

Quick Points on Lifelong Learning

Interesting Facts and Perspectives on the field of Lifelong and Older Adult Learning for use in Osher Institute presentations and writing

- **Lifelong Learning and the Underpinnings of Carl Jung**

The lifelong learning movement has strongly been influenced by the psychological works of Carl Jung, who offered a positive, life-enhancing approach to aging. He was among the first who asserted that those in the second half of life can work toward the possibility of continuing creativity and fulfillment, and a deepening of spirituality, bringing a new vitality to their lives. It is increasingly recognized that learning and personal growth are as much an imperative and opportunity in the second half of life as they are in the first.

Source: Carl Jung, *Collected Works Vol 8*, Page 399, Para 785

- **Longevity and the 65+ Population is Growing**

It has been estimated that by 2030, 20% of the US population will be 65 and older. Contrary to outdated stereotypes, many of today's older adults are described as vibrant and engaged—they exercise, travel, remain socially active and enjoy learning. It has been observed that the more education people have, the more education they want. In an AARP study, 9 out of 10 adults (ages 50 and over) said they wanted to actively seek out learning opportunities to keep current, grow personally, and enjoy the simple pleasure of mastering something new.

Sources: <https://www.census.gov/prod/2014pubs/p25-1140.pdf> AARP

- **Loneliness is Bad for Health**

In a comprehensive meta-analysis, actual and perceived social isolation, a feeling of loneliness, has been associated with increased risk of early mortality as great as that for obesity. Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: a meta-analytic review. Lifelong learning institutes offers opportunity for socializing with like-minded learners.

Source: Holt-Lunstad J, Smith TB, Baker M, Harris T, Stephenson D, *Perspectives on Psychological Science* March 2015 vol. 10 no. 2 227-237. <http://pps.sagepub.com/content/10/2/227.full.pdf+html>

- **An Active Brain is Preventative Medicine**

“If you don’t use it, you lose it” stands true when it comes to cognitive abilities and memory. In 2012, the Rush Medical School Memory and Aging Project demonstrated that increased cognitive activity in older adults slowed their decline in cognitive function and decreased their risk of mild cognitive impairment. The study’s cognitively active seniors were 2.6 times less likely to develop Alzheimer’s disease and dementia than similarly aged individuals with less cognitive activity.

Source: Bennett, D. A., Schneider, J. A., Buchman, A. S., Barnes, L. L., Boyle, P. A., & Wilson, R. S. (2012). Overview and Findings from the Rush Memory and Aging Project. *Current Alzheimer Research*, 9(6), 646–663. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3439198/>

- **Lifelong Learning Brings Health Benefits**

Lifelong learning students experience health benefits such as being less likely to visit a doctor, take medication or experience depression. A George Washington University Medical Center study found that lifelong learners

were less likely to visit a doctor, take medication, experience depression, or suffer from low levels of morale.

Source: <http://www.carp.ca/2011/01/14/lifelong-learning-with-carp/>

- **Lifelong Learning Aids Development of Wisdom**

Participating in lifelong learning activities enhances intellect but also helps develop wisdom. Ardelts has written that acquiring intellectual knowledge allows older adults to stay involved, but wisdom-related knowledge helps them prepare for physical and social decline and ultimately their own death. He suggests offering people the opportunity for autobiography work and life review to make sense of their lives and to come to terms with the past. The study of liberal arts and the humanities also appears to be especially valuable during the later years of life.

Gene Cohen describes 'developmental intelligence' in terms of three forms of thinking that actually improve and can be developed with aging:

- *Relativistic thinking*, where understanding is based on a synthesized combination of disparate views. Absolute truth is abandoned in favor of more realistic relative truths.
- *Dualist thinking*, where contradictions in opposing views are uncovered and opposites are held in mind at the same time without judgment. In this way, opposing views can both be accepted as valid.
- *Systematic thinking* allows the person to see the forest as well as the trees, helicoptering up to understand the bigger picture. The thinker is thus not trapped in personal and petty issues.

Sources: Cohen, G.D. (2005) *The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain*, New York, NY: Basic Books; Ardelts, M. (2000) 'Intellectual vs wisdom-related knowledge: The case for a different kind of learning in the later years of life', *Educational Gerontology*, 26, pp. 771-89.

- **Lifelong Learning Eases the Transition to Retirement**

Lifelong learning supports satisfying needs and goals related to identity, affiliation, competence, and involvement in meaningful and purposeful activities. Participation appears to enhance creativity and innovation. And Lifelong learning has been found to be helpful in easing the adjustment to retirement. Source: Adair, S. R. & Mowesian, R. (1993): The meaning of motivations of learning during the retirement transition. *Educational Gerontology*, 19, 317-330.

- **Lifelong Learners Feel Good**

People who attend OLLI type classes feel better about themselves. A recent Pew survey found:

- 87% of personal learners say their activities helped them feel more capable and well rounded.
- 69% say their learning opened up new perspectives about their lives.
- 64% say their learning helped them make new friends.
- 58% say it made them feel more connected to their local community.
- 43% say it prompted them to get more involved in volunteer opportunities.

Source: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/03/22/lifelong-learning-and-technology/>

- **Adult Learners Feel Better**

Recent studies have found that participation in adult education generates multiple benefits. Overall, 70 - 87 % of respondents experienced positive changes in learning motivation, social interaction, general well-being and life satisfaction.

Sources: <http://www.bell-project.eu/cms/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/BeLL-Survey-results.pdf>

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02601370.2011.570876>;

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01924788.2013.816834?src=recsys>

- **Adult and Lifelong Learners Feel Best**

Today, there are an estimated 400,000 people involved in more than 450 formal LLI (Lifelong learning institutes) in North America. Older individuals who participate in lifelong learning organizations and educational travel show levels of well-being and optimism about the future substantially above national averages. LLI

members, even when educational attainment is removed as a variable, report positive levels of well-being at 83%, above the average older American of 78%.

Source: https://www.road scholar.org/globalassets/road scholar_lifelonglearningday_oct15_lores.pdf

- **Harvard Generations Study**

Dr. Robert Waldinger, Director of the Harvard Second Generation Study, the most significant longitudinal study of our time, finds the clearest message from the data is that good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Lessons from the study show social connections are good for us and that loneliness kills. Those who are well connected to family, friends and community are happier, physically healthier and live longer than those less connected. On the other hand, those who are more isolated than they want to be are less happy, their health declines earlier in midlife, their brain function declines sooner, and they lead shorter lives. Waldinger says the study shows that “the people who were happiest in retirement were those who actively worked to replace workmates with new playmates.”

Source: Robert Waldinger, TED Talk, November 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KkKuTCFvzI>

- **Osher Institute Quick Facts as of October 2016**

- There are 119 Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes with more than 154,000 members
- Programs are held at 379 U.S. cities and towns, covering all 50 states and the District of Columbia
- The Osher Lifelong Learning Network began in 2001 in Maine, the home state of philanthropist / businessman Bernard Osher, expanding to 119 programs by 2015
- Nationally, Lifelong learners in Osher programs are between 50 and 100 years old, with more than half (52%) age 65 to 74; they are about 70% female; 30% male
- OLLI members are highly educated with 51% holding graduate degrees and 87% holding baccalaureate degrees

Source: Osher NRC and Robert Jack Hansen, E. Michael Brady & Steven P. Thaxton (2016) Demographic and Behavioral Characteristics of Osher Lifelong Learning Institute Members, *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 64:1, 42-50, DOI: 10.1080/07377363.2016.1131541