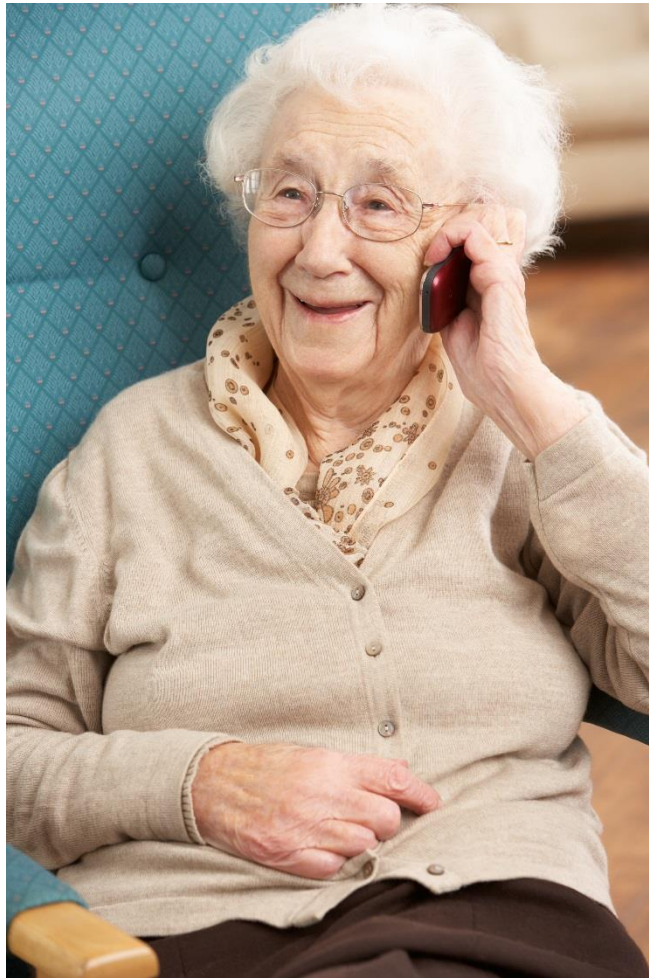


Seniors' Centre **WITHOUT WALLS**

Making Connections with Older Adults in Timiskaming



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research confirms that social connections are a fundamental human need and crucial to well-being. The 'loneliness epidemic' can be a significant risk to health as we age. Loneliness and social isolation have been linked to depression, cognitive decline, decreased mobility, and even death. Many people feel lonely and lose social connections as they age, which can lead to a significant increase in the use of emergency and non-urgent medical care.

As our district is wide spread and highly rural, many older adults in Timiskaming are at risk of being socially isolated. In Timiskaming 31% of the seniors in Timiskaming live alone, and many are homebound and not able to attend the educational and social programs offered in the community.

Since November 2018, with funding from the Centre for Aging and Brain Health Innovation (CABHI) Spark Program and in partnership with Timiskaming Health Unit, Timiskaming Home Support has been piloting a program called Seniors' Centre Without Walls (SCWW).

Seniors' Centre Without Walls is a free, telephone-based activity program. The goal is to connect adults who cannot get out of their home and be social as often as they would like. Using simply a phone and connecting to a specialized teleconference system, SCWW allows participants to learn about health-related information and make social connections through conversations with peers and professionals from the community. The program allows for later in life learning opportunities, participation in brain-stimulating activities, and most importantly, to feel part of a community and opportunity to create new and meaningful friendships.

The Seniors' Centre Without Walls is already known to be effective in other communities and evaluation results from the Timiskaming pilot confirm the program's success and participation has increased each month. Of the seniors who reported feeling lonely before the program began, none were still feeling lonely after being a part of the program. Most participants felt as though they belonged to a community, had something to look forward to, and in general, felt better since being a part of the program. In our second year, our goal is to increase participation of the francophone community, caregivers and introduce new technologies to further enhance the program.

