

# MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION FOR ETHNO-CULTURAL SENIORS

## Chinese Immigrant Seniors:

### Report on the Consultation to Improve Senior's Mental Well-Being



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Kanata Chinese Seniors Support Centre



**Copies of this report can be obtained from:**

**Kanata Chinese Seniors Support Centre (KCSSC)**

E-mail: [kcssc@kcssc.org](mailto:kcssc@kcssc.org)

Internet: <http://www.kcssc.org/>

**Project Team**

Wen jean Ho, Projector Coordinator

Alfia Sorokina, Volunteer Researcher, Social Planning Council of Ottawa,  
Community Collaborative Research Initiative

**Advisory Committee**

Clara Jimeno, Social Planning Council of Ottawa

Kug Ngo, Ottawa Public Health

Maria Friis, Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre

Wendy Birkhan, Home Watch Caregivers

Wendy Tang, Chinese Community Service Centre

**Community Advisory Group**

Clare Wong

Cuei Gou Li

Hai Bao sun

Hua Qiang Yang

Mei Ling Li

Pei Zhen Ma

Phyllis Chong

Shu Hui Chen

Wei Yang

Ya Nan Ning

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## INTRODUCTION

Small ethnocultural organizations, like KCSSC, are a community-based asset, with valuable collective experience in community development. It is largely agreed that communities know best how to deal with their issues and are able to take a lead. KCSSC has valuable experience working with Chinese older adults. Its best practices have been documented by the Social Planning Council (2010)<sup>1</sup>. KCSSC's activities have an intergenerational approach aiming to support a new role of seniors within the extended family that will assist their independent healthy living.

The extended family plays a significant role in Chinese families, in their interaction with their own community and the mainstream culture. Family and community support are essential elements in the promotion of mental health. It has also been demonstrated that social networks improve the mental health strengthening social capital (CAMH 2009). Ethnocultural organizations like KCSSC play a key role in the development and support of social capital. Through its activities, the Centre offers informal links for cohesion and mutual help which increase seniors' sense of belonging and of being supported. Furthermore, KCSSC bridges their members to external networks increasing their access to resources and information.

With the rapidly increasing number of older adults in Ottawa's ethnic minority communities, the issue of their mental well-being also becomes increasingly important. The number of seniors living in Ottawa is expected to more than double over the next twenty years, representing by far the fastest growing population segment. While the number of seniors make up about 12 per cent of the population today, this group will represent over 20 per cent of the population by 2031.<sup>2</sup> KCSSC acknowledges that the process of integration is long-term and multidimensional, including all levels: cultural social, economic and political. Within this framework, the analysis presented in this report focuses on the social and cultural realms of integration, as well as on the civic participation of volunteers, which is part of the political sphere.

## METHODOLOGY

KCSSC held a community consultation with Chinese seniors to identify the most effective ways to promote good mental health and mitigate the stressors of their integration process, preventing them from living a meaningful life in Canada. The consultation objectives were the following:

- To identify the main issues affecting Chinese seniors' mental well-being
- To detect major barriers preventing them from participating in community activities
- To determine what type of community activities could be successful in improving their mental wellness
- To find out how their volunteer participation can break down their isolation

Two advisory committees were created to support the implementation of the consultation. One was formed by community organizations and the other by community members. A semi-structured questionnaire was developed in collaboration with the two committees. The questionnaire was translated into Mandarin by KCSSC. It consisted of two parts. The first one was designed to be responded

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<sup>1</sup> Social Planning Council of Ottawa, "Best Practices in Supporting the Integration of Immigrant Families, Through Small Ethno-cultural Organizations," 2010

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada Projections, 2012

individually, and the second one to be responded in group discussions using the focus groups methodology. Sessions to gather the information were held in Mandarin at Kanata and Barrhaven using the facilities of KCSSC partner, the Social Planning Council of Ottawa, as well as at the United Church in Abbeyhill and at the two community houses located in Kanata and Barrhaven. The questionnaire grid is included in Appendix A. The present report includes the input from the two advisory committees.

## UNIQUENESS OF IMMIGRANT SENIORS

Seniors arrive in Canada under the principle of family reunification, which is the foundation of the family class immigrants. This class includes parents and grandparents.<sup>3</sup> Research indicates that extended family members contribute significantly to the long integration process, both financially and with in-kind contributions, such as homecare, childcare and labour in the family owned business. Vander Platt et al. (2009)<sup>4</sup> argue that little attention is paid to immigrant parents' and grandparents' needs because of their perceived marginal contributions and gendered nature. In practice, the contrary occurs, but it is not evident. Their contributions are critical to support the economic well-being of immigrant families. This lends support to the participation of family members in the labour market and the achievement of educational goals. Therefore, they need to have access to services and programs that meet their needs.

Research findings indicate that older immigrants, and particularly women, were more likely to have higher levels of depressive symptoms and other forms of mental health issues (Chundamala, Matso and Peng, 2007<sup>5</sup>). One of the most important suspected causes of depression among older immigrant women is the lack of contact with other older women from their country or cultural group. As well, as living on low income and not speaking one of the official languages. Together these facts contribute to the exclusion of ethnocultural seniors. (National Advisory Council on Aging, 2005, Barnett, 1999). Older immigrant women are at a particular risk of mental health issues and have been identified as one of Canada's most isolated social groups (National Council on Aging, 2005).

Research has shown that within few years upon their arrival in Canada immigrant seniors' mental health deteriorates (CAMH 2009)<sup>6</sup>, particularly due to isolation. The importance of social networks is their ability to break down the isolation of seniors and that a supportive cultural and social environment can reduce the stress of integration and promote mental well-being. We address mental health in this report as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his own community" (World Health Organization).

