

The Lending Library Project: Lessons Learned





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.

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



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 to Lending Libraries

What are Lending Libraries?

Lending libraries are programs that allow the borrowing of non-traditional library items including sports and fitness equipment, gardening supplies, household tools, art supplies, and other items as determined by the individual program.

Lending libraries can help address socioeconomic inequities in accessing health and wellness programs, organized sports, hobby groups, and outdoor recreation. Many lending libraries are designed to target the specific needs of a community or an underserved population by providing low-barrier access to equipment that may otherwise be cost prohibitive.



ONTARIO

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Examples of Lending Libraries

Lending libraries are a growing phenomenon across North America. In this section we highlight some interesting examples of lending libraries to provide inspiration and guidance!

1 **Pedometer Lending Library** KINGSTON, ON

A physical activity non-profit group, known as Kingston Gets Active (KGA), partnered with the Kingston Public Library to implement a pedometer lending program. The goal of this project was to promote active transportation and physical activity through pedometers without cost to the community. Over the 6-month program, pedometers were stored in local libraries and lent to over 330+ people. The program evaluation found that pedometer usage was

linked to wanting to walk more and setting walking goals. The program was able to demonstrate that pedometer programs have the potential to enhance walking within the community and providing free pedometers may be a low-cost and low risk strategy to increase physical activity ([Ryder, et al., 2008](#)).



2 **Outdoor Recreation Lending Library** ALFRED-PLANTAGEN TOWNSHIP, ON

Alfred-Plantagenet is a Township just outside of Ottawa that is best known for its trail networks and proximity to nature that attracts many cyclists from nearby areas. The library noticed that recreation decreased in winter months due to less ideal cycling conditions and so the library invested in winter outdoor recreation equipment as a part of a new lending program. In the winter, the library offers fat bikes, helmets, sleds, snowshoes and skates. The program also extends into

the summer, when residents can borrow sports equipment like basketballs, different sized tennis rackets, baseball equipment, footballs, volleyballs and bikes. Borrowing is free for all residents of the Township, however, some items require a refundable \$25 deposit ([“Sports Equipment Rental”, n.d.](#)).



3 **Naturalist Lending Library** OUTAOUAIS, QB

In the region of Outaouais, QB, local libraries created the “Biblio Binoculars” program which allows community members to borrow binocular sets and nature guidebooks. This allows people with no naturalist background or education to identify native plants, birds and other wildlife in their local area. The binocular library encourages community members to spend time outdoors all year

round and provides opportunities to connect with nature. The program was created in partnership with the library and Loisirs et Sports Outaouais, as a part of a winter physical activity program that aims to encourage physical activity in colder weather.



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Examples of Lending Libraries

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4 **Ease into Leisure Kits** LONDON, ON

The London Public Library and Age-Friendly London collaborated to create the Ease into Leisure kits: activity kits that are specifically designed for people with physical limitations. Kits include ergonomically designed gardening sets, large print games, and arts and crafts activity sets. The activity sets can be used at the library or can be reserved and delivered to those who are interested. All kits are housed at the central

library and are distributed to local libraries for easy pick-up or delivery. The kits have been used by people of all ages who may have accessibility challenges and specifically allow older adults to continue old hobbies or start new ones ([Wallace, 2019](#)).



5 **Outdoor Gear Library** OTTAWA, ON

The Ottawa Outdoor Gear Library is a community initiative passionate about health equality, outdoor leisure time, and safe access to a clean environment. Launched in 2021, they have grown to over 800 members and counting. The Gear Library hopes to overcome barriers experienced by low-income, marginalized communities when accessing nature-based experiences and recreation, while also promoting the mental and physical benefits of the outdoors. Thus, they have sports equipment available and provide a list of desired items for donation that have been identified as needed by the community. Gear drives are held to promote donations and individuals can also donate items in person ([“Ottawa Outdoor Gear Library \(OOG\)”](#), n.d.).



Overview: The Lending Library Project

Objective

The objective of the Lending Library Project is to:

- 1 Support flexible and autonomous social and physical activities in seniors
- 2 To invest in the capacity of WoodGreen's Senior Active Living Centres and their ability to serve the diverse needs of their clientele

Project Overview

In response to the pandemic, 8 80 Cities and WoodGreen's Senior Active Living Centres began the Lending Library Project with financial support from the New Horizons for Seniors federal grant initiative.

