



Bingo Halls & Shopping Malls

An ethnographic dive into what life is like for people 75+ in greater Vancouver — and the kind of life they aspire to.

Research by:



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For many of the adults age 75+ we spoke to, 'loneliness' and 'senior' weren't words that resonated. So we focused conversations on desired outcomes that generate opportunities to address what matters to them.

The number of older adults in Vancouver is growing. By 2036, adults 65+ will make up 21% of the Vancouver population. But, what's in a number?

18 is the number Esther gave us. Sure, her birth certificate says 83, but she sees herself as she always has. Bob felt a similar continuity. *"When I look in the mirror, I look the same as I did before."*

Age was rarely people's defining feature. And yet, much of the policy & service landscape treats age as a risk factor. The literature reinforces the vulnerability of older age: declining health and mobility, dwindling social networks, and fixed

90+
this segment has one
of the most significant
growths in Vancouver

1 in 4
people over 75
lives alone in Metro
Vancouver (2016)

incomes. We opted for a different starting point: resiliency and ego strength.

Allies in Aging is a Collective Impact Initiative focused on improving life & reducing social isolation amongst adults over 75 years. In February 2018, we spent 12 days on-the-ground capturing 75+ every day realities, hearing their pain points co-designing possibilities.

This research isn't a comprehensive or generalizable account. Our aim is to spark novel conversations between people and organizations, starting from lived experience. How might we reframe challenges and generate *'what could be?'* In this leaflet, we share our process & learnings.

research



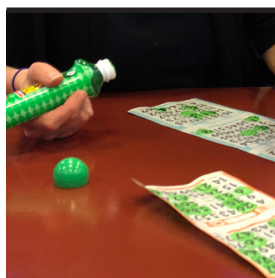
Saturday 10am at Royal City mall, starting conversations



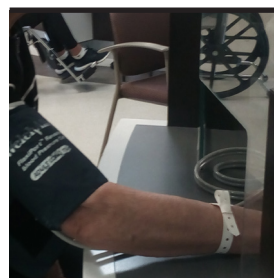
Saturday 6:25pm seeing who goes to the Legion No 2



Sunday 10:26am deliveries with meals on wheels

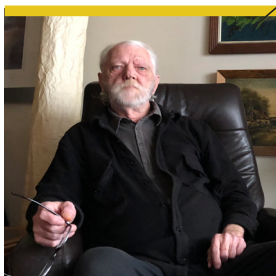


Tuesday 7:10pm meeting people at Planet Bingo

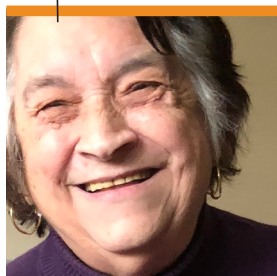


Thursday 1pm shadowing an over 75 person to hospital

In eleven days, we spent time with 18 people: 11 single folks, 2 couples, 2 informal resources and 1 business.



Bob (75) Every day is the same. Bob wakes up, has a cigarette, a glass of pepsi, another cigarette and turns on CNN. A couple times a week he goes to the mall for groceries. Bob has 3 ex-wives and a couple of kids, but he hasn't spoken to them in a while and that's "okay". "I don't really have a use, or a designated purpose anymore. And I don't want one. I don't want any obligations."



Maria (75) Since her husband died 10 years ago, her social world has progressively shrunk. Friends and neighbours dead, estranged daughter, and houses knocked down and replaced by young families she doesn't know. She gets out once or twice a week, to see a friend, and use a senior's program. She would like a bit more, but has been hurt: "it's better to be alone than with people who aren't good".



Mrs & Mr Ford (90s) Four years ago they moved to Burnaby from Regina. While they wanted to be close to their kids they've found themselves without community, friends and activities. "I'm bored. Completely". Mrs. Ford wonders what to do with her time but has no idea. The kids never take them out, so they don't leave the apartment. "Every day I'm frustrated".

