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Target population

Kudoz is a platform that matches youth and adults with cognitive disabilities to community members throughout Greater Vancouver in order to share splendid and delightful experiences in communities.

Mission

Kudoz is designed to deliver better outcomes for youth and adults with a cognitive disability and to shatter social stigma. It's about developing a deeper sense of self and possibility, growing confidence, motivation, abilities and one's own personal network. It's also about the idea that the mind can grow and stretch at any age no matter what ability!

Context



Kudoz began in the Spring of 2014 when three disability organizations, who were tired of the status quo of people with disabilities living largely segregated lives, asked InWithForward, a social design firm, to research the lived experience of social isolation and loneliness for people living with a disability in Greater Vancouver. Kudoz further asked how interactions that bring mutual value to diverse people in buildings and neighbourhoods might be designed.

Six researchers moved into a social housing complex where 20% of the residents had a disability. This team spent 3 months conducting immersive ethnographic research, not only with those with disabilities, but also with the other tenants. The researchers spent time with people in their apartments, out in community, with their social networks, and at all times of the day. They learned that the lives of persons with disabilities were on repeat—they were doing the same things over and over, and having the same conversations with the same people. There was little novelty or opportunities to learn and grow, which meant many were losing skills, becoming increasingly anxious and depressed, and living unfulfilled lives.

3 months of immersive research in a social housing complex



After 5 years of prototyping and running, Kudoz has evolved into an online catalogue offering in-person experiences with community members, a mobile app and regular reflection cafes. Kudoz applies evidence-based social science theory to interactions and the initiative has helped prompting improved mental health, lifelong learning, meaningful employment and increased independence among its users, as well as reduced stigma.

Governance & funding



Kudoz is currently run by 3 disability service providers (posAbilities, Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion, and Kinsight) and InWithForward. This partnership has an MOU in place. Kudoz will be incorporated as its own non-profit in 2019 and begin licensing its product/support to clusters of organizations throughout the province.

Funding is secured through Community Living BC (crown corporation), foundations and resources from the disability organizations.

What this initiative is about



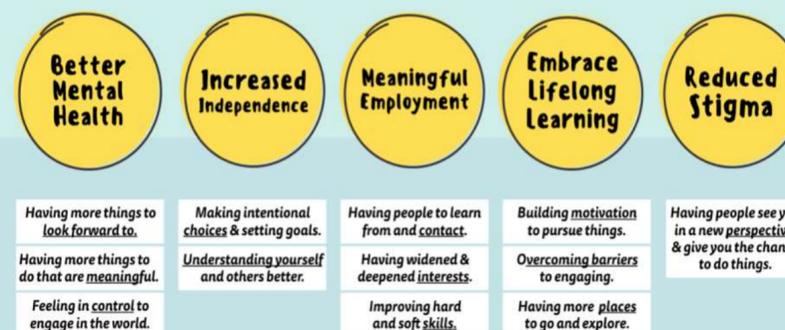
Kudoers (youth or adults with a cognitive disability) sign up to Kudoz as a way to discover new passions, learn something new, explore a curiosity, and make connections. Hosts are community members or families, and small-to-large businesses that volunteer an hour of their time for an experience. Volunteering is flexible as the host manages their own online calendar and determines where, when, and how often they will offer the experience.

When Kudoers find an experience that sparks their interest in the online catalogue, they can submit a request to the host based on the available times already inputted by the hosts. Messages are exchanged via the platform and profiles are shared so that users are able to virtually meet each other before meeting in person.

Behind Kudoz are 5 key innovative design features:

- (1) a new kind of face-to-face interaction between adults with disabilities and community members;
- (2) a new value proposition for volunteers that allows them to choose the nature, place and time of their contribution;
- (3) 3 new roles: the **'curator'** to recruit community hosts and help them shape the learning experiences; the **'taster'** (someone with a cognitive disability) to quality check the experience; and the **'Kudoz coach'** who uses a strength-based approach to support, confidence and a positive self-narrative among Kudoers and parents.
- (4) a new measurement system and app;
- (5) a new booking system (front and back-end).

Our outcomes, linked to determinants



Built with users not for them

The platform has been co-designed with users at every stage of development, from the language to functionality to imagery. Since one of the key outcomes for Kudoz is building independence and agency, Kudoz is designed to put control in the hands of Kudoers and hosts.



Impact



- Over the last 4 years, Kudoz has had over 500 community members host an experience (the equivalent of one full-time person), 160+ people with disabilities and their families participate, and collected over 400 stories of impact.
- In 2017-2018 Kudoz conducted an extensive evaluation study in concert with Community Living BC, and which, among other things, (1) assessed outcomes against Shalock's 8 domains of quality of life, and (2) assessed significant shifts in the areas of motivation, capability, and opportunity. Hosts are learning just as much as Kudoers and are developing fresh perspective and connections based on shared experiences. Many of our hosts (between 60-70%) have not had a prior interaction with someone with a disability prior to joining Kudoz.



- Kudoz uses the most significant change methodology which involves capturing stories in users' own words and analyzing them. Here is a small sample:

"I'm more confident now. In the past, I didn't want to talk to anyone. I wasn't as outgoing as I am now. I got to meet a lot of people - at Kudoz, at work, school. I've learned how to communicate with people and how to make friends." - Annie, Kudoer

"Kudoz helped me understand how Canadians think and what they're like. I'm from Morocco and it's different here from there. Hosting has helped me to understand the community here." - Moncif, Host

Insights (Key learnings)



- Coaching is a critical component of Kudoz and qualitatively different from a support worker.
- Tech literacy can be a barrier for engagement and coaches also works with families to help them engage with the platform.
- Having a first positive experience is crucial for future engagement. Having a negative first experience can lead to a loss of Kudoer and host engagement.
- The culture of service delivery organizations is slow and cautious and frequently gets in the way of a start-up like Kudoz.
- Government struggles to purchase prototypes like Kudoz because while it can reduce future demand for services, it doesn't relieve current demand.

