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Crochet Connections: An Intergenerational Fiber  
Craft Project

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### Crochet Connections: An Intergenerational Fibre Craft Project

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# **Crochet Connections: An Intergenerational Fibre Craft Project**

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This research study has benefited from the support of Sheridan's Centre for Elder Research whose knowledge and expertise played an important part in our research design. Above all, the team thanks the generous donation of space from Sheridan's [EDGE: Entrepreneurship Hub](#) and [Library Services](#) department where we hosted the crochet intervention and knowledge mobilization event.

## Funding:

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## Introduction:

The story of Crochet Connections began in 2019 when three Sheridan College colleagues, Ferzana Chaze, Karen Lints, and Kimberly Anderson conducted a [comprehensive literature review](#) on how participation in fibre craft communities contributed to one's overall sense of well-being. As avid crocheters themselves, Karen and Ferzana knew firsthand the positive impacts fibre crafts such as crochet, knitting, and quilting had on their personal well-being. The literature review explored the connection between well-being and fibre craft community groups.

Research studies published within the last ten years were gathered in this review to examine fibre craft communities with a focus on intergenerational programs. Intergenerational programs in this context were defined by the International Consortium for Intergenerational Programs as “social vehicles that create purposeful and ongoing exchanges of resources and learning among older and younger generations” (as cited in Kaplan, 2002, p. 306). This literature review documented how fibre craft groups, including those with older adult members, impacted one’s perceived physical,



social, emotional, cognitive, and psychological well-being (Brooks et al., 2019; Fraser & Keating, 2014; Kenning, 2015). In fact, formal and informal fibre craft groups were environments where members improved motor skills, reduced stress, increased concentration, received social support, and enhanced skills while expressing themselves through tangible handmade items (Brooks et al., 2019; Burt & Atkinson, 2011; Dickie, 2010; Pöllänen, 2013).

Based on the review, the research team hypothesized that fibre craft communities, organized as intergenerational, activity-based programs, have the potential to remove age and cultural boundaries, promote lifelong learning, reduce social isolation, and foster a sense of belonging, while also having positive implications on well-being (Chaze et al., 2021). The research team learned from the literature that social connection over a common activity between older and younger generations had the potential to create positive relationships that reduced ageism and age-related barriers (Canning et al., 2020). Therefore, *Crochet Connections: An Intergenerational Fibre Craft Project* was conceptualized as a research study that brought together older adults (aged 60+) and College students (18 – 30 years) to engage in crochet over an eight-week period. The purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis that participation in weekly intergenerational fibre craft groups could influence participant well-being including, but not limited to, aspects of social connection and relationship building.

In 2022, Karen Lints, Ferzana Chaze, and Kate Dupuis received a Sheridan College-funded research grant to carry out this research. The grant supported the implementation of an on-campus intergenerational crochet group to examine the impacts on participant well-being. The research team hypothesized that the project would enhance participant well-being through intergenerational opportunities over crochet and the collective design of blankets for charitable donation.





## **Methods:**

### **Recruitment:**

Older adults aged 60+ and Sheridan College students between the ages of 18 to 30 years were recruited to participate in an intergenerational crochet group. Recruitment was limited to English speaking older adults geographically situated in the Greater Toronto Area and current Sheridan College students enrolled in any program.

Participants were invited to attend weekly in-person crochet sessions at Sheridan's Davis campus in Brampton, Ontario. Availability to attend most, if not all, crochet sessions was a factor in participant eligibility. The study was open to a range of crochet ability from beginner to advanced skills. The overall recruitment process took place over a five-week period through email promotions, posters, flyers, and general outreach. Participants completed a voluntary screening questionnaire to assess their eligibility for inclusion in this study. Those participants who met the above requirements were randomly selected to join the crochet group, however, space permitted additional persons to join.

All participants provided the research team with written informed consent prior to beginning the project. The research study was approved by Sheridan College's Research Ethics Board. Monetary reimbursement was not provided to participants. Parking reimbursement was available to the older adults who required it.

## Younger Adults:

To recruit student participants, print posters were distributed around the College on bulletin boards near high-traffic areas. A QR code on the poster linked students to the screening questionnaire. A digital poster was circulated internally on the College's Learning Management System to capture students in all programs of study. A word-of-mouth campaign was initiated by a member of the research team who handed out flyers in hallways, cafeterias, and other well-traveled areas on campus.

