



Closing the Distance

For Seniors and Youth in Cambridge & North Dumfries

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INCLUSION INITIATIVE

Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries

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PART I - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Narrative

The Story We Heard About the Seniors in Our Communities – December 4, 2002

There is a sense of loss of choice as health declines for seniors. As people get older, they begin to meet the social and health care systems. Some seniors may choose to opt out of the system to protect themselves from institutionalization. There is an inherent sense of fear around institutions, such as nursing homes, and being less able to take care of themselves.

Seniors also have a lessening of choice due to the increased cost of living coupled with their lowered income levels. While some seniors may experience an increase in income due to the selling of assets (e.g. farms, houses, etc.) in general, there is a decrease in their revenue from a lack of paid income. Some seniors also face the issue of running out of funds, because of living in expensive retirement homes. Senior women are particularly vulnerable, because they tend to survive longer than men, and must face limited financial resources.

Seniors may lose their networks of social support (e.g. church, clubs, neighbours, family, friends, etc.) for a number of reasons. For example, some seniors move from an urban environment to a rural or small town setting, because it is less expensive and they have a perception that there is a stronger sense of community in rural settings. On the other hand, seniors who once lived in rural settings move to smaller towns, or urban areas for more convenient lifestyle. However, with the closing of churches, community centres in both rural and urban areas, seniors have reduced opportunities to maintain and develop relationships with others.

Furthermore, seniors also face the loss of loved ones and may be farther away from their families and friends due to geographic distances. For example, seniors who live on farms or in small towns may not have continual support from their families because they have moved to the city. Some seniors may choose to move to the small town or urban settings, because they cannot keep up the farm or find it more difficult for financial and transportation reasons. These seniors may feel disconnected from their familiar way of life that they were used to for several decades in the rural settings due to the drastic change in their environment. There are several factors that are contributing to a fragmentation of social support among seniors.

With their declining health, seniors increasingly rely on the support of friends and family to provide assistance with transportation to medical appointments, shopping, and general household duties and maintenance. The social support network of seniors living in rural areas is extremely important, because in general, there is a lack of transportation and support services provided by formal agencies and municipal structures. Similarly, in urban settings, seniors also rely on the support of friends and family, because they may fear the use of public transportation.

The Story We Heard About the Youth in Our Communities – December 4, 2002

There were a combination of issues identified that the youth population experience in both urban and rural areas. There is a sense that youth have no place to gather with their friends and no way to get around the area that they live. Municipal structures and formal institutions, in general, discourage the gathering of youth in public places through the enforcement of bylaws and failing to plan and develop public spaces for youth to gather. For example, there are bylaws that prevent youth from having places to skateboard and play ball hockey. Furthermore, some public spaces, such as parks, where youth have traditionally gathered are becoming unsafe. The closing of churches and community centres in both urban and rural areas is weakening the historical strength and community structure. Overall, there are less public spaces for youth to gather.

There is a fear of youth gathering on their own without adults present. There is a distrusting of youth by adults. For example, there are an increasing number of stores, such as convenience stores that restrict the number of youth entering their stores. They display signs that state only two or three students at a time, and make students hand over knap sacs at the counter due to a fear that youth with shoplift. The distrusting of youth by adults maybe related to fear, because of their appearance (e.g. piercing, tattoos) that express their individual identity.

There is an absence of adult presence in the lives of youth. Youth end their school day in mid afternoon and are unsupervised by adults for several hours until their parents arrive home from work. For families that live in rural areas, parents face longer commuting times resulting in less amount of time for them to spend time with their children and provide them with transportation from after school activities and jobs.

Youth who live on farms and have chore responsibilities are often not able to participate in recreational activities, because they are often held at times when youth must do chores. In rural communities, there is also a lack of job opportunities for youth.

Many families who once lived in urban centres are now moving to more rural settings, because of less expensive housing, and they feel that there is more sense of community. However, youth feel even more isolated in rural settings, because they lack transportation and places to gather with friends. The independence of youth is often limited, because parents have a perception of fear with allowing their kids to use vehicles in rural areas due to the road conditions. Similarly, in rural areas, youth are discouraged from using public transportation or walking to destinations, because of safety issues. For youth that live in suburban areas, they may rely on their parents to drive them to activities, because of the far distances to community centres, shopping malls, etc.

Overall, youth are feeling disconnected from their communities. They do not feel valued and accepted as contributing members of society, and as a result, do not participant in civic life. They are less involved in their communities for a number of reasons. Furthermore, the services to meet the needs of youth are diminishing with the closing of formal institutions.

1.2 Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative

Over the past year, community leaders from across central west Ontario participated in four soundings to explore community interest in population health initiatives using a social and economic inclusion framework. Through these discussions, isolation was identified as a common concern for both urban and rural areas, with youth and seniors targeted as particularly vulnerable population groups on account of the social distance they experience from their communities. The rapid changes taking place in informal structures, formal systems and local governments are creating an environment of reduced social support and citizen involvement for youth and seniors in our community.

The Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative has been funded by Health Canada (Population Health Fund, Population and Public Health Branch) and aims to respond to concerns about isolation and community disconnectedness experienced by urban and rural communities. The focus is on the isolation of vulnerable groups such as youth and seniors to further understand the degree to which people are included or excluded from participating in decision-making and planning in our communities.

