

Aging in Community:
Social Connection, Well-Being, and Empowerment at North Edmonton Seniors Association

Makaela Paynter (Student)

Department of Social Sciences, Athabasca University

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Dr. Trevor Baxter (Tutor)

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Abstract

This community-based research project examined how older adults experience participation in the North Edmonton Seniors Association (NESA), with a focus on physical health, mental well-being, and social connection. Guided by a qualitative, participatory approach, the study drew on interviews, surveys, and participant observation to explore how aging is lived and supported in a community setting. Four central themes emerged: social belonging and connection, physical and mental well-being, lifelong learning and engagement, and accessibility and barriers. Participants described how routine, movement, and volunteering fostered confidence, purpose, and emotional resilience. At the same time, they identified challenges related to affordability, space, and inclusion of culturally diverse and male-identifying members. These findings affirm and extend existing literature on active aging and empowerment, offering grounded insight into how well-being is supported through community centres. The study highlights the essential role of seniors' centres in promoting connection, autonomy, and inclusion, and calls for greater attention to older adults' voices in creating age-friendly, equitable community spaces.

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Introduction

Canada is experiencing a major demographic transformation; by 2037, nearly one in four Canadians will be over the age of 65 (CIHI 2025). This shift raises urgent questions about how society can support well-being in later life, not only through formal healthcare or aging-at-home policies, but through sustained opportunities for connection, contribution, and dignity (National Seniors Council 2024). As researchers and policymakers promote “active aging” as a public health priority, community-based organizations have emerged as crucial supports for helping older adults remain physically active, socially connected, and mentally stimulated (Dogra et al. 2022). Yet few studies explore how these programs are actually experienced by older adults themselves. This report explores those experiences through a case study of the North Edmonton Seniors Association (NESA), a non-profit that has become a vital hub for older adults in northeast Edmonton and surrounding areas.

This project began as part of community-based research (CBR) methods course at Athabasca University. I was encouraged to consider communities I was already involved with; as a yoga teacher, the idea of studying yoga communities initially came up. However, as I engaged more deeply with the ethical foundations of CBR, particularly its emphasis on reciprocity, co-learning, and social justice, I realized that research should be directed toward a community where it could hold greater relevance and benefit. Community-based research, especially when framed by critical and Indigenous methodologies, invites researchers to work alongside historically marginalized groups and to contribute meaningfully to collective well-being (Gallant and Hutchinson 2016). This approach aligned with my values as a student of anthropology and led me to reflect on relationships that could support this kind of work.

I soon recognized NESA as an ideal research context; I already worked there as a chair yoga instructor. Older adults often face systemic marginalization through declining mobility, shrinking social networks, income insecurity, and persistent ageism (National Seniors Council 2024). I saw NESA as a space of potential, where seniors are not just served, but empowered through participation, connection, and creativity. My interest in working with this demographic is also personal. During the COVID-19 pandemic, both of my grandparents lived in a long-term care facility. Isolated from us and from one another, they ultimately passed away without the presence or support of their loved ones. That loss profoundly shaped my awareness of how loneliness and separation impact welfare in later life.

Initially, I framed this research around social isolation, hoping to understand how community centres like NESA might reduce social isolation among older adults. But early in the data collection process, it became clear that isolation is a complex and deeply subjective experience; It is difficult to define or measure within the scope of a small CBR project. As my relationships with members deepened, I shifted toward a broader, strengths-based inquiry into how NESA contributes to older adults' physical, mental, and social well-being.

The North Edmonton Seniors Association has served older adults since 1978, when the Northgate Lions Club constructed the facility (NESA 2024). Today, it operates as a charitable, membership-based, non-profit in partnership with the City of Edmonton. Its mission is “to provide a friendly environment offering physically and mentally rewarding activities and services which promote wellness, independence, and community involvement” (NESA 2024, 2). Governed by an elected Board of Directors and supported by staff, instructors, and over 220 volunteers, NESA is one of the region's largest and most active senior-serving organizations, with over 2,000 active members in 2023 (NESA 2024, 23). That year, it offered 587 programs

including fitness classes, creative arts, educational seminars, and social events, with 96% of members reporting satisfaction with program delivery (NESA 2024, 18-20). For many, NESA is more than a recreation centre; it is a space of belonging, purpose, and connection.

Guided by community-based research principles and shaped by my relationships within NESA, this project explores how older adults experience social, physical, and mental well-being through community participation. It asks: How do seniors perceive the benefits of participating in NESA programs? What barriers limit their access? And what can their experiences tell us about the role of community organizations in supporting aging with dignity and connection? Drawing on interviews, surveys, observations, and informal conversations, the study centres participant voices to explore these questions. Findings reflect both challenges and deep appreciation and are organized around four central themes: social connection, health and well-being, lifelong engagement, and accessibility. Ultimately, this research highlights the essential role of community-based organizations like NESA in promoting meaningful, empowered aging.

Literature Review

Canada's population is aging rapidly, with older adults now representing the fastest-growing age group in the country; as of 2024, more than seven million Canadians, approximately one in five, are aged 65 or older, a number projected to rise to nearly eleven million by 2046 (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors 2024). These demographic shifts are often framed in terms of burden or cost, narratives that risk reinforcing ageist assumptions which portray older adults as fragile, dependent, or obsolete (Fortune and Butler 2023). Such stereotypes have material consequences: they can limit access to meaningful roles, discourage participation in community life, and obscure structural barriers that many older adults

face (Gallant and Hutchinson 2016). In response, researchers and practitioners have increasingly called for approaches that move beyond deficit-based thinking and instead emphasize well-being, inclusion, and agency in later life. This project takes up that call by examining how older adults themselves experience health, connection, and purpose through participation in community-based programs, using the North Edmonton Seniors Association (NESA) as a case study.

The active aging framework, first developed by the World Health Organization, promotes the idea that aging well depends on optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security to enhance quality of life (WHO 2002, cited in Dogra et al. 2022). In contrast to models that emphasize frailty or dependency, this approach centres autonomy, social inclusion, and lifelong engagement. In Canada, active aging has become a guiding principle in both public health policy and service delivery, positioned as a strategy to enhance well-being while reducing reliance on institutional care (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors 2024). In their review of active aging interventions, Dogra et al. (2022) emphasize that meaningful engagement in later life depends not only on individual motivation, but on structural supports that make health and connection accessible and sustainable. Community-based programs that integrate physical activity, social participation, and mental stimulation, are among the most promising avenues for achieving these goals. This framing underscores the significance of seniors' centres like NESA, not only as service providers, but as sites of agency, belonging, and empowerment.

