



Seniors Action Quebec

Focus Group Findings 2015 – 2016

Building Community Capacity: From Evidence to Action

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1 INTRODUCTION

The 2015 – 2016 Seniors Action Quebec (SAQ) project entitled “Building Community Capacity: From Evidence to Action” used the strategy of focus groups for its consultation of English-speaking seniors in four regions of the province (Gaspésie, Greater Quebec City, the Outaouais and the North Shore). The focus groups were designed with the intention of gathering seniors together in their regions to:

- identify and establish priorities among critical needs and issues affecting their quality of life;
- contribute to the development of action plans designed to mobilize communities and organizations working on behalf of seniors, both locally and provincially, to address these priorities; and
- increase English-speaking seniors’ awareness of organizations presently working to serve their diverse needs.

2 DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Background

The SAQ 2015 – 2016 focus groups followed upon the 2012 – 2015 project of the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) entitled “Building Research Capacity related to Quebec’s English-speaking Seniors” and funded by the *Soutien aux initiatives visant le respect des aînés* (SIRA) senior support program of the

provincial ministère de la Famille.¹ As a feature of the QCGN project, “Lunch & Learn” sessions were held in four regions of Quebec, project findings were disseminated and consultation took place with seniors in each region, the hosting English-language community organization, and SAQ. The SAQ focus groups build and expand upon the objectives of the QCGN “Lunch & Learn” sessions by continuing to inform and mobilize English-speaking seniors and their communities with respect to priorities they themselves establish for improving their quality of life.

The accompanying table presents the regions and host organizations of the QCGN 2014 – 2015 “Lunch & Learn” sessions.

Focus Group Implementation

The project included 17 focus groups starting in Sept-Îles on October 7, 2015 and finishing in Low on March 8, 2016. There were 269 English-speaking seniors who participated when all 17 focus groups are combined. The number of focus groups and the number of participants exceeded expectations.

The accompanying table presents the date, location, region, host organization and number of seniors who

QCGN / SAQ Lunch & Learn Sessions, 2014 – 2015		
date	host	region
6 Oct. 2014	Quebec Community Groups Network / Seniors Action Quebec	Greater Montreal
20 Feb. 2015	Voice of English-speaking Québec	Capitale-Nationale
8 Apr. 2015	4 Korner	Laurentians
3 June 2015	Vision Gaspé-Percé Now	Gaspésie

SAQ Focus Groups, 2015 – 2016				
date	location	region	host	attendance
7 Oct. 2015	Sept-Îles	North Shore	NSCA	24
13 Oct. 2015	Aylmer	Outaouais	Connexions	10
15 Oct. 2015	Buckingham	Outaouais	Connexions	8
19 Oct. 2015	Quebec City	Capitale-Nationale	JHCP	6
19 Oct. 2015	Quebec City	Capitale-Nationale	JHCP	9
20 Oct. 2015	Valcartier	Capitale-Nationale	JHCP	15
18 Nov. 2015	Chelsea	Outaouais	Connexions	34
24 Nov. 2015	Port Daniel	Gaspésie	CASA	10
25 Nov. 2015	Matapedia	Gaspésie	CASA	14
27 Nov. 2015	Cascapedia	Gaspésie	CASA	11
2 Dec. 2015	Barachois	Gaspésie	VGPN	15
7 Jan. 2016	Aylmer	Outaouais	RAWQ	27
12 Jan. 2016	Chandler	Gaspésie	CASA	14
15 Jan. 2016	New Carlisle	Gaspésie	CASA	12
10 Feb. 2016	Escuminac	Gaspésie	CASA	8
15 Feb. 2016	Shawville	Outaouais	Connexions	29
8 March 2016	Low	Outaouais	Connexions	23
				Total : 269

¹ For further details and findings of the QCGN / SIRA 2012 – 2015 seniors project go to <http://www.qcgn-seniors.org/research.html>.

attended each focus group. The recruitment process entailed a public announcement by the host organization and typically the session was integrated into an event or activity already designed for area seniors through a seniors' wellness centre, seniors' day centre, regional associations, church, or social club. Project regional partners assumed responsibility for arranging times, venues, refreshments, and technical assistance.

