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GREY MATTERS

A GUIDE TO COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH WITH SENIORS

Nancy Marlett and Claudia Emes

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Appendix 7

Follow-Up Focus Group to Discuss Rural Resilience Findings

Cochrane, 2004

Sponsored by Family and Community Support Services (Cochrane),
Town of Cochrane, Kerby Centre

This follow up workshop provides an opportunity to learn about the ideas generated in the first research workshop. In Participatory Action Research, you, the participants, are the active ingredient – like the yeast in baking. Your ideas lead to new ways of thinking about resilience. In the group sessions, we invite you to react to the themes that emerged from your earlier work, to think about whether the theme holds true to your experience and to add your own stories about how this theme makes sense in your own life.

Five factors were identified:

- Personal strengths
- Opportunities that adversity provides to learning about identity
- Resilience roles – learning from others
- Purpose and contributions
- Natural cycles
- Quotes are included

Personal Strengths

Personal strengths seem to include characteristics or skills that have come from your experiences and family background. Please add personal examples to the following categories:

- Ability to live with change and that you can be flexible.

I moved so much; I just learned to be resilient.

Family relationships change dramatically; you always have to regroup.

The war separated us; we had to learn to do things differently.

- Finding balance in your life and interests.

Exercise, entertainment, volunteering, a little bit of everything.

I'm happy my family helped me find peace and balance.

- Learning to focus and to plan.

Chores, children's responsibilities. Work was so hard, you had to stay organized and focused to get the chores done.

Chores build resilience; you couldn't not do the chores.

Keep your things in order so that others don't have to clean up your mess.

Live your own life; let other's mind their own business; don't meddle in your children's lives and let them live their own problems and solve them.

When families are in trouble, the little ones are expected to take their roles and be responsible.

Accept responsibility and act accordingly.

- **Sense of humour.**

Black humour to see you through.

Just see the funny side of tragedy.

Try to see the funny side; talk your troubles out by laughing.

- **Self-esteem.**

Belief in oneself; self-confidence and self-esteem will build resilience.

Family and friends build self-confidence; they care about your struggles and successes.

Opportunities that Adversity Provides to Learn about Identity

Stress and struggle helps you learn about strength and resilience, tempering the steel of your personality.

Please add personal examples to the following categories:

- **Shared grief and loss. You develop identity based on common struggle; you all can survive and grow.**

Kids died young; you became a new kind of family and formed bonds with other families who shared the same experience.

My father died early, my mother ran the farm, and we all pitched in.

- Learning to accept suffering, situations that couldn't be changed.

Family violence was a source of resilience, isolation made it easy to hide the violence; we didn't know it was not that way.

Times were just tough, violent to wife, kids, animals and sons learned to be the same.

- Doing without. We were the lucky ones, we know the hard times.

This generation is resilient because we survived without comforts.

Living through the depression, everyone had to live through it.

The war brought us together; no one had much.

Purpose and Contributions

Having a purpose keeps you going with a reason to try again and a reason to live. Please add personal examples to the following categories:

- Make the world a better place, keeps you focused.

Leave your footprint behind,

Make the world a more beautiful place, garden, be kind.

Stand up for someone.

- Appreciate the small things.

I look forward to each new day, new season, hot tea.

A pet means a lot.

Cocoa at the end of a walk home.

The things we did without made us appreciate the little things.

Good music, going to church.

Today I enjoy making something out of nothing.

- **Power of vision: Involvement beyond yourself.**

Belonging to church.

Knowing there is a purpose to my life.

Giving without expecting.

Helping people just comes naturally when you all had to help to survive.

Standing up for someone should be natural.

BSE, farmers helped each other.

Everyone helped with the haying.

Roles and Resilience

How being connected and in relationship teaches you about resilience and what is expected to be resilient. Please add personal examples to the following categories:

- **Childhood freedom to experience life without adult control.**

Children were able to be active and independent, not like today.

When we were young, my brother and I would ride to Vernon on the train that delivered mail, rode on the mail bags.

Had to learn how to get along with each other, on our own.

You could fight your own battles.

Go off on your own.

- **Gain strength from being with others like me, knowing that I can be strong.**

Getting to know others who have survived grief and illness helps me to know that it is possible to get on with life.

You feel less isolated, you see yourself in others when you belong to a group of people like you.

Cooking together really helps, get together with friends.

- Family members were role models, especially mothers and women relatives.

Grandmas cared for children, taught us what it was like for them.

Mothers were left raising the family in war and on the farm. They became our models for resourcefulness.

When my wife died, I thought I had lost everything; I found another partner who has taught me resilience.

Large families teach children about hard life and finding joy.

- Teachers were a window to the world.

When things were bad, the teacher was there to demonstrate strength and build self-confidence.

Teachers were very young, just like us, and they were on their own.

Showed us you could get off the farm, to become a teacher and see the world.

The scoutmaster was my model when I was in my teens.

Teachers gave us strength and ideas to help us cope.

The Role of Natural Cycles in Understanding Resilience

Living in isolated, harsh, and marginal farms, children were part of harsh treatment that had to be made sense of. Without extended family or neighbours, many turned to nature and the promise of spring and regeneration to give them a sense of meaning. Whatever happened, things would get better.

This theme seems to reflect a particular rural theme. Could you expand?

Would you be interested in continuing this resilience project?
Yes ____ No ____

If yes, would you like to help with other rural workshops?

If yes, would you like to help design research projects?

If yes, would you like to join the research teams studying resilience?

Would you be interested in developing other options for seniors?

Comments on the process or the information.

Thank you for your assistance and we look forward to working with you again.



Noreen Mahoney

*It's amazing to see the energy
that comes from being involved in
research that can make a difference.*