While active aging is widely endorsed in theory, its practical realization depends heavily on local infrastructure and community-based delivery systems (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors 2024). Community organizations like seniors' centres play a vital role in supporting older adults to remain connected, mobile, and engaged. These settings

offer more than structured activities; they serve as social anchors, creating spaces where individuals can build relationships, establish routines, and feel recognized as capable contributors (Fortune and Butler 2023). In a qualitative study of senior centre participants, Fulbright (2010) found that involvement in community programs contributed not only to physical and mental health, but also motivation, accountability, and a sense of belonging. Similarly, Merriam and Kee (2014) argue that lifelong learning, particularly in informal and community contexts, can strengthen self-esteem, cognitive function, and social engagement. These benefits are amplified when older adults take on meaningful roles, such as peer leaders or volunteers contributing to a shared sense of purpose and mutual support.

However, participation alone is not a simple solution to the complex dynamics of inclusion. In their qualitative study of a Canadian senior centre, Gallant and Hutchinson (2016) found that while some members felt empowered by their involvement, others experienced frustration or disengagement when decision-making processes were unclear or exclusive. Their findings highlight that empowerment depends not only on access, but on transparency, trust, and shared ownership. Similarly, Fortune and Butler (2023) emphasized that inclusion is not just about being present, but about being needed; centres that cultivate emotional connection and shared responsibility are more likely to foster a true sense of belonging.

The risks associated with social isolation and loneliness in older adulthood are also well documented. Vlaicu (2024) synthesizes research linking chronic loneliness to declines in mental and physical health, including increased risks of depression, cognitive deterioration, and early mortality. Susanto (2024), using survey data from Indonesia, demonstrated strong statistical correlations between perceived isolation and a range of negative health outcomes. In Canada, isolation is considered one of the more pressing threats to older adults' quality of life, with

mobility challenges, income insecurity, and the loss of close relationships all contributing to disconnection (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors 2024). Rosso et al. (2013), drawing from U.S. survey data, found that individuals with mobility limitations were significantly less likely to participate in social or recreational activities, illustrating how physical barriers can often reinforce social exclusion.

Taken together, these studies affirm the vital role of inclusive, community-based programs in responding to the complex and interrelated challenges of aging. Physical health, mental well-being, social connection, autonomy, and learning are not separate domains, but mutually reinforcing. This underscores the need to move beyond broad health indicators and attend to how aging is experienced and interpreted by older adults themselves. In organizations like NESAs, where programs, relationships, and daily routines intersect, it is especially important to understand how members describe the impact of their involvement. Qualitative, community-based research offers a crucial lens for exploring these dynamics, grounding theoretical models in lived experience.

Despite these advances, several key gaps remain in the literature. Many studies remain heavily quantitative, emphasizing metrics such as attendance rates or generalized measures of satisfaction while overlooking the personal and emotional meanings that shape participation. Others treat older adults as a homogenous group, failing to account for how intersecting factors like income, gender, mobility, and cultural background shape experience. Additionally, while barriers such as cost, transportation, and accessibility are often mentioned, few studies examine how these challenges affect daily routines or long-term engagement. Vlaicu (2024) and Susanto (2024) both point to the compounding effects of isolation and health challenges, but cross-sectional approaches limit understanding of how these issues evolve over time. These gaps point

to the need for more participatory, qualitative research that centres older adults' voices and attends to the internal dynamics within community organizations. Such approaches are most impactful when rooted in co-learning, reciprocity, and reflexivity, principles often absent in conventional aging studies (Gallant and Hutchinson 2016). This project responds to that call by centring the experiences of NESA members, staff, volunteers, and instructors, and by exploring the physical, mental, and social dimensions of aging as they are lived, not merely measured. By positioning older adults as knowledge holders and co-creators of meaning, this research offers a more grounded, nuanced understanding of what it means to age well in community.

My interest in this topic has been shaped not only by academic inquiry but also by personal experience and ethical commitment. As a yoga instructor at NESA, I had already built rapport with members before the project began. These relationships prompted me to ask how I could contribute something meaningful to a community I was already part of and deeply care about. My positionality as a younger adult, as someone whose grandparent experienced devastating isolation in long-term care, and as a student learning about CBR, has informed how I approached the topic and interpreted the literature.

Fieldwork challenged some of my initial assumptions, especially around the concept of social isolation. I had seen isolation as inherently negative and widespread but came to recognize that some seniors find comfort in solitude, while others define connection in ways I hadn't anticipated. I also became aware of how dominant narratives frame older adults as frail, passive, or in decline, images I had internalized more than I realized. These assumptions risk reducing seniors to recipients of care rather than acknowledging their agency, creativity, and insight. Engaging with literature on empowerment, lifelong learning, and strengths-based approaches

helped me reframe aging not as a problem to be solved, but as a complex life stage shaped by resilience and participation.

Ultimately, this project contributes to the literature by amplifying the voices of older adults and exploring how physical, mental, and social well-being are supported through participation in a community setting. It responds to key gaps by centring lived experience, emphasizing the strengths and insights of older adults, and demonstrating how community-based programs can foster connection, purpose, and resilience. In doing so, it reflects a broader shift in aging research, away from deficit-based models and toward participatory, reflexive, and relational understandings of what it means to thrive in later life.

Methodology

This project adopted a community-based research (CBR) design, grounded in qualitative and participatory methods. Rooted in principles of reciprocity, reflexivity, and collaboration, it aimed to explore how older adults at the North Edmonton Seniors Association (NESA) experience health, connection, and purpose through community programming. As a yoga instructor within NESA, I approached the project from an insider-outsider position, seeking to contribute meaningfully to a community I was already engaged with. To capture diverse perspectives, I employed a multi-method design incorporating semi-structured interviews, self-administered surveys, and participant observation. This combination allowed for in-depth exploration alongside broader pattern recognition, an approach well-suited to CBR.

Participants were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling. Posters, brochures, and a research booth, were visible throughout the NESA facility and at programs I attended or led. Recruitment was shaped by my existing relationships, and those familiar with me were more

likely to engage. This dynamic fostered trust but limited representativeness. Between April 15 and May 26, 2025, I collected data from 12 interview participants (including a couple interviewed together), 32 completed surveys, and 18 sets of fieldnotes. Of the survey respondents, 26 identified as female and 6 as male, with most between the ages of 60 and 79. The majority identified as Caucasian and had been NESA members for over three years. Most participants regularly attended fitness classes but were also involved in arts, social clubs, or volunteer roles. While the sample offers rich insight into actively engaged members, it may underrepresent individuals facing barriers to participation.

