

OUR STARTING POINT

Core Questions:

Social connections and relationships

What activities, links and relationships form the social world of older people?

What do quality relationships look like?

What are the discrepancies between ideal and perceived social relationships?

What types of supports and interventions support increased sense of social connection?

What's the difference for individuals between social isolation (their level of integration into the wider social environment) and loneliness (a deficit between individuals' actual and desired level of social engagement)?

How do changes in health, relationships, housing and income impact isolation? (ex: loss of eyesight, mobility, spouse, independence)

Quality of Life

What is a good quality of life look like for seniors, for their family members/ caregivers?

What does a valued life look like to seniors? To family and caregivers?

Opportunity areas & positive deviance

Where are the opportunities spaces?

What are the positive experiences of seniors life?

Who is experiencing their version of a good quality of life, despite risks & challenges? Why?



Who:

Older adults who are 60 and above



Where:

Vancouver



DISTILLED SYNTHESIS

The research in numbers

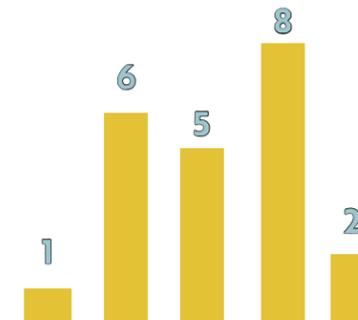
Self-Identified Gender

n = 22



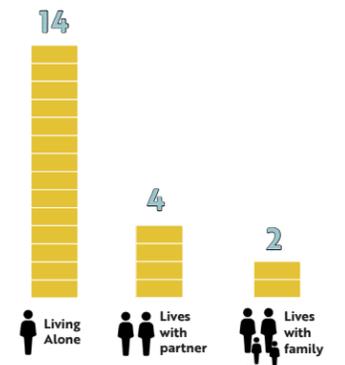
Age

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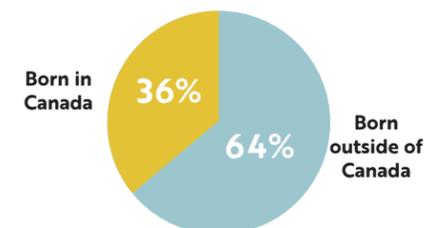
Living Situation

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Countries Born in

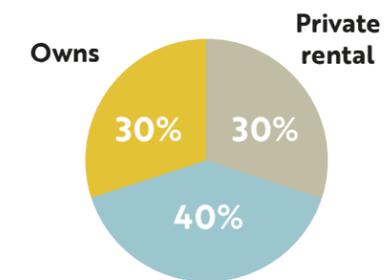
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Canada	9	Guatemala	1
Trinidad & Tobago	1	Philippines	1
Czechoslovakia	2	India	1
Scotland	1	Hong Kong	3
China	2	Fiji	1

Type of Housing

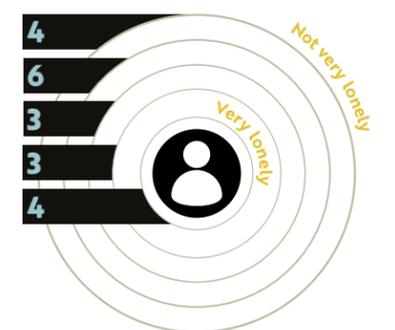
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Subsidized/senior housing

