

Assignment 3: Services for seniors at the Scugog Public Library

By Mark Borden

Introduction

I once again am looking at Scugog Public Library because I am interested in how smaller institutions try to service different groups within their communities given their limited resources. I also think one could argue that the position Scugog is in is more reflective of how most public libraries in Canada operate with the large systems like Toronto Public Library and Vancouver Public Library being the notable exceptions. For this paper I am specifically interested in looking at what services Scugog provides to seniors in the Port Perry community as well as make suggestions on how they may be improved.

Demographics

As mentioned above Scugog is located in Port Perry, Ontario which is home to 8,980 people according to the 2011 Canadian Census. The median age of residents in Port Perry is 47.4, higher than the Canadian median of 40.4, and 1790 residents, very close to 1 in 5, are 65 or older.



It is clear that Port Perry has a significant senior population will only rise in the coming decade as the largest age groups, according to the Census, are in the 55 - 64 range. I would suggest that this information means that Scugog not only needs to have services for seniors now, which we will look at in a moment, but also prepare for the aging group preceding them.

Senior Services at Scugog

Scugog lists several services on their sites home page but clicking on their links leads to no additional details which is unfortunate. It was only through subsequent searching using Google that I was able to find details on what these programs are. Generally speaking it seems that the services provided by Scugog are mostly aimed at young families with children, which certainly makes sense after seeing the Census data, but also has services specifically for seniors.

The “Zoomer Tech Club” does not specifically mention it is for seniors but is implied by both the name, as “Zoomer” is a brand marketed at people 45+, and the imagery associated with this ad. Library staff will help patrons learn how to use consumer grade electronics like

Zoomer Tech Club



Come in on Saturdays from 2-4 to talk about technology and get encouragement from your peers. Sit down with your iPad, tablet or laptop and share tricks and tips that you have learned. For one hour we will have a library staff member sit in with you to help troubleshoot computer problems.

When: Every Saturday from 2pm-4pm

This is a drop-in program and pre-registration is not required.

tablets and laptops which is a service, at least in my experience, which is unique to libraries. I think this is an important service to seniors for several reasons. The first is that research conducted by Jaeger et al (2013) suggests that the “digital divide”, the schism between people that are able to use technology and those who cannot, grows as a population ages with the widest disparity being between the youngest and oldest members of a given community. As we have learned throughout the course technology has really changed the way we access information and news as well as how we remain in contact with one another. Isolation, and loneliness, are well known problems elderly people face and not having the ability to remain in contact with their children or grand kids, as examples, because they do not know how to send an email or text message may exacerbate those issues. Having a program like this not only allows for seniors to have those tools at their disposal but I would also imagine is very empowering as they learn and develop skills with technology

Computer Classes



Getting Comfortable with the Mouse
When: 3:00 to 4:00 pm on Friday, July 11

Windows 7 Basics
When: 3:00 to 4:00 pm on Friday, July 18

World Wide Web for Beginners
When: 3:00 to 4:00 pm on Friday, July 25

Email for Beginners

When: 3:00 to 4:00 pm on Friday, August 8

Introducing Facebook Seminar
When: 3:00 to 4:00 pm on Friday, August 15

Introducing Skype Seminar
When: 3:00 to 4:00 pm on Friday, August 22

Intro to iPad
When: 3:00 to 4:00 pm on Friday, August 29

The Scugog Public Library also offers a series of “Computer Classes” which, again, are not directly marketed towards seniors but is a service which seems intended for them and is also something the wider community could take advantage of. The subjects taught in these classes are very basic, like becoming comfortable with using a mouse, which is good for seniors in particular as some may have never used a computer and these are good starting points. The classes also cover topics like sending email and using Facebook and Skype which, as discussed above, are all tools that seniors can use to remain in contact with friends and family.