Interviews were conducted in person at the NESA facility in private or semi-private spaces, depending on participant preference. Eleven interviews were conducted with a total of 12 individuals, seven members (including one couple) and five staff or instructors. Conversations lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were guided by open-ended questions related to social connection, health, accessibility, and the meaning of program involvement. With informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and manually transcribed. While I used an interview guide, I allowed conversations to flow based on participants' responses and comfort.

Surveys were distributed in paper format at the research booth, during my yoga classes, and in other programs I attended. A total of 32 responses were collected anonymously. The survey included Likert-scale and open-ended questions, capturing data on demographics, participation frequency, and perceived impacts on social, physical, and mental well-being. These responses supported triangulation and offered a wider snapshot of member experiences.

Participant observation was conducted in both formal and informal settings. I participated in a range of programs including yoga, circuit training, chair workouts, and social groups. I also observed informally at the café, at community events, and during casual interactions at the

project booth. Fieldnotes were written shortly after each session and later expanded into detailed digital entries. These notes captured not only the activities and environment, but also social dynamics, tone, and interactions, elements that are often missed using other data collection tools.

Interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and survey responses were anonymized and stored in password-protected folders on my personal laptop, with backup on an encrypted external hard drive. Survey responses were organized into tables using Microsoft Word. I analyzed interview transcripts and observational data using thematic coding, beginning with an open reading to identify key words and phrases such as “routine,” “welcoming,” “friendly,” and “mobility,” which were then refined into broader thematic categories. Four central themes emerged: (1) social connection and belonging, (2) physical and mental well-being, (3) lifelong learning and engagement, and (4) accessibility and barriers. These themes were cross-referenced with survey data to ensure coherence and depth. Outlier experiences, such as critiques, were retained and analyzed critically to avoid overly idealized conclusions. A research journal was maintained throughout to document analytic decisions, and participant quotes were used in the findings to preserve voice and enhance credibility.

This study received ethical approval through my tutor at Athabasca University and followed the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2) principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice. Participation was voluntary, informed, and centred on participant autonomy and comfort. Interview participants provided written informed consent, while survey participants consented through the completion of an anonymous questionnaire. To protect participant privacy, all data was anonymized and stored securely.

Reciprocity guided the research process. As both a yoga instructor and researcher within NESAs, I was aware of the ethical complexities of dual roles and aimed to foster trust through

openness, consistency, and relational engagement. I used the research booth not only to recruit participants and hand out surveys, but to hold space for questions, casual conversations, and feedback. While informal interactions were not recorded, they were integral to building relationships and reinforcing transparency. In this way, reciprocity and ethical care were embedded in daily practice, not limited to formal procedures.

Several practical and ethical challenges emerged during the research process. The most significant was difficulty accessing a broader and more diverse sample. Despite distributing recruitment materials widely, most participants were individuals with whom I had pre-existing relationships. Time and financial constraints also limited the recruitment period and scope. As a result, the sample may not fully reflect the experiences of members facing barriers to participation.

Personally, I also encountered moments of uncertainty and self-consciousness. My dual role helped build trust, but it likely influenced how participants responded. I occasionally felt unsure of my capacity as a student researcher to offer something of value to a community that I greatly admire. I navigated these tensions through continuous reflexivity, adjusting my approach when needed and remaining sensitive to both participant and personal dynamics. Some interviews were emotionally sensitive or more reserved, underscoring that ethical research requires not only procedural consent, but attunement, flexibility, and care.

This study employed a participatory and flexible CBR approach to explore how older adults experience well-being through community participation. The integration of interviews, surveys, and observations allowed for both depth and breadth of understanding. Although limitations in sample diversity and time constraints presented challenges, the project remained grounded in ethical care and collaborative spirit. The findings that follow are organized around

the four central themes that emerged through analysis and reflect the voices and experiences of NESA members, staff, and instructors.

Results

This section presents the key findings of the study, drawn from a combined analysis of interview transcripts, survey responses, and observational fieldnotes. The results are organized around four central themes, each encompassing subthemes that reflect distinct dimensions of participant experience. Quotations and contextual data are included to illustrate key patterns and perspectives. Together, these themes highlight the emotional, physical, social, and structural factors that shape older adults' engagement with NESA programs. The four major themes are: (1) social connection and belonging, (2) physical and mental well-being, (3) lifelong learning and engagement, and (4) accessibility and barriers.

(1) Social Connection and Belonging

Subtheme 1: Friendship and Humor

Participants frequently described NESA as more than just a place to attend programs; it was a reliable and meaningful place for forming friendships. Many referred to it as a “second home” or the “highlight” of their week, with relationships often extending into daily life. One member shared, “my wife and I call this place the club... it’s pretty huge in my life,” noting that coffee meetups with friends continued long after they stopped playing pickleball. A sense of connection was also visible through small acts of community, like a member sending their “useless fact of the day” via text to the *Connections* group when they couldn’t attend in person. Survey data echoed this pattern: 26 out of 32 respondents reported improved social connection since joining NESA. Staff noted that deeper relationships often developed through volunteerism

or regular attendance. While many found connection easily, others noted that the process was gradual. One member reflected, “connection takes time to build,” expressing a desire to open up but difficulty in doing so right away.

Laughter, playfulness, and humor were also central to how participants experienced connection. Across programs, light teasing and shared jokes helped ease social dynamics and build familiarity. During a game of cornhole, one member’s dry one-liners drew group laughter. In another moment, a pair of book room volunteers wandered into an interview and were playfully teased by the interviewee, who joked that NESA should “cancel the group” altogether. The spontaneous exchange reflected a strong sense of mutual rapport. Observational data reinforced this tone: laughter, casual conversation, and joking with instructors were common across programs and in informal settings, contributing to a welcoming and lively atmosphere.

Subtheme 2: Trust and Relational Safety

Trust and emotional support were consistent undercurrents in participant experiences, particularly during periods of loss, transition, or vulnerability. In one interview, a recently widowed participant explained that while they didn’t usually initiate conversations, NESA gave them “an entry point” to reconnect and open up. In another instance, during the *Connections* program, a member quietly sought out the facilitator for a private conversation about a personal issue – an act that reflected trust in both the staff and the emotional safety of the setting. Fieldnotes described these moments as subtle but meaningful, suggesting NESA was not only a space for structured activity but a relational environment where members could move at their own pace.

This trust was shaped by the warmth and consistency of instructors and staff, who were described as approachable, kind, and emotionally present. “What really impressed me is the

staff... they're so positive," one member shared. Another explained that instructors were "the key to the programming... it means a lot." However, the importance of tone was also evident in contrast. One member described leaving a program after sensing the instructor was disengaged, saying, "I thought, how am I supposed to do that?" These reflections underscore that emotional safety is relational, built not only through content, but through care.

