FWI Funding Statement

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Faculty/Area: Gilbrea Centre for Studies in Aging
Project title: Discovery through Discussion: Identifying Senior and Community Research Priorities

Discovery through Discussion: Identifying Senior and Community Research Priorities

The Gilbrea Centre for Studies in Aging serves as a critical hub of research, training and outreach. Housed in the Faculty of Social Sciences, and holding an inter-disciplinary mandate, the Gilbrea Centre is positioned to be a leader in the social and cultural perspectives on aging. The Centre comprises four membership groups that facilitate interdisciplinary research and engage in meaningful forms of knowledge transfer: Associate Members (Faculty); Graduate Students; Community Organizations, and Older People. The Centre also facilitates the Seniors Helping Advance Research Excellence (SHARE) group – a group of over 355 seniors aged 55 + who volunteer for graduate and faculty research on a variety of topics. This group participates in a variety of Centre events and associate member and student research, including, our most recent initiative “Discovery through Discussion” funded by the President’s McMaster’s Forward with Integrity program. In this event, the Gilbrea Centre brought together over 40 community seniors and partner organizations to identify local senior and community research priorities.

The primary objective of the event was to inform the Centre’s interdisciplinary mandate by involving seniors and community organizations more centrally in the definition, implementation and achievement of research goals, and the development and sharing of knowledge that has both practical and scholarly significance. Closer networking with the seniors’ community helped to create and sustain a virtuous circle that facilitates the Centre’s interdisciplinary research mission in ways that are socially relevant, beneficial and self-sustaining. It also enhanced the Centre’s ability to foster stronger partnerships between McMaster and the broader Hamilton community, including not only seniors but also the agencies and organizations that serve their needs and interests.

Members of our student group and SHARE were involved in the planning of this event from the application process, to developing/facilitating the event, and synthesizing the information gathered. This integral involvement allowed the students and seniors to provide input and expertise at all levels of the project and gain understanding in grant writing, event planning and knowledge gathering and transfer strategies. This practical involvement went beyond the traditional classroom experience by allowing students to actively shape and participate in a community initiative. Students and seniors participated in planning meetings where they were paired together in facilitator teams to develop logistics, thematic discussion guides, and an evaluation tool for the event. The afternoon was organized around four key themes that were generated from these planning meetings: HEALTH CARE - the components of the health care system that are organized around assuring seniors have access to needed medical services; COMMUNITY SERVICES - social aspects of community services such as transportation, home care, involvement in decision making, volunteerism, community and neighborhood issues; ARTS CULTURE AND RECREATION - roles as both consumers and producers of art, culture, and recreation, as well the ways seniors engage in arts, culture, and recreation individually and collectively; and SOCIAL INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION - ways to facilitate and encourage seniors to establish new relationships and how seniors can remain socially involved in their physical and virtual...
community. These four themes represent the diversity of seniors’ lives and experiences, as well as the interdisciplinary focus of the research to which the Gilbre Centre is committed.

The discussions around these four themes were synthesized with the help of the student group into an inventory of twelve abstracts outlining potential student or faculty research questions/projects that have community as well as scholarly relevance and importance. The list is available to all Centre members and will be expanded and refined as new research emerges. The students also assisted in presenting the findings of the event at the Forward with Integrity Conference and created a follow up package for senior and community organizations outlining the results and next steps. The Centre has continued to follow up with organizations about becoming formal partners with the Centre and engaging in initiatives as opportunities arise.