

Aging Well Whatcom Steering Committee

Friday, May 7, 2021

By Zoom call

MINUTES

Attending:

Adrienne Solenberger, Opportunity Council
Becky Kirkland, PeaceHealth Center for Senior Health
Dr. Chao-ying Wu, Chuckanut Health Foundation Board/Family Care Network
Dr. Dave Lynch, Chuckanut Health Foundation Board/Family Care Network (retired)
Heather Flaherty, Chuckanut Health Foundation
Heidi Bugbee, Generations Early Learning & Family Center
Janet Malley, Whatcom Transportation Authority
Lindsey Karas, Mercy Housing
Marie Eaton, Palliative Care Institute, WWU
Mary Anderson, Whatcom Transportation Authority
Molly Simon, Whatcom Council on Aging
Sarah Lane, Health Ministries Network
Tammy Bennett, YMCA
Tessa Whitlock, Chuckanut Health Foundation
Tonja Myers, Christian Health Care Center
Vinson Latimore, Gibraltar Senior Living

Guest: Greg Winter, Opportunity Council

Regrets:

Amy Hockenberry, Whatcom County Health Department
Chris Orr, Whatcom Council on Aging
Melinda Herrera, Rosewood Villa

Welcome and Introductions

Lara welcomed Steering Committee members and guest Greg Winter from the Opportunity Council. Members introduced themselves and shared program and organizational updates.

Molly: Whatcom Council on Aging has opened the Sr Vaccine Assistance line for COVID vaccination appointment assistance. Call volume has been relatively low, but people have greatly appreciated the assistance and talking to a real person. The Bellingham Senior Activity Center is determining how to re-open after the COVID closure. They will not be requiring vaccination, and will pilot some incremental opening of the most used programs. Congregate meals will likely be the last to re-open.

Ryan: NW Regional Council has been contacting independent in-home long term care providers and found that about 30% are “resistant” to vaccination. For clients receiving in-home long term care, NWRC is assessing vaccination status and interest, and identifying those who are homebound. On a second round of calling, a surprising number of those initially assessed to be homebound had been vaccinated on their own. The new WA State budget was developed quickly and includes a lot of federal dollars. More work is needed to fully understand the budget and how the funds can be spent.

Ying asked Ryan via the chat: *any ideas yet on how the recovery act will impact caregiver support/training/development/reimbursement?* Ryan responded: *Not yet. The current rate enhancements will carry forward through the end of the pandemic. There is new money in ARPA for workforce development, but how those funds will be invested is unknown at the present time.*

Ying: Family Care Network is trying to catch up on patients' health care that has been forgone or delayed due to COVID, and expect that there will be some diagnoses that would have been identified sooner under normal circumstances. He noted that he's seeing very distressed teens and that teachers aren't getting enough credit for the work that has been required of them this year. From the chat: *I think our teachers and especially our adolescents could use some thoughtful targeted support from the aging immunized community. It's the toughest time to be a teenager that I can remember, even more than the Vietnam war.* He noted that the experience in 1920 at the end of the last pandemic was to "just forget" and it didn't work. It's important to acknowledging the impact of COVID. Some kind of reconciliation process, such as a public memorial, could be beneficial to mitigate the damage.

Heidi: Generations Early Learning Center is slowing starting to re-open now that most of the [Summit Place] residents and staff are vaccinated. The re-opening guidelines keep changing, but there is excitement to resume intergenerational connections.

Janet: Whatcom Transportation Authority is gearing up to resume its full service again. This will mean WTA will not be able to continue delivering food bank boxes. Of the approximately 150 people receiving these deliveries, a large portion are older adults. WTA will continue to participate in the Healthy Whatcom work around racial equity. Mary added that fare collection will resume on July 1st. The Lynden Hop (WTA's new on-demand service) is also scheduled to start on June 13.

