

Summary

- New Brunswick has a high proportion of adults over 65 facing financial struggles, food insecurity, and social isolation, highlighting the need to address these social determinants of health.
- This project's purpose was to develop and demonstrate an applied learning model involving New Brunswick Community College (NBCC) students and seniors living at home or in community settings like nursing homes and assisted living facilities.
 - The project's ultimate goals were to provide NBCC students with experiential learning in the health sector and to improve the emotional and social well-being of seniors.
- NBCC instructors and students from multiple disciplines participated in 7 different projects, including free tax clinics, a virtual vacation in a chair, raised garden beds, and a tea and technology session.
 - Projects were delivered across various communities within the province, including Woodstock, Fredericton, St. Andrews, Saint John, Moncton, and Miramichi.
- The project involved over 240 NBCC students enrolled in a variety of programs, including information technology, business, carpentry, and practical nursing.
- 214 older adults participated in the projects, and 52 seniors completed surveys before and after participating in the student-led projects. These surveys were used to assess the impact of student-led applied research projects on senior's well-being.

HSPP Focus Area

Social and Built Environments

Project Start & End Date

February 1, 2022 – March 31, 2024

Organization/Agency

New Brunswick Community College and University of New Brunswick

Location

Saint John, New Brunswick

Principal Investigator(s)

[Andrew Sexton](#), [Dr. Barry Watson](#), [Dr. Kyle Brymer](#)

Indicator	Impact / Outcome / Result	Quote
Improved Health, Social, and Emotional Wellness of Seniors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre- and post-program surveys were completed by 52 seniors, which contained questions like "To what extent do you experience stress in dealing with feelings of loneliness?" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ These questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (e.g., 1 = not at all stressful, 5 = extremely stressful). 	<p><i>Edness, an 80-year-old woman in an assisted living facility, felt shy and isolated without nearby family. She decided to attend an event called "vacation in a chair" hosted by NBCC's Information Technology program. The joyful experience with virtual reality brought her laughter and helped her make new friends, allowing her to approach her loneliness with more light.</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The findings from the pre-test survey revealed that, on average, seniors indicated low levels of stress from loneliness (M=1.8, SD=0.8), social connections (M=1.6, SD=0.8), paying bills (M=1.7, SD=1.1), home maintenance (M=1.7, SD=1.2), having enough food (M=1.3, SD=0.7) and enough healthy foods (M=1.5, SD=0.9) in the home prior to participating in the projects. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seniors indicated similarly low levels of stress on the post-test survey, and no significant differences were found between pre-test and post-test scores on any of the measures. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, the projects did not significantly reduce senior's stress related to social determinants of health. 	

Indicator	Impact / Outcome / Result	Quote
Increasing student participation in course-based applied research projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 240 students participated across 7 applied research projects. The project aimed to estimate the % of students reporting increased knowledge and understanding of healthy aging. This data was not collected. Anecdotal reports suggest students gained applied research experience, along with project management, and communication skills. Students found working with seniors rewarding and have expressed interest in pursuing careers in this field. 	<p><i>“As a student who worked on this project, I learned a lot and had a great experience. Working on the HSPP helped me use what I learned in my classes in real life. I got better at research, managing projects, and talking with others. These skills are very important for my future.”</i></p>

Methods and Comparison

- 52 seniors were surveyed at baseline and post-test regarding their stress related to finances, access to groceries and healthy foods, social connections, loneliness, and household maintenance.
- The project intended to collect data of the % of students reporting increased knowledge and understanding of healthy aging. However, only anecdotal student reports were collected.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

- The student-led experiential learning projects did not significantly reduce seniors' stress related to social determinants of health.
 - This finding can perhaps be explained by the fact that the seniors who were surveyed reported low stress levels prior to participating in the project. It is also possible that participants in this sample were more financially well-off, or perhaps delays between program participation and the post-test survey impacted seniors' responses about their experience.
- Students who participated in the applied research projects gained invaluable experience in research, project management, and communication, found working with seniors particularly rewarding, and expressed increased interest in working with seniors in their future careers.
- These projects offer valuable social interaction for seniors and opportunities to connect with the younger generation and share their wisdom.
- Promising partnerships have been initiated with the City of Fredericton to update the Seniors Directory, as well as Stepping Stones Senior Center to continue some of the student-led projects.

Recommendations

- Collect Demographic Information:** Ensure future projects collect detailed demographic information to better understand the background of participating seniors.
- Broaden Recruitment:** Continue to recruit from a wide range of settings to maintain a representative sample while ensuring inclusion of socioeconomically disadvantaged seniors.
- Enhance Project Evaluation:** Implement more robust evaluation methods to capture the full benefits of the projects to both students and seniors.
- Expand Student-Senior Engagement:** Expand research projects to further develop students' skills and interest in careers working with seniors.

Next Steps

Secure funding for program coordinators, materials, venues, and other expenses to continue and expand the student-led experiential learning projects.

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