

Aging Well Whatcom Steering Committee

Friday, June 5, 2020

By Zoom call

MINUTES

Attending:

Becky Kirkland, PeaceHealth Center for Senior Health
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)
Heidi Bugbee, Generations Early Learning & Family Center
Janet Malley, Whatcom Transportation Authority
Marie Eaton, Palliative Care Institute, WWU
Mary Anderson, Whatcom Transportation Authority
Melinda Herrera, Rosewood Villa
Ryan Blackwell, Northwest Regional Council
Tessa Whitlock, Chuckanut Health Foundation
Tonja Myers, Christian Health Care Center
Vinson Latimore, Gibraltar Senior Living

Regrets:

Amy Hockenberry, Whatcom County Health Department
Carol Nicolay, Health Ministries Network
Heather Flaherty, Chuckanut Health Foundation
Lindsey Karas, Mercy Housing
Wendy Lawrence, Opportunity Council

Guest: Lisa Sohni, Opportunity Council

Welcome, Introductions, Reflection

Lara welcomed the Steering Committee, and members shared updates from their organizations and reflected on any opportunities related to older adults they see emerging from the COVID-19 experience.

Marie reported that the Palliative Care Institute's spring conference was postponed, and is now planned as a webinar format for the fall. The theme was care across cultures, and that is being expanded to look at embedded racism in our society in the context of COVID-19. PCI is also partnering with Honoring Choices PNW to develop a workshop for legal and medical professionals to help align how the two professionals approach advance directives.

Opportunity: increased use of telemedicine, which could propel the healthcare system into new ways of providing services and improve access to care; older adults' increased competency with using technology.

Ryan said about 95% of NWRC staff are still working from home, but NWRC is open, services are still available, so he requests that members encourage people to call with their needs.

Opportunity: not see much opportunity, and is very concerned about the economic impacts of COVID-19. He observed that older adults are showing their resiliency and ability to adapt.

Mary reported that WTA continues services with restrictions such as riding for essential trips only and no more than 12 passengers per bus. They're planning what transportation services will look like in next phases as Whatcom county starts to re-open.

Opportunity: like Ryan, she's not seeing opportunities at this time.

Ying commented that the advances in telemedicine are good, but it's being used as an overlay to the existing healthcare delivery system that is built for providing care in-person, so other structural changes are also needed. He wonders about

the possibility of a demographic shift with the majority of COVID-19 deaths being older adults, and if demographers and social scientists are looking at this.

Opportunity: the combination of COVID (and the structural inequities it further reveals) and the recent protests are so significant it's almost a social deconstruction that will require reconstruction; there may be an opportunity to put the blocks back together in a different way.

Becky stated the Center for Senior Health continues to do a lot of telemedicine visits, which has enabled them to see patients safely, but patients are clearly missing the social connection of in-person visits. Using technology often requires support from family or caregivers. Some types of care have been delayed so they have started reaching out to patients to get them in for care. Providing in-person care will be challenging in terms of maintaining physical distancing, for example, not having multiple people in the waiting room together, especially since older adults are eager to socialize. Opportunity: there is increased interest in advance care planning and overall awareness of older adults' social and health issues.

Tessa reflected on the opportunity of older adults sharing their perspectives and life experiences regarding challenging life experiences through things such as the StoryCorps project <https://storycorps.org/participate/storycorps-connect/>.

Tammy shared that the YMCA has been closed since March 17, and will likely take a long time to rebound. It's undergoing big changes due to the financial impacts of COVID-19. Sarah's position was eliminated and the Ferndale branch is permanently closed – with hopes to provide some classes and activities in borrowed spaces (church, community center, etc.) once in-person gatherings are possible again. The Lynden branch may also close if funding can't be secured. Both Ferndale and Lynden sites serve large populations of older adults. The Bellingham branch is slated to re-open in Phase 3, with limitations. They have continued providing childcare for essential workers, and distributing food in partnership with Whatcom Unified Command.

Opportunity: senior fitness classes have been converted to a virtual format and 70-100 people are participating each day. They also plan to move the chronic disease self-management program to a virtual format, which may actually work better than the in-person groups.

Chris expressed appreciation for the Y's fitness classes and said fitness opportunities are what senior center members are asking for the most. The Council on Aging has been expanding the Meals on Wheels program, and more communication with other local food providers is resulting in some efficiencies and strengthened collaboration, such as a partnership with Foothills Food Bank in the East County.

Opportunity: the WCOA applied for the AARP funding (discussed at the last steering committee meeting) to transform the annual Senior Day in the Park to "Picnic with a Purpose" with the goal of reaching 1,000 people – twice as many as the 500 people who generally attend Day in the Park. In addition to distributing food and information on community resources, they also plan to host a series of virtual events aligned with the focus areas of the AWW blueprint, which will be an opportunity to lift up the work of AWW.