Tonja: At Christian Health Care Center some group activities are resuming, which is wonderful but also hard and scary. CDC has strict regulations regarding masking and vaccination that must be followed; for example, if one person in a group is unvaccinated, every person must wear masks. About 20% of staff are currently declining to be vaccinated (about 50 people). Making vaccination mandatory is an ongoing conversation, but the risk is that staff will leave which would be a hardship. In the dementia unit, all residents and staff are vaccinated; there was no fear or anxiety around resuming activities. Tonja echoed Ying's comment about teens' anxiety; COVID, social and racial issues, and climate change are "heavy on their hearts."

Vinson: Gibraltar Senior Living is starting a dementia care facility in Eastern WA. An increasing number of customers are coming into the retail store, and they are opening another one in Everett. He noted that working in numerous counties, it is interesting to see the difference in responses to COVID. Vinson continues to lead the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team for the Whatcom County YMCA where he is a board member.

Becky: The Center for Senior Health is working on getting patients back on track with routine care. Those who haven't used video options have gone a long time without care. The PeaceHealth vaccination clinic at the Health Education Center is seeing decline in demand for appointments and has started taking walk-ins.

Marie: the Palliative Care Institute is hosting two free webinars this month on [Supporting Your Patients Who Choose VSED](#) [Voluntary Stopping of Eating and Drinking] (May 13) and [Home Care Workers for the Elderly in Washington State and Whatcom County](#) (May 24). On a personal note, Marie enjoyed a trip to see her grandchildren!

Tammy: Yesterday the YMCA received news that its CDC ranking increased for the Diabetes Self-Management Program certification. This certification is based on the number of people served, so is harder to achieve for programs with fewer participants. The Y will also be piloting an [urban poling](#) program for older adults, which helps with posture and gait.

Dave: Is enjoying time with his family in sunny California.

Lindsey: Mercy Housing is building new apartments in the Barkley area [*more info on page 3 below*]. The resident services coordinator at Eleanor Apartments is leaving that position, so please spread the word that Mercy is seeking to fill that role and refer anyone who may be a good fit for it. Lindsey shared news of her new foster baby.

Heather and Tessa: the Chuckanut Health Foundation has been busy with numerous projects. Most recently, CHF has started the development of the Whatcom County Racial Justice Commission. Aging Well members are invited to the community visioning summit on May 22. More information and registration here: <https://www.chuckanuthealthfoundation.org/communityvision>

Review and Approve Minutes

Minutes from the 2/5/21 Steering Committee meeting were approved as written.

AWW Project Updates

There are four main project areas in the AWW 2021 workplan, and Steering Committee members gave progress reports.

Art of Aging

Marie said that 15 interviews/conversations and portraits have been completed, with another five still to come. Five portraits are posted on the AWW website: <https://www.agingwellwhatcom.org/art-of-aging> and a new one is being added each week. The portraits and interviews provide a window into a variety of lives and views. They still have 2-3 “spots” available, and are specifically looking for someone from the Hispanic community and an unhoused community member. Please contact Marie if you have suggestions or recommendations.

In addition to completing the 20 portraits, the AWW goal is to find ways to amplify the project, share more widely, and possibly expand into related work.

Dear Friend Pen Pal Project

Tessa reported that letters and cards continue to arrive, though in smaller numbers than earlier in the project. Over 800 cards and letters have been distributed to Meals on Wheels participants and residents of Summit Place, Christian Health Care Center, and Rosewood Villa.

Tessa and Lara are working on gathering feedback from participants via surveys and a Zoom call to help determine next steps for the project. Overall, feedback has been positive, but some clear themes are also emerging regarding challenges and opportunities for improvement. On the “receiving” end, there is often confusion regarding where, why and from whom these letters are coming (or even uneasiness/discomfort or suspicion). In some cases, letter receivers expressed desire for a reciprocal relationship. On the “sending end” there is a desire for some kind of “feedback loop” or reciprocal one-to-one pen pal relationship, and also comments that it’s hard to maintain a consistent level of enthusiasm.

