# ENGAGING OLDER WOMEN IN YOUR COMMUNITY

## A Promising Practices Guide for Women's and Senior Serving Organizations

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR
ELDER LAW

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# I.  Executive Summary

*Engaging Older Women in your Community* is a promising practices tool developed as an outcome of the Older Women's Dialogue Project (OWDP). The publication is intended to support your agency to anticipate and address structural barriers to the participation of older women in community initiatives aimed at legal and policy change. We include key questions to explore, tips for enhancing organizational capacity to include older women, and examples from our experience throughout the OWDP.  All of the ideas contained in this resource reflect what we learned through our work with older women living in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The quotations are the words of older women who shared their experiences with us.

Older women contribute enormously to our communities, through paid and unpaid work, caregiving, volunteering, and much more. They also bring great knowledge and experience to their work. However, many older women also experience barriers to their well-being that impact on their ability to participate in community initiatives. This guide identifies strategies for engaging older women in meaningful, older women-led volunteering as a method to combat systemic inequalities against older women, and support the leadership potential of older women. The guide will be useful to staff working in the women's sector, seniors sector, and volunteer organizations, and also to practitioners working in research, community development, program development, policy, and law reform, and in general, for anyone working with older women in Canada.

# II. What is the Older Women's Dialogue Project?

The OWDP was born out of a concern that the perspectives of older women are often missing from discussions of aging policy and law reform. The purpose of the OWDP is to close the gap between aging and gender in law and policy, and give voice to the experiences of older women. The OWDP explores:

> " When one's [hair] starts turning white, you start to fade into the background, like a ghost. "

- What are the pressing law and policy issues impacting older women?
- What can we do to address these barriers to quality of life for older women?

With these goals in mind, the Canadian Centre for Elder Law and our project partner West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund held consultation focus groups involving over 460 older women living in the Lower Mainland, engaging women from nine different linguistic communities. To date we have published two consultation reports:

- *Your Words are Worth Something: Identifying Barriers to the Well Being of Older Women* (2013)
- *We are Not all the Same: Key Law, Policy and Practice Strategies for Improving the Lives of Older Women in the Lower Mainland* (2017)

We also worked with four communities of older women to create tools that take action to address barriers to well-being they identify as most pressing. The women developed brochures, videos, petitions and other tools to help people better understand their experiences, and to support change in law and policy. Learning as we went, the OWDP developed an approach to engaging older women in law and policy change.

# 1. Connecting Age, Gender and Other Aspects of Identity

The Canadian population is aging. According to demographic projections, the number of people aged 65 or over could double in the next 25 years. Women, on average, live longer than men, and the majority of seniors in Canada are women.[1] By 2031, projections estimate that there will be 5.1 million older women, comprising 24% of the total female population of Canada.[2] Older women represent a significant part of the population, a tremendous volunteer group bringing diverse skills and lengthy experience to their work, and significant foundation of wisdom to inform law and policy change. Indeed, Statistics Canada reported that, in 2013, one third of women over age 65 were engaged in volunteer work, and that senior women who volunteered spent more time volunteering than their younger counterparts.[3]

> " This project gave us voice. "

Law and policy work aimed at improving quality of life for women often occurs without consideration of older women's unique needs, and aging policy rarely reflects a gender analysis. There is also often a disconnection between the women and seniors serving sectors. As a result, policies often neglect the needs of older women.

In our work, many people have asked why our project focuses on older women. In short, positive change for older women is only possible if we identify how older women's experiences differ from both those of younger women and older men. As long as older women's experiences and needs are invisible to us, we are powerless to take action to address their pressing needs. However, engaging older women calls for deliberate strategies for inclusion. These strategies are the subject of this guide.

# 2. Systemic Barriers Impacting Older Women

## INCOME

Women earn an average of 66.7 cents for every dollar earned by men, and 72 cents when only full-time employed men and women are compared.[4] Other barriers can further negatively impact income level. For example, Indigenous women earn less 26% less than non-Indigenous men, racialized women earn 32% less than non-racialized men, and immigrant women earn 28% less than non-immigrant men—and these numbers compare only full-time income earners.[5] In BC, senior women are more likely to be poor than men: based on Statistics Canada data, one in three senior women who resides alone is living in poverty, and many more live just above the poverty line.[6] In 2008, 17% of women aged 65 and over in Canada who were living alone were low income, 5% higher than the rate for senior men (12%).[7] In our own consultation work, older women consistently identify poverty and fear of poverty as one of the most pressing barriers to their well-being.[8]

> " It's not just that older woman are treated poorly, but if you're older, a woman, and not white, you're treated worse. "

## CAREGIVING

Caregiving is intimately tied to some of the barriers to quality of life that older women negotiate, including reduced incomes and retirement savings. Although our communities rely heavily on the unpaid caregiving of women, there is minimal social, legal, and economic support for women in their caregiving roles. Across the life course, older women make choices that prioritize care over paid employment, resulting in lower incomes and reduced savings. Older women report they are the primary caregivers of grandchildren, great-grandchildren, adult children with

disabilities, spouses, siblings, parents, and other people.

