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SENIORS EMPOWERMENT WORKSHOPS

GLEN ERIN SENIORS' PROJECT

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Seniors' Empowerment Workshops PROGRAMME REPORT

ICNA Relief Canada (IRC), a Canada-based social welfare organisation, frequently arranges programmes for the welfare of community seniors. In November 2014, IRC initiated a new project, “Glen Erin Seniors’ Programme”, funded by the Ontario Senior Secretariat that focusses on: (i) Promoting volunteerism among seniors through organised activities, (ii) Engaging seniors in mentoring the community youth, (iii) Raising awareness on issues vital for seniors, (iv) Promoting community engagement through seniors’ forum, and (v) Launching an on-line newsletter by seniors for seniors.

Fifteen sessions and workshops of this project have so far been conducted with active cooperation from NGOs like Comfort Keepers, Elder Abuse Ontario, PEACE Foundation, Heart and Stroke Foundation, Alzheimer Society of Peel, and dedicated volunteers. Each session is normally spread over three hours with 20-25 participants in each. It’s nice to see enthusiastic response from seniors, in particular, women who have actively participated and shared their stories, expertise and skills in different fields. Encouraged by the

response, IRC plans to continue the programme in future.

Ontario Seniors Secretariat (OSS) advice on useful issues, especially in regard to getting out of loneliness and depression, proved to be a subject of immense interest among the participants.

Amongst NGOs, Comfort Keepers’ representative discussed the topic “Nourish Seniors” as part of health & fitness. **Heart & Stroke Foundation** emphasised significance of diet and fitness to prevent heart and other related diseases. **PEACE Foundation** assisted with computer classes. **Elder Abuse** spokesperson talked about aging well, and abuses frauds and scams that seniors often face, while **The Alzheimer Society’s** spokesperson discussed about brain health and possible remedies.



A seniors' session on Yoga exercises in progress



Ms Nicole Parent of “Comfort Keepers” speaking on the topic “Nourish Seniors”.

Surveys conducted at the end of each session found the participants very interested in the programme and asked for its continuation in future as well. The session ended with some light exercises and deep breathing, followed by light refreshment.

The Intergenerational sessions to facilitate interaction between the seniors and younger generation was yet another popular topic. The seniors felt delighted to share their life experiences, favourite sports, and their skills such as knitting, quilting, housekeeping, cooking, cake decoration, and child raising. The younger participants applauded the seniors’ skills and experience and in turn responded by describing their own skills, such as computer literacy, social networking, and home appliances upkeep.



A women's intergenerational session in progress



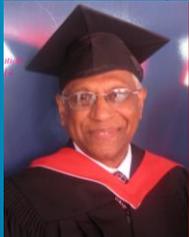
A young girl speaking about issues faced at the educational institutions at the women's intergenerational session under Glen Erin Seniors' Programme



Participants of a seniors' workshop attentively listening to a presentation on "Healthy Living"

Basic Computer Skills was the main topic of another seniors' session. The modern world having become a global village, one cannot remain ignorant of events occurring around. Learning computer skills cannot be overemphasised for the Canadian immigrants, living far away from their countries of origin. The use of Internet, Skype and Email is no longer a luxury. It is rather a necessity irrespective of age and individual circumstances.

"Never Say Quit" is motto of



Sam Ashroff is a retired business manager with engineering background who strongly believes in physical & mental health. In 2014 he took Honour's degree in Humanities from York University and now works at Sheridan College.

Sam Asroff, an active participant of IRC Inter-generational sessions. He is a role model for all age groups. Sam holds the view that learning is a lifelong vocation. After retiring from an illustrious career of engineering and management background, he refused to give up and joined York University for further education. He now teaches Gerontology at Sheridan College. He is involved in many activities for seniors, including sitting on the board of directors of Ontario Senior Citizens Coalition Ontario (OSCCO). Sam religiously follows a regimen of working out at gym and engaging in Yoga & Tai-chi. Sam suggests all 60 plus seniors to benefit from York University's free

education programme by visiting: <http://sfs.yorku.ca/fees/waivers>.

Sancho Panza (by Dr M. Abid)



Muhammad Abid, PhD, PEng is a civil engineer with specialisation in earthquake engineering. He also takes interest in sports, history, religion, travelling, literature, community work, music and general knowledge. The following story is based on his experience.

Many of those who finished high school in 1960s are familiar with the humorous character of Sancho Panza, from Spanish author Don Miguel de Cerantes Saavedra's novel "Don Quixote" written in 1605. In one of the episodes, Sancho Panza and his son are riding a donkey to drop the son at school. On their way they meet some people who say, "Wow! The two are putting too much weight on the poor animal. They are very cruel!" Hearing this, Sancho gets off the animal and starts walking alongside. Soon they come across another group of passersby who say, "How disrespectful of the son. He is young and strong and riding the donkey while his poor old man is walking on foot." The son feels embarrassed, gets off and insists his father to take his place and ride the donkey. When they go further, they meet some more people who exclaim, "The father has no love for his son. He is riding the animal and forcing his little son to walk on foot." Sancho feels shame, gets down and both father and son start walking.

As they go further, they arrive at a river bridge where they again meet some people who speak out, "How foolish! They have a strong animal to ride and yet they are walking with the animal following aimlessly.

Sancho and his son, finally fed up of the comments, push the donkey into the river and take a sigh of relief.

Something similar has happened to me. I, because of arthritis, use a chair when offering salaah (namaz). While praying in masjid, I used to keep my chair's rear legs in line with the relevant row. One day the Imam admonished me saying that if I stand up during "Qiyam", I should keep front legs of my chair in line with the row. He said that in the present position I was "out of line" and therefore my namaz unlikely to be acceptable to Allah SWT. He said that only those who cannot stand during Qiyam, may keep hind legs of their chairs in line with the row.

A few days later, when I happened to pray in another masjid and did as above, some anxious looking people rushed to me after prayers and said that I was wasting one space as no one could pray behind me. The argument looked convincing but it left me thinking. It meant that when I go from one masjid to another, I should keep changing my chair's position. I am confused and wonder why can't we follow one principle.

I also think that no matter what one does, some people will always make comments -- positive or negative - and one cannot please everyone. It's therefore up to oneself to make well informed and balanced decisions, and stand by them in any circumstances.