

The Plug-in.

Social program co-design

Project highlights for community



Produced for the Healthy Ageing team, City of Adelaide
September 2024



Social program co-design project highlights

Consumer insights report

Qualitative Research

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For: Healthy Ageing team, City of Adelaide + project participants

Related work:

This qualitative research report by The Plug-in, COTA SA, builds on research findings conducted in 2023. A co-design process was undertaken in 2024 to build a new social program for City of Adelaide residents aged 50+. This report outlines the type of social program that will continue to build strong connections, wellbeing and physical activities for older people living in the city.

Insights will assist the Healthy Ageing team to plan new activities and leverage existing programming to meet the wants and needs of older city residents.

Contents

Executive summary	2
Principles for new program.....	3
Summary of recommendations.....	5
Demographics.....	10
Key findings	12
Program design guide infographic	
Method	15
Next steps.....	22

Executive summary

Following quantitative and qualitative engagement with older city residents in 2023, The Plug-in delivered a comprehensive Key Insights report outlining the wants and needs of older people living in Adelaide and North Adelaide.

In seeking to reshape and broaden the services delivered to city residents, the City of Adelaide's Healthy Ageing team engaged The Plug-in again in 2024 to undertake a co-design process that would detail what a new, dynamic social program might look like to meet the diverse needs of older people working and living in the city, providing optimal ways to improve wellbeing through social connections.

Participants of the co-design process shared that **social connections** underpin the activities they seek out. Under the umbrella of social connection, areas to focus on are:

- + **Special Interests:** participation in activities that are of personal interest or facilitated ways of trying out new activities.
- + **Lifelong learning:** keep the mind active and challenge thinking.
- + **Emotional wellbeing:** activities that bring focus to mindset.
- + **Physical activity:** both structured and unstructured types of classes.

Other considerations of significant importance are that activities be low-cost, offered on various days and times, and that transport support be explored for those with mobility issues.

Finding out about activities and events is a major challenge which presents an opportunity to explore the ways that information about council-run activities (community centres) could be consolidated to ease the strain residents experience in keeping up to date.

Participants shared that they would travel outside of the city to attend events, but for activities that are accessed frequently, preferences are for those to be in accessible locations and walkable distances from home.

Opportunities and recommendations presented throughout the report don't necessarily require a significant time or cost investment. By starting small and focussing on the following, the Healthy Ageing team will make a considerable difference to supporting connections within the local community and improving the wellbeing of city residents:

- Establish and coordinate activities that don't require significant administration.
- Focus on improving the flow of information of council-run activities and events

This research was conducted in partnership with the Healthy Ageing team. Key insights throughout this report detail elements that must be considered in the planning of new services and programming for city residents to truly meet the needs of people aged 50 years and over.

Principles for new program



Social connections are the most important aspect of any new program and is a thread that should run through any scheduled activity or event to support older people living in the city.

Participants expressed their motivation to continue an activity is placed equally between the connections made and their enjoyment of the activity itself.



Special interest activities continue to be vital for people to continue their passions with others. There is a strong desire to explore new activities in a facilitated series that provide avenues of discovering 'missed opportunities' of the past – this could be activities such as painting or exploring different sports such as archery.



Lifelong learning is highly sought after. Participants highly recommend U3A, WEA and the HAWKE Centre (UNISA) as sources for pursuing learning. People also seek out keynote speakers through events at libraries, neighbouring council areas and online.

Partnering with other organisations and councils to promote opportunities will help residents discover available and affordable avenues for learning.



Emotional wellbeing activities like mindfulness, spirituality (higher purpose), meditation, variations of yoga adaptable to individual ability, and tai chi are sought after.



Physical activities should range from structured fitness classes to more casual formats such as walking groups. The various court facilities around the Park Lands are a great available asset to utilise and encourage social engagement while being active, such as pétanque and tennis courts.



