



# SENIORS' OUTDOOR ACTIVATION TOOLKIT



This project is funded in part  
by the Government of Canada.





**ABOUT THE NEW HORIZONS FOR SENIORS PROGRAM** The New Horizons for Seniors Program is a federal grant that provides funding for projects that make a difference in the lives of seniors and their communities. The objective of the New Horizons for Seniors Program is to support the social participation and inclusion of seniors by providing financial assistance for new and existing community projects and programs for seniors.

Through the New Horizons for Seniors Grant, we have developed the Seniors' Outdoor Activation Toolkit to equip and inspire seniors' agencies and service providers to safely expand their programming to outdoor settings, thereby increasing opportunities for seniors across the GTHA to participate in social and recreational programs safely.



**ABOUT US - 8 80 CITIES** 8 80 Cities is a non-profit organization based in Toronto, Ontario. We exist to improve the quality of life for people in cities by bringing citizens together to enhance parks, mobility, and public space so that together we can create more vibrant, healthy, and equitable communities. We believe that if everything we do in our public spaces is great for an 8-year-old and great for an 80-year-old, then it will be great for all people.

Our approach is to engage communities at all levels and across multiple sectors to inspire the creation of cities that are easily accessible, safe, and enjoyable for all. We are specialists in supporting community-led investment in sustainable mobility and equitable multigenerational public spaces. We have extensive experience leading innovative city-building programs that bring together diverse partners from various sectors and across multiple levels of government. We have facilitated inclusive community engagement processes and transformative human-centred mobility and public space projects worldwide.

We collaborate for impact. We have built meaningful partnerships with dynamic organizations looking to improve the quality of life in their community. For the New Horizon for Seniors Grant, we have partnered closely with WoodGreen Community Services, leading experts in seniors' recreation in the City of Toronto.



**OUR PARTNER - WOODGREEN** A United Way Anchor Agency, WoodGreen is one of Toronto's largest social service agencies, serving 37,000 people each year from 36 locations. Together they help people find safe, affordable housing, seniors live independently, internationally-trained professionals enter the job market, parents access childcare, children and youth access after-school programs, newcomers settle in to Canadian life, homeless and marginalized people get off the streets, youth find meaningful employment and training and provide a wide range of mental health supports.

The Seniors' Outdoor Activation Toolkit project is supported through WoodGreen's Seniors Active Living Centre (SALC), which provides community, social, recreational, and exercise programs for all seniors. WoodGreen's SALCs offer health promotion and wellness programs, educational workshops, community engagement activities, cultural events, outings and more.



**OUR PARTNER - GOVERNMENT OF CANADA** The New Horizons for Seniors Program is a federal grants and contributions program. It provides funding for projects that make a difference in the lives of seniors and their communities. Thank you to the Government of Canada and the New Horizons for Seniors Program for making the Seniors Outdoor Activation Toolkit possible.

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# INTRODUCTION

880 Cities in partnership with Woodgreen Community Services have come together to develop the **Seniors Outdoor Activation Toolkit** to support more outdoor programming, physical activity, and social connection opportunities for seniors in Toronto and beyond.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, seniors' agencies and service providers have had to move online or postpone much of their seniors' social and recreational programming indefinitely. This has had an adverse effect on seniors' social participation and inclusion while also intensifying the crisis of social isolation and loneliness among older adults. Overall, there has been a significant reduction in seniors' access to and participation in programs that support their emotional and physical wellbeing. While some service providers have been able to translate their programs to outdoor settings, there is a sector-wide lack of understanding of promoting and facilitating seniors' programming outdoors so that it is safe, comfortable, and enjoyable for all those involved. What is also lacking is the ability of

some parks and public spaces to transform into reliable, safe and supportive spaces for activities geared towards seniors. The Seniors' Outdoor Activation Toolkit is a response to these issues and provides clear direction for how to bring indoor fitness outdoors in a manner that is safe, comfortable and promotes good health and wellbeing.

Discussions among City of Toronto's Senior Strategy Accountability Table members, of which WoodGreen is a member, identified the need for more explicit guidelines and resources for adapting seniors programming to the new COVID-19 reality. The Seniors' Outdoor Activation Toolkit responded to these concerns and was developed

in consultation with staff in the City of Toronto's Senior Services and Long-Term Care division.

The Toolkit is informed by several piloted outdoor fitness classes held in parks and public spaces from June 2021 – November 2021 that tested the potential of outdoor fitness in real-time. As this report will demonstrate, the piloted fitness classes were formulated with the support of WoodGreen's staff and 30 of their senior clients.





## PROJECT GOAL

**The Seniors' Outdoor Activation Toolkit** aims to expand seniors' opportunities to safely participate in social and recreational activities by equipping service providers with an online guide for adapting seniors' programming to outdoor settings.

## WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

The Seniors' Outdoor Activation Toolkit will better equip WoodGreen and similar seniors' agencies and service providers to safely host outdoor seniors' programming, resulting in expanded access to social and recreational activities for seniors across the GTHA. The Toolkit will also better equip communities of all sizes as they engage in park planning and the reimagining of public spaces to become places that have the potential to provide recreational opportunities for seniors and adults of all ages. The Toolkit's goal is to build capacity among service providers to combat the effects of COVID-19 on seniors' isolation, loneliness, reduced mobility and physical inactivity across the region.

With the Seniors' Outdoor Activation Toolkit being the first resource of its kind, more agencies and service providers will feel prepared and equipped to offer outdoor programming. We anticipate that this will have the effect of expanding access to safe outdoor programming options to over 10,000 seniors across the GTHA.



## 2

## BRINGING INDOOR PROGRAMMING OUTDOORS

This section includes research on seniors' health and wellbeing and the importance of outdoor fitness and recreation in parks and public spaces. Service providers can use this section and the larger Toolkit to make a case for bringing indoor programming to outdoor spaces. Additionally, we hope that the information presented here will "make the case" for planners, politicians, and policymakers to invest in public spaces that support our parents and grandparents' active recreation to create healthy, active and livable communities.



“the most powerful determinant of physical activity was the **allure of recreational enjoyment or fun**, seconded by the motivation to improve quality of life.”<sup>2</sup>



## BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR PROGRAMMING FOR SENIORS

Increasingly, seniors' physical fitness and recreational programming are motivated by an all-encompassing definition of health promotion that includes social, intellectual, physical, emotional, occupational, environmental, cultural and spiritual well-being.<sup>1</sup> The importance of fitness, health, and wellness need to be coupled to address social, physical, and psychological impacts of the pandemic on seniors. The need for seniors' social and physical activity to be culturally reflective, physically and mentally stimulating and based on social connections is an important consideration for the future of seniors programming.

In a 2008 study on the correlation between enjoyment in exercise and exercise rates in seniors, the most powerful determinant of physical activity was the allure of

recreational enjoyment or fun, seconded by the motivation to improve quality of life.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, physical fitness and participation in recreational activities that focus on socialization amongst seniors can contribute to many health benefits including a lower risk of dementia.<sup>3</sup> Acknowledging that enjoyment and socialization are strong motivators for seniors to engage in physical fitness is an important realization for senior service providers as the typical promotion of physical activity in health care focuses on behavioural modifications through education on the benefits of exercise. The fitness and recreational programs held through the New Horizons for Seniors Program, which has informed this Toolkit, are premised on promoting enjoyment, co-creation and the autonomy of seniors over their own physical activity.

The physical, community and social contexts in which seniors live are large determinants of individual access to fitness and recreational opportunities and the health benefits that can be gained from such opportunities.<sup>4</sup> Individual fitness levels and time spent exercising are often seen as standalone indicators for health in seniors, but limited access to community centres and safe outdoor recreational spaces should be seen as factors impacting the health and wellness of seniors. The way communities in North America have been built focus on a separation of land uses, often requiring an automobile to travel from a residence to a park, green space, or recreational institution, which has had significant negative impacts on the availability of recreational opportunities for seniors. The importance of seniors' fitness and the need for age-friendly communities are thus intertwined.

<sup>1</sup> Despite pandemic, wellness remains a mainstay in senior living communities. (2021, January 25). Rochester Business Journal, NA. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A649953114/HRCA?u=anon~739ecc51&sid=sitemap&xid=b3b195b6>

<sup>2</sup> Scharlach, A. E. (2012). Healthy Aging in Community Context. In *Healthy Aging in Sociocultural Context* (pp. 21-31). Routledge.

<sup>3</sup> Yu, S., Guo, N., Zheng, C., Song, Y., & Hao, J. (2021). Investigating the Association between Outdoor Environment and Outdoor Activities for Seniors Living in Old Residential Communities. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(14), 7500.

<sup>4</sup> Hagberg, L. A., Lindahl, B., Nyberg, L., & Hellénus, M. L. (2009). Importance of enjoyment when promoting physical exercise. *Scandinavian journal of medicine & science in sports*, 19(5), 740-747.



“Creating inclusive and accessible outdoor environments that provide and encourage opportunities for older adults to **engage in physical activity and social interaction** is important for healthy ageing.”<sup>5</sup>

## MAKING THE CASE FOR OUTDOOR PROGRAMMING

Exposure to green space is critical in health promotion amongst seniors, but exposure is often defined by time spent sitting or walking through parks. Parks are often seen as places of rest and relaxation for seniors and are spaces seldom associated with fun and recreational programming for this demographic. Engaging in purposeful activities in public green

spaces can have greater positive mood and health impacts on seniors than just exposure to green space through passive activities.<sup>6</sup> Purposeful activities include group guided walking, gardening, socializing and other creative programming like dancing and meditation.

<sup>5</sup> Levinger, P., Panisset, M., Dunn, J., Haines, T., Dow, B., Batchelor, F., ... & Hill, K. D. (2019). Exercise intervention outdoor project in the community for older people—the ENJOY Senior Exercise Park project translation research protocol. *BMC public health*, 19(1), 1-11.

<sup>6</sup> Coventry, P. A., Neale, C., Dyke, A., Pateman, R., & Cinderby, S. (2019). The mental health benefits of purposeful activities in public green spaces in urban and semi-urban neighbourhoods: A mixed-methods pilot and proof of concept study. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(15), 2712.