Loneliness

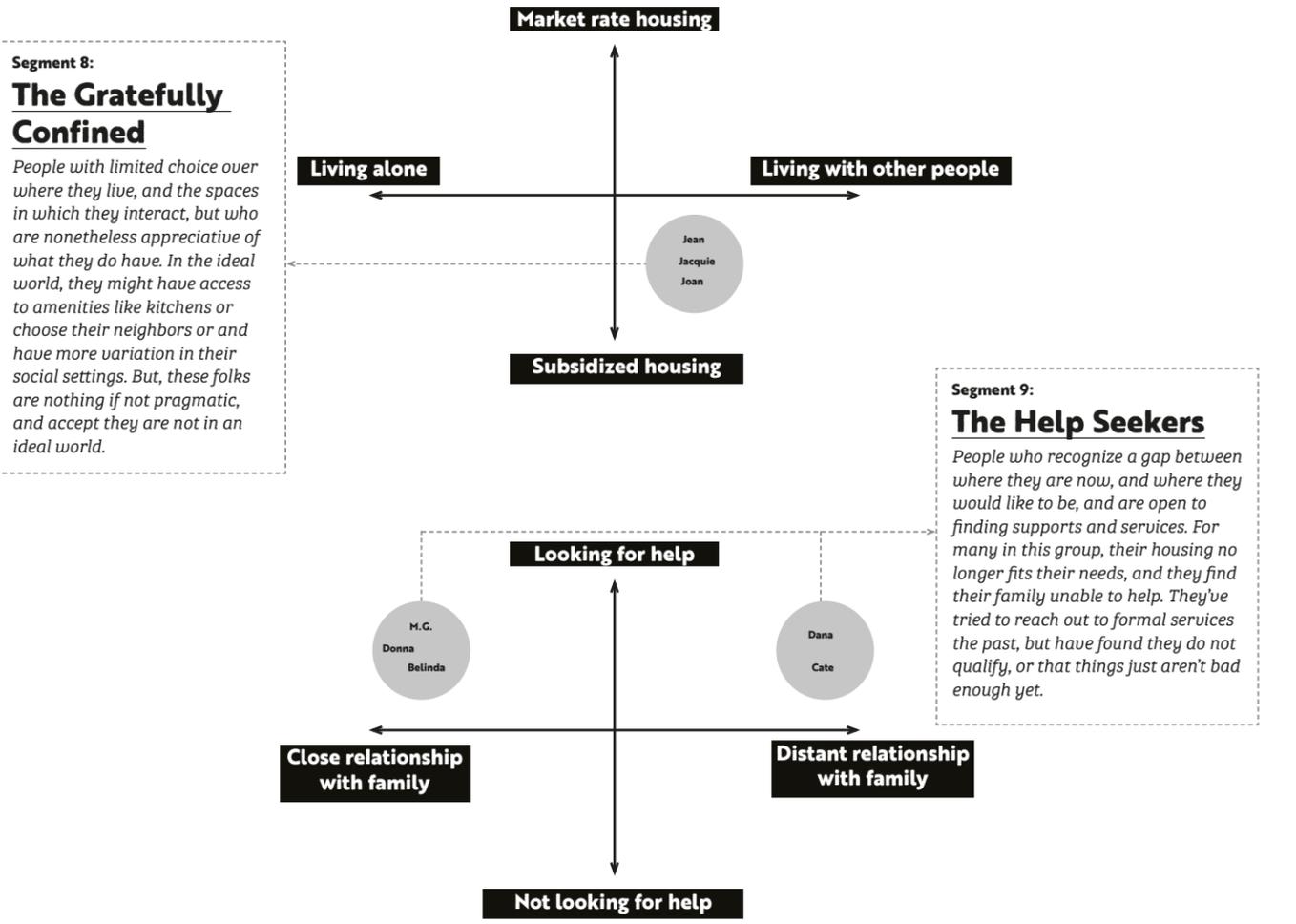
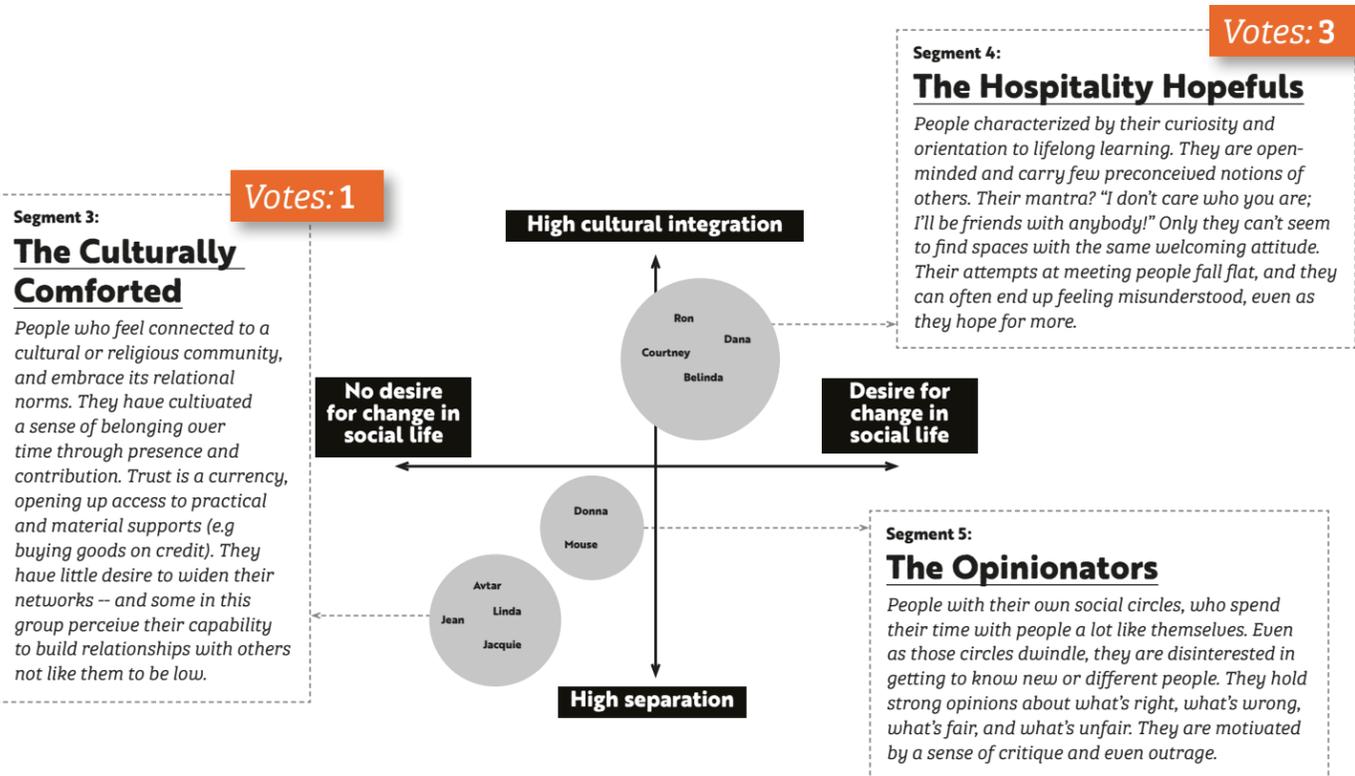
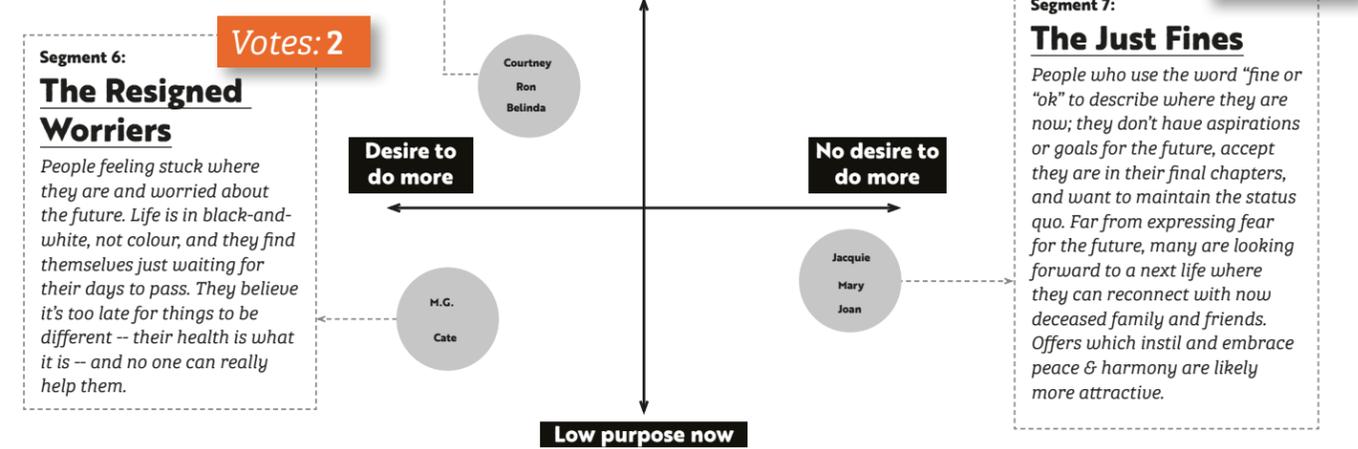
