

Sheridan College

SOURCE: Sheridan Scholarly Output Undergraduate Research Creative Excellence

Centre Publications and Scholarship

Sheridan Centre for Elder Research

1-2009

As Seen Through Their Eyes: The Learning Needs of Ontario Elders

Pat Spadafora

Sheridan College, pat.spadafora@sheridancollege.ca

Follow this and additional works at: http://source.sheridancollege.ca/centres_elder_publ

 Part of the [Geriatrics Commons](#)

SOURCE Citation

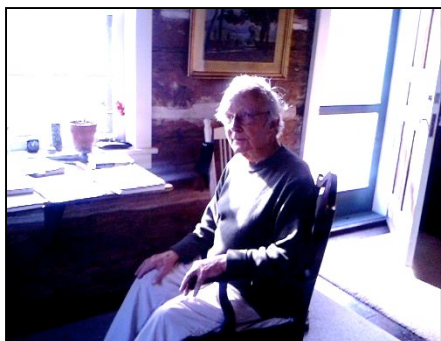
Spadafora, Pat, "As Seen Through Their Eyes: The Learning Needs of Ontario Elders" (2009). *Centre Publications and Scholarship*. Paper 22.

http://source.sheridancollege.ca/centres_elder_publ/22



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Sheridan Centre for Elder Research at SOURCE: Sheridan Scholarly Output Undergraduate Research Creative Excellence. It has been accepted for inclusion in Centre Publications and Scholarship by an authorized administrator of SOURCE: Sheridan Scholarly Output Undergraduate Research Creative Excellence. For more information, please contact source@sheridancollege.ca.



As Seen Through Their Eyes: *The Learning Needs of Ontario Elders*



Pat Spadafora
Director, Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC)
Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning
January 2009



This work was funded by a contribution from the Canadian Council on Learning

All documents produced by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) will be available in both French and English. However, documents produced by external organizations for CCL will be posted on the website only in the language of origin. When a full translation is not available, CCL will ensure that an executive summary is available in the other official language.

The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the authors. The Canadian Council on Learning bears no responsibility for its content.



Acknowledgments

There are many individuals who have contributed to this study. I would first like to recognize the invaluable contributions of older Ontarians. It is your voices that have guided us. Thank you for taking the time to share your wisdom and life experiences with our team.

I also want to acknowledge the many others who generously offered their perspectives to this study. This includes participants in the key informant interviews, those who assisted with developing the inventory of existing learning opportunities and individuals who promoted our study on their web sites and through other means.

In addition, this study would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL). Thank you for your support and for believing in the value of the study.

Finally, I want to thank the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC) team that came together and worked tirelessly on this important initiative. Each of the following individuals played a significant role in this study and I sincerely thank you. The results of this study are richer for your many contributions.

Ann Anas, Researcher

Shirley Barrowclough, Volunteer Researcher

Peter Benne, Volunteer Researcher

Helen Ferguson, Volunteer Researcher

Candace Fochuk-Barey, Researcher

Rebecca Hart, Research Assistant

Rita McPherson, Administrative Support

Trudy Medcalf, Researcher

Daniela Ronca, Student Research Assistant

Eugene Strauss, Volunteer Researcher

Respectfully submitted:

Pat Spadafora

Director, Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC)



Table of Contents	Page
1. Executive Summary	1
2. Background and Literature Review	3
3. Methodology	4
Research Design	4
Listening to the Older Adults	5
i. Questionnaire	5
ii. Focus Groups	6
Available Learning Opportunities	8
i. Inventory of Existing Learning Programs	8
ii. Key Informant Interviews	10
4. Results	11
Listening to the Older Adults	11
What Learning Means to Ontario Seniors	13
What Motivates Ontario Seniors to Learn New Things?	16
What are the Learning Interests of Ontario Seniors?	17
What are the Learning Styles of Ontario Seniors?	17
Barriers to Learning	26
Available Learning Opportunities	42
i. Inventory of Existing Learning Programs	42
ii. Key Informant Interviews	53
5. Common Themes	54
6. Limitations	56
7. Implications/Recommendations for Research, Learning and Policy	57
8. Conclusions	61
9. References	62
Appendices	
APPENDIX A (Questionnaire)	63
A1: Questionnaire – Version A	64
A2a: Questionnaire Promotion Strategies	75
A2a-i: Faith Based Communities	78
A2b: Questionnaire Promotion: Sheridan News Release	80
A2c: Initial Questionnaire Distribution to Organizations	81
A2d: Questionnaire Distribution - Timeline and Sampling Method	84
A3: Questionnaire: Demographic Information	86
A4: Questionnaire: Frequency Results	90
A5: Questionnaire: What does learning mean to you? Quotes by participants	101



APPENDIX B (Focus Groups)	116
B1. Focus Group Demographics	117
B2. Focus Group Questions	118
B3. Recent Learning Opportunities - Responses	119
B4. Available Community Programs - Responses	123
B5. Barriers to Learning – Responses	126
B6. Purpose for Learning – Responses	127
B7. What is Missing in the Community? - Responses	130
B8. Learning Styles - Responses	132
B9. Information Technology - Responses	135
B10. “If you were to advise us ...”	138
B11. Common Themes Among All Focus Groups, Organized by Question	140
APPENDIX C (Inventory)	144
C1. Selected Sites: Tables	145
C2. Telephone Script	147
C3. Inventory: Most Popular Programs	154
C4. Inventory: Sample of Courses/Programs Offered by Agency Type	155
APPENDIX D (Key Informant Interviews)	159
D1. Key Informant Interviews: Criteria for Key Interview Inclusion	160
D2. Key Informant Interviews: Discussion Guide	161
D3. Key Informant Interviews: Interview Sites	163
APPENDIX E: Knowledge Exchange Activities and Dissemination Activities 164	
E1. Presentation: CCL Adult Learning Knowledge Centre (ALKC) National Symposium, Halifax, Nova Scotia, June 11 th , 2007 – PowerPoint Presentation	165
E2. Focal Point on Seniors’ Learning: A Compass to Guide Us, SERC, March 22 nd and 23 rd , 2007 – Roundtable Agenda	171
E3. National CCL Study Meeting, as Proposed in Original Proposal, SERC, June 10 th , 2008 – Worksheet Summary	173
E4. Presentation: International Federation on Aging (IFA) global conference in Montreal, September 6 th , 2008 – PowerPoint Presentation	180
APPENDIX F: Knowledge Exchange ‘Products’: Descriptions	197
F1. Your Health Marketplace	198
F2. Promotional Poster and Book Mark	200
F3. Promotional Brochure Encouraging Use of Technology by Older Persons	200
F4. ‘Result’ Sheets Highlighting Study Results	200



APPENDIX G: Knowledge Exchange ‘Products’	201
G1. Promotional Poster Jpeg Image	202
G2. Promotional Brochure Encouraging Use of Technology by Older Persons	203
G3. ‘Result’ Sheets Highlighting Study Results:	
○ ‘Result’ Sheet #1 - Barriers to Learning for Older Adults	204
○ ‘Result’ Sheet #2 – Older Adults’ Learning Preferences	205
○ ‘Result’ Sheet #3 – Purposes for Learning in Later Life	207
○ ‘Result’ Sheet #4 – Learning Opportunities for Older Adults: What is Missing?	208
○ ‘Result’ Sheet #5 – Recent Learning Opportunities Engaged in by Older Persons	209



1. Executive Summary

This study investigated the learning needs, interests and learning styles of Ontarians 65+ as seen through their eyes. This work was guided by evidence that learning in later life has significant benefits for seniors on their quality of life, which in turn improves health outcomes. Improved health outcomes can lessen the demand that will be placed on an already over-taxed health care system. Given the aging of the Canadian population, understanding their learning needs and preferences is essential to effectively create and maintain programs that support learning in later life. A ‘snapshot’ of learning opportunities available to older adults was developed and analyzed to determine the extent of congruence between learning preferences as expressed by older adults and what, in fact, exists.

Recognizing that Ontario’s seniors have varying degrees of interest in and access to learning opportunities, the researchers explored both informal, community based opportunities as well as those that exist in formal settings such as colleges and universities. Every effort was made to listen to the voices of those who face challenges of sensory, cognitive and/or mobility impairments as well as those individuals living at, or near, the poverty line.

Over two years, researchers collected information through hard copy questionnaires mailed to over 1,000 organizations as well as to individuals across Ontario. In addition, an online version of the questionnaire was posted on the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC) web site (<http://serc.sheridaninstitute.ca>). Data was also collected in focus groups, key informant interviews and through telephone interviews conducted to build an inventory of programs offered to older adults throughout Ontario.

Whether older Ontarians lived in rural or urban environments, northern or southern Ontario, whatever personal challenges they may have encountered, the SERC team was committed to listening to the voices of as many adults 65+ as possible. The results are, in numerous ways, rich beyond our initial expectations.

What did we learn? We learned that the ability and desire to learn does not diminish with age. As one questionnaire respondent wrote, *“It means that I’m never going to stop being curious, that I’m never going to be satisfied until I learn everything there is to know about any topic or subject and that we’re never too old to learn!”* We learned that health challenges don’t necessarily impede an interest in learning. One focus group participant commented that *“My problem is physical especially...I’ve had a stroke too, my voice is gone but I’m still available to learn because I’m still living”*. Study participants emphasized that learning opportunities exist in every day living and not just in formal settings. Informal learning was expressed by one individual as *“Constant communication with other people and reading of newspapers and TV and radio media on current affairs and learning channels.”*

Wherever we went, an intrinsic motivation for lifelong learning was validated. Despite this interest in lifelong learning, we discovered that there are very real barriers to participation faced by many older Ontarians. The built environment, especially transportation, posed barriers for some. For others, there were health challenges faced by both participants and their families that impeded



opportunities to learn. We learned that, in an increasingly technological society, there are still too many older persons who are at risk of being marginalized by technology.

We also learned that there are many exemplary programs being offered throughout Ontario and a genuine commitment to responding to the learning needs and interests of older persons. That good will, and the fact that 73.1% of the questionnaire respondents reported total agreement with the statement that they considered themselves to be 'life long learners', provides a solid foundation from which to build and, especially, to reach out to older Ontarians whom we didn't reach through this study.

A primary limitation of this study was that, in spite of our best efforts, our sample was not as representative as we would have liked. However, this only encourages the research team to take what we have learned and to seek alternate ways to hear the voices of those older Ontarians not captured by this study. In addition to learning more about elders in Ontario, the data collection tools we developed and what we have learned have tremendous implications for conducting further Pan Canadian research.

To sum up the words of many of our respondents, if we truly want to know what older Ontarians want and need to learn, all we have to do is ask!



2. Background and Literature Review

Population aging is a defining characteristic of our time, one often described as an “age wave,” “age quake”¹ or a “silver tsunami”². There are currently an estimated 605 million older adults (60 years and over) worldwide. That number is expected to rise to about 1.2 billion in 2025 and 2 billion in 2050. The impact of that growth for Canada can be viewed in the three population pyramids (1994, 2004 and 2005) presented in Appendix 1. In Ontario specifically, by 2026, the number of adults over the age of 65 is expected to nearly double (Statistics Canada, 2006).

This population shift presents a significant challenge to our health care system, as health care needs naturally increase with age. Therefore, efforts to support healthy aging will be of the utmost importance to both alleviate the burden of increased demand on the health care system, and to improve the quality of life of seniors in Canada.

Opportunities for continued learning in later life are one way to both improve quality of life and, consequently, health status for seniors. Learning in general has beneficial effects on an increased feeling of self-reliance (Ardelt, 2000; Glendenning, 1997) and the ability to cope with daily challenges (Walker, 1998). Continued learning is also perceived by seniors to be a hallmark of successful aging (Duay & Bryan, 2006), which indicates that simply participating in learning activities affords seniors the self-perception of healthy aging. Specific learning opportunities also have positive effects for seniors. For example, Internet training for older adults has been shown to benefit self-reported levels of depression, life satisfaction, and feelings of self-control (Shapira et al., 2007). Even very brief educational programs have significant effects on self-reports of depression, mental fitness (e.g. memory, creativity, optimism), and self-esteem (Cusack et al., 2003). Such improvements in perceptions of self-efficacy and general well-being are tightly tied with actual health outcomes for seniors, such as the number of doctor’s visits, reported falls, and physiological measures of health (e.g. Cohen, et al., 2006; Umstattd et al., 2007). We can, therefore, predict that improved access to learning opportunities for seniors will have benefits for both quality of life and likely lessen the impending demand upon our health care system.

Despite this support for the importance of continued learning in later life, there has been very little research to date that has explored the learning experiences and needs of older adults in Canada. Work by Hori and Cusack (2006) began to explore the learning needs of Canadians by asking seniors to choose the types of learning activities they were interested in from a predetermined list. Their results indicate that Canadian seniors were most interested in volunteering activities, physical fitness, and communicating with other seniors. However, the selection of interests from a list places obvious limitations on the types of responses that participants in the study could give, and leaves open the question of whether this work truly captures the preferred learning opportunities and topics that older Canadians prefer. Further, as their study focused solely on the use of senior centers as a source of learning opportunities, Hori and Cusack’s analysis of the preferred format of opportunities for learning are similarly limited. Our study was designed to fill the gaps in our understanding of the learning needs and experiences of older adults, and to create a

¹ A term coined by Julia Alvarez, former alternate delegate at the United Nations from the Dominican Republic

² Identified in the Pew Internet Project’s 2001 “Wired Seniors” report.



practical set of recommendations for promoting learning in later life in Canada. We addressed these questions using Ontarians as a model for a national study.

The four primary purposes of this study were to:

1. Identify the learning needs, interests and learning styles of Ontarians 65+.
2. Examine psychosocial factors that inhibit and/or facilitate learning opportunities.
3. Prepare an inventory of a sample of both informal and formal learning opportunities and to evaluate same.
4. Develop provincial recommendations for responding to the learning needs of Ontarians 65+ with suggestions for national scalability.

3. Methodology

Research Design

Although the original intent was to focus on the learning needs, interests and learning styles of adults 60+, the research team made an early decision to modify the target group age to 65+. This study was launched prior to the abolition of mandatory retirement age and, at the time, 65 was interpreted to be consistent with many people's understanding about 'traditional' retirement age.

When making decisions about methodologies used in this study, the overarching commitment of the research team was to reach as many older Ontarians as possible. Three primary methods of data collection were designed to collect both the perspectives of older adults themselves and service deliverers with decision-making authority. A mixed methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures was employed. Data collection tools included a questionnaire, focus groups and key informant interviews. The protocol for each of these tools was designed and pilot tested by the SERC research team. In addition, an inventory of existing learning opportunities for older Ontarians was conducted to assess the congruence between what older adults said they want and need and what currently exists.

It is important to highlight that the research team recognized that not all learning takes place in formal settings and that not all older Ontarians gather at senior specific sites. Throughout the study, we attempted to model an expansive view of learning and to reflect that in our data collection. For example, when distributing the questionnaire and gathering information for the inventory, not only did we include senior specific sites but also mall walking programs and faith based communities. Similarly, when identifying potential participants for the key informant interviews, we included television and magazines (print media) as important sources of older adult learning.

In terms of methodology, we would also like to draw attention to the inclusion of retirement residences and long-term care homes in each component of data collection. Although the data were not analysed separately for these individuals, it was felt to be important to include them. Too often seniors living in

“Learning contributes to my health. To keep on learning means you are involved in living and are still capable. Perhaps it makes you an interesting person to be around”

Respondent ID # 292



retirement residences and care facilities are forgotten when we conceptualize ‘learning’ opportunities.

Their inclusion in this study underscores our commitment to ensuring that appropriate, accessible learning opportunities are available for adults 65+ regardless of where they live or their stage in life’s journey. What follows, then, is a description of each data collection method used in this study.

Listening to the Older Adults

i. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed by the SERC research team in collaboration with four volunteer elder co-researchers. The questions were designed to capture not only what learning means to older adults in Ontario, but also their motivation for learning, their learning preferences and learning styles as well as the barriers they were experiencing to learning new information. Questions about formal and informal learning experiences and other specific learning contexts were also included. We added questions about quality of life and perceptions of health so that we could examine any links between these two variables and the learning experience. In addition, we asked about computer use to get some sense of the familiarity older adults in Ontario have with this technology.

Prior to distribution, the questionnaire was pilot tested with a representative sample of adults 65+ for clarification of meaning and language and revised accordingly. Four different versions of the questionnaire were produced by reordering the questions to address issues of primacy (the tendency for some people to answer the first choice they read) and recency (the tendency for others to respond to the last choice they read). Version A of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A1.

Sampling Methods:

Mixed purposeful sampling techniques were employed to achieve maximum variation within the sample of Ontarians 65+ (see Creswell, 1998). While SERC purposefully targeted seniors’ related organizations, opportunistic sampling, convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods³ were used in an effort to collect a representative sample. An introductory cover letter for both online and hard copy versions of the questionnaire informed potential participants that the research team would be pleased to mail out additional questionnaires to friends or family members who met the age criteria (for a detailed account of sampling methodology see appendices A2a and A2b).

³ See <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/tutorial/Mugo/tutorial.htm>



Questionnaire Promotion and Distribution:

In an effort to reach all seniors across the province, the following four strategies were used to promote and distribute the questionnaire:

- Media releases and public service announcements through print and broadcast in both major market and community media across Ontario.
- Web-based promotional initiatives
- Public relations and outreach activities
- Direct mailing of the questionnaire and promotional flyers

Details of each strategy can be found in Appendix A2a.

ii. Focus Groups

The focus group results provided us with a rich tapestry of perspectives reflecting personal experiences. It was through the focus groups that the research team hoped to learn from the perspectives of older Ontarians who might not respond to a written questionnaire. Each group comprised individuals experiencing one of the following: a rich learning in retirement environment, a recent diagnosis of cognitive impairment, vision or hearing problems, residence in long-term care, the perhaps unique circumstance of living in Northern Ontario, cultural diversity and living at, or close to, the poverty line.

Initially, the researcher responsible for facilitating the focus groups conducted a pilot group to elicit feedback about how well the questions worked (e.g. meaning, wording, order), the appropriate length of time for the sessions and to generally assess the process (co-facilitation model, gender mix, stranger/familiar participant mix).

Following the pilot group, several questions were edited and reordered. The length of the sessions was kept to 90 minutes and more emphasis was placed in the introductory remarks for bringing the groups back to a topic at hand. Subsequently, eight focus groups were held in 2007. They were hosted in various regions of Ontario.

Recruitment:

Focus group participants were recruited between March and September 2007, through various individuals contacted by the facilitator. Following is the chronological order of the interviews and a description of the recruitment for each group.

The pilot group referenced above, was held in Owen Sound, and was organized by a winter resident of the community who gathered together eight participants by inviting four people she knew and asking each of them to bring a friend.

The Northern group was held in Thunder Bay and consisted of six people who were all volunteers for the local Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. They were invited to participate by the network's co-coordinator.



The six members of the Downsview (Toronto, Central Ontario) focus group were residents of seniors' high-rise apartment buildings and townhouse complexes administered by Toronto Community Housing. Members were invited to attend by an officer of the non-profit housing authority.

The research team wanted to ensure that we heard the perspectives of individuals living with cognitive impairments. This focus group consisted of three women who had each recently received a diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders (ADRD). They meet monthly in Orangeville (West), as a support group, with a counsellor from the local Alzheimer's Society. The focus group was conducted immediately prior to their June meeting.

At the Parkdale Community Health Centre in downtown Toronto (Central Ontario), a focus group of 10 people was convened. All members were immigrants to Canada and students in the centre's English as a Second Language Program. As members of an English class, they were invited by their instructor to participate.⁴

Eight individuals, all active members of the local Learning and Living in Retirement organization met in Elliott Lake (North). Participants were invited by an officer of the Learning and Living in Retirement group.

Ten members of the Windsor-Essex (South West) Low Vision Social and Support Group agreed to take part in the study. They were recruited by the leader of their organization.

A focus group consisting of 11 volunteers for the Waterloo Region (South West) branch of the Canadian Hearing Society was held in Kitchener. All members were hearing impaired but none was deaf. The focus group took place at the end of their monthly meeting and was organized by a hearing care counsellor of the Waterloo Region branch.

Six residents of the Extendicare Kingston (Eastern Ontario) long-term care home took part in the final focus group. They were invited to attend by the activities director of Extendicare Kingston.

⁴ Language did present some difficulties; the spoken English of these participants, with few exceptions, was limited. Nonetheless, the facilitator has had the advantage of teaching English as a Second Language to adults and determined that the questions were adequately understood for the purposes of the project.



Available Learning Opportunities

i. Inventory of Existing Learning Programs for Older Ontarians

Data Collection Process

The following strategies were used to determine formal and informal learning opportunities that are currently available to older Ontarians.

A database was created to include all potential Third Age learning programs offered in Ontario. This included all universities, colleges, boards of education and all known institutes for 'learning and living in retirement' in the province. Opportunities outside of traditional learning institutions were added to the database by selecting a random sample of five percent of the 1,001 community agencies and faith communities identified in the original project mailing. The categories were:

- Ethno-specific service agencies
- Faith based communities (5% of each denomination)
- General community/recreation centres
- Long-term care homes
- Provincial boards of education: private and separate
- Provincial seniors' organizations
- Public libraries
- Retirement residences
- Seniors' centres

In addition, 300 literacy programs were added.

From this database of 1,201 agencies and institutions, 25% of each agency type were randomly selected except in the following circumstances: in cases where an agency type was deemed to be very relevant to the goal of this project, 100% of the sites in the database were selected (e.g. Living and Learning in Retirement Programs and Third Age Programs in universities and colleges). For less relevant programs, (e.g. literacy) a smaller percentage (5%) was selected. See Table 1 in Appendix C1 for a list of the agency types and the number and percentage of sites selected within each. Every attempt was made to represent all geographical areas of Ontario with the inclusion of six different area codes⁵. There was some difficulty obtaining information from agencies in the 807 area code because of the time difference (Central versus Eastern). See Table 2 in Appendix C1 for the distribution of the organizations by area code.

⁵ 416/Toronto area, 519/London, Windsor and south western Ontario, 613/Ottawa and south eastern Ontario, 705/North Bay and north eastern Ontario, 807/Thunder Bay and Western Ontario, 905/Hamilton, Toronto suburbs and central south eastern Ontario.



Telephone Interviews

A telephone interview script was developed to explore characteristics of learning opportunities in terms of learning format (e.g. workshops, seminars, lectures, et cetera), whether the classes for older adults differed from those offered to the general community, accessibility of the built environment and demographic profile of the users. In an effort to obtain a snapshot of programs offered within a specific time frame, a program schedule for courses/learning opportunities offered in October 2007 was requested. See Appendix C2 for a copy of the telephone interview script.

Five individuals were provided with an orientation to the study, trained and assigned to make the telephone calls. The interview script was pilot tested by first placing calls to twelve sites representing each of the 12 agency types. On the basis of the results from these initial calls, several questions were revised for clarity. For example, the questions requesting demographic information about older adults participating in programs had to be reworded because a number of agencies were unwilling or unable to disclose this information. In addition, one semantic issue that arose was the interpretation of the words “education” or “learning”. Some agencies did not consider themselves to be offering educational or learning opportunities because they believed that learning and education occurred only in traditional, formal settings. If it was confirmed that the agency did not provide any learning opportunities in general, then the interview was concluded.

Care was taken to carefully document the following: which research assistant called an agency; the date and time of the call; the position of the individual who was contacted and whether the interview had been completed or the agency was to be contacted again. If an agency had not been reached after three attempts, no further calls were made.

Challenges and Alternate Strategies

Two agencies that proved to be quite difficult to reach were the faith-based organizations and the universities and colleges. Most of the faith-based organizations selected did not have standard (i.e. nine to five) hours of operation and some were open only one day a week. For large agencies like colleges and universities, it was frequently the case that questions could not be answered by a single individual and the interviewer was transferred to various departments without successfully acquiring the necessary information. In addition, information about the built environment varied greatly depending upon the building in which a particular learning opportunity was offered. Relatively few agencies kept information about who was using their facilities and, if they did, the individual contacted often did not have the information to share or showed some reluctance to do so.

It became increasingly evident to the research team that building the inventory was going to be very difficult to accomplish exclusively by telephone. Given that emerging reality, the team introduced additional strategies to increase the probability that all 12 agency types could be represented in the data collection. One of the research assistants was assigned the task of contacting by email those agencies not contacted by telephone; however, as with the telephone attempts to reach larger organizations, there was difficulty identifying an appropriate contact person.



For every agency not reached by telephone but where a web site or web page existed, calendars or descriptions of activities offered were examined online. As well, an additional request for calendars and activity brochures was sent out to agencies represented by the Older Adults' Centres Association of Ontario. Fourteen agencies responded to this additional outreach strategy (13 seniors' centres and 1 recreation centre). Some had already been captured in the original database, but an additional nine agencies sent in their calendars bringing the number of agencies in the database to 300. Finally, all of the agencies in the database with websites, including those that had been reached by telephone, were re-examined. The activities and learning opportunities described were categorized to reflect the interests expressed by the sample of 475 older adults who had completed our questionnaire. Due to the unanticipated amount of time it took to complete these extra procedures (from October, 2007 to August, 2008), the calendars examined both as hard copy and online comprised a variety of fall, winter, spring and summer programs. As such, they were not representative of any one season. Through these efforts we were able to get some sense of the opportunities available to older adults in Ontario. However, we were unable to determine information about several of the topics addressed in the original telephone interview guide such as accessibility of the built environments or demographic information about the consumers of the programs.

Using these strategies (telephone and/or email contact, website and/or calendar perusal), we were able to obtain varying degrees of information for 241 of the 300 selected agencies. Of these, 57 (23.7%) were traditional learning environments (universities, colleges, third age, school boards) and the remainder were more informal, community environments. See Table 3 in Appendix C1 for the number of agency types for which information was obtained by each method. In some cases, there is overlap where the information for the same agency was obtained with more than one method.

ii. *Key Informant Interviews*

The original plan was to identify and evaluate a select number of programs offered by post-secondary institutions, community based organizations and secondary school boards. It was believed that evaluating programs in a case study format would result in an enhanced, deeper understanding of the multiple factors at play when planning learning opportunities for older persons.

However, as the project evolved, the team's thinking also evolved and this component of the study was redesigned. As information was gathered for the inventory, it was determined that case studies would most likely yield similar information. What seemed to offer greater potential from a value added perspective was the opportunity to interview a larger number of individual key informant service providers, administrators and policy makers. We hoped to gain a more comprehensive understanding about the decision-making processes that underpin the types of courses/programs represented in the inventory. For the selection of the key informants, care was taken to represent different geographical areas of Ontario, to have a rural/urban mix, to select groups *not* represented by the focus groups and to select individuals who were in a decision-making position. For more details of the selection criteria, see Appendix D1.



Process

Significant planning went into determining which agencies would be selected and where the final interview locations would be in order to meet our representational and geographic criteria. Interviews were scheduled both by email and telephone invitations. A general introduction to the scope of the project and its objectives were provided to each interviewee.

The interviews, scheduled for 60 to 90 minutes, were digitally recorded and summaries were derived from both field notes and digital voice files. The discussion guide (Appendix D2) was followed as much as possible, but the one-on-one interviews frequently led to a more flexible format in which unsolicited comments would emerge and build on one another. Given the diversity of services represented, the interviewer modified the script when necessary. Where appropriate, the interviewer offered insights from previous interviews that served to generate further conversation and interviewee insights.

Fifteen interviews were conducted either on location or by telephone to meet with various interviewee scheduling demands (e.g. their preference to conduct the interview from their home office). Materials were collected that demonstrated their program offerings to older adults. For a list of the interview sites, see Appendix D3.

4. Results

Listening to the Older Adults

The data from the older adults will be presented predominantly around the topics addressed by the questionnaire, with additional information included from the focus groups where applicable.

Questionnaire: Return Rates

Although multiple strategies were instituted to widely distribute the questionnaire, the response rate was lower than we had expected. Four hundred and seventy-five questionnaires were returned. Due to the fact that we could not ascertain how many questionnaires had been distributed to individuals by the organizations, we could not calculate a specific return rate for any particular organization. However, of the 360 questionnaires sent directly to the McMaster S.H.A.R.E. (Seniors Helping Advance Research) group, 228 (63%) were returned. These returns comprised 48% of the sample. Table 1 provides the number and percentage of returns received from other sources.



Table 1. Distribution of returned questionnaires from target organization types.

Source	Number Returned	Percentage of Sample
Supportive housing	9	1.9
Senior centres	19	4.0
Long-term care homes	8	1.7
Retirement residences	19	4.0
National senior organizations	10	2.0
Retiree associations	1	0.2
Ethno specific service agencies	11	2.3
College gerontology programs	32	6.7
SERC Internet Café	6	1.3
Online	50	10.5
Individuals (source unknown)	82	17.3

Therefore, although every effort was made to reach a representative sample of Ontario seniors, the response from other organizations was low in comparison to the S.H.A.R.E. returns.

Questionnaire Participants (for details, see Appendix A3)

Of the 475 participants, 304 (64%) were women ranging in age from 65 to 98 (Mean age = 77.4; SD = 7.3). The 170 males (Mean age = 77.0; SD = 7.2) ranged in age from 65 to 97. One 89-year-old individual did not identify gender.

The participants were relatively well educated with 62.3% having some college or university schooling or higher (see Figure Ba).

The majority of participants were either married or widowed (see Figure Bb) and lived in either an urban (51.2%) or small town setting (33.7%) as opposed to rural (11.8%) (see Figure Bc). Two-thirds owned their home (see Figure Bd). For the 'other' category, respondents reported that they lived in a condominium (4%) or in the home of a family member (1%).

Most respondents were Canadian or from the United Kingdom (see Table B1) and spoke English in the home (Figure Be).

The sample also enjoyed generally good health and mobility with relatively few rating their hearing, vision and mobility as 'not very good' or 'not good at all'. (see Appendix A3, Tables B2a and B2b)

Focus Group Participants (for details, see Appendix B1)

In addition to the eight people who took part in a pilot focus group, 60 individuals participated in the additional eight groups hosted throughout the province. Of the 60 individuals, 45 (75%) were women. Although the facilitator did not ask specific ages, the age range was estimated to be from 65 to late 80s and the average age was estimated to be between 70 to 75 years. No additional



demographic information was collected from these individuals beyond their geographical area and their group purpose.

Analysis of open-ended questions in the Questionnaire

The percentages of participants responding to each of the quantitative questions are shown in Appendix A4. Except for the question “What does learning mean to you?”⁶, responses to open-ended questions were examined for themes separately by two individuals on the research team. This was followed by discussion of the similarities and differences in interpretation. A list of agreed upon themes was then submitted to the project’s PI who determined the final categories to be used for coding. The two coders then separately assigned one or more codes to each response. Cohen’s Kappa coefficient was calculated as a measure of the level of agreement between the two coders. Any differences in coding were then reconciled through discussion. On the rare occasion where agreement could not be reached, responses were submitted to a third person for resolution.

What Learning Means to Ontario Seniors

The first question asked of the participants in the questionnaire was: “What does learning mean to you?” Examination of the answers revealed eight different themes: Learning is: 1) Important; 2) Lifelong; 3) Occurs every day; 4) Improves quality of life; 5) Keeps one’s mind active; 6) Keeps one current; 7) Allows acquisition of knowledge and personal growth; 8) Provides and enhances social interactions. (For a complete list of responses for each theme, refer to Appendix A5).

1) Learning is a highly valued activity by many of these respondents.

“Learning is everything. It is so important to know what is going on around you as well as the rest of the world as long as you are able!” (ID #169)

“I need to learn something new every day - learning is the core of my being.” (ID #7)

“Learning makes life exciting. I was taught by my parents to appreciate and love learning. Learning brightens a dull day, eases the troubles that come with age.” (ID #451)

⁶ For ‘What learning means’, it was important only to determine the kinds of themes being expressed. The inclusion of this question was to acknowledge that learning means different things to different people. For the barriers to learning and motivations for learning, it was important to determine those reported most frequently. Therefore more stringent coding was required.



2) The ability and desire to learn does not diminish with age.

“It means that I'm never going to stop being curious, that I'm never going to be satisfied until I learn everything there is to know about any topic or subject and that we're never too old to learn!” (ID #11)

“Life as a whole is a continuing learning role. We are always learning and changing through all the stages of life no matter how long or short it is.” (ID #76A)

“I feel you are never too old to learn. More open now than when I was younger.” (ID #83)

3) Learning opportunities are in every day living, not just in formal settings.

“Constant communication with other people and reading of newspapers and TV and radio media on current affairs and learning channels.” (ID #102)

“Exploring, reading, talking to others in a learning setting, from radio, TV, just talking to others, perhaps the odd lecture, talks, church sermons.” (ID #171B)

“We are learning every day of our lives. Every experience is a learning or teaching.” (ID #532)

4) Learning is a means to improving one's quality of life.

“Knowledge gives me confidence, reassurance in life. Knowledge is power. When I know I can access several options about a topic - I will be able to give a sound opinion to others.” (ID #158)

“Increases my confidence. The feeling of ‘Oh wow I understand’. More in control of my life, feeling of independence.” (ID #252)

“Opens up opportunity. Gives meaning to life; removes fears; develops confidence.” (ID #512)

5) Learning means keeping one's mind active and reducing the cognitive effects of aging.

“Keeping my mind alert/sharp/growing in thought and mind.” (ID #148A)

Learning (to) my keep my brain healthy - postpone dementia.” (ID #292)



“Keeping my mind active. Avoiding "senior moments" for as long as possible.” (ID# 3013)

6) Learning allows older adults to keep up with various aspects of the world around them such as grandchildren, technology and politics.

“Understanding new technology. I want to be able to function and speak about current and new technology. I don't want to feel "out of date" or "out of step" with the rest of the world.” (ID #42)

“Keeping up with my grandchildren! Not stagnating.” (ID #257)

“Keeping up with the new technology books, health, medicine, fashion, theatre.” (ID #3033)

7. Learning allows acquisition of knowledge and personal growth.

“Learning to me means gaining knowledge to help yourself or correct mistakes or how to solve your problems.” (ID# 183)

“Learning means being aware or educating yourself on something new. To undertake new challenges and not be afraid to change.” (ID# 43)

“Learning to me means striving to reach your potential as a human being.” (ID# 50)

8. Learning is a means to providing and enhancing social interactions.

“Learning as a means of keeping interested in events and enjoying talks with family and friends about politics, books, etc”. (ID# 428)

“Makes me feel comfortable in company. Like to share it (when asked).” (ID# 448)

“An opportunity to interact with people of similar interests.” (ID# 1002)

“...I find it interesting to meet new people and also learn more about changes in the communication world.” (D# 3008)

Participants were also asked directly about the importance of learning new things, on a five-point scale ranging from ‘very important’ (1) to ‘not important at all’ (5). The majority (87.3%) of participants checked either ‘very important’ or ‘important’ (see Appendix A4). Expressed in terms of mean ratings, where a low number represents high importance, the respondents as a group rated the importance of learning new things at 1.66 (N = 467, SD = 0.75). In addition, 87.6% of the respondents considered themselves to be either very open or open to new learning and 73.1%



totally agreed with the statement “I consider myself to be a ‘life-long learner’” (see Appendix A4). Their mean rating of openness to new learning was 1.74 (N = 468, SD = 0.80) and their perception of themselves as life-long learners was rated at 1.34 (N = 470, SD = 0.66).

The focus groups were not asked explicitly about what learning meant to them, but they were asked to discuss what they saw as the reasons for learning by older adults. This is very similar to the questionnaire item asking respondents what motivated their learning. Interestingly, three of the themes that emerged from the “What does learning mean to you?” question overlapped with the motivation themes (see below). We will present the questionnaire data first, then the information from the focus groups.

What Motivates Ontario Seniors to Learn New Things?

The responses to the open-ended question “What motivates you to learn new things?” were categorized into one or more of six themes: for interest/curiosity/staying current (labelled ‘Interest/staying current’), to enhance quality of life (labelled ‘Quality of life’), the need to address specific concerns (labelled ‘Need’), people or things (labelled ‘External’), to stimulate and keep the mind active (labelled ‘Keep mind active’), and to help and/or teach others (labelled ‘Help others’). Cohen’s Kappa coefficient was 0.7 indicating good agreement. Table 3 shows the percentage of participants (in declining order) for each kind of motivation.

Table 3 (N = 431)

Motivator	Number (Percentage) of Participants
Interest/staying current	232 (48.8)
Quality of life	137 (28.8)
Need	55 (11.6)
External	43 (9.1)
Keep mind active	30 (6.3)
Help others	10 (2.1)

As mentioned above, three of these themes were similar to the meaning of learning themes (“keeping up”, “improved quality of life” and “keeping the mind active”).

The focus groups were asked: “At any age there are reasons why people engage in learning. What do you see as the reason for learning for older adults?”. For a detailed listing of the responses to this question in each of the focus groups, see Appendix B5. Their responses were very similar to those given by the questionnaire respondents in terms of types of motivations. For instance, they reported “To maintain thinking level and improve memory” (akin to “keeping the mind active”); “New learning is necessary to function in a changing world” (“interest/staying current”); “for pleasure, happiness”, “promotes healthy lifestyle”, “maintain independence” (all akin to “Quality of life”); “as a response to changes” (similar to “staying current” and “need”; “to be of service” (“help others”). Although the categories given were similar, there was a suggestion that the relative rankings of the various motivations were different for the two samples. For example, “keeping the mind active” was reported less often than most of the other categories by the questionnaire participants, but was the topic that was raised most frequently by the focus groups.



We should keep in mind, however, that the questionnaire participants were asked what motivated *them*, while the focus groups were asked what motivated older adults in general. In addition, and unlike the questionnaire sample, the focus groups reported learning “for social reasons” and “to feel engaged with others”. This is reminiscent of the “promotion and enhancement of social interactions” theme of the meaning of learning to the questionnaire sample. The motivations for learning, then, appear to inform the meaning of learning and vice versa for these samples of older adults. One other point of note is that the focus groups had specific needs and purposes and their responses about learning reflected these needs.

What are the Learning Interests of Ontario Seniors?

Participants completing the questionnaire were asked to indicate which topics they had been most interested in learning about recently. Health and medical information was of interest to most of the participants, followed, in declining order, by ‘hobbies’, ‘travel’, ‘spirituality’, ‘financial planning’ and ‘relationships’ (See Appendix A4 for percentages). Although almost 30% of the participants checked the ‘other’ category, examination of the comments revealed that participants often used this category to provide further details about ones for which they had already expressed interest. This was particularly true for the ‘hobbies’ category where ‘other’ was checked and a hobby named. Additional ‘other’ categories that were difficult to classify as any of those explicitly presented were current events/civic engagement/history (N = 50, 10.5%) computer and information technology (N = 24, 5.1%) and languages (N = 6, 1.2%).

The corresponding question asked of the focus groups was “Please tell us about a learning experience that you engaged in during the past year”. The responses again reflected the various purposes for the groups, but overall, the most frequently mentioned were hobby-related, then volunteer related, then those responding to changes in health (their own or others). Those who had specific health issues (hearing, vision, diagnosis of cognitive decline, long-term care residency) frequently mentioned learning about health-related problems. Other answers were related to physical activity, as a response to loss, related to career or work, self-empowerment, and personal safety. Like the questionnaire sample, interests in health and hobbies were important to the focus group members. A complete list of responses for each focus group can be found in Appendix B3.

What are the Learning Styles of Ontario Seniors?

This section will present the results about **where** and **when** older adults in Ontario say they **actually** learn new information. We will then address **learning preferences** in terms of their **approach** to learning, the **context and setting** in which it occurs and the **importance of the source** of new information. Information about the learning styles of the focus groups was gleaned from responses to Questions 1 and 6⁷. Again, the questionnaire data will be given first in each section, followed by information from the focus groups where applicable.

⁷ Q1: “Please tell us about a recent learning experience that you engaged in the last year” and Q6: How do you think older adults learn best? What do you think needs to be taken into consideration when planning learning opportunities for older adults?”



Where learning occurs

At the time of the survey, approximately one-quarter (25.9%) of the questionnaire sample said they were currently engaged in formal class learning such as that conducted in universities, community colleges, high schools, public libraries and correspondence courses (see Appendix A4, Questions 5 and 6). All but two of the individuals in the sample reported that they learned new information in informal settings such as senior centre functions (42.1%), faith communities (32.6%), community/recreation centres 31.4%, support groups (24.8%), cultural centres (21.1%), specialty schools (12.4%) and online communities (6.7%). In addition, many other examples (17.5%) were given by the participants as additional settings for informal learning. These included self selected settings for various interest clubs, retirement organizations and discussion group activities, exercise settings, travel, volunteering contexts, and simply at home, for example listening to the radio. See Appendix A4, Question 9 for an extended list of responses. As a group, the older adults in this sample were engaged in very many diverse and unique activities that they had no trouble recognizing as opportunities for new learning.

When asked about recent learning, only the Thunder Bay focus group members mentioned a formal learning setting (i.e. ‘going back to school’, ‘elders gathering at Trent University’). On the whole, the focus groups reported learning in community settings such as church, career centre, garden centre, elementary school, local stores, and a bowling alley. When asked specifically about learning styles, the setting was not mentioned.

When learning occurs

As already mentioned, the majority of questionnaire respondents perceived themselves to be life-long learners and open to new learning. In addition, participants were asked what time of day they learned within each of the four seasons.⁸ Table 4 shows the percentage of participants endorsing each time of day and season. (These percentages are not independent of each other, given that most participants checked more than one option).

