

**The Countdown Public Art Project
Research Report**

**Senior Women-Focused Activity Kit
Participatory Co-Research Findings**

*Developed through community participatory co-research with
older adults in the Ottawa Valley*

March–June 2026

ReDefine Arts

July 2026

Purpose

Between March and June 2026, ReDefine Arts facilitated a series of participatory co-research sessions to review and test [*Draft 2 of the Senior Women-Focused Activity Kit*](#), developed as part of the Countdown Public Art Project.

Rather than evaluating a finished resource, participants were invited to act as participatory creative researchers, helping identify opportunities to improve the accessibility, relevance, and community impact of the kit.

The sessions explored language, accessibility, facilitation approaches, activity design, mapping, reflection prompts, and opportunities for individual and collective participation. Together, these conversations shaped the continued evolution of the Activity Kit and will directly inform the development of Draft 3.

About the Senior Women-Focused Activity Kit

The **Senior Women-Focused Activity Kit** is being developed as a flexible, accessible creative resource that invites older women to explore personal stories, strengthen community connections, and contribute to creating safer, more caring communities through art-making and reflection. Designed for use independently, with a friend or family member, or in facilitated group settings, the kit offers a series of adaptable creative activities, reflection prompts, and community actions that encourage participants to share memories, celebrate resilience, express care, and imagine positive change. Grounded in the values of accessibility, participation, and community-engaged arts practice, the Activity Kit recognizes older women not simply as participants, but as artists, storytellers, caregivers, knowledge holders, and active contributors to community life. As part of the Countdown Public Art Project, the kit is intended to foster belonging, reduce social isolation, inspire meaningful conversations, and create opportunities for individual reflection to grow into collective acts of creativity, connection, and community care.

Why a Focus on Senior Women?

The Countdown Public Art Project was created to help build safer, more connected communities by fostering reflection, dialogue, creativity, and collective action around gender-based violence. In Renfrew County, this work has taken on renewed urgency following the County's 2023 declaration of intimate partner violence as an epidemic. While gender-based violence affects people of all ages and identities, older women are disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence and often face additional

barriers related to social isolation, geography, transportation, stigma, and access to support—particularly in rural communities.

The Senior Women-Focused Activity Kit was developed in response to this context and recognizes older women not only as individuals who may be affected by violence and isolation, but as artists, caregivers, mentors, knowledge holders, and community leaders. Through accessible creative activities, reflection, and opportunities for community participation, the kit seeks to strengthen connection, celebrate lived experience, and support older women in contributing to safer, more caring communities. Although developed with and for senior women through a participatory co-research process, many of the activities, approaches, and insights have the potential to be adapted for broader communities and future Countdown initiatives.

Supporting Resources

To support informed participation in the co-research process, two orientation resources were developed and shared with participants throughout the workshop series. A captioned introductory video provided an overview of the Countdown Public Art Project, its goals, and the role of the Senior Women-Focused Activity Kit within the broader initiative. A companion handout offered a concise project summary and key information and prompts to support discussion and activity testing. Together, these resources helped establish a shared understanding of the project while supporting accessibility and a consistent facilitation framework across multiple co-research sessions.

[Countdown Public Art Project – Introduction Video \(close-captioned\).](#)

[Countdown Public Art Project – Participant Handout \(PDF\).](#)

Participatory Co-Research Sessions

March 9, 2026

Countdown Public Art Project Presentation & Creative Workshop

Location: Killaloe Public Library, 1 John St, Killaloe, ON

This initial co-research session launched the collaborative development process for the Activity Kit.

April 20, 2026

Countdown Public Art Project Presentation & Creative Workshop

Location: Killaloe Public Library, 1 John St, Killaloe, ON

April 29, 2026

Senior Women's Activity Kit Focus Group

Location: Community Resource Centre, 12 North St, Killaloe, ON

May 1, 2026

Countdown Public Art Project Presentation & Creative Workshop

Location: Echo Centre, Eganville & District Seniors, 30 Bell St, Eganville, ON

May 25, 2026

Activity Kit Co-Research Workshop

Location: Community Resource Centre, 12 North St, Killaloe, ON

June 11, 2026

Mapping Co-Research Workshop

Location: Community Resource Centre, 12 North St, Killaloe, ON

Partnership Reflections

The richness of these participatory co-research sessions was made possible through strong community partnerships that created welcoming, accessible, and well-supported spaces for collaborative learning.

Community Resource Centre's Seniors Active Living Centre (CRC SALC) played a critical role in establishing and sustaining a committed core working group of community participatory creative researchers. Beyond providing meeting space, CRC SALC collaborated on participant outreach and registration, contributed to the development of community safety guidelines and session protocols, provided refreshments that fostered hospitality and connection, and actively participated throughout the co-research process. This collaborative approach created the conditions for trust, thoughtful dialogue, and sustained participation across multiple gatherings.

The **Killaloe Public Library** played an important partnership role by generously providing workshop space for multiple sessions and assisting with workshop set-up and breakdown. Their support helped create an accessible and welcoming environment for the beginning of the co-research process.

Barry's Bay and Area Home Support also contributed important perspectives by sharing their experience developing activity kits and ensuring that the needs and lived experiences of some of the area's most isolated and vulnerable older adults were considered throughout the design process.