The analysis presented is meant to assist KCSSC in identifying more effective ways to promote good mental health among Chinese older population and mitigate the stressors preventing them from living a meaningful life in Canada.

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<sup>3</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada

<sup>4</sup> Social Planning Council of Ottawa, "Immigrant Children, Youth and Families," 2010

<sup>5</sup> Chundamala, Matso and Peng, "Older Immigrant Women's Health: from the Triple Jeopardy Perspective to Cultural Competency-Personal Communication.", 2007

<sup>6</sup> Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), "Improving mental health services for immigrant, refugee, ethno-cultural and racialized groups: Issues and options for service improvement", 2009.

## CONSULTATION TO IMPROVE CHINESE SENIORS' MENTAL WELL-BEING



Community group:  
Dance in the park with  
KCSSC members

### Age, gender and life experiences of survey respondents

One hundred and thirteen older adults from the Kanata Chinese community participated in the survey; 73 female and 40 male respondents. The majority (68.6%) of them were of the Canadian retirement age (65+), 12.7% were in 55-65 age group, another 5.9% were between the ages 45 and 55 and 12.7% were in the age group 35-45. Accordingly, older adults from different age groups have varying capacities and needs that KCSSC takes into consideration in its programming and volunteer initiatives. For instance older adults in the 55-65 age group are more active and able to play a leadership role in the community, whereas seniors in a 70-80 age group are normally quieter and more affected by health issues. These groups also have life experiences rooted in different political historical periods in China, which also influences their participation.

The presence of older adults within the KCSSC service users is explained by the early age retirement in China at 55 years and the overrepresentation of widowed mothers, due to women's longer life expectancy. The input from the participants in the age group 35-45 represents the family members of older adult respondents. KCSSC wanted to know what family members think about the Centre's activities and how to improve the communication among generations. Parents usually come to Canada sponsored by their children who must provide a 'safety net,' which restricts seniors' access to some services and makes them financially dependent. This arrangement influences seniors' living arrangements. According to the survey, the most common living arrangement among the participants was living with their children (66.4%), 22.4% lived with their partners, while 2.8 % lived alone and 8.4% had other living arrangements, e.g. living with a relative.

Older adults living alone are of particular concern for KCSSC. Research findings indicate they are at a higher risk of isolation, which can affect their mental well-being, particularly if they do not speak an official language (allophones). The goal of settlement policies and the agencies/community organizations have been to facilitate immigrants' integration process, and avoid the development of marginalized,

isolated immigrants, particularly seniors, within the Canadian society (SPCO 2010).<sup>7</sup> Allophone older adults are unable to access mainstream services and programs offered in English or French. Community organizations, like KCSSC, are filling the gap in services for ethnocultural seniors, but do not have the necessary financial resources.

## Community activities as a tool to build social capital



Seniors collaborating in the food drive to support the local food bank

Lewis-Watts (2006)<sup>8</sup> stresses that the type and quality of immigrants' social networks can be just as important as 'human capital' in the success of the integration process. A significant challenge for immigrants is that their social support networks may be broken and lost when they move to Canada. It is not easy for them to reconstitute these networks. Finding a place where they can speak their language and express their culture can be a difficult and time-consuming process. Therefore barriers preventing older adults to participate in community activities and do volunteer work are a concern. Small ethnocultural organizations, such as KCSSC, play a significant role in re-creating the social networks for older adults in Canada and developing their sense of belonging. This was demonstrated by the responses of what helped the survey participants to make new friends after they arrived in Canada:

- 27.2% KCSSC
- 26.0% The language program
- 23.4% Neighbours in the community
- 15.7% Volunteering
- 7.7% Other (e.g. church, exercise club, Chinese community event)

According to the survey, the two main reasons that prevented participation in community activities were transportation, followed by the inability to speak an official language. It is important to note that cultural

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<sup>7</sup> Social Planning Council of Ottawa, "Immigrant Children, Youth and Families", 2010 (Supra note xx)

<sup>8</sup> Lewis-Watts, Laura, "Speaking with Families from Within the 'Family Class'". Metropolis, Canadian Issues, Spring 2006, pp 81-84.

and language barriers combine to create an emotional problem that prevents participation. The survey found that Chinese older adults will fear to walk into a mainstream event or organization and will find it difficult to participate if they are not with their peers. By contrast, at the KCSSC they feel comfortable, are not shy to participate, feel happy, dance, and support each other. Through partnerships and collaborations with large organizations KCSSC has been supporting older adults' participation in mainstream activities. It is important to note that many Chinese older adults have babysitting responsibilities within their extended family, a circumstance uncommon for most mainstream Canadian older adults. The detailed responses about the barriers to participation are presented below:

- 24.8% Lack of transportation
- 22.1% Events held in English and French only
- 14.0% Not knowing where and when the events take place
- 14.0% Conflict with the days and times when the events are held
- 6.3% Mobility, visual, hearing and other limitations
- 6.3% Lack of daycare at the location of the events
- 7.7% Other (e.g. activities are too far, house work/childcare responsibilities, not knowing the location)
- 5.0% Volunteer work exceeds my physical ability

The type of physical limitations experienced by respondents is also an indicator of the type of supports they need in order to participate in community activities. Most of these limitations are associated with old age and, thus, are attributed to the older seniors. This is an issue all programs serving seniors face. KCSSC has developed creative ways to include them and use their strengths, instead of focusing on their weaknesses. The distribution of the type of limitations is presented below.



