

Seniors Action Quebec: Focus Group Findings 2015-2016

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 with English-speaking seniors in four regions of the province (Gaspésie, Greater Quebec City, Outaouais and the Lower 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 the awareness of English-speaking seniors 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 SIRA of the provincial Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés¹.

As a feature of the QCGN project,

“lunch & learn” sessions were held in four regions of Quebec where project findings were disseminated and consultation was held with the seniors of the 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 lunch & learn sessions of 2014-2015.

QCGN/SAQ "Lunch and Learn" Sessions, 2014-2015		
Date	Host	Region
06-Oct-14	Quebec Community Groups Network / Seniors Action Quebec	Greater Montreal
20-Feb-15	Voice of English Quebec	Capitale-Nationale
08-Apr-15	4Korners	Laurentides
03-Jun-15	Vision Gaspé-Percé Now	Gaspésie

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

Focus Group Implementation

The project included 17 focus groups starting in Sept. Iles on October 7, 2015 and finishing with 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 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 seniors of the area through a seniors' wellness center, seniors' day center, regional associations, church or social club. Project regional partners assumed responsibility for arranging time, place, refreshments and technical assistance.

The session

The duration of the focus group session generally ranged from 1 to 1.5 hours. Consent forms, demographic sheets and evaluation forms were completed by participants (see appendices). Sessions typically included 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 socio-demographic findings drawn from the community profiles produced for the participating communities of 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 3-4 priorities by participating seniors for their region.

SAQ Focus Groups, 2015-2016				
date	location	region	host	attendance
07-Oct-15	Sept-Iles	Cote-Nord	NSCA	24
13-Oct-15	Aylmer	Outaouais	Connexions	10
15-Oct-15	Buckingham	Outaouais	Connexions	8
19-Oct-15	Quebec City	Capitale-nationale	JHCP	6
19-Oct-15	Quebec City	Capitale-nationale	JHCP	9
20-Oct-15	Valcartier	Capitale-nationale	JHCP	15
18-Nov-15	Chelsea	Outaouais	Connexions	34
24-Nov-15	Port Daniel	Gaspé	CASA	10
25-Nov-15	Matapedia	Gaspé	CASA	14
27-Nov-15	Cascapedia	Gaspé	CASA	11
02-Dec-15	Barachois	Gaspé	VGPN	15
07-Jan-16	Aylmer	Outaouais	RAWQ	27
12-Jan-16	Chandler	Gaspé	CASA	14
15-Jan-16	New Carlisle	Gaspé	CASA	12
10-Feb-16	Escuminac	Gaspé	CASA	8
15-Feb-16	Shawville	Outaouais	Connexions	29
08-Mar-16	Low	Outaouais	Connexions	23
(Total participants = 269)				

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
SAQ Focus Groups, by Region		
region	sessions	participants
Capitale-nationale	3	30
Cote-Nord	1	24
Gaspé	7	84
Outaouais	6	131
Total	17	269

3 DEMOGRAPHICS

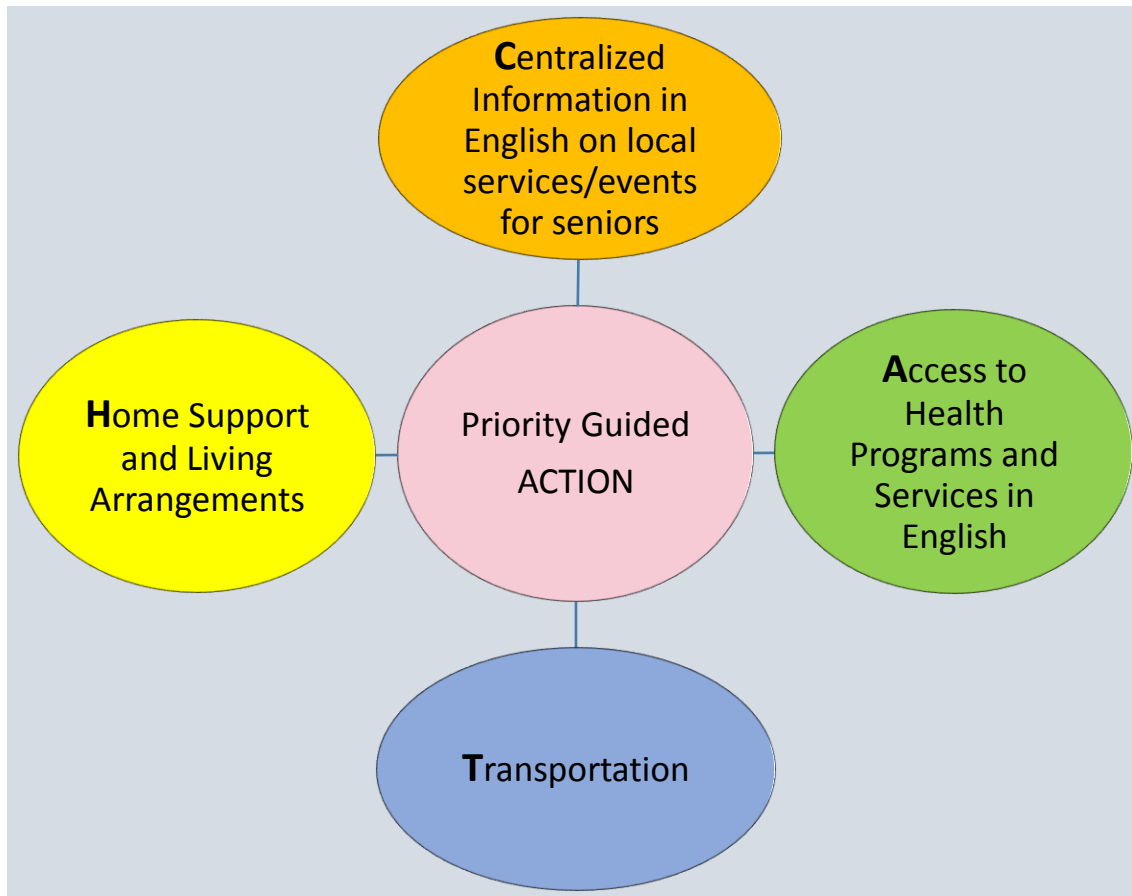
The demographic profile of English-speaking seniors who participated in the SAQ focus groups is presented in the accompanying table. The distribution of participants in terms of age was fairly balanced - the fewer individuals under 60 years of age was expected as many focus groups were held during the day to accommodate the older senior group. Female participants greatly out-weighed males and the language of preference was pre-dominantly English. Interestingly, a small number of seniors whose preferred language is French were in attendance as well a few seniors whose preferred language is neither English nor French.