Staff and instructors acknowledged that finding professionals willing to work with older adults can be a challenge. One instructor explained, "it isn't a demographic that a lot of trainers want to work with," while a staff member added, "it's a tough sell to find instructors who want to be working in this environment." These comments point to a broader ageist bias in the recreation and fitness sector. Despite this, NESA has cultivated a team culture grounded in intentional inclusion. Observations noted staff regularly greeting members, checking in on emotional tone, and encouraging conversation; practices that helped foster trust over time.

Subtheme 3: Respect, Inclusiveness, and Feeling Seen

Participants frequently described NESA as a place where they felt respected and valued, though not always in explicit terms. One participant explained, "You don't have to explain why you are the way you are. There's no justifying... It's very esteem building." They went on to describe the inclusive tone of classes, where people of different abilities participate side by side: "You see people who are better than you, like you, or a little bit worse... and so you feel like, yeah, we're all human and we're sort of trying to figure out our path together." A survey respondent echoed this feeling, writing, "there's something for everyone."

Staff also emphasized NESA's inclusive ethos. One noted, "you don't have to explain who you are to be welcomed here," underscoring a deep culture of nonjudgment. At the same time, they acknowledged room for growth. One suggested, "advertising in other communities,"

to reach a more diverse membership, particularly across cultural lines. The survey sample, 26 women and 6 men, reflects the gender imbalance commonly observed in NESAs. Staff recognized this pattern but were encouraged by recent shifts: “there’s definitely more women that come here,” one shared, “but there’s lots of men joining, which is cool.” Rather than treating inclusion as a checkbox, staff approached it as a continuous effort. Through attentiveness and openness, NESAs created a space where many felt respected, welcomed, and seen.

(2) Physical and Mental Well-Being

Subtheme 1: Fitness, Strength, and Movement Adaptation

NESA’s physical activity programs play a central role in helping older adults maintain strength, balance, and flexibility – capacities participants consistently linked to independence and quality of life. Of 32 survey respondents, 22 reported improved physical well-being. Many members described feeling “stronger,” “better,” or “more capable.” Several interviewees noted specific improvements: one mentioned regaining hip mobility, while another shared that they had lost 60 pounds at NESAs post-retirement and stayed active through both programs and volunteer work. Others emphasized how adaptive class formats supported continued participation despite chronic conditions. For example, a member managing a heart condition and knee pain explained that chair-based classes helped them stay engaged safely. Even logistical features like the elevator were appreciated. These examples reflect not just the functional benefits of movement, but the importance of inclusive design in ensuring members of all abilities can participate fully.

Staff also emphasized this commitment to adaptation, noting that, “a lot of our programs are catered to the varying levels of physical abilities.” They highlighted member milestones such as being, “not in pain anymore” or “able to get up and down more easily.” One staff member shared the story of a 93-year-old member who retained their mobility and independence through

consistent training, concluding, “That right there proves that no matter your age, you can become stronger and move better, live better.” Observational data reinforced this; across programs instructors regularly offered modifications, and participants of varying abilities remained visibly engaged. Together, these reflections frame NESA as a space where aging bodies are supported, challenged, and respected.

Subtheme 2: Routine and Motivation

For many participants, NESA provided meaningful structure and rhythm in daily life. Attending classes or volunteering at set times helped establish a more predictable routine, which members linked to both emotional stability and physical well-being. One interviewee reflected, “it gives me routine... a routine that’s mine,” while another shared, “I always look forward to chair yoga,” emphasizing how these programs serve as both anchors and highlights in their week. A staff member described how regular volunteer shifts became important commitments: “They’re here every Thursday for three hours, and that’s their thing... they look forward to it all week.” These routines encouraged participants to leave the house, stay active, and engage socially, offering gentle but consistent motivation.

Staff and instructors echoed this motivational impact. One instructor described how NESA helped fill a gap in later life: “A lot of people miss that structure... and if you’re missing that motivation to keep up with the people around you and to challenge your brain and your body... there’s always going to be a decline.” They described a “snowball effect,” where small benefits, like reduced stiffness or improved mood, encouraged members to return. The motivational role of routine was not expressed in dramatic terms, but as a steady force that sustained members’ movement, purpose, and emotional balance. These findings emphasize how

community-based programs offer preventative support through everyday structure, not just clinical interventions.

Subtheme 3: Mental Health

Participants frequently described emotional and psychological benefits from attending NESAs, even if they did not name these experiences as “mental health.” Many spoke about feeling more balanced, less lonely, or generally uplifted after programs. As one participant explained, “You always feel better mentally if you do something physically,” pointing to the close connection between movement and mood. Survey results also supported this theme: 24 out of 32 respondents reported improved mental well-being since joining NESAs.

Interviewees further reflected on the role NESAs played in maintaining emotional steadiness or supporting recovery after hardship. One person shared that stress had previously taken a serious toll on their health, but they now felt more grounded, crediting a combination of social connection, physical activity, and medication. Another participant, referencing the impact of regular engagement, said NESAs “definitely enhanced” their mental health and “kept [them] thinking young.” A member in the *Connections* program mentioned that their mood had recently improved after a family visit, adding that NESAs “saved [their] life” when loved ones moved. In a more lighthearted exchange at the front desk, a member joked that they were “here for books, mental health, and distraction,” reflecting a casual but sincere appreciation for the centre’s positive emotional impact. While these benefits were often subtle or unnamed, they collectively point to NESAs as a stabilizing and emotionally nourishing environment, supporting mental health through consistent activity, connection, and presence.

(3) Lifelong Learning & Engagement

Subtheme 1: Trying New Things

Participants frequently described NESA as a space for continued learning, exploration, and mental engagement, challenging ageist assumptions that older adults are no longer curious or growth oriented. Many emphasized how educational programs helped “keep the mind sharp” or introduced helpful, relevant topics. One member described themselves as a lifelong learner and said that they appreciated seminars that offered insight “without the pressure of homework or tests.” Another praised the library and financial courses as “very informative.” These structured learning opportunities were not only mentally stimulating but also provided a sense of purpose and enjoyment.

Others found cognitive engagement through creative or experiential activities. One participant recalled trying tai chi because it sounded interesting and was “something different,” while another enjoyed a “choose your colours” and looked forward to an upcoming “find your style” session. Such experiences reflect the value of novelty and variety in later life. Suggestions for future programs also reflected this mindset. One member proposed introducing games like Mahjong, noting the potential for both for mental stimulation and more culturally diverse participation. Although this study did not include extensive interviews with members from arts or formal education programs, references across interviews and surveys indicate that curiosity, learning, and trying new things are central to how many members embrace NESA.