Social and Economic Inclusion can be defined as both a process and a goal. As a process, it welcomes individuals and groups who have been left out of the planning, decision-making and policy development processes in their communities. As a goal, it empowers people by offering them opportunities, resources, and supports to promote participation in their communities.

The purpose of our current research has been to measure the process of inclusion and to develop tools and strategies to reduce the barriers to youth and senior participation in our community. This process has included learning forums and kitchen table talks conducted in Waterloo Region and Brant County, with local seniors, youth and community partners as our informants. The project thus far has provided a cross-community perspective to explore social and economic inclusion. The knowledge gained has been used to create strategies and resources to increase community capacity to reduce barriers to youth and senior participation in local communities.

A lot has been gained from this project in terms of education and awareness, learnings about seniors and youth issues, and action oriented methods of implementing processes that will hopefully lead to positive change within the community. This documentation report has tried to reflect the numerous processes and research that took place during the past year in order to complete this initiative. It is hoped that it can be of assistance for guidance as to how the project has proceeded during the past year and what is hoped to be accomplished in the months to come in terms of closing the distance within the community.

1.3 Objectives

1. To learn about social inclusion

We will organise two reference groups (one for seniors and one for youth) from Cambridge and North Dumfries, comprised of local organization representatives and community members (a total of 10-15 persons per group). We plan to meet with the reference groups every 3 or 4 months to provide feedback on our progress and to get input from them. It is probable that these groups will be combined for key information sessions from time to time.

2. To develop tools for social inclusion

First we need to find out what is currently being used in the community from our local partners. We plan to get input from our key informants on what would be of most use to them during our interviews. The goal is to develop tools that can help audit programs and projects for social inclusion/exclusion.

3. To develop/support local initiatives

We will determine what local community groups currently exist and invite those that may benefit from participation in our initiative. It is our goal to support one local community group for seniors and one for youth, hopefully beyond the duration of this project if a mutually beneficial partnership is developed. We suspect that initiatives with an emphasis on senior will be fewer than those with an emphasis on youth; a youth network is currently developing in Cambridge (Cambridge Steering Committee). It is possible that we may initiative a support system (e.g., help with terms of reference) for a senior group if needed, especially in North Dumfries.

4. To compile community profile/inventory

We will gather statistical information (e.g., demographics), map existing networks in the community and identify key formal documents (e.g., City and Council policies and planning reports concerning youth and seniors) to fulfill this objective. Initial data gathering will be compiled early in the project, but will continue throughout.

1.4 Scope

This report has tried to cover the extent of isolation that vulnerable groups such as seniors and youth in Cambridge and North Dumfries may experience. It has analysed data obtained from interviews and kitchen table talks to aggregate the concerns that youth and seniors have within their community. Suggestions for the next phase of this project have been recommended to improve upon the research that has been completed up to date. Suggestions regarding the implementation of concepts of inclusion and exclusion within service organisations have been requested to further improve and enhance their current services.

1.5 Methodology

This report is a combination of both primary and secondary sources of information. The secondary sources of information include data collected for the creation of a community profile. The statistics found in that data was used to get an understanding of the demographics of the city of Cambridge and North Dumfries. The other source of secondary data was received from the municipal documents reviewed for the analysis of youth and senior policies within the community. These policies have been aggregated and can be found in figure 5.7 in section V of the appendix. The primary sources of information were the participants involved during the interview and kitchen table talk processes. All of the interviews were carried out using a questionnaire containing relevant questions required for the preparation of this report. This questionnaire can be found in figure 5.4 in section V of this report.

A list of organisations was made in order to identify key participants within the community who serve youth and seniors. This list was added to the community profile which can be found in figure 5.7 in section V of the appendix. A plan of local action that outlined a month-by-month action plan was also created to keep the project on track in terms of time.

In figure 5.2 of section V of this report, a letter regarding the project and its initiatives written by the executive director of the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries can be found. Of the many letters that were sent to each organisation, a few were selected to be contacted for the interview process. Most service providers were extremely co-operative and quite generously offered about one hour of their time for an interview to be conducted. E-mails regarding a synopsis of questions from the questionnaire were sent to these organisations in advance in preparation for the interview. This list of brief questions can also be found in the appendix in section V of this report in figure 5.5. A consent form was taken at each interview in order to receive permission and written authorization of the information we were about to receive and use for this report. A copy of this form can be found in figure 5.3 in section V of this report. After the interviews had been conducted, each was carefully transcribed and sent to the interviewees for feedback and confirmation of the information collected.

Another phase of the project included setting up kitchen table talks to be able to talk to the seniors and youth about issues of isolation in a direct manner. Each service provider was asked if they had any clients that could potentially be interested in attending a kitchen table talk. It was made clear that only four questions were going to be asked as part of this informal process, and that it would take less than one hour of their clients' time. A copy of the framework that was established for the kitchen table talk process can be found in figure 5.6 of the appendix. Lastly, the interviews conducted were analysed, along with the evaluation of the kitchen table talks for the preparation of this report.

1.6 Limitations

This report has heavily relied on the personal observations and judgment of the writer; therefore the following important limitations are appended below.