- 15.3% Hearing impairment
- 13.6% Pain
- 8.5% Visual impairment
- 8.5% Complications after surgery
- 8.5% Symptoms from a serious illness
- 5.1% Physical mobility
- 40.5% Other (e.g. complications after surgery, high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes)

In order to gather more information about the transportation challenges, respondents were asked about the type of transportation they use. Four main sources of transportation were cited: taking the bus, walking, getting a ride from friends or a family member, or driving. The findings indicate the importance that the location where the community activities are held be within walking distance due to the transportation challenges of the participants. The other important factor is making seniors comfortable using the bus by making them familiar with the routes and places they need to go. See below the detailed responses:

- 25.8% I take the bus
- 24.9% I walk
- 15.3% A family member drives me
- 12.9% I drive my car
- 8.6% I ride my bicycle
- 4.3% A friend drives me together with a group of seniors (car pool)
- 3.8% I take Para Transpo
- 2.9% I take a taxi
- 1.0% My husband/partner drives me
- 0.5% Other (e.g. children gave a ride)

## **Feeling unhappy or sad**

Research indicates that having good mental health mitigates the stresses and hardships of the integration process (CAMH 2009). Barriers such as stigma, lack of official language skills, trust and cultural competence affect how immigrants deal with mental health issues. It is noted that immigrants experiencing mental health issues may need to use their own language to explain what they are going through. An emphasis is placed on prevention and promotion of awareness of mental health issues with targeted strategies for particular groups, including older adults. In this process the role of ethnocultural organizations, family support and peer support are key to facilitate speaking out about mental health issues and accessing services.

The survey used the wording ‘sad or unhappy’ to address anxiety, stress or depression in order to be culturally-sensitive and begin the discussion of this issue. When participants were asked if they felt sad or unhappy, over a half of the respondents answered “yes”; 74.4% of them felt occasionally sad/unhappy, with 17.4% feeling sad/unhappy all the time. The prevalence decreased for those feeling sad/unhappy a few times a month (7.0%) and a few times a week (1.2%).

The stigma of mental health issues deters people from speaking out about the issue. Researchers and community leaders acknowledge that in many cultures issues of mental health are considered a private matter and normally are not discussed. In some cases acknowledging a mental health issue can bring shame to the individual and their family. Negative perceptions of mental health issues isolate people and

their families. Therefore providing a safe place where people can feel secure expressing their values and explaining what is happening to them in their own language is crucial for the promotion of mental well-being and the prevention of the onset of mental illnesses.

The most numerous group among the participants noted they would feel more comfortable addressing the situations that make them unhappy or sad in a group of Chinese seniors (26.2%) and being able to speak their own language (25.2%); others would feel more comfortable speaking with a trustworthy member of their community privately (22.8%). Concerns about their dependence were expressed by 8.9% of the respondents when speaking about mental issues, as they wanted to make sure the support they received from their children was not jeopardized. Being stigmatized as having a mental problem was also a concern; 1.5% of the respondents noted they would speak about their mental health issues if they were not being identified as having a problem. Others (0.5%) were open to discuss the issue with a family member and in an informal situation, e.g. while playing games or cards.

## **Main reasons for being unhappy or sad**

It is generally acknowledged that work, family and gender roles change during the integration process, impacting family relations, particularly between parents and children. CAMH (2009) acknowledges that intergenerational problems put seniors at a higher risk of mental health issues. There is a concern that the gap in accessing information about Canadian family structures and organization (for example different approaches on raising children, gender roles, role of grandparents and cultural values) faced by older adults contributes to this divide, with those who do not speak an official language being more affected. Power reversal roles take place in ethnocultural seniors' mobility, finances and communication. Children and grandchildren translate and interpret for them with doctors, service providers and so forth. These barriers to communication become even more severe when they cannot communicate with their grandchildren.

Boyd (2006)<sup>9</sup> acknowledges immigrant's resilience and the acceptance of family members that they need to make some deep changes. The author proposes an empowering strategy that focuses on the immigrant strengths (e.g. family cohesion, cultural beliefs), rather than a focus on the problems. His approach involves asking questions, which are central to the work of KCSSC. These are: "What do I need to learn, in order to cope?", "What must I let go of that isn't working anymore?", "What attitude will serve me best?" The responses we received about the main reasons for feeling unhappy or sad reinforce the research findings mentioned above:

- 21.8% Not being able to speak English or French
- 14.4% Dependence on the children (e.g. economic, transportation, language)
- 10.0% Not knowing about Canadian values, culture and practices
- 10.7% Health and physical issues
- 8.9% Change of occupation after arriving in Canada
- 7.8% Physical issues
- 5.6% Not feeling appreciated by my children/grandchildren with the work I do at their house
- 5.2% Having my advice and experience neglected
- 4.8% Unable to communicate with my children's partner and grandchildren
- 3.7% Lack of my children's time to visit me and go out as a family
- 2.2% Feeling lonely

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<sup>9</sup> Boyd, Dominic, "Resilience in Newcomer Families," *Metropolis, Canadian Issues*, Spring 2006, pp. 85-86

- 1.9% Lack of opportunities to talk to someone about my problems
- 3.0% Other (e.g. transportation and language problems, partner's health problems)

The survey included a probing question about the participation in community activities, aiming at identifying emotional problems hindering participation, by posing a question “what are the three most important factors that prevent you from leaving the house?” The responses received stressed the access to transportation, lack of official language skills, homecare/babysitting responsibilities and limitations. However, some responses addressed emotional issues and others triggering feelings of sadness, such as:

