



GREY MATTERS

A GUIDE TO COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH WITH SENIORS

Nancy Marlett and Claudia Emes

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The retired professors and team leaders were seniors, accomplished researchers, and the bridge between the senior researchers and the principal investigators. Their enthusiasm and wisdom kept the unruly project on target and on time. A special thank you to Dr. Mo Watanabe, Dr. Joan Ryan, Dr. Bob Stebbins, Dr. Ralph Miller, and Dr. Mary Sheridan. They came to help run a day-workshop on resilience and stayed for three years.

The senior researchers showed that, given the opportunity, they could stand with the best. They had to endure while we tried to sort out the processes; they bravely took on new and sometimes frightening roles; and they patiently negotiated with us for their power and gracefully took over the project. Their determination and talent was an inspiration. A special thank you to Anne Hartley, Margaret Harche, Shirley Atkinson, Pauline Gorton, Maureen Wills, Nancy Jensen, Fouad Henin, Noreen Mahoney, Ida Henin, Marilyn Akazawa, Dr. Jenifer Meynell, Winnifred Woodhouse, Geoff Elliott, Grant Allen, Sheila Power, Carroll Jonns, Julia Thorpe, Dr. Herb Breitreutz, and Valerie Breitreutz, who were the core of the senior researchers.

Our partner sites were the bedrock of the research. They welcomed us and opened their doors to a new model of negotiated partnerships. They were observed and interviewed and they hosted our focus groups. They encouraged their members to take part in the narrative interviews: Kerby Centre, Confederation Park Senior Citizen Centre, Japanese Canadian Seniors Club, Okotoks Seniors' Club, Cochrane Family and Community Support Services, and various churches. Through all of this they welcomed challenge and supported the seniors as they grew in their roles as researchers.

After the project was completed, two other sites offered to implement the research methods and these sites are included in this book. The Snowbirds Fellowship in Bragg Creek and their oral history project is highlighted in Chapter 3 and the Ogden House Housing Project is highlighted in Chapter 4. Okotoks Seniors' Club provides the basis for Chapter 5 and the experiences of the Kerby Centre in starting an Elder Abuse Shelter provides the basis for Chapters 7 and 8.

There are many at the University of Calgary and the Kerby Centre who should receive thanks but special thanks go to Dorothy Dooley, Coordinator of the KCE, who kept the finances on track, the schedules organized, the meals ready, and the reports written. She was always there when senior researchers were discouraged or angry, when the investigators or the university had impossible deadlines, and when the media demanded responses. She holds a vision of the KCE that will move seniors to the forefront of innovation and research.

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Finally, thanks to all the families and friends who supported us during the past three years of writing this manual through its various iterations: pamphlets, manual, and finally, a book written with seniors.



This book is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Joan Ryan, a University of Calgary professor and one of Canada's pioneers in Participatory Action Research (PAR) with Aboriginal communities. She taught and enforced the principles of senior leadership with all of us. She gave seniors the confidence they needed to try something new and to be researchers with other seniors. Dr. Ryan will be remembered for her down-to-earth manner and her ability to teach through stories. Her passion about PAR kept us all on our toes.