

FINAL
REPORT

CARING COMMUNITY CHALLENGE

Land Acknowledgement

The statement was created by Jane's Walk and the Neighbourhood Arts Network and is used with permission.

"We would like to honour the land that we are on, which has been the site of human activity since time immemorial. It is the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and most recently, The Mississaugas of the Credit River First Nations.

Ontario is covered by 46 treaties and other agreements and is home to many Indigenous Nations from across Turtle Island, including the Inuit and the Métis peoples.

These treaties and other agreements, including the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant are agreements to peaceably share and care for the land and its resources.

Other Indigenous Nations, Europeans, and newcomers were invited into this covenant in the spirit of respect, peace, and friendship.

We are mindful of broken covenants and we strive to make this right, with the land and with each other.

We are all Treaty people. Many of us have come here as settlers, immigrants, newcomers in this generation or generations past.

We recognize the many Nations of Indigenous People, who presently live on this land, those who have spent time here, and the ancestors on this land known as Turtle Island. We recognize and support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action."

BALSAM FOUNDATION

 **Unison**
Health & Community Services

Ontario Trillium Foundation  Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario

An agency of the Government of Ontario.
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario.

UpSocial Innovation and Scaling

 **MakeWay**

The Caring Community Challenge is a collaboration between the Balsam Foundation, Unison Health and Community Services, Ontario Trillium Foundation, UpSocial and UpSocial Canada - a MakeWay Foundation program. To connect with the facilitators, contact UpSocial Canada's Geraldine Cahill at gcahill@upsocial.ca

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Introduction

The Caring Community Challenge set out to find answers to a big question: how can we look after each other better in the places where we are? Many factors shaped this question, including growing rates of social isolation in Toronto, the increasing density of the city, an aging population, and reports of worsening mental health. We were drawn in and informed by the Toronto Foundation's Social Capital Report 2018, which found tens of thousands of people living in the city that felt they didn't have someone they could ask for help or lean on in bad times.

Recognizing the need to better understand what was happening at the neighbourhood level, we began our Challenge with a request to community service agencies to become co-hosts in the project. We were aiming for local impact first and for scale later. Just as we launched our search for a community agency partner, COVID-19 hit Toronto. From that point on, our host team was forced to see everything through a pandemic lens - from the call to participate, to the methodology, the coordination of pilots, and the outcomes.

Despite the hurdles presented by COVID-19, UpSocial Canada found a creative and energetic partner in Unison Health and Community Services and their Strong and Beautiful Bathurst Finch program. Our Strong and Beautiful Bathurst Finch was a community development program funded by United Way Greater Toronto, which aimed to improve the neighbourhood condition through nurturing local leadership. With Unison on board, all partners worked together for two years to gather a cohort of stakeholders, search for innovations that addressed social isolation, test the programs selected by the cohort, assess the outcomes and aim for scale beyond the local region.

This report covers how we traveled the pathway to outcomes, what we learned and what we hope to see develop beyond our collaboration period. UpSocial Canada is grateful for the support, guidance and creative energy offered by Balsam Foundation every step of the way.

Timeline and artifacts

March - May 2020

i. RTP Process
Request to Participate

August - November 2020

0. Convening stakeholders and prioritizing topics
Context and Issue Paper

November 2020

1. Challenge Definition
Guiding Research Question
Workshop Report

December - April 2021

2. Global research of proven innovations
94 researched innovations, 14 case studies

June 2021

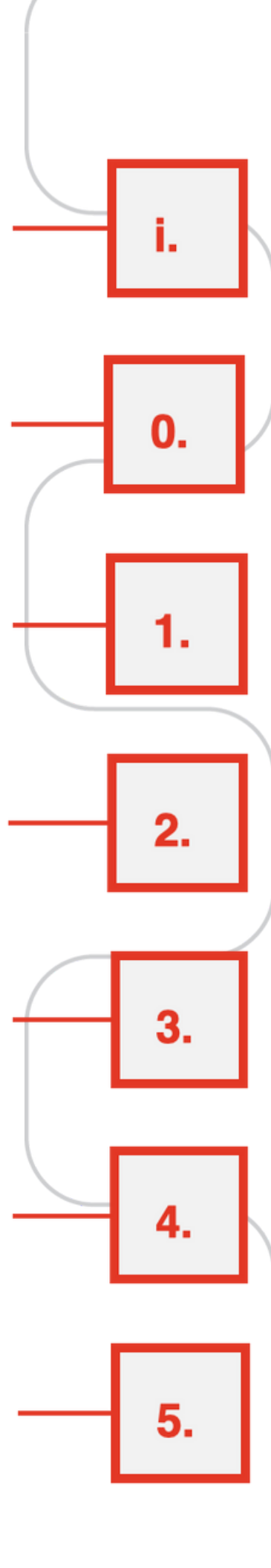
3. Selection of innovations best placed to pilot
Workshop 2 report

July - November 2021

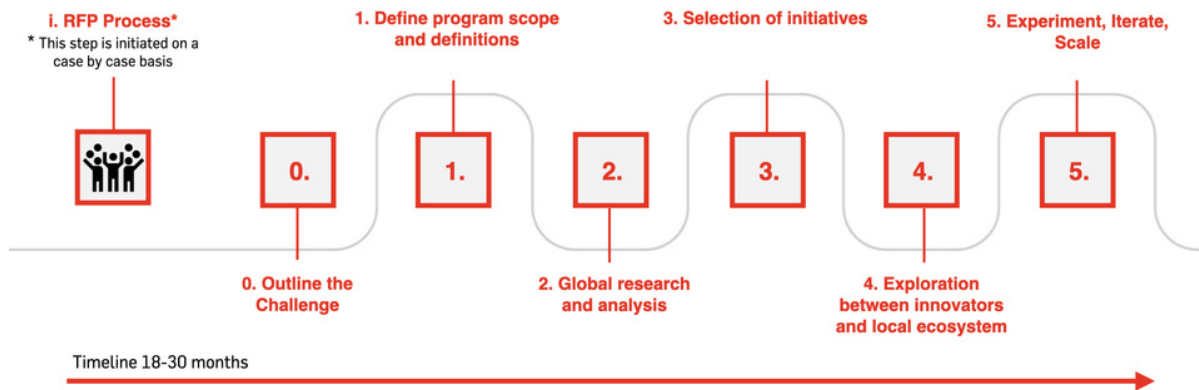
4. Design adaptation and scaling strategy

