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# Embracing the views of those who matter the most: an approach towards a more sustainable recreational program for older adults

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Embracing the views of those who matter the most: an approach towards a more meaningful and sustainable recreational program for older adults.

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\*This document is my final paper for the Capstone Project, part of the Gerontology Interprofessional Practice Program.

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** With age, older adults may face increasing challenges to community recreational participation. This is usually not for the lack of programming, rather, it may be the result of older adults not finding the programming to be as meaningful. Among other issues, there may be little to no opportunity for self-determination (defined as, having a perceived sense of control over one's environment), which has been shown to be a critical factor for successful aging. Older adults are usually not at the center of the process; programs are instead primarily driven by the needs of the organization. Community recreational facilities, such as senior centers and the YMCA (Y) aiming to build healthy communities, can alter their approach to include older adults in the program development and evaluation process. The present study implemented a community engagement approach to empower older adult participants of the *55+ Day* Program at the Bostwick Y and sought to better understand their perspective of the programming, along with the perspective of the service providers for determination of feasibility. The Y may use this feedback to create a more meaningful and sustainable program going forward.

**Methods:** Since mixed-methods were employed this helped to obtain a well-rounded and accurate perspective of *55+ Day*. This included, conducting questionnaires (n=30) and a focus group (n=12) with the older adult participants, as well as interviews with the facility staff (n=2).

**Results and Discussion:** Although both participants and staff largely appreciated the programming on offer, they also identified improvements that can be made to the program structure, scheduling, and adaptability, to further enhance the experience of *55+ Day* for the participants. Moving forward, the Y, and other community facilities can directly engage both participants and staff in the development of the programming and ensure a more efficient use of time and resources.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Literature Review**

#### **1.1.1 Barriers to Recreational Engagement for Older Adults in the Community**

With age, older adults (OA) may face increasing challenges to community recreational participation (Dattilo et al., 2015; Smith, Carr, Wiseman, McNevin, & Weir, 2012). While the impact of loneliness and social isolation is well documented in the literature (Lorek et al., 2017), OA participants of a qualitative study (whose sample consisted of 34-50 community-dwelling OA aged 60+, recruited from four senior centers within a rural community in the United States, having a high female-male participants ratio) identified other challenges associated with aging, and consequently community participation (Dattilo et al., 2015). These included: challenges with daily functioning; fear of falls/safety concerns; lack of access to transportation and other resources; difficulty managing multiple health conditions/medications, and concerns about how they can adapt to these challenges and maintain participation in the community (Dattilo et al., 2015). OA experiencing these challenges may develop a lack of competence in their ability for participation (Dattilo et al., 2015). When OA do participate in community recreation, they may have little to no opportunity for self-determination, defined as having control over one's environment and being self-directed, which has been shown to be critical to successful aging (Dattilo et al., 2015). This can result in a lack of motivation for participation and/or an inability to derive meaning from the participation (Dattilo et al., 2015).

#### **1.1.2 Role of Community Leisure**

A study by Lachman et al. (2011) found that those OA who believe they have control over their environment seem to have better overall health and well-being (Dattilo et al., 2015; Lorek et al., 2017). As a result, community service providers, such as senior centers and the

YMCA (Y) aiming to build healthy communities, have a role to play in not only fostering this sense of control, but also, building competence for participation, creating opportunities for empowerment, and a perception of social connectedness to ensure OA are able to enjoy the health benefits of meaningful community engagement (YMCAWO, 2012; Dattilo et al., 2015; Lorek et al., 2017).

Leisure services offered in such facilities may benefit OA physical and mental health (since it may provide a meaning and purpose to their lives), and may assist in building a necessary support network, all of which are critical to successful aging (Dattilo et al., 2015; Lorek et al., 2017; Boulton, Horne, & Todd, 2017; Smith et al., 2012). Participants' responses within many of the studies referenced here (which have all been taken from peer-reviewed journals), and elsewhere in the literature serve as evidence for the same (Dattilo et al., 2015; Lorek et al., 2017).

Participants of the study (discussed previously) describe how attending programming in the community contributes to their feelings of connectedness (Dattilo et al., 2015). This is because it enables consistent social interaction with peers, often of the same age, helping them feel part of a collective (Dattilo et al., 2015). As well, being provided the opportunity to choose between different programming and activity schedules serves the need for self-determination (Dattilo et al., 2015). Participants in a follow up study (whose sample consisted of 21-59 community-dwelling OA aged 60+, and included both those who attended senior centers on a regular basis, and those who did not, with a limited male representation) further describe how community leisure can facilitate access to resources, and offer age-appropriate services by incorporating some of the same aspects identified in other studies (Lorek et al., 2017). These include, offering flexibility in scheduling; creating a welcoming and inclusive culture;

facilitating feelings of connectedness; providing opportunities for learning/growth, among others (Lorek et al., 2017). While another study (whose sample consisted of 60 community-dwelling OA, aged 50+ part of organizations in the UK, having little male representation) specifically pertaining to physical activity programming reinforces some of these findings, there is an additional finding of the importance of perceived enjoyment in the programming, since most participants are not active just for the health benefits (Boulton et al., 2017). As well, participants emphasize how important it is that they perceive the programming to be adaptable to their needs, and feel welcomed regardless of their ability, because this builds a sense of competence for participation (Boulton et al., 2017). This may enable them to join a program they would otherwise not join (Boulton et al., 2017). A study (whose sample consisted of 4900 OA aged 60+, who did not perceive any barriers to participation due to health, had an almost equal male-female representation) within the Canadian context synthesizes participation levels and barriers to participation, in regards to leisurely physical activity (Smith et al., 2012). The study reveals a potential disconnect between self-reported health concerns and actual health concerns (Smith et al., 2012).

### **1.1.3 Interpreting the Literature**

It is important to recognize however, that these findings are context dependent. In other words, OA populations are heterogeneous, and what OA want with regards to leisure changes depending on the social circumstances (Dattilo et al., 2015; Lorek et al., 2017; Boulton et al., 2017). Hence, when applying findings from other contexts and sample populations (such as from these studies), one must exercise caution because what may be meaningful to one population of OA may not be meaningful to another (Dattilo et al., 2015; Lorek et al., 2017; Boulton et al., 2017). The results not being generalizable to other populations of OA is a consistently identified

limitation within the literature (Dattilo et al., 2015; Lorek et al., 2017; Boulton et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2012). As a result, researchers and service providers must find what OA want in their particular community, which may be best served by hearing from the OA themselves (Dattilo et al., 2015; Lorek et al., 2017; Boulton et al., 2017).

#### **1.1.4 The Community Engagement Approach**

An approach known as ‘community engagement’ facilitates this process by directly involving those who matter the most in the development, implementation and evaluation of the services (Lorek et al., 2017; Boulton et al., 2017). Participants of a study based on this approach may feel empowered through their engagement in the process (Lorek et al., 2017). This approach can also build trust and mutual respect between community members and service providers (Lorek et al., 2017). Such engagement conveys to community members that they are being heard, and are welcomed in their beliefs/values (Dattilo et al., 2015; Lorek et al., 2017). The benefits of ‘community engagement’ may also extend to the organization because working closely with the target population, and learning about their true needs/interests can mean the organization’s time and resources are used more effectively (Lorek et al., 2017). In other words, such an approach may contribute to greater sustainability of the programming (Lorek et al., 2017).

However, only a limited number of studies have directly involved OA in the development and implementation of recreational services in the community (Boulton et al., 2017). Some of the studies that have are referenced in this paper.

#### **1.2 Study Aim**

This study aims to better understand the perspective of OA participants and staff on *55+ Day* at the Bostwick Y (Bostwick being the placement location). *55+ Day* is a newer initiative of the Y, offering free services to senior participants on Thursdays (YMCAWO, 2019). The Bostwick Y



currently has programming that targets specific known needs of OA, such as mobility/function; fall prevention; cardiovascular fitness; flexibility; mental health, etc (YMCAWO, 2019).

However, there is a lack of knowledge about how effective the Y has been at meeting those needs, and how satisfied OA are with the current programming. There is little to no knowledge of whether the participants desire more programming (and if so, what type), what aspects have been effective/not effective, or if they are fully satisfied with the current state of the programming.

This is because participants at the Y haven't had the opportunity to give formal feedback as yet about *55+ Day*. In other words, direct 'community engagement' has not happened. The Y is not entirely sure of the best or most practical way to engage OA in the process. Furthermore, the continuous growth in numbers on *55+ Day* has prompted the need for greater and more diverse programming tailored to the OA population. Hence, this study aims to investigate the following to assist the Y in meeting the felt needs of the OA participants, and contribute to greater sustainability of *55+ Day*:

- What do 'seniors' (55+) who are currently attending a community-based recreation facility (i.e. the Bostwick Y) want in regards to programming?
- How can the Y best facilitate their engagement, and play a meaningful role in their development?

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Study Approach**

To investigate the aforementioned questions, a mixed-methodology was employed (please refer to the appendices for the question set and transcripts for each phase). One consisting of questionnaires (that included mostly closed ended questions), and a subsequent focus group with OA participants. The sample included members (those participants of *55+ Day* paying a monthly membership fee), and non-members (those who are able to access Bostwick (only) on

55+ *Day* for free). The perspective of staff members was also obtained, mainly for determination of the feasibility of proposed changes.

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Board at Fanshawe College.

\*The following paragraphs will discuss each of the aforementioned phases in detail.

### **2.1.1 Staff Interviews**

This descriptive study began with staff interviews. Staff interviews provided the perspective of the service providers: their views on what is working/what can be improved; the perceived impact on the participants and the branch; what attracts participants the most; the changes that are necessary, with regards to communication with participants, and how feasible their proposed changes are for the facility (Boulton et al., 2017). None of the studies referenced in the literature concern with service providers. However, it has been shown that feasibility considerations may shape programming to a large extent (Boulton et al., 2017). Hence, involving staff members was deemed necessary.

The staff members (n=2; pre-selected by the mentor; one member part of the senior management team, and the other from membership services, who interacts with participants on a regular basis at the front desk) were emailed asking for their interest in participating in the study, and were provided with a brief overview of the study in the email. Consent forms were given to them at the time of the interview and when they consented, a 15-20 minutes interview that was audio recorded followed. The audio recordings were then shared with an IT student for ease of transcription.

\*Interviews were held in a multi-purpose room at Bostwick, one after the other.

