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# Overall Summary of Ontario-wide ThinkTanks

Seniors Bullying Project Sheridan College

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# OVERALL SUMMARY OF ONTARIO-WIDE THINKTANKS

# SENIORS BULLYING PROJECT SHERIDAN COLLEGE

"Solutions: Everybody's Business"





Elder Abuse Prevention (ON)

Stop Abuse - Restore Respect
Prévention de la maltraitance envers les aînés (ON)

Arrêtez les mauvais traitements - Restaurez le respect



Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada



# **INTRODUCTION:**

People of all ages can be bullied. The Centre for Elder Research is working with Sheridan faculty member Dr. Kirsten Madsen and Elder Abuse Prevention (ON) to better understand bullying between older adults age 55+ in Ontario. This work is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and aims to support the development of best practices and strategies for this diverse population. Our project aims are to collect data on the prevalence and nature of Senior to Senior bullying in Ontario, and to use this data to create a resource package outlining best practices for seniors and those working with seniors to stop bullying.

Definition of bullying for this project:

"Bullying is sometimes called harassment and happens when someone hurts, intimidates or scares a peer consciously or unconsciously. When someone is being bullied they often have a hard time defending themselves. Bullying is usually not a one-time event. It can happen over and over again." This survey relates to bullying which is based on peer to peer interactions, and not perpetrated by a person who is in a position of trust.

The Senior Bullying Project created a survey and asked older adults across Ontario about their experiences with peer to peer bullying. The survey garnered 683 respondents across the province with invaluable insights into the prevalence of bullying in the older adult population. Once the survey results were analyzed and themes were identified the team held 4 ThinkTanks in the following four (4) cities across Ontario: Oakville, Ottawa, London, & Peterborough. The ThinkTanks goals were to engage with stakeholders and older adults who were vested in the issue of older adult bullying. The stakeholders were able to see the survey results and to generate ideas that could be used in the prevention and intervention of older adult bullying incidents through various activities and exercises throughout the day.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the stakeholders who attended our ThinkTanks across Ontario; your valuable insights, ideas, and experiences will make our final Toolkit a rich resource to all who use it in the future.

**Important Note:** This report is a summary of the four ThinkTanks and is not the final toolkit nor does it reflect best practices. The final toolkit will be made available March 2020.

During bridge game a verbal exchange occurred between two card players Sam and Ned. The conflict escalated with Sam accusing Ned of cheating. Sam then pointed that everyone knows that Ned is a cheater at Bridge. The other card players were visibly uncomfortable during the verbal exchange. Finally, the volunteer convenor of the bridge game came over to try and diffuse the situation. The two men agreed to disagree on Ned being called a cheater for the purpose of completing the game. After all the participants left for the day the volunteer convenor went to the program staff to let them know about the incident.

#### **Major Issues**

- Behaviour: name calling/verbal exchange
- · Lack of conflict resolution "agree to disagree" just to finish game
- Unknown history of Sam and Ned
- No early intervention
- Unclear rules of game
- Lack of timely volunteer/staff involvement
- Other players did not confirm or deny that he was cheating
- Sam self identifies as the person who is wronged (perhaps self appointed leader)
- The game itself (rules, dynamics, type of bridge, etc.)
- Space (public)
- Lack of volunteer training

- Have a clear policy on how to address disputes
- Passing around rules/code of conduct of the game as a reminder at the start of the game
- Intervention sooner to identify root cause/immediately diffuse
- Have some kind of de-escalation strategy in place
- Roles of volunteer conveyor need to be clear
- Continuous training for all parties (staff, volunteers, clients, bystanders)
- Consequences needed i.e. written warning or game gets ended
- Program evaluations need to be done
- Have other players stand up for Ned
- A safe third party to be called (staff)
- Discuss with all involved on how to resolve issues (accountability for all)
- Knowledge of group dynamics
- Cannot prevent every situation, mitigation might be the key

During Scrabble players have noticed that Anne is taking a lot longer to come up with words and when she does complete her turn her words are often jumbled and do not make sense. At first many players would make a light hearted comment and help her along, but in the last few weeks Anne's fellow players have grown increasingly frustrated with her. Some have made fun of her, others have taunted her, and in some cases some people have refused to play with her.

