

DEVELOPING
A LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAM
FOR SENIORS
IN NEW WESTMINSTER

A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
PRESENTED BY THE CENTURY HOUSE ASSOCIATION
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH COMMUNITY EDUCATION
NEW WESTMINSTER SCHOOL BOARD

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in collaboration with
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LIFELONG LEARNING

There can be no human development without the right to learn.
(UNESCO, 1985, p. 9)

The world has made great strides in our time in the field of technology, but we haven't developed the wisdom that goes along with it. Wisdom often comes with age—it takes a long time to become a person. (Gwen Kirkpatrick, Senior Research Associate)

Learning is the process through which the human essence emerges from the existent. (Jarvis, 1992, p. 13)

I heard Horowitz play at 37 and at 87, and he was better at 87. When you get older, the highs are higher and the lows are lower.
(Gwen Kirkpatrick, Senior Research Associate)

What is meant by ageing and being old? The youngest person I know is Elsie, who at 82 has just started her B.A. degree. The oldest person I know is Robert, age 32. He knows everything about everything. He hasn't room for one new idea. His mind is made up. His life is over. So, although he thinks he is quite young, those of us around him know he is very, very old.
(Battersby, 1989, p. 36)

Learning needs to be more a stepping outside ourselves, becoming a part of our community . . . and that should involve more sharing of experiences . . . not back to kindergarten. (Thompson & Cusack, 1990, p. 39)

The most valuable thing I have learned as a senior is communication skills—that has broadened my life in countless ways. (Dot Josey, Senior Research Associate)

Classroom dialogue is the essence of the learning experience, and the time devoted to it should be sacrosanct. An education that is not grounded in intensive discussion has the form, but not the substance of civilized growth. (Winn, 1989, p. 630)

When my husband took sick, I enrolled in an English literature course at university. I found I knew so much more than when I went to school and many of the older people in the class knew a lot more than the younger students. (Mary Oryall, Senior Research Associate)

Seniors are a social resource; lifelong learning provides an opportunity for intergenerational sharing. (NACA, 1990, p. 9)

Some older people learn for themselves, others learn to leave something behind. The more we learn, the more we leave. (Gwen Kirkpatrick, Senior Research Associate)

Lifelong learning isn't just about reading a book or developing the mind, it is also about health. When we learn something new, we stimulate our minds and become better conversationalists, and this helps us feel better all over. (Mary Frehlick, Senior Research Associate)

The benefits of lifelong learning accrue to the individual through continued contribution in remunerated and voluntary work roles and sustained physical and mental well-being and to society through the enhanced participation of its older members. (NACA, 1990, p. 15)

I want to understand people, what they are all about, and how to get along with them. That's more important than anything else I might learn. (Gwen Kirkpatrick, Senior Research Associate)

Education is a key to individual quality of life and to social integration for Canadians of all ages. (NACA, 1990, p. 15)

When you become a senior nobody asks you about your life experience and your educational background, and we need to be asked. (Ene Falkenberg, Senior Research Associate)

Older people never learned all they needed to know in kindergarten, most never went to kindergarten. (Myrtle Carson, Senior Research Associate)

More adults are entering colleges and universities, but the potential contributions of their years of life experience remain undiscovered by younger students. Instruction is still dominated by the compulsion to fill the empty baskets of the mind with an endless stream of factual nuggets thrown by "experts". (Winn, 1989, p. 630)

When I was younger, learning didn't come easy to me, but my mother would say 'You learn by doing it again and again'. I would persevere and suddenly a light would come on. Then I knew I could learn anything if I put my mind to it. (Edna White, Senior Research Associate)

The desire for lifelong learning is difficult to encourage. It is easier to get excited about physical exercise than mental exercise. Perhaps because it is easier to get a healthy body than to get a healthy mind and it is easier to see the results. (Gwen Kirkpatrick, Senior Research Associate)

When I was growing up, I learned about the world, I understood what I learned, and I used the knowledge I gained. But now computers have taken over and they do things for us that we used to do for ourselves. These machines, this technology, has put man on the moon, but we haven't used the knowledge we have gained to run the world the way we should. (Edna White, Senior Research Associate)

The world used to be simple, now we are powerless over so many things. I have the feeling I have lost control. For example, taxes and prices keep on going up and our incomes do not and cannot. Things are moving so fast that we can't keep on top of things.
(Dot Josey, Senior Research Associate)

How much should we try to influence seniors to become lifelong learners? . . . to the extent that we help them to become healthier, and able to take more control over their lives. (Dot Josey, Senior Research Associate)

People often have negative memories of their early schooling and this may leave them with negative attitudes toward education in general. I remember we had this awful teacher and she used to give us the strap all the time. She was very cruel. She would ask people when they got into trouble, whether they would like her to use the strap or the pointer on them—and then she gave them what they didn't want. (Jo Ebert, Senior Research Associate)

If people have been in a situation where learning has never been fun, they won't think it is going to be fun. We need to educate people to the fact that learning can be enjoyable. (Monica Hammett, Senior Research Associate)

Only when continuing education is recognized as the means by which a philosophy of lifelong learning becomes active and engaged will British Columbia truly have a learning culture.
(Centre for Policy Studies in Education, U.B.C., 1992)

Preface

The potential of education for the elderly is . . . greater than its current practice and the way forward is tentative. . . . [R]esponding to the learning needs of older people in later modernity seems to be one of the most challenging at the present time. (Jarvis, 1992, p. 14)

It seems firmly established that we are in the Information Age. Information and knowledge are accruing at such a rapid rate, so we are told, that anyone who isn't engaged in learning is in danger of being left behind or . . . out in the cold. We are a learning society, and all members of such a society need to be lifelong learners.

The word "lifelong learning" has become a slogan and, regardless of age, we are urged to engage in *it* with some confusion as to what *it* means, where to get *it*, or how to do *it*. A central mandate of current educational reform in the schools of British Columbia based on the *Year 2000* is to teach children how to be lifelong learners. "Lifelong Learning" is proposed as the vision for Advanced Education in British Columbia and Continuing Education is to be the means of achieving it. (Centre for Policy Studies in Education, 1992)

What are the implications of a public policy of lifelong learning for senior citizens? Many of the current cohort of older adults were not well-served by education in the past and hold a view of education as not relevant to later life. Only a small percentage of seniors take advantage of opportunities for education offered through most continuing education programs in schools, colleges or universities. How shall we now convince *all* seniors that learning and education are essential to quality of life. . . or even relevant to their lives in some way? What are the lifelong learning needs of seniors and who should provide the opportunities for learning?

In addressing these questions, we build on two previous needs assessments conducted by Community Education, New Westminster School Board. Such traditional approaches, however, have not been highly successful in promoting lifelong learning and developing educational programs for seniors. To achieve a better understanding of the needs of seniors, we have assumed a different attitude and we have taken a different approach. Recognizing that seniors have skill, knowledge, and a need to contribute, we build on the strengths of *senior lifelong learners* in order to better understand the learning needs of seniors.

Seniors have skill, knowledge, and a lifetime of rich experiences to share. Many just don't know how their experiences can benefit others. In many cases, developing the confidence to speak up is the key that leads to greater involvement in groups and activities. Graduates of educational programs at Century House have expressed an interest in contributing to the community in imaginative and self-fulfilling ways. Their enthusiasm for learning created the realization that we need a more consistent and comprehensive approach to lifelong learning for seniors both in Century House and the broader community of New Westminster. Their enthusiasm also prompted us to build on the resources of these senior leaders at Century House who have benefited from education and who share the commitment of professional educators to bringing the rich experiences of learning to their peers.

Our approach to assessing need is nontraditional and collaborative, providing seniors who are already committed to lifelong learning with a unique experience in educational leadership. This report, therefore, contains a case study of a lifelong learning program as an integral part of developing and conducting a needs assessment. This unique experience in educational leadership was designed to increase the role of seniors in building a healthy lifelong learning community and to deepen our understanding of what, where, and how to better serve the learning needs of seniors in New Westminster.

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Developing a Lifelong Learning Program for Seniors

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Lifelong learning has become a slogan for Western society, requiring that everyone be engaged in learning throughout life. To this end, opportunities for learning must be made available to people of all ages, and other agencies besides schools and colleges must become involved in providing educational opportunities. This raises a number of issues in the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for seniors, issues that we identify and address in this report.

In setting the context of the project, we begin with background information regarding two needs assessments conducted by Community Education, New Westminster School Board, in 1988 and 1989. We then provide a brief history of lifelong learning in a seniors' centre. In outlining the lifelong learning project, we identify the opportunity, resources, purpose, objectives, and the timeframe. This section concludes with some comments on our philosophy of research as emancipatory education.

