

The background of the entire page features a warm, bokeh-style light pattern of soft, out-of-focus yellow and orange circles. On the left side, a wooden heart-shaped object is partially visible, resting on a dark, textured log. The heart is made of light-colored wood with visible grain and is positioned vertically, with its top pointing towards the upper left.

Memory Café: Community Centre Programs and Support Needs for Seniors Experiencing Memory Loss and Their Caregivers

Kitsilano Community Centre Group
Findings

October 2022

Arbor Educational & Clinical Consulting Inc.

Kitsilano Community Centre Memory Cafés

Project Overview

The Kitsilano Community Centre Association Board, in conjunction with the Vancouver Parks Board, oversees programs at the community centre. One of the newer initiatives is a Community Needs Assessment Group charged with undertaking efforts to become better informed by the community to increase understanding of how to best serve individuals in the community. This project focuses on the needs of seniors experiencing memory loss. To date, information about the experience of seniors has been derived from program user evaluations, informal conversations, and shared learning with the Westside Seniors Hub.

At the Kitsilano Community Centre, there are specific programs aimed at seniors, including physical fitness (yoga), financial education, social gatherings and educational workshops to support technology use. One gap that has been identified is tailored programs and supports specifically for those struggling with memory loss and supports and services for those caring for seniors with memory loss.

To that end, this community needs assessment was undertaken as part of a larger project entitled *'Building Capacity for Meaningful Participation by People Living with Dementia'* led by the University of British Columbia and the Westside Seniors Hub. The Kitsilano Community Centre received funding to conduct two Memory Cafés. These Memory Cafés were advertised as part of the fall programming at the Community Centre. In addition, partners promoted the Memory Cafés through their networks. The author of this report was engaged to facilitate the Memory Cafés and to synthesize the findings into a report.

Report Overview

This report presents the findings from two Memory Cafés held on October 19th and 20th, 2022 at Kitsilano Community Centre. The purpose of these cafés was three-fold: (1) to gain insights as to the programs and supports that would be beneficial for seniors experiencing memory loss; (2) to identify any specific needs that caregivers have in relation to their role; and (3) to identify any support needs that are beyond the scope of the community centre but could potentially be addressed by community partners.

Memory Café Participants

In total, 18 individuals (11 for the afternoon Memory Café and 7 for the evening Memory Café), registered to be part of the Memory Café. Three days before the Café, the author provided participants/caregivers with an initial welcome email or call (for those without emails) to remind registrants about the Memory Café. Of the 18 registrants (17 female, 1 male), 11 participants came to a Café. Of the remaining 7 participants, three emailed indicating that they could no longer

attend due to family members serious illnesses/passing away; one participant felt too tired to attend the evening session, and three did not respond to the welcome email.

Of the 11 participants: 4 were from community partners, 2 were caregivers, and 4 were seniors who identified themselves as having memory loss. One participant attended only briefly.¹

Memory Café Setting

The Memory Café was held in the Kitsilano Community Centre Board Room. The Community Centre provided refreshments and food (sandwiches, sweets, and drinks). The author facilitated the first Café with the support of a note-taker, given that the group was larger. The evening Café, smaller in size, was facilitated by the author, who took notes. While each Café was scheduled for 1.5 hours, the evening Café ran over by 20 minutes.

The two Cafés organically revealed themselves to be quite different. The daytime session was attended by seniors struggling with memory loss and looking for programs and supports. In addition, two project partners also attended the daytime Café, and they were able to provide information about some of the programs and initiatives taking place to support seniors with memory loss.

The evening Café was comprised of one caregiver, project partners and one additional participant who volunteered in a support role for an individual with significant memory loss. Memory loss was acknowledged as a personal area of concern by two of the participants. In this session, the focus was on resource sharing as the volunteer and one community partner had a great deal of knowledge about community programs and services. The caregiver, who attended the group, commented on the value of being part of the conversation in which they learned about potential services and supports to explore for their parent.

Memory Café Questions

There were three main questions to guide the Café discussions, with one additional question that emerged as an important avenue to explore:

1. Types of Programs and Supports for People Experiencing Memory Loss: As a person who is struggling with memory loss, or someone caring for someone who is struggling with memory loss, what programs or supports would you be interested in accessing at the Kitsilano Community Centre?

¹ It was unclear if this individual, an English language learner, understood the purpose of the Memory Café as they had signed up for both days. This individual attended one session but arrived approximately 45 minutes late and stayed for about 20 minutes.

2. Timing of Programs: Are there certain times of the day and week that are better for these programs?
3. Program and Support Design: Are there other things that Kitsilano Community Centre should consider when designing programs and supports for seniors struggling with memory loss?