The Sessions

The duration of the focus group session generally ranged from one hour to one and a half hours. Consent forms, demographic sheets and evaluation forms were completed by participants (see appendices).

Sessions typically included an SAQ researcher as lead moderator with assistance in moderating and note-taking by a representative of the regional host organization. All sessions were recorded.

The session started with a presentation of key sociodemographic findings drawn from the community profiles produced for the participating communities in the project as well as some findings from the 2013 QCGN/SIRA Survey of English-speaking Seniors. This was followed by group discussion and finally a selection of three or four priorities by participating seniors for their region.

SAQ Focus Groups, by Host Organization		
Host	sessions	participants
CASA	6	69
Connexions	5	104
JHCP	3	30
NSCA	1	24
RAWQ	1	27
VGPN	1	15
<i>Total</i>	17	269

SAQ Focus Groups, by Region		
region	sessions	participants
Capitale-Nationale	3	30
North Shore	1	24
Gaspésie	7	84
Outaouais	6	131
<i>Total</i>	17	269

3 DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographic profile of English-speaking seniors who participated in the SAQ focus groups is presented in the accompanying table.

The distribution of participants in terms of age was fairly balanced—fewer individuals under 60 years of age were expected, as many focus groups were held during the day to accommodate the older senior group. Female participants greatly outweighed males and the language of preference was predominantly English.

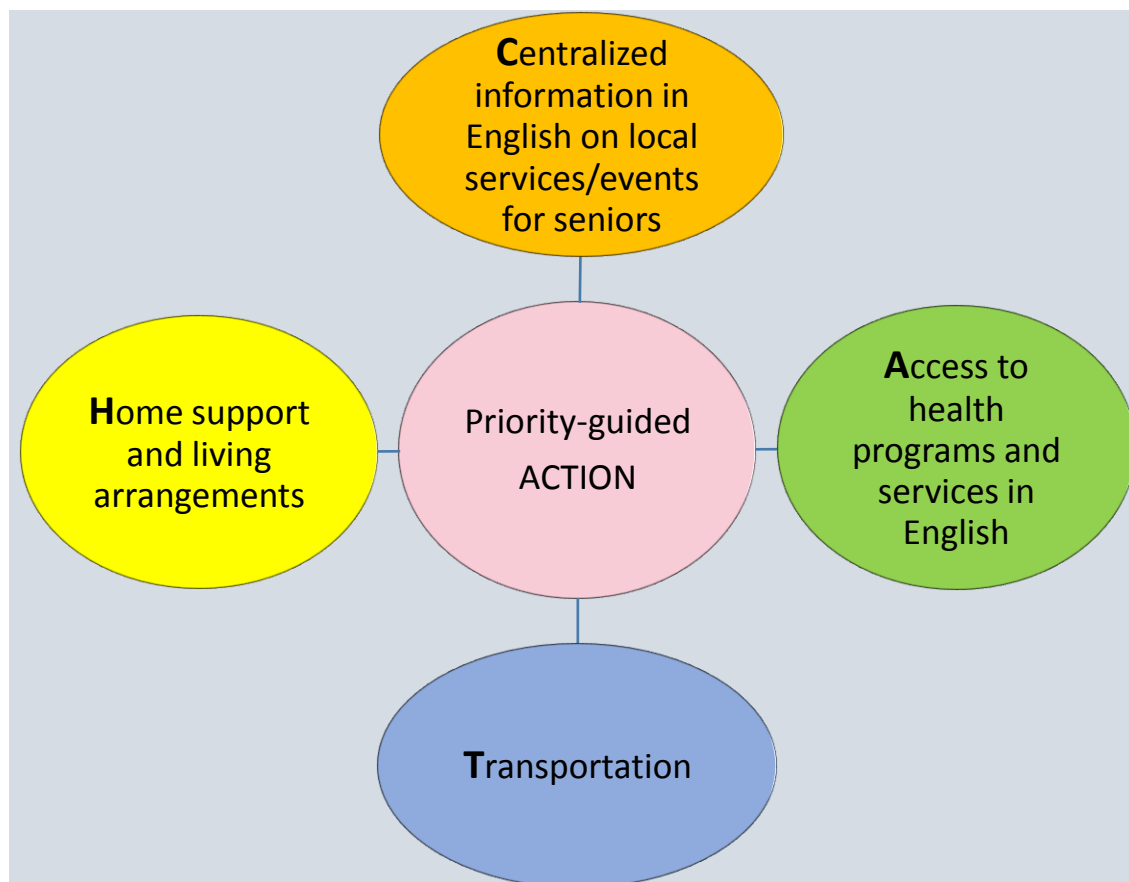
Interestingly, a small number of seniors whose preferred language is French were in attendance, as were a few seniors whose preferred language is neither English nor French.