Feedback will be summarized into a progress report to help guide decisions about continuing the program and/or possibly looking for another organization or program to coordinate it.

AWW Grant Round

The [first AWW grant round](#) has been launched! [Applications](#) are due by close of business on June 1 and AWW partner organization represented on the Steering Committee are invited to apply. Heather expressed her appreciation to Tessa for her thoughtful work on convening the planning committee which included Marie, Tammy, Sarah and Mary. Heather also gave kudos to the CHF board for their focus on relationships and for supporting the AWW grant round.

Tessa, Heather and others noted that this grant round is different from CHF’s usual grantmaking process. The review committee will include the AWW steering committee members as “subject matter experts” in aging issues along with members of the CHF Grants Committee. The grant round is specific to one of CHF’s strategic priorities and an information session was held for potential applicants on May 6, which CHF has not done in the past.

Marie noted she appreciated the group’s conversation about the purpose of the funding, which included discussion regarding equity, how equity applies aging in that as a group older adults are marginalized.

Tammy commented that the application is fairly simple which makes it more accessible for smaller organizations or new grant writers. She appreciated that at the info session, Tessa and Heather encouraged potential applicants to just call with questions, which creates an open door and a welcoming, open process. The fact that applications can be for small or large amounts of money also speaks to the flexibility.

Mary seconded the appreciation for the flexible and communicative relationship with potential applicants. She also noted the different approach to data, and the recognition that sometimes data are not available, and there are other ways to measure impact.

COVID Vaccine Information and Access

Lara reported Chris, Molly, Ying, Ryan, Sarah, Becky, Vinson and Melinda have met several times in March and April.

- The group set a target: 80% of Whatcom County residents age 65+ will be fully vaccinated by May 22. Currently the rate is 66% so that target will likely not be met, especially with the recent overall decline in demand for appointments.
- Molly and Chris worked to open the WCOA Sr vaccine appt assistance line – see [April 26 Bellingham Herald article](#).
- The majority of senior low-income housing sites (Housing Authority, Mercy, Sr Housing Assistance Group, others) were vaccinated by the National Guard. Lynden and Ferndale senior centers have had “pop-up” clinics; more of this kind of outreach clinic is needed.
- Work to identify homebound community members who need in-home vaccination has been coordinated by the health department. NWRC led the way with contacting in-home Medicaid LTC clients to assess those who still need vaccine, want vaccine, and are homebound. Health Dept is compiling lists from NWRC, MoW/WCOA, Home Health, DSHS, then deduplicating the list and cross referencing with State Immunization registry, to remove people who are already vaccinated. The Health Dept, Family Care Network and PeaceHealth are coordinating based on patients’ medical homes. FCN has a home visit clinical team and will be vaccinating their homebound patients, and PeaceHealth is working on a similar arrangement.

Comments and discussion regarding COVID vaccination:

- Ryan shared that Catholic Community Services did an assessment of its in-home caregivers and found that about 23% were “resistant” to getting vaccinated; 11% were a “hard no.” CCS is providing financial incentives to its caregivers who get vaccinated.
 - Tonja reported that Christian Health Care Center has also incentivized vaccination by holding a drawing and giving bonuses. In addition, there has been a lot of communication with staff including weekly newsletters and having an open door for conversations regarding concerns.
 - Molly shared a link via the chat: <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/736/transcript> for a piece that was interesting in terms of messaging for those who are hesitant.
 - In reference to in-home vaccination, Ying asked via the chat: *Can there be a community message that will protect people from scammers getting into their homes by offering vaccine?* Vinson wrote that he too worries about scammers going into homes of vulnerable adults.
 - Marie suggested communications focusing on caregivers’ vaccine hesitancy. Lara stated that the Health Dept is doing some work engaging local trusted messengers, and perhaps a caregiver could be one of these people.
- ➔ Lara will relay the concern regarding caregivers’ hesitancy to the Health Dept communications team and suggest the possibility of including that group in the trusted messenger campaign.