Community Education

Assessing the Needs of Seniors (1988). In response to aging population trends and recognizing the senior population as a group with unique needs and characteristics, Community Education, New Westminster School Board, conducted a traditional community-wide assessment of the educational needs of seniors in 1988. From a total of 392 surveys distributed to community agencies serving seniors, 87 were completed, returned, and subsequently analyzed. The sample population was predominantly female, aged 60 - 75 years, single, living alone, active and mobile, whose primary life occupation was listed as homemaker.

Four factors were identified as critical to participation: time, topic, location, and cost. Preferred times were morning or afternoon between 1 and 4, with classes offered in a comfortable environment (i.e., not in classrooms). Concern was documented regarding crime and personal safety, and interest was expressed in a variety of topics, including travel, art, music, fitness, languages, health, and self-development. Cost was an important consideration (e.g., an all-day session should be no more than \$25 per day including lunch). Recommendations based on that assessment:

- (1) That Community Education offer a course in crime prevention.
- (2) That Community Education offer a course in how people can organize their own classes, and provide direct assistance to groups organizing their own classes.
- (3) That Community Education offer programs in other settings.
- (4) That Community Education offer courses as joint ventures with different groups and agencies.
- (5) That courses of interest to seniors be offered during the day.

Assessing the Needs of Seniors (1989). The following summer, a second needs' assessment was targeted at less active seniors and ethnic groups not represented by the previous study. A total of 72 individual interviews were conducted and analyzed, resulting in the following recommendations regarding the provision of education for seniors designed to promote greater participation:

- (1) Provide introductory sessions so people can get an idea of content and presentation to follow.
- (2) Offer a greater social component.
- (3) Schedule classes in the daytime.
- (4) Presentation style should be informal and flexible.
- (5) Classes should be offered in comfortable, familiar surroundings (i.e., not in schools).
- (6) Advertise 50% discount for seniors.

- (7) Encourage more communication between program developers and professionals in the seniors' field.

Despite two assessments, seniors remain underrepresented in continuing education courses offered through Community Education. While Community Education continues to wrestle with the question of how to increase the participation of seniors, the Century House Association has developed some strategies for addressing the learning needs of seniors during the past decade.

Century House

Century House is one of the oldest seniors' centres in Western Canada, serving the recreation and leisure needs of more than 2000 members between the ages of 50 and 102 who reside in the city of New Westminster and surrounding districts in the greater Vancouver area. [Tables showing population breakdown according to age and gender are contained in Appendix A]. Like other centres of its kind, Century House relies on a supply of able and willing senior volunteers who work with staff in delivering programs and services for seniors. During these recessionary times coupled with the rapid growth of the senior population, the centre has experienced a problem widely shared by others working in seniors' centres across Canada, *How do we get seniors more involved and willing to share the leadership responsibilities?* The Century House Association has had some successes and has learned, sometimes serendipitously, what works and what doesn't.

The concept of recreation is changing and the role of seniors' recreation centres is changing. Recreation now means much more than social activity and sport—it means *recreating one's own life and helping others do likewise*. This calls for new approaches to recreational leadership and to the provision of recreational services for the retired. Providing a more sophisticated smorgasbord of programs is only part of the answer. It means working with members in a new way— "empowering" seniors to take charge of their personal lives as well as the groups and organizations to which they belong.

Developing Seniors as Leaders. How does one empower seniors? The word "empower" is used so often, but it is seldom clear what *it* means and how *it* is achieved. Fundamental to empowerment is a philosophy that promotes the potential of seniors. Staff and seniors firmly believe that, given an opportunity and the right kind of people, older people can provide effective service to their peers. In fact, they often do it better than staff. Furthermore, Century House recognizes the role of education in building knowledge, understanding, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Education is the key, but providing a training program is not enough: the key to any successful program is the instructor. Staff provide encouragement and support to volunteers and assist them in getting the needed training programs in place. What they cannot provide is the expert training that a skilled adult educator can. A brief history of educational programs provides some insight into how Century House has attempted to meet the lifelong learning needs of members.

Lifelong Learning in a Seniors' Centre. Some eight years ago, staff and members identified the need to provide emotional support to local seniors who were isolated, suffering losses, experiencing health problems or had recently moved into our community. They recognized that seniors with some training were the most capable of making that connection. With funding from the Federal Government, a board of seniors hired a professional who trained a group of 18 seniors as peer counsellors over an 18-month period. That program is alive and well today with ongoing funding from the provincial Ministry of Health's Community Partnership program supplemented by private donations and regular fundraising activities.

The Senior Peer Counselling service is a vital and respected link in the continuum of care in the community. Although the first priority of the program was service to "at-risk" seniors, staff soon became aware of the increased capabilities of counsellors (e.g., as advocates, as leaders, and as a resource to the centre). Individually, peer counsellors soon emerged as confident and

capable leaders in other areas and activities at Century House. What a difference education made.

Century House depends on volunteer leadership. The entire operation requires willing and able members to accept responsibilities for more than 90 elected Activity Committee positions and on a seven-member Executive Board, as well as the numerous volunteer duties in the office, kitchen, and the Host program. Once again, with funding from the Federal Government for a 20-week program called, *Participation with Confidence*, the board hired an educational gerontologist to facilitate the program and a researcher to evaluate it. The program was designed to increase member participation and involvement in programs and activities and to develop leadership potential. It did just that and more. One woman who enrolled in the program had very little self-confidence and had never been a leader during her youth or adulthood. With encouragement, support, and an opportunity to develop her confidence and skills, she is now the President of this 2000-member association—and a very effective and capable leader. Furthermore, participants said the personal development aspects of the program went far beyond centre participation. They said they were more confident in all areas of their lives—in their relationships with family and in other community groups.

Graduates of the *Participation with Confidence* program also said they needed ongoing training to maintain their new-found confidence and skill. To this end, a board of seniors secured funding for a public speaking program, *Speaking from Experience*. Developed and taught by a skilled adult educator, this program was designed to hone confidence in speaking up in a group and expressing one's views. Many just don't know they have it—or that it can benefit others. In many cases, developing the confidence to speak up is the key that leads to greater involvement in groups and activities. And again, staff watched the transformation of participants in the *Speaking from Experience* course, their increased self-confidence and greater involvement in programs and activities at the center. Program "offshoots" from these leadership and personal development programs [e.g., a host

program and an informal social group for new members called, *Operation Friendship*], have been primarily senior-led and senior-driven.

What is the situation at Century House today? Seniors who took both the public speaking and the leadership programs say they want more opportunities for personal development, and they feel that courses such as these need to be available on a continuing basis to the larger membership. There is a growing belief that the focus of any program is immaterial, as long as it contributes to personal development and the facilitator is skilled at "empowering seniors" —i.e., providing knowledge while drawing on life experience and building self-esteem and self-confidence.

Graduates of the educational programs say education is the key that facilitates the emergence of seniors as leaders, and they want more of it. Society is changing and in order to remain a part of it, seniors need to be engaged in some form of learning. Seniors' centres have the potential to provide a valued service to the community as public forums for lifelong learning for the retired. Seniors' centre policy, however, rarely includes provision of education.

Where are the resources to provide the kind of highly skilled instruction that is required? Many seniors cannot afford to pay, nor do we think they should have to pay for education that enhances their ability and willingness to contribute their time and energy to the centre and the community. The challenge is to create innovative partnerships with agencies and governments that will enable a seniors' centre to access expert training and education for the membership and to make learning a way of life for many more seniors. As a place to begin, the Director and Recreation Programmer conducted a preliminary assessment of learning needs in the centre.

Preliminary Assessment of Learning Needs. An informal assessment produced the following list of targetted needs for education/training in Century House.

- (1) Every two years, new people join the Executive Board of the Century House Association. Many seniors take on a leadership role for the first time in their lives and have not had leadership training. Others have been leaders in the working world and need formal training in working with seniors.

We need ongoing leadership training and board development for senior leaders.

- (2) The centre has 33 activity groups, each one with an elected chairperson charged with providing group leadership. Chairpersons have expressed a need for training in conflict management to help them deal with difficult people.

Chairpersons need training in building and maintaining healthy groups and how to deal with difficult people.

- (3) Senior peer facilitators working in the *Operation Friendship* program say that many seniors need to improve their communication and listening skills.

We need classes in effective communication for the general membership.

- (4) A public information session on the constitutional debate organized by the President of the Association was attended by approximately 70 people. Many people have expressed an interest in forums related to citizenship and seniors' issues.