Table 4. Time of day and season for learning.

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Mean Percentage
Spring	52.6	30.5	23.8	35.6
Summer	47.2	28.2	25.1	33.5
Fall	43.4	38.1	27.6	36.4
Winter	43.8	36.2	26.9	35.6
Mean Percentage	46.8	33.3	25.9	

These results suggest that learning takes place most often in the morning for this sample of older adults compared to other times of the day, regardless of the season. However, if participants had been asked directly when they preferred to learn, one could predict that the percentages for

⁸ This question was originally included to ask the participants when they preferred to learn new things, but was inadvertently worded in a way that asked simply when they engaged in new learning.



learning preferences during the winter season would be lower than for other times of the year because of transportation and other mobility issues. (Later we address the barriers to formal learning and to new learning in general.)

When asked about learning styles only one of the focus groups (Elliot Lake – Learning in Retirement group) mentioned the best time for learning. “It has to be during the day”; “Lots of people don’t like to drive in the evening – even if it’s not far and especially during winter”. This group however, is perhaps the most highly functioning of the focus groups and consequently one seeking wider learning opportunities than the other groups. These opportunities may be offered at other times of the day and year but are not appealing to them.

Learning preferences

Approach to learning. To get an indication of how the older adults completing the questionnaire preferred to learn something new, we asked them to imagine that they had been asked to make a paper snowflake, then to indicate how likely, on a 5-point scale, they would be to follow a particular approach to create one, from ‘very likely’ (assigned ‘1’) to ‘never’ (assigned ‘5’) (see Appendix A4, Q.10).

Table 5a shows the different approaches in order of preference, with ‘look at one and duplicate it’ being the most preferred by this sample, and ‘gather a group to design it’ the least preferred.

Table 5a. Learning styles/approaches: mean likelihood of using.

Approach	N	Mean Likelihood*	Standard Deviation
Look at one and duplicate it	426	1.98	0.94
Consult with an expert	431	2.00	1.04
Trial and error alone	418	2.18	1.07
Check out how-to books or videos	410	2.38	1.09
Search online for best method	398	3.20	1.42
Gather a group to design it	393	3.21	1.10

* The lower the number, the higher the likelihood

A one-way (1x6) repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant main effect of Approach, Wilks’ Lambda = .41, F(5, 346) = 101.26, p < .001. Follow up t-tests revealed that all of the approaches significantly differed from one another except duplicating (1.98) vs. consulting with an expert (2.00) and online (3.20) vs. gathering a group (3.21). Note in Table 5a that as the means decrease, the number of participants endorsing the options also decreases.



It is also interesting to examine the percentages of responses for the different levels of likelihood shown in Appendix A4, Q10 and duplicated below. In Table 5a above, showing the means, we see that searching online is near the bottom of the list both for mean likelihood of use and for the number of people checking that option. In Table 5b below, we see that searching online also received the highest ‘never’ percentage at 23%.

Table 5b. Learning styles/approaches: Percent of sample endorsing each level of likelihood.

Learning Style	Very Likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Never
Look at one and duplicate it	28.8	44.0	9.1	5.3	2.3
Gather a group to design it	4.0	19.2	26.9	21.1	11.6
Trial and error	24.0	39.2	13.3	7.8	3.8
Search online	11.6	19.4	17.1	12.6	23.2
Use how-to books or videos	18.1	36.6	16.6	10.9	4.0
Consult with expert	33.3	36.2	11.8	6.3	2.9

Although the focus groups were not asked about their learning preferences per se, only learning styles in general, it was suggested that being shown what to do (hearing impaired group) and hands on activity (visually impaired group) would be helpful to the learning experience.

Context. In the questionnaire, participants were asked about the likelihood of learning new information in particular contexts. Again, for each context, they indicated the likelihood of their choosing it on a five-point scale from ‘very likely’ (assigned ‘1’) to ‘never’ (assigned ‘5’) (see Appendix A4, Q11).

Table 6a. Learning contexts: Mean likelihood of participation.

Context	N	Mean Likelihood*	Standard Deviation
Find someone who shares interests	447	2.01	0.85
Use local library or organized resources	447	2.02	1.00
Join a discussion group	434	2.50	1.02
Join an organization	434	2.64	1.02
Register for formal classes	440	2.78	1.15
Access the Internet	417	2.87	1.51

*A low mean indicates high likelihood.

Table 6a above shows the mean likelihood of learning in each context in declining order. Finding someone to share one’s interests was the most likely, with accessing the Internet as the least likely.



A one-way (1x6) repeated measures analysis of variance revealed a significant main effect of Context, Wilks' Lambda = .56, F(5, 368) = 58.74, p < .001. Follow up t-tests revealed that all of the contexts significantly differed from one another except the first two, finding someone who shares one's interests (2.01) vs. the local library (2.02) and the last two, registering for formal classes (2.78) vs. accessing the internet (2.87). Accessing the Internet was endorsed by the fewest people and reported as the least likely learning approach.

Table 6b below shows that accessing the Internet also had the highest percentage of "never" responses, similar to 'search online' in Table 5b above.

Table 6b. Learning contexts: Percent of sample endorsing each level of likelihood.

Context	Very Likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Never
Register for formal classes	11.2	30.7	27.8	13.5	9.5
Find someone who shares interests	25.7	48.4	14.5	4.2	1.3
Join an organization	10.3	33.9	31.4	10.3	5.5
Join a discussion group	11.4	41.7	25.3	7.4	5.7
Use local library or organized resources	30.5	42.7	12.6	4.6	3.6
Access the Internet	20.0	23.4	14.7	7.2	22.5

The use of the Internet (compared to other options we offered the participants) as a learning style and context will be examined further in the section comparing computer users to non-users in this sample.

One other point of interest is the fact that 41.9% of the questionnaire sample said that they would be very likely or likely to register for formal classes. This is in contrast to 25.9%, the percentage of individuals who reported actually being engaged in formal learning at the time of completing the questionnaire. One might speculate that part of the difference could reflect learning needs not being met.

In response to the question "How do you think older adults learn best?" the focus groups reported that small groups (e.g. to a maximum of 20 people) were conducive to successful older adult learning and that discussion and conversation were preferable to lectures. Learning from peers and one-to-one was also suggested. See Appendix B8.

Importance of the source of new learning. We asked the participants to rate the importance to them of various sources of learning on a five-point scale from 'extremely important' to 'not important at all'. (See Appendix A4, Q8). Because of the large number of items (11), a principal components factor analysis (with varimax rotation) was carried out as a data reduction technique. Only factors with loadings of 0.4 or higher that also differed by 0.15 from any loading on another factor were retained. Three factors emerged explaining 56% of the total variance: Visual/print media (television, books, magazines/newsletters, newspapers); Group (faith/community, clubs, discussion groups, workshops/seminars); Internet (internet, online learning). Radio did not load uniquely on any one factor and was excluded from subsequent analyses. Mean importance ratings were then



calculated for each factor by averaging the ratings of the respective loading items. Table 7a shows the relative importance of the three sources of new information to the participants as a group.

Table 7a. Learning source: Mean importance.

Source	N	Mean Importance	SD
Visual/print media	452	1.95	0.59
Group	411	2.47	0.73
Internet	380	3.04	1.27

A 1x3 analysis of variance revealed a significant main effect of source, Wilks' Lambda = .52, $F(2, 346) = 160.42$, $p < 0.001$. Post hoc paired sample t-tests showed that visual/print media was the most important source of new learning, followed by group sources, which in turn was more important than sources from the Internet.

See Table 7b below for comparisons using t-tests.

Table 7b. Sources of Learning: Comparisons*

Comparisons		Mean	N	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Visual/print media vs.	1.9633				
	Group	2.4781	405	12.78	404	$p < 0.001$
Pair 2	Visual/print media vs.	1.9760				
	Internet	3.0723	370	16.52	369	$p < 0.001$
Pair 3	Group vs.	2.4954				
	Internet	3.1172	352	8.90	351	$p < 0.001$

* N's and means at the 2nd decimal differ from Table 7a above because only those responses for which both items are available can be used for a comparison.

One should keep in mind that for the questionnaire sample, these comparisons involve the whole sample regardless of computer use. When we later compare computer users to non-users, we expect to see the importance of the Internet to be much greater for computer users.

Perusal of the focus groups' responses to the question about learning styles revealed many comments about the importance of learning in a group through conversation, discussion and listening. (See Appendix B8 and Appendix B11, Learning Styles). Interaction seems to be a necessary component of the experience. Mentioned less often was the importance of visual aids, such as film and "back up notes" for reference. Several individuals commented that television and reading could also provide learning experiences.

For several aspects of learning preference, the focus groups echoed those reported by the questionnaire sample. However they also provided additional insights into what older adults need for a successful and productive learning experience. For example, they were explicit about the necessity for health characteristics and individual needs of older adults being taken into account such as the following: The need for repetition is crucial for the aging memory and for those with hearing impairments; visual materials should be in larger font; instruction must be slower, with



less jargon or fewer ‘big words’ and broken down into smaller steps for mastery. Of special importance were the comments that older adults need to be respected and valued for the wealth of knowledge and experience they bring to the learning situation.

Frequency and Value of Social Interactions and Overall Life Satisfaction

This topic was not addressed directly in the focus groups, only indirectly through the question about motivations for learning where these individuals cited “for social reasons” and “to feel engaged with others” as reasons for learning. Social interaction also figured prominently in their reported learning preferences. Otherwise, the focus groups provided little additional information about their actual levels of life satisfaction or satisfaction with their existing social interactions. To address this, we rely predominantly on the data provided by the questionnaire respondents.

Participants were first asked to rate the quality and frequency of their social interactions, each on a five-point scale from ‘very satisfied’ (assigned ‘1’) to ‘very dissatisfied (assigned 5). Tables 8a and 8b below show that the majority of participants were satisfied with both the quality and the frequency of their social interactions; as a group they gave high ratings for both.

Table 8a. Quality and frequency of social interactions: percentage of sample endorsing each level of satisfaction.

Measure	Very Satisfied (%)	Satisfied (%)	Indifferent (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Very Dissatisfied (%)
Quality of Interactions	37.1	53.9	3.6	0.2	3.4
Frequency of Interactions	28.4	58.7	4.4	0.2	6.5

Table 8b. Mean satisfaction of quality and frequency of social interactions.

Measure	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Overall satisfaction with quality of interactions	469	1.75	0.74
Overall satisfaction with frequency of interactions	468	1.90	0.78

Participants were also asked about the importance of social interactions to their experience of life satisfaction from ‘very important’ (assigned ‘1’) to ‘not important at all’ (assigned ‘4’). From Tables 9a and 9b, we see, not surprisingly, that social interactions are important to this sample’s experience of life satisfaction.

Table 9a. Importance of social interactions to life satisfaction: percentage of sample endorsing each level.

Measure	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important at All
Importance of Social Interactions to Life Satisfaction	50.3	40.8	7.2	0.4



Table 9b. Mean importance of social interactions to life satisfaction.

Measure	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Importance of social interactions to life satisfaction	469	1.57	0.65

Finally, they were asked to rate their perceived overall quality of life from ‘excellent’ (1) to ‘poor’ (5).

Table 10a. Overall quality of life: Percentage of sample endorsing each level.

Measure	Excellent	Very Good	Comfortable	Not Very Good	Poor
Overall Quality of Life	25.1	47.4	22.5	2.5	0.2

Table 10b. Mean satisfaction with overall quality of life.

Measure	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Overall quality of life	468	2.04	0.78

Tables 10a and 10b show that, as a group, this sample of older adults were satisfied with their overall quality of life.

Formal versus informal-only learning

The information in this section is derived from the questionnaire data. As noted earlier, only 25.9% of this sample said they were currently engaged in formal learning. Of these, all but two also engaged in informal learning⁹. As mentioned earlier, this percentage is somewhat lower than the likelihood of these seniors engaging in formal learning, as indicated in Tables 6a and 6b.

Table 11 compares the demographic, health, learning attitudes and life satisfaction information of the two groups.

⁹ Keep in mind that most of those accessing formal learning also engaged in informal learning, however for analyses, the two groups are mutually exclusive in that the individuals in the group we designate as informal-only learners indicated that they did not engage in formal learning.



Table 11. Demographic, perceived health measures, learning attitudes and life satisfaction: Formal versus informal-only learners – questionnaire sample.

Measure	Formal Learners (N = 58)	Informal only Learners (N = 392)	Significance of Difference*
Mean Age	75.6	77.5	marginal (p = 0.07)
Gender (% Female)	60.3	64.5	ns
% married	51.7	53.7	ns
% widowed	22.4	32.7	ns
% own home	63.8	66.5	ns
% urban	63.8	49.1	p < 0.05
% rural	6.9	12.8	ns
% some university or higher	70.7	42.7	p < 0.001
% never drive	20.7	24.3	ns
Mean- Hearing	2.14	2.27	ns
Mean- Vision	1.91	2.21	p < 0.01
Mean- Ease of getting around	1.82	2.14	p < 0.05
Mean- Open to new learning	1.45	1.81	p < 0.001
Mean- Life-long learner	1.11	1.38	p < 0.001
Mean- Importance of learning	1.26	1.73	p < 0.001
Mean- Satisfaction - Quality of interactions	1.59	1.78	marginal (p = 0.08)
Mean- Satisfaction - Frequency of interactions	1.64	1.95	p < 0.01
Mean- Importance of social interactions	1.43	1.59	p < 0.05
Mean- Overall quality of life	1.79	2.08	p < 0.05

*ANOVAs conducted with robust test for equality of means (Welch); X^2 for differences between percentages.

The formal learners were marginally younger than the informal learners. The proportion of females in each group was the same. Compared to those who participated only in informal methods of learning, a greater percentage of the formal learners lived in urban areas and had some university education or higher. The formal learners gave more positive ratings to their vision and mobility, and learning was of greater importance, not just in rated importance, but also in how much they considered themselves to be life-long learners and open to new learning. Social interactions were also of greater importance and they were more satisfied with the frequency of interactions. Finally, they rated their overall satisfaction with their quality of life more positively than the informal-only learners.

One might expect that those who participated in formal education would also have a higher probability of owning a computer. This proved to be true. Of the formal learners, 80.7% owned a computer, compared to 57.3% of the informal-only group ($X^2 = 11.4$, $p < 0.001$). The characteristics of computer owners compared to non-owners will be discussed in a later section.



Barriers to Learning

Formal learning: Barriers

The data regarding barriers to formal learning is from the questionnaire sample only. The focus group data for this topic is more relevant to barriers to learning in general and will be discussed in a later section.

Using an open-ended format, the questionnaire participants were asked to list issues that made it difficult for them to attend formal classes. Ten themes or barrier types emerged and all responses were then coded according to these themes with high initial agreement between the two coders (Cohen’s Kappa = .876). Any disagreements in coding were subsequently resolved through discussion and third party resolution where necessary.

Of the 475 participants, 292 (61.5%) listed at least one barrier to formal learning. The barriers fell into two broad categories, ‘external’ or ‘internal’. Barriers such as those presented by the built environment, one’s health status, family responsibilities, lack of availability, cost and scheduling of courses, were considered to be external barriers, while lack of interest or motivation, lack of time, lack of confidence and feelings of being too old, were designated as internal.

Table 12 shows the different barriers in declining order of reported frequency.

Table 12. Formal learning: Barrier types*

Barriers to Formal Learning	Number of Participants	Percentage of Sample	Percentage of those Reporting Barriers
Built Environment	91	19.2	31.2
Personal – Health	59	12.6	20.2
Personal – Family Responsibility	14	2.9	4.8
Personal – Other	2	0.4	0.7
Personal – Total	75	15.9	25.7
No Interest	64	13.5	21.9
Too Busy	53	11.2	18.2
Scheduling/Season	47	9.9	16.1
Cost/Resources	32	6.7	11.0
Too Old	28	5.9	9.6
Not Suited to Needs	18	3.8	6.2
Not Aware of Info	5	1.1	1.7
Lack of Confidence	2	0.4	0.7

* Categories are not mutually exclusive; therefore no statistical comparisons between barriers were conducted.

The most frequent external barrier to formal learning for these participants was the built environment. This category included complaints such as classes being too far from home, lack of transportation and difficulty parking. Another frequent barrier, personal health, included responses about health concerns related to aging, such as vision, hearing, and mobility, as well as cognitive



difficulties and lack of energy. Another personal barrier, family responsibilities, (e.g. caregiving) was also mentioned as a personal reason for not engaging in formal learning, though to a much lesser extent than health concerns. Only two of the personal barrier responses did not fit into the health or family responsibility categories. These were from two individuals who felt that their lack of education presented a barrier to formal learning. Also note that almost 10% of the sample mentioned scheduling difficulties (over and above being too busy), which included their unwillingness or inability to drive at night or in the wintertime. Cost and lack of resources, however, was a barrier for only 7% of the participants, in keeping with the demographics of this group described earlier as relatively well-educated, urban home owners.

What are the characteristics of individuals experiencing the most frequent external barriers such as the built environment, personal health concerns and scheduling issues (time of day, season et cetera.)? To answer this question, we looked at demographic information, the quality of life and health ratings for each type of barrier. Table 13 below shows the demographic, health, attitude to learning and life satisfaction information of the participants experiencing each of the most frequent external barriers compared to the sample as a whole¹⁰.

Table 13. Demographic information, perceived health measures, learning attitudes and life satisfaction of participants experiencing external barriers to formal learning.*

Measure	Built environment (N = 91)	Health concerns (N = 59)	Scheduling/ Season (N = 47)	Sample (N = 475)
Mean Age	77.7	81.4	75.13	77.4
Gender (% Female)	65.9	79.7	78.7	64.0
% married /widowed	47.3/36.3	44.1/45.8	46.8/29.8	53.3/33.0
% own home	61.5	45.8	78.7	65.7
% urban/rural	37.4/26.4	57.6/5.1	44.7/21.3	51.2/11.8
% some university or higher	42.9	35.7	46.8	44.2
% never drive	46.2	50.8	14.9	23.6
Mean- Hearing	2.37	2.48	2.27	2.26
Mean- Vision	2.34	2.79	2.06	2.18
Mean- Ease of getting around	2.29	3.15	2.26	2.09
Mean- Openness to new learning	1.73	2.02	1.72	1.74
Mean- Life-long learner	1.35	1.29	1.30	1.34
Mean- Importance of learning	1.66	1.78	1.60	1.66
Mean- Satisfaction - Quality of interactions	1.81	2.02	1.70	1.75
Mean- Satisfaction - Frequency of interactions	1.97	2.21	1.94	1.90
Mean- Importance of social interactions	1.58	1.64	1.38	1.57
Mean- Overall quality of life	2.20	2.46	2.10	2.04

¹⁰ We remind the reader that many participants listed more than one barrier.



* For the mean ratings, recall that the lower the number, the more positive the rating.

From Table 13 we can see that, compared to the sample as a whole, there is a greater tendency for those who reported barriers concerning the built environment to live in rural areas and drive less than the sample as a whole. Those who reported health concerns tended to be older, female, less educated and report numerically more negative life satisfaction. They also drove less. Those who reported scheduling issues in terms of time of day and season were also more likely to be rural, and female, but own their own home and drive more.

The same procedure was used to examine the characteristics of those individuals who listed internal barriers such as lack of motivation or interest and lack of time/being too busy to engage in formal learning. See Table 14.

Table 14. Demographic information, perceived health measures, learning attitudes and life satisfaction of participants experiencing internal barriers to formal learning *

Measure	No Interest/ Motivation (N = 64)	Lack of time/ Too busy (N = 53)	Sample (N = 475)
Mean Age	75.8	75.7	77.4 years
Gender (% Female)	57.8	56.6	64.0
% married /widowed	54.7/28.1	58.5/28.3	53.3/33.0
% own home	73.4	79.2	65.7
% urban/rural	46.9/9.4	50.9/11.3	51.2/11.8
% some university or higher	53.3	58.5	44.2
% never drive	7.8	7.5	23.6
Mean- Hearing	2.08	2.13	2.26
Mean- Vision	1.98	2.06	2.18
Mean- Ease of getting around	1.82	1.76	2.09
Mean- Satisfaction – Quality of interactions	1.66	1.81	1.75
Mean- Satisfaction - Frequency of interactions	1.90	1.92	1.90
Mean- Importance of social interactions	1.60	1.53	1.57
Mean- Overall quality of life	1.90	1.89	2.04
Mean- Open to new learning	1.92	1.56	1.74
Mean- Life-long learner	1.38	1.29	1.34
Mean- Importance of learning	1.73	1.60	1.66



* For the mean ratings, recall that the lower the number, the more positive the rating.

In spite of their self description as being ‘life-long learners’ and the professed importance of learning to them, 13.5% and 11.2% of these participants cited lack of interest and time, respectively, as reasons for not engaging in formal learning (see Table 12). However, from Table 14 above, we can see that, numerically, these individuals tended to be better educated, to drive more, were more likely to own their own home and gave numerically better (more positive) vision, hearing and mobility ratings than the sample as a whole. This suggests that these internal barriers are not an expression of being ‘lazy’ (especially for those who reported being ‘too busy’), but rather an expression of ‘not needing’ to engage in formal learning because formal learning needs may have already been met during earlier education experiences.

One might speculate that these individuals may be of higher socio-economic status, although we did not ask about annual income. These appear to be people who are not as vulnerable and therefore require less assistance from society. Next we examined barriers to learning in general.

Barriers to Learning in General

In this section we have data from both the focus groups and the questionnaire sample. We present the information from the questionnaire respondents first.

Participants were asked the question: “Has there ever been a time recently when you wished you could have engaged in a learning activity but could not?” (Yes/No). One hundred and ninety-six (43.6%) of the participants answered ‘yes’ to this question. Table 15 shows the demographic, health, attitudes to learning and satisfaction information for these individuals versus those who answered ‘no’.

The individuals in our sample who reported experiencing barriers to learning were more likely to be women and less likely to be married, own a home or drive than those reporting no barriers. These individuals also gave poorer ratings to their vision and mobility. Yet, learning was also more important to them and they were more likely to describe themselves as life-long learners and open to new learning. Note that these individuals also gave poorer ratings to the three life satisfaction measures, yet the importance of social interactions was the same for both groups. For future research, it would be interesting to examine the exact relationships between perception of barriers, learning attitudes and life satisfaction. Are barriers more apparent the more one is anxious to learn? To what degree does this predict life satisfaction?

To assess the *nature* of the barriers experienced, participants were next asked: “If ‘Yes’, please explain what or who limited your access to learning.” Interestingly, the themes emerging from these responses were the same as those for barriers to formal learning (Cohen’s Kappa = 0.878). Of the 475 participants, 191 (40.2%) reported at least one barrier, somewhat fewer than those reporting barriers to formal learning. In Table 16, the barriers are listed in declining order of reported frequency. Again, although reversed in order of frequency, the external barriers of health concerns and the built environment were at the top of the list. Scheduling issues was the next most frequent barrier. As was the case for formal learning, cost was not a major concern for this sample. The internal barriers such as lack of interest and being too busy were reported less frequently than



for formal learning. While not everyone may be interested in formal learning, most are interested in informal ways of learning.

The characteristics of those individuals who reported health, built environment and scheduling barriers are presented in Table 17.

Table 15. Demographic information, perceived health measures, learning attitudes and life satisfaction of participants answering ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to the question: “Has there ever been a time recently when you wished you could have engaged in a learning activity but could not?”

Measure	‘YES’ (N = 196)	‘NO’ (N = 254)	Significance of Difference*
Mean Age	77.61	76.94	ns
Gender (% Female)	71.4	59.1	p < 0.05
% married	45.4	59.8	p < 0.01
% widowed	35.2	29.1	ns
% own home	59.2	70.5	p < 0.05
% urban	54.1	49.6	ns
% rural	11.2	12.2	ns
% some university or higher	49.0	44.5	ns
% never drive	29.1	18.5	p < 0.01
Mean- Hearing	2.31	2.18	ns
Mean- Vision	2.29	2.08	p < 0.05
Mean- Ease of getting around	2.26	1.96	p < 0.01
Mean- Open to new learning	1.63	1.84	p < 0.01
Mean- Life-long learner	1.26	1.39	p < 0.05
Mean- Importance of learning	1.47	1.80	p < 0.001
Mean- Satisfaction - Quality of interactions	1.87	1.68	p < 0.01
Mean- Satisfaction - Frequency of interactions	2.00	1.82	p < 0.05
Mean- Importance of social interactions	1.54	1.58	ns
Mean- Overall quality of life	2.22	1.91	p < 0.001

* We conducted t-tests for differences between means, X² for differences between percentages.

Although no statistical comparisons were possible because the categories of barriers are not mutually exclusive, nor reported by every participant, there are some interesting observations one can make from Table 17. For instance, and not unexpectedly, the average age of those with health concerns is slightly higher than the sample as a whole and higher than those experiencing scheduling issues. These individuals and those reporting built environment barriers also report more mobility issues and a higher incidence of not driving. Numerically, there are a higher percentage of females reporting these two barriers. This is in keeping with the greater proportion



of females to males in the population as age increases. The coding of the themes is also validated by the fact that those reporting health issues also give poorer health ratings (hearing, vision, mobility) than the sample as a whole.

Table 16. Barriers to learning in general.*

Barriers to Learning in General	Number of Participants	Percentage of Sample	Percentage of those Reporting Barriers
Personal – Health	46	9.7	25.7
Personal – Family Responsibility	16	3.4	8.4
Personal – Other	4	0.8	0.2
Personal – Total	66	13.9	34.6
Built Environment	41	8.6	21.5
Scheduling/Season	34	7.2	17.8
Too Busy	26	5.5	13.6
Cost/Resources	26	5.5	13.6
Not Suited to Needs	23	4.8	12.0
No Interest	7	1.5	3.7
Too Old	6	1.3	3.1
Lack of Confidence	5	1.1	2.6
Not Aware of Info	3	0.6	1.6

*Categories are not mutually exclusive

We did not examine the characteristics of participants who reported the internal barriers of being too busy or having no interest in general new learning. We anticipated that, as for formal learning, these barriers would be reported by people who are not as vulnerable and therefore not the main focus of this project.

The **focus groups** reported barriers to learning in the form of responses to the question: “What, if anything, prevents you from taking part? What, from your perspective, might prevent others from taking part?” By far the most frequent barrier to these participants was lack of transportation. Other barriers mentioned were not being able to find out what is available or not knowing where to look. Lack of confidence was also reported (note that very few of the questionnaire respondents mentioned this barrier), perhaps a reaction of individuals who have special needs. Not surprisingly, health was also reported as a barrier. However, several of these groups reported no barriers at all (see Appendix B6). In fact members of one group (the low vision group) seemed especially motivated to remove barriers to learning. For example, two individuals in this group asked for a jewellery-making course to be designed and delivered to suit their limitations. They also coached each other to use the transit system so that they could attend.



Table 17. Demographic information, perceived health measures, learning attitudes and life satisfaction of participants experiencing external barriers to learning in general.

Measure	Built environment (N = 41)	Health concerns (N = 46)	Scheduling/ Season (N = 34)	Sample (N = 475)
Mean Age	79.4 years	80.5	75.7	77.4 years
Gender (% Female)	80.5	80.4	67.6	64.0
% married/widowed	36.6/39.0	30.4/47.8	44.1/35.3	53.3/33.0
% own home	61.0	39.1	76.5	65.7
% urban/rural	48.8/26.8	52.2/6.5	55.9/17.6	51.2/11.8
% some university or higher	43.9	54.6	73.5	44.2
% at present never drive	36.6	50.0	11.8	23.6
Mean- Hearing	2.59	2.55	2.31	2.26
Mean- Vision	2.44	2.79	2.01	2.18
Mean- Ease of getting around	2.48	3.02	1.97	2.09
Mean- Satisfaction - Quality of interactions	1.93	1.77	1.79	1.75
Mean- Satisfaction - Frequency of interactions	2.05	1.89	2.00	1.90
Mean- Importance of social interactions	1.51	1.58	1.44	1.57
Mean- Overall quality of life	2.27	2.52	1.91	2.04
Mean- Open to new learning	1.59	1.80	1.47	1.74
Mean- Life-long learner	1.20	1.22	1.21	1.34
Mean- Importance of learning	1.44	1.58	1.32	1.66

Age differences within the sample of questionnaire participants

This topic could only be addressed by the data provided by the questionnaire. The older adult population is a very diverse group and it was expected that much could be learned by examining the characteristics of different age groups within the sample. For example, do the learning interests, levels of engagement in formal learning and barriers to both formal learning and learning in general differ significantly between the older and younger members of our sample? Do their levels of perceived health differ? The sample was divided into two groups, ‘young-old’ and ‘older’¹¹ using the median age of the sample (76 years). First we will examine the demographic characteristics of these two subgroups (see Table 18).

¹¹ We do not consider the lower ages in the 77 to 98 group to be ‘old-old’.



Demographic comparisons

Table 18. Demographic characteristics of two age subgroups.

Measure	Young – Old group (age 65-76, N = 240)	Older group (age 77- 98, N = 235)	Significance of Difference*
Gender (% Female)	63.8	64.3	ns
% married	65.8	40.4	p < 0.001
% widowed	17.4	46.8	p < 0.001
% own home	76.7	53.6	p < 0.001
% retirement/LTC	3.3	21.4	p < 0.001
% urban	50.0	52.3	ns
% rural	15.8	7.7	p < 0.01
% some university or higher	50.0	43.0	ns
% never drive	11.3	36.2	p < 0.001

* X² tests

Compared to the younger group, the older group comprised more widowed individuals (and fewer married) and more who did not drive. Fewer participants in the older group lived in rural locations or owned their own home. A new variable was computed from the living arrangements responses to provide an estimate of those living in retirement residences, long-term care or supportive housing. Comparison of the two groups reveals that, as expected, the proportion of the older subsample with these living arrangements is significantly higher than that of the young-old group. (Further comparisons using three age subgroups revealed that the proportions of the younger groups, aged 65 to 73 or aged 74 to 79 living in some kind of assistive housing did not differ [3.8% vs. 4.6%] but were significantly lower than the proportion of the oldest group [80 to 98, 27.8%]).

Learning interests and age group membership

Table 19 shows the percentages of each group who indicated interest in learning about the topics of health, relationships, hobbies, travel, spirituality and finance.

Table 19. Learning interests by age group: Young-old vs. older.

Interest	% Young – Old group (age 65-76, N = 240)	% Older group (age 77- 98, N = 235)	Significance of Difference*
Health	83.5	80.4	ns
Relationships	37.0	48.5	p < 0.05
Hobbies	53.8	47.8	ns
Travel	52.9	44.3	marginal (p = 0.07)
Spirituality	45.8	44.5	ns
Finance	42.1	44.2	ns

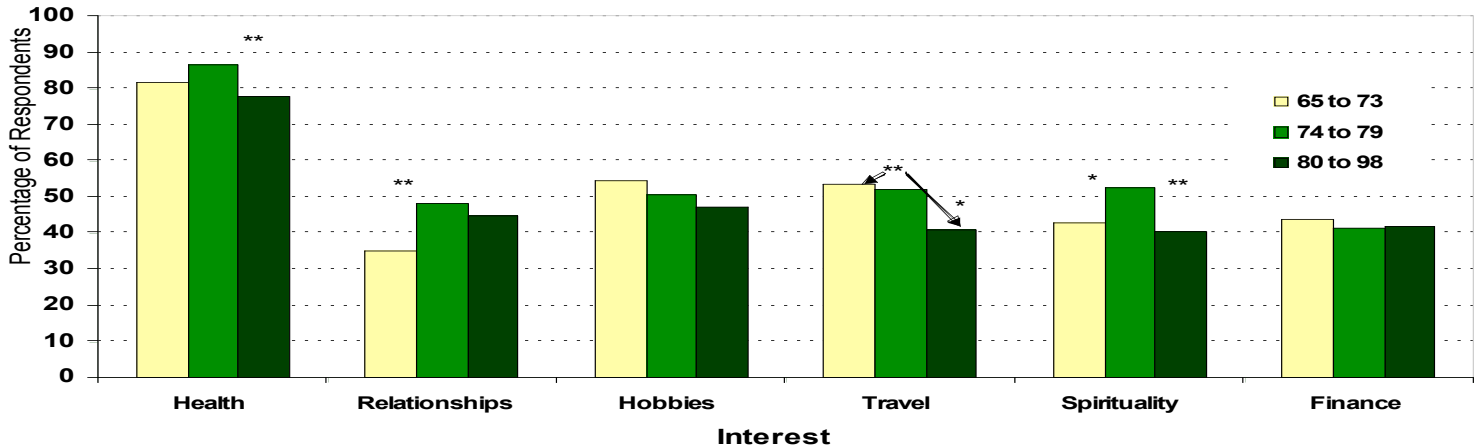
* X² tests

There were few differences between the two groups. Only Relationships and Travel (marginal) differentiated the two groups, with the older group showing less interest in both topics than the ‘young-old.’ To further pursue possible differences in age groups, the sample was divided into



three groups so that each sub-sample comprised approximately one-third of the sample. See Figure 1 for comparisons among the three subgroups for each of the six interest topics.

Interests of 'Young-Old', 'Middle-Old', and 'Old-Old'



** significant difference p< .05; * marginal, p = .07

Comparisons between the youngest group (age 65 to 73) and the oldest group (age 80 to 98) revealed a significant difference in travel interests with the oldest group expressing less interest. When the youngest group was compared to the middle group (age 74 to 79) there was a significant difference for relationship interests and a marginally significant difference for interest in spirituality, with the middle group expressing more interest in both. However, when the middle group was compared to the oldest, the picture changed somewhat. The oldest group was significantly less interested than the middle group in health and spirituality matters, and marginally less interested in travel with no difference for relationships.

To summarize, the youngest group showed the least interest in relationships, the middle group showed the most interest in spirituality, compared to the other age groups, and the oldest group showed less interest in health, spirituality and travel than at least one of their younger counterparts. There were no differences among the groups for hobbies or financial interests.

Formal learning and age group membership

We then looked at the level of engagement in formal learning for the young-old (age 65 to 76) and older (age 77 to 98) groups. Of the young-old group, 16.2% reported taking formal classes, compared to only 9.5% of the older group (X² = 4.59, p < 0.05), a significant difference. When the sample was divided into three age groups however, no significant differences appeared for any comparisons, perhaps because of reduced sub-sample sizes.

Barriers. Next we compared the young-old and older age subgroups with respect to the most frequent external and internal barriers to formal learning. The only external barrier that differentiated the two groups was personal health, with 89.4% of the older group versus 60.7% of the younger group reporting that barrier (X² = 8.58, p < 0.01). The barriers of the built



environment and scheduling issues were reported with equal frequency by both age groups. For the internal barriers of being too busy or having no interest, there were no significant differences in reporting by the two age groups, although numerically, the tendency was for the older group to report

fewer incidences of these barriers. This tendency is in agreement with the data presented in Figure 1 above, where the oldest-old show lower endorsement of several interest topics. As well, the characteristics of those who reported these internal barriers to formal learning suggest that these participants are less vulnerable as a group than those reporting other barriers (see Table 14).

Learning in general: barriers and age group membership

We made the same subgroup comparisons for barriers to learning in general. There were no significant differences in the overall existence of barriers¹² regardless of whether the sample was subdivided into two or three age groups. When we looked at the *nature* of the barriers however, the built environment was reported by 28.4% of the older group compared to only 15.9% of the younger group. Although personal *health* issues did not differentiate the groups, when the personal barriers category also included family responsibilities and ‘other’, the reporting by the individuals in the older subgroup was greater (41.1%) than that of the younger subgroup (27.3%), $X^2 = 3.84$, $p = 0.05$. So it would seem that there is some evidence that the older individuals in the sample perceive more external barriers than their younger counterparts.

Self-perceptions of health and age group membership

Table 20 shows the health ratings of the two subgroups. As expected, the older group had more negative ratings of their hearing, vision and mobility.

Table 20. Age differences: self perceptions of health.

Measure (Mean)	Young – Old group (age 65-76, N = 240)	Older group (age 77- 98, N = 235)	Significance of Difference*
Hearing	2.15	2.37	$p < 0.05$
Vision	2.03	2.33	$p < 0.001$
Ease of getting around	1.79	2.40	$p < 0.001$

*t - tests

Importance of learning and age group membership

As seen in Table 21, the rating of openness to new learning was the only measure that differentiated the two age groups, with the older group giving less positive ratings than their younger counterparts.

¹² Answering ‘Yes’ to the question: “Has there ever been a time recently when you wished you could have engaged in a learning activity but could not?”



Table 21. Age differences: importance of learning.

Measure (Mean)	Young – Old group (age 65-76, N = 240)	Older group (age 77- 98, N = 235)	Significance of Difference
Open to new learning	1.67	1.82	p < 0.05
Life-long learner	1.31	1.37	ns
Importance of learning	1.60	1.72	ns

Life satisfaction and the importance of social interactions in different age groups

There was no evidence of less satisfaction with life or with social interactions for the older group. The importance of social interactions was also the same for both groups (see Table 22).

Table 22. Age differences: Life satisfaction and the importance of social interactions.

Measure (Mean)*	Young – Old group (age 65-76, N = 240)	Older group (age 77- 98, N = 235)	Significance of Difference
Satisfaction - Quality of interactions	1.75	1.76	ns
Satisfaction - Frequency of interactions	1.89	1.91	ns
Importance of social interactions	1.55	1.59	ns
Satisfaction – Overall quality of life	2.05	2.03	ns

* Recall that the lower the number, the more positive the rating.

High versus Low Ratings of Life Satisfaction – Questionnaire data

Again, the data for this section comes solely from the questionnaire sample. How do the characteristics of individuals who give relatively high ratings of life satisfaction compare to the characteristics of those giving lower ratings in terms of demographics, attitudes to learning, perceived barriers to learning and perceive health? A composite variable of life satisfaction was computed by averaging the ratings of: satisfaction with quality of social interactions, frequency of social interactions and overall quality of life¹³.

Almost one third of the sample had a mean composite life satisfaction rating of 2. These were removed from subsequent analyses so that only the most positive ratings (scores below 2) and the most negative (above 2) were used for the comparisons.

Table 23 shows the demographic and health characteristics of the two groups as well as the percentage of non-drivers and rated importance of learning and of social interactions. The only demographic differences pertained to level of education and driving. In the ‘high satisfaction’ group, there were more individuals who had some university education or higher than in the ‘low satisfaction’ group and who were drivers. In terms of health, those with more positive satisfaction

¹³ Cronbach reliability coefficient for the 3 items = .80, above the accepted value of .70 for computing a composite variable.



ratings also gave more positive health ratings. They were more open to new learning, more likely to call themselves ‘life-long learners’ and new learning and social interactions were more important to them than for the ‘low satisfaction’ group.

Table 23. Demographic information, perceived health measures, and learning attitudes of individuals reporting high and low satisfaction (combining level of satisfaction scores for social interactions and life).

Measure*	High Satisfaction	Low Satisfaction	Significance of Difference**
Age	77.7	77.7	ns
Gender (%Female)	66.7	60.6	ns
% Married	54.8	52.8	ns
% Widowed	34.7	32.3	ns
% own home	68.9	58.8	ns
% retirement/LTC	10.1	16.5	ns
% urban	50.3	56.7	ns
% rural	10.1	11.8	ns
% Some university or higher	50.8	33.1	p < 0.01
% never drive	18.1	36.2	p < 0.001
Mean- Open to new learning	1.56	1.97	p < 0.01
Mean- Life-long learner	1.23	1.50	p < 0.01
Mean- Importance of new learning	1.49	1.90	p < 0.001
Mean- Hearing	2.12	2.46	p < 0.01
Mean- Vision	1.92	2.56	p < 0.001
Mean- Getting around	1.82	2.60	p < 0.001
Mean- Importance of social interactions	1.33	1.83	p < 0.001

* For means, the lower the number, the more positive the rating.

**For comparisons between means, ANOVAs were conducted with robust test for equality of means (Welch) and t-tests with Bonferroni corrections for experiment-wise error yielded the same results; X² tests were conducted for differences between percentages.

Does health status significantly predict life satisfaction for this group of older adults? To answer this question, multiple regression analyses were conducted with the three health measures (hearing, vision and mobility) entered as independent variables and the composite life satisfaction variable as the dependent measure. Not surprisingly, vision and mobility each significantly predicted life satisfaction, (vision: $\beta^{14} = .21, t = 3.56, p < .001$; mobility: $\beta = .22, t = 4.18, p = .001$); hearing did not. That is, positive vision and mobility ratings predicted positive life satisfaction ratings for this group.

¹⁴ Beta coefficient: For every unit change in an independent variable, the Beta coefficient value gives the corresponding change in the dependent variable.



Do individuals who report barriers to learning in general also report lower life satisfaction? To see if experiencing barriers is significantly associated with lower life satisfaction above and beyond the prediction by health measures, we conducted the same multiple regression analysis as before but added the variable of experience of barriers as another independent predictor of life satisfaction. Experiencing a barrier was significantly associated with lower life satisfaction ($\beta = -.11, t = 2.29, p < 0.05$) even after the effects of vision and mobility had been taken into account. See also Table 15.

We then examined the nature of the three most common external (built environment, personal (total) and scheduling issues) and internal (no interest and too busy) barriers experienced by those with low satisfaction scores compared to those with high satisfaction scores. Table 24 shows the percentage of participants in each group experiencing each barrier.