## Older Adults:

Recruitment for older adults began with an email campaign in collaboration with Sheridan's Centre for Elder Research. The email included a direct link to details about the study including a screening questionnaire. The Student Research Facilitator connected with local retirement residences, community centres, and volunteer organizations to share information about the research study.

## Program Format:

Participants met in-person at Sheridan College's Davis campus over an eight-week period to learn and engage in crochet. Sessions were approximately two hours in length and hosted in a large room with flexible seats, tables, and natural light. Tables were organized in a



## Tips:

- Use flyers, posters, email campaigns, and newsletters to promote the program.
- Host information sessions to generate interest and answer questions.
- Connect with community partners like libraries, centres, seniors' residences to distribute information about the program well in advance.
- Use social media to generate a word-of-mouth campaign that reaches local crafters.



circle configuration to encourage dialogue and social interaction. The Student Research Facilitator not only guided sessions by giving samples of the stitches and diagrams, but also provided outreach crochet support to participants throughout the program through email and telephone in-between sessions.

### **Supplies:**

A craft kit was provided to each participant at the start of the program. Each kit included crochet supplies (i.e., crochet hooks, ruler, darning needle, notebook, pen, and craft scissors), and yarn in a variety of colors organized in a reusable tote bag. Participants were directed to select yarn during each session and encouraged to provide the research team with suggestions for additional supply purchases. Members of the study took their craft kits home to crochet in-between sessions, but at home-crocheting for the program was optional. Any remaining supplies left at the end of the intervention were distributed amongst the participants.

### **Outreach:**

In preparation for crochet sessions, the Student Research Facilitator sent weekly emails to participants with pattern resources in the form of diagrams and online videos. These resources introduced the group to new stitches showcased at the start of each session. Phone calls were made to some participants as an alternative to email. Weekly outreach gave the Student Research Facilitator an opportunity to answer questions about the stitches and offer timely support for learning complex patterns throughout the intervention.





## **Stitches:**

Crochet sessions featured a stitch that welcomed participants to learn at a similar pace. The patterns required the use of slipknot, chain, single, double, treble, cluster, and puff stitches. Stitches were demonstrated by the Student Research Facilitator with samples circulated in the group. There were five square patterns planned for use in the crochet group including the basic square, mitred square, solid square, a simple flower square, and heart-at-the-centre square. These patterns ranged in their level of difficulty.

A goal of the crochet group was to stitch together the squares into blankets destined for charitable donation. The small size of the square patterns gave all participants an opportunity to contribute to the blanket regardless of their crochet ability, and often many squares could be made in a two-hour session. Out of the eight week program, two weeks were devoted to designing and joining squares. The Student Research Facilitator gathered suggestions from the group of possible recipients of the blankets.

# Data Collection:

## **Surveys:**

Participants were invited via email to complete online surveys before and after joining the crochet group. To maintain the confidentiality of the study participants, members created a unique identification number which enabled the research team to track data points across both surveys. The surveys consisted of a variety of question formats including multiple-choice, Likert, and open-ended.

## **Pre-Survey:**

The multiple-choice questions in the pre-intervention survey included general demographic information, crochet-specific questions (e.g., Have you ever participated in a crochet group?), and addressed the participant's motivation for joining the program as a rating scale (e.g., How much do you agree with these stated goals? / I want to meet people who have a similar interest). Additionally, the survey examined participants' current self-reports of well-being.

## **Post-Survey:**

The post-intervention survey included multiple-choice questions about the participant's experiences during the program (e.g., rate your overall enjoyment in the program / Will you continue to crochet after the program?), provided participants with an opportunity to give the research team feedback about the crochet program and prompted them to explain and/or elaborate on responses with open-ended questions. The post-intervention survey also examined to what degree their previously-stated goals for the program had been reached. Results from the survey were coded, and then sorted for analysis by members of the research team.



## Journaling Activity:

To support the research team in measuring well-being, a notebook was provided to each participant for weekly reflection exercises. Participants were encouraged to write about their experiences and interactions during the crochet group. Three guided questions were provided as a prompt::

- What did you like most about today's session?
- What did you learn in today's session?
- How did you feel after today's session?