The questions for the interviews were created in partnership with the mentor. The same question set was created for both staff members, however, there were slight changes during the

interview (some questions were asked on the spot, whereas some were missed due to time constraints). The aim was to obtain a well-rounded perspective from each of the staff members, so the questions covered their own perspective on the programming, but also their views on how the participants and the branch perceive the programming. Moreover, their ideas on how the Y can stay connected with the participants were also elicited, as was the case with all the participants in the study. The questions were open ended in nature, so there was little to no prompting during the interviews. They were allowed to speak to the question in the manner they wished to.

Following transcription, the interviews were analyzed for patterns/themes in the responses, as well as the individuality present. The views of staff members were also compared to OA participants' views to assess the level of alignment.

### **2.1.2 Participant Questionnaires**

In the same week as the interviews, OA participants from Thursday classes (specifically *Active Agers* and *Chair Yoga*) at the Bostwick Y were invited for the first round of anonymous questionnaires. Anonymous Questionnaires have been shown to be an effective method for eliciting OA participants' opinions, especially for a larger sample (Smith et al., 2012). The anonymity adds to the comfort level, as does the shorter time commitment (Smith et al., 2012). In general, one can get a large amount of information more easily, and in a relatively short time period.

The questions were created in partnership with the mentor, integrating findings from the literature and information desired by the organization. It had various sections: one acquiring information about participants' gender, age, living status, self-reports of health status and life satisfaction (i.e. those factors identified as directly affecting participation in the literature);

second, participants' experiences with 55+ Day; third, participant's views on current programming; fourth, their views on potential programming, and finally their experiences with giving feedback in the past/their interest in a focus group, or future opportunities to give feedback to the Y (Dattilo et al., 2015; Lorek et al., 2017; Boulton et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2012 & YMCAWO, 2019). The questionnaire took about 15-20 minutes to complete, and consisted of 24 items, and a consent form. In total, there were three rounds of questionnaire administration (on each subsequent Thursday).

\*Three rounds were deemed necessary to achieve maximum coverage/diversity, and meet the proposed target of 30 participants.

The researcher made an announcement to the classes one week prior to, and on administration day to ensure participants were made aware of the opportunity. Participants either filled the questionnaires at the time of administration or brought them home, and were to eventually drop them off at the specified location.

\*Questionnaires from only 30 participants were included in the analysis. The actual number of participants who filled out the questionnaire was 45. Due to time constraints (some participants not dropping off the questionnaire in the pre-determined time window), and some participants not signing the consent form, only 30 were deemed valid, and thus included in the analysis.

The sample consisted of 30 participants; half in the age group of 65-74, one third in the 55-64, and the rest in the 75-84 age group. Gender wise, there were 28 females, and 2 males in the sample. It was determined that over half of the sample lived with a partner or with a group, and close to one third lived alone. On average, the self-reported health and life satisfaction of the

sample was 'very good' to 'excellent' (a mean of 7.8 for health; 7.9 for life satisfaction on a scale of 0-10). The sample included 24 non-members and 6 members.

The data from 30 questionnaires was inputted in an Excel Spreadsheet. This included participants' side comments that were transcribed verbatim. The data was organized by questions.

A mode (the most popular choice) was determined for each question manually, while the mean was determined for the scaled questions (self-reports of health and life satisfaction). Since there was an expectation that the member questionnaires may skew the results slightly, member and non-member responses were separated during this analysis. Nevertheless, a 'total sample' mode and mean was also calculated for each question to determine the characteristics of the overall sample.

\*Initially, the data was also analyzed for assessing the interest level for the focus group, to assist with planning for the same.

### **2.1.3 Participant Focus Group**

\*In the following week, participants were invited for a focus group discussion around their 55+ *Day* experience.

Focus groups have been the preferred method in the literature, hence they were also trialed for this study (Dattilo et al., 2015; Lorek et al., 2017). Focus groups are said to provide richer and more accurate information, in comparison to questionnaires and interviews (Lorek et al., 2017). This is often because they are done in a group setting. Participants feel more comfortable opening up in such a setting, and may be more likely to provide honest opinions (Lorek et al., 2017). As well, they are able to articulate their experiences better because they are able to learn from, and build off of others' experiences/thoughts and feelings (Lorek et al., 2017).

The focus group (audio recorded and sent for transcription after) included 12 participants, representing both non-members (n=11) and members (n=1). There were 4 males and 8 females at the table, with one third being in the age group of 65-74, one third in the 55-64, and the rest were in the 75-84 range.

A structure to the focus group, consisting of a set of questions and discussion prompts, as well as instructions was created in partnership with the mentor, integrating guidelines from the literature. The questions were similar to the ones asked to the staff for determination of the alignment of views. Again, questions were open ended for the most part, and there was little prompting, so as to the direction the participants could go with their response. Participants were also allowed to discuss amongst each other when they felt necessary.

The focus group took place at Bostwick in the community kitchen on Thursday. A consent form was handed out, and those who indicated they wanted to participate participated in a 30 minute focus group (not all planned questions were asked due to time constraints and size of the group on the day), led by the researcher and co-facilitated in part by the mentor.

An announcement was made to the classes one week prior to, and on the day of the focus group, identical to the process for the questionnaires. However, for the focus group, posters were also used to maximize participant reach. Initially, the focus group was not advertised well, which resulted in the focus group being pushed by a week.

Note: the participants could do either the questionnaire or the focus group or both.

\*Participants were numbered. They were also transcribed the same way to separate views.

The transcription was analyzed for patterns and themes, and alignment with staff responses from the interviews.

**3. Key Findings**

**3.1 OA Participants’ Routines (Questionnaires)**

<b>On avg, how often do you attend the Y on 55+ Day in a month?</b>	Total sample (n=30)	Non-members (n=24)	Members (n=6)
Every Thursday	~80%	~79%	~83%
3 times	~13%	~17%	—
Not very often	~8%	~4%	~17%

Table 1. \*none of the participants reported attending only twice a month.

<b>What activities do you engage in on the day?</b>	Total sample (n=30)	Non-members (n=24)	Members (n=6)
Playing sports	~7%	~8%	—
Swimming	~30%	~20%	~67%
Using the wellness area	~23%	~30%	—
Walking on the track	~70%	~80%	~33%
Attending fitness classes (includes Aquafit; open only for members currently)	~83%	~83%	~83%

Table 2. \*In terms of the specifics of the classes, **50-60% of the total sample attends the two most popular classes**, *Chair Yoga* (most popular in the sample) and *Active Agers*. Included in this number are two members. The attendance in these classes far outnumbers other classes.

**3.2 Key Themes: What Matters Most?**

\*The following is a summary of the study participants’ views on the perceived impact, things that can be improved, and their proposed way to stay connected.

Phase	Views of the Study Participants
<p>Staff Interviews (n=2)</p>	<p><b><u>Perceived Impact</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful at this branch.</li> <li>• Shows we care about the aging community- OA feel they are important and included.</li> <li>• Great opportunity to connect socially for the participants, and the staff with community members who are not necessarily Y members. Word of mouth is strong.</li> <li>• Participants are enjoying it – coming to a beautiful facility at no cost, they like their instructors/coaches, the classes (<i>Active Agers and Chair Yoga</i>- getting huge numbers; instructor great advocate for <i>55+ Day</i>).</li> <li>• Seems to build competence to engage in other activities, especially the case with <i>Chair Yoga</i>.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>“We are seeing a lot of people who are repeats because of those things”</i></b> (Staff 1).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>55+ Day</i> does not require commitment, which participants like.</li> <li>• They like the variety on offer (can walk, use the wellness area, attend fitness classes, go for a coffee, etc).</li> </ul> <p>*The free day can negatively impact attitudes of Y members.</p> <p><b><i>“...I can’t see any other downside to wanting to be here for free.”</i></b> (Staff 1)</p> <p><b><i>“One of the things that I think is awesome about it is that it encourages older people to continue to maintain a fitness level that they’re comfortable with”</i></b> (Staff 2).</p> <p><b><i>“...in a chair you’re not as inhibited so then they’re willing to try it which means that then they’ll gain strength and confidence to do other things”</i></b> (Staff 2).</p>



	<p><i>“The walking track, the same, I think it’s really appealed to them because it’s that thing that they can all do and there’s no barriers to it...”</i> (Staff 2).</p> <p><i>“They like that we have something that is continuous. They keep waiting for us to tell them that it’s going to be over”</i> (Staff 2).</p> <p><b><u>Proposed Improvements</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adding more senior friendly classes; offering them at more times during the day to cut the numbers, and accommodate those who are unable to make it Thursday mornings.</li> <li>• Greater access to the pool (a special Aquafit for non-members; not offered currently for safety reasons and lack of staff)</li> <li>• Scheduling: slightly later classes (most people are early risers however, according to the first staff member), and extending the free hours for the pool/pickle ball on the day.</li> </ul> <p><i>“...the feedback is sometimes that ‘you know what, we’d like to use those other things later in the day when it’s a little bit more feasible, a little bit more realistic”</i> (Staff 2).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and Wellness Workshops like safe winter walking and falls prevention would be very important- have been tried but it’s not been done as deliberately, or at the right time in the day</li> <li>• A seniors’ day twice a week, or a special seniors’ membership rate.</li> </ul> <p>*Proposed changes feasible but concerns about giving away everything on Thursdays. They want nonmembers to eventually buy membership, and participate other days of the week.</p> <p><b><u>Staying Connected</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A desire is there to stay connected, however, both staff members hesitant about putting it out to the OA.</li> </ul>
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	<p><i>“I get really nervous when we put it out to the participants because then you might get 50 different things that they want and you choose one or two things and everybody feels like ‘you asked and you didn’t do what I wanted’. I do hesitate on that a bit but if there’s an overwhelming idea of something they would like to see, I think it’s great to hear their feedback for sure”</i> (Staff 1).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to figure out a way to give them a voice- currently no formal mechanism for checking in with participants about the programs.</li> </ul> <p><i>“The good and bad of this program is, yes, we’ve said to them ‘yes, you’re still an important part of our community’. But that bad is that we haven’t given that chance for them to then be the masters of what that’s going to look like”</i> (Staff 2).</p> <p><i>“...they want to know they’re heard the same as everybody else”</i> (Staff 2).</p> <p><i>“Right now, the only place that they think that they’re heard is at the reception desk if they complain and that’s a shame”</i> (Staff 2).</p> <p><i>“And we do try, I send emails all the time to senior management saying ‘this is what people have shared with me’ but where it goes beyond that, I don’t know”</i> (Staff 2).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys; suggestion box (more appropriate for the older adult demographic), followed by a town hall/focus group with the management; committee of OA to drive the program.</li> </ul> <p>Staff 1 to the researcher at the end of the interview: <i>“You’re hearing something I don’t hear every day.”</i></p>
<p>Participant Questionnaires (n=30)</p>	<p><b><u>Perceived Impact</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ~70% of the sample reported that their overall physical activity level increased slightly due to 55+ Day, while ~15-20% felt it increased to a large amount or remained the same.</li> <li>• Health wise, there were similar results with over ~50% of the sample reporting their health improved slightly through the</li> </ul>

