

**PREVENTION-PROMOTION
HEALTH AND AGING**

JOG YOUR MIND

A Program of Cognitive Vitality for Seniors

INTRODUCTION

2015 Edition

**Centre de santé et de services sociaux
Cavendish
Health and Social Services Centre
Affilié universitaire**



**Centre de recherche et d'expertise
en gériatrie sociale**

Promoting cognitive vitality

Jog your Mind is a workshop that promotes the cognitive vitality of seniors who are worried about normal aging-related changes in their memory. The workshop manual offers ten sessions of between 90 to 120 minutes duration, according to the needs of the participants and the activities prioritised by the group leader. The session themes reflect the determinants of cognitive vitality such as: stress management, healthy eating, stimulating hobbies, etc.

Why promote cognitive vitality?

Intellectual functions are crucial for the maintenance of autonomy and quality of life for seniors. For quite some time, the perspective on cognitive aging has been fatalist; reflecting beliefs that cognitive deficits are inevitable. More recent research has shown that the brain can maintain its capacity to restructure itself in response to stimulation, even at an advanced age (American Society on Aging, 2007). Also, several other factors have been brought to light that can contribute to seniors cognitive faculties, notably: brain training, stimulating hobbies, healthy lifestyle, social contacts, and physical exercise.

Memory changes are a source of worry for a lot of older people. Many seniors are concerned with staying mentally alert as they age. A study conducted in the Netherlands with 1168 « normal aging » people aged between 62 and 85 showed that a quarter of them complained about their memory (Dik, Jonker, Comijs, Twisk, van Kamp, & Deeg, 2001). As well, in a study of 2500 Canadian women between 55 and 95 years of age the prevention of memory problems was the health issue they identified as top priority (88% of respondents) (Tannenbaum, Mayo, & Ducharme, 2005).

Advances in studies of the brain and aging in recent decades have proved to be very fruitful. These discoveries have shown that memory and concentration training programs for healthy aging adults can improve mental performance. Table I summarizes the consensus of a panel of experts consulted by the American Society on Aging (2007) regarding the results of their research and their recommendations.

Table 1: Findings and expert recommendations regarding intellectual vitality

Findings	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The normal brain can stay healthy just as long as the rest of the body. ○ Throughout our lifetime, activities and experiences that challenge our intellect generate positive changes even in the structure of our brain. ○ The frequency, intensity, and the diversity of intellectually stimulating activities are important. ○ Physical activities are good for both the body and the mind. ○ The effects of intellectual training endure for a long time. Some programs have been shown improvements in intellectual performance that have lasted for five years after the intervention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Brain health should be considered a high priority for public health. ○ More research should be conducted to explore the link between lifestyle/behaviours and intellectual faculties. ○ Health professionals need more education about brain health on a continuous basis. ○ Programs targeting the development and the maintenance of intellectual health should be put into place for all stages of life. ○ Programs intended for seniors should be designed to reflect the needs of the diverse clientele. ○ Community organisations must propose intellectually stimulation activities to seniors. ○ Seniors themselves must be responsible for their intellectual health and maintain a positive attitude in daily life.

From a global health perspective, interventions that promote cognitive vitality are now considered a very promising strategy for healthy, active aging. Studies have shown that programs specifically for memory training, concentration, and other intellectual faculties can improve the intellectual performance of healthy seniors (Ball et al., 2002), and their subjective appreciation their performance (Mohs et al., 1998). Researchers have found that the effect of these interventions can still be measured several months, even years after the completion of a program (O'Hara et al., 2006).

Origin of the project

For several years the prevention-promotion health and aging team of the CSSS Cavendish has been offering workshops on well aging to seniors living in its area, such as: nutrition, stress management, and menopause. The *Jog your Mind* program was inspired by one of these workshops that were originally offered in the form of five sessions on memory (Amzallag et al., 2004). The contents of the original workshop have been revamped and modified to include a broader presentation on the subject of intellectual vitality, more brain training activities and the identification of community resources that could contribute to the maintenance of cognitive functions.