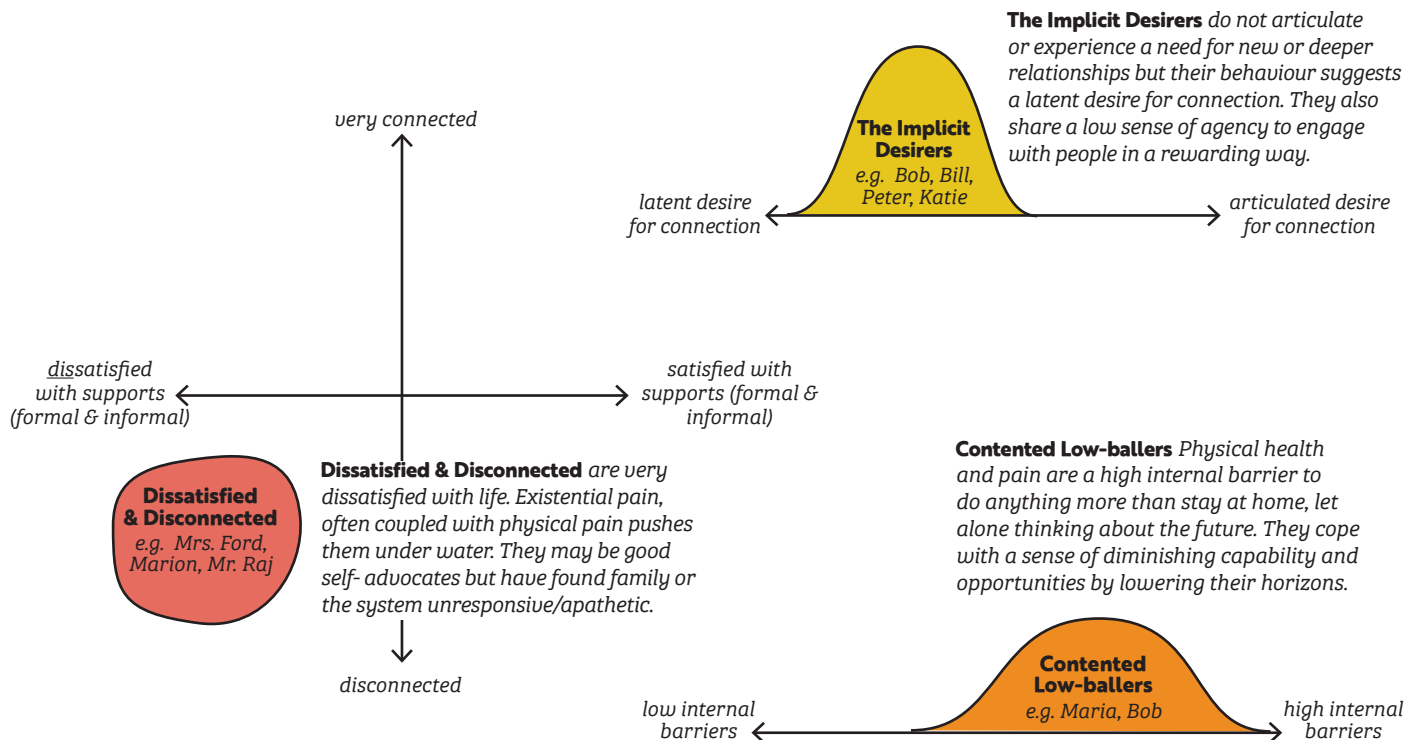


Varinder (Food court worker) Varinder sees the same older people every morning sitting for hours with cold cups of coffee. He attends to the trays, and cleans up the spills. But Varinder offers more. He doesn't see them as loiterers, rather treats them with respect, and with kindness. If someone is napping he makes sure they don't fall. "This is just what you do when you're human, you help others".



Sunrise Medial Centre When staff at the clinic don't see the older regulars who pop in each day to say hello, they call them just to make sure they're okay. "We're like a family" the manager says. "We care". The community feel resonates as staff laugh with clients, blow them kisses and engage them in conversation. At the clinic you hear more than talk about sickness and pain.