Subtheme 2: Volunteerism, Contribution and Purpose

Many NESA members found purpose, pride, and connection through volunteering, describing it as a meaningful way to remain active, contribute to the community, and feel useful. Volunteers take on a wide range of roles, from running clubs and helping at the front desk to giving building tours or maintaining book sales. One member shared that they first joined NESA with their parents over two decades ago and now volunteer at the desk because it’s “easier on the

body” than their previous role in the book room. Another member described transitioning from participant to facilitator in a program order to keep it running for others. Even small informal gestures, like offering to pour coffee for each other before *Connections*, illustrated a broader culture where helping is part of daily social life.

Staff emphasized how meaningful volunteer roles are, describing them as central to NESAs’ community and spirit. One recalled a quiet book sale where they suggested volunteers go home early, only for someone to reply, “well, there’s no one at home.” The staff member reflected that even if people weren’t actively socializing, “it was just as important for them to be here... that there were other people around.” Another staff member spoke about the joy of helping people find roles that suit them: “I like the feeling of finding a position for somebody that makes them feel really good... that makes them feel purpose again.” Together, these reflections illustrate how volunteerism at NESAs offers more than tasks, it fosters contribution, connection and a renewed sense of fulfilment in later life.

Subtheme 3: Autonomy and Empowerment

A sense of agency and dignity emerged as a steady undercurrent in how members described their experiences at NESAs. While few used terms like “empowerment” directly, many emphasized the importance of having choice in how they participate, share their stories, and step outside roles shaped by caregiving or dependency. One member reflected on how NESAs gave them space to focus on themselves, rather than always being a support person. This sentiment was echoed by a survey respondent who noted their “wife is in care” as a barrier to participation, underscoring how caregiving responsibilities can shape older adults’ ability to engage and how meaningful it is to have spaces where they can prioritize their own needs.

Empowerment also appeared in smaller practices that welcomed member input and involvement. Staff confirmed that feedback is routinely gathered from members and volunteers through surveys and conversations, and people are encouraged to share suggestions. One interviewee expressed hope that this research would be shared with NESA's board of directors, reflecting a broader desire for their experiences to inform decision making. Others appreciated being able to vote in board elections or take part in organizational matters. While subtle, these practices reinforce that members are not passive recipients of services, but active contributors with insights and authority. In this way, NESA supports not just participation, but autonomy, empowerment, and aging with dignity.

(4) Accessibility and Barriers

Subtheme 1: Transportation, Cost, and Technology

While many participants praised NESA's affordability and efforts to support access, individual-level barriers still affected some members' ability to fully engage. Survey responses identified transportation and financial concerns as common obstacles. Two respondents cited transport challenges, and five agreed that financial limitations affected their involvement. Bus service and long commutes were discussed in interviews with one member noting that "it's about a 20-minute drive... I wish it was closer to where I live," and another suggesting "the bus could come to the NESA stop more often." Although NESA offers a ride program, staff shared that only 13 people used it in a recent month, suggesting limited awareness or lingering barriers. Financially, NESA's Landry Leisure Pass (LLP) – established through the generous charitable bequest of a former member who wished to support seniors' access – offers a grassroots model of affordability, but not all members qualify. In a casual conversation, a member expressed desire to attend more classes but said they were "just on the cusp" of eligibility for the LLP.

Technology was discussed as both a bridge and a barrier. While NESAs trialed virtual programming during COVID-19, attendance was low, and online offerings have since been discontinued. Still, some members expressed interest in pre-recorded classes, digital outreach, or workshops to build tech confidence among older adults. A new staff member shared plans to expand NESAs's digital presence, particularly through social media and clearer messaging about available supports. These intersecting transportation, affordability, and technology barriers point to the need for flexible, layered strategies that respond to the diverse and evolving realities of aging in place.

Subtheme 2: Scheduling and Space Constraints

While enthusiasm for NESAs programs was high, many participants acknowledged challenges around scheduling, space, and capacity. Eleven survey respondents cited scheduling conflicts as a barrier, reflecting a mismatch between availability and demand. One member described being waitlisted for a course and then unable to switch into it after registering for a different program due to policy restrictions. A staff member empathized, noting how difficult it is when “someone who has been coming to a program here for years” can’t get a spot, calling it “hard” to balance long-time members with welcoming new ones.

Staff members also spoke candidly about NESAs operating “sort of at capacity,” with another adding, “The parking lot’s as big as it’s ever going to get... physically, we’ve expanded as much as we can.” Members echoed these concerns, with one remarking, “we need two gymnasiums... bigger space, more programs,” and others comparing NESAs's facilities to larger local centres. One staff member noted that past efforts to offer evening programming saw low turnout, and another added, “you can’t keep everyone happy,” pointing to the balance between organizational sustainability and meeting diverse community needs. Although members and staff

share a clear understanding of the constraints, this theme underscores a structural tension between growing interest and limited space. NESA continues to respond creatively, but some limitations are simply beyond its current infrastructure.

Subtheme 3: Gender Imbalance and Cultural Inclusion

While NESA programs were widely appreciated, participants and staff noted a significant gender imbalance, with women comprising the large majority of attendees. In the survey, 26 of 32 respondents identified as female and a member from a workout class estimated the participant ratio as roughly “80% women, 20% men.” Some saw this dynamic as fostering camaraderie, while others felt it may deter male participation. One member proposed activities like “men’s sheds” to support male engagement through shared hands-on projects. Others reflected on why older men might avoid seniors’ centres, citing stigma around the term “senior” or differing social habits. One instructor added that some male trainers are hesitant to work with older women, often due to limited education or experience supporting physical aging.

Cultural inclusion emerged less often in surveys but surfaced in several interviews and fieldnotes as an area for growth. Nearly all survey participants identified as Caucasian, and both staff and members reflected on the limited ethnocultural diversity in NESA’s current demographic. One member emphasized the need to ask underrepresented groups what would make the centre feel more welcoming, while a staff member suggested targeted outreach in different communities. Language barriers, visibility and cultural familiarity with senior centres were noted as possible factors affecting membership. While NESA is widely described as friendly and inclusive, these reflections point to the need for more intentional efforts to foster meaningful inclusion and representation across cultures.

Discussion

This study set out to explore how older adults experience participation in NESA programs across physical, mental, and social dimensions. The findings affirm much of the existing literature on aging and community engagement while also offering new insights into the everyday realities of empowerment, inclusion, and connection. Drawing on interviews, surveys, and fieldnotes, the research highlights the critical role that senior centres like NESA play in supporting well-being through routine, opportunities for contribution, and a sense of emotional safety. These findings align with key theoretical frameworks such as active aging (Dogra et al. 2022), community-based empowerment (Gallant and Hutchinson 2016), and the importance of emotional and social connection (Fulbright 2010; Fortune and Butler 2023).