In addition to the benefits from purposeful activities, seniors engaging in physical activities outdoors report more time dedicated to fitness and higher self-rated health as compared to seniors who only exercise indoors. However, seniors are the least active segment of the population and are less likely to spend time outdoors than other age groups.<sup>7</sup> Those seniors who spend over 30 minutes of physical activity time outdoors report significantly fewer feelings of depression, higher rates of self-reported function and a lessened fear of falling than those who do not spend as much time outdoors.<sup>8</sup>

**IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH**



**IMPROVED SOCIAL CONNECTION**



**INCREASED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND FITNESS**



**INCREASED SENSE OF PURPOSE**



**INCREASED EQUITABLE ACCESS**



**INCREASED FEELINGS OF SAFETY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SATISFACTION**



<sup>7</sup> Kerr, J., Sallis, J. F., Saelens, B. E., Cain, K. L., Conway, T. L., Frank, L. D., & King, A. C. (2012). Outdoor physical activity and self-rated health in older adults living in two regions of the US. *International journal of behavioral nutrition and physical activity*, 9(1), 1-4.

<sup>8</sup> Kerr, J., Marshall, S., Godbole, S., Neukam, S., Crist, K., Wasilenko, K., ... & Buchner, D. (2012). The relationship between outdoor activity and health in older adults using GPS. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 9(12), 4615-4625

“To challenge these inequalities, the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals aim for “universal access to **safe, inclusive and accessible public green spaces**, particularly for women and children, older people and people with disabilities.”<sup>10</sup>



Despite the proven benefits of exercising outdoors, the health and wellness benefits that green space can provide are not equally distributed to all seniors. Living in proximity to high-quality, safe and attractive green space is the largest determinant of the time seniors spend outdoors engaging in physical activities. Those living in more dense environments or historically underinvested communities have less access to programmable green spaces. Having less access to green space disproportionately impacts seniors who are more susceptible to the urban heat island effect that is offset by green space and tree

canopy.<sup>9</sup> To challenge these inequalities, the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals aim for “universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible public green spaces, particularly for women and children, older people and people with disabilities.”<sup>10</sup> The importance of accessible and plentiful programmable green spaces is evident. Post-pandemic parks planning should prioritize equity in the allocation of parks, programming and of green public spaces [See the [City of Vancouver’s Equity Initiative Zones for prioritizing equity and access in parks and recreation](#)].<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Government of Canada. (2020, May 4). Government of Canada. Canada.ca. Retrieved January 18, 2022, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/health/publications/healthy-living/reducing-urban-heat-islands-protect-health-canada.html>

<sup>10</sup> Coventry, P. A., Neale, C., Dyke, A., Pateman, R., & Cinderby, S. (2019). The mental health benefits of purposeful activities in public green spaces in urban and semi-urban neighbourhoods: A mixed-methods pilot and proof of concept study. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(15), 2712.

<sup>11</sup> Vancouver, C. of. (n.d.). Equity in parks and Recreation. City of Vancouver. Retrieved January 18, 2022, from <https://vancouver.ca/parks-recreation-culture/equity-in-parks-and-recreation.aspx>



## PARK PRESCRIPTIONS

“Prescription Trails trained health care professionals to use special prescription pads and other tools to help promote healthy lifestyle changes for their patients. To ensure patients engage in appropriate levels of physical activity, health care providers first assess their patients for readiness to start or maintain a walking program and then write **tailored prescriptions based on each patient’s current physical condition.**”

- Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012

In making the case for outdoor physical and social activities for seniors, we look to the power of parks prescriptions. Park prescriptions are recommendations made by physicians for patients to spend an allotted amount of time in green space as a form of treatment for disease management.<sup>12</sup> The earliest recorded park prescriptions can be traced back to more than two millennia ago in India where a physician known as Susruta provided patients with a written outdoor exercise prescription in order to prevent the need for minor surgeries.<sup>13</sup> Modern understandings of parks and their connection to public health began to re-emerge in the United States in the 20th century through a program called Prescription Trails. This program was led by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and focused on linking primary medical care and outdoor physical activity for patients with chronic diseases.<sup>14</sup>

In a study comparing park usage before and after a park prescription, there was a significant increase in observed park usage post-prescription alongside reported feelings of greater neighbourhood satisfaction and safety.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, a study on the effectiveness of prescribing outdoor physical activity to improve health and wellbeing revealed that individuals with park prescriptions spent much more time outdoors and reported significantly improved psychological quality of life over the control group.<sup>16</sup> Parks prescriptions have the potential to encourage seniors to engage more in outdoor activities and should be a future public health tool adopted throughout the GTHA. Coupled with outdoor programming held by senior service providers, parks prescriptions could become a helpful public health tool to combat social and physical inactivity due to future waves of the pandemic.

<sup>12</sup> James, J. J., Christiana, R. W., & Battista, R. A. (2019). A historical and critical analysis of park prescriptions. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 50(4), 311-329.

<sup>13</sup> Tipton, C. M. (2014). The history of "Exercise Is Medicine" in ancient civilizations. *Advances in physiology education*, 38(2), 109-117.

<sup>14</sup> Seltenrich, N. (2015). Just what the doctor ordered: using parks to improve children's health.

<sup>15</sup> Razani, N., Hills, N. K., Thompson, D., & Rutherford, G. W. (2020). The association of knowledge, attitudes and access with park use before and after a park-prescription intervention for low-income families in the US. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(3), 701.

<sup>16</sup> Müller-Riemenschneider, F., Petrunoff, N., Yao, J., Ng, A., Sia, A., Ramiah, A., ... & Uijtewilligen, L. (2020). Effectiveness of prescribing physical activity in parks to improve health and wellbeing-the park prescription randomized controlled trial. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 17(1), 1-14.





## HOW TO ACTIVATE PARKS FOR SENIORS

Interviews with 30 seniors and WoodGreen SALC staff were conducted to understand how fitness and recreational classes can be brought to outdoor spaces in a manner that is responsive to the needs of both staff and participants. The process and findings of this engagement process have informed the creation of this Toolkit's first tool, [Tool #1 Program Scoping Engagement](#). This tool can be used to guide senior service providers as they engage with their clientele to understand how programming can be brought outdoors in a safe, responsive and interactive manner.

These interviews aimed to hear what the seniors wanted from outdoor fitness classes. The interviewed seniors spoke about their fitness goals, their experience with virtual programming and the amenities needed to make outdoor fitness and programming fun and accessible. In these interviews, we heard the following themes on outdoor programming that later came to inform both the type of piloted programs and their locations:



## ACCESSIBILITY & ACCESS TO AMENITIES

### WHAT WE HEARD

Opportunities for outdoor programming rely on accessible public spaces with necessary amenities like washrooms, places to sit, shade, maintained paths and, for some, privacy. Potential outdoor locations should not have uneven pavement paths, gravel and sand barriers and should be in proximity to transit, parking lots and wheel trans stops. Proximity, access to amenities and accessibility concerns determine the locations that suit seniors' fitness programs. On average, the interviewed seniors stated that they would be willing to walk for up to 15 minutes from a WoodGreen location to access an outdoor program. Additionally, up to one hour was identified as an acceptable commute time on public transportation from seniors' homes to an outdoor program.

### OUR RESPONSE

Accessibility and proximity to transit and amenities were atop the siting guidelines when deciding on the location of a program. Parks adjacent to SALCs were often chosen as sites for programming to allow for a short commute; however, all parks within a walkable radius around the SALCs were evaluated for their ability to provide quality spaces for outdoor programming for seniors. Additional siting guidelines as seen in [Tool #2 Public Space Observation Checklist](#) included parameters on seating conditions, washrooms and hours of operation, and the presence of infrastructure for gathering spaces.

Partnerships with other service providers like the Toronto Community Housing Commission (TCHC) and the City of Toronto contributed to the choice of location to host the programs. TCHC provided chairs, patio space and storage space for a series of recreational classes hosted through this project.





## PRIVACY

### WHAT WE HEARD

Out of 30 seniors interviewed, 26 identified as women and three identified as men. The male interviewees stated that they had no concerns with privacy while exercising or engaging in outdoor programming of any sort. While out of 26 women, 11 were concerned about the presence of spectators if the program was to be held in a public park. Those concerned with privacy suggested that smaller parks be chosen as destinations for outdoor programming. Additionally, if larger parks are selected to host the program, then sites within that park with natural sightline barriers like trees will provide more comfort.

### OUR RESPONSE

Gender, sex, race, and other intersecting identities impact perceptions of safety in parks and public spaces. The programs piloted for this Toolkit sought out spaces set back from high trafficked roads and large open spaces to ensure comfort and safety.

In order to ensure the safety and comfort of seniors, several classes during the pilot were held in sideyard patio spaces adjoining TCHC buildings geared towards seniors, locations in which many of WoodGreen's participants live. Additionally, the public park spaces chosen were purposefully located across from Senior Active Living Centres, where seniors are already comfortable frequenting.

“If I can do physical activity at home, why would I commute? The program **needs to be more social** for it to be attractive to me.”

– Interviewed Senior



“I can do fitness online now. I am, however, **starved for social connection.**”

– Interviewed Senior

## SOCIABILITY

### WHAT WE HEARD

All interviewees stated the need for outdoor programs to have a strong social aspect, as many seniors said that they can get a virtual fitness class or go outdoors on their own but have not been able to have meaningful social interaction due to the pandemic and social distancing.

Social programs can be incorporated with physical activities to make future outdoor programming well-rounded and attractive for most seniors.

### OUR RESPONSE

To meet the demand for socialization, piloted recreational classes focused on interaction and social connection. Piloted classes like the Spanish Language Class emphasized the importance of reconnection within the WoodGreen community. The Spanish class began in 2020 as a virtual class, wherein the attending seniors had never met each other in person. Bringing the class to outdoor spaces allowed for reconnection amongst participants and injected vibrancy into the class brought on by the outdoor setting. The Healing Dance class held in Greenwood Park showed that the WoodGreen community is deeply connected, and they only need to be provided with a safe space to allow their connections to bloom. The Healing Dance class was attended by a growing number of participants each week, with new participants having heard about the class through friends in the program. The space and program provided a means for safe socialization proven by seniors’ attendance and social networks, along with a few grandchildren who eagerly participated in the class.