Additional Question: What are some strategies to reach seniors with memory loss with information about Community Centre programs and services?

Memory Café Perspectives: What Was Said

The following are the results of the two Memory Café sessions. Results are grouped by each question posed during the sessions:

Types of Programs and Supports for People Experiencing Memory Loss: As a person who is struggling with memory loss or someone caring for someone who is struggling with memory loss, what programs or supports would you be interested in accessing at the Kitsilano Community Centre?

For seniors experiencing memory loss, the most dominant theme that emerged was the wish to have programs and support that focus on building social connections among individuals. One participant commented that ‘bonding around conversations’ would be something they would like to be a part of at Kitsilano Community Centre. There was great interest in having regular cafés with conversations about issues important to seniors and as a way for seniors to support one another. As not all individuals with memory loss find conversation easy, one participant indicated that it would be important to make sure that there were people in the group who are conversationalists.

It was clear from the moment participants entered the room that they wanted to engage in conversation, talk about their interests and passions and share ideas. In one group, participants talked about their struggles with mental health due to the isolation felt during the Pandemic and the loss of friendships as they age. For example, one participant talked about friends moving away to be closer to their children. At the end of one café, a participant asked if there could be another Memory Café. The desire to connect in a shared space was strongly felt during this particular session.

Participants were asked to share the types of activities in which they would be interested in attending at the community centre. Interests were diverse and included the following:

Physical activities:

- Pickleball
- Table tennis

- Dancing and movement
- Walking group²
- Hand massages
- Yoga

Arts

- Theatre – skits, plays (with the right instructor)
- Photography
- Filmmaking
- Collage
- Cardmaking (one participant was interested in leading this activity)

Health-related

- Different workshops by professionals (e.g., doctors, naturopaths, nutritionists, massage therapists, etc.) on how to maintain and enhance health
- Brain health – learning about ways to keep the brain healthy, opportunities to play brain games in a fun and supportive environment
- The impact of stress on ones' health
- Ways to support individuals with memory loss

Other

- Opportunities to interact with animals (e.g., playing with dogs or helping to walk dogs)
- Intergenerational programming³
- Card games (one participant was interested in leading this activity)
- Scheduled phone calls (with a time limit to make it easier for a volunteer) from someone who would engage in conversation. This suggestion was put forth as a way to reduce loneliness and provide individuals with limited social connections something to look forward to in their week

Caregiver Needs: Within the two sessions, there were two caregivers who attended. In one situation, the caregiver was caring for their older sibling with memory loss. This individual came to the Memory Café as a result of their employer signing them up for the session. The employer, noted as highly supportive, communicated with the facilitator prior to the session, indicating that the caregiver was having a very hard time in her caregiving role. In the session, this caregiver was very distressed and in talking one-on-one with them, it was clear that they required more intensive support and respite. They were exhausted and had no personal time. They had limited resources and a strong sense of duty to be the primary round the clock caregiver to their sibling who had not

² A successful walking group for people with memory loss in Seattle was mentioned, Momentum.

³ Note that the author of this report has been involved in the evaluation of an 'Intergenerational Mother Goose Programs' which was highly successful. This multi-session program brings together parents and their babies in a circle story time format with a trained facilitator. An outer circle is comprised of seniors who watch the story time. At the break, the parents and babies interact with the seniors. Further to this, there is the added benefit of interaction among group participants (parents, babies, and seniors) in the community outside of the group.

responded well to any of the free respite programs. They worked as a nanny/housekeeper, and their employer allows them to bring their sibling to work every day with them.

The other caregiver provided support to their parent. They commented, *'I don't want to accept what is happening'* but also noted that they were fortunate to have a lot of time to provide care for their parent, who was doing quite well, albeit struggling with memory loss. They had decided to come to the Memory Café to learn about what was available in the community. They noted a desire to learn what to expect as their parent's memory declined and how they could be as supportive as possible.

Timing of Programs: Are there certain times of the day and week that are better for these programs?

Daytime programming: Earlier in the day was the preferred timing of programs and services, noting that any programs or services should wrap up well before sunset, allowing enough time for individuals to make their way home before dark. Evenings were not preferable due to increased likelihood of fatigue later in the day. Individuals who attended the Memory Café that took place in the early afternoon (1 pm) expressed that the timing of the Café worked well.

Weekly programming to build community: A key theme of the Memory Cafés was the need for individuals to be part of a community that is strengthened over time. Suggestions for programming focused heavily on ideas that bring people together on a regular basis. One participant talked about how monthly activities do not allow for enough community building. Instead, having a weekly opportunity to come together would both allow more opportunities for the development of friendships as well as an event which individuals could look forward to weekly.

