Sunshine Coast
Resource
Centre

Sunshine Coast Seniors Planning Table

Final Report

Project Impact Healthy Aging

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September 2021

Organization and Program Overview

Mission
The Sunshine Coast Seniors Planning Table works collaboratively as seniors, service providers, community organizations and local governments to ensure that supports and programs are available for all older adults living on the Sunshine Coast to be healthy, valued and involved members of the community.

Vision
As individual seniors, and organizational representatives, we take action collaboratively to:

- identify needs and gaps, honouring the diversity among older adults in all dimensions
- build partnerships
- connect existing services
- communicate and collaborate to meet the needs of older adults
- speak up for and about services for older adults

We are recognized by local governments and the community as the coordinated voice of Sunshine Coast Seniors, and can be counted on for efficient, effective actions that serve to better the lives of all seniors in our community. We live by the slogan "compassionate hearts working together."

Scope

- to build capacity in the engagement and leadership of older adults
- to nurture community engagement, capacity, and mobilization related to seniors' issues
- to support citizens and service providers to collaboratively identify and respond to local challenges and opportunities, build partnerships, and create a collective voice.
- to provide a network for information and resource sharing and collaboration
- to facilitate effective information, referral and coordination of service delivery
- to enhance public awareness and service provider knowledge on matters relating to seniors through educational activities and hosting workshops or events
- to identify and encourage projects and research that will benefit seniors
- to assist local government to determine priority needs for older adults
- to communicate with all levels of government on seniors' issues
- to request resources from funding agencies, planners and other appropriate sources

Program History

Before the Seniors Planning Table (SPT) was created 5 years ago, most local organizations and agencies who are serving older adults in some form, were operating in silos with almost no interconnection.

In the years since, we have been able to streamline service provision, find and fill gaps, and through collaboration, facilitate referrals as well as improve much needed navigation for older adults in the community.

We have been able to facilitate granting partnerships between member organizations, as well as to coordinate and expand service provision during the pandemic.

How We Work

We follow evidence-based principles for social change to create and support an age-friendly community. Prior to COVID, we met as a whole Table 3 to 4 times a year while rotating the location through the communities on the coast. During COVID all meetings are held online. Each meeting usually has a focus on an issue that the steering committee has identified or that the group has brought forward either through individuals or in a meeting.

The SPT is hosted by the Sunshine Coast Resource Centre which is the Coast's Information and Referral Hub and offers a variety of important community programs.

The SPT is guided by a Steering Committee that is currently composed of 7 volunteer members and a part-time coordinator. The Table's members are recruited from over 40 senior-serving organizations and all local governments on the Sunshine Coast. They are currently represented by over 100 individuals.

Five years into operation we were curious to see how the program had impacted our member organizations. We chose the following areas to focus on:

1. *Representatives of member organizations have service literacy:* Through membership, organizations know what each member organization is doing to gather and provide information about their services, and they connect their services to that of other providers in the community. Service literacy is reflected in internal work. Members have the necessary information to identify needs and gaps in existing services.

2. *Representatives of member organizations work together to serve seniors seamlessly:* Member organizations build partnerships with each other to work together more effectively, and to streamline and target services to seniors in the community. Members identify and communicate needs and gaps in services for seniors and collaborate toward filling these gaps. These efforts are reflected in external-facing work, such as reporting out to the community.

3. *Representatives of member organizations are advocates for services and programs addressing concerns of older adults:* Members speak up for and about services for older adults in the community, and advocate to the community, other organizations and governments.

Evaluation Methodology

The goal of this project was to evaluate the impact of the Sunshine Coast Seniors Planning Table on our member organizations, specifically:

1. What kind and quality of impact are we having on our member organizations?
2. What aspects of our program are causing this impact?

Over the course of the project, we developed and refined our ideas of intended impact and indicators, designed and implemented a mixed methods outcome evaluation using both qualitative and quantitative means to collect and analyze data, identified findings, and considered the implications to those findings for program improvement and innovation.

The project began with a focus on the work of identifying and clarifying the intended impact of the Healthy Aging program. Once the ideas of impact had been developed, we used the Heart Triangle™ model to identify qualitative and quantitative indicators of impact focused on the mental, behavioral, and emotional changes in our Sunshine Coast member organizations that indicate we are achieving our impact. We then used these indicators to design a qualitative interview protocol and a quantitative questionnaire to measure our progress toward achieving our intended impact.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

For the qualitative portion of the evaluation, we designed an in-depth interview protocol to gain data about the structural and qualitative changes resulting from our program. We used a purposeful stratified sampling technique to select a representative sample from the membership we serve. The SPT has around 40 member organizations represented by over 100 people. We decided to include in our qualitative exploration all those members who had attended at least two meetings in the past year. Sifting the meetings attendance data yielded 22 member organizations, which is just over half our membership.

Our interview team consisted of the members of our project team: two steering committee members (one of whom is also a host organization board member) and the program coordinator. We decided against involving board members or staff who did not participate in the Project Impact cohort meetings, as we felt we would be saving time not having to train non-project members in qualitative data collection and analysis prior to conducting interviews.

We verified this assumption in a test interview after which each member of the interview team convened one-on-one interviews lasting between 30 minutes and one hour in length (and some longer).