Low-cost affordable options

The preferred cost of activities was affordable at \$2 - \$10. Note that \$12+ is consistently viewed as expensive for some to participate.

People prefer not to be locked into paying for block of 10 sessions where possible. If needing to lock into a block of 5 or 10 sessions, it is important for a 'come and try' to be offered.



Travel + transport

People are not opposed to traveling outside of the city limits to participate in activities, but the preference is for activities and events to be available close to home. Limited mobility is a prohibitor so if transport can be supported, it will encourage participation.



Days and times

Activities being offered at a variety of times through the day, some evenings and weekends, provide opportunity for more people to participate, especially for people who are working or in a carer role.



Flow of information

How residents find out about activities and events continues to be a challenge. Through engagement, The Messenger continually comes up as a lost source of information that was primary to most people. There are many different channels that people use to keep up to date with current activities but it's often ad hoc and disordered.

Council has an opportunity to review the way information is distributed and consolidate communications about the various programs that run out of Community Centres and Libraries as well as the programs the Healthy Ageing team coordinate.



Advertising and ageism

A finding from 2023 research is important to keep front of mind: The way activities and events are advertised, and use of language impacts attendance of activities and events. Residents don't need activities to be branded with age-related language – it can be a turn-off, unless of course, the activity is for a specific age bracket. If advertising includes comprehensive information, people can make their own mind up if it is suitable to join.



Age groups, cultural diversity, intergenerational opportunities /all ages, and gendered activities

A mix of cohorts for activities is important and participants are keen to participate in activities that encourage cultural diversity. Supporting intergenerational activities is essential, but there are certain activities that should be more age-specific such as tailored fitness classes. Gender specific activities are still important for fostering connections in certain areas, for example, men's breakfasts.

Summary of recommendations



Recommendation one

Prioritise the establishment of highly sought after activities that have lower demand for administrative support.

By starting with highly desired activities, the Healthy Ageing team will be able to establish community connections and rapport. Activities that are easy to administer will allow for time to develop more intricate programs with residents that require more time investment and possibly the support of volunteers.

An example of one such activity is a demand for regular coffee catchups in local areas that can be set for certain days and times that become well-known among residents.



Recommendation two:

Complement existing council-led programs delivered with new activities that increase social connection in the four areas outlined in consideration two.

Complement the existing programs that are run out of Community Centres across the city with a new activity that is not currently on offer, or an activity that is popular and books out quickly.

- Analyse what's already on offer, what is very popular and fills up quickly that may benefit from being upscaled easily and replicated across other sites in the city; or
- Implement a series that provides opportunity for people to try something different each week at a low-cost.



Recommendation three:

Support opportunities for residents to continue learning and challenge thinking.

Continued learning and challenging the mind is of great importance to older residents.

- A way of doing this could be to invest in a series that teaches the art of writing a memoir. This type of activity was interesting to participants as a way of reflecting on their life and learning how to translate and record information. The concept was further verified through the concept testing workshop as an area of particular interest.
- Of equal interest were conversational classes that provide opportunity for people to gather and discuss current affairs, providing opportunity for social connection, an avenue for sharing thoughts, and learning more about political events or more local issues such as housing.



Recommendation four:

Increase access to wellbeing activities

There is significant interest in Tai Chi being run out of the Park Lands or city squares in the morning(s) across the city.

There is the offer of yoga, Pilates and/or meditation available at the North Adelaide Community Centre and the Minor Works building, but it seems like there may be a reduced offerings of these types of activities at the Box Factory.

A desire for consistency of some programming across the Community Centres would be very palatable to city residents – this was mentioned multiple times across workshops. Some influence in this space would be beneficial to residents and improve access to wellbeing activities.



Recommendation five:

Maximise the use of the city's open spaces

Adelaide's open spaces are a major attractor and city residents share how important these spaces are.

For city residents that had strong social connections formed around the Adelaide Aquatic Centre, there is a current opportunity to coordinate and trial activities to support the continuation of group gatherings that are important both socially and physically.