#### **Major Issues**

- Player with possible changes in cognitive behaviour
- Lack of sensitivity, knowledge & acceptance regarding mental health issues & cognitive behaviours
- Frustration/impatience/intolerance/fear from fellow players
- Potential embarrassment (shame about cognitive change)
- History of players (shift in dynamics, leadership, focus on person with disadvantage)
- Players not knowing who to alert of changes or not seeing it as their responsibility
- Participants are not aware of the repercussions of their behaviour towards Anne
- Inappropriate response from fellow players: refusal to play with Anne
- Nature of the game- is it meant to be competitive or fun?

- Get staff/volunteer involved in facilitating programs
- Reiterate the code of conduct before each game
- Work collaboratively: have champions of the game
- Reporting process/designated person to report to
- Assessing change in client cognition- referring Anne to her doctor and/or alerting family of any changes
- Education on: bullying, cognitive impairments, assertiveness training/self esteem
- Alternative activities/games for people when there are changes in cognition or ability
- Establishing response strategies for all (policies and procedures)
- Talk to Anne privately (Has she noticed changes? Is she aware?)
- Players need to inform staff of issues or concerns if they notice a change in a fellow player instead of resorting to bullying
- Regular education about potential reasons for cognitive changes from guest speakers (cognitive impairment, stress, UTIs, etc.)
- Alter games: Teams instead of individual play or less competitive teams
- Advocates/buddy system/identifying allies
- Signage to promote kindness/civility
- Introduce reward system for positive behaviour
- Staff could talk to group about bullying behaviours in general and focus on positive discussion rather than consequences.
- Program evaluation completed by staff on a regular basis

Liam lives in a seniors community building and is ignored and often feels isolated. Sometimes he is discussed by other residents while he is present. Liam comes from a cultural background that is different than the majority of residents who live in the building. Some feel that Liam presents in a way that is not deemed acceptable to the majority of the group. Liam is not able to pick up on the social cues demonstrated by members of the majority group and tried to join in on various activities/socials in the activity room without success. Liam has been spending more and more time in his unit alone and refusing the invitation of the recreation staff.

#### **Major Issues**

- Different cultural backgrounds/prejudice
- Lack of respect/tolerance
- Ignoring and exclusion holds Liam back from participating with others
- Systemic Issues (cliques)
- · Lack of staff involvement
- Loss of community/friends
- · Lack of communication between clients and staff
- Unaware of social cues
- Isolation
- Perceived behaviour of Liam by fellow residents

- Role modelling positive behaviour
- Cultural sensitivity education/diversity training for all
- Ask Liam what would help
- Staff policy for intervention and how to effectively deal with cliques
- Welcoming process: change the way Liam/anyone is introduced to the tenants
- Connecting Liam to 2-3 key residents to form friendships/connections
- Encourage the group to create a welcoming communal space for all
- More staff involvement starting from intake through to continuous follow up
- Working with all parties in order to reduce conflict
- Offer cultural groups/activities: share similarities & allow new senior to explain their culture to others
- Communicating that common spaces are designated safe spaces
- Empower Liam to be involved in the residence i.e. residents council
- Identify a "go-to" person/staff to talk to about issues/concerns
- Witness education: strategies and intervention techniques
- Rules and consequences communicated to residents

At one of a series of community meetings on seniors issues in the local town hall, Wendy seems to be targeted by Peter. He constantly is interrupting, criticizing what she says, turning his head away Wendy speaks, talking to the person beside him, and is simply being disrespectful. Staff who are facilitating the town hall meeting are aware that Wendy and Peter are cousins. Both are avid advocates for seniors issues in the city and are often at the same community meetings.

