

Aging Well Whatcom Steering Committee

Friday, October 7, 2022

By Zoom call

MINUTES

Attending:

Chao-ying Wu, Chuckanut Health Foundation Board/Family Care Network
Heather Flaherty, Chuckanut Health Foundation
Heidi Bugbee, Generations Early Learning & Family Center
Kristin Hill, Opportunity Council
Mary Anderson, Whatcom Transportation Authority
Melinda Herrera, Rosewood Villa
Ryan Blackwell, Northwest Regional Council
Sarah Lane, Health Ministries Network
Tessa Whitlock, Chuckanut Health Foundation
Tonja Myers, Christian Health Care Center

Regrets:

Amy Hockenberry, Whatcom County Health Department
Barbara Juarez, NW Indian Health Board
Becky Kirkland, PeaceHealth Center for Senior Health
Chris Orr, Whatcom Council on Aging
Janet Malley, Whatcom Transportation Authority
Kenzie Nelson, VibrantUSA
Marie Eaton, Palliative Care Institute, WWU
Tammy Bennett, YMCA

Refresh and Reconnect

What's new with your organization? New opportunities or challenges related to older adults and aging (conversations, programs/services, funding, partnerships, policy...).

Mary – Whatcom Transportation Authority

- WTA will be proposing a service expansion to add paratransit services in the Blaine-Birch Bay area.
- She notes an increased concern about safety and security (harassment, violence), especially in downtown Bellingham. Whether this reflects actual increased risk, or **perceived** risk, she isn't sure; media exposure might be causing it to seem like more of an issue than it really is.

Sarah – Health Ministries Network

- The Ask-a-Nurse program continues in East County and at Eleanor Apartments in Bellingham. A group of residents at Eleanor Apartments are developing a community health worker model for residents. Related to Mary's comments about public safety concerns, their training will include administering Narcan.
- In Kendall, some community members are visiting people who are using substances, checking in and providing Narcan if needed. It has been observed that for some individuals, multiple doses of Narcan (seven in one case) are needed.
- A training on how to respond to people in overdose situations might be helpful – many people may want to help but aren't sure how.
- Health Ministries Nurses are participating in the development of a school-based clinic in the Mt Baker school district.

- HMN is engaging with the [Chardi Kala Project](#), which will be the focus of the Oct meeting (everyone welcome). Friday, October 21st, 12-1:30pm. Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87031301954?pwd=cm51M2tTRDluS1U3YnErQWQ2Zi94QT09>. Sarah is exploring nurses or lay people within the Sikh community supporting older adults within that community.
- The Art of Aging portraits are currently at Bellingham Covenant Church. One viewer expressed appreciation for the racial and ethnic diversity reflected in the portraits. Sarah's sense is that racial tension seems more overt now than previously.
- Health Ministries Network is seeking an assistant director.
- Via the chat: "Interfaith Coalition has a new director and other staff, and this might be a great time to bring them on (Steering Committee?) regarding older adults and housing and eyes on the older adult community."

Tessa and Heather - Chuckanut Health Foundation

- There are two big "pressure cookers" at CHF right now, the [Racial Equity Commission](#) and [Prop 5](#), along with the fall grant round and other activities.
- Racial Equity Commission – A Whatcom County Council Public Hearing will be held on October 11, which will result in a Council vote regarding formally establishing the Racial Equity Commission. Heather expressed concern about the possibility of disruption or even violence at that meeting, and noted the historical significance of being a voice for racial equity, regardless of the outcome of the Council's vote.
- Prop 5 – It's unlikely there will be another opportunity for a fund like this, so it's high-stakes, high visibility, and a short timeline. Tessa observed that people of all ages are supporting Prop 5, not just people with young children. It is heartening that people see that supporting young kids and families benefits the community as a whole.
- CHF's Fall grant round is underway, and Tessa observed they are seeing more references to the Aging Well Blueprint.
- Heather shared a recent conversation with County Councilmember Kathy Kershner, who is interested in issues related to older adults. Heather described AWW and directed her to the Blueprint, of which Councilmember Kershner had been unaware.

Heidi – Generations Early Learning and Family Center

- There was excitement about "getting back to normal," including restoring intergenerational activities. Parents and grandparents are now able to enter the building again, but staffing shortages and staff absences due to COVID have hampered intergenerational programming.
- The idea of intergenerational program seems to be gaining some momentum, but there are still many barriers, including fear of COVID, especially since most children are not vaccinated.
- Staffing is a huge issue with other childcare centers in the community as well.
- Ying asked via the chat, "Since the population is shifting older, is there any movement to recruit the older population back into the workforce to meet some of our needs in caregiving and childcare? Recruit and fund the community to get involved, to meet workforce needs, treat loneliness, and connect multiple generations and various ethnic groups."
- Heidi is not aware of an organized recruitment effort focused on older adults.

