

Aging Well Whatcom Steering Committee

Friday, August 6, 2021

By Zoom call

MINUTES

Attending:

Becky Kirkland, PeaceHealth Center for Senior Health
Chris Orr, Whatcom Council on Aging
Dr. Dave Lynch, Chuckanut Health Foundation Board/Family Care Network (retired)
Heather Flaherty, Chuckanut Health Foundation
Janet Malley, Whatcom Transportation Authority
Mary Anderson, Whatcom Transportation Authority
Melinda Herrera, Rosewood Villa
Ryan Blackwell, Northwest Regional Council
Sarah Lane, Health Ministries Network
Tammy Bennett, YMCA
Tessa Whitlock, Chuckanut Health Foundation
Tonja Myers, Christian Health Care Center

Regrets:

Adrienne Solenberger, Opportunity Council
Amy Hockenberry, Whatcom County Health Department
Dr. Chao-ying Wu, Chuckanut Health Foundation Board/Family Care Network
Heidi Bugbee, Generations Early Learning & Family Center
Lindsey Karas, Mercy Housing
Marie Eaton, Palliative Care Institute, WWU
Vinson Latimore, Gibraltar Senior Living

Welcome and Introductions

Steering Committee members shared program and organizational updates.

Tammy/YMCA – Responding to ever-changing COVID circumstances is a challenge for planning; the Y is re-thinking its plans to expand in-person programs in the fall. The Y is launching a new program for blood pressure self-monitoring in the East County. The pilot for the urban poling program funded by a Seeking Health grant was very successful, with participants reporting improved mobility, and increased sense of safety and confidence with walking.

Chris/Whatcom Council on Aging – Also riding the “changing tides” of COVID. The Bellingham Sr Activity Center re-opened June 1 with masking required, but many members aren’t participating due to safety concerns and/or discomfort with masking. Picnic with a Purpose will be the week of Aug 23 in Lynden, Blaine, Sumas, Ferndale and Everson, with a drive through cook-out and resource bags. The theme is “reconnection” - information to include in the resource bags should be delivered to BSAC by Aug 16.

Tonja/Christian Health Care Center – Dealing with new COVID guidelines and regulations, and the ongoing challenge of balancing service, safety and compliance. Mandated staff vaccination would likely result in losing staff, which would exacerbate the already constrained staffing. In regards to the Picnic with a Purpose’s theme of reconnection, Tonja noted the value of iPads and suggested an iPad as a raffle item.

Heather & Tessa/Chuckanut Health Foundation – A lot is going on, and managing the logistics and the criticism of the Win-A-Truck campaign to incentivize COVID vaccination has required a lot of time and energy. One of the criticisms has been the cost of the truck (\$60K), and Heather noted it’s helpful to put that in the context of the value of a life. She stated that some government agencies value a human life at around \$10 million, and shared a pertinent [New York Times article](#). About 1,000 people registered for the drawing and 50% live outside of Bellingham which were the target areas due to lower vaccination rates. Winners will be drawn today; names will only be shared with their permission.

➔ Numerous steering committee members commended Heather and CHF for organizing the drawing, as well as the compassionate and open way Heather engaged with critics on social media and other channels.

Tessa reported that a survey was sent to all 1,000 registrants; 40% of respondents said the drawing motivated them to get vaccinated, 60% they would have gotten vaccinated regardless. The responses were anonymous and many thoughtful comments were received that give insight into vaccination perspectives and decision-making.

Ryan/NW Regional Council – Developing policies and procedures for resuming home visits; are apprehensive about how clients are doing after 1.5 years without home visits. NWRC’s behavioral health services have grown, with seven clinicians all with full caseloads. NWRC is also developing a substance use program for older adults.

Janet, Mary/Whatcom Transportation Authority – Full service has resumed, so WTA is no longer delivering food bank boxes (about 120/week). Mary stated that the pilot for the Lynden Hop has been more successful sooner than expected; the Hop provides on-demand van service in city of Lynden, with two vans M-F. The feasibility of paratransit service between Whatcom and Skagit counties is being explored.

Dave: As previous CHF board member, appreciated CHF’s boldness with the Win-A-Truck drawing. He continues to engage himself in aging well. 😊

Sarah/Health Ministries Network – Also experiencing the challenges of moving forward while still caught in the pandemic. HMN participated in the SummerFest event at the East Whatcom Regional Resource Center; nurses checked blood pressures and made numerous referrals for follow-up care. In June the HMN board completed a strategic planning process, including the decision to re-brand.

