

To: Dr. Erika Paterson, ENGL 301 Instructor

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Subject: Evaluation of Community Engagement Initiatives to Alleviate Social Isolation Among Seniors—Research Report Proposal

Introduction:

Social isolation among seniors is on the rise and its impact can be felt by communities all over Canada. It is defined by the lack of engagement in one's community, an inadequate support system, feelings of unfulfillment and an absence of belonging. It is characterized by the complex interplay of personal, community and societal factors that holistically impact social cohesiveness, public cost and individual well-being. Existing literature describes a direct link between social isolation and deteriorating physical and psychological health. Furthermore, it shows social isolation is most prevalent amongst seniors.

In an urbanized metropolis like Vancouver where growth and progress are valued above community and social connections, ramifications of social isolation are heightened and go unaddressed. Social isolation is known to be an enhancer as well as the underlying basis of many other serious issues faced by seniors. Therefore, the lack of recognition and action in response to this problem poses a great burden on government funded programs, shelters and non-profit organizations. This oversaturates available resources and drains the limited amount of social funding designated for senior care.

This report is intended for the City of Vancouver with the aim that its content and proposed action items are implemented in the form of social programs and public initiatives.

Statement of Problem:

Social isolation is prevalent amongst seniors; it negatively impacts individual health and poses a great economic and social burden on society. There are a few major implications of this problem: firstly, social isolation is not just an enhancer of issues faced by seniors (i.e. homelessness, poverty, abuse, mental health and etc.) but also a key component assisting their development. Secondly, the unproportionate response and lack of preventative measures enable it to persist and over time worsen the social, physical and economic condition of seniors. This neglect leads to an overall increased reliance on government subsidized care programs and depletion of limited public funds.

Proposed Solution:

Promoting social connectedness and encouraging community engagement for seniors can prevent and mitigate much of the harm associated with social isolation. Allocating funds to support programs that encourage seniors to get involved in their communities, provides the means for them to socialize and contribute. These types of programs would allow isolated seniors to forge connections within their communities, feel valued and gain a sense of belonging. Furthermore, they would enable the formation of support networks that are crucial to maintaining individual health and safety. Developing initiatives that create opportunities for senior participation and contribution will also benefit society as a whole. Seniors involved in their communities will extend significant social capital and offer vital services that will ultimately advance the organization of community initiatives and promote overall public health.

Scope:

To evaluate factors limiting community engagement and social connectedness amongst seniors, in order to develop a comprehensive guideline that outlines effective strategies to promote and sustain seniors' involvement in their communities. I will be utilizing the following areas of inquiry to lead my research:

1. What is the quality of community programs and opportunities available to seniors living in Metro Vancouver?
2. What type of funding is available (i.e. grants, subsidies and donations) to sustain community and social programming for seniors?
3. How does accessibility limit seniors' participation in community based social programming and initiatives?
4. What are the limitations of strategies currently used to promote community engagement programs and initiatives to seniors?
5. How does individual health and wellness limit seniors' participation in community based social programming and initiatives?
6. How does perception of one's community deter or encourage participation in community based social programming and initiatives?

Methods:

My primary data sources will include consultation with Brightside Community Homes Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides affordable housing for seniors and people with disabilities. They provide independent living options for seniors and hope to address many senior specific social problems by enhancing social connectedness within their residences. Additionally, I will reach out to senior residents living in Brightside owned buildings to gain insight from their first-hand experiences and record their responses using a standardized survey.

Secondary sources will include reference and review of existing literature and reports exploring social isolation and how it relates to quality of life with a specific focus on seniors. The two major references will be the National Seniors Council – Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors published by government of Canada and Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Seniors in Vancouver: Strategies for Reduction and Prevention, a report by City of Vancouver Seniors' Advisory Committee.

Qualifications:

I worked with Brightside Community Homes Foundation over the course of summer 2018 as a community engagement facilitator. My position required close collaboration with senior residents to coordinate the integration and launch of community development programs that intended to establish social connectedness within residences. During my time organizing this programming, there were various approaches attempted to engage senior residents and encourage involvement, all with varying degrees of success. Hence, the insight and experience I gained through this role not only equips me to explore this research topic, is also what highlighted the need for this report.

Conclusion:

The need for research exploring effective strategies to counter social isolation amongst seniors is great. Ramifications of social isolation are far reaching and can have insurmountable detriment on individual quality of life and the overall well being of a community. By recognizing the extent of impact social isolation has on other senior specific social issues, we can begin to explore potential solutions. Through this report I will be able to evaluate factors limiting senior participation in community-based initiatives and social programming. Based on the findings of these research, I will present a comprehensive guideline outlining effective strategies to promote and sustain seniors' involvement in their communities. With your approval and support I will begin research once.