November - June 2022 & ongoing

5. Implement pilots, evaluate, learn, grow
Pilot evaluation, Final Report, Video,
OTF-supported Social R&D Learning Series



The methodology



The UpSocial Challenge methodology has been applied to a range of social impact areas across Europe and into South America since 2010. Prior to the Caring Community Challenge, UpSocial facilitated a project with The McConnell Foundation in Montreal, focusing on activating post-secondary sector assets in the direction of positive social change. In 2019, UpSocial Canada was launched, seeking to build out the practice here. Balsam Foundation was UpSocial Canada's first Challenge partner.

The phased approach developed by UpSocial (illustrated above) helps guide collaboration among cohort participants without being overly expert-driven and design-centric. Where many social innovation processes focus on prototyping a product or process built from scratch, the appeal of the UpSocial process is its focus on meeting the demand for innovation with programs or initiatives that have proven themselves in other jurisdictions. The emphasis then falls on creative adaptation of the found innovations and strong partnership development.

After the request to participate (Phase i) closed, we partnered with Unison Health and Community Services, Strong and Beautiful Bathurst Finch program in North York. As co-host they provided a geographic focus for the work and the critical social capital to invite residents and local organizations to the Challenge table.

For its part, UpSocial Canada invited subject matter experts to join the local cohort to inform the development of the Guiding Research Question and to help provide external context for decision making.

Our first Challenge Cohort workshop was in November 2020. During this gathering, the cohort developed an asset map of the neighbourhood's resources and relationships and shaped the development of the Guiding Research Question. This workshop is indicated as Phase 1 above. For the Caring Community Challenge Cohort, in order to look after each other better in the Bathurst and Finch community, they wanted to answer the following focused question:

To meet the need for greater inclusion in the Bathurst and Finch neighbourhood, how might we better use shared and public spaces to foster belonging across intercultural and intergenerational lines?

Answers to that question were then researched during Phase 2. The research sought innovations that have proven themselves over time, and that could be adapted into the local community. The global scope of the research was made possible through partnership with several social impact intermediary organizations with whom UpSocial (Global) has developed relationships.

From a pool of 94 found innovations, UpSocial and UpSocial Canada reduced the list to a Top 24 and presented them to the cohort in April, 2021. The cohort helped reduce that number to a Top 14, from which UpSocial and UpSocial Canada developed short case studies.

In June 2021, the cohort came together again to select 2-3 innovations from the Top 14 that would move into the pilot phase - Phases 4 & 5. At this workshop, Post Bellum, Link Generations and Incredible Edible were chosen.

A note on Incredible Edible

This UK-born program is led by local citizen-based groups who physically transform their towns turning unused public spaces into edible landscapes called "propaganda gardens." These gardens invite any passer-by to help themselves to a fruit or vegetable free of charge or to simply enjoy their beauty and accessibility, thus lowering barriers for people being able to access the food they need.

Although the Caring Community Cohort was excited by the idea of adapting Incredible Edible to the Bathurst and Finch community, the program relies heavily on a motivated and physically able volunteer base. There is little financial investment needed, but a considerable amount of time required in finding the plots, tending the gardens, spreading the word, hosting events. This felt less tenable during the COVID-hampered Challenge timeframe. Also, Phase 4 started at the end of growing season, putting up a further barrier to program testing. Certainly the cohort and local residents may pick this program up at a later stage, but we didn't pursue it further during the Challenge period.

Changing expectations demand new resources

Before exploring the preparation and execution of the pilots, we feel it's helpful to share a unique challenge to engagement with community agencies subject to funding elements beyond their control.

Bringing on Unison's Strong and Beautiful Bathurst Finch engagement lead was absolutely critical to the successful hosting of the Challenge and testing of the programs. UpSocial Canada brought the Challenge question and methodology, the global partner and research capabilities. Yet, without local networks and relationships, the Challenge would have died.

While UpSocial and UpSocial Canada conducted the global search for innovations, Unison was told that their community engagement work, which had received many years of financial support from United Way, would be coming to an end. As a host partner, this was a serious complication. Fortunately, the deadline for the program's closure was extended long enough for their Community Engagement Lead, Mandana Attar Zadeh to support Phase 4 - pilot development. However, the funding decision was extremely disappointing for Mandana personally, and for the organization, preventing them from truly co-leading this project through to its end.

As Mandana prepared to finish her work, UpSocial Canada was able to reallocate some funding towards the hiring of volunteer coordinator, Mila Robinson. This position helped provide the hands-on training for Post Bellum youth participants, matching seniors to youth for the pilot, and general support for the youth engaged in the story development process. The coordinator also picked up management of the second pilot of Link Generations when UpSocial Canada Director, Geraldine Cahill traveled to Australia in January 2022.

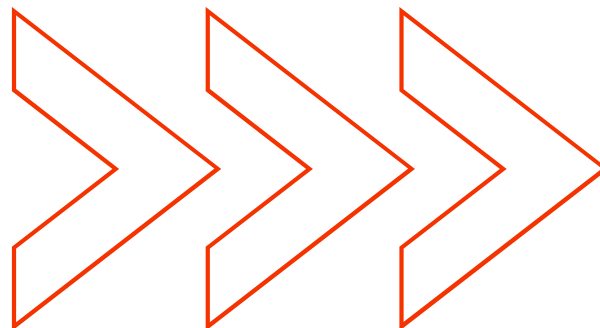
The funding reallocation was made possible by COVID. UpSocial Founder, Miquel de Paladella had originally planned to be in Canada for the workshops, and all workshops were planned to be in person. However, as we were forced to operate in an online environment throughout, funding was freed up for the coordinator role. When Mila's contract needed extending, we received more funds from Big Brothers Big Sisters Halton Hamilton, who had learned of the project and wanted to be involved.