	<p>program, and ~20-30% saying it improved to a large extent or remained the same.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ~90% of the sample agreed that the program was effective for OA, and a little under reported it to be effective for their own needs.</li> <li>• ~93% of the sample agreed that <i>55+ Day</i> is time worth spent.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Proposed Improvements</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For scheduling, a lesser percentage of the sample (~80%) agreed that it was suitable for their needs. A nonmember wrote that they would like to see the day extended.</li> <li>• ~93% of the sample report agreement with offering classes targeted to specific health conditions; half say they would benefit, and the rest say they wouldn't or not yet.</li> </ul> <p>*Wide range of responses, in regards to health conditions, but the top four choices were: arthritis, weight loss, general health and wellness workshops, and falls prevention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many write on the side that they would buy full membership if there were more senior friendly classes (osteofit being the most popular comment) through the week, and if it was more affordable.</li> <li>• Also, there were comments about the pool/aquafit in general, as well as aspects of the pool like the water temperature.</li> </ul> <p>*Some members express disapproval of the free services on offer to the nonmembers, and that it gets busy with their presence.</p> <p><b><u>Staying Connected</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ~75% of the sample would like to give feedback through surveys, while the rest are evenly split between focus groups and speaking to instructors at the classes.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the time, ~60% of the sample expressed interest in participating in the focus group, and this also included members.</li> </ul>
<p>Participant Focus Group (n=12)</p>	<p><b><u>Perceived Impact</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The classes; approach of the instructor- participants feel welcomed to participate regardless of ability; intensity/content of the classes, the facility as a whole, and the timing of the classes greatly appreciated by most. As well, connecting with other participants over a coffee after is appreciated.</li> <li>• Contributes to better health for OA and also has social benefits</li> </ul> <p><i>“I think there are a lot of us who really want to be worked very hard...”</i> (Participant #7).</p> <p><i>“...I do the active agers, which is great, it keeps you moving, keeps you going, good for the brain, good for the balance, good for getting everything moving, she’s very funny...”</i> (Participant #6).</p> <p><i>“To me, it’s free, you don’t have that much to say”</i> (Participant #6).</p> <p><b><u>Proposed Improvements</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few more options- more classes and times during the week (another free day perhaps); maintain the philosophy of the current instructor of <i>Active Agers</i>.</li> <li>• Different intensity fitness classes to cut numbers and accommodate the oldest old (85+) or those who require adaptations in activities (those undergoing rehab or living with a disability).</li> </ul> <p><i>...”there are so many people it’s a little hard to get into arm swinging or leg movements”</i> (Participant #8).</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearer communication about the services on the day, especially for the pool</li> <li>• Aspects of the pool- some disapproval about the temperature, the shower spaces, etc.</li> <li>• Make memberships more affordable</li> <li>• Individual fees for things like pickleball to be available at different times during the day</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Staying Connected</u></b></p> <p><i>“...think that questionnaires not be discrete answers that we check the box. If open ended, you’re going to get the true feelings of the people that are participants...and a very succinct way of answering”</i> (Participant #7).</p> <p><i>“I don’t like lining up at the desk to ask questions and I don’t even know where the suggestion box is. I don’t really know how you’re going to get my feedback”</i> (Participant #5).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys, suggestion box, in-person opportunities to give feedback preferred.</li> </ul>
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Table 3. Emerging themes

**4. Discussion**

**4.1 Interpretation of Study Findings**

**4.1.1 Perceived Impact**

Both the staff and participants largely appreciate *55+ Day*, and perceive it to be an effective service for the OA demographic.

The staff believe the offering of this program conveys to the OA community that they are cared for, and are as important for a facility like the Y, as the younger community. This is echoed by the participants themselves who are very appreciative of the service. In the long run, making participants feel that they are truly cared for can help build a relationship of trust and respect

between the participants and the organization, which is important to the sustainability of the program, as identified in the literature (Lorek et al. 2017).

Both the participants and staff also identified health and social benefits of such a program, including a necessary feeling of connectedness, and opportunities to build a support network. This can be critical for especially those living alone in the community. This was also reflected in the literature as one of the main perceived benefits of such a program. The current study brought about an additional finding of the staff also perceiving a social benefit of such a program, since it was identified that they are able to connect with diverse members from the community who aren't necessarily Y members.

Participants through the questionnaires indicate that their overall physical activity levels and health have improved in general through their participation in this program. Although this measure may not give an indication of the actual impact (since it is self-reporting), how participants feel about something can often influence the reality to a large extent. This perception speaks to the effectiveness of *55+ Day*, and is an indication that the Y may be successfully working towards its goal of building a healthy community through this program.

As well, the welcoming nature of the instructors is one of the primary reasons many of the participants are repeats. Especially important is the sense of competence that this type of an environment provides, as described by both the staff and participants. Participants emphasized that the instructor for *Active Agers* in particular pitches the class to all levels of abilities, which means everyone feels welcomed, regardless of their ability. This was identified by the participants in some of the studies in the literature as well because this approach of the instructors can make them join a class they otherwise wouldn't (Boulton et al., 2017).

However, participants did identify the need to have the option to choose a lower or higher intensity class to cut the numbers in the classes, and achieve more needs-appropriate programming. This is important to consider for sustainability, because offering different levels can build self-efficacy in participants, which can be critical to them spending more time at the Y in the long run, as well as in how meaningful their experience of *55+ Day* turns out to be. It is also an important factor to consider in attracting more participants to the program.

The most interesting finding is that participants aren't just here because of the health benefits (something that was echoed in the literature as well; enjoyment/feeling connected just as important), or that it's a free program (although one participant did claim, "*I wouldn't be here if it wasn't free.*") It is a combination of the aspects discussed above, and the sheer variety of activities on offer in the facility that pull them to attend every Thursday. This is again important when considering the sustainability of the program.

#### **4.1.2 Proposed Improvements**

Some of the major improvements identified by both participants and staff include, more flexible scheduling (especially with regards to the pool and Pickle ball), having more to choose from in general (time wise, and activity wise during the week), expanding the philosophy of the current offerings to the new additions, and clearer communication on part of the staff.

Both the desire for flexibility in scheduling, and having more options in general, reflects the diverse needs of OA. Many wish to have more flexibility as they age, and some may have other commitments during the times the classes are offered (the young old in particular may have other commitments). On the other hand, as this study found, there are others who prefer the current schedule, and the early classes. It can be difficult therefore to balance the needs of this demographic.

Participants also feel there is a need for programming to be more adaptable to the diverse needs of the demographic. Participants identified a need for leveled programming (as discussed previously), that allows participants to choose between a basic, higher and lower level. This would also serve to make classes less busy, and the experience more meaningful. Also, making shower spaces for the pool more conducive to OA, in regards to the physical space and the temperature would serve to make the experience more meaningful for the OA.

There is also a consensus (among both staff and participants) for having more senior friendly activities/classes. The Y does have a variety of things participants can do in general on the day, however, more specific programming for seniors is called for. Specifically, as one participant expressed, and was echoed by other participants in the focus group, adding fitness classes that carry the same philosophy/approach of the current classes, but have a different fitness focus would be a big pull factor.

The demand for another free day is common as well among participants, as is the demand for a seniors' membership rate to make activities/classes during the rest of week more affordable. There is a concern however among the management that adding more classes on *55+ Day* may mean participants don't feel as inclined to come to the Y on the other days, in other words, they may not buy memberships. There is an additional concern for participants' safety due to the lack of staff, especially when it comes to opening up the Aquafit for nonmembers.

Another important aspect to consider is the perspective of the members, the ones paying a membership fee to attend *55+ Day*. They may perceive the free service to be a disadvantage to themselves, as evident from some of the comments on the questionnaires. Clearer communication with the members, and a strategy in place to accommodate a large number of people will be important to maintain their participation on *55+ Day*. Clearer and more consistent



communication about the services (what services and times are free on Thursdays for instance) in general would be important because some of the participants in the focus group had identified this was a major issue. Inconsistent communication from staff caused great inconvenience to the participants, and they felt discouraged, in regards to coming back to the facility.

#### **4.1.3 Staying Connected**

In general, many of the study participants have identified the need for the OA participants to have a say in *55+ Day* programming.

Staff are understandably more hesitant to involve OA participants, since there is great diversity within this demographic, in regards to interests, preferences, and needs. They also have to work within the budgetary and resource constraints of the Y, and participants may be disappointed if their views are asked for, but little subsequent change is made.

Both staff identified ways the Y can stay connected. Administering questionnaires or having a suggestion box was one of the suggestions, and so was a coffee chat/town hall with the management to get a better idea of what participants are thinking, and for the participants to achieve a better understanding of the organization's operations.

Participants largely preferred having open ended questionnaires, and speaking to management. They also identified in the focus group how important it is that they feel connected to the person they are speaking to, so many of them would prefer to give feedback in-person or in a focus group directly to the management.

Although staff are hesitant about directly involving OA, the literature shows that 'community engagement' can lead to collaborative solutions, and greater sustainability of the programming, since the true needs are made known through this process. Conducting the focus

group brought about the finding that the effect is mutual; both parties are able to clarify their views with each other.

#### **4.2 Recommendations for the Facility**

Considering the perspective obtained in this study, and the findings within the literature, listed are some recommendations that may allow the organization to make the experience more meaningful for OA participants (while still working within the budgetary/resource constraints of the facility), and ensure sustainability of the program:

\*Some of these recommendations may be more realistic for the Y to put into place in the long term, and some, they have already been in talks about.