Older women are also sometimes recipients of care who rely on family members for support. According to projections, the number of older women with no surviving children will increase substantially in the next 30 years.[9] These women will encounter significant challenges accessing care for themselves. In our consultations, elder lesbians and queer older women in particular raised concerns about a lack of respect for their relationships of care. Some wondered who will care for them as they aged and experienced greater functional limitations.

## DISCRIMINATION AND AGEISM

Discrimination of older women is ubiquitous, undermining quality of life and access to services.[10] Older women experience discrimination and ageism from landlords, health care providers, social services, and others. The poor treatment women experience is not only linked to age and gender, but also to other aspects of identity, such as disability, immigration status, sexual orientation, poverty, Indigeneity, and ethnicity. Indigenous women and women Elders in particular face discrimination across their lives. Lack of respect for the rights of older women is a matter requiring urgent attention.

## ISOLATION

Although research on social isolation does not clearly reveal older women to be generally more socially isolated than men of a similar age, it is clear that women are more likely to live longer than their male counterparts, and outlive their partners, resulting in greater isolation in their late senior years.[11] Statistics Canada data indicates that senior women are more likely to live alone, especially if they are over 85.[12]

# POLITICAL POWER

In 2016, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report ranked Canada at 49 of 144 countries in the area of women's political empowerment.[13] Similarly for BC, in 2016 the Minerva Foundation's BC Score Card for Female Leadership ranked BC very low in terms of the presence of women in corporate leadership: for example, one finding was that 50% of the companied reviewed had no women on their boards, and none of the companies that participated had Indigenous women on their boards.[14] Older women have tremendous wisdom to share with their communities, and this knowledge is under-utilized.

# VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

There are millions of older women survivors of abuse: 50% of Canadian women have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 16,[15] and Indigenous women are more than eight times more likely to be killed by their intimate partner than non-Indigenous women.[16] For Indigenous older women, historic trauma is fundamental to the experience of aging.[17]

Women who have experienced violence at a young age may be at a greater risk for abuse in later life, and a significant proportion of elder abuse is violence between partners in later life.[18] Women with disabilities and deaf women[19], as well as immigrant older women, are especially vulnerable to domestic violence due to economic dependence, language barriers, and a lack of knowledge about community resources.[20] Older women may, like younger women, experience violence from a partner, but more uniquely may also face abuse from their adult children, grandchildren, other family members, caregivers, or strangers.[21] Women are also more likely to experience sexual violence in old age as compared to men,[22] and many transition houses are not sufficiently accessible to older women.[23] Barriers related to abuse and violence must be addressed in order to support the engagement of many older women in community.

# 3. Meaningful Volunteerism and Community Engagement for Older Women

Every year, older women across Canada contribute millions of unpaid volunteer hours to the social and economic benefit of non-profit, community, and social service agencies. Volunteering is an important component of active and healthy aging for many older women. Benefits of volunteering include improved physical and mental functioning, enhanced emotional health, social connectedness, education, and skill and career development.[24]

> " I feel empowered to see the campaign and that I was included. "

The benefits of volunteering on older women's sense of self-esteem and the value they contribute to community are seldom noted. Volunteering has been shown to help combat social isolation, and is one of the one of the most empowering activities for seniors because the focus of volunteering is on the strengths that a person has to offer as opposed to her needs.[25] Recent research also highlights the benefits of volunteer opportunities that are self-directed, and provide education and support for volunteers to engage in citizen advocacy, civic participation, and community leadership.[26] Historically older women were recognized as Elders, and sources of great wisdom and guidance for communities. Many older women need support to resume their rightful place at the helm of our communities.