Note that for the one caregiver who was looking more to learn how they could be as supportive as possible to their parent, scheduling was very flexible. The other caregiver was extremely limited in their availability due to working full-time and caring for their sibling.⁴

Program and Support Design: Are there other things that Kitsilano Community Centre should consider when designing programs and supports for seniors struggling with memory loss?

For the most part, responses to this question reflected considerations that apply to all general programming practices, apart from the use of reminder calls as a way to support individuals with memory loss.

Inclusive and supported programming: A theme that is relevant to this question is the importance of having opportunities for seniors with memory loss to be part of any programming open to

⁴ In this second situation, it brings up the question as to whether it may be worth some exploration to examine ways to support both the caregiver and individual struggling from memory loss by having programs in which both attend at the same time so that caregivers can develop a support network while programming specific to individuals with memory loss takes place.

adults. There did not appear to be a great deal of dialogue around the idea of having programming specific for people with memory loss, but rather, ideas focused on opportunities to engage in passions and interests while connecting with others. For example, one participant noted a wish to have intergenerational programs as they commented that there are 'lonely kids' out there. Another participant expressed an interest in rediscovering their passion for painting, which was negatively impacted by the pandemic and ensuing struggles with depression.

Good teachers: Participants indicated that it would be helpful for instructors to have some skills in supporting individuals with memory loss. One participant commented that they would prefer instructors who like working with seniors as they had had an experience in which they felt that the instructor didn't enjoy interacting with seniors. Further to this, there were wishes to have teachers who are inspiring and know how to teach.

Physical comfort: Given the varying physical needs, one suggestion was to make sure that program rooms have a variety of seating options to ensure the comfort of all individuals.

Group size: When asked about group size, participants indicated that group size didn't matter unless there was a need for a smaller group so that participants could see visuals such as art demonstrations, whiteboards, etc.

Reminder calls: A suggestion put forth was to have someone make reminder calls to support seniors in remembering session dates and times.

Note that these seniors were all individuals who were able to get the Cafés, but there was some brief discussion about those seniors who may need support attending programs. This is an avenue that requires further exploration.

What are some strategies to reach individuals with memory loss with information about Community Centre programs and services?

One of the questions that emerged as being important to ask was how to reach seniors who have memory loss. With the participation of project partners at the Memory Cafés, who shared several different program offerings through UBC and other partners, it was clear that this information was not well-known and that it is challenging to get the right information to individuals who may benefit. Of the four individuals who identified as having memory loss during the daytime session and who were not affiliated with project partners, three had assistance in registering for the Memory Café. The fourth person was in the earlier stages of memory loss and physically visited local resources regularly.

One of the challenges is the reliance on web-based platforms where individuals can find information. In one of the sessions, two individuals noted that they did not have access to a computer. One additional individual had access but didn't know how to navigate the internet, and one individual used the computer for writing purposes but less so for searching for resources.

Given the vast amount of information that can be found online, it can be an overwhelming space for many to find resources.

Participants had several ideas to reach individuals with memory loss, some of which still relied on the use of the internet and others on more traditional strategies:

Internet-based strategies

- Having one centralized and easy-to-navigate site where all information can be found for programming for people with memory loss and seniors in general programming.
- Having a well-advertised phone number that would connect to an individual who has access to all the resources. An interested senior could talk through options with a knowledgeable program/service navigator.⁵

Non-internet-based strategies

- Mailing out easy-to-read listings of programming available with registration information.
- Offering a one-time class (repeated before each program season) in which programs and resources are presented, and registration assistance is made available.
- Engaging senior volunteers who could assist in spreading information by telephoning other seniors they know and handing out printed information packages to other seniors. A couple of participants talked about having phone trees to share information.
- Distribute programming/service information at residences (both those with a focus on seniors and those that are of all ages, including seniors).
- Putting program/service information at key locations such as medical offices (doctors, labs), pharmacies, retail outlets (note that many have seniors discount days) and other touch points that seniors frequent in the community.

⁵ Westside Seniors Hub has a wealth of information. One idea, with adequate funding, is to support advertising of a dedicated phone number that connects to a 'community navigator'. This person could tailor information for each person and assist in bridging an individual to services. This would also be an extremely valuable resource for caregivers, not to mention as a way to gather information about gaps in the community.