Table 24. Percentage of participants experiencing external and internal barriers as a function of high vs. low satisfaction scores.

Barrier	High Satisfaction (N=70)	Low Satisfaction (N =66)
Built environment	14.3	22.7
Personal (total)	31.4	36.4
Scheduling/time of day/season	22.9	10.6
No interest	0	6.1
Too busy	20.0	9.1

Numerically, those with relatively higher satisfaction scores complained less about the built environment, but more about scheduling and being too busy. Given that the scheduling barrier was defined as including difficulties with night and winter driving, this result may seem surprising. However, given that these individuals also drive more than those with lower satisfaction, then they may be less likely to be concerned with transportation issues and more with scheduling difficulties, while those who do not drive are going to report more transportation issues.

Overall then, the individuals who are better educated, drive more, have fewer health problems, perceive fewer barriers to learning and are generally more engaged with life also report higher satisfaction scores.

Next we will examine the differences between computer users and non-users in our questionnaire sample and the prevalence of and interest in computers for the focus group participants.

Computer use by the questionnaire and focus group participants

What are the differences between computer users and non-users in the questionnaire sample in terms of demographics, perceived health, learning attitudes and life satisfaction? Of the 475 individuals responding to the questionnaire, 301 (63.4%) indicated that they either owned a computer or accessed the internet through other computers available to them (e.g. the library, someone else’s home). As a group, computer users rated their ability to use a computer at 2.69, on



the positive side of the scale. 44.1% had owned a computer for more than 10 years. Table 25 shows the demographic and health information for computer users versus non-users.

Table 25. Demographic and health information for computer users versus non-users.

Measure	Computer Users (N = 301)	Computer Non-users (N = 168)	Significance of Difference*
Age	75.8	80.1	p < 0.001
Gender (% Female)	60.5	70.8	p < 0.05
% Married	60.5	40.2	p < 0.001
% Widowed	25.9	43.8	p < 0.001
% own home	74.8	48.5	p < 0.001
% retirement/LTC	5.0	24.3	p < 0.001
% urban	51.2	51.5	ns
% rural	12.6	10.1	ns
% Some university or higher	56.1	29.0	p < 0.001
% never drive	12.6	42.6	p < 0.001
Mean- Hearing	2.27	2.24	ns
Mean- Vision	2.07	2.36	p < 0.01
Mean- Getting around	1.96	2.32	p < 0.001

*X² for differences between percentages; t-tests with Bonferroni-type corrections for differences between means.

Computer users were younger, more likely to be male, married (or not widowed), own their home, drive more frequently and be more educated than non-users. They also rated their vision and mobility more positively, but did not indicate better hearing.

We then compared the relative importance of learning to the two groups as well as their life satisfaction measures.

Table 26. Learning attitudes, life satisfaction measures and computer use

Measure (Mean)	Computer users (N = 301)	Computer non-users (N = 168)	Significance of Difference*
Open to new learning	1.56	2.08	p < 0.001
Life-long learner	1.22	1.56	p < 0.001
Importance of new learning	1.51	1.95	p < 0.001
Satisfaction - Quality of interactions	1.74	1.79	ns
Satisfaction - Frequency of interactions	1.87	1.95	ns
Importance of social interactions	1.54	1.63	ns
Satisfaction – Overall quality of life	1.99	2.11	ns



Computer users considered themselves to be more open to learning and to be life-long learners to a greater degree than did non-users. Learning new things was also more important. None of the life satisfaction measures differentiated the two groups. This finding is not surprising to the extent that the non-users have chosen not to engage in computer learning and appear to be happy without this technology in their lives. There was also no difference in the importance of social interactions for the two groups.

In the section on learning styles and preferences earlier, there was evidence of some aversion to computer technology with searching online and accessing the Internet being quite low in priority of choice and importance to the sample as a group (see Tables 5a, b, 6a, b, 7a, b). On the other hand, more than half of this sample identified themselves as computer users. The ‘aversion’ to computer use shown earlier most likely reflects the responses of the non-computer users. We would expect the learning styles of the computer users to indicate more use of computer technology compared to their non-user counterparts. Table 27 shows the relative preference for computer technology by computer users versus non-users. As expected, computer users showed a greater preference for using online resources and accessing the internet.

Table 27. Mean likelihood of using a computer-related activity to learn something new.*

Computer-related preference	Computer Users (N = 301)	Computer Non-users (N = 168)
Search online for best method (to make a snowflake)	2.65	4.41
Access the Internet	2.13	4.54

* The lower the number, the more likely the behaviour.

The large number of computer users aged 65+ fits with the other demographic information of this sample: relatively well educated, healthy and a sizable proportion (65.3%) owning their home. This large number gives us the opportunity to examine the frequency with which they perform certain computer tasks.

Table 28 shows computer activities used for learning, in declining order of daily use. (See also Appendix A4, Q17 for the scale used and for percentage of responses at each level of the scale).

Table 28. Daily use of computer activities in declining order.

Computer activity	Percentage of participants noting daily use
Email friends/family	46.2
General reading	27.2
Play games	23.9
Word processing	20.6
Google searches	19.6
Play music	6.0
Banking	5.0
Shop on E-bay	0.3



Almost half of the computer users engaged in email activities. This is an activity that allows them to keep in touch with distant relatives (e.g. grandchildren) with whom they might not otherwise have contact. Next most popular were non-social activities involving information gathering and entertainment. The least frequently used activities were playing music, banking and shopping on E-bay, the latter two perhaps being at the same time the most unfamiliar and threatening (in terms of security) for this older cohort.

As a whole, many of the **focus group participants** had at least some access to computers. Their use of computers varied widely (Appendix B9, Information Technology and Appendix B11, Information Technology Use). For example, one individual from Elliott Lake said that he “*was refinishing a kayak and I learned on line where I could buy the supplies that I needed*”. Another man, a former pilot, has and uses a flight simulator. One individual in the Parkdale focus group uses the computer to read papers from his/her home country in his/her own language. It was encouraging to read that 7 out of 9 persons in the low vision group have and use computers. From the data available, it would appear that there was a comparable percentage of computer users in the focus groups and the questionnaire respondents. One might speculate that the computer was used more as a technological assistive device for the focus group individuals with health issues and less so for the relatively healthy individuals in the questionnaire sample.

Earlier, we had noted that there was no difference in life satisfaction between the computer users and non-users in the questionnaire sample, speculating that the non-users had chosen not to have a computer and were quite happy with that decision. This was echoed by one of the focus group non-users who preferred to write letters; another had no interest in having a computer. On the other hand, other focus group members reported not using a computer because of experiencing frustration or having no patience. It would be interesting to investigate further the consequences of being challenged when learning to use a computer in terms of life satisfaction measures.

Additional information from the focus groups

As planned, additional and more in depth information was provided by the focus groups above and beyond that gathered from the questionnaire participants. In contrast to the latter, these individuals were asked what learning opportunities were available, what was missing and what advice they had to offer with regards to what else we should address in our research (See Appendix B2 for the precise wording of the questions).

What is available in their community? (See Appendix B4)

In general, what was available to older adults depended on where they lived and their particular situation. Most groups reported an interesting variety of available learning opportunities. For example, the Elliot Lake Learning in Retirement group had many offerings, including crafts (e.g. ceramics, printmaking) physical activities (hiking, tai-chi) theatre and arts groups, choir, volunteer resources centre, computer club, etc. However the Downsview group whose living arrangements were administered by a social housing provider, reported very few, if any, learning opportunities. This could also be due to these individuals not knowing what is available or how to access information. As well, the long-term care facility group reported very few activities beyond how to cope with health problems. As we will see again in later sections, the more older adults are



involved in the designing of programs, the more those programs will reflect their interests and diversity.

What is missing? (See Appendix B7)

One of the points raised here was the lack of transportation, which was one of the barriers reported by both the focus groups and the questionnaire respondents. This was also reported in the context of an expressed need to motivate seniors “to come out of their apartments”. Many of the individuals felt that there was a paucity of programs aimed at the interests and needs of older adults and a lack of meaningful learning opportunities - “*I don’t want to just have a garden or read the newspaper*”. They also reported wanting opportunities to give back to their community. Many of these comments came from the same group (Downsview) who had reported very few available learning opportunities in their community. Interestingly, the Elliot Lake group, which appeared to have the widest variety of available opportunities, perceived that other opportunities were missing, such as adequate transportation, space or equipment or wheelchair accessibility. On the other hand the Waterloo group (hearing impaired) reported that nothing was missing “*It’s all out there; all you have to do is look for it.*” Again, it is apparent that there is a wide variety of opinions about these issues, reflecting the diversity of these groups.

What would you advise? (See Appendix B10)

Most of the responses to this question came from the visually impaired group and were related to the challenges these individuals face, especially within the realm of transportation. The other groups suggested greater emphasis on examining seniors’ learning interests, their feelings about living alone or their feelings in general, what is important for elder health and well-being and how to get more funding for seniors.

Available Learning Opportunities

i. Inventory of Existing Learning Programs

Results from the telephone interviews will be provided first, followed by information obtained through other strategies. Characteristics of learning opportunities will be examined from the perspective of the learning interests expressed by the sample of Ontario older adults who completed the questionnaire. A summary of the qualitative data from the recorded comments of the research assistants and the data analyst provide additional details about the programs offered by the various organizations.

Telephone Interview Information (see Appendix C2 for the interview guide). Of the 145 agencies reached by telephone, 129 (89%) represented community-based facilities versus traditional learning environments.

Format of learning opportunities. Respondents were asked about the formats of general learning opportunities they provided such as structured classes, informal discussion groups, computer classes et cetera. See Table 29 for a list of formats for the traditional learning agencies and the community-based facilities.



As might be expected, traditional learning environments offered more structured classes but fewer informal discussion group opportunities than did the community-based agencies. The higher incidence of computer training in the traditional institutions reflects the more advanced computer education offered in degree programs than the beginner training (more suitable for many seniors) offered in the communities.

Table 29. Formats of learning opportunities by learning environment.

Format	Traditional/formal (N=13)	Community-based (N=93-95)
Structured classes	11 (84.6%)	41/94 (43.6%)
Informal discussion groups	9 (69.2%)	78/95 (82.1%)
Workshops	11 (84.6%)	51/94 (54.3%)
Online/distance learning	6 (46.2%)	12/94 (12.8%)
Correspondence courses	6 (46.2%)	3/94 (3.2%)
Lectures	7 (53.8%)	53/94 (56.4%)
Computer training	10 (76.9%)	52/93 (55.9%)
Seminars	4 (30.8%)	36/94 (38.3%)
Print resources	7 (53.8%)	49/93 (52.7%)
Television programming	0	29/94 (30.9%)

Program demand. Agencies were asked which of their programs had the greatest demand. Very few of the traditional learning sites answered this question because, in many cases, the information was not known by the person being interviewed. Agencies that offered specific services, such as the faith-based institutions and literacy programs, gave responses corresponding to the purpose of their agency, e.g. Bible study and education upgrading, respectively. The greatest variety of answers came from the retirement residences and senior centres. Some of the activities/programs mentioned were exercise/fitness, crafts (e.g. knitting, scrap-booking), computer classes, dancing, card games and current events. See Appendix C3 for the list of responses given to this question by the retirement residences and senior centres.

Older adult programs. When asked whether they offered programs specifically for older adults, 62.5% of the traditional learning institutions (10 out of the 16 answering this question) and 76% of the community-based agencies (67 out of 88) answered affirmatively¹⁵.

We asked whether these older adult focused learning opportunities differed from those offered to the broader community. They differed for four of the seven traditional agencies and for 26 of the 51 community-based sites who answered this question. Collapsing over learning environment¹⁶, we examined how the programs differed. The majority of respondents indicated that the programs for older adults were more accessible, less structured, lower in class size, offered at lower cost, and had more peer led learning groups than those offered generally. For agencies that reported not providing learning opportunities for older adults, we asked whether they had done so in the past or

¹⁵ Note that those answering are only a small percentage of the agencies canvassed. Generalization should be made with caution.

¹⁶ The numbers become too small to be meaningful for learning environment comparisons.



planned to in the future. Again, because the responses to these two questions were so few¹⁷, we collapsed over learning environment. Only seven of 17 agencies that responded said they had offered programs in the past; six of 15 responding said they planned to in the future.

Promotion of learning programs. Next we tried to get a sense of how learning opportunities were promoted to older adults (refer to the interview guide in Appendix C2). Only four of the 10 respondents from the traditional learning sites answered any of the options, making it difficult to generalize to all traditional learning sites. For the community-based agencies, we were able to elicit more information (see Table 30).

Table 30. Methods of Promoting Learning Opportunities for Older Adults by Community-based/Informal Agencies.

Method	Number (%) endorsing (N=67)
Notify local seniors' groups	30 (44.8%)
Advertise online	15 (22.4%)
Word of mouth	36 (53.7%)
Advertise in seniors' magazines	8 (11.9%)
Advertise in local newspaper	16 (38.8%)
Advertise on community TV station	12 (17.9%)
Post flyers/posters in the community	29 (43.3%)
Post flyers/posters within organization	35 (52.2%)

Other methods of promoting the programs included large signs outside the building, advertising on the radio, distribution of weekly/monthly bulletins or newsletters and in faith organizations, announcements after the weekly service. Cost was mentioned only once, but may account for the relatively infrequent use of seniors' magazines for 'spreading the word'.

Accessibility of the built environment. Agencies were then asked about the accessibility of their built environment with 16 Yes/No questions. As mentioned earlier, for larger institutions, some of the questions could not be answered generally because the programs were held in various buildings that could differ in accessibility. See Table 31 for a list of the questions and the number of agencies in each of the traditional and community-based environments endorsing each one.

The mean percentage 'accessibility score' for each of the traditional and community-based learning environments (reversing # 8) was 69.7% and 75.7% respectively. Though this difference is not confirmed statistically, it suggests that the community-based agencies may be more accessible to older adults than traditional institutions and likely reflects the fact that the community-based agencies included retirement residences, long-term care facilities and seniors' centres where accessibility may be a higher priority. Despite this, the score for the community agencies is still quite low. Given the relatively small response rate and the differences in the number of agencies contacted for the two learning environments, generalization of these numbers to all such agencies in Ontario and comparison between the two learning environments should be done with caution.

¹⁷ Many respondents did not have the relevant information at hand.



Table 31. Number and percentage of respondents endorsing each accessibility question by learning environment.

Question (Yes/No) *	Traditional Environment (N=12) “Yes”	Community-based Environment (N= 71-94) “Yes”
1. Clear directional signage?	11 (91.7%)	78/93 (83.9%)
2. Building wheelchair accessible?	12 (100%)	83/94 (88.3%)
3. Program on ground level?	9 (75.0%)	64/92 (69.6%)
4. Elevator for upper level programs?	7 (58.3%)	45/86 (52.3%)
5. Program within 50 ft of main entrance?	5 (41.7%)	64/85 (75.3%)
6. Short walking distance to parking?	10 (83.3%)	77/90 (85.6%)
7. Ramp access?	11 (91.7%)	61/90 (67.8%)
8. Steps to enter building?	2 (18.2%)*	25/71 (35.2%)*
9. Washrooms wheelchair accessible?	11 (91.7%)	85/91 (93.4%)
10. Washrooms less than 50 ft from program?	9/11 (81.8%)	84/91 (92.3%)
11. Adjustable window coverings to reduce glare?	9 (75.0%)	68/88 (77.3%)
12. Chairs with arm rests?	3/11 (27.3%)	68/90 (75.6%)
13. No wheels on chairs?	6 (50.0%)	72/91 (79.1%)
14. Transportation arranged to and from?	1 (8.3%)	40/89 (44.9%)
15. Accessible by public transit?	12 (100%)	60/88 (68.2%)
16. Print materials consider font size etc.?	7 (58.3%)	83/89 (93.3%)

* Answering ‘yes’ reflects higher accessibility except for #8

Time of day that programs are offered. Agencies were asked about the time of day that their learning opportunities were offered, both for the general community and for older learners in particular. See Tables 32(a) and 32(b) for the responses from the traditional and the community-based learning environments respectively.

Table 32(a) Traditional learning institutions: Time of day programs offered.

Time of Day	All learning opportunities (N=13 responding)	Older adult learning opportunities (N=4 responding)
9 a.m. – 12 p.m.	12	3
12 p.m. – 5 p.m.	12	3
5 p.m. – 10 p.m.	10	1

Table 32(b) Community-based agencies: Time of day programs offered.

Time of Day	All learning opportunities (N=91-92 responding)	Older adult learning opportunities (N=63-64 responding)
9 a.m. – 12 p.m.	72/92 (78.3%)	46/64 (71.9%)
12 p.m. – 5 p.m.	81/92 (88.0%)	58/64 (90.6%)
5 p.m. – 10 p.m.	55/91 (60.4%)	29/63 (46.0%)



These numbers suggest that both learning environments are somewhat responsive to lower demand in the evening, particularly by older adults who expressed less desire to travel at night in our questionnaire data. Again, however, caution should be exercised when generalizing from these data particularly in the case of the traditional learning environments where the response rate is so low.

Time of year most popular. The agencies were asked which seasons of the year were deemed most popular for older adults. Table 33 shows the number of responses endorsing each season from both the traditional and community-based agencies.

Table 33. Popularity of seasons for older adult learning.

Learning Environment	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Traditional (N=8 responding)	2	2	7	2
Community-based (N=58 responding)	31	14	38	21

Spring and fall seem to be most popular for community-based agencies. Summer is the time for holidays and winter is more difficult for travel. Numbers for the traditional learning settings are too low for any generalizations but they suggest that the fall is the most popular season. Fall marks the beginning of the academic year for these institutions and any older adults taking formal courses could be expected to follow the general enrolment figures for that season.

Demographic information of the older adult learner

We also wanted to examine demographic information for the older adult consumers of the learning programs offered. However, very few of the agencies canvassed by telephone kept information about the demographic make up of their clients and if they did, the person being interviewed either did not have the information at hand or ‘guessed’. As well, some agencies were hesitant to give out that information. Instead, we turned to our questionnaire data where we had asked the older adults in our sample to indicate where they learned new information.

From those responses we were able to determine age and gender demographic information for three of the community-based learning environments, (recreation centres, seniors’ centres and faith-based agencies) and for the traditional institutions (see also Appendix A3).

Table 34. Age and gender of older adults (65+) attending each of four learning environments.

	Mean Age	Gender (% Female)
Traditional learning (N=58)	75.6 (range 65 to 96)	60.3%
Recreation centres (N=149)	76.5 (range 65 to 98)	63.8%
Seniors’ centres (N=200)	77.9 (range 65 to 98)	72.5%
Faith-based communities (N=155)	76.5 (range 65 to 98)	66.5%

There is little difference in the mean ages of the different groups but there is a tendency for more women than men to attend the seniors’ centres. One should note that all of these adults are 65 and older as many of the programs offered by the agencies in our inventory invited adults 55 and older.



Therefore the mean ages given here will be higher than the mean ages of the populations attending the agencies we canvassed.

Program content

We then examined the content of the programs offered by all agencies by studying the calendars that had been mailed to us and, where available, the online calendars. To get a sense of whether older adults' learning needs are being met in Ontario, we classified these activities and learning opportunities in terms of the learning interests identified by our sample of older adults. The interest topics were: health, finance, relationships, spirituality, travel, hobbies, computers, current events/civic engagement/history and languages. Table 34 shows the percentage of participants in our questionnaire sample who expressed interest in the presented topics.

Table 35. Responses to the question: Which of the following have you been most interested in learning about recently? (N = 475; from questionnaire study)

Topic	Percentage of Participants
Health and Medical Information	80.6
Hobbies	50.1
Travel	48.0
Spirituality (not necessarily religion)	44.4
Financial Planning/Investing	41.9
Relationships	41.9
Other	29.5

The 'other' categories that were difficult to classify as any of those explicitly presented were current events/civic engagement/history (N = 50, 10.5%) computer and information technology (N = 24, 5.1%) and languages (N = 6, 1.2%).

As mentioned above, the activities and courses offered in the calendars and on the websites were loosely categorized according to the nine topics reported by the older adults who completed our questionnaire on learning. There was some range in the courses and activities offered within each category as there had been in the interests expressed by the sample. The criterion used for inclusion was that the course or activity could be useful/interesting to an older adult and was relatively easy to find by the person examining the calendars and websites.

- Health: This included any topic that had to do with health information ranging from information sessions about, for example, 'foot care' in long-term care homes to more complex courses on health offered at the university level.
- Hobbies: This category included arts, craft, genealogy, gardening, book club, et cetera or any activity generally assumed to be enjoyed as a hobby.
- Travel: In long-term care homes, travel could be a day or afternoon trip to a local place of interest. At the university level, travel might include lectures with slides on distant places within disciplines and programs such as geography or tourism.
- Spirituality: Any activity that touched on the 'inner self' including church activities, meditation or courses about religion were selected.



- Financial planning/investment: The activities in this category ranged from information sessions on investments at retirement residences to more complex courses on accounting or other business topics offered at the university level.
- Relationships: This topic included courses or workshops on, for example, ‘dealing with difficult people’ or tips about how to improve one’s communication with others.
- Current events/civic engagement/history: This included discussion groups on current events, any seniors’ centre’s involvement in the community and history courses at the university level.
- Computer/information technology: Beginners’ computer lessons in long-term care and university-level introductory courses were in this category.
- Languages: Any course or activity that involved learning a second language including English was included here.

Tables 36(a) to 36(g) show the frequency of these topics being offered by traditional learning institutions and by each of the community-based agencies. As the ‘third age’ agencies specifically target older adults, they have been separated from other traditional learning institutions within Table 35(a). The reader should keep in mind that these classifications are approximate. The number of agencies from which the percentages are calculated are those agencies for which some information was obtained using any or all methods of data collection. Please refer to Appendix C4 for additional qualitative information recorded by the research assistants and the data analyst by agency type.

Traditional learning agencies

Table 36(a) Frequency of interest topics offered by traditional learning agencies.

Topic	Third Age Learning Agencies (N= 8)	Other Traditional Learning Agencies (N=50)
Health and medical information	3 (37.5%)	25 (50%)
Hobbies	4 (50.0%)	25 (50%)
Travel	5 (62.5%)	9 (18%)
Spirituality (not necessarily religion)	3 (37.5%)	16 (32%)
Financial planning/investment	3 (37.5%)	33 (66%)
Relationships	0	15 (30%)
Current events/civic engagement/history	3 (37.5%)	20 (40%)
Computer/information technology	4 (50.0%)	30 (60%)
Languages	3 (37.5%)	26 (52%)

The following tables demonstrate the frequency of interest topics for each of the community-based agencies. Those agencies that serve the general community are listed first, followed by those who specifically target older adults.



Ethnic specific agencies

Table 36(b) Frequency of interest topics offered by Ethnic specific agencies.

Topic	Ethnic specific agencies (N=13)
Health and medical information	3 (23.1%)
Hobbies	1 (7.7%)
Travel	4 (30.8%)
Spirituality (not necessarily religion)	1 (7.7%)
Financial planning/investment	2 (15.4%)
Relationships	1 (7.7%)
Current events/civic engagement/history	1 (7.7%)
Computer/information technology	2 (15.4%)
Languages	2 (15.4%)

The main purpose of these agencies was to provide services to immigrants and to help them assimilate into the community regardless of age. Few of these organizations had calendars or their own websites to enable us to determine details about learning opportunities. Notes recorded during the telephone interviews, however, revealed more details about the types of activities that could be of interest to older adults attending these centres and helped to provide the numbers for the above table.

Faith-based agencies

Table 36(c) Frequency of interest topics offered by faith-based agencies.

Topic	Faith-based agencies (N=25)
Health and medical information	1 (4%)
Hobbies	3 (12%)
Travel	1 (4%)
Spirituality (not necessarily religion)	25 (100%)
Financial planning/investment	0
Relationships	0
Current events/civic engagement/history	1 (4%)
Computer/information technology	1 (4%)
Languages	2 (8%)

* The primary focus of the faith-based agencies is the ‘inner well-being’ of their members, so it is not surprising that most of the other learning opportunities as they are defined here were low in priority

Literacy programs

None of the literacy programs canvassed had a calendar or an informative website for our purposes. As well, no additional helpful information was recorded by the research assistants or the data analyst. As a result, particular learning opportunities in any of the nine interest categories could not be determined for these agencies. It should be noted, however, that by their very nature,



these agencies do offer upgrading in education and language skills and so they might be viewed as a source of new learning for particular older adults seeking literacy services.

Public libraries

Table 36(d) Frequency of interest topics offered by Public libraries.

Topic	Public libraries (N=11)
Health and Medical Information	1 (9.1%)
Hobbies	0
Travel	2 (18.2%)
Spirituality (not necessarily religion)	0
Financial planning/investment	1 (9.1%)
Relationships	0
Current events/civic engagement/history	2 (18.2%)
Computer/information technology	8 (72.7%)
Languages	1 (9.1%)

Public libraries are places where individuals can independently seek out their own learning opportunities regardless of age.

However, the libraries we canvassed also offered a variety of special services. Please note that, although these activities were not specifically aimed at older adults, they might be appealing.

Recreation centres

Examination of the sample of recreation centres yielded very little information on potential learning opportunities for older adults. One centre did have a lunch and learn program, but there were no other details given. Other centres with ice rinks focused on hockey and public skating activities.

Provincial seniors' organizations

We examined six provincial seniors' organizations. These agencies serve a variety of needs pertaining to older adults, and can be a source of very useful new information for a senior. The Ontario Gerontology Association (OGA) "is a voluntary, not for profit, charitable organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of older people through research, education, advocacy, and related initiatives" (<http://gerontario.org/>). While the Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres (<http://www.ccac-ont.ca/>) can "help you access government-funded home care services and long-term care homes (and) help people to navigate the array of community support and health agencies in our communities." The Ontario Association of Residents' Council provides networks to strengthen the voice of residents in long-term care or retirement homes through their councils (<http://www.residentscouncils.ca/>). Some organizations provide other learning opportunities useful to an interested older adult, such as healthcare information, or taxation facts (see Canadian Pensioners Concerned, Ontario Division; <http://www.canpension.ca/>). Another



agency, although perhaps less useful to older adults, provides training for support workers who care for older clients (Ontario Community Support Association; <http://www.capacitybuilders.ca/training/training.htm>). The sixth organization we examined was the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (ONPEA), which provides many links to potential learning opportunities, depending on the needs and interests of the older adult.

Long-term care facilities

Table 36(e) Frequency of interest topics offered by long-term care homes.

Topic	Long-term care facilities (N=24)
Health and medical information	6 (25.0%)
Hobbies	8 (33.3%)
Travel	5 (20.8%)
Spirituality (not necessarily religion)	6 (25.0%)
Financial planning/investment	1 (4.2%)
Relationships	0
Current events/civic engagement/history	2 (8.3%)
Computer/information technology	6 (25.0%)
Languages	0

A sizable proportion of long-term care facilities are owned by large organizations that have a common home web page with links to the individual homes. For these agencies, the information given is the same for each home with little to distinguish them in terms of learning opportunities or services offered. In one case, the example calendar of activities for each home was the same. However, it is quite possible that once one is inside a particular long-term care facility, more learning opportunities could be discovered. By referencing the comments recorded by the research assistants and the data analyst, we were able to document additional detail about the types of activities offered to the residents.

Retirement residences

Table 36(f) Frequency of interest topics offered by Retirement residences.

Topic	Retirement residences (N=61)
Health and medical information	23 (37.7%)
Hobbies	34 (55.7%)
Travel	50 (82.0%)
Spirituality (not necessarily religion)	37 (60.7%)
Financial planning/investment	5 (8.2%)
Relationships	1 (1.6%)
Current events/civic engagement/history	11 (18.3%)
Computer/information technology	16 (26.2%)
Languages	0



The numbers for the retirement residences suggest that they provide more learning opportunities in the different interest areas than do the long-term care facilities. In long-term care homes, more time and resources are devoted to responding to physical care needs.

Seniors' centres

Table 36(g) Frequency of interest topics offered by Seniors' centres.

Topic	Senior centres (N=26)
Health and Medical Information	19 (73.1%)
Hobbies	23 (88.5%)
Travel	21 (80.8%)
Spirituality (not necessarily religion)	7 (26.9%)
Financial planning/investment	7 (26.9%)
Relationships	1 (3.8%)
Current events/civic engagement/history	6 (23.1%)
Computer/information technology	21 (80.8%)
Languages	8 (30.8%)

In the seniors' centres where most, if not all, of the older adults are still living and functioning well in the community, we see that even more learning opportunities are offered. These agencies are more likely to have members who are 'joiners', who are healthy, engaged and who take an active role in the running of activities that reflect their interests. The recorded notes of the research assistants and the data analyst revealed the richness of the programs offered overall. As with all of these agency types, we should keep in mind that not all centres offer all of the activities referenced in Appendix C4.

As we move from long-term care to retirement residences to senior centres, it is evident that the variety and richness of programs and learning opportunities increases. This may be partly due to the fact that the senior centres were more individualized rather than being one of many sites of a larger organization. It is also reasonable to suggest that the level of control that the older adults have in planning the programs also increases; those in long-term care may have less control and the members of the seniors' centres may have the most. In the latter case, other needs (e.g. for physical care) are minimal; the learning needs can be directly addressed and most or all resources can be focused on providing a wide variety of learning opportunities. Although this point may seem self evident, it emphasizes the importance of addressing older adults' interests and learning needs in agencies beyond traditional learning organizations.

Additional observations

One of the research assistants noted that, in many cases, it took up to 20 minutes to find any information on programs offered to older adults on any of the college and university web sites. One could suppose then, that it would be difficult for a number of older people trying to use online methods for accessing information on programs offered for older adults in post-secondary institutions.



There was also a large variety in the appearance and usability of the web sites. Some were not conducive to use by older adults (small font, grey font on white background, too ‘busy’, hard to navigate, et cetera). Others, by contrast were easy to read and to navigate. Some had only one page within a larger organization’s web site (e.g. a senior centre within a city’s parks and recreation site); others were very complex with many links (e.g. the provincial seniors’ organizations).

Cost for the learning opportunities also varied greatly, from hundreds of dollars for one university based course to \$88 for a member for six cooking classes to \$2 for a drop-in computer session.

This overview of learning opportunities available to older adults in October 2007 gives a ‘snap shot’ of activities offered by traditional and community-based learning environments between October 2007 and August 2008. Due to the difficulties encountered obtaining the information with the resources at hand, we again repeat that caution should be exercised in generalizing to all agencies in Ontario. This inventory should be considered a starting point and in the future, efforts should be made to supplement it with additional information gathered from another sample of similar agencies.

With more resources, it would be useful to further examine the characteristics of those agencies that appear to best meet older adults’ learning needs. This inventory suggests that the seniors’ centres are well on their way to providing those needs.

ii. Key Informant Interviews

The interviews were intended to complement the agency inventory to give us the additional perspective of decision and policy makers and to raise awareness about the learning needs and interests of older persons with people who may not have direct contact with the learners. Given the diversity of agencies/services represented, each key informant interview was quite unique. What follows is a summary of the themes contained in these perspectives on later life learning. These views from the 15 interviewees do not represent all perspectives; we acknowledge that there may be others not presented here.

A heightened sensitivity to clear communication (larger print on invitations or flyers, good signage, low background noise) makes for a rewarding learning experience for older adults in Ontario.

If you build the right program, they will come.

- Arts and physical fitness appeal to older adults who have been active all of their lives. According to Art Instructor V. R. “Art creates healthy people”. If older adults frequented clubs and fitness centres over their lifetime, there is a greater likelihood that they will also be involved in local seniors’ centres such as the four operated by the City of Ottawa. The Georgian Triangle Lifelong Learning Institute (GTLLI) in Collingwood devotes considerable time preparing to offer the ‘right’ lecture and as a result, their programs are sold out. Yee Hong Centres offer in language programs and also draw huge numbers.

“Lifelong learning is maintained even when people can’t maintain their physical fitness.”
M. K., GTLLI



- Some retirement communities attract golfers or skiers whose ability to engage in these sports may diminish over time. In Collingwood, the lecture series offers retired professionals a chance to retain their brain fitness.

Courses for credits are not generally popular.

- L'université du troisième âge de Sudbury experienced a dismal response when they offered courses for credit at Carleton University. * Note – there may be multiple explanations for a poor response and, again, the reader is cautioned against reading too much into this.

Seniors like to learn from other seniors. Peer-led groups are popular.

- In Sudbury, Franco-Ontarians hold monthly brunches to hear lectures by retired professors or community leaders. In Southwestern Ontario, G. B. believes that the “salon” concept would work in his retirement community in order to effect change for older adults. The salon concept involves a discussion that people prepare for in advance and that is more interactive than a lecture.

Relatedly, the social aspect of a gathering is an important ingredient for successful learning.

- Other than for some lecture series, a primary draw for older adults to participate in a program is the company and, with that, the sharing of food, music and stories.

A complete sense of safety and security is essential to full participation.

- Daytime classes, easy parking, accessible buildings and a convenient location are important for drawing seniors from their homes. Self-esteem and confidence issues arose frequently in the key informant interviews. Transportation in some rural communities continues to be an inhibitor to participation. Generally, the less mobile seniors are, the less likely they are to travel, mostly for safety and security reasons. Mobile library services recognize this and their service grows by 7% annually.

Cultural diversity is a key factor to appeal for non-Anglo Canadians

- Yee Hong and various long-term care homes and residences offer familiar food, programming and entertainment in their own languages.

Funding of formal or informal learning does not appear to be a significant barrier.

- Repeatedly, key decision-makers said that if someone wanted to pursue a course, they would find a way to fund it if they were asked. Libraries offer programs for free. Membership dues for the GTLLI, for example, are held at \$5 per year.

5. Common Themes

a. Learning about health. Question #4 of the questionnaire asked participants about what they had been most interested in learning about recently. Of the young-old group (65-76), 83.6% said ‘health’. Of the older group (77-98), 80.4% said ‘health’. In the focus groups, the Thunder Bay group talked about the need for more health information and others talked about seeking health information as a response to a change in health status (own or others). Regardless of the agencies canvassed for the inventory, none of them offered health as a topic to the extent that there appears



to be an interest. The closest ‘match’ is with seniors’ centres, settings in which seniors seem to have greater input into programs that are offered. See the chart below for details.

Agency	Frequency with which topic offered
Third Age learning environments	53.7%
Other traditional environments	50.0%
Ethic specific agencies	23.1%
Faith based agencies	4.0%
Public Libraries	9.1%
Long-term care facilities	25.0%
Retirement residences	37.5%
Seniors’ centres	73.1%
Interest in health information as reported by questionnaire respondents	80.6%

Learning about health does appear, then, to be a common interest among older adults and one that the SERC research team is responding to via ‘Your Health Marketplace’ (see knowledge exchange products).

b. Keeping the mind active. In terms of motivation for new learning, questionnaire respondents talked about interest/staying current (48.8%), quality of life (28.8%) and need (11.6%). Comments from the focus groups related to keeping active, stimulating your mind, keeping you sharp and thinking. It would appear that many of the programs we learned about through our inventory do provide activities that may help one to stay ‘sharp’.

c. Learning styles. Both questionnaire respondents and focus group participants referenced joining discussion groups, small groups and conversation rather than lectures. Information from some of the key informants agreed with this perspective, designing programs where older adults could learn from each other, in groups, rather than from more formal ‘for credit’ lectures. It would be interesting to examine whether a preference for face-to-face communication in small groups may correlate to some extent with age; younger persons may be more comfortable, for example, communicating through online social networks such as Facebook.

d. The built environment. When it came to barriers to learning, the built environment, especially transportation, was reflected in responses by questionnaire respondents, focus group participants and key interview informants. Transportation was the most frequently cited barrier in the focus groups and the most frequently cited barrier by the questionnaire respondents to formal learning. However, simply having a public transit system in place does not necessarily guarantee accessibility. Focus group participants commented on busy roads to cross, frequency of service, cost and long distances to walk. Key informants referenced safety and security as of paramount importance and some focus group participants talked about feelings of insecurity in some buildings and in the community. The preference for day-time classes was cited by all.

e. Use of computers. Among questionnaire respondents, 63.4% indicated that they either owned a computer or accessed the Internet through other computers available to them. Use of computers



varied among focus group participants (refer to Appendix B9 for details) with everyone in the Waterloo group having access compared to the Downsview group where there was little interest and where cost may have been one impediment. Seven of nine people in the low vision group (Windsor) had and used computers and two in the Kingston (long-term care) group. Most participants report using the computer for email but there were other uses cited by focus group participants.

6. Limitations

Questionnaire

Although an exhaustive effort was made to reach as representative a sample of Ontarians 65+ as possible through the questionnaire, the results were disappointing in two principal ways:

- a. Given the wide scale distribution of the questionnaire, the absolute number of returns was smaller than the research team had hoped for.
- b. The questionnaire results were skewed towards well-educated, generally healthy English speaking respondents. A significant percentage of the returns were from McMaster University S.H.A.R.E members.

Inventory

Collecting data about current learning opportunities in Ontario proved to be a challenge.

- a. It was difficult to reach the 'right' people and many people we spoke with through telephone interviews did not seem to have a lot of specific information about the population they served.
- b. Interviewees committed to sending program calendars but did not consistently follow through on this commitment.

Diversity

Although every method of data collection was designed to encourage hearing diverse voices, we did not hear from as many non English speaking Ontarians as we would have liked. Over 80% of the questionnaire respondents spoke only English at home. Although 25 countries were checked when questionnaire respondents were asked about their country of birth, English was still predominant. Given the rich diversity of cultures that exists in Ontario, this is a significant limitation to this study.

Perhaps if there had been financial resources to translate the questionnaire to dominant languages spoken and greater access to a range of cultural communities, we might have generated a higher response rate to the questionnaire.



7. Implications/Recommendations for Research, Learning and Policy

This study has yielded extremely rich information and has provided a solid foundation from which to move forward. The following implications and recommendations have, first and foremost, been shaped by study participants. In addition, participants at our national meeting held June 10th, 2008, (refer to Appendix E3, Knowledge Exchange Activities) were instrumental in reviewing major study results and contributing their recommendations for the future.

Recommendations have been categorized as research, learning or policy. It should be noted that these categories are not totally distinct and a case could be made for some recommendations fitting into more than one. In addition, an 'other' category has been added to capture recommendations that did not fit into any of the other three.

Research:

a. As previously referenced, the response to the questionnaire could have been more robust. Yet, exhaustive efforts were made and multiple strategies employed to distribute and promote the questionnaire. Although there are many interpretations about why people might not respond to questionnaires, this method of data collection is more cost effective than face-to-face strategies.

If money was not a constraining factor in conducting a study, the following strategies might ensure a greater response:

- ✓ A financial incentive for completing the questionnaire.
- ✓ Substantial prizes in a draw offered for completed questionnaires.
- ✓ Arranging for an individual to be physically present while participants completed the questionnaire.
- ✓ The use of a much larger, existing database such as Statistics Canada, rather than the creation of a new, in-house data base.
- ✓ The translation of the questionnaire into the dominant languages spoken in the geographic area of interest.

If sufficient funds are available to a research team, we recommend relying less on questionnaires for data collection and introducing a greater number of focus groups and telephone interviews.

b. In terms of what we might do differently, one participant at our national meeting suggested '*drill down to more complexities*'. We recommend that a future study be designed that builds on the results of this one and, in a sense, peels away the layers to get at a deeper understanding of the relationships unearthed here. For example, we would like to learn more about the later life health benefits of learning and the correlation with life satisfaction.

c. Some agencies did not interpret what they offer as 'learning'. This was particularly true for retirement residences and long-term care homes. However, learning is not necessarily constrained by where one lives or the stage in one's life. The Principal Investigator has had preliminary discussions with one retirement residence and long-term care provider about further research to



define learning in those settings and to consider the best way to both offer learning opportunities and encourage participation.

d. In future studies, strategies need to be developed to reach a more representative sample of older persons. As referenced in the results section, our questionnaire respondents tended to be fairly well educated and reported relatively good health status and life satisfaction. We were able to reach others who may be more marginalized through the focus groups. However, the focus group sample (60 participants) was not large and the participants in each group represented specific concerns (e.g. dementia, low vision, language barriers).

e. In terms of national scalability and the potential replication of this study, one suggestion from our national meeting held June 10th, 2008, was to lower the age to 50+. It was further suggested by meeting participants that we involve researchers from other provinces and ask them to build provincial teams to feed into a national initiative.

f. Sufficient financial resources should be built into future research to develop strategies to hear from those older persons whose primary spoken language is not English. In addition, culture extends beyond the spoken word to include cultural nuances, customs and traditions. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on understanding learning within a cultural context. To do that will require a level of funding than was not available for the current study.

g. The key informant interviews did not produce as much information as hoped to complement the inventory segment of the project. What they did provide validated the data collected by the other methods in terms of what older adults said they wanted (e.g. large print, safety, group discussions rather than formal learning). Future research using this method might focus more on questions about what was actually offered and why.

h. When asked what they most wanted to learn about, questionnaire respondents indicated 'health'. The research team recommends that further work be done exploring the impact of learning on health and, in particular, health literacy.

Learning:

Recommendations related to learning range from the nature of what is offered to ensuring an accessible built environment.

a. The recommendations found in the text box below are taken verbatim from the key informant interviews.