The contents of the workshop have been submitted to several professionals to validate the scientific material and the elements related to the groups activities. Following this, the workshop was tested with six groups of seniors in various settings, as follows:

- Members of a community centre;
- Seniors recruited via neighbourhood announcements;
- Tenants of a private residence;
- Clients with physical limitations in a day centre.

The workshop has received a very favourable reception from seniors as evidenced in the high rate of participation. The participants have appreciated the format, the activities, and the group discussions. Although the impact has not yet been fully studied, several participants have expressed that their confidence in their intellectual abilities has improved.

For whom is the workshop intended?

There is not one universal intervention for stimulating cognitive faculties. Experts recommend creating programs that reflect the needs and abilities of the clientele. *Jog your Mind* is intended for seniors who are worried about changes in their memory resulting from normal aging processes. It is not intended for seniors with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia, since experts warn that programs based on learning mnemonic memory strategies could needlessly cause these people to feel frustrated (American Society on Aging, 2007).

At the time of recruitment, it is suggested to talk to each potential program participant personally, not just to one of their family members. Certain questions could be asked, for example: "How do you find your memory?" "Have you ever discussed your concerns about your memory to your family doctor?"

This way it becomes easier to raise the question of cognitive deficits and, in case of any doubts, to refer the person to their doctor for an assessment or to

suggest some activities that would be more appropriate, for example, those offered by the Alzheimer Society. (<http://www.alzheimer.ca>)

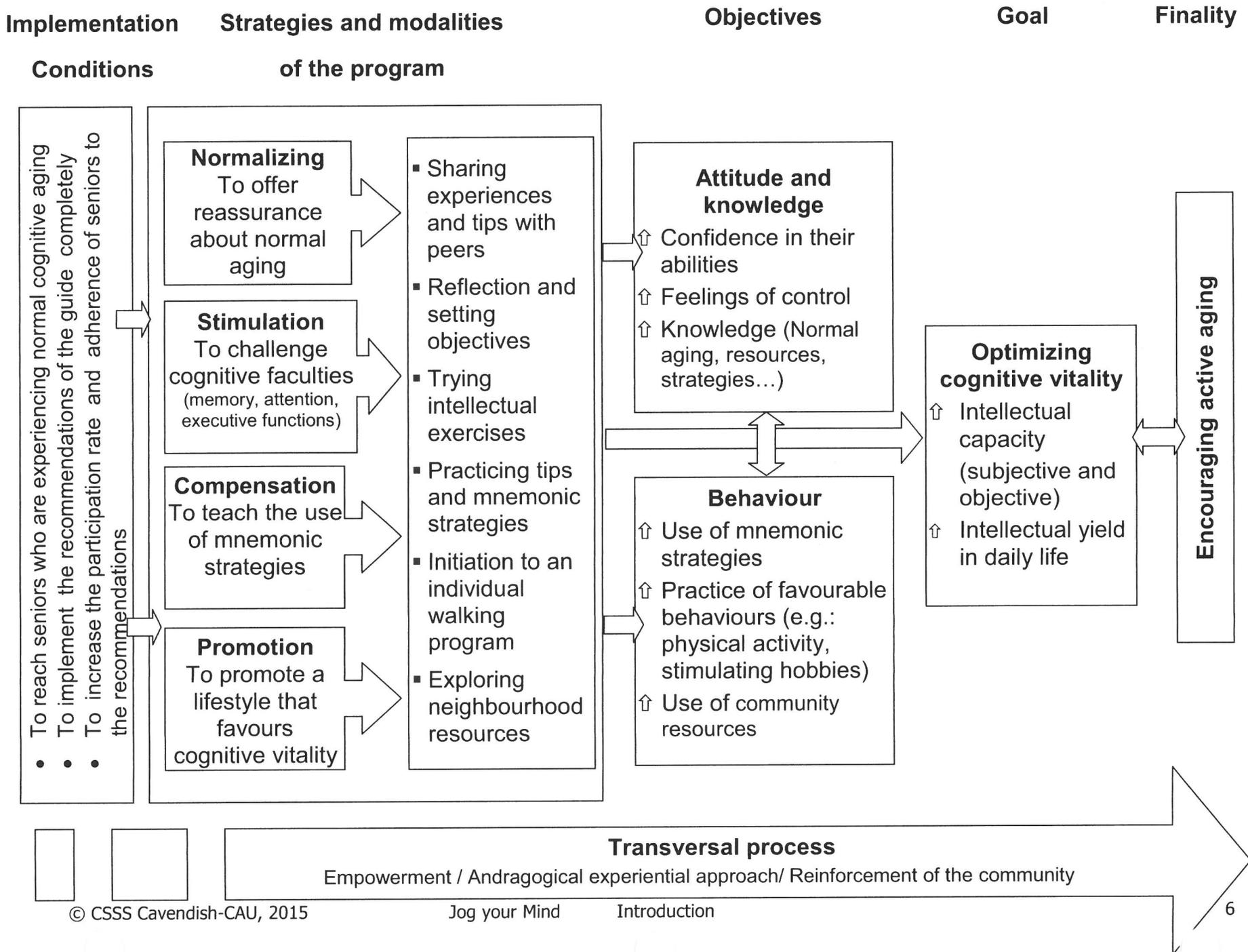
The participants may come from community organisations, day centres, apartment blocks, or the general population. Here are a few helpful strategies for recruiting participants: publicize in local newspapers, activity calendars of local recreation centres, notices in public places, presenting the workshop whilst doing another one. There is a model of a brochure in the *Annex* of this guide that could be used for promoting the workshop.