The Lending Library Project sought to create autonomous and flexible recreation and fitness opportunities for WoodGreen's senior clientele who were high-risk, hesitant to return to in-person programming and those searching for the ability to stay active on their own terms.

With financial support from the New Horizons for Seniors grant, the Lending Library Project acquired the following materials:

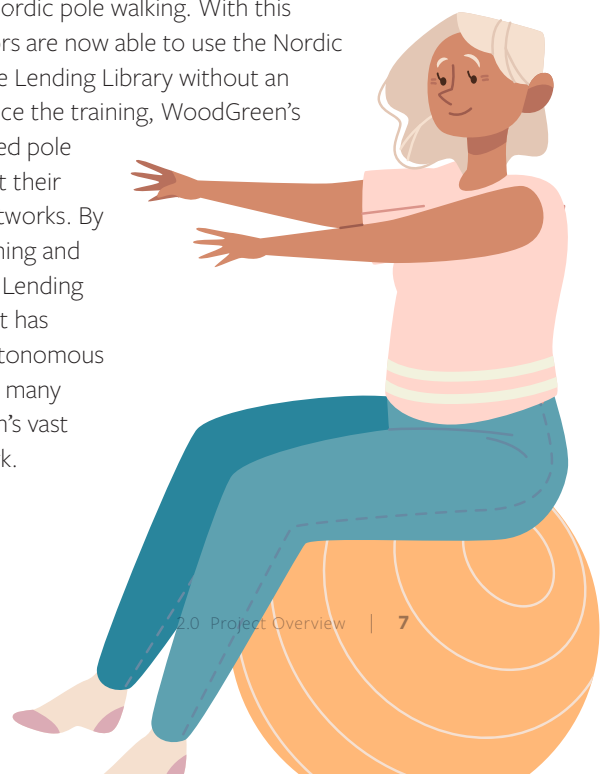
- Nordic Poles and accessories
- Exercise Balls
- Resistance Bands
- Dumbbells (2lb, 3lb, 5lb)
- Badminton Rackets, Birdies & Nets

... and workshops:

- Urban Poling Canada's Activator Training Program
- Balls & Bands Fall Prevention Workshop with Norine Saldanha, Certified Senior Fitness Specialist.

In addition to the physical materials, WoodGreen's clientele were invited to workshops that demonstrated the use of the Lending Library's materials with a Certified Senior Fitness Specialist.

In partnership with Urban Poling Canada, seniors enrolled in the Activator Training Program to learn the best practices of Nordic pole walking. With this training, seniors are now able to use the Nordic poles from the Lending Library without an instructor. Since the training, WoodGreen's seniors have led pole walks amongst their own social networks. By providing training and materials, the Lending Library Project has invested in autonomous recreation for many in WoodGreen's vast senior network.



Findings & Recommendations

The following section includes findings and recommendations from the Lending Library Project and is meant to inform future projects that are geared towards making seniors recreation more accessible, mobile and autonomous.

1 Invest in user-friendly equipment and training for all abilities



Lending libraries should provide items that can be used by people of different abilities and strength levels. Workshops that introduce and teach good practices of lending library equipment give seniors the confidence and knowledge of how to use materials effectively and encourage equipment usage ([Cress et al, 2006](#)).

TIP: Identifying the existing knowledge and ability levels of the target population before deciding which exercise equipment and programs to include in the lending libraries will promote more active participation, as people will feel like the program is designed with them in mind.

It is helpful to have take-home resources to walk users through exactly how to use the library items. Many of the WoodGreen seniors suggested that the library should provide hard-copy resources like pamphlets or brochures that have information on how to use the item and some sample exercises to remind people how to use them.

What we heard:

“We need hard copies of written material for information purposes and use”

“[My ideal vision for the lending library is to have] items for all different ability levels, like how we learned seated exercises with the balls and bands”

“I like that there are different bands for what you’re doing, the different colours are different difficulties”

“I would like to see something to take home (an exercise booklet) things to do that you can do at home, added to the Lending Library”

2

Embed social opportunities in lending libraries



By stocking the library with dumbbells, resistance bands and more, the Lending Library Project sought to connect seniors experiencing isolation as a result of the pandemic with opportunities for physical activity, social connection and mental health improvements. The Lending Library embraced a holistic perspective health by focusing on creating opportunities for emotional and mental health that are tailored to the individual.