- Not having a friend
- Fear of getting lost, from lack of sense of direction and not knowing how to take a bus
- Lost friends circle I used to have back home
- Too dependent on my child
- Afraid of meeting strangers
- Difficult to communicate with people who have a different value system
- Looking for friendship, not only to attend activities
- Not having interest
- No financial ability

The survey indicated that lack of skills in an official language is a main concern for Chinese older adults. Inability to learn a new language is usually associated with older age; however, the issue is more complex. It involves teaching methodologies, as well as seniors' mobility, time, location and supports. Focus groups held by SPCO (2008<sup>10</sup>) raised concerns that ESL methodologies and teaching materials are not adapted to seniors, which can contribute to poor language skills. According to Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH 2009), lack of language skills is an important stress factor for older immigrants and can affect their mental well-being, particularly if the person is isolated. Survey respondents expressed the need of an English language training that could enable them to express a need and ask for help, using practical and visual methodologies linked to their everyday life. Respondents also stated their desire to learn English in a supportive community environment. The detailed responses to the question “What prevents you from taking English classes?” are the following:

- 37.7% Transportation
- 11.2% Teachers unable to speak Mandarin
- 11.2% What I learn has no practical use for everyday activities (no connected to real life)
- 9.2% Ways of teaching not appropriate for seniors
- 3.1% Not having other Chinese seniors in class
- 27.6% Other (e.g. slow learner, memory problems, no time, no opportunities to use English)

## **Openness to learn about Canadian systems and values to reduce stress**

The survey responses demonstrated the older adults' interest to learn about the Canadian culture, values, and institutions to bridge the gap in communication with their children's families and to be on an equal plying field in negotiating decisions within their families. The overwhelming majority (93.5%) of the respondents stated their interest to learn about new topics, particularly:

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<sup>10</sup> Social Planning Council of Ottawa, “Mixed Blessing and Missed Opportunities: The Intercase Study of Inclusion and Exclusion of Ottawa's visible and Ethnic Minority Residents, 2008.

- 15.4% Different ways of raising children
- 15.1% Ways to express a need and ask for help
- 12.8% Grandchildren independence
- 12.5% Change of the role of grandparents within the family
- 12.5% Small size of Canadian families (nuclear family)
- 12.1% Different values of the new generation
- 9.8% Personal space and privacy
- 7.5% Responsibilities and rights of women and men
- 2.3% Other (e.g. better communication)

## Types of community activities that could improve mental wellness



Seniors dancing during the Chinese New Year's community celebration

“What activities make you happy?” During the consultation process it became evident that the majority of respondents both felt better and were keen about meeting people (making new friends) within the community; being able to share with peers, participating in community activities with other Chinese seniors, learning new things, and being able to speak Mandarin. The responses varied as follows:

- 21.0% Meeting with friends
- 15.4% Doing exercise
- 11.6% Traveling with peers
- 11.3% Dancing
- 10.6% Volunteering
- 9.6% Cooking
- 9.1% Gardening
- 6.3% Talking about your problems
- 3.8% Painting
- 1.3% Other (e.g. sing and chat, sing and learn English to be with others, swimming and singing, learning about computers)

Almost 70% of the participants were interested in becoming part of the community garden. Negative responses were related to transportation, health and mobility problems, lack of time due to homemaker/babysitting responsibilities and not knowing how to garden. These are issues that need to be taken into consideration in planning a community garden to ensure that people are not excluded.

Participants were also asked about suggestions on how Chinese seniors who feel lonely or isolated could be contacted to participate in community activities. The majority of the responses emphasized family visiting, forming a volunteer team to visit seniors, encouraging seniors to participate and accompany them, as well as organizing three generation activities, so the whole family can attend and seniors can learn about community activities and how they can participate.

## **Volunteer work as a tool to break down isolation and increase self-worthiness**



KCSSC volunteers working in the kitchen for the Chinese New Year's community celebration

According to Volunteer Canada, volunteering can play a vital role in healthy aging. Remaining active and staying connected to the community can have a tremendous positive impact on a person's social, physical and emotional well-being. Studies have found that older adults who volunteer have reduced stress-related illnesses and higher self-esteem and are less likely to feel isolated. KCSSC places particular importance on strengthening volunteer work of older adults, and their families as a tool to break down seniors' isolation. The Centre also acknowledges health problems and limitation that seniors face when planning volunteer activities, in order to include them. Below are the responses of what motivates the respondents to volunteer:

- 18.3% Tasks within my physical limits
- 16.2% Opportunities to get out of the house and be with others
- 15.9% Being able to make a contribution
- 15.6% Meeting friends
- 10.7% Sharing Chinese culture and food with others
- 8.4% Opportunities to speak Chinese
- 7.8% Opportunities where I can share my professional knowledge
- 6.5% Transportation being provided
- 0.6% Other (e.g. makes my life more interesting, it is a moral issue)

Participants were keen in identifying the types of volunteering they would like to do. Their input reinforces the present involvement of volunteer seniors in all KCSSC activities, which in many cases they lead. Fundraising with local businesses was one of the most popular volunteer activities, followed by calling community members to invite them to community events. Some were interested in coordinating events when one can share their knowledge, helping with volunteer reminders and coordination, distributing posters and designing programs for the neighbourhood seniors. Others wanted to help the food bank and assist the fundraising centre. The distribution of the responses is presented below.