Eganville & District Seniors played an important hosting and community outreach role by welcoming the Countdown Public Art Project presentation and creative workshop at the Echo Centre. They supported the session through workshop set-up and clean-up, promoted the gathering within their community, and helped create a welcoming environment for older adults to engage in the co-research process.

Together, these partnerships demonstrate how community-engaged artistic research is strengthened through shared leadership, thoughtful logistics, local knowledge, and mutual investment in creating meaningful opportunities for older adults to contribute as collaborators and knowledge holders.

High-Level Findings

Language Shapes Participation

Participants consistently observed that language can either invite or discourage participation. Terms such as *art* and *activity kit* may unintentionally create barriers for people who do not identify as artists. More welcoming language emphasizing making, sharing, curiosity, and connection was preferred. Participants also expressed interest in a more engaging title for the kit itself.

Clear Prompts Build Confidence

Across multiple sessions, participants appreciated activities that reduced the intimidation of a blank page. Clear prompts gave people "a place to start," encouraging creativity while allowing many different interpretations. Participants valued activities that were open-ended without feeling overwhelming.

Accessibility Must Be Built Into Every Activity

Accessibility emerged as a core design principle rather than a separate consideration. Participants recommended:

- suggesting adaptive materials for people living with arthritis or reduced dexterity
- encouraging different artistic materials and approaches
- designing activities that work equally well independently or with a facilitator
- offering multiple ways to participate so people can engage according to their abilities, preferences, and comfort levels.

Individual Reflection and Collective Action Are Equally Important

One of the strongest findings was the importance of supporting both private reflection and public participation.

Participants appreciated opportunities for quiet personal reflection while also expressing enthusiasm for activities that invited community action—displaying messages in public spaces, hanging collaborative installations, sharing work in apartment buildings, libraries, bridges, bulletin boards, or through the mail.

Rather than seeing these as separate approaches, participants encouraged designing activities that allow personal reflection to evolve into collective expressions of care, belonging, and community action.

Belonging Is Created Through Contribution

Participants emphasized that many older women strongly identify as caregivers, volunteers, mentors, makers, and helpers. They often feel more comfortable contributing to something larger than themselves than receiving support.

The kit should therefore invite participants to create, share, encourage others, and leave visible traces of care throughout their communities.

Connection Happens Through Stories, Music, and Handmade Objects

Throughout the sessions, participants repeatedly returned to the power of storytelling, music, mapping, handmade objects, and shared creative experiences.

Ideas included:

- exchanging stories across generations
- incorporating music sharing
- mapping memories, relationships, and places of belonging
- using handmade objects as gifts or messages of care
- recognizing that creative work can strengthen community connections, even when participants work independently.

Mapping Is More Than Geography

The mapping workshop significantly expanded the team's understanding of what a map could become.

Participants envisioned maps as living documents that could layer memories, stories, Countdown mosaics, aspirations, acts of care, safer community ideas, and participant contributions rather than simply documenting physical locations.

Several participants proposed interactive approaches including legends linked to activities, puzzle pieces, postcards, game boards, layered maps, and opportunities for participants to continue adding to the map over time.

Co-Design Produces Better Resources

Across all six sessions, participants demonstrated that iterative co-design strengthens creative resources. Activities became clearer, more accessible, and more meaningful through repeated testing, discussion, and revision. Rather than simply validating an existing draft, participants actively reshaped the Activity Kit, reinforcing the value of participatory research as an artistic methodology.

Strengthening the Connection to Countdown

Participants consistently encouraged making the relationship between each activity and the Countdown Public Art Project more visible.

Suggestions included:

- explaining how each activity contributes to creating safer communities
- showing how activities connect with Countdown mosaics
- including examples of completed work
- sharing future opportunities to participate
- providing website links for those wanting to learn more.

These recommendations reinforce the importance of helping participants understand that each creative act contributes to a much larger community movement.

Reflections

Across six co-research sessions, participants demonstrated generosity, creativity, curiosity, and critical insight. Rather than simply reviewing activities, they continually reimagined new possibilities, tested ideas collaboratively, and considered how the Activity Kit could reach people who are isolated, newly retired, living with disabilities, or seeking meaningful ways to connect with others.

The research affirmed that the Activity Kit is much more than a collection of creative exercises. It is emerging as a flexible framework for reflection, storytelling, relationship-building, and community action that can be adapted for individual use, facilitated groups, and public participation.

Equally important, the process itself demonstrated the value of participatory creative research. By inviting older women to act as collaborators rather than recipients, the project generated richer ideas, stronger activities, and a deeper sense of shared ownership over the emerging resource.

What Comes Next

Anna Camilleri, Tristan R. Whiston, and Lesley MacDonald will now reflect on the findings from these participatory co-research sessions and prepare Draft 3 of the *Senior Women-Focused Activity Kit*.

Draft 3 will be presented to the Countdown core working group, in partnership with CRC SALC and Barry's Bay and Area Home Support, in October 2026 for one final round of collaborative feedback. Following this review, the team will incorporate revisions before moving into graphic design and production.

The goal is to fabricate the Activity Kits and supporting materials in early 2027 and distribute 250 of them to Senior Active Living Centres and other senior-centred organizations in the Ottawa Valley between March and September 2027.

About This Publication

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Eganville and District Seniors

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Sharing & Attribution

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