

SENIORS WORKING GROUP

SUMMARY AND HISTORY OF THE GROUP

Under the direction of the North Shore Emergency Management, shortly after the inception of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, several groups were formed to respond to the pandemic. One of these North Shore groups was the *Seniors Working Group* facilitated by the District of North Vancouver Community Planner. Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society took over the group in August and supported by funding from the West Vancouver Community Foundation has been facilitating the group meetings almost every two weeks.

Group members include participants from Parkgate Community Centre, Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre, Capilano Community Services, West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre, VCH members from across the North Shore, Family Services of the North Shore, North Shore Community Resources, the Better at Homes Program, North Vancouver Recreation and Culture, Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society, North Shore Neighbourhood House, City, District of North Vancouver and West Vancouver Social Planning, City of North Vancouver Library, North Shore Stroke Recovery Society, Hollyburn Family Services Society and North Shore Keep Well Society.

Funding for the Seniors Working Group provided by West Vancouver Community Foundation



Miki Nash, Acting Executive Director at Capilano Community Services Society displays gift baskets ready for distribution

Much of the discussion since March has involved talking about how the groups have redesigned and pivoted their programs and services to respond to COVID-19. Using Zoom as a virtual platform the groups meet to talk about their redesigned programs and services, brainstorm new ideas and discuss amongst themselves the toll the pandemic is taking on the seniors they serve and on themselves as staff. But since July, more of the discussion involved describing the reopening and repurposing of centres and the rejigging of a variety of programs and services as some of the restrictions around COVID-19 had been lifted. The groups have also had to deal with a constantly changing landscape as restrictions sometimes are put back in place, as for instance fitness programs being allowed then restricted.

Organizations in the group find the meetings invaluable as a way to share resources, collaborate on delivery of programs, network on different approaches to reopening and discuss how to deal with Dr. Bonny Henry's new guidelines.

In response to the pandemic, there are many innovative programs and services being offered by these organizations. Below is an overview of many of the activities' the groups have undertaken to initially respond to COVID-19 and to start the process of reopening and repurposing.

OUTREACH

Telephone outreach:

In lieu of face to face meetings with seniors many of the organizations are providing a phone check in service and seniors help lines. These provide information, raise awareness of services, ascertain needs of seniors, and then try and match them with services. Some calls are meant to provide emotional support and counselling.

Gift bags, Care Packages and Goodie bags:

Many of the organizations have been sending regular bags of goods to isolated seniors, especially around various significant dates such as Valentines, Canada Day, Halloween, and Thanksgiving. As the holiday season approaches many centres are sending out lovingly wrapped gift bags with cheerful and useful contents such as gift cards, coffee pouches, soup mixes, calendars, newsletters, and toiletries. Much of the content has been donated by local business and grant programs (WVCF).

Newsletters and media coverage:

Many organizations are offering newsletters, sending them out by snail mail or email to their members. These offer seniors many ideas about how to cope with the lock down or semi lock down constraints on their lives, where to get assistance, what is open or closed and perhaps a joke or two, a personal story and so on. These groups have more than doubled their usual distribution to meet the needs of isolated seniors.

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A regular column (biweekly) is written by one of our organizations which is published by the North Shore News on-line and in the paper format and is also sent out by the organization to a wide group of people in the community. These columns are meant to keep seniors informed about a variety of topics including, keeping yourself safe, getting exercise, eating well, providing lists of services to support them through the pandemic and more. A recent column talked about the Seniors Working Group and its achievements.

VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES

North Shore Groups have been offering programs by implementing an approach called "Seniors Centre Without Walls."

Like many organizations around the province, the North Shore Groups have been offering programs by implementing an approach called *Seniors Centre Without Walls*. A United Way Healthy Aging report suggests that this approach involves "older adults participating in a variety of programs designed to promote recreational activities, health and wellness, and social connections through group conference calls or other virtual methods."

Two organizations are presenting zoom programs for their clients with dementia issues. One North Shore group is offering Zoom concert sessions, while another is offering chair fitness classes on YouTube. There are on-line book clubs, cooking classes, painting classes, multicultural discussion and exercise groups, discussion and writing groups, stroke recovery sessions, holiday craft workshops, elder college classes, on-line grief support sessions, on-line support for caregivers, bingo, tai chi, chair yoga and more.

Some organizations are offering free on-line mental health services. One is providing up to 6 free counselling sessions to seniors in the community and will be providing a Grief Support online group in January.

VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES (Continued)

Because many seniors have had trouble accessing or using technology organizations have been implementing programs to assist seniors to participate in this type of programming. The Libraries through their seniors programming run programs for seniors using loaned iPads and, also an ongoing support program on other uses of technology.

One of the organizations partnered with a local library to provide in-person COVID-safe training on how to Zoom, in a large room at their Centre – a volunteer is following up with weekly phone or in-person mini-sessions for those wanting additional support for using Zoom.



