Towards Respect Together

Academic Underpinning

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Introduction

The program Towards Respect Together, a part of the Respect for Seniors project, aims to develop protective factors against elder abuse and ageism.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission states that abuse of older adults is largely due to negative attitudes towards older people. The Commission considers that ageism can be addressed in part by highlighting older adults' individual, collective, and lifelong contributions to our society.

As Lane (2009) identified in her scoping research for this project: "Stuart-Hamilton (2006) discusses the relationship between stereotypes and self-image that maybe resultant of the self-image decline experienced by many people in later life. It is reasonable to expect that exposure to programmes that encourage reinforcement of self-image, identity and self-esteem would reduce the level to which stereotypes are interiorised in the re-enforcement of self image in older people" Lane (2009).

The protective factors included in this program increase awareness of quality of life and relationships, enhance confidence, resilience, assertiveness & coping skills, reduce isolation through group work communication skills and strengthen capacity for mutually respectful relationships. Through a reflective process of life stories older adults' individual, collective, and lifelong contributions to our society are acknowledged. The project is primarily a preventative measure structured as a social education program.

Towards Respect Together is a program that encourages seniors to socialise, engage in discussions, activities, reminiscence and a life review which reflects on their personal strengths, resilience, coping strategies, contributions throughout their lifetime and capacity to maintain dignity as a natural part of the ageing process.

Towards Respect Together recognises the complexity behind elder abuse and the

various factors that contribute to the hard to define concepts of "well-being" and "successful ageing", and therefore aims to develop several interconnected skills.

The importance of respectful relationships are emphasised in the program and the focus is to develop an awareness of how respect is balanced between and within individuals. Connected to this are assertive communication skills that the sessions aim to develop among seniors, to enable them to better communicate their needs and feelings.

The program promotes social connectivity and community cohesiveness, and in doing so targets the problem of loneliness which has been shown to have serious effects on seniors' well-being. The sessions both build the potential of countering loneliness, while also providing a place to connect with the other participants.

Primary prevention

Towards Respect Together is a primary prevention program that develops protective factors against elder abuse and ageism. It also has the capacity to increase well-being among seniors and build a cohesive community.

Primary prevention measures "provide the resources to both potential victim and abuser by reducing their respective risk factors" (Lane, 2009). Programs promoting intra and inter personal skills can address risk factors associated with both potential abusers and victims of elder abuse.

For example, perpetrators are often likely to suffer from behavioural problems, depression and antisocial behaviour (Anetzberger, 2005, as cited by Lane, 2009). These issues may become apparent during the program and referrals can be made as necessary to local services and resources. The program intent is to equip participants with the capacity to handle stressful situations, enabling them to recognise unhealthy relationships and seek assistance.

Towards Respect Together, uses a psycho-educational approach of raising awareness through a learning rather than therapeutic context. This avoids the stigma often associated with therapy by being delivered as a discussion group for seniors.

Circle of Respect

Towards Respect Together has at its core an emphasis on the respectful treatment of others as well as oneself. The Circle of Respect concept can be used as a social education tool in this program (Fernandez, 2010). The Circle of Respect promotes awareness of respectful relationships with others as well as an individual's own self-respect. It is intended to encourage discussion about the concept of respect and the diversity of interpretations of this concept. In addition it raises awareness of a lack of balance between respect for self and respect for others. If an individual lacks self-respect it may impact on their self worth and on their relationships with others. The individual may become susceptible to disrespectful treatment from others, particularly if they do not expect respect in their relationships. (Fernandez, 2010)

The Circle of Respect visualises a balance of mutual respect within and between people (Fernandez, 2010). When there is a balance of self-respect and respect for others, and a balance in the respect a person gives and the respect a person receives, a greater understanding of other people's differing views and opinions can be developed. This can contribute to a reduced likelihood of relationship conflicts (Fernandez, 2010).

"Expressions of respect are changing in Australia" (McCabe et al., 2010). McCabe found that intergenerational differences include lack of understanding, different values and an uncertainty about how to show respect. Part of the change has involved a shift from automatically respecting someone because they are older to an expectation of two-way, reciprocal respect. (McCabe et al., 2010, Fernandez, 2010). Discussion and activities in the program that explore these different interpretations

can lead to more mutually respectful relationships through enhanced understanding and assist in reducing the intergenerational gap.

Self Respect and Self Esteem

"Branden (2001) speaks of positive self-esteem as the immune system of the spirit, allowing an individual to face the vicissitudes of life and rebound from misfortunes" (Lane, 2009). Dictionaries define respect as having esteem or a sense of worth and definitions of self-esteem include the quality of self-respect (Rosenberg, 1965). The two concepts are intertwined in the sense of self or identity that individuals form about themselves.

Of relevance to this program is recent research conducted by Orth, Trzesniewski, and Robins (2010) which identified the decline in self-esteem that tends to occur from the age of 60.