Join us for Tea & Books



Drop by the Library for an afternoon of tea & treats and discover some great new reads! Come and discover a new author or find out more about the titles creating a buzz in in the book biz. Join us for 'Tea & Books' where Library staff will discuss their latest fiction and non-fiction picks, as well as some of their all time favourites.
Thursday, June 5th & Thursday, August 7th from 2 to 4 pm

Lastly Scugog offers their “Tea & Books” program

which appears to be more of an all ages type

of service but one seniors may receive a lot of

benefit from. With this program patrons have the

opportunity to speak with library staff to learn about what is popular or to hear recommendations. I think this service would be good for seniors because they may not have access to the regular channels, like the internet, people use to learn about new books. I also like this service as it appears to be more social, or low-key, than the other two and is a way seniors can become involved with the library without committing either too much time or energy.

Recommendations

I would say that, across the board, Scugog is doing an excellent job with the services they provide to seniors especially in the area of technology literacy. One suggestion is they should expand their services to include some that are a little more social in nature or scope. For example the library hosts multiple movie nights a month but they are usually geared at a younger audience and I think they could do the same for seniors and show films better suited for an older demographic. I also think they could bring in guest speakers to discuss

issues relevant to seniors. For example, when I was living in London, I would often see the Cherryhill Branch of the LPL bring in speakers to talk about things ranging from joint health to planning for retirement. Unless I missed it I did not see anything of that nature on the Scugog website “agenda” of events which is something they may consider doing in the future.

The Role Of New Technologies And Products For Senior-Oriented Services

This may be my own bias but I believe that technology is best taught when it is a mix of utility and fun. If you can show someone that is either unfamiliar with, or even intimidated by, technology that they can both accomplish tasks like emailing family and have access to content that is entertaining with the same device they will be more likely to engage with it. I think that browser based games, like the one pictured above, is a good way to show seniors that, with a little bit of work, they can not only have access to something like Cribbage online but can play against people across the world. As mentioned above feeling isolated is a problem many seniors face and helping them stay connected to other players, and people, via browser based games may be helpful.



I discussed in length how helping seniors connect to social media can help them stay in touch with younger relatives but it also allows them to stay informed, as we learned in this course, these channels are becoming a primary source for news in this country. With the decline of print newspapers we could be looking at a not-so-far off future where we only get news online or through TV outlets meaning there could be a generation of people kept entirely out of the loop if they do not have the skills to access social media or the internet. I think, to a degree, we are already seeing that as even Scugog seems to rely quite heavily on their social media presence to advertise events meaning they potentially are not reaching seniors in the community.



Podcasts are interesting because of how similar they are to radio which is a technology one would

imagine is very familiar to a senior population. Radio, of course, is still around but podcasts are unique because anyone can make one on any topic that they like. Consequently we see very specialized shows on anything from wood-working to history which are topics you are unlikely to hear on over the air radio. I think that podcasts may be a format seniors may be very receptive to and could be a good way to ease them into other things like online video. Anecdotally, while teaching my Grandfather how to use his new phone, we found a hockey podcast he really enjoys and prefers it to watching coverage on television because he finds the graphics sports channels use to cover the screen distractive.

The last piece of emerging tech we will look at is the potential role consumer grade virtual reality devices like the Oculus Rift can play in senior services. The Oculus, developed primary as a gaming device, has a much higher barrier to entry than the other services and products discussed but can also deliver experiences



they cannot. Virtual reality, and the Oculus, looks and feels very futuristic and can deliver a very unique experience to elderly patrons for a relatively inexpensive price. Aside from gaming there are demos like riding a rollercoaster or being in a hot air balloon which patrons can enjoy without leaving their chair. I think this is particularly exciting for patrons with disabilities or with movement impairments and limitations as it allows them to experience things they otherwise would not be able to do without jeopardizing their physical well being or otherwise exerting themselves. I also think there is a novelty factor here, again speaking anecdotally, as the Oculus was a big hit among my older family members when I borrowed a friends development model for a family gathering. At the very least this might drive traffic into the library which is never a bad thing.

References

Jaeger, P. T., Bertot, J. C., Thompson, K. M., Katz, S. M., & Decoster, E. J. (2012). The Intersection of Public Policy and Public Access: Digital Divides, Digital Literacy, Digital Inclusion, and Public Libraries. *Public Library Quarterly*, 1-20.

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