Melinda shared that maintaining the lockdown at Rosewood Villa is difficult; the hardest part is telling people they can't go outside and that friends and family members can't visit. Staff are trying to combat the isolation and depression by taking people out for walks every day. Telehealth services have been a blessing. One employee tested positive for COVID, and the Health Department responded quickly with testing all residents and staff.

Tonja reported that skilled nursing facilities have been mandated to test all employees and all willing residents; however, they are still awaiting testing supplies from the state. Though overall residents are staying positive despite the challenges of not being able to do group activities or have as many visitors, Tonja concurred with Melinda regarding the increased isolation and depression. They are also walking with residents and trying to get them outside, and one

MASKS AVAILABLE

Tessa and Ying shared that masks are available from Whatcom Unified Command. Family Care Network is storing them and the local medical society is helping to coordinate distribution to healthcare providers and other groups, especially those whose need for PPE may not usually be considered. Skilled nursing facilities and dentists are being supplied by another source. Marie mentioned that mental health providers may be interested.

Please contact Ying if you're aware of a group that could use masks.
ying@chuckanutthealthfoundation.org

employee plays her violin in the hallways and for people in their rooms, taking requests which makes it very personal. Opportunity: they received funding to purchase iPads that enable residents to communicate more with family members, and plan to apply for funding to purchase two pedi-cabs.

Tammy noted the YMCA has a pedicab [[check out this 2018 Herald article](#)] which seniors have loved; she can also share some lessons learned about “driving” them.

Tonja also shared that she interviewed her mother in StoryCorp fashion, and that is was a very positive experience that she encourages others to do.

Janet reflected on the sentiment expressed by the adage of not letting cynicism masquerade as wisdom. Opportunity: there are lessons related to the importance of people connecting with hopes that empathy people have demonstrated for others will continue.

Heidi shared that Generations re-opened this week with 30 children after being closed for April and May. There are many new procedures and protocols to learn and implement. The childcare is in the Summit Assisted Living building where there have been COVID cases and deaths, so it feels very real and close. They are just beginning to consider creative ways to do safe intergenerational connections, but she thinks resuming “regular” intergenerational programming won’t happen for quite some time.

Opportunity: increased collaboration within the early learning community, with people sharing information and providing mutual support. The Bellingham school district has been a great partner – school nurses have been screening and training Generations staff, and providing meals for the children.

Project Updates

1) Information & Navigation

Lara introduced Lisa Sohni, Outreach & Development Manager at Opportunity Council. Lisa said her role includes overseeing the Community Resource Center, and updating, organizing and generally managing resources is not as easy as it may seem! The OppCo’s [Community Resource Directory](#) was first developed in 2008 – it’s an antiquated system, but still widely used with about 400,000 page views last year.

Lisa stated that there is widespread recognition that we need a robust, accurate, and continually managed resource system. COVID has increased awareness of the need for a less disjointed system, and has highlighted the challenges of navigating resources and information, especially for people who are new to accessing them.

Lisa and Kristi Slette at the Whatcom Family and Community Network have been leading a community-wide Resource Roundtable effort, and Lara, Chris, and NWRC have participated in some discussions. Lisa, Kristi and others have gathered information about the existing resources and community needs. They’ve coordinated two community meetings and conducted interviews; this isn’t the first effort to address this need, so they’ve been trying to understand the barriers and issues encountered in the past. In previous efforts, care navigation and resource/information management have always been approached together, adding to the scope and complexity. Based on past experience, it would likely be more successful if the two were de-coupled addressed individually.

They researched Washington 211, a statewide information and referral system supported largely by the United Way [*North Sound 211*: <https://wa211.org/region/north-sound/>]. The system is populated by information that agencies and organizations enter; Whatcom County never fully embraced the use of 211. Organizations don’t always have the staffing or administrative support that is necessary for this work, and staff turnover presents a challenge. However, some areas of the state use 211 heavily, and through talking with those communities, it’s apparent that to be successful, 211 requires an investment of local funds to manage the database. In a Lewis County partnership between 211 and United Way, United Way paid for a part-time community liaison. This person had access to the backend of the 211 system, and interfaced with local organizations to make sure their information was entered and updated, and the resulting system is robust.

At the last Resource Roundtable meeting in February, they shared their findings and made a plan to form a planning committee. That was delayed by COVID-19 but is now getting underway again. The OppCo has transitioned one of their employees (Heidi) to a Community Resource Specialist position, and she will coordinate this work going forward. This will include looking at how our community could leverage 211 (since it already exists), identify and address its limitations, and what the additional needs are. Building community awareness and participation in 211, including offering trainings on how to use it, will be needed. Lisa described building the community's "muscle memory" of entering and updating information in 211.