One way to do this would be to establish an activity at the same time as residents used to meet at the Aquatic Centre and create a walking group or regular meet at the pétanque courts in North Adelaide.



Recommendation six:

Offer a diverse range of low-cost activities to increase community participation.

Participants expressed their desire for a diverse range of activities to increase inclusion opportunities of the wider community.

A range of free and low-cost activities available at different times and across a variety of locations will help keep programs close to home and include older residents with busy lives, those continuing to work, volunteer and with other commitments such as Carers.

Incentivising attendance through plus-one promotions will help spread information and increase participation.



Recommendation seven:

Prioritise consolidating council event and activity information and use multiple channels to share information

To help ease the strain of seeking out information from multiple channels and platforms, it is recommended that the Healthy Ageing team focus a portion of resourcing to assist the flow and access of information to older city residents.



Recommendation eight:

Increase community awareness of ways to improve health and wellbeing.

Tailoring communication tools, such as the Grapevine, to include news articles based on topics that are known to improve overall health and wellbeing as we age would be an effective way for the Healthy Ageing team to broaden community knowledge. This could also be used as an opportunity to promote a Council-led activity or event that matches the theme, or to introduce the concept of the 5 Ways to Wellbeing.

[RN1]

“

There was a breakfast down at the South West Community Centre two or three years ago. The Muslim community came along and talked about what they believed and shared information about Ramadan.

We just had coffee and croissants for breakfast. It was so good. It gave an opportunity to meet others, but also to learn from them.”

Female, 70 - 74

Concept testing workshop participant

Community participant demographics

Co-design workshops (2)

17
Participants

76% female

24% male

55-59 **6%**

60-64 **12%**

65-69 **6%**

70-74 **47%**

75-79 **24%**

80-84 **6%**



I am normally able to meet my living costs **52%**

I mostly have more than enough money **18%**

I mostly struggle to make ends meet **18%**

Prefer not to say **12%**

Concept testing workshop (1)

Residents who had engaged in the co-design workshops were invited back to join the concept testing workshop.

9
Participants

78% female

22% male

78% Adelaide

22% North Adelaide

“

I want to feel good that I'm old. Well, I don't always, and often it's not treated like it's a good thing. That's what I find really challenging... irritating.”

Male, 70-74

Concept testing workshop participant

Key findings

Social program design

In workshops, participants shared what they value about current activities, and the types of activities they would be interested in accessing to complement and enhance lifestyle across a week, fortnight or month.

Assumptions should not be made that people are sitting around waiting for a set program to pop up; participants provided insight into their busy lives and the ways in which they seek activities that stimulate continued learning, special interests, wellbeing and physical activity. The common thread that ties these themes together is social interaction – every activity has a social component that keeps people engaged and satisfied.

While the co-design participants were quite well connected within their communities, it is important to note that through the 2023 survey and workshop engagement there are parts of the community that find connecting with others a challenge.

There is great opportunity for the Healthy Ageing team to establish new activities that are accessible and will help foster strong links for older city residents. It also became very clear there is substantial programming that exists across community centres and libraries in the city. Participants shared the challenges of discovering activities and events in the city: this is a significant opportunity to consider how communications can be consolidated around council-led activities and events to increase awareness and participation.

There is a community need to initiate a new social program that is vibrant and inclusive of all older people living in the city. Part of the program should focus on coordinating participation across existing council programming, as well consolidating communications and the flow of information to city residents.