Since we were still under pandemic in-person gathering restrictions, we used video conferencing to conduct 20 interviews. We gathered the data by capturing the conversation using Otter.ai to transcribe the content. We also took written notes during the interviews and filled in the notes immediately after the interview to obtain a substantive rendering of the interview. The transcriptions were used to pull quotes, and as a source to compare content with other team members' interviews.

In the next step we analyzed the data by implementing the first three phases of thematic analysis for each interview by becoming familiar with the data, then generating initial codes, and finally identifying themes. We analyzed the raw data by reviewing each interview four times through four lenses (how, what, why, and transformation) to illuminate a different aspect of what the data revealed about the research question. The data were then sorted into four categories to serve as a basis for further analysis. The interview team met to tease out common themes based on the insights from the data, and interpreted the meaning and significance of the data.

Next, we merged all of the data analyses and initial themes and implemented the next two phases of qualitative analysis: defining and naming themes. We mapped these themes visually and examined features, causes, and commonalities, in order to discover new or surprising insights. This process allowed us to pull out the most significant and meaningful discoveries and detail them as findings as described in this report.

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

We carefully designed a list of 20 questions based on our quantitative indicators of impact that we had identified in an earlier evaluation phase. We made sure to create a natural flow throughout the questionnaire by keeping the format of the questions and response options consistent. We judiciously inserted a few open ended questions which we hoped might capture some outlier data, mindful of the added time and effort this would entail in the analysis of the data.

We embedded these 20 questions in an online survey app which would provide some analysis and export options. We then e-mailed the survey link to the full membership of over 100 individuals. The survey included a brief introduction with an overview and some background on the project, followed by a substantive section with scale response formatted questions that focused on the experiences of our members.

We received 22 responses. The response rate translated to approximately 20% of our

membership and incidentally overlayed exactly with the number of more actively involved members, and the number of interviews we had conducted.

Limitations of our Evaluations

With participation from about 20% of all members, the perspectives of the less active membership may be underrepresented in our findings. Learning more about the impacts of the program for the less actively involved members may be another important avenue for future evaluation.

Findings and Responses

Finding 1: AN ACCIDENTAL THINK TANK

Key Insight: Sunshine Coast leaders in older adult service delivery are a think tank for expertise.

Discussion: The data has shown that through interactions and the structure of the SPT, we are able to draw out people's intuitive and implicit knowledge and expertise which allows us to reconceptualize, broaden, and enhance the scope of practice for SPT members.

For example, one SPT participant stated,

> This [SPT] is heart centred work and you have to bring your brain with you. Experience totally counts. And this is a way of getting to that experience and that is exciting as well, as it is hard to get these kinds of people together. Experience, passion and wisdom are important in a think tank, all are required in order to get to the entire experience.

Another said,

> [The Seniors Planning Table] is a clearing house. It's a place where ideas come together and get filtered into a nugget of what the issue really is, like a diverse number of voices, and then once it's discussed it coalesces into a particular argument or request or way forward… that's a key part of getting people together, because your collective discussions result in better and clearer ideas and carves paths forward.

Significance: Hearing the SPT called a Think Tank was very surprising since we had never thought of our work in that way. It was also extremely encouraging to us that our members would experience themselves as something that could be described as cutting edge. This then raised the questions for us: How do we better access our members' expertise and how do we find out what expertise is relevant to them? How does this relate to, and benefit, the community that our members are serving?

Possible Responses:

- Explore structure for our meeting to access expertise
- Explore with members what expertise they want to know about
- Determine who in the community can augment our expertise
- Explore other Think Tanks
- Consider how could we consult (for) other Tables

Finding 2: CREATING GOOD CITIZENS

Key Insight: The SPT helps to create good citizens who are committed to public engagement and the creation of an equitable and compassionate society.

Discussion: Our members spoke powerfully to how the SPT encourages public engagement because it brings together organizations and the people who run them. The SPT builds a community of practice, supports the provision of high quality service delivery, and fosters a community-led approach to problem-solving. One participant commented,

> I'm really interested in producing good citizens. How do we build civil society and how do you knit it together? Public engagement is one way to do that. You [SPT] are developing civil society by the way you approach things and it's ever so important. It's fundamental.

The survey showed that members of the SPT gain an increased understanding and awareness of issues affecting older adults in the community. This kind of understanding will enable them to make better decisions when creating services for older adults and responding to their needs and move us closer to being an age-friendly community.

Below: Results to the question "Through your SPT membership, what issues concerning older adults have you become more aware of (check all that apply).
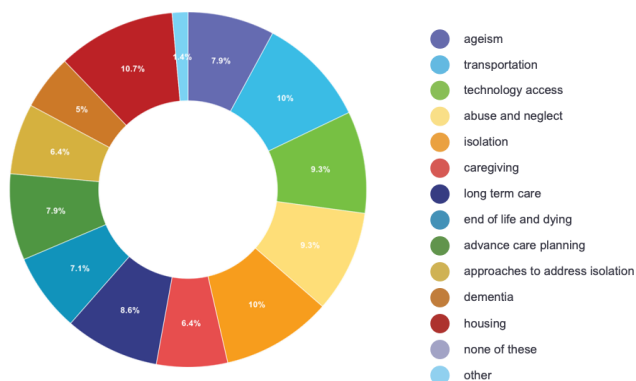
Significance: Similar to the thoughts on think tanks, we had not previously given any thought to how we might be molding society at large. Our focus had been much more narrow; namely on the members of the SPT. We are heartened by this widening of our horizons, and specifically by the idea that we may have a role to play in building a better society. We feel this is a strong motivator for our members to want to sit at the Table. Membership in the SPT has the real potential of giving them a sense of meaning and purpose.