1. Unidentifiable Tool

Unfortunately (even after four months into the project), a clear idea of what the tools and resources will be is still undecided. It is unclear whether a report style, checklist, or other kind of format will be utilized to form this tool that the outcomes of this project promise.

2. Gaps in Information

Crucial gaps exist in the kind of information the City of Cambridge has to offer. In the past, the city had a very informative Strategic Plan presented in 1994 stating the city's main concerns, objectives, initiatives, and policies. No updates have been found in regards to such a plan as of 2003. Gaps such as these hinder the development of projects that organisations such as the Social Planning Council are involved with. The report of 1994 helped to set an indication of where the city of Cambridge saw itself, as well as providing a direction for where it wanted to be in the future.

3. Time Restrictions

This study was carried out in a limited amount of time. Had more time been available, some organisations would not have been left out of the interview and kitchen table talk process.

4. Available Human Resources

All of the human resources available for the project had contracts ending near the end of August. Much of the work near the end of the month had to be rushed and completed so that nothing was left unfinished for those that took on the project in months ahead. Therefore, most reports had been left in draft form to be taken up by new placement students and staff members during the next phase of this project.

5. Knowledge of Inclusion and Exclusion

It should be noted that the information received throughout this report relied heavily on the knowledge and understanding the interviewees had on the concept of social and economic inclusion and exclusion. Efforts were made to increase their comprehension of the concept had it not been clear, so that they could better understand each question and thus give relevant feedback about their organisation, community, and their perception of senior/youth concerns.

6. Interviews and Kitchen Table Talks

A total of fourteen interviews (seven seniors services and seven youth services) were conducted and analysed, along with the evaluation of six kitchen table talks (three senior groups, and three youth groups) for the preparation of this report. In light of the many other organisations that serve Cambridge and North Dumfries, only a small percentage of seniors and youth were contacted for this study.

7. Rural versus Urban

It should be noted that most of the organisations interviewed were located in Cambridge and served mainly the urban population. Very few rural youth or seniors participated in the interview and kitchen table talk processes, which might have unfortunately made this report less comprehensive.

PART II: FINDINGS OF STUDY

2.1 Community Partner Interview Analysis - Seniors

The Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries interviewed service providers to gain some insight on how seniors and youth were being excluded or included in local decision-making throughout the community. Here is a list of the senior organisations interviewed and the services that they provide.

Organisation	Service
Seniors For Seniors	Provides employment for people 50+ to work with other seniors with other seniors to allow them to live independently for as long as possible.
Marsdale Seniors Services	Retirement home which provides security and some healthcare.
Cambridge Home Support	Provides services to seniors over 65 and permanent disabled adults. Provides meals on wheels, housekeeping, home maintenance, snow shoveling, grass cutting, community referrals
Allan Reuter Centre	Provides recreation programs for seniors.
Friendly Visiting Program	Serves isolated seniors and physically disabled adults. Co-ordinates volunteers and matches them up with seniors. Volunteers visit the seniors and spend time with them.
St. Luke's Places	Have long term care beds and day programs. Serve those who cannot live independently.
Fairview Mennonite Home	Have long term care: full range of activities in feeble population. Have senior centre: target mainly individual seniors. Have assisted living: specific separate programs + activity (exclusively)

There were three sections to the interview; questions regarding the interviewee organisation, questions regarding the community on the whole and questions about the seniors they serve.

Organizational Perspective

The participants that were interviewed were asked several questions ranging from their role in the organisation, to whether or not their organisation had policies/rules/and or practices concerning seniors and inclusion. The majority of interviewees hold director or manager positions in organisations that serve mostly the urban regions of Cambridge.

Most of these service providers feel that the issue of inclusion and exclusion are relevant to the senior population. Some feel it is financially important because many seniors cannot pay for certain services. Others feel that inclusion and exclusion are relevant because they have organizational visions that are largely based on integration rather than assimilation. They try to create an atmosphere where their services are oriented to provide activities that encourage participation.

An excellent example of this relevance is shown in one organisation where a suggestion box exists so that seniors can go and drop off any complaints or compliments they may have. It allows them to express their thoughts anonymously and thus protects their privacy. Annual conferences are held by this organisation to make sure that things are running smoothly. Meetings are held among the residents to discuss what things could be improved, and whether or not needs are adequately being met. Tenant associations and resident councils open the door for representatives from each floor to voice their opinions and choice about the effectiveness of the organisation.

Most providers perceived their role as one of facilitation; their main objective is to enable their clients to be part of the planning and decision-making process. Although most of the participants felt that the issue of isolation was relevant to the current aging population, it should be mentioned that one of the directors of the organisations felt that the issue of isolation was not relevant to seniors, and that their level of participation depended solely on their willingness to be involved.

It was found that although most of the service providers claimed that issues of social and economic inclusion had some relevance to them and their organisation, much of their internal policies and procedures lacked this sense of senior involvement. In some organisations, they are included in terms of their personal care but many seniors are excluded due to their cognitive inability. For instance, seniors are consulted when a new form of medication needs to be used. In the case of those who suffer from a severe cognitive decline, their families are consulted instead.

