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GIANTs are Grand Individuals Aging with Neighbours  
in Thunder Bay

# GIANT EDUCATION TOOLKIT

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Discussion Guide for GIANT Digital Stories

Prepared by:





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## **GIANT EDUCATION TOOLKIT**

This GIANT Education Toolkit is a discussion guide, serving as a companion to the 10 GIANT Digital Stories written and produced in 2017. This Toolkit includes photos that are linked to each of the 10 GIANT stories, transcripts of each of the videos, as well as suggested discussion questions developed by a collaborative of older adults in Thunder Bay and academics specialized in gerontology.

This toolkit has been developed to stimulate conversation and generate thoughtful discussion about aging at home and in community.

## NELLIE

*Nellie and Ted: It all started with a chair*



In her digital story, *Nellie and Ted: It all started with a chair*, Nellie describes her experience making modifications to her home, changing vehicles, and how she and her husband maintained social connections throughout their lives.

### Discussion Questions:

- What adaptations has Nellie made that allow her to age in her home?
- How did she find out what services were available to her in the community?
- How did Nellie tap into the resources available in her neighbourhood that have allowed her to remain in her home?
- *Coping with the passing of a spouse can be a difficult part of the transition to older adult life. What types of supports/services can be provided to improve and maintain good quality of life for individuals going through the loss of a loved one?*

## NELLIE

### *Nellie and Ted: It all started with a chair*

*We had never planned for our own physical changes, or how this would affect our ability to stay in our home. At 47, I chose to give up my teaching career and take on a family as a wife and mother. Ted being the older one, his physical condition deteriorated and we had to think about changing how our home was set up. My neighbor had a climber that she didn't want anymore, so I took it. I put it between the first floor and the basement so Ted could get to his desk. Ted was stubborn and didn't use it as much as he should have. When Ted developed vertigo and deafness and needed access to the shower, Veteran's Affairs got involved and set us up with another chair climber for the upstairs. This made it even easier for me to do the laundry and cart everything else up and down the stairs. I was also able to organize other supports for Ted such as hand grips and raised toilet seats.*

*Having a smaller car that Ted could step up into, made it easier to go where we wanted to go - McDonald's, doctor's appointments, church. We were also able to get help for housekeeping and yard work, making it possible for us to stay in the house and the neighbourhood we loved. When Ted was able to drive himself, he went to Con College for a workout and I went to the community centre to work out with my ladies fitness group. Later, I would drive him to the college to workout, drive him to McDonald's so he could socialize with his football friends, while I had coffee with the ladies.*

*After Ted passed, I was feeling sorry for myself. If I had stayed single I wouldn't have to go through this agony of his passing. Then I realized how it great it is that Ted let me into his life, adopt his daughter and family. I still have friends to have coffee with, the beautiful garden to look after and my ladies fitness class. And I never realized that the climber and the chair we set up would save my knees and back.*

## DIANA

### *Life Transitioning*



In her digital story, *Life Transitioning*, Diana shares about how she handled the various transitions along her life journey, and what she did to continue to experience joy and express herself.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- How did Diana recognize that she needed to make some changes in her life after she retired?
- Who did Diana reach out to in the community? Why?
- What benefits did Diana discuss related to becoming more active and engaged in the community?
- *Retirement is a milestone and a major lifestyle transition for many older adults. How can older adults be better supported to deal with this transition? In your current role, what can you do to ensure older adults still feel purposeful and continue to engage in meaningful activities?*

## DIANA

### *Life Transitioning*

*When I was growing up, there weren't many pathways for a proper young girl to take. I didn't want to be a teacher and nursing was yucky, so I became the only thing I thought I would be good at - a wife. Turned out, first time didn't work. In all fairness, we were still kids ourselves. The second time was the charm, forty years and still counting. He helped me become who I am today. When I retired, I became a homebody - I stayed home, became a couch potato, puttering in my yard on occasion. This didn't last long; the restlessness was setting in. My job had been very physical and social. I started to miss it. Besides, I was becoming boring. When you are together for so long, it seems you run out of interesting things to talk about. Sitting quietly isn't my thing. My husband observed my restlessness and encouraged me to seek out other avenues. Maybe he was bored too.*