Notebooks were collected at the start of each crochet session by a member of the research team. Responses were coded using their unique identification number, and then passages were photocopied. Participants kept their notebook at the end of the intervention.

Data from the personal reflections were coded using open coding and responses were grouped into themes.





# Results:

## Journal Entry Analysis:

Results indicate that all participants found crochet to be a pleasurable and comforting activity. Three major themes emerged from the journal entries: Socialization & Friendship, Mood Enhancement & Upliftment, and Skill Development.

1. **Socialization & Friendship:** The participants described an appreciation for having an opportunity to meet new people over a common interest and make new friends. Having a shared hobby was viewed as an icebreaker that offered members of the group something to talk about:

- *“I met a lot of new friends that share the same hobby.”* (P7: Session 1)
- *“I enjoyed the comfort I felt walking into the room, greeting everyone and sitting down comfortably to crochet. It felt almost as if I was having a get together with a bunch of friends with a bunch of old friends. I'm not usually very comfortable with strangers or people. I don't know very well, so that was nice and surprising.”* (P2: Session 1)
- *“We like to crochet. There are plenty of topics we can talk about.”* (P7: Session 2)
- *“Today I really enjoyed chatting with my neighbor about their hobbies and likes. It is great to meet people who are so sweet and friendly and who have similar interest to me.”* (P2: Session 3)

A few participants noted an appreciation for the friendly, welcoming environment created by the facilitators and other group members:

- *“My first crochet session was very exciting being the first time into a crochet session. Most of all I like the warm welcome, everyone smiling.”* (P1: Session 1)
- *“From the beginning of this course and coming into the class it was very welcoming. I felt relaxed. Everyone was so warm and welcoming. The teachers are awesome, and I totally enjoy coming to class and learning a new skill. And meeting new people at the same time”.* (P8: Session 3)

One participant who wrote that they “struggle while talking to people in general” (P3: Session 4) expressed thanks to those members who helped them learn crochet.



In the following week, the same participant shared how affirming it was to hear others praise their hobbies saying *“I got to open up about some other hobbies as well. It was fun to talk about them with the group”* (P3: Session 2).

It was interesting to note that one participant felt that crochet is perceived as a non-productive activity and that they felt less guilty taking time to crochet when it was done in a group setting: *“I enjoyed spending quiet time crocheting in the company of others. It is an activity that brings me calm and relaxation which is great, which is great after a stressful day. Doing it in a community lessens any guilt of not being productive”* (P2: Session 1). Besides meeting to crochet, one participant liked how the group’s blankets would be donated to charity: *“I felt really happy to have met such sweet people. I was also really excited to think about our joint efforts will go to benefit in a charity”* (P2: Session 1)

Sharing a common hobby also helped one participant feel more comfortable in intergenerational groups and encouraged them to explore joining other similar groups in their community: *“Another enjoyable day. It's amazing what the other members of this group are accomplishing. Both in design and volume of work. My contribution is much smaller then except for effort maybe. I enjoy myself in this company and I'm sorry it will end soon. I know I am probably the oldest member, yet I don't feel this is a drawback this exercise is having me give some thought to joining the knitting circle in my building.”* (P4: Session 6)

As the project came closer to its conclusion, some participants expressed regret that the opportunities for socialization and friendly interactions would soon come to an end. They wanted to continue the crochet group and stay connected after the sessions: *“I have been so impressed by this course. It has been my escape from the routine, and I am grateful for the skills I have learned in this crochet course. I wished this course could have been longer because I really liked the group of people I have met and form a friendship with. If the course starts again, I would definitely come back.”* (P8: Session 8)

2. **Mood Enhancement & Upliftment:** All participants had prior knowledge of crochet or showed an interest in learning fibre craft. They found the activity inherently pleasurable and relaxing. The words “happy”, “excited”, and “enjoyable” were often repeated in participant journal entries:

- *“My third class was wonderful. Am enjoying it everyday more and more everyday. Everyone is loving and kind, we have a great time together. I am so happy I Want to keep going.”* (P1: Session 3)
- *“Today I really enjoyed chatting with my neighbor about their hobbies and likes. It is great to meet people who are so sweet and friendly and who have similar interest to me. I feel really excited to put together the blanket now. I'm excited and relaxed. Although my neck is a bit dense from crocheting for a few hours. Doing more crochet also makes me feel inspired to do more art- art, sewing and journaling and more.”* (P2: Session 3)

