Key Elements of Seniors Programming Checklist

Seniors

There has been little rigorous research to show which interventions are most effective in addressing social isolation among seniors. One issue is that studies may fail to distinguish between social isolation and loneliness, the latter of which is hard to address through programming. Social isolation, on the other hand, can be prevented via good health, communication skills, social skills, accessible services, feeling connected to and valued by others, having meaningful roles in society, and having access to transportation.

Types of programming and interventions that appear to increase positive social ties for vulnerable seniors:
- **Group interventions:** In particular, structured groups targeted at people with common interests and which meet other criteria described below have been shown to be effective.
- **Gatekeeper and Community Navigator programs**: These interventions train those who come into contact with seniors on a regular basis (e.g., bank personnel, apartment managers, letter carriers, police, paramedics) to identify signs that a senior is at risk (e.g., deterioration in personal appearance, clothing not appropriate to the weather, strong foul orders, confusion or disorientation) and refer them to services and supports.
- **Volunteer programs**: Providing opportunities to make a contribution and see it valued is an important component in addressing social inclusion.
- **Intergenerational programs**: Providing opportunities for all generations to interact, create bonds, and decrease stigmas.

Types of programs for which insufficient evaluation research is available:
- Financial literacy programs
- Home maintenance/improvement programs

Mixed evidence:
- Telephone and internet/email connections
- Home visiting
- Befriending (most show some positive impact)

Those shown to be ineffective:
- Individual mentor matching for seniors

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Summary of Research Evidence	
Program Type	**Research Evidence**
Gatekeeper and Community Navigator Programs	Some evidence at promising practice level
Group Programs	Lots of evidence at best and promising practice levels
One-on-One Programs	Mixed evidence (some studies show effect, others show no effect), some at promising practice level. (Note: no research evidence for effectiveness of one-on-one mentor matching for seniors)
Counselling Programs	Some evidence at promising practice level
Internet Training Programs	Some evidence at promising practice level
Volunteer Programs	Evidence for the benefits of seniors volunteering in general, limited specific program examples
Intergenerational Programs	Some evidence at best and promising practice levels
Food Delivery Programs	Mixed evidence on social impacts
Homeshare Programs	Emerging evidence – more research needed
Financial Literacy Programs	No rigorous research found
Home Maintenance/Improvement Programs	No rigorous research found
Timebanking Programs	Emerging evidence – more research needed

Key Elements for Seniors Programming

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Program Elements		✔	**Comments**
Intensity, timing and duration	• Interventions should be at least 3 to 6 months in length to allow for the development of feelings of belonging as well as significant relationships.		
	• Monitoring and encouragement of attendance to reach the amount of contact/intervention outlined in the program design.		
	• Provision of service soon after critical life events or transitions (e.g. death of a spouse, move to a retirement home, etc.)		
Approach	• Based on theory of the causes of social isolation		
	• Have a clear program logic		
	• Person-centered (holistic) rather than focusing specifically on one risk factor.		
	• A culture of caring that creates trusting and meaningful relationships and makes participants feel welcome, secure, and comfortable		
	• Group approaches are particularly beneficial in increasing social interaction, especially if the goal of establishing friendships beyond the particular program is explicitly facilitated.		
	• Meaning and purpose (action/goals) in programs, rather than just time/space to 'be together'		
	• System-wide approaches that encompass multiple areas of service		
	• Inclusivity and flexibility in programming		
Proximity	• Providing services in proximity to where seniors are located.		
	• Flexible transportation options for seniors not living in proximity to services.		
	• Seeking community-based partnerships to increase the identification of at-risk seniors and availability of services in proximity to seniors (seeking opportunities for delivery through community-based organizations or facilities).		

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Engagement of seniors in program design	• Providing services that are relevant and acknowledge and respect the different interests, needs, experience and culture of seniors (no 'one-size-fits-all' programs).		
	• Involving seniors in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs.		
	• Creation of specific programs for different groups of individuals (e.g. LGBTQ)		
	• Targeting at-risk groups and addressing their specific needs		
Staff training	• Training staff in person-centered and senior-specific approaches that emphasize respect and inclusion.		
	• 'Culturally competent' delivery including recognition of different meanings attached to concepts such as 'aging' and 'social isolation'		
	• Specific diversity training related to the needs of sub-groups such as LGBTQ, immigrant/newcomer, and Indigenous seniors		

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8

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