Certain barriers exist within these services which limit potential clients in participating in their organisation. Some of the most common barriers seem to be:

- Financial
- Transportation
- Cognitive Impairment/Decline
- Other health related issues
- Marketing
- Lack of government funding

Other less common barriers include:

- Language
- Faith
- Culture
- Gender

Fortunately, most of the services claimed to be quite successful in overcoming these barriers. Most of them tried to integrate the seniors in different ways to serve those who do not easily

participate, such as having a variety of new programs to keep the seniors interested and content. Subsidy plans were also common in order to try to eliminate the financial barrier that hindered the participation level of many potential clients. One organisation even has a recreationist do a review for their program department within five days of a resident admission. This is done in order to setup a recreation program based on the way they use to live within their own community. The recreationist reviews the assessment every once in a while to check whether needs are being met, whether the needs have changed, and whether the programs need to be changed. Each resident having an individual program allows them to feel included because the programs are tailored to their specific needs.

It seems that better family co-operation in terms of providing senior institutions with client information, would help the interviewees better understand what is happening with seniors in their community. More education and training was also stated as a means of better understanding this aging population.

The final outcome of this project entails the development of tools and resources to aid service providers to become more sensitive to issues of inclusion within their organisation. Among the organisations interviewed, networking is currently the most common tool used to keep up to date with any emerging issues concerning the senior population. Helpful tools that could aid these services to be more aware of inclusion and exclusion would be to provide more education and training in terms of learning about the concepts of isolation and its affects. Workshops could be a helpful learning method, especially when many groups of people are involved. Another tool that service providers seem to be inclined to use is a checklist. A type of form that could act as an indicator of whether or not they are being inclusive, could allow them to properly evaluate the level of senior participation within their organisation.

Community Perspective

To get a sense of the environment surrounding their community, interviewees were asked questions regarding their community (their organizational community as well as the community of Cambridge). Questions on their perspective on their community ranged from asking the participants if they thought isolation was even an issue for seniors in the first place, to what the community does well or not does well for the senior population. The urban versus rural experience of isolation was also a key question asked in order to address the effect that different regions and physical environments may have on community participation.

It was found that exclusion and isolation seem to be an issue for seniors due to the factors of health, loss of control, confidence and their social network. Their social connections decay as their spouse, siblings, and friends pass away, and they thus tend to become more lonely and isolated. Others feel left out or let down by the government and thus do not wish to participate in political matters. Perceptions of seniors also affect their level of participation. One interviewee claimed that not enough time was used in recruiting seniors for their input, advice and expertise. They thus feel neglected, and feel as though they are not given much respect at times.

An important aspect of this project was to explore the urban experience as compared to the rural experience of seniors in terms of social and economic inclusion. Almost all of the participants interviewed saw a difference in isolation between rural and urban regions. They noted that in rural settings the issue of isolation was even more significant. The following were the most frequent reasons given to why they felt that rural populations had fewer supports within their community, than those that resided in rural areas:

- Lack of access to services
- Lack of transportation
- Distance

There are many things that the interviewees felt that the community did well and many things which they felt they could do better. In general, the community of Cambridge was considered to have many services that cater to the senior population. However, some things that the community does not do well are things such as:

- Government Funding
- Marketing
- Transportation

It was mentioned that the key people who could make changes within the community were the local churches, government, and senior centres.

It is important to note that emergency transportation is quite accessible (i.e. when a senior needs to go to see a doctor). However, access to transportation for something like entertainment is not as readily available. It is assumed that seniors' quality of life is affected by this, in the sense that even if seniors desire to be involved in a variety of activities or events, the lack of transportation to these services stands as a barrier to their active participation. Elements to reduce this barrier should be tailored to seniors' needs in this respect. More marketing, funding, and volunteers could be effective measures to reduce current barriers so that seniors are more included.

Seniors Perspective

The last section of the questions posed to the participants of the interviews included questions about what the seniors themselves wanted different within their community. For example, the service providers were asked how they thought seniors could contribute to increasing their inclusion (for themselves, in their organisation, or in their community).

From the interviewees' perspective, the key changes that seniors seem to want are those associated with the level of transportation and social support they receive. Seniors are thought to want more support and help in order to be able to connect with the community. They also seek acceptance for the knowledge and experience they have; wishing to feel needed and useful. One interviewee stated that many seniors today feel patronized by society, which helps us understand their lack of desire to participate in their community.

The following are reasons why seniors may not want to participate as often as we may like:

- Suffering from health related issue such as depression
- An apathetic attitude towards things
- As seniors' physical/cognitive ability declines, their loss of power and control within the family structure decays as well. They have to accept the fact that they are no longer the "bread winners" or the ones with the leading role in the family in terms of decision-making. They may no longer have the ability to make decisions concerning finance, or their decisions that would affect their well-being. Thus, depending on the situation, seniors may not want to cause trouble for their caregivers by having their voices heard.