Demographics of SAQ Focus Group Participants	
by age group	
< 50	3
51 – 60	10
61 – 70	61
71 – 80	87
80 +	60
<i>Total</i>	221
by gender	
female	176
male	44
<i>Total</i>	220
by preferred language	
English	195
English/French	13
French	10
other	3
<i>Total</i>	221

4 TOP PRIORITIES FROM PROJECT CONSULTATIONS

A project session was held on February 12, 2016 to establish the top priorities that emerged from the 17 focus groups held in the four project regions. The four priority areas below were validated by SAQ, provincial partner the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) and regional partners the North Shore Community Association (NSCA), Vision Gaspé-Percé Now (VGPN), Jeffery Hale Community Partners (JHCP), the Council for Anglophone Social Action (CASA), Connexions Resource Centre, and the Regional Association of West Quebecers (RAWQ).

C.H.A.T. – Four priorities were established by participants of SAQ’s (2015-2016) Building Community Capacity focus groups to guide future action targeting Quebec’s English-speaking seniors.



CENTRALIZED INFORMATION IN ENGLISH ON LOCAL SERVICES AND EVENTS FOR SENIORS: Someone to call and talk to in English; information on services that range from the offerings of public institutions and community organizations (health clinics, schools and community learning centres, networks, advocacy groups, libraries, etc.) to the private services of professionals for home maintenance (snow removal, home adaptation, general maintenance); increase awareness of local social participation opportunities.

HOME SUPPORT AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS: A trusted contact to turn to for help; a seniors’ network that organizes a “check-in” on seniors in their region; access to support services or programs in English that facilitate independent living; monitoring as protection against elder abuse; more affordable living

arrangements for English-speaking seniors; more alternatives to living alone and maintaining a single dwelling.

ACCESS TO HEALTH PROGRAMS AND SERVICES IN ENGLISH: Sessions provided by English-speaking community organizations (health information offered through group session, support groups organized around health issues, fitness and prevention activities designed for seniors, day centres in English); improved information in English to facilitate the navigation of the public health and social service system; improved communication in English from public institutions concerned with health and the dignity of those in advanced stages of life (service reception, hospitals, assisted living and long-term care).

TRANSPORTATION: Transport with scheduling, costs and safety adapted to seniors' lifestyle and limitations; increase options to relying on personal cars; a volunteer network for ride sharing among English-speaking seniors.

5 FROM LESSONS LEARNED TO PLANS FOR ACTION

The four priority areas established in the project will serve as guidelines in the partnership development, planning and activities of the participant community organizations as they move forward in their work with and on behalf of English-speaking seniors in their regions. Findings from the community profiles as well as lessons from the project focus groups are important additions to the evidence base that informs regional and provincial initiatives and advocacy.