*Food waiting for pick up at
West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre
Photo by Jill Lawlor*

FOOD SERVICES



*Silver Harbour driver John McCann and assistant cook Don
Do load 100 turkey dinners for delivery to seniors in need.
photo Margaret Coates*

Meal drop off and pick-up programs:

Several groups have redesigned their onsite food services to respond to COVID-19. These groups have been dropping off meals to various seniors at their private homes and at various buildings with a high concentration of seniors. Many of the groups have formed partnerships to offer food drop off. The food programs are also designed to provide an outreach service to seniors, so tucked inside a food delivery package might be a kindness card or a list of services they can access in the community.

Some groups are offering a low-cost pick-up meal program as well, utilizing volunteers and staff to make it a smooth process. These meals are selling like hot cakes, so to speak.

The Food Bank program sponsored by one of the North Shore organizations has been successful in meeting an ever increasing number of seniors with their drop-in (pick up on site) and drop off programs. Numbers of participants went from 180 in March to 520 in November. That with hamper delivery equals 750 or so.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

As mentioned elsewhere several groups have formed partnerships to provide services, especially in Food Programs. The Seniors Working Group has a great partnership with the municipalities as they send community planners to our meetings which gives us a link to how local governments are managing COVID-19 for their citizens. Two organizations provided a tax clinic for low-income seniors. A few organizations have built relationships with restaurants to provide meals for drop-off.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION (Continued)

Many organizations are sharing their resources as requested and needed. So, for instance iPads have been shared between two organizations in order to provide online training. Some organizations have given groups their unused items to assist a senior (telephones not being used shared out). Many have shared PPE if they have an abundance but also have collaborated on where to find PPE.

The Christmas Bureau (which is a part of Family Services of the North Shore) have begun to deliver 1200 hampers with seniors being a large proportion of the total number.

Some groups have been sending out thank you cards to their volunteers using artwork created at various organizations. For instance, Better at Homes participant/volunteer did a sketch for a card mailout.

The City of North Vancouver through their Seniors Gathering Zoom group offered a Christmas program with jokes, games, and stories – very popular.

One organization has worked with multiple service clubs, youth organizations, and other informal groups to receive a wide variety of holiday cards and gifts (decorations, gift baskets, items for the home) that have then been delivered to seniors along with their regular programming and deliveries.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation services have been repurposed – groups are not using their regular and mini- buses to provide trips and travel for large group pick ups and drop offs. Organizations are providing a bus service for a limited group of seniors to go shopping and to go to important appointments. This service has proven to be a challenge with keeping seniors, volunteers and staff safely distanced from each other – usually meaning only a few passengers in a mid sized bus.

HOUSING AND INCOME SUPPORT

One agency is able to offer emergency rent subsidies, emergency utility/telephone/storage assistance and grocery cards to low income seniors that are at risk of losing their housing or cannot afford to eat after paying rent etc.

REOPENING, RECOVERY, AND REBUILDING - PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES

Groups have had to balance the need to provide short-term supports as mentioned above to respond to COVID-19 with preparations to eventually resume normal services. They have had to formulate and adapt to clear safety protocols for staff and participants all not without challenges.

On-site programming:

Reopening has been a challenge, as organizations cannot offer the wide array of programs available pre COVID-19. However, agencies who provide on site programs have been realigning program space so that participants can easily self distance. They are also working on creative positive space allocations. During the warmer months, organizations offered programs outside under tents, in parking lots or on terraces. One great innovative idea was the offer of a bridge game program using an X-shaped plexiglass divider.



Photo by Georg Arthur Pflueger on UnSplash

NEXT STEPS

The Seniors Working Group will continue to meet to discuss and collaborate around reopening, rebuilding, and repurposing their activities.

However, given the adjustments we might expect over the next ½ year because of the vaccine process, organizations will be dealing with a changing landscape in providing services and programs at their physical centres. Since March 2020, the SWG has been discussing the response to Covid-19. Going forward, the discussion will also facilitate the recovery and rebuilding of programs for seniors. For example, SWG will be engaged in looking at a complexity of issues in how they will begin to integrate and transition their participants and volunteers to on-site programs. Organizations may have to deal with some participants for on-site programming who may be vaccinated while others are not.

In addition, organizations will need to look at the return of participants who may have had a sharp decline in physical or emotional health over the last 10 months. This could mean coordinating on setting up different programs.

The Seniors Working Group will begin discussions about these important issues beginning January 2021.

FUNDERS

While this report does not have knowledge of every funding source here are a few:

West Vancouver Community Foundation

Vancouver Community Foundation

New Horizons for Seniors

United Way

Small businesses

Larger businesses

Community donations



Photo by Wallis Dixon