- Perhaps they are not the ones who wanted to come to this community in the first place, had to migrate due to their son/daughter
- Are tired and exhausted, want to simply be waited on in this phase of their life
- Some feel that they are not old enough to join senior centres and their activities, while others feel too dependent on senior services

Things that could contribute to increase their inclusion could be things such as the following:

- They must feel comfortable enough to speak up and express their desires
- Making use of the variety of services that are out there in the community
- Volunteering (if they are physically able to do so) in order to participate within the community and find out what is out there

2.2 Community Partner Interview Analysis - Youth

Organizations

The Social Planning Council interviewed key community organisations in Cambridge and North Dumfries that serve the youth population in order to gauge the inclusivity of organisations and the community proper. Here is a list of the youth organisations interviewed and the services that they provide:

Organization	Service
Argus Residence for Young People	Provides emergency and transitional shelter to youth 15-24, counseling, career services.
City of Cambridge Community Services Dept. (Youth and Sport)	Liaison between various youth councils/groups. Works to engage youth.
YMCA Immigrant services	To promote well being and inclusion of refugee and immigrant populations.
YMCA Youth Centre	Setting up a new free Youth Centre at the YMCA.
John Howard Society	Works with youth for career planning and crime prevention.
Big Brother Big Sisters	Provides friendship and mentoring for young boys and girls.
Community Support Services of Ayr and North Dumfries	Working to engage youth in a rural setting.

There were three sections in the interview; questions regarding the interviewee organization, questions regarding the community on the whole and questions about the youth they serve.

Organizational Perspective

The various roles that the interviewees held in the organisations ranged from Executive Director, to Program Manager, to Recreation Coordinator. Also, these interviews probed issues such as barriers to participation, community perceptions, opportunities for change, etc.

Participants interviewed felt that social and economic inclusion was very relevant to their organisation. All the interviewees felt that inclusion was something that their organisations strive for when creating programs for the youth population. Many of the organisations felt that inclusion was the overriding idea or philosophy of their organisation, showing just how important and relevant the term was to them. An excellent example of this relevance is shown in one organisations mandate. The entire vision of the organisation is to integrate and include rather than assimilate. This shows that the relevance of the term inclusion is truly at the forefront of most organisations serving youth.

Although all the organisations work hard to include and integrate they all stated some barriers that some people might have when looking to participate in their organization and/or the community. The one common barrier that every organisation stated was transportation. This seems to be a very important barrier youth must overcome in order to participate. Some of the interviewees stated that no matter how well an event was planned, kids could not come unless there was transportation provided. Youth do not have their own transportation so if a parent is busy, then they cannot participate. Many do not know how to use the transit system, even if they can afford to use it. This is an even greater issue for rural youth. Most services for youth are run in the city of Cambridge; therefore youth from North Dumfries need a car to get to the services because there is no connection to the Grand River Transit System. This lack of transportation is a serious barrier that all youth and more importantly, youth service providers need to look at.

Another common barrier is lack of knowledge among youth about programs catered to their population. Many organisations felt that they provided many quality services but youth simply did not know about the, eliciting the common response “There is nothing to do in Cambridge” from youth they encountered. This barrier stems from a lack of funding organisations have to go towards quality marketing plans to inform and attract youth to their programs. Some of the organisations try very hard to stretch their resources and find creative ways to market, always asking youth if the marketing is working, but they find the lack of dollars a true problem when it comes to marketing.

Another interesting barrier is community perception. One organisation in particular stated that the community’s false perception that their services are for marginalized or criminal youth acts as a barrier for some youth to use their services. “Mainstream” youth sometimes feel that they are not welcome or are “scared” to use the programming. This is a major problem because these services are provided for all youth, even the “mainstream” youth.

Other barriers stated in the interviews were:

1. Language
2. Gender
3. Religion
4. Culture

Despite these barriers the organisations work hard to overcome them, and this is shown in some of the successes and strategies that they have taken to work through such barriers. All the organizations have some policy towards fees. Most provide services for free, which totally eliminates the barrier of income that is such an issue for youth, especially for marginalized

youth. If an organization charges for service, it is done on a sliding scale or subsidies are readily available. No organization that we interviewed will withhold services or programming based on income.

Also some organizations subsidize travel, especially the rural organizations. This could mean gas money or money for a bus ticket. Also organizations are always looking at inexpensive, creative marketing strategies. They all have an excellent rapport with their clients and constantly ask them about what resonates with the youth population. These relationships are a sign of the success these organizations have at reaching out to youth and making them feel welcome. And for all of the organizations that is the key, making the youth feel welcome.

When asked what could be used to better understand youth and what tools can be used to make organizations more inclusive, one theme ran throughout, relationships. Every participant felt that the best way to understand youth and therefore include them in the community was to build a relationship with individual youth. By talking and more importantly, listening to what the youth population had to say, organizations could then truly understand what the youth wanted and truly include them in decision-making and programs. It is the best and least expensive method for including youth. However it was noted that many adults do not have the patience and/or knowledge to understand how to approach youth at all.

This is where the idea of some sort of workshop or tool book for including youth in committee structure might come into play. Also, a workshop that teaches youth how to be a part of a committee seemed like a common theme. Other ideas included:

1. Networking between organizations.
2. Focus Groups
3. Working with the Schools
4. Connecting with the right people who can connect with youth.

No interviewee was currently using a tool with regards to inclusion or had awareness of a project working on inclusion.

Community Perspective

In this section of the interview participants were asked to reflect on if and how exclusion and isolation were factors for youth and whether or not this isolation was different between rural and urban youth. Also a probe was done into what the community does well and does not do well for the youth population.

Every interviewee felt that isolation and exclusion were highly relevant issues for youth today. Given the fact that our society places the most value on economic productivity, the youth population is being undervalued and excluded by the "mainstream" of society because they have very low productivity. This means youth rarely have a say in public forums and are overlooked. Couple this with the already common issues that teens are going through such as puberty, identity shaping, social acceptance, and the increasingly harsh consumer society we live in, isolation can become a huge factor in a youth's life.