The workshop may be offered to groups of 5 to 15 seniors. It requires very few materials and can be offered in community halls, libraries, or in spaces loaned by grocery stores. The manual consists of detailed descriptions of the sessions that may be offered by community workers, health professionals, or eventually, volunteers who have received the training.

Goals of the workshop

Jog Your Mind is a workshop that offers information about intellectual health and cognitive training. Figure 1 presents the underlying logic of the workshop, that is, the link between the various components and their objectives. The workshop follows a global health approach that takes into account the bio-psycho-social determinants of intellectual vitality. The workshop objectives look at attitudes and knowledge about intellectual functioning, as well as behaviours. Ultimately, the hoped-for effects are to improve intellectual vitality, that is, objective abilities and intellectual performance in daily life.

Figure 1: Logic Model for the *Jog your Mind* workshop



RUNNING THE WORKSHOP

The workshops of the CSSS Cavendish are based on the concept of personal change, that is, to help people identify and better understand the important factors related to their aging that can lead them to a greater mastery of their aging process. To accomplish this, a group workshop format has been selected because it reinforces the feeling for the person that they are not alone in what they are going through. Also, with the support of the group members and the leader the participants can explore realistic avenues for change. The group can also bring together people with similar interests, thus creating greater cohesion.

People have many reasons for joining a workshop: their interests and culture, curiosity about the topic, socialization, hobbies, etc. Testing of *Jog your Mind* has demonstrated that most participants want to be reassured about their own intellectual faculties or want to learn concrete ways to improve their memory. The workshop has been created to respond to these needs.

A workshop based on hands-on experience

The workshop process was inspired by the experiential approach of Kolb (1984), often used in adult education. The underlying principle of this approach is that participants are more apt to learn if they have the chance to experience a situation from which they draw their own conclusions which can then be integrated into their daily lives.

