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CCEL C2C Grant Project Report

Golden Years: Enpowering Healthy Aging

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Executive Summary

"Golden Years: Empowering Healthy Aging" was a community workshop series hosted by 411 Seniors Centre in collaboration with students from the University of British Columbia centred on educating seniors on the science of aging and maintaining health with age. It addressed a number of topics, ranging from basic stroke biology to senior lonliness.

Through a partnership with 411 Seniors Centre, a local not-for-profit community centre for seniors, we led a series of workshops centered on healthy aging tailored for seniors. We consulted key stakeholders - UBC researchers, senior center leaders, and community members - through a focus group, to identify the most in-demand topics in healthy aging. Our workshops combined informative lecture sessions with interactive components and open-question periods, supporting seniors in their learning and nourishing their curiosity. Furthermore, many connections were formed between and amongst the community members and the speakers, with many 411 members who act as leaders in their own communities planning similar initiatives in the future.

The "Golden Years: Empowering Healthy Aging" lecture series was incredibly well received by the members of 411, evidenced by consistent, increasing high turnout (50+ audience members per workshop), and vocal appreciation from 411 Centre staff and community members. We are excited to have been invited back by 411 to discuss how to extend the series into a more permanent fixture in the upcoming year. Overall, our program provided seniors in the community from diverse educational backgrounds with scientific, educational knowledge on the processes involved in aging as well as actionable knowledge on how to implement research into practice in their personal life, empowering our community members to age healthily and gracefully.

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Background

Canada's population demographics have rapidly shifted over the past decades. With fertility rates down, and increased life expectancy due to advances in healthcare, there has been a rapid demographic shift towards an increasingly aged society. The proportion of seniors, people aged 65 and above now outnumber children younger than 15. Canada's 6.6 million seniors currently make up 17.5% of the population, a number expected to rise to 22.5% and 10.7 million by 2031 and 2040, respectively.

Traditionally, public health approaches to aging have focused on biological age - increasing numbers of health check-ups and treatment of chronic health conditions. In recent years, there has also been a shift towards a more holistic, community-based approach to aging, incorporating basic health functions with things that are important to seniors: decision-making, mobility, building and maintaining relationships, and a sense of fulfilment or contribution to society. These combined define what we now call healthy aging.

While workshops for seniors about healthy aging are increasingly common, we recognized in speaking to seniors in the community that there was unmet demand. Furthermore, as student-researchers at UBC, we recognized our unique position to develop workshops with UBC researchers that could prioritize both education about healthy aging practices with intellectually stimulating content on the latest trends in healthy aging research that could both satiate the curiosity of the seniors and improve their scientific literacy. By addressing this critical gap, our aim was to empower seniors with practical knowledge for healthy aging, build a connection between academic research at UBC and the community, and enhance scientific literacy in a population of East Vancouver seniors.

"Golden Years: Empowering Healthy Aging", was a collaboration between UBC students, CCEL, 411 Seniors Centre, and the members of the 411 community aimed at educating seniors on the diverse aspects of healthy aging and empowering seniors to learn and adopt these practices in their daily life.

Our primary objectives for this project were to:

1. Educate seniors on key aspects of healthy aging, such as stroke prevention, heart health, exercise, and loneliness.

2. Foster engagement between the academic community and senior populations.

3. Evaluate the impact of workshops on participants' knowledge and behaviours.

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Description of Activities

5
Workshops

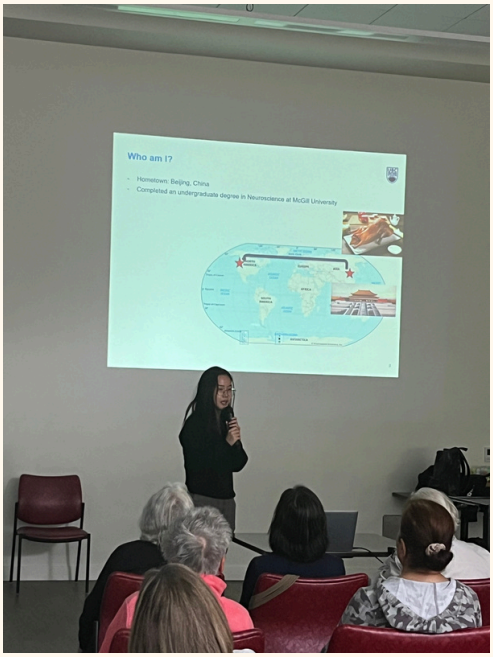
150+
Total attendees

Below, we have included a summary of the key events that occurred during our "Golden Years: Empowering Healthy Aging" project:

1. **Community Engagement:** In early May, we had the opportunity to participate in a town hall where we polled the opinions of ~40 senior members of the 411 Seniors Centre. We first asked if there would be a demand for our workshops - to which they vehemently said yes. Key themes we emerged were appreciation for UBC researchers interacting with the community outside of a research setting and the need for more education focused around healthy aging. We next asked what types of topics would be most relevant for the community. What emerged was somewhat unexpected: we got answers surrounding health topics like brain health and exercise which we had expected, but also got several requests for topics like senior loneliness and other public health concerns. We wrote down all of the feedback received and used these ideas when brainstorming our final workshop topics for speaker outreach.
2. **Workshop 1: "**The Brain, Stroke, and the Benefits of Exercise" by Vivian Li, UBC MSc Student in Rehabilitation Sciences. In our first program workshop, we had a stroke researcher discuss brain anatomy, symptoms and effects of stroke, and strategies to prevent stroke, including exercise. Vivian also discussed recent stroke research advancements, such as the applications of transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS).
3. **Workshop 2: "**Introducing the BC Brain Wellness Program" by Alisa Hashimoto, UBC Masters of Physical Therapy Student. The BC Brain Wellness Program is a lifestyle intervention program established with a goal of improving quality of life for individuals with chronic brain conditions, their care partners, and older adults across BC. This workshop highlighted ongoing programming both virtually and in-person including classes on exercise, nutrition and creativity with the ultimate goal of staying healthy in the aging journey.
4. **Workshop 3: "**Diet for a Balanced, Healthy Lifestyle" by Adrianne Chow, UBC Dietetics Student. Highlighting nutrient information for various food groups, this workshop focused on factors to consider in diet and making healthy eating decisions. Canada's Food Guide was also discussed to provide a reference for developing a positive relationship with food and meeting daily nutrient needs.
5. **Workshop 4: "**Knee osteoarthritis: A story from the knee to the brain" by Chris Lamb, Physical Therapist and PhD Student. In this presentation, Chris discussed causes of osteoarthritis, its symptoms, and methods of prevention. He also presented a generalized summary of his research project on increasing brain activation to improve muscle activity in areas affected by osteoarthritis.
6. **Workshop 5: "**Staying Connected: Preventing Social Isolation and Loneliness" by Linda Yauk, Seniors First BC Learning Events & Outreach Coordinator. This presentation by Seniors First BC illustrated the importance of staying connected to prevent social isolation and loneliness. The workshop explored the correlation between social isolation and decreased well-being, risk factors, and ideas about how older adults can successfully stay connected with others.
7. **Distribution of Materials:** After the conclusion of our workshops, all of our speakers agreed to the release of their lecture materials and associated pamphlets/printed materials to the 411 community. We asked interested community members to contact our 411 collaborator to organize a centralized process for community members to keep these learning materials and continue using them as a resource to learn.

Personal Reflections

We believe that the program has not only created a positive, educational impact on our targeted community, but also brought together closer collaboration between UBC and the 411 Seniors Centre. Furthermore, this opportunity, which would not have been possible without the CCEL C2C grant, has taught both of us many skills related to project management, including organizational skills, leadership, outreach and communication skills, and networking with members of the UBC community and beyond.



One particular lesson we felt most impactful was the importance of listening to your audience and meeting them where they were. While our initial plans involved recruiting UBC speakers by consulting 411 Seniors Centre staff and UBC collaborators, we had the serendipitous opportunity to attend the 411 Seniors Centre Annual General Meeting and get input from over 40+ community members. They shared their own perspectives on aging and what "healthy aging" meant to them, allowing us to tailor our speakers around what the community members felt was important to them. We hope to carry this type of community engagement into our future efforts as ambassadors and mentors in the community, prioritizing the needs of key stakeholders and incorporating different types of perspectives. Lastly, this project really pushed us outside of our own comfort zone, working with a diverse variety of people outside of our typical peer and co-worker group, which was an incredibly useful learning experience.

Conclusions

Our workshops far exceeded our original expectations by all metrics. Feedback from participants who attended was overwhelmingly positive, with many participants asking for our workshop to become a permanent fixture in the centre or to adapt our workshops to other communities to which they belong. Feedback from our community partner (411 Seniors Centre) was also incredibly positive. Participant engagement was high at every workshop we hosted: every single workshop ran to the maximum intended time and we exceeded 80% of the room's maximum seated capacity at every workshop.

These successes do not mean that there were not areas for improvement. Key areas for improvement we identified in speaking with participants and our partners was timeliness (technological issues with presenter laptops meant multiple workshops started 10-15 minutes late) and scheduling of speakers (we had a late speaker cancellation/rescheduling on one occasion, which we thankfully filled). We acknowledged feedback on these areas as they came up and worked with community partners to address these concerns, like setting up technological support for presenters (having common computers to present on) and pushing forward room set up times so that workshops would begin promptly at their scheduled time. One original goal that we were not able to complete was to include a quantitative survey from our participants about the workshops. Although we got tons of amazing word-of-mouth feedback, having survey results to conduct data analysis may have allowed us to explore more ways to improve, and we hope to implement this in a future iteration of these workshops.

Overall, despite some growing pains, our workshops were extremely successful, well-attended, and appreciated by the members of the 411 Seniors community. With the help of our community partner and the CCEL C2C grant funding, we were able to bridge together UBC researchers with seniors in the community to provide education sessions that both nourished the mind and provided actionable advice on how to age gracefully and with dignity.

Next Steps

Overall, we hope to continue carrying out our impact in the community and promoting healthy aging in whatever way we can to the seniors of Vancouver. We see two potential approaches to expanding our project: breadth and depth. Multiple community members have suggested that we host our workshops at other community and senior centres that they were members at, telling us that these topics were important to the wider Vancouver senior community, increasing the breadth of our project. We have also received feedback from 411 Seniors Centre about increasing the depth of our project but having it become a regular addition to the workshop schedule. We anticipate exploring both of these options moving forward, and hope to apply for more external funding to make continuing our project a reality.

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Thanks to CCEL, 411 Seniors, speakers, and our participants!