In line with Dogra et al.'s (2022) emphasis on optimizing health, participation, and security in later life, NESA offers a setting where older adults can maintain physical function, form relationships, and feel purposeful. Many participants described becoming stronger, more balanced, or better able to manage health conditions as a result of program participation; findings were supported by survey data, where 22 out of 32 respondents reported improved physical well-being. Yet unlike the abstract models often referenced in policy, participants described these outcomes in tangible ways: walking more confidently, feeling proud of their strength, or staying “sharp” through learning and volunteering. These lived experiences deepen our understanding of how active aging is practiced on the ground, especially when supported by instructors who adapt programming to diverse needs.

This study also reinforces Fulbright's (2010) and Butler's (2023) findings on the mental and emotional benefits of community-based activity. Many participants said NESA supported their mental health by providing structure, distraction, companionship, or motivation to stay

engaged. As one member put it, “You always feel better mentally if you do something physically,” pointing to the interconnectedness of emotional regulation and physical activity. These insights echo Fortune and Butler’s (2023) argument that belonging, not just participation, can protect against isolation and loneliness. At NESA, belonging emerged not only through structured programs but also through informal gestures, shared routines, humor and care between members. Importantly, members did not always name their experiences in clinical terms; instead, they spoke of “feeling better,” “having something to look forward to,” or “being needed.” This language reveals how emotional well-being is interwoven with the everyday rhythms of community life.

At the same time, the study adds depth to the literature by highlighting autonomy and empowerment as key dimensions of aging with dignity. While Gallant and Hutchinson (2016) caution that inclusion does not automatically equate to empowerment, many NESA members reported feeling heard, involved, and respected. Practices like member surveys, volunteer leadership, and board voting processes allowed some participants to influence programming and express a sense of ownership. This aligns with Merriam and Kee’s (2014) findings on the value of informal lifelong learning and contribution in sustaining self-worth and agency. Several members said that volunteering gave them structure and meaning, echoing staff descriptions of this work as “lifeblood.” These narratives challenge deficit-based views of aging, instead presenting older adults as active agents shaping their own experience.

Still, the research also surfaced meaningful barriers to full participation. These included practical limitations such as transportation, scheduling conflicts, and financial access, as well as structural challenges such as facility capacity and space constraints. These findings parallel concerns raised in the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers’ (2024) report, which highlights

the need for improved infrastructure and targeted outreach. Participants and staff also reflected on the gender imbalance at NESA – 26 of 32 respondents identified as female – and the need to better include seniors from culturally diverse backgrounds. While NESA is broadly experienced as inclusive and welcoming, these findings suggest that genuine inclusion is not static; it requires ongoing engagement with underrepresented voices and attention to evolving community needs.

Together, these findings carry both practical and theoretical significance. Practically, they demonstrate that senior centres like NESA are not simply recreational facilities, but sites of health promotion, social connection, and civic engagement. Theoretically, they reinforce the importance of community-based settings as spaces where aging is negotiated not just biologically, but socially and symbolically. This aligns with a broader shift in aging research toward strengths-based and participatory models that challenge assumptions of decline and dependency, and instead highlight resilience, interdependence, and creativity in later life.

As with any community-based project, this study is shaped by its context and methodological constraints. The sample primarily reflects highly engaged NESA members already participating in programs or those already familiar with me through my role as a yoga instructor, which may underrepresent the voices of more isolated or marginalized seniors – a limitation also noted in Fulbright (2010). The study relied heavily on self-reported data, which may be affected by social desirability or selective memory. As a student-researcher working from an insider-outsider position, my presence may have influenced participant responses, despite efforts to build trust and transparency. These limitations, typical of qualitative research, underscore the importance of reflexivity, ethical care, and modesty in drawing conclusions.

Future research should explore the experiences of seniors who are less engaged or face greater barriers to participation, including those from culturally diverse or lower-income

backgrounds. Participatory approaches that co-design programming with these groups could illuminate unmet needs and support more inclusive planning. Comparative studies of different senior centre models may also help identify how organizational culture, staffing, and governance shape experience. Finally, longitudinal or mixed-method research could explore how community participation affects health, mobility, and well-being over time, offering deeper insight into what it truly means to age well in community.

Conclusion

This research set out to explore how older adults experience participation in the North Edmonton Seniors Association (NESA), particularly in relation to physical health, mental well-being, and social connection. Rooted in a community-based research approach, the project responded to a growing need to understand aging not as decline, but as an active, relational process shaped by inclusion, connection, and purpose. As Canada's aging population continues to grow, these questions matter more than ever. Aging well is not just a personal journey, it is a social, cultural, and political one.

Findings from interviews, surveys, and observations show that NESA is far more than a provider of programs; it is a space where older adults come to move, laugh, learn, contribute, and belong. These findings affirm and extend the literature on active aging, empowerment, and social inclusion, not by repeating general claims, but by illustrating how those outcomes unfold in everyday life through friendship, movement, humor, and meaningful roles. Participants described how routines supported their mental health, physical activity restored confidence, and volunteering created a sense of meaning and accountability. Importantly, the research also surfaces tensions between demand and capacity, inclusion and representation, and affordability

and access. This study answers its central questions by showing how aging is experienced not as a static stage, but as a dynamic, context-dependent process shaped by infrastructure, culture, and community.

Participants offered action-oriented insights that should be understood not merely as feedback, but as acts of co-creation. Suggestions included expanding outreach to men and culturally diverse communities, improving communication and visibility, and creating new ways to welcome underrepresented groups. Others emphasized physical accessibility, digital tools, and affordability – areas where supports like the Landry Leisure Pass offer grassroots models of success. Calls to ensure that participant perspectives reach decision-makers reflect a desire for transparent, inclusive processes and shared ownership. As Gallant and Hutchinson (2016) remind us, empowerment arises not just from access, but from trust and shared responsibility. These reflections offer concrete directions for NESA and other organizations working toward age-friendly, equitable programming.

Engaging in this research as both a student and instructor allowed me to reflect critically on my own assumptions about aging, community, and care. While I entered the project concerned about social isolation and vulnerability, I was consistently reminded of the strength, creativity, and insight that older adults bring to community life. Fieldwork challenged my unconscious biases and deepened my understanding of aging as a diverse and dynamic experience. The opportunity to build trust and share space with NESA members made this project not only academically meaningful, but personally transformative. I will be sharing the final report with NESA in both print and digital formats for any members or staff who are interested. While there is a certain sadness in bringing this research to a close, I remain

committed being present in the community, not only as an instructor but as an equal and engaged participant.