One lesson was that each region, and indeed each sub-regional community, has its unique demographic characteristics, challenges and strengths, institutional resources, and organizational style. For example, some organizations are involved in the direct delivery of services, such as a seniors' day centre they manage, while other organizations are working through and with partner organizations to support them in adapting services to the needs of English-speaking seniors. Still, despite these differences there are also notable commonalities in their vision for their elders.

It was agreed by all project organizations that the priority-guided action they envision going forward would be designed to enhance the social engagement and connection of English-speaking seniors, and that, as much as possible, the action would be responsive to all four priority areas. Practically speaking, it was acknowledged that the plan for action would need to be modified in accordance with the circumstance of each organization in terms of the size and geographical dispersion of their English-speaking senior population, the capacity of seniors' organizations in general in their region (number, state of networks, etc.) and, of course, financial resources.

Preliminary statements on plans for action with validation by seniors



NSCA: We would like to see a “community liaison link to existing services helping seniors find English resources” and “a volunteer, peer-to-peer support system that would ‘check-in’ on seniors.” A form of community outreach with a designated person for seniors.

Jeffery Hale: We would like to see “a community organizer. Someone that would be designated for seniors... receive their calls and help them find English resources.” Also, the organization will work on “integrating new retirees into volunteering.”

CASA: We would like to work towards establishing an “outreach worker or street worker for seniors. Someone in a position responsible for getting information to seniors, assisting them in access to different services” and to “link to other similar initiatives in the area.”

RAWQ: We propose to act as “a clearing house for information. Bring groups together for information exchange and have seniors take an active leadership role... mobilizing and empowering seniors to act on their own behalf.”

Connexions: We would like to work on “strengthening the links of seniors’ organizations (for example, we have five seniors’ tables in our region). A type of outreach worker but with a broader focus by building and strengthening a common link among organizations already actually working with the community and with seniors in particular.”

Vision: We will work on “rejuvenating and revamping our social clubs. We want to bring the different communities served by them together and reorganize them to better serve the seniors.”

SAQ: “We see ourselves playing an advocacy role in terms of policy development. We need to bring English-speaking seniors to the attention of policy-makers.”

6 PRIORITIES AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION – NORTH SHORE

6.1 SITUATION OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING SENIORS IN THE SEPT-ÎLES TERRITORY OF THE CÔTE-NORD REGION

Within the Côte-Nord region, there are 780 English-speaking individuals aged 65 and over; together they represent 14.6% of the region's English-speaking population. Of these seniors, 155 live in

North Shore Focus Groups

Seniors' Wellness Activity, Sept-Îles, October 2015

TOP 3 PRIORITIES

1. Access to organized social support and assistance for seniors
2. Access to health and social services in English
3. Accessible living arrangements

the Sept-Îles territory, where the 65 years and over group represent a substantial 16.8% of their English-speaking community. In Sept-Îles there are 290 English speakers in the 45 – 64 age group—many of whom may consider themselves seniors—and they represent 31.4% of the English-speaking community residing in this area. While smaller in number, both the 45 – 64 and 65+ English-speaking age groups of Sept-Îles outweigh their francophone counterparts as a percentage of their language community.

In terms of education, 45.4% of English speakers residing in the Sept-Îles territory report high school leaving or lower as their highest level of education, 21.5% have a college or CEGEP diploma and 17.4% have a university certificate or degree. Among English speakers 65 years and older, 51.7% report high school leaving or lower as their highest level of educational attainment. This compares with 69.9% of French-speaking seniors (65+) living in the same Sept-Îles territory. When the Sept-Îles English-speaking population (all ages) is compared to the English-speaking Côte-Nord group as a whole, they are more likely to have attained a university certificate or degree (17.4% Sept-Îles compared to 8.1% across the Côte-Nord generally).

The unemployment rate of the English-speaking community of this Sept-Îles territory is 9.1%, which is somewhat higher than the rate of the francophone community at 7.2%. With respect to income level, 36.1% of English-speakers have an annual income of less than \$20,000. Among seniors 65 years of age and over, a substantial 56.7% are living on a low income (less than \$20k). Among French-speaking seniors of the same age, 49% live at this income level.