Also, it was noted that the increasing use of electronic media has cut off many youth from actual face-to-face human relationships. So much so that they feel uncomfortable talking to other

people, especially adults. True relationship building has been compromised because of dependence on electronic media.

The differences between rural and urban youth seemed to solely revolve around issues of transportation. These issues have been talked about previously. Other than transportation, participants felt that the isolation factor was the same for all youth whether living in rural or urban settings.

Some of the key organisations that the interviewees felt could help make the community more inclusive for youth are:

1. Churches
2. Neighborhood Associations
3. Lutherwood Coda
4. City Council and other municipal committees
5. YMCA
6. Community Centres
7. The Cambridge Art Centre
8. Schools

All the interviewees felt that the community provided ample services for youth and that they were more or less accessible. Also they all felt that the co-operation and networking between various community organizations was something that was a plus for the youth population. One participant noted that they shared calendars between organisations to make sure that there was no programming overlap in the community.

Other various things the community does well:

1. New Youth Policy adopted by the City (backed by funding)
2. Creative marketing strategies
3. More organizations were letting youth create programming

There was no one overriding theme among participants on what the city was not doing well, only various suggestions.

1. Attitudes in the community towards youth
2. Discipline policies (3 strikes and your out) often let the youth down and work only to exclude.
3. Some services only cater to the "mainstream" youth
4. Lack of after school activities
5. Marketing for youth
6. Funding

One strategy that a few interviewees felt could work to make youth more included in the community was letting youth design their programming. With the facilitation of the organisation, the youth get to make the decision on what type of programming they want and the details of individual programming. This requires patience and understanding on the part of the organisation because as noted, youth like to move at their own pace. However, if done properly it works well to make the youth feel welcome and in turn have larger turnouts at programs/events. Also, it was mentioned that mentoring is an excellent strategy to break down barriers for youth.

Youth Perspective

When asked what they felt youth wanted different in the community the overriding theme was activities. The biggest complaint is that there is nothing to do in Cambridge and North Dumfries. Youth want a place to hang out; the most requested type of hang out is a permanent Skate Board park. Every participant offered a skateboard park as a solution.

Also, among most of interviewees an over riding theme was that youth just want to be listened to and respected. This one point probably does the most for youth inclusion. If they feel listened to and respected by the community than they are more likely to include themselves in that community.

Community perception was also something that participants felt youth wanted to be changed. Many youth feel discriminated against solely because of their age. They feel that the community believes that all youth are “punks” and cannot be trusted. This can be seen in many corner stores where most instate a rule allowing no more than three youth in the store at a time. However, many interviewees felt that youth could make changes to this perception. Every participant noted that youth must stand up for their rights and be more visible in the community. This is a key point for youth to understand. The community on the whole wants youth participation (although sometimes they are not very good at expressing it) so all it takes is for youth to stand up and say, “I think this needs to change, how can I do that?”

It was also felt among some interviewees that a good strategy for youth is to take on small projects and do them very well. The promotion of those successes would be the best way to gain trust in the “mainstream” community.

2.3 Kitchen Table Talk Analysis

Six community soundings were held to help us understand what urban and rural youth and seniors have to say about their communities – what they liked, what they didn’t like and their thoughts on how we could increase participation within mainstream societal institutions.

What was learned from our Cambridge and North Dumfries’ youth:

General Thoughts on Inclusion

Youth in our community want to be involved in activities that respect the contributions that they can make in our society. Youth councils are an excellent medium for channeling the energy and enthusiasm of our future – to encourage young adults to participate in the planning of events so that the opportunities that are available to them are relevant. Time and again we heard that “there is not much to do here,” especially in rural settings. It seems that, indeed, participation in the community can be a function of how much effort is put into strategic community planning by City officials regarding key features such as youth drop in centers and programs that cater to a wide variety of interests (not just sports, as was a complaint from many rural youth).

Youth need to know where they belong, where they will be welcomed. Having a safe space to participate in their own communities is a definite asset and can be theoretically linked to a ‘healthy community’ in terms of safety, resource and having the opportunity to enhance positive appraisals of our youth among all members of society. As one youth said, “perhaps if there were

things for us to do, there wouldn't be any vandalism." It is important that we continue to ask our youth what they want and how they want it. This engenders both a sense of social responsibility and teaches them to be proactive with their power to enact social change.

What Youth Like About their Communities

Youth enjoy the places that they feel included and welcome, such as the mall and YMCA, and where there are activities oriented to youth, such as the arcade, sports and movie theatre. Church groups were recognized as being assets to the community for welcoming new members and networking for services and education. Other places that were noted as positive were: Argus House, YMCA, Out of the Cold, Teen Drop In Centre (Hespeler Road), John Howard Society and Lutherwood Coda. Rural youth shared their positive feelings for living in a smaller town, where you know most people by name and feel more secure and safe in your surroundings.