#### **Major Issues**

- The relationship between Wendy and Peter; perhaps this is how they have always communicated with each other
- The behaviour has been normalized by the staff
- Poor meeting etiquette by not intervening when Peter is negatively communicating (tolerating the behaviour)

#### **Prevention**

- Set the tone for each meeting; let the group members know that this is a safe place
- Enforcing ground rules at each meeting including clear expectations of participant behaviour
- Mediation offered for one on one and/or group setting debriefs
- Offer an anonymous survey for participants to complete after each meeting reflecting on their experience with the most recent town hall meeting
- Declaration form: having them sign/agree to abide by the rules just by being in the space

# **CASE STUDY:**

A group of residents monopolize a common area in a seniors residence. This group often believes they have priority to use the lounge because they have lived there the longest and volunteer to run activities. They are known to gossip and monopolize the space between certain times of the day while they knit. A resident catches them speaking about her & tries to stand up to them resulting in her crying & leaving area:

#### **Major Issues**

- Group "clique" mentality & gossiping
- Sense of entitlement: monopolizing the space
- The groups bad behaviour was identified and called out

- Having a set of rules and regulations posted on walls code of conduct
- Identified staff member to report to
- Leadership and volunteer training
- Mediation session on how residents can effectively communicate with one another
- Reduce isolation by improving community engagement/involvement
- Set times for specific activities
- Education/awareness through speakers, poster campaigns, etc.
- Counselling for the group & those affected by bullying behaviours
- · Clear communication of anti-bullying mandate

#### **Barrier: Lack of Funding**

- Using volunteers
- Collaborative partnerships
- Seeking out other funding opportunities
- More cost-effective ways for training (webinars/train the trainer)
- Re-evaluating your program: Prioritize, re-evaluation of current funding, programs

#### **Barrier: Lack of Staff**

- Volunteers/peer to peer mentoring
- Staffing efficiency in scheduling
- Corporate volunteer opportunities
- Motivation: boosting staff morale & work culture
- Bringing higher education students "ask the expert"

#### **Barrier: Labour Intensive**

- Partner collaboration
- Professional development day
- Webinar on policy & procedure writing
- Realistic timeframe for development
- Scheduling time in the week for staff to dedicate to this, also sharing workload
- Integrated into work culture/ethos: "Ethics committee that creates the policy, then it becomes manual, part of the culture"
- Community involvement/open forum meetings

#### **Barrier: System Navigation**

- How to find the info you need in the way you need it
- Brainstorming avenues to reach isolated seniors
- By phone/in person conversation
- Help to navigate web resources
- Print copy
- Publicize in paper
- Present in places where they are/go. e.g., spiritual centres
- What are the norms of engagement they are used to? (radio, free paper, etc.)
- Neighbourhood ambassadors/welcome committee
- Formal & informal professionals e.g., hairdressers, bank tellers

#### **Barrier: Diversity**

- Encourage community to embrace different cultures & find commonalities (diversity training)
- Providing interpretation (language)
- Organize activities that bring people together

#### **Barrier: Level of safety**

- Establishing rules of what is expected (safe space)
- Sharing circle: use feather or talking stick (only the person holding the feather speaks)
- Moderator keeps everyone on track/keeps the conversation going
- Safety meetings for clients
- Have police officer or community safety worker present to group about safety strategies
- Provide a safe meeting space
- Educate community on external resources

#### **Barrier: Fear**

- Education & communication
- Policy & Procedure: recognition & how to respond effectively
- Build confidence: training & support
- Visible Champions at all staff levels
- Recruiting those with lived experience
- Bystander campaign
- Define and acknowledge fear and isolation
- Opportunities to engage and get involved

#### Barrier: No organizational leadership/Commitment

- Coming together with community coalition
- Corporate social responsibility that influences leadership
- Involvement of key stakeholders
- Commitment & accountability at all levels
- Designated committee or group
- A course that offers accreditation/compliance

#### Barrier: Afraid to upset paying clients

- One on one conversations with individual engaging in bullying behaviour and staff
- Involve family members to be a part of a conversation
- Consistent adherence to code of conduct/equal rights

#### **Barrier: Lack of External Support**

- Identify advocacy groups to push for change i.e CARP
- Identify supportive organizations/partners with similar interests in improving policies/developing partnerships
- Forming policy & procedure development committee
- Focus groups with key stakeholders
- Identifying best practices/resources/research on pre-existing framework
- Appeal issue to decision makers e.g. potential revenue saving, time consuming, etc...
- Implement on-going staff training starting at new staff orientation
- Identify funding sources to implement programs
- Advocacy to promote the development of tools through CARP, city councillors, MP's,
   MPP's, invite seniors groups to petition for change/pressure executives
- Holding information sessions/education for caregivers/family councils
- Established procedures for how staff are expected to respond/support all involved parties
- Raise awareness in the community: talk about it on social media, radio, news, newspapers

