

# Ageing Well Whatcom Steering Committee

Friday, November 6, 2020

By Zoom call

## MINUTES

### Attending:

Becky Kirkland, PeaceHealth Center for Senior Health  
Carol Nicolay, Health Ministries Network  
Chris Orr, Whatcom Council on Aging  
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, and Margot  
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  
Ryan Blackwell, Northwest Regional Council  
Tammy Bennett, YMCA  
Tessa Whitlock, Chuckanut Health Foundation  
Vinson Latimore, Gibraltar Senior Living

### Regrets:

Amy Hockenberry, Whatcom County Health Department  
Melinda Herrera, Rosewood Villa  
Tonja Myers, Christian Health Care Center  
Wendy Lawrence, Opportunity Council

### Guests:

Hoku Rivera, Whatcom Intergenerational High School  
Adrienne Solenberger and Cliff, Homeless Service Center, Opportunity Council

## Welcome & Updates

Steering Committee members settled in by naming family members who have passed away, honoring them in the spirit of Dia de Los Muertos. Some members shared how they're feeling at the end of this presidential election week.

## Opportunity Council Housing Lab - Presentation and Discussion

Adrienne Solenberger, from the Homeless Service Center at the Opportunity Council, shared information about the Housing Lab. The Lab was started about two years ago to help community members search for affordable housing and overcome barriers to renting. Pre-COVID the program provided free one-on-one assistance for navigating the rental process and its barriers. Since there are limited options for affordable housing and long wait lists, the Lab started using this wait time to help people prepare to be more competitive in the rental market, for example, resolving outstanding legal issues or debts.

The Housing Lab then started the Roommate Café which connects people who are seeking shared housing arrangements. Prior to COVID, Roommate Café was serving about 25 people per week and had about 250 people on its "roster." The numbers are currently lower, as COVID has introduced new challenges. Meeting with clients is harder and potential home-sharers are concerned about COVID risk associated with living with people they don't know.

Noticing that about 70% of the people participating in the Roommate Café were adults over the age of 55, the Lab started the Generations Housing Project, which facilitates home sharing specifically for older adults. This can take several different forms, including 1) Seniors living with other seniors; 2) Seniors with extra room in their home which they rent for income or work-trade arrangements; 3) A household (for example, a single parent family) that rents a room to a senior.

A primary focus right now is on housing retention. The Senior Diversion Program is for older adults currently living with homelessness or at risk of losing their housing. It connects them to basic needs and/or services that will allow them to continue living in their current housing.

Adrienne noted that in regards to housing for seniors, Whatcom County has a shortage of long-term care options, resulting in some people moving to other communities for long-term care. Also, much of the housing is designed (and priced) for families; she emphasized the need for greater variety of housing options, including more smaller units, shared models, etc.

**Information from Adrienne in response to members' questions:**

- Roommate Café and Generations Housing Program don't assist people with screening or conducting background checks for their potential house mates – that is up to the parties involved. However, the program does facilitate the connection by coordinating an anonymous bio exchange; once mutual interest is identified, it can help set up communication that is comfortable for both parties (phone, email, in person, etc.).
- Adrienne does some mediation/conflict resolution for program participants if needed.
- Adrienne could provide some training for faith community nurses (Carol stated that some are resources for facilitating housing connections, and would benefit from learning more).
- Rent prices haven't decreased with fewer WWU students living in Bellingham (due to COVID), but some landlords seem to be a bit more flexible with their requirements or criteria.
- New units are being built; many of these are being rented or purchased by people from the Seattle area or other places with higher housing prices.
- Medical oversight or guidance could help the Generations Housing Program link more people for shared housing; some protocol related to COVID could decrease concern for participants and liability for OC.
- The COVID eviction moratorium may be extended again, and COVID-related funds are helping with eviction prevention.
- Most people hear about the home sharing programs by word of mouth. Adrienne also presented at the Sr Center which generated some interest.
- Lack of program staff/person power is the biggest barrier to expanding the Generations Housing Project.

**Next steps questions and comments:**

- How can AWW support the expansion of the Generations Housing Project in spite of COVID?
  - Ying is willing to provide medical guidance regarding COVID prevention protocol.
  - Could AWW provide financial support? CHF has funded them in the past. An AWW funding mechanism hasn't been developed yet.
- What is the number of potentially available rooms/places open for a roommate/housemate?
- Mercy's new Barkley housing (in development) will have some 1- and 2- bedroom units which could potentially be for older adults; YMCA childcare will be co-located. Lindsey can inquire for more information.
- Adrienne suggested a follow up conversation with Teri Bryant (Homeless Service Center), AWW, and others to discuss how program expansion could be accomplished.
- Dan Hamill (B'ham City Council) and Samya Lutz (COB) could be other key people for this conversation.