# 4. The Older Women's Dialogue Project Approach

One of questions the OWDP explored was how to engage older women in meaningful volunteerism and community leadership as a strategy to combat the many systemic issues and barriers negatively impacting older women. The OWDP directly engages older women both as project participants and active agents of change. Central to the OWDP is recognition that older women are the experts of their own lives, and have valuable knowledge to share. Exclusion of older women not only has negative impacts on the women themselves, but also compromises our capacity to produce work that is thorough and comprehensive.

Readers familiar with participatory action research or a community development framework will notice similarities to the OWDP approach. Older women volunteer their time to participate in the project, and are valued as experiential experts and leaders. Project staff are accountable to the women. We work as agents of change to support older women to direct the work, and eventually, take ownership of the activity. Volunteerism is connected to reducing age and gender inequalities, with empowerment as a key goal.

# III. How to Use this Guide

This guide will be of interest to anyone who works with older women. It was created to enhance the capacity of practitioners from all sectors, including law, policing, government, health care, finance, social services, and housing to consider the impact of both aging and gender on the experiences of older women, and to include older women more actively in agency initiatives. The purpose of this guide is to share the lessons learned from our work with older women. We anticipate the guide will be of particular interest to stakeholders working in:

- Senior and women's based social services sectors
- Organizations who employ older women as paid staff, volunteers, or in a leadership capacity
- Government and policy development
- Participatory based action research and community development projects with older women

This guide is a starting point to encourage conversations within your organization about how best to engage older women in your work. The strategies flow in no particular order. Each section begins with a small paragraph describing the issue, followed by questions for reflection, some practical tips, and one example from our work.

Here are some suggestions for how to incorporate the promising practices tool into your work:
- Use the document as a training resource for new staff or volunteers
- Share the publication with a potential partner or collaborator to start a conversation about how to work together
- Cite the tool in a funding application as authority for the need for certain resources to support the inclusion of older women in projects
- Explore the principles and practices described in the document to help you develop an inclusive consultation strategy
- Include the tool in post-secondary curricula and professional development activities
- Study the guide as you develop a research and ethics board application for a research initiative involving older adults or women

# IV. Promising Practices

" The key issue is that if you go to the women and help them, they can then fix the rest of the family.  Women are the ones that always fix and rebuild the communities. "

# 1. Supporting Older Women's Leadership

Services and programs that are delivered to older women should be informed by the needs and desires of older women themselves. Following this principle is essential to combatting ageism and gender inequalities, and to creating programming that is responsive and accountable to older women in your community.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What does it mean to have a project or program that is led by older women?
- Are your project staff prepared and equipped to support older women to lead the project?
- How will your group make decisions?
- Are your programs inspired by the real needs of older women, or what you think they might need? How can you explore this issue?

# TIPS

- **Allow sufficient time for trust building** with the group of older women you want to work with. Like any group, older women may take time before they develop trust with your organization. It is important to recognize the power of staff to influence process, and to work toward building trust and reducing power differences between your organization and the women you serve.

- **Recognize your own agenda and values** (individually and as an agency) so you can better understand the women's desires and needs. Initiatives that are truly led by older women must reflect their agendas. This process will require you to give power (back) to the women. Your funding needs to be sufficiently flexible in terms of outcomes in order to allow older women to take the lead.

- As a group, **decide on the decision-making processes** at the start of a project for example, consensus versus majority rule. Resist participant impulse to defer to staff, while sharing your knowledge and experience as appropriate.

- **Emphasize evaluation and be willing to rethink your strategies** on an ongoing basis. Ongoing program evaluation can be a great opportunity to develop program themes, content, and other areas as informed by the needs of older women. Evaluation findings throughout the process can help staff identity more effective approaches for working with a particular community of women. It is important to be humble, and willing to try to do things differently if appropriate.

- **Be willing to accept something less than perfect.** If older women are leading the work you are aiming to meet their standards, not yours—they may be higher, lower, or just different from yours. Sometimes this commitment means accepting a tool or outcome that may be less than perfect in your eyes. True community-led work emphasizes process as much as outcome. Supporting women to lead means the facilitator or organizer is assisting with skill and knowledge development that enhances the women's leadership capabilities.

