

Communication Workshops to Re-frame Aging: Summary report



Centre on Aging, University of Manitoba
November 2019

Background Information

In 2018, the Centre on Aging received funding from the **New Horizons for Seniors Program** of the Government of Canada for **Communication Workshops to Re-frame Aging**. The foundational materials that were used to develop the workshop came from the "[Gaining Momentum – A Frameworks Communications Toolkit](#)". The workshops consisted of a presentation about the toolkit, and moved to group activities which helped participants to recognize issues in written materials, and then practice writing short passages incorporating lessons learned from the presentation and resources from the toolkit. All participants received a link to the online toolkit so that they could read through the materials in advance of the workshop, and have the information for future reference.

Workshops

Workshops were held in the following locations:

- | | | |
|----|---|--------------------|
| 1 | Winnipeg, University of Manitoba (Spring Research Symposium Workshop) | May 5, 2018 |
| 2 | Gimli, Gimli New Horizons 55+ Activity Centre | May 31, 2018 |
| 3 | Brandon, Park Avenue Activity Centre (Seniors for Seniors) | June 20, 2018 |
| 4 | Winkler, Winkler Senior Centre | September 13, 2018 |
| 5 | Thompson, Thompson Recreation Centre | September 26, 2018 |
| 6 | Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes, Club D'Age D'Or | October 15, 2018 |
| 7 | Winnipeg, Holiday Inn South | January 23, 2019 |
| 8 | Beausejour, Beau-Head Seniors Citizen's Association** | September 27, 2019 |
| 9 | Dauphin, Dauphin Multi-Purpose Senior Centre** | October 2, 2019 |
| 10 | The Pas, Wescana Inn** | October 3, 2019 |

***These locations had a shorter workshop with an ageism presentation first.*

Participants

The more than 400 participants came from a variety of backgrounds, and included: older people, students, people working for organizations that serve older people (e.g., support services to seniors, senior centres), healthcare practitioners, advocates, journalists, entertainers, municipal employees and representatives, provincial government employees, researchers/teachers, age-friendly community committees, as well as long-term care facility staff and administrators. As a result, there were both men and women attending, as well as participants from a wide spectrum of ages.

Evaluation of the workshops

Evaluation forms were completed by 292 participants. In general, participants rated the workshop as being positive (> 68% reported Good to Excellent). They also felt that the workshop met its objectives (> 80% replied Agree or Strongly Agree) of: building awareness of communication issues, providing opportunities to practice, increasing comfort with trying new communication strategies, and encouraging future use of the toolkit.

Future use of the workshop information

Through the evaluation forms, as well as sticky notes comments at the workshop that were used to highlight some short- and long-term goals, we learned about how participants thought they might use the information that they learned at the workshop. Some participants reported that they were going to spend more time with the workshop documents as well as explore the source materials. Many reported that they were going to be mindful of how they use language in the future, to avoid some of the traps, and try out some of the messaging recommendations. They planned to discuss what they learned with family, friends, colleagues, board members, and government officials. Further, they planned to educate staff and volunteers. We also heard from some participants that some were going to review and revise a whole host of documents (policies, procedures, strategic plans, promotional materials, board by-laws, etc.), websites, social media, presentations, and even organization names, as a result of what they heard. For some, the messages of the workshop were quite personal, which resulted in them trying to be more aware of their own implicit bias, and even thinking better of their own aging and abilities (e.g., “see myself as being an individual who has a lot to offer in the world today”).

A few participants suggested that some challenges could be encountered because change is difficult, time-consuming and resource intensive, particularly in light of many competing and ongoing priorities. On a system level, someone suggested that there is a lack of coordinated advocacy. A final thought comes from one person's reflection that *change takes time, so we need to be kind and patient.*

Research Project

In conjunction with several of the workshops in 2018, we invited individuals to volunteer for a research project where we could garner more in-depth reactions to the workshop, along with learning more about actual changes that participants made. Interviews were conducted by phone a couple of weeks after the workshop, and two to three months later. Results from this research project will be released in a separate report in the future.