“Create an environment in which people feel that they are worth something and that there are still things to learn.” G. B., Seniors Planning Committee, Kingsville-Leamington

- ✓ N., an instructor who uses humour, is with Thames Valley Board of Education. He explains that, for his adult computer learners, “Stress is the greatest barrier – fear of failure and education – “I’m going to forget” and “I won’t get it”.
- ✓ The CAW partners with various schools in communities such as Windsor, London and the GTA where there are significant numbers of automotive retirees. Their classroom set-up is non-threatening and has the feel of a big family gathering with snacks. The CAA program, “Shifting Gears”, offers older adults an event to help build their knowledge and confidence about driving in later life.
- ✓ The CNIB uses personalized consultation to help those with lower vision to assimilate into existing seniors programming – “keeping who I am even though I have vision loss.”

b. Transportation was cited as a major barrier to participation in learning activities. Although 100% of traditional learning environments and 68.2% of community based settings indicated that they were available by public transit, the existence of public transit does not (and cannot) tell us the following:

- ✓ How far from home the older person has to go to access public transit
- ✓ Whether there are busy roads to cross
- ✓ Whether the transportation system is wheelchair accessible
- ✓ How long he/she would have to travel on public transit to reach their destination (or how many transfers they might have to make)
- ✓ For those on a fixed income, cost of the transit

Just knowing there is public transportation available is not sufficient. For example, we also know from the study results that those who reported health concerns as a barrier tended to be older, female, less educated and drove less. Further research needs to be undertaken into providing innovative solutions to transportation barriers for the aforementioned cohort of older women, as well as for others.

c. A number of recommendations emerged at our national meeting regarding ways to increase learning opportunities for people who live in rural areas. The suggestions included offering activities around other community events, ‘piggy backing’ on existing seniors’ buses or school buses, the town shuttle system et cetera. Further work needs to be done to create innovative solutions for those individuals who do not live in urban areas.

d. Use of Technology. As we become an increasingly technological society, it is important to encourage older adults to become familiar with technology. By not doing so, we run the risk that they will be left behind.



Of the 475 individuals who responded to our questionnaire, 301 (63.4%) said that they either owned a computer or accessed the Internet through other computers available to them. The primary use (46.2%) was for emailing friends or family. Many focus group participants also reported using computers.

However, we also know that many older adults are not using available technology. Our recommendation is that further research be conducted to explore optimum ways to include older adults in technology applications. Further design work must also be done to create truly accessible technology. A review of many Internet sites that present themselves as 'senior friendly' revealed that most are far from it.

e. Although 80.6% of our questionnaire respondents indicated that health was their primary topic of interest, that topic did not emerge as a 'top' learning opportunity offered in either formal or informal settings. While there may be reasonable interpretations for what is offered by agency type, there may still be a disconnect in some. We recommend that further work be done to ensure a closer match between what older persons want and what is offered.

f. Related to #e., the learning needs of older adults appear to be better met if they have ownership over the 'content' and/or if they are able to remove the barriers to learning themselves (as was the case with two individuals who participated in the low vision focus group. It is recommended that, wherever possible, older consumers participate in the decision making process related to program delivery.

Policy:

a. Although cost was not cited as a major barrier to participation by our sample, we have already acknowledged that the sample was not representative of all older Ontarians. We do know that for those living at or below the poverty line, cost will be a factor. Service providers might consider the following policies in their program offerings:

- ✓ Offer incentives ranging from complimentary refreshments and providing free transportation.
- ✓ Free registration for those who cannot afford to pay.
- ✓ Create bursaries (national meeting suggested foundation bursaries).

b. Computer access from a policy perspective. Consider renting computers at minimal cost to encourage use by non-users. Related to this, perhaps an agency's policy could include paying for Internet service for those who cannot afford to pay. We encourage a policy of universal access to the Internet for all interested older adults.

Other:

a. Marketing and promotion. One cannot access what one does not know about. In both telephone interviews and in Internet searches, our research team encountered many difficulties trying to find out what was available in the community and in formal learning settings. One can only imagine what a challenge it must be for some older adults to navigate the system.



We must find ways to make information available to older persons where they are most likely to access it and pay closer attention to optimum ways for them to receive it. Our inventory of existing learning opportunities revealed the top approach used by community based/informal agencies was word of mouth (53.7%) to promote their activities. One might speculate that, in doing so, you are in effect ‘preaching to the converted’ and that individuals who are not connected to this ‘circle’ might never learn about opportunities.

The next most frequent method of promotion (52.2%) was posting flyer/posters within the organization. Again, one has to be physically there to see the flyer. In addition, although the organizations catalogued in our inventory can be a great source of information and learning opportunities, they may be difficult to find or explore if the older adult is not a computer user. For such individuals, access would have to be through more traditional methods such as telephoning local information agencies, searching the telephone book or perhaps visiting the public library.

We recommend that further research be conducted to determine the most effective ways for older persons to access information about learning opportunities in their communities.

b. One promotion strategy suggested at our national meeting was to “*create a membership concept that encourages seniors to take pride in being part of a learning organization*”. The author recommends exploring other promotional incentives to encourage later life learning.

8. Conclusions

This study has captured a ‘snapshot’ about the learning preferences and learning styles of Ontarians 65+ at a given point in time.

It was evident from the research results that, regardless of their circumstances, the opportunity to continue to learn is vitally important to older Ontarians. The majority of participants in this sample consider themselves to be lifelong learners. As one questionnaire respondent wrote:

“I need to learn something new every day – learning is the core of my being.”

The SERC team designed an innovative approach to elicit information about learning styles. We invited questionnaire respondents to indicate how likely they would be to use a variety of methods to make a three-dimensional snowflake (Appendix A1, question #9). In terms of the percent of the sample endorsing the choices offered, it is interesting to note that 28.8% said they would “look at one and duplicate” it, 11.6% said they would ‘search online’, 18.1% said they would ‘use how-to books or videos and 24% said they would use ‘trial and error’¹⁸. Using this one finding as an example, one might interpret this to suggest that the respondents in this sample were independent and self-directed in their learning. This interpretation has important implications for service delivery and how we include older persons in determining the nature of those services. They know what they want – all we have to do is ask.

¹⁸ An additional 33.3% said they would consult with an expert and 4.0% said they would ‘gather a group to design it’.



During the same time period that we were gathering information from older Ontarians, we learned a great deal about the range of learning opportunities offered by both traditional learning institutions and community-based agencies. Although there were some mismatches between what older persons want and what is offered, it appears that much of what older learners say they want is available – if you know about it. There are barriers to access. The barriers may be external, impediments in the built environment. They may also be internal and, for many, may reflect self-limiting beliefs and the lack of confidence of some older persons. An additional barrier lies in the reality that it is not always easy to access information about what is available. Finally, there are geographical disparities that need to be addressed. Generally, urban dwellers have greater choice and fewer barriers to accessing learning opportunities. It is important that we continue to seek ways to reduce barriers to access.

Longevity is a defining characteristic of the era in which we live. Lifelong learning has the potential to positively impact our health and enhance our quality of life. One questionnaire respondent wrote – “*Learning contributes to my health. To keep on learning means you are involved in living and are still capable. Perhaps it makes you a more interesting person to be around*”. Acknowledging our shifting demographics, it is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that the availability of consumer driven learning opportunities is truly lifelong.

9. References

- Ardelt, M. (2000). Intellectual versus wisdom-related knowledge: The case for a different kind of learning in the later years of life. *Educational Gerontology, 26*, 771-789.
- Cohen, G.D., Perlstein, S., Chapline, J., Kelly, J., Firth, K.M., & Simmens, S. (2006). The impact of professionally conducted cultural programs on the physical health, mental health, and social functioning of older adults. *The Gerontologist, 46*, 726-734.
- Cusack, S.A., Thompson, W.J.A., & Rogers, M.E. (2003). Mental fitness for life: Assessing the impact of an 8-week mental fitness program on healthy aging. *Educational Gerontology, 29*, 393-403.
- Duay, D.L. & Bryan, V.C. (2006). Senior adults' perceptions of successful aging. *Educational Gerontology, 32*, 423-445.
- Glendenning, F. (1997). Why educational gerontology is not yet established as a field of study. *Education and Aging, 12*, 82-91.
- Hori, S. & Cusack, S. (2006). Third-age education in Canada and Japan: Attitudes towards aging and participation in learning. *Educational Gerontology, 32*, 463-481.
- Shapira, N., Barak, A., & Gal, I. (2007). Promoting older adults' well-being through Internet training and use. *Aging & Mental Health, 11*, 477-484.
- Statistics Canada (2007). A portrait of seniors in Canada 2006. Catalogue no. 89-519-XIE. (Ottawa: Minister of Industry).
- Umstatted, M.R., McAuley, E., Motl, R.W., & Rosengren, K.S. (2007). Pessimism and physical functioning in older women: Influence of self-efficacy. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 30*, 107-114.
- Walker, J. (1998). Mapping the learning of older adults. *Adults Learning, 10*, 14-16.



Appendix A
Questionnaire



APPENDIX A1: Questionnaire (Version A)

February 1, 2007

Dear Ontario Resident,

Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC)

Located on Sheridan's campus in Oakville, Ontario, SERC strives to enhance the quality of life for older persons. SERC affiliated researchers and volunteers are dedicated to developing, testing and implementing innovative, realistic solutions that improve the day-to-day-lives of older adults and their families.

Whether it involves user friendly product designs, improving accessibility or assisting seniors with technology, SERC's goal is to be a leader in transforming research into practical solutions – “from lab to life”™.

Announcing our newest research study

“As Seen through Their Eyes: Understanding the Learning Needs of Ontario's Older Adults”

Through our latest research initiative, funded by the Canadian Council on Learning, we are trying to understand all that we can about how, what, where, when and why seniors learn. From the information that Ontario seniors provide, we will develop recommendations about responding to the various learning needs and interests that emerge from this study.

If you are over 65 years of age, we invite you to participate!

We would like to understand your thoughts and ideas about learning. The information that you choose to provide is completely voluntary, confidential and anonymous. The attached questionnaire will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. We invite you to return it to us by mail in the envelope provided. If you prefer, the questionnaire can also be completed online at <http://serc.sheridaninstitute.ca>. If you have friends or family members who would like to contribute to this project by responding to the questionnaire, we would be pleased to send them a questionnaire.

Please contact Candace at: candace.fochukbarey@sheridanc.on.ca or by phone at (905) 845-9430, ext. 4117 should you have any questions or require additional information.

Deadline for responses: March 16, 2007

With thanks,
The Research Team
Sheridan Elder Research Centre
Sheridan Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning
1430 Trafalgar Road, Oakville, ON L6H2L1



A Understanding the Learning Needs and Interests of Ontario's Older Adults

1. Learning means different things to different people. What does it mean to you?

2. How open do you consider yourself to be to new ways of learning?

Very Open Open Could be open Not very open Not open at all

3. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statement:
I consider myself to be a "life-long learner".

- Totally Agree
- Partially Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Partially Disagree
- Totally Disagree

4. Which of the following have you been most interested in learning about recently? Please check as many as apply and use the space provided to add further comments.

- Hobbies _____
- Health & medical information _____
- Financial planning / investing _____
- Travel _____
- Relationships _____
- Spirituality (not necessarily religious) _____
- Other (please list) _____



5. Do you currently attend formal classes in traditional learning settings?

- Yes No

If you do attend formal classes, please indicate where these classes are held, checking all that apply.

- Community college University High School
 Public library Correspondence courses

6. If you do not take formal classes, please list some issues that make it difficult for you to attend.

Three horizontal lines for writing answers.

7. Some older adults also learn in more informal ways. Please mark how important each source of new information is to your own learning using the scale below:

Books

- Scale: Extremely Important, Important, Take it or leave it, Not Important, Not important at all

Informal discussion groups/ coffee chats

- Scale: Extremely Important, Important, Take it or leave it, Not Important, Not important at all

Television

- Scale: Extremely Important, Important, Take it or leave it, Not Important, Not important at all



Faith / Community

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extremely Important	Important	Take it or leave it	Not Important	Not important at all

Workshops / Seminars

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extremely Important	Important	Take it or leave it	Not Important	Not important at all

Clubs / Societies / Organizations

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extremely Important	Important	Take it or leave it	Not Important	Not important at all

Radio

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extremely Important	Important	Take it or leave it	Not Important	Not important at all

Internet

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extremely Important	Important	Take it or leave it	Not Important	Not important at all

Newspaper

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extremely Important	Important	Take it or leave it	Not Important	Not important at all



On-line Learning

- Extremely
Important
- Important
- Take it or
leave it
- Not
Important
- Not important
at all

Print media including magazines or newsletters

- Extremely
Important
- Important
- Take it or
leave it
- Not
Important
- Not important
at all

8. Some older adults learn out in their community. Please indicate whether you learn new information in any of the following settings, marking all that apply to you.

- Seniors’ Centre functions
- Faith communities
- On-line communities
- Health Education or Support Groups
- Speciality Schools (e.g. craft classes)
- Arts / Cultural Centres
- Community / Recreation Centres
- Other (please explain) _____

Understanding how you learn something new

Now, imagine that you are asked to make a 3-dimensional paper snowflake for a young child but you have never made one before now. Please think about which approach you would take in order to create that paper snowflake.

9. How likely would it be for you to use any of the following methods in order to make this snowflake?

By checking out various “how to” books or videos

- Very Likely
- Likely
- Unlikely
- Very Unlikely
- Never

By gathering a group of others together to work on the design of the snowflake

- Very Likely
- Likely
- Unlikely
- Very Unlikely
- Never

By consulting with someone else who makes them all the time

- Very Likely
- Likely
- Unlikely
- Very Unlikely
- Never



By searching on line for the best method

Very Likely Likely Unlikely Very Unlikely Never

By looking at another one already made and then duplicating it

Very Likely Likely Unlikely Very Unlikely Never

By trial and error on your own

Very Likely Likely Unlikely Very Unlikely Never

10. In order to learn something new, how likely are you to ...

Register for formal classes?

Very Likely Likely Unlikely Very Unlikely Never

Access the Internet?

Very Likely Likely Unlikely Very Unlikely Never

Join informal discussion groups (eg. church or local coffee shop)?

Very Likely Likely Unlikely Very Unlikely Never

Search for someone who shares your interest?

Very Likely Likely Unlikely Very Unlikely Never

Use local library or other organized resources?

Very Likely Likely Unlikely Very Unlikely Never

Join an organization?

Very Likely Likely Unlikely Very Unlikely Never



11. Has there ever been a time recently when you wished that you could have engaged in a learning activity but could not?

Yes

No

If yes, please explain what, or who limited your access to learning. Please be specific.

12. How important is it to you to learn new things?

Very important

Somewhat important

Take it or leave it

Not very important

Not important at all

13. What motivates you to learn new things?

14. What would help you to accomplish this?

15. Please indicate at which time of day you engage in new learning based on the season:

	Mornings	Afternoons	Evenings	
Spring		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Summer		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fall		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Winter		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



16. If you have access to a computer and internet at home, please indicate how frequently you use it to learn on a typical day by performing the following tasks:

Banking

Daily Every few days Weekly Occasionally Never

Email friends / family

Daily Every few days Weekly Occasionally Never

Google searches

Daily Every few days Weekly Occasionally Never

Shop eBay

Daily Every few days Weekly Occasionally Never

Word processing

Daily Every few days Weekly Occasionally Never

General reading

Daily Every few days Weekly Occasionally Never

Play games

Daily Every few days Weekly Occasionally Never

Play music

Daily Every few days Weekly Occasionally Never



Your interaction with others

In this next section we are interested in the nature, frequency and value of your social interactions with others.

17. How satisfied are you overall with the quality of your interactions with others?

Very Satisfied Satisfied Indifferent Dissatisfied Very Dissatisfied

18. How satisfied are you overall with the frequency of your interactions with others?

Very Satisfied Satisfied Indifferent Dissatisfied Very Dissatisfied

19. How important are social interactions in determining your overall level of life satisfaction?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4
Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not very Important	Not important at all

20. I consider my overall quality of life to be ...

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1	2	3	4	5
Excellent	Very Good	Comfortable	Not very Good	Poor



Please tell us about yourself All responses remain anonymous and confidential.

21. What is your year of birth? 19 __
22. Your gender? Male Female
23. What is your marital status?
- Single Married Widowed Living with partner or other family member
24. What is the highest level of formal education that you completed?
- Grade school or equivalent depending on country of birth
 Some high school or equivalent depending on country of birth
 Graduated high school or equivalent depending on your country of birth
 Some Trade school
 Trade school
 Some College
 Completed College Diploma
 Some university
 Completed University Degree
 Some Post- Graduate Study
 Completed Post- Graduate Degree
 Completed PhD
25. How often do you drive a vehicle?
- Every day A few times a week Occasionally Hardly ever Never
26. Which location best describes where you live?
- In a rural area In a small town In a larger city
27. Please indicate which best describes your living arrangements.
- Own house Independently in a Retirement Residence/Community
 Apartment Supportive Housing
 Long Term Care Facility Other (Please specify) _____
28. In what country were you born? _____
29. What language(s) do you speak at home? _____



APPENDIX A2a. Questionnaire Promotion Strategies

Media Release and Public Service Announcements

In an effort to reach Ontarians 65+ across the province, including isolated older adults, a media release (Appendix A2b) was initiated through Canada News Wire Service. The Canadian News Wire reaches all major market print and broadcast media across Ontario. A media release and public service announcement was also sent to regional cable TV stations in Halton and Peel, to radio station AM740 (targeting older adult listeners across Ontario) and to the Ontario Newspaper Association's service which reaches community newspaper media across Ontario.

Web-Based Promotional Initiatives

The Sheridan Institute Home Page featured a link to a PDF version of the promotional flyer and a link to the media release. The SERC web site (<http://serc.sheridaninstitute.ca>) featured links to the on-line survey as well as links to a PDF of the questionnaire and to a PDF of the promotional flyer.

A one paragraph introduction to the study, including a link to the SERC web site, was posted on five Ontario seniors' related web sites from February 15th until March 31st, 2007.

www.ryerson.ca/~lifeinst/: The L.I.F.E. Institute (Learning Is For Ever) is an institute for learning in retirement affiliated with Ryerson University in Toronto.

- www.changinggears.ca: Changing Gears is a Canadian organization that supports people through life transitions associated with aging.
- www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/seniors/index.html: The Ontario Seniors' Secretariat- influences and supports policy development across all government activities on behalf of Ontario's seniors.
- www.seniorsinfo.ca: Seniors' Information was developed by the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat as the first multi-jurisdictional Seniors' Portal in Canada.
- www.web.net/OCSCO/: The Ontario Society (Coalition) of Senior Citizens Organizations is a provincial organization whose membership includes over 140 seniors' organizations and individuals representing 500,000 senior citizens from across Ontario.

Direct Mailing

With the assistance of two SERC volunteer elder co-researchers, a SERC research assistant created a mailing database that included organizations that represent, serve or come into regular contact with older persons across Ontario. On Feb 6th, 2007, 1,000 seniors' related organizations across Ontario were mailed a hard copy of the questionnaire as well as a flyer that respectfully requested the reader's assistance in making copies and distributing the questionnaire "to as many Ontarians 65+ as possible". A random sample of one-third of this mailing list also received a colour flyer to post within their organization.

Not all older Ontarians come into direct contact with senior specific organizations. Therefore, the database was created using 15 categories that captured not only senior specific organizations such as retirement residences and seniors' centres, but also those organizations that seniors in Ontario were likely to frequent (e.g. libraries and faith based communities). The 15 categories included:



1. Ethno-specific service agencies
2. * Faith based communities
3. General community/recreation centres
4. Gerontology research and education programs
5. Long-term care homes
6. Ontario shopping malls: mall walker programs
7. Provincial organizations for people with disabilities
8. Provincial seniors' organizations
9. Public libraries
10. Retiree associations
11. Retirement residences
12. Seniors' advocacy and/or self help groups
13. Seniors' centres
14. Supportive housing settings
15. 'Third' Age learning programs

*For a breakdown of faith based communities please refer to Appendix A2a-i.

Additional direct mailing initiatives:

- On Feb 28th, 2007, SERC was given permission to mail questionnaires to 360 members of McMaster University's research participant group: S.H.A.R.E. (Seniors Helping Advance Research Excellence).
- From Feb 12th - May 15th: an additional 286 hard copy questionnaires were distributed to organizations and individuals who either called or emailed to request copies. Seventy-nine of these questionnaires were sent to one resident of Sault Ste. Marie who, upon receiving her own copy, offered to distribute questionnaires to older adults who belonged to organizations with whom she was involved. These groups included:
 - Chapter 15, Canada's Association for the Fifty Plus, (CARP); covering Sault Ste. Marie and the surrounding area.
 - Retired Teachers Association, Algoma; covering Chapleau, Hornepayne and Elliot Lake, as well as Sault Ste. Marie.
 - Sault Ste Marie Elder Abuse Committee.
 - Local Slips, Trips and Falls Committee.

Public Relations and Outreach Activities

The research study was promoted electronically and in person by the SERC research team and others:

- Feb 12th, 2007: On behalf of the SERC team, the Ontario Seniors Secretariat (OSS) emailed a PDF version of the questionnaire and a promotional flyer to the OSS Liaison Committee Members representing eight Ontario Seniors' organizations received the questionnaire. Canada's Association for the Fifty-Plus (CARP)
 - Canadian Pensioners Concerned (CPC) – Ontario Division
 - Councils on Aging Network of Ontario (CANO)



Sheridan Elder Research Centre

- Older Women's Network (OWN)
 - Ontario Coalition of Senior Citizens' Organizations (OCSCO)
 - Royal Canadian Legion
 - United Senior Citizens of Ontario (USCO)
 - Multicultural Council for Ontario Seniors
-
- Feb 12th, 2007: The SERC research assistant contacted individual members of both the Ontario Social Service Worker Educators and Personal Support Worker Educators of Ontario via email. The letter outlined the purpose of the study and requested support from those who teach students who had field placements that connected them with older adults in Ontario. The aspiration was that, through students, we might reach a broad spectrum of older adults, including those who are isolated as a result of physical and/or psychosocial limitations. A PDF version of the questionnaire and a PDF of the promotional flyer were attached to the email.
 - Feb 12th, 2007: On behalf of the SERC team, Sheridan's Social Service Worker – Gerontology field placement liaison faculty member forwarded a PDF version of the questionnaire and the promotional flyer to 60 Social Service Worker-Gerontology students and to 117 field placement supervisors.
 - Feb 12th - 15th, 2007: Participants in SERC's open lab computer coaching sessions were provided with copies of the questionnaire and invited to promote it, where appropriate, with their friends and family.
 - Feb 16th, 2007: The SERC research assistant gave a presentation about the CCL study at the annual meeting of the Ontario Social Service Worker Educators in Toronto. Twenty questionnaires were distributed to the 15 attendees.
 - On March 16th, 2007, 992 reminder cards were sent to the original CCL mailing list. Eight of the original addresses were deemed undeliverable and new addresses could not be found.
 - March 22nd, 2007: During a presentation to 21 attendees of the CCL Adult Learning Knowledge Centre's (ALKC) funded knowledge exchange roundtable: *Focal Point on Senior's Learning: A Compass to Guide Us*; the SERC research team summarized their research process to date and encouraged participants to promote the questionnaire within their organizations. Each attendee was provided with a hard copy of the questionnaire in their workshop package.
 - On April 11th, 2007: The Sudbury chapter of CARP distributed promotional flyers to 4,100 members (individuals and couples) who receive their newsletter.
 - On April 20th, 2007: The Ontario Provincial Command of the Royal Canadian Legion mailed a promotional flyer to 422 Ontario branches.



APPENDIX A2a-i. - Faith Based Communities

Faith Group	#	Systematic Sampling method¹⁹
Anglican	26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca entered Anglican Churches and Ontario • Results: 546 listings in a random list. • Recorded every 60th listing for a total of 9 • In order to capture more data we selected the 25th entry for a total of 17. Listings after the 17th did not fit our criteria (i.e. not churches). • Grand total: 26
Baptist	22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca entered Baptist Churches and Ontario • Results: 683 listings in a random list. • Recorded every 30th listing for a total of 22
Buddhist	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca entered Buddhist Temples and Ontario • Results: 11 listings in a random list. • Recorded every 5th listing for a total of 2
Catholic	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca entered Catholic Church and Ontario • Results: 364 listings in a random list. • Recorded every 60th listing for a total of 6 • In order to capture more data we selected the 25th entry from each page (each pg. Contained 30 entries). We were able to capture 9 entries using this method. Listings after the 9th did not fit our criteria (i.e. not churches). • Grand total: 15
Hindu	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca entered Hindu Temples and Ontario • Results: 10 listings in a random list. • Recorded every 5th listing for a total of 2
Jehovah's Witness	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca, entered Jehovah's witness and Churches and Ontario • Results: 136 listings in a random list. • Recorded every 30th listing for a total of 4
Jewish	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca entered Synagogues of Ontario • Results: 116 listings in a random list. • Recorded every 15th listing for a total of 7

¹⁹ <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310116.NSF/0/116e0f93f17283eb4a2567ac00213517?OpenDocument>



APPENDIX A2a-i. - Faith Based Communities, continued

Faith Group	#	Systematic Sampling method
Lutheran	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca, entered Lutheran Churches and Ontario • Results: 296 listings in a random list. • Recorded every 30th listing for a total of 9
Muslim	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca entered Mosques of Ontario • Results: 39 listings in a random list. • Recorded every 15th listing for a total of 2
Pentecostal	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca entered Pentecostal Churches and Ontario • Results: 227 listings in a random list. • Recorded every 30th listing for a total of 7
Presbyterian	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca entered Presbyterian Churches and Ontario • Results: 467 listings in a random list. • Recorded every 60th listing for a total of 8 • In order to capture more data we selected the 25th entry from each page • The 18th entry did not fit our criteria (fax line listing) so we have only 17 entries. • Grand total: 25
United	58	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca entered United Churches and Ontario • Results: 1,177 listings in a random list. • Recorded every 60th listing for a total of 19. • In order to capture more data we selected the 25th entry for a total of 39 entries. • Grand total: 58



APPENDIX A2b: Questionnaire Promotion - Sheridan news release

SHERIDAN ELDER RESEARCH CENTRE (SERC) INVITES SENIORS 65+ TO PARTICIPATE IN A PROVINCIAL SURVEY ABOUT LATER LIFE LEARNING

For Immediate Release: Wednesday, February 7, 2007

Oakville, Ontario: The Sheridan Elder Research Centre has launched a province-wide research initiative that includes surveying Ontario's older adults with respect to their thoughts and ideas about later life learning.

“Through our latest research initiative, funded by the Canadian Council on Learning, we are seeking to understand all that we can about how, what, where, when and why seniors learn,” said SERC Director Pat Spadafora.

If you are 65+ and living in Ontario, Sheridan researchers encourage you to participate in this important research study entitled “*As Seen Through Their Eyes: Understanding the Learning Needs of Ontario's Older Adults*”.

From the information provided by Ontario seniors, Sheridan researchers will develop recommendations about how best to respond to the various learning needs and interests of older persons.

“The information that older adults provide is completely voluntary, confidential and anonymous,” Spadafora added.

For more information or to receive a paper copy of the questionnaire, please contact Candace Fochuk-Barey at (905) 845-9430, ext. 4117 or email candace.fochukbarey@sheridanc.on.ca

To complete an on-line questionnaire go to: <http://serc.sheridaninstitute.ca> and click the questionnaire button on the homepage.

Located at The Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning in Oakville, Ontario, SERC researchers and volunteers strive to enhance the quality of life for older persons and their families.



APPENDIX A2c: Initial Questionnaire Mail Out – Organization and Sampling Method

Organization	#	Sampling Method
Ontario Shopping Malls: Mall Walker Programs	20	<p>Systematic Sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca • Searched “Shopping Centres” and “Ontario” for a total of 209 randomly displayed listings • Every 10th listing was recorded for a total of 20.
Ethno-specific Service Agencies	62	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From http://www.settlement.org/site/REGIONS/ • Recorded all appropriate listings under “Major Immigrant/Refugee Settlement Service” for a total of 62
Faith based communities	172	<p>Random Purposeful Sample²⁰:</p> <p>*See Appendix A2a-i for break down by faith group</p>
General Community/ Recreation Centres	44	<p>Systematic Sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From www.yellowpages.ca • Searched: “Recreation Centres” and “Ontario” for a total of 78 randomly displayed listings • Recorded every 10th listing. • In cases where the 10th listing was not appropriate (i.e. RV repair centre), the next appropriate listing was selected. • The selection process was resumed by taking the 10th listing from the last appropriate listing.
Gerontology Research and Education Programs	19	<p>Convenience Sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From Simon Fraser University, Gerontology Department’s website at: http://www.sfu.ca/gerontology/08gero_links/gero_programs.html#ont • Recorded all entries from an online database of Ontario research and education programs for a total of 19 listings
Long-Term Care Facilities	125	<p>Systematic Sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From the Ontario Long Term Care Facility Employment Information website’s Facility Locator webpage at: http://www.ltccareers.com/facilityframe/english/FacilitySearchResult.asp?Facility+Name=&Region=&County=&City=&CCAC • Total of 625 alphabetically ordered listings • Recorded every 5th for a total of 126 <p>Removed entry: Tsi Ion Kwa Nonh So:Te after investigation revealed that it was an aboriginal site and therefore not relevant to the scope of our project</p>

²⁰ <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/tutorial/Mugo/tutorial.htm>



APPENDIX A2c: Initial Questionnaire Mail Out, continued

Organization	#	Sampling Method
Provincial Organizations for People With Disabilities	29	<p>Convenience Sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited our scope to only include Ontario chapters/branches of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and The Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA) • From: http://www.chha.ca/chha/about-ontario.php • Recorded all listings under “Ontario” for a total of 9 listings • From: http://www.cnib.ca/community/ontario/offices/index.htm • Recorded all listings under “Ontario” for a total of 20 listings
Provincial Seniors' Organization	23	<p>Convenience Sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recorded all listings from the Ontario Seniors’ Secretariat’s database: OSS Major Stakeholders, with permission
Public Libraries	44	<p>Systematic Sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquired access to an alphabetically listed database of all Ontario Public Library branches for a total of 921 • Recorded every 20th listing for a total of 45 • Tyendinaga library was removed because it didn’t fit our criteria (i.e. aboriginal community)
Retirees Associations	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recorded all available listings from: www.yellowpages.ca • Search: “Retiree Associations” and “Ontario”
Retirement Residences	295	<p>Convenience Sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From the Ontario Retirement Communities Association’s “City Search” webpage at http://www.orca-homes.com/city_search.asp • Recorded every listing for a total of 295
Seniors' Advocacy and/or Self Help Groups	8	<p>Convenience Sample:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recorded 3 listings from the listings from the Ontario Seniors’ Secretariat’s database: OSS Major Stakeholders • Recorded 5 listings from SERC’s pre-existing contact list



APPENDIX A2c: Initial Questionnaire Mail Out, continued

Organization	#	Sampling Method
Seniors' Centres	75	Convenience Sample: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Recorded all listings from the Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario's current membership directory posted at: www.oacao.org/2006-07_OACAO_Membership_by_Community.htm
Supportive Housing Settings	65	Systematic Sample: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Recorded every 10th listing by region under "Subsidized/Public Housing" from http://www.settlement.org/site/REGIONS/In regions where there were fewer than 10 listings the first listing was chosen
Third Age Learning Programs	16	Convenience Sample: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Recorded all Ontario listings from The Canadian Network for Third Age Learning's website: http://dev.www.uregina.ca/catalist/courses/courses.html



APPENDIX A2d: Questionnaire Distribution – Timeline and Sampling Method

Systematic²¹	Opportunistic²²	Convenience²³
<p>Feb 6, 2007: Direct mailing of one questionnaire to 1,000 organizations who represent, serve, or come into regular contact with seniors across Ontario</p>	<p>Feb 12, 2007: Emailed promotional flyer and questionnaire to 117 field placement supervisors for Sheridan, Social Service Worker-Gerontology students requesting their help in distribution</p> <p>From Feb 12-April 15th: SERC sent out 286 hard copy questionnaires to various organizations and individuals who either called or emailed to request copies. 79 of these questionnaires were sent to 1 resident of Sault Ste. Marie upon receiving her offer to distribute questionnaires to older adults who belong to organizations with which she is also involved.</p>	<p>Feb. 12, 2007: Loren Coe of The Ontario Seniors Secretariat (OSS) emailed a PDF version of the questionnaire and a promotional flyer to the OSS Liaison Committee Members representing the following 8 Ontario Seniors’ organizations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada’s Association for the Fifty-Plus (CARP) • Canadian Pensioners Concerned (CPC) – Ontario Division • Councils on Aging Network of Ontario (CANO) • Older Women’s Network (OWN) • Ontario Coalition of Senior Citizens’ Organizations (OCSCO) • Royal Canadian Legion • United Senior Citizens of Ontario (USCO) • Multicultural Council for Ontario Seniors
<p>March 16, 2007: Sent out 992 reminder slips to original mail out recipients.</p>	<p>Feb 16, 2007: Presented at annual Social Service Worker Educators of Ontario’s annual meeting to request their assistance in getting students involved in distributing the questionnaire</p>	<p>Feb 12, 2007: Emailed promotional Flyer and questionnaire to 60 Sheridan, Social Service Worker-Gerontology students and 170 Social Service Worker-Gerontology field placement supervisors</p>

²¹ <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310116.NSF/0/116e0f93f17283eb4a2567ac00213517?OpenDocument>

²² <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/tutorial/Mugo/tutorial.htm>

²³ Ibid



APPENDIX A2d: Questionnaire Distribution – Timeline and Sampling Method, continued

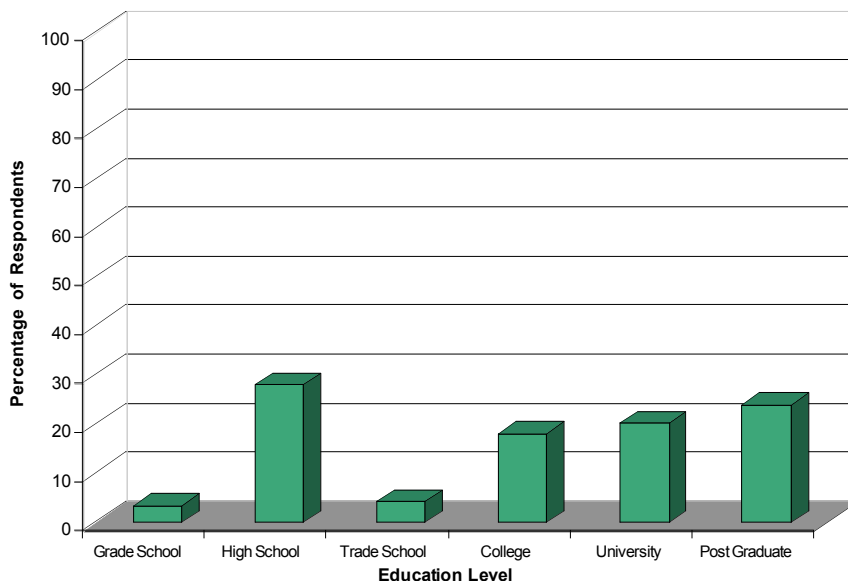
	<p>Feb 28, 2007: Mailed out 360 questionnaires to SHARE members 65+ with return envelopes</p>	<p>Feb 12, 2007: Emailed promotional Flyer and questionnaire to 46 members of the Social Service Worker Educators of Ontario directly, to request their assistance in distributing the questionnaire through their students and within their college</p>
	<p>March 22, 2007: Presented to 22 participants of the CCL funded knowledge Exchange Roundtable titled: Focal Point on Seniors Learning, A Compass to Guide Us. SERC requested that attendees fill out the questionnaire, if appropriate, and that participants encourage Ontarians 65+ to fill out the questionnaire.</p>	<p>Feb 12, 2007: Emailed promotional flyer and questionnaire to 51 members of the Personal Support Worker Educators of Ontario directly, to request their assistance in distributing the questionnaire through their students and within their college</p>
	<p>April 11, 2007: The Sudbury CARP branch sent 2,600 promotional flyers to 4,100 Sudbury CARP members on SERC's behalf</p>	
	<p>April 20, 2007: The Ontario Provincial Command of the Royal Canadian Legion mailed out a promotional flyer to 422 Ontario branches on SERC's behalf.</p>	



APPENDIX A3 - Questionnaire: Demographic information

Of the 475 participants, 304 (64%) were women ranging in age from 65 to 98 (Mean age = 77.4; SD = 7.3) The 170 males (Mean age = 77.0; SD = 7.2) ranged in age from 65 to 97. One 89-year-old individual did not give his/her gender.

FIGURE Ba
Education Levels (N= 474)*



* High School includes 'some high school'; College includes 'some college'; University includes 'some university'; Post graduate includes 'some post graduate'

FIGURE Bb
Marital Status (N= 472)

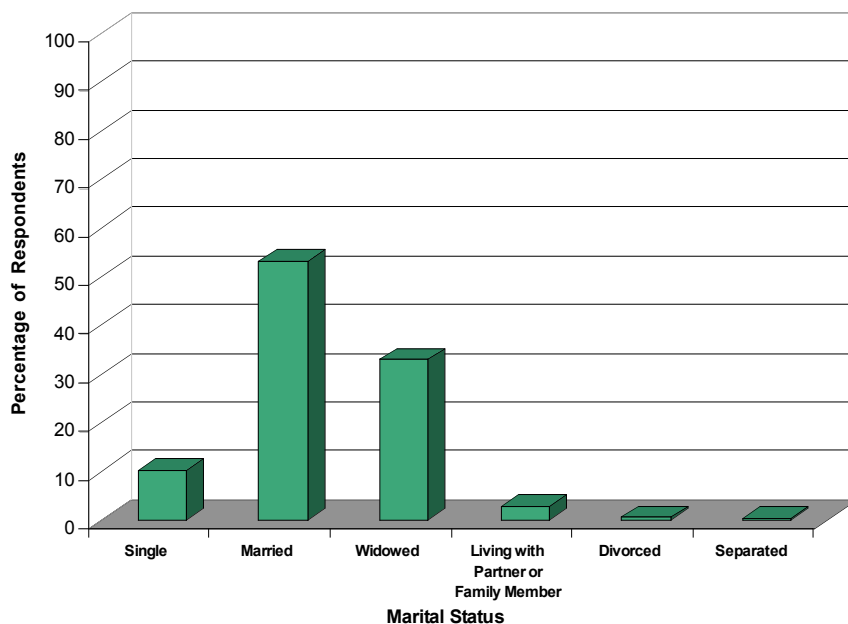


FIGURE Bc
Living Location (N = 470)

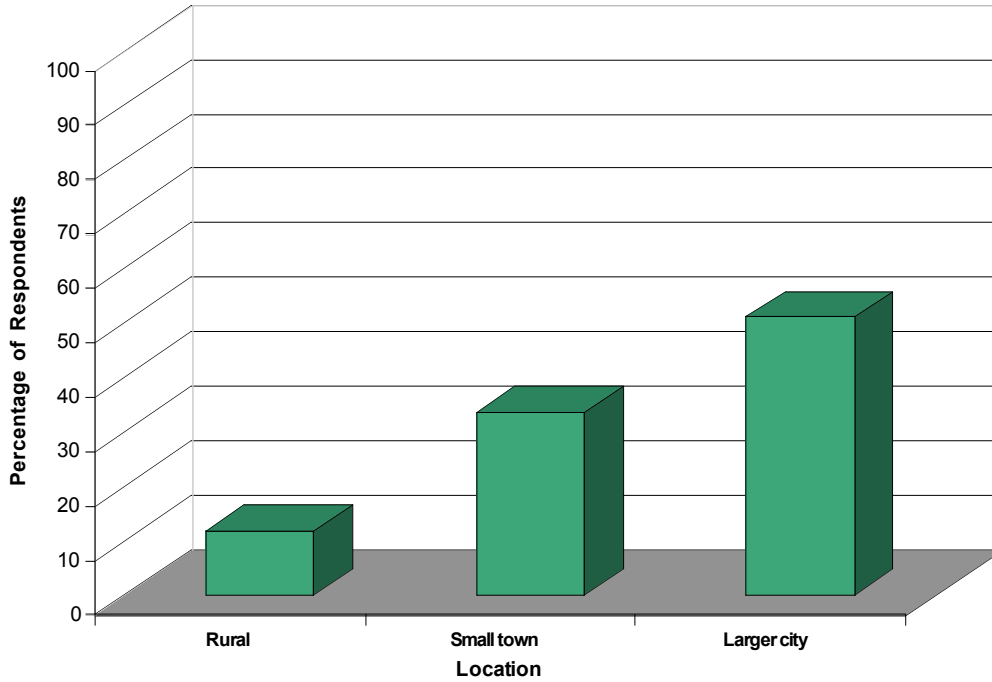


FIGURE Bd
Living Arrangements (N=473)

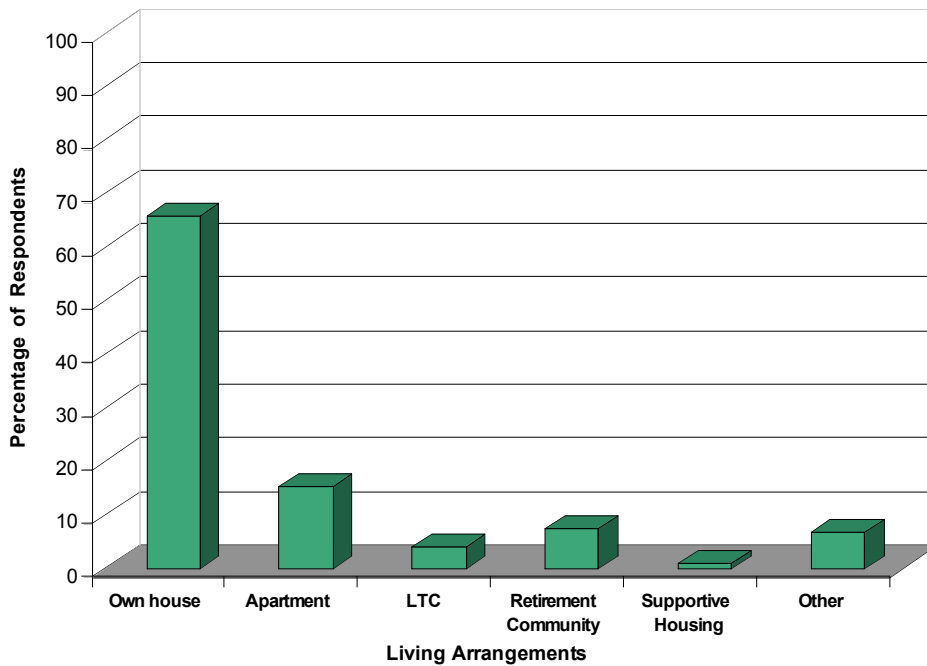




Table B1. Country of Birth

Country	Frequency	Percent
Missing values	8	1.7
Argentina	2	0.4
Australia	1	0.2
Belgium	1	0.2
Canada	362	76.2
Denmark	1	0.2
East Africa Kenya	1	0.2
Egypt	1	0.2
France	1	0.2
Germany	5	1.1
Holland	1	0.2
Hong Kong	1	0.2
India	6	1.3
Ireland	5	1.1
Italy	2	0.4
Malaysia	1	0.2
New Zealand	1	0.2
Panama	1	0.2
S. Korea	1	0.2
South Africa	1	0.2
Sri Lanka	5	1.1
The Netherlands	10	2.1
Trinidad	1	0.2
Uganda	1	0.2
UK (England, Wales, Scotland, N. Ireland)	47	9.9
USA	8	1.7
Total	475	100.0

FIGURE Be (N = 468)
Languages spoken at home

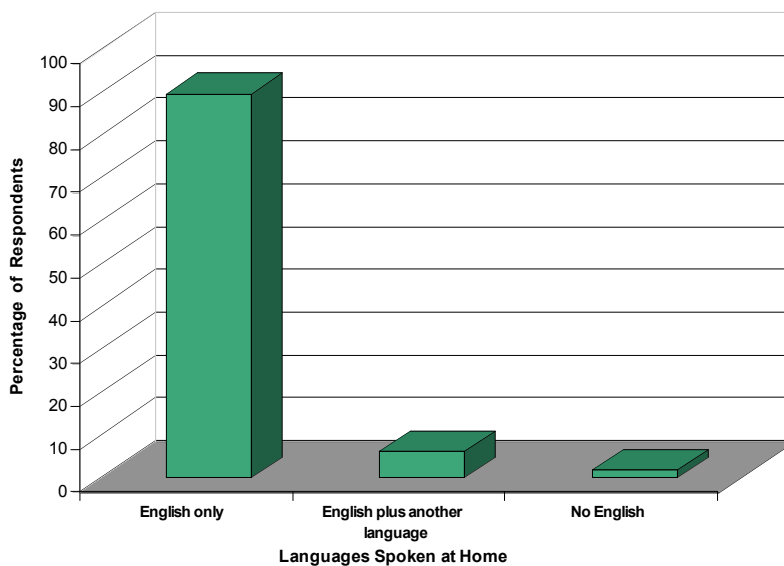


Table B2a. Percentage of sample endorsing each level.