According to Kolb (1984), adult « learners » remember:

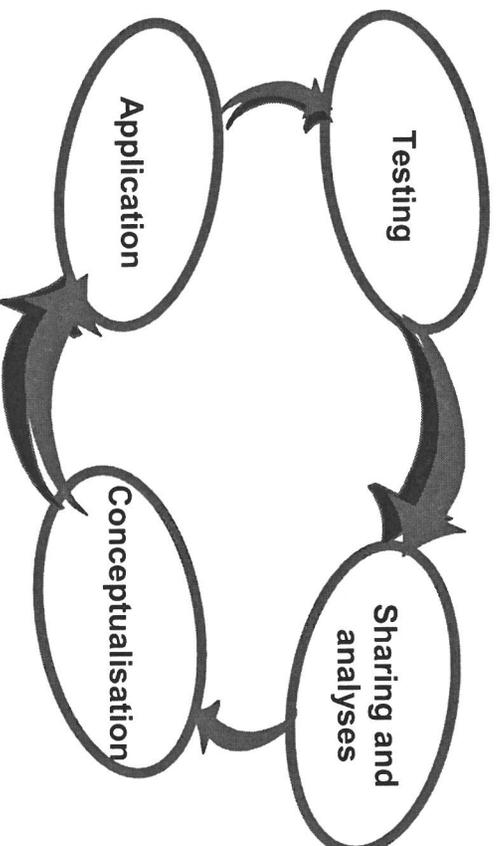
- 10% of what they read;
- 20% of what they hear;
- 30% of what they see;
- 50% of what they see and hear;
- 70% of what they say;
- 90% of what they say and do.

This is why the experiential approach uses discussion and experimentation as the predominant strategies for learning. According to Kolb, the needs of adult participants for learning are: to be psychologically ready to receive the information, to be able to make links to their personal lives, to actively participate in the learning process, and to be exposed to a variety of activities.

The topics in the *Jog your Mind* sessions follow a four-step sequential process (figure 2):

- 1) Testing: the participants do a reflection exercise about the proposed topic.
- 2) Sharing and analyses: the participants review the activity and answer questions related to the testing process.
- 3) Conceptualisation: as a group, the participants come to general conclusions about the exercise; the leader completes the activity with an explanation of the concepts.
- 4) Application: the concepts are then transposed into tips that the participants may be applied in their daily lives; this also includes sharing existing resources.

Figure 2: The workshop testing process



The workshop thus aims to accompany the participants in their process of change, with the ultimate goal being the application of what they learned into their daily lives. The application step is important because it allows appropriation of the concepts and personal commitment to the process. It is very important to encourage the participants to share the tips and resources they use. The participant's workbook presents additional exercises for each session and offers the opportunity to put the concepts discussed during the sessions into application. In the workbook, the participants can also learn about different exercises that can stimulate their brain cells.

Volunteer group leadership

The Jog your Mind program can also be offered by experienced volunteers. The CSSS Cavendish-CAU team has developed a variety of tools that can help in preparing and supporting the volunteers. These tools can be downloaded free-of-charge at the website of the Centre for research and expertise in social gerontology <http://www.creges.ca>.

THE ROLE OF THE GROUP LEADER

How the group is run is often the determining factor for reaching the workshop objectives and satisfying the participants. The functioning of the group is a shared responsibility between the group leader and the participants, at the level of the climate of the group, the process and the exercises. The following text presents several points on the role of the group leader.

Create a favourable timetable and physical environment

It is important to ensure that the physical environment is comfortable: not too hot or cold, enough chairs and places for everyone, and good visibility for all the participants. Try to arrive about a half hour before the beginning of the session to prepare the room and the material and to welcome the participants personally. Running a group for seniors poses the problem of ensuring that everyone will be able to hear what is being said. To overcome this, the room should be organised to minimize the distance between the group leader and the participants and so they can see each other as well. A configuration in the shape of a « U » can facilitate this. Special attention should be paid to reducing extraneous noise. It may be necessary sometimes to close the door or turn off fans.

Most participants appreciate the duration of the sessions of 120 minutes each, which allows enough time for discussions, the chance to go at everyone's pace during the exercises, and to form work groups to do some of the homework in their work books together. If a time frame of 90 minutes is selected, then it is recommended that the leader choose the most pertinent exercises for his or her group. In this way the rhythm and speed of the group does not become counter productive or too challenging.