- 24.7% Requesting donation from local businesses
- 24.2% Calling people to invite them to community events
- 15.3% Reminding volunteers of their commitment and finding a replacement if they cannot attend
- 11.5% Coordinating events where I can share my knowledge
- 9.6% Distributing posters
- 8.9% Designing programs for seniors living in my neighbourhood
- 4.5% Setting the event and cleaning after it finishes
- 1.3% Other (e.g. helping the food bank, help with fundraising activities)

Participants' input on volunteer work was broadened by asking for suggestions of programs or activities they would like to attend or contribute to develop. The question was aiming at promoting participants-led activities that can strengthen KCSSC support to seniors. The suggestions received included the following:

- 29.0% Learn how to use a computer
- 26.9% Learn how to send an email
- 19.4% Develop a community kitchen
- 17.2% Create a community garden
- 7.5% Other (e.g. organize visiting Chinese senior facilities and friendly senior visiting at home, provide information on how to make a life better)

Barriers preventing participants from volunteering mirrored the main barriers to participation in community activities, such as transportation and ability to speak an official language. However, it has also been highlighted that there is a need to promote the value of volunteer work that is not a part of the Chinese culture. In China the provision of services is an exclusive responsibility of the state. Another key issue indicated by participants is to have very well defined tasks of the volunteer work that needs to be performed to avoid unexpected outcomes and feelings of frustration. Below is the participants input about the key barriers to volunteering.

- 25.5% Transportation
- 24.7% Not able to speak English or French
- 16.8% Family responsibilities
- 12.6% Health problems
- 8.9% Not having clear information about the volunteer task
- 4.7% Not being asked to do volunteer work
- 6.8% Other (feeling old, fearing strong opinion of others, homecare/babysitting responsibilities, time conflict)

## Building inter-generational bridges to improve seniors' well-being



Four generations on the stage during the Chinese New Years' celebration

Two central issues were addressed during the group discussions about how KCSSC could get the support from the respondents' children's families for its activities. These were:

- 1) Increasing involvement of children's families in the Chinese community events
- 2) Providing sufficient information to the families about opportunities for parents' involvement in the community

The need of the support of seniors' children and their families, as well as their involvement in activities organized by KCSSC was mentioned as one of the key ingredients for the successful participation in the

community life of parents, as well as the need of organizing multi-generational activities so that entire families can get together, have fun and connect with other families.

It was noted that some families are unaware of KCSSC's programming. It was suggested that greater efforts be made to inform family members about the Centre's activities and its mandate, in order to promote their involvement. Some participants stated that their children encourage them to participate more in community activities, fully supporting them and are eager to help in the activities. It appears that when family members are aware of KCSSC's programming and its benefits for seniors, they are more supportive. It was also considered important to make the information about community activities more accessible to families through, for example, regular newsletters and articles in the Chinese and community newspapers. Another suggestion on how to involve families was asking for their support on specific issues and inviting them to make donations to KCSSC. Some seniors wanted to play a role by sharing their stories of community involvement and volunteer work with their children's families and to invite them to participate in holiday festivals (such as the moon festival or a Chinese New Year) hosted by KCSSC.

Participants also identified ways in which their grandchildren could be involved in supporting senior activities:

- Provide opportunities for youth to volunteer in KCSSC events, such as the Chinese New Year
- Create activities where youth can get involved and share their skills, e.g. computer skills
- Encourage youth to drive seniors to the activities by involving them as volunteers
- Choose topics and tasks that are interesting for youth
- Provide opportunities for youth to share their stories and share their talents



Youth volunteers at a KCSSC community event

## CONCLUSION

Social networks and feelings of belonging are important to healthy living and the reduction of isolation among older adults. This community consultation demonstrated that social involvement of Ottawa Chinese older adults improves their mental well-being despite various challenges they may experience. Additionally, most participants stated their willingness to learn new things, as well as to participate in community undertakings and to volunteer.



In dealing with barriers preventing many seniors from engaging in community activities, the role of the seniors' children and grandchildren is considered particularly important. Informing younger generations about community events and programs and engaging them in the community together with their senior parents is key. The consultation has showed that the more they are involved in the community, the more they are willing to support their parents' involvement in community activities.

KCSSC plays a strategic role in breaking down Chinese seniors' isolation. The organization is in a unique position to meet the language and cultural needs indicated by the seniors in the survey. KCSSC possesses the cultural knowledge and understanding of the special needs of Chinese seniors to develop effective programs, able to prevent mental health issues and promote mental well-being. Through hard volunteer work KCSSC has achieved recognition and trust in the community. These assets make the organization a viable vehicle to outreach to the isolated Chinese seniors and to secure the support of their families. However, in order to have significant impact on the mental well-being of Chinese seniors, the organization needs support to access resources. This will increase KCSSC capacity to break down the barriers isolating seniors, involve them in volunteer activities and get the support of their children's families.

Risk-inducing factors of mental health issues in immigrants must be mitigated to ensure mental well-being. Among the key concerns for older immigrants' mental well-being are the availability of culturally-sensitive services, language difficulties and social isolation. In preventing an emotional distress, the first line of contact for these older adults, are the community organizations who can respond to their needs according to their cultural and linguistic diversity.

## **NEXT STEPS: SUPPORTING SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION OF IMMIGRANT SENIORS**



Seniors gathering for a community volunteer activity

### **Breaking Down Seniors' Isolation**

#### **Broaden access to resources and information**

***Outreaching to isolated Chinese seniors and their children's families:*** KCSSC can develop a community bulletin in Chinese to provide information to families about the Centre's activities. The bulletin could be posted on KCSSC's website and at various locations in the community, such as the bulletin boards of the church, the supermarket, the community centre and the municipality. However, a bulletin is not enough to outreach to isolated seniors and invite them to a workshop or event. First an organization needs to have a profile in the community, to build relationships with seniors and gain their trust; only then they will participate. This is a hard work that KCSSC has already been doing through its volunteers. Maintaining KCSSC's leadership role in the community is essential because Chinese people believe in community leadership, and by setting a good example and creating positive experiences, the people will follow. This is exactly what the organization has been doing in order to get the trust of the community.