Youth Stereotypes

Stereotypes were also mentioned in our discussions with youth. Stereotypes for rural youth were noted as especially harmful and as an obstacle to community participation. Many youth are aware that there are negative associations with youth in their communities – from what older people say, to policies and practices that serve to exclude youth from businesses or public spaces (e.g., floor walkers at malls that follow only youth customers, police who stop a group of teenagers in the street because of the 'gang' association). It was recognized that these stereotypes make our youth feel isolated, they decrease their chances to be independent, and that they support a negative assumption about how young adults can participate in mainstream society. Youth want credit for their achievements; they feel that too much emphasis is placed on those few individuals in the community who cause trouble for others, which perpetuates negative stereotypes in the community and limits resources for positive change for those who are responsible (i.e., "the good kids"). As one participant said, "It takes longer to earn others' trust because of these negative stereotypes."

Need for Transportation

The need to travel to Cambridge was noted as a huge disadvantage in terms of community inclusion for our North Dumfries teenagers. They would like to have a bus into Cambridge to facilitate increased participation in the activities available there. In the summer months, there is limited access to transportation for rural youth with parents working full time (often outside of the community).

Need for Employment within their Communities

Many rural youth must travel to Cambridge for their part time jobs. They would prefer to work in their own communities, but the opportunities are very limited and there is a lot of competition for the few positions that are available. Competition for employment is increasing with the growth of rural areas such as Ayr.

Youth want increased volunteer options within their communities, in areas that they choose to participate in (rather than being forced to volunteer where they are not comfortable doing so).

Need for Increased Funding

Funding was a common theme that surfaced in our discussions. There needs to be increased funding for youth, especially those who are marginalized from mainstream society. There isn't enough funding for improvements to the systems that support our vulnerable youth populations (e.g., those at risk for homelessness, or homeless). Lack of opportunity for youth leads to feelings of boredom and being "trapped" (as one youth said). Without enough resources to fund the essentials, such as transportation, it is difficult for youth to access programs that are open in the community. Youth, as a consequence, end up "not going anywhere." While youth would prefer to be independent, they need basic supports like affordable housing, people who can help them access the systems that are available, and adequate financial assistance to help them get through often very challenging times.

Community awareness of the need for funding needs to be increased, to help programs and services access the resources that are required to sustain a healthy community for youth in both rural and urban areas.

Rural Youth

Limited Number of Opportunities Available

Rural youth are especially concerned about the limited number of opportunities that are available to them for participation in the community and they want more permanent programming that is available to them throughout the year. Rural youth would like to increase the variety of people who join them for their activities, they would like for more people to know that certain services or programs are open, and they would like more options that are flexible to their needs, but these improvements require an increased investment from external funding sources beyond their current focus on fundraising within the community. Therefore, funding appears to be a very limiting factor for rural youth inclusion.

Rural youth feel, to a certain extent, that they were not included in the planning of the rural development, especially for the age range of 13-18 years, and that the recent population growth has sometimes made them feel less connected to the community on the whole.

Who Can Change the Community?

While some youth felt that they could change the community for the better, most agreed that adults hold the power in this regard. However, youth want to influence these changes in important ways, so that the changes are meaningful. As one youth noted, "We know what we want." Youth know that they need to stand up and share their needs, but to do this they also need to know that the mainstream is willing to listen to what they have to say.

What was learned from our Cambridge and North Dumfries' seniors:

General Thoughts on Inclusion

Seniors had very varied responses to our questions about the community. While many felt quite connected and included within mainstream society, others felt quite isolated. It appears that the

overriding factor in terms of the difference between these experiences is income. Those who are able to afford the luxuries associated with senior care facilities that provide an immediate community for their residents fared much better in terms of inclusion on the whole. Those who were unable to afford, or chose not to join, such care facilities appeared to face many challenges that decreased their sense of well-being by feeling more isolated and less able to change their circumstances for the better.

Seniors suggested that people maintain contact with those who are older in order to gain an appreciation of the natural process of aging. They felt that individuals who have had this type of contact were more open and sensitive to seniors' needs. Also, they recommend volunteering with senior centres so that you know what to expect and what services or programs are available in the community.

What Seniors Like About their Communities

Again, seniors' sense of community changed greatly dependent upon their living arrangements. Those who are in long term care facilities (i.e., nursing or retirement homes, independent living complexes) benefited from a range of positive supports such as social networks, access to transportation and medical care, opportunities to use their talents in-house, contact with people who seem to genuinely care about the residents, and access to outside assets within the safety of their home environment such as library resources, a beauty parlor, health lectures, etc. Health care, in general, was perceived very positively – with the exception of the lack of doctors in the area.

The church communities were noted as very helpful. For example, some churches organize networks for free transportation. These services, and others like Home Support, were especially important to the rural senior population. Rural seniors shared that they felt it would be nearly impossible to live in their home communities without adequate family support, given the limitations that rural environments often present in terms of more restricted access to transportation and medical care.

On the whole, however, most seniors felt that the community perceived them positively, as noted by the ramps into stores and walkways. They felt that others were very tolerant to their needs, and that many strangers in their communities went out of their way to help them. Seniors want to be independent, but seem to appreciate the extra assistance when it's needed. Family support and connection with others seemed to be a central theme of importance for many seniors: this emphasizes the significance of relationships in terms of community inclusion.

More Funding

It is clear that we need more funding in the community to support institutions that can provide the types of services that increase seniors' well-being as noted above. Increasing seniors' independence appeared to be a main factor as well – those who felt that they had options and could exercise their willpower in certain situations were happier than those who felt they were forced into changes, even in cases where they were placed in excellent care facilities in the communities as described above.