We are now seeking support from local partners to ensure this program can be sustained beyond the one year pilot. To continue to run, the program requires an additional \$55,000 in funding. This program can directly benefit your clients, enhance their quality of life, reduce loneliness and reduce the stress on the already overburdened health care system. Please consider partnering with us to fund this impactful seniors programming.



WHAT'S THE SITUATION?

According to Statistics Canada, as many as 1.5 million elderly Canadians report feeling lonely. The 'loneliness epidemic' can be a significant risk to health as we age. Research confirms that social connections are a fundamental human need and crucial to wellbeing. Loneliness and social isolation have been linked to depression, cognitive decline, decreased mobility, and even death. Many people feel lonely and lose social connections as they age, which can lead to a significant increase in the use of emergency and non-urgent medical care.

The Timiskaming District is geographically vast, covering 13,300 square kilometers. In our district, there are approximately 7,205 seniors aged 65 years and over, making up 21.8% of the population (approx. 5% higher than the national average). Thirty one percent of the seniors in Timiskaming live alone, and many are homebound and not able to attend the educational and social programs offered in the community.

These programs tend to reach those who are already socially active and connected in their community. **Seniors who are homebound and not able to access these opportunities are often left without options for stimulating and meaningful social connections.**

Older adults face multiple barriers accessing traditional services, including but not limited to transportation, financial constraints, long waitlists for community support programs, as well as their health or health of a loved one. Some older adults lack services as there is limited capacity to accommodate higher needs or complex issues. As well, there can be vast difference with the quality, quantity and consistency of programs across the district due to volunteer capacity.

Individuals who are lonely or have few social contacts are 1.5 times more likely to use homecare services in a year. Current home care services are fee based and are only able to reach a small portion of seniors in our district.



"I've met more people through the calls. Staying in the house all day by yourself is no good."

"I enjoy listening and learning about other things that I may not know about. It enriches my life."

THERE IS A SOLUTION

The World Health Organization recommends strategies that increase social support for older people and their caregivers including targeted health and social programs for vulnerable groups (e.g., those who live alone and in rural areas are those with chronic mental or physical illness).

Social support is a determinant of positive mental health. Improving the mental health of older adults can have a positive impact on their overall well-being.

Providing social opportunities for older adults at home, will increase their opportunities for interaction, decrease isolation and allow them to stay in their own home longer and improve their quality of life. The absence of social supports can lead to a higher use of medical services.

"I like the challenge of learning new things. I also like the exercise group - it keeps me motivated."



TIMISKAMING PROGRAM

Telephone-based services for seniors to socialize have been implemented in cities across Canada with great success. Locally, we have launched **Seniors' Centre Without Walls**, connecting adults across the district to learn about health related information, and make social connections through conversations with peers and professionals from the community.

The program facilitates later in life learning opportunities, participation in brain-stimulating activities, and most importantly, it allows seniors to feel part of a community and to create new and meaningful friendships.

Older adults can self-refer or be referred to the SCWW through an organization to the program. An intake is completed over the phone or home visit. Those interested in participating receive a calendar of upcoming sessions/activities and can register for the sessions they choose. A multi-line teleconferencing system connects seniors to the facilitator and other program participants from across the district. Participants can call in themselves or receive a call from the coordinator. Programs run on specific days and times and include a variety of topics and formats including health and wellness presentations on issues such as healthy eating, managing chronic pain, managing medication, fall prevention, cognitive health, educational lectures and information sharing by health professionals, musical entertainment and brain-stimulating activities such as trivia and games.

"I feel like I've made new friends because of the program. It's a happy time. It gives me something to look forward to."

In November 2018, a coordinator was hired as an employee at Timiskaming Home Support. He, along with many of our local community partners actively promote the program to clients and seniors that they are involved with. The program launched publicly in February and within eight months over 100 seniors registered and regular participation numbers are rising monthly. We concluded our pilot year with an evaluation report to further assist in guiding the direction of the program.