There are four key areas for consideration:

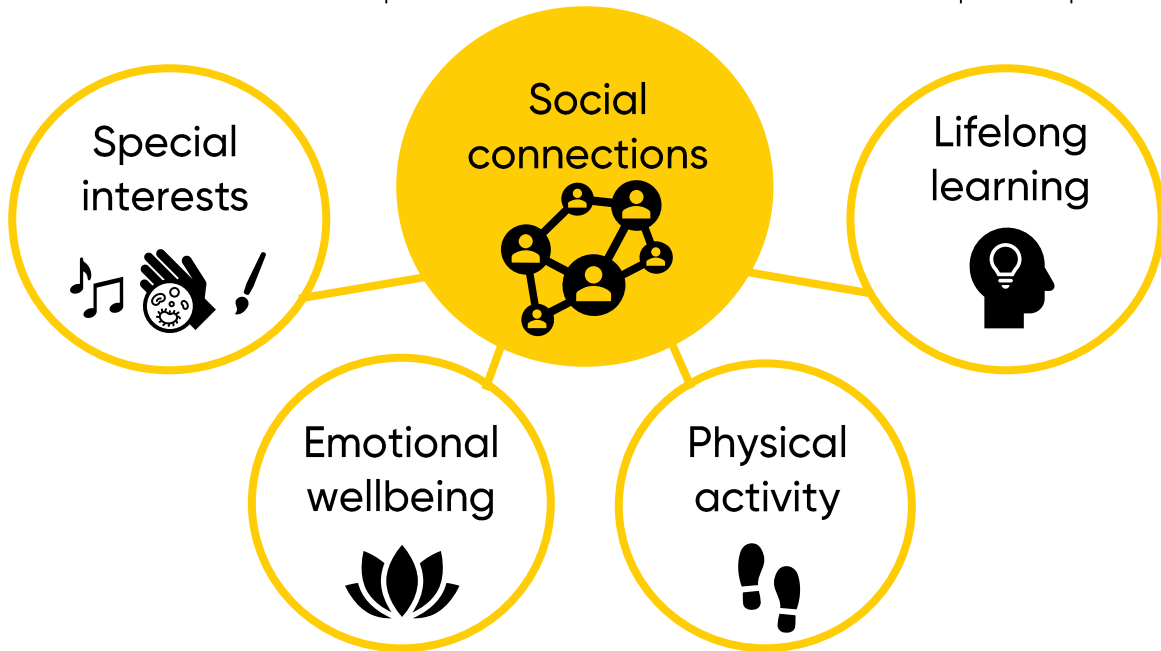
1. Programming (complementing existing programs with new activities and events)
2. Pillars for success
3. Scheduling + access
4. Flow of information

Consideration 1: Programming should comprise of new activities that complement existing programming delivered by Council across the city.

Existing programming

New programming

Consideration 2: Activities should fall within the areas of fostering special interests, emotional wellbeing, continued learning and physical activity. Social connection underpins each area: it is the driver for participation.



Consideration 3: Increase participation through offerings at various times + days (some scheduling in evenings and/or weekends), support with transport options



Activities and events across various days, times and weekends to be inclusive of people who work and in carer-roles.



Supporting residents with limited mobility or access to transport will increase opportunities for social participation.



Low-cost options

\$2 - 10



Consideration 4: Consolidate the flow of information of council activities through key channels to help residents stay informed and maximise



- + Printed communications
- + Community notice boards
- + Publications (Grapevine)
- + Eventbrite
- + Email subscriptions

“Ageing Well Book Club.

This is a monthly event, and it's a book club that has a specific focus on ageing well. Each month we alternate between a book – fiction that deals with ageing well and then the next month, a non-fiction book that deals with ageing well.

Now we're looking at a book called Blue Zones. And these are areas around the world where people over the age of 100 years are more prominent and dominant. Before this, we had a fiction work called Mrs. Winterbottom's Gap Year, which was such a lot of fun.

It's a lovely balance between fiction and non-fiction in an area that is, for me, intrinsically interesting, because I want to know about ageing well. I really look forward to that. It was free. It's sponsored by Unley Council, and it's run through the library there.

And the great thing about coming back to it is there's like-minded people who are interested in ageing well and are prepared to do the necessary reading before the event itself, so it is quite informative...”

