

Minds in Motion ® Intergenerational Program

This beautiful story started in May of 2016.

One of the Minds in Motion® sites for the Alzheimer Society of Perth County is located at the YMCA of Stratford-Perth. The participants of this program would be greeted with smiling faces as they transferred to another room for the therapeutic portion of the program. A group of 12 children would also be transferred to a new programming place at the same time. It didn't take long for these two groups to build friendships during this brief interaction. What started off as exchanging smiles, quickly turned into high fives and what followed is truly hard to put into words. The Alzheimer Society of Perth County's Minds in Motion ® facilitator Pamela Balfour reached out to the Childcare Supervisor at the YMCA Stratford-Perth. Pamela had a proposal for an Intergeneration Program involving the participants of the Minds in Motion® program and the children of their preschool program. The YMCA was on board immediately and shared that they felt the program would be very beneficial to the children. This was going to be the first intergenerational program for the participants of Minds in Motion ® and the preschool children. Everyone was very excited. Pamela had planned for the children to join the second hour of Minds in Motion ® with the hopes that the children would be engaged for around 30 minutes. The preschool childcare teachers shared that a 30 minute program for this group of children would be appropriate. After an hour of physical fitness the Minds in Motion ® participants patiently awaited the arrival of the children. As in the past the children came bouncing into the program space and shared high fives with all of the participants. But instead of the children continuing on to their next adventure they were invited to stay. The children shared some of their favourite childcare songs, then both groups came together and sang familiar songs. The children shared their likes and dislikes along with the Minds in Motion ® participants. This sparked conversation between the two groups regarding food, music, sports, family and toys. Pamela shared that the connection between the older adults and the children was indescribable. High fives and hugs were exchanged at the end of program leaving the room with an amazing energy and a group full of giggling older adults. When the group of older adults were asked what they thought of the visit with the preschool children the following thoughts were shared.

"I felt like a kid again." ~ person with dementia

"They remind me of my grandchildren that are far away." ~ care partner

"The children are beautiful." ~ person with dementia

The preschool teachers shared that the children really enjoyed their time with the older adults. Since the program was so successful another visit was organized for the next 8 week session. The second gathering brought the same energy, smiles and giggles but included playing with play dough and colouring. This program was scheduled to last for 30 minutes again but when Pamela and the preschool teachers witnessed the magic the program continued another 30 minutes. One of the preschool teachers shared that the children rarely stay quiet and engaged for that length of time. Children that are normally shy were non stop chatting, children that are normally very active were sitting patiently listening to stories from the older adults all while giggles filled the entire space. All the older adults agreed that the children brought energy, innocence, laughter and made them feel young again. This intergenerational program has benefitted everyone involved from the children to the older adults to the facilitators and volunteers. The preschool children are now a permanent fixture for Minds in Motion® Stratford and this beautiful story will continue.





