



## North Shore News Column.

### Older & Wiser

By Tom Carney

#### **Seniors action tables gear up for 2013**

Local residents driving change in their respective neighbourhoods

By Tom Carney, Special to North Shore News January 6, 2013

MY vote for the feel good story for 2012 was the emergence of Seniors Action Tables on the North Shore.

SATs organize and bring together local teams of seniors to help improve their community.

I first wrote about SATs in February 2012. Today, we get an update on the program from Jane Osborne, a community developer and the mentor for the SATs.

The idea for the SATs was rooted in a survey of seniors done by the Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society in 2010.

"Initially we were thinking of doing a survey on aging in place," says Osborne, "that would probably have quite a heavy emphasis on housing but then one of our municipal partners, Cheryl Kathler, a social planner for the City of North Vancouver, said, 'Well you know, it's about more than housing, it's about more than health services, it's about the determinants of health across a broader spectrum of services that need to be available in people's neighbourhoods for them to remain active and healthy as long as possible.'"

From there it was a question of making sure that everyone was on the same page going forward.

"It's a very interesting process," notes Osborne, "to try to bring seniors around a table and get some sort of agreement about what their priorities are going to be . . . with a sense of commitment to it because if you don't have that, you are not going to have the energies and synergies you need to actually accomplish something."

SATs tackle issues like community and health services, transportation, social inclusion and socialization opportunities, all of which contribute to an age-friendly community.

SATs are action-oriented says Osborne.

"SATs are not just about thinking about things, not just about planning things," she says, "the word action is there because these folks want to take action . . . they want to see things happen and they want to be a part of it."

Currently there are SATs operating in the Seymour, Capilano and the Lower Lonsdale neighbourhoods of North Vancouver. The newest SAT is in West Vancouver.

The formation of the SATs gives us an opportunity to tap into a group of seniors who are not connected to the community through existing programs and services.

"That's a huge advantage," notes Osborne, "because those are voices that we do not hear otherwise." Challenges? There are a few.

"You need two things to make this kind of a mix work," say Osborne, "you need the seniors . . . but you also need . . . some of the logistical things (the note takers and the organizers) to make sure that a group of people can get together and do meaningful work in the community. There is also a need to ensure that the SATs are truly inclusive.

"One of the challenges we have," says Osborne, "is to bring marginalized seniors (i.e. those with intellectual disabilities or language barriers) into a mainstream table that works for them and the seniors that are already there."

Osborne notes the support from the municipalities and service providers has been there from the start and has been critical to the success of the program. Going forward she is hoping that the SATs can for the most part be self-sustaining.

"You are not going to be able to get huge sums of funding for something that doesn't deliver a specific program," she says. "What this is about is really igniting

projects and getting some partners involved that will work with you as a group of seniors to get that thing done and then moving to whatever your next priority is and igniting another project."

Stay tuned. My prediction is that you will be hearing a lot more about the work of the SATs in 2013.

Tom Carney is the executive director of the Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. Ideas for future columns are welcome. Contact him at 604-985-3852 or send an email to lions\_view@telus.net.