

Aging Well Whatcom Steering Committee

Friday, November 5, 2021

By Zoom call

MINUTES

Attending:

Becky Kirkland, PeaceHealth Center for Senior Health
Chris Orr, Whatcom Council on Aging
Heather Flaherty, Chuckanut Health Foundation
Heidi Bugbee, Generations Early Learning & Family Center
Mary Anderson, Whatcom Transportation Authority
Ryan Blackwell, Northwest Regional Council
Sarah Lane, Health Ministries Network
Tammy Bennett, YMCA
Tessa Whitlock, Chuckanut Health Foundation

Regrets:

Adrienne Solenberger, Opportunity Council
Amy Hockenberry, Whatcom County Health Department
Dr. Chao-ying Wu, Chuckanut Health Foundation Board/Family Care Network
Dr. Dave Lynch, Chuckanut Health Foundation Board/Family Care Network (retired)
Janet Malley, Whatcom Transportation Authority
Marie Eaton, Palliative Care Institute, WWU
Melinda Herrera, Rosewood Villa
Tonja Myers, Christian Health Care Center
Vinson Latimore, Gibraltar Senior Living

Welcome and Introductions

Steering Committee members shared program and organizational updates.

Chris/Whatcom Council on Aging – The Festival of Trees fundraiser for the Bellingham Sr Activity Center is Dec 3. WCOA will be engaging in strategic planning Dec-April, looking particularly at facility investments, Meals on Wheels, and mission expansion and potential additional roles. The updated AWW Blueprint will be used as one way to inform WCOA strategic planning.

Mary/Whatcom Transportation Authority – working on WTA's long-range plan which should be ready for feedback in the next week or so. There will be several opportunities for input and Mary will share those opportunities with AWW partners. WTA is hiring new transit operators. On a personal note, Mary is very proud of her daughter who holds a first place position for track in WA State!

Ryan/NW Regional Council – NWRC is seeking a new director, as Dan Murphy is retiring at the end of the year. NWRC recently underwent a rebranding process, so we can expect to see a new logo and tag line soon. NWRC also received a pilot grant from the Dementia Action Collaborative, which has resulted in adding two FTE to provide dementia support services and training, including a legal clinic.

Tammy/YMCA – The Y will be launching a blood pressure self-monitoring program, funded by the Mt Baker Foundation, in partnership with the Health Ministries Network, the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center, and potentially other organizations. She noted two significant challenges for the Y right now: 1) managing the logistics of serving two groups of people, those who have received COVID vaccination and those who haven't, and 2) reduced staffing. The staff who remain are carrying heavy loads. She appreciated recently learning the term [pandemic flux syndrome](#).

Tessa & Heather/Chuckanut Health Foundation – Tessa is helping to wrap up the Art of Aging portraits project and supporting the Ask a Nurse program (one of the AWW grant recipients). Heather noted that CHF is taking a stand on some big issues, which seems to be "full of potholes and landmines." She has been very active with working on a

Children’s Initiative, which would create a dedicated fund for children, similar to the existing housing and behavioral health funds.

Sarah/Health Ministries Network – HMN has revised its mission statement: “Linking Faith Community Nurses & Health Ministers, congregations and local resources, to nurture community health equity with spiritual well-being.” A new logo and updated website are coming soon. Sarah has been creating a HMN video on gratitude and hope. The Ask-a-Nurse program is going well; they are interacting intensively with about 12 people each session (twice a month at E Whatcom Regional Resource Center), seeing 40-60 people overall, including members of the Slavic community. HMN is also partnering with the Y on the home blood pressure monitoring program Tammy mentioned. The Art of Aging portraits will have a show at the Bellingham Senior Activity Center in early December, and they are exploring other possible venues as well.

Becky/PeaceHealth Center for Senior Health – PeaceHealth continues to experience staffing shortages. Though the Center for Senior Health staffing has been less impacted by the vaccine mandate than other parts of PeaceHealth, some staff have departed for other reasons, including the provider that oversees the nursing home program.

Heidi/Generations Early Learning & Family Center – Generations is seeking volunteers so they can re-open the Generations Corner Shop that has been closed since the beginning of the pandemic. See Heidi’s classified ad. 😊 → Generations is “still here and open” and without any COVID-related classroom closures. Child care has been hit hard by staffing shortages, and Heidi is working with other providers to try to address the issues. She’s also helping to plan two new intergenerational child care programs, but notes intergenerational programming during COVID is exceptionally challenging. Even programs like Generations, which is very well-established, has limited intergenerational interaction right now, so it’s even more difficult for new programs to figure out how to do it safely and effectively.

The Corner Shop gives residents of Summit Place Assisted Living and Mt. Baker Care Center access to some necessities not offered by their residency, as well as some of their favorite treats and gifts for their loved ones.

Volunteers must be 18 or older, and will need to pass a specific background check with Mount Baker Care Center. Volunteers must be able to handle money, be comfortable learning card processing through Square on a tablet, and be able to run the shop on their own (though we are just a phone call or a short walk away if help is needed). We will of course do some hands-on training.