The crochet group for some participants was uplifting and/or an escape from daily stressors:

- *“Today I was feeling very low when I arrived at the session. I've been stressed out as of late and I haven't been I haven't had much time to work on my crochet project. I got to share some art at the show. And it was nice to hear people's praise but results a bit embarrassing since I don't usually show people the art and sometimes when I have the reaction has been negative. So I'm used to downplaying it a lot. I got to open up about some other hobbies as well. It was fun to talk about them with the group. I didn't feel as low as I did earlier in the morning after the session ended.”* (P3: Session 5)

- *“When time is up, I felt reluctant to leave. The time I spent here is really enjoyable. And it’s a reprieve from the stresses of daily life. I feel calm and happy after crocheting together.”* (P2: Session 5)

3. **Skill Development:** At the start of the intervention, the participants had varied crochet skills that ranged from beginner to advanced. While beginner crocheters learned the stitches like single and double crochet, the experienced crocheters wrote about new stitches or techniques which provided them with new experiences and enhanced skills:

- *“In today’s session, I learned about the magic loop that allows you to be able to adjust the opening loop of the project. That was such a useful technique to learn.”* (P2: Session 1)
- *“I learned how to read a drawn pattern. As I was looking at the printed handouts. I never crocheted from a pattern like that before. So this was a new experience.”* (P2: Session 5)
- *“I really liked how today was a good intro start learning different types of squares to make and put towards a blanket. I like how it was nice and simple start. I learned a new way to crochet granny square today. It was a lovely pattern, and I can’t wait to map out a blanket using more of the same square. There are many options on how to crochet them.”* (P6: Session 1)
- *“I learned that it’s best to make sure I have add an edge of sc around each square before attaching them together. It makes for a nicer and more polished look. I feel great after today’s session so sad next week is last week. going to miss the group so much.”* (P6: Session 7)





Learning a new skill were described as an exciting challenge. A participant with limited knowledge of crochet wrote about their progress and intension to continue with crochet after the intervention concluded:

- *“I felt excited to be in today's class, I was able to complete a granny square. I had trouble while reaching the corners and had a lot of anxiety. [The facilitator] was there to relieve my anxiety and I was shown the correct way to complete the square. In today's session I learned I was not the only one with questions and needed help to figure out the patterns after today's session. I feel like I have overcome my anxiety and have the confidence to continue on. I love doing crochet and I feel relaxed and now I have completed a square. I have the confidence to continue. This will be an ongoing project for me. Thanks for this new hobby and for the relaxation I am free feeling I will be forever grateful.”* (P5: Session 7)

Other participants described a sense of accomplishment that accompanied skill development. It gave them joy and a motivation to learn on account of their individual and collective achievements:

- *“This week, I was finally able to overcome the rut I was in when it came to my crocheting abilities. I finally learned how to double crochet and have been able to fix the problems I'm having with single crochet. I feel I felt such a sense of accomplishment not only for being able to persevere, but also for not giving up as well. I felt immensely grateful for all my fellow group members were incredibly patient and supportive of me as they tried to learn as that's not something I usually have in my life. I want to try to work on a few projects of my own to share with the group for next time we meet.”* (P3: Session 6)
- *“It's amazing what the other members of this group are accomplishing. Both in design and volume of work.”* (P4: Session 6)

*“I love looking at how much we have accomplished over the last seven weeks organizing and planning the assembly of blankets was super fun today. Big feeling of accomplishment. I'm so excited to see them all put together.”* (P6: Session 7)

# Survey Analysis:

Eight participants completed the eight-week program: Four younger participants (M age = 21.5 years, range = 20-23) and four older participants (M age = 75 years, range = 64-80). All participants identified as female located in Ontario, Canada.

## Pre-Survey Results:

The pre-intervention questionnaire received a hundred percent (100%) response rate. On a scale of excellent to poor, the mean overall rating of personal well-being was “good” for both younger and older participants before joining the crochet group. The crochet ability of the participants ranged from poor, moderate, good, and great with two participants in each category. Most participants (63%) crocheted between zero to three hours per week while the remaining participants crocheted varied amounts ranging from four or more hours per week. No participant reported any previous experience with crochet groups.