6.2 DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

Focus group participants were generous with their comments on the challenges and advantages of their region when it comes to the quality of life of their elder English-speaking citizens. For the purpose of reporting highlights of the discussion are presented by theme.

Access to organized social support and assistance for seniors in English

A significant portion of the comments from participants addressed the need to strengthen the system of social support among seniors. Several speakers mentioned that this system for connection could be peer-to-peer support among English-speaking seniors themselves, which would ensure the use of English, and a mutual trust and understanding between the senior in need and the volunteer responder. Devoting resources to improving engagement among seniors was proposed as a single solution answering several needs, such as improved access to information in English, safety, increased opportunity for social participation and even improved access to health and social services.

Comments



- *In this region of the North Shore, many seniors are unilingual English and language is a barrier for them. They can feel socially excluded from the francophone community.*
- *As you can see by the unemployment rate, it is not easy to find work in the area so many seniors do not have family living nearby. The younger generation have moved away looking for jobs.*
- *There is a need among English-speaking seniors living alone and without family for help to get around, to buy groceries, for medical appointments and just to come out of isolation. Each of us needs some friends to talk to—somewhere to turn.*
- *We need more of a network among English-speaking seniors—even a phone number we can dial to check on one another or to use in case of an emergency. Seniors need to feel connected, safe.*
- *There are many seniors who aren't here today and we need to reach out to them. They may not be aware of things going on that they could be part of, or they may need encouragement or assistance to get out. The social aspect is important and if we had a list of names of isolated seniors maybe we could arrange to visit.*

Access to Health and Social Services in English.

The health services of Sept-Îles are used by individuals from the area as well as from across the region. Aside from being ill, many patients who arrive from villages along the coast are English speaking and unfamiliar with the hospital setting that they must navigate. Interpretation services are offered but there is only one available interpreter, “Sharon,” who is in high demand, serving the aboriginal community as well as English speakers.

Comments



- *The CLSC has services for home support but not in English and they don't screen the volunteers. The services are there but to get them in English is very hard. I need someone to shovel for me in the winter but the CLSC offered someone from the prison and, living alone, I didn't know if I could trust this offer.*

- *Many go to the hospital who don't speak any French. If you go to the emergency at the hospital, they don't speak a word of English. I was in the hospital for surgery and I did call for Sharon. They wouldn't release me until there was someone to take me out of the room.*
- *We know there is an interpreter and she is very nice, but she is always very busy. She can't be everywhere.*
- *Elder abuse takes place in the seniors' homes every day. The way they are being treated in long-term care is neglect and abuse.*
- *It is frightening to be ill and not be able to understand what is being said around you. I have tried to find a social worker who could speak English and I couldn't find one.*

Accessible Living Arrangements for English-speaking seniors

Many of the participants in the focus group reported living independently in their own home. There are challenges—both socio-emotional and practical—associated with this living arrangement.

Comments



- *All seniors' homes are operated in French, so to avoid an uncomfortable situation most English-speaking seniors choose to struggle at home. They do the best they can. There aren't a lot of options.*
- *If you're living alone and have no family nearby there is nobody to turn to. Many seniors are living alone and need companionship. Even just a drive to the store... Some don't feel comfortable asking.*
- *The issue is what seniors can afford. The CLSC will give you a list of volunteers but they don't know them... They are not screened. My mother can't be expected to assess and manage a group of volunteers to help her keep up her home.*

Vulnerable seniors

Participants underscored the message that there are vulnerable seniors who need attention from their peers and from the larger community.

Comments



- *Those of us here today are connected. This group is a support group for each and we can reach out. We all know each other, and have for some 50-plus years now. We need to build on this strength—expand the network.*
- *Like you said, many of our seniors are living on a small income and they cannot afford to pay for services. They cannot afford to go into a home if they wanted to, so they're trying to get by at home on their own. I am afraid they are falling through the cracks.*