Many seniors who join a group do so also with the aim for more socialization. Thus, it is important to encourage exchanges, and to plan for a break of at least 20 minutes in a place that could encourage chatting and informal discussions after the session. Serving some refreshment and coffee at the beginning or during the break promotes a friendly ambiance and is always appreciated.

Create an atmosphere of respect

From the first session, the leader should promote a warm and welcoming climate that encourages cohesion, empathy, and inclusion. This makes the participants feel comfortable in sharing their feelings and experiences with the other members. The participants should also be encouraged to be active members of the group and not adopt the role of observers. To do this the leader must verify the expectations of the members, clearly explain the objectives of the workshop, go around the table to make sure that everyone has the chance to say what they want, present the choices to the group and give everyone a chance to make changes if they wish. This favours empowerment of the group and respects individual needs as well.

The group members should also be reminded about the importance of keeping an open mind towards the opinions of the other members and to respect the confidential nature of what they might hear the others say. In the first session there is a form to be filled out by the members which talks about commitment to the workshop. This provides the opportunity to discuss these norms with the group.

The group leader must resolve any conflicts within the group in a fair and diligent manner. Problematic behaviour must be addressed without delay, before it can become a distraction and make the objectives more difficult to reach.

The role of the group leader is to help the members find their own solutions and not to find them for them. If anyone seems to be uncomfortable, it is recommended to take that person aside, during the break for example, in order to understand what the nature of the problem is and to discuss their individual needs.

Active listening

Active listening is an indispensable tool for the group leader. It requires more concentration and energy than being the one doing all the talking, but it is a skill that can be developed. Here are a few guidelines for active listening:

- Control your urge to do all the talking.
- Look at the speaker in the eyes. This offers a non-verbal message to the speaker that you are with them and paying attention.
- Avoid interrupting the speaker, do not complete sentences, and prevent the other leaders, if any, from changing the subject.
- Show that you understand what the other person is saying and experiencing by asking simple questions. Show empathy by asking questions that help the person speaking to vocalize their thoughts.

- Reformulate in your own words what you have heard the other person say, to verify that you have completely understood.
- Show you are really listening by using expressions such as “I understand”, “perfectly” and “exactly”.
- Observe the reactions of the other members of the group (the non-verbal), invite them to comment on what they are hearing and ask them if they have ever experienced the same thing.

Gain the confidence of the participants

The participants must understand that they can say what they want, even if their opinion is not the same as the others. This attitude can be reinforced by reformulating some of the statements; “you believe that, “you seem to not agree with what’s being said...”. It is important that everyone respect differing points of view. Sometimes it is necessary to move away from a discussion that gets too animated and by focussing on the main points, ask the members who are quieter to express their opinion: “Up until now, these are the ideas that are being expressed, does anyone else want to share their ideas or present another view point?”

Encourage group interaction

During the first sessions, the participants often tend to direct all of their comments to the group leader. The leader should encourage the members to share their ideas and perceptions with each other as well. Saying the name of the person who is speaking helps to focus attention on this person. After that, it becomes easier to invite the other members to react as well, “what do the rest of you think about what Robert said?” Try to discourage long stories or anecdotes; this helps everyone make connections to what is being said.

Ask questions

The workshop is a place where the participants can get as much from each other as they do from the group leader. It is also important to ask certain kinds of questions that conform to the workshop objectives, such: normalisation of worries and sharing of tips and resources. There are several kinds of questions that can be used, each one with its own purpose and application.

An *open question* is a question addressed to the whole group. Because there is a possibility of many answers the leader should be prepared to ask the question several times and to ask sub-questions. A *direct question* is a question the leader asks to one specific person, often after having naming the person. A *relay question* is one asked by one member of the group that is then relayed by the

leader to either another group member or to the group as a whole to stimulate the discussion.

Since the leader must maintain neutrality it is important to avoid expressing personal opinions when answering questions or making comments. For example: "I think it's better to do...", or "I think you should..." It is preferable to bring the question back to the group.