We need to provide forums regarding social issues on a local, provincial, and national level that address the concerns of seniors.

- (5) Seniors who have taken the Speaking from Experience program want to continue to develop their expressive skills. They say,
We need more personal development opportunities (e.g., to develop speaking and writing skills) for the general membership.
- (6) An intergenerational songfest organized by the President of the Association in collaboration with a nearby school was held last Christmas.
The CH songsters and teachers in the community have expressed an interest in intergenerational activities of a cultural nature.
- (7) The *Stay in Schools* program sponsored by Community Education needs seniors who are willing to serve as mentors to youth.
A mentoring program would provide an opportunity for intergenerational sharing and for seniors to make an important contribution to the community.

The challenge to provide expert education/training opportunities in these various areas raised an awareness of the need to collaborate with other agencies in the community.

An Opportunity to Collaborate

Preliminary meetings held in the Spring of 1992 with staff and seniors at Century House and, subsequently, with staff from Community Education suggested that Century House and Community Education combine their resources in order to better serve the educational needs of seniors in New Westminster. Furthermore, both agencies wanted to expand the role of seniors in building a healthy lifelong learning community. The Community-based Grants Program offered the opportunity to use the combined resources to work toward our common goals.

Resources

- (1) A core group of committed senior leaders.
- (2) A Director and Recreation Programmer at the seniors' centre committed to providing educational opportunities for the membership.
- (3) A Coordinator of Continuing Education who wants and needs information to assist in planning and delivering educational programs for seniors.
- (4) A Coordinator of the *Stay in Schools* program who wants to build on the reciprocal nature of the skills of seniors and youth.
- (5) Two Educational Gerontologists (an adult educator and a researcher) willing to work with a group of senior leaders to develop and implement the necessary training; to design, conduct, and analyse the needs assessment phase; and to document and evaluate the findings.

Purpose of the Project

To develop a plan for a comprehensive lifelong learning program for seniors in the community of New Westminster.

Objectives

- (1) To review the literature on lifelong learning programs for seniors.
- (2) To develop a program to train Senior Research Associates (SRA).
- (3) To develop the survey and interview questionnaires that SRA's will administer to their peers.
- (4) To conduct an assessment of the educational needs of the membership of Century House and affiliated seniors groups.
- (5) To produce a research report summarizing the needs and outlining a framework and a long-range plan of action.

Timeframe: January 15, 1992 - June 15, 1993

- (1) Phase 1 (7 weeks): Training Seniors as Researchers
 - Reviewing the literature
 - Researching lifelong learning programs
 - Developing the training program
- (2) Phase II (7 weeks): Conducting the Needs Assessment
 - Developing survey and interview questionnaires
 - Assessing the needs of Century House (surveys, interviews, and focus groups)
 - Identifying seniors groups in the community
 - Conducting the community assessment

- (3) Phase III (7 weeks): Conducting the Needs Assessment
- Discussing and analyzing the results
 - Participating in a focus group regarding critical issues
 - Developing recommendations for future directions and a framework for lifelong learning for seniors
 - Producing and distributing the final report

Evaluation: Research as Emancipatory Education

We hold a view of evaluation and research as elements of an educational process that *empowers* participants, in the tradition of Lather's work in the area of feminist pedagogy and research (1991). Participants are engaged as equal partners, not just by asking them what they liked and what they didn't like about a training program, but by giving voice to personal experience, raising critical awareness of their social world, as well as reinforcing their personal skills and contributions. Critical reflection was encouraged throughout the development of the project using both formal and informal methods. [Further references to *empowerment* occur throughout the report].

Formal evaluation procedures include:

- (1) a pretest questionnaire to SRA's prior to the training;
- (2) a posttest questionnaire;
- (3) a participant observation record of all class discussions;
- (4) a final evaluation in the form of a focus group concerning the project, issues that remain, and recommendations for the future.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The provision of any learning opportunity that creates the potential for personal growth and development is education and, therefore, the role of adult educators is to respond to learning needs, of whatever type of people . . . response to the learning needs of the elderly could be crucial to both the future of adult education and contemporary society. (Jarvis, 1992, p. 14)

We planned to take a relatively new approach to education and to research with seniors. We knew that the whole idea of education in later life would be new to many seniors and that our collaborative efforts in this project would be foundational to the development of a comprehensive lifelong learning program. Seniors can hardly be expected to identify a need for something that many may have never thought about before. In this regard, an important goal was to raise awareness and to promote lifelong learning as something that is not only essential but also enjoyable.

In this section of the report, we first look at the broader impact of the project in terms of the target group of seniors that have been touched in some way and whose awareness regarding lifelong learning may have been raised. We then summarize the results of the interviews, conducted and documented by SRA's, and the results of the survey. [Because of our commitment to giving voice to individual experience, the reader may note some redundancy, which we hope will serve to strengthen some of the points].

Impact of the Project

Once our proposal was funded, staff at Century House circulated the promotional flyer advertising the program and discussed the opportunity for seniors to participate in the project with members whom they felt might be interested. Through word-of-mouth and the promotional flyer, it is estimated that approximately 50 seniors became aware of the project, although in

the early stages no one was entirely clear what the program would entail or how it would evolve. Twelve seniors (all women) attended an introductory session, and eight attended the final focus group discussion session [one dedicated member was unable to attend due to a serious injury]. During the early stages of Phase II, SRA's conducted pilot interviews and semi-structured interviews—a total of 20 people were interviewed. SRA's elected to promote lifelong learning at Seniors' Community Health Fair where a promotional flyer was distributed [as in Appendix H] to approximately 75 seniors visited the Lifelong Learning table.

Eighteen hundred surveys were enclosed in the monthly newsletter, "The Clarion" which is read by all the membership. We also connected with seniors groups that are affiliated with Century House [e.g., community groups holding their meetings in the centre]. Brief introductions to lifelong learning and the project were presented to the Alzheimer's and Parkinson's support groups, to Branch 15 of the Senior Citizens Organization, to the Queensborough Community Centre's seniors' group, and to the Sapperton Old Age Pensioner's Organization.

In summary, the estimated impact of the project was:

Persons initially informed about the project	50
Persons engaged in discussions at the Health Fair	75
Estimated number reading the survey in the Clarion	500
SRA's interviews and informal discussions	40
Presentations to affiliated groups:	
(a) Alzheimers' support group	15
(b) Parkinsons' support group	15
(c) Branch 15	70
(d) Queensborough seniors' group	40
(e) Sapperton O.A.P.O.	<u>100</u>
Total	905

Interviews

The actual process of conducting semi-structured conversational interviews was time-consuming and intensive. Since most SRA's had numerous other commitments in the centre and in the community, conducting interviews was an optional activity. A total of 12 interviews was recorded and analyzed.

Interviewees. Interviews were recorded for 2 men and 10 women ranging in age from 63 to 75. [It is not possible to report the average age since not every age was recorded—two people gave their ages as "70+"]. Six of the 12 listed their primary life occupation as homemaker: also included were a social worker and an addictions' counsellor. With respect to the highest level of formal education attained, 2 people completed grade 8, 3 completed grade 12, 3 had vocational training, and 4 had university degrees.

Results. Following is a summary of the responses to specific questions, with many individual comments recorded verbatim for the insights they provide.

What educational courses or programs have you taken at Century House over the past five years?

Three of the people who were interviewed had not taken any classes at Century House. Programs taken included, *Speaking from Experience* (3), bridge (3), the host program (2), massage (2), inner fitness, computers, line dancing, peer counselling, Participation with Confidence, literature, sketching, writing, and literature.

What courses or programs have you taken elsewhere over the past five years. Four of the people interviewed had not taken any classes elsewhere. Of those who had, the following topics were identified: chinese cooking, sewing, mathematics, investment and money management, self help, languages, Spanish and German, pattern making, playing the organ, history of antiques, and elderhostel trips. One person had taken a number of addictions classes as well as signing for the deaf, and another had taken a

spanish class at the University of Guadalajara and art at the University of London.

What educational programs should Century House offer?

Suggested topics were: communication skills, local history, driver training, nutrition, native indian studies, comparative religions, psychology, philosophy, carpentry, lapidary, humour, discussion groups, history of art, geography, philosophy, music appreciation, current events, multiculturalism, upholstery, foreign languages, refinishing furniture. [Many of these suggestions were subsequently incorporated into the survey].

What does lifelong learning mean to you?