Positive self-esteem has been found to be associated with better physical health (Reitzes & Mutran, 2006), lower levels of depression (Orth, Robins, Trzesniewski, Maes, & Schmitt, 2009), closer and more supportive relationships (Andrews & Brown, 1995).

With the most significant decline in self-esteem occurring in older age it is important to address this within the program as a core preventative factor.

Assertive communication skills

Assertive communication skills are included in the program to enhance seniors ability to communicate their needs and feelings. This can also assist the gradual shift from independence to interdependence.

Communication challenges can occur in many different settings that involve patronising communication with seniors. Bouchard Ryan et al. (2006) define patronising communication as stereotype-based talk targeting seniors. It includes simplified vocabulary and grammar, repetition, over familiarity, disapproval, lack of listening and ignoring the senior in favour of communicating with a third party. The authors term this as dependency-inducing, especially in health care, where the consequences are a reduction in information, motivation and support. The consequences for an older person can be reduced self worth.

Patronising communication also creates a reduced confidence in the seniors own perceived communication skills. Assertiveness can be defined as the calm, direct, honest expression of feelings and needs (Rakos, 1991; Wilson & Gallois, 1993, as cited by Bouchard Ryan et al., 2006). A study of senior's assertiveness in a clinical setting examined the responses to assertive, passive and aggressive communication (Bouchard Ryan et al., 2006).The authors concluded that assertiveness can be used positively by seniors in a context where patronising communication is employed.

Lane (2009) highlighted the need for programs that target the development of self-identity and resilience among seniors. This would address the decline in self-image that often comes with ageing as many studies have identified. Assertive communication skills can be used in this context to promote self-esteem and social engagement while empowering the participants in terms of self efficacy and self-esteem (Lane, 2009). The program enables participants to speak up for themselves through the development of assertive communication skills.

Addressing loneliness

In addressing protective factors for prevention of elder abuse and neglect, recognition of the "need to belong" is crucial in promoting social attachments as well as understanding that people will maintain and guard bonds that become a source of

distress (Leary, 2001).

Social isolation and absence of social support are risk factors for abuse victims (Brozowski & Hall, 2004, as cited by Lane, 2009). The fear of being alone has been given by older women as an explanation for why they stay in abusive relationships (Zink et al, 2004, as cited by Nesbitt, 2010), expressing the belief that due to their age it is not possible to find another relationship, and that an abusive relationship is preferred to the prospect of loneliness.

In addition to reducing this barrier to dealing with abusive relationships the program Towards Respect Together also aims to connect seniors in the community thereby reducing other negative effects of loneliness. These may include depression, low self-esteem and substance abuse (Fisher & Regan, 2006). Loneliness is also associated with higher mortality, poor sleep, systolic hypertension, heart disease and cognitive decline (Luanaigh & Lawlor, 2008).

Lane (2009) conducted a focus group with seniors and found that the concept of ageing well often translated to different forms of social engagement, and accordingly social isolation was seen as a potential risk with ageing. Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008, as cited by Lane, 2009) found that those who are lonely are more likely to accept unfair treatment.

The barriers preventing social inclusion can be examined from the perspective of the elderly themselves, where it has been found that loneliness, feeling of disconnection and ones worth to society are related to reduced social inclusion (Stanley, Moyle, Ballantyne, Jaworski, and Corlis et al., 2010).

The sessions will bring together seniors in a setting that encourages socialisation, mutual respect and communication, with the potential of more meaningful friendships developing. More effective communication skills can also enhance existing relationships and improve the potential for them to be mutually respectful.

Developing resilience

The concept of resilience has been described as "the maintenance of physical and psychological health in the face of risk or threats (Mehta et al., 2006 cited by Mlinac et al., 2010). The program uses nostalgic reflection over the lifespan to identify the challenges that older individuals have survived through their inherent resilience. This strengths based approach then builds on the potential each individual has for utilising that resilience in the future.

Even for those who may struggle to recognise their resilience, Seligman (1992) established that resilience can be developed by any individual.

Psychological resilience has been correlated with an adaptive coping style that encompasses problem-solving and learning from experience, compared to lower resilience which is reliant on avoidant styles of coping. Hildon et al. (2008). Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley & Novacek (1987) noted that older people were most likely to use passive intrapersonal forms of coping.

Programs that develop a robust self-identity and resilience would address the self image decline noted in other studies. Promoting behavioural changes by enabling the development of inter and intra-personal skills such as assertive communication will enhance self efficacy and introduce mastery experiences that will support a strong self concept, promote self esteem and encourage social engagement. These different styles of coping are explored in activities within the program.

Having access to social support was also integral to resilience. Hildon et al. (2008) found that, besides social support and coping strategies, the process of constructing and reinterpreting past events through reminiscence using experiences from more recent events was essential to developing resilience.