# EXAMPLE FROM THE OWDP PROJECT

In one of the OWDP groups, older women seemed initially keen to address discrimination and ageism faced by seniors on public transportation in their community. Every woman in the group had either shared a personal story of discrimination on transit, or relayed an incident of poor treatment of an older woman on the bus. Stories includes seniors who had fallen on the bus because it moved away too quickly, or older women who could not find a seat as nobody would give one to them. One woman said she saw an elder pushed from the bus while trying to exit at her stop. Project staff and volunteers had gathered useful research on the topic, and were excited to support the women to develop a tool focused on this important subject. Then the women surprised us. When the issue was put to anonymous vote we learned that every single woman wished to focus on a health care related topic, not transportation. The women told us "transportation is important, but without your health, you have nothing." Working with the women in small groups, the team took a step backward to explore the issues most important to the group a second time. In the end, the group decided to focus on access to publicly-funded dental care. From this experience, we learned the value of repeatedly checking in with older women to make sure the project focus is truly addressing what they identify as important.

# 2. Addressing Accessibility, Safety, and Inclusion across Difference

Accessibility for older women includes physical, social, emotional, cultural, and linguistic considerations. The onus is on organizations to ask themselves what they are doing to engage traditionally excluded and marginalized women and communities. Older women from most communities will experience unique challenges to participating in an initiative. Barriers can layer on top of one another to create access and inclusion issues that must be addressed. Women who live with poverty, disability, family violence, trauma, caregiving responsibilities, and other challenges may need additional support. It is also important to remember no group is homogenous, and there will be power differentials within and between groups of older women. Safety includes cultural safety, and freedom from discrimination and racism.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How does your organization identify the accessibility requirements of programming? Will particular women experience additional barriers?
- Is your organizational structure (i.e. Board, Advisory Committee) representative of the population you serve?
- How do you know when the needs of your community have changed?
- How accessible is the physical space of your building?
- Can you hire a leader from the women's community?

# TIPS

- **Ensure project leaders or advisers reflect diversity.** Forming a community advisory committee with a diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, abilities, genders, and ages can help staff identify emerging accessibility and safety concerns as well as strategies to combat them.

- **Conduct an accessibility audit.** Local health services and disability agencies may offer tours of your facilities to identify barriers and offer solutions to address accessibility concerns. There are many structural accessibility guidebooks such as the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's Maintaining Seniors' Independence Through Home Adaptations guidebook.[27]

- **Ensure language interpretation needs are met.** Think creatively and consider partnering with another organization to offer interpretation and translation for your programming. Bilingual student volunteers can be a great resource.

- **Value cultural safety.** Power dynamics between facilitators and participants can undermine process, and result in women not feeling safe. Consider hiring older women project leads and facilitators from the women's cultural community. Even dynamics of ageism can interfere if project leaders do not make it clear that the wisdom of older women is valued. Some participants may have internalized ageist ideas about their own worth.

- **Make sure your facilitators have the skills for the job.** Effective facilitation helps create a respectful environment where people can participate without fear of being cut off by someone with greater power. Not everyone is a skilled facilitator, and some very experienced facilitators have limited experience working with older women, in culturally or racially diverse settings, or with interpreters.

- **Recognize inequality and privilege amongst group participants.** Use different engagement techniques such as small group work, breakout sessions, and individual writing time to engage all participants rather than just the most outspoken women.

# EXAMPLE FROM THE OWDP PROJECT

One of our groups of older women included mostly Indigenous women, and a smaller number of Caucasian women. After a few meetings, there emerged a dynamic of Indigenous older women feeling excluded from the conversation as Caucasian women were monopolizing speaking time, and making discriminatory comments. The facilitator brushed off discriminatory comments rather than directly addressing them as inappropriate. As a result, Indigenous older women felt silenced, and did not feel safe in the group—the group dynamics had begun to mirror the systemic racism and discrimination that Indigenous peoples experience daily. To address meeting dynamics, we brought in a new facilitator and changed facilitation styles dramatically. We began opening each meeting with a restatement of the group's commitment to safety and respect, underscoring that racism was not welcome in the room, and that everyone must be sensitive to the poor treatment they each encounter in the larger community. We permitted lengthy check-ins that provided an opportunity for the women to honour each other—sometimes this meant fewer tasks were accomplished in each meeting; however, greater equality in participation resulted. We employed different strategies to ensure participants had equal speaking time and felt safe, such as creative breakout activities that valued non-verbal ways of expression, such as collage, and small group work. We also consulted more often with project collaborators about meeting process design. The shift in group dynamics was profound and positive, and all began with the project team admitting they had made a mistake with facilitation.

# 3. Working Across Generations

Many older women love working with younger generations. Intergenerational activities can help older women feel valued as teachers and sources of wisdom and experience. Older women can also learn skills from younger people. Adding an intergenerational component to programming can also help break negative stereotypes that contribute to ageism. In many situations, student volunteers can also be used to leverage scarce resources, and support in-kind contributions for funding proposals.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What tasks in your organization could be carried out by students?