For these people, lifelong learning means

- *a way of keeping your mind active, keeping on your toes.*
- *the day I stop learning I'm dead.*
- *satisfaction when you do something new.*
- *having wide interests, picking up bits and pieces of information from the television (Knowledge Network), reading a lot.*
- *I can develop the intellectual side of my mind, which is too often ignored. As Canadians, we do question things and when we are in a group we can exchange ideas. When we exchange ideas, we exchange a part of ourselves with others.*

What do you think are the benefits of continued learning?

Many people said continued learning kept their minds active and improved mental as well as physical health. Other comments were that continued learning

- *helps keep an open mind.*
- *keeps you from feeling closed off from others, broadens horizons, keeps you from getting bored.*
- *provides enjoyment.*
- *disciplines you, improves your ability to express yourself.*
- *keeps interests current and helps one to feel younger.*
- *has social benefits.*

One person, however, suggested *it isn't everyone's cup of tea.*

How do we convince others of the benefits of continued learning to their health and happiness?

A number of people admitted they didn't know and two people felt that it just could not be done. Suggestions they gave to convince people of the benefits were:

- *Don't use the word "learning" — refer to "growing more within yourself".*
- *Be an example, talk to them and explain your experience*
- *Be willing to admit you don't know it all.*
- *Pique their curiosity.*
- *Provide the environment that will draw people in, present them with the information and say, here it is.*
- *Share your experience and enthusiasm, and tell them how much you enjoy it.*
- *Invite them to the Health Drop-in.*

Why do you think there are so few people who join up for the educational classes at Century House?

Interviewees felt that many people don't take educational classes at Century House because:

- *The words "learning" and "education" scare them—they think of school and homework.*
- *Some people are too lazy, others too timid or afraid of showing their ignorance.*
- *They are too busy and seek only pleasure.*
- *Some people don't want to better themselves, they are happy the way they are.*
- *They don't understand what experiential learning is all about.*
- *Seniors believe that the negative image society projects on them is the way they really are and they're afraid of making a fool of themselves.*
- *Seniors tend to avoid commitment.*
- *They have attended programs in the past that failed to meet their expectations.*
- *Some have transportation problems, and fear of being out alone.*
- *Learning requires too much effort or is too expensive.*

Why do so few of the men attend?

In addition to the obvious reason [i.e., there are fewer men in the centre] interviewees offered the following insights as to why so few men attend:

- *Men are more timid than women.*
- *In retirement, men feel cut off from everyday work activities, and seek the company of other men.*
- *Classes seem to be more directed towards women.*

How can we get more people involved in learning?

To get more people involved, interviewees had the following suggestions:

- *Don't use the words "learning" and "education"*
- *Advertise: provide a good description and build up to a program.*
- *Make opportunities available.*
- *Talk to people one-on-one, have enthusiastic presenters*
- *Offer a certificate of recognition.*
- *Talk it up and emphasize the benefits.*
- *Don't push people or they will push in the opposite direction.*
- *Ask people to bring a friend.*

What would it take now to get you interested in lifelong learning?

Many people said, they were already interested. Some suggestions to get them interested were:

- *having a friend to go with*
- *a class that isn't too time-consuming*
- *offer something I want to learn about*
- *offer something related to my former employment*

Do you think opportunities for advanced education and continued learning are stacked against women?

Four people felt that opportunities were stacked against women. They said

- *It is a male-dominated world, and while male dominance is breaking down, we still have a long way to go.*
- *Women have too much to do and therefore no time for education.*
- *As in many other walks of life, education is dominated by men and they don't want women to invade their territory.*

What can be done to overcome the obstacles?

People felt it was *hard to overcome social norms*, that *education is needed*, and *women need to become more assertive and stand up for themselves in an unemotional ways*.

Other Comments:

- *What have we done in the past that worked.*
- *I wish we could get more men involved in CH.*
- *Seniors should keep doing stimulating things and spread the word about the benefits in a better way.*

Survey

Respondents. Forty people completed the survey: 29 women and 11 men [an equitable representation according to sex]. Ages ranged from 55 to 83 [it was not possible to estimate the average because not everyone recorded their age, one listed age as 65+ and one, 70+]. With respect to marital status: 16 were widowed, 14 married, and 4 single. Primary life occupation was listed as homemaker (10), clerk/secretary (10), teacher (6), nurse (2). Professions also included a medical doctor, pharmacist, and justice of the peace. Highest level of formal education: grade 8 (3) and university degrees (6). The majority had high school graduation with some form of vocational training and experience.

Results.

What educational classes or programs have you taken at Century House?

Eight people had not taken any classes at Century House. Those who had taken classes identified the following:

dancing	5
computers	4
bridge	4
fitness	4
painting	3
peer counselling	4
<i>Speaking from Experience</i>	4
<i>Participation with Confidence</i>	2
massage	2

One person said the classes she had taken at Century House over the past ten years were too *numerous to mention*.

What courses or programs have you taken elsewhere since age 50 and where?

While 5 people had never taken classes outside of Century House, a number had taken classes at the following institutions:

Douglas College	5
Community Education	4
University	4
Other seniors centres	3
B.C.I.T.	2

As expected, a wider range of topics was identified as compared to those taken at Century House. Topics in addition to those identified in the interviews, e.g.: piano, dressmaking, art, religious studies, photography, water management, social ethics, ESP, income tax, sales management, conveyancing, photography, aptitude testing, quilting, concert band, typing, arthritis management, old English script writing, reflexology, investments, boating, safety, chinese cooking, yoga, upholstery, cooking classes, stress management, assertiveness, power squadron, first aid, speed reading, therapeutic touch, organized crime, calligraphy, and stained glass. One mentioned having taken professional development courses by correspondence through a university in the United States.

What educational programs should Century House offer?

Respondents generally felt that Century House already offered a variety of suitable programs. Some new suggestions were:

psychology, ethics, how to cope with government forms, fashion updates, make-overs, art and music appreciation, writing, biography, saving the environment, cooking for one, medication for seniors, discussion group, drama, diet, philosophy, and natural history.

Individual suggestions were that Century House should offer programs that

- *are challenging.*
- *acknowledge the experience of senior students.*
- *keep seniors current.*
- *are especially designed for those who come to Century House but might not go to a class at the school.*

What educational programs should the New Westminster School Board, Community Education, offer seniors?

In general, people felt that community education offered a wide selection of courses and should not offer any special courses for seniors.

Specific suggestions were:

- *shopping and cooking for health*
- *safety in homes and apartments*
- *new technologies*
- *Offer classes in the daytime .*
- *Offer classes that aren't too expensive.*
- *I enjoyed the memory course. It doesn't make sense to be educated without health education.*

What do you think are the benefits of continued learning

Respondents identified the following benefits:

keeping the mind active/working	17
keeping current/up-to-date/interested	8
improved physical health	4
improved mental health	3
social	2

Individual comments were that continued learning

- *keeps me in touch with changing technology.*
- *keeps me in tune with today's world and able to converse with the younger generation.*
- *improves the memory and helps me look after my own affairs. As a result, I am "with-it" more and not dependent on family.*
- *keeps me young.*
- *offsets depression.*
- *can make use of seniors experience as a resource.*
- *makes life more enjoyable.*
- *makes the world a better place for everybody.*
- *when you stop learning, you get old.*

How can we help seniors understand the benefits of continued learning to their health and happiness?

Responses reinforced information contained in the interviews—that we convince people by example, by improved advertising, by talking with them one-on-one, by enthusiastic presentations, and by showing them that learning can be enjoyable. Education is needed in this regard. To help seniors understand the benefits of learning, we need to

- *pique their curiosity.*
- *stress how much more fun life is when the mind is active and challenged.*
- *offer courses chosen by them.*
- *convince seniors that learning can be fun.*
- *give education a higher profile in the centre.*
- *have patience, understanding, and offer encouragement.*
- *emphasize how important it is to keep up with changing technology, and to keep pace with children and grandchildren.*
- *encourage people to express their views.*
- *value each person, show them you care and respect them and are sincerely interested in their future.*

And one person concluded, *There are many ways and this particular question needs serious study.*

Why do so few people sign up for the educational classes at Century House?

Respondents gave the following reasons:

lack of time	6
lack of self-confidence	5
too lazy	3
no interest	3
poor advertising	3
poor health	2
think they are too old	2

Why do so few men attend?

Respondents gave the following reasons:

lack of self-confidence	6
shy	6
too many women	5
not interested	2

Specific comments were:

- *Many men are uncomfortable with large numbers of women.*
- *Men think they know it all and they feel it is beneath them to learn at their age.*
- *Some are afraid they will look foolish admitting they still have to learn something.*
- *There are too many women who are smarter than they are.*
- *Men tend to be antisocial when older.*
- *That's the \$64 question! They may prefer to play golf or pool.*
- *Courses that are offered seem to be of more interest to women*
- *Men are more independent and usually prefer a sporting activity.*

Why do so few seniors take courses through Community Education?

