



TOOL

Personas: Older Adults



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Older adults have skills, strengths, interests, passions and energy that can fuel the network effect of [Neighbours](#). They also have goals, needs and preferences that inform their choices and shape their experiences.

As you design services, it's important to think about who you are designing for. Personas are archetypical users whose characteristics and goals represent the needs of larger groups.

What does this tool help you do?

These personas can help you understand the expectations, needs and motivations of the people you are designing for. They can be useful for gaining a perspective that is similar to the end user. Personas can help you identify a broader range of needs of end users. These personas are based on our extensive field work with [Neighbours](#).

ABOUT THIS TOOL



What was the tool developed for?

Partnering with multiple sites across Toronto, Health Commons has developed the [Neighbours](#) initiative, which aims to reduce isolation and improve quality of life. Neighbours is a catalyst for creating connected communities where people take care of one another and neighbourhood assets are activated to meet the health and social needs of residents.

These personas were developed to represent older adults we have met delivering Neighbours. We collected data through ethnographic research, survey responses, conversations, and observations from 2018 to 2019 across 5 housing sites in Toronto (mostly social housing).



How did we use it?

We use these personas to accurately represent the lived experience of older adults involved in [Neighbours](#) while respecting the privacy of the hundreds of people we've met. We also inform design decision making with these older adults in mind – any new activities we design must account for the needs, goals and realities of Michael, Meilin, John and Zophia.

HOW YOU CAN USE THIS TOOL



Test your ideas for older adults against these personas. How might Zophia respond to your idea?



Ask the older adults in your network if these personas make sense to them. If not, make your own.



Engage with others who are also interested in supporting older adults using these personas as a conversation starter.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- 1 The Helper - Persona for Michael
- 2 The Marathoner - Persona for Meilin
- 3 The Soloist - Persona for John
- 4 The Survivor - Persona for Zophia
- 5 Definitions for interpreting personas

Michael – The Helper

Social isolation



Sense of safety



Mobility



Background Information

- Age: 63
- Prefers 'Mikey'
- Born in Nigeria
- Living in Canada for 43 years
- Widower; living alone

Interests

- Meeting Nigerian-born friends at church
- Making people laugh
- Exploring the local neighbourhood

Quality of Life

- Is sometimes comfortable asking for help
- Manages many medications
- Values feeling acknowledged

Connections

- Joins all the programs that are on offer
- Volunteers using skills and experiences
- Wishes he saw his family more

You might hear Michael say...

- "Government can't do everything, we must help each other!"
- "I find comfort in my spirituality"
- "I'm paying off a loan that isn't mine"

Signature Neighbours engagement:

- Welcome Committee
- Safety checks (volunteer)

Tech

- Has a telephone, television, and internet access

Mobility

- Walks without any assistive devices



Meilin – The Marathoner

Social isolation

L-----◆-----H

Sense of safety

L-◆-----H

Mobility

L-----◆--H

Background Information

- Age: 93
- Born in B.C. to Chinese parents
- Retired teacher
- 2 children and 5 grandchildren
- Widowed twice; living alone



Interests

- Practicing spirituality
- Organizing community events
- Connecting with family

Quality of Life

- Survived cancer; now managing arthritis
- Experienced a lot of loss
- Health is up and down

Connections

- Maintains one close friendship
- Prioritizes activities that provide food
- Helps others when possible

You might hear Meilin say...

- “For my 85th birthday, I did the CN Tower walk”
- “I have lobby friends but don’t let them in my apartment”
- “They tell me I can’t take care of myself”

Signature Neighbours engagement:

- Welcome Committee
- Cultural exchange activities

Tech

- No telephone, television, or internet access

Mobility

- Walks without any assistive devices



John – The Soloist

Social isolation

L-----◆---H

Sense of safety

L---◆-----H

Mobility

L-◆-----H

Background Information

- Age: 72
- Never married; living alone
- Retired handyman
- Born near Barrie, Ontario
- Living urban for 55 years



Interests

- Garage sales
- Watching sports on TV
- Using the internet at the library

You might hear John say...

- “When I give people info about myself, I regret it later”
- “I used to hang out on the bench outside, but it’s gone”
- “I wish I could travel”

Mobility

- Uses a scooter to get around

Quality of Life

- Describes health as pretty good
- Helped out at home by Personal Support Workers
- Values independence and choice

Signature Neighbours engagement:

- Drop-in talking cafés
- Safety checks (recipient)

Connections

- Reaching out means giving up privacy
- Attends wellness program offered onsite
- Desires a companion

Tech

- Has a phone and television – no internet access



Zophia – The Survivor

Social isolation



Sense of safety



Mobility



Background Information

- Age: 78
- Speaks Polish; very little English
- Trained as a dentist
- 1 daughter; spouse deceased
- Living in Canada for 10 years



Interests

- Going for walks in the neighbourhood
- Singing at church
- Puzzles and conversation

You might hear Zophia say...

- “My happiest was at the beach with my young daughters”
- “I am grateful to have housing”
- “I used to drink – I don’t drink anymore”

Mobility

- Uses a walker to get around

Quality of Life

- Manages anxiety and depression
- Survived a stroke with the help of a Personal Support Worker
- Describes health as very poor

Signature Neighbours engagement:

- Performing arts (audience)
- Gardening club

Connections

- Would visit friends but it is too expensive
- Language barriers prohibits new friendships
- Chooses not to live with daughter

Tech

- Has a telephone – no television or internet access



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Neighbours

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Definitions



Social Isolation Low-----High

...is defined by the amount of contact people have with others. A person's social isolation is not static and can vary over time and circumstances.



Interests

The ways people enjoy spending time and the activities they enjoy doing or learning.



Sense of Safety Low-----High

...is how safe a person *feels* in their current context, including, their home and neighbourhood. It is defined by a person's sense of safety and security in their immediate surroundings.



Connections

Interactions and activities that people have with others for both socialization and support.



Mobility Low-----High

...is the self-reported physical ability a person has. It is measured by the ability to carry out activities of daily living.



Quality of Life

Overall health, personal well-being and relationships about which people express satisfaction and challenges.

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