



**SAMUEL CENTRE
FOR SOCIAL
CONNECTEDNESS**

Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness

2024 Fellowship Program

Project Proposal

PARTNER ORGANIZATION:

HelpAge Canada

PROJECT TITLE:

Understanding CORE – How Online Support Facilitates Independent
Living for Older Canadians

Partner Organization: HelpAge Canada

Founded in 1975, HelpAge Canada emerged from a group of volunteers addressing the lack of representation for older persons in Canadian charitable organizations. Originally named "Help the Aged Canada," it has evolved into a registered charity dedicated to promoting healthy aging. In 1983, HelpAge Canada joined forces with organizations in Colombia, Kenya, India, and the UK to establish HelpAge International, forming a global network supporting older people.

As the sole Canadian organization exclusively focused on older persons, HelpAge Canada employs a holistic approach to healthy aging. Collaborating with community-based seniors' services organizations, it tailors' solutions to meet the specific needs of communities and the older population. By working closely with these frontline organizations, HelpAge Canada gains valuable insights into the priorities of older people in Canada, shaping its strategic program development.

HelpAge Canada's mission involves supporting community-based initiatives both domestically and internationally, striving to enhance the lives of older individuals and their communities. Through innovative programs and collaborations, the organization aims to empower vulnerable, isolated, or lonely older people, contributing to a world where everyone can age with dignity. Their vision is to create a world where all older persons lead secure, healthy, active, and dignified lives.

Learn more: www.helpagecanada.ca

PROJECT INFORMATION

Location of the Project: Canada, Remote

HelpAge Canada is accepting candidates from across Canada.

HelpAge Canada is headquartered in Ottawa and thus tends to operate predominantly on eastern standard time. To date the team has been working in a hybrid model of working remotely and coming into the office, with some team members residing in Toronto (thus only working remotely). We will be flexible to the location of the fellow given our ability and comfort to work remotely and offer the fellowship in person.

Though the majority of the team is in Ottawa, this fellow will be working closely alongside the Director of the Program (Dr. Raza Mirza) who resides in Toronto. HelpAge Canada works in a hybrid model and will offer that option to the fellow.

Section 1: Description of the Project

Healthy Aging CORE (Collaborative Online Resources and Education, "CORE") Canada is an innovative community-driven initiative dedicated to connecting organizations that support older adults, and advance independent living for older adults across Canada. CORE is an online platform that connects organizations and individuals, through discussion groups, communities of practice and through

knowledge exchange and resource sharing. Launched in 2021, CORE Canada has 10 active groups with themes such as: Intergenerational Programming; Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery; Social Prescribing; Age-Friendly Communities; Digital Literacy; etc.

While these active groups are undoubtedly helpful, a strategic approach to discerning priority topic areas and resources at a national scale has not been undertaken. To address this, the SCSC Fellow will build off HelpAge Canada and National Institute on Aging research to identify priority topic areas at a national level, most important to supporting older adult independence and inclusion. They will also conduct a strategic analysis to understand how the CORE platform currently functions to create a sense of community among participants, and begin to develop guiding principles for 'virtual age-friendly communities' using the CORE platform.

The Fellow will develop a report that focuses on how online platforms/ communities can best support community-based senior serving organizations to ensure that older adults remain connected, have a sense of belonging, and identify gaps in current online programming and approaches.

They will interview participants from CORE to understand their experiences, conduct qualitative research on the benefits of using the CORE platform for engagement and facilitate focus groups. This research will help us understand and describe the needs of CORE participants and how HelpAge Canada alongside local community-based seniors services organizations (CBSS) can further support older persons in these online communities to age in place with dignity.

Further, while guidance and best practices exist for age-friendly communities in the context of physical and social environments, the knowledge base is thin with regard to how to promote feelings of 'connectedness', belonging and community in online environments. The Fellow will create a best practice guide focused on creating and fostering online communities for older adults.

Section 2: Goals of the Project

This research will be used to understand the impacts of the CORE platform on participants' experiences of connectedness, belonging, and on knowledge sharing/ exchange.

The Fellow will help HelpAge Canada better understand and implement CORE through research that meets the following goals:

- Understand the impacts and benefits of participating in CORE Canada programming through conducting focus groups on:
 - Knowledge and Information needs
 - Online Community support
 - Translation of online community support to offline effectiveness of fostering inclusion and belonging
- Scoping and mapping of community actors:

- o Identify 4-5 case studies where a community or organization has leading edge practices that effectively foster inclusion and wellbeing for older adults in priority topic areas.
- Research on best practices for facilitating Online Communities:
 - o The SCSC Fellow will investigate best practices to support organizations nationally to facilitate a sense of community online.