***Bridging seniors to broaden social networks:*** It is important that KCSSC access external resources and information through partnerships, particularly with mental health public education programs and mental health agencies. KCSSC has already developed partnerships with the Social Planning Council of Ottawa, Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre and Briarbrook-Morgan's Grant Community Association in launching 'Kanata-North Community Garden.'

## Increasing participation in community activities



Chinese seniors participating in local Senior meet seniors' event organized by local councillor's office



A community outing organized by senior themselves

***Empowering seniors to increase their participation:*** Chinese seniors have childcare responsibilities with their grandchildren, which limits their time and ability to attend activities if childcare is not provided at the facility. This is a particular cultural characteristic uncommon for many Canadian mainstream seniors. To facilitate the access to activities offered by the Centre it is necessary to keep in mind the babysitting duties of ethnocultural seniors. In this instance, KCSSC can use suitable times for its organized activities. In addition, posters of activities can be distributed by the seniors to their children's families to inform they have an activity and need to have time free of childcare responsibilities. Seniors must be made to feel comfortable and empowered so they can speak to their children to let them know when they are not available for childcare and to negotiate a solution.

***Strengthening seniors' volunteer work:*** KCSSC is coordinating work with its members according to their age and capacities. The objective is to break down their isolation. Physical limitations do not have to affect the volunteer work of seniors. KCSSC has successfully used in their events the volunteer work of seniors who are hearing impaired or have physical disabilities. Two recent events demonstrated this fact: The Chinese New Year's Celebration and the Christmas Party, which was attended by many from the larger community. The organization has the strategies in place to promote seniors volunteer work. The KCSSC can continue to develop creative learning environments in order to organize the volunteer work around learning activities, e.g. painting, Internet skills.

## Addressing Barriers to Participation and Volunteer Work



Chinese seniors introduce tea drinking art in the seniors' residence



Seniors helping to clean their community during the Capital Clean up Event

**Transportation Support:** Developing partnerships for transportation as well as a carpool are the two main options. KCSSC has developed a partnership with Western Ottawa Resource Centre (WOCRC) to transport seniors, and could also recruit volunteers from the younger age group to drive seniors to KCSSC activities, but it will need to pay the mileage. However, any of these alternatives would have to be complemented with an initiative to make seniors unable to speak an official language more independent and self-confident to take a bus. Providing bus tickets is not enough. Older adults need a road trip map. For example, how to get to the city center, to the T&T Chinese supermarket, to the church, and places where KCSSC holds its activities.

**English classes for seniors:** Chinese seniors need very practical activities to learn English, as the ESL adult methodology has proven not to be very helpful. KCSSC could implement learning activities where seniors can learn new words and apply them, through songs, cooking classes, visits to the supermarket and round bus-trips.

### Strengthening Inter-generational links

**Intergenerational cohesion and family support:** KCSSC has been successfully involving seniors' grandchildren in taking pictures of the events, being responsible of the sound system, stage programs and the kitchen at different events. The grandchildren wear red t-shirts to demonstrate they are volunteers and provide information to event participants. KCSSC has also involved grandchildren in showcasing their talents at the community events, encouraging their parents to also get involved. The Centre is planning to develop the rule that parents of the grandchildren involved in KCSSC activities, particularly in stage activities, should support the event by volunteering. Parents have been already participating in KCSSC activities, for example, by decorating the venue and selling tickets for the events through their networks.

## Achieving Good Mental Health for Seniors



Chinese seniors  
enjoying a  
community social  
gathering

### **Community awareness to break down the stigma of mental health issues**

Community awareness campaigns and activities are a tool to outreach to the community to start the conversation on mental well-being, using a holistic approach of health that includes physical and mental health within a safe cultural environment.

### **Prevention and promotion of mental health issues**

***Non-medicalized approach:*** KCSSC is promoting a non-medicalized approach to mental wellness, based on prevention and promotion. The possibility to intervene at early stages of anxiety and depression, particularly in the case of isolated seniors is a must. Seniors usually are unfamiliar with Canadian cultural practices, the transportation system and have no official language skills. It has been proven that social interaction, cultural and artistic activities are a tool to break down seniors' isolation. This is the role played by KCSSC through social activities, by developing friendships, encouraging peer-to-peer support and creating volunteer opportunities.

***Developing a new role for seniors:*** Seniors lose the central role they play in the extended family when they move to Canada, where the nuclear family predominates. Creating alternatives for a new role for seniors should be done by action, not just by making seniors' children and grandchildren aware of the wisdom of seniors and the value of the work they do, such as babysitting. Instead, KCSSC believes that it is by having seniors participating in activities and involving their children and grandchildren that a new role of seniors could be developed. Additionally, seniors need to be empowered with knowledge and strong self-esteem, so they can negotiate with their children's families. Such initiative could improve the dynamics within inter-generational families, where seniors face many dependencies, such as transportation and cultural interpretation, while also struggling with their financial affairs and resources.

***Enhancing mental wellness peer support:*** KCSSC activities provides the space for older adults to get together in social club activities, sharing their problems and getting advice from each other as the natural part of Chinese culture. Peer support is a strategy KCSSC can strengthen through facilitation and information.