Possible Responses:

- Review our lens, could we improve community development?
- How can we be more mindful about what type of citizen we want to create?
- What values are most important to us in terms of the society we help create?
- Are we collaborative enough?
- Look at outliers.
- How do we influence individuals?

Finding 3: A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Key Insight: The SPT is a forum for mutual support, sharing best practices; and creating new wisdom to develop and fulfill individual and community goals, ongoing interaction, and collaboration.

Discussion: Our data showed clearly that the SPT has begun to function as a community of practice. As a result of bringing forth gaps to meet the needs of seniors, several working groups that pulled in community members and businesses were formed by members, including: the Transportation Working Group; the Technology Working Group (they created a poster listing all organizations who provide virtual and telesupport for older adults); and the Coastal Care Navigator Grant Application Working Group (which is a partnership with Hospice and the Caregiver Support Network).

The formation of working groups had the added benefit of creating confidence in the work and pride of the achievements as a group. As one member noted, "I was so delighted to see how the tech group made things happen so quickly and this might be a good example for our direction - the smaller groups so that we can move forward quickly on issues."

Another said,

> Just the fact that the Seniors Planning Table exists, it's a demonstration to people we can learn from that. We can find our way of being advocates when we see good examples of how people get together and collaborate. To me I think that it sets an example about how communities can organize.

Our survey results showed that for over half of our members, involvement with the SPT led to a significant increase in familiarity with the services other organizations provide, and the remaining respondents had increased their familiarity at least somewhat.

Below: Question 3 "I am more aware of the services other organizations provide as a result of participating in the Seniors Planning Table."
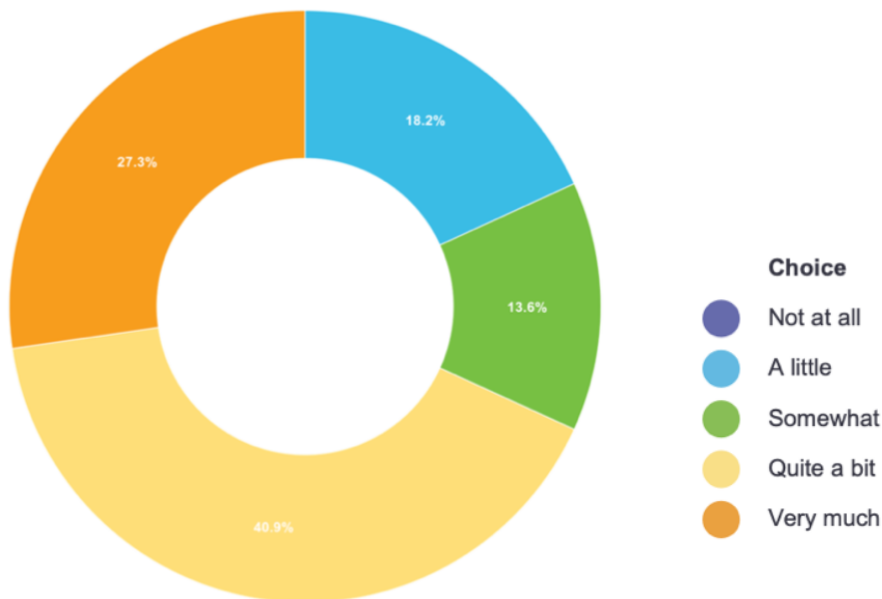
Significance: The most important goal of convening a community of practice is to enable participants to learn from each other's successes and to learn how to deal with challenges Our survey results confirmed that involvement with the SPT led to a significant increase in familiarity with other member organizations' services which they provide to seniors in the community. This is a good indicator that the SPT does in fact serve to provide mutual learning and support to members.

Possible Responses:

- Explore impact of working group on members of WG (especially those who are not SPT members).
- Explore the impact of the working groups on the community.
- Determine what other groups we need to connect with?
- Determine what else would be value-added for members of a community of practice?

Finding 4: AGE-FRIENDLY HEARTS

Key Insight: To develop a truly age-friendly community we need to take into account *all* barriers to participation, not just the physical ones.

Discussion: Addressing ageism, elder abuse, isolation, needs of the LGBQT2+ senior population and poverty at our meetings has added to the array of issues to be aware of, augmenting earlier insights from a report which we had produced in 2017 titled Age Friendly Communities. This report was commissioned by, and developed for, the District of Sechelt. The SPT conducted focus groups with 208 participants in eight different events. Participants were asked what would make Sechelt even more friendly for people of all ages. The feedback was summarized by topic and, in consultation with community groups and agencies, and used as a basis for formulating key findings and recommendations.

As one participant emphasized, "The issues around the physical world are really important in terms of mobility and accessibility, there's no doubt about that. But Age Friendly has to really touch on the social and anti-social aspects that develop in our social landscape; we can not be in denial of that." One of our members mentioned that being on the SPT strengthened her view of an interwoven safety net when it came to addressing the abuse and neglect of older adults. This interwoven safety net is a multidimensional, holistic approach to an age-friendly community.