"It's a big benefit as I don't drive anymore and rely on friends to take me shopping and errands. It's the friendship you feel when you're all together laughing, joking and listening that I enjoy most."

EVALUATION RESULTS

In August 2019, thirty-one participants enrolled in the program were surveyed, providing feedback on the program to date. In general, people enjoyed participating in the SCWW calls. They found the activities mentally stimulating and would tell other people about the SCWW program. Most participants felt as though they belonged to a community, had something to look forward to, and in general, felt better since being a part of the program.

Over one-third of participants who had learned about a new program, went on to use those services. Of the seniors who reported feeling lonely before the program began, none were still feeling lonely after being a part of the program.

When asked how the SCWW program has changed their lives, participants all agreed that they felt as though they had something to look forward to as a result of the program and that SCWW provides them with something they don't get anywhere else. Many participants shared that the program gave them a social outlet to meet more people and feel connected to others. When asked what they liked most about the SCWW, most cited the social aspect of the program, including the camaraderie, being able to chat with someone, being with people, and sharing. Many participants enjoyed the flexibility/convenience of the program.

For a copy of the full evaluation report contact desmaraisl@timiskaminghu.com

FUTURE OF THE PROGRAM

In its second year, the goal is to increase participation of the francophone community, caregivers and introduce new technologies to further enhance the program. The francophone community represents approximately 25% of our district's population, however, despite the program being offered in both languages, the francophone community is under-represented. The SCWW has formed a strategic partnership with le Centre de santé communautaire du Temiskaming to help reach this important segment of our population into the program. As caregivers to older adults or those with higher needs are often constrained on their own social participation, expanding programming to reach these caregivers will help increase their social support network and decrease their own feelings of isolation. Finally, as participants becomes more technologically savvy, the program will introduce more technology to help enhance education and entertainment options, as well as to help attract more participants. This strategic growth will help reach more people in our communities leading to better outcomes for our population.



"I'm happy that we have this program for those who can't get around, or depend on friends and family and are stuck in their homes. It's a great way to learn about what's going on in the community and stay connected."

BUDGET BREAKDOWN

As the one year funding from CABHI is coming to an end, we are seeking your support to fund the continuation and further development of the program's potential. The opportunity to partner yourselves with SCWW and reach the high risk segment(s) of our population with your messages for a fraction of the marketing and program dollars to do it alone. The annual cost to operate SCWW is approx. \$70,000, \$15,000 of this is committed to be provided in-kind via Timiskaming Home Support and Timiskaming Health Unit leaving \$55,000.00.

Your agency's support is needed to continue this valuable program in our community. Consider allocating marketing and/or program dollars towards delivering messages to these hard to reach and often isolated individuals.

A cost breakdown of the budget is as follows:

- \$43,600 Program coordinator/facilitator (0.8 FTE)
- \$5,400 Mercuri Teleconference System
- \$3,000 Printing and distribution of the quarterly program calendar
- \$3,000 French Translation and Marketing
- \$8,000 Office space, administrative support and travel (in-kind via THS)
- \$7,000 Program evaluation and public health promoter support (in-kind via THU)

Total program costs = \$70,000/year (minus in-kind - \$55,000 annually)

Please consider allocating dollars in your budget to support this worthwhile program in 2020.

Your support will allow for the continued growth of this important program. With interventions like Seniors' Centre Without Walls, socially isolated seniors have an opportunity to live more fulfilling and meaningful lives, reducing the use of medical services and social costs that result from the overuse of our medical system.

If you would like more information about this program, please contact the Seniors' Centre Without Walls Coordinator @ 1-800-361-5820 or via email scww@homesupportservices.ca.

If you are interested in supporting this worthwhile program, contact Caroline Morin, CEO, Timiskaming Home Support cmorin@homesupportservices.ca