Male, 70-74

Concept testing workshop participant



Method

To help shape a new program for older people living in the city, a three staged engagement process was executed:

- + CoA Internal scoping session
- + Co-design workshops with community
- + Concept testing workshop with participants who engaged in the co-design workshops.

CoA Internal Scoping Session, June 2024

The Plug-in facilitated a session with key members of the Healthy Ageing team to understand the needs, risks and opportunities prior to holding co-design workshops with community members.

The Plug-in revisited key findings from the 2023 research which helped set the scene for the second stage of engagement. We explored known and possible risks and touched on ways the Healthy Ageing team may mitigate these. As a group, we discussed possibilities, opportunities, and what has worked well from previous experiences. Finally, we delved into what is out of scope; this was important for making sure unrealistic expectations were not set when entering the co-design and concept testing stages with community.

Co-design workshops, July 2024

To shape a new program fit for purpose for older city residents, co-design workshops involved four (4) activities to discover and design key elements that are most important for participants. These activities were also created on the basis of rich information and key findings of the survey respondents (100) and workshop participants (25) in 2023 research.



Image: Co-design workshop 2

Activity 1: Experiences we don't want to recreate

In this activity, we aimed to get some less-desirable experiences documented to learn what hasn't worked in the past, and to then focus the remainder of the workshop on problem-solving and solutions.

This activity provided insight into the barriers that older people face that prohibit participation.

Activity 2: Speedy solutions... "Your neighbour was speaking to you and said..."

This activity required participants to find some quick solutions to a set of questions. This required participants to consider known barriers that people face when trying to join social activities. The barriers for this activity were based on insights shared in 2023 by survey respondents and workshop participants.

The solutions gave insight to how participants organise themselves or their friends to be connected into different activities whether they be social, or community based, or more structured fitness activities.

Activity 3: A day in the life...

We wanted to understand participants favourite day of the week to understand what makes this day so enjoyable, their feelings throughout the day, what attracted them to the activity and how they became connected with it.

The insights detailed the individual drivers to engage in the activity, emotional response, and the reasons they continue to engage in the activity.



Image: Co-design workshop 1

Activity 4: What should a new program look like?

The final activity provided participants with hard copy fliers and schedules of existing programs that run in the city and neighbouring council areas. Participants had approximately 15 minutes to review material, highlight information and record notes on the flyers.

This was a powerful exercise as it provided tangible information for participants to consider, giving us insight to what activities are desirable, what information is needed to make decisions about activities and events, cost impacts, and location/venue appropriateness. This exercise helped clarify some of the earlier workshop discussions.

Concept testing workshop, August 2024

The Plug-in analysed the rich data provided by participants in the co-design workshops and began shaping the fundamentals of a new social program. The concept testing workshop enabled us to present the concept, invite feedback and work through exercises to further clarify some areas we needed further participant input.

All attendees of the co-design workshops were invited back to participate. Of our target of 10 people for this workshop, we were pleased to have nine (9) participants able to re-engage in the process.



Image: Concept testing workshop

To set the context for participants, The Plug-in explained the process so far. We introduced key considerations the Healthy Ageing team had shared in the scoping workshop (1), the key findings of the co-design workshops (2), and the aim of the concept testing workshop (1) being to ensure that the newly designed social program resonated and if there were any areas that hadn't been interpreted quite right.

Activity 1: Considerations + challenges

Participants reviewed the key considerations for both City of Adelaide's Healthy Ageing team and those of participants from the co-design workshops. The purpose was to facilitate true co-design by allowing potential end-users of the program to let us know what was most important to them, what they didn't agree with, and highlight any additional considerations that may have been missed.