We segment people in different ways to find interesting groupings to design for. What do Mrs. Ford & Marion have in common? They're both dissatisfied with formal and informal support, and feel socially disconnected.



Two of the themes we surfaced: people over 75 building networks where they're at, and reaching out to supports celebrating not stigmatizing their age. How can services model these motivations?

In the Vancouver and surrounding areas folks +75 with the same resources and contexts as their peers, are finding work-arounds to better their lives. What

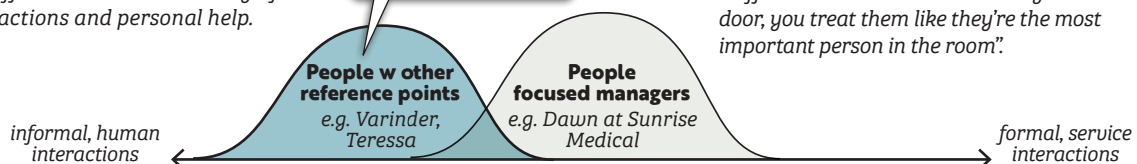
if others could be inspired by them? What if social programs organized events and programs not based on age but on motivation, interest and themes?

We found businesses and malls that intentionally create places for people to feel dignified. How can services model these interactions?



People with other reference points
People who draw on other reference points (examples from other cultures) can offer older adults more dignified interactions and personal help.

I help them because that's what you do with older people, you respect them. I will be old soon too"



People focused managers like Dawn at Sunrise Medical learned what matters to clientele and responded to it. She trained staff "when someone walks through the door, you treat them like they're the most important person in the room".

We generated 27 ideas across 8 opportunity areas, all to spark dialogue & debate. Here are three:

Food for Purpose

for: Contented Low-Ballers, like Maria

Food is more than satisfying hunger. For adults +75, choosing what to eat, and when to make it, reflects agency and control. Moreover, eating is about being social. Yet meal delivery services and food banks offer little choice or ways to maintain food capability, let alone sense of control or an opportunity to socialize. What if meal delivery services offered a range of options -including DIY boxes that reduce preparation time and chances to swap food with others?

featured idea

Meal Swap Socials



What if there was a platform enabling people with a love of cooking to make large batches of their favourite foods and exchange these with others? Or with newcomers. They can meet up to share foods, recipes and memories?

featured idea

Inspiration Packages

What if adult children could subscribe to Inspiration & Care packages, delivered to their parents, with conversation prompts in their own email? To help deepen their engagement and introduce new topics.



Preparing Adult Children

for: Dissatisfied & Disconnected, like Mrs. Ford

Many +75 have children near by who stop in or call. But older adults want to leave the house, see something new, have an adventure. Learning how to take care of parents isn't explicitly taught and children often don't know how to engage their parents, which can leave older adults feeling hurt and unimportant. What if children were better up-skilled to engage older adults in a different way? What if there was a badging system to recognize those new skills?

Low Commitment Supports

for: The Implicit desirers, like Bob

Many +75 cope with a sense of diminishing capability and opportunity. They lower their horizons and stick to themselves for fear of becoming a burden, or being burdened themselves. Latent desires exist, but after a life time working for others they often don't want to be "programmed", or commit to anything. Each day looks the same. What if there were opportunities to engage without obligation? Chances to socialize without intake processes, forms, or defined time commitments?

featured idea



Philosophical Cleaner

What if the popular service of house cleaning was a Trojan horse for companionship and end-of-life philosophical conversational prompts, to help make sense of it all?

other ideas



visit www.inwithforward.com to see all segmentations, opportunity areas, emerging insights and ideas.

This Quick Dive was in partnership with Allies in Aging. Quick Dives are 2 week periods of ethnographic research, synthesis, reflection and playback. Our research team draws

out insights and opportunities, all with the intent of gaining momentum for longer-term change. More information at: www.inwithforward.com