Measure	Excellent	Very good	OK	Not very good	Not good at all
Hearing	22.1	30.5	28.0	5.9	1.7
Vision	21.1	45.5	25.1	4.4	1.5
Ease of getting around	32.4	35.4	21.7	7.2	1.7

Table B2b. Mean ratings.

Measure	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Rating of hearing with hearing aid if used	420	2.26	0.97
Rating of vision with glasses if used	465	2.18	0.87
Ease of getting around	469	2.09	1.00



APPENDIX A4 – Questionnaire: Frequency Results

All numbers in each table represent the percentage of participants in the sample responding. Sum of percentages may not add to 100 because of missing cases.

Question #2. How open do you consider yourself to be to new ways of learning? (N= 468)

	Very Open	Open	Could be Open	Not Very Open	Not Open at All
Openness to New Learning	41.1	46.5	7.2	2.7	1.1

Question #3. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statement: I consider myself to be a “life-long learner”. (N = 470)

	Totally Agree	Partially Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Partially Disagree	Totally Disagree
“I’m a life-long learner”	73.1	20.0	4.4	1.1	0.4

Question #4. Which of the following have you been most interested in learning about recently? (N = 475)

Topic	Percentage of Participants
Health and medical information	80.6
Hobbies	50.1
Travel	48.0
Spirituality (not necessarily religion)	44.4
Financial planning/investing	41.9
Relationships	41.9
* Other	29.5

*** Other (N = 140; some of these responses include elaborations of options given above)**

- Home renovation/decorating
- Current events (e.g. what's happening in Canada and the world) and Human Rights (e.g. healthy living environment, home care, housing)
- Current events
- Current events, global warming, socializing
- Trivia
- To do more cooking
- Renovations
- Yoga, tai chi, world affairs
- Politics local and provincial
- Friends teaching me to play 'pool'
- Politics



- Introduction to computers - Probus - power walk Halton Region Citizen Police Services
- Computers
- I am the photographer for Churchill Place taking photos of activities
- Computer
- Community and political updates; religions of the world
- Astronomy
- Specialist about seeing
- Volunteerism, committees for seniors
- New music in a choral group and at church choir
- Environmental issues
- United Empire Loyalists. Genealogy
- World affairs
- Learning how to cook: so very exciting.
- I love crossword puzzles, jumble words, trivia contests, knit, crochet, play the piano at the home. Read a lot.
- City of (name of city) Library Board. I am a member also nature and ecology
- Aging
- Memoir writing
- Languages
- A sympathetic listening to the problems of the elderly and trying to solve them or help them understand. Why.
- Computer operation and desk top publishing.
- Information technology
- Bridge playing and the emotions it causes
- Computer use.
- Pilates
- Internet-computer use
- Nutrition, physical training, everything in all fields
- Doing family tree
- New cooking ideas
- Computers
- Cooking, baking
- Study - Rogers Faulks, Next of Kin
- Environment book "Upside of Down" memoir writing.
- Politics
- Global warming
- Learning computer skills
- Computer skills, exercise e.g. yoga
- The changes in my daily life
- Philosophy and languages
- I also like to read all kinds of books.
- Politics, history, nature
- Fitness- for bone building



- Afghanistan and the Taliban
- Sports
- My computer
- Computer skills - still trying to learn more
- Major area is keeping up with work around the cottage - wood chop - boats - bush clearing etc.
- History
- International issues/ politics/raccoons in the chimney. Just learned to text message - fun! son in Africa won't need it when he gets home.
- Environment and poverty.
- Helping vulnerable people collect information to improve their quality of life.
- History, biography
- Writing. I recently had a book of humorous short stories published.
- Politics, general area info
- Exercise
- Adjusting to new lifestyle - retirement residence
- Bridge, religions, gardening, cooking
- French language
- History and other cultures, horticulture
- Ecology
- Environmental issues
- Skiing/Sailing
- A person's salvation.
- Craft groups at friends house
- History
- Have been learning line dancing.
- Web page design, animation
- Computers-research
- Computer training
- Politics, philosophy, figure skating judging
- Computer and software etc.
- Volunteering. 1. I can still use the talents I have left such as driving a friend to appt. 2. Talking on the telephone. 3. Working for the O. Historical Society. 4. Letter writing for Amnesty International. 5. Helping children with learning skills. 6. Playing the mother and grandmother role for step children or adopted children.
- Have just stopped attending later-life courses - non-credit
- World events
- World affairs & history. How things became as they are
- Politics, history, current events
- Politics
- Cultural differences, more of the nationalities that compose Canada
- Politics, history, biographies, anthropology, booking, home decorating, science, geography...just about everything



- Local and global news and happenings
- People
- Cosmology
- On my own, I have recently begun to renew the Latin which I enjoyed at school and which I have forgotten in the 65 years since. 2) I use TV (PBS and the History channel) as a convenient way to indulge my interest in geography & history.
- All of the above, but not just recently - has been ongoing for years
- Sport activities as an observer
- University courses: gerontology, women's studies, some religious studies
- Volunteering
- Volunteering
- Golf
- World events, history, fiction
- Biographies - but like anything
- Knitting clubs
- Any topic of interest
- Science
- Volunteering, learning thing about archival material
- How to be compatible with people
- Cost of living, change in living from house to retirement apartment
- Open to new things
- Keep reading, keep in touch with friends, stay active as much as possible
- Reading or TV
- History
- Government, immigrants
- Sports; technology; internet
- Peace movement
- World affairs
- Events in world today; technology
- Computer learning
- Service activities
- Trees, astronomy, ecology
- Club and association activities
- Understanding senior benefits and assistance
- Increased study of a major hobbies: photography related to ornithology; intensified study of history, geography, languages and cultures prior to travel to chosen destination.
- Computer
- Keeping abreast of technology
- History and biography
- Telecom related
- Understanding art, music, literature nature
- Latest technology re: TV's, computers, phones, accessible buildings
- Operation of our local community



- World news, social activism, outlook of different cultures and keeping up with all the generations' thinking, whatever is current.
- Computers
- Political process, sports, cultural activities
- Coping with a loss
- Technology
- Math upgrades, informative lectures.
- Life sciences
- Career change
- Learning German, French, Italian
- Both hobby and practical; COPA @ ham I certificate.
- Learning languages

Question #5. Percentage currently attending formal classes = 25.9%.

Question #6. Location of formal learning (N = 58)

Location	Percentage of Participants
Community College	25.9
University	32.8
High School	10.3
Public Library	29.3
Correspondence Courses	5.2

Question #8. Please mark how important each source of new information is to your own learning.

(Rows do not add to 100 because of missing cases)

Source	Extremely Important	Important	Take it or Leave it	Not Important	Not Important at all
Television	15.6	52.6	23.8	2.7	3.6
Radio	17.5	40.0	23.8	10.1	4.4
Books	45.7	42.1	6.5	1.9	1.5
Print Media/Magazines	25.1	55.2	13.3	2.9	1.1
Newspapers	33.7	47.6	11.8	2.7	1.5
Faith/Community	18.5	40.4	16.2	10.9	6.9
Internet	13.1	30.9	14.1	7.6	18.7
Online Learning	4.0	25.7	21.1	12.0	20.8
Discussion Groups/Coffee Chats	14.7	47.4	21.9	8.2	3.8
Workshops/Seminars	9.7	34.3	26.9	16.4	5.5
Clubs/Organizations	17.3	48.0	16.2	8.6	4.0



Question #9. Please indicate whether you learn new information in any of the following settings.

Setting	Percentage of Participants
Seniors' Centres	42.1
Faith Communities	32.6
Community/Recreation Centres	31.4
Health Education or Support Groups	24.8
Arts/Cultural Centres	21.1
Specialty Schools (e.g. Craft Classes)	12.4
Online Communities	6.7
Other	17.5

Other: (N = 181; some of these responses include elaborations on presented settings above; see Questionnaire Report, p9, for summary)

- Attend city council meetings, MPP's town hall meetings, political gatherings
- Exercise groups
- I belong to a couple of art groups
- Attending government meetings and participating in their workshop or focus groups.
- Interested in activities at the residence
- Association meetings such as MROO and Kiwanis and condo programs
- Always searching for opportunities to learn new things in areas I'm interested in.
- Volunteering
- LTC
- Resident council
- Friends
- United Empire Loyalists
- Kiwanis
- Receive and send a lot of mail, many containing jokes for cancer clinic - many inspirational articles. I was leader of 130 seniors at my church for 8 yrs. Traveled widely and had own travelogues. Played piano and accordion
- Stamp club and library board. media
- Radio programs discussing new books or interviewing an author of a book, occasionally will motivate me to purchase and read a book (in my area of interest)
- Most of above are not available locally
- Retiree's clubs
- Club membership i.e. stamp collectors club, woodworking club, games activity club
- Interchange with other fellow "early bird" members of the YMCA
- Church groups-choir, book club. tai chi class, horticultural society meetings
- Special public lectures put on by McMaster Science department.
- Booking groups (discussion, bridge games)
- Film society
- Volunteer role in McMaster Health Sciences library archives
- Social groups, choirs, clubs etc.



- University College
- I'm not really a joiner
- University
- Where ever they happen. Most of the time a group of friends will get together, choose a topic (anything) and discuss it over supper. (2 a month) wonderful evening
- Library
- Library
- Golf club, curling club, health club, social club, bridge club
- Travel much. Probus some
- Exercise clubs
- Probus Club. Royal Niagara Military Institute
- Organized discussion groups, membership in a political party
- Advisory committees regarding health, housing and safety
- Writers workshops
- Royal Botanical Gardens
- The retirement residence in which I live
- I learn through several organizations to which I belong.
- Dance classes
- I enter competitions in flower arranging - I have learned through speakers. I do some for various organizations. I sing baritone in Harmony Inc. female barbershop chorus. This is the most difficult part and takes time to learn. We have to perform without music, do choreography and have facial expressions. We are performing 17 songs at a cabaret performance May 5. There are many seniors in the chorus and they can handle it well. We are always learning new techniques and skills. I am in charge of decorating the auditorium for the show.
- Track 3 skiing and sailing community
- Gym, friends' homes.
- In long term care.
- Adult ed. centre
- RC Legion
- Museum
- Our town and its history, its Birthday celebration - 150th in 2007. We can learn a lot from our past.
- Ham Naturalists Club
- Probus Club
- Volunteering in nursing home, mental health
- Only can attend things made available to the nursing home, but attend any programs, seminars happening
- None of above are applicable
- Probus Club
- Nothing of interest to me at any of these
- None
- In this weather we are confined to home



- Associations such as CARP
- Library
- I refuse to be a 'senior', a meaningless term. Several discussion groups such as book clubs and informal groups such as a group of neighbours interested in discussing history - at the moment. Canadian history. And membership in groups such as Canadian Club and the local historical society
- I teach knitting and crochet at Sr. Centre and volunteer a lot
- Financial seminars
- College and university
- National Film Board, Toronto Film Video Club. Why - because I make films
- Clubs - Thunder Bay hiking assoc, executive. Volunteer - local citizens committee, Ministry of National Resources Employment - Forest Management Planning - Lakehead Forest - Ministry of Natural Resources
- Book club monthly meetings, art club activities & workshop
- Bridge club, course
- Oak. Historical Soc.
- Get togethers at the home
- Bingo hall
- Church
- Royal Canadian Legion - active. Executive member - responsible for youth education programs in public schools locally
- Society for Learning in Retirement
- Literacy society classes
- I enjoy playing bridge, duplicate & social
- We appreciate having lectures about current events, floral talks, health seminars, etc. political discussions
- University specialty lectures
- Traveling - even to the cottage
- Parkinson's Society
- Travel
- Service clubs
- None of above
- Arts and culture is not affordable to seniors who have no private pensions
- Philosophy classes in private school, night school (high), one-on-one sessions in photog. & PC's., bridge classes (club group).
- Internet
- Volunteer organizations
- Art Gallery of Ontario, family discussions
- Formal businesses
- University Women's Club
- Church
- Friends, social groups, coffee breaks with friends
- Specialty classes (i.e. technology)



Question #10. Learning styles: Percentage likelihood of use.

Learning Style	Very Likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Never
Looking at and duplicating	28.8	44.0	9.1	5.3	2.3
In a group	4.0	19.2	26.9	21.1	11.6
Trial and error	24.0	39.2	13.3	7.8	3.8
Search online	11.6	19.4	17.1	12.6	23.2
Use how-to books or videos	18.1	36.6	16.6	10.9	4.0
Consult with expert	33.3	36.2	11.8	6.3	2.9

Question #11. Learning Settings: Percentage likelihood of use

Learning Setting	Very Likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Never
Register for formal classes	11.2	30.7	27.8	13.5	9.5
Find someone who shares interests	25.7	48.4	14.5	4.2	1.3
Join an organization	10.3	33.9	31.4	10.3	5.5
Join a discussion group	11.4	41.7	25.3	7.4	5.7
Local library or resource organization	30.5	42.7	12.6	4.6	3.6
Internet	20.0	23.4	14.7	7.2	22.5

Question #13. How important is it to you to learn new things?

Very Important	Somewhat Important	Take it or Leave it	Not Very Important	Not Important at All
46.7	40.6	8.0	2.7	0

Question #16. Please indicate at which time of day you engage in new learning based on the season (many participants indicated more than one time/season).

Season	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Spring	52.6	30.5	23.8
Summer	47.2	28.2	25.1
Fall	43.4	38.1	27.6
Winter	43.8	36.2	26.9

Question #17. Participants who are computer users (determined by number of respondents answering Q35 “where do you access the internet” and/or answering ‘Yes’ to Q33 “Do you own a computer?” (N=301)): Percentage of participants indicating frequency of performing particular computer activities.

Computer Activity	Daily	Every Few Days	Weekly	Occasionally	Never
Word processing	20.6	22.9	8.0	23.3	15.3
Banking	5.0	17.6	7.3	10.3	48.5
Email friends/family	42.2	21.6	3.0	15.3	6.0
Shop on E-bay	0.3	1.7	0.7	10.3	74.4
General reading	27.2	15.6	5.3	27.9	13.6
Play games	23.9	17.6	3.3	13.0	32.6
Google searches	29.6	28.2	6.3	28.2	9.3
Play music	6.0	6.3	2.7	22.9	50.5



Questions #18 and #19. Satisfaction with Quality and Frequency of Interactions with Others (N = 469, N = 468 respectively):

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Indifferent	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Quality of Interactions	37.1	53.9	3.6	0.2	3.4
Frequency of Interactions	28.4	58.7	4.4	0.2	6.5

Question #20. Importance of Social Interactions to Life Satisfaction: Percentage of Participants Indicating Different Levels of Importance.

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Very Important	Not Important at All
Importance of Social Interactions to Life Satisfaction	50.3	40.8	7.2	0.4

Question #21. Overall Quality of Life: Percentage of Participants Indicating Different Levels of Quality.

	Excellent	Very Good	Comfortable	Not Very Good	Poor
Overall Quality of Life	25.1	47.4	22.5	2.5	0.2

Question #26. How often do you drive?

	Every Day	A Few Times a Week	Occasionally	Hardly Ever	Never
Frequency of Driving	53.1	17.3	3.6	1.5	23.6

Questions #32, #33, #34. Ratings of Hearing (N = 420), Vision (N = 465) and Mobility (N = 469).

(Rating of hearing, with hearing aid(s) if you wear them. This question was interpreted by many to mean that no response was necessary if no hearing aids were worn)

	Excellent	Very good	OK	Not very good	Not good at all
Hearing	22.1	30.5	28.0	5.9	1.7
Vision	21.1	45.5	25.1	4.4	1.5
Ease of getting around	32.4	35.4	21.7	7.2	1.7



Questions #33 to #36. Computer ownership, access to the Internet and ability

Question #33. Percentage of participants owning a computer = 60.4 (N = 287)

Question #34. How long have you owned a computer? (N = 286)

Less than a year	About a year	Less than 5 yrs	Less than 10 yrs	More than 10 yrs
4.2	1.4	16.7	32.4	44.6

Question #35. Where do you access the Internet?

At home	55.4
At work	2.7
Public library	5.3
School	0.6
Someone else's house	2.3
Other	3.2

Other places of access mentioned were:

Internet Cafe
 Senior Centre/Residence
 Clubhouse
 Community Centre
 Volunteer Job
 Hotels, etc. when traveling

Question #36. Rated Computer Ability

	Excellent	Very Good	OK	Not Very Good	Not Good at all
Ability	5.9	20.8	25.9	8.8	15.2



APPENDIX A5 – Questionnaire: What does learning mean to you? Quotes by participants

Learning is 1) Important; 2) Lifelong; 3) Occurs every day; 4) Improves quality of life; 5) Keeps one's mind active; 6) Keeps one current; 7) Allows acquisition of knowledge and personal growth; 8) Provides and enhances social interactions.

Importance of learning

- I need to learn something new every day - learning is the core of my being
- Learning is certainly important to me; I enjoy learning about Grandview.
- Knowledge is always important to me.
- Hearing, reading about seeing and trying new things and trying to understand them. I do not judge these new ideas, etc. but I feel I should know about them.
- Learning is everything. It is so important to know what is going on around you as well as the rest of the world as long as you are able!
- It is important to keep learning because the world changes constantly and not learning would cause confusion.
- It means a lot to me. I love to learn new things.
- As a retired teacher learning means everything.
- Learning is a lifelong passion. It means living - if we stop learning we stop living - very simple
- Love to learn!
- Graduated from university at 70 and continued studies until age 84. Value knowledge so much to learn about our world especially political science, philosophy, religions
- Very important
- Multiple things that includes satisfying an urge to learn; becoming informed about a topic of interest; learning new skills; understanding in greater depth a phenomena, to list a few. Overall, it's an inner need just simply to know.

Learning is lifelong

- An ongoing process for whole of your life
- It means that I'm never going to stop being curious, that I'm never going to be satisfied until I learn everything there is to know about any topic or subject and that we're never too old to learn!
- A lifetime experience
- Opens new vistas to contemplate or react either more positively or negatively. One is never too old to learn
- Learn what to do; what I should do and shouldn't do; the things I do learn are to my advantage (so) never too old to learn
- Life as a whole is a continuing learning role. We are always learning and changing through all the stages of life no matter how long or short it is.
- I feel you are never too old to learn. More open now than when I was younger.
- Learning never stops. We are born to learn new things.
- You're never too old to learn something.
- You are never too old to learn. Whether it's painting techniques to health concerns.



- As far as I am concerned, one is never too old to learn new ways, etc.
- It never stops...spiritually, mental and physically
- Learning was and is part of my life. As a retired educator at the secondary school level learning never ceased.
- I am a voracious reader. Mostly history, biography. Long time science teacher.
- Learning to me is a life-long process. You never stop learning if you are at all interested in what is going on around you. I believe knowledge is the only thing you take with you when your life ends.
- Requirement of life, always a student and remain a student.
- Expanding my knowledge to date. New experiences - around every corner. Life's ongoing adventure
- I think a person is never too old to learn whether it is computers or other things.
- It means being willing to attempt new projects even though I may fall flat on my face. It means that I don't believe my chronological age and I believe I'm as young as I feel.
- We are never too old to learn. Who knows, we may get smarter
- Learning is a process which lasts from the cradle to the tomb to learn knowledge, either physical or spiritual
- Own belief I'm not too old to learn
- Continuous process, birth to death, during which new knowledge is acquired and processed
- I consider learning and gathering information a life-long process
- Learning to me is a lifelong experience and I look forward to it day by day. I am happy to state that we get a lot of information and learning experiences through (name) Community Services
- Learning is a never ending thing. You learn a lot as you grow older. When you're young
- Learning should be a lifelong thing, but it does not always have to take place in a classroom.
- Learning or experiencing something new no matter what age you are.
- Lifelong, ongoing, a necessary part of growing
- My observation is that as it appears, most people think of retiring at the age of 65 from active life. With the modern day advancement and amenities in health care and hence increase in life expectancy, I feel one should continue life as before.
- An ongoing process throughout life. There is always something new to be learned or some new way of looking at things.
- You are not too old to learn something each day.

Learning occurs every day

- Being interested in what is around us. Looking into and making use of learning opportunities around us. Enjoying informative programs on TV.
- Education with life experiences. Hands on experiences.
- Learning is a day-to-day experience. There is so much to learn and so little time to learn it in.
- Constant communication with other people and reading of newspapers and TV and radio media on current affairs and learning channels
- New techniques, ideas, etc. in any setting but not restricted to formal class situations



- A difficult question! Every waking, experiencing moment. I "learn" something new from experiences I have had. I "learn" or acquire new wisdom or knowledge from every success and every mistake.
- Exploring, reading, talking to others in a learning setting, from radio, TV, just talking to others, perhaps the odd lecture, talks, church sermons
- Learning does not have to be in a formal setting.
- Increments of knowledge and understanding which comes every day from CBC, friends, television, public meetings - EVERY thing counts in building wisdom.
- Reading the paper, listening to/watching T.V., discussions with friends, going to church
- Learning means finding out or understanding by many means - books, talking to others, the media. Learning to me is a way of not making (hopefully) the same error twice.
- I'm still a curious person. I like to know the how, why, when and where of things going on around me and in the world I live in.
- Learning (to me) is accepting whatever happens-hopefully-'good' things-good health and good friends. I've had a wonderful life - and am grateful to still be around!
- Learning happens every day and with these new generations of technology I'm still learning a great deal at my age.
- New experiences and everyday knowledge
- You can learn something new every day if you go to the right place to learn. I want to learn something new every day!
- We are learning every day of our lives. Every experience is a learning or teaching.
- There is something to be learned every day - from reading daily newspapers, store flyers, book reading & a small amount of TV
- Doing new and interesting things. Challenging projects. Experiencing new places, things & activities
- Learning is living.
- Learning means experience, whether first or second hand. We learn from what we do, see, and hear. Unfortunately memory also affects learning and my memory is not good.
- It means to me that learning is what happens every day. I feel that everyone learns something new every day no matter how old one is.
- Life experiences
- Taking in new ideas, picking them up in newspapers, magazines, TV programs, conversations
- One should learn something new every day through radio, TV, internet and doing puzzles
- Watching the daily news is a learning process. So is trying a new recipe.
- Learning can come from reading books, or even other people. With the help of a computer whiz, I have become quite proficient on the computer. With hands on it means searching,
- Learning, acknowledging, experiencing things in life
- All of life has been a learning experience. Constantly!

Only five individuals mentioned formal learning.

- Knowledge - from formal classes, books, newspaper, TV, other people
- Taking more courses at the University or community college level
- I think primarily of formal learning. e.g. I am taking my 10th course in Italian. I also read relatively technical works in philosophies.



- 1) In my working life, learning meant two things - taking academic courses and also giving thought to improving my skills and becoming more competent at my job. 2) Now, in my 70's, it means improving social skills and a more random approach to academic learning in discussion groups, etc.
- Assimilating new information. It can be obtained informally (conversations, media) or formally through lectures, classes and retreats. Learning new skills as sewing, wood work & cooking.

Learning enhances life

- Learning new things makes me happy.
- Keeps me from being bored.
- Learning is a way to better living
- Gaining information to improve lifestyle, health
- Curiosity, stimulation of the mind, a feeling of accomplishment, confidence and exhilaration when achieved or understood.
- A: Learning to improve the method of an old activity increase(s) the joy of the activity.
B: Learning stimulates one's mental attitude
- Provides the excitement in being alive in our wonderful world.
- To enhance one's quality of living.
- Stimulation
- Improving my outlook on life so I can enjoy what is left of my life
- Broadening one's field of learning makes one's life more interesting and enjoyable.
- It widens my interests, increases my knowledge and understanding, enhances my life by creating an appreciative awareness of my situation, permits wider decisions because I'm better informed.
- For me, learning means acquiring and organizing information that can be used for benefit of self or others
- Knowledge gives me confidence, reassurance in life. Knowledge is power. When I know I can access several options about a topic- I will be able to give a sound opinion to others.
- It makes life more interesting
- Learning new ideas and ways of doing certain tasks keeps you young. Computers, although many of us are afraid of them, offer tremendous information and keep us young.
- Learning means finding ways to solve problems - learning about the needs in my own community and volunteering to help others
- Staying active and alive. Excitement
- Learning contributes to my health. To keep on learning means you are involved in living and are still capable. Perhaps it makes you an interesting person to be around.
- Increases my confidence. The feeling of "Oh wow I understand". More in control of my life, feeling of independence.
- Enjoyment
- Satisfies my curiosity. Gives me pleasure by painting.
- Learning means understanding all that life is. To feel by some small way by learning from others the world seems to be better
- Better understanding why people act the way they do. Better understanding of the world around us. Helps in keeping ourselves fit in good health as possible.



- Learning is a challenge which, when accomplished, gives a great feeling of satisfaction.
- Learning makes life exciting. I was taught by my parents to appreciate and love learning.
- Learning brightens a dull day, eases the troubles that come with age.
- It creates more opportunities for sharing ideas and opinions with others and for me, more self confidence.
- Opens up opportunity. Gives meaning to life; removes fears; develops confidence
- Acquisition of new knowledge/skills for lifestyle enhancement.
- Makes life interesting, vitality, fully alive
- Extending life.
- Gathering information to help self or others.
- Helps reduce stress when you're kept occupied, whether it be helping yourself or others.
- What it means to me is self esteem and more often in discussions I like to meet people of all nationalities
- It makes for easier conversation when with a group of people. It is important to learn about new gadgets that make our life better.
- Enhances quality of life, i.e. meeting people with similar interests
- The challenge
- Personal satisfaction and understanding
- Staying alive!
- After a lifetime of working outside the home and raising a family of four (all university graduates) without financial assistance, physical or emotional support from any source other than that supplied by myself, learning is a great joy to me, now at last
- A new adventure! I love to learn something new. My husband and I are in 3 choirs and love to learn the new music. In one group all music & lyrics have to be memorized.
- Increasing enjoyment of life
- Keeps you interested in what is going on near & far.
- Wonderful new things
- Why I learn: enjoy the challenge; ingrained in me by my parents - learning is power; curiosity; using opportunities available;
- Interest & curiosity of subject matter, explained in detail, my input into class discussion groups, etc. Learning is very exciting to me!
- Increasing one's knowledge base. Thus, an improved quality of life should ensue
- Having a purpose in life and an interest in the world you live in
- At my age it's mostly just fun. I'm 88 with failing eyesight
- To enhance one's life; to make a positive contribution
- That I would like to know or gain knowledge or skill to make my life happy and satisfied
- Learning something new pleases my mind and gives me inspiration to find ways to apply it to my own personal life
- Means that we maintain our interest in the world in which we live, be it in nature or what goes on in the world
- Education and improving a way of life
- Living - you cease to learn, you cease to live
- Enjoyment & pleasure - sense of accomplishment
- Living to the fullest
- An opportunity to be engaged in life A mind expanding experience An opportunity to investigate the unusual or something that titillates me



- Many things. Probably can be best stated as a synopsis: a craving to always know more in an attempt to satisfy myself.
- To give meaning to life. Feeling good when you learn and accomplish something new.
- Learning new things keeps you young in your thinking.
- Makes life more interesting
- At my age it cannot contribute to my income, so it is mainly entertainment
- Expanding my mind! A joyful, rewarding experience
- Opening up new avenues for hobbies and recreation.
- New challenges, opportunities, stimulation

Learning keeps one's mind active

- Keeping my mind active
- Different learning keeps my mind in good shape.
- Keeping my mind active
- Learning about anything new - recent trip to Alaska spurred learning history of that area – anything that spurs the mind.
- Keeping an active mind - discovering new things; developing knowledge and skills.
- To keep my mind alert
- Learning keeps me going; keeps the brain working.
- Keeping my mind alert/sharp/growing in thought and mind
- It keeps my mind functioning
- Experiencing something new and keeping your mind active
- It means improving my mind. I believe that is what we are here for, to learn every day of your life.
- Hoping to hold back Alzheimer's Disease
- Learning keeps my brain healthy - postpone dementia
- A way to keep busy and keep your mind sharp
- Learning is the best way to keep your mind active hopefully at least- slowing the ravages of aging and various forms of dementia
- Learning means doing things to keep my mind sharp-volunteering, reading, conversing with people, etc.
- Keeping the mind, body active for a better life.
- Learning keeps ones brain active.
- Keeping ones brain active as one can at 87 years of age.
- To be more knowledgeable; keep my mind active
- Being mentally challenged e.g. reading, participating in new activities
- Learning keeps my brain active and clear.
- My mind is still active and I can keep up to the conversations of younger folks.
- Keeping my mind active. Understanding new teaching of things, taking part in conversations.
- Staying alert-keeping my mind and body active.
- It means exercising the brain muscles
- Functioning with every day - to keep up with the up-to-date and to days' change.
- Keeping one's mind active. Becoming more proficient in selected specialties.
- It keeps one's brain active



- Learning is a form of keeping your brain working at all times and there is so much to read and see and keeping busy is the best form of exercise
- Also keeps my mind active
- To stay current with events and trends - both locally and globally. To understand and appreciate the various factors affecting local and global happenings
- It means keeping up with all the new innovations and technology in today's life
- Exploring exciting avenues. Keeping my mind alert & functioning
- Keeping your mind active. Being aware of the times and happenings of the day.
- If I can keep my brain active by learning new things, I feel I can make decisions that will help me, and others
- It means stimulating my brain to at least remain in the present. It also lead to new social contacts.
- Keeping up to what is going on in the world.
- It keeps the brain active & indirectly the body response.
- Keeping an open mind and being aware
- Learning to me means an active brain which translates to a healthy mind. Therefore physical health as long as possible
- Keeping the mind active
- Keeping my brain active and enjoying it
- This helps to keep our minds active and less likely to develop dementia in later years.
- Keeping my mind active and thereby taking advantage of additional academic studies and seeking out various interests such as computer, exercise, health and current interests. Of course participating in these pursuits are most important.
- Keeping my mind active
- Keeps your mind and body active
- Keeping my mind active. Avoiding "senior moments" for as long as possible.
- Keeping my mind active, alert. I am 70 and I am developing and conducting telecommunications workshops and training in developing economies. The next ones are in Papua New Guinea and in Riyadh. I just came back from Nairobi.
- For Sr.'s, and others, learning is necessary to keep the mind active so we don't become couch potatoes, lazy and eventually a quickening of declining health.
- Keeping my mind sharp
- Learning anything helps me to keep the thought processes working as they did while I was in the work-a-day-world. I spend time searching the internet for general information about community and our environment. It also gives me the opportunity to earn
- It provides an opportunity for mental activity, problem solving, and incidentally, though not as important, the acquisition of useful information.
- Learning means keeping one's mind active.
- Keeps our mind alert and active.
- More important it helps to keep my brain active and hopefully whole.
- Learning for a senior means keeping mentally active
- Keeping your mind active. Learning new things. Feeling young.
- Keeps your mind sharp. Learn new things.
- Keeps your mind and body active in later years



Keeping up to date

- New information; updating old info
- Keeping up to date with changing methods and technology
- To keep up to date. 6 to master new technology. 4. to be more comfortable socially. 4. to find new and interesting activities.
- Keeping abreast of new information keeps one young.
- Anything new in a rapidly changing world
- Keeping up with current events. Keeping an open mind to new ideas - considering and accepting or rejecting them as it concerns me.
- I like to be aware of world affairs so I watch news on TV and radio and get a newspaper every day and learn more about my computer and printer
- Understanding new technology. I want to be able to function and speak about current and new technology. I don't want to feel "out of date" or "out of step" with the rest of the world.
- More information to think about and/or research very useful and up to date info via the media of books.
- Keeping up to technical trends; learning how things work
- Being able to know what people are talking about - current events, trends, etc. Being able to continue my knowledge of stamps, genealogy and library and nature
- I like to know what is going on in our world. Am interested in politics, health issues, and different cultures. I like people. Used to volunteer for years.
- It gives me the necessary ability and understanding of a citizen living in the world of today
- Being informed, interesting
- Trying to keep up with the use of technology, maintaining driving skills/info, exploring areas of interest that surface i.e. openness
- New knowledge, keeping with the times, challenge
- Keeping up with the changes. i.e. attending seminars, etc.
- Keeping abreast of local, municipal, provincial, federal benefits for spouse and family. Using the dictionary for crossword, spelling variations and variety of meaning, etc.
- Learning means keeping up with what is happening. It means reading and being informed
- Keeping abreast of development in community health and social, personal? (hard to read) and political
- Try to keep up-to-date
- Being able to function in our ever increasingly technical environment. I enjoy the social aspect of group learning.
- Learning to adapt to the changing world - culturally - racially – economically, etc. and trying to keep up with technology.
- To secure a broad knowledge on a variety of subjects or events that impact myself, my family or my friends
- It means keeping informed of all new developments. There are many such as health, science, art, politics, etc.
- Keeping up with modern technology.
- Learning to me means keeping abreast of current events such as the news, current trends, and being able to manage interesting conversations with both the young and my contemporaries.



- It means being open to new ideas, keeping up with the news and looking forward and also trying to understand the world around me
- It is important to ask "why" and please "explain" otherwise you get left behind in conversations and getting along with other people have different opinions than yours.
- Keeps me up-to-date
- Keep up with current events and find out information as required
- Trying to understand the politics and working of new Government Pension Benefits
- Being able to communicate with others in different levels. To read and understand what I read.
- Being aware of what's going on in the world around us. Keeping current on new developments and trends.
- Being interested in knowing and understanding more; having more skills; in getting the knowledge to be a better citizen; to keep up with our grandchildren's world
- Being interested and knowing what's going on in the world
- It's trying to keep abreast of the changing world; of the progress being made; new terminology.
- Attempting to keep with every day events, the latest in science, medicine, engineering, etc.
- (a) A desire to be aware of and understand events as they develop in this community and outside it. (b) An interest in building and maintaining past educational interests – e.g. - foreign languages
- It means keeping up with technology e.g. ATM machine, computer, etc.
- I have to keep learning to be educated. I do it so that I can discern the difference between truth and untruth
- Keeping up to date - technology, politics, socio-economic factors. Always learning new ways to work, understand, organize ideas, people, society
- Learning to me is keeping abreast of current events, advances in health care.
- Getting used to changes in society and culture
- How to cope with life in old age. I try to do the very best I can each day
- I write for a seniors' newspaper so it is important for me to keep up with current events. I am in the process of upgrading my Windows 98 to Windows X. I still hate bank machines & phones with no real person.
- Education – and keeping up with the old and new
- It means to me finding out about or learning more about what has happened or is happening in our world today. Also I enjoy the study of history and government and politics. Learning, especially in a rapidly changing world like ours prevents isolation
- It means keeping on the ball, on track with life. Even reading a dictionary to learn new words is learning.
- I would like to keep up to date with learning programs.
- Do things which keeps me connected with today's world.
- Keeping up with the new technology books, health, medicine, fashion, theatre, being alert to the environment, emergencies, world events senior activities, arts, & politics somewhat. All these are possible because I have always wanted to learn
- It also means keeping abreast of what is happening in the world around us.
- Seeing the changes around me every day and what they mean to me.
- Because of difficulties in my early days and the teaching methods of those times, I find I do have a thirst for knowledge and feel it is necessary to be able to keep pace with the times.



- Some of the topics have to be staying current.
- Keeping up with my grandchildren! Not stagnating. Meeting people.
- Keeping up to date with the use of electronics. Learning new things.
- Learning helps me relate to younger generations.
- Trying to keep up to date on all information.
- Keeping up with the new information available;
- Learning to me means broadening my knowledge of the world and events taking place. It enables me to help my children and grandchildren and to keep up with them in their knowledge.

Growth/improvement/acquiring new knowledge

- "Learning" means acquiring knowledge (information and/or skills)
- Learning means growing
- To grow spiritually and mentally
- Finding out what's going on in the world
- Acquiring new knowledge, in every way.
- Getting information to be more informed about different things
- More about this place
- Assimilating relevant knowledge. The dictionary is indispensable used on a daily basis.
- Ability to understand the practical aspect of the subject....to be open minded to consider other point of view
- Learning means being aware or educating yourself on something new. To undertake new challenges and not be afraid to change.
- Learning to me means striving to reach your potential as a human being. As an educator and life-long learner, I enjoy the challenges, satisfaction and sense of accomplishment it provides me. It also means giving back to others - both old and young.
- Expanding the mind
- Development of the mind, body, spirit through knowledge and practice obtained from facilitators - e.g. teacher, computer, audio, visual, experience, role models and more. Can be new learning or in elderly, refresher
- Learning new things
- A matter of learning new things
- To find out how to do something new
- Acquiring new knowledge and skills
- Learning means improving my understanding of every aspect of life.
- Learning furthers my understanding of new concepts and products.
- Expanding my knowledge
- Broadening my horizons; meeting people
- Getting smarter
- Gaining knowledge about world we live in
- Acquiring information whether specifically for a purpose or just for general interest
- Gain knowledge of something useful or entertaining
- Gaining new knowledge and experiencing new challenges
- Taking and retaining knowledge
- Getting to know more and find out more things.