Demographics of SAQ Focus Group Participants	
by Age Group	
under 50	3
51-60	10
61-70	61
71-80	87
81 and over	60
Grand Total	221
by Gender	
Female	176
Male	44
Grand Total	220
by Preferred Language	
English	195
English/French	13
French	10
Other (specify)	3
Grand Total	221
<i>Note: Not all respondents completed the demographic forms.</i>	

4 TOP PRIORITIES FROM PROJECT CONSULTATION

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 CHSSN and regional partners NSCA, Vision, Jeffery Hale, CASA, Connexions and RAWQ.

C.H.A.T. – The top four priorities 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/CLCs, networks and advocacy groups, libraries) to the private services of professionals for home maintenance (snow clearing, 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/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 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 health prevention activities designed for seniors, day centers in English); improved information in English to facilitate navigation of public health and social service system; improved communication in English from public institutions concerned with health and dignity of those in advanced stages of life (service reception, hospitals, assisted-living/long-term care).

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

5 FROM LESSONS LEARNED TO PLANS FOR ACTION

The four priority areas established by the project will serve as guidelines in the partnering, 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 focus groups produced by the project are important additions to the evidence-base that informs regional and provincial initiatives and advocacy.

One lesson learned 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 service such as a seniors' day center they're managing 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 to 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 5 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 – CÔTE-NORD

Côte-Nord Focus Groups

Seniors Wellness Centre, Sept-Îles, October 7, 2015

TOP 2 PRIORITIES

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

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

Within the Cote-Nord region, there are 780 English-speaking individuals aged 65 and over and together they represent 14.6% of the region's English-speaking population. Of these seniors, 155 live in the CLSC Sept-Iles territory where the 65 years and over group represent a substantial 16.8% of their English-speaking community. In CLSC Sept-Iles there are 290 English speakers who are located 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 CLSC Sept-Iles outweigh their Francophone counterparts as a percentage of their language community.

In terms of education, 45.4% of English speakers residing in the CLSC Sept-Iles territory report high school leaving or less as their highest level of education, 21.5% have a college or CEGEP diploma and 17.4% have a university certificate or degree. Among the English-speaking 65 years and older group, 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-Iles territory. When the Sept-Iles English-speaking population (all ages) is compared to the English-speaking Cote-Nord group as a whole, they are more likely to have attained a university certificate or degree (17.4% CLSC Sept-Iles compared to 8.1% Cote-Nord).

The unemployment rate of the English-speaking community of this Sept.Iles 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% are located 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 and this 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 network among English-speaking seniors - even a phone number we can dial to check on one another or to use in the 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 and there were 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 your 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 larger community.

- *Those of us here today are connected. This group is a support group for each other. This is a strength. The English-speaking community is a small community 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.*

7 APPENDICES

7.1 APPENDIX A. CONSENT FORM

You have been asked to participate in a focus group hosted by Seniors Action Quebec and funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage. The main purpose of the group is to identify the critical issues affecting the English-speaking seniors in your region. The information learned in the focus group will be used to establish action plans to address the issues identified.

Your participation in the focus group is voluntary and you may stop at any time. Although the focus group will be tape recorded, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report.

There are no right or wrong answers to the focus group questions. We want to hear many different viewpoints and would like to hear from everyone. We hope you can be honest even when your responses may not be in agreement with the rest of the group. In respect for each other, we ask that responses made by all participants be kept confidential.

I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

7.2 APPENDIX B. SAQ FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Date:

Time:

Place:

Where do you live? _____

How long have you lived in the region? _____

Your age:

- under 50
- 51-60
- 61-70
- 71-80
- 81 and over

Your gender:

- Male
- Female

Preferred language:

- English
- French
- Other (specify) _____