## DESIRE FOR AUTONOMY

### WHAT WE HEARD

During the early months of the pandemic, interviewed seniors stated their apprehensions about returning to in-person group fitness classes. The desire for autonomy in fitness was a reoccurring theme to which WoodGreen quickly adapted by delivering fitness equipment and walking poles to seniors in their homes for use on their own terms.

### OUR RESPONSE

To create a sense of autonomy and empowerment, the pilot program included enrolling several seniors in a virtual pole walking training module. These trained seniors now have the certification and confidence to lead pole walking groups independently. The training module invested in the autonomy and stewardship of WoodGreen's senior clientele.

The desire for independent recreation also led to the creation of a lending library in which resistance bands, weights, fitness balls, poles for pole walking can be loaned out for extended periods.

### 3

## SURVEY RESULTS

### PILOTING OUTDOOR ACTIVATIONS FOR SENIORS

The following pilot programs were chosen based on the engagement findings above. The spaces where these classes were hosted were chosen using [Tool #2 Public Space Evaluation Checklist](#). This tool was used to evaluate a walkable radius around each of the six SALCs to see what parks and public spaces were suitable for the piloted classes. The Public Space Evaluation Checklist is a tool used to quantify the quality and accessibility of a park or public space by its ability to meet the basic needs of seniors engaging in physical activities.

The piloted programs included: Drum Circle, Chair Yoga, Healing Dance, Zumba, and Spanish Language Classes, alongside Pole Walking Training and the creation of a Lending Library. The following section details each program, the location that played host to the program and select data points detailing how the seniors felt about each class as identified through a series of surveys found in [Tool #3 Program Evaluation](#). For aggregated survey results from all programs, see the [next section](#).

# 87%

of seniors stated that the program was **excellent** based on their levels of enjoyment.





**50%**

of respondents made a new friend during the Drum Circle classes

# Drum Circle

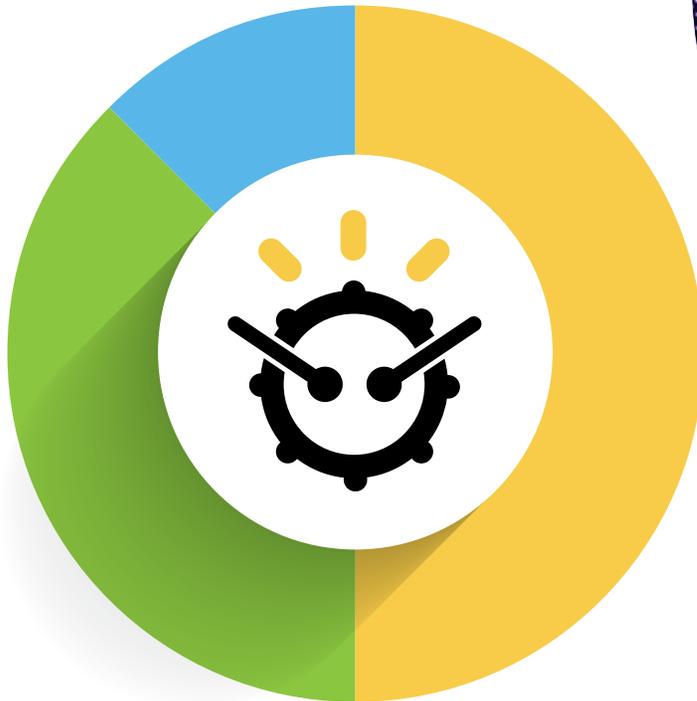
## LOCATION: STAN WADLOW PARK

Eight drum circle classes were held in Stan Wadlow Park, across from 9 Haldon Avenue, a Senior Active Living Centre and Toronto Community Housing senior's apartment complex. This space was chosen due to its proximity to the Seniors' Active Living Centre, the senior's apartment complex and its location directly across from a bus loop frequented by the Wheel-Trans service and other buses.

The class introduced seniors to a range of drums from across the world. The class hosted up to ten seniors at a time, spaced six feet apart in a circle atop a paved area painted with shuffleboard lines. Through a partnership between WoodGreen and Toronto Community Housing, drum circle participants could access the washroom and handwashing facilities within the apartment complex's lobby area.



# How do you travel to the program?



-  **WALKING**
-  **BUS**
-  **CAR**
-  **CAR POOLING**
-  **OTHER**

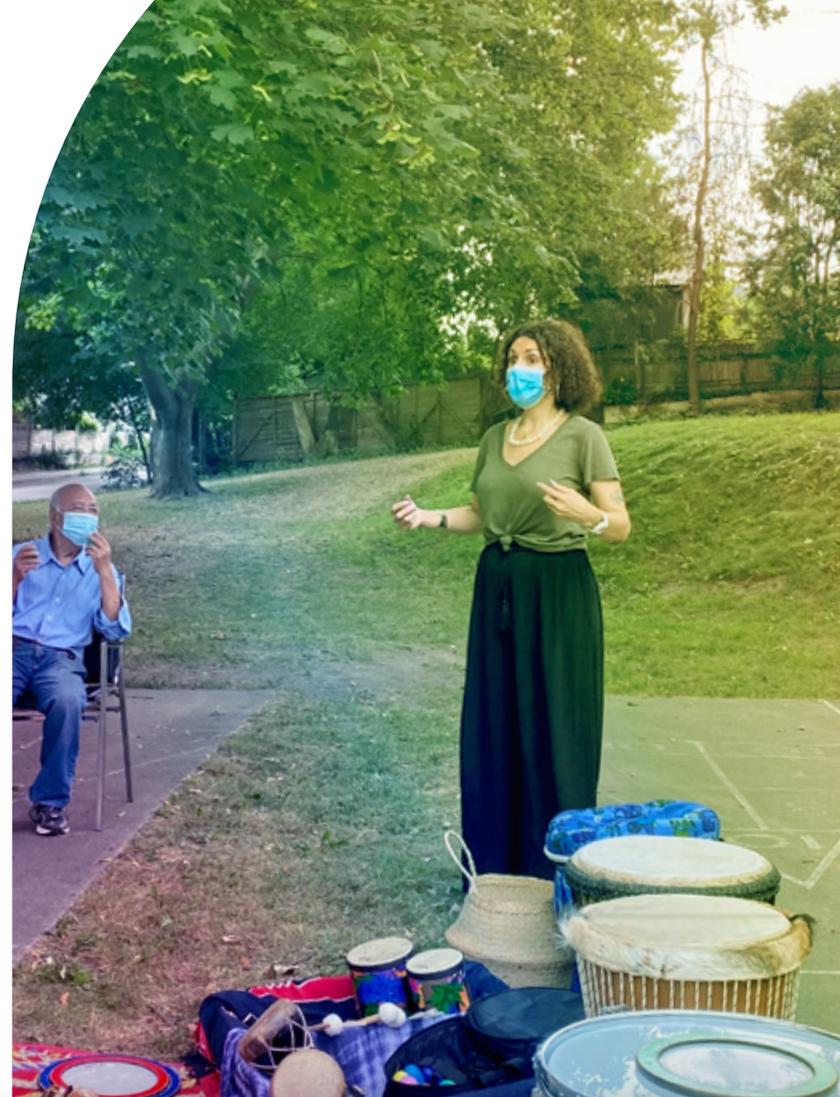
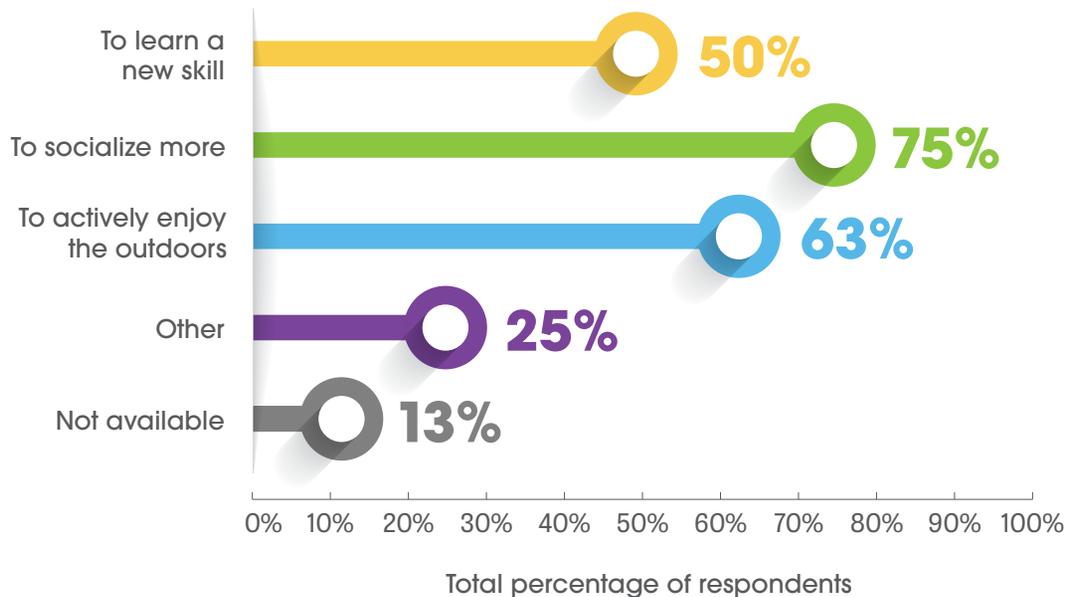


**50%** of Drum Circle attendees access the program by walking

**38%** of Drum Circle attendees travelled to the program by bus

**12%** of Drum Circle attendees travelled to the program by personal car

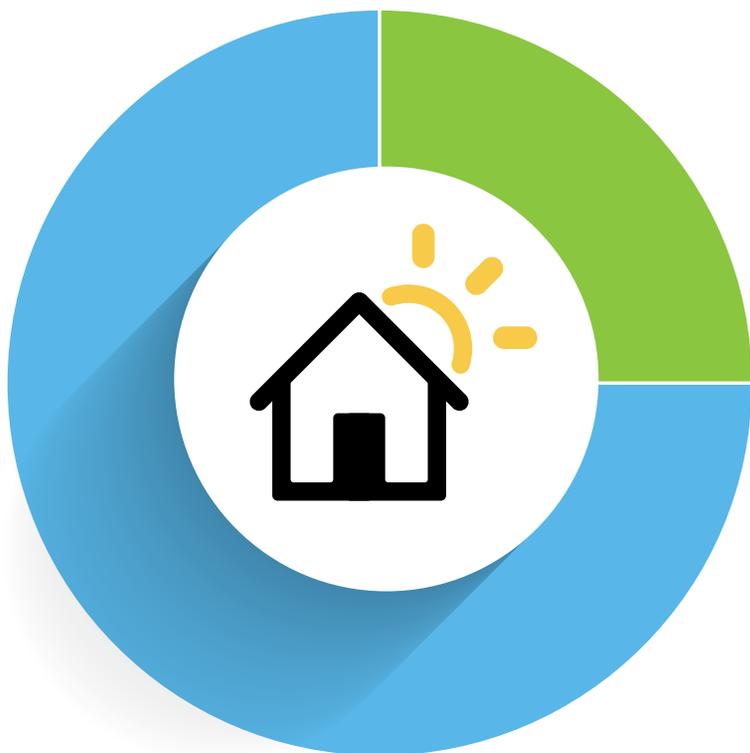
# Why did you register for these programs?