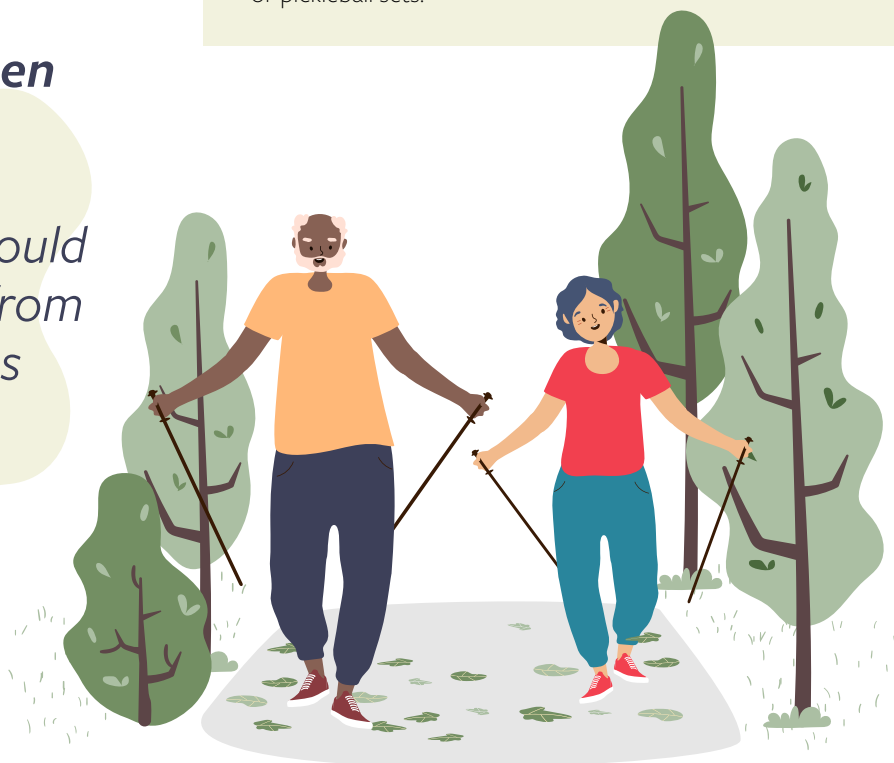
For individuals who are self-isolating or house bound, WoodGreen's Senior Active Living Coordinators would connect with them to offer a personal delivery of materials from the Lending Library. The ability to use the library's materials on their own schedule allowed many seniors to connect with each other outside of WoodGreen's regular scheduled activity times.

Many seniors who used the Lending Library reported that their favorite part of the program was being involved in Nordic pole walks or joining the weekly Ball and Band workshops; many even requested for there to be more in-person and online workshops.

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TIP: Lending Libraries should provide opportunities for users to use the equipment together in classes, social groups, and/or events. Lending Libraries should also consider providing multi-player games or activities for people to borrow and use together like badminton sets, lawn bowling, nature exploration kits or pickleball sets.

55% of WoodGreen senior participants who were surveyed reported that they would continue to borrow from the Lending Library as an opportunity to be more social.



3

Provide translated materials and accommodate for diverse needs



One of the main ways seniors learned about the Lending Library was through direct outreach from their Senior Active Living Coordinator who provided a personalized invite to the Balls & Bands workshop.

The WoodGreen Lending Library was designed to minimize any barriers to access by creating long lending periods of 3 months and having minimal paperwork (1-page) for users to complete. All materials provided were translated to their spoken language with support of a local translation service.

A barrier many seniors experience is simply in knowing the Lending Library's existence.

TIP: Future lending library programs should organize workshops with direct promotional outreach to share information on new services and equipment.

22% of seniors who participated in one of the Lending Library workshops said they had not used the program yet because they were previously unaware of it.



