Health-e-living for seniors: A local project with global connections
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Aim
- to maintain and improve the health of Shoalhaven seniors by increasing their opportunities for participation and social connections through Internet use

Rationale
There are three key reasons for undertaking this project:
1. Using the Internet is an occupation that positively influences the health and mental well being of seniors as it involves thinking, interacting with information and communicating with other users.
2. Research reveals that rural seniors use the Internet the least.
3. Ageing well, ageing productively is an Australian national health priority.

Setting
Shoalhaven
- rural community on NSW south coast
- part of the 'sea change' phenomenon
- has higher than state average proportion of seniors

Approach
Participatory Action Research (PAR):
- recognises individuals’ rights to participate in health research
- utilises participants’ contributions
- aims to bring about change
- involves critical analysis and reflection

Intercultural collaboration:
- occupational therapy - enables participation for health and well-being
- occupational science - generates knowledge about occupation
- community health informatics - enables Internet access
- Shoalhaven City Library - conducts an Internet training workshop

Method
1. recruit seniors + students
2. administer questionnaire to seniors
3. randomly assign seniors to workshops
   - A without student support
   - B with student support
4. conduct Internet training
   - Workshop A
   - Workshop B
   - students provide support for 1 month
   - keep reflective diary
5. re-administer questionnaire 1 month later
6. conduct focus groups - A + B + trainer + students
7. modify program as per feedback

Assumptions
- People need participation in purposeful and meaningful occupations for their health and well-being.
- Isolated and excluded populations have a right to Internet access.
- Seniors will experience different levels of increased participation and life satisfaction as a result of using the Internet.
- Barriers to Internet adoption and use exist.
- Access to student support during Internet training and practice may reduce barriers

Project participants
- Shoalhaven residents aged 55+, little or no Internet experience, registered for Internet training workshop
- students enrolled at Shoalhaven Campus, volunteer to support seniors
- Education Officer trained to conduct the Internet training workshop

Ethics Approval
- granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong.

Funding
- financial support from the University of Wollongong’s Faculty of Commerce Research Grant program.

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References

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