

Fall Fling 2008 – Facilitated Discussion Analysis

This document will organize the findings of the small group discussions that took place during the afternoon on the 2008 Fall Fling, held November 26th 2008. During the analysis of the facilitator notes, it became clear that the structure of the afternoon discussions and the broad demographic makeup of its participants made for a difficult analysis. However, this report will pull together the common themes as well as highlight specific recommendations for each of the four topic areas (Life Long Learning and Active Involvement, Health, Access to Information, and Finance and Income).

Common Themes

During the initial review of the facilitators' notes, several common themes arose:

- There is still confusion surrounding the purpose and role of Eldernet. In almost every group there were comments and/or questions surrounding the purpose and mission and goals of ElderNET as an entity. There appears to be a need for a communications and marketing plan that highlights these areas.
- It was also suggested that we look at changing the format of the day. Broad representation from all stakeholders limits the depth of the facilitated discussions. One suggestion would be to reformat the day the separate professional and non-professional participants for a portion of the day to encourage deeper discussions.
- Another theme that ran through all the topic areas was the use / or lack of use of technology to reach seniors. It was noted that there are access concerns surrounding the use of technology and that not all seniors use or are comfortable with technology. It was also noted that as boomers age, there will be greater technological fluency and access to the internet.
- Additionally, there were a number of suggestions regarding inclusion of diverse community groups. Further study is required to see how ElderNET can reach out to these communities.
- Communications - All the regular avenues of communication were identified (TV, Radio, Print, Electronic) with the suggestion that we also target the families of seniors and service providers with an emphasis on having materials translated and distributed by the various ethnic community groups to ensure that we reach those populations.

Although there was a great deal of overlap in the tone and content of the various discussions in each of the four topic areas, the following points were specific to the topic being discussed.

LIFE LONG LEARNING and ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT

Collaboration

Discussion in this area appeared to center mainly around the need for sustainable funding and resourcing to ensure access to a variety of “senior focused” learning opportunities. These included ‘life skill’ or ‘living learning’ opportunities (such as how to use a cell phone, how to text, etc), as well as, more formalized continuing education experiences (U of C’s Senior Certificate Program, McGill University’s “Learning in Retirement Program” – www.mcgill.ca/mlr/).

It was further noted that, of the four topic areas, Life Long Learning and Active Involvement was the one area that was least reliant on the involvement of the various level of government. It appeared to be understood that since this was such a broad area, with varying levels of interest by the individual seniors, it would be difficult to determine specific needs and desires for training without further research.

Convening

The greatest number of included the existing formal education institutions and the existing life skills program providers currently operating in Calgary as well as the larger public institutions such as the Public Library and The City of Calgary. It was suggested that ElderNET could facilitate the process of convening these stakeholders and help them analysis the current state of seniors’ learning opportunities and help them to identify the gaps in service.

Planning

Transportation and Finances were both raised as areas of concern when planning was discussed. There appears to be a need to further research appropriate, flexible delivery models that meet the need of a diverse community.

Communications

See Common Themes.

Health

Collaboration

Much of the discussion in this topic area revolved around the Health Care System. Rather than looking at health from a holistic perspective. Although there were a couple of discussions that suggested that non-clinical professional and seniors themselves be involved with further discussion of the topic area. The role of ElderNET in this area was suggested as an advocate of patient/consumer rights with an emphasis on communication of rights and options. It was suggested that interested stakeholders work together with a variety of members from the health care sector so that they have all of the information on health care issues and act as a hub or a resource where the public can get information.

It was recognized that Health should not be seen as a single issue because all of the identified topics are linked together. Health is connected with other issues such as transportation and therefore there should be collaboration between those topic areas.

It was further suggested that Health care issues are very large and complex and can be hard to understand. Seniors need to be more informed of the services available to them – interpretation within the health care field is vital and currently the needs of ethnic seniors are not being met. Additionally, professionals in the health care field also need to understand what is happening in the community and should work together to understand where there are gaps.

Convening

It was noted that there is a need to have representation from the CHR at the table but not just administration but also the frontline staff such as doctors and nurses. Additionally both professional and non professionals need to be at the table with an emphasis on a holistic approach to health, not just health care. This would include EMS, Hospital social workers, discharge social workers, Spiritual care workers, Community Home Care nurses, seniors, their families, caregivers, Funders, government, and Blue Cross

Planning

The emphasis in many of the discussion was to ensure a holistic approach, ensuring that the whole community should be involved at one point in the process because everyone has information/experience in regards to health care issues.

Communications

See Common Themes.

Access to Information

Collaboration

Of the four topic area, this was perhaps the most vague and convoluted. Many of the comments addressed the fact that this topic is relevant to all the other areas of concern and that it was very difficult to extract relevant information on this topic in a standalone state. Comments were framed in the context of health, finance and life long learning.

It was emphasized, however, that ElderNET must raise its' own profile in order to raise the profile and awareness of these four topic areas. It was suggested that a marketing plan be developed to reach this goal.

Convening

Once again, the common suggestions included inviting the relevant stakeholders to participate in further discussion, although those stakeholders were defined by other topic areas such as health and finances. Additionally, it was suggest that we invite all service providers that deal with seniors to share how they communicate with their clients.

Planning

Issues raised in this topic area included concerns about to identify the best practices of access to information. Again, it appears that respondents chose to focus on other topic areas for their examples. Writer's Note: There is an excellent resource of the Web, www.comingofage.org that could be examined as a model for information sharing.

Communications

See Common Themes.

Finance and Income

Collaboration

Again, many of the topic areas were touched on in these discussion groups. Issues ranged from concern about rising costs on fixed income to the need for a seniors advocate with the various levels of government. It was suggested that ElderNET could have a role as advocate in dealing with governmental institutions and New Zealand's 'Grey Power' was suggested as a potential model (www.greypower.co.nz).

Additionally, concerns were raised regarding access to food bank resources and the difficulty seniors have in accessing those resources. Not only are there transportation issues in attending food bank outlets but there also appears to be a stigma attached to the utilization of this resource. A suggestion was made to partner with large-chain grocery stores to run food bank outlets from their 'community rooms'.

Convening

The emphasis in this area was the need for an advocate to act on behalf of seniors with the various levels of government. There appears to be a desire to have a 'stronger voice' for seniors heard within all public institutions. It was suggested that the emphasis be placed on assisting seniors to age in place and work with government institutions to offset the rising taxation costs.

Planning

There appeared to be a general consensus that the current OAS and GIS rates are inadequate. Many of the suggestions included the development of a government targeted campaign to raise awareness of the financial crisis that low income seniors face. Additionally, concerns were raised regarding immigrant seniors and their access to resources.

Communications

See *Common Themes*.