This process is important for maintaining self-identity and to comprehend the meaning of stressful experiences, as well as to accept and readjust to changed

circumstances. The authors therefore recommended interventions using reminiscence therapy or life review at the individual level to promote resilience among seniors.

The role that emotions play when handling adversities and conflict is of interest in understanding resilience. Reacting with positive emotions can be a more effective and stress reducing way to approach problems, and provides more varied responses than a negative response of fight or flight (Mlinac et al., 2010).

An example of this can be found in a study by Tugade and Fredrickson (2004). Participants were encouraged to view stressful situations as challenges that could lead to personal growth rather than as a threat. The researchers also found a link between positive emotions and being able to positively appraise a situation. It is possible that resilience among seniors could be negatively affected by ageist attitudes and social beliefs. For example, Kane (2008) found that social work students believed that when they became seniors, they would be more resilient in stressful situations than seniors are today, and that they would need less reassurance and support. The author states that this indicated the students did not think the circumstances that apply to seniors would apply to them as they aged, and that this may be an expression of narcissism or denial. This is an example of how the intergenerational approach is important for all the goals of Towards Respect Together. The program recognises the importance of resilience among seniors, and the development of it is an integral part of the sessions. The Towards Respect Together program uses reminiscence and life review to raise awareness of resilience among seniors.

Maintaining Dignity

The program includes life review, nostalgia and reminiscence activities which assist seniors to reconcile with their past, thereby increasing life satisfaction, maintaining dignity and reducing death anxiety.

Lundgren (2010) found nostalgia was most beneficial to one's identity when it was thought of as an offer of shared feelings and mutual understanding. This is the context in which the program encourages life long reflections.

Notions of dignity were explored from an older person's perspective in a study by Woolhead, Calnan, Dieppe, and Tadd (2004). They found that dignity was most pertinent in the way it affected the sense of self and one's identity. Reflecting on roles and responsibilities throughout the lifespan assists in consolidating an individual's life experiences and sense of identity.

Lane (2009) found that in a focus group there was an emphasis on ageing well however there was no mention of ageing as a process or acknowledgement of death. This may indicate a resistance to thoughts of the final stages and ultimate end of life. The life review and reminiscence in the sessions can work as a way to counter this, both to create a life coherency and to perhaps come to terms with difficult memories that can plague individuals and act as a barrier toward feeling at peace at end of life. Fishman (1992) found in a study that death anxiety can be reduced through life review as the individual works through the past. The author concludes that life review can be used to prepare oneself for the final phase of life.

Seniors themselves have also expressed the desire to undertake life review. Schrader, Nelson, and Eidsness (2009) conducted a study to find out what end of life experiences seniors preferred. Undertaking life reviews, being at spiritual peace and having a sense of self were emphasised as desired end of life experiences. The social aspect was also apparent, with the desire for friends and family to visit.

Intergenerational approach

Towards Respect Together will contribute to bridging the intergenerational gap by including students in the sessions to help out with the activities as well as participate by for example listening to the senior's memories. The benefits from connecting

generations in this way were seen in a program where seniors acted as mentors to children in a school setting (Ellis & Granville, 1999). The seniors in the program reported having felt great personal satisfaction and reward in helping the children, and stated that their own lives had improved from the experience. The children showed a great positive change in attitude towards seniors after the program. The teachers were overall positive regarding the program and found that the seniors brought maturity and respect to the classroom and had also improved the classroom dynamic. The whole community benefits from an intergenerational approach.

In the USA a Community Program promoted an intergenerational community by arranging for school children to visit seniors in nursing homes and engage in both educational and recreational activities (Hamilton et al., 1999). Children and seniors alike benefited greatly from the program. The authors provide an example of a woman in a nursing home who, the nursing staff reported, had not spoken for years. However, after a few visits from the school children she began speaking to a child. The parents of the children reported that the children had gained a better understanding of the ageing process and the cycle of life, as well as a more positive view of seniors.

Towards Respect Together therefore aims through this approach to not only improve seniors well-being, but also to be of benefit to everyone who is involved, thereby empowering and bringing together the community.

"There is a particularly important need to connect the older generations with younger generations." (McCabe et al., 2010). McCabe identifies the 'contact' hypothesis as a potential source of change in the stereotypical attitudes toward older people, particularly the views of younger generations.

Conclusion

Towards Respect Together addresses many protective factors that are interconnected and reinforce each other. The preventative measures that the sessions provide have been called for in many fields within gerontological studies. The methods of life review and reminiscence in particular have been shown to be effective in both developing resilience and decreasing death anxiety.

This program provides an experience for seniors that encourages awareness of unhealthy relationships and empowers seniors to address these situations through speaking up and seeking assistance.

Towards Respect Together aims at equipping seniors with a range of skills that will help them in everyday life, and particularly during stressful situations. The intergenerational and community building approach ensures that the benefits of the program will reach the community at large as well.

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