Rural Issues

Transportation and access to medical care

These were noted as key concerns for the rural senior population. It is often very expensive for them to access transportation. Many seniors shared stories of those who had to move to the cities because living in a rural environment, although perhaps where they had spent most of their lives was simply no longer an option. They needed to move into urban settings where services and programs for seniors, especially those that support seniors to live independently within their homes for as long as possible, are more plentiful, less expensive and more convenient to access.

Rapid growth

This was also noted as a concern; seniors often reminisced of their past when they knew one another personally and had many opportunities to connect with friends and family informally throughout one's daily routine.

Leadership capacity

This was noted as an increasing issue. Where in the past there were a variety of organizations (e.g., Ayr Seniors, Women's Institute) that were lead by seniors in the community, many of these have now decreased in membership to the point where their impact on the community is greatly diminished. Seniors that have participated in these organizations in the past want to pass on their leadership roles to others, but there appear to be limited numbers of people willing or able to fulfill these roles. As a result, community organizations that are oriented to senior participation are much more limited.

Need for Transportation

In general, the need for transportation was a constant throughout our discussions. All seniors need access to reliable and affordable means of transportation to enable them to participate in the community. Transportation is needed for all types of participation – for leisure and recreation as well as medical care. Cambridge's 'transmobility' service was mentioned several times as a great support, one that significantly increased many seniors' quality of life.

PART III: KEY FINDINGS OF STUDY

The interview process along with the soundings that were held was informative and crucial to our understanding of seniors and youth in their community. Many interesting and important issues were raised and discussed making clear certain needs they have, and particular reasons they hold for not participating in local decision making processes. Here are some key findings drawn from the analysis of the research conducted.

Seniors

- Although more than half of the organisations interviewed have mandates to address issues of isolation, much of the organisations key decisions are made by the central advisory councils which may or may not include the senior population present in that institution. This has been understood to show that the idea of inclusion and exclusion exist in an abstract form within these organisations, instead of being present in a concrete manner. Unfortunately, the ideas of social and economic inclusion do not seem to extend beyond the mere knowledge of the term onto reports and policies which hold the power to make the necessary changes within the community.
- It was found that exclusion and isolation seem to be an issue for seniors due to the factors of health, loss of control, confidence and their social network. Some feel left out or let down by the government and thus do not wish to participate in political matters. Others feel that not enough time is used in recruiting seniors for their input, advice and expertise. Thus, it can be said that certain passive attitudes towards seniors, coupled with inadequate funding has become aiding factors in the increasing isolation they feel in society.
- Access to transportation for something like entertainment is not as readily available as is emergency transportation. It is assumed that senior's quality of life is affected by this as it limits their participation level in numerous areas. Elements to reduce this barrier should be tailored to seniors' needs in this respect. More marketing, funding, and volunteers could be effective measures to reduce current barriers so that seniors are more included.
- It was noted that pain due to seniors' cognitive or physical decline is a limiting factor that needs to be taken into consideration. Therefore, it would be very beneficial that transportation be made available for seniors so that they can attend the numerous things they actually want to be involved in. Seniors enjoy things such as going to the theatre, or a visit to the mall; these are highly important in increasing their well-being and sense of self worth within the community.
- Rapid growth of the rural regions and lack of leadership capacity were also major concerns for rural seniors, as was the restriction and access to transportation and medical care.
- Seniors want to be independent, but seem to appreciate the extra assistance when it's needed. The emphasis is on the significance of relationships in terms of community inclusion.
- It is clear that we need more funding in the community to support institutions that can provide the types of services that increase seniors' well-being
- Lastly, hardly any of the participants had any knowledge of other projects within their community that dealt with the issue of isolation. This shows a lack of awareness of this issue in the community even though it is clear that isolation amongst the senior population is a great dilemma we face today.

Youth

- Every participant felt that the best way to understand youth and therefore include them in the community was to build a relationship with individual youth. By talking and more importantly, listening to what the youth population had to say, organisations could then truly understand what the youth wanted and truly include them in decision-making and programs. However, it was noted that many adults do not have the patience and/or knowledge to understand how to approach youth at all.
- Time and again we heard that “there is not much to do here,” especially in rural settings. It seems that, indeed, participation in the community can be a function of how much effort is put into strategic community planning by City officials regarding key features such as youth drop in centers and programs that cater to a wide variety of interests (not just sports, as was a complaint from many rural youth).
- Youth want credit for their achievements; they feel that too much emphasis is placed on those few individuals in the community who cause trouble for others, which perpetuates negative stereotypes in the community and limits resources for positive change for those who are responsible (i.e., “the good kids”). As one participant said, “It takes longer to earn others’ trust because of these negative stereotypes.”
- Rural youth feel, to a certain extent, that they were not included in the planning of the rural development; and that the recent population growth has sometimes made them feel less connected to the community on the whole.
- True relationship building has been compromised because of dependence on electronic media.
- Need for Employment within their Communities: Many rural youth must travel to Cambridge for their part time jobs. They would prefer to work in their own communities, but the opportunities are very limited and there is a lot of competition for the few positions that are available. Competition for employment is increasing with the growth of rural areas such as Ayr.