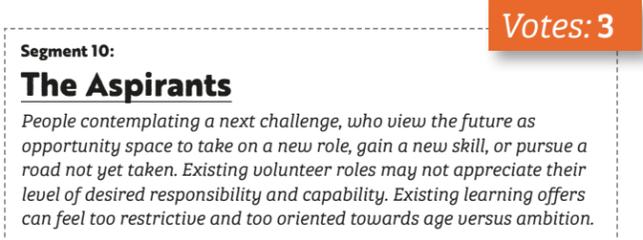
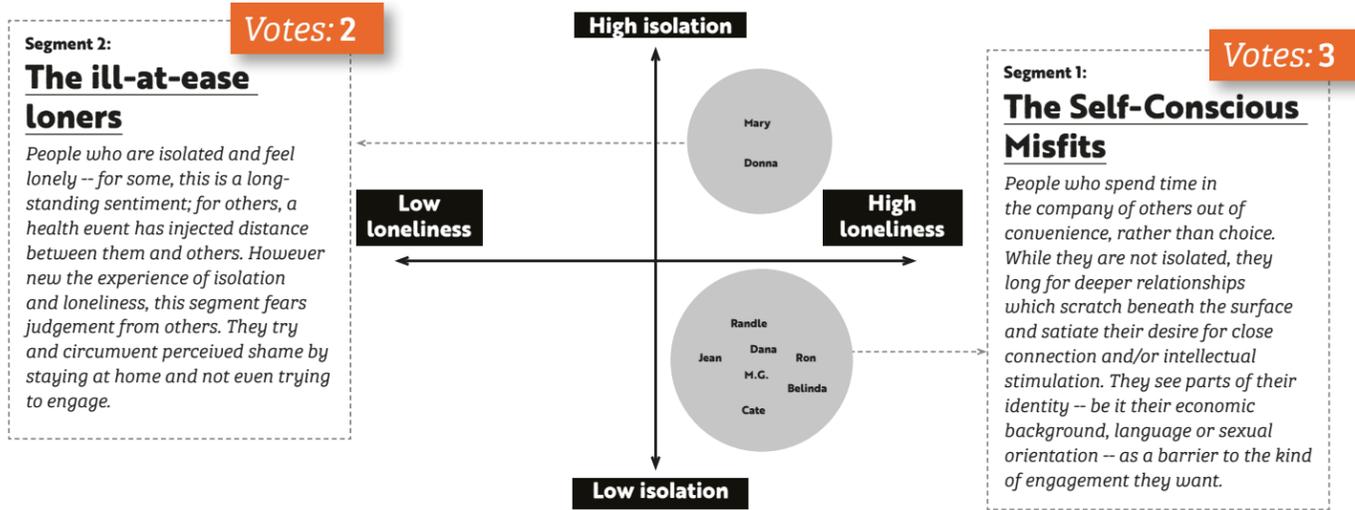
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SEGMENTATIONS