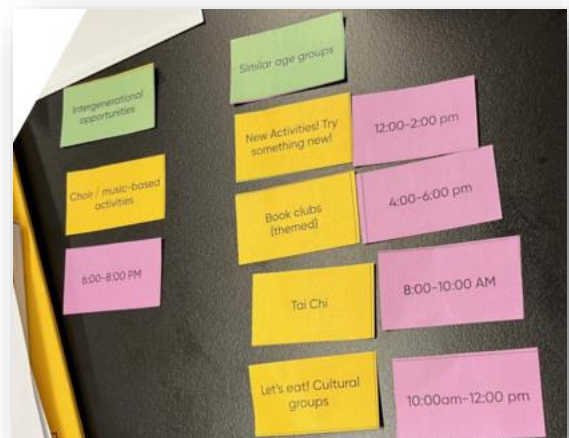
We then segued into a conversation about flow and sources of information to further probe about preferred channels, good information sources and the challenges faced.

Activity 2: Types of activities

The Plug-in presented a model of activities based on findings from the co-design workshops. This provided a strong and productive discussion. Importantly, the discussion led to a change in the model which is now much more powerful and places a due amount of emphasis on social connection being the overarching theme that community seek out when engaging in activities.

Participants each received an envelope with cards:

- + Yellow cards listed activities that had been recurrently popular in discussions (and 2023 research)
- + Green cards prioritised whether the activity should be intergenerational, gender specific, or similar age groups
- + Purple cards allocated 2hr timeslots across a day ranging from 6am to 8pm



Participants were asked to select the activities they would most like to join (or suggest their own) and organise them underneath the green cards as headers. Some participants utilised the purple cards to nominate preferred timeslots, however this was more of a group conversation to understand most desired times of day to engage in activities.

Activity 3: Location, length of time, frequency

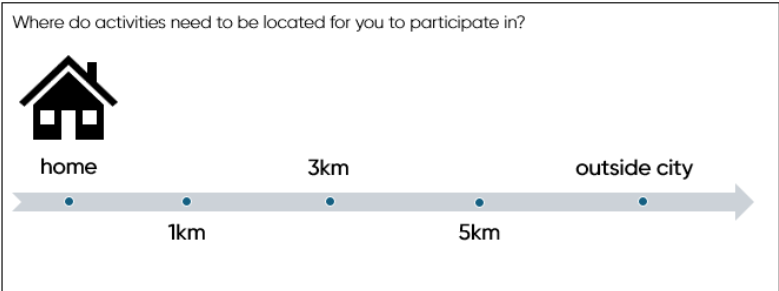
Participants were provided a worksheet to complete that outlined preferred distance to home, the frequency they might engage with an activity, ideal length of time, days of week, and how frequently they may re-engage with an activity.

These insights are important to understanding the access, frequency, and how much time availability people may have for introducing new activities.

Activity 3: Location, length of time, frequency

Objective of this activity is to understand how far participants are willing to travel for activities, the duration activities should be, and the frequency able to commit to.

Where do activities need to be located for you to participate in?



home 3km outside city

1km 5km

How often would you travel outside of the city to attend something?

What type of activity would that be? (Once off? Recurring?)

Activity 4: Program foundation

This activity zoomed out to focus less on individuals and consider the wider population. Information was provided on leading research on overarching fundamental influences that support people to age well. The Healthy Ageing team had already identified they use 'The 5 Ways to Wellbeing' as foundational to the way they work.

The Plug-in gathered additional examples of pedagogies used in different settings to introduce in the workshop. Participants were asked to review the information and work in groups to choose categories they felt were most important to address for city residents. The idea being these categories could provide the foundations for any work produced by the Healthy Ageing team and wider council when designing services or considering impacts to older residents.

This activity was a nice way to introduce concepts that are used in a variety of settings and identify the areas that they felt would benefit them and their community. The findings of this activity were consistent with 'The 5 Ways to Wellbeing' (see section 'Ageing well pedagogies') – the Healthy Ageing team can continue to build on this framework which will support Council to positively impact wellbeing of older city residents.