*Although I knew a lot of people, they mostly all worked. I think one day, my hubby suggested 55+ may have something. That's how I connected with Fun Active Babes, or as we refer to it FABs. It was a lifesaver! I started going to all these monthly events, doing different things - aquabics, yoga, bowling, dancing, and all the other physical activities. Even pole dancing! I became interested in people again. Because of this I also became interesting. I realized that there are a lot of fun things to be had by us old people, and I wanted to share in it all. So now my pathway has taken me out of the yard and into the community, making friends and having a lot of fun.*

## JOHN

### *Cosgrove's Taxi*



In his digital story, *Cosgrove's Taxi*, John speaks to maintaining close, supportive, and lifelong friendships despite geographical distance.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- How did John find new purpose after retirement?
- What personal benefits did John talk about in the video as a result of his decisions?
- Why did John create his team of eight? Why is it important for everyone to have a team of eight? How would you go about finding your team of eight?
- *What barriers exist to older adults in your community when it comes to establishing good social networks and strong social connections? In your current role, how can older adults be best supported to overcome these barriers and facilitate these types of interactions/connections?*

## JOHN

### *Cosgrove's Taxi*

*Staying connected is important to me, especially as I age. I am now deepening my friendships with friends and family, neighbours, hockey buddies, and a men's book club, and with a friend of 40 years. I first met Jacob in the 70s, my wife Gerri and I had an opportunity to teach adults and so we flew 500 kilometers north of Thunder Bay, to Kasabonika Lake First Nation for a 6 month assignment.*

*We dropped out of the sky into another world. It was an island of 250 Anishnaabe people, accessible only by float plane. No air strip. There were no phones, commercial radio, nor daily contact with anyone off the island. Just 3 radio phones for emergencies, when signals were available. People fished, hunted, trapped, had fun, and supported one another, and I soon learned that in their world, relationships were more important than status or achievements. During the next 6 months, we established relationships with a few people who became lifelong friends. We began to bridge the gap between our world and theirs. We really liked their values.*

*Now living in Thunder Bay, I have become a go-to driver for those friends, their children and grandchildren, when they are in town for essential medical appointments, meetings, or just passing through. Like me they are no 50 years older. I drive them to Dollarama, Value Village, Canadian Tire, or to a church on Sunday, or we are finding used ski-doo parts or a model bush plane for a grandson. My wife calls me Cosgrove's Taxi. My motto is "we may doze, but we never close." During the rides I get an update on life in Kasabonika and they hear what interests me in Thunder Bay. We talk about difficulties, we tease each other, and joke with one another. I may no longer do fundraising and committee meetings, but I have found a way to volunteer in a way that makes more sense to who I am now, and where I stay connected with my friends.*

*"If you are not connected to eight people, go out and get them"*

## RAZI

### *Life Transitioning*



In his digital story, *All That is Not Given is Lost*, Razi describes how helping others has always given his life meaning, and how he continued to help others as his roles and geographical location changed.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- In the video, Razi speaks about wanting to always give of himself to others. How does this contribute to his sense of well-being?
- How does Razi demonstrate empathy? How does this contribute to the community?
- Have you ever moved to a new country, city, or community like Razi? If so, what has helped you to adapt to your new setting and feel comfortable in your home?
- *Volunteering is a great way to give back to the community, while also participating in activities you enjoy. How can older adults be utilized in the community to help create more safe, inclusive, supportive environments?*

## RAZI

### *Life Transitioning*

*I always made myself available in others health. I used to help vaccinating people when I was a boy. I even helped my younger brothers and sisters with their homework. When I was an undergraduate student, my grandfather fell ill. He was unconscious for more than a week and then died. When he was sick, we had bought a number of bags of saline to inject. One of them was leftover. When a poor neighbour of ours had cholera and was about to die, and there was no doctors or medicine around the village I went to see the ailing person and did not find her pulse but her body was warm and she was still breathing. So I ran home, brought that saline bag and set up an IV for her. By the morning, she moved and opened her eyes. It was amazing that I had saved her life. I always liked to do anything that helped others. I've learned to give and never expected anything in return.*

*I moved to Canada because my youngest daughter wanted me to. I had nothing to do here and was trying to find an opportunity to give service. So now, I happily help out with my grandchildren and am volunteering at the Thunder Bay Multicultural Association, working with the Syrian refugees - teaching them English and supporting them in their new lives. I can relate to them, because I was once new here myself and they connect with me because of that too.*