What resonates



TOP PAIN POINTS



Votes: 3

“Anti-Chinese sentiment”

“This is a challenge for nearly every age group in Vancouver”

What resonates

Your comments

SEPARATENESS

Dana put up posters to try and make friends -- but no one responded. Ron heads to McDonald's for company, but sits at separate tables. Too many people report friendships forged out of convenience versus choice. Although they are not isolated, they feel separate and on the outskirts, with few opportunities to build meaningful relationships. Instead, they are relegated to pleasantries and superficialities.

How might we broker & match make neighbours and residents?

EMBARRASSMENT Votes: 3

Donna doesn't want to go far -- lest she has to use the bathroom. Randle doesn't want to leave the safety of his Filipino friends -- lest others cannot understand his English. For a sizeable segment, embarrassment casts a long shadow over their engagement with others. Fear of judgement and rejection can dampen motivation.

How might we address feelings of shame by breaking down perceived barriers between people?

BEWILDERMENT

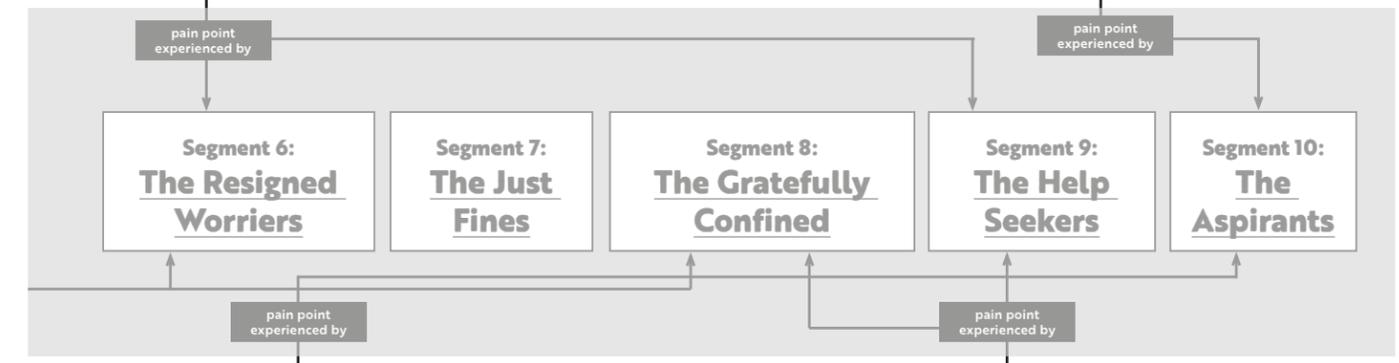
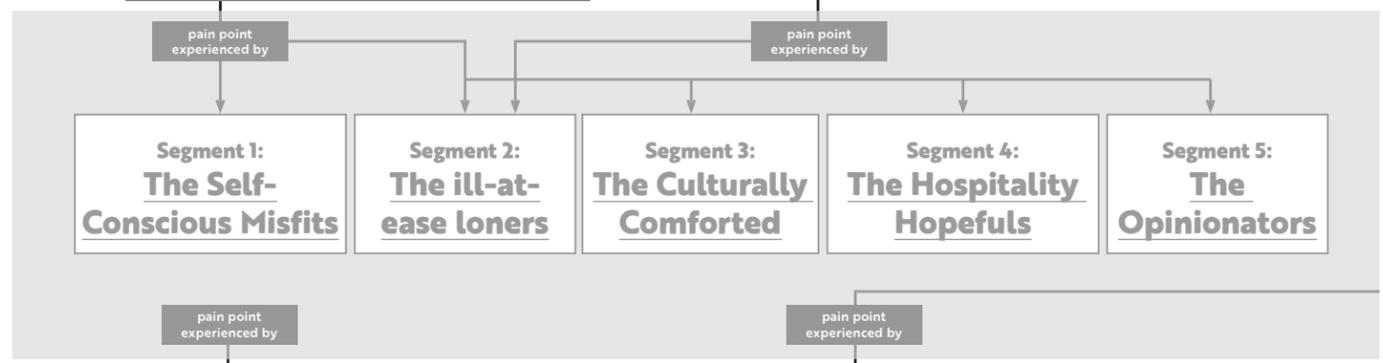
Family can function as a double edged sword. At times, they can offer emotional support. Other times, family can stand in the way of qualifying for financial and practical supports. Not sure where to turn, or how to navigate on their own, too many older folks feel lost, confused, and as if they are a burden or drain.