**75%**

Reconnected with an old friend during the Senior's Drum Circle classes.

# What type of programming location do you prefer for the Drum Circle sessions?



**75%** of Drum Circle attendees prefer **indoor and outdoor** sessions

**25%** of Drum Circle attendees prefer **outdoor** sessions

- Indoor Programming
- Outdoor Programming
- Indoor & Outdoor Programming
- Not Available



**75%** Reconnected with an old friend during the Chair Yoga classes

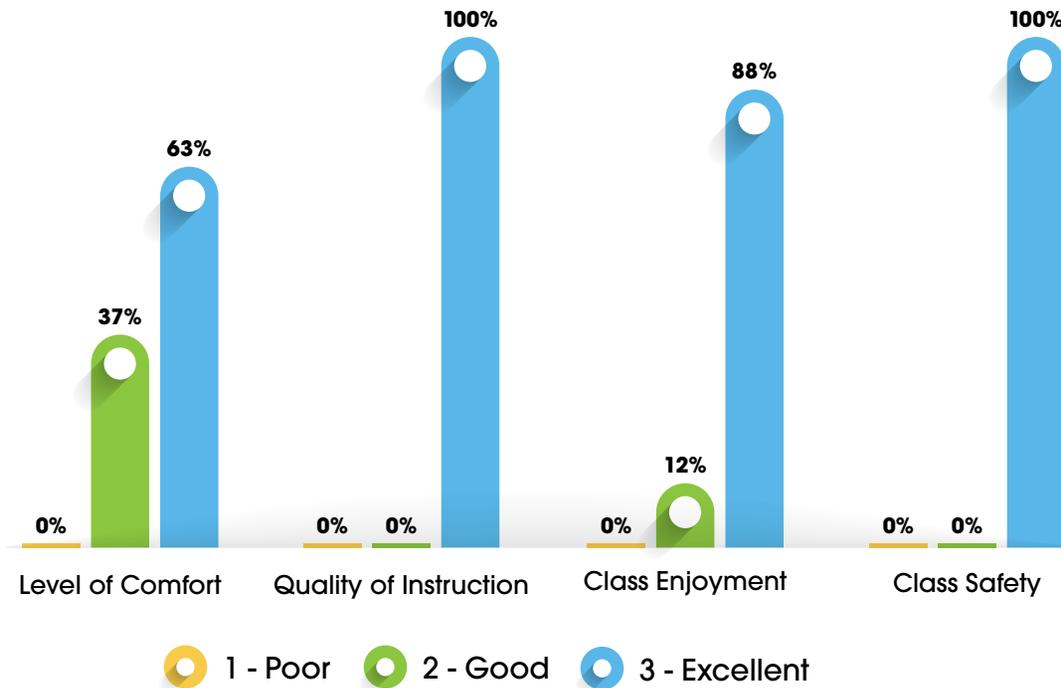


# Chair Yoga

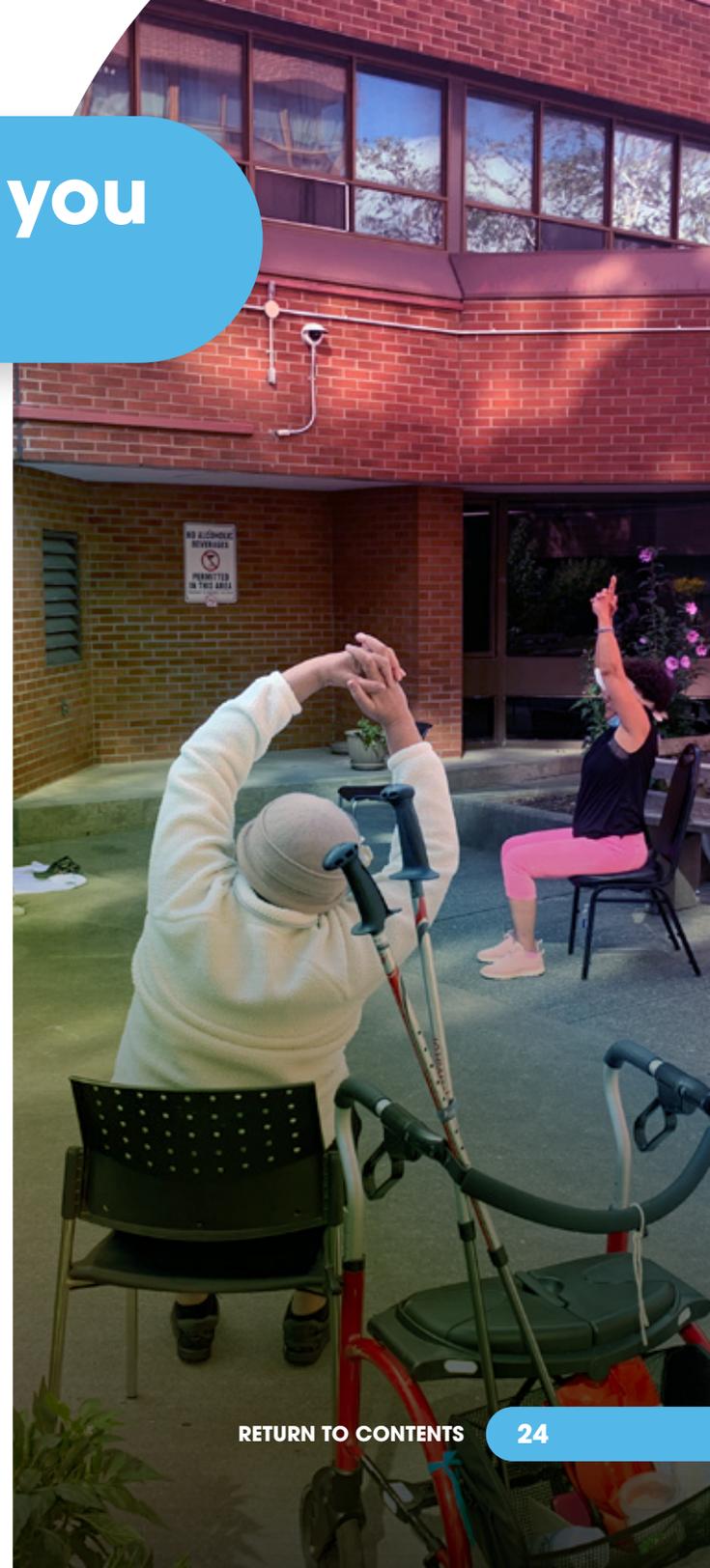
**LOCATION: 145 STRATHMORE AVENUE**

145 Strathmore Avenue is a Toronto Community Housing senior's apartment complex where all eight Chair Yoga classes were hosted in the sideyard patio space. Chair Yoga is a gentle-paced class designed for seniors of all ages and abilities.

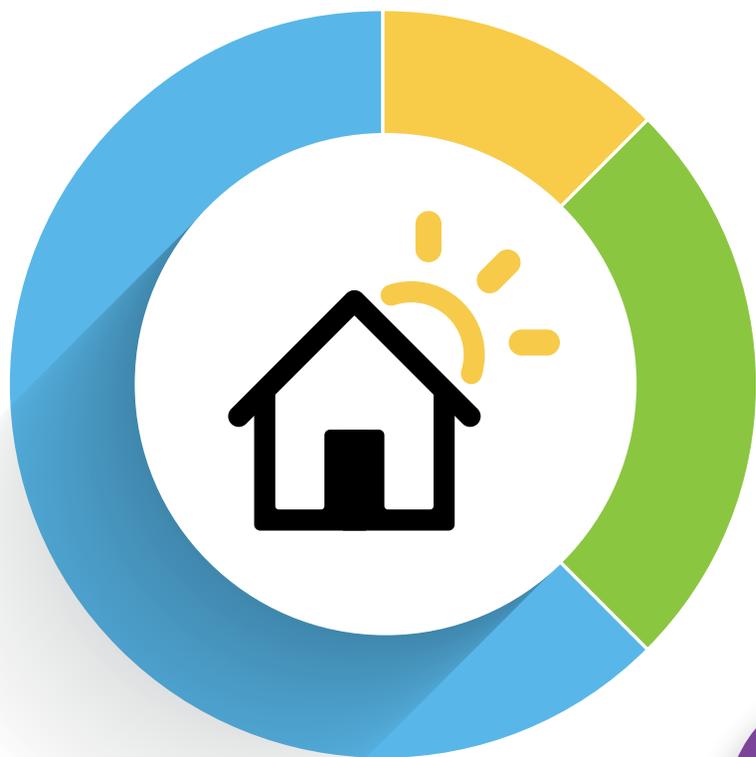
# On a scale of 1-3, how would you rate the program based on...