**ACTION** → Lara will work to facilitate next steps.

## Review and Approve Minutes

Minutes from the 9/4/20 Steering Committee meeting were approved as written.

## Members' organizational/program updates:

Carol reported that the Health Ministries Network has hired a new executive director, whose name will soon be publicly communicated.

Marie stated that two sessions remain in the Palliative Care Institute's webinar series [Advance Care Planning in Legal and Medical Care](#) which promotes aligning advance care planning documents used by legal and medical professionals.

She shared that the Art of Aging Portraits Project, funded by the CHF, will involve facilitated conversations (by Richard Scholtz) and portraiture (by Sarah Lane) with a diverse range of older adults. Invitations are selective, not come one come all. Please contact Marie if there is someone you'd like to recommend as a participant. Marie will share informational videos they've have developed to help explain the project.

Hoku Rivera shared that the Whatcom Intergenerational High School is developing an Intergenerational Learning Alliance, and she invited members to upcoming information sessions on Nov 12 @11am and Nov 19 @6pm. Registration link is: <https://tinyurl.com/wihs-ila>

Mary reported Whatcom Transportation Authority is hiring a new general manager and hosting a virtual reception to meet candidates on Nov 6 @ 6:30pm. Steering committee members are invited; Mary will send information to Lara to forward.

Heather announced two upcoming events the CHF is helping to sponsor: 1) Measurable Equity Conference, Nov 13 and 19, connected to Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) and Results Based Accountability work. She would love to have AWW participation, as aging and older adults are not explicitly represented int the CHIP.

2) Groundwater Training by the Racial Equity Institute will be Dec 12 (Mary calls this training "phenomenal.").

## **AWW Project Updates and Discussion**

### **AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities**

Ying reported that he, Dave, Carol, Heather and Lara had productive conversations with County Council members Todd Donovan and Rud Browne in October. Todd Donovan encouraged developing more specific and concrete explanations and examples of what Network membership would really look like. Rud Browne strongly suggested focusing on solving a problem the Council is dealing with and named childcare and affordable housing as two pressing needs for which solutions and partnerships would be welcome. Both noted that the Council is more likely to support a no-cost proposition, since budget issues are critical. They suggested making a presentation to County Council in January.

Comments and discussion regarding next steps:

- Browne suggested approaching municipalities completely separately from county council, as they may resist the County "telling them what to do."
- We need to be clear that we're asking for more than the Council's endorsement; the goal is that the county government incorporates awareness and concern regarding aging into all its functions.
- Council is asked to use many different lenses – may be fatigued and reluctant to add another.
- We aren't asking the county to do the work, but their partnership is important.
- Additional funds may be more accessible with government support.
- Addressing agism is where the "political winds are blowing" and could be another way to draw electeds' attention to the issues.

The committee agreed that next steps, including a presentation to Council in January, need to be mapped out.

### **Dear Friend Pen Pal Project** (formerly known as the Intergenerational Letter Project)

Cards and letters are coming in to the CHF and Tessa made the first delivery to Christian Health Care, Summit Place, Mt Baker Care Center, Rosewood Villa, and the Bellingham Senior Activity Center/Meals on Wheels. There are numerous letter drop-off sites in the community including the YMCA (thank you Tammy) and all WECU branches. More outreach is needed to involve younger letter writers; Ryan shared that his daughter's school volunteer club is participating.

Tessa showed photos of some of the cards and letters that have come through. Steering committee members expressed appreciation for the project. From the chat: "This is so awesome!!!" "Truly heartwarming in a challenging time. Thank you!" "Lovely to send these positive messages into the community at a time when divisions are all too common."

### **Information & Navigation/Resource Roundtable**

Chris reported he was unable to attend the Resource Roundtable planning committee meeting last month.

## **Ageing Well Whatcom Fall Update 2020**

A draft written report was distributed earlier in the week, and Heather invited committee members' comments and revisions. Creating the video is underway but it's not too late to submit a short, informal video to Heather by email, text, Google share, or Dropbox.

## **Wrap Up and Next Steps**

Heather suggested this would be a good time to look at AWW priorities for 2021.

The next AWW Steering Committee meeting is scheduled for Friday, December 4.