Research Insight

"UpSocial's skill at scanning successful initiatives elsewhere was a hugely valuable exercise for this project but also for thinking about other initiatives that we would consider supporting or implementing." - Balsam Foundation



Three of the researched innovations.
From top: GAP Boa Mistura. Spain
Cycling Without Age. Denmark
Detroit Soup. USA



The pilots

The Caring Community Challenge Cohort selected three innovative programs they believed would combat social isolation in the community of Bathurst and Finch. We prepared two for pilot.



Maryland, USA

The mission of the Link Generations program is to engage isolated older adults in interactive conversations with youth to learn about different perspectives and overlapping experiences. This program provides meaningful social opportunities to participants with intergenerational conversations that benefit all age groups. Adult participants feel a sense of purpose by helping young people learn life lessons and at the same time mitigate feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Young participants practice social skills, get to appreciate history from someone who lived through it, learn about resilience, and improve their attitudes toward aging. www.linkgenerations.org



Czech Republic

Post Bellum is a nonprofit organization documenting the memories of witnesses of the most critical historical events of the 20th century. They post and broadcast these stories to the broader public to create an understanding of the past and foster a shared public life.

“Stories of Our Neighbours” is a team-based and youth-championed, six month long program embedded into history classes guiding teenagers to explore key historical events and lessons witnesses have learned from history. Under the supervision of their teachers and with the support of a Post Bellum coordinator, they interview a witness, record their life story, digitize photographs, scour archives, and ultimately create a radio, television, or written news report. The results of their efforts are presented to the public and an expert jury.

www.postbellum.cz

Prepping for pilot

Phase 4 is about preparing the conditions for testing programs in the local community. Meetings were held with Dr. Lori Marks, program founder of Link Generations, who was very keen to see her program tested in a Canadian city; and with the international partnership lead of Post Bellum, Marie Janoušková. Agreements were reached on how we could test the programs, providing appropriate support and/or leadership when required.

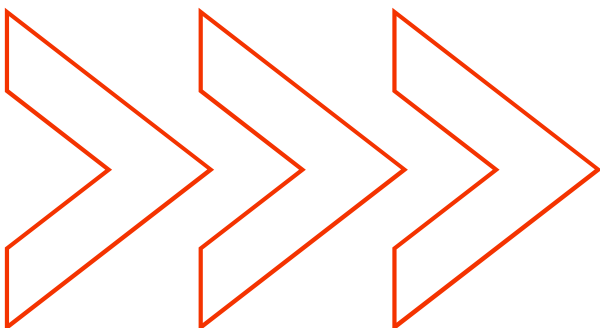
The host team discussed how many people would be needed to test the programs adequately to achieve outcomes. We also began shortlisting and reaching out to organizations in the neighbourhood who could provide participants for the pilots. Here we relied on the assets identified by the cohort and the relationships developed by Unison's Our Strong and Beautiful Bathurst Finch program. We needed youth organizations and/or school groups and we needed seniors agencies.

Mandana Attar Zadeh had fostered relationships with dozens of organizations and resident leaders over the course of her 15 years in community engagement. In extending an invitation to learn more about the pilots, UpSocial Canada and Unison held conversations with several of these agencies.

When it came time to execute the pilots we had confirmed the participation of:

- Circle of Care: inviting seniors for both pilots
- North York Community House: inviting youth from two programs for the Link Generations pilot
- North York Seniors Centre: invited seniors for Post Bellum
- Volunteer Toronto: a public posting on Volunteer Toronto's website drew in many youth for the Post Bellum pilot. It was aimed at youth needing volunteer hours for their school's Community Contribution requirements.
- Big Brothers Big Sisters Halton Hamilton: although an outlier, we were unable to register enough youth from the local community to participate in the Post Bellum pilot. BBBS Halton Hamilton were very keen to participate and provided additional financial support as well.
- John Polanyi Collegiate Institute: although late to the pilot, a year 12 class joined the Post Bellum pilot, ensuring the numbers of youth met the numbers of seniors wanting to contribute.

Lessons from Phase 4 & 5 are included below.



We could not have executed the pilots without the commitment of Circle of Care and North York Community House. While we are so grateful to all our pilot partners, these two agencies provided the critical early and ongoing support to move forward.
- UpSocial Canada

Link Generations

Simple steps

5 sessions of approximately 2 hours each
Session 1: youth only
Sessions 2-5: combined seniors and youth
Facilitated by founder, Dr. Lori Marks



Pilot 1

In November 2021, Circle of Care and North York Community House engaged in the first pilot of Link Generations. Program founder, Dr Lori Marks, hosted the two groups of approximately 6 regular seniors and 5-6 youth. The program followed its established method of bringing youth together first to learn some basic principles about aging and communicating with older adults. Lori has found that this first session helps establish some expectations so that youth are more comfortable in the first combined session with the seniors and also mindful of some physical limitations the seniors may experience eg. hearing loss, vision etc.

The North York Community House program most keen to participate when asked, was an after-school program of very young children. Aged between 6-11 years old, they were much younger than Lori's regular cohorts and we asked her if she was comfortable trying it out. With her acceptance, we entered in.

Unfortunately, it was clear from the first session it would be a challenge to host conversations with the children. After many months of online learning, hosting further online conversations with people after school hours, proved too difficult for their attention spans. While Lori taught the children about speaking clearly to seniors and having cameras turned on throughout the sessions, the children would regularly turn off their cameras or walk away from the session completely.