##### **To continue building a sense of competence for participation:**

\*Appropriate intensity/rigour in the fitness classes seems to be crucial to OA having a meaningful experience at Bostwick. Many of the participants identified this to be important, as did the samples from the literature. The recommendation therefore is as follows:

- ✓ Incorporate leveled classes. Begin with 'a' class that is opened up to 2 intensity levels that are offered at the same time (Bostwick does have space to accommodate more classes during the morning hours), and assess the effectiveness of the change by asking participants on a monthly basis. *Active Agers* and *Chair Yoga* may benefit the most from this change as identified by the participants, since these are the busiest classes (it would cut their numbers). The *Active Agers* is a level 2 class, whereas *Chair Yoga* is a lower level class than the regular Yoga class offered on Monday, which means either of these would benefit from a lower, and higher intensity option respectively. This may assist in offering more needs appropriate programming, and give confidence to older age groups and individuals with diverse abilities to participate.

- ✓ Training volunteers to assist with lower level classes may be a more feasible approach than assigning them to certified instructors. Volunteers often supervise the existing classes already, so they could be trained to lead a class.

**Adding more variety to the programming (both in terms of content and scheduling) to**

ensure continued participation:

\*A separate Aquafit for nonmembers, or *55+ Day* members is being implemented already, since there was an overall consensus about this, and the change was deemed feasible.

\*Concern about “...*giving everything away on Thursdays*” to nonmembers is an important one to keep in mind.

- ✓ There seems to be an overall consensus that more classes would be preferred. However, further assessment is needed as to what new programming is desired. A larger number of participants could be asked what they desire, before taking next steps in this area, since this study had a relatively small sample size. Although, this study provided information about some of participants’ desired qualities within the classes, little information was obtained about the desired content (although there is a general idea from the data collection about what health conditions to target within the classes). To ensure effective use of time and resources, more information is therefore needed.
- ✓ When the needs are known, classes that have been tried at other branches of the Y may be trialed at Bostwick. Something that has been tested may be easier to put into place, administer, and there would also be greater knowledge about the outcomes of such a class. Osteofit is an example of such a program. Nevertheless, regular evaluation of the effectiveness of these changes would be important.

- ✓ Further assessment is also needed before making scheduling changes (offering classes a little later in the day; extending the day- currently free only until 2pm, and offering more free times during the day/week) because although there are some participants who feel the activities/classes are held too early, many feel this is not a big problem, and instead, prefer the early hours. However, the sample size of this study was relatively small to truly determine if there is a change needed. A more representative sample is required to make decisions.

**Towards sustainability:**

- ✓ Management can make a plan for the sustainability of the program, if it is not in place already.
- ✓ It is encouraged that the plan include regular ‘community engagement,’ and greater coordination among staff members at the facility (since the personnel at the front desk often hear from OA about their experiences, and pass these messages onto the management team, but the feedback is not always incorporated by the management team). The management team is encouraged to make note of this feedback and consider incorporating it into the team meetings. This can help the management stay connected with OA participants, and reduce the need to have frequent time consuming focus groups.
- ✓ The most appropriate way forward may be to stay connected with OA through open ended questionnaires/a focus group or coffee chat semi-annually, and trialing a suggestion box in the near future at some of the classes to accompany the feedback given at the front desk or to the instructors. For the focus group, all the relevant staff members are encouraged to attend, along with the interested participants to allow for a rich discussion, and clarification of positions. Positions in this case, refer to each party’s view

on not just *55+ Day*, but also the Y as an association, and the constraints that are present when designing programs. Such a discussion can build an understanding among participants about what the Y does, and can lend to the sustainability of the program. These discussions may help bring about collaborative solutions as well. The focus group that was done for this study provided a similar opportunity for the mentor to converse with the participants, and the outcome was an extremely rich discussion. It was an opportunity that was greatly appreciated by both participants and the mentor.

- ✓ Clearer and more consistent communication about the day is also necessary. Staff messages about rules and regulations must be closely monitored to ensure consistency and avoidance of misinformation. Often misinformation can lead to participants feeling frustrated.

#### 4.3 Study Limitations

- **Sample:** Sample size (relatively small for the questionnaires), low member/non-member participant ratio, low male/female ratio similar to the literature, and inability to achieve saturation. The sample in general was not as representative as it perhaps could have been, since participants were recruited from specific classes. There was sampling bias, since certain participants like the staff were handpicked.
- **Instrumentation:** Questionnaires, focus group and interview questions were not part of a validated tool, neither were they piloted with a small number of OA before full administration. Some questions may not have been as clear or well understood. The procedures for the interviews (including specific questions) were not as standardized, and the focus group lacked a more skilled facilitator. Although efforts were made to incorporate the literature available on specific questions to ask OA of a recreational

facility in a questionnaire, there was limited applicability, primarily because of the highly specific context of *55+ Day*.

- **Self reporting** of participants throughout the study meant that there was very little objective data that was obtained. Self reporting, especially in questionnaires can mean the accuracy of the data is to an extent questionable, and consequently the ability to draw conclusions from it.
- **Generalizability:** This is a limitation similarly identified in many of the studies in the literature. It is an inevitable limitation, since OA populations are extremely heterogeneous, and applying the same findings to another context is rarely practical.
- **Time:** The data collection was done in less than in a month at placement. There were also time constraints within the research phases, such as for staff interviews and focus groups, which had to be within the time limit stated on the consent forms. A smaller sample was obtained for questionnaires, primarily because those questionnaires returned after the pre-determined time window could not be included.

#### **4.4 Directions for future research**

Investigating the views of a more representative and a larger sample would provide a more accurate perspective of *55+ Day*. Participants from other areas of the facility for instance, can be involved in the study, such as those from Pickle Ball. Instructors in particular can be interviewed, since they work very closely with the participants. Higher level management such as regional managers can also be involved to get an even broader perspective on the feasibility of proposed changes.

Relevant staff can be involved in the development of questions for the focus group or the questionnaires, since they may have a better idea of what matters most to participants. For the focus group in particular, a more skilled facilitator may bring about a more focused discussion.

A better understanding of what a majority of the participants want in regards to the desired activities/classes is warranted. Investigating if there are differences in the interests/needs of the male and female participants would be appropriate as well.

A future study can also be done in multiple iterative phases. Multiple focus groups can be conducted with different sets of participants (perhaps from different branches), and then themes/recommendations consolidated with a similar group further down the line, as is done in some of the studies in the literature. This would give a much broader perspective, and allow participants the time to come up with solid recommendations.

A future study can also evaluate how effective the recommendations of the current study have been towards making *55+ Day* more sustainable, and a more satisfactory program for the participants.

## **5. Conclusion**

The current study provides a firsthand perspective of the experience of OA participants, as well as that of the service providers of a community recreational facility. Getting the perspective of both parties can be a research approach that can be applied to any community organization with a similar structure as the Y, since it can provide a well-rounded perspective of a program, in order to make more evidence-informed decisions about programming, and/or begin to get a sense of the sustainability of a program. This approach directly involves those who matter the most, which is an approach that can mutually benefit both the service providers and those being served

in the long run. Finally, giving OA a voice in such settings fulfills the need for self-determination to an extent, and can contribute to improving the quality of life of OA in the community.



## 6. References

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## 7. Appendices:

### 7.1 Questions:

#### 55+ Day Feedback Survey

- ✓ By completing this survey, you are helping to improve your experience at the Y on 55+ Day and otherwise. This survey will help the Y understand your views and assist in future program development.
- ✓ **\*\*Your honesty in answering the following is appreciated. If you have any questions while you are going through the survey, please do not hesitate to ask.\*\***

**\*Please place a checkmark unless otherwise indicated.**

#### **Part I: About You**

Your **age (please circle)**: 55-64 65-74 75-84 85+ Prefer not to say

Your **gender (please circle)**: Male Female Other Prefer not to say

#### **Living status:**

- Live alone currently
- Live with a partner/others
- Prefer not to say

On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your overall **health** (1 being “**poor**” and 10 being “**excellent**”? **Please circle.**

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your overall **satisfaction with life** at this time (1 being “**not satisfied**” and 10 being “**fully satisfied**”? Consider the level of support and meaning in your life. **Please circle.**

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

**Part II: Your 55+ Day (Thursday) Experience:**

1) How did you hear about 55+ Day? (**select all that apply**)

- Word of Mouth (From a friend or someone else)
  - At the YMCA
  - Website
  - Social media
  - Other media (**please write the type on the line below**)
  - Via another Community Organization (**please write the name of the organization (s) on the line below**)
- 

2) On average, **how often** do you attend 55+ Day in a month?

- Every Thursday
- 3 times a month
- 2 times a month
- Not very often

3) When you attend 55+ Day, which **activities** are you engaging in? (**select all that apply**)

- Playing Pickleball, basketball and/or other sports
- Swimming
- Using the wellness floor (weights, cardio equipment etc.)
- Walking on the track
- Attending classes (**please write the name of the classes on the line below**) \_\_\_\_\_

- 4) What effect has 55+ Day had on your overall **physical activity levels**? (The activity can be of any intensity, and can include daily activities that you would consider physical activity)
- My overall activity level has **increased slightly** since I have attended 55+ Day
  - My overall activity level has **increased by a large amount** since I have attended 55+ Day
  - My overall activity level has **remained the same** since I have attended 55+ Day
  - My overall activity level has **decreased** since I have attended 55+ Day
- 5) What effect has 55+ Day had on your overall **health** (consider physical, mental and social aspects of your health)?
- My overall health has **improved slightly** since I have attended 55+ Day
  - My overall health has **improved greatly** since I have attended 55+ Day
  - My overall health has **remained the same** since I have attended 55+ Day
  - My overall health has **worsened** since I have attended 55+ Day
- 6) How do you **get to and from the branch** on 55+ Day?
- Bus
  - Drive self or someone else drives me
  - Taxi
  - Para Transit
  - Walk
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part III: Your views on current programming**

**\*For the following statements, please describe your level of agreement with them.**

- 1) The programming (classes and activities) on offer during 55+ Day is suitable for the **senior demographic or population. (please circle)**

Agree                  Disagree                  Neither agree nor disagree

- 2) The programming (classes and activities) is suitable for **my own needs. (please circle)**

Agree                  Disagree                  Neither agree nor disagree

- 3) The **scheduling** for the programming is appropriate to **my needs. (please circle)**

Agree                  Disagree                  Neither agree nor disagree

- 4) **My time** at 55+ Day has been time worth spent. **(please circle)**

Agree                  Disagree                  Neither agree nor disagree

- 5) Has experiencing the YMCA during 55+ Day made you interested in having a **full YMCA membership?**

- Yes  
 No  
 Not sure

**Part IV: Your views on potential programming**

1) Do you think recreational and/or educational classes for those with **specific chronic conditions** would be good to offer?