Ultimately, this research affirms the deep value of community in later life. Through their stories, routines, and relationships, NESA members remind us that aging is not a period of decline, but a stage of ongoing contribution, connection, and growth. In a society that too often sidelines older adults, this project highlights how seniors' centres can foster belonging, autonomy, and resilience. The work being done at NESA is not incidental, it is essential. As aging populations grow, the importance of inclusive, accessible, and empowering community spaces cannot be overstated. This study contributes to a broader call to recognize older adults not as passive recipients, but as active citizens with insight, agency, and the right to thrive.

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Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Building Social Connections and Enhancing Well-Being: Members' Experiences with NESAs Programs

The purpose of this research is to better understand social isolation among seniors and how community programs like those provided by North Edmonton Seniors Association (NESA) impact seniors' mental, physical and social well-being. The research will also attempt to identify barriers to participation in NESA programming. The research will involve semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and surveys. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed into electronic notes. You will be provided with the final report and all the information gathered from you, if desired. Any information that is collected will be used solely for the researcher's project in the course Anthropology 390: Community-Based Research Methods at Athabasca University. Data will be stored securely for six months and then permanently deleted. If you request that your data be destroyed immediately after the project, it will be done.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to:

1. Refuse to answer any questions.
2. Request a break during the interview process.
3. Withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. In this case, the researcher will only use information you have given with your permission. If you choose to withdraw, your data will either be destroyed or returned to you, depending on your preference.
4. Ask questions or contact the researcher regarding the study at any time.
5. Anonymity – All your information will be kept confidential. You will not be identified in the report unless you explicitly choose to be named. If you prefer to remain anonymous, that request will be respected.

Consent Statements (please check one option):

a) Audio Recording

I consent to being audio-recorded for the purpose of this study:

- ☐ Yes, I consent to being recorded.
☐ No, I do not consent to being recorded.

b) Destruction of Data

I would like the information that I provide to be destroyed:

- ☐ Yes, please destroy my data after the study.
☐ Yes, please provide me with a copy of my data and destroy the master copy.
☐ No, I do not wish for my data to be destroyed after the study.

c) Anonymity

I would like to remain anonymous:

- ☐ Yes, please keep me anonymous.
☐ No, I am comfortable being identified in the report.

Participant Acknowledgement:

I, _____ (written name), have been adequately informed and voluntarily agree to participate in this study on _____ (date).

_____ (signature)

Student Researcher:

Makaela Paynter
587-991-1971
makaelapayn@gmail.com

Course Instructor:

Dr. Katherine Strand
306-661-9274
kstrand@athabascau.ca

If you have questions or comments about your treatment as a participant in this research project, please contact Athabasca University's Research Ethics Board by e-mailing rebsec@athabascau.ca, or calling 1-800-788-9041 extension 6718.

A COPY OF THIS FORM IS TO BE LEFT WITH THE PARTICIPANT



Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview Questions - Members

Building Social Connections and Enhancing Well-Being: Members' Experiences with NESA Programs

Demographics/Background:

1. Can you please share your age group? (>50, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, 80+)
2. What gender do you identify as? (Male/Female/Non-binary/Prefer not to say) and are you comfortable sharing your cultural/ethnic background?
3. Do you live alone, with family, or with others?
4. Are you currently retired, still working, or in transition?
5. How would you describe your overall health? (mental/physical/spiritual/social)
6. Do you experience any challenges with mobility or physical limitations? If yes, how do these affect your daily life?

Social Isolation Pre-NESA:

7. What does social isolation mean to you? How important is socializing to you?
8. Do you have close family or friends nearby that provide you with regular support and/or opportunities for socialization?
9. Before becoming involved in any community programs, how would you describe your feelings of loneliness or isolation? How often do you feel this way?
10. How would you describe your social life and interactions with others before joining NESA? Did you participate in any other social activities? Were there specific times when you felt more isolated or disconnected?
11. How have feelings of isolation affected your mental and physical health, if at all?

NESA Involvement:

12. How long have you been a member of NESA and which programs do you participate in regularly? What motivated you to join?
13. How would you describe your experience with NESA programs? Which programs do you find the most helpful or enjoyable, and why?
14. How do you feel NESA involvement has impacted your overall well-being?

Social Connection Post-NESA:

15. How important is it for you to have a sense of belonging in the NESA community? Why?
16. Have you made friends or built stronger relationships through NESA programs? Could you share an example?
17. Has participation in NESA programs helped to reduce feelings of isolation for you? Can you share a specific instance where you felt particularly connected or supported?
18. How would you describe your sense of belonging or community at NESA, do you feel like you are a part of something bigger?

Other Perceived Impacts:

19. Would you say that participating in NESA programs has made you feel more connected or healthier? Can you be specific?
20. What kind of impact, if any, do you think NESA programs have had on your mental health, social connections, and overall sense of well-being?
21. Can you think of a specific time when you felt that a NESA program made a significant difference in how you were feeling socially or emotionally?
22. Have you noticed any changes in your physical health since joining NESA programs, such as increased energy, improved mobility, or better fitness levels?

23. What specific benefits have you gotten from specific programs?
24. How do you think NESA's programs have influenced your overall quality of life? Do you feel more fulfilled or happier?
25. Have any NESA programs help you in areas of your life that were previously a struggle? If so, how?
26. Are there any benefits from participating in NESA programs that you didn't expect or weren't initially looking for?
27. What aspects of NESA's programs have had the biggest or most meaningful impact on you?

Barriers and Suggestions for Improvement:

28. What challenges, if any, do you face that make it difficult to participate in NESA programs regularly?
29. Do physical health or mobility issues limit your ability to attend certain programs? Which ones?
30. Are there specific times or scheduling conflicts that prevent you from joining programs?
31. Do you ever feel anxious or uncomfortable about joining new programs or meeting new people at NESA? Is there anything that would help ease this?
32. What changes could NESA make to its programs to make them more accessible to you or other seniors that face barriers?
33. What types of new programs would you like to see offered at NESA?
34. How could NESA improve the social environment to make it feel more inclusive and welcoming for everyone?
35. Is there anything that you'd like to ask me about or add to our conversation to contribute to this research?

Interview Questions – Staff & Volunteers

Building Social Connections and Enhancing Well-Being: Members' Experiences with NESA Programs

Demographics/Background:

1. Can you describe your role at NESA (staff/volunteer)?
2. How long have you been involved with NESA, and what motivated you to get involved?
3. What do you like about working with / volunteering for NESA? Is there anything you dislike?

Perception of Social Isolation:

4. From your perspective, how does social isolation affect seniors in the Edmonton and surrounding areas?
5. What are some of the common challenges you see that contribute to social isolation among seniors?
6. How would you define a “sense of community” for seniors? How important do you think it is for their well-being?