Most participants (88%) selected that they either “strongly” or “somewhat” agreed to the following program goals: “I would like to have a better understanding of crochet”; “I want to learn crochet from other participants”; “I want to feel more confident in my crochet abilities”; “I want to meet people who have similar interests”; and “I want to feel more socially engaged overall”.

Seventy-five percent (75%) of participants responded that they “strongly” or “somewhat” agreed with this statement: “I want to interact with people from other age groups”. Self-reported motivations for joining the crochet group included social interaction, community engagement, and skills development as indicated in these responses:

- *“I like the idea the finished product goes to charity” (P1)*
- *“To meet other creative people and to spend some relaxing time crocheting” (P2)*
- *To refresh crocheting skills and meet new people. I like that it’s a program that will benefit others” (P4).*

## Post-Survey Results:

The post-intervention survey received an eighty-seven percent (87%) response rate (three older adults and four younger adults). After joining the crochet group, the mean overall rating of personal well-being remained “good” for both age groups.

All participants either “strongly agreed” (57%) or “agreed” (43%) to this statement: “My understanding of crochet has improved since the start of the program.” Most of the participants “strongly agreed” (71%) or “agreed” (14%) that they had learned crochet from the Student Research Facilitator. Most participants “strongly agreed” (43%) or “agreed” (43%), and only one participant (14%) “neither agreed nor disagreed” that they learned crochet from other participants.

When asked what they gained from the project, participants indicated that they learned new skills and enjoyed the social aspect of the program: *“I also saw a massive improvement in my crocheting skills which were almost non-existent at the start of the program”* (P3); *“I gained knowledge because I learned something new and how to crochet.”* (P5); *“meeting new friends which [was] really really good”* (P1).

Overall, most (86%) “strongly agreed” and one participant (14%) “neither agreed nor disagreed” with the statement that they felt more confident in their crochet abilities by the project’s conclusion. When asked about group engagement, all respondents either “strongly agreed” (86%) or “agreed” (14%) that they enjoyed interacting with people from another age groups. All expressed an interest in participating in future intergenerational programs as they “liked a great deal” (100%) the opportunity to crochet with others from diverse ages and meet participants who had a similar interest in crochet. Most choose “strongly agree” (71%) to the statement “I felt more socially engaged during my participation in the program” while some simply “agreed” (29%).

The skills learned by participants during the program included double crochet, blanket joining techniques, floral squares, and techniques for crocheting circles. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of respondents found the crochet stitches were “extremely easy”, somewhat easy (14%), and “neither easy nor difficult (29%). Eighty-six percent (86%) stated that they would recommend this program to a friend while fourteen percent (14%) said “maybe” to a friend referral. Overall, all respondents rated their level of enjoyment in this program as “delightful” and plan to continue to crochet (100%).



## Discussion:

Participants came into the program with varied levels of crochet experience and left the project with improvements to their crochet skills and a desire to join other inter-generational groups. The learning support received by both older and younger members and from the Student Research Facilitator contributed to this positive learning development. Participant journal entries and survey responses illustrated that opportunities to socialize and meet people who have a similar interest in fibre craft, or crochet in particular, broke conversation barriers and fostered their ability to find common ground despite their varied ages. The group environment and welcoming atmosphere enhanced their mood and motivation to attend sessions. There was no change in the group's overall health, however, they reported feeling increased social engagement.



## **The Crochet Program: Blankets:**

The crochet program evolved over the eight-week intervention due to the group's interests and diverse experiences in fibre craft. The Student Research Facilitator monitored participant progress and modified the program based on their suggestions. There were five patterns initially outlined in the program, but three patterns emerged as the dominant ones: basic square, mitered square, and flower square. To a lesser extent, participants created their own patterns while a few others members crocheted solid squares.

At the intervention's mid-point, the participants made plans for sorting squares, designing layouts, selecting a color themes, and choosing border colors for each blanket. Seven blankets were designed by the participants with varied color stories including six adult and one youth-sized blanket. Each blanket featured one or more square type. All participants contributed blanket squares and design elements. As an organic outcome from the crochet group, one participant noticed that the heart square was underrepresented in the blanket design.