Many of the reasons given reinforce the findings of the needs assessments conducted by Community Education in 1988 and 1989. Barriers people mentioned were:

classes offered at night	9
transportation	5
lack of confidence	5
time	2
cost	2
health	2
lack of motivation	2

Specific comments were:

- *Many seniors are concerned about memory and don't think they can learn anymore.*
- *Some may be uncomfortable when they do not know anyone in a class.*
- *Either they feel their life experience is enough or they hesitate to be with youngsters.*
- *Continuing education is a relatively new concept—not many people were involved in education beyond public schooling 40 or 50 years ago.*

How can we interest more seniors in lifelong learning?

Suggestions included offering shorter courses, better promotion and advertising, one-to-one, inviting suggestions from people, encouraging and motivating them, stressing the importance of keeping pace with changing times, and making them aware that it will meet their needs. One person suggested that there be previews of programs at gatherings of the general membership, making people more aware of how much pleasure they can get out of attending classes. Clearly, the emphasis has to be on word-of-mouth advertising, personal contact and encouragement.

Would you attend an informational session on lifelong learning opportunities at Century House? Of the 39

respondents, 26 indicated they would be interested in attending an informational session.

When presented with a smorgasbord of topics, seniors indicated their preference as follows:

- 26 How to Improve Your Memory
- 25 Humour and Laughter (How to Get More Fun out of Life)
- 20 Health Education in the 90's
- 19 Current Events Discussion Group
- 18 Medications Awareness
- 14 Speaking Up (Building Confidence in Speaking in a Group)
- 14 Philosophy
- 15 Forums on Social/Political Issues
- 13 Natural History/Birdwatching
- 13 Creative Writing
- 13 Music Appreciation
- 13 Living Will

Other topics suggested: history of religions, speakers on social problems, educational trips [e.g., to provincial legislature, art gallery, stock exchange], a diet course for health, exercise for trouble spots, group discussion on interesting books, ancient history, conversation starters, tennis, easy computer courses, art appreciation, art history, local history, classics in literature, philosophers, great writers, classical ballet, opera, psychology, advanced bridge, computers, estate preparation with handouts and follow-up service, anything that furthers communication, french, tracing a family tree.

Final Comments

- *I was in the group that started the Medication Awareness Society in 1970 - I'd really like to get it going again.*
- *I'm not interested in deep subjects. I have trouble retaining the knowledge I already have.*
- *Not all instructors are good—some patronize seniors and some have poor attitudes.*
- *We are at an age when we want to just live, take our time, enjoy our life (what's left) in peace and quiet. We no longer want to challenge, prove, or beat others. We can take time to relax, smell the roses, and enjoy the grandchildren.*
- *An important factor regarding participation is a feeling of belonging and camaraderie.*
- *Too bad that Century House has not been focussed as a natural place for continuing education offerings [sponsored by UBC, SFU, Douglas College, School Board, etc.]*
- *Can seniors be included in deciding the range of offerings at Century House and at Community Education at the earliest planning stage?*
- *I have some interest in all the topics you suggest—the subject of lifelong learning is a very worthwhile project.*
- *A lot of the programs suggested are for potential leaders, whereas many seniors just wish to learn for their own enjoyment, not to be leaders.*
- *I believe lifelong learning is a necessity, and once seniors understand what it means they will demand more opportunities.*
- *A lifelong learning program is an excellent idea. I sure hope it happens. Go for it!*

But before we "go for it" and outline our vision for the future, we present the results of the formal program evaluation.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The provision of any learning opportunity that creates the potential for personal growth and development is education and, therefore, the role of adult educators is to respond to learning needs, of whatever type of people . . . response to the learning needs of the elderly could be crucial to both the future of adult education and contemporary society. (Jarvis, 1992, p. 14)

We planned to take a relatively new approach to education and to research with seniors. We knew that the whole idea of education in later life would be new to many seniors and that our collaborative efforts in this project would be foundational to the development of a comprehensive lifelong learning program. Seniors can hardly be expected to identify a need for something that many may have never thought about before. In this regard, an important goal was to raise awareness and to promote lifelong learning as something that is not only essential but also enjoyable.

In this section of the report, we first look at the broader impact of the project in terms of the target group of seniors that have been touched in some way and whose awareness regarding lifelong learning may have been raised. We then summarize the results of the interviews, conducted and documented by SRA's, and the results of the survey. [Because of our commitment to giving voice to individual experience, the reader may note some redundancy, which we hope will serve to strengthen some of the points].

Impact of the Project

Once our proposal was funded, staff at Century House circulated the promotional flyer advertising the program and discussed the opportunity for seniors to participate in the project with members whom they felt might be interested. Through word-of-mouth and the promotional flyer, it is estimated that approximately 50 seniors became aware of the project, although in

the early stages no one was entirely clear what the program would entail or how it would evolve. Twelve seniors (all women) attended an introductory session, and eight attended the final focus group discussion session [one dedicated member was unable to attend due to a serious injury]. During the early stages of Phase II, SRA's conducted pilot interviews and semi-structured interviews—a total of 20 people were interviewed. SRA's elected to promote lifelong learning at Seniors' Community Health Fair where a promotional flyer was distributed to approximately 75 seniors visited the Lifelong Learning table.

Eighteen hundred surveys were enclosed in the monthly newsletter, "The Clarion" which is read by all the membership. We also connected with seniors groups that are affiliated with Century House [e.g., community groups holding their meetings in the centre]. Brief introductions to lifelong learning and the project were presented to the Alzheimer's and Parkinson's support groups, to Branch 15 of the Senior Citizens Organization, to the Queensborough Community Centre's seniors' group, and to the Sapperton Old Age Pensioner's Organization.

In summary, the estimated impact of the project was:

Persons initially informed about the project	50
Persons engaged in discussions at the Health Fair	75
Estimated number reading the survey in the Clarion	500
SRA's interviews and informal discussions	40
Presentations to affiliated groups:	
(a) Alzheimers' support group	15
(b) Parkinsons' support group	15
(c) Branch 15	70
(d) Queensborough seniors' group	40
(e) Sapperton O.A.P.O.	<u>100</u>
Total	905

Interviews

The actual process of conducting semi-structured conversational interviews was time-consuming and intensive. Since most SRA's had numerous other commitments in the centre and in the community, conducting interviews was an optional activity. A total of 12 interviews was recorded and analyzed.

Interviewees. Interviews were recorded for 2 men and 10 women ranging in age from 63 to 75. [It is not possible to report the average age since not every age was recorded—two people gave their ages as "70+"]. Six of the 12 listed their primary life occupation as homemaker: also included were a social worker and an addictions' counsellor. With respect to the highest level of formal education attained, 2 people completed grade 8, 3 completed grade 12, 3 had vocational training, and 4 had university degrees.

Results. Following is a summary of the responses to specific questions, with many individual comments recorded verbatim for the insights they provide.

What educational courses or programs have you taken at Century House over the past five years?

Three of the people who were interviewed had not taken any classes at Century House. Programs taken included, *Speaking from Experience* (3), bridge (3), the host program (2), massage (2), inner fitness, computers, line dancing, peer counselling, Participation with Confidence, literature, sketching, writing, and literature.

What courses or programs have you taken elsewhere over the past five years. Four of the people interviewed had not taken any classes elsewhere. Of those who had, the following topics were identified: chinese cooking, sewing, mathematics, investment and money management, self help, languages, Spanish and German, pattern making, playing the organ, history of antiques, and elderhostel trips. One person had taken a number of addictions classes as well as signing for the deaf, and another had taken a

spanish class at the University of Guadalajara and art at the University of London.

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Suggested topics were: communication skills, local history, driver training, nutrition, native indian studies, comparative religions, psychology, philosophy, carpentry, lapidary, humour, discussion groups, history of art, geography, philosophy, music appreciation, current events, multiculturalism, upholstery, foreign languages, refinishing furniture. [Many of these suggestions were subsequently incorporated into the survey].

What does lifelong learning mean to you?

For these people, lifelong learning means

- *a way of keeping your mind active, keeping on your toes.*
- *the day I stop learning I'm dead.*
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- *having wide interests, picking up bits and pieces of information from the television (Knowledge Network), reading a lot.*
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One person, however, suggested *it isn't everyone's cup of tea.*

How do we convince others of the benefits of continued learning to their health and happiness?