Ying – Family Care Network

- The pandemic is not over, we are just in a different phase. Paxlovid is very effective for reducing severity of COVID, but is very underutilized. Bivalent COVID booster and flu vaccination is very

important, but uptake is low so far. Promoting both Paxlovid and vaccination could significantly reduce the impact on healthcare system, as well as childcare and other settings.

- Healthcare resources could very easily get maxxed out with many sick people and staffing shortages in both inpatient and outpatient settings. With reduced access, people delay care or go without, which in turn creates additional problems down the line. It seems that a community back-up plan for providing emergency and/or urgent care is needed.
- Family Care Network will soon be establishing a non-profit part of the organization to address health issues outside of its clinical services/direct care.

Kristin Hill – Opportunity Council

- The Opportunity Council’s homeless outreach services will be expanding out into county areas in the near future. That team is equipped with and trained to use Narcan.
- Work on the new 56-units of senior housing (Laurel and Forest streets) is starting, but there is asbestos work required prior to demolition of the current building. The hope is to break ground in Spring 2023 and have the units completed in Spring 2024.
- There is a new Landlord Liaison staff person who is available to help both landlords and renters who are at risk of losing their rental resolve issues and allow the renter to continue there. The most recent call was from a 70-year old individual who had rented their apartment for 15 years.
- A new Housing Navigator position has also been added (not yet filled). This person will assist community members not in the OC/Homeless Service Center Housing Pool navigate their housing options. Services will be “lite” – this is not a case manager role.

Ryan – NW Regional Council

- NWRC also now has Narcan on site; it is available from the North Sound Accountable Community of Health.
- The annual [Dementia Support Northwest conference](#) is on Friday afternoons, Oct 7, Oct 14 and Oct 21. It is free to all this year due to NWRC grant funding.
- NWRC is definitely seeing a shortage of in-home caregivers and has created an outreach position to intensify recruitment starting in mid-October.
- Work continues on starting a program for in-home substance use disorder in older adults, where it is very underreported.
- The upcoming legislation session seems promising for issues around aging and older adults. Last session was historic in terms of funding for older adults and budget forecasts are looking good.

Melinda – Rosewood Villa

- Rosewood’s management changed earlier this year to a Tacoma-based company. They are now accepting Medicaid with no wait period, which is extremely unusual for long-term care – usually wait periods are as long as three years.
- Dealing with extensive water damage to fifteen of the apartments.
- Have been hit hard by COVID this year with three different outbreaks. Working with Walgreen’s on bivalent vaccines; residents had a 98% vaccination rate with previous rounds of vaccination.
- Seeing more drug use such as cannabis among residents, and in some cases, it’s associated with increased falls. It’s a new challenge in terms of caring for assisted living residents, though it was not unexpected.

Tonja – Christian Health Care Center

- CHCC had COVID in the building among residents in August for the first time, though there were no hospitalizations thanks in part to high vaccination rates.

- Held first bivalent vaccine clinic yesterday, with good uptake by residents. Vaccination for staff is a “harder sell” – many have had COVID and the idea of reduced severity of symptoms is not a big incentive.
- Operating in crisis mode – currently 50 open beds, not because there isn’t demand for them, but because there are not people to staff them.
- Staffing shortages have been intensified by many being out with COVID. In addition, numerous staff are leaving to work at the hospital instead.
- Reached out recently to Rick Larsen’s office regarding issue of work visas for LPNs. RNs can get a visa to work in the US within 6 weeks, whereas it takes 3 years for LPNs. Trying to see why it takes so much longer, and if this could be changed.
- In regards to Ying’s question about recruiting older workers into the workforce, fear of COVID is a barrier, especially for the long-term care setting (Melinda echoed this). Perhaps an organized recruitment effort could be effective?

Public Health Advisory Board Request

Ying shared that County Council member Carol Frazey contacted him stating that the Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) is developing its priorities to focus on in 2023 and asking about priorities related to older adults.

Discussion

- A priority around reducing social isolation and loneliness could be suggested. Ying recommended the book [Together: the healing power of human connection in a sometimes lonely world](#) by Vivek Murthy.
 - In the near-term, addressing the overwhelmed, crisis-mode of healthcare, child-care and other settings seems urgent, especially as we head into the winter when flu and COVID rates likely to increase. Caregiving systems will be more needed, and caregiver workforce will be further limited and stressed.
 - Requesting time with the PHAB to present the Blueprint, share more about AWW, and discuss priorities would be valuable.
 - It’s great Councilmember Frazey asked!
- ➔ **ACTION:** Ying will respond to Councilmember Frazey on behalf of the Steering Committee, outlining a near-term priority of preventing and mitigating flu and COVID and associated workforce strain and a longer-term request for the PHAB to engage with AWW.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

The Committee didn’t discuss where AWW is with its 2022 priorities due to lack of time. Lara suggested that since we are nearing the end of the calendar year, this discussion can roll into identifying priorities for 2023.

Next meetings: **Fridays, November 4 & Dec 2 9:30-10:30 AM**