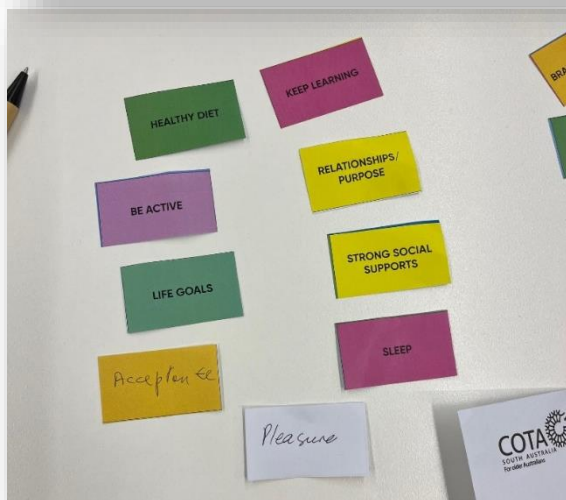
The Plug-in.

Influencers of modern ageing

We considered:

- + 5 Ways to Wellbeing (and added the concept of Nutrition + Sleep, used at Port Adelaide Enfield council)
- + Wiseseed – the five pillars of successful ageing
- + Aspen Valley Hospital – the five pillars of healthy aging
- + WHO – Decade of healthy ageing

This activity provided a nice way to close out the engagement. Participants worked together in three (3) groups and discussed what they believed is most important to help city residents maximise opportunities for improving wellbeing.



Project-itis.

“

I think we might want to be mindful of something in community development called Project-itis.

When a project is funded for a particular period, and it gets up and going... and then, BOOM, the funding runs out. Then there's nothing, and there's no Plan B put in place. That's very, very destructive, because people wonder how sincere Council is, in this case, in actually putting on these programs.

I was going to a Qigong class that I think was funded by the council at the Box Factory - it's a form of Tai Chi.

It had a mixture of people from different backgrounds, different age groups, and that's now stopped. I don't think there's going to be another. So, I'm left wondering how sincere, really, the council is in *actually* providing these facilities if they get chopped off when the 'dough' runs out?”

Male, 70-74

Concept testing workshop participant

Next steps

There are clear opportunities to make an impact to the lives of older people living in the city. These opportunities don't necessarily require a significant time or cost investment: a dedicated resource to establish and coordinate activities and focus on improving the flow of information to residents would make a considerable difference to supporting connections within the local community and improving the wellbeing of city residents.

Additional to the objectives of this project, through the process of exploration in the co-design workshops, we discovered the attributes of staff/employees was a critical element to successful engagement. Participants noted that programs need staff that are skilled, empathetic and have an understanding of the unique needs of older people.

Being educated on the prevalence and impact of ageism is critical to ensuring planned activities (and those who facilitate them) are contributing to positive ageing experiences for community and valued citizens of the City of Adelaide.

As the quote about 'project-itis' speaks to the importance of reputation and genuine intention to establish a social program that will receive long-term commitment by Council. There is appreciation for the work being done to understand the needs of community, however some residents are apprehensive of the ongoing commitment to the running of a program. Success may look like starting small within existing means, building over time, and scaling up in a way that is sustainable. Enough is known to be able to begin filling programming gaps to begin making meaningful change.

While the establishment of a new social program is dependent on funding, the Healthy Ageing team could work toward trialling a new activity through grant funding opportunities such as the Ageing Well Grants available through the Office for Ageing Well.

The Plug-in would love the opportunity to work together in the future, whether by supporting the Healthy Ageing team in grant funding applications, aiding with evaluations and/or role design, or undertaking further work to shed light on the needs and wants of older people living in the city.

We have thoroughly enjoyed partnering with the City of Adelaide again to explore lived experiences of city residents, understand better their needs, and shape a new social program alongside city residents.

Future research direction

Trialling program concepts with a small group of residents will be a positive way to continue the use of co-design principles in development of programs and assist the Healthy Ageing team understand what does or doesn't work in the delivery of new social activities.

This approach will help ensure future programs meet the needs of residents.



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