

Creating Spaces to Connect

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“Connecting. The action of linking one thing with another.”

My position at Shalem Society for Senior Citizens Care is about making connections - community and volunteer connections. One of the most rewarding aspects of my role working in Shalem's Recreational and Volunteering Department, has been helping link Shalem seniors with Calgary Christian School students. This is particularly special to me, as I am an alumna and my two children attend the school.

At Shalem, we have worked hard to create spaces for seniors and kids to bond through activities like storytelling, arts & crafts, bingo and games, music programs, grandparent buddy reading programs, and more. Building connections like these with our neighbour also allows us to strengthen our communities at large. When we purposefully make spaces for seniors and kids to connect in meaningful ways, we ALL benefit. Studies show connections with kids improve a senior's quality of life. They generally experience better physical health, are happier, more energized, less isolated, and more hopeful.

For kids who do not have grandparents, this relationship can fill a void. It also helps kids understand and accept the aging process, provides an opportunity to learn new skills, and equips kids with a sense of purpose. Children and adolescents also benefit by learning how to relate to older people. Unsure about what they might see and what they should say, a senior home can be an uncomfortable experience for some. By getting to know real 'old people,' kids learn how to look beyond the typical ageism stereotypes.

With a lifetime of stories, words, and wisdom to share, seniors can offer a perspective that only comes with age. I witnessed this two years ago, while a CCS Grade 6 class was at Shalem. The kids were learning how to write stories and articles, so we invited the class to come over to interview our seniors. The afternoon went far better than I could have imagined. Many seniors showed up eager to share their stories and the kids soaked it all up.



The result was touching and inspiring stories about the seniors; stories we printed in Shalem's monthly newsletter.

While the pandemic has made it challenging to meet physically, we have explored and created beautiful connections that continue to allow for seniors and kids to share, care and celebrate. We regularly connect virtually with a Grade Five class at CCS.

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After a recent discussion about Christmas memories, CCS teacher Heather Thompson wrote to me stating the students learned a lot. "We had a really good discussion afterwards. The students thought it was interesting how the seniors shared stories about not having enough food, so they didn't have favourite Christmas treats. We also found it interesting that no one was born in Canada. They had all immigrated here."

The perspective and history seniors share is so valuable. Some of our seniors can even tell accounts of CCS in the early days, as they were part of the planning and ground-breaking. When we know our yesterdays, it can help us value and shape our tomorrows. Creating spaces to share these stories is vital, and lays the foundation for a meaningful relationship.

One memorable connection we recently shared with CCS was during the Christmas holidays. Shalem staff asked people to consider donating Care Packages for our then approximately 150 seniors. It was a big ask, but elementary kids and staff helped make it happen by donating and delivering 73 packages!

Shalem Manor resident, Jeanette Miller, told me how much she felt cared for and valued. "I just wept when I opened my gift bag. This is the best Christmas gift," shared Miller.

Gifts that evoke that kind of emotion are part of God's Biblical design for connection. All generations have the potential to bring joy to each other. That's why at Shalem, we believe an important part of our role is to foster intergenerational connections by creating safe spaces where the story threads of young and old can be interwoven.



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If you would like to volunteer or connect to one of the recreational programs at Shalem, please contact Michelle by email: recreation@shalem.ca or phone: Office: 403.240.2800 ext. 4 | Cell: 403.510.8902