

Session Identifier: A.5
Session Theme: Social Isolation and Engagement
Thursday, June 16, 2016
10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Seniors and Isolation: Exploring the Facts

Brenda MacKinnon, Community Links; Mary MacLellan, Community Links

Pictou County service and volunteer providers are seeing a tsunami of senior's isolation and loneliness issues. Our health authority lacks supportive resources for seniors; the quality of life of our seniors is deteriorating. We need to determine the root causes of seniors isolation and loneliness so that we can support them. Purpose: We must remove the stigma that surrounds ageism. We must create opportunities for older adults. Using the World Café facilitation technique and hosting consultations we explored: What resources are currently available for seniors? How can seniors have purpose driven lives? What transition are we in? What are the opportunities? More than 135 people engaged in conversation. Project Deliverables included an analysis of materials, stories gathered in the consultations, as well as information gathered from key informants. Report focuses on recommendations and potential next steps. Recommendations to consider were: 1. Apply an asset-based approach to increase the mental, physical and emotional wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, to enable individuals and communities to take more control of their own emotional, physical and mental health and safety. 2. Incorporate a population health lens when providing and developing future programs and services for seniors. 3. Develop and communicate clear messaging about seniors, their individual and collective strengths and challenges, as they relate to creating a healthy and safe community. 4. Advocate to all levels of government, private sector and others regarding strengths and challenges faced by seniors in rural communities, and share positive impacts made by seniors in their communities.

Seniors' Centres as Third Places that Facilitate Aging 'in Place'

Dr. Karen Gallant, Dalhousie University; Dr. Susan Hutchinson, Dalhousie University

'Aging in place' suggests that there are places that not only accommodate changes in older people's physical or cognitive abilities and social networks but also hold important meanings for people as they age. Given that the home may be a restrictive or limiting (role-less) environment for some older adults, seniors' centres may be important venues for older adults to age in place. Guided by the concept of third places (Oldenburg, 1999), a community-based participatory research study involving observations and audio-recordings of team meetings with seven centre members examined the features of the physical and social environment (e.g., the interactions and actions that occur) within a small seniors' centre in a mid-sized Canadian city, and the meanings associated with them, that facilitate or undermine aging in place. Findings suggest that as a third place—a familiar and welcoming place that is a consistent feature of seniors' daily lives—seniors' centres can facilitate aging in place by creating opportunities for people to experience self-determination and control by providing inclusive opportunities for meaningful engagement, for sociability, and for being a contributing community member. Even when older adults experience residential relocation, continued participation at a senior centre may provide a sense

of familiarity and continuity. Public spaces that permit (and encourage) shared use in a diversity of activities by a range of different people are those that enable people to feel ‘at place.’

Caring Canines: Dogs and Dementia

Dr. Ardra Cole, Mount Saint Vincent University

I draw on my program of research on caregiving and Alzheimer’s disease to provide a description and analysis of the role of dogs in the lives of seniors, both ill and well. Over several years of gathering stories of caregiving as well as photos and artifacts that symbolized what care looked like for family caregivers, one unanticipated finding was the large number of stories, photos, and symbols that included and referenced the family dog as part of the care experience. Whether by providing companionship or psychological or physical security; creating opportunities for physical and social interaction; or by restoring a sense of agency through basic care-related tasks, dogs are an important source of comfort, reassurance and pleasure in the lives of seniors, both ill and well. In the proposed session, I present a selection of images, narratives and audio excerpts that describe the varied roles that dogs play in the caregiving experience. I follow this with an analysis framed by Kitwood’s (1994) theory of person-centred care with its philosophical roots in Buber’s (1937) idea of I-Thou relationships. I specifically focus on Kitwood’s concept of “timalation”—a form of interaction that is based on direct sensual engagement without the intervention of intellectual understanding, and that provides contact, reassurance, and pleasure while making very few demands. This concept has particular relevance for the role of dogs in caregiving.