The Circle of Care participants did their best to engage with the children, but unless conversations focused on the children's toys or games, it was very hard to maintain their interest. Feeling somewhat dejected from this first pilot, the host team discussed running a second version, to better assess the feasibility and desirability of the program.



Pilot 2

"I was really excited to learn about life lessons from all these more experienced seniors. It just made me feel less alone. It definitely did."

- Crystal, youth participant Pilot 2

Both Circle of Care and North York Community House returned for Pilot 2. This time an older cohort of youth were invited to participate, all falling within Link Generations established age range - middle to high school age. The five weeks proceeded without a hitch and outcomes are outlined below. In short, the youth participating in Pilot 2 were highly engaged and excited to join the sessions each week, as were the seniors - many of whom attended Pilot 1 as well.

For both pilots, it was useful to have the participation and support of Circle of Care and NYCH staff. Given COVID restrictions, we ran the Zoom version of this program - although traditionally Lori would run it in person. The Zoom-based program is best executed with break out rooms for deeper conversation among seniors and youth. With staff present, they were able to lead breakout room discussions, allowing Lori to float to each room throughout the sessions.

The participation of Circle of Care during these pilots will also prove helpful downstream. The organization has expressed interest in hosting further sessions of Link Generations as part of its regular programming, and UpSocial Canada, Balsam Foundation and Link Generations are engaged with them to discuss its growth potential.

Post Bellum's Our neighbours' stories



Given the Caring Community Challenge was focused on intergenerational connection, we tested “Our Neighbours’ Stories,” rather than the more professional-grade Post Bellum documentary program. Although we wanted to run the pilots with schools, it was very difficult to connect with teachers or administrators to pitch a proposal. UpSocial Canada did connect with a Guidance Counsellor in one local high school and she encouraged us to list the opportunity on Volunteer Toronto stating it was the only way students would apply for Community Contribution hours. An immersive classroom experience felt almost impossible within the pilot timeframe.

Although Post Bellum runs Our Neighbours’ Stories over 6 months in schools, we wanted to gather feedback and outcomes within the lifespan of the Challenge, so we designed a smaller scale pilot without the competition element, and then received guidance from Post Bellum staff to deliver the media training for students to get started.

This training guide is available for future instances of the program should the right partnership be established.

Following the advice of the Guidance Councillor, we extended youth invitations through Volunteer Toronto as well as through local youth organizations, signing up a number of youth from the former. We were unable to secure a commitment from youth agencies despite interest, as it was perceived to be too human resource intensive for their staff to support.

On the seniors side, Circle of Care and the North York Seniors Centre invited clients to participate. Both organizations had been involved in the Caring Community Challenge cohort and they were very keen to try out the program, drawing up long lists of interested seniors.

So, we needed more youth!

UpSocial Canada went outside the neighbourhood and pitched the program to Big Brothers Big Sisters Halton Hamilton (BBBSHH). They had received federal funding to run intergenerational programming and were short on dispersing it.

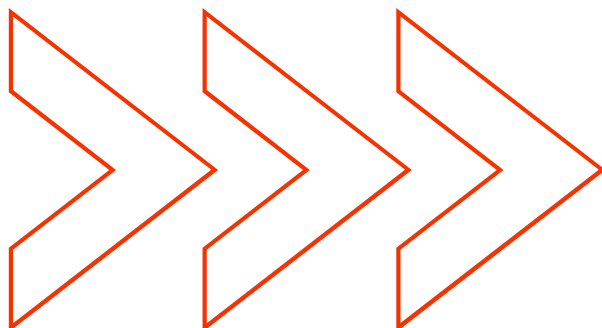
They were very keen to participate. On balance, the host team decided that as long as Bathurst and Finch seniors stories were being told, we could still evaluate the success of the local program. With the matches between seniors and youth starting to fall into place, we started setting up interviews.

Later, with several stories already in post-production, we were contacted by Rahim Essabhai, Business & Cooperative Education Lead at the John Polanyi Collegiate Institute. Rahim teaches a Year 12 class and wanted his students involved in the program. These students were divided into teams of two, much closer to the Post Bellum operating model, and interviews were scheduled. This was a just-in-time collaboration exciting for our host team, as it would enable us to test the model in conditions much closer to its intended design - albeit with a much-tighter timeframe.

Lessons about the partnerships are included below. In pure number terms, we were able to complete 18 stories of seniors living in the Bathurst and Finch community, recorded by youth both in the local neighbourhood and around the GTHA.



When the person I was interviewing talked about the importance of not having regrets in life; her ideas of doing what you believe in really resonated with me and I felt so motivated to live my life in the same way she lived hers.



What surprised me was how many of the little moments the senior still remembers and cherishes. Even after so many experiences and a long life, they still remember and cherish the little things.

Link Generations outcomes

The following outcomes were summarized by Dr Lori Marks using pre and post-program surveys:

Attitudes and knowledge about older adults improved as a result of the program.

Youth ratings of their enjoyment spending time with older adults increased as did their comfort level in being with older adults. Following the program, they were more likely to disagree with the statements that “all older adults are chronically ill”, “older people’s intelligence declines with age”, and “all older people are alike.” These changes in attitude support the approach that connecting youth with older adults improves attitudes towards aging and helps debunk stereotypes of aging.

Older adult attitudes about youth also improved as a result of the program.

In post-program evaluation surveys, older adults stated how much they enjoyed connecting with the young people and how talking with youth made them feel optimistic about the future. One older participant “found it encouraging to interact with young people and learn that they can be wise and serious about their lives.” Another said, “It was inspirational to hear many words of wisdom from the younger generations.” One talked about how the program helped in “understanding the similarities and differences between the age groups.” Another mentioned how much she thought the young people “valued the lessons learned from our experiences in life, and saw that they can enjoy talking with and hanging around older people.” She added, “This can help combat ageism!”