*I do really like my life here in Canada. I am happy to be near my daughters and grandchildren, but I very much miss my home and my family back there, which I really love. It is very likely that I will eventually go back to my home country, but so long as I am here I'll continue to do the work I enjoy - helping others.*

# SIS

## *Limberlost Found*



In her digital story, *Limberlost Found*, Sis reminisces about her childhood and shows how the things that once brought you joy can continue to do so later in life.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What are some of Sis's characteristics that contribute to her aging well?
- How did Sis connect her love of reading to aging well?
- How has her close relationships and connections to family members contributed positively to her life?
- *How can recreation and leisure activities be adapted to ensure older adults can be meaningfully engaged throughout their lives, without having to forgo the activities they once loved? What supports and services can be implemented to enable older adults to achieve these goals?*

## SIS

### *Limberlost Found*

*I grew up in a family of four brothers and one younger sister in a small town of about 700 people. I was a tom-boy. My brother Duel, said he wouldn't have anything to do with me unless I could fight. He taught me to take care of myself. My aunt was worried about me, she wanted me to be a lady. Both she and her husband had books in their house. They had no girls, so I was special. I went over there and spent weekends with them. She got me reading books. This one book fascinated me. I read it so much, I'm sure I had it memorized. It was about a girl around the same age as me. She'd love to explore in the woods and look for flowers. I started to do the same thing. I'd look for pink lady slippers at another aunt's farm, and mayflowers, wild roses. It was a detective hunt. I was hooked on the world that reading opened up for me. I began to read everything I could.*

*One day I told my son-in-law about this book that turned me onto nature and reading. He asked, 'what was it called?' I told him 'Girl of the Limberlost.' This past Christmas, imagine my surprise when I opened a gift and there was Girl of the Limberlost. Best Christmas gift. Almost 90 years later, I enjoyed reading it again. It brought me back to my childhood and I was so amazed how many details I still remembered, but I discovered there was a love story. I guess that I had been too young to appreciate that before. Who would have thought a book from 1909 would still inspire me to look for the beauty all around me. As I near my 100th birthday, I'm still looking for flowers.*

## LYNN

### *My Home and Fences*



In her digital story, *My Home and Fences*, Lynn delves into her past and describes how her connection to nature helped overcome challenges with isolation in her neighbourhood.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- How did Lynn's neighbourhood change? What may have contributed to these changes?
- What has her life been like as she has grown up in the neighbourhood and now owns the home she grew up in? Why did Lynn stay in her neighborhood?
- Who can she rely on for help with her home?
- *It can be difficult to stay connected when it feels like "fences" are isolating you from potential social interaction. How can you, in your current role, reduce these barriers and support older adults who may feel isolated in their communities?*

## LYNN

### *My Home and Fences*

*I live in Thunder Bay and I am back in the same house I grew up in, in the 1950s. Back then, we lived in a neighbourhood that was built by Central Mortgage and Housing for Veterans, there were strict regulations for what home owners could and could not do. The lease agreements stated that homeowners could not build a fence higher than 3 feet. So as a result the kids ran free. Moms ritually had coffee had each other's houses and doors were never locked. There were no fences and you could actually see into our neighbour's backyard. When I needed my mother, I would go into the upstairs, look out of the bedroom window and see if she was having coffee with our next door neighbour. If she wasn't there, I would go out to the bedroom on the other side of our house and look out to see if she was in the kitchen of another house. In those days, neighbours knew each other, and if you needed help it was easy to find someone.*

*It's different now. Backyard fences are everywhere and it seems people value their privacy more. I miss that openness. On one hand I enjoy the privacy of my backyard and the beauty of nature around me, but on the other hand I don't really know my neighbours - I know of them, but I don't really know them. Sure we say hello to one another in passing, but there are no real conversations and I miss the warmth, the interaction and the caring for one another.*

*Now when I get up in the morning, I like to take my coffee and cereal out to the back deck. I eat breakfast and watch the birds, squirrels and all other critters that come by. At night, I watch for Northern Lights, watch for fireflies, and listen to the crickets. They replace my human neighbours visits in my backyard. I take out a cup of sunflower seeds out for them, and see who's going to come around. They make me closer to nature. I feel connected to life a bit more. To me, this is my time of tranquility and serenity.*

# ARLENE

## Summer Stroll



In her digital story, Summer Stroll, Arlene takes us along on a walk through her neighbourhood and speaks on how she stays connected to her community while still participating in the activities she enjoys.

