



**Community Engagement Initiative –
OLDER ADULTS & SENIORS COMMUNITY CONSULTATION:
Understanding our Aging Community
Mallory Lowes, Social Connectedness Fellow 2019**

The Goal

To consult older adults and seniors in the Toronto area to identify common barriers faced in achieving social connectedness in their daily lives. Using shared discussion, the event aimed for an enhanced understanding of the lived experience of older adults and a brainstorming of ideas on how to address the identified challenges.

Beneficiaries

The intent of this event was to benefit the lives of older adults in the Toronto area, by consulting seniors directly as to what issues they personally endure or see their peers face. As a result, ideas on how to combat these challenges were developed, to ultimately benefit the lives of older Toronto residents in being socially connected and engaged.

The Event

A consultation was selected for this community engagement initiative to foster social connectedness among older Toronto residents and to efficiently gather information for my research project. The consultation took place on July 10, 2019 from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM at Artscape Wychwood Barns in Toronto, Ontario. The event was held in partnership with The Stop Community Food Centre and TakingITGlobal, who together assisted in providing space, reaching out to potential participants, facilitating the conversation and providing funding. Topics covered in the consultation included social isolation, general life challenges, community changes and ideas on how to be connected to the community. An activity of painting canvas grocery bags was offered to promote creative discussion. A lunch followed the discussion to facilitate connection.

Impact

10 older people residing in Toronto attended the consultation.

The consultation provided a welcoming environment for the participants to share meaningful, personal narratives building off of one another's ideas and insight.

The discussion brought to light various challenges including road safety, language barriers, cultural siloes, emotional struggles, barriers in expressing concerns to city officials, and caregiver isolation.

The discussion also highlighted positive initiatives and ideas for older adults in the community. Community gardens, community kitchens, games, field trips, peers reaching out to peers, and other frequent social activities were expressed to be beneficial in fostering social connectedness among older Torontonians.

A few participants asked to attend other consultations in the future, as they enjoyed the experience to express concerns and ideas with fellow community peers. The participants communicated their gratitude in having the opportunity to be heard and acknowledged.



Community residents painting together during the discussion.