Our survey results confirmed that over half of respondents were more or much more likely to advocate for issues affecting older adults than before they started attending SPT meetings. This is an indicator of increased awareness and understanding of the needs of this population and should translate to appropriate responses; each a stepping stone toward a more inclusive, age-friendly community.

Below: Question 10 "How much more likely are you to advocate for an issue affecting the wellbeing of older adults today than before you attended SPT meetings?"

Choice

- much more likely
- more likely
- same as before
- less likely
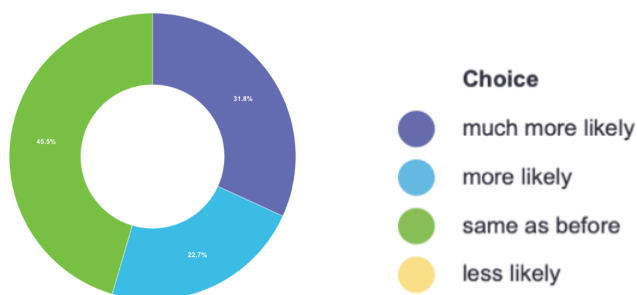
Significance: Many well meaning projects address an issue from a one-dimensional perspective, but don't take into account the complexity of the human experience. The SPT was contracted in 2016 by the District of Sechelt to create an age-friendly plan for our community. The remarks of our members to the scope and parameters of a community that can call itself age-friendly, has made us aware that we may have been overlooking a very important determinant of health in our previous planning.

Possible Responses:

- Revisit the Age-Friendly plan for the District of Sechelt under that lens
- Follow up on isolation report
- Pilot one of the isolation report socializing approaches to address isolation in older adults
- Connect with health care system to explore overlap in work on social determinants of health

Finding 5: WANTED: WISDOM AT ALL AGES AND STAGES

Key Insight: Intergenerational and cross-generational exchange and mentoring causes paradigm shifts in understanding and approaching ageism in all its manifestations.

Discussion: The SPT recognizes a lack of formalized intergenerational exchange at the Table and in the community. One of our members related that sitting on the SPT inspires her to adopt an intergenerational perspective and practice in her work and her family life. She sees that the informal instances of intergenerational exchange, builds leadership skills for younger members like her. She gained the courage to initiate and lead projects. In her personal life it led to a more holistic family experience through openness to mentoring by elders and the opportunities to inspire them. In turn, this led to a deeper understanding of age-related life experiences and innovation in service provision.

Another member said,

> Without the informal intergenerational dialogue (at the SPT) and without the ability to have those insights, or having these resources, we would have missed the mark in writing a successful grant application for a Seniors Palliative Day program, which included plans for intergenerational activities and mentorship.

Another member talked about the challenge of finding housing on the coast. They said, "Another issue facing seniors that I'm aware of is the fact that there are not a lot of places for young people who are going to be the care aids, and others who work with seniors, to live on

the coast."

Significance: In relation to an age-friendly community, collaboration is important. Seniors need younger folks to support them, and seniors need to support younger community members! Affordable housing is needed for both ends of the spectrum, and child care is essential for younger folks to be able to stay on the coast and work.

Possible Responses:

- In view of findings on age-friendly and social experience, focus on intergenerational approaches
- Seek examples where intergenerational interventions/programs are successful
- Explore community partnerships with youth organizations or youth planning table

Finding 6: WE ARE THE WAY!

Key Insight: The SPT is ideally placed to develop a model of advocacy and lobbying for older adults at all levels of government.

Discussion: We have sought, and have been involved with, provincial working groups and have brought information from those back to the Table. This in turn has informed local governments, our MP, MLA, Federal Ministers and the BC Seniors Advocate.
The data show our 'government-connected' members are empowered by the work of the SPT. One said, "Isobel McKenzie's presentation and the discussion with her were profoundly helpful; I can now cite these in support of making a case for certain projects or services."

Another member commented, "Your advocacy work is spectacular. It's fabulous what you've been doing in pulling together the group and getting federal and provincial ministers there, getting their attention."

Significance: As a result of our ongoing lobbying efforts and the potential advocacy power of the SPT we are poised to receive sustainable funding for not only our own Table but all such forums in the province. In addition to these successes, the individual connections with legislative bodies can have other benefits for our members such as support for evidence based and data driven interventions.

Possible Responses:

- Share our model with others (Housing Action Table, Poverty Reduction Strategy: Social Planning Council)

- Follow up with politicians; continue advocacy and build on successes
- Continue to seek new members for the Table
- "Market" our model
- Connect with other models in the province and across Canada i.e. Minister Schulte
- Continue building provincial framework
- Plan another Seniors Conference

Finding 7: THIS IS MY TRIBE

Key Insight: Working with like-minded people creates a powerful sense of belonging among our members.