**100%** of respondents would participate in Chair Yoga again



# Do you prefer outdoor programming, indoor programming, or both?



**63%** of Chair Yoga respondents prefer a hybrid of **indoor and outdoor** programming

**25%** of Chair Yoga respondents prefer **outdoor** programming

**12%** of Chair Yoga respondents prefer **indoor** programming

- Indoor Programming
- Indoor & Outdoor Programming
- Outdoor Programming
- Not Available

Attendees find Chair Yoga to be relaxing while having the ability to **breathe in fresh air and exercise** in a comfortable manner



**86%** of respondents made a new friend during the Healing Dance program

# Healing Dance

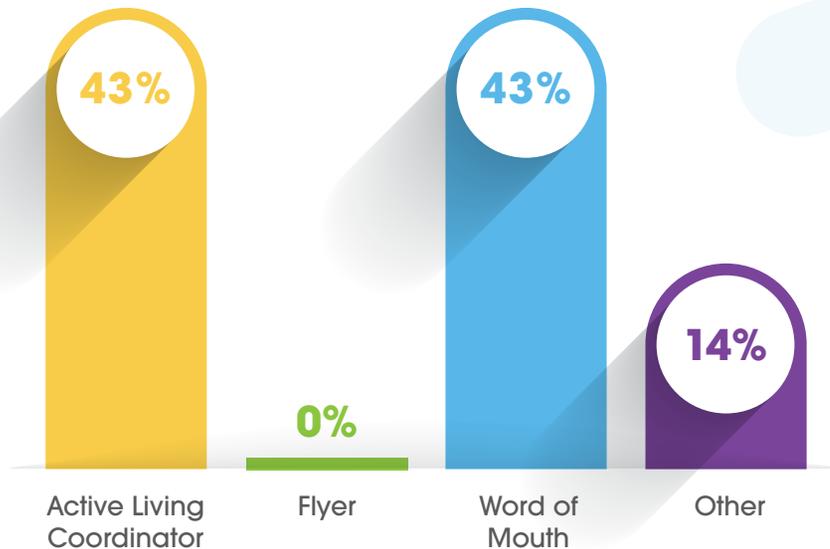
**LOCATION: GREENWOOD PARK**

Greenwood Park's covered ice rink initially played host to all eight Healing Dance classes. This space is a multi-purpose paved area used for ball hockey, tai chi, and more during the spring, summer and fall. The covered nature of this space allowed Healing Dance to take place

during the rain and inclement weather without interruption. Later, the Healing Dance classes shifted to the paved trail outside of the covered rink. Both locations were close to seasonal public washrooms, public transit and other WoodGreen locations.



# How did you find out about this program?



**43%**

learned about the program through  
**Active Living Coordinator**

**43%**

learned about the program through  
**Word of Mouth**

**14%**

learned about the program through  
**an alternative source**

**100%** of respondents would attend the program again



**88%** of respondents met a new friend during the Zumba classes



# Zumba

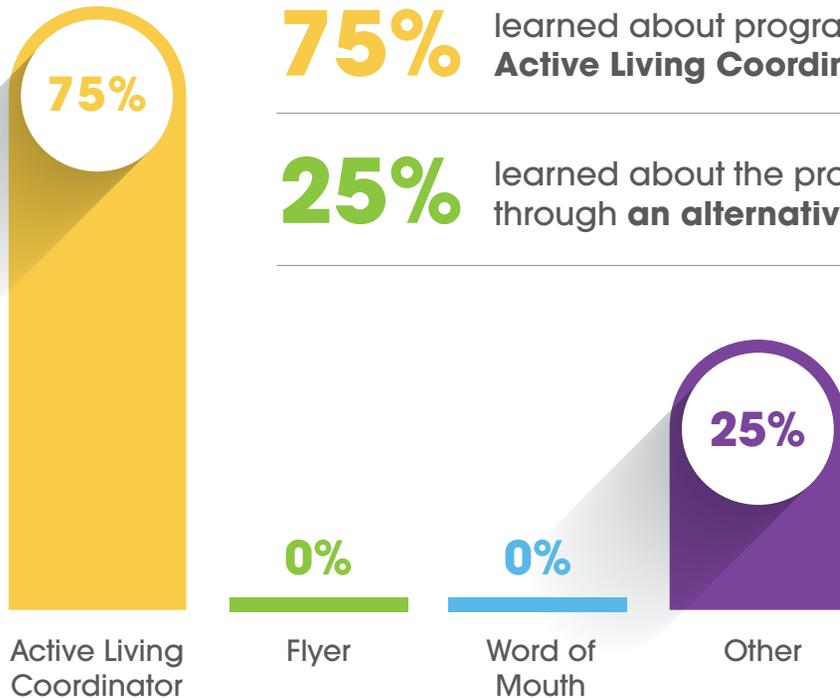
**LOCATION: GREENWOOD PARK**

The Zumba program was a series of eight classes held in Greenwood Park immediately after Healing Dance. Some seniors attended both classes consecutively.

In Greenwood Park, prior to Healing Dance, there was a self-organized tai chi class that several seniors at WoodGreen attended.

This group was invited to participate in both Healing Dance and Zumba after their tai chi class by WoodGreen's Senior Active Living Coordinators. This personalized invite, alongside active seniors' existing use of this space, led to Zumba being a popular and well-attended class.

# How did you find out about this program?



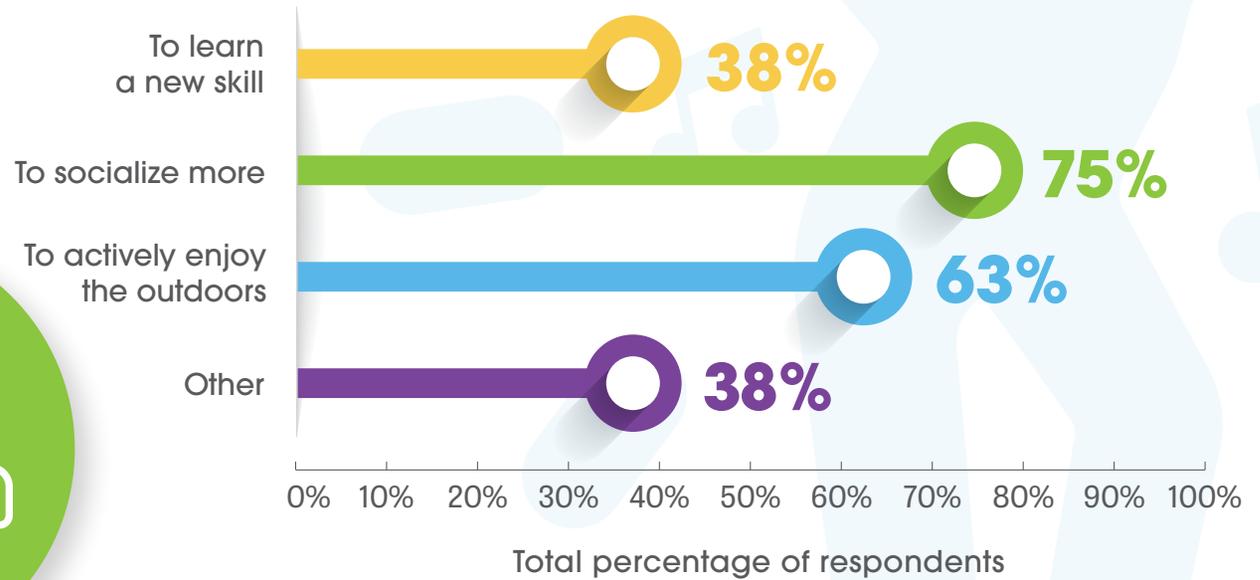
**75%** learned about program through **Active Living Coordinator**

**25%** learned about the program through **an alternative source**



**100%**  
of respondents would attend the program again

# Why did you register for these programs?



**75%**

Reconnected with an old friend during the Zumba classes

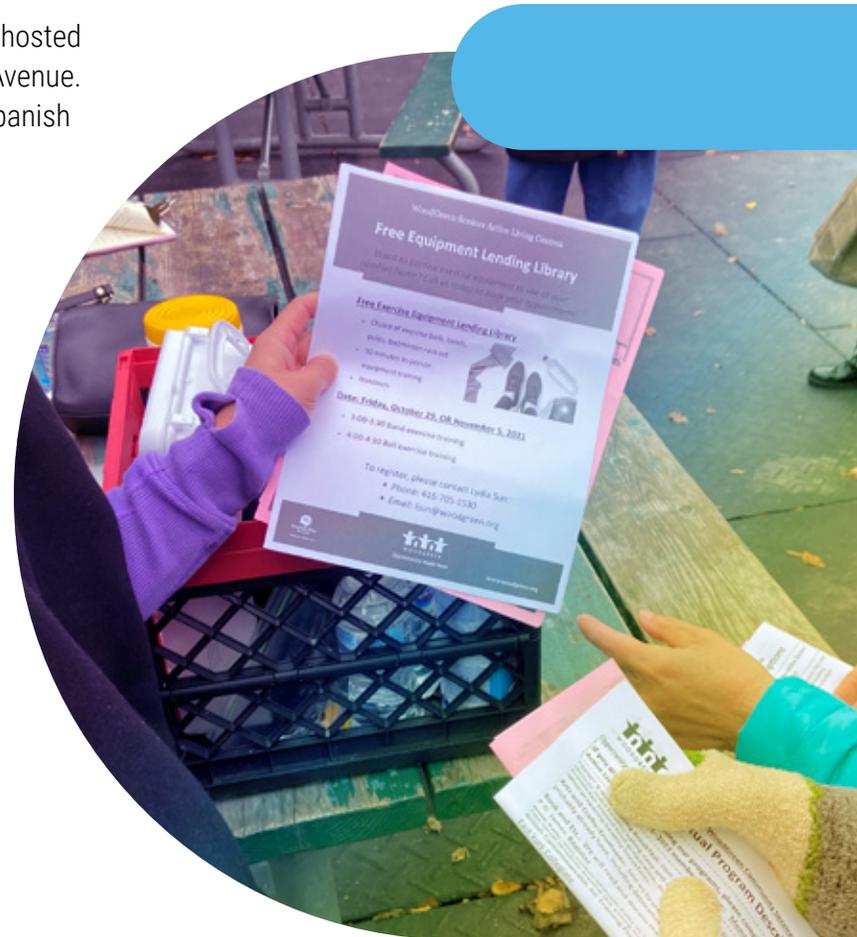
# Lending Library, Pole Walking Training and Spanish Class

The Lending Library is an ongoing project where WoodGreen’s senior clientele are able to loan out exercise balls, resistance bands and Nordic poles for extended periods of time. The Lending Library provides high-risk seniors, those hesitant to return to in-person programming and those searching for autonomy in their recreation the ability to stay active on their own terms.