Older and younger participants reported decreased social isolation and loneliness.

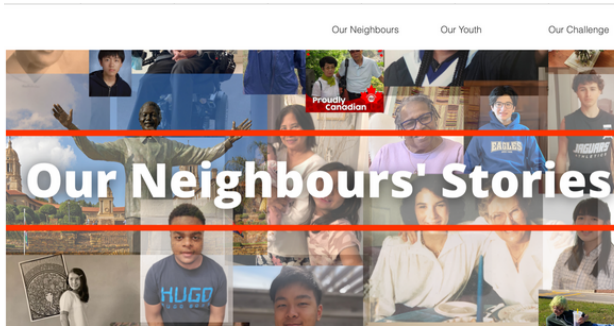
Survey questions answered by all participants indicated this program can decrease social isolation and loneliness. Some of the older participants felt that meeting in person would be better.* They mentioned that having the conversations each week was “rewarding.” Another stated that the program can help people feel less lonely because she “looked forward to it.” Youth participants agreed: one stated, “I had something to look forward to on Mondays, and I hope the [older adults] did too. By sharing our stories, I think we all felt less lonely.”*

(Note: the Link Generations program was originally created and conducted in person, pre-pandemic.

The program created a sense of purpose and belonging.

Participants of all ages expressed satisfaction with the program. They loved the discussion topics and spending four weeks in conversations developing relationships with each other. One older participant stated, “It was just a lovely connection with people.” One of the younger participants said, “I felt I have made greater connections with older adults and youth.” Another youth said, “[making connections] is the most important thing in Link Generations.” One of the older participants said, “It would be great if we could continue with the same group and with more discussion topics!” Youth participants also expressed this sense of belonging, saying, “This program made me feel amazing inside and out. I was looking forward to them every Monday...I am so excited I was a part of their lives.”

Our neighbours' stories outputs



Our Neighbours' Stories is a collection of living memories told by seniors living in North York and recorded by youth in and around Toronto. Each story is unique and its interpretation is centred by the young person producing it. From hours of interviews they have constructed the story that most spoke to them. In listening to the stories, we encourage you to also think about what the life lessons mean to you. Our Neighbours' Stories is a pilot project launched by the Caring Community Challenge. The original program was designed by [Post Bellum](#) in the Czech Republic. Explore our site beyond the stories to learn more.

If Our Neighbours' Stories inspires you to learn more about the life of seniors in your community [get in touch](#) and add to the collection. Every story matters. Every life is precious. Let's keep growing the collection together.

Our Stories

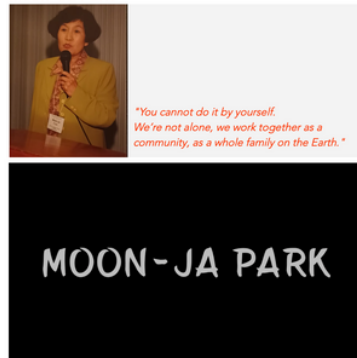
Our Challenge

Your Story

- 17 completed stories
- 18 successful matches made; one story unpublished
- Stories were produced in various mediums: powerpoint, video, podcast, animation;
- Stories published on OurNeighboursStories.ca and hung at the Toronto Public Library, Centennial Branch, Finch Ave, North York
- Select stories will be cross-posted on the Post Bellum website, on a Canadian page currently in development.



Moon-Ja Park



Moon-Ja Park's story is one of perseverance, hard work, and overcoming adversity. Her life is to be admired, filled with accomplishments and faith - all supported by a wonderful family. She was able to completely move her life halfway across the world from Korea to Canada. To this day, she continues to educate young minds about women's rights and the battle against racism.

Produced by Emily Chen

I'm 15 years old and a grade 10 student from Oakville Trafalgar High School. My favourite subjects include science, french, history, and music. I'm ambitious and creative and love to get involved. Outside of school, I play rep. hockey and I do a variety of volunteering work.



Keepsake Memories



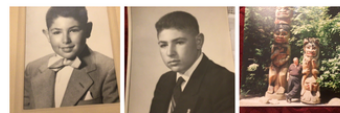
At the age of sixteen, Jack took on a massive responsibility by stepping up and supporting his family. It was a life-changing experience which made him realise the true importance of family.

Produced by Vincent Yao



Hi! I was born in China in 2006, and I am currently living in Canada. I enjoy playing the violin and drawing in my free time, and I am currently studying towards the medical field.

Keepsake Photographs



Jack in his Youth.

Jack in his Youth.

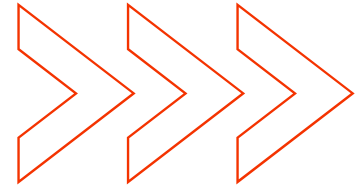
Jack pictured next to a Totem...



Top: Our Neighbours' Stories website

Above: Councillor Pasternak launched our exhibit of stories. Moon-Ja and Emily were one matched pilot pair. Right: From the site, two story pages.

Our neighbours stories outcomes



Key Indicator	Outcome
Does the program impact feelings of belonging and decrease isolation?	Seniors: 57% believe the program is very successful in increasing feelings of belonging, while 28.6% believe it's successful. Youth: 42.9% believe the program is very successful in addressing isolation, while 42.9% believe it's successful.
Did this program impact your feeling of isolation?	Seniors: While most indicated no change, 25% reported a decrease in isolation. Youth: 57% reported no change to feelings of isolation, 35.7% say it decreased feelings of isolation.
Would you like to stay in touch with the person you met in the program?	Seniors: 71.4% said they would like to stay connected to the youth. Youth: 84.6% said they would like to stay connected to the senior.

