all sorts of things.. it's more of a family than it ever used to be.





Result in a sense of belonging

- Sense of belonging means seniors feel valued and appreciated
- Providing and receiving support can contribute to those feelings



“I got the most beautiful card from a cousin of mine...It was so full of understanding and caring ... it just picked me right up. She really cared and she understood.”





Is accessible

- Many barriers exist which impede participation
 - Technology
 - Physical limitations
 - Language barriers



...it does leave people out. In my writing group. We had several people who once we switched to zoom, left, because they weren't comfortable with it.



Implementation Tips for Social Programming

Implementation tips are some tangible ways that you can **directly apply** the design principles to community programming.

1. Recognize and be respectful of the *varying levels of participation*
2. Ensure that *newcomers feel welcome*.
3. Increase accessibility through *hybrid models* of programming.
4. *Clearly communicate* program offerings and schedules.
5. Include *existing social networks* in programming.

Implementation Tip #1



Recognize and be respectful of the varying levels of participation.

- *Insight:* Active participation is not the only form of participation
- Facilitators should consider individual participant's comfort levels
 - For example - refrain for calling on participants that are visibly uncomfortable speaking in front of the group
- Programming should allow for participants to engage however they are comfortable

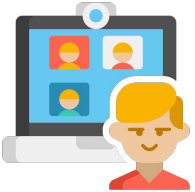
Implementation Tip #2



Ensure that newcomers feel welcome.

- Facilitators should continuously make an effort to integrate newcomers
- Create a welcoming environment
 - For example - have name tags for participants to easily address one another by their preferred name (both virtually and in-person!)

Implementation Tip #3



Increase accessibility through hybrid models of programming

- Allows for participants to engage in the way that is most accessible to them
- Allows for consistency in programming, even if accessibility needs change

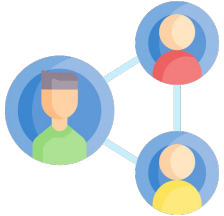
Implementation Tip #4



Clearly communicate program offerings and schedules

- Some participants expressed a lack of knowledge regarding existing programs, and how to learn about what is offered
- Consider different avenues of promotion and communication
- Consistent scheduling can help participants to join on regularly and facilitates the design principle of consistency

Implementation Tip #5



Include existing social networks in programming.

- Some seniors have existing social networks composed of their friends, family and communities
- Can leverage these relationships to help maintain social connection and increase organization reach in the community

How can this help community centres?

These design principles and practical tips can offer...

A framework for **evaluation**:

Does my organization's current programming facilitate social connection?

A starting point for **ideation**:

What can my organization do in the future to better facilitate social connection?

Tangible action items ready for **implementation**:

What can my organization do today to better facilitate social connection?

Thank you!