The Pole Walking Training invested in the autonomy of WoodGreen’s seniors. The training has created a network of pole walking stewards who actively use the poles from the Lending Library independently or in self-directed groups.

The Spanish Class was a one-time class hosted in the sideyard space at 721 Broadview Avenue. This class featured flamenco dancers, Spanish delicacies and interactive Spanish language instruction.

The training and classes described in this section were hosted through a collaborative effort of WoodGreen Senior Active Living Centre staff and 8 80 Cities as supported by the New Horizons for Seniors’ grant made possible by the Federal government.



SENIORS' OUTDOOR ACTIVATION TOOLKIT SURVEY RESULTS



## WHAT WE LEARNED: SURVEY RESULTS

This section has taken information from all the collected surveys on modes of travel, general preferences for outdoor or indoor programming and suggestions for future programming and aggregated them to tell a comprehensive story of the pilot program.

# How did you find out about this program?

Survey data suggests that the majority of seniors participating in the New Horizons for Seniors program offered in 2021 learned about it directly through their Active Living Coordinator. Overall, 68% of all attendees to one of the seven classes found out about the activation program they attended through their assigned Active Living Coordinator, while 13% stated they found out about their program through word of mouth. Only 3% of respondents found out about the Senior's Outdoor Activation Toolkit program through a flyer, while 19% of respondents learned about the program in other categories not listed on the survey, which include information online and by passing through the area when a program was in session.

68%

3%

13%

16%

Active Living  
Coordinator

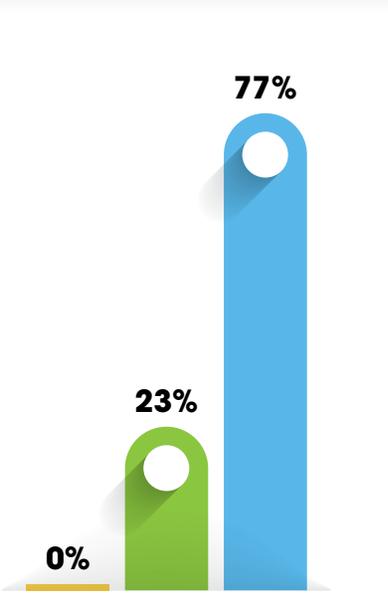
Flyer

Word of Mouth

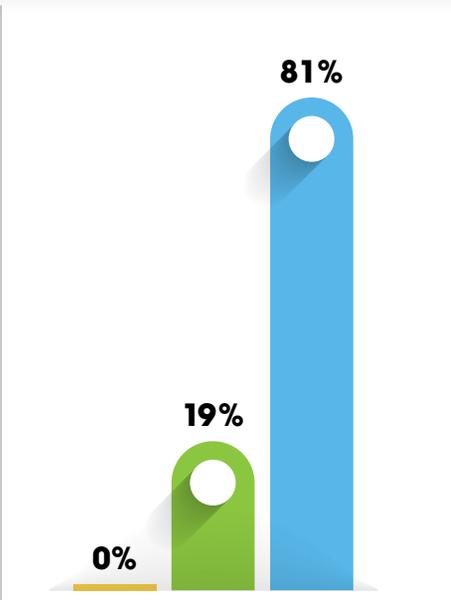
Other

# On a scale of 1-3, how would you rate the program based on...

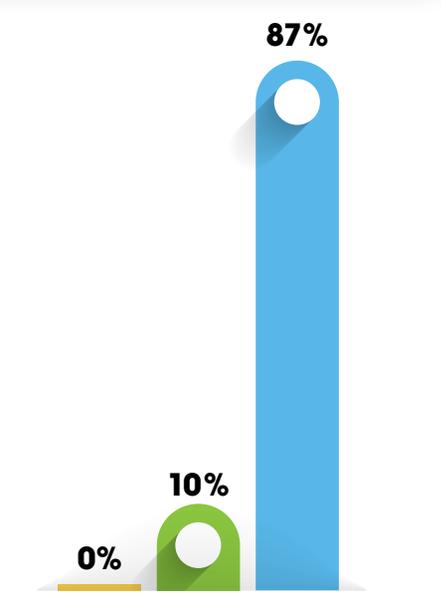
- 1 - Poor
- 2 - Good
- 3 - Excellent



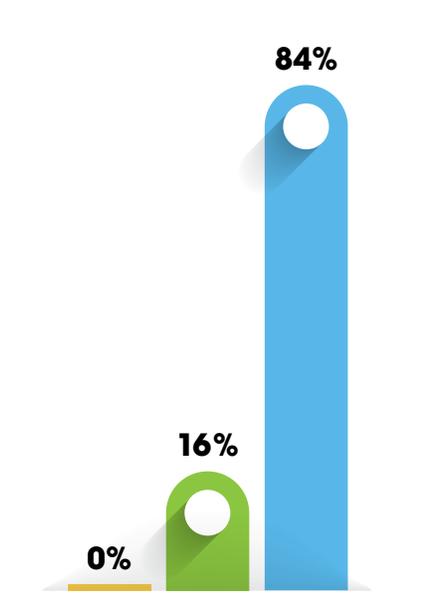
**COMFORT**  
Most senior survey respondents (77%) that attended one of the seven programs offered rated their comfort levels as being "excellent" when actively participating in one of the programs offered.



**QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION**  
A large majority of seniors found the instruction of their class to be excellent. 81% of survey respondents gave a rating of excellency to the program, while 19% of respondents gave it a general rating of being good.



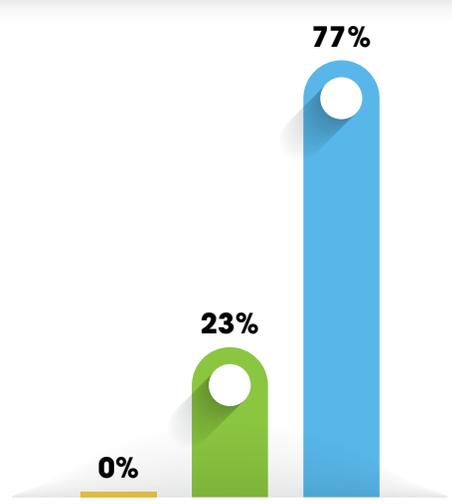
**PROGRAM ENJOYMENT**  
Most seniors responding to the survey have strongly enjoyed their program. 87% of seniors stated that the program was excellent based on their levels of enjoyment.



**PROGRAM SAFETY**  
Survey respondents have stated a high rating of excellence regarding the program based on participants' general perception of safety. 84% of respondents have given a rating of excellence, while 16% of respondents gave a rating of being good.

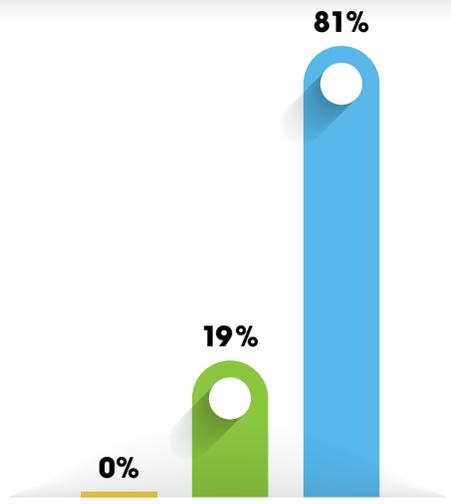
# On a scale of 1-3, how would you rate the quality of the...

- 1 - Poor
- 2 - Good
- 3 - Excellent



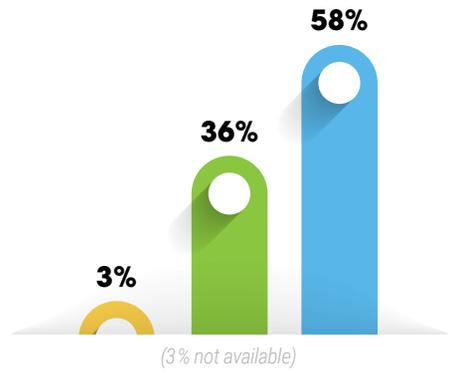
### LOCATION

The majority of survey respondents have given the program a strong rating for the quality of the program's locations. 77% of seniors found the quality of programs locations to be excellent, while 23% of seniors found the quality of the programs locations to be good.



### QUALITY OF SEATING

The majority of survey respondents have also given the Senior's Outdoor Activation Toolkit program a strong rating for the quality of its seating. 81% of seniors found the quality of programs seating to be excellent, while 19% of seniors found the quality of the programs locations to be good.



### AMENITIES

The largest difference in opinions was observed in the quality of amenities offered. Amenities refer to the hosted space's access to washrooms, water fountains and more. Due to the programs being offered in public spaces amidst a pandemic, amenities were limited. Only 58% of respondents gave an excellent rating to the quality of amenities being offered, while 36% of respondents gave it a rating of being "good." 3% of respondents rated the quality of amenities as poor.

# Would you attend this program again?

90% of all survey respondents indicated that they would like to attend any future programming. Only a small minority of 3% stated they would not participate in the program again due to the distance it takes them to travel to the location.

However, many respondents to the survey have noted that the program has offered a wide range of benefits for their personal health, both in respect to their mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing. Respondents have stated that the program has increased their physical activity on a day-to-day basis, has provided a safe space for socialization amidst the threats of a global pandemic, and has boosted mood levels while decreasing stress levels. The outdoor aspect of the program has further allowed seniors to access fresh air while engaging in forms of physical activity, thereby increasing the enjoyment of the program.