- Yes
- No

2) What programs do you feel would be of benefit to offer at the YMCA?  
(select all that apply)

- Stroke** Rehabilitation Program
  - Cardiac** Rehabilitation Program
  - Cancer** Rehabilitation Program
  - COPD** Rehabilitation Program
  - Falls** Prevention Program
  - Hypertension** Management Program
  - Arthritis** Management Program
  - Alzheimer's** Management Program
  - Weight Loss** Program
  - General Health/Wellness Educational Seminars and/or Workshops**
  - Intergenerational Programs** (working with kids or youth)
  - Other** (please write what other programs you would be interested in on the line below):
- 

3) **Would you personally benefit** from a recreational/educational program designed for those with chronic diseases?

- Yes
- No

**Part V: Giving Feedback**

**\*For the following statement, please describe your level of agreement.**

- 1) This survey was helpful in giving feedback about my experience. **(please circle)**

Agree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

- 2) Have you given feedback (positive or negative) on programming at the YMCA **in the past?** (through chats with instructors, the management, surveys, or other means). **Please circle. Write how you have given feedback on the line below, if you answered Yes.**

Yes

No

- 
- 3) How would you like to give feedback **in the future**, given the opportunity? **(select all that apply)**

- Surveys like this one
- Chatting with management or instructor
- Social media
- Focus groups or group discussions
- Other **(please write if you would like to give feedback in another way on the line provided)**
- 

Please turn to the next page.

- 4) Would you be interested in participating in a **30-50 minutes focus group discussion at the Bostwick YMCA around the experience of 55+ Day, of being at the Y, and how it can be improved, over the next 2 weeks?**

**The focus group would be held on Thursday here at the branch. (please circle)**

Yes

No

**\*\*If you answered No, you may skip to the end. Thank you.\*\***

- 5) Would you require any **accommodations/supports** to allow full participation in the focus group? **(please circle)**

Yes

No

**Please write what types of supports you would need on the line provided below:**

---

**\*\*Thank you for your time and consideration in completing this survey. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.\*\***

We hope you have a great day ahead. You may hand in the survey to the researcher.



**Questions for staff (interviews):**

- 1. Would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The perspective of the service providers is important. You can answer from your own perspective or from what you have heard from others. It is entirely up to you.**
- 2. Since this interview is primarily about 55+ Day, we would like to know what your general thoughts are about 55+ Day?**

Prompts (for guidance):

**General thoughts:**

- What are your thoughts on 55+ Day and the programming on offer?
  - What impact has it had or what difference has it made for you, the branch and/or the participants?
  - What feedback have you or other staff received in regards to 55+ Day (either in conversations, emails or through other means)?
- 3. Next, we would like to get your views on why participants join 55+ Day and what keeps them coming?**
    - What in your opinion influences participants' decision to join/come to the Y? (can answer in the context of 55+ Day and/or the Y in general)
  - 4. What do you feel matters most to them when they are here. How does the experience of the Y compare to other rec facilities?**
    - What matters most to them when they are here?
  - 5. What may be some reasons why someone would not join/drop out? If you had to give some feedback about 55+ Day what would you say?**
    - What can the branch and/or the association do to improve the 55+ day experience? What seems reasonable- what barriers do you foresee to implementation? What needs improvement in your opinion?
    - What programs have been the most effective for the senior demographic? What types of programs do you feel would be of benefit to offer here at Bostwick (for example

programs targeted to specific chronic conditions or educational/rehab type programs)  
Why?

**6. Regarding next steps for the branch/association:**

- Moving forward, what would be the best way to keep up to date on the needs/interests of the participants? Would getting regular feedback from participants be worthwhile? What would be the best way for participants to give feedback?

**7. Do you have any other comments/thoughts/suggestions that you would like to share?**

## **Focus group questions/structure**

\*Since you all have experienced 55+ Day, I thought it would be best to start by asking you all about **your own experiences with it. What has your experience been like with 55+ Day?** (go around asking each individual)

**Prompts:** (for guided discussion; **check off what is addressed**)

- What made you join in the first place?
- What have you enjoyed the most- What activities or aspects of the programming?
- What do you feel needs improvement- where would you like to see changes happen?

\*Next, let us get a little more specific about our thoughts on 55+ Day. If you could share, **what is it about 55+ Day at the Y that has kept you coming when you could attend other facilities in the community, and what can the management do to enhance your experience- what programs would you like to see?**, (during the week).

**Prompts:** (for guided discussion)

What makes you come to the Y?

- What other similar recreational places/programs do you attend in the community, if any? How does the experience of the Y compare to those?

**What considerations do you make when deciding whether you want to attend a program/activity?**

- What would compel you to spend more time at the Y during the week- what types of programs would you like to see or see more of? (can use the survey question to prompt)

**What barriers or challenges do you experience**, either coming to the Y (transportation, scheduling, health concerns, motivation) or when you are here (fear of injury, length of classes, activity levels, options for programming, culture, etc)?

- What matters most to you when you come to the Y?

**How does your time at the Y influence your life outside/lifestyle/daily activities or does it at all?** (can use survey question to prompt).

\*Some of you had very graciously filled out the survey, and if you did not, that's not a problem, it's one of the reasons why we have chosen to use multiple ways of collecting perspectives. **The Y would like to give you more such opportunities in the future to give feedback on the programs/experience, and shape your experience, they would like to know how best they can do that, and how best they can accommodate all the different interests that are out there. If you have any thoughts on the surveys or group discussions like these or some other method, it would help the Y immensely.** Please raise your hand if you have something to say.

**Prompts:** (for guided discussion)

- **How important are these opportunities for you?**
- **How was your experience of doing the survey?**
- **How was your experience of participating in this focus group?**
- **Anything else you would like to share with the team?**

**Thank you for your time and a rich discussion.**

**Transcript: Interview 1:**

Key: IR = Interviewer

IE = Interviewee

IR: Thank you for your participation in this interview. We're looking for the perspective of the service providers because we believe that service providers are as important as the participants themselves. Yes, we're doing focus groups and surveys with participants but we're also looking to get the perspective of the service provider. You can answer from your perspective or from what you've heard from others, that's entirely up to you. The interview is primarily about 55+ day as you read. So, can we get started?

IE: Yes, for sure.

IR: So, to start off can you tell us a little bit about your role at the Y and how you're connected to 55+ day.

IE: For sure, so my role here is, I'm the manager of adult health and wellness. So, I do all programming for 13+. I shouldn't say 13+ but adults. So, I would make the fitness schedule for group fitness as well as aqua fitness so those classes fall under me. I also program for our spectrum as well, so things like tai chi, line dancing that kind of thing that we offer. I'm in charge of scheduling for all those things.

IR: Thank you. So next, to get your general thoughts about 55+ day and what you think?

IE: I think it's a great service that we provide, I think it's really well utilized here at Bostwick. I've worked at every branch, in London, and I didn't see that at every branch but here we are really highly utilized, So I think it's really successful at this location.

IR: So, what impact do you think it has had, in your opinion, on the participants, the staff or the branch.

IE: For the people that are participating in 55+ day I think they're enjoying it, they're coming back, they're telling their friends. We're seeing all of the program areas grow. For the branch, for our members who are not 55+ members, I see the impact on them because it is so heavily used, they're not as happy about it. So, trying to sell them the benefits of why we are doing that for the members that are our everyday members. For the staff I think it's a great chance to connect with more community members who aren't necessarily our everyday members.

IR: Building off of that, what kind of things have you heard from the participants themselves or the staff?

IE: From the participants themselves, that they're enjoying the programs. I think they want more programming for them but they're enjoying it. That's why they want more. I think that they are liking the fact that they can talk to a coach and learn how to use equipment that they've maybe never used before. They're really enjoying both active agers and the chair yoga. Those classes are seeing huge numbers. So, they're enjoying their time here but of course they want more

IR: So, if you were a participant or part of the demographic, why would you want to join 55+ day or conversely, why would you not?

IE: Well I think it's a great opportunity to get to use beautiful facility at no cost, to get to participate in healthy, active classes. It's also great for social time so I see a lot of people coming in groups. It's actually rare to see them coming on their own, they're usually with at least one or two other people, I think that's really kind of great. Why I wouldn't want to come is maybe because it is really busy so I would be turned off by walking up to studio and seeing 45 people in it. So, I wouldn't want to participate in that. But that would be the only downside to it, I can't see any other downside to wanting to be here for free.

IR: What programs would you like to have if you were a participant?

IE: If I were a participant, I think, probably, I would love the active agers but I would like to see another one so that I could cut the numbers down a little bit. Some of the things that I've heard, pickle ball is really, really popular in the morning to extend those hours if I were a participant and I would want access to the pool.

IR: Is that currently not?

IE: They are not allowed to go to aqua fit. They are allowed to go to lane swim until a certain time but then they're not to participate in aqua fit.

IR: Once a participant has joined the program, what do you think would keep them coming on Thursday?

IE: That they're enjoying it. They like their classes and the instructors and that they're getting out with their friends and then they can have a coffee after. So that social side of it. So, I think that, we are seeing a lot of people who are repeats because of those things.

IR: How is the experience of the Y different for seniors who are also attending other or who could attend other community facilities?

IE: Well we're more than just a one-stop-shop, so there's more to do here. So, you could come in for a class but you could also play pickle ball or walk of the track, those kinds of things. So, yes you could pay for a class in spectrum but you're just going likely for that one class and there's not much to keep you engaged there. Where here you can do several different activities.

IR: From the perspective of the branch and the association or one or the other, what do you think they could do to improve the experience?

IE: I think at our location, again, would be adding more classes. I think is the overall consensus that I hear. Active agers is so popular, it is our busiest class in the entire week. So, I think having

more opportunities to attend a class like that would be better and also having access to the pool. Sorry what was the question? I think I got off track.

IR: What can the association or the branch do?

IE: We could offer a 55+ only aqua fit or a second aqua fit as well because the reason we don't open it up to that is basically is for safety. We would have to have so many guards on because there's so many people coming in and we already get about 40 people in those classes anyway. Maybe adding a second aqua fit, something that we would allow them to participate in.

IR: 55+ day currently is until 2:00 p.m., from the morning until 2:00 p.m. Would you think it would be beneficial to extend the hours?