A number of people admitted they didn't know and two people felt that it just could not be done. Suggestions they gave to convince people of the benefits were:

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Why do you think there are so few people who join up for the educational classes at Century House?

Interviewees felt that many people don't take educational classes at Century House because:

- *The words "learning" and "education" scare them—they think of school and homework.*
- *Some people are too lazy, others too timid or afraid of showing their ignorance.*
- *They are too busy and seek only pleasure.*
- *Some people don't want to better themselves, they are happy the way they are.*
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- *They have attended programs in the past that failed to meet their expectations.*
- *Some have transportation problems, and fear of being out alone.*
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Why do so few of the men attend?

In addition to the obvious reason [i.e., there are fewer men in the centre] interviewees offered the following insights as to why so few men attend:

- *Men are more timid than women.*
- *In retirement, men feel cut off from everyday work activities, and seek the company of other men.*
- *Classes seem to be more directed towards women.*

How can we get more people involved in learning?

To get more people involved, interviewees had the following suggestions:

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What can be done to overcome the obstacles?

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Other Comments:

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Results.

What educational classes or programs have you taken at Century House?

Eight people had not taken any classes at Century House. Those who had taken classes identified the following:

dancing	5
computers	4
bridge	4
fitness	4
painting	3
peer counselling	4
<i>Speaking from Experience</i>	4
<i>Participation with Confidence</i>	2
massage	2

One person said the classes she had taken at Century House over the past ten years were too *numerous to mention*.

What courses or programs have you taken elsewhere since age 50 and where?

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- *are challenging.*
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Specific suggestions were:

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- *safety in homes and apartments*
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- *Offer classes in the daytime .*
- *Offer classes that aren't too expensive.*
- *I enjoyed the memory course. It doesn't make sense to be educated without health education.*

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Respondents identified the following benefits:

keeping the mind active/working	17
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- *keeps me in touch with changing technology.*
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Responses reinforced information contained in the interviews—that we convince people by example, by improved advertising, by talking with them one-on-one, by enthusiastic presentations, and by showing them that learning can be enjoyable. Education is needed in this regard. To help seniors understand the benefits of learning, we need to

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And one person concluded, *There are many ways and this particular question needs serious study.*

Why do so few people sign up for the educational classes at Century House?

Respondents gave the following reasons:

lack of time	6
lack of self-confidence	5
too lazy	3
no interest	3
poor advertising	3
poor health	2
think they are too old	2

Why do so few men attend?

Respondents gave the following reasons:

lack of self-confidence	6
shy	6
too many women	5
not interested	2

Specific comments were:

- *Many men are uncomfortable with large numbers of women.*
- *Men think they know it all and they feel it is beneath them to learn at their age.*
- *Some are afraid they will look foolish admitting they still have to learn something.*
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- *Men are more independent and usually prefer a sporting activity.*

Why do so few seniors take courses through Community Education?

Many of the reasons given reinforce the findings of the needs assessments conducted by Community Education in 1988 and 1989. Barriers people mentioned were:

classes offered at night	9
transportation	5
lack of confidence	5
time	2
cost	2
health	2
lack of motivation	2

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- *Some may be uncomfortable when they do not know anyone in a class.*
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- *Continuing education is a relatively new concept—not many people were involved in education beyond public schooling 40 or 50 years ago.*

How can we interest more seniors in lifelong learning?

Suggestions included offering shorter courses, better promotion and advertising, one-to-one, inviting suggestions from people, encouraging and motivating them, stressing the importance of keeping pace with changing times, and making them aware that it will meet their needs. One person suggested that there be previews of programs at gatherings of the general membership, making people more aware of how much pleasure they can get out of attending classes. Clearly, the emphasis has to be on word-of-mouth advertising, personal contact and encouragement.

Would you attend an informational session on lifelong learning opportunities at Century House? Of the 39 respondents, 26 indicated they would be interested in attending an informational session.

When presented with a smorgasbord of topics, seniors indicated their preference as follows:

- 26 How to Improve Your Memory
- 25 Humour and Laughter (How to Get More Fun out of Life)
- 20 Health Education in the 90's
- 19 Current Events Discussion Group
- 18 Medications Awareness
- 14 Speaking Up (Building Confidence in Speaking in a Group)
- 14 Philosophy
- 15 Forums on Social/Political Issues
- 13 Natural History/Birdwatching
- 13 Creative Writing
- 13 Music Appreciation
- 13 Living Will

Other topics suggested: history of religions, speakers on social problems, educational trips [e.g., to provincial legislature, art gallery, stock exchange], a diet course for health, exercise for trouble spots, group discussion on interesting books, ancient history, conversation starters, tennis, easy computer courses, art appreciation, art history, local history, classics in literature, philosophers, great writers, classical ballet, opera, psychology, advanced bridge, computers, estate preparation with handouts and follow-up service, anything that furthers communication, french, tracing a family tree.

Final Comments

- *I was in the group that started the Medication Awareness Society in 1970 - I'd really like to get it going again.*
- *I'm not interested in deep subjects. I have trouble retaining the knowledge I already have.*
- *Not all instructors are good—some patronize seniors and some have poor attitudes.*
- *We are at an age when we want to just live, take our time, enjoy our life (what's left) in peace and quiet. We no longer want to challenge, prove, or beat others. We can take time to relax, smell the roses, and enjoy the grandchildren.*
- *An important factor regarding participation is a feeling of belonging and camaraderie.*
- *Too bad that Century House has not been focussed as a natural place for continuing education offerings [sponsored by UBC, SFU, Douglas College, School Board, etc.]*
- *Can seniors be included in deciding the range of offerings at Century House and at Community Education at the earliest planning stage?*
- *I have some interest in all the topics you suggest—the subject of lifelong learning is a very worthwhile project.*
- *A lot of the programs suggested are for potential leaders, whereas many seniors just wish to learn for their own enjoyment, not to be leaders.*
- *I believe lifelong learning is a necessity, and once seniors understand what it means they will demand more opportunities.*
- *A lifelong learning program is an excellent idea. I sure hope it happens. Go for it!*

But before we "go for it" and outline our vision for the future, we present the results of the formal program evaluation.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Participants

Twelve women attended the first session, 3 choosing not to continue because it didn't meet their needs. Of the 9 who continued, 8 attended the final focus group discussion [one was unable to attend due to an accident]. All were single women living alone, either widowed or divorced in their 70's, with the exception of two women in their 80's. The pretest was completed following the introductory session. People came for a variety of reasons:

- *I want mental stimulation and the company of those who think like me.*
- *I want to help coming generations of seniors avoid becoming "old fogies" [83 yr. old].*
- *I want to be useful and to help others, because that builds my self-esteem, which seems to go up and down lately.*
- *I want to see more learning opportunities available for seniors.*
- *I want to experience new challenges.*
- *I want to gain more confidence in myself either working in a group or alone.*
- *I want to be able to express myself more clearly.*

Results

When participants were asked to explain what education and learning had to do with their health, they said:

- *Education and learning keep me from getting depressed.*
- *Being involved in education keeps the mind active, and usually a healthy body follows an active mind.*
- *Having a class to attend gets me out of bed and planning my day, which makes me feel more alive.*
- *Learning gives me a positive attitude and makes me more aware of my physical wellbeing and interested in all that goes on around me.*
- *Just because your body begins to fail, doesn't mean you lose interest in life and stop learning. In fact study and mental growth can make the onset of illness more bearable.*

- *Education is critical because I need mental stimulation. Physical problems restrict involvement in many activities that I have always enjoyed, but I can still learn.*
- *Education teaches me what getting older means. I can remain active, maintain good health, learn more about people, and be able to help them.*

When people were asked what specific talents they had to offer a lifelong learning group, 3 did not respond on the pretest, however, everyone responded on the posttest. In general, responses suggested a growing awareness of personal skills [e.g., one woman said *"I'm willing and I have energy"* on the pretest, whereas her response on the posttest was *"I am interested, I am a logical thinker and I have leadership skills."*]

Participants were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being high) on 12 items reflecting lifelong learning skills and attitudes. A comparison of these self-assessment scores at the beginning and at the end of the project showed increases in 11 out of 12 items, with dramatic changes on some items. As we expected, these people place a high value on education and that value seems to be relatively stable, as is their ability to work independently. Increases were noted in their general level of confidence in a group [from 6.1 to 7.6]; level of self-esteem [from 6.1 to 7.9]; and confidence in a learning situation [6.9 to 8.3], suggesting a relationship between self-esteem, confidence, and learning. As we might expect, these people also rate themselves relatively high [8.1] on willingness to take a risk, and they were even more willing to take a risk following their experience in the project. Increases were marked in ability to express ideas clearly [from 4.9 to 6.5]; in how well they felt they listened [from 6.6 to 7.8]; in how well others listened to them [from 5.5 to 7.1]; and in their ability to work as a member of a team [6.6 to 7.6]. There were minimal increases in their ability to give and to take criticism. [Individual and mean scores are listed in table 1 on the following page—participants are identified alphabetically].