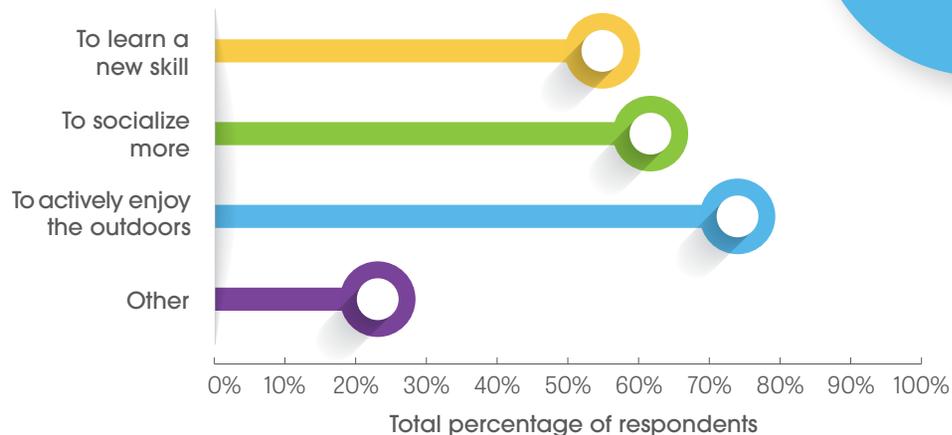


# 90%

of respondents would attend this program again

# Why did you register for these programs?

The majority of seniors have stated they registered for the Seniors' Outdoor Activation Toolkit program in order to actively enjoy the outdoors, while many seniors have also joined the programs to learn a new skill or socialize. 74% of respondents to the survey stated they attended at least one program to enjoy the outdoors actively. 61% of seniors signed up to socialize with others more, 55% of respondents registered to learn a new skill, and 23% of respondents joined classes for other reasons such as staying active and healthy, reconnecting with friends, or an engaging in a new form of exercise.



**55%**

attended the Seniors Activation program to **learn a new skill**

**61%**

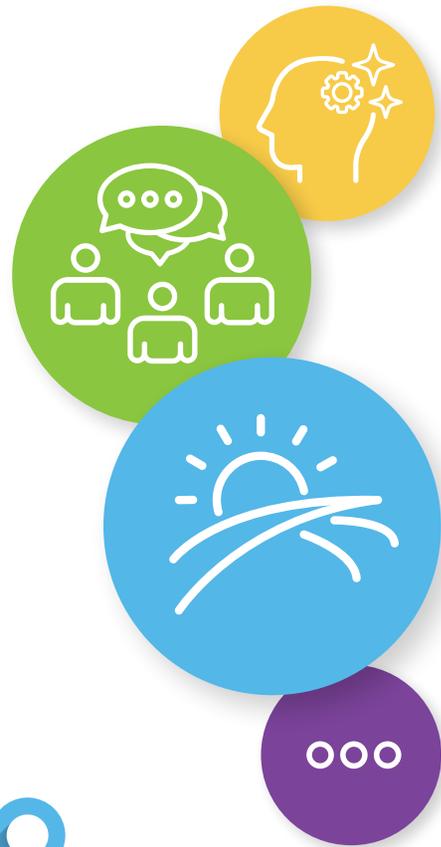
of people participated in the Seniors' Activation program to **socialize more**

**74%**

of people attended the Seniors Activation program to **enjoy the outdoors actively**

**23%**

of people participated in the Seniors Activation program for **other reasons** such as exercise, reconnecting with friends, and staying healthy



# Did you meet a new friend during this program?

**68%**

met a new friend in the Seniors' Activation programs

Many attendees of the programs have noted they have made a new friend during the program's rollout. 68% of survey respondents have stated they made a new friendly directly by participating in one of the program's classes.



# Did you reconnect with an old friend through this program?

**77%**

reconnected with an old friend from the Seniors Activation programs

Many attendees of the Seniors' Outdoor Activation Toolkit program have also noted they have reconnected with old friends during the program's rollout. 77% of survey respondents have stated they reconnected with friends thanks to the program's classes.



# How could this program be improved?

While many seniors from the survey responses stated there is nothing that needs to be improved, others suggested **additional classes, longer sessions, and larger participating audiences**. Respondents have also requested programming to become year-round rather than be limited to just summer and fall sessions. Respondents have also wished to see a further variety of activities, different music options for dance classes, and more educational awareness about the program.

# What other programs that are traditionally implemented in indoor spaces would you like to see implemented in an outdoor space?

Other forms of activities traditionally implemented indoors that seniors would like to see and engage with outdoors are a variety of dance class types such as folk and martial arts activities like Tai Chi. Respondents have stated that a wide range of activities generally programmed within indoor settings can be brought outside for seniors to have the opportunity to enjoy more nature, weather, and fresh air.



## 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Senior service providers now have the precedence needed to begin investing in outdoor programming for their clientele. Programming of all types, recreational, physical, arts and crafts alongside educational activities, can be hosted in safe and comfortable outdoor environments to both weather future waves of the pandemic, and to embrace the health benefits from purposeful outdoor activities.

Hybrid programming that is hosted both in-person indoors and outdoors while synchronously online appear to be the future of seniors' programming. Programming for seniors should be co-created and collaboratively designed. Using the three tools this Toolkit introduces is a great start to begin engaging with seniors and senior service providers to understand their ever-changing needs regarding recreation, health and wellness.

The pandemic has illuminated the importance of quality outdoor public spaces alongside the need to protect our most vulnerable. By investing in the future of outdoor programming and safe, age-inclusive parks and public spaces, we will be securing a future where healthy public spaces are synonymous with healthy, age-friendly communities.

“...we will be securing a future where healthy public spaces are synonymous with healthy, **age-friendly communities.**”



## INVEST IN OUTDOOR PROGRAMMING AND SPACES

Investing in outdoor programming for seniors can be as simple as bringing weights, resistance bands and comfortable seating to a safe patio, park or public space. However, ensuring that the outdoor space is accessible, maintained and provides amenities like washrooms that supports the possibility of programming is less simple.

Communities across Canada are beginning to recognize the importance of investing in age-friendly parks through programming and capital investments in accessibility and amenities: See the [City of London,](#)

[Ontario's 2019 Parks and Recreation Master Plan,](#) [District of Saanich, British Columbia's Parks, Recreation and Community Services Washroom Operations and Capital Plan,](#) and the town of [New Tecumseth's Older Adult Strategy within the Parks, Recreation & Culture Master Plan, 2017.](#)

Complete, age-friendly communities and the ability to age in place is reliant on high-quality parks and public spaces that are planned and built with the accessibility needs of seniors in mind.

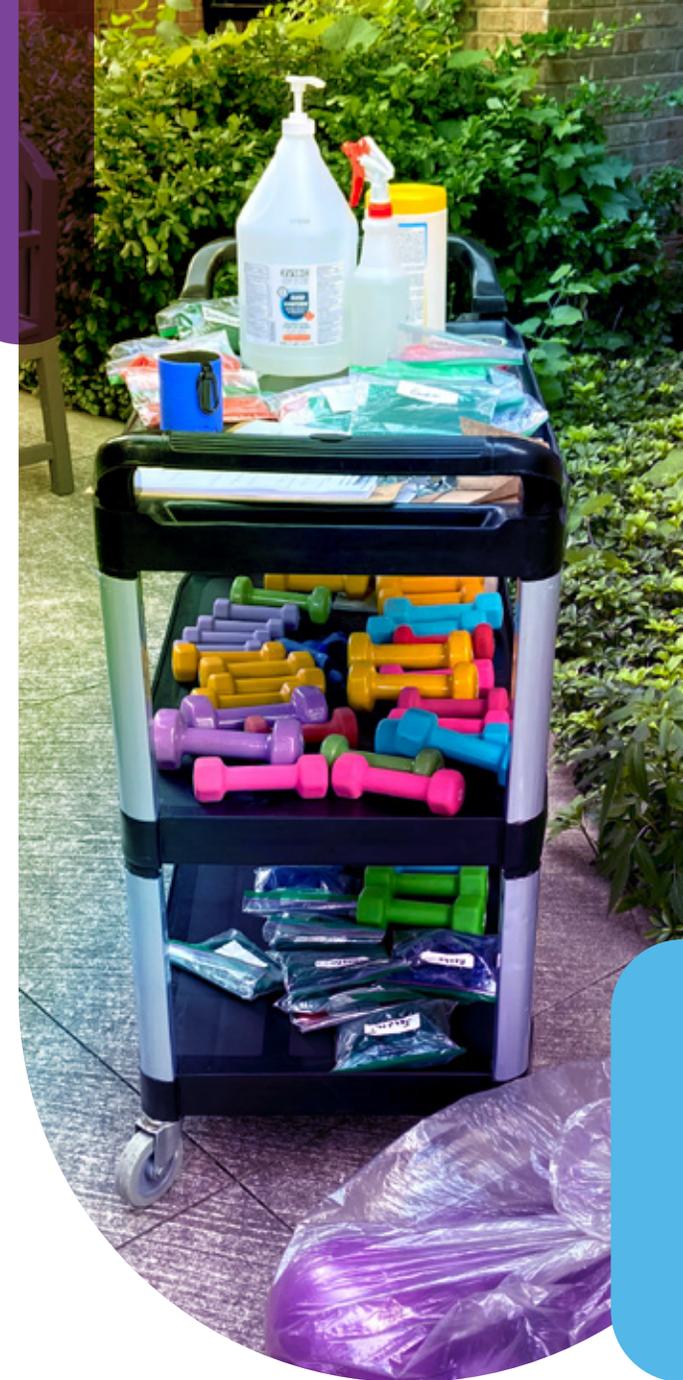
## REMAIN FLEXIBLE WITH HYBRID PROGRAMMING

Even in a post-pandemic future, virtual programming will remain an important component to seniors' recreation and physical activity.

Senior service providers should continue to offer recreational opportunities over the phone and over Zoom or a similar service alongside expanded outdoor program offerings. As observed in Section 3, Survey Results, 63% of polled seniors prefer a future of programming that is offered both indoors

and outdoors. Also, in this Toolkit we've pointed to research on the health and wellness benefits of purposeful outdoor activities for seniors.

Recognizing the importance of flexible, hybrid programming and the potential for outdoor programs will be paramount for senior service providers throughout future waves of the pandemic, and into a post-pandemic future.



## RECOGNIZE THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

The future of sustainable and creative outdoor programming for seniors relies on partnerships with like-minded organizations.

The successes detailed in this Toolkit were made possible through a partnership between WoodGreen Community Services and 8 80 Cities with funding from the Federal Government. Similar partnerships between [Mosaic Home Care and the Armour Heights Presbyterian Church](#) have resulted in pandemic resilient programming tailored to the needs of senior community.