- To understand and acquire new knowledge and improve on existing knowledge
- Learning means discovering facts about any subject that I didn't previously know, or being made aware of new ways to perform any act.
- It's new things - it makes life less complicated. A wider understanding makes for a better world.
- Answering my own questions by whatever means I have available. Soaking up as much of this world as I can expose myself to.
- Acquiring new information
- An enrichment of day-to-day facts and information. A deeper understanding of previously learned info. An assimilation of completely previously unknown information.
- Acquiring new skills and fostering future development of existing skills.
- Grasping ideas that I read or hear about and putting them into practice. Learning means making relationships between ideas and then expanding to get synergism to produce expansion of ideas and practices.
- Acquiring new skills, facts, attitudes and hence changing my view of my world.
- Improving your knowledge of new things
- Learning means to find out something I did not know. It could be how to make something different or in a different way. It could be seeing other countries and how people there live and why. It is difficult to define.
- Learning means being open to new possibilities
- Exploring new ideas; discussing points of view that are new to me; listening to new classical music structures (I'm not much interested in 'popular' music); Trying to be more open to visual art which is not really my "thing".
- Different ideas - other ways of doing things - hearing about new findings and inventions - more possible choices in decision making.
- It increases your knowledge of everyday living and life in general
- Learning and developing skills and acquiring knowledge in areas I did not have time for previous to retirement.
- Broadening my way of thinking.
- Finding out 1. How things work e.g. electronic devices 2. What words mean 3. How to get to new places
- Expanding my horizons,
- Learning to me means gaining knowledge to help yourself or correct mistakes or how to solve your problems
- Progress
- Learning is the process and/or end result of my being involved in or instigating various mental and physical activities that lead to better understanding, skill improvement and knowledge of people and the world.
- To improve my skills, to introduce new thoughts and skills into my life - mentally and physically
- Learning means to receive information and to (be) able to put it (to) some use. An example: A person to person demonstration permits an easier and more lasting learning situation
- New experience. An opportunity to expand your mind.
- It opens the rest of the world up to me and helps me to grow as a person.
- Branching out for a new experience



- An opportunity to gain knowledge about topics I don't know about or the chance to gain further insight into a less known subject
- Learning is having an open mind toward anything that interests you. I am usually reading further about something that caught my attention.
- Remaining open to all sources of information; learning how these bits and pieces fit into the whole and thus over time gain wisdom of how the world and other worlds function productively
- Finding out something I didn't know before - also reminder (sometimes) of things I already know that might have slipped my mind - NOT forgotten - just not needed recently so is in storage!!!
- Acquiring knowledge from various sources.
- Acquiring knowledge and skills
- Other people may have ideas that may not have occurred to me and can give me a new insight on a subject which may never have seemed important to me.
- Collecting information to make informed decisions and expanding precious concepts about all activities of daily living.
- Advancing knowledge about many different things.
- Learning means improving the knowledge (or wisdom) I already enjoy.
- Learning broadens ones outlook on life.
- Acquiring and developing skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours beyond what I now possess.
- Adding to my store of knowledge.
- Improve my knowledge of many things
- Trying new things
- Learning how to fix things
- To understand unfamiliar or new things and ideas, approaches.
- Expanding my knowledge; gaining understanding about other people, other countries; often when I'm faced with difficulties, I believe I deal with them effectively because of some knowledge.
- Expanding your views.
- A greater understanding of life and living
- Knowledge- in addition to the learning of many years.
- Is to advance ones skills.
- Expanding my horizons. Learning about new developments, different peoples, being aware of events, and points of view on a range of matters.
- Broadens my outlook. Helps me understand the workings of the universe, life forms on earth, different cultures. Fills me with awe. Satisfies my curiosity.
- Anything new interests me. I am open to broadening my mind
- Knowledge, Learning new things
- Constant progress, being well informed and interested in world around me
- Acquiring knowledge about new things not previously known.
- Finding something new and unknown
- Gathering information.
- It means gaining new insights, expanding my database, acquiring new skills, or refreshing old ones.
- Knowledge



- Learning new things as you age, having new interests and hobbies, using computer software with your children and grandchildren
- Expands my interest in topics I would probably not seek out
- Keeping an open mind being open to change.
- Exploring & acquiring new knowledge & skills
- Taking in new information and making use of it
- Wanting to know more about everything
- Gathering knowledge
- Learning to me is expanding my knowledge of things which are of interest to me
- You need to keep growing. "If you don't use it you lose it."
- Learning means "stretching yourself" many ways - mentally, physically, emotionally & so on.
- Learning something new helps to improve my knowledge of current events and improves my ability to understand others better and also allows me to be able to communicate better.
- Gaining an insight into different issues occurring now and in the past.
- Trying to do things differently. Finding information on environment, health. Seeing ballet, plays, art. Trying to understand what makes me & others tick.
- To me, learning means to be open to new ideas, ready to adapt to new ways of doing things, to try to understand world affairs, the changing face of our Canadian culture and what the future holds for my grandchildren
- Increasing knowledge. Finding out how little I do know. Learning new skills
- It means developing oneself to the fullest potential possible and learning to be able to understand oneself and others. At this age, it is perhaps important to learn more about the spirit and soul.
- Learning to me is finding out new ideas about many things - not always agreeing, but open to so many interesting avenues of thought - always developing in any topic.
- Learning means keeping my mind open to trusting my judgement in making the proper choice.
- Learning means being exposed to a new thought, idea, emotion, activity, etc. and then integrating this into my being, so that I experience a change within myself
- Gaining knowledge
- Enlarge my world
- Broadens the mind. Adds to ones education
- Curiosity! Always wanted to broaden my horizons. I endeavour to learn something NEW every day. It is fascinating!
- Opening the mind to new ideas and ways of looking at problems, i.e. Thinking "outside the box"
- Absorbing knowledge & retaining it for future reference - we learn from our experiences, good or bad & we must keep the positive and dispose the negative to survive life, always get rid of your fears & life can be fun
- Always enhancing your knowledge
- Learning to me means having your mind open to receive new things. Having an open mind to learn new things.
- Knowledge provides the ability to function at personal peak efficiency
- An expansion of the mind, which in turn increases our tolerance and appreciation of the world around us.



- Obtaining basic understanding on a subject or topic
- Learning to me means to be open to new ideas, especially how they relate to our culture & the alternate lifestyle of Christian values
- Being exposed to new ideas and learning new physical and mental skills
- Keeping an open mind to new ideas. Being able to keep up academic abilities despite aging
- Finding out how to do new things. Taking part in different games or activities
- Acquiring information that is new to me
- Learning is being taught something you didn't know before, regardless of the method.
- Becoming more knowledgeable
- Expanding the vision of life; by interaction of different nationality seniors, as everybody has something to teach
- Learning to me means that you do something new, or like you cook a new dish or you play a new game. Anything that you had not done earlier that is. Your learning.
- Increase knowledge
- Increase knowledge
- 1. Increase my personal general knowledge 2. Come to know more things 3. Benefits I will derive from more learning
- New information, new activities, new friends, challenges
- We learn a lot from learning and thereby we improve so many things.
- Learning means understanding a new concept, discovering something, developing a new skill previously unknown to me.
- It means different ways of seeing things.
- Finding out new things I did not know about
- Acquiring new skills, or improving old ones, broadening knowledge, discovering something new or re-discovering things that were forgotten
- Learning means gaining knowledge and understanding of the things which surround us in our everyday lives. Learning coupled with experience (which is a learning process) hopefully leads to maturity.
- It means an exciting adventure into previously unknown or little known territory.
- Learning is to further your understanding of the many aspects of life.
- Learning is the process of gaining knowledge or understanding of a skill by study, instruction, experience. It is the cognitive process of acquiring skill or knowledge. Learning changes as we age.
- An opportunity to gain for self/others- to keep the generation gap narrow.
- You must learn from your mistakes
- Getting smarter
- Learning means my mind is content and can grow
- Enrichment - wider horizons
- Expanding ones horizons.
- For me, learning means finding out something that I did not know previously.
- Keeping an open mind to ideas and behaviours
- The acquisition of knowledge and/or skills
- Having the knowledge necessary to understand or accomplish something new
- Resulting in personal change, development & growth. This knowledge is acquired through all senses in varying degrees and is received and processed in an individual way.
- Growing,



- To me learning means learning how to do new things, to do old things in new ways, and to change my concepts of ideas I have in my brain.
- Being able to acquire new methods of doing things, new ways of understanding things,
- Simply gaining knowledge about anything you didn't know before.
- Learning means a change in behaviour. This may be through a change in perception or attitude or action, but until this occurs true learning has not been achieved.
- It means growing in spirit, wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.
- Learning something new; polishing existing skills
- Acquiring new skills, information, insight

Provides and enhances interactions with others

- Learning as a means of keeping interested in events and enjoying talks with family and friends about politics, books, etc.
- Makes me feel comfortable in company. Like to share it (when asked).
- It means the ability to understand and communicate
- An opportunity to interact with people of similar interests
- Meeting other people with shared interests. Opportunity to participate in dialogue. Bringing forth new ideas. Enthusiasm for life.
- meeting new people.
- I think when you hear the word 'learn' you think of school. You can also learn from the company you keep. I learn a lot at the older adult centre doing volunteer work and meeting new people.
- Able to converse with other people on different subjects.
- Also I find it interesting to meet new people and also learn more about changes in the communication world.



Appendix B
Focus Groups



APPENDIX B1 - Focus Group Demographics

A. Number of focus groups - 8 (+ one pilot)

B. Number of participants – men, women, total

Owen Sound (pilot)	2	6	8
<hr/>			
Downsview (Toronto)	0	7	7
Elliot Lake	4	4	8
Kingston	2	4	6
Orangeville	0	3	3
Parkdale (Toronto)	2	8	10
Thunder Bay	1	5	6
Waterloo	3	8	11
Windsor	3	6	9
<hr/>			
Totals	15	45	60

C. Age of participants – at least 65 years, according to project criterion
Estimated range: 65 to late 80s
Estimated average age: 70-75 years



APPENDIX B2 – Focus Group Questions

1. Please tell us about a learning experience that you engaged in during the past year. If you think that experience could be improved upon, how would you improve it?
2. At any age there are reasons why people engage in learning. What do you see as the reason for learning for older adults?
3. What is available in this community for older adults who want to learn? (formal and informal)
4. What, if anything, prevents you from taking part? What, from your perspective, might prevent others from taking part?
5. What is missing in your community? What do you want or need that is not presently available?
6. How do you think older adults learn best? What do you think needs to be taken into consideration when planning learning opportunities for older adults?
7. Tell us about one learning opportunity for older adults that is happening in your community that you think is particularly creative?
8. Do you use information technology (e.g. a computer, the Internet, others) to access learning opportunities? If so, how do you use it?
9. Has access to technology increased and/or improved your opportunities to learn? If so, how?
10. If you don't already have access to technology, do you think that has made a difference to you? If so, please describe.
11. If you were to advise our research team as we carry this research into older adult learning, what else would you say to us? From your perspective, what do we need to pay attention to?



APPENDIX B3 – Recent learning opportunities - Responses

ALZHEIMER'S

- Volunteer at a reading program in an elementary school three mornings a week, to help children to read, “which also taught me many things”, “that’s what I consider a learning experience”
- No formal training but meetings beforehand
- Learn about Alzheimer disease
- Attended meetings, participated in the home where husband is now living
- Read about the disease – not best way to learn about the disease, but when you hear it from a new perspective [from others with similar experience to your own] it help
- Support group - need to attend a few meetings before you can understand it, doesn’t sink in for the first while, then you understand they’re talking about what has happened to you, too, then you read about it, then there is affirmation of what you’ve been doing as normal for the disease – and that everyone has a different struggle
- As a caregiver, you need to experience what the person you are supporting is like – they’re all different
- Volunteered in palliative care (in past)
- Recalling experience of palliative care volunteer training, many years ago
- A great deal of learning about the experience, feels today that caregivers play a central role [in her own life]

DOWNSVIEW

- Course at a career centre (many of the women, although of traditional retirement age, are working part-time or looking for work)
- Resume in order prepared for getting back to work, challenging, everybody pulled together
- Learned from each other and from instructor, broken up into groups for discussion
- Workshop on violence prevention for ethnic women, Asian women (non-Asian woman speaking)
- Study, discussion, learning from each other, interesting, used a community development model
- Workshops, need to know how to talk to others, to have confidence. “A lot of us...you want to say something but you don’t have the courage or are not confident enough to say. And I have got that. And if I can get some work I will be happy, because it’s very important to all of us.”
- Senior program at the mall, Wednesdays, a teacher there, “I get some good knowledge, staying in the apartment doesn’t make sense”
- Bus trips, like to Niagara Falls
- Meetings every two weeks for tenant reps, workshops to improve skills as representatives (tenant reps also organize for the tenants – Christmas party, bingo, garden)
- Crafts class offered in the building



ELLIOT LAKE

All responses related directly to programs offered by Learning in Retirement.

- *Archaeology*. 12-week course (weekly) set up in traditional classroom style, instructor gave basic background. “Had a great time just picking out different information, the very interesting points about archaeology.”
- *Survival skills*. “I knew a lot about it. Focus was excellent. Very professionally done. How could you improve it? I’m not sure you could.”
- Format for these courses is “wide-open” in terms of opportunities for questions and discussion.
- *Gardening*. “For me it was excellent. Came out of it really confident. Course was in two sections: botany and then outside to look at the trees and plants. Instructor went through the basics, was open, you could ask questions at any time. Tons and tons of material [handouts] so that you could go back and check. Very professionally done. You had the feeling that every time you came it was well-prepared, well-organized. I’m going to take it again this fall.”
- “I found the instructors to be really knowledgeable, experts in their own field. That makes it more interesting. As students, we’ve all had interests over the years, all our lives, in something; nobody’s had time, until we’ve stopped working, to dig a little deeper.”
- *Psychology*. “Instructor asked us why we were taking it and I said, ‘I’ve worked all my life; who’s had time to think? Nobody drags us up at 7:00 in the morning any more. We have a good time – we don’t have any money, but we have good times.’”
- *Geology*. “One of the most popular courses. Facilitator’s knowledge is just out of this world. I take it year after year.”

KINGSTON (long-term care home)

- “I’ve learned a lot of things in the last couple of years”
 - Learned about and now take part in activities to help keep my balance
 - Learned about managing high blood pressure, understanding effects of medicines prescribed
 - Learning accommodations to changes in mobility – e.g., first how to use a cane, then a walker, then, for some, a wheelchair
 - “I never did that before, never asked what I was given.” – got older, many things happened lately, diagnosed with COPD, “I wanted to know what that stood for...what it did to you...is that normal, does it go away?”
 - “I took two courses that I can remember. One was how to deal with strokes when you’ve had a stroke. That was a session over at St. Mary’s. The other one was ‘how to get into a car’ and they had a half a car there, no engine. And they showed my son and I how to get me into a car.”
 - Learned how to get in and out of bed
 - Difficulty reading as a result of the stroke
- [T – So what do you do instead of that? R – Not much of anything]
- One resident taught another how to use a lock box because he needed to know how



PARKDALE

(Most spoke about computer use.)

- Computers, but difficult because of lack of facility with English. More success when using computer with own language but that doesn't provide him with opportunity to practice English
- Computers for Internet and email
- Taught computers one-to-one
- “Doctor Talk” sessions at the centre
- Learned a variety of things about Canada in Tamil language program
- Through experience of cancer, learned about treatment and health

THUNDER BAY

- Workshop for retired nurses, communicating with Alzheimer’s patients
- Interest related to a family member who had the disease, could have been more time
- Volunteer for hospital, felt workshop would help her, sounded interesting
- Quilting, intended to be bonding session, mother-daughter, turned out to be frustrating experience
- Instructor hounded them about details of quilt, needed to give us more time and better instruction, daughter gave up, mother finished on her own
- Learned new recipes related to health
- Went back to school to learn about alcoholism related to issues in aboriginal community, and to learn how to do translation (to Ojibwa), for daughter’s business, stories of how it was for the university and for other members of her community
- Used as role model in family after she went back to school
- Workshop at her church, learning communication skills for those in helping roles
- Each participant had opportunity to talk, to include their own life experiences
- Easier for seniors to learn by interaction rather than lecture
- “Sharing part was the better learning part for me”
- Board member training
- Being around seniors is an education in itself
- Learning to overcome loss
- Learning through a variety of roles at the 55+ Centre (board member, committee)
- Member of elders group of Northern Ontario School of Medicine – weekend “elders gathering” at Trent University, speakers, lectures and workshops, cultural events

Comment from participant that learning was happening around the table as participants shared their stories (related to different ways the traditional Aboriginal culture is either kept or denied in different parts of Ontario; relates to past experience of the generations)

There seemed to be a strong drive for the participants to talk about the ways they were teaching others and the contributions they were presently giving to their communities



WATERLOO

- Stained glass, given at night and would have preferred a daytime class
- Yoga, prefer to do with peers
- Class with a speaker – use of microphone is very important, and the microphone must follow the speaker, aimed at the mouth, rather than having the speaker wander away from it
- Speaker followed by question and answer period, important that the speaker repeats the question before answering it
- Helpful if, during a question and answer period, someone takes the microphone to each person asking the question
- Art class, have been taking the same one for many years, so the instructors knows I am hard of hearing. When giving instructions to the class, she stands beside me
- Decided to turn the front lawn into a garden; attended garden centre and other programs that taught us about gardening
- Book club

WINDSOR

- I'm a singer and do a lot of entertaining in nursing homes, a 45-minute show of songs and stories. I'm learning old songs that are new to me; it's a constant learning experience. As a blind person, I have to memorize the material, so it becomes a bigger chore.
- Beading, jewellery-making, very challenging and I'm learning more and more about how to overcome some of those challenges. I took class with another blind person at local beading store. Asked if we (three of us) could have a personal class for the visually impaired. Use magnifier. Beading teacher agreed to work with us on Sunday afternoon. We were accommodated separately at two different stores.
- Lawn bowling for visually impaired
- Horseback riding (para-equestrian group) – have ridden for a long time but para-equestrian events, including dressage, are new to me
- Alley bowling, one plays with sighted people
- Like to read – read three books at the same time, in Braille, on tape and on CD (person has an MA in English, taken after she became blind), “and I learn something every day from one of my books”
- A variety of volunteer work for the CNIB
- “Everyday you learn something when you're blind. If you attempt to ride the bus, as a couple of us do, that can be a learning experience especially if you're going to an unfamiliar environment. You roll with the punches.”
- One man had had several operations during the past year and after each had to learn how to adjust, how to do the relevant exercises, how to make lifestyle changes.
- A recently-widowed woman had to learn how to live alone, without a sighted partner to guide her
- Members of this group are planning to facilitate a peer-support group for people who are newly visually impaired



APPENDIX B4 – Available Community Programs - Responses

(What is available in this community for older adults who want to learn?)

ALZHEIMER'S

- Local senior centre has crafts, exercise, games (e.g., cards), trips, knowledgeable guests – can all be learning experiences if you want them to be
- Activities for residents of the retirement home similar to those offered by senior centre
- Tai-chi at a variety of locations
- Not aware of programs through the school board

DOWNSVIEW

- Heads shaking, blank look, even sadness
- Several participants – “Nothing,” “There really isn't”
- Black Creek Seniors' Program (in a nearby mall, not a separate senior centre)
- In this apartment building – church service, bingo (tenant rep did not know who runs these)

ELLIOT LAKE

Elliot Lake Learning in Retirement

- Courses available through the local school district, at the school (adult education and correspondence)
- Computer club, meets first and third Friday of every month, costs one dollar a meeting, members problem-solve for each other. “When you can't get the answers yourself, there's help there.”
- There was an art college – White Mountain Academy – now gone, building unused. (Printmaking, welding, photography, etc.)
- Ceramics and stained glass at the Pearson Centre (government-sponsored multipurpose centre, including theatre)
- Theatre group (performance and production)
- Naturalists club
- Hiking club
- Friends of Algoma – have funding from Wildlife Habitat to distribute and maintain saw-whet owl and wood duck boxes; taking part in turtle study; take graffiti off the rocks; ‘soft-release’ of young orphaned animals back to the wild. Most members are over 60.
- Group was not aware of any church activities, or use of church space, other than for religious purposes.
- Training in wellness practices such as reiki, reflexology, etc.
- Tai-chi
- Philatelic group
- Red Hat Society (for women)
- Similar group for men; they wear yellow miners' hats
- Two choirs
- Model trains group
- Volunteer resources centre, to connect older adults to volunteer opportunities



Sheridan Elder Research Centre

- Rio-Algoma (mines) offers an annual tour of the former mining area. Tours are very popular with retirees.

KINGSTON

- Some training is available on site and sometimes residents are taken to a nearby hospital or long-term-care facility (i.e., St. Mary's)

PARKDALE

(Almost all in the Parkdale Community Health Centre)

- Computer instruction
- Gardening
- English language
- Elder abuse prevention
- Lessons in practical aspects of living in Canada – shopping, banking
- Healthy food – buying and preparing
- Visits to the library (computers available there, too)
- Lawyers present on legal issues, offer free services
- Wellness clinic, health issues – high blood pressure, etc.
- Visits from medical professionals on particular topics
- Nurse teaches about safety regarding management of medicines
- Walking group
- Peer support group
- Bus trip once a year, last year they went to St. Jacobs for a day trip

Outside of the Health Centre, out in the community –

- South Asian group for women, cooking class for example (no longer funded)
- Chinese man not aware of programs for older Chinese offered through Chinatown community
- Church services, not aware of many programs offered - tai chi is one
- Meeting in coffee shop or in a park doesn't seem to happen. People come to the centre and go back home (I sit here, go back home.)
- Most don't live with children, even if their children are here in Toronto
- Important to go out every day – to beach, park, etc.

THUNDER BAY

55+ Centre

- (E.g., art classes, health and wellness, computers, “seniors are just crazy about computers, at first you just couldn't get into the classes!” fitness, dance classes and dances, gardening, library, places for reading, cards very popular)
- Mental health program to teach elders about healthy lifestyles and give support
- Story-telling at library
- “A lot of things if you search for them”
- In some places, fees can be ‘forgiven’ but most seniors will not ask



Sheridan Elder Research Centre

- Confederation College and Lakehead University – used to have free tuition for seniors
- Encourage others, because you don't know what resources you have until you try
- Involvement in elementary and secondary schools (e.g., help with play day, choir, 'buddies', 'grandparents program, drama)
- Thunder Bay Positive Aging was very active in community, strong educational mandate, folded due to lack of funding
- Church groups – many offer cards
- Aboriginal community – workshops, conferences, lots of programs with youth
- Buses will pick people up (e.g., at senior centre) and take them to the casino for free (!!!)

WATERLOO

- Conestoga College catalogue has listing of night-time courses
- City Hall has listing of activities – book describing programs comes in the newspaper
- Some of the activities available are not specifically for older adults but older adults tend to predominate (e.g., group that builds model boats)
- Seniors' centres
- Seniors' advisory council, connected to City Hall, searches out activities for seniors in the community
- Events such as the Royal Medieval Fair
- Lectures at a local institute

[- participants appear to be more aware of the activities going on than in some of the other focus groups. List appears in the paper every week, and Rogers cable has many listings]

- YMCA programs – aerobics, conditioning room, etc.

*- Transportation doesn't seem to be as much of an issue with this group as it's been with some others. They're a somewhat younger group than some of the others have been. Bus transportation is adequate, except for the suburbs, and many of the participants drive.

WINDSOR

- Two senior centres (one is east end and one in west) with a variety of the traditional programs
- University of Windsor had difficulty getting accommodations at either U of Windsor or St. Clair College
- Many volunteer programs, with training provided, "a further form of education"
- Poetry class at U of Windsor for retired people and St. Clair College offer daytime adult courses (opinion was that courses at U of Windsor were free to seniors but not courses at the college)
- Stories about other blind people who
- Bible study ("Are they going to have large-print Bibles?")
- Since becoming visually impaired, most of what I've learned, I've learned from my peers
- Many of the activities (perhaps even most) that they engage in are directly related to their involvement with low-vision-related organizations and friends



APPENDIX B5: Barriers to Learning – Responses

What, if anything, prevents you from taking part? What, from your perspective, might prevent others from taking part?

ALZHEIMER'S

- Lack of transportation
- Present state of health

DOWNSVIEW

- Lack of transportation (none had regular access to a car. Walking an issue due to long
- Distances to amenities, very busy roads. TTC available)
- Cost
- Feelings of insecurity – in building, in community
- Lack of confidence, courage to enter a program, enter a class, even if you want to learn
- Lack of information about what is available “lot like myself who don't know where to go”

ELLIOT LAKE

- Funding for expansion of initiatives and ideas

KINGSTON

- Mobility, health issues (also, very little available in facility)

PARKDALE

- Lack of facility with the language

THUNDER BAY

No barriers given

WATERLOO

No barriers listed

WINDSOR

No direct response (because of their very considerable disability, the learning activities they engaged in were either designed specifically for them - barrier-free - or they were empowered enough not to be stopped but to ensure that barriers were removed. One example is the pair who wanted to learn jewellery-making and asked for a course to be designed and delivered to suit their limitations. For them transportation was seen as a challenge to be overcome; they coached each other to become transit users. In short, this was a group that did not appear willing to think in terms of being stopped from engaging in activities they wanted to engage in.



APPENDIX B6 – Purpose for Learning

(What do you see as the reasons for learning for older adults?)

ALZHEIMER'S

- Missed certain learning experiences when young, e.g., friend who never learned to knit and is learning now
- What we learn today is not what we had 50 years ago, can learn new things as we go along, even if the new things we learn about aren't things we use ourselves [i.e., we're still of this world]
- We learn things that benefit our own lives, make it more pleasant
- Enjoyment, e.g., friends who enjoy taking art classes
- Forced into it by life circumstances, e.g., learning about Alzheimer disease
- Loss of spouse results in learning skills that had been the spouse's responsibility, necessities that must be learned and can be overwhelming, learning about things that I didn't need to know about earlier
- Experience of moving to new home requires new learning

DOWNSVIEW

- Provides focus
- Activates your memory and keeps it going
- Keeps you sharp, thinking, active
- Life changes as we age, need to learn how to deal with things that come at us
- After retirement there's a chance to do something different, something you really want to do
- Still want to be valuable members of society, don't want to be shoved aside because you can't do anything new
- Concern that after retirement there will be nothing to do, no one will want them
- Want to be able to make changes, want people to know that I've been in this world and this is what I did

ELLIOT LAKE

- "Stimulate your mind."
- "We're not dead, you know!"
- "There's time, too. There's always things that you wanted to do, wanted to know more about, but there wasn't time to do it. The time was filled with what you're supposed to be doing... Opportunity to answer some of the questions that may have been back there for a long time."
- "When [my wife and] I came up here, we didn't know one single soul...One of the reasons to take a course is to meet people. Aside from the course and what they were teaching, that was of prime importance to us – to meet new people."
- "A lot of field trips. For newcomers, as we all have been, it gave the opportunity to explore the area, and the friendship and the meeting of people were very important to us."
- "From all we're hearing at the moment, it is more than just learning, it is communicating, coming together, to a certain point socializing, more than just those who are drinking



beer...it is a healthy way of living. It's something that invigorates us...I realized that activity of body and brain is the secret of healthy longevity."

- Want to know that as a volunteer, the work one is doing has value and meaning and is not seen as something to fill the time.

KINGSTON

- "So you know what's going on"
- "So we know what we missed"
- To learn how to make a variety of accommodations to changes in health
- "My problem is physical especially...I've had a stroke too, my voice is gone, but I'm still available to learn because I'm still living. You have to learn, whether you want to or not."
- Learn how to get around the facility, "it's all on one floor but it's very confusing"
- Learn how to live in this new type of community

PARKDALE

(most responses related to English language learning, although that wasn't the question)

- English is an international language
- To share our feelings and talk we must learn English
- Make medical appointments
- To engage in community activities such as shopping, banking
- To keep our memory
- To be happy
- To keep busy
- Learning English non-stop
- Keep independence
- Learn about how to stay healthy (e.g., concerning conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol, etc.)
- To be able to interact with Canadian people
- Came to Canada as old person, understand so little
- Older people forget easily, need to learn and relearn
- Exercise memory
- To get together with our grandchildren

THUNDER BAY

- Life is ongoing learning, always a situation you can learn from
- Need to be open-minded
- Activities keep people out of the healthcare system – e.g., of 90 year old hosts at the 55+ Centre
- Senior centre keeps us active
- Opportunity to meet same-age people
- Like to keep mind alive, things that interest her help her to feel alive
- Like to do things she saw her own mother do as she grew into old age
- Want to do something every day
- Connection to spirituality, spiritual learning that comes from going for a walk,
- "Sharpens your senses", opportunity in later life when you don't need to be learning in order to use the learning – "I'm much more aware", noticed a moose's lips moving



- “In our senior years we have that opportunity to do some of the things we were too busy to do”
- “My dad, at 97, still learning something new every day and my kids would come into town it was very important that they visit Grandpa because he would have a lesson.”

WATERLOO

- Keep the noodle going, stimulating
- Want to have a hobby
- Have the extra time now, so why not learn something?
- Good for your mind to keep learning something new. The older you get, the more important it is
- Learn a skill
- To do volunteer work
- Learn about health and wellness to promote own good health
- World has changed, learn about things that are new to us
- Learn about accommodating to hearing loss
- To socialize

WINDSOR

- Occupy your time
- Keep your mind active, stimulate your brain
- Maintain independence
- Socialize
- Acquire new knowledge
- So as to serve as a teacher to younger people
- “I don’t think you ever quit learning”



APPENDIX B7 – What is Missing in the Community? - Responses

What is missing in your community?

ALZHEIMER'S

- Agreement on wish for more trips
- Bus trips don't seem to encourage participation of older adults

DOWNSVIEW

- Opportunities to learn how to change policies – “I don't want to just have a garden or read the newspaper”
- We want something for seniors, learning
- Valuable learning (i.e., learning opportunities that are worthwhile)
- Opportunities to give back to community
- “It may be too late”
- School boards to be interested in seniors' learning needs and interests
- People taking an interest as we are doing in this focus group, with the financial infrastructure behind it
- Places people would feel comfortable coming to
- Facilitators/instructors to enable what we want to do
- Teacher to provide instruction
- Ways of letting those we can't read know about what is available
- ESL instruction
- One person described what is, in essence, already available for those who attend learning in retirement programs (e.g., retired nurse, teacher, or lawyer talks about issues of interest to seniors)
- Fitness, music, computer skills, electronic gadgets instruction
- Organized walking sessions, “walk and talk”
- Ways to motivate seniors, motivating and encouraging them to come out of their apartments, providing transportation
- Support to check on home-bound people, go to the store for them, etc.

(In this room are several exercise machines that need repair; tenants have asked the tenant rep for new ones. (TM - An exercise program could be provided without the use of exercise machines, which are problematic for an unsupervised senior in any case))

ELLIOT LAKE

- Elliot Lake Retirement Living organization surveys retirees about their needs and tries to provide courses and facilities for trade-related learning, such as welding, woodworking. There's an interest but not a facility, no space or equipment for such activities.
- Did not appear to be, at least within this group, an interest in organized indoor physical activity.
- Likewise sessions on health and wellness, although the hospital gives diabetes education.
- People who've moved to Elliot Lake do sometimes choose to leave again, believing that there's nothing to do there. Suggestion that if you enjoy shopping, you would be



disappointed because there is none in Elliot Lake. Transit system described as cheap and reliable.

- Although there is car-pooling and a transit system within town, there are issues of accessibility for some older people. For example, Learning in Retirement (LIT) courses are not available in a wheelchair-accessible facility. People who depend on walkers, one member said, have also told her (she's president of LIT) that it's difficult to attend.
- One member, when she arrived in Elliot Lake, was told by another older resident that she shouldn't attend the Learning in Retirement activities because "they're full of old people." Seems not everyone shares the interests of the people in this focus group or the desire to be included in the older adult population there.

PARKDALE

(Difficulty in getting response, in making the question understood)

- South Asian program no longer offered

THUNDER BAY

- More information about health
- Programs through Lakehead or Confederation
- Notices about what's happening – suggest half-page in the newspaper or web page

WATERLOO

- Nothing
- "It's all out there; all you have to do is look for it."

WINDSOR

- Courses that are specifically geared to older adults, with topics such as Canadian history or literature of interest to older adults
- Adequate advertising to make people aware of programs that are available in Windsor
- "We're a specific group. If you can't read it you can't do it. We can't just join anything."
- "So much of the material would have to be printed in large print or Braille and too often that's just not available."
- Adequate transportation
- Awareness of blind people, often blindness is equated with stupidity



APPENDIX B8 – Learning Styles - Responses

How do you think older adults learn best?

ALZHEIMER'S

- Consider an older adult's need to remember (i.e., memory strategies, repetition)
- Combination of ways (i.e., reading + talking with others + listening)
- Visual presentation of information (i.e., film and discussion)

DOWNSVIEW

- Can't learn unless people are talking
- Sometimes the way a question is put throws you off
- At 65, can return to university and tuition is paid [not sure that is still the case]
- Have friend who did this and found the workload very heavy. Speaker found that when she turned 65 she was still working and didn't have the time. Now is not sure she wants to do this (traditional format, essays, etc.). Still like learning, in a group setting with discussion. Wonder how one can use this information that we learn from others. As we age, outlook and ideas change, making me a better person but takes so many years to get to this place. What used to be important is just not important anymore.
- As seniors, we're all different – can't satisfy everybody
- Some like the idea of lectures, others would fall asleep with that method of learning
- Small groups (20 or less for lecture, fewer for discussion)
- Refreshments provided

ELLIOT LAKE

- Time for questions and discussion – “great discussion”. “It has to be during the day.” “Lots of people don't like to drive in the evening – even if it's not far and especially during the winter.”
- No particular preference over lecture or other formats. “All of the above.”
- Appreciate instructors and facilitators who are knowledgeable and organized, knows how to teach. Otherwise, can lose interest very quickly.
- Length of session, breaks, etc., depend on the subject.
- Needs to be respect, e.g., “retired person working with retired person,” “have to have the feeling that what you have learned up to this point is of value, and I wouldn't want to take a course where I had a younger person...talking down to me.”
- In designing courses, take into account the knowledge, experience, skills that older adults bring to the learning experience.
- “Take from those that have a lifetime of experience.”
- An emphasis on “street-smarts” as well as the formal background.
- “Why limit ourselves to 55 and over, why not have some of these programs available for them too?” “They would come in and see us in a different light.”
- Interaction with younger people so that they can see us as “still vibrant, active, alive, curious, etc”.



KINGSTON

- One-to-one, ask (doctor, for example)
- Connecting new learning to previous experience
- “I was taught years ago – you remember doing”
- “If anything happens to you, you remember it better than if you read about it, because it doesn’t sink in”
- “Our brains right now, like my brain right now, is not very good”
- Need to be looking to see what I should be doing and what I should be watching out for, you have to be very careful
- Changes in health status result in changes in appropriate and effective ways of learning
- Effects of stroke, particularly in relation to emotional responses
- As a new resident, would watch what the others did and learn from them about life in the residence
- Need those helping us to listen to us
- “When I came here, I just came because I needed to be here, I didn’t intend to learn anything...I was only interested in having therapy and getting better.”

PARKDALE

- Reading, using dictionary for English
- English challenge – with different levels of facility and different accents
- Talking with a friend in the group
- Learning from children in first language
- Use a combination of my own language, Spanish, and English
- Communicating with peers
- Conversation is very good way to learn
- Can learn from television

THUNDER BAY

- Conversation rather than lecture
- Film and discussion with prepared questions can work, but follow-up is also helpful
- Pay attention to possibility that senior can’t hear, ensure that volume is adjusted when in large room
- Smaller group around the table can also facilitate hearing
- Arrangement of furniture affects learning experience
- Being taught by peers – depends on what is being learned
- Speak more slowly, don’t use big words or jargon
- Large font and clearly stated

WATERLOO

- “Right up front” let the instructor know that I have a hearing loss and what my needs are
- Try to position myself so that I can hear and then during the break mention that I’m hearing impaired
- “I tell the instructor that I must see their face and their mouth.”
- Let the instructor or committee know where you’d like to be seated, so show up early
- * Initial responsibility [to see that our needs are met] is always ours (general agreement)



- Allow more time; takes you longer when you are older
- For physical activities particularly (yoga, Tai-Chi) prefer to be with peers
- Sometimes prefer to be with a variety of ages; depends on the activity
- Helps if you are shown what to do
- Give a set of “backup notes” to refer to
- Ensure that the instructor has your attention
- Speak to us slowly and clearly, without hand covering face
- Slow down the instruction
- More interesting if there is interaction

WINDSOR

- Some blind people are visual learners. “I have to visualize in my head what I’m hearing, so it makes me slower.”
- Repetition
- From peers and one-to-one, learn from each other
- Confidence (i.e., lack of it) is a big issue – having the confidence to ask and to persist with new learning is very important
- Learn better with the support of each other
- Hands on
- Break learning down into small pieces, small steps, walking you through it until you’ve got it
- Accommodations are needed to compensate for the visual learning that isn’t happening
- For blind people, so much has to be done beforehand to get to the point where a sighted person would begin



APPENDIX B9 – Information technology - Responses

Do you use information technology to access learning opportunities? How? Has it increased or improved your opportunities to learn?

ALZHEIMER'S

One has no interest in having or using a computer (“my daughter’s tried to encourage me but I just haven’t had the interest. I’m not sure whether I’m afraid that I wouldn’t learn or that I’m just not interested. It doesn’t bother me that I don’t have one”); one used to have a computer, used it a lot, and more recently found it was beyond her (“it’s frustrating”); another has one.

- Use for email
- Look up things I want to know about – recipes, anything that I think looks interesting, I’ll go and look it up, if I have the time
- Play solitaire
- Don’t use the computer if they wake up in the night
- Person who has never used one enjoys writing letters
- Daughter gave mum her old computer, has given her two
- Grandchildren taught her how to use it
- Took a course but didn’t like it – learned more from her grandchildren
- Re: course – “I have white hair and automatically they treat you as if you don’t know anything.”
- Took a couple of lessons, but when family helped, they had more patience, wrote everything down and told you what to do
- When it was new, had to really concentrate on it, now I have a laptop and love it

DOWNSVIEW

- Tenant reps have computers for the work they do, through Toronto Community Housing, to communicate with administration and with other reps
- Other members presently did not have access to a computer, although some had used them when working and one still used one for work, keeps her connected with the people she needs to be connected with in community development – email, creating flyers
- Those who didn’t have access to a computer did not appear to want access
- Would not go to a library or other centre to use one; knew of places where computers were available
- Did not know if seniors’ program in the mall had computers for seniors’ use
- Need money not only to purchase a computer but to learn how to use it

ELLIOT LAKE

- “There’s a difference in this age group between those who are computer knowledgeable and those who don’t give a damn and don’t want to have one in the house!”
- Two men commented that before they retired they had businesses, and there was someone available who did the necessary computer work for them. “Now I didn’t have someone else to do it for me, and I had the time to do it myself.”
- “When we moved up here we thought, ‘Hey, we’ve got to get into the new world.’”



- “I had to learn because I was missing too much.”
- They are all on dial-up which ties up the phone line
- Learned without instruction, by playing around, used “Dummies” books, asked for specific help at Computer Club, one asked her sister to show her how to use internet and emails
- Some (women) used the computer at work, mostly for word processing, and continued to learn and use after retirement
- Some use computer for word processing only; use the library (\$1.00 for half hour) to check their hotmail account for email and to Google
- One recently retired teacher gave away her computer upon retirement and thinks that in time she’ll get one. “It was one of the trappings that I wanted to get rid of.”

Uses

- “I was refinishing a kayak and I learned on line where I could buy the supplies that I needed.”
- Making travel arrangement, booking tickets
- Virtual tour of travel destination, particularly accommodation interior
- Banking
- Recipes
- Looking up things. Follow-up on something learned in another place.
- Hiking club toured a windmill farm and now members have questions that they’ll investigate online. “In the old days you could go to a library, but they don’t know anything about windmill farms because they’re so new.”
- How to get the bugs off my roses
- Several have bought on eBay
- Some have Encyclopedia Britannica online or on disk
- One man, a former pilot, has and uses a flight simulator
- For photography, uses PhotoShop and other programs, repairs old photos for purpose and for pleasure

KINGSTON

- Several had used the computer before coming to live in the residence. Two participants in this group continue to use their own computer in the residence
- “I never had a computer before I came here. [now has one] I only use it for playing solitaire...I have a little table that I set it on...” “If I do anything [else] I’m going to have to go to school for computers.”
- No Internet access available for residents, but the residence has plans to provide it
- Used computer like a typewriter after a stroke
- None had ever used the computer in their working life

How did you learn?

- Nurses taught me
- Taught myself, had an electronics background
- Son taught me, used to use it for email



PARKDALE

- Has computer at home but son doesn't wish her to use it
- Uses computer to read papers from home country and in own language
- Want to use it to learn about what interests them – plants, food, etc.
- Information, interactive programs
- Audio features are useful, chance to talk online
- Use as way to listen to music
- News from own country, text and audio
- Everyone in the group but one person has used a computer – most only in the centre or the library
- Want to learn more about computers, asked me if I knew where they could learn

THUNDER BAY

- Four of six have and use computers at home
- Access to info such as pruning apple trees



APPENDIX B10 – “If you were to advise us...”

ALZHEIMER’S

- Ask how older people feel about things. Sometimes it doesn’t come up because people are afraid to say. Keeping feelings inside can make things worse

DOWNSVIEW

- Importance of issues of transportation and accessibility
- Consider the isolation of some seniors (e.g., need prescription for medication but have no one to go for them)

ELLIOT LAKE

- What are you proposing to do for us? Is there a possibility that you would go to bat for us so that we could get more funding?
- At the end – plea for funding to create the physical spaces in which the older adults can put their skills, expertise and interests to work – good work.