What if information wasn't delivered in a static, one-way interaction but as part of trusted roles in the places?

STATUS LOSS Votes: 4

The loss of a driver's license or car is a painful event for many. Not only does it alter one's sense of independence and curtail freedom of movement, it also reflects a shift in perceived competency that can feel scary and shameful.

How might capability loss be coupled by gains?



IDLENESS Votes: 3

Sleep can be elusive to many, turning the night time into a long and uneventful period of idle time and the days into a sleepy stupor. While many older adults did not feel comfortable being out at night, they also feel the monotony of so much time at home, with the TV or internet as their primary companion.

What if experiences and content could be on demand, at any time of day?

CONFINEMENT

Health and mobility challenges aren't just practical barriers, they are also deeply psychological, constraining people's sense of freedom and control. As people's worlds narrow, the fear of engaging can grow.

What if new technologies were leveraged to bring the wider world to people and prevent extreme narrowing?

STIFLED Votes: 5

Linda is creating her own Chinese singing and dancing groups. Ron wants to start a reflexology group. Plenty of older adults have an insatiable appetite for both learning and teaching, and yet a sizeable segment have found community centre structures striffling and unattractive. They don't like being told what to do.

What if community centres were platforms for self-organizing groups, providing resources, and not just directly running programs?

“Need more Neighbourhood Houses or participant led senior centres”

“Much more responsiveness is needed for young seniors programmers”

UNSATIATED Votes: 3

For too many, food functions as a daily reminder of what has been lost: independence, self-sufficiency, connectedness. Over and over again, older folks describe barriers to eating well: the expense of groceries, not having choice, lack of access to kitchen facilities, mistrusting one's self to safely prepare a meal, shifting diets, and solo meals. And yet food is also a powerful convening tool, breaking down isolation.

What if food wasn't simply seen as a means to survival, but for sustenance? What if meal times were seen as opportunities for increasing agency, control, hope, and connectedness?

TOP INSIGHTS



Votes: 1

PROTECTIONISM

CONTRIBUTION

Libraries, meals on wheels, and churches function as trusted service providers for older adults. They construe their role in terms of protecting 'vulnerable' older people -- and seem weary of assuming a brokerage or connector role. Older adults did not have much of a language of vulnerability; they spoke of contribution. Even older adults seeking more support, perceived themselves as self-advocates, able to speak to their needs -- if only others would listen.

Votes: 2

STRUCTURED

UNSTRUCTURED

Selective, exclusive and "not for me" were some of the words used to describe community centres. Active users of community spaces described their rules and norms: they were only for certain cultural groups; you were told what to do, when. Commercial spaces like mall food courts and open spaces like park benches could feel more liberating. For some older adults, the anonymity of the crowd provided cover to be themselves. There was a greater sense of control and autonomy -- and therefore normalcy -- being in open, unstructured spaces.

Votes: 1

TRUST

MISTRUST

Unreliable memory is a source of significant anxiety and fear. Older adults frequently started sentences with "I wouldn't trust myself anymore to" As people lose confidence in their own competencies and their self-efficacy dwindles, they are often forced to put faith in others to help. We can learn from older adults such as Jean H. how they've managed to maintain a sense of self in the face of growing dependencies. That has looked liked choosing caregivers, seeing pictures and 360 degree panoramas of housing options, getting on the bus with an extra hand, etc.

Votes: 5

USEFUL

USELESS

There are no obvious personal milestones after retirement -- except death. While most older adults revel in the lack of responsibility, many felt useless, purposeless, and with more to give. But because volunteering is often constructed like a job, with expectations and obligations, it wasn't such an attractive proposition. Older adults wanted to contribute on their terms, and engage in learning on demand.

Votes: 1

BUSY

FULFILLING

Keeping busy -- with cleaning, TV, Facebook (for some), puzzles, coffee -- prevented time from standing still. So too did social interactions with whomever was around: the people in your building, at McDonalds, at the Safeway checkout stand. Older adults described friendships forged out of convenience rather than mutual interests, and expressed a desire for deeper connection with people, even if they weren't of the same age or background.

WEATHER

SHAKESPEARE

Hamlet, psychology, medicine, history, geography. These were just some of the conversation topics older adults wanted to talk about, and yet, they found themselves chatting about the weather and other day-to-day mundanities. Enrolling in a class or a program at a certain day and time in order to have these conversations felt contrived or too much effort for too little known pay-off.

PROFESSIONAL

PERSONAL

Adults with professional backgrounds in social work or aged care entered their older years with specific strategies and preferences: in many ways, they had prepared for life at this age, were aware of what might be coming next, and because of that, felt they had a modicum of choice and control. Many were open to sharing their accumulated knowledge.