Looking for recurring volunteers who can commit to a day every week. Open days are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and we are hoping to add weekends. We are usually open 10a-2p but hours are flexible. The corner Shop is Wheelchair Accessible.

For more info contact Heidi: HEIDI@intergenchildcare.com

Review and Approve Minutes

Minutes from the 8/6/21 Steering Committee meeting were approved as written.

Blueprint Update

Mary provided an overview of the work of the Blueprint Update Committee (Chris, Sarah, Mary, Heather, Tessa and Lara). They are working on gathering input from older adults in the community via hardcopy and electronic survey, as well as from AWW partners via discussions on each Blueprint focus areas and a corresponding survey. Tessa will be sending out an email to the full AWW mailing list inviting participation. Chris is leading the distribution of the survey to older adults through senior centers and other organizations.

Lara shared a summary of community assessments and strategic plans that have been reviewed [in meeting packet].

Comments and discussion:

- Ryan noted that the NWRC strategic plan that’s included in the review is a requirement associated with receiving Older Americans Act funding, and is therefore a bit prescriptive in its format. He stated the Long-Term Care Act (now called the We Care Fund), is where he sees the greatest opportunity for growth, with service delivery expected to start in 2025.
- Within WWU, the Academy of Life Long Learning may have plans or priorities more specific to older adults.

➔ **ACTION:** Lara will reach out to the Academy of Life Long Learning.

Discussion to Inform Blueprint Updates

What has **changed** in the last 3 years? What are the biggest **needs/challenges** and the greatest **opportunities** NOW or in the near future?

- A “soft gain” is the slowing down of life due to COVID.
 - The issue of social isolation has been heightened for older adults due to the pandemic.
 - Increased desire for older adults to stay living in their home (vs. going to a care facility w/ restricted visits, etc.) .
 - Continued increase in the cost of housing.
 - Expensive housing in Bellingham prompting people to move to outlying communities where housing is more affordable, which increases transportation needs and costs.
 - Widening income gap.
 - Workforce [shortage] issues; staffing challenges are limiting capacity for organizations and businesses.
 - Managing vaccinated and unvaccinated participants/clients/members is a big challenge for programs/services
 - Discerning what changes that have resulted from COVID should be continued, vs. things we should go back to doing the pre-COVID way.
 - Continue: empower people to know and help each other (e.g. giving a friend a ride to get a COVID vaccination).
 - Take things to people vs. asking them to come to the service provider. “Taking to people” was a theme of some of the proposals from the AWW grant round.
 - Anti-agism campaign, following in the steps of the racial justice work that is happening. Campaign could also help elevate AWW.
 - COVID has increased attention to older adults and their vulnerability, greater isolation, and care needs.
 - Our entire community can now relate to the challenges of social isolation, and have a better understanding what many seniors experienced pre-pandemic.
 - Opportunity to encouraging intergenerational connection while we have heightened understanding and empathy.
 - More older adults are using technology now. They have shown great adaptability in terms of learning how to use technology; at the same time, lack of technology or tech know-how is now a greater barrier to access since so much is online or virtual.
 - Need: Information, education, and support regarding technology use for older adults. Equipping more older adults to use technology; intergenerational opportunities with youngers as teachers and mentors.
 - Adult day center closure, part of a national trend of decline in these kinds of programs.
 - Demographic shift – Boomers coming of age have different wishes, greater emphasis on autonomy, may be wanting or seeking more individualized services.
 - Boomers are more sensitive to being lumped into a category like seniors, active agers, etc. Don’t want to be othered, less likely to participate in “senior” activities e.g. a congregate meal, or day health program; may not want services dedicated to or branded for seniors, e.g Senior shopping hours.
 - Opportunity is system redesign, not having separate “senior” activities and services.
 - Due to COVID, we have been forced to do things in ways that benefit older adults. Changes have affected all of us, but are especially good for seniors– who would have benefitted them well before COVID. For example, click-and-pick up shopping, Zoom church services, Telemedicine appointments.
 - One of the greatest opportunities for local agencies and people that work with older adults is the ability to try new things and think outside the box. People have been forced to think outside of the box, especially in terms of trying to keep safety in mind.
 - We’ve all been forced to be outdoors more, including elders.
 - New relationships and partnerships among organizations and programs, e.g., YMCA has developed new funding and work partners.
- ➔ **ACTION:** The Blueprint Update Committee will use these comments, along with those from the six discussions scheduled with community partners, to guide revisions to the Blueprint.

Discussion of meeting schedule for 2022.

Quarterly meetings have worked well, but there is also concern about the “drop off” and how to sustain energy for AWW.. Meeting every other month is an option, or having quarterly meetings with a broader group of AWW members and supporters. Perhaps we need to re-think the purpose of the meetings.

- ➔ **ACTION:** Lara and Heather will outline some options and send survey to Steering Committee members.
- ➔ **ACTION:** We will meet in January because Steering Committee will need to discuss potential Blueprint revisions. Lara will send invitation for January 7 (first Friday).