

# POSTER

## Late Breaker

K.A. THEURER, J. KRUL. *Overcoming social isolation through peer support programming: development of a digital prototype. Gerontechnology 2018;17(Suppl):189s; <https://doi.org/10.4017/gt.2018.17.s.184.00>* **Purpose**

Social isolation and loneliness among older adults has been associated with premature mortality and is a growing area of concern<sup>1</sup>. Research documents the impact of peer support in alleviating social isolation and loneliness<sup>2,3</sup>. Peer support enables individuals to learn new ways of coping through identification with others in a similar position<sup>4</sup>. The Java Music Club is a novel peer support group for residential care that uses themes chosen by participants to facilitate sharing and emotional support. The program uses facilitators guide and a training video, a group manual with 52 themes, theme-associated licensed music, readings, and photographs<sup>3</sup>. The program is being used across the continuum of care and is now implemented in over 800 organizations across Canada and the United States. Recommendations have been made for further research into interventions using new technologies to help reduce loneliness and social isolation among older adults<sup>5</sup>. The purpose of this study was to: (1) to develop a prototype based on the needs of those currently using the peer support program, and (2) explore individuals' experiences with the prototype. Specifically, we wanted to assess how intuitive and easy it was to use the digital prototype; determine how well the digital prototype met user expectations, assess the current features, and find out whether facilitators preferred the digital or paper version.

**Methods** We used a qualitative design to explore the facilitation of the Java Music Club using a digital platform prototype among facilitators across eight residential care settings. Using a cyclical process to provide understanding of the impact of the prototype, qualitative data was collected using a combination of observations and individual interviews with staff. We conducted two cycles of feedback sessions with six Java facilitators who included two recreation staff, a social worker, a volunteer manager, a music therapist and a volunteer. **Results & Discussion** The responses to the prototype were positive and included a definite preference for the digital version over the paper version. We observed that the current features largely matched user expectations, the labels for the user interface elements and navigation system seemed intuitive, and staff liked the additional features such as the ability to easily select themes, access new themes and music, keep track of previous sessions, and availability of resources. Facilitators indicated the need for additional items such as controls for adding/deleting group members, training and resources for new and experienced facilitators, the ability to add notes, access to new themes and music, connect with other facilitators and integration with Point Click Care. Our initial findings show promise and indicate the need to further develop this prototype to improve practices to reduce social isolation among older adults in residential care and beyond.

### References

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