***Creative ways to break down communications barriers:*** KCSSC approach to break down communication barriers between older adults and children/grandchildren can be done through drama with intergenerational participation. In this way seniors and their family members can get involved in the

performances and learn how to communicate effectively. This is also a way to create more opportunities for families to participate together.

***Bridging Canadian cultural values and gender roles:*** KCSSC believes that the best way to open a discussion about different cultural values and changes in gender roles is through a participatory approach, where different views can be put on the table and openly discussed, with the aim to identify a negotiated solution that can contribute to keep the family united and prevent stress on seniors.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Kanata Chinese Senior Support Centre (KCSSC)**

New Horizon Senior Program (NHSP) 2013-2014

Mental Health Promotion for Ethno-Cultural Seniors

(Supporting social participation and inclusion of seniors)

#### **Project objectives:**

1. To encourage seniors and their families to gain a better understanding of mental health issues, 鼓励老年朋友和他们的家属对于心理健康有更多的认识
2. to take steps to improve their overall health and well-being 采取措施来提升老年朋友们整体的身心健康

#### **Questionnaire objectives:**

- To identify the main issues affecting Chinese seniors' mental well-being  
确定影响华裔老人的精神健康的主要原因
- To detect the major barriers preventing them from participating in community activities  
探讨阻止老年朋友参与社区活动的主要障碍
- To find out how their volunteer participation can break down their isolation  
寻求如何藉由参与社区义工活动的方式，来打破老年朋友们与社区的隔离感
- To determine what type of community activities could be more successful in improving their mental wellness  
拟定对老年朋友能造成正面影响的社区活动项目来提升老年朋友的心理健康

**Choose one or more answers from each question 您可以选择单一或多项回答**

1. Please indicate your age group 您的年龄组

- A. 35-45
- B. 45-55
- C. 55-65
- D. 65+

2. What is your present living arrangement? 目前的居住情况

- A. Living alone with wife/ husband/ partner 和伴侣独自居住
  - B. Living alone as a single person 自己独居
  - C. Living with your children 和孩子居住
  - D. Other, please specify 其他, 请解释
- 

3. What helped you to make new friends after you arrived to Canada? Please indicate. 抵加后, 您如何认识结交新朋友?

- A. Neighbors in the community 社区里的邻居
- B. The KCSSC program 透过华裔支助中心的活动
- C. The language program 透过英语学习的活动
- D. Volunteering 透过义工活动宣传
- E. Other, please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you feel sad or unhappy? 您会感到压力和不快乐吗?

- A. Yes 会
- B. No 不会

5. How often do you feel sad or unhappy? 感觉压力和不快乐的次数有多频繁?

- A. Occasionally 偶尔
- B. Happens all the time 常常
- C. Happens few times a week 一个星期几次
- D. Happens a few times a month 一个月几次

6. What are the main issues making you feel sad or unhappy? 什么事会让您感觉压力或不开心

- A. Physical issues 身体因素
- B. Health issues 疾病因素
- C. Not knowing about Canadian culture, values and practices 不瞭解加国文化、价值和生活方式
- D. Not being able to speak English or French 不能说英文和法语
- E. Change of occupation after arriving in Canada 抵加後, 职业改变
- F. Dependence from my children (e.g. economic, transportation, language) 依赖子女如: 经济, 交通和语言



- G. Unable to communicate with my children's partner and grandchildren 无法和子女的伴侣和孙辈沟通
- H. Not feeling appreciated by my children/grandchildren with the work I do at their house 付出不被感谢
- I. Having my advice and experience neglected 我的经验和建议都被忽略
- J. Lack of my children's time to visit me and go out as a family 我的子女没时间探望我
- K. Lack of opportunities to talk to someone about my problems 没有机会和别人谈谈我的问题
- L. Feeling lonely 感觉很孤独寂寞
- M. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_

7. What would make you comfortable to address situations making you unhappy or sad? 在何种环境之下, 能让您感觉舒适的说说您的情况
- A. Being able to speak my own language 可以用自己的语言来表达沟通
  - B. Being in a group of Chinese seniors 在华人的老年朋友团体里
  - C. Being alone with a member of the Chinese community I trust 单独和我能信任的来自华人社区的成员
  - D. Making sure the support I received from my children is not jeopardized 确定不会影响我的家庭关系的和谐
  - E. Not being identify as having a problem 不认为自己有问题
  - F. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_

8. What of the following activities make you happy? 什么活动能够让您感觉快乐?
- A. Meeting with friends 和朋友见面
  - B. Cooking 烹饪
  - C. Doing exercises 远动
  - D. Talking about your problems 聊聊自己的问题
  - E. Gardening 种菜/花
  - F. Dancing 跳舞
  - G. Painting 绘画
  - H. Volunteering in activities 当义工
  - I. Travel with peers 和老年朋友一起旅游
  - J. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_

9. Community gardens can allow Chinese seniors to get together and cultivate a small plot of land to produce vegetables for their own consumption. Would you like to be part of a Community garden? 社区菜园能够让华裔老年朋友聚在一起和共同开垦一块小菜园, 所生产的蔬菜还可以和社区享用。您愿意一起来做吗?
- A. Yes 愿意
  - B. No 不愿意