The details

Our Neighbours' Stories

Our Neighbours' Stories Storytelling Matches:

1. Lou Vandelman with Zev Zabitsky and Jamal Badarudu
2. Carol Park with Schaveeve John and Gleb Bobrakov
3. Antoinette Charlebois with Celia Yang
4. Marie Slark with TL Sutherland
5. Moon-Ja Park with Emily Chen
6. Goldie Wallensky with Kusha Shirani
7. Marjorie King with Miles Lin
8. Charline Sherman with Vishva Patel and Kevin Hoang
9. Elizabeth Ramsuchit with Mackenzie Falconer
10. Jan Batchelor with Evelyn Barlow
11. Elizabeth Nyburg with Keting Trinh
12. Sharon Baker with Chloe Wang
13. Jack Greenberg with Vincent Yao
14. Tolsa Greenberg with Chris Hu
15. Martha Mizuik with Kai Zabitsky and Cameron Wolfe
16. Maureen Simpson with Jett Major Thompson-Davidson and Julia Pham
17. Angie Buado with Desree Bugayong

- 21 students completed stories
- Mahek Saini produced a story for Margaret Cole but Margaret decided very late not to make her story public.
- Chloe Wang interviewed Sharon Baker but didn't complete her story. The UpSocial Canada team completed the story to ensure it was shared.
- Similarly, UpSocial Canada completed Elizabeth Ramsuchit's story for inclusion in the final product.

Link Generations

- Between 6-8 Circle of Care seniors regularly came to the sessions during both pilots
- North York Community House (NYCH) invited two cohorts to the pilots.
- The second cohort were 14-18 years old and new immigrants to Canada
- Between 6-9 youth participants took part in this second pilot experience.
- In total approximately 60 seniors and youth were engaged in the pilots.
- The numbers fluctuated in the Link Generations pilot from week to week.

Testimonials

"It made me realize I have led a very fruitful life."

Personally, I think this program was very successful because I got to meet and talk to a very lovely senior and hear her story, which she was happy to share. I made friends with the organizers of this program and we got to visit the seniors in person which was really special. Also, I got to practice my media and creative skills while compiling the final output.

"Although I am not an isolated senior, I see the value of these interactions as history is so easily lost without storytellers."

"I never felt very interesting in the past, but suddenly that changed."

Her ideas of doing what you believe in really resonated with me and I felt so motivated to live my life in the same way she lived hers.

Thank you so much for giving the opportunity to volunteer with Post Bellum. I am very happy for the opportunity to be a part of this wonderful project. I hope that I can participate in opportunities like this in the future. Thank you for your support and guidance during this process.

It helps individuals who have gone through a tough adulthood and childhood feel as if they are not alone and not the only ones. It could also help individuals feel that they could talk about their hard stories.

Nowadays the youth are isolated from those in elderly homes, but this program allows us to break this barrier to connect with each other.

"I found the intergenerational program fascinating. The students were bright and inquisitive and seemed to appreciate what they were hearing from the older participants. It felt good to be able to share some of my life experiences, and the students took us seriously and didn't show any signs of ageism."

What we learned

Pilot Learning

Link Generations best met our quest to find a program that supports feelings of belonging and connection.

With 4 weeks of exposure to one another sharing experiences and insights, we found Link Generations creates a dynamic and deep connection between youth and seniors. The feedback from youth was particularly emphatic about the desire for the program to run for a longer period of time. As we look to grow this program in Toronto, we recommend extending the number of sessions the cohort spends together.

As outlined in the Pilot Chapter, ensuring the youth are old enough for the connections to be meaningful will produce positive outcomes. Young children are unable to take advantage of this opportunity in the same way, and seniors are left unsatisfied with the experience.

The program was delivered on Zoom due to the pandemic, and many of the youth expressed their preference for this model, saying they feel more comfortable having these conversations online. While some seniors said they would like to meet in person, the Zoom connection also enables greater access for those with mobility or transportation barriers.

Finally, youth also expressed that an intergenerational program like Link allows for sharing and depth of confidence in excess of many peer support programs. The youth interviewed said that often they are concerned about sharing fears or questions with peers and that this program allows them to confide in a way they feel less vulnerable.

Post Bellum fosters a sense of unique contribution for the seniors; providing them with an opportunity to share their learning, passing on insights to youth they believe of value to their future. While the seniors didn't report reduced rates of social isolation, they expressed high rates of satisfaction with their involvement. Youth, on the other hand, reported decreased rates of social isolation through this engagement.

Programmatically, both seniors and youth report a desire to meet on multiple occasions prior to and beyond the interview experience; for youth, meeting before the interview will help them better prepare for it, and the connection between both will be richer throughout. Post Bellum is driven by youth who want to hear living history stories, better understand life choices, and seek guidance on growing up. It is also driven by seniors keen to be remembered, but more importantly, extending their learned insights to a younger generation.

Critically for development of Post Bellum's Our Neighbours' Stories program, some in-person time must be scheduled for best results. Given the heightened vulnerability of seniors in the pandemic and the rise of the Omicron variant during the pilot, we conducted the entire program on Zoom. This meant that students were unable to meet the seniors and collect their photos and memorabilia to post-produce their story. This task fell to Mila Robinson, the volunteer coordinator. Mila has expressed how meaningful the visits with the seniors were; and how much closer she felt to them as a result. In the process of looking through their photos, she was exposed to more stories, more anecdotes and greater confidence. This experience would normally be shared with the youth cohort. This in-person element must be included in future design.

More learning

Further recommendations for scaling Our Neighbours' Stories include the following from the youth cohort:

1. The development of tips and tricks to maintain focus during the interview and actively listen;
2. More tips on handling difficult subject matter
3. A checklist of expectations, assignments
4. More check-ins throughout the process*

* UpSocial did arrange multiple checkins in the post-production process, reaching out via email and setting up drop-in Zoom calls for questions. These were very poorly attended.

In General

It would be beneficial to secure permissions to enable the youth and seniors to connect independently beyond the scope of engagement, should the parents agree. Both seniors and youth expressed an overwhelming desire to remain connected, but chasing permissions after the fact is very difficult. We only had email access to some of the youth, with the school group only accessible via the teacher. It gave us very little flexibility to secure ongoing connection.