KINGSTON

Did not ask

PARKDALE

- Ask about feelings around living alone, psychological aspects
- About what’s important for elder health and wellbeing

THUNDER BAY

- Find out what elders want to learn by asking to them about it, finding out about their interests

WINDSOR

- *Transportation is paramount issue* for all members of the group “When any blind or visually-impaired person wants to do anything, the first thing they think about is, how do I get there and how do I get back?”
- Local HandiTransit, like WheelTrans in Toronto, very accommodating but must book in advance, several days at least. They will determine when they will pick you up and when they will bring you back. “You can’t call them up and say, ‘Today I want to go to the mall’, or ‘Tomorrow I want to go to so and so.’” A man in the group booked HandiTrans a week in advance so that he could attend our session.
- Extra steps: example of taking a course at U of Windsor. Need to find out if registered. Need to book HandiTransit or take the bus. Need to get someone to teach you the route from the drop-off point or bus stop to the classroom.
- A lot of older adults will not or cannot take all of the necessary extra steps required and so will stay home. “Less bother to sit home and rot.”
- “If you lose your sight, and if you’re not careful, you can lose all ambition.”
- * *Some blind people’s families “don’t allow them to grow.”* May be worried about their safety. Family members will overprotect so that the blind person comes to believe she needs the protection. Want them to live nearby. One woman in group, daughter wanted her



to move nearby, yet daughter lived outside of town. No buses. Mom (now age 89) chose to stay in the city and to live alone. Story of man whose family had his stove disconnected because of concern for his safety.

- One woman was a hospital volunteer for many years. When the hospital was expanded and renovated, she couldn't easily find her way around and so stopped her volunteer work there. "The hospital is entirely different; I get lost in it."
- Two of the group, a man and a woman, go walking together a lot. She has no sense of direction but is partially sighted. He is totally blind but has a great sense of direction. She says to him, "I can get you there, if you can tell me how to get there."
- Need to learn as a result of newly-acquired blindness
- Learn through ongoing interaction with the changing environment
- One woman went back to school at 52, for six years she went to school and work part-time, had an opportunity to earn a lot more money with this additional education. Found that as time went on and as her vision deteriorated, it was difficult to supervise other staff and she had to resign. "Aced" her course as an older person and is convinced she wouldn't have if she'd been in her 20s.
- Large companies have pre-retirement training; members of this group sometimes attend to talk about volunteer opportunities after retirement
- Low vision support group has speakers for their members once a month
- CNIB has lending library and music library, can get music notation in Braille
- Princeton University (US) library lends materials
- "Basically, blindness doesn't change the individual...We're all basically the people we were before we lost our sight."
- Inability to make eye contact has led some to feel more confident about speaking in a group (i.e., can't see the people in the group)



APPENDIX B11 – Common Themes Among All Focus Groups, Organized by Question

Listed in descending order of number of related responses introduced during the focus group discussion (given in brackets). That is, numbers do not correspond to the number of individuals who mentioned each topic but the number of times the topic was introduced into the discussion by a participant (and usually discussed by several of the participants).

1. Recent Learning Opportunity – please see also Appendix B3, presented by group

Hobby-related (10)

Volunteer-related (8)

As a response to change in health status, own or others' (8)

Related to physical activity (4)

Career or work-related (2)

As a response to loss (2)

Related to self-empowerment (2)

Related to personal safety (1)

** Second part of this question – “If you think the experience could be improved upon, how would you improve it?” – is included in question 6, on learning styles – “How do you think older adults learn best? What do you think needs to be taken into consideration when planning learning opportunities for older adults?”

2. Purpose for Learning – Please see also Appendix B6, presented by group

To maintain thinking level and improve memory (8)

For social reasons (6)

New learning is necessary to function in a changing world (5)

To be of service (4)

To make up for learning missed when younger (4)

For pleasure, happiness (4)

As a response to a change in a) health status (3), b) living arrangements (1)

To feel engaged with others (3)

Promotes a healthy lifestyle (3)

To maintain independence (2)

To connect to our spiritual life (1)

3. Available in the community for older adults: Please see Appendix B4, presented by group

4. Barriers to Learning See Appendix B5, presented by group

Lack of transportation (8) – by far the barrier most frequently mentioned. Even in areas where public transport was available, busy roads to cross, frequency of service, cost and long distances to walk remained factors

Lack of information about what is available or not knowing where to find that information (5)

Lack of confidence, courage to enter a program (3)

Present state of health (2)

Lack of facility with the English language (1)



5. Missing - Please see also Appendix B7, presented by group

Organized physical activity (3)

Awareness, information on what is available (3)

Health and wellness programs (2)

Facilities for programs (2)

Financial support for programs (2)

Opportunities to be of service (2)

Instructors (2)

Adequate transportation (2)

Accessibility to facilities (1)

Senior-centred programming (1)

Organized excursions (1)

6. Learning Styles – responses to this question, below, are as given by individuals and are organized into one of two categories. Please see also Appendix B8, presented by group

a) Related to the organization of the learning experience

Small groups, 20 or less for a lecture, fewer for a discussion

Refreshments provided

Occurs during the day

Adequate transportation available

Length of session, breaks, etc., will depend on the subject/activity

May include interaction with younger people

Arrangement of furniture affects learning experience

b) Related to the instruction

As seniors, we're all different – instructor can't satisfy everyone

The way a question is worded is important

Time for questions and discussion

Instructors and facilitators need to be knowledgeable and organized

Needs to be respect on the part of instructor for those who have a lifetime of experience

Connect new learning to previous experience

Changes in health status may affect ways of learning

Learn by talking with friends in a group

Conversation is good way to learn

Conversation rather than lecture

Use a combination of own language and English

Film and discussion with prepared questions

Follow-up is helpful

One to one is best for some activities, for new learning

Smaller groups around a table



Speak slowly; don't use big words or jargon
Use large font, text clearly stated
Allow more time, can take longer when you are older
Prefer to be with peers, for physical activities particularly
Helps if you are shown what to do
Give participants a set of notes to refer to
Speak slowly and clearly, without hand covering face
Slow down the instruction
More interesting if there is interaction
Use repetition
Consider the older adult's need to remember through use of memory strategies, repetition
Learn from peers and one-to-one; learn from each other
Learn better with the support of each other
Confidence is a big issue, having the confidence to ask
Hands on activity
Break learning down into small pieces, small steps
Walk the learners through until they understand
Provide a combination of strategies, such as reading, talking with others, listening
Present information visually

7. "Tell us about one learning opportunity for older adults that is happening in your community that you think is particularly creative." Not asked, as the question had been thoroughly covered in #3 – What is available?

8, 9, 10. Information Technology Use – Please also see Appendix B9, presented by group

Reported uses for information technology:

- Email, stay connected with friends and family
- Email in relation to volunteer and paid work
- Playing games such as solitaire
- Finding suppliers and dealers
- Making travel arrangements – booking trips
- Looking at videos of travel destinations online
- Banking, paying bills
- Finding recipes
- Looking up practical information – pruning roses, fixing kayak
- Buying e.g., on eBay
- Using flight simulator
- For photography – using PhotoShop
- Read newspapers from home
- Find out news from own country, text and audio
- As a way to listen to music
- Accessing auto market, sailboat market



Ways that participants learned how to use a computer:

- Daughter gave mother her old computer, showed her
- Grandchildren taught grandparent
- Took a course but learned more from grandchildren
- Took lessons but family members had more patience
- Learned without instruction, by playing around with it
- Used “Dummies” books
- Took a computer course
- Asked sister
- Asked at computer club
- Learned word pro at work and continued to learn after retirement
- Taught myself, had an electronics background
- Son taught parent
- Nurses in Extendicare taught
- Learned while still working
- Learned while taking university courses
- Ask spouse for assistance
- Go to the library for support
- Many use word pro on home computer and the library for internet access

Comments about not having a computer:

- No interest
- Used to use one but found it frustrating due to health changes
- Prefer to write letters
- Recently retired person gave hers away
- Have no patience with computers

* In each group, only one or at most two participants did not have a computer or ready access to one, usually in their library. Those who did not have a computer did not appear to want access to one.

Comments around computer use generally:

- Needed a computer to get into the “modern world”
- Had to learn how, because she was missing too much
- Dial-up ties up the phone line
- Use computers in place of library to find out about things that are so new – there aren’t yet any books about them
- Some residents of Extendicare brought their computers with them to the residence
- One participant has a computer at home but her son does not want her to use it
- Audio features useful for blind and (in first language) for second language users

11. If you were to advise us...

There wasn’t a lot of response to this question. Please refer to Appendix B10 for details.

* In Appendix B11, there is some feedback that relates specifically to the Windsor Low Vision group and to the particular challenges of older adults who are blind.



Appendix C

Inventory



APPENDIX C1. Selected Sites: Tables

Table 1. Percentage and Number of Sites Selected Within Each Agency/Institution Type.

Agency/Institution type	Number of sites in database	Number (%) selected
Ethnic specific	62	16 (25%)
Faith based	172	46 (25%)
Third Age learning	9	9 (100%)
Literacy programs	300	15 (5%)
Long-term care	126	32 (25%)
Provincial senior's organizations	23	6 (25%)
Public/separate school boards	6	6 (100%)
Public libraries	44	11 (25%)
Recreation centres	44	12 (25%)
Retirement residences	295	75 (25%)
Seniors' centres	75	19 (25%)
Universities and colleges	45	45 (100%)
TOTAL	1,201	291

Table 2. Geographical Distribution of the Agencies Reached.

Agency Type	Area code						Total
	416	519	613	705	807	905	
Universities/Colleges	8	9	9	9	2	7	44
Ethnic specific	2	2	3	2	0	4	13
Faith based	4	7	6	3	0	5	25
Literacy programs	1	2	1	5	0	2	10
Long-term care	3	10	7	3	0	1	24
Public libraries	0	2	4	4	0	1	11
Recreation centres	3	0	2	0	0	1	6
Retirement residences	10	19	13	7	0	12	61
School boards	1	1	1	2	1	0	6
Senior centres	2	8	2	0	1	13	26
Provincial seniors' organizations	5	0	0	0	0	1	6
Third Age	1	2	3	1	1	0	8
Total	40	62	51	36	5	47	241



Table 3. Strategies Used to Collect Information by Agency/Institution Type

Agency Type	Telephone	Email	Web Pages	Calendars Received
Ethnic specific	9	1	4	-
Faith based	23	-	7	-
Third Age learning	6	-	6	1
Literacy programs	11	-	-	-
Long-term care	24	-	-	-
Provincial senior's organizations.	3	2	4	-
Public/separate school boards	4	-	3	-
Public libraries	9	-	7	-
Recreation centres	3	2	2	1
Retirement residences	37	-	51	2
Seniors' centres	9	10	22	14
Universities/ Colleges	7	32	39	2
TOTAL	145	47	145	20



APPENDIX C2 – Telephone script

Inventory of Learning Opportunities for Older Adults in Ontario

Telephone Script

Hello, I am calling from the Sheridan Elder Research Centre at Sheridan College in Oakville. We are currently conducting a research project about the learning needs and interests of adults age 65 and over in Ontario.

We would like to ask you a few questions; this should take only a few minutes. All information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name and your agency's name will not be referenced in our final research report or in any presentations related to our study. Shall I begin?

If the person says they can't talk

Is there a more convenient time for us to call? *Take name and/or best time to call and explain that someone will be in touch.*

Or, if you are not speaking to the appropriate person

ask to be connected with the appropriate person or take the name of the appropriate person and the best time to call back.

If "Yes" continue....

Program Information

1. Do you currently offer learning opportunities such as formal and/or informal classes, lectures, workshops, seminars?

Yes No

If "No" end call.

If "Yes" continue....



2. Which of the following types of learning opportunities do you offer?

Structured classes Informal discussion groups

Workshops Online/distance learning

Correspondence courses Lectures

Computer training Seminars

Print resources (i.e. books, magazines, scholarly journals)

Television programming

Other _____

3. Based on the number of registrations, can you tell me which of your programs has the greatest demand (e.g. computer training, yoga)?

.....

4. Do you currently offer learning opportunities that are specifically geared towards older adults?

Yes No

If "no"

No a) Have you done so in the past?

Yes No

No b) Do you plan to do so in the future?

Yes No

Go to question #6



If “yes”

Yes a) Do these classes, lectures or workshops differ from those that you offer to the broader community (i.e. young and old alike)?

Yes No

If “No” go to question #6

If “yes”

Yes a) Are these classes, lectures or workshops....

offered in a more accessible location? Yes No

less structured? Yes No

lower in terms of class size? Yes No

offered at a lower cost? Yes No

peer led learning groups? Yes No

Other: _____

Yes b) In order to promote these learning opportunities to older adults, do you...

Notify local seniors’ groups Yes No

Advertise online Yes No

Through word of mouth Yes No

Advertise in Seniors’ magazines Yes No

Advertise in the local newspaper Yes No

Advertise on community TV station Yes No



Post flyers/posters in the community Yes No

Post flyers/posters within your organization Yes No

Other: _____

6. How accessible is the physical environment for those who participate in the learning opportunities you provide?

We post clear directional signs to help people find specific rooms
Yes No

The main building is wheelchair accessible Yes No

Learning program areas are located on the ground level Yes No

We have an elevator for people attending programs on upper levels
Yes No

Learning program areas are located no more than 50 feet from the main entrance.
Yes No

Parking is available within a very short walking distance to the main doors (i.e. no more than 100 feet). Yes No

There is ramp access into the building Yes No

Number of steps (if any), to enter the building Yes No

Washrooms are wheelchair accessible. Yes No

Washrooms are located less than 50 feet from the learning program area.
Yes No



Window coverings and/or lighting can be adjusted to reduce glare

Yes No

Learning program areas use chairs that have arm rests Yes No

Learning program areas use chairs that do not have wheels (i.e. stable)

Yes No

We arrange/provide transportation to and from programs Yes No

We are accessible by public transportation Yes No

Our print materials take into consideration font size, contrast between text and background et cetera Yes No

Demographic Information

7. Does your agency keep information about the people who attend your programs?

Yes No

If “No” go to question #8

If “yes”

This information will help us to gain a better understanding of older adults who participate in learning opportunities.

Yes a) What is the total number of adults age 65+ who participate in your programs.



Yes b) What percentage of students are in the following age ranges?

65- 79 ___% 80+ ___%

Yes c) What percentage of students are 90+ ___%?

Yes d) Of those who fall into these age ranges, what percentage are women?

65-79 ___% 80+ ___%

Yes e) Of those who fall into these age ranges, what percentage are men?

65-79 ___% 80+ ___%

8. What time of day are all learning opportunities offered?

Morning 9am-12pm

Afternoon 12pm-5pm

Evening 5pm-10pm

IF APPLICABLE

a) What time of day are programs that are geared specifically towards seniors offered?

Morning 9am-12pm

Afternoon 12pm-5pm

Evening 5pm-10pm

8. Do you experience an increase in older learners during a particular time of year?

Yes No

If "Yes"

b) What season is most popular with your older learners?

Spring Summer Autumn Winter

Would you be able to send us an electronic copy of your program calendar for the month of November?



APPENDIX C3 – Inventory: Most Popular Programs

Responses to the question: Based on the number of registrations, can you tell me which of your programs has the greatest demand (e.g. computer training, yoga)?

Retirement Residences

Special events, gambling
Music therapy, exercise, crafts, knitting, day away programs, animal farm
Guest speakers - authors
Exercise, card games, movies, trips outside of facility (mall, symphony)
Social programs/large groups like Bingo
Information series: healthy steps, ethics, computers, education on referendum, Red Cross stops by, scrap-booking, hobbies specifically related to them
Mind games, physical exercise
Topic discussions, guest lectures
Debates, discuss world news in the evenings
Seminars
Informal interest based - birds
Exercise
Entertainment is the most popular
Written word, book programs
Exercise, games, cards
Physical programs, exercise programs
Word games
Dance, cards, exercise, happy hour, entertainment
Exercise, reading, games, trivia
Music, bingo, scrap-booking
Mental activities and games, physical activities, physio
Music, current events, exercise
Travel log (discussion group about different countries)
Free food gets people out
Reminiscence
Current events
Computers
Fitness, lectures
Travel log, lectures about different countries
Outings, hand waxing, social events, painting classes, park, volley ball, bingo, cards

Senior Centres

Fitness classes
Computer training
Have over 30 programs, depends on nature of course
Special events, dinner dances, fitness
Fitness, well-being, yoga
Spanish and computers
Card games
Fitness, computers



APPENDIX C4 - Inventory: Sample of Courses/Programs Offered by Agency Type.

The following data represent additional qualitative information recorded by the research assistants and the data analyst for that agency type.

Traditional learning agencies

Third Age. The Third Age learning agencies offered programs concerned more with intellectual pursuits to stimulate the mind rather than with other topics such as health information, physical fitness or dancing, social outings or learning particular art skills. Rather, lectures on impressionism, English Canadian writing, astronomy, travelogues, and psychology courses were offered. Programs were advertised as offering daytime courses, with no exams and no grades or educational prerequisites. They invited older adults to meet peers where they could share intellectual interests, ‘reconsider one’s opinions’ in an enjoyable social, stimulating educational environment. One program offered luncheon meetings with speakers and “minimax” organization, i.e. “minimum structure and formality combined with maximum flexibility and participation”.

Other Traditional Agencies. Some, but not all, of the other traditional learning agencies (colleges, universities and school boards) offered a large variety of non-credit courses and activities that one might expect older adults to enjoy through continuing or distance learning programs. The courses included life and leisure or general interest opportunities beyond the degree driven opportunities. Examples are:

- Chess, bridge
- Dancing, fitness
- Art, sculpture, woodcarving, quilting, sewing
- Writing (memoir) and storytelling courses
- Genealogy
- Gardening (and more formally, horticulture)
- Music programs (singing and instruments)
- Photography, cameras
- Calligraphy
- Spanish and French classes
- Financial planning
- Dealing with retirement
- Computer courses
- Bus trips

One university academic program was especially for older adults. Lectures were presented by experts on art history, architecture, literature, archaeology, DNA. Another had a living and learning in retirement program which offered courses on classical art and literature.

However, there were a number of traditional learning agencies that did not offer non-credit or general interest courses or did not have a continuing education program or department. There were no opportunities aimed specifically for older adults at these institutions. All of their offerings were degree or diploma driven with many needing prerequisite courses.



In addition, many of the courses did not fit into the topics of interest expressed by our sample of older adults and so may not be of interest to an older adult even if they were offered as a non credit course.

Some, but not all, agencies offered discounts for older adults, but this information was not easy to find when searching the websites. As well, many of the courses could be deemed expensive. For example, the photography course offered at one institution cost \$275, which could be prohibitive for the average older consumer.

So there are fairly large discrepancies in the degree of availability of learning opportunities for older adults offered by the traditional institutions.

Of the 58 traditional learning agencies, 11 (19%) had an easily found continuing education department and 29 (50%) had online learning opportunities, both of which allow for greater flexibility for the older learner, although the latter is not helpful unless one is computer literate. We should keep in mind that approximately 37% of our older adult sample were not computer users.

Ethnic specific agencies

- Fitness/exercise
- Games (e.g. dominoes, bingo, scrabble, cards, and various board games)
- Movies
- Health education programs
- Arts and crafts
- Weekly information and social sessions
- Educational workshops, invited speakers
- Field trips
- Computer training

Faith-based agencies

- Bible studies, meditation
- Arts and crafts, art classes
- Line dancing
- Musical instruments classes
- Speakers on various topics
- Hiking
- Games

Public Libraries

- Book clubs
- Computer classes (1:1, internet training, zoom tech/larger monitors/video magnifiers available)
- Poetry workshops
- Travel logs (people bring in slides and pictures of their vacations)
- Health and wellness seminars



One library reported being a member of the Visunet Canada Partners Program, a service of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), which “provides local library access to Canada’s largest collection of alternative format books and online resources for people who have difficulty reading print due to a visual, physical or learning disability”.

(<http://www.cnib.ca/en/services/library/libraries-schools/visunet/default.aspx>.)

This library also had an outreach program for seniors with books being delivered to homes and to retirement residences for those who are homebound. One other of the libraries we canvassed also reported having a ‘shut in’ service. However, this information was volunteered by these agencies in the telephone interview or posted on their website, rather than being a response to a specific question, so it is possible that the other facilities also provided such services but did not advertise them.

Long-term care facilities

- Games, (bingo, trivia, crosswords and other puzzles, word games, cards)
- Bowling, billiards
- Gardening
- Exercise, walking, swimming
- Reminiscence activities
- Crafts (knitting, leaf printing, poster painting), word working
- ‘Computer time’ at 9 a.m.
- Reading group/corner, book club, ‘news and views’, discussion groups
- Speakers series, visiting lecturers, family council meetings (lectures)
- Entertainment (music programs, movies)
- Outings (shopping trips, van/bus trips e.g. fall colour tours)

Retirement residences

- Games, (‘casino run’, bingo, scrabble, crosswords, trivia, bridge and other card games)
- Carpet bowling, darts, shuffleboard
- Art classes, ceramics, crafts, card making, ‘sit and stitch’, ‘knit wits’
- Gardening
- Computer classes
- Exercise/fitness, tai chi, walking
- Clubs/groups (book, bible study, chess, informal discussion groups)
- Biography night, ‘day in history’, ‘news and views’
- Speakers (e.g. CNIB), monthly resident forum, visit from legion, educational seminars
- Entertainment (musical presentations, singing groups, in-house movies, travel videos dances, ‘socials’)
- Outings/bus trips (shopping, theatre), and special events (e.g. BBQ’s, annual Christmas lights tour), involvement in local community organizations), intergenerational program
- Religious services on site
- Music therapy
- Animal care
- In-house and visiting library services
- ‘Memory lane’ program for residents with dementia



One facility also advocates for retirees. It had an informative newsletter and offers medical, fire and safety tips, as well as information on OHIP, CPP, and other facts useful to seniors.

Seniors' centres

- Games (bridge, euchre, cribbage, bingo), puzzles (crossword, sudoku), chess, 'brain games', snooker, shuffleboard, darts, bowling
- Exercise/Fitness classes, (variety of dance (e.g. line dancing, belly dancing, square dancing, ballroom dancing, Scottish dancing), aerobics, yoga, tai chi, 'osteo-fit', hiking, meditation, swimming, walking), some offered online
- Arts and crafts (painting, drawing, pen and ink art, water colours, bunka embroidery soap stone carving, photography, stain glass, glass etching, quilting, mosaics, card making, scrap booking), some offered online
- Computer classes (internet searching, email, using a scanner, different software), some peer led, technology (digital camera)
- Music programs and classes (instrument lessons (guitar), steel band, jazz/blues, music appreciation and theory)
- Performing arts
- Groups and clubs (art, current affairs, camera, support, cards)
- Language classes (French)
- Genealogy
- Writing (creative, memoirs)
- University lectures, seminars and workshops (e.g. 'downsizing', driving, health and wellness, hearing help, public speaking, financial information, historical talks), living with memory loss, mythology
- Entertainment (movies, slide show presentations)
- Outings/day trips/tours, community involvement/volunteer opportunities



Appendix D

Key Informant Interviews



APPENDIX D1. Key Informant Interviews: Criteria for Interview Inclusion

1. Geographic representation
 - a. Southwestern Ontario – Kingsville-Leamington; London/Thames Valley (Strathroy, St. Thomas, Woodstock, Tillsonburg)
 - b. Eastern Ontario (Brockville including Cornwall, Smiths Falls, Gananoque, Perth, Iroquois, Ottawa)
 - c. GTA and Halton (Toronto City Centre, Scarborough/Markham, Oakville, Burlington)
 - d. Northern Ontario (Collingwood, Sudbury)
 - e. Southern Ontario - Niagara Region (Hamilton, St. Catharines)
2. Rural and urban mix; large cities and smaller towns.
3. In order to provide as much breadth and depth as possible to the study, interviews were to be conducted with individuals from agencies *not* included in the focus groups.
4. Similar to #3, every effort was made to conduct the interviews in communities *not* represented in the focus group sample.
5. Interviewee in a decision making position.



APPENDIX D2. Key Informant Interviews: Discussion Guide

Overall Research Questions to keep in mind during interviews:

1. What are the learning needs, interests, and learning styles of Ontario's seniors?
2. Who are the seniors accessing both formal and informal learning opportunities?
3. What exists across Ontario, in both formal and informal learning settings that addresses these needs and takes into consideration specific demographic profiles and the diverse physical abilities of seniors?
4. What are the psychosocial and socio-cultural barriers and motivators in the lives of seniors that have an impact on whom and how learning opportunities are accessed?
5. How do successful formal and informal learning opportunities for seniors address and/or overcome these barriers?

Introduction

- Tape recorder “on”; explain privacy of information, etc.
- I am a part of a research team at Sheridan Elder Research Centre that is assessing the learning needs, interests and styles of Ontario's seniors. We are trying to understand what exists in various parts of Ontario in both formal and informal learning settings that addresses these needs. You have been invited to participate today because of your commitment as *Chair of the Georgian Triangle Lifelong Learning Institute (GTLLI)*.

Background on Program

- Please tell me how your program started up
- When?
- Why?
- Where? Locations? If not mentioned specifically, probe for any special accessibility or facility arrangements for older learners (large print handouts, AV, ramps, etc).
- Times of day, season offered, probe for reasons why...
- Promotion / advertising? Explain your approach. Probe for ways they are inclusive of all older adults in design, font, materials, etc.

Course Offerings

- Please tell me about your course offerings. *Collect all materials.*
- We are interested to know which criteria you use to decide which course/workshops to offer your participants. Please explain.
- How do you evaluate your program offerings?
- Are there any programs that are held over repeatedly/any programs that have been offered but without success?
- Have you had any prospective participants cite any specific reasons why they are unable to participate?
- How do most people register?

Wait Lists

- Do you keep a wait list?
- How is it administered?



- How long on average is the wait?
- Do you have any contingency plans to accommodate those on the wait list – eg. Referrals to other programs?

Instructors / Leaders

- How do you select instructors or discussion leaders for programs?
- Are they compensated in any way?
- Please describe the ideal instructor for your programs?

Funding

- What costs are associated with the programs you offer?
- What do participants pay?
- Are program fees a barrier to some prospective participants? Is there assistance available?

Other

- If you could build the perfect learning situation to meet and exceed the desires of your participants, what would it look like?
- What would you need to initialize this?



APPENDIX D3 – Key Informant Interviews: Interview Sites

Eastern Ontario

- St. Lawrence College, Belleville - Encore Education Program for the 50+
- Heron Seniors' Recreation Centre/Centre des aînés Heron, Ottawa
- Carleton University, Ottawa – Learning In Retirement (LinR)

Southwestern Ontario

- Seniors Planning Committee, Community Social Planning Council
- Thames Valley District School Board, London
- Canadian Automobile Association (CAA), South Central Ontario

Greater Toronto Area (GTA)

- Yee Hong Centre (ethno specific long-term care home)
- Forever Young Magazine, Oakville
- Rogers Omni Programming, Toronto
- Silver and Gold Magazine
- Toronto Public Library

Niagara Region

- Health Care Consultant/Long-Term Care
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), Niagara, Hamilton, Brant, Halton

Northern Ontario

- Laurentian University, Sudbury
- Georgian Triangle Lifelong Learning Institute



Appendix E

Knowledge Exchange and Dissemination Activities

Summary

A number of knowledge exchange activities have taken place at various junctures throughout this study. The first was an interim progress Power Point report presented by the Principal Investigator at the CCL Adult Learning Knowledge Centre's (ADLC) National Symposium held in Halifax, Nova Scotia in June 2007. The slides from the presentation are shown in Appendix E1 for the purpose of this report. The original presentation in PowerPoint format is available upon request.

Progress reports were also presented at a SERC knowledge exchange roundtable (agenda can be seen in Appendix E2) and at a national meeting hosted by SERC in June 2008 (Appendix E3).

The final knowledge exchange activity (Appendix E4) that took place within the time frame of this study was a presentation at the International Federation on Ageing's global conference held in Montreal in September 2008. This presentation in PowerPoint format is available upon request.

It should be noted that there are plans for a SERC affiliated researcher who assisted with this study to continue with knowledge exchange activities after the formal project end date. Her role will focus on sustainability and building community capacity.



APPENDIX E1. Presentation: CCL Adult Learning Knowledge Centre (ALKC) National Symposium, Halifax, Nova Scotia, June 11th, 2007 – Power Point Presentation (saved as slides for this report).


Slide 1

**As Seen Through Their Eyes:
*Understanding the Learning Needs of
Ontario's Older Adults***

Pat Spadafora, M.S.W.
Director, Sheridan Elder Research Centre
Sheridan College Institute of Technology
and Advanced Learning
Oakville, Ontario

ALKC National Symposium
Halifax, June 11th, 2007

This study has been funded by the
Canadian Council on Learning



Slide 2

PURPOSE

- ✕ **Identify the learning needs, interests and learning styles of Ontario adults 65+**

- ✕ **Examine psychosocial factors that inhibit and/or facilitate access to learning opportunities**

- ✕ **Prepare an inventory of a representative sample of informal learning opportunities as well as formal (traditional) opportunities; review a select number of initiatives in both categories**

- ✕ **Develop provincial recommendations for effectively responding to the learning needs of older adults with suggestions for further research on a national scale**



Slide 3

DATA COLLECTION

- ⌘ *** Questionnaires
(completed)**
- ⌘ **Focus groups**
- ⌘ **Key stakeholder
interviews**
- ⌘ **Telephone
interviews**
- ⌘ **Case studies**

Slide 4

QUESTIONNAIRE

"Learning means different things to different people.
What does it mean to you?"

- ⌘ *"Learning to me means striving to reach your potential as a human being. I enjoy the challenges, satisfaction and sense of accomplishment it provides me. It also means giving back to others - both old and young."*
- ⌘ *"I feel you are never too old to learn. More open now than when I was younger."*
- ⌘ *"Opens up opportunity. Gives meaning to life; removes fears; develops confidence"*
- ⌘ *"Exploring, reading, talking to others in a learning setting, from radio, tv, just talking to others, perhaps the odd lecture, talks, church sermons."*



Slide 5

Questionnaire: Preliminary Data
(for N=200 of 494 collected so far)

- **Mean Age = 77.05 years, 65 to 98 years; 60% Female**
- **55% own a computer**
- **Only 9.5% indicated that they were currently enrolled in formal learning.**

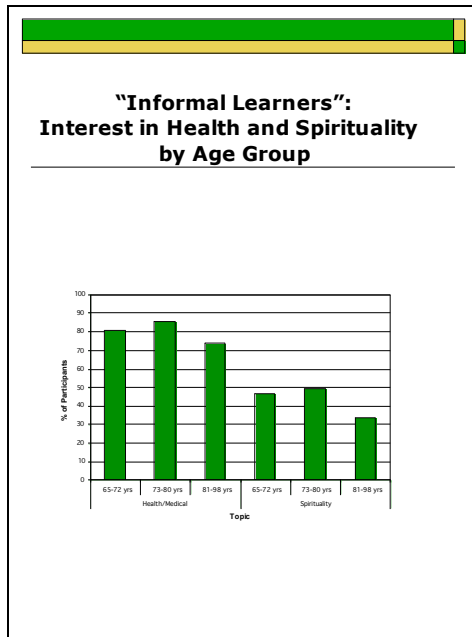
Slide 6

"Informal" Learners: Interests

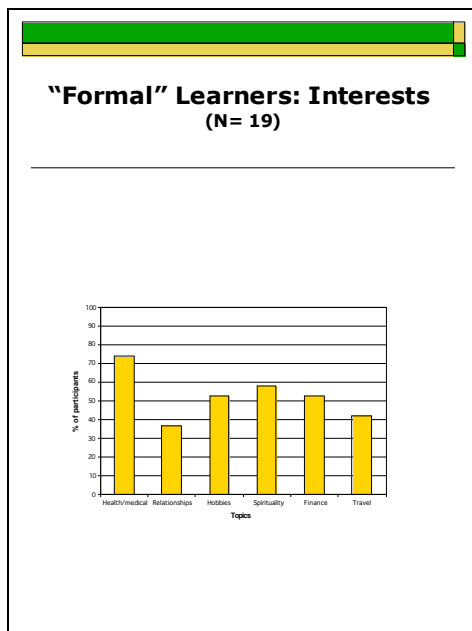
Topic	% of participants
Health/Medical	78
Relationships	38
Hobbies	48
Spirituality	42
Finance	45
Travel	45



Slide 7

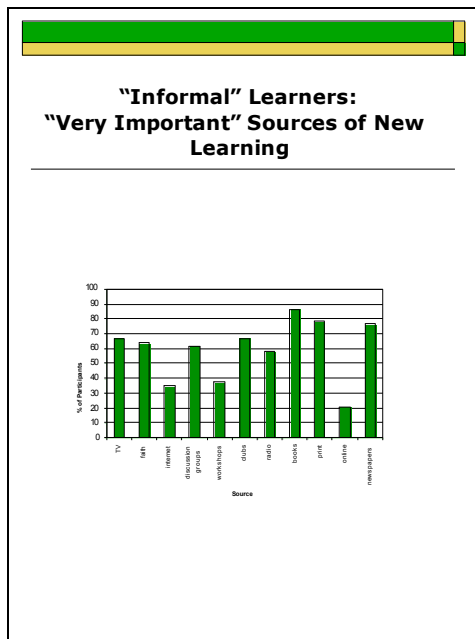


Slide 8

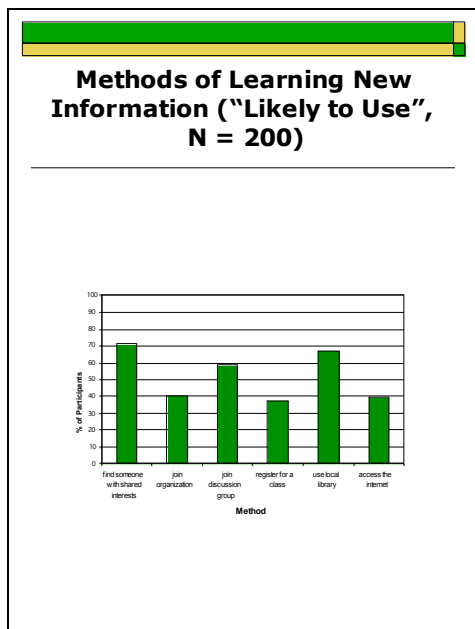




Slide 9



Slide 10





Slide 11

Barriers to New Learning

- ⌘ "Transportation, weather, high tuition. Too many stairs, not enough security guards/accessibility"
- ⌘ "Bus times, distance and evening classes"
- ⌘ "Not able to drive at night"
- ⌘ "Lack of finances"
- ⌘ "Taking care of family member"
- ⌘ "Not being able to see"
- ⌘ "Have problems walking"
- ⌘ "Too busy"
- ⌘ "Not interested"

Slide 12

NEXT STEPS

- ⌘ **Focus groups (in process)**
- ⌘ **All remaining data collected by December 2007**
- ⌘ **Winter – convene a national roundtable to discuss findings & discuss recommendations**
- ⌘ **Final report to CCL summer 2008**

[http:// serc.sheridaninstitute.ca](http://serc.sheridaninstitute.ca)



APPENDIX E2. Focal Point on Seniors’ Learning: A Compass to Guide Us, SERC, March 22nd and 23rd, 2007 – roundtable agenda

AGENDA: Focal Point on Seniors’ Learning: A Compass to Guide Us -* topics in red directly related to the CCL study

Time	March 22 nd	Time	March 23 rd
8:30-9:00	Registration and coffee	8:30-9:00	Coffee, Tea and muffins
9:00-9:15	Welcome & overview of roundtable	9:00-10:00	Developing solutions: responding to factors that facilitate and/or inhibit later life learning <i>Breakout group discussions and reports</i>
9:15-9:45	What does learning mean to you? Sharing our learning experiences. <i>Small group discussion.</i>	10:00 - 10:45	Dr. Lori Wallace, University of Manitoba Profile of Adult Learners: Development of a demographic profile of adult learners in university evening courses, 1996-2005. <i>Teleconference presentation and group discussion.</i>
9:45-10:30	Reflections on lifelong learning: SERC elder co-researchers Helen Ferguson, Shirley Barrowclough & Eugene Strauss <i>Presentation and discussion.</i>	10:45-11:00	Refreshment break
10:30-10:45	Refreshment break	11:00 - 12:00	Possibilities: Creating a Framework for Future Collaboration <i>Breakout group discussions and reports.</i>
10:45- 11:45	The SERC CCL study: “As Seen Through Their Eyes: The Learning Needs of Ontario Elders” <i>Presentation and large group feedback.</i>	12:00-12:30	Summary & next steps
11:45-1:00	Meet and greet: lunch		



1:00-2:15	Identifying factors that inhibit access to older adult learning <i>Breakout group discussions and reports</i>		
2:15-3:15	Embracing technology: identifying challenges <i>Breakout group discussions and reports</i>		
3:15-3:30	Refreshment break		
3:30-4:45	Atlanta Sloane-Seale and Bill Kops, U of Manitoba <i>Teleconference presentation and group discussion</i>		
4:45-5:00	Summary: day 1 Dinner on your own; lecture at 7		



APPENDIX E3. National CCL study meeting, as proposed in original proposal, SERC, June 10th, 2008 – Worksheet Summary

As Seen Through Their Eyes: The Learning Needs of Ontario Elders
National Meeting, June 10th, 2008

Recommendations for Further Research
National Scalability

The following is a summary of two 2 exploratory group discussion sessions, conducted from 1:45-3:15 p.m., June 10th, 2008. Participants were asked to spend 15 minutes jotting down their individual responses to the following questions before discussing each question as a group. This summary is based on transcripts of both the individual responses/notes as well as facilitator notes recorded during the broader group discussions.

Table 6a (from the questionnaire data report). Learning contexts: Mean likelihood of participation.
(from Question 11: “In order to learn something new, how likely are you to ...”)

Context	N	Mean Likelihood*	Standard Deviation
Find someone who shares interests	447	2.01	0.85
Use local library or organized resources	447	2.02	1.00
Join a discussion group	434	2.50	1.02
Join an organization	434	2.64	1.02
Register for formal classes	440	2.78	1.15
Access the internet	417	2.87	1.51

Learning contexts: 3 most likely methods:

1. find someone who shares interests
2. use local library or organized resources
3. join a discussion group

Are there strategies you can recommend to facilitate access to the above learning methods?



Participants shared several ideas around how to increase access to the types of learning contexts that seniors said they were most likely seek out when wanting to learn something new. Ideas from the national meeting participants centred around four main themes that addressed issues of access for seniors living in diverse contexts (e.g. urban vs. rural dwellers).

Marketing and Promotion. *The need to make seniors aware of learning opportunities was identified as an important strategy for facilitating increased access to programs. Suggested promotional strategies ranged from word of mouth (low cost and effective), to using a variety of media, including print ads in community newspapers and agency newsletters, as well as public notices through cable television and radio. Posting flyers on both real and virtual (on-line) message boards were also recommended. It was suggested that marketing and promoting seniors' learning provides us with an opportunity to debunk negative stereotypes and promote positive images of aging.*

“Need a national “Participaction” type [marketing] program to situate a sense of potential/value.”

“Show the advantages of learning and encourage people to take the initiative [to participate] through the media.”

“Create a message board where ideas can be placed including carpooling requests and invitations to [learning] opportunities.”

Offer Incentives.

“Offering a free “course preview” or “2 for 1” pricing were suggested as financial incentives; other incentives with financial implications ranged from offering free refreshments to providing free transportation to and from seniors' learning opportunities.”

“Minimize costs and other disincentives”

“Free tuition to those who can't afford. Need foundation bursaries.”

Utilize Existing Public Institutions/Organizations and Businesses: *Several people identified the benefit of encouraging both public and private institutions, organizations and businesses to offer programs that reflect the methods of learning that seniors are most likely to choose.*

“Joint programming between service clubs and other organizations and businesses (libraries, coffee shops etc.), lead to a better understanding of each other's roles in the community. Try offering off site programs at business that senior clientele frequent (Encourage Tim Horton's to offer free coffee for your discussion group!)”

“Perhaps the AGO or the ROM could host a ½ day program including bussing people to and from retirement homes (for example). This could be organized by volunteers.”



Create New Learning Opportunities for Seniors: Ideas for new programs that facilitate access to seniors’ preferred learning methods emerged from the discussions. These included creating peer led “Seniors’ Swaps” and “Salon” style learning opportunities, where seniors can share diverse knowledge and interests using existing community settings (e.g. town hall). Creating online learning chat rooms was another recommended way to connect seniors with similar interests across broad geographical locations.

“Offer a variety of settings for learning: e.g. Long Term Care, Residential Care, community centres and through caregivers.”

“Create a membership concept that encourages seniors to take pride in being part of a learning organization: membership card, annual newsletter, etc.”

Table 13 (from the questionnaire data report). Demographics, health ratings and life satisfaction measures for participants experiencing external barriers to formal learning. (Barriers listed come from open-ended responses to Question 7 “If you do not attend formal classes, please list some issues that make it difficult for you to attend.”)