10. If your answer is No, please explain why 如果您的回答是不愿意, 请解释为什么不愿意?
- \_\_\_\_\_

11. Would you like to learn about new topics? 您想学习一些人际关系的新知识吗?
- A. Yes 想
  - B. No 不想
12. What would you like to learn? 您想学习哪方面的题目?
- A. Change of the role of grandparents within the family 祖父母在家庭中的角色变化
  - B. Small size of Canadian families 加拿大的小家庭制度
  - C. Different ways of raising children 不同护养孩子的方式
  - D. Grandchildren independence 如何培养孙辈独立
  - E. Different values of the new generation 不同价值所形成的代沟
  - F. Responsibilities and rights of women and men 男性和女性的责任和权益
  - G. Ways to express a need and ask for help 寻求帮助的不同管道以及表达方式
  - H. Personal space and privacy 个人空间和隐私
  - I. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_
13. What prevents you from participating in community activities? 什么原因阻止您参加社区活动?
- A. Not knowing where and when the events take place 不知道活动在什么时候和地点举行
  - B. The days and times when the events are held 不知道活动的时间和日期
  - C. Lack of transportation 没有交通工具
  - D. Events held in English or French only 语言不通
  - E. Lack of daycare at the location of the events 没有托儿服务
  - F. Volunteer work that exceeds my physical ability 义工的性质超过我的体力能负担的范围
  - G. Limitations with mobility, visual, hearing or other limitations 受到身体限制, 如: 行动, 视力和听力的不便等
  - H. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_
14. If you have any limitations, which are affecting you? 如果您有行动不便的问题, 请指出:
- A. Physical mobility (wheel chair, walker, etc.) 行走需要辅助器
  - B. Visual Impairment 视力受损
  - C. Hearing Impairment 听力受损
  - D. Pain 疼痛
  - E. Complications after surgery 手术后遗症
  - F. Symptoms from illness (e.g. Parkinson, Alzheimer) 疾病的症状, 如巴金森病, 老年失忆症
  - G. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_
15. What are the three most important factors that prevent you from leaving the house? 影响您外出的三个主要原因
1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_

3.

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16. Do you have any suggestions on how Chinese seniors who feel lonely or isolated could be contacted to participate in community activities? 对于孤独或寂寞的老年朋友,您如何建议他们与外界接触?

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17. What type of transportation do you use? 您的交通工具是什么?

- A. Drive my own car 我自己驾车
- B. My husband/partner drives me 伴侣接送
- C. A member of my family drives me 家人接送
- D. A friend drives me together with a group of seniors (car pool) 朋友接送
- E. I take the bus 乘公交车
- F. I use Para Transpo 利用残障人专车
- G. I take a taxi 坐计程车
- H. I walk 步行
- I. I ride my bicycle 骑自行车
- J. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_

18. What prevents you from taking English classes? 您为什么不想上英语课

- A. Transportation 交通不方便
- B. Teachers unable to speak Mandarin 老师不会说中文
- C. Not having other Chinese seniors in the class 没有其他中国人一起上课
- D. Ways of teaching not appropriate for seniors 教学方式不适合老年朋友
- E. What I learn has no practical use for everyday activities 所学的在日常生活用不上
- F. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_

19. What motivates you to be a volunteer? 什么原因让您想做义工?

- A. Opportunities to speak Chinese 可以说中文
- B. Meeting friends 和朋友见面
- C. Sharing Chinese culture and food with others 和他人分享中华文化和食物
- D. Occasions to get out of the house and be with others 走出户外认识朋友
- E. Transportation being provided 有车接送
- F. Volunteer work within my physical limits 能力范围之内做义工
- G. Volunteer work where I can share my professional knowledge 可以分享我的专业知识
- H. Being able to make a contribution 为他人及社会作贡献
- I. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_

20. What prevents you from doing volunteer work? 阻碍您当义工的原因

- A. Transportation 交通问题
- B. Not able to speak English or French 不会说英文或法语
- C. Not being asked to do volunteer work 没有参与义工活动的机会

- D. Not having clear information about the volunteer task 没有足够的义工活动讯息
- E. Family responsibilities 家事太多
- F. Health problems 健康原因
- G. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_

21. Would you like become a community volunteer? 您想为社区做义工吗, 例如主持社区活动, 分送活动海报, 募款等等?

- A. Very much 很愿意
- B. Sure 愿意
- C. May think about it 可以考虑
- D. Not at all 不愿意
- E. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_

22. What type of volunteer work would you like to do? 您想做那类的义工工作?

- A. Designing programs for seniors living in my neighborhood 为社区设计活动
- B. Coordinating events where I can share my knowledge 分享我的经验共同主持活动
- C. Distributing posters 分送海报
- D. Calling people to invite them to community events 打电话邀请大家来参加社区活动
- E. Reminding volunteers of their commitment and finding replacements if someone cannot attend 打电话提醒义工活动工作分配
- F. Requesting donations from local businesses 向附近商家募款
- G. Setting up the event and cleaning up after it finishes 活动前后的准备和善后工作
- H. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_

23. Do you have any suggestions of programs or activities that you would like to attend or contribute to develop?

- A. Learn how to use a computer 学习操作电脑
- B. Learn how to send emails 学习使用电子邮件
- C. Develop a community kitchen 社区厨房
- D. Create a community garden 社区菜圃
- E. Other. Please specify 其他, 请解释 \_\_\_\_\_

24. Do you have any suggestions on how we could involve members of your children's family to get their support to the seniors' activities we organize? 您有任何建议可以让家人也一起来帮助策划和参与老年朋友的活动?

25. Do you think young volunteers could make a valuable contribution to senior activities? If so, do you have any suggestions on how we could involve your grandchildren? 您认为年轻人（青少年）可以为老年朋友做些事吗? 如果可以,您是否有任何建议可以让他们也参与为老年朋友服务的义工工作?

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Thank you 谢谢您!