### Discussion Questions:

- How does Arlene connect with the neighbourhood? Why? What are the benefits?
- Would everyone be able to do what Arlene has done to stay connected?
- How can you adapt your favourite hobbies and activities to best suit your needs as you age, as Arlene has with her downsized garden?
- *One's living environment largely shapes their health and wellbeing. What strategies can be implemented in the planning and design of communities to facilitate safe, positive, and inclusive environments? How else can older adults be supported to engage in social and physical activities in their neighbourhoods?*

## ARLENE

### Summer Stroll

*It's 7 p.m. and my sister's waiting at the end of the driveway, ready to go on our usual evening stroll around the village. The sun is shining, the birds are singing, and the air smells very clean after the weekend rain. As we are chatting up the day's events, I notice how green the grass seems and the leaves on the trees are so lush. Walking along on the roadside, we hear the neighbourhood children, shouting, and playing.*

*As we saunter along, there's a neighbour, making a pass with his new lawnmower. As we draw closer he parks the tractor and waits for us, all ready for a chat. He loves his new toy and wants to tell us all about it. We learn that there's a family of raccoons living near the riverbank behind his house and have been warned to keep our garbage secured. Also, he tells us there's a piece of property next door that may come up for sale soon, and wouldn't it be a fine place for my granddaughter to live. Now he's had his fair share of health problems, but here he is, out enjoying everyday.*

*Moving on and feeling a little tired, we knock on another neighbour's door and ask her to join us on her front porch. She complains that the workmen remodeling her kitchen are taking far too long, she's really put out by having to live and cook in the basement. The noise of a motor bike pierces the tranquil air as he buzzes by.*

*As we return home, I notice the hydrangeas are flowering, another few days of warm sun and they will be spectacular. The lillies have come out and are real beauties with their large vibrant, orange flowers. My new addition this year is my square foot garden. In four square feet I've managed to plant, four tomato plants, two peppers, onions, peas, beans, and beets. What a great way to garden. Absolutely no weeds and just the right size for one person like me. What a wonderful day.*

## JARO

### *Gems of the Neighbourhood*



In his digital story, *Gems of the Neighbourhood*, Jaro describes how being part of a club, volunteering, and music can bring people together.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- How does Jaro actively participate in his community?
- Why is volunteering important to Jaro?
- What are some of the hidden gems in your community that can contribute to joy?
- Are there any activities that you are passionate about, or wish were available to you in your community? How could you work with others to make it these wishes a reality?
- *How can more places be adapted and facilitated to accommodate the needs and interests of older adults? How can you, in your current role, help facilitate these experiences for older adults in your communities?*

## JARO

### *Gems of the Neighbourhood*

*Do you like the sound of a pipe organ? I do, but some people don't. As a seven year old, growing up in Czech Republic I was a member of a choir and I grew to love organ music. As a senior citizen, now in Thunder Bay, I enjoy going to the Chamber Music Concerts which are held in a historical church in the city core, St. Paul United. About once a year, the church organ is featured and I always enjoy the magnificent sound of this instrument.*

*When I moved here, some 40 years ago, I was happy to join a service club and I enjoy taking part in such diverse activities as hosting foreign students, helping the Christmas parade, working in a soup kitchen, and fundraising for the symphony. But now, something has changed. My club as many others in the country, is losing membership and now meetings are becoming humdrum. What could I do to make our club more lively? I had a hunch that the organ music I loved, could enliven and refresh the serious and dry meetings and inject some optimism into the life of our club. It was a long shot, but I decided to try.*

*I had recruited a young organist, he was delighted to have an opportunity to play in public. I invited the club members to a special meeting with a celebration of historical pipe organ. I did not have high expectations, so I was pleasantly surprised that members showed up in unusually large numbers. The organist showed off with a Bach Contata, followed by a racy piece of Rachmaninoff, and then what was that? A familiar melody we all knew. Everyone was really enjoying themselves and were in awe. Being able to watch the organist's hands and feet to control the huge instrument and experiencing that joyful sound pouring from over 30 000 pipes all around us was so thrilling! Four weeks after, club members kept telling me how much they enjoyed that event.*

*How many other gems do we have in our city? Gems which are living in plain sight? Maybe discovering these treasures could make our life richer and more exciting!*