Votes: 3

TRAPPED

STUCK

Older women in bad marriages and power imbalanced family relationships felt particularly stuck, without a clear place to turn. They wanted out of their homes, and yet, the cost of housing prevented them from leaving. These women knew of no helpful formal supports -- and found past attempts to reach out to services ineffectual.

Votes: 3

CHANGE

ADAPTATION

"I used to know my neighbourhood, but not anymore" was a common sentiment, followed by a sense that developers own the city. As buildings shoot up and roads close to accommodate construction, older adults' worlds become smaller and narrower. The fear of getting lost in one's own neighbourhood grows. With few opportunities to meet new neighbours, and get re-introduced to the changing landscape, "othering" thrives. Phrases like, "They are not like me" and "I don't fit in" were commonplace.

Votes: 1

APPRECIATION

ABANDONMENT

"Canada takes care of its seniors" -- except when they don't. Older adults are appreciative of their pensions and access to health care. And yet, Mouse sleeps on his couch and rents his bedroom out. M.G and Kate can't afford to leave abusive relationships. Mary has been robbed renting out her room to students. Belinda must use the food bank to make ends meet at the end of the month. For the financially precarious, there is a sense of abandonment. Things aren't "bad" enough for them to qualify for more supports. Because they may live with family members with an income, they are not sufficiently down and out. It's a waiting game for their situations to worsen.

Votes: 5

POSITIVE IDENTITY

NEGATIVE IDENTITY

One of the most palpable barriers to engagement was fear of judgement -- because of age, sexuality, health, language, and culture. One segment described not being 'other' enough -- they didn't see themselves fitting into neighbourhoods that didn't look or sound like them. Another segment described being too outside the norm, perhaps their accent or their sexual orientation set them apart. Across the folks we met, perceptions of difference and negative identity seemed stronger than perceptions of similarity and positive identity.



**Welcome to the
Convivial City!
Year of 2050**

A city that harnesses people's creative capacity

"Society can be destroyed when further growth of mass production renders the milieu hostile, when it **extinguishes the free use of the natural abilities of society's members**, when it **isolates people from each other** and locks them into a man-made shell, when it **undermines the texture of community by promoting extreme social polarization and splintering specialization**, or when **cancerous acceleration** enforces social change at a rate that rules out legal, cultural, and political precedents as formal guidelines to present behavior..."

To formulate a theory about a **future society** both very modern and not dominated by industry, it will be necessary to recognize natural scales and limits... Such a society, in which modern technologies serve politically interrelated individuals rather than managers, I will call **'convivial.'**"

Ivan Illich

"There are cliques, and sometimes you don't feel you fit in, you feel uncomfortable." - Belinda

"No one wants to be friends with an older person unless they are old themselves." - Dana

"Canadian people say, I must call you for tea and they never do. Spanish people are the opposite. They are very friendly and outgoing." - Jean

"I love cooking shows. I tried once to sign up to do a cooking program, they asked me 'What's your addiction?' You have to have an addiction to be eligible! That pissed me off." - Mouse

"I'm not a retiree because I keep busy. If I was a retiree then I'd be sitting at home watching TV all day." - Ron

"If you stop learning, that means some kind of death. Spiritual death, or mental death, and I can tell you, in our building we have many people who just spirituality die, and they don't learn a thing" - Robert

A city of spontaneity and shared action

"I believe that a desirable future depends on our deliberately choosing **a life of action over a life of consumption**, on our engendering a lifestyle which will enable us to be **spontaneous, independent, yet related to each other**, rather than maintaining a lifestyle which only allows to make and unmake, produce and consume – a style of life which is merely a way station on the road to the depletion and pollution of the environment."

Ivan Illich

A city of neighbourliness and love

"One problem with this state of affairs is that the work now most needing to be done—that of **neighborliness and caretaking** — cannot be done by remote control with the greatest power on the largest scale..."

In our limitless selfishness, we have tried to define "freedom," for example, as an escape from all restraint. But ... "free" is etymologically related to "friend." These words come from the same Indo-European root, which carries the sense of "dear" or "beloved." We **set our friends free by our love for them**, with the implied restraints of faithfulness or loyalty. And this suggests that our **"identity"** is located not in the impulse of selfhood but in **deliberately maintained connections.**"

Wendell Barry

"I am a very gregarious person, I like to talk to anybody, but I can't. There are times I just sit here, sometimes I go three or four days without really talking to anyone. You have that feeling, you flip through your phone, longing for intelligent conversation. I can't find anyone to really talk to." - Randle

"You know, the city of Vancouver loves to start programs, but it's not about those programs. It's about the people -- they need people like us who can follow-through and pay attention to what's important." - Ben

A city of solidarity & positive identity

"Scholarly frameworks starting from the stress on negative identities – subject to discrimination – within a field of power relations must be grasped ... as quite different from analyses that start from the **positive aspects of multiple ethnic and diasporic identities.**"

[We can] contrast between positive and negative forms of identification, the former **a source of solidarity** and taken-for-granted, **shared understandings**, the latter subject to inferiorizing, stigmatising and discriminatory constructions."