Section 3: Guiding Questions

1. How does the sense of community and belonging in an online environment such as CORE differ from that in traditional, face-to-face settings and other professional support networks? What factors contribute to these distinctions?
2. What role do communication tools and platforms such as CORE play in shaping and fostering a sense of community in online environments, and how can these tools be optimized to enhance the online community experience for older adults?
 - a. What are the limitations of platforms like CORE? Are there political, socio-economic or cultural contexts which limit their effectiveness?
3. In what ways does facilitation of online communities need to be adapted to effectively build trust and strong social connections and a sense of belonging among members, considering the absence of physical proximity and non-verbal cues?
4. What are the best practices for creating online community spaces?
5. How do online platforms address issues of EDI and the needs of diverse participants in online communities?
6. How can online platforms be leveraged to create inclusive spaces, considering the potential for anonymity and the absence of face-to-face interactions that might impact individuals' sense of belonging?

Section 4: Key Deliverables

- **1 blog post** (500 – 1,250 word), posted to SCSC's website
- **A Community Engagement Initiative (CEI)** in support of the Final Output
 - o This project will involve interviews, focus groups and connecting with community actors to understand best practices. The SCSC Fellow will take the lead in planning their engagement with community.
- **Final Outputs**
 - o 1) A final 25 – 35 page research report supported by primary and secondary source data that includes findings from the qualitative interviews, focus groups and other research. This report will investigate the impacts, context, benefits and include recommendations

- o A mini-best practices guide for other community-based organizations
- **A Final Presentation** with the cohort

APPLICATION INFORMATION

Key Attributes and Skills in the Applicant

This project is prioritizing older applicants and there is no upper age limit for this position. Many older applicants in their late 60's, 70's and 80's may be worried they're not a perfect fit, and not apply. However, we strongly encourage applicants from this age range and are excited to see your application!

The following skills and experiences will help the fellow excel in the program:

- Graduate-level education or equivalent experience
- Some background knowledge or coursework in aging, gerontology or social studies preferred.
- Experience conducting interviews or working with older adults preferred (lived or professional experience).

About the Fellowship/What the Fellowship Offers

The Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness (SCSC) Social Connectedness Fellowship empowers young people and people with a variety of different types of lived experience to partner with groundbreaking organizations from around the world to carry out innovative research on social isolation and belonging.

SCSC defines belonging as connection to the 4 Ps: people, place, power, and purpose. This is to say that belonging comes through our relationships with other people as well as through our rootedness in nature, our ability to influence social, political and economic decision-making, and our capacity to find shared meaning and purpose in our lives. The Fellowship offers a unique opportunity to apply the lens of Belonging, thinking intersectionally, and holistically about the problems of the 21st century.

These are paid positions, starting on **May 6, 2024**, and ending on **September 27, 2024**. From **May – August the position is full time, 35 hours per week** and in **September the hours are reduced to part time, 10-20 hours per week**.

SCSC Offers:

- Competitive wages, adjusted according to each Fellow's geographic location and experience.
 - o This project is offering a range of \$22 – 27 CAD per hour.
- Opportunity to work with national & international community partners
- Capacity building, skills development, & mentorship

- Ability to network, and be part of an international cohort
- All Fellowship works are published on the SCSC website
- The Fellow's work will be supported by regular supervision meetings with both organizations, and a 1-week long orientation at SCSC.

Program Requirements:

- Be able to work at least 4 hours per day (in alignment with the 9-5 workday) in Eastern Standard Time to ensure overlap with the Toronto-based team.
- Be ready to engage in regular online meetings, check-ins, capacity building sessions, and work remotely.
- Ability to take initiative, manage their time effectively, work independently, and draw from different resources to support their work.
- Have a passion for research and building a more inclusive, belonging-oriented world.

EQUITY STATEMENT

The Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness is an equal opportunity employer, and we encourage applicants to apply even if they do not meet all the criteria. We believe all candidates have something to bring to the organization and the role. If you have skills outside the job description that you think can benefit the project, let us know in your cover letter. We encourage all equity-seeking groups, such as immigrants, Black and Indigenous communities, people of color, women, young people, 2SLGBTQ+ community members, people with disabilities, and people who have been justice-impacted to apply.

Please tell us if you need accommodation throughout the application process and we are happy to support you.

You can email any accommodation requests to scfellowship@scscglobal.org