- What mentorship and supervision is available? What valuable skills does your staff have to share with students? Are staff able to set aside time to mentor? Do your staff know how to be mentors?

- Does the student volunteer position replace a formerly paid position or does it follow the organizations volunteer program guidelines for appropriate placements?

- Can your organization form an ongoing relationship with a school or university to secure student volunteers for your programs?

# TIPS

- **Start small while building organizational capacity to support intergenerational programs.** Bringing multiple generations together even a couple of times a year can still have a positive impact on both older women and youth.

- **Consider what you can offer younger generations to support their learning goals.** Develop relationships with local learning institutions by inviting them to community events. Invite students to visit your organization on a field trip, and ask to be added to a school's community events mailing list.

- **Develop your in-house capacity for mentorship skills** through discussions with others with mentorship experience, formal learning opportunities, and experience.

- **Think long term.** Student volunteers can grow into terrific summer employees, sometimes funded through government or foundation sponsored mentorship programs. Volunteerism can be a great way to train future staff.

- **Be curious about keen students.** Sometimes a conversation will reveal a student has surprising and unique skills that can make an enormous unexpected contribution to your work.

Access to legal information emerged as a significant barrier faced by older women in each of the groups we worked with. The project has had great success in sharing legal information and resources with women using a model whereby legal issues that arise during a meeting are documented and researched by student volunteers, reviewed by project staff, and then addressed by the volunteer at the next meeting as a learning session. OWDP participants reported feeling valued by the younger generation because students took the time to understand who they were, hear their stories, and learn about issues they experience in their lives. Students learned about different legal topics, and enhanced their oral presentation skills. Volunteer work expanded our project capacity, and supported the CCEL to develop rich relationships with various university departments.

# 4. Collaborating and Working in Partnership

A cornerstone of the OWDP is building relationships with community agencies to maximize resources and strengthen programming for older women in our communities. A successful collaboration can help non-profits save costs by sharing infrastructure and administrative expenses, expanding clientele or participants, tapping into complementary skills and abilities, and leveraging each other's social and community networks. Collaboration can be an effective way to bring together complementary expertise—this is especially true of working with older women, as the seniors and women serving sectors have often been very separate. Although collaboration poses challenges, it often results in superior work.

Increasingly funders are requiring projects be led as community collaborations of multiple agencies. Collaboration can be a strategic way to maximize impact and avoid competition for scarce resources. However, not every seniors or women serving agency, non-profit or community centre will have the same capacity, infrastructure, or available staff time to support collaborative work. To add to this pressure, many grant applications have a short turn-around time, and require completion of complex online application forms. Some agencies may not have much experience with collaboration.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What are your weaknesses as an agency vis-à-vis project work that you would like to do? Could capacity be enhanced through collaboration?
- How can your organization further engage with key stakeholders (individuals or agencies) in the communities you serve?
- What barriers does your organization need to overcome to improve the quality of collaboration with other organizations?
- In what areas can your organization assist a potential collaborator with the grant writing process?
- What organizations have you always wanted to work with? Who is doing great work?

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# TIPS

- Make time for strategic community outreach. Introduce yourself and your organization to other groups running similar or complementary programming. If your work is with seniors, introduce yourself to women's sector organizations and vice versa. One of the barriers to social, policy, and legal change benefiting older women is the silo'd nature of our busy practices.

- Support the work of potential partners and collaborators. If you are on social media, be sure to share information about the work of other agencies, especially those you would like to collaborate with. Show up to their events. Write support letters for grant applications and funding reviews. Volunteer on their committees. Promoting the work of other agencies can pave the way for future collaboration.

- Be clear about roles and expectations. Collaboration requires good communication. Consider developing a detailed written collaboration agreement to be signed by key staff at each agency. Don't assume one person within the other agency will loop everyone in—be explicit about who needs to know what in order for a project to be successful. A shared project timeline can also be helpful. Also, be clear with each other about where decision-making authority lies with respect to various elements of the work.

- Discuss capacity and respective funding needs. Non-profits and government agencies alike can struggle with limited funding. It is really important to discuss the budget and each agency's financial needs in order to participate in the project. Even agencies playing a small role will appreciate a financial contribution in recognition of staff time (if permitted by their core funders to received additional funds). Non-profits can over-commit if all their contributions are expected to be in-kind, and funding can permit them to dedicate staff time to your project work.