In general, do not ask questions that:

- Can be answered with a "yes or no";
- Might arouse antagonism;
- Are personal, a participant may not want to answer in front of a group;
- Put a participant on the spot, such as, "Joanne, I'm not sure you have the right answer to this one..."
- Reflect your own opinion, such as "Don't you think that..."

Verify that all the participants can hear you

Hearing problems are very common amongst seniors. Here are a few tips to make sure that everyone can hear everything the leader and all the group members are saying:

- Eliminate ambient noise and ask for silence before speaking;
- Make sure that everyone can see the face of the person who is talking (avoid talking while facing the wall);
- Place the participants with their backs to the windows;
- Speak slowly, raise your voice;
- Summarize important points regularly, write them on the board;
- Ask questions to verify that everyone has understood what has been said;
- If a participant has brought up something important, make sure that everyone has heard it, and if necessary, repeat it.

Handling problem situations

Absences, tardiness or dropping out

This type of behaviour can be contagious and it disrupts the group for the other participants and interferes with group cohesion. At the first meeting, stress the importance of attending all sessions. If they must miss a session, ask that they advise in advance, if possible.

Monopolizers

In group situations there are often one or two people who take up too much time telling their story, expressing their opinions and getting into debates with other members. The group may, at first, welcome someone who takes the lead but eventually they can become resentful if they feel that too much time is being spent on this person's problems to the deficit of everyone else. This behaviour can arise from social anxiety and the person might not be aware of doing it. There are a few strategies that can be used to deal with this.

- At first, in a general way remind the group that everyone needs to be heard so to keep their comments to the point.
- If the behaviour continues, gently interrupt the person and ask them to summarize what they want to say so that the others have a chance to comment.
- At a certain point, if this continues to be a problem take the person aside and ask them to be more concise in their comments.
- It is also possible to use this as a group experience and turn the problem back to the group by asking them why they permit (or encourage) one member to carry the burden of speaking for everyone.
 - This may startle participants who had thought of themselves as victims of the monopolizer.
 - It can open the door to discussion fears of assertiveness and hurting other people's feelings.

Silent members

Some people fear speaking out in a large group. Invite the silent participants to talk by calling on them a few times. Without making an issue, ascertain if the person is feeling included and is benefiting from the discussions.

SUGGESTED MATERIALS FOR THE WORKSHOP

The workshop was created so that it can be implemented in a variety of ways and at not too much expense. The only materials required are usually photocopies and pens or pencils. However, in places where there is access to a variety of intellectual games the leader is invited to use them instead of those that are in this guide. To facilitate the process a white board can be used or a flip chart. The participants appreciate having a folder for all the papers they will be receiving throughout the course of the sessions. A form with the name of the workshop that can be printed on stickers is in the annex section of this guide.

In order to reduce the amount of paper to handle, the leader can present a stapled package of the material for that week to the participants. The workbook has several activities that can be done during the session as well as some homework for them to do during the week. Other papers that are needed for the session are included in the section “workshop materials.” It is suggested to distribute them one by one before giving out the tips and the recommendations. Some members may become flustered by all the papers, while others may start to do the homework during the class. To keep everyone’s attention the leader can ask the participants to arrange them in their files, discarding unneeded ones before each session.

The participant’s workbook contains some reading suggestions for those who would like to learn more about the subjects that are raised. They are usually documents that have been written for the general public and can be found in local libraries and book stores. In keeping with the experiential approach of the workshop it is recommended that the leader can bring in any additional materials they have that reflect the theme and objectives of the workshop, for example:

- Books on memory;
- Magazines;
- Pamphlets about services in the community;
- Activity booklets: puzzles, cross words, brain teasers, etc.;
- Games that can challenge intellectual functions: 2 or 3 dimensional jig saw puzzles, card games, number games.

These items can be on display during the group and can be loaned to the members for the week (see the lending form in the annex section). It is recommended to insert a sheet of clear plastic acetate cut to size and that can be dry erased over the puzzles so the exercises can be re-used over and over by other participants.