The ask of both seniors and youth agencies during the Pilot phase was very resource intensive. We found that smaller community agencies did not have the capacity or runway to join the pilots in the timeframe we required. Larger agencies were more receptive and capable of deploying staff to work with us on execution.

Any outreach to school groups needs to be done with a considerably longer timeframe. It is most likely that a teacher/teachers will be most receptive, with schools boards and administrators hard to reach.

I think the most memorable part was actually meeting the senior in person because seeing her actual photos and souvenirs made the story a lot more meaningful.
- Celia Yang - the only youth introduced to her senior storyteller

UpSocial Methodological Learning

Methodological flexibility is key

The attraction to the UpSocial methodology has always been its attention to partnership development and its demand driven global search for proven innovations. Balsam Foundation was keen to see a Challenge undertaken and provided generous support to make it possible.

Yet, there was a missing element in the process UpSocial Canada felt very strongly about, and that was to ensure that a community partner join the host team on equal footing from the beginning. Thus we added the Request to Participate as a new step in the process. While it added time and some complexity, it produced very positive outcomes from the get-go. UpSocial Canada could never have engaged local residents in such an authentic and generative way without the relationships fostered by Unison's Community Engagement team. UpSocial Canada is grateful to UpSocial for its methodological flexibility,.

Never make predictions

Very early in the process we learned never to assume how a community will choose to address an issue of interest you share. Given our original motivation to act and the Guiding Research Question which directly mentions better uses for public and shared spaces, we anticipated the pilot programs selected would focus on those initiatives that activate actual public spaces - festivals, markets, designed walkways, innovative high rise tower initiatives etc.

As a science major I like preciseness in volunteering and community work. I don't want vague [where] I don't have a sense of belonging over the project. But you embraced us, step by step, 1/10th in it, 2/10ths in it, now I'm fully engaged. I think it's well-designed."

- Moon-Ja Park, Bathurst Finch Seniors Society and cohort participant

However, the composition of the group included many senior residents, very few of whom related closely with those types of programs. Some of the residents had experience trying to engage people inside their high-rise towers and had not been successful. They therefore selected programs that were defined and not reliant on volunteer management. They also selected projects they felt most intentionally addressed the intergenerational divide.

Communication will get you everywhere

This Challenge was a first for most of the Challenge cohort participants. Although many of the senior residents were active volunteers and leaders in their community, they had never been invited into a process such as this. We have heard that engagement was very satisfying for them; that communication was maintained throughout and attention to holding space thoughtfully was appreciated.

Yet, not long after we started, the program funding for community engagement at Unison was revoked and Mandana had to plan herself out of the project. As a project team, we can never assume continuity of resources or teams, but remain open and agile to the changing conditions. Thankfully, Mandana, her manager, Simon Cheng and his successor, Amy Cheng remained committed to the Challenge, even if at a distance. Mandana has continued regular checkins with UpSocial Canada and together we have produced a series of learning articles for the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Social R&D community.

Planning the exit

While the host team is evaluating the success of the pilots and looking for ways to scale the two programs, we are also paying attention to the thoughtful closure of the facilitation process. The Caring Community Cohort devoted hours of volunteer time and their networks and ideas to this process, and we are very grateful.

"I enjoyed the process of this project, because it gives me a chance to think, gave me a chance to express myself, gave me a chance to meet people, gave me a chance to hear their opinion, and change conversation. And while I think I might be educating people, I'm being educated myself." - Maureen Simpson, Resident leader and cohort participant

Partnership stewardship is a moving target

From the outset, the relationship with Unison's Strong and Beautiful Bathurst Finch project was generative and energetic. As we became the host team, there was a sense that great things would result. Community engagement lead, Mandana Attar Zadeh was instrumental in the establishment of a rich community cohort that would guide program research and selection, and move us towards pilots in the local community.

We could not have proceeded without them. Dates and attention spans have shifted in the last few months. Where participation leading up to the pilots was very sticky, we have now lost the attention of many in the cohort, as less was asked of them. UpSocial Canada is keen to rectify any sense that their contribution is undervalued in any way. A closing gathering is being scheduled for July 2022.

Exhibition

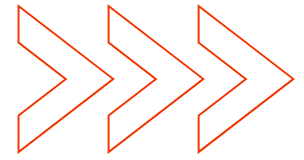
As the Post Bellum *Our Neighbours' Stories* pilot got underway, UpSocial Canada began looking forward to closing the facilitated part of the Challenge process. For nearly 2 years, the resident leaders, local agencies and supportive subject matter experts had been involved in the project, and a celebration was needed to share our appreciation. The host team also wanted to launch a public exhibition to showcase the pilot stories developed by youth.

Given the amazing support provided by the Centennial branch of the Toronto Public Library throughout the Challenge process - and given how important the library is to the community - we decided it was the best place to showcase the Post Bellum stories and enable a gathering to celebrate the Challenge participants. The exhibition was planned for May 26, 2022. City Councillor James Pasternak was invited to officially launch the exhibition; his team had been involved in the cohort throughout the process as well, and he was quick to oblige.

The stories were uploaded to OurNeighboursStories.ca and a QR code generated that was added to designed posters exhibited at the library throughout June, Seniors Month. Additional support was provided by way of sponsored poster printing by Still Images.

It is hard to exaggerate the joy in the room on May 26, 2022. After a nearly 2 year period of meeting over Zoom, many cohort participants were in the same room for the first time. We also had many seniors and youth on hand to celebrate the exhibition. Balsam Foundation was well represented with three staff/managers in attendance, providing a huge boost to confidence in moving these pilots forward.

On behalf of all partners, UpSocial Canada wishes to thank Cohort Participant and Centennial Branch Head, Charlene Goldman for her support in making this Exhibition a reality.