## JUDY

### *My Cluster My Home*



In her digital story, *My Cluster My Home*, Judy describes the social support and opportunities for connection that living in co-operative housing provides.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- From Judy's story, what is cooperative living? What is it like for her to live in a cooperative?
- There are three cooperative's in Thunder Bay; Castlegreen, Superior View, and Tahwesin. How do cooperatives support aging in the community?
- In the cooperative, neighbours help neighbours. What can you do to help older neighbours in your area? How are you supported by your neighbours in your area?
- *How can the provision of different types of housing improve the wellbeing of individuals as they age? What other types, styles, or adaptations to housing or housing arrangements could also be supportive to older adults? How could these ideas be put into action?*

## JUDY

### *My Cluster My Home*

*Having moved every few years as a child, it was so nice to find a safe, friendly, and stable community. Castlegreen Cooperative provided this for me and my son, giving me roots and peace of mind, that I never experienced as a child. Over 40 years ago, when I first moved into the 1300 cluster, a group of townhouses clustered together, I was required to work during the day and then return several evenings a week. So what does a single mum do with a 3-year old child who has been in day care all day? I wanted someone who would mother, nurture, and teach him in my absence. Well, the cluster provided us with adopted grandmas to help out. You know the old saying 'it takes a village to raise a child.' In my case, it took my cluster to help raise my son. Members of our cluster have worked together over the years, to landscape, to make it a very pretty place, also to help others to learn to garden, to share plants back and forth, to mow each others' lawns, to shovel out our neighbours, and to generally just be there for each other.*

*After my stroke, 12 years ago, Castlegreen made changes to my house so I could return home from the hospital. I got a stair railing and grab bars in my bathroom. My neighbours still watch out for me. One has a key to my house and will come in to check on me if my outside light is not off at 7:30 each morning - weekends included. I love my home and location on McVickar Creek, with its little back and front yards, and in the spirit of cooperative living, we neighbours just look out for and help each other.*

## BRIAN

### *Life's Changes*



In his digital story, *Life's Changes*, Brian tells us about how he has overcome adversity throughout his life course and how he remains positive and motivated to keep himself connected.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- How has Brian made his apartment into a new home for himself?
- What strategies has Brian used to meet the people in his apartment building?
- How have the physical changes Brian has experienced contributed to him maintaining his independence in the neighbourhood in which he lives?
- How does Brian become a part of the life he sees around him?
- *Changing abilities, interests, and lifestyles often require older adults to adapt and move to more supportive and accommodating environments. How can older adults be better supported through these transitions? What steps can be taken to help older adults maintain social networks, navigate new environments, and sustain their their health and independence?*

## BRIAN

### *Life's Changes*

*I was born a healthy, inquisitive, energetic boy. That all changed at age 13. I was diagnosed with a brain tumor, that left me with disabilities mainly facial paralysis, poor balance, impaired dexterity, progressive hearing loss, and a speech impediment. From that time, my life became full of the challenges of learning to adapt to changes in my body. I had to learn how to speak and walk again, reach for things without knocking them over, basically, learn how to communicate with others and be understood. 45 years later, I'm still adapting.*

*After 11 years of living with my sister and her three children, it was time for me to find my own apartment, on that tree-lined street that I always wanted. I spent the last year, adapting to living on my own again, but I was determined not to be isolated. I made a point of introducing myself to my neighbours. The lady across the hall gives me loaves of homemade bread. The woman down the hall has two little dogs, one likes me, the other doesn't. I find that amusing. I gained instant rapport with the retired man that lives in the apartment below me. On my walks, I say hello to people and every Saturday I go to nearby yard sales and buy something. My favourite is a clock I purchased for \$5. The clock didn't work, but I knew I could fix it.*

*If there is one thing I have learned in my life's journey, it's this world is about change, if we want to be part of it we have to adapt. Life doesn't find you, you have to find life. You have to make things happen. In a year of living in my apartment, I know I gained a foothold here. I can tell from the looks and voices of recognition I receive. This place is now truly my home.*

# **GIANTs are Grand Individuals Aging with Neighbours in Thunder Bay.**

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Over three days in July 2017, a group of older adult participants, StoryCentre Canada facilitators, and volunteer coaches met to write and produce digital stories about their own, personal experiences aging at home and in their neighbourhood. Age Friendly GIANTs has since grown into a wide-reaching, community-based initiative facilitating engagement and producing resources about aging well at home and in community.

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