Potential Next Steps for Kitsilano Community Centre

Reflecting on the information and perspectives shared at both the Cafés, the following potential steps for Kitsilano Community Centre are put forth as options to consider:

1. Larger Programs/Services Mapping: With project partners, map (if not already completed) existing services and supports for seniors (both those targeted at individuals with memory loss and general seniors' programs) and create varying ways to share these resources with seniors. Ideally, sharing available resources (including the process for accessing them) may require different strategies for different groups, such as:
 - Reaching caregivers who support seniors with memory loss
 - Having an individual available at the community centre who can talk to seniors about available options (or directing an individual to a service such as Westside Seniors Hub)
 - Having easy-to-read print information about programs
 - Offering informational workshops for general community members about the many resources available to seniors with memory loss. The broader community plays an important role as they are often partners, friends, and colleagues who support caregivers who in turn support individuals with memory loss.

Also mentioned was having information about all the free programs and services in Vancouver. For example, one participant mentioned that the Vancouver Art Gallery has free entry for people with a disability and their caregiver.

2. Create a Kitsilano Community Centre Seniors' Advisory Committee: Seniors who live in the community and have connections with other seniors in the community are critical as a way to build a community that is vibrant and supportive. Consider developing a seniors' advisory committee comprised of seniors, including a significant representation of seniors who have memory loss. Meetings would be held regularly (ideally bi-weekly as both a way to accelerate the work and as a way to facilitate community-building among seniors). The committee could generate ideas for engaging seniors at Kitsilano Community Centre and develop and execute information dissemination strategies to reach seniors in the neighbourhood. This group could also serve as a means to gather information on the needs of seniors in the Kitsilano community. .
3. Develop a pool of senior volunteers to support inclusive programming: Since the interests of seniors with memory loss vary a great deal, providing supports so that all programming can be inclusive may be a viable approach to expanding program offerings. One avenue for creating a supportive and safe space for seniors with memory loss is to engage a volunteer senior, who could attend a class, and act as a support to seniors who struggle with memory loss. Tapping into Kitsilano seniors could be a way to make all relevant classes more inclusive and welcoming. These volunteer seniors could receive training (from seniors who

understand the needs of those with memory loss). In turn, these seniors can also offer support to general program instructors to build their skills in supporting individuals with memory loss.

4. Offer a weekly seniors' café: As previously noted, having an opportunity to develop social connections with others was a key theme. With so many ideas for activities noted by Memory Café participants, it would be very difficult to offer such a wide range of activities specific to seniors struggling with memory loss and guarantee that they attract enough participants for the program to run. An alternative approach is to offer a weekly senior's café whereby different activities are offered at each Café, and seniors can opt to participate, or they can opt to watch the activity or engage in conversations with others. The idea of simply coming together every week was appealing to participants. Further to this, two seniors specifically noted activities that they would like to lead during such a format. Tapping into seniors' talents and interests and inviting those interested in leading an activity takes advantage of the valuable wealth of experience that seniors have to offer one another.

In short, if Kitsilano Community Centre could offer a year-round weekly café wherein seniors can connect, try out activities, and learn new information, there is the opportunity for it to be a mechanism to grow and strengthen the network of seniors in the community. Linking this Café with the work of a seniors' advisory committee could lead to Kitsilano Community Centre becoming known as a place where seniors have a strong voice in decision-making.

5. One-time workshops on strategies/approaches to supporting those with memory loss: Whether Kitsilano Community Centre offered such a workshop or helped promote a community partner who offered such a workshop, access to information on supporting those with memory loss for community members is important. A general workshop could be targeted to family members, caregivers, community members and program staff to learn about resources and ways to support those with memory loss. For example, one senior participant, who supports someone with dementia by volunteering to walk with them regularly, was struck by how some individuals talk about the individual with memory loss using the third person. Through their volunteering, they have developed so many skills and strategies that would be incredibly valuable to others.

Casting the net wider to the community at large presents an opportunity to build the web of support at the community level, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all of us.

6. Workshops on brain health: There was great interest in learning about the brain and, specifically, how to keep the brain healthy. This information is relevant to all, given our aging population. Offering this type of workshop can increase knowledge and build our collective understanding of brain health and memory loss.

7. Engage youth: Youth in schools engage in community service hours. Creating opportunities for youth to engage with seniors who identify as having memory loss or having youth support dissemination activities helps bridge the divide between generations. Working with relevant school personnel to design meaningful volunteering opportunities can benefit youth and seniors.

Given the many areas to explore and the importance of being responsive to the diversity of needs of seniors with memory loss and their caregivers, there is an opportunity to consider extending this work by developing a community centre model to support seniors with memory loss. One path forward to accomplish this work may be to seek funding for a program developer position dedicated to this work or possibly even share such a position collaboratively with another Community Center to reduce the burden of funding it solely. A strong yet responsive model for Kitsilano Community Centre can benefit all Vancouver community centres and has the potential to further enhance the lives of seniors with memory loss, their caregivers, and community members.