Discussion: Members find a sense of purpose through, and pride in, the achievements of the group. They see this as a way to bring meaning to their work, and they understand the contributions they are making to the organization as well as to the larger society. Members experience a sense of belonging through the SPT. One said, "I find the dialogue with people who work in the same sector energizing. I feel like these are my people, I belong here. It helped me crystallise my professional fit and desire and to realise that passion." Another member said, "Seeing the energy in the room, quite honestly, that people are bringing to their roles, that they're enthusiastic for what they're doing, and they do see that they are making a difference. It's a ripple effect."
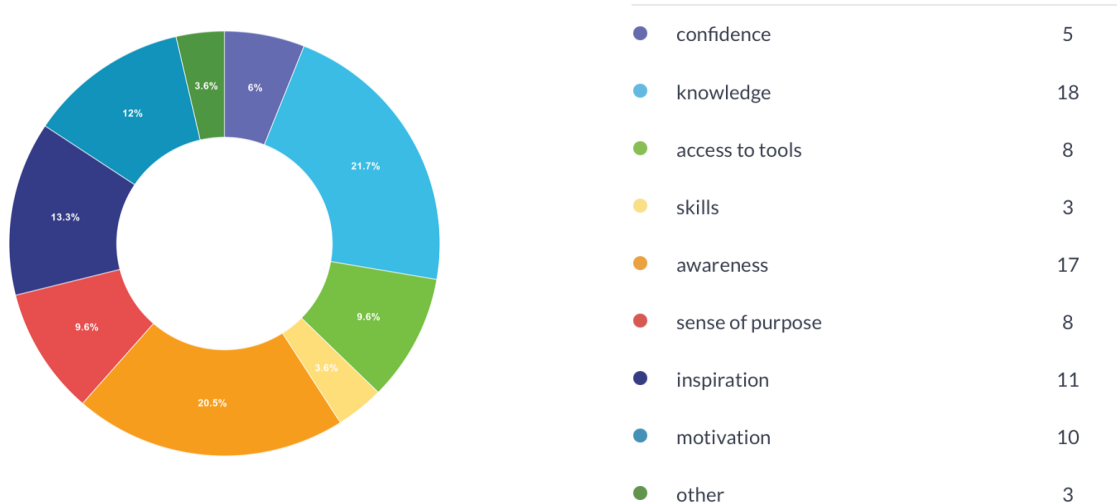
Survey data confirmed that the SPT fosters relationship building and increases collaboration between members even outside of meetings. We measured this by asking members about the frequency of their work-related interactions with other members outside of meetings:

Below: Question 7 "Because of my involvement with the SPT, I have had work-related interactions with other members outside of meetings."
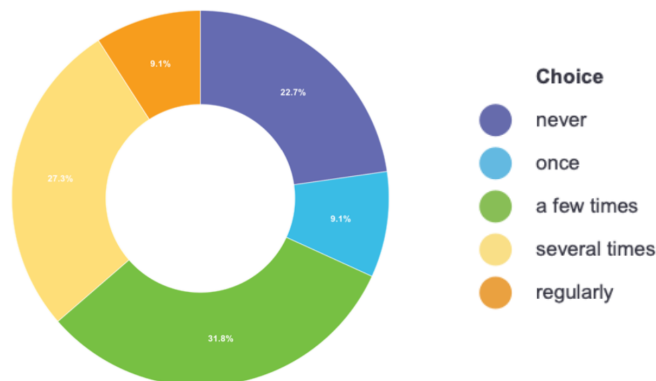
Perhaps even more significant was the influence on more intangible improvements affecting quality of life in members that were transferable life skills such as confidence, sense of purpose, inspiration, motivation and, most cited, awareness of issues affecting older adults:

Below: Question 11 "As a result of my membership on the SPT, in regards to creating meaningful, sustainable, community-based services/programs, I have experienced an increase in… (check all that apply)."

● confidence	5
● knowledge	18
● access to tools	8
● skills	3
● awareness	17
● sense of purpose	8
● inspiration	11
● motivation	10
● other	3

Significance: People need to find this meaning in their daily work in order to be fully engaged. As Aristotle said, "Where your talents and the needs of the world cross, there lies your vocation." Research suggests that if these "softer" qualities can be identified, they may become the differentiators of a purpose-driven organization, as well as have fundamental implications on organizational success. Evidence shows that organizations that embrace purpose and where organizational social responsibility is present, employee engagement is high, and personal values are connected to work, i.e. expressing one's whole self through one's work (Kahn 1990; Glavas & Piderit, 2009).

Possible Responses:

- Determine if we are missing members
- Are there enough outliers who challenge our assumptions and thinking?
- Determine if we need more diversity; to go more broadly into the community?
- Provide more opportunities for people to have dialogue to identify pressing issues.
- Reach out to community associations to educate them, and for them to inform us (e.g. what can they teach us about isolation).
- Present at board meetings about SPT (community engagement).

Finding 8: SPEED DATING

Key Insight: The SPT provides members with an instant network across the sector and the community.

Discussion: New members can assess 'who is who in the zoo' and learn what the issues in the sector are. They can get a sense for the culture of the community, learn who the vulnerable populations are, what barriers are present, and what success stories might be relevant to them.

For those new to the community, the SPT meetings afford them the opportunity to learn about the other participating members, their strengths, activities, and what they have to contribute. As one new member said,

> Because I did not live in the community, I was able to learn quickly who the players are, what the important issues are for the community not just from my perspective, and I was able to bring that back to my work; to the physicians in a real way, to put that information into their software as a resource, and to share further with their networks.

Our survey results showed that for a good two third of our members, involvement with the SPT led to a significant increase in familiarity with other member organizations who serve seniors in the community, thus not only short-circuiting potentially time-consuming attempts to get to know the relevant "players" in the sector but also provisioning access to the networks of these contacts.