THE TEAM FOR PREVENTION-PROMOTION HEALTH AND AGING OF THE CSSS CAVENDISH-CAU

The health and social services centre (CSSS) Cavendish is a university affiliated centre in social gerontology. The prevention-promotion team in health and aging (PPHA) of the CSSS Cavendish was came together as a partnership between research and practice. The team offers several kinds of interventions aimed at health promotion for seniors. Its mandate is at times local and provincial. In the local area, the aim is to offer health promotion activities to seniors who live on the territory of the CSSS Cavendish in partnership with the local health and community resources. The activities are offered in several ways, for example: workshops for seniors, and a walking club. In the provincial arena the PPHA team develops, validates, and supports activities and intervention models in a way that is transferable to others to enhance the practice of health promotion for seniors. In addition the team produces workshop manuals, develops training and offers support to practitioners.

The workshops created by the PPHA team target many issues of aging, for example: cognitive vitality, stress management, chronic disease management, etc. The workshops offer a place for exchange and learning that primarily aim to motivate the participants to adopt a healthy lifestyle and attitudes to improve their health. Following participation in one of the thematic workshops the participants learn that they are not alone in their feelings and perceptions. This encourages them to undertake a process of change and to begin to explore the resources presented by the group leader and their peers.

The approach of the PPHA program is based on the principles of active aging:

- Maintaining a positive attitude towards aging;
- Combat ageism;
- Empowerment;
- Integration of the concept of overall health;
- Balance in life;
- Promoting social participation.

The following pages describe the main points of the program and give some examples of how they are applied in the *Jog your Mind* workshop.

Maintaining a positive attitude towards aging

Attitude is an internal disposition, determined by experiences that cause someone to react in a positive or a negative way to a situation. Scientists have proven the benefits of positive thinking on longevity; those who envision their aging process in a serene way live longer than those who are more anxious about it. On the other hand, worry and fear of the aging process accelerate it. Studies show that those who are more optimistic live 7.5 years longer than pessimists (Levy et al., 2002).

- ⇒ In the *Jog your Mind* workshop, the participants learn that many of the small lapses of memory they have noticed can be caused by many things, not only the aging process.

Combating ageism

The term ageism refers to an attitude or a behaviour that discriminates against someone because of their age, in particular older people (catalogue.iugm.qc.ca/thesaurus). The founding principles of the PPHA program are under scored by the belief in the capacity of a person to learn and contribute to society, at any age. The practitioners in the program always pass the message of a positive vision of aging.

- ⇒ *Jog your Mind* explores the myths about cognitive aging and offers activities that reflect the idea that although sometimes seniors are victims of ageism, they themselves can, at times, have preconceived ideas about aging.

Having a feeling of control over life (empowerment)

Empowerment is a process through which a person or a social group develops the means to permit themselves to become aware, to reinforce their potential, to transform, while in the process of transformation and in the perspective of improving the conditions of their lives and environment (catalogue.iugm.qc.ca/thesaurus). The interventions offered in the PPHA program put this concept into action by focussing on taking charge of life and encouraging the participants to identify and use their strengths.

- ⇒ *Jog your Mind* offers many concrete strategies to help the participants take control of their cognitive vitality through learning mnemonic techniques and trying some intellectually stimulating activities.

Integrating the concept of global health

Active aging means that a person is able to find balance in their lives in relation to their overall health at all levels, biological, psychological, and social (figure 3).

The *biological sphere* is composed of elements that contribute to physical well-being and the maintenance of cognitive vitality. The *psychological sphere* includes having a sense of meaning in life as well as feelings of psychological well-being. Finally, the *social sphere* refers partly to future planning as well as social well-being that includes family and community participation.

- ⇒ In the *Jog your Mind* workshop these elements are covered by looking at their influence on cognitive vitality, for example, the link between stress and memory, and the importance of physical activity for maintaining cognitive vitality, etc.

