Living Words: An Assessment of a Creative Writing Program for Older Adults

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Mentor:
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The Living Words Program

- Creative writing program designed for older adults
- Conducted in a group setting
- Goal is to try to encourage individuals to have fun with writing

Experience Living Words: A Writing Prompt

- Who are they?
- Where did they come from?
- What is happening in this photograph?
- Why was it taken?
- What time period is this taking place?

Hypothesized Benefits of Living Words

- Social Benefits
  - Social opportunities
- Emotional Benefits
  - Increases confidence
  - Increases resilience to stressful life events such as the loss of a loved one
  - Greater overall life satisfaction
- Cognitive Benefits
  - Preserve cognitive functioning by strengthening neural connections

Procedure

- LW participants vs. Controls
- Consent and demographic forms
- T1 assessments:
  - Social: Life Satisfaction Index (LSI), Social Engagement Questionnaire (SEQ)
  - Emotional: Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS), Reminiscence Function Scale (RFS)
  - Cognitive: Verbal Fluency Task (FAS), Digit Span, Mini Mental Status Exam (MMSE)
- T2 assessments:
  - Social: LSI
  - Emotional: GDS
  - Cognitive: FAS
- Qualitative interview
- Independent testing schedules

Living Words Workshop Locations

- Shepherd’s Center (Taylor Fenig)
- Eden Terrace (Marie Hewes & Caroline Liddy)
- Skylyn Place (Aften Blackwell)
- Dillon Pointe (Emily Loeb)
- Eden Terrace (Marie Hewes & Caroline Liddy)
**LW Workshop Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Type of Facility</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>Mean Participant Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity of Participants</th>
<th>Sex of Participants</th>
<th>Mean Education (years)</th>
<th>Mean MMSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dillon Pointe</td>
<td>Assisted Living</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>83.67</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eden Terrace</td>
<td>Assisted Living</td>
<td>8-10</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>2 males, 6 females</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shepherd Center</td>
<td>Activity Center for Older Adults</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>78.89</td>
<td>Caucasian, 1 African American</td>
<td>3 males, 5 females</td>
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<td>28.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skylyn</td>
<td>Assisted Living</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>77.75</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>assisted living – activity center</td>
<td>21-27</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>Mostly Caucasian</td>
<td>5 males, 10 females</td>
<td>14.69</td>
<td>26.15</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**LW participant vs. Control Comparisons**

- **Reminiscence Function Scale (RFS)**: Significant group differences
- **Social Engagement (SEQ)**: Significant group differences

**MMSE**
- $t(14) = 0.75, p = ns$

**Digit Span**
- $t(20) = -0.11, p = ns$

**Emotional and Social Scales: GDS & LSI**

- Correlation between LSI and GDS, $r(20) = -0.75, p < .001$
- Correlation between LSI and SEQ, $r(20) = -0.54, p < .01$

**Cognitive scale: Verbal Fluency (FAS)**

- None of the correlations with FAS were found to be significant

**Qualitative Results**

- **Social**:
  - Participants enjoyed getting to know the other group members
  - Believed LW gave them an opportunity to meet people that they otherwise wouldn’t have been able to get to know
  - Felt that the other members of the group were supportive

- **Emotional**:
  - Writing as a distracter from daily worries
  - Found workshop prompts to be cathartic

- **Cognitive**:
  - Improved memory recall
  - Able to think more clearly
  - Encouraged to think deeper

**Discussion**

- **Potential Benefits**:
  - Social benefits - Increased life satisfaction
  - Emotional benefits - Stress relief
  - Cognitive benefits - Improved clarity and memory
Limitations

- Locations were not willing to add program
- Fear of workshop
- No random assignment to conditions
- Physical and cognitive deficits

Future Directions

- Increase sample size
- Random assignment
- Additional assessments
- Retesting of participants
- Instructional book

Thank You!

We would like to thank Dr. Kara Bopp for her support, patience, and guidance throughout this semester!

Research Conducted By:

Aften Blackwell, Marie Hewes, Taylor Fenig, Caroline Liddy, Emily Loeber