

# St. Michael's Long Term Care Centre – Connecting by Creating – Final Report

## Executive Summary

In the original proposal, St. Michael's planned for a volunteer-based community hub. However, COVID-19 regulations prevented the original programming. St. Michael's turned the program into an art-based program with the help of volunteers called "Connecting by Creating." Connecting by Creating is a dementia-friendly, intergenerational, arts-based program which includes an art club, drama club, and bi-weekly art-making visits from Father Leo Green School, with classes attending ranging from kindergarten to grade six.

In total, 27 volunteers supported the art and drama clubs. 68 residents joined in the kids' group and for the art and drama clubs. 54 school children attended the bi-weekly art visits. Pre and post project surveys were completed with all the new volunteers.

The program now has groups of volunteers that come for six weeks of sessions. Once the sessions are over, volunteers are welcome to return and new volunteers are also recruited.

## Objectives/Implementation

Goals of Connecting by Creating include helping residents with dementia to regain their creative self-expression and spreading knowledge and understanding about people living with dementia to youth in the community. The programs were started using plans from Opening Minds through Art and Village Improv for Alzheimer's. The programs were adjusted to accommodate the residents at St. Michael's. Staff were trained on the art club and improv program.

Once a week for six weeks, volunteers assisted resident artists for an hour as they created art pieces or took part with residents in improv acting sessions. Volunteers were educated during their orientation on dementia. For the art program, each week there was a new art project to work on with clear instructions to guide the artist. Volunteers for the art program included school-aged children. For the improv program, each week participants expressed themselves through theatre games and activities providing for physical and mental exercises.

Volunteers were also able to spend time with residents through a one-to-one activity bin. The bin included games, books, nail kits, and many other supplies that volunteers could take to residents. All volunteers had access to the supplies and were trained on any necessary equipment.

## Impact

A formative review was completed on resident pre and post project surveys. Areas that showed change included:

1. Increased frequency of recreation attendance showing more residents attending higher numbers of programs, especially 7+ programs in 7 days.
  2. Mood showed minor change in numbers of residents who are content and happy most of the time, but more major change in residents who are sad/worried/bored (fewer negative emotions).
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3. Major decline in behaviours recorded in same group of residents in 7 days before and after 6 weeks following the Connecting by Creating program.
4. No residents stated that they never feel good about themselves in the post survey (versus one in pre survey).
5. No residents stated they feel lonely very often in post survey (versus four in pre survey).
6. Comments (on pre and post surveys) show excitement leading into the program and mostly positive responses at the end of the program.
7. Artist feedback surveys showed a good measure of mood from start to end of a single session indicating most participant moods remained consistent or improved. Comments were mostly positive.
8. Theatre participant surveys showed most participant moods remained consistent or improved from start to end of a single session.

Comments from school groups about the experience were also positive.

St. Michael's has been working towards program sustainability by recruiting new volunteers to start up in January (2023). They have also trained all of recreation staff members on both the art program and drama program. They have purchased the materials to keep up with both programs. Some new purchasing will be required for the art program, which will be done by the recreation department. St. Michael's has all the materials needed for the drama program. Program instructions have been uploaded on all iPads purchased through the grant. The partnership with the Father Leo Green school will continue.