South Granville Seniors Centre: Happy Memories Café   September 23, 2021

Inspired by the February 2020 Building Capacity Launch Event, new South Granville Seniors Centre Executive Director Douglas Dunn started a new initiative known as the Happy Memories Café. Accommodating members with memory loss issues was never something the SGSC had done before, but based on their staff's familiarity with its membership, they were able to *"find a group of participants who keep coming back and [they've been able to] build from there."* Originally designed as in person program, the group meets virtually online every month, an adaptation to the pandemic, which happened right after the program's launch.

As the staff have learned from their experience with this group and with their tablet lending library, people are often reluctant to explicitly identify themselves has having dementia or memory challenges. As X says, members talk about *"want(ing) to participate in order to practice [using their memory] or in order to prevent or ... hav(e) more information about dementia"*. Towards this end, group leaders engage participants in a variety of activities (i.e., using body and mind) and gather feedback from participants to shape future sessions.

For the next phase of the project, SGSC plans to introduce a Spanish speaking Happy Memories Café, as well have the existing group meet in person. Staff would also like to bolster the group's ongoing membership by finding ways to promote it more broadly, including through linking with care partners. Given the new virtual world of seniors programming, there may be an opportunity to gain membership from other local seniors centres.

An emerging learning from the project is the importance of creating a safe space where members can feel a sense of belonging with others who are like them, and have a chance to share and participate together. Part of the learning for this pilot project will be to understand the key features that make the group successful, and to find ways to spread this understanding more broadly to SGSC's other programming, in order to make it more dementia friendly.