**TABLE 1: SELF-ASSESSMENT OF LIFELONG LEARNING
SKILLS AND ATTITUDES**

<u>ITEMS</u>	<u>MEAN SCORE</u>
1. The value you place on education	
pre b10, c10, d10, e7, f10, g10, h8, i10	9.4
POST B10, C10, D8, E8, F10, G10, H10, I10	9.5
2. Confidence in a learning situation	
pre b10, c2, d6, e7, f10, g7, h7, i6	6.9
POST B10, C10, D6, E8, F8, G7, H8, I9	8.3
3. General level of confidence in a group	
pre b10, c2, d4, e6, f8, g9, h8, i2	6.1
POST B8, C10, D5, E8, F6, G8, H8, I8	7.6
4. Current level of self-esteem or self-worth	
pre b5, c8, d4, e5, f5, g5, h9, i8	6.1
POST B6, C10, D6, E8, F7, G8, H10, I8	7.9
5. Ability to express ideas clearly	
pre b2, c5, d7, e6, f3, g2, h8, i6	4.9
POST B4, C9, D8, E5, F6, G5, H8, I7	6.5
6. How well you listen	
pre b8, c10, d9, e8, f3, g6, i9	6.6
POST B5, C10, D9, E8, F5, G7, H9.5, I9	7.8
7. How well people generally listen to you	
pre b3, c3, d7, e8, f4, g5, h9, i5	5.5
POST B4, C8, D8, E8, F5, G8, H8, I8	7.1
8. Ability to work as a member of a team	
pre b5, c2, d8, e8, f3, g9, h9, i9	6.6
POST B5, C10, D7, E8, F4, G9, H9, I9	7.6
9. Ability to work independently	
pre b10, c10, d5, e8, f8, g10, h9, i10	8.8
POST B9, C10, D5, E8, F9, G10, H9, I10	8.8
10. Willingness to take a risk or try something new	
pre b10, c10, d8, e8, f4, g8, h8, i9	8.1
POST B10, C10, D9, E8, F8, G9, H8, I9	8.9
11. Ability to give criticism	
pre b8, c4, d7, e5, f4, g5, h7, i5	5.6
POST B4, C9, D5, E5, F6, G6, H8, I7	6.3
12. Ability to take criticism	
pre b1, c8, d9, e7, f8, g9, h9, i10	7.6
POST B1, C10, D10, E8, F9, G9, H9, I9	8.1

Concluding comments were:

- *I enjoyed the meetings—you made me think and that is exhilarating.*
- *I have gained and grown so much during this period and wish such a program could be available to others.*
- *I have found new ways to look at and to solve problems.*
- *I require new challenges that are within my scope to perform and that is what this project offered me.*
- *I find the more I participate in Century House, the better I feel and the happier I am.*

Focus Group Discussion

In our discussions following the written evaluation, participants were asked to reflect on how the program might have been improved. While two people said they would have liked things laid out more clearly in the beginning, one person disagreed:

- *The way you presented it made it more challenging. We were the ones who were going to shape the project. You piqued my interest right at the very beginning. I knew you would never undertake anything that wasn't worthwhile.*

In general, people were disappointed in the low return rate of surveys, and they suggested ways that we might have obtained more information from people.

- *We should have laid out our concept of lifelong learning more clearly before conducting the surveys. Maybe an informational meeting around the concept of lifelong learning would have been valuable.*
- *A lot of people said, I don't like questionnaires. Maybe people needed help with filling it out?*
- *Some of the questions were too sophisticated.*
- *We needed more time to prepare and conduct the survey.*
- *We needed more time for the interviews. It was very hard to get people together. And we were learning how to conduct interviews at the same time.*
- *We enjoyed the work. Doing the interviews was more successful than a survey. The one-to-one contact got people interested.*
- *For some of us sickness intervened and many people had other responsibilities such as the Health Fair.*

The program was designed to empower seniors, and one of the methods we used was including participants as full partners in the development of each phase of the project. This presented problems, particularly in the beginning of the program. It is very difficult to recruit people for a program when it is not possible to identify what the program involves at the outset. In the final analysis, it is obvious from the comments of participants who committed themselves to the project that they felt empowered. They felt they had created the program themselves—because indeed they had!

Funding restrictions required that the project be completed within a four-month timeline. However, we were aware at the outset that the project was an ambitious undertaking requiring considerable time and commitment from everyone. We were concerned throughout the project that the workload for senior research associates might be excessive. We were assured by participants that they enjoyed the entire process, but would have liked more time to conduct interviews and to prepare the survey. They were convinced of the value of one-on-one interviews as a better way to gain information as well as to share information with their peers about the joys of lifelong learning.

CONCLUSIONS

In this final section of the report, we discuss the findings of the needs assessment focussing on the benefits of lifelong learning, barriers to participation, interesting differences between men and women regarding education, and topics of interest. We then present our recommendations in the form of a framework for lifelong learning, and we conclude with questions for future research and the role of education in empowering seniors. But, first, we reiterate our purpose.

This project addresses three of NACA's recommendations outlined on page 19 by (1) giving a high priority to the development and promotion of educational activities for older adults; (2) actively recruiting the talents of older adults and providing opportunities for them to contribute knowledge and skills to the education of others, and (3) identifying many of the barriers to senior participation. Our primary purpose is to identify the learning needs and the barriers in order to remove the barriers so that more older adults can share the benefits and joys of learning. To this end, rather than produce a technically rigorous analysis of the findings, we give voice throughout the report to a diversity of experience and insights using language that is easily understood regardless of one's level of education.

During the focus group discussion, Senior Research Associates were asked to critique the first draft of the final report and to reflect on what had been accomplished during the course of the project. In general, they felt that the report accurately reflected their experience. One woman said, "*When we first sat down together we didn't know what was going to happen. When I finished reading the report, I was amazed we came up with all of this. It is a miracle!*" and another added, "*When I read it, I felt that everybody was talking to me. You have captured our voices.*" The consensus was, "*The report is just a beginning—it's a first phase. There's so much more to be done.*"

Results of the needs assessment provide a basis from which to recommend what needs to be done in the future.

Results of the Needs Assessment

Lifelong learning means many different things to different people, and considerable time in the first phase was taken to identify its various meanings. Regardless of the meaning attached to the word, people were generally clear as to its benefits.

Benefits of Lifelong Learning. Time and again, the connection was made between learning and health. While the benefits to mental fitness and mental health are obvious, learning also contributes to physical health and a general sense of wellbeing. Social benefits include an opportunity to enjoy the company of people with common interests, and a chance to build confidence and improve communication skills. One woman said, *"For those people who, due to physical disability, are unable to participate in activities they enjoyed in younger years, education provides a challenge and involvement that compensates for their frustrations with reduced physical health in their later years"*. While it may be easier to see the results of a physical fitness program, "mental fitness" in later life may, in fact, be the more important of the two. Many people stressed the importance of learning in later life in order to stay in tune with changing technology, to communicate with younger generations, to stay in control of their lives, and to make the world a better place for everybody. One man said, *"A person gets old if he stops learning"*.

Barriers to Participation. While our study reiterated barriers previously identified by formal needs assessments conducted by Community Education (e.g., time, cost, comfort level), we believe the greatest barrier is one of attitude toward education. For many older adults, the words "learning" and "education" have negative connotations resulting from bad experiences with schooling as a painful process and teachers who were of the "spare the rod and spoil the child" mentality. Seniors said these people must be

encouraged to continue learning and to keep up with the changing times. The challenge for those who have tasted the joys of learning is to convince others of its many benefits. In this regard, it may be important to consider the differences between the experiences of men and women with respect to education.

Differences between Women and Men. The study illuminated some interesting differences between the experiences of men and women. Fewer men are involved in educational programs at the centre, preferring to play cards or participate in the more physical activities. While men are not equitably represented in the educational programs at Century House, it is important to note the male voice is equitably represented in the surveys [11/40 respondents were men].