Partnerships between community organizations can begin to address service gaps for seniors with complex care needs and can advance programming capacity, both indoors and outdoors. Hobby groups, seniors' associations and other informal citizen-initiated seniors' groups should be seen as potential grassroots partners in the co-creation of both indoor and outdoor programming.

Establishing these partnerships can be done with support of Tool #1 (see below). Involving all community partners as co-creators in seniors' outdoor programming can prove to be cost effective while investing in local autonomy and by ensuring programming is culturally-relevant.



# SENIORS' OUTDOOR ACTIVATION TOOLKIT ATTACHMENTS

The Seniors' Outdoor Activation pilot programs were chosen using the following attachments. The newly developed toolkit includes:

## **TOOL #1: INTERVIEWS WITH SENIORS AND STAFF**

These questions are intended to equip senior service providers with a template for how to engage seniors on program co-creation. Respondents will aid in creating programming that is relevant, demand-driven and adaptive

## **TOOL #2: PUBLIC SPACE EVALUATION CHECKLIST**

The Public Space Evaluation Checklist is a tool used to quantify the quality and accessibility of a park or public space by its ability to meet the basic needs of seniors engaging in recreational activities

## **TOOL #3: PROGRAM EVALUATION**

This data can be used to justify future investments in outdoor programming and make a compelling case in funding and grant applications.

## **PROGRAM CHECKLIST FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS**



# TOOL #1: INTERVIEWS WITH SENIORS AND STAFF



When investing in seniors' programming, seniors should be seen as co-creators in program design and location siting. Amidst COVID, recreational activities and community spaces have had to adapt to closures and a range of other operational modifications. This same willingness to adapt should be applied to the programs offered by senior service providers across the GTHA.

The questions below can be used by senior service providers in interviews with staff and clientele in order to create programming that is relevant, demand driven and adaptive. The goal of this Tool is to equip senior service providers with a template for how to engage seniors on program co-creation.

The answers to these questions should be compiled and observed. The observations gathered should inform the location and type of programming...

.....

## UNDERSTANDING SENIORS' NEEDS

What kind of outdoor programming or activities have you engaged in since the start of COVID-19?

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When choosing an outdoor space to do a program or activity, what do you look for?  
(i.e proximity to your home, washroom access, transit access)

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When participating in an outdoor program, what would make you feel most comfortable and safe?  
(I.e. ensuring there are places to sit, privacy, proximity to your place of residence)

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What does your **IDEAL** public park or green space look like?

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How many participants would you feel comfortable sharing a space with?

---

What are your social, physical and well-being goals?

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# UNDERSTANDING SENIORS' PREFERENCES

What do you like about outdoor programming?

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What kind of activities do you do indoors and you think it would be nice to do outdoors?

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In what kind of spaces would you prefer your programming to take place?  
(I.e. Parks, parkettes, patio space, open streets, under a canopy of trees)

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How can these spaces be improved to suit your needs? (I.e more seating areas, better washroom access, shade)

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# UNDERSTANDING LOGISTICS

How do you commute to your program?

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How far would you be willing to commute to get to an outdoor program? Do you take public transit? Walk? Other?

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Would you be willing to go to another neighborhood (or city) to join programs hosted outside? **(Y/N)**

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What is your preferred time of the day for programming?

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What is your preferred time of the year for outdoor programming? (I.e in summer)

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Anything you'd like to share with us about your experiences with both indoor and outdoor programming?

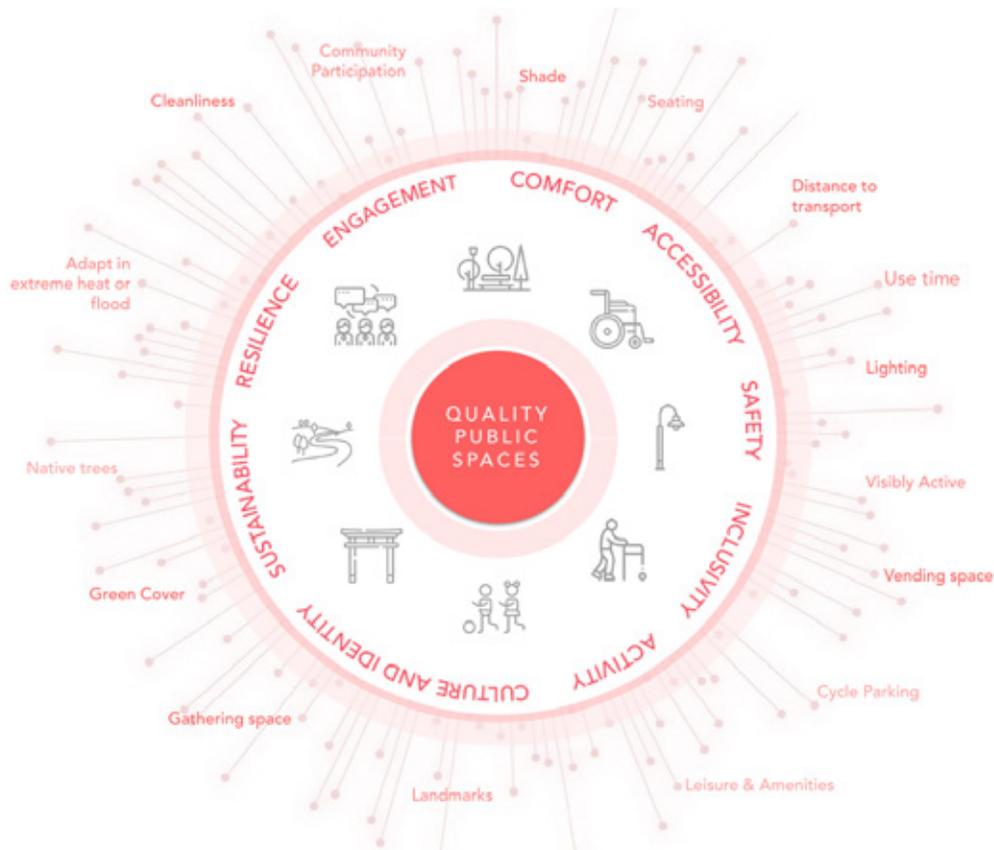
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## TOOL #2: PUBLIC SPACE EVALUATION CHECKLIST

The Public Space Evaluation Checklist is a tool used to quantify the quality and accessibility of a park or public space by its ability to meet the basic needs of seniors engaging in recreational activities. The Public Space Evaluation Checklist was used in this project to determine the quality and accessibility of parks and public spaces within a walkable distance around WoodGreen's Senior Active Living Centres (SALCs). The identified parks were then evaluated against the following criteria to determine the quality and accessibility to meet the needs of seniors while engaging in physical exercise classes.

If your identified park, public space or repurposed space meets the criteria listed here, the next step should be to obtain permits if your program capacity, duration and location so requires. Often, programs under a certain capacity do not require a permit. Hosting a program outdoors with a limited capacity can be a great way to trial seniors' outdoor programming and to test this tool in real time.



Source: Ravindran, K., Kawale, K. et al. (2020). Public Space Design and Assessment Tool. Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.



### STEP 1:

Identify a walkable distance around your location(s) of choice. Locate the parks and public spaces within this walkable distance. Public space and open spaces that can be repurposed to host seniors programming can include, but are not limited to parking lots, open fields, green buffer space and more.



### STEP 2:

Evaluate these parks and public spaces within the short walking distance to see if they have the following amenities:

- Washrooms with ramp access
- Bus Stops/Subway Stations/Accessibility Stop adjacent to the identified parks and public spaces
- Benches/Sitting Areas
- Shade
- Paved walkways
- At grade walking conditions
- Potential parking



### STEP 3:

The parks and public spaces that provide the needed amenities can then be evaluated for the quality of gathering space provided:

Does the park/public space have a flat surface that will allow for seniors to move on the spot without impediment? **(Y/N)**

Are there existing structures that can be transformed to suit the outdoor fitness class/program? **(Y/N)**

What are the hours of operation/seasonality of the washrooms? \_\_\_\_\_

Is the area/park visual attractive? **(Y/N)**

Are there perceived safety concerns of the area/park? **(Y/N)**

\_\_\_\_\_

Is this there the presence of needles, waste? **(Y/N)**

Is it a well-frequented park? **(Y/N)**

Is there enough space for social distancing? **(Y/N)**

Are there nearby attractions and cultural institutions that can make this space apart of a destination? **(Y/N)**

\_\_\_\_\_

## TOOL #3: PROGRAM EVALUATION

Tool 3 provides a template for a survey that can be distributed to program participants. The information collected using the questions below shall form the basis of the program's evaluation. Please see the Toolkit for how these questions and subsequent answers have been analyzed and displayed to present a compelling story on a program's successes. This data can be used to justify future investments in outdoor programming and make a compelling case in funding and grant applications.



.....

1. Please check all the classes you attended:

- Drum Circle
- Spanish Class
- Pole Walking
- Chair Yoga
- Zumba
- Healing Dance

2. How did you find out about this program? (Select all that apply)

- Through my active living coordinator
- Flyer
- Word of mouth
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What was your goal coming into the program?

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4. How would you rate the program based on the following categories? (1 = poor, 2 = good, 3 = excellent)

- Comfort \_\_\_\_
- Instruction \_\_\_\_
- Enjoyment \_\_\_\_
- Safety \_\_\_\_

5. How do you travel to the program?

- By foot
- By bus
- Personal car
- Carpooling
- Bike
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. How would you rate the quality of the location? (1 = poor, 2 = good, 3 = excellent)

- Location \_\_\_\_
- Seating \_\_\_\_
- Amenities available \_\_\_\_

7. Would you attend this program again?

- Yes
- No

8. Did you meet someone new during this program?

- Yes
- No

9. How could this program be improved?

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10. What programs in the future would you like to see?

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# PROGRAM CHECKLIST FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

As a senior service provider, there are a few items that you will need to bring to make the programming as comfortable and safe as possible.

This checklist can be a jumping off point that you can tailor to meet your local organization's needs.

.....

## PROGRAM ESSENTIALS

- Client reminders
- Sign-up sheets
- Program equipment
- Speakers
- Waivers
- Permits

## SAFETY ESSENTIALS

- Portable first aid kit
- Client emergency contact info
- Sanitizers
- Water
- Juice boxes
- Energy bars/Snacks