#### **Barrier: Lack of awareness**

- Use social media and hashtag to get the message across
- Bystanders to take a stand don't walk away
- · Acknowledge situation as a valid issue/event
- Change needs to occur consistently across sector
- Breakdown silos broader conversation of bullying occurring at all ages
- Repetition in messages
- · Having a toolkit that is easy to implement
- Continuity of anti-bullying message across sectors
  - Health, social/recreation, retirement homes/residences, & government
- Self awareness education
- Informing about rights and safety & where to go for help

#### Barrier: Mental health & Wellness/Isolation

- More education about self care
- Destigmatizing of mental illness
- Self-advocacy
- Privacy/confidentiality for those who disclose about mental health
- Giving jobs to clients that "give purpose"
- Take a risk (forget WSIB)
- Stop treating them as "seniors", treat them as "people"

#### Barrier: Lack of Training/knowledge/education

- Define bullying
- Recognition: "if you see this, do this" posters
- Professionals to facilitate training
- Change the name, instead of "anti-bullying" try "community engagement" or "promoting care & acceptance"
- Developing a Comfort Agreement vs. Code of Conduct
- Comfort agreement posted in facility for consistent messaging
- Ongoing 3rd party presenters/education for residents & staff
- 1:1 coaching\* with people who engage in bullying behaviour and those who are bullied
- · Case study activity with clients
- Value assessment of education (human benefit vs. money spent)
- Online education
  - Multiple formats: presentations, videos, guest speakers, case studies, modules
- Encourage buy-in for all staff/residents/volunteers
- Positive and solution focused education/campaign
- Ongoing required training for all
- Client Orientation: expectations/comfort agreement/inclusivity/acknowledgment and education about anti- bullying program
- Self esteem & assertiveness training
- Setting healthy communication/boundaries
- Response training
- · Acknowledging good/kind behaviour
- Having policies and procedures in place for staff

#### **Barrier - Lack of Support**

- Educate managers to get them to proactively tackle the issue
- Identify funding sources to implement programs
- Advocacy to promote the development of tools through CARP, city councillors, MP's, MPP's, invite seniors groups to petition for change/pressure executives
- Holding information sessions/education for caregivers/family councils
- Established procedures for how staff are expected to respond/support all involved parties
- Raise awareness in the community: talk about it on social media, radio, news, newspapers

\*Coaching: a coach would guide bullied seniors through the process of creating a vision for their well-being. The coach could use the same evidence-based, skillful conversation strategies and goal setting/action planning techniques to safely engage bullies in positive behavior change.

Barrier: How to build on movements that already have traction i.e: Me too movement

- Senior influencers on TV/social media
- Response training for volunteers
- Positive peer supports
- Get all chain retirement homes on board buy-in to campaign
- Empower to make choices give options and simple solutions
- Appreciation of values/skills
- Change in cultural/generational beliefs rename campaign to suit current older adults
- Empowerment: for those who have been oppressed and have no voice

# Need for Policy & Procedure

- · Clear definition of bullying
- Various templates in toolkit such as:
  - Comfort agreement
  - Policy and procedure
  - Proper incident reporting documentation
  - Examples of responses (to behaviour)
  - List of training
  - Coaching
  - Group discussion/resolution
  - List of additional resources & external community resources/agencies
  - Scripts to support authentic conversations (prompts to encourage strength based conversation)
- Easily accessible (online access), simple language, language translation, accessibility (brail, talk to text, etc.)
- Mandatory policies for staff/clients/participants that include responsibility for each level of staff
- Response levels & warning system (verbal, written, exit) or potential external mediation
- Education about Policy & Procedure at first point of contact for clients
- Posted code of conduct in public spaces
- Living document
- Practice of anti bullying program can be highlighted to regulatory/accreditation bodies
- · Policy review timeline
- Connecting anti-bullying to anti-oppression and diversity frameworks
- Positive/solutions focused (staying away from consequences)
- Having all levels of staff writing/contributing to its development
- Person centred approach
- Directions of where to go if issue escalates (past agency ability/\$\$)
- Need 2 components: staff, and residents/clients
- · Documents posted online
- Giving context/inspiration to the "why" and how it shows up in their job/role
- Support from federal and provincial government