NESA's Role in Addressing Social Isolation & Perceived Benefits:

7. How do you think NESA's programs address the issue of social isolation among seniors?
8. Which NESA programs do you feel are most effective in fostering social connection for seniors? Why?
9. Can you share any specific examples of how NESA programs have helped reduce isolation or created a sense of community for members?
10. Based on your observations/experience, how have seniors benefited from participating in NESA programs (mental/physical/social well-being)?
11. Have you noticed any improvements in members' overall well-being or quality of life due to their involvement with NESA? Can you provide an example?

Barriers and Suggestions for Improvement:

12. In your experience, what barriers do seniors face when trying to participate in NESA programs? (mobility, transportation, funding, scheduling)
13. Have you noticed any trends in which groups of seniors face more difficulties accessing programs?
14. What strategies do you think could help overcome these barriers and increase participation?
15. Based on your observations, what improvements or changes could be made to NESA's programs or offerings to better address social isolation?
16. Are there any new types of programs or initiatives that you think NESA could introduce to better serve the community and reduce social isolation?
17. How do you think NESA can improve its outreach or accessibility to ensure that all seniors who needs support are able to access it?

Additional Insights:

18. From your perspective, what are the key factors that make NESA programs successful in addressing social isolation?
19. Are there barriers that NESA faces that affect or limit the associations' ability to provide programs to the Edmonton area? How can we address these barriers?
20. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences working with NESA or contribute to this research?

Appendix C Sample Survey

Survey

Building Social Connections and Enhancing Well-Being: Members' Experiences with NESA Programs

Statement of Consent:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. This survey is part of a student research project to explore how participation in North Edmonton Senior's Association programs affect your social, physical, and mental well-being, as well as identify any barriers to participation. Your involvement is voluntary, and you can skip any questions or withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. All responses are confidential and anonymous. By completing this survey, you consent to participate in the study. If you have any questions, please contact Makaela Paynter by email (mpaynter1@learn.athabasca.ca) or phone (587-991-1981).

Section 1: General Information

1. Age Group:
 - ☐ > 50
 - ☐ 50-59
 - ☐ 60-69
 - ☐ 70-79
 - ☐ 80 +
2. Gender:
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Other
 - ☐ Prefer not to answer
3. Ethnicity:
 - ☐ Caucasian
 - ☐ Indigenous
 - ☐ Black/African Canadian
 - ☐ East Asian
 - ☐ South Asian
 - ☐ Latin/Hispanic
 - ☐ Middle Eastern
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____
 - ☐ Prefer not to answer
4. What is your current living situation?
 - ☐ I live alone
 - ☐ I live with a spouse/partner
 - ☐ I live with family members
 - ☐ I live in shared accommodation or a group home
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____
5. How long have you been a member of NESA?
 - ☐ Less than 6 months
 - ☐ 6 months – 1 year
 - ☐ 1 – 3 years
 - ☐ Over 3 years

6. Which of the following NESA programs do you currently participate in? (Check all that apply)
- ☐ Exercise Classes (e.g. yoga, fitness classes, walking groups)
 - ☐ Fitness Center (e.g. gym, equipment use, personal training)
 - ☐ Sports and Recreation (e.g. pickleball, paddle sport, recreational activities)
 - ☐ Arts and Crafts (e.g. painting, crafting, silversmithing)
 - ☐ Music and Performance (e.g. choir, learning an instrument)
 - ☐ Educational and Learning (e.g. language classes, learn to draw, dancing)
 - ☐ Clubs (e.g. crib, quilting)
 - ☐ Community events (e.g., festivals, outings, fundraisers)
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____
7. How often do you participate in NESA programs?
- ☐ Daily
 - ☐ Several times a week
 - ☐ Once a week
 - ☐ Occasionally, a few times a month
 - ☐ Rarely

Section 2: Social Isolation and NESA's impact on Well-Being

8. How often do you feel social isolated?
- ☐ Never
 - ☐ Rarely
 - ☐ Sometimes
 - ☐ Often
 - ☐ Always
9. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Participation in NESA programs has helped reduce my feelings of social isolation."
- ☐ Strongly agree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Strongly disagree
10. How would you rate the overall impact of NESA programs on your physical health?
- ☐ Very positive
 - ☐ Somewhat positive
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Somewhat negative
 - ☐ Very negative
11. How would you rate the overall impact of NESA programs on your mental well-being?
- ☐ Very positive
 - ☐ Somewhat positive
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Somewhat negative
 - ☐ Very negative
12. How would you rate the overall impact of NESA programs on your social well-being (e.g., connection to others, sense of community)?

- ☐ Very positive
 - ☐ Somewhat positive
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Somewhat negative
 - ☐ Very negative
13. Do you feel that participation in NESA programs has improved your sense of belonging within the community?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Unsure
14. In what ways have NESA programs positively affected your social interactions or connections with others (open-ended)?
-
-
-

Section 3: Barriers and Suggestions for Improvement

15. What, if any, barriers have prevented you from participating in NESA programs? (check all that apply)
- ☐ Physical limitations (e.g., mobility, health concerns)
 - ☐ Lack of transportation
 - ☐ Financial constraints
 - ☐ Scheduling conflicts
 - ☐ Lack of interest in available programs
 - ☐ Lack of information about available programs
 - ☐ Social isolation or lack of support to attend
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____
16. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I find it difficult to access NESA programs due to physical or health-related limitations."
- ☐ Strongly agree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Strongly disagree
17. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Transportation or lack of access to transportation limits my ability to participate in NESA programs."
- ☐ Strongly agree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Neutral
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Strongly disagree
18. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Financial limitations affect my ability to participate in NESA programs."
- ☐ Strongly agree
 - ☐ Agree

- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

19. What changes or improvements would make it easier for you to participate in NESA programs? (open-ended)

20. Are there any additional programs, activities or services you would like NESA to offer? (open-ended)

21. Do you have any other suggestions for how NESA can improve its programs or better support its members? (open-ended)

Follow-Up Opportunity

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses are valuable and will help us better understand the impact of NESA programs on members' social, physical, and mental well-being. Your input is crucial for improving these services and contributing to the overall understanding of the impact that seniors' associations have on reducing social isolation.

If you are interested in participating in a more in-depth interview to further discuss your experiences and insights, please contact me directly. I would be grateful for the opportunity to speak with you in more detail!

Makaela Paynter

Email: mpaynter1@learn.athabasca.ca

Phone: 587-991-1971

Thank you again for your participation! Please return this survey directly to Makaela.



Appendix D

Visual Thematic Summary