IE: It might be, I think most of the people are really early risers and want to be here first thing in the morning or they're more like the 10-11 crowd. I don't know if we would see a ton of use after the 2:00 p.m. time slot so I don't know how beneficial that would be. The building starts to pick up with younger ages too and when the track gets busy with younger people and kids and that kind of thing. I think that kind of deters that population anyway. So, I don't know if it would benefit us, I don't see that it would have a huge impact.

IR: Do you think these changes are feasible?

IE: Things like adding classes? Totally they are but we would also like to see them participating in more than just Thursdays. So, I think, we're adding some things to encourage more participation throughout the week, trying to not give away everything on just Thursdays.

IR: Talking about the activities and the programs, which ones do you think have been the most effective for the demographic?

IE: Active agers. I'm running two classes and then pickle ball. Active agers is by far, just because the numbers are huge, has been the most effective and people really want it, they also



really love their instructor. She brings with her people from the city and she's been great at recruiting people to come to the class and she's been a really great advocate for 55+ day.

IR: Would it be beneficial to have classes targeted specifically to certain health conditions?

IE: Yeah, I think that would be a nice, like even if we ran workshops, that kind of thing. We have partnered with VON who's here on Thursdays, who are focusing on fall prevention. So, I think that's really great and we would explore that, so far nobody has taken them up on it. It's not until 1:30 in the afternoon and we're not getting any participation yet but I do think that, especially workshops, would be really important.

IR: Moving forward, what would be the best way to keep up with the interest and what the participants want for the Y?

IE: I think, having communication with them, asking them what they would like to see. I get really nervous when we put it out to the participants because then you might get 50 different things that they want and you choose one or two things and everybody feels like 'you asked and you didn't do what I wanted'. I do hesitate on that a bit but if there's an overwhelming idea of something they would like to see, I think it's great to hear their feedback for sure.

IR: What would be the best way to go about that? Surveys or...?

IE: Yeah, I think surveys. They like to be heard so I think surveys are really good. I think that even just mentioning it to them last week they're really keen on that and I've had several people 'where is that going to be at? What time?'. I think they're really keen to give their feedback so I think surveys are a great way to get a hold of them.

IR: That's basically it. Do you have any other thoughts, comments, suggestions for 55+ day?

IE: I don't think so, no. I'll be interested to see what you come up with.

IR: Thank you.

IE: You're hearing something I don't hear.

IR: For sure.

**Transcript: Interview 2:**

Key: IR = Interviewer

IE = Interviewee

IR: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. We're looking for the perspective of the service providers with this interview because we are interviewing participants but we also feel it is valuable that we get the perspective of the organization, the people who are giving the services. So, you can answer any of the questions from your own perspective or from what you've heard from others. To start off, could you tell us a little bit about your role at the Y?

IE: Sure, I'm in membership and sales, I work at the front desk, I actually register people who sign up for the 55+ program. I also deal with any customer concerns that may come up. I get a lot of feedback about different programs including the 55+ program.

IR: If you want to start us off by saying your general thoughts on 55+ Day.

IE: I think it's awesome, and a couple of reasons. One of the things that I think is awesome about it is that it encourages older people to continue to maintain a fitness level that they're comfortable with. I like that it's not a cost because a lot of seniors are on a fixed income and a general membership is too hard for them, it's too expensive or they feel that there's too much pressure because then they'd have to come every day. It's something they look forward to because it's once a week and they know it's the same every week which is really nice. We have some programs that are designed especially for seniors and I think that's a real benefit as well. And finally, I think that it's a good stepping stone for people. So, if they just wanting to try us out, there's no cost involved so all they have to do is 5 minutes of their time to sign up. If they

love it, great, they can do whatever they want. They can come more if they wish too or not and it hasn't cost them anything, which is super.

IR: What difference do you think it has made to the branch or the association as a whole?

IE: I think that it shows that we care for people at whatever their fitness level is and that finances are not a barrier to people accessing fitness. The walking track, the same, because we have that free to the public all the time and it's used quite a bit by seniors. I think it sends a strong message that we really do care about our aging community and that we want them to continue to be strong and vibrant people. The same with our programs that we set up on Thursdays, we want them to be strong and healthy and to be able to maintain the lifestyle they've been accustomed to their whole lives, which is really important.

IR: Based on that, what feedback have you gotten?

IE: A lot of positive feedback. A lot of seniors really like the day. They like that we have something that is continuous. They keep waiting for us to tell them that it's going to be over. I think that they think that it's just a time out period, we're just going to do it for 3 months and then we're going to say that we're not doing it anymore and that hasn't happened so they really like that. It really shows them that we really do care about our entire community not just our younger people or not just people from a financial demographic that would not be within their means. I think that they feel that they're really important and included so I think they really like that. The walking track, the same, I think it's really appealed to them because it's that thing that they can all do and there's no barriers to it, which is really awesome.

IR: How do you think the experience compares to other community recreational facilities?

IE: I don't think it's without its flaws. I think some of the expectations of the program are unrealistic. For example, pickle ball is really popular with seniors, they hold pickle ball from 6-9 in the morning. Well at 9 in the morning some people are just beginning their day and so they're excluded and they feel that and they're upset about that and that's one of the negative messages

that we get. That it's so early in the morning that it's not feasibly possible. Same with the pool that's only open until 8:30 a.m. for them. So, after 8:30 a.m. they can't use the pool, well that's kind of the pits if you're not an early riser or you have to deal with somebody being a caregiver to your loved one so you can leave the house to come to something. I think that those are barriers that they need to address because I think if they offered those a little bit later in the day, I think that that would send a strong message to seniors that we're listening to their concerns and we're responding to them. All of our programs are early in the morning, everything, the active agers program is at 8:45 a.m. I think, chair yoga is at 9 something, that's the latest program we have then the rest of the day they just have the fitness studio and while I appreciate that there are some people that just want to use the fitness studio, the feedback is sometimes that 'you know what, we'd like to use those other things later in the day when it's a little bit more feasible, a little bit more realistic. We are the only place in London that has pickle ball for free at all though, I've researched that. So, there is some that will come even at 6 o'clock in the morning, come and enjoy it.

IR: What do you feel has to be in place for them to continue on once they've joined?

IE: I think that every once and a while we need to do a check in with them and we need to find out what their need are and change accordingly. So, like I said, with those timelines, maybe we need to check in with people and say 'would you be more likely to come to an event if we held it later in the day' and ask them, they want to know they're heard the same as everybody else.

IR: What may be some reasons why someone would not like to try it or would drop out?

IE: One of the reasons would be the pool issue. I know for a little while we didn't offer the pool at all that really ticked people off and we did have some people who said 'I'm not coming anymore'. It's hard to judge at this time of year though because some of them are snow birds so they go south and so some people have literally signed up for Thursdays, said 'I'm going away for a period, when I come back maybe I'll buy a membership for the rest of the week but it doesn't make sense to sink money in and then go away and pay while I'm away'. So, they may come back and buy a full membership. So, we're missing a whole group of people there that

we'll need to check in with in the spring. But I think too that the early hour of everything might be a reason for some people to not come and just a lack of diversity. I think that we need to add some different programs or some other senior friendly programs to just add to what we've already done.

IR: Could you elaborate?

IE: It would have been great to have done a couple of workshops on safe walking in the winter time for seniors. We did have somebody who came out, they set up a booth, they were there for an hour, but they were there between 8 and 9 in the morning and that was it. And if they'd stayed all day or if they'd done it more than once, I think that that would have been a benefit. I think they should do senior's day a couple times a week. They offer a couple of the programs twice a week. Why not let it be a couple times a week that you could come out or the seniors rate would be a good thing too like we do get that question a lot too where people say 'well I can't afford it and even if I came with my paperwork to say I want financial assistance, some are too proud and some just don't even know where to access that paperwork to put that into motion but it is too expensive for them. So those things to be considered perhaps.

IR: Do you see any barriers to making those changes?

IE: The changes that I talked about?

IR: Yeah. Like resources or?

IE: I think that there are certain barriers. I think that we're quick to take in feedback but we're not quick to respond to feedback. In fact, I think that sometimes we are our own worst enemy because we listen to what people have to say but we don't respond to it. In the case of seniors, we don't see everything that they need, we don't walk around during the programs and ask them. We don't take that feedback that I've shared with you and do anything about it. I mean, the program's been running since I started in September, or maybe the end of September beginning of October, I haven't seen any real changes since it started. Even though there's been feedback

the only change was adding the pool in for a couple of hours in the morning, which is kind of the pits and originally the pool was all day long. They could use it from 5:30 in the morning until 2 in the afternoon, the length of the program. So, I think that's been a bit of a disappointment but we'll see what happens.

IR: So, you kind of touched on that but what programs or activities have been the most effective do you think?

IE: So, there's a program in the morning called active agers. I know, just from hearing from people, they love it. Most of it is done in a chair and it really works their core muscles. So, when I promote it to people I say, 'when you fall, falling isn't hard. Getting up is hard. Getting up without strength in your core muscles is incredibly hard. So, if you can build your core muscles, if you ever were to fall in your own home you can at least get yourself up to get to somewhere where you could call for emergency help. But if you don't have that then you're stranded on the floor.' And I've seen that happen I had a friend who fell in the driveway of her condo and literally crawled back to her house with a broken ankle, it took her two hours in the snow and I always think of her and think that if her muscles and her core were stronger she probably would have been able to push herself back up to at least be on her knees to crawl back in. It would have been quicker. She was literally scraping the ground trying to get back in. That one is one that really stands out to me, is really awesome. We started chair yoga in January and it seems to have been really awesome for the same reason because it builds your core strength. And also I think that yoga is a course that people are interested in but they're kind of intimidated by it because they see the stuff on advertisements where its those really advanced moves and you're like 'oh I could never do that' but in a chair you're not as inhibited so then they're willing to try it which means that then they'll gain strength and confidence to do other things. And I think that's one of the benefits of those programs is that hopefully then they'll gain the confidence to do other things. It's just getting started. I think both of those programs are really good.

IR: Last but not least, as you mentioned, it's important to keep up with the needs and interests of the demographic. What would be the best way to do it?