# Need for Confidential Avenues for reporting

- Complaint form
- Anonymous online form/survey
- Box for reporting (location)
- Suggestion box (drop box)
- Report to designated staff/champion/community contact via email or verbally as well as a follow up
- · Meetings available outside of office
- Coaches (in-person) or on telephone
- · Confidential agreement (reporter and staff) consequences if they break this
- Seniors safety line
- Mail-in option
- Telephone number (you can text)
  - This leads to accountability someone must respond
- Police or Crime Stoppers
- Drop-in time offered by Director for people to come and discuss anything regarding bullying
- Template on how to report
- Third party to report to (cost could be shared by various organizations)
- Designated staff/peer to report to
- Document to take away (acknowledgment of reported incident)
- Resident satisfaction survey (include reporting slip in survey with posted envelope to mail back to agency)

#### Need for **Discussion & Awareness**

- Town hall meetings/focus groups with communities e.g. faith communities
- Mandatory education for all levels of staff about bullying behaviours with an evaluation on the effectiveness of said education
- · Kindness recognition program for all residents/staff
- Allies/coaches to facilitate discussions
- Lived experiences/testimonials/successes
- Day of SSS (Seniors Supporting Seniors), just as there is "Earth Day"
- · More research required on health impacts of being bullied: highlight data/build the case
- Create an awareness campaign that is informed by older adults at every stage of the process (planning, development, execution and evaluation)
- Invite an experienced educator to provide education (can be targeted to specific groups such as, LGBTQ+, indigenous groups, etc.)
- Values of resources on-line
- Piggy back on funded initiatives/projects for seniors (agencies)
- Model similar to "Violence Against Women: "don't be that guy" media campaign
  - o Commercials
- PSAs: Intertwine child and elder bullying
  - I.e. using grandparent dynamic would you feel comfortable addressing this if it was your grandchildren, so why not your peers?
- Social media campaign but use a platform older adults use
  - Short segments in local news
- Intergenerational: no best before date R.E.S.P.E.C.T
- Champions of change: opportunity to learn/mentor
- Educate ways to create change e.g. communication
- Videos: demonstrates successful interventions
- Educate board of directors with case studies
- Tie it into "liability" of doing nothing
- Get to seniors "where they're at": multiple avenues to outreach & education
- Wisdom bench (intergenerational) peer to peer
- Every municipality gets a toolkit
- Expectations and consequences
- Bring organizations together
- Training for seniors being bullied
- Engage family
- · Comfort agreement posted
- Partner agencies e.g., geriatric clinics, day programs, schools, humane society, mental health organizations, places of worship, community gardens, United Way
- Presenting in multi-faceted/sensory/modes
- · Continuity of message

Alternative Behaviours to Bullying (for those who engage in bullying behaviour):

#### **Training/Support**

Self awareness raising for individuals:

- Provide a self-assessment tool i.e. journal (reflective tool)
- Sharing circle, Open round table discussions and allow for debrief
- Diversity awareness training (including de-stigmatization of mental health)

#### Target cause of behaviour:

- Exploring what is behind their bullying (learning their history)
- Look at bullying as a responsive behaviour. What needs are not being met?
- Recognize when there is a clinical aspect to bullying (i.e. cognitive impairment)

#### Alternative behaviours:

- Coaching support
- Intergenerational educational program on bullying behaviours (role playing, videos etc.)
- Access to resources and peer support groups for those engaging in bullying behaviour
- Education & modelling of respectful behaviour through avenues such as skits/role plays/guest speakers by a reputable group that can answer questions and provide additional resources from attendees
- Offering Behavioural Supports Ontario (BSO) supports (if applicable) to the individual
- Conflict management and alternative communication methods (how to respond effectively)- through workshops or counselling
- Case studies: seniors develop the case studies and work on their own solutions
- Using virtual reality for positive reinforcement
- Mindfulness training/seminars
- Positive behaviour reinforcement i.e. random acts of kindness day/program
- Discover a sense of purpose through skill(s)-based activities. Include others as a way to build trust