- Make sure writing and submitting a proposal is the last step, not the first, in the partnership development process. Before you begin the application:

  ☐ Identify the proper point of contact for the organization.

  ☐ Explore interest in the proposed project, including what they would like to accomplish as an organization, and what sorts of benefits they would like to realize from a partnership.

  ☐ Learn about your partner's organization including the mandate, core values, business characteristics, key issues, and resources they could contribute to the partnership.

  ☐ Determine how your potential collaborator measures success.

- Consider imbedding evaluation of the collaborative relationships and partnerships into your evaluation process so you can gain greater insight into what is working, and what is not.

# EXAMPLE FROM THE OWDP PROJECT

One of our project collaborators had difficulties invoicing for project expenses such as catering and facilitation costs. They were always behind in submitting documents, and the delay began to impact the project timeline. It turned out that the small organization needed support with drafting invoices for payment. Sample templates were sent to the organization, and after that all project invoices were received on time. Open conversation about our project partner's barriers and challenges, prior to the beginning of the project, could have helped us avoid these delays.

# 5. Meeting Basic Needs and Showing Respect: Honorariums, Food, and Transportation

For some older women, volunteering in community programs and participating in leadership initiatives will present multiple barriers. Not everyone will be able to participate without supports. Inadequate housing, clothing, food, and employment opportunities can limit the ability of a person to contribute meaningfully. Providing food, honoraria, and transportation can help level the playing field, allowing a diversity of older women to be involved. Honoraria can be used as part of a continuum of supports to encourage the community involvement of multi-barriered populations, recognize expertise or commitment, and help reimburse older women for out-of-pocket expenses, such as childcare and transportation costs.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Is an honorarium the most appropriate way to recognize the expertise and commitment of older women in your community, or are there other more culturally suitable means? (for example, providing childcare).

- Is the provision of honoraria sustainable? If not, is there an agency plan to deal with the expectations of volunteers when honoraria are no longer possible?

- What are the dietary needs of the group? Consider allergies and diseases such as diabetes.

- How does your organization plan to handle administrative costs associated with the recruiting, screening, tracking, supporting, and recognizing volunteers?

- Do all project staff understand why honoraria, food, and transportation costs are being provided to volunteers?

# TIPS

- **Discuss honoraria with collaborators,** and put the agreement in writing. It is very important that the rationale for the use of honoraria is clearly understood by both the organization and the older women receiving the honorarium. Let the older women know how much honoraria they can expect, and what they need to do to receive it (for example, attend group programming). Develop an agreement with the host agency regarding when it is appropriate to provide honoraria, and how often.

- **Plan for the logistics of administering cash honoraria.** Managing honoraria means withdrawing and carrying cash, which may raise logistical, accounting, and policy issues for small organizations. Instruct staff to make sure honoraria are distributed respectfully, and take the time to thank each older woman.

- **Consider providing food at the outset of a gathering,** rather than only at breaks. Some women will not have access to nutritious food early in the day. Starting with food is a friendly way to begin that shows appreciation for participants.

Throughout the project, we offered participants a $20 honorarium for their time, two bus tickets, and healthy food during the meeting. These items were provided at every meeting. Some older women traveled more than three hours a day on public transit to attend the group's programing. We see these practices as part of a successful strategy for helping to reach socially isolated older women, but also honoraria help compensate a woman for her time. Many of the women making this long journey to the meeting relied on the regular honoraria and free food to offset poverty and food insecurity. We found it very important to start each meeting with food, because otherwise some woman would be hungry. This approach also emphasized that the food was a gift, not something women had to earn. In some groups women proved to be so hungry that we added additional snack breaks, and food became very central to the gatherings.

# V. Conclusion

Older women are a vital part of Canadian society, a tremendous resource for community development and social change, and a profound source of knowledge and experience. However, they can also face

> " "Our generation is a potent force because we are a huge demographic." "

significant barriers to participating in community initiatives. Older women experience discrimination, ageism, racism, and many other barriers that compromise their quality of life, and limit their participation in community. These issues must be addressed in order to ensure that older women are able to age positively and actively.

We must recognize the many contributions that older women make to our communities, and support them as community resource people and leaders. Both community agencies and older women benefit when older women are supported to be agents of legal and social change in their communities. Engaging older women as experts and knowledgeable community leaders helps them to build resiliency, and promotes healthy communities where older women are respected and valued. This guide serves as a starting point to help organizations develop or enhance initiatives that are more inclusive of older women, and more responsive to their needs.

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