IE: So, there's a couple of ways. I think that we should send something out to those who are signed up for our seniors program and invite them to come to something like this or to come to a coffee chat where we would have the director of education, when I worked in school, and he would sit with his constituents and talk to them about 'what do you need? What do you like? What don't you like?'. We could do the same with our management team where we would have them sit with people and listen to their thoughts and their concerns and get their feedback. And I think seniors really want to be heard, they've never been invited to the table. I even think it would be great to start maybe a committee of them, where they would kind of be the advocates for their demographic within our community and represent different parts of our area. Even if they came from the major apartment buildings or something to start off with just to kind of let them know that their voices are heard. Right now, the only place that they think that they're heard is at the reception desk if they complain and that's a shame. I don't want people to feel that the only time they can talk to us is if they have a complaint about something. I do try to stop people if I see that they've registered, and I know them because I see them pretty much every week. I do try to stop them and say 'hey how's it going? What are you finding...?', I try to kind of check in with them but it needs to be more than just a couple of people at the membership desk and it needs to be more than just in passing as you're heading out the door, I think it needs to be more deliberate. So, I think that setting something like that up would be really good. I'm not wanting to put more work on senior management by any means, but I just think that it's a demographic that really needs to be heard. I think too that they need to feel like they're respected and I think that as they get older, I think that people feel like they've kind of been pushed to the sidelines. So, the good and bad of this program is, yes, we've said to them 'yes, you're still an important part of our community'. But that bad is that we haven't given that chance for them to then be the masters of what that's going to look like. Somehow creating a voice for them would be amazing. A lot of them ask if they can do a suggestion box, too. I'm a little bit afraid of what that might look like but again, we have to look at where people are comfortable and what they're comfortable with. They might not be comfortable with the technological stuff of our generation, so maybe a suggestion box is a good for seniors day at specific seniors' programs where they give a little feedback even if it's a little card where they check off what they like and don't like, just because I think that would meet the demographic and their level of comfort with communicating that information back to us.

IR: One of the concerns about effectively using that feedback and kind of putting it into place is that the demographic is very heterogenous. They're mixed, they have a lot of different interests, needs and that kind of thing and so, how do we go about picking and choosing interests? There is a concern.

IE: Absolutely, I agree. So, I think again, having the dialogue as well. Even if we did do a two-week period or three-week period where we did a suggestion box, took the information from that and tallied it and then did a town hall which was very directional and said 'these are the things that we've heard from people, now let's talk about it. What are your thoughts? Let's elaborate on some of this. Like, ok, we do chair yoga, do you love it? Do you not love it? What do you love about it, or not?'. I think that we could do that in stages and in steps. I think that, unfortunately, we rely way too much on the technology to communicate. So, recognizing that that is a barrier for a lot of them, not all of them, some of them are probably wizards at, I can only imagine them all of Facebook and stuff. However, it would be good to recognize that a lot of them are not comfortable with that too.

IR: Any other thoughts or comments?

IE: Like I said before, I think having the walking track is really communicated to our senior population that we do really care about them. However, that being said also, we started it off as a walking loop, it's now been changed so that people can run on it or people can do whatever on it. So, it's not just for walking which also intimidates seniors a little bit so some of them have said they're heading back to the mall to walk even though it's not as safe a surface and it's not as conducive to our goals because they're afraid of the runners. They're afraid of the kids all over the place. And I get that, like I really understand that but I'm not sure that that concern has been heard more than just at our desk, again. And we do try, I send emails all the time to senior management saying 'this is what people have shared with me' but where it goes beyond that, I don't know. I think that sometimes we're our own worst enemy because we don't listen to that group of people, we don't take their wisdom and use it to the best of our abilities. I still think that if they formed a group people to kind of spearhead what senior's day would look like, it would



be phenomenal. We'd probably have tea parties every week too, I'd be game for that. But I just think that it would just be a little bit more successful than it is now. We just keep working at it.

IR: Thank you.

**Focus Group**

Key: IR = Interviewer

Number = Participant

IR: Hi everyone, thank you for coming in today. Thank you very much for your time, we appreciate your interest in participating in this focus group. This is something we haven't done before, so we'll just try our best. We'll go around one by one, listening to what everyone has to say about a topic. We hope to do a couple of questions so that we get to hear from everyone. So, does anyone have any questions before we get started? One thing, if you could say your number before you speak so we can easily tell who said what, that would be perfect, thank you. So, some ground rules for our discussion today, we would like if only one person spoke at a time. Please feel free to grab paper if you'd like to make note of something and then once we've heard from everyone, we can take up what you have to say. We will not identify each other by names just because of confidentiality, we'll just go with numbers. And you can feel free to say 'pass' or 'come back to me' if you would prefer not to share something at a point in time. So, our first topic is expressing what our opinions are about 55+ day and what your experience has been like. So, if you could start?

1: Classes are great, we've had them for a few months now. I think it's super that the Y is offering this to seniors, Thursdays as good a day as any, I don't mind getting up this early. It would be nice if there were a few more options, different intensity fitness classes would be nice rather than have them all in one. We've been going to other classes after the one hour, so it's nice to have the classes, so one can go from class to class at one's own time.

IR: Could you speak about your own experience what kind of programs and what classes you've been to?

1: Been going to most of the 8:15 a.m. fitness classes, that (the *Active Agers* instructor) teaches and then there's that 3D 30 after and there used to be a weight lifting class after and then there's a cycling class later in the day. We've dabbled with them all but we always take the earlier one.

IR: Anything else? Ok next.

2: I've been going here 3 months. I very much enjoy the cardio class at 8:15 a.m. very professionally administered by (the *Active Agers* instructor). The class is a bit full and perhaps there is a need for additional facilities. I've been asked by somebody in the class to note that there could be a lapse period between courses to allow people to transit from one place to another. As for anything else, it would be nice to have a second free day for seniors because it's very difficult to schedule everything on the one day but apart from that, I'm very appreciative of the free program at the Y and I think it does play a social and benefits for the community and better health for seniors.

3: I agree that it's an awesome idea to provide the 55+ day, I was very surprised when I found that out and quite pleased. Personally, I've been taking advantage of being in the gym and playing pickle ball and also, I'm hoping to start taking advantage of the yoga classes.

They did change it early in October with 55 and up. I think it was the third week they switched it from 8:30 to 2:00. But it had been advertised until 2 initially.

IR: If you could just speak up, sorry.

8: First, I agree with the gentleman that we should have the free program that they offer on Thursday to seniors. My husband and I both belong to another senior program where they have exercise and a full package. But this is in our neighbourhood and over the period of time we've watched it be built and we're certainly interested. We would probably be more involved in some of the other things but I think the pricing they've set for two is a lot more than what we pay as a couple to go to the other seniors programs and I understand that this isn't over all where I go as well is a facility that also takes care of children and other particular needs besides seniors. I'd like to, as well, see another free day or at least another optional time that might be available on that free day on the Thursday because other's have indicated the room and I think because it's a free program is it gets quite condensed and there are so many people it's a little hard to get into arm swinging or leg movements. But other than that, I appreciate it very much that they made it available to us.

When we came for the orientation, I asked about the aqua fit on the senior day, as to whether or not it was included into the free portions of the other things that were there. That if I wanted to take part in the aqua fit on the Thursday when I came, at 9:30 a.m., that I could buy a pass for 10 classes for \$45, there's not time limit on it, you can go any time that they have aqua fit and use it. But the lady that I had that did the tour, made it very clear that swimming on the Thursday was only from 5 to 8:30 a.m., then the other class, the 50 class for the exercise, as far as others staying, I don't know beyond that but I see what you're saying about it would be nice if we could swim afterwards, if it was included into the free section. But our lady that did our tour, clearly indicated that was not an option and was not included. If we were only looking for the three-set part on the Thursday we could go other days as well. Like a friend of mine that comes to this class indicated today that the activity I like is on Tuesday because they also offer it but you have to be a member and she said, what she does the cardio thing but she buys the flex pass which ends up being \$4 a class apparently for the cardio class. I will look into it because I didn't know they had another flex pass that you could buy besides the full pass. But the lady we had made it very clear.

I just know that when we swam and we came and did the weight room because when we did the weight room, we were told in the orientation to use their equipment. The gentleman upstairs is excellent, he showed us how to use it because where we go now, as seniors they don't have as quite elaborate of the equipment so he was very informative, showed us how to use this stuff and then we did our workout after the swim but we were out by 8:30, as soon as the others came in for the aqua fit.

We've had it since the fall.

9: I do appreciate the opportunity to come here, this is a wonderful facility. We have participated in the pool; we've gone to the pool and it feels wonderful. We haven't done any of the active fit or anything like that. I've watched it, it looks like a great program as well. The program that we've done, just upstairs, the lady comes on and she hits all the muscles that you're supposed to get moving. But it would be nice to do that a little bit more often. But for the most part I'm very happy with what we've got and I'd like to see more, I know that's funding.

10: I'm participating in pickle ball in the mornings and the fitness level class upstairs. I started here because it's so close and I love these facilities, they're great. A couple of comments, one is,

the fitness class that you offer up there is a level 2 and the city also offers a level 1, which is a little less intense and I think that would be something that some of the people in the class would probably prefer as opposed to the level 2. That would be one of my comments. The other one is, the pickle ball, I just love pickle ball and I play with the city program as well on Tuesdays and Thursdays and it would be good if this could be opened up for people even if they have to pay a nominal fee to play pickle ball in these facilities at different times as opposed to getting up at 6 o'clock- in the morning and playing until 9. So those are a couple of things that I would like to add.

7: I'm here at the active fit exercise on Thursday morning. Not because it's free but because it's (the *Active Agers* instructor), because I am involved in the cardio fit 2 programs for spectrum and at a certain point there was only the (the *Active Agers* instructor) in cardio fit 2. I see now that they are trying to add several more active fit 2 courses. The genius of the (the *Active Agers* instructor) is that she pitches it to all levels. It's not just 2, she'll say 'if you're level one do this' and to a lot of our delight, she'll say 'if you're level 3 do this'. So, I think there are a lot of us who really want to be worked very hard and (the *Active Agers* instructor) a delightful drill sergeant and we really do leave the classroom wet so we really have a good workout. I'm sure the other programs are wonderful too, the pickle ball, and I've heard that some of the other classes are rigorous as well but I think that there is a market for people who are 65+ like myself, who really want to be stretched to the limit and can be stretched to the limit. So, we're delighted that (the *Active Agers* instructor) here and if you wanted to expand someone who has the same philosophy like (the *Active Agers* instructor) in the other part of this exercise programs, I think we'd all come in a hurry and we'd even pay for it.

