



George Brown College Retirees' Association

How Chatting to Wellness Started

While Mahad was visiting his family in Pakistan, he noticed that despite living with family, his grandparents were still experiencing isolation; they were doing



everything by themselves. Mahad was intrigued by this because if social isolation of seniors is occurring in family-oriented cultures, then it must be even more prevalent in North America. Upon further research, Mahad found that mental health issues and suicide rates were higher in seniors than in youth. Mahad was shocked by this finding, since teen mental health and suicide are talked about frequently, but rarely is senior mental health. With this research, Mahad was feeling inspired to make a change and help seniors combat social isolation. A solution, that Mahad noticed had worked with his

grandparents, was simply chatting to someone. With the idea of connecting a senior with someone to talk to, Mahad rounded a few of his friends up and pitched the mission and vision to them. Mahad had also gone to some retirement homes and some of the residents were willing to be a part of this way of combating social isolation. Mahad's friends started setting up calls with the residents. Slowly and surely, the organization grew with more recruitment of volunteers and more retirement and long-term care homes wanting to connect their residents with the organization. One Mahad's biggest challenges when creating this organization was proving to people that senior mental health is an important topic. Today, mental health is still a new topic and some people feel it still isn't really that important.

Volunteer Recruitment and Training Process

The volunteers that are recruited by Chatting to Wellness are 80–90% post secondary students. While the main goal is to help seniors, volunteering for the organization also provides students with a practical learning experience. Recruitment mainly started through word of mouth, but progressed to postings on social media. Recently, with the pandemic, there has been a major media cycle on the organization, and some celebrities such as Lily Singh and Joe Jonas

have talked about it as well. There is a very thorough process in recruiting volunteers, since seniors are a vulnerable population. The process includes a vulnerable sector check and an interview. The interview ensures that the person is responsible, reliable, and trustworthy, since safety is the number one priority of the organization. The interview also looks for people who are personable, are able to communicate and hold a conversation well. The person should have a diverse mentality, since seniors think, experience and talk about different things than the younger generations. Once the volunteer has been recruited, the volunteer goes through a thorough training program that has been compiled, some aspects from other training programs, and some created by the organization itself.

The Future of Chatting to Wellness

The future of Chatting to Wellness certainly looks bright, especially since many more seniors are experiencing social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The organization is currently looking to expand, since community partnerships and grants are incredibly important and essential to the sustainability of the organization. Mahad's greatest satisfaction and success from establishing this organization has been simply being able to help seniors. Reading stories and feedback from others solidifies the impact the organization is having on seniors and students.



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