Coming of Age: Specialized Public Programming for Older Canadians

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This thesis explores the relationship between archival public programming and older Canadians. It begins by reviewing developments in public programming from the time of the earliest archives to the present day in practice and prescriptive literature. In this discussion, special treatment is given to the developments in the last fifteen years, especially the 1990 call by Canadian public programming advocates for increased attention to this function (and subsequent response of the archival community). The impact of postmodern ideas on archival public programming is also considered. The thesis asserts that while archives have made significant progress in the field of outreach over the years, much work remains to be done. Among the most significant areas requiring improvement is the need for archives to design targeted public programming for groups that have received little specialized attention in the past.

After a general discussion of the ways that archivists can begin to extend their services to marginalized groups, the remainder of the thesis explores how archivists can reach out to one such segment of society: individuals over the age of fifty-five. Based on primary research conducted with older Canadians, activity and recreation professionals, and Canadian archivists, the thesis recommends that archivists enhance their relationship with individuals in this age category. Justifications of selection of this group for targeted public programming include the absence of literature and practice on this demographic segment, the current growth of this group, and the natural potential for a relationship between archives and older people. Also important are the benefits to archives and others that will result from an enhanced partnership with older people. Characterization of this target population is offered, followed by suggested points of connection between these individuals and archives. The thesis concludes with several practical suggestions for archivists attempting to reach out to this group.