

TESTIMONIALS

Some older adults with intellectual disabilities participated in senior centre programs in Winnipeg. Those involved in the process shared their experiences.

Senior centre staff said:

“When he was there regularly, he became part of the class. People were happy to have him there.”

“She comes with a caregiver and she is in a wheelchair. So, we make sure we have space for wheelchairs and for her. We make it so she feels comfortable. And anything she needs we try to accommodate her.”

An older adult with disabilities said:

“I want to get together with older people because I am old. I want to make friends with old people. It makes me happy inside. I want to be with them.”

Support workers said:

“The environment was very open and welcoming.”

“The instructor was really welcoming. He took the time to teach her things step-by-step. He was accepting of her joining the class. I think she enjoyed the class a lot because of who the instructor was and he took the time to teach her.”

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All three photos in this brochure courtesy of the Manitoba Association of Senior Centres

The Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS) conducted a research initiative, *Inclusive Senior Centres Project*, in partnership with the Manitoba Association of Senior Centres and Winserv Inc. It is sponsored by the Winnipeg Foundation. This brochure was developed based on the findings of the project.



The Canadian Centre on Disability Studies (CCDS)

If you have any questions or comments about the information in this leaflet, please contact CCDS.

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Guide for Inclusive Centres for Older Adults

How to Make Your Centre More Inclusive for Older Adults with Intellectual Disabilities



Inclusive Senior Centres

Many senior centres strive to create an inclusive, welcoming environment for all older adults. Here is helpful information to guide you in making your centre more inclusive for older adults with intellectual disabilities.

Barriers to Inclusive Centres

Barriers to inclusive senior centres may be physical, attitudinal, cultural or lack of resources. To overcome those barriers:

- ◆ Make the environment accessible for those with mobility difficulties.
- ◆ Provide staff with training and education on diversity and inclusive programming.
- ◆ Ensure your senior centre policies and practices are in line with the principles of inclusion.

Older Adults with Intellectual Disabilities

- ◆ They have a range of communication skills. Some may not (or cannot) speak much, but can understand. Some may use other ways of communicating – through sign language, a speech generating device, or a support staff.
- ◆ Many older adults with intellectual disabilities have limited opportunities for social interactions. Social inclusion is as critical for their wellbeing as it is for everyone else.

- ◆ Not all older adults with intellectual disabilities require one-on-one support. Some can, and will, participate in a senior centre without additional support.
- ◆ Support workers are there to assist the person's full and meaningful participation in activities. At the same time, many support workers try to minimize any unnecessary assistance and foster independence.

Tips for Centre Staff

1. *Address the person directly*

Talk to the person directly regardless of whether or not he or she is accompanied by a support worker. It is simply a respectful way of addressing people.

2. *Assume that the person understands*

When you communicate with an older adult with intellectual disabilities, assume he or she understands. If you are not sure, ask them directly if they understand.

3. *Invite the person to be a part of the senior centre community*

A sense of belonging is important. Involve them in centre activities. Many older adults with disabilities will be happy to help with events or to volunteer.



4. *Be creative and flexible*

Some older adults with intellectual disabilities may not be able to fully participate in a program or activity. Be creative and flexible in creating alternate ways that the person can participate in the program or activity.

5. *Set the tone of respect and acceptance*

The role of instructor (or facilitator) is very important in setting the tone of respect and acceptance among people who participate in a program. Be the leader in creating a welcoming and accepting environment.

6. *Collaborate with support workers*

Support workers can be a good resource for program instructors (or facilitators). Consult with the support worker on how to better communicate with and accommodate the person. Some support workers may be interested in providing support for the whole program or class, in which the person participates.