Below: Question 2 "I am more familiar with other organizations serving seniors as a result of participating in the Planning Table."

Choice
● Not at all
● A little
● Somewhat
● Quite a bit
● Very much

18.2%
13.6%
40.9%
27.3%
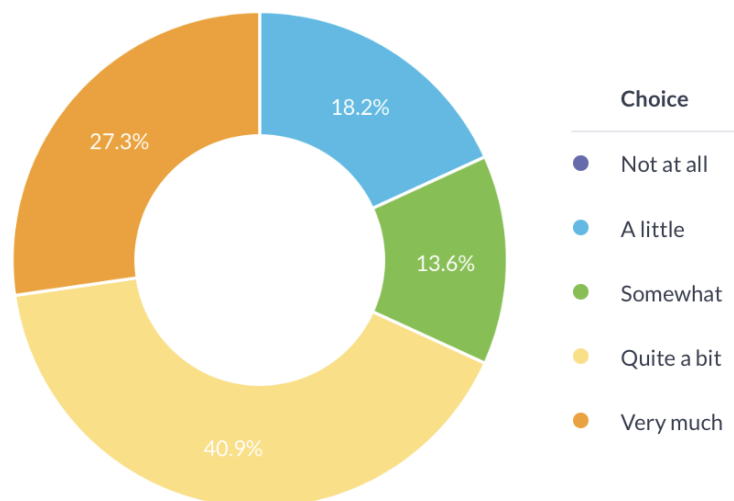
Significance: For many members who are immersed in the intricacies of the daily tasks of their work, attending SPT meetings enables them to be informed of what is current with other organizations, within our community, and in some instances, in the province. They can 'feel the dynamic', make connections, and see how they can contribute. The SPT is an empowering opportunity that enables individuals and/or their organizations to make an impact.

Possible Responses:

- Continue to explore pre-meeting breakout rooms
- Formalize introducing people to each other in fun ways
- Introduce new people to the group

Finding 9: MISSING LINKS

Key Insight: We realized that we have no framework to determine the impact of member organizations on their clients, seniors in the community that we, as a Planning Table, aim to serve.

Discussion: In order to contemplate strengthening and guiding future growth for the SPT we may need to put frameworks in place to ensure that we work collaboratively as seniors, service providers, community organizations and local governments to ensure that supports and programs are available for all older adults living on the Sunshine Coast to be healthy, valued and involved members of the community. Creating an evaluation framework will help us in determining whether we are in fact, collectively and as individual member organizations, fulfilling the SPT's mission statement.

Significance: In order to contemplate strengthening and guiding future growth for the SPT there are several aspects to consider. Who might be missing from the table? Are our First Nations represented? Do we have a mandate for diversity? As one participant suggested :"for future growth for the planning table it would be great to be working a little bit closer with the nation [Sechelt]. You know, the elders, it could be really interesting to get them around the table."

Possible Responses:

- Determine who might be missing from the table?
- Determine if First Nations are represented?
- Determine if we have a mandate for diversity?
- Consider how culture changes over time
- Consider which stakeholders should be at the Table
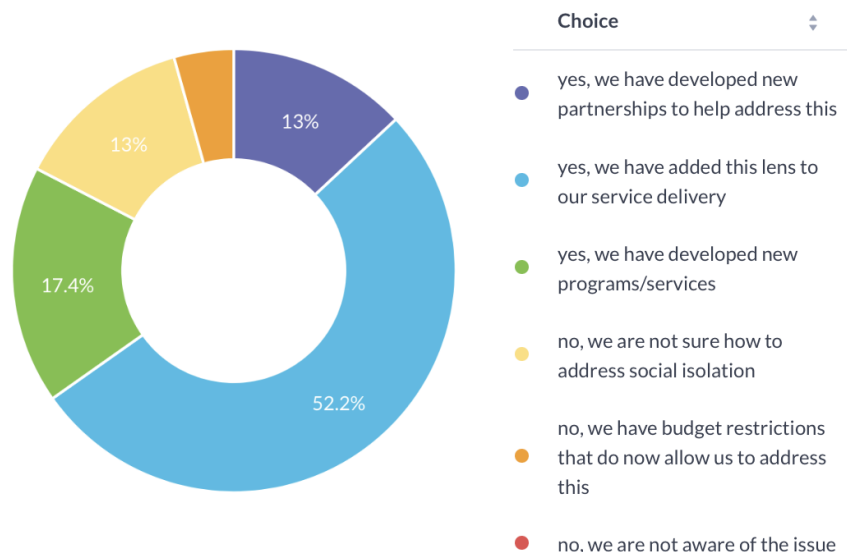
Finding 10: ONE TO BIND THEM ALL

Key Insight: Isolation is a key challenge that many seniors are facing and creates many of the barriers and challenges the SPT is trying to address and solve.

Discussion: When pandemic restrictions started the SPT had been working on outcomes of our report on isolation in older adults in Canada. Suddenly isolation became a common shared experience. One member said, "The one thing the pandemic has done is really brought social isolation out in a way that we probably hoped it never would have to."

However, isolation has always been the "elephant in the room". Our member organizations and others in the community have struggled to identify those who are hard to find and truly isolated, and as a result fall through the cracks of any support system.