### **Tips:**

The Student Research Facilitator found it beneficial to provide participants with partially crocheted squares for each pattern in addition to hand-drawn diagrams. These physical squares were step-by-step instructions of the creation process to support beginner crocheters. Participants used starter squares to gain an understanding of stitches while some members built upon these incomplete squares for inclusion in the blankets.

This heart square design became a *Crochet Connections: An Intergenerational Fibre Craft Project* signature that represented a collective message, which the Student Research Facilitator translated into a poem called *From Our Hearts*. The poem was included in a gift bag along with each blanket to share with its recipient. Using participant suggestions, a women's shelter was chosen as the destination for all blankets.



### **From Our Hearts**

With hands of love, by the young and old,  
This blanket was created, and is a story to be told.

By some just learning, how to crochet,  
With other's teaching, leading the way.

Each stitch carefully crafted, each colour selected,  
Taking hours of work, this blanket constructed.

Handmade with love, and patience too,

For warmth and for comfort,

Made just for you.

-A poem by Jennifer Chiovitti

### **Group Engagement:**

The Student Research Facilitator planned activities throughout the intervention to create a welcoming environment and foster conversation between members. These activities included an icebreaker at the start of the intervention that focused on crochet as a shared interest. The icebreaker had participants introduce themselves and then describe what they liked about crochet using a ball of yarn that was tossed around the group. At the mid-point in the intervention, the group took part in a Craft "Show and Tell" where participants brought personal craft items to the session which could be unrelated to crochet. This activity encouraged participants to share stories, celebrate accomplishments, and learn about their other interests beyond crochet. Members brought a range of items to the session including handmade clothing, glasswork, and digital art. At the final session, the Student Research Facilitator organized a farewell

event for participants with one final engagement activity. Sticky notes and markers were offered to participants with three guiding questions:

- My favourite thing about Crochet Connections is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Crochet Connections makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_.
- My time spent at Crochet Connections has been \_\_\_\_\_.

The open-ended questions has participants reflect on their individual and collective experiences in the program. The engagement activities evolved out of the crochet group's discussions and interests.

### **Program Recommendations:**

Consider these tips when planning your intergenerational crochet program:

- Reserve space for a minimum of three hours in the morning or early afternoon.
- Your ideal meeting space will have flexible seating with bright, natural light, and large tables for design layout.
- Plan for ten to twelve consecutive sessions.
- Include stitches and patterns that range in their level difficulty to engage people with diverse crochet abilities.
- Provide print and digital instructions for patterns and crochet samples.
- Plan for a consistent size of crochet squares to facilitate blanket formation.
- Supply a variety of yarn colors, curved darning needles, aluminum crochet hooks (5 mm, 5.50 mm, and 6.0 mm), and craft scissors.
- Appoint two facilitators to lead conversations, plan icebreaker activities, and support participants throughout the program.
- Consider pairing members to support their learning of crochet.

*“Celebrate the small wins throughout each session ... to provide encouragement to participants. For example, when a participant learns a crochet technique, completes a granny square, or meets their weekly learning goal.”*

-Jennifer Chiovitti





## **Knowledge Mobilization:**

In the Spring of 2023, the research team hosted an event for the Sheridan community. The event included a display of the blankets with an opportunity for Sheridan to connect and celebrate the project. The event contained a makerspace where students and employees were encouraged to try crochet and other yarn-based crafts. The event was hosted at Sheridan College's Davis Campus Library in Brampton, Ontario. It generated interest in crochet from not only attendees, but also students who were using the library at the time. The event was highlighted in Sheridan's internal newsletters and on its social media posts. These knowledge mobilization efforts created a heightened interest in the Crochet Connections research project across Sheridan and generated awareness of the benefits of sustained intergenerational crochet programs for older adults and College students. Sheridan's Library Services is looking to implement an ongoing intergenerational program based on the Crochet Connection model at Sheridan's Davis campus.



# Conclusion:


Intergenerational groups, organized as activity-based programs, was shown to be an effective way to foster social connection over a shared interest. The program facilitated participant learning of fibre craft in a safe and supportive environment while providing opportunities for them to support their local community through handmade donations.



Image of the research team (left to right): Kate Dupuis, Karen Lints, Jennifer Chiovitti, Ferzana Chaze, and Laura Vincent.

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