A planning group will be convened, with the intention to start meeting in July. Lisa confirmed that AWW can have a seat at the table for these planning discussions.

Mary asked about the possibility of redirecting the Whatcom County "share" of funds currently going to 211 to OppCo instead.

Lisa responded that 211 system is already pretty under-funded, and relies on community partners in order to be successful. It's important to think about how to make this sustainable, and the new OppCo staff position is a start. Lisa noted that the OC is also reassessing the existing Community Resource Network, a resource sharing group that meets monthly and has broad email distribution. It has a lot of participation but operates in a more "popcorny" approach to resource sharing, so they're considering how it can be most effective and efficient.

ACTION → Steering committee will discuss and determine which AWW member(s) would participate in the planning committee.

2) AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities

Ying stated that the application for the AARP Age-Friendly designation will come from Whatcom County [see summary, attachment 2 in meeting packet]. The plan is to engage with elected officials, starting with those who attended the AWW Summit, and find someone to champion joining AARP Network and bring it to Council. The "asks" would be for one or more council members to commit to working on this and providing a staff person to partner with AWW on preparing the application

DECISION → The group confirmed its support for moving forward.

3) Intergenerational Community

Tessa reported that there was an Intergenerational Community meeting in February with 21 people, but the planned follow up was cancelled due to COVID-19. In early May, Tessa, Lara, Tonja, Sarah met to discuss how AWW could continue this work, noting older adults' heightened isolation during COVID-19. Lara sent an update email to all Summit participants interested in the Intergenerational Community focus area (about 85 people) asking about current efforts to support intergenerational interactions. About 10 people have responded, and Lara is reviewing the information. The email also included links to AWW Intergenerational page and articles on older adults and social isolation.

4) Awareness Campaign

Tessa stated there are no updates from CHF, but that she would like to hear what steering committee members wants to highlight. Comments:

- Mary stated it seems important to raise awareness about effects of isolation on older adults *and* their families/caregivers and offer resources about navigating.
- Ying observed that the process around the Age-Friendly designation will help raise awareness about AWW and allow the community to hold officials accountable.
- Lara said that that awareness campaign may end up being a number of smaller opportunities rather than one big push.

Workplan/Projects Review

Lara asked for input on any needed revisions to the 2020 AWW workplan, given that we are half-way through the year and considering the changes COVID-19 has brought.

Information and Navigation

Participating in the Resource Roundtable planning group – questions and comments:

- Is participation in the resource roundtable discussion enough? That process may be slow.
- It's important to ensure that resources for older adults are considered in the community-wide discussion.
- AWW can serve as a "gathering funnel" to identify resources for older adults that should be included, and ensure that those resources are easily accessible, not "buried in the morass" of the system.
- We should be aware of the precariousness of funding for 211 funding and the new OppCo position; it may be unwise to put all our eggs in that basket.
- The limitation of 211 is not just lack of information; the user interface is not very user-friendly.
- Could 211 be modified or made better for our community?
- It may be our best option for now.
- The merits and limitations of 211 would be discussed by the community committee.
- It's important to keep moving forward, even if it has to be in smaller increments or baby steps.

ACTION → Someone from AWW will attend the July planning group meeting and report back on how it appears that work will proceed, what the timeline might be, etc. The steering can then decide if AWW wants to continue participating in that group and/or explore other options.

Intergenerational Community

- Should we delay or revamp intergenerational messaging in light of COVID?
- Intergenerational work could be adapted to focus on how to have safe, distanced connections across generations – share best practices.
- Probably not plausible to create an action plan as originally planned.
- At national level, there is discussion among groups doing intergeneration work, so information and guidance are available.

ACTION → Pivot to sharing best practices, ideas and resources for intergenerational connections.

AARP Age Friendly Community

AARP designation can still be a deliverable, and be part of the awareness campaign.

ACTION → Continue this process as decided earlier in the meeting.

Awareness Campaign

The campaign can be highlighting other efforts, as discussed above.

Annual Gathering

- Doesn't make sense to invest time and resources into planning a gathering.
- We should produce something in the Fall that says, "we're still here"
- Cancel the in-person gathering, but create a report to share with the community about AWW's work this year.

ACTION → Continue to work on the projects in the 2020 workplan, but approach it in smaller increments.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

The group decided to observe its tradition of not meeting in July; the next AWW Steering Committee meeting will be Friday, August 7, presumably by Zoom.

Ying asked the group whether AWW should advocate for elected officials to address racial injustice and systemic inequities, alongside our advocacy around older adults.

Mary, Melinda, and Dave expressed their opinion that it's appropriate for AWW to address this – if not us, who? It's important for us to demonstrate that we care about these issues and we want everyone to feel welcome in AWW. Other group members expressed their support for Ying using his judgement in bringing this up to elected officials.