Considering the burden that isolation presents we were heartened to find that survey respondents had overwhelmingly added this lens to their work following our research on the subject and subsequently provided training and awareness raising as well as exploring local solutions.

Below: Question 16 "Has your organization taken steps to address social isolation in older adults as a result of the SPT's report and presentations on isolation in older Canadian adults?"

Choice	⇕
●	yes, we have developed new partnerships to help address this
●	yes, we have added this lens to our service delivery
●	yes, we have developed new programs/services
●	no, we are not sure how to address social isolation
●	no, we have budget restrictions that do now allow us to address this
●	no, we are not aware of the issue

Significance: As we discussed in our 2019 report on social isolation in older Canadian adults, there are many negative impacts. The report states: "The impact of social isolation on health and mortality is at least as great as the impact of smoking, alcohol consumption and obesity. Anyone can become socially isolated when challenges exceed personal resources and available support from friends, family and community. Ageism, lack of transportation, affordability, mobility/physical barriers in the community, lack of information and access to community support and health care all limit the social participation of seniors and call for system changes. An age-friendly community facilitates social inclusion" (Report on "Social Isolation in Older Canadian Adults", Sunshine Coast SPT steering committee, 2019).

It is of vital importance to de-stigmatize isolation and normalize asking for help before we can meaningfully address social isolation.

Possible Responses:

- Explore the stigma around asking for help: "I don't want to be a burden."
- Explore NORCs (Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities)
- Clarify causes for isolation on the Coast through provider and public engagement
- Conduct a post-pandemic check on strategies and interventions to discover isolated seniors, and also to continue support.
- Revisit Addendum to Isolation report: Are there recipients of the isolation report and addendum we are missing such as service clubs, support groups, faith communities, and community associations?

Other findings from the survey

More than half of respondents said that SPT membership made them very much or quite a bit more effective in doing their work.

Almost half of respondents had created or improved services/programs for older adults in the community because of their membership with the SPT. This is a surprising and encouraging outcome considering the resources such work often requires.

Below: Question 9 "Have you created or improved a service/program as a result of your work with the SPT?"
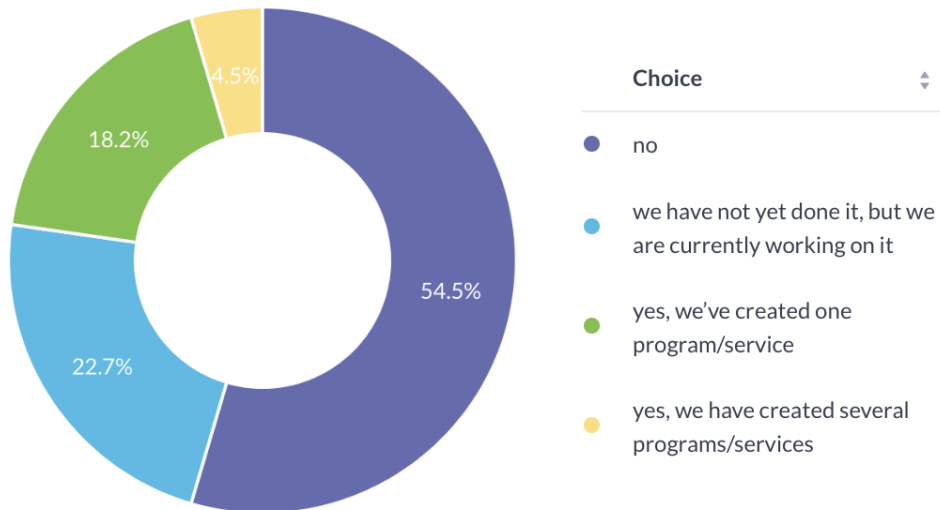
And finally, one of our members contributed these thoughts to the survey:

As a library, we have the privilege to serve the many seniors we have in our community with everything you can imagine. Through the SPT, I have realized how many organizations have mandates to contribute to the well being of seniors. I think these organizations are fragmented and wish everyone to come together under one umbrella to market these wonderful services. A Coast Reporter Directory printed one every few years is not going to do this. A role for SPT.

Conclusion

Insights Into Impact

The Sunshine Coast Seniors Planning Table (SPT) was created 6 years ago with the goal to connect hitherto siloed community-based services to seniors by giving the organizations providing them a forum in which to connect and collaborate. The aim was to create a collective, ensuring that supports and programs are available for all older adults living on the Sunshine Coast to be healthy, valued and involved members of the community.

In order to be able to achieve this goal, we thought it important that member organizations know what each is doing, that they gather and provide information about their services among each other, and that they connect their services to that of other providers in the community.

We defined this goal as Service Literacy which requires that members have the necessary information to identify needs and gaps in existing services.

Our impact evaluation showed us that those members we interviewed and surveyed, which was over half of membership, were overwhelmingly (> 80%) more familiar with other organizations serving seniors and the services they offer as a result of participating in the SPT. They were almost equally strongly (>70%) able to do their work more effectively because of the information they gained as a result of participating in the Planning Table. They also share the information they receive with others (>60%).

These results indicate that we seem to be on the right track in regards to the way we provide opportunities for our members to engage with each other, learn from each other and share information. In order to translate information and learning into the creation of synergies for our local community based seniors services sector, we expect that representatives of member organizations would also need to work together to serve seniors seamlessly. Collaboration could mean building partnerships with each other to work together more effectively to streamline and target services to seniors in the community. In this way members would be able to identify and communicate needs and gaps in services for seniors and collaborate toward filling these gaps.