Becky/PeaceHealth Center for Senior Health – This week PeaceHealth announced its requirement for all its health care workers to be vaccinated, which is expected to intensify the staffing crisis. Staff vaccination rates for CSH were already at about 95%.

Melinda/Rosewood Villa – Things are going well, Rosewood Villa is COVID-free.

Review and Approve Minutes

Minutes from the 5/7/21 Steering Committee meeting were approved as written.

Blueprint Update

Heather described the goals of updating the Blueprint: identify how things have changed since the original Blueprint, who is doing what work related to the strategies, what is still relevant and necessary, and what changes should be made.

Lara stated that the overall process would be to scan new assessments and strategic plans, update the data, gather community input via “road shows” (similar to those planned post-Summit) or possibly surveys, revise the Blueprint with new information and strategies, and share it with the community. She noted that the six focus areas would remain, and the updating process would also be a strategy for re-engaging partners. The goal would be to complete by end of January 2022.

Comments and discussion:

- An update is a good way to mark what we’ve done and create a “temporary data set” for a point in time.
- It’s an ambitious timeline; need to be realistic about the depth and detail of the review. Lara has capacity to facilitate the process.
- Steering committee members would be asked to help with presentations to partners and community groups.
- A small committee to guide the process was very helpful for the original blueprint and will be important again.
- Mary’s experience with WTA’s planning process was that it can be hard to get meaningful public input via Zoom.
- Sarah, Chris and Tessa volunteered to serve on the committee.

➔ **ACTION: All Steering Committee members** will send recent strategic plans to Lara to begin to review.

➔ **ACTION: Lara** will invite others who aren’t at this meeting, form the committee, and set a meeting schedule.

Project and Committee Updates

AWW Grant Round

The AWW grant review committee (Heather, Tessa, Mary, Tammy, Marie and Sarah Lane) are recommending funding seven grant proposals that align with the Blueprint. There were ten total applications. The CHF Board still needs to approve the recommendations before awardees can be shared with the public. The Board meets on 8/23 and CHF will publicize the grants following that meeting. Grantees will be asked to provide brief reports to CHF corresponding with a quarterly payout schedule, and a final report.

- ➔ Gratitude was expressed for Tessa's leadership and those who served on the committee. Committee members noted the value of learning from being "on the other side" of the grant-making process, and appreciated CHF's open and relational approach.

Art of Aging

Sarah stated that all 20 interviews have been completed. The portraits are being scanned and a show is planned in partnership with the Whatcom Council on Aging. See the portraits here: <https://www.agingwellwhatcom.org/art-of-aging> and some "alternate" portraits here: <https://www.agingwellwhatcom.org/news-events>. Feedback regarding the project has included the desire to see more socioeconomic diversity in the people featured; Sarah noted they have strived for this, but it has been very challenging.

- ➔ Dave suggested that a short intro video about the project and common themes might help provide context.
- ➔ Tonja noted individuals or organizations might wish to sponsor a portrait of someone as a way to honor them; since the original funding has been spent, this could be a way to continue adding portraits.

COVID Vaccine Information and Access

Ryan reported that the committee (Chris, Molly, Ying, Ryan, Sarah, Becky, Vinson and Melinda) has met regularly and there have been some good efforts at improving access, including the WCOA standing up a vaccine assistance hotline. Momentum for vaccination has slowed, but the vaccine initiation rate for Whatcom residents age 65+ is now over 80%.

Dear Friend Pen Pal Project

A summary of the project and participant feedback (*included in meeting packet*) was reviewed by the original intergenerational committee. The committee's recommendations are to 1) facilitate 1:1 pen pal relationships for Meals on Wheels participants, residents of assisted living facilities and adult family homes, and potentially other more isolated older adults in the future; and 2) coordinate general letters around seasons/holidays for people in skilled nursing facilities, since the more detailed or personal letters that were confusing to some residents.

The Steering Committee supported implementing these recommendations.

Other concerns, issues, or opportunities

Lara stated that AWW members have expressed concerns regarding the impacts of rental assistance/eviction and housing stability in general for older adults, as well as the caregiver workforce. Steering Committee members identified other issues, which may inform the Blueprint update:

- Elder abuse/predation on older adults (increased with COVID?)
- Homelessness and older adults
- Caregiver crisis is both for older adults and child care
- Social isolation, intensified by COVID, still happening and getting worse. Need ways to connect with friends, neighbors, etc.
- Need for mental health/behavioral health supports – heading into second winter of the pandemic
- Equity issues (racial, LGBTQ, other) should be an integral part of AWW

Wrap Up and Next Steps

- ➔ The next full Steering Committee meeting will be Friday, November 5.
- ➔ Blueprint committee meetings and other work between now and November 5!