

Cycling Without Age: Enhancing the Lives of Seniors The Ottawa Experience

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What images come to our mind when we think about our community? Strolling around admiring the neighbors' gardens, seeing children play, walking to work or to shops. Enjoying our outdoor environment. What could we do to avoid the risk of isolation and loneliness that many seniors feel when their movements are more restricted due to age or disability and they find it harder to get outdoors? How could we ensure that the free access to outdoors that we take for granted when we live independently in our homes do not change when circumstances force us to move to a retirement home or to a long-term care home?

Cycling Without Age (CWA) is an innovative program that has helped seniors stay active and stay connected with their communities. CWA is making it possible for seniors or those with mobility challenges to get back on their bicycles and enjoy their communities and nature.

CWA uses a special 3-wheeled rickshaw bike. These "trishaws" have a two-seater passenger carriage in the front. They are propelled by a "pilot" who sits on a bike in the back. The bike pilot can easily chat with the passengers: slow rides bring people together from different generations through conversation, storytelling and reminiscing.

What is CWA at Bruyère?

CWA started in Denmark in 2012 and has grown to 225 chapters in 28 countries with 8000 volunteer pilots. Bruyère Continuing Care opened Ontario's first CWA chapter in 2016 in partnership with Gary Bradshaw, a community member in Orleans. Bruyère's Therapeutic Support Services Department runs the program on its Orleans campus on the banks of the Ottawa River that houses Saint-Louis Residence and the Bruyère Village.

In the first summer season of the program, the CWA program in Ottawa

- served 46 residents of Saint-Louis Residence, or 1 in 4, as well as 48 Bruyère Village tenants, family members and friends who accompanied residents on their outings
- pedalled over 121 hours - the average ride was 60 minutes long and each participating residents had an average three rides
- trained more than 34 volunteer bike pilots.

The first season had a 99% satisfaction rate. Participants commented on their enjoyment of the rides and the beauty of nature, they laughed, waved and smiled at their neighbours as they passed them on the bikepath and in the community. Pilots enjoyed the exercise, nature and chatting with new friends.

Bruyère Continuing Care's Orleans campus includes Saint Louis Residence, a designated francophone long term-care home where 198 seniors live, and the Bruyère Village that offers independent and assisted living in 227 seniors' apartments.
www.bruyere.org

How Do I Start a CWA in My Community?

The CWA website is full of practical information <http://cyclingwithoutage.org/>. The CWA chapter at Bruyère started when Mr. Bradshaw partnered with Therapeutic Support and Volunteer Services team. Together they raised approximately \$10,000 in private donations to purchase a trishaw. A local business provided helmets and maintenance support at cost.

What to Consider When Starting a CWA Program?

Trishaw and storage

Bruyère purchased the “taxi” model (see photo) as it is designed for easy passenger entry and easy pedaling. The trishaw features a protective canopy, seatbelts, disc brakes and an electric motor that pilots can use on steep hills.



Other models allow the front foot rest to swing open to further facilitate entry. For more details go to <http://copenhagencycles.com/>

The trishaw is stored in the entrance hall of Saint-Louis Residence. Bruyère Village tenants can easily get there as the buildings are connected. Using a large service elevator, the pilot can bring the trishaw directly to a resident’s room if they need a mechanical lift for entry, which happened 26% the time in the first season. At the end of the ride, the pilot wipes down the wheels before coming back onto the unit.

Volunteer recruitment and training

Volunteers are the centre of the CWA program and essential for its success. At Bruyère, cycling attracted existing and new volunteers who were interested in combining their desire to help residents, get some exercise and enjoy nature. Bruyère used newsletters, bulletin boards, websites and media reports to let people know about new cycling program.

Bruyère and its community partner collaborated to provide training for each volunteer. Although the trishaw is easy to pedal, safety program rules and procedures had to be discussed. For example, helmets are mandatory for all participants, routes are pre-planned to satisfy insurance requirements, pilots carry cell phones and check the weather before setting out. Pilots also have to be aware of scheduling systems, infection control procedures and the need to check in with nursing staff before signing a resident out. As volunteers' knowledge and confidence grew, they could run outings more independently; for example, by the middle of the summer, TSS staff no longer needed to accompany the pilots to residents' room.

Organizational processes

Participant Agreement and Assumption of Risks:

All participating residents or their Substitute Decision Maker have to sign a Participant Agreement. On the day of the ride, the Registered Nurse makes the final decision whether a resident can attend or not.

Program Documentation:

- Rules and Process: Guidelines
- Volunteer Acknowledgements and Waiver of Liabilities
- Volunteer Pilot Checklist

Evaluation:

TSS developed an evaluation framework and collected data to guide program development and implementation. Volunteer pilot surveys and daily ride logs indicated that the CWA program engaged residents who do not often have the chance to get outdoors to connect with nature and the wider community. Resident and volunteer participation exceeded initial expectations and attracted a new and more diverse group of volunteers. Despite the level of risk involved with taking residents outside for an activity that required appropriate prior consent and additional volunteer training, the first season went off without a hitch.

Staff involvement

Therapeutic Recreation Services (TSS):

TSS staff coordinates the resident and tenant bike outing schedule. They manage the list of residents who could sit for 2 hours without an upper-body personal assistance service device, ensure that all waivers and consent forms are signed, and collaborate with nursing staff about scheduled outings or cancellation due to extreme weather.

Nursing staff:

The nursing staff make sure that the resident is ready for their scheduled ride and for cancelling an outing if a resident is not able to participate that day. Nurses ensure that residents do not have any of the following conditions: head laceration or wound, C. difficile, gastroenteritis symptoms, scabies, shingles, lice or any condition that requires the resident to be confined to their room (or unit, in the event of an outbreak) for the purpose of infection prevention and control. Nursing staff are also responsible for resident transfers in and out of the trishaw if a mechanical lift is needed.

Resources for getting a chapter started

- For more information on the CWA program at Bruyère Continuing Care, including consent forms and evaluation tools, contact: Kim Durst-Mackenzie kdurstmackenzie@bruyere.org or (613) 562-6262 ext.2568
- Think about connecting with potential partners who may have an interest in supporting this opportunity. Partners can help with finding volunteers and funding.
- Use the Cycling Without Age resources to plan and run the program <http://cyclingwithoutage.org/> Reach out to other chapters in Canada <http://cyclingwithoutage.com/chapters-canada/>
- Consult with staff at your LTC home or retirement home who will be involved in supporting the project. Ensure that there are adequate resources for training and supporting volunteers, getting appropriate consent and waivers from residents or substitute decision makers. Also make sure there is sufficient support to transfer residents in and out of the trishaw and a way to monitor successes and adverse events.

You could partner with...

- Municipalities
- Seniors' organizations, such as the Council on Aging
- Cycling organizations
- Local businesses
- Local highschools

This summary draws on the findings of the evaluation of the first season of the Bruyère Cycling Without Age program, that was partially supported by the Government of Ontario through the Bruyère Centre for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-term Care. Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Ontario.