Our impact evaluation showed that those members we interviewed and surveyed, which was over half of membership, had developed work-related relationships with other members outside of meetings (70%). Even more impressively, a majority had formally partnered with other member organizations, about half of them several times. Additionally; over 20% had created new programs or services as a result of their work with the SPT.

These responses show us that the SPT has a significant impact on the quality and quantity of new and increased collaboration and partnerships between previously siloed organizations. This directly translates into the discovery of gaps in services for seniors on the Sunshine Coast and the creation of programs and services to fill them.

While the provision of services for older adults forms the basis for improving the quality of life for seniors, we also would like our member organizations to grow an ethical framework around their work and expand their spheres of influence. We believe that this can best be achieved through identification with the population they serve and manifests through advocating for services and programs addressing concerns of older adults. Through our work we want to give them the tools so they are able to speak up for and about services for older adults to the community, to other organizations and to governments.

Our impact evaluation showed that of those members we interviewed and surveyed, which was over half of membership, over 55% were much more likely to advocate for an issue affecting the wellbeing of older adults today than before they attended SPT meetings.

In summary, data supports that we have been successful, albeit to varying degrees, in the three areas we chose to focus on. A valuable outcome of the evaluation was to discover that

we are more than an information and referral network: we inspire others and stimulate their thinking, as well as make members feel part of building a better community. Perhaps the most rewarding revelation was that 'We are the way'! The model used for the SPT has received accolades and is serving as a model for other groups within our community, and elsewhere in the province.

Of note are areas we are motivated to improve on. To broaden our horizons, we need to examine who is missing from the table, and to seek ways to gather input from 'free range' seniors, those who are not connected to one of the organizations at the table, or are not served by them.

Steps Forward

We continue to address the issue of Isolation. Although the focus of the transportation and technology committees has served to ameliorate some aspects of isolation, there is still much to be done.

We are hopeful that Recommendation 1: Coordination of Social Planning cited in 'A Strategic Framework for Action on Poverty Reduction' will serve to mobilize actions at the local municipal level. The potential formation of a regional Social Planning Council [SPC] is a first step toward 'facilitating information sharing, service delivery and collaborative planning on social issues related to related to achieving healthy and affordable communities on the Lower Sunshine Coast [p 32.]' Awareness of the impact of the social issue of isolation is a factor to be considered. It is worth noting that the functions and structure of the SPT are outlined in the report.

Moving forward, we plan to explore several aspects of our work. In particular, how might we structure our meetings to enhance sharing of expertise that could enhance the work of members, while at the same time addressing some of the social issues seniors in our community are facing. Define what information members would like to access, and who can provide the expertise. Can we connect with the Rural Health Network to explore the health impact of isolation, especially as we emerge from Covid.

We might also explore the concept of a Think Tank, to see how the structure might augment our meeting structure. How do the core issues that seniors are facing relate to the bigger picture of community development. Who do we need to join our table, and enhance our work. It is time to formulate a new strategic plan, and this in turn allows us to review who needs to join our network, and expand input.

Future Evaluation Opportunities

- Conduct further evaluation activities that reflect the experiences of those who are not regular participants.
- Explore the impact of seniors' programs and services on the clients of our member organizations.
- Explore the impact of working groups on members of WG, especially those who are not SPT members.
- Conduct ongoing impact evaluation that incorporates data collection with a purposeful, stratified sample of members and/or their clients over time (e.g., a one-year period) to gather longitudinal data that could help highlight factors contributing to experiences and outcomes.

Appendix

Qualitative Inquiry Protocol:

What have you been able to learn since you've been a part of SPT about services for seniors being offered in the community that you didn't know before?

→ How has this changed your thinking about your role helping older adults on the Sunshine Coast?

What have you been motivated to try or explore as a result of participating in SPT programs?
 → How has this changed your approach to developing/offering supports and programs for older adults in the community?

What makes you feel energized as a result of engagement with SPT? What drains your energy when engaging with SPT?
→ How has this affected what is most meaningful to you in your work and engaging in the community?

What have you learned from other organizations that has been most helpful to you in your work?
→ How has this affected your confidence/motivation in approaching other member

organizations for support/collaboration/information? How has this affected what you believe is possible for your organization and community?

What new collaborations (partnerships, assistance) have you been a part of since you've been a part of SPT? What have been your biggest successes as a part of these collaborations? What have been the biggest challenges?
→ How has this influenced the way you approach your work with others?

What is most rewarding to you about being part of a collaborative group with shared goals? What is most frustrating?
→ How is this shaping your commitment to teamwork and collaboration?

What sort of new perspectives, assumptions, views on aging have you perceived/recognized through your work with the SPT?
→ How has this influenced your own values and beliefs about getting older? How has this changed the way you see your role in the community?

What new tools and approaches that you acquired at the SPT have you been trying to help address the challenges of ageing for your clients? What challenges have you struggled to address?
→ How has this helped you to become a stronger advocate for seniors? How has this affected other parts of your life?

What do you feel most hopeful about your ability to create a more age-friendly community? What do you feel most concerned about?
→ How have your interactions with older adults become more fulfilling and enduring because of these insights?