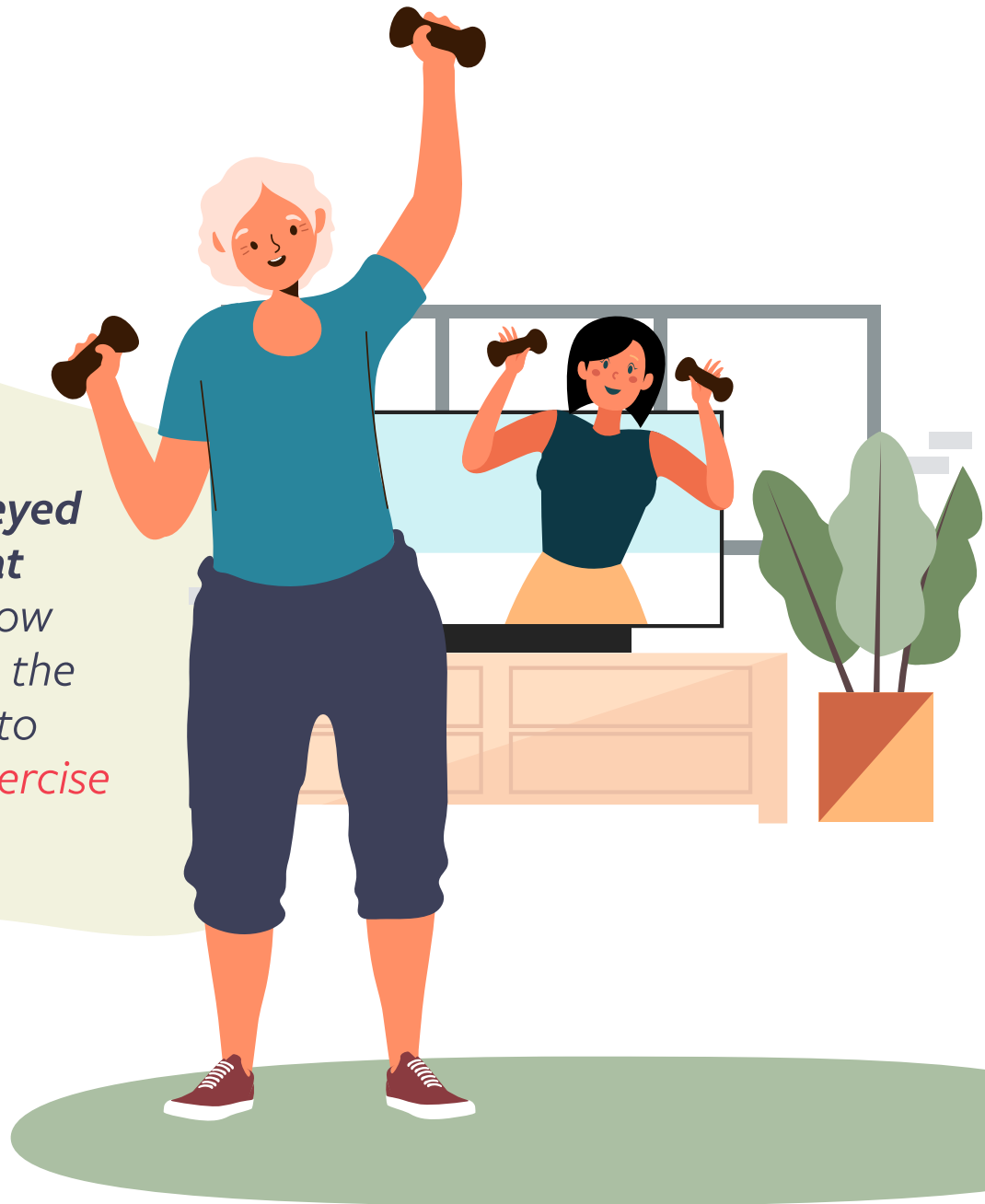
Making Use of Technology

During the pandemic, many people became more comfortable using technology and attending programs virtually. Many of WoodGreen's seniors expressed that they would like to have more opportunities to participate in programs or exercise from home using materials from the Lending Library.

36% of surveyed seniors said that they would borrow equipment from the Lending Library to attend virtual exercise classes at home.

TIP: Future Lending Libraries should acknowledge the benefits of virtual programs by allowing users to participate in workshops online and providing online resources, like exercise videos users can watch on their own time. Technology devices may also be useful additions to lending libraries.

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