Measure	Built environment (N = 91)	Health concerns (N = 59)	Scheduling/ Season (N = 47)	Sample (N = 475)
Mean Age	77.7 years	81.4	75.13	77.4 years
Gender (% Female)	65.9	79.7	78.7	64.0
% married /widowed	47.3/36.3	44.1/45.8	46.8/29.8	53.3/33.0
% own home	61.5	45.8	78.7	65.7
% urban/rural	37.4/26.4	57.6/5.1	44.7/21.3	51.2/11.8
% some university or higher	42.9	35.7	46.8	44.2
% never drive	46.2	50.8	14.9	23.6
Mean- Hearing	2.37	2.48	2.27	2.26
Mean- Vision	2.34	2.79	2.06	2.18
Mean- Ease of getting around	2.29	3.15	2.26	2.09
Mean- Openness to new learning	1.73	2.02	1.72	1.74
Mean- Life-long learner	1.35	1.29	1.30	1.34
Mean- Importance of learning	1.66	1.78	1.60	1.66
Mean- Satisfaction - Quality of interactions	1.81	2.02	1.70	1.75
Mean- Satisfaction - Frequency of interactions	1.97	2.21	1.94	1.90
Mean- Importance of Social Interactions	1.58	1.64	1.38	1.57
Mean- Overall quality of life	2.20	2.46	2.10	2.04



Table 16 (from the questionnaire data report). Barriers to learning in general. (from Question 12 “Has there ever been a time recently when you wished you could have engaged in a learning activity but could not? If yes, please explain what, or who limited your access to learning.”)

Barriers to Learning in General	Number of Participants	Percentage of Sample	Percentage of those Reporting Barriers
Personal – Health	46	9.7	25.7
Personal – Family Responsibility	16	3.4	8.4
Personal – Other	4	0.8	0.2
Personal – Total	66	13.9	34.6
Built Environment	41	8.6	21.5
Scheduling/Season	34	7.2	17.8
Too Busy	26	5.5	13.6
Cost/Resources	26	5.5	13.6
Not Suited to Needs	23	4.8	12.0
No Interest	7	1.5	3.7
Too Old	6	1.3	3.1
Lack of Confidence	5	1.1	2.6
Not Aware of Info	3	0.6	1.6

**Consider this barrier identified by respondents:
Built environment – e.g. transportation, especially in rural areas.**

What recommendations do you have for increasing learning opportunities for people living in rural areas? Do you have other recommendations for increasing accessible opportunities for older persons, regardless of where they live?

Recommendations for overcoming lack of transportation and barriers in the built environment, especially for rural seniors, focused on 3 main strategies:

Piggyback on Existing Community Facilities and Events: *It was noted that community facilities such as local town halls may serve as useful settings to bring rural seniors together as they are often centrally located and usually wheelchair accessible. It was also suggested that senior’s organizations partner with unrelated community services to piggyback on their existing transportation services.*

“Build around other community events [to engage rural seniors].”

“Piggy back on existing seniors’ busses or school busses, town shuttle system, etc.”
“Seniors helping seniors idea: ask individuals who are already involved in programs to reach out to neighbours and friends who are not, (bring a friend).”



Utilize Existing Technology: Suggestions for overcoming barriers through technology ranged from low-tech solutions like distance learning through “snail mail”, the telephone or radio, to more high tech solutions like learning online through the Internet.

“Work with conference calling system to create ‘learning on the line’ opportunities.”
“Revisit the radio show as a learning opportunity.”

Mobile Learning: Participants considered strategies for bringing learning opportunities to rural seniors in addition strategies that would encourage rural seniors to participate in existing learning opportunities.

“Create a “SERCmobile” to take learning to rural seniors homes.”
“Bring a “traveling road show” of opportunities to rural church halls.”
“Revisit earlier “snail mail” distance learning – will be necessary with increasing fuel costs”

From Table 16:

Personal – health & personal – family responsibility

Scheduling, cost, not suited to needs

What recommendations do you have for responding to these barriers?

Recommendations for how to address these barriers demonstrated a variety of possible approaches, including the potential to create a specialized learning institution suited for frail elders and caregivers. Peer led learning was suggested as a low-cost solution that came up often, technology based solutions such as asynchronous on-line programs, activities and chats were suggested, and solutions based on accessible design of the built environment were highlighted. Several suggestions were also made around the potential for community partnerships to reduce barriers.

“Enable, (perhaps train) seniors to deliver some programs to cut costs (other benefits too!)”

“[Provide] relief for caregivers on some regular basis. Either volunteer or funded. Could VON help here?”

“Make health professionals aware of opportunities for lifelong learning. They are in direct contact with seniors at many stressful points of their lives. Everyone usually listens to their health care professional.”

“Ensure adequate parking for pick up and drop off services.”

“Let caregiver bring along the person they care for. Perhaps they could be cared for in a group setting (e.g. Alzheimer’s Day Centre).”



Table 25 (from the questionnaire data report). Demographic and health information for computer users versus non-users.

Measure	Computer Users (N = 301)	Computer Non-users (N = 168)	Significance of Difference*
Age	75.8	80.1	p < .001
Gender (%Female)	60.5	70.8	p < .05
% Married	60.5	40.2	p < .001
% Widowed	25.9	43.8	p < .001
% own home	74.8	48.5	p < .001
% retirement/LTC	5.0	24.3	p < .001
% urban	51.2	51.5	ns
% rural	12.6	10.1	ns
% Some university or higher	56.1	29.0	p < .001
% never drive	12.6	42.6	p < .001
Mean- Hearing	2.27	2.24	ns
Mean- Vision	2.07	2.36	p < .01
Mean- Getting around	1.96	2.32	p < .001

*X² for differences between percentages; t-tests with Bonferroni-type corrections for differences between means.

Users are more likely to be male but women are more likely to be rural and drive less (Table 13). For example, does that have implications for encouraging computer use by rural women? Even acknowledging that our sample isn't representative of all older adults, over half of our sample owned or access computers. What do you see as the implications for creating accessible technologies and encouraging their use among older persons?

Responses to these questions centered on empowering new users with knowledge by reducing both internal and external barriers to technology. These solutions encompassed many of the strategies discussed around overcoming general barriers to seniors' learning including cost reducing measures, mobile learning opportunities and peer-to-peer training. The need for more studies on why women don't use computers was also suggested.

“Rent out computers at minimal cost to encourage non computer owners. Advertise on T.V.”

“Provide computer training on how to access on-line learning opportunities. Knowledge and low confidence may be preventing people.”

“Create a mobile computer teaching centre with wireless Internet access.”

“Train female instructors to teach older women computer skills. Older women may feel more comfortable learning from a woman than a man”.

“Pair up those who have computers with those who don't. Advertise in local print media and at Town Hall meetings.”



One of the expected outcomes of this study is to look beyond Ontario and provide recommendations for a follow up Canadian study.

What suggestions do you have for replicating this study on a national scale?

“Tease out common issues across Canada.”

“Identify National seniors related organizations, learning institutes, seniors’ centres and ask for their mailing lists.”

“Get more funding.”

“Look at lowering age range to 50+.”

“Change the language, “learning” has negative connotations for people 50+.”

“Need to somehow address those who did not respond.”

“Funnel in on a “Big Question” for national objective.”

“Except for urban/rural differences and possibly linguistic issues I would not expect other results in other parts of Canada.”

Who should we invite to join our core team?

“Go in at the ground level citizen groups to do it [collect data].”

“It would be great if you could involve researchers from each province and ask them to build a team.”

“Include municipal recreation department reps across Canada who deal with 50+ programs and services.”

“Speak with MPs and get their buy in to help get the word out.”

What do you suggest we do differently?

“Multicultural training and diversity in researchers.”

“Drill down to more complexities.”

“Use phone surveys.”

“Reach out to families of seniors to reach those seniors that you may have missed this time.”

“Hand out hard copies and receive back “on site” rather than through the mail.”

“Define “learning opportunities” [for phone survey].”

What methodologies (processes), from our current study, should we keep?

“I think there is tremendous strength in the mixed methods approach you have used this time and commend you for keeping that aspect of the original proposal intact.”


“You’ve done such a good job of explaining your process that people with time and money could copy your methods.”

“Keep all methodologies with representatives or Principal Investigators in each province.”



APPENDIX E4. Presentation: International Federation on Aging (IFA) global conference in Montreal, September 6th, 2008 Power Point Presentation (saved as slides for this report; Power Point version available upon request).

Slide 1

 **Sheridan Elder Research Centre**

As Seen Through Their Eyes:
The Learning Preferences of Older Ontarians

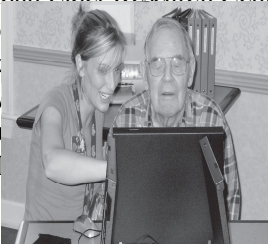
Rebecca Hart, Research Assistant
Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC)

Funding provided by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL)

Slide 2


SERC's Mission

Through applied research, the Sheridan Elder Research Centre will improve the quality of life for older adults by supporting innovative research and providing the results to improve the quality of life for older adults.






Slide 3



Wherever possible, older adults participate in the identification of research questions and contribute to the development of research projects at SERC.

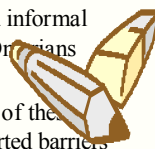
- We conduct applied research from a psychosocial perspective which builds on the strengths of older adults.
- Our research is intended to directly benefit older adults and their families in their everyday lives. The process of knowledge translation takes our research findings from lab to life.



Slide 4

As Seen Through Their Eyes

- 2 year study to examine the learning needs, interests and learning styles of Ontarians 65+
- To explore both formal and informal learning opportunities for Ontarians 65+
- To examine the correlation of the opportunities with self reported barriers to accessing learning, measures of quality of life and social inclusion





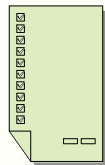
Slide 5

Primary Questions

- What are the learning needs, interests and learning styles of Ontario seniors?
- Who are the seniors accessing both formal and informal learning opportunities?
- What exists in Ontario, in both formal and informal learning settings, that addresses these needs? Do these opportunities consider specific demographic profiles and the diverse physical abilities of seniors?
- What are the psychosocial and sociocultural barriers and motivators that have an impact on how learning opportunities are accessed?
- How do successful formal and informal learning opportunities for seniors address and/or overcome these barriers?

Slide 6

Data Collection



Mixed methods approach: qualitative and quantitative measures

- Provincially distributed questionnaire
- 8 focus groups + 1 pilot group
- Key informant interviews
- Telephone surveys (inventory collection only)

Slide 7

Questionnaire

- Developed by research team in collaboration with 4 elder volunteer co-researchers.
- Special focus on the accessibility of language/phrasing to reduce the risk of excluding respondents from a variety of cultural, socio-economic and educational backgrounds



Slide 8



Questionnaire Promotion and Distribution Strategies


- Media releases and public service announcements
- Web-based promotional initiatives
- Public relations and outreach activities
- Direct mailing of the questionnaire and promotional flyers





Slide 9

Hard Copy Distribution




- Ethno-specific Service Agencies
- Faith based communities
- Community/Recreation Centres
- Gerontology Research and Education Programs
- Long Term Care Homes
- Ontario Shopping Malls: Mall Walker
- Seniors Centres
- Supportive Housing Settings
- Provincial Organizations for People With Disabilities
- Provincial Seniors' Organizations
- Public Libraries
- Retiree Associations
- Retirement Residences
- Seniors' Advocacy and/or Self Help Groups
- Third Age Learning Programs

Slide 10

Focus Groups

- Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (volunteers)
- Community Housing high -rise for seniors (inner city/low income)
- Alzheimer's Support Group (for persons with a recent diagnosis)
- English as a Second Language program
- Learning in Retirement institute
- Low Vision Social and Support C
- Canadian Hearing Society
- Long Term Care Home

An illustration showing three people—two men and one woman—engaged in a discussion. They are standing around a table, with one man gesturing as if speaking. The style is simple and colorful, typical of educational materials.



Slide 11

Key Informant Interviews

- Learning & Living in Retirement Program
- Long Term Care Home
- Ethno-specific agency or agency
- CNIB
- Board of Education Adult Learning Centre
- Third age learning program: Community College
- Print Media (2 seniors' focused magazines)
- Cable television
- Seniors Planning Committee, Community Social Planning C
- Public library
- Community Service Organization
- Seniors' Recreation Centre



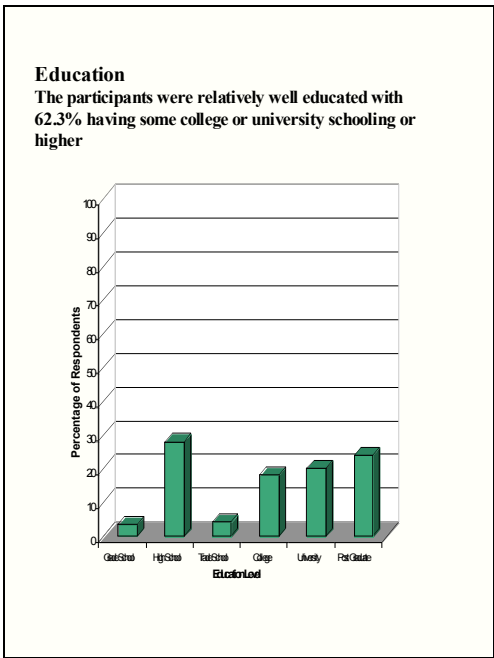
Slide 12

Questionnaire Respondents

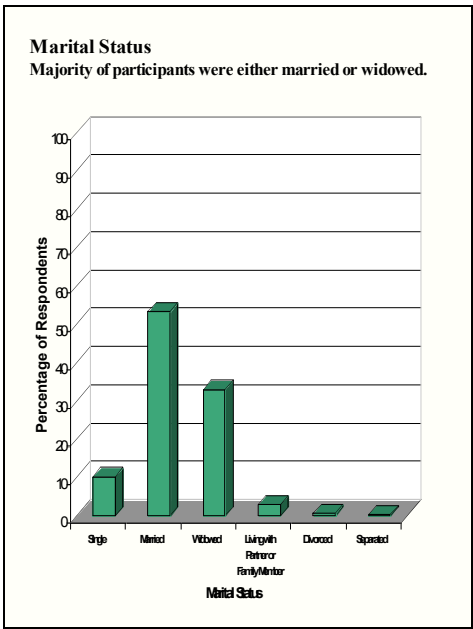
- Of the 475 respondents, 304 (64%) were women ranging in age from 65 to 98 (Mean age = 77.4; SD = 7.3).
- The 170 males (Mean age = 77.0; SD = 7.2) ranged in age from 65 to 97.
- One 89 year old individual did not provide his/her gender .



Slide 13

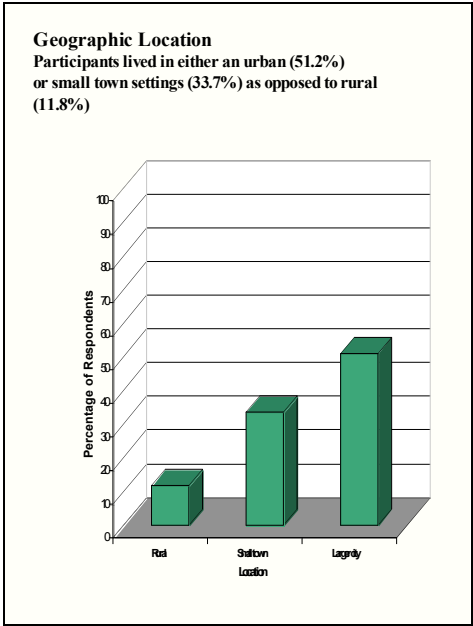


Slide 14

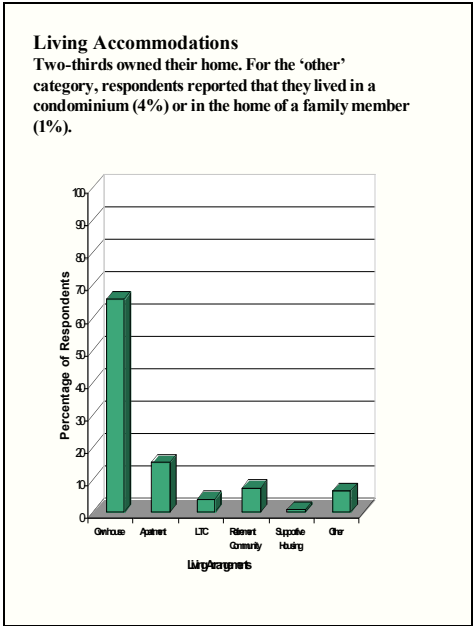




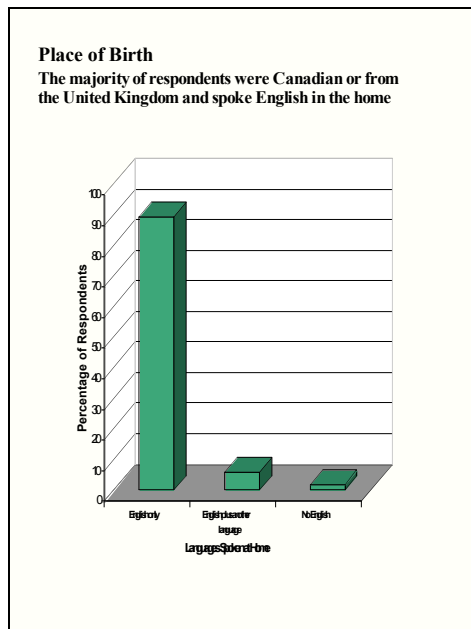
Slide 15



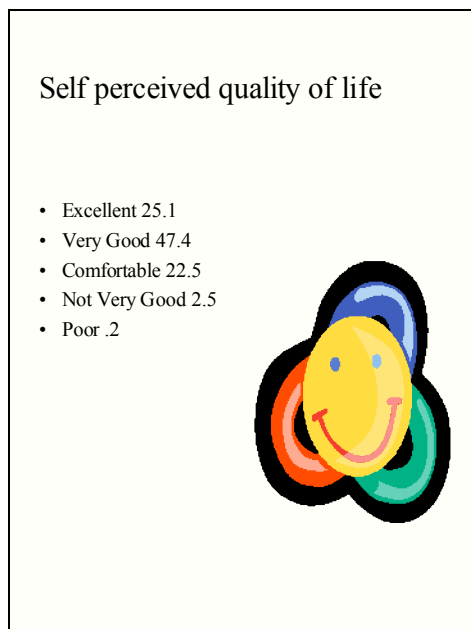
Slide 16



Slide 17



Slide 18





Slide 19

What Learning Means to Ontario Seniors

- *“Learning is everything. It is so important to know what is going on around you as well as the rest of the world as long as you are able!”*
- *“I need to learn something new everyday - learning is the core of my being.”*
- *“Learning makes life exciting. I was taught by my parents to appreciate and love learning. Learning brightens a dull day, eases the troubles that come with age.”*

Slide 20

The ability and desire to learn does not diminish with age

- *“It means that I'm never going to stop being curious, that I'm never going to be satisfied until I learn everything there is to know about any topic or subject and that we're never too old to learn! ”*
- *“Life as a whole is a continuing learning role. We are always learning and changing through all the stages of life no matter how long or short it is. ”*
- *“I feel you are never too old to learn. More open now than when I was younger. ”*



Slide 21

Learning opportunities exist in every day living, not just in formal settings

- *“Constant communication with other people and reading of newspapers and TV and radio media on current affairs and learning channels.”*
- *“Answering my own questions by whatever means I have available. Soaking up as much of this world as I can expose myself to.”*
- *“Exploring, reading, talking to others in a learning setting, from radio, TV, just talking to others, perhaps the odd lecture, talks, church sermons.”*

Slide 22

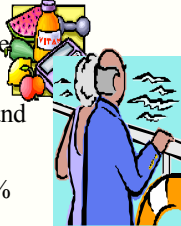
Learning was seen as a means to improving one's quality of life

- *“Learning contributes to my health. To keep on learning means you are involved in living and are still capable. Perhaps it makes you an interesting person to be around.”*
- *“Increases my confidence. The feeling of ‘Oh wow I understand’. More in control of my life, feeling of independence.”*
- *“Opens up opportunity. Gives meaning to life; removes fears; develops confidence.”*

Slide 23

Most recent learning interests


- Health and Medical Information 80.6 %
- Hobbies 50.1%
- Travel 48.0%
- Spirituality (not necessarily religion) 44.4%
- Financial Planning and Investing 41.9%
- Relationships 41.9 %
- Other 29.5%



Slide 24

What Motivates Ontario Seniors to Learn New Things?

- Interest/staying current 48.8%
- Improving quality of life 28.8%
- Need 11.6%
- External 9.1%
- Keep mind active 6.3%
- Help others 2.1%



Slide 25

Learning Styles of Ontario Seniors

When?

Learning takes place most often in the morning for this sample of older adults compared to other times of the day regardless of the season.



Slide 26

Where?

Formal learning

One-quarter (25.9%) of the sample said they were currently engaged in formal class learning such as those conducted in universities, community colleges, high schools, public libraries and correspondence courses



Slide 27

Informal Learning

All but two individuals reported learning new information in informal settings such as senior centre functions (42.1%), faith communities (32.6%), community and/or recreation centres (31.4%), support groups (24.8%) cultural centres (21.1%), specialty schools (12.4%) and online communities (6.7%). In addition, other examples (17.5% were given by the participants as additional settings for informal learning.)



Slide 28


How?

The snowflake question...

1. Look at one and duplicate it
2. Consult with an expert
3. Trial and error alone
4. Check out how-to books or videos
5. Search online for best method
6. Gather a group to design it




Slide 29

An illustration of four diverse individuals (two men and two women) sitting around a table, engaged in conversation. One man is pointing towards the table, while the others listen attentively.

Learning context



1. Find someone who shares interests
2. Use local library or organized resources
3. Join a discussion group
4. Join an organization
5. Register for formal classes
6. Access the Internet

A small illustration of a person with short hair, wearing a blue shirt, sitting at a desk and looking at a computer monitor. The person appears to be engaged in an online activity.

Slide 30

Most important source of information for informal learning

- Visual/print media
- Informal discussion groups/ coffee chats
- Internet

An illustration of a woman with red hair, wearing a purple top, sitting at a desk and working on a computer. She is looking at the monitor, which displays a blue screen.An illustration of a newspaper or news document with the word 'NEWS' written on it. Below the newspaper is a computer keyboard and a mouse, suggesting digital news consumption.



Slide 31

Barriers to Learning

- The most frequent external barrier to formal learning for these participants was the built environment. This category included complaints such as classes being too far away from home, lack of transportation and difficulty parking.
- Compared to the sample as a whole, there is a more of a tendency for those who reported barriers concerning the built environment to live in rural areas and drive less than the sample as a whole.
- Another frequent barrier, personal health, included responses about health concerns related to aging, such as vision, hearing, and mobility, as well as cognitive difficulties and lack of energy.

Slide 32

- Those who reported health concerns tended to be older, female, less educated and report numerically more negative life satisfaction. They also drove less.
- Family responsibilities, (e.g. care giving) were also mentioned as a personal reason for not engaging in formal learning, though to a much lesser extent than health concerns.
- Those who reported scheduling issues in terms of time of day and season, were more likely to be rural, and female, but own their own home and drive more.
- Cost and lack of resources was a barrier for only 7% of the participants, in keeping with the demographics of this group described earlier as relatively well -educated, urban home owners.



Slide 33

Thank you

For further information,
please contact us
through our web site

<http://serc.sheridaninsitute.ca>



**Appendix F -
Knowledge Exchange ‘Products’:
Descriptions**



Knowledge Exchange ‘Products’ - Descriptions

From the outset, the SERC team believed that, in addition to this final research report, it was important to create deliverables that would provide immediate and direct benefits for older persons as well as for other users. This following section presents an overview of these ‘products’.

APPENDIX F1. *Your Health Marketplace*

In the original proposal, one suggested deliverable was to develop a course in conjunction with Continuing Education at the Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning. Their role in the study would have been to assist with curriculum development, people resources and promotion of the resulting course. However, as this study evolved, the data supported neither a specific course nor necessarily having it offered in a formal institution. It was critical that we listen to what older adults were telling us and to modify our thinking accordingly. As the team worked with the data and reflected upon what older adults said they wanted to learn, we also considered their reported barriers to learning. In the end, we decided upon an alternate strategy and, after presenting this proposed change to the senior manager at CCL, designed a ‘product’ that potentially has greater use for consumers.

A primary learning interest identified by study participants was learning about health. With contributions by subject matter experts, an online course/resource was designed that presents a number of learning modules related to health. We have interpreted health in an expansive way and, in the end; have been able to collectively offer quite diverse topics to users. A prototype is housed on the SERC web site (<http://serc.sheridaninstitute.ca>).²⁴

Offering this resource online addresses a number of study results. They include, among others:

- Users can access the resource at any time. Its availability is not contingent on time of day, season, building accessibility, transportation or respite services for caregivers who may not be able to leave their homes to participate in learning opportunities.
- There is no cost involved.
- It encourages people to consider the Internet as a source of learning (a separate study deliverable).
- It has the potential to contribute to quality of life by empowering people to take responsibility for their own learning about health. The learning modules are self directed and many embed self evaluation or tracking tools.
- One way of learning reported by study participants was learning from peers. ‘Your Health Marketplace’ has a “blog” function (and/or discussion forum) so that individuals can post their own additions/resources/comments about the individual modules.
- Approximately two-thirds of participants indicated that they had access to computers.

What follows is the introduction to ‘Your Health Marketplace’ as it will appear on the SERC web site. Please note that this resource is a work in progress. Based on user feedback and an evaluation of this resource prototype, the introduction, learning modules and other features may be modified.

²⁴ Please note that one could offer this course face-to-face in community settings. The decision to offer it online is to obtain further feedback from users and to be able to build on this prototype.



Welcome to “Your Health Marketplace”!

This self-directed learning resource has been developed in response to the results of a study that explored the learning needs, interests and learning styles of Ontarians 65+. The study was funded by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL).

Through the study, you told us that:

- ✓ Learning about health is your primary learning interest. (83.5% of people age 65-76 and 80.4% of individuals age 77-98 cited health as their primary area of interest.)
- ✓ Among others, scheduling, health (vision, hearing, mobility), cost, transportation and location of learning opportunities can be barriers to formal learning.
- ✓ 20% of those who responded to our survey said they would be ‘very likely’ to access the Internet, 25.7% indicated they would find someone who shares interests and 30.5% said they would use a local library or organized resources.

We listened to your voices and have created this online resource to respond to your interests and to address access barriers. You can visit the marketplace any time without being concerned about cost, time of day or building constraints! We know you love to learn – one individual put it this way *“Learning contributes to my health. To keep on learning means you are involved in living and are still capable. Perhaps it makes you an interesting person to be around”*.

Since learning about health is your primary area of interest, health is our focus here.



APPENDIX F2. *Promotional poster and bookmark*

Another goal of this study was to celebrate and promote learning in later life. One way we have chosen to do this is through posters and bookmarks (refer to **Appendix G1** for a jpeg image of the poster). A graphic designer was commissioned to design a poster that represented our research results. It was to depict activities that older persons reported as ones with which they were already engaged or that were of interest to them. For example, there is an image of a man in front of a computer screen stating “Health News”. The designer was also asked to incorporate images that demonstrate accessibility of the built environment, another focus of this study. In that regard, please note that the chair in front of the computer has arms for stability, the bus has a lowered step and handrail to represent accessible transportation (a major barrier as identified by participants) and the entrance to the dance studio has a low threshold and no steps.

The posters will be made available to a sample of the agencies that distributed the questionnaire, who hosted focus groups or who contributed to the inventory. They will also be mailed to all key informants.

The bookmarks will depict three of the images from the poster and the tag line “Commit yourself to lifelong learning and reap the rewards”. They will be produced in bulk and made available to older users through a variety of means. Both the posters and bookmarks acknowledge CCL.

APPENDIX F3. *Promotional brochure encouraging use of technology by older persons*

The original proposal cited the following as one deliverable – “If time permits and acknowledging the advent of e-learning, a preliminary strategy to educate elders about the benefits of online learning will be developed”.

In this regard, a three-fold brochure has been designed to promote online learning among older users. A copy of this can be found in **Appendix G2**.

APPENDIX F4. *‘Result’ sheets highlighting study results.*

As mentioned earlier in this report, four older adults participated in this study as volunteer co-researchers. They decided that one of their contributions would be to review research results and develop a series of ‘results’ sheets that could be distributed in a wide range of settings to both the agencies and older adults themselves. Five such sheets covered a number of topics and can be found in **Appendix G3**.

It should be noted that, in addition to the five sheets found in the appendix, the co-researchers developed two related to computer use. Although we have not used the computer result sheets for this purpose the content has been incorporated into the flyer highlighting study results.



APPENDIX G

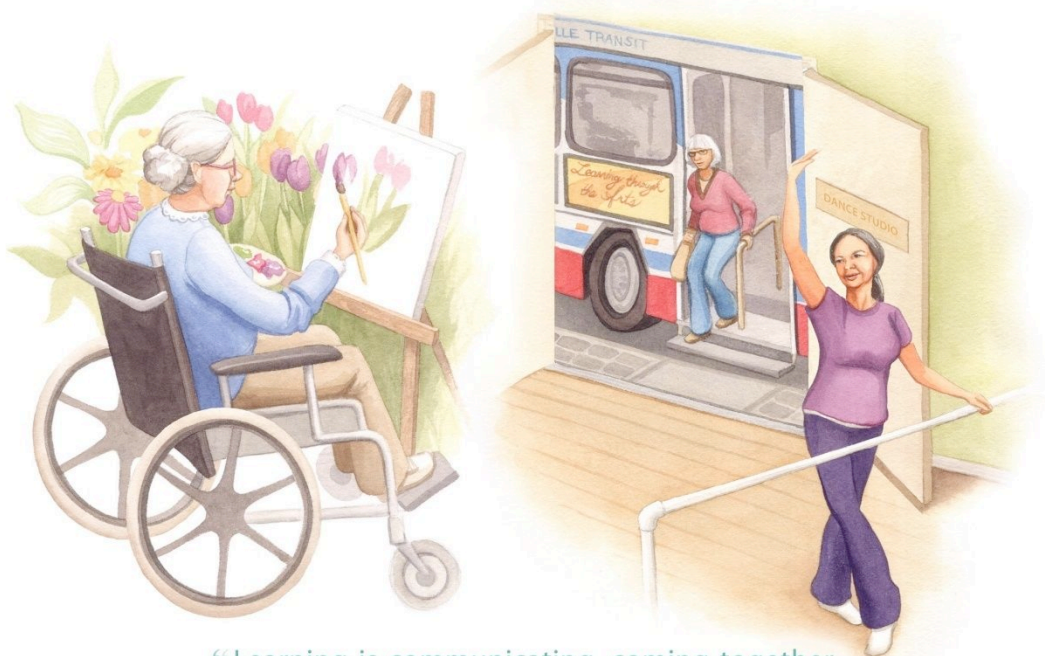
KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE
‘PRODUCTS’



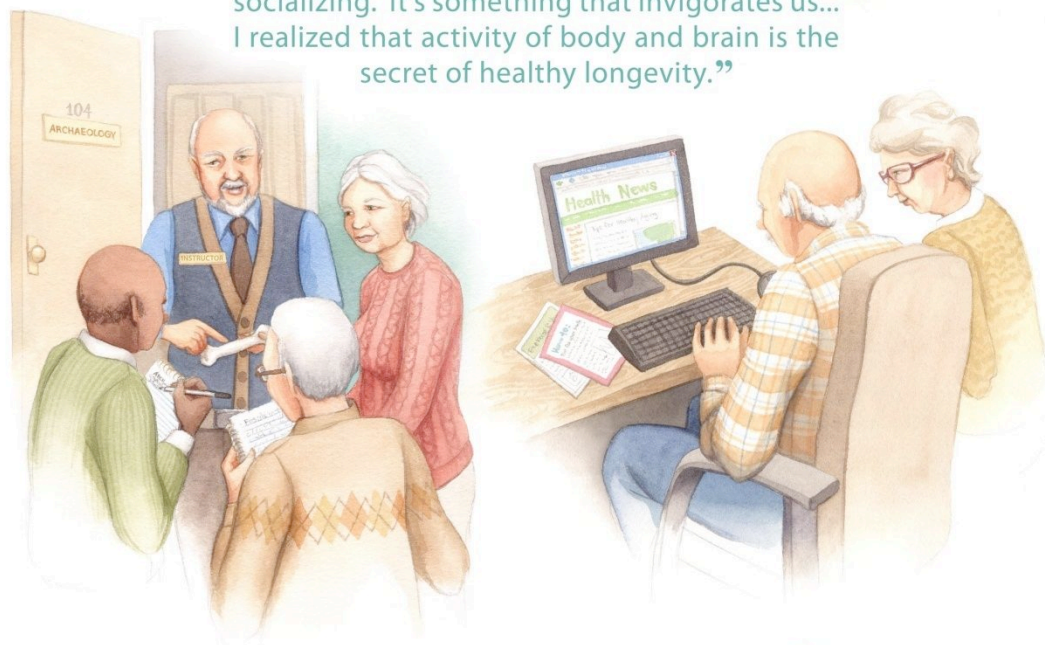
Sheridan Elder Research Centre

APPENDIX G1. Promotional poster and bookmark

Commit Yourself to lifelong learning and reap the rewards!



“Learning is communicating, coming together, socializing. It’s something that invigorates us... I realized that activity of body and brain is the secret of healthy longevity.”



What learning means to a participant in the 2006-08 study 'As Seen Through Their Eyes: The Learning Needs of Ontario Elders'. This study was conducted by the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC - <http://serc.sheridaninstitute.ca>) at the Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, through the generous support of the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL).



Artist: Alicia Hough



APPENDIX G2. Promotional brochure encouraging use of technology by older persons

AND MORE....

Additional learning opportunities can be accessed by various technologies or through the Internet.

- Other E-commerce activities such as purchasing airline tickets, transferring money
- E-government activities – paying taxes, forms and information on pensions
- E-health resources –for information related to health interests – for example, refer to the SERC website

<http://serc.sheridaninstitute.ca>

- Enrolling in an online course where one can complete lessons at a pace that is suitable for them and without going to a classroom.
- Producing a scrapbook or a photo album on a CD

ARE YOU READY TO GET CONNECTED?

Tips that will help you launch your exciting journey into the world of computers.....

- Use different search engines and select one that you find useful. For example, in Google, you can use Advanced Search or Search within Results.
- Remember to use the "help" or the "?" icons.
- Try some virtual tours.

Pat Spadafora, M.S.W.
Director

Sheridan Elder Research Centre

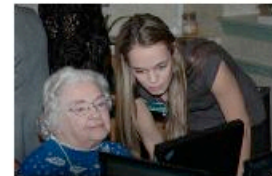
Sheridan Institute of
Technology and Advanced
Learning

1430 Trafalgar Road,
Oakville, ON Canada
L6H 2L1

Tel: (905) 845-9430, extension
8165

GET CONNECTED

Computers and Internet Learning



¹ Funder of the study



APPENDIX G3. *As Seen Through Their Eyes: The Learning Needs of Ontario Elders*

‘Result’ Sheet #1: Barriers to Learning for Older Adults



This research, conducted through the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC) and funded by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), investigated the ways in which Ontario currently responds to the learning needs, interests and learning styles of Ontarians 65+. The results told us about what some older adults perceive as barriers to learning opportunities.

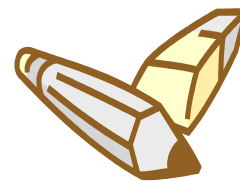
The following list represents barriers identified by adults 65+ during 2007 in a variety of settings throughout Ontario:

- Lack of physical facilities or adequate physical facilities
- Lack of access to facilities
- Lack of transportation to facility; if walking, busy roads to cross, long distance to walk
- Personal situation such as health, family responsibilities
- Lack of interest
- Too busy
- Timing (i.e. of day, week, year)
- Cost
- Physical mobility
- Health issues
- Lack of funding for desired programs or activities
- Lack of facility with the English language
- Lack of information about what is available
- Lack of confidence, feeling of being too old
- Feelings of insecurity

** A series of ‘results’ sheets representing study findings have been prepared by four volunteer elder co-researchers in collaboration with a SERC affiliated researcher.*



As Seen Through Their Eyes: The Learning Needs of Ontario Elders



‘Results’ Sheet #2: Older Adults’ Learning Preferences

This research, conducted through the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC) and funded by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), investigated the ways in which Ontario currently responds to the learning needs, interests and learning styles of Ontarians 65+. The results will promote a culture of lifelong learning by providing practical recommendations for effectively responding to the learning needs of older adults.

The following list represents suggestions to those who deliver ‘learning’ programs, as reported by older adults during 2007 in a variety of settings throughout Ontario:

Suggestions related to the learning environment:

- Small groups are preferable – 20 or less for a lecture and fewer for a discussion
- Provide refreshments
- Consider the length of the session and the need for breaks
- Arrangement of furniture affects the learning experience

Suggestions related to the instructor and method of instruction:

- Use memory strategies and repetition
- Provide clearly-stated objectives
- Allow more time for the older adults to absorb new learning
- Make adequate accommodation for hearing loss
- Use a combination of approaches, for example reading, discussion, listening, film
- Hands-on application
- Consider the way that a question is posed, reword it to increase understanding
- Most groups prefer conversation and discussion to lecture
- Speak more slowly than with a younger group of learners
- Avoid jargon that may be unfamiliar



- For some types of learning, give a set of “backup” reference notes
- Use an appropriately-large font

Older adults appreciate instructors and facilitators:

- Who are knowledgeable, organized, and have an understanding of basic teaching principles
- Who take into account the knowledge, experience, and skills that older adults bring to the learning experience, connecting new learning to previous experience

For older adults not comfortable using English, consider ways for them to learn in their first language, use a combination of the learner’s own language and English, use the Internet and television to teach

Many study respondents suggested that the initial responsibility for making sure that needs were met rested with the older adult

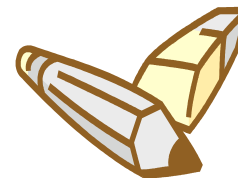
Sometimes older adults prefer to be with a variety of ages, but for physical activities such as yoga and tai chi, they prefer to be with peers

** A series of ‘results’ sheets representing study findings have been prepared by four volunteer elder co-researchers in collaboration with a SERC affiliated researcher.*



As Seen Through Their Eyes: The Learning Needs of Ontario Elders

‘Result’ Sheet #3: Purposes for Learning in Later Life



This research, conducted through the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC) and funded by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), investigated the ways in which Ontario currently responds to the learning needs, interests and learning styles of Ontarians 65+. The results will promote a culture of lifelong learning by providing practical recommendations for effectively responding to the learning needs of older adults.

The following list represents purposes for learning as older adults during 2007 in a variety of settings throughout Ontario:

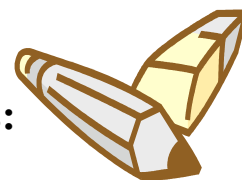
- To maintain thinking level and improve memory
- For social reasons
- To function in a changing world
- To be of service
- To make up for learning missed when younger
- For pleasure, happiness
- As a response to a change in health status
- As a response to a change in living arrangements
- To feel engaged with others
- Promotes a healthy lifestyle
- To maintain independence
- To connect to one’s spiritual life

** A series of ‘results’ sheets representing study findings have been prepared by four volunteer elder co-researchers in collaboration with a SERC affiliated researcher.*



As Seen Through Their Eyes: The Learning Needs of Ontario Elders

‘Result’ Sheet # 4: Learning Opportunities for Older Adults: What is Missing?



This research, conducted through the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC) and funded by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), investigated the ways in which Ontario currently responds to the learning needs, interests and learning styles of Ontarians 65+. The results will promote a culture of lifelong learning by providing practical recommendations for effectively responding to the learning needs of older adults.

The following list represents what is missing in learning opportunities, as reported by older adults during 2007 in a variety of settings throughout Ontario:

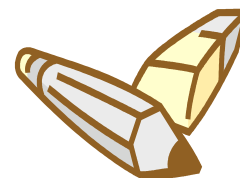
- Awareness, information about what is available
- Health and wellness programs
- Facilities for programs
- Financial support for programs
- Organized physical activity
- Opportunities to be of service
- Instructors for programs
- Transportation to facilities
- Accessibility to facilities
- Senior-centred programming
- Organized excursions

** A series of ‘results’ sheets representing study findings have been prepared by four volunteer elder co-researchers in collaboration with a SERC affiliated researcher.*



As Seen Through Their Eyes: The Learning Needs of Ontario Elders

‘Result Sheet #5: Recent Learning Activities Engaged in by Older Adults



This research, conducted through the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC) and funded by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), investigated the ways in which Ontario currently responds to the learning needs, interests and learning styles of Ontarians 65+. The results will promote a culture of lifelong learning by providing practical recommendations for effectively responding to the learning needs of Ontario seniors.

The following list represents learning activities engaged in during the past year, reported by groups of older adults during 2007 in a variety of settings throughout Ontario:

- Workshops for retired professionals
- Quilting, stained glass, and other craft courses
- Nutritional health – finding and using recipes related to health issues
- Training for volunteer position
- Learning new languages
- Courses with speakers and workshops at local post-secondary institution
- Art classes, beading, jewellery
- Survival skills course
- Gardening classes, botany
- Instruction in understanding medications and their safe use, other health issues
- Learning how to deal with effects of stroke, diabetes, dementia, assistive devices
- Computer use, book club
- Learning new songs for performance in nursing homes
- Physical activities such as lawn-bowling, bowling, yoga and horseback riding

** A series of ‘results’ sheets representing study findings have been prepared by four volunteer elder co-researchers in collaboration with a SERC affiliated researcher.*