Pnina Werbner

What about block parties to get people to come out? We used to have a dance once a month at 43rd and Victoria at the community centre. Then [specific ethnic groups] took it over. People are a bit resentful." - Ron

"I've been in Vancouver for so many years, and never been to the library. And community centres? No. I have a feeling I'm being looked down upon. I cannot open my mouth and say anything I want. What if I offend?" - Randle

Convivial Roles

- » How might the city shift from a service deliverer to a community connector?
- » How might the city create more opportunities for contribution & exchange?



Transit Talkers

What if there was a network of friendly residents who rode buses, Skytrains, and handycarts to spark conversations, bring a bit of surprise & merriment, and offer a helping hand with groceries, walking to and from transit stops, and navigating the city?

Votes: 1

Good segway/transition to a new mode of travel without pressure — could be linked to work done by SENIORS ON THE MOVE (SOTM) + ALLIES IN AGING



Hi, I'm Sherry! I'm a Transit Talker. I just love chatting to people. A couple days a week, I ride along the Marine Drive bus route, and help folks get on the bus, offer water, flowers, anything that puts a smile on people's faces!

Transit Talkers



Stand-in Family

What if Vancouver took a page from Japan's bustling 'rent-a-family' industry and recruited its large acting community to serve as stand-in family & friends to older folks? Older folks could choose their helpers & conversational companions?



Senior Realtors

What if there was a city-run letting agency specializing in housing needs for seniors? What if seniors felt there was a real estate agent on their side to help them find units that fit their needs?

Votes: 1

Reno-viction lawyer for seniors?



City Crews

What if more city staff and residents were on a first name basis and there was less anonymity? What if staff working in a particular neighbourhood -- city planners, garbage collectors, gardeners, parking attendants, postal service workers and police officers -- organized as teams and got to know their neighbours through shared meals, block events, storytelling, etc.

Votes: 3

How about staff-led "walking tours"?



Neighbourhood Matchmakers

What if there was a new kind of Neighbourhood Watch -- teams of residents supported to meet & greet neighbours, listen and connect folks with shared interests, tastes, and desires?

Convivial Information

- » How might the city shift from pushing out information to exchanging know-how?
- » How might the city turn generic information sharing into personalized experiences?



Gifts of Knowledge

How might resident's life course events trigger a gift from the city: beautifully packaged information relevant to that point of time, personalized invitations to participate in community, and suggested places to go and people to meet? For example, the loss of a driver's license can amplify feelings of isolation and loneliness, so how might a package in the mail acknowledge the transition, connect residents to others like them, and introduce alternative transit options? Other triggers might be ...

- Birthdays = timely & staged information about resources, discounts, opportunities
- Change of address = maps of local area, passes to cultural events & spaces, stories of neighbours

Likes: 7

Could build on ALLIES IN AGING transportation initiatives



"I turned 71 last week, and it was such a surprise to get a box in the mail from the city! There was some lovely tea and special socks, a card from my Neighbourhood Crew, and invitations to so many things happening just a few blocks around me!"

Gifts of Knowledge

Likes: 2



Content Boxes

How might the city put some of its cultural & learning content into the hands of more residents? What if city libraries & cultural institutions created subscription boxes with DIY content in different languages? Drawing on bibliotherapy, what if these boxes could help older residents with feelings of separateness, boredom, anxiety, and uselessness?

Likes: 3



Pop-up Public Squares

What if the city resurrected the notion of the public square, and curated teams of residents who speak different languages to regularly pop-up at grocery stores, parks and malls to share updates, solicit ideas, and create a two-way flow of information? How might teams use a range of modalities: singing, dance, theatre, oration, art, etc?

Like: 1



Story Books

What if the city helped tackle stigma, perceived language & cultural barriers, and "othering" by creating neighbourhood story books? What if there was an analog Facebook -- with photos and backstories of people who live in each neighbourhood -- to engender empathy and positive identity?

Convivial Exchanges

» How might the city shift from running programs and operating community centres to curating networks and facilitating community platforms?



"I love Shakespeare -- Hamlet is my favourite play. I find the language a little tough, but through the Start-up group platform, I found three other people who

love Shakespeare as much as I do. We get together once a month, and we even got \$100 from the city to buy the complete works plus the ability to book a space down the street for our readings."

Start up groups



Start-up Groups

What if community programming wasn't just delivered by community centres, but by self-organizing groups of residents? What if residents could propose new activities, find like minded folks, and access city resources to run their groups at any time of day or night? Think: Meet-up meets Saddleback Church (a platform for setting-up your own bible study) with the added bonus of city resources (spaces, equipment, etc.)

This is what NHS do, but we need more space and money to expand this approach — could the "Shared Spaces or Space Shares" be linked to this?



Space Shares

What if people and institutions had a place to list their underutilized spaces -- backyards, front lawns, sheds, empty sides of buildings -- and people looking to garden or to create art could use those spaces in exchange for sharing the fruits of their labour?