Taking on the notion of balance in life

The notion of life balance looks at the person as a combination of all of these dimensions that have been integrated into their lives and modeled through unique life experiences. These dimensions are inter-related and disequilibrium in one area can have an affect on all of them. In this program, balance is considered an essential condition for overall health. This is the reason why the exercises often include a reflection on all of the dimensions that make up active aging.

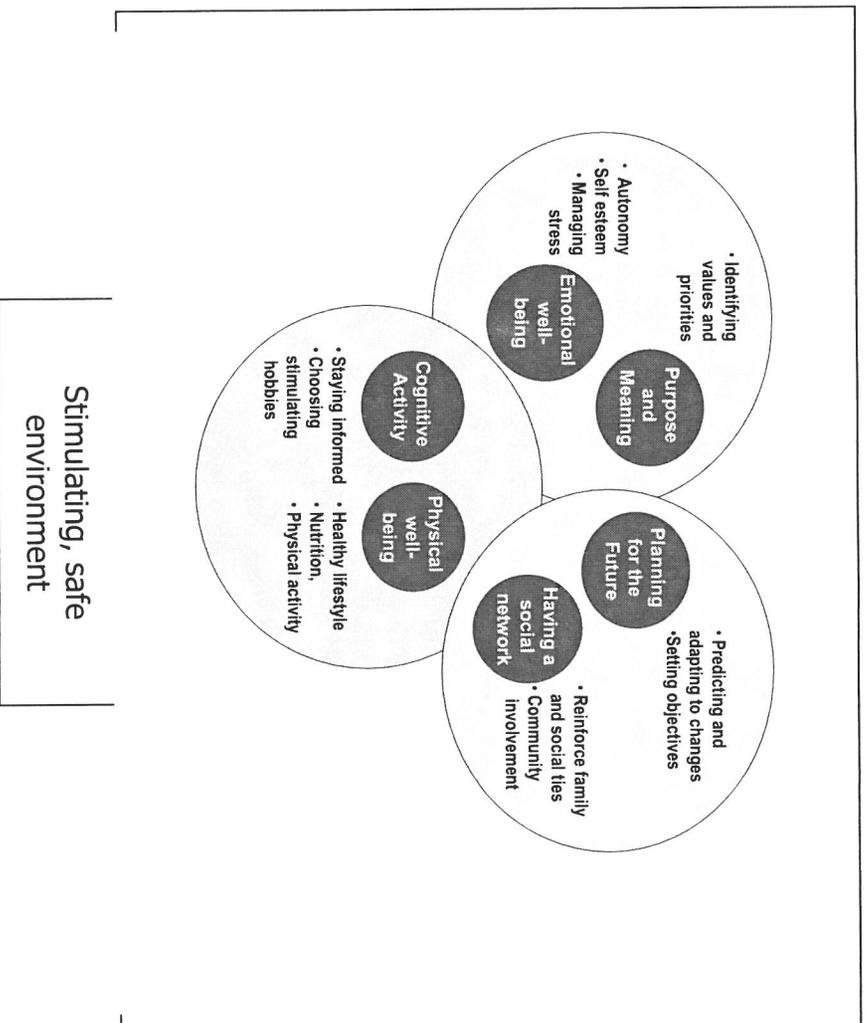
- ⇒ One of the sessions of the *Jog your Mind* workshop includes a discussion about the notion of life balance. The participants are asked to identify their priorities and to set some personal objectives.

Promoting the social participation of seniors

Social participation is the act of taking part in a group or in society (catalogue.iugm.qc.ca/thesaurus). Members of a group can reinforce their feelings of belonging through social participation. As well, for many older people, social participation is a fundamental part of maintaining their dignity and quality of life. In fact, it calls on their skills, wisdom, and their experience, allowing them to increase their ability to take charge of their lives. Also, the social involvement of older people can have positive repercussions for everyone.

- ⇒ The last session of *Jog your Mind* discusses the importance of social involvement to stay mentally stimulated. Participants are encouraged to explore places in which they may become more socially involved (Volunteering, community groups, family involvement, action committees).

Figure 3: Bio-psycho-social dimensions of active aging



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