Housing for Older Adults – see also Greg’s PPT that was sent out with these minutes.

Greg Winter is the executive director of the Opportunity Council (OC) and has been involved with housing work for many years. Adrienne Solenberger is on the OC’s housing development team in addition to the AWW Steering Committee.

The OC conducts a needs assessment and strategic planning every three years, which includes looking at initiatives in other sectors and where there might be connection or collaboration. Based on the last round of assessment and planning, the OC has recently focused more on housing development and the preservation of affordable housing (preventing it from reverting to market rate).

High priorities currently are housing for 1) Community members living in chronic homelessness, with numerous and complex barriers to stable housing; 2) Native Americans, who are overrepresented in the homeless population by a factor of four (OC is working on a project of 25 units of cottage homes on the Lummi Nation); 3) Families with young children and 4) People living on fixed incomes, which for the most part are seniors and people with disabilities.

The OC is leading the planning for new senior affordable housing, the Laurel and Forest Project (yet to be officially named). The Aging Well Whatcom Blueprint provided some of the inspiration for this project. Whatcom County

transferred an underutilized building on the corner of Forest and Laurel in Bellingham to the OC for redevelopment. The emerging plan is for 60-63 units for low-income older adults, with 10% of the units designated for people who have been living homeless. There will be three childcare rooms (toddler, preschool, and before and after school care), outside space, and supportive services and programming.

Greg and Adrienne invited ideas and suggestions regarding the project, and group members offered the following:

- Connect with WWU due to close proximity to student housing. Elders could mentor college students; college students could be caregivers or support people for elders.
- Garden space.
- Opportunities for technology – connecting virtually is more common now.
- Heidi offered to share her expertise regarding intergenerational programming, especially licensure issues.
- Consider how faith community nurses could provide some in-home health care.
- Tap into our rich arts community.
- Reserve some units for people receiving in-home long term care; efficiency would be gained by caregivers assisting multiple clients at the same location.

Additional feedback from the chat:

- *I love that name--Laurel Forest. It can have multiple meanings and offers a great theme of richness and verdure.*
- *On a transit line. :-)*
- *In the Jewish Community project we visited in Boston, casual exercise equipment in common, hallway, passing spaces was very popular. E.g., a couple of NuStep machines in the hallway.*
- *Age Lab at MIT would be a good resource potentially; see Joseph Coughlin author.*
- *WWU's Academy for Life Long Learning could also be a partner: <https://oce.wvu.edu/academy-lifelong-learning>*
- *The Intergenerational High School would be a good partner*
- *BAAY is so close! A great opportunity for intergenerational arts collaborations.*
- *Traditional evolved community architectural traditions can be informative. Patterns of circulation can increase or diminish opportunities for random enriching interactions, especially intergenerational interactions. "Efficiency" and "safety" focused design often acts to silo functions and can be isolating and impoverish the social opportunities.*
- *The co-location of housing and childcare may be able to help with some transportation barriers people with low or no vehicles access experience. This is very smart and very exciting.*

There was a lot of energy in this discussion and time was short. Lara suggested that a separate input session could be held for the AWW Steering Committee to contribute more ideas, and/or that AWW could potentially facilitate sessions to hear directly from older adults in the community.

➔ Adrienne and Lara will discuss further to determine what would be helpful to the effort.

Lindsey provided an update on Mercy Housing's new development in the Barkley area:

- There will be co-located childcare.
- There will be seventy-seven 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom units.
- Eight units will be specifically for people or families who had been living with homelessness.
- While not specifically senior housing, there are no age restrictions so older adults could certainly apply.
- Construction is slated to start this summer and units are expected to be ready for move-in by Winter 2022.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

- ➔ The next full Steering Committee meeting will be Friday, August 6.
- ➔ Look for opportunities to discuss the Laurel-Forest Project.