

Westlock and District FCSS Final Report

Executive Summary

Aspen Primary Care Network was initially approved for the CIDC grant to fund their Dinner Club project in the community of Westlock. This project intended to bring people living with dementia (PLWD) and their caregivers together for dinner, education, and activities. The goal was to provide opportunities for education and social connection among community members with the shared experience of dementia. One dinner was held successfully in February 2020, however, with the rise of COVID-19 and the restrictions introduced, no further dinners could be held. Westlock & District FCSS was engaged to take the lead on developing a new grant proposal which focused on activities that could be carried out with minimal in-person contact. The Building Compassionate Communities project focused on creating resources for PLWD and their caregivers to utilize in their own homes, as well as educational opportunities that could be offered virtually if necessary.

The Building Compassionate Communities project aims to increase material, educational, and social resources available to PLWD and their caregivers. In addition, the projects aims to educate the larger community about dementia to decrease stigma and increase the sense of inclusion that PLWD feel in the Westlock community. To do so, this project focused on three major deliverables: sensory kits for PLWD, an iPad lending library for PLWD and their caregivers, and public education sessions.

Our project has made 250 sensory kits available to PLWD at no cost. These sensory kits include brain-stimulating sensory toys and activities, as well as local/provincial/ national resource information. An iPad lending library has also been developed through this project, allowing the loaning of iPads by PLWD and their caregivers at no cost. These iPads have been pre-loaded with brain stimulation games, interactive applications that provide information regarding dementia, and a resource library covering a variety of topic areas relevant to dementia, including types of dementia, typical progression from early to later stages, caregiving, and how to promote quality of life.

Public education was also an important objective outlined in our project proposal. To date, one Westlock & District FCSS staff and three community volunteers have completed the Living the Dementia Journey (LDJ) train-the-trainer workshop, enabling them to facilitate the LDJ overview workshop to all interested community members at no cost.

This program aims to shift participants' understanding of dementia from the biomedical model to a social model, fulfilling our objective of decreasing stigma and increasing our larger community's ability to respond compassionately to PLWD. The situation with COVID-19 had



changed significantly since the grant proposal had been submitted, with risks being low enough that the education sessions could be offered in-person. These in-person education sessions allowed for social connection and peer support for PLWD and their caregivers in a similar way as was originally intended in the Aspen Primary Care Network Dinner Club project.

Our overall goal of our project was to make Westlock a dementia-friendly and compassionate community through various dementia-related objectives. To do so, our major objectives were to make dementia sensory kits and iPads available to PLWD and their caregivers, to enhance their quality of life. We also aimed to provide community education to increase understanding of dementia in the general public, not only to identify symptoms of dementia but to respond in a way that is helpful and decreases stigma. In focusing on these three major components of the project, namely the sensory kits, iPad lending library, and community education, we engaged a number of community partners and volunteers.

The primary method through which we engaged community partners and volunteers was through our Westlock Dementia Working Group, which was a team of agency representatives and community volunteers who determined the course of the entire project. Intergenerational engagement has occurred throughout the project, with children and youth volunteering their time to assist in the development of different components of the project, as well as participate in educational opportunities regarding dementia. Westlock & District FCSS has served as a “hub” for the project, providing a staff member to coordinate the project, purchase supplies, and administer the programs developed under the project.

Evaluation

Given that we began our project in January 2022, the different components of our project launched between June and November 2022. Therefore, outcome data is limited, as limited numbers of people have accessed the programs. However, for those who did access the sensory kits, iPad lending library, and LDJ education workshops, post-surveys were completed with participants to measure outcomes.

Not surprisingly, the LDJ workshops received the most positive feedback of all the project components, with many participants commenting on the benefits they gained through the social connections they made with other caregivers in the workshop. A total of 20 individuals participated in the 2 workshops which ran in November/ December 2022, with 17 completing evaluation surveys. 89% of participants either somewhat or strongly agreed that they made new connections, or strengthened existing connections, with people in their community through participating in the workshop. 94% of participants either somewhat or strongly agreed that they gained better understanding of how to support the well-being of PLWD. Finally, 89% of participants either somewhat or strongly agreed that what they learned would help them in their role as a caregiver/ support person.

Since launching in the summer of 2022, 13 sensory kits have been distributed. Outcome surveys were completed over the phone with 8 community members who accessed a kit. 75% of participants either somewhat or strongly agreed that they sensory kit was useful. 75% of participants either somewhat or strongly agreed that they felt more confident as to where to go

for help in the community after reviewing the resource list included in the kit. 75% of participants either somewhat or strongly agreed that having access to a sensory kit made them feel more supported in the community, with the remaining individuals stating they neither agreed nor disagreed.

The iPad lending library had the fewest number of community members to survey, as 6 individuals had accessed the program between August and December 2022. 5 individuals completed phone surveys, so data on outcomes is most limited for this particular component of the project. 60% of participants stated that the iPad was easy to navigate, the remaining 20% stated it was difficult or very difficult. The same 20% who stated the iPads were difficult to use also responded that they somewhat disagreed when asked if the iPad was useful, whereas the other 60% of users either strongly or somewhat agreed that the iPad was useful. 80% of participants responded that having the lending library available helped them feel supported in their community. Of those who did not find the iPads useful, most comments revolved around issues with the games loaded onto the iPads, specifically them having too many pop-up ads or the levels progressing too quickly.

Volunteer hours were also tracked throughout the project. The dementia working group had eight members who committed minimally one and a half hours a month to attend the monthly group meeting. In addition, presentations to community stakeholders and attendance at community events required approximately 20 additional volunteer hours among the working group members. Our three LDJ facilitators were all volunteers who committed 16 hours each for their training and approximately 20 hours each to prepare and deliver the LDJ workshop in community. Finally, the volunteers engaged in the project through knitting twiddle-muffs, put in significant volunteer hours. With 7 community volunteers officially recorded, but likely far more having contributed their time, 42 twiddle-muffs have been donated between June and December 2022. With one twiddle-muff taking approximately 8 to 11 hours to make, it is estimated that 336 to 462 volunteer hours were required to produce the total amount we received in donations.

Sustainability

The iPad lending library is a sustainable community resource, now that the initial iPads have been purchased. Westlock & District FCSS will take on the ongoing administration and maintenance required to continue maintaining the library. The 250 sensory kits will be a finite resource; however, it is expected that it will take a significant amount of time to deplete this resource, as less than 20 kits have been distributed from the time of launch in July 2022 to present. However, even if the items that were included in the 250 initial sensory kits cannot be replenished, there is significant community interest in knitting and donating twiddle-muffs, which are a particular sensory item included in the sensory kits. With continued community investment, Westlock & District FCSS could continue providing twiddle-muffs to PLWD at no cost.

The LDJ community education workshops are a sustainable portion of this project, as they can continue to be offered in the community at little-to-no-cost following the completion of the grant

project. Westlock & District FCSS ensured to train a staff member in addition to community volunteers to ensure the workshop can continue to be offered long-term through the agency. The community volunteers also signed an agreement to facilitate at least two workshops each on behalf of Westlock & District FCSS. Westlock & District FCSS can continue to provide a facilitator and facilitation space on an ongoing basis. The only participant cost that may have to be introduced to cover ongoing expenses related to the training are to cover the \$20 participant workbooks and any meals/ refreshments offered during the training.