Various reasons for the lack of male participation were offered (e.g., that many men lack confidence in a group of women, aren't interested in topics offered, or don't feel education is something they need or want any more). Discussion suggested that women in the past had been excluded from further education, because higher education was a man's world. Although this may be changing for present generations, many older women did not have time nor access to education and personal development programs in earlier years and, therefore, they often find opportunities for learning in later life particularly enriching and fulfilling. Questions for future consideration are, what programs might be of particular interest to men and what kinds of programs might be offered that would be of interest to both men and women?

Topics of Interest. A wide range of interests were identified, however, the message was clear. Seniors need to be involved in planning the variety of course offerings and they need easy access to programs in the centre that challenge them and keep them up-to-date with events and technology in a changing world. The four topics of greatest interest were:

- *How to Improve Your Memory / Mental Fitness*

- *Humour and Laughter*
- *Health Education in the 90's*
- *Current Events Discussion Group.*

One person commented, "*Too bad that Century House has not been focussed as a natural place for continuing education offerings sponsored by universities and community education.*"

To which our response is, while it may not be true for the past, this report suggests seniors centres *ought* to be considered the natural place for continuing education in the future if seniors are to play an active role in building healthy communities.

Role of Education in Building a Healthy Community

Graduates of Century House's educational programs have expressed an interest in contributing to the community in imaginative and self-fulfilling ways. The opportunity for members to participate in educational programs at Century House opens doors to the broader community. The enthusiasm expressed by seniors committed to lifelong learning suggested the need for a more consistent and comprehensive approach to lifelong learning for seniors both in Century House and the community of New Westminster. Prior to this lifelong learning project, seniors identified a variety of educational needs, which are supplemented by the results of the formal assessment. Findings suggest it is time for those who work with seniors to recognize the role of education in building healthy minds and bodies.

Mens sana in corpore sano. ["A healthy mind in a healthy body"]. Physical fitness takes on new significance in an aging society and we have witnessed a revolution in recreation programming for seniors during the past decade. It is time to consider notions of mental fitness and its relationship to health. Seniors tell us that health and learning go hand in hand. Together, they lead to improved mental and physical health and greater involvement in social life and the community. Consequently, our vision for a comprehensive approach to lifelong learning for seniors focusses on developing mental fitness as part of a holistic approach to healthy aging.

Recommendations: A Framework for Lifelong Learning

We view this project as the needs assessment or first phase that lays the foundation for a comprehensive lifelong learning for seniors in the community of New Westminster. It is our recommendation that those involved in the project and others committed to lifelong learning continue during the next phase to spread the word and the joys of learning and to make lifelong learning a way of life for many more seniors. Recommendations are framed according to the 3 pro's of lifelong learning: promotion, process, and program.

Promotion. We recommend that professionals in consultation with SRA's work collaboratively to

- continue to promote lifelong learning informally
- promote the benefits of lifelong learning formally
 - (1) by preparing a brief summary/flyer summarizing the report, thanking people, and outlining plans for the future.
 - (2) by hosting an information session in September in order to
 - (i) present a project summary
 - (ii) get more info from people
 - (iii) recruit people for advisory group
 - (iv) give info re program initiatives
 - (v) generate enthusiasm

Process. To enhance the process, we recommend that professionals working in consultation with SRA's

- develop a Lifelong Learning Advisory Group.
- continue to strengthen links with Community Education.
- invite a representative from Douglas College to join the steering committee.

Program. We recommend that professionals in consultation with the Lifelong Learning Advisory Group develop the following

program initiatives during the second (implementation) phase:

- Offer a 6-week course in October/November which reflects what people are requesting and what SRA's might like to take. We suggest an introduction to lifelong learning that includes notions of mental fitness and critical thinking, and opportunities to sharpen speaking and thinking skills.
- Offer "communication" workshops once a month.
- Explore with Community Education the possibility of offering one of their courses at Century House during the day, funded by Community Education and jointly advertised, to begin January of 1994 (suggested topics: philosophy, history, religions of the world).
- Host a forum in November on a social/political issue of concern to seniors.

When these recommendations were presented to Senior Research Associates at the final focus group meeting, they received unanimous, enthusiastic support. In general, people agreed that a program had to be offered in the Fall:

- *The whole purpose of the project was to begin to develop a long range plan. Something should happen.*
- *Don't you feel that after what everybody has done you have to do something more. You have got us all enthused.*

They also recognized the need to get more people interested in lifelong learning and wondered how it was going to be achieved. Because lifelong learning has not been traditionally taught in seniors centres, it would take time to change attitudes and get the needed programs in place. While it is important to offer an informational session in the Fall, SRA's were concerned that *they* might be expected to keep the interest going in the future and wondered how they would be able to generate interest and enthusiasm in others without "something" [i.e., a program] to nourish their own interest and commitment. And, finally, concern regarding funding was expressed by both professionals and seniors.

Future Directions

The project has achieved its objectives in developing and implementing a lifelong learning program as an integral part of an educational needs assessment. Findings and discussions have provided a framework within which senior leaders and professionals can work toward a comprehensive lifelong learning program for seniors. That framework includes a steering committee of professionals, working collaboratively with committed senior lifelong learners to promote and provide rich opportunities for lifelong learning to the members of Century House and seniors residing in the surrounding community. The challenge for Century House is to secure a continuous source of funding in order to deliver educational programs facilitated by expert adult educators on an ongoing basis in response to the changing needs and interests of seniors. In addition, a number of challenging questions have been raised and explored during the course of the project that need further research.

Questions for Further Research.

(1) Why don't more seniors fill out surveys?

The response rate to our lifelong learning survey was only slightly better than 1% [40/3000], which is surprisingly low and reflects neither the needs nor interests of seniors. It has been our experience that seniors do not respond well to surveys. [The response rate to a survey of leadership training needs of seniors groups throughout British Columbia (Cusack, Thompson, & Manley-Casimir, 1991) was 2%, which also failed to reflect the need for leadership training.] A number of reasons were offered by Senior Research Associates as to why seniors don't fill out surveys, but this question needs further investigation if we are to continue to use surveys as a basis for developing policies and programs for seniors.

(2) What is the relationship between health and learning?

Seniors tell us there is a close relationship between mental and physical health and learning. Given new directions in healthcare policy with greater emphasis on health promotion and prevention, more research is suggested in this area.

(3) How does one *develop lifelong learners*?

This question is of particular interest to those seniors who are committed and want to encourage others to become lifelong learners so that more opportunities can be made available to everyone. This is also a question of concern to educators in continuing education and in public schools system, since it is central to educational policy in British Columbia.

(4) What are the differences in educational interests and barriers to participation between men and women?

Our study touched on some interesting differences in the experiences/interests of men and women. There was concern raised about the lack of male participation and there was some animosity expressed between the sexes suggesting the *battle of the sexes* may be alive and well in seniors centres. Perhaps there is work to be done to create the kinds of programs that facilitate healthy dialogue and communication between men and women, drawing on their different points of view while emphasizing their common interests and concerns.

(5) What is the role of education in empowering seniors?

Given the central mandate of health promotion as *empowering seniors*, clarification is needed with respect to the concept of empowerment, how it is developed and how it is eroded. As educational gerontologists, the last question is of most interest to us, because we know that education has a primary role to play.

Role of Education in Empowering Seniors

Empowerment is the ability to make a difference, to participate in decision-making and to take action for change. Empowerment does not assume control of resisting others, but emerges from work with others who are also deciding, acting, and making a difference. (Kreisberg, 1992, p. xi)

Empowerment is a process that demands both personal and institutional change. It begins with a personal transformation out of silence and submission that is characterized by the development of an authentic voice. In order for such empowerment to occur, there must be a commitment to providing needed lifelong education for seniors, not just through sporadic funding opportunities that give seniors a taste of what is possible, only to be frustrated and disillusioned when their creative achievements are inadequately recognized and funding is withdrawn. As Novak (1985) suggests,

If senior education is to have a future, government must help—and not just with short-term grants. Long-term plans to fund and support education for older people makes the most financial sense. Seniors with active, alert, and questioning minds are healthy people, and can be most useful to society and the community in which they live. (p. 249).

Empowerment is a process through which people and communities increase their control and mastery of their own lives. Knowledge is power, but what kind of knowledge and whose knowledge is empowering? Education is needed that provides people with the skills and the confidence they need to participate effectively in decision-making processes. But the primary role of third-age education must be to develop a critical cultural awareness among the growing populations of older adults—to help people to understand how organizational structures and cultures

influence the quality of their lives and to recognize when their creativity, motivation, initiative, and generativity are being eroded. Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) refer to "contested public spheres—i.e., places that have the potential to contribute to social transformation. They suggest that schools ought to be such places. We suggest that seniors' centres ought to be such places—public forums for lifelong learning and education for senior citizens.

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