

KVR Middle School classes connect with City for 'age-friendly' pilot project

(Penticton, BC – November 2, 2020) – About 50 students from KVR Middle School will connect with a group of older adults at Cherry Park Retirement Residence thanks to a spinoff pilot project created as a result of the City of Penticton's age-friendly initiative.

The two Grade 6 classes will start as pen pals as they gain perspective about what it means to be an older adult in our community. The teachers hope these relationships will continue throughout the year, building connections through virtual meetings and online games.

"We've been hearing feedback that older adults are worried about the coming winter and feelings of isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic," said the City of Penticton's Social Development Specialist, Adam Goodwin. "We're thrilled these classes are taking initiative to provide social interaction and taking the time to learn about the older adult community in Penticton."

The City launched its age-friendly campaign on Oct. 13, encouraging residents – young and old – to share their ideas and photographs about how Penticton can become even more welcoming and inclusive for older adults. As part of this initiative, the City reached out to School District 67 with a teacher's guide informing educators about the online photo project.

"We welcome this opportunity for our students to connect with our larger community. We have seen a huge increase in student social conscience recently and many are just looking for an opportunity to exercise this. I can't think of a better way than for our youth to dialogue with seniors and hear their thoughts on the strengths and stretches of what our community offers. It's an opportunity for them to build relationships, gain perspective and have a voice," said Steve DeVito, Principal of KVR Middle School.

The City is also working with Penticton Seniors' Drop-In Centre Society and the South Okanagan Seniors Wellness Society to possibly expand the project.

"We are very grateful to see specific initiatives arising already from this age-friendly project, bringing together people of all ages and backgrounds," said Elmie Saaltink, President of the South Okanagan Seniors Wellness Society.

If your residence is interested in taking part, please email socialdevelopment@penticton.ca. This project was also inspired by Penticton Library's latest pen pal initiative, which has connected citizens with residents at Haven Hill Retirement Centre.

The deadline for the City's age-friendly initiative has been extended to Friday, Nov. 27, with feedback being collected at shapeyourcitypenticton.ca. Participants can also provide submissions at kiosks at City Hall and Penticton Library.

Mignonne Wood, President of the Penticton Seniors' Drop-In Centre Society, encourages all residents to continue submitting their ideas: "We are being given the opportunity to provide feedback on what works for seniors, what doesn't work for seniors and how areas of concern might be addressed. This chance to have a voice should not be missed as the issues, suggestions and ideas presented will help the City improve its support for seniors in our community."

Data collected will help the City prepare its Age-Friendly Action Plan as it moves forward with plans to become recognized by the Province of B.C. as an age-friendly community. To find out more, visit shapeyourcitypenticton.ca.

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