#### Supports:

• Counselling for all affected by bullying behaviour (onsite, offsite, drop in)

#### Bring all those directly affected together:

• Finding commonalities e.g. interests between people who are engaging in bullying behaviours and those on the receiving end of bullying

#### For staff:

- Education and training on bullying behaviours and recognizing triggers
- Collaborating with other agencies on best practices

#### Whole Community Recognition Initiative:

- Create a symbol for anti-bullying that is easily recognizable i.e. ribbon with a specific colour/pattern
- Community engagement activity on older adult bullying (including resource handouts)
- Media awareness campaign: focus on positivity and empathy

#### Need for Response Training for all involved

#### Response training for person being bullied

- Reporting avenues (confidentiality of great importance or option of anonymous reporting)
  - Incident reports (acquire from staff/write a complaint form)
  - o Distinction of when it becomes criminal (harassment, physical abuse) contact Police
  - o Ontario Human Rights Tribunal (identify an advocate)
  - Report to tenant support or landlord & tenant board (lobbying for a branch to deal with complaints about the landlord)
  - Making sure that there's a follow up (therefore complaints cannot be anonymous)
  - Identifying a person to report bullying incidents to
  - Open communication (It's not right, you're not alone, it's not your fault) validate feelings and offer counselling
  - o Steps, rules around confidentiality, staff follow-up/update individual
  - Respect boundaries i.e, person might not want help
  - · Learn to differentiate bullying from a one-off incident
  - Encourage residents to report to RHRA or MOHLTC
- Assertiveness Training (Role Playing)
  - Teaching them not to respond with bullying behaviour Case studies
  - Mediation/conflict-resolution
  - Increasing self-esteem
  - Learning about their own communication style (passive, passive-aggressive, aggressive)
  - SAFE PEOPLE TRAINING (Ottawa Pinecrest Queensway CHC)
  - Encourage them to report if it happens again
- · Ally identification
  - Support group (mens & womens)
  - Identify a safe person/friend/family (who you feel comfortable talking to)
- Toolkit
  - Training
  - Education about bullying, reporting, and effective intervention strategies
  - Promo materials (posters) "if this is happening to you..." poster outlining process for reporting and obtaining support
  - Assessment (self-assessment) tools
  - o Safety planning/identifying supportive family members or friends
  - Templates for comfort agreement
  - Counselling options & additional resources/support
  - Fact sheets (assertiveness, self- esteem)
  - Audio-visual component
- Having response procedures laid out for different settings community, senior centre, seniors residence, retirement home, etc.

### Need for Response Training for all involved

#### Response training for witnesses

- Education for witnesses on bullying behaviour
- Reporting paths/protocol/confidentiality encourage witness reporting
- · Support and empowerment for passive and active witnesses
- Empathy and sensitivity training for witnesses to the person being bullied
- Learning de-escalation strategies & techniques
- Education to older adults on how and why senior to senior bullying occurs
- Use existing resources such as EAO's 'It's Not Right'
- Learn conflict resolution skills & assertiveness training
- Intervene safely
- Being respectful of people's right to make their own decisions
- Ensuring it won't embarrass the bullied person or increase risk
- Effective communication strategies
- Draw on bystander advocacy
- Calling crime stoppers
- · Referring to signage
- Bully watch (like neighbourhood watch to deter bullying)
- Encourage standing up for peers if safe
- Offer counseling to witnesses: debriefing/results of intervention
- Validate their concerns
- · Multidimensional training, recognizing different backgrounds and cultures
- Scripts examples of what to say
- Value of reporting after the fact
- Safety tips for prevention
- · Debrief with whoever is involved

#### **Response training for Staff**

- Training & education on how to support, intervene, and de-escalate
- Conflict resolution techniques
- · Debrief for staff
- Policy and Procedure reporting systems, contact, timelines
- · Correctly identifying bullying behaviour

# POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:

## As Identitifed by ThinkTank Participants:

An observational study to be done in the future:

- Focus on older adults being bullied by anyone (e.g. intergenerational)
- Evaluating resources
- Bullying in relation to dementia
- More details on the consequences of bullying

Potential stakeholder groups to focus future research with:

- LGBTQ+
- Indigenous people
- Culturally specific groups
- Age specific groups

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