Likes: 5



Language Buddies

What if dual language high school and college students were paired with non-English speaking seniors to help them navigate city offers and services? What if there was an easy way for older folks to access translation over the phone with this student-run service?



Retiree Corp

What if retired residents were invited to join Retiree Corp, where they could be matched to local organizations to share their know-how or propose their own project drawing on their unique skills and background?

Like: 1



Meal Mates

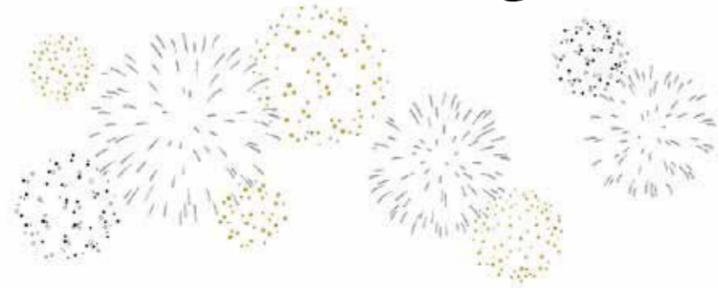
Food isn't just a tool for survival, but for connection and camaraderie. How might community centres & libraries broker people to one another for shared meals based on similar taste preferences and desired topics of conversation? How might meals on wheels and other community meal services offer bundled take-away packages to facilitate people coming together -- and include table clothes, candles, and conversation prompts?

Likes: 4

There were threads of people loving to cook, people who don't cook — can this be linked to some shared space where some cook and share, others eat and share?

Convivial Culture

» How might the city invest in joyful customs and celebrations to bring people together around a shared and emergent identity?



"I've lived in this neighbourhood for ten years, and it's changed so much that I barely recognize it. This year's swap day was just so much fun. I exchanged two sweaters I had knitted for a rice cooker and a beautiful orchid. I didn't expect I would have anything in common with people around me, but turns out one of my neighbours and I both love flower arranging! We're going out for coffee next week!"

Swap Days



Swap Days

What if the city hosted street parties which gave voice to hyper local bands, performances, and stuff swaps? How might Vancouver learn from cities like Amsterdam with its King's Day celebration where the city turns into a giant thrift shop, and residents get to know each other over shared food, drink, and merriment?

Votes: 2

Can we use the city booking system to make it easy?



CityTube

What if the city created its own Youtube & social media channels fed by citizen content creators: residents trained-up to create short clips and stories of everyday people having everyday moments? What if we used media to intentionally cultivate a shared positive identity?

Can this be linked to "SMART CITY" strategy?



Footing

What if residents visited each other at least once a year with a festive drink & treat? How might teams of residents work with the city and property managers to identify new or older residents and offer a delightful reprieve?

Convivial Infrastructure

» How might the city out in place infrastructure that brought people together and cultivated connections?



Hello City!

What if the city hosted a range of phone lines, particularly in the evenings after community centres closed, where residents could call-in to hear the news read to them; join a conversation on topics like jazz, movies, and history; practice English, etc.?

Likes: 3



"I can't sleep and night time just feels like it goes on forever. There's a 2am classical music group I can join by calling a number. I listen to pieces of music, people's opinions of them, and add my two cents when I feel like it. It keeps my mind occupied so I don't feel so lonely."

Hello City



Healing Infrastructure

Grief, worry, and sadness is part of the human experience – and as people age, they accumulate more loss. What if the city identified spaces and people in each neighbourhood from different faith & philosophical backgrounds and made it easy for people to access – through a shared phone number, free rides, etc.



Tech Helpers

What if seniors received a free Internet package courtesy of the city with a bundle of easy-to-use resources to keep them feeling connected with the outside world? What if they could access tech helpers – local student volunteers – who could help to sort out tech challenges and also help automate things like cooking in the house?

Neighbourhood and community centre staff are innovating in programming all of the time, what are their ideas? Are we short of ideas or rather short of money to implement these ideas?

Can we inspire young people 7-17 to meet and spend time with their neighbours who are seniors?

\$\$\$ funding streams to support

Can we design spaces to fulfill this function? In new developments? "Space shares"

Shift service focused to contributor focused

How do you get people from their home to the event? Cognitive difficulties can make it difficult

Speakers corners

Are there other cultural forms of gathering that can be encouraged? Eg. mah jong party

Right on! Loved what we had to say about program segmentation

Can we embed a seniors focus in similar programs that are currently operating? (segmentation)

More community centre outreach...block by block...

Shared stories of seniors overcoming adversity on public plaques on poles

Many grandchildren don't really know how to spend one on one time (the lack of common interest) with their elderly relatives. How can we encourage this behaviour — ie. shifting the culture to where learning from your elderly is respected

Flexible spaces in community centres for resident led programming

Iona Beach Regional Park

Leverage leverage leverage into existing initiatives

Let's address racism, recognizing how during the formative years the cultural norms and attitudes towards people of colour were