Exhibition

Top: Councillor Pasternak and Resident leader, Angie Buado; top right: Centennial Branch Head, Charlene Goldman; middle left: Exhibition guests, middle: Resident leader Moon-Ja Park, Emily Chen, Emily's dad, middle right: Councillor Pasternak launching the exhibition, bottom left: Storyteller Lou Vandelman and Volunteer Coordinator Mila Robinson; bottom middle, Challenge Co-host Mandana Attar Zadeh;

Link Generations

Given the success of the Link Generations pilot and the heavy involvement of Circle of Care, the agency team has expressed interest in developing the program further, making it one of their regular offerings for seniors. Link Generations Founder, Lori Marks is very excited about the potential to grow the program beyond the east coast of the United States. While she has always been confident in the program's results, she hasn't had time to develop a scaled version of the program.

Thus, Circle of Care, UpSocial Canada and Link Generations are working together to develop a partnership agreement that will likely include:

- Train the Trainer resources and a program to convey key program elements to Circle of Care staff
- A schedule for the deployment of the program over at least the next fiscal year, with the program running 8 weeks, 3 times before March 2023.
- Licensing arrangement to compensate for intellectual property and guidance as needed from Link Generations

The aim is that the staff and volunteers at Circle of Care can take this program across the Greater Toronto Area to their many thousands of clients over time. With the extremely positive results generated in the pilot, backed by like-results in Maryland and Washington DC, we believe this will have a very positive impact on Toronto's seniors and youth.

Post Bellum - Our Neighbours' Stories

The host team feel similarly excited about the potential to scale Our Neighbours' Stories, but less clear on the scaling partners. Both Circle of Care and Big Brothers Big Sisters Halton Hamilton would like to continue to contribute, at this stage we are also hoping to engage an intermediary partner who can embrace the storytelling nature of the project more deliberately.

This intermediary role might include:

- Hosting the local archive
- Managing contributions to the site
- Managing relationship and exchange with Post Bellum in the Czech Republic
- Training and support matching with seniors and youth agencies
- Amplifying the stories through the site and social platforms
- Fostering media partnerships - eg. CBC, TVO, Zoomer Media
- Developing promotional partners: City of Toronto, City of Hamilton, Toronto Public Library

Discussions and design are emergent right now, but it is hoped that a partner such as the Toronto Public Library or an institution like the Royal Ontario Museum may be interested in hosting this living history project. Updates will be provided to Balsam Foundation as progress is made in this effort.

Our Caring Community Challenge Cohort members were our guides, innovation analysts and network connectors. We are very grateful for their passion and commitment.

Caring Community Challenge Cohort

Angelita Buado: Resident, Bathurst-Finch Women's Group, Bathurst-Finch Food Coalition (BFFC & BFCAN)
Larisa Shirenko, Resident leader
Maureen Simpson, Resident leader, BFFC
Moon-Ja Park, Bathurst Finch Seniors Society, BFFC & Bathurst-Finch Community Action Network (BFCAN)
Arnold Spevac: Resident Leader, BFCAN
Goldie Wallensky, Resident leader, BFCAN
Priyan De Silva, Chair BFCAN, BFFC
Emiko Savic, Resident leader
Pastor Jake Ivanovic, Willowdale Seventh Day Adventist Church
Mandy Ridley, North York Harvest
Jamie-Lynn Parker, North York Seniors
Katrine Sauvé-Schenk, School of Rehabilitation Sciences, Université d'Ottawa
Amanda O'Rourke, 880 Cities
Jeanhy Shim, Toronto Housing Lab
Lisa Rae, Circle of Care
Councillor James Pasternak, Ward 6 - York Centre
Michelle Zaslavsky, Office of Councillor James Pasternak
Jill McDowell, City of Toronto
Juneja Varghese, United Way of Greater Toronto
Celine Thomas, Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness
Charlene Goldman, Toronto Public Library
Fairoz Retha, Unison Bathurst Finch Hub
Simon Cheng, Unison Health and Community Services
Mandana Attarzadeh, Unison Bathurst Finch Hub
Andrea Hamilton, Balsam Foundation
Ava-Dayna Sefa, Balsam Foundation
Tracey Robertson, Ontario Trillium Foundation
Assiri Valdes, UpSocial
Miquel de Paladella, UpSocial
Geraldine Cahill, UpSocial Canada
Mila Robinson, UpSocial Canada
Todd Jaques, Makeway Foundation

Conclusion & acknowledgements



The opportunity to launch the Caring Community Challenge was a huge privilege for the team at UpSocial Canada. In every way it has exceeded our expectations, reinforcing our belief in the generosity of people and partners across Toronto. We are very grateful to the Balsam Foundation for supporting this project from inception through to pilot, with a special hat-tip to Andrea Hamilton and Ava-Dayna Sefa.

The community of Bathurst and Finch was a joy to work with; led by the resident seniors and connected through the wonderful work of Our Strong and Beautiful Bathurst Finch program. UpSocial Canada wishes to thank Mandana Attar Zadeh in particular for her energy and commitment to this process.

We are confident the Foundation will find Link Generations and Post Bellum as inspiring as we have and work with us to grow their impact. To this end we must also thank Dr Lori Marks, founder of Link Generations and Marie Janoušková at Post Bellum for their engagement in this effort.

Given the length of the Challenge and the breadth of outreach, there are far too many people to recognize by name, but UpSocial Canada does want to thank all Caring Community Cohort members for their commitment and creativity, Mila Robinson for her passion, Zahra Ebrahim, Amanda O'Rourke and Anne Gloger for helping Balsam Foundation and UpSocial Canada launch this right.

Finally, thank you to our team in Barcelona, Miquel de Paladella and Assiri Valdes for your leadership and ever-present support, Tracey Robertson at Ontario Trillium Foundation. and Todd Jaques, Antonia Taylor and KeunWoo Lee at Makeway Foundation for getting us to a thoughtful close.

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