4: So, I am a member, but I thought that the 55+ would be amazing and I did put it out to my friends. I love doing aqua fit and the rest of it or just getting in the pool and running and doing different things. I've had one knee replaced and the other one is happening next month. I didn't know there were different levels to what (the *Active Agers* instructor) does. What (the *Active Agers* instructor) does is amazing and I just don't have time like the rest of you guys. My friends first were coming to the pool and then we found out that they could only swim until 8:30 a.m. and I thought 'wow'. So, we go in the pool first and then we go up to the class, which we like to do the class and then do the pool. But I've heard from different individuals in the pool, and also

questioned a few of the lifeguards, that individuals do stay for the aqua fit afterwards but I'd like a really clear answer on that because they say 'we're not going to question you if you go into the pool for the aqua fit afterwards' but if you're a rule follower, you feel badly if you're there when you know you've been told at the front desk that you can only swim until 8:30 a.m. whereas it was first advertised that everything for the seniors would happen until 2 in the afternoon. So, I felt very badly that my friends that came had to be in the pool before that and then we'd go to the exercise classes, if they wanted the pool experience. So, it would be nice to have that answered because you find that there are so many of the individuals in the aqua fit class but others feeling 'should I go in, should I not go in'. Again, having one knee replaced and another and a hip coming up, I'm interested to find out what the level 1 is all about whether it's a little bit more rehab. So again, those levels sound amazing, to which would be offered.

5: I agree, I'm not clear on the pool rules either. I do belong to another facility but this is a good time for me to come and I really enjoy (the *Active Agers* instructor) workout. Like you said, you can go at whatever level you like, but it is crowded. So, it would be nice if they could do 2 classes at the same level, well maybe even one that's a lower level and one that's a higher level at the same time but in a different room because it is getting crowded. And I really like (the *Active Agers* instructor), she's an excellent instructor. And I use the walking track.

6: I go with my friend and she has a membership and I don't. So I just come Thursday mornings when she comes for the free swim early and I do agree that it would be nice if they went back to their original agreement of allowing us to stay in the water because I don't like to be told 'this is the rule but you can break it' because if you break one rule then... So, I would like it if they just went back to saying... And if there's too many people in the pool then say there's a cut off time or cut off number for if you're late. But if you're already in the pool it would be nice to stay for the other. And I do the active agers, which is great, it keeps you moving, keeps you going, good for the brain, good for the balance, good for getting everything moving, she's very funny and very good and a lot of varied things for that. So, I just do the water and the active agers. Somebody mentioned about maybe an individual fee for one thing, like say pickle ball, say you paid so much just to do pickle ball rather than join everything just to get to the pickle ball, so that's just another idea.

And the nice thing about that class is that you can do whatever you want. She doesn't center you out if you're not moving as fast as she does. So, it seems to me that a class where you have a basic thing and you can go higher or lower depending on what you want to do. If you advertise, it is going to get bigger and you will eventually have to cut people off or do another class. When we say free, our taxes pay for it so it's nice that we have this day and we really, really appreciate it but I think as seniors we paid taxes long enough that it's nice to get something back for free.

6: I stand to be corrected because I just went along, we thought you could get the free swim. So that makes sense.

11: Also, I really appreciate being able to come here on Thursday morning. It would be nice to have another day as well and again, can't say enough about (the *Active Agers* instructor). I go to her fitness class and she's excellent. I use the walking track, use the pool. One huge complaint I have are the showers, there are no controls for the heat, to put cold or hot for the shower. A friend of mine was almost scalded, she had quite a red mark on her from just the shower. And they're so tiny and no place to put your stuff. I also belong to another club that the showers are amazing. We also use the machines; I find the pool is too cool. Yeah, I know a lot of people like it cool but I find it's too cool so for that reason I probably won't use it. Other than that, I think this is a great facility and thank you very much for having us for 55+.

12: I love coming here, I love the free day. I think that a second or third one would be great and I think the cost in health care, the more active we are, the healthier we can stay and spend less on health care so, you know our government doesn't think that way but I think it could be balanced out and the more programs there is the better. I love going to the (*Active Agers* instructor) class, she's my favorite ever of all the instructors I've had in my life. She is the best. I've gone to the 3D; I like it as well and also the chair yoga but I decided I shouldn't do a week worth of exercise in one day just because it's a free day. The other comment is, I tell everybody I know about this Thursday, most people have not heard that it's free for seniors on Thursdays and I wondered if maybe somehow it could be put out there more so more people know about it. Not that we need more in our class. And if we do go to a level one or if there is a level one added, I would not like to see our level taken away, what we're doing now. But it is a good idea too and there is a lot of

people that are even older than most of us that might be able to come to a level one class that wouldn't want to take part in this one.

10: Could I counter with that? We're a group, a demographic that has benefited tremendously from an expansion of the economy, growing civil benefits and now we have a lot of families that experience precarious employment and aren't going to receive the same sort of benefits that we did. I would rather pay some money for our free Thursday and have that benefit go to young families that are struggling with their finances and perhaps be able to add free programs for kids.

6: And that's not a bad idea, except that both my husband and I are both on fixed income. He was a minister for years and we don't. So, if it weren't free, I wouldn't be coming. So, I think that it's ok sometimes just to realize that when you are seniors you get a few privileges. We've contributed for many, many years. But that doesn't mean we don't look out for those less fortunate. But I don't see that we have to take away one to give to the other. And I don't think that's selfish.

3: You can donate with your cards as soon as you enter or exit, there's a donation spot. You can just swipe it and put 5, 10, 15 so if you want to contribute because you're receiving this for free. If you want to contribute to the people who need an extra hand then that option is available to everybody.

IR: So, I'm just cautioning for time because we've already taken up a half an hour. So, the next 6-7 topics, instead of going around, we're just going to do 2 or 3 minutes on each one. So, try to keep it short and sweet, right to the point and then we can make sure you're out of here by lunch time. Our next topic is, what considerations do you make when deciding whether you want to attend a program or an activity? What matters most to you?

1: Tensing up and getting a good workout.

2: I would echo the same.

3: The most important thing for me and the reason I joined originally is that you have a lane swimming pool that is not kept at the hot tub temperature.

8: Could you say that again?



IR: So, what factors do you consider when deciding whether you want to attend something, a program or an activity. So, what matters most to you in a program or activity?

8: Probably the time, the time the program is run. I prefer to, myself I'm a morning person, so I prefer to do morning programs as opposed to something that's scheduled late in the afternoon.

9: I like the early morning thing too. I've always worked and I was always up early, so that's my time. And then it gives me the rest of the day to do all the other stuff I have to do.

10: For me, it's the location, we live close by so it's easy to get here and also, I attend some of these things here because of the people that are involved. We socialize a lot, we always go for coffee, in fact I always tell them that's the only reason we came.

7: I agree with the first two people. For me it is the instructor and the level of rigor.

4: Location, I'm close enough in the area, Westmount area. I need to be here; I need to continue my physio. The classes do fit my needs.

5: On Thursdays, my club I belong to doesn't really offer the class that I like. I wish this was a little bit later but I can get up. It's ok. And I really like (the *Active Agers* instructor) and in the winter time especially, I like the walking track. I usually walk in the park but in the winter when it's icy I come here.

6: I go because my friend takes me. I like doing it but I'm not a, I mean I do a lot of gardening in the summer so I don't really need the activity but it's nice for the winter months when you're not gardening and I just go for the one day because my friend goes and we support each other.

11: I like the time that it's at. I come for the fitness and the location.

12: For me the time and the instructor.

IR: Great, so our last topic, would be about this feedback opportunity that may be provided and your thoughts on how best feedback can be obtained from participants or how best you'd like to provide feedback about programming.

1: Probably a form, maybe with questions, some open-ended questions. I think that's more time efficient than a focus group.

2: Focus group is fine, I'm not sure I like being recorded I don't think that's something that aids discussion.

3: I prefer to speak to someone in person rather than, for example, a suggestion box or emailing in your complaints. It's nice to have the opportunity to talk to somebody, I find that the staff behind the desk are very open to listening to you when you have something to say or ask.

8: I think, the same as number 3, I prefer to speak to somebody personally rather than questionnaires that are unclear of their purpose. Certainly, that personal contact is a little bit more attractive.

9: I like the personal touch because most people are very connected when they speak. It seems like the younger generation has a problem they like to email you because I'm sitting right beside you, I'm not into that I like to talk to somebody.

10: I think if you want to zero in on the issues you should probably discuss with people who are involved in those programs. Like right now we're talking to people who have been in different aspects of your program but if you like say take the fitness group and get feedback from them, and then take the pickle ball and get feedback from them, you'll zero in on the issues that are most important to them rather than just the general kind of thing.

7: I agree with the first gentleman that it's most time efficient if we manage to do some kind of survey where we can provide feedback instead of all this time in focus group. I also think that questionnaires not be discrete answers that we check the box. If open ended, you're going to get the true feelings of the people that are participants for example in the aqua fit and a very succinct way of answering. I think the open-ended part is very important.\

4: I'm not so apt to come to a thing like this because I have gone to different people to ask about pool timings and things like that. But because the answers were so different.

5: I don't like lining up at the desk to ask questions and I don't even know where the suggestion box is. So, I don't really know how you're going to get my feedback.

6: I didn't know there was a suggestion box and I was going to suggest that there be a suggestion box. But also, face-to-face. I think that the option of a suggestion when you think of it in the change rooms. Or I guess it would have to be out in the open here but it depends where you go. So, somewhere you could have a suggestion box, like with some cards. But also, I agree that talking to people personally is fine, but sometimes you think of something and you want to just write it down. To me, it's free, you don't have that much to say. But I hope that if the Y does read this, they will take into consideration the idea about the showers, like today I forgot my bag with me, so I had to put my glasses in the little shelf and I'm scared my glasses are going to fall off the shelf. So, they were soaking wet of course. So, it would be nice to have something outside, just so it's safer, they're just so different, I've never seen such small showers and then you have to keep pushing the water and you have to push the button. But I know they do that so people don't run the water. Not a big deal.

11: I also like this kind of format but it would be good to have these too because with all this information that we have.

12: I like the personal, face-to-face thing, but I also don't want to stand in line for half an hour to talk to somebody. And I have done that before here. The people there are great, they're amazing back there but sometimes people are there a long time. And the idea of having a suggestion box where, if you think of it, you can write it down and submit it because if I wait until I see them or speak to them sometimes, I forget.

IR: Thank you everyone for sharing, any last thoughts or comments?

No comments were made by the participants.