

# Ageing Well Whatcom Steering Committee

Friday, May 1, 2020

By Zoom call

## DRAFT MINUTES

### Attending:

Chris Orr, Whatcom Council on Aging  
Dr. Chao-ying Wu, Chuckanut Health Foundation Board/Family Care Network  
Heather Flaherty, Chuckanut Health Foundation  
Marie Eaton, Palliative Care Institute, WWU  
Ryan Blackwell, Northwest Regional Council  
Sarah Lane, YMCA  
Tessa Whitlock, Chuckanut Health Foundation  
Tonja Myers, Christian Health Care Center  
Lindsey Karas, Mercy Housing  
Vinson Latimore, Gibraltar Senior Living  
Carol Nicolay, Health Ministries Network  
Dr. Dave Lynch, Chuckanut Health Foundation Board/Family Care Network (retired)  
Wendy Lawrence, Opportunity Council

### Regrets:

Mary Anderson, Whatcom Transportation Authority  
Melinda Herrera, Rosewood Villa  
Heidi Bugbee, Generations Early Learning & Family Center  
Janet Malley, Whatcom Transportation Authority  
Amy Hockenberry, Whatcom County Health Department  
Becky Kirkland, PeaceHealth Center for Senior Health

## Welcome, Introductions, Reflection

Lara opened the meeting and welcomed new Steering Committee member, Lindsey Karas from Mercy Housing, whose membership was approved by email. Lara also acknowledged that this will be Heather's last meeting before her baby is born; committee members wished her well (and requested a photo of the baby when she arrives).

Committee members reflected on how they have seen older adults being impacted by COVID-19 since last month's meeting.

Chris said the Whatcom Council on Aging continues to do wellness checks by phone, and "there have been some very long calls." The isolation and loneliness are apparent, especially for people with limited access to or familiarity with technology. At the same time, it has been impressive and inspiring to see how friends and neighbors are stepping forward to help each other.

Marie shared that the Palliative Care Institute has been hosting virtual support groups with people working in assisted living and home health. They've shared many poignant stories regarding the older adults they work with and this time without contact with family and friends. People with dementia can be especially confused by the masks, personal protective equipment, and not being able to see others. Marie mentioned she will be a panelist on a May 14 panel of "Re-Entry through COVID" which looks at COVID in the context of disparities and impacts on the social determinants of health. On 5/20 there will be a discussion "Advance Care Planning in the time of COVID."

➔ ACTION: Marie will send out information to the committee.

Vinson reported that early on there was no COVID in the Gibraltar buildings, but once one person was infected, 27 people were infected within a week. Though most people recovered, it took a huge toll – physically, mentally and emotionally – and impacted staff, residents and their families. Their facilities tend to take people with mental illness, and the usual mental health resources were not available due to COVID 19 contact restrictions. He asked how this scenario of ensuring mental health services is handled in Whatcom County.

Committee members shared that Motel 6 on Samish Way has been converted into a recovery facility for people with COVID who aren't able to safely isolate in their living situation, including those with mental illness and/or living with homelessness. There are behavioral health staff there. Home care agencies are offering financial incentives to employees who serve COVID patients

Heather stated that elders with mental health issues is a hard situation at any time, and COVID adds significantly to those challenges. In general, COVID 19 is highlighting how many issues there are with the way we care for older adults, and the extensive loneliness. Will this help us see better ways, and do better? She expressed gratitude for committee members' stories and observations; hearing them is very helpful for understanding the context for funding.

Dave said that we will come out of this – to some degree, at some point – and older adults will be at highest risk. How do we protect the most vulnerable members of our community? Opening up is almost harder than just being closed, and requires figuring out how to provide services in ways that are different and more complex than before.

Sarah echoed it will be interesting to see how re-opening happens. At the Y they are working on re-opening, and deciding how to approach it – for whom, and in what ways. People with chronic diseases, who she works with, are among the most vulnerable. In her interactions with seniors she sees a wide range of how people are responding. Some people don't care, feel there is no reason to get up in the morning, "don't contact me," "I am okay with life ending." Others are ready to get back to "normal" and want to know the standards for protection and safety (distancing, using masks). However, these guidelines are for the general population, not the most vulnerable.

Lindsey Karas is the Resident Services Manager at Mercy Housing. So far, they've focused on food distribution and housing stability – preventing people from losing their housing. They are experimenting with using Microsoft teams and have launched a "community challenge" writing contest. She's also been advocating to allow residents to use the community garden with social distancing.

Wendy stated that access to behavioral health services is a challenge. There have been no COVID cases for either residents or staff in any of the properties managed by the Opportunity Council, so they're lucky to continue to have full staffing.

Tonja stated that Christian Health Care Center has had no new admissions since March 21, and no COVID among residents. One staff person had COVID and fully recovered without spreading the infection. Being closed to visitors has been very challenging but is necessary as protecting residents is the first priority. Staff, residents and families overall have been very patient and gracious. They are trying to provide some special interactions with residents, such as videos. Four long-time residents have died, and COVID has prevented their deaths from being the kind of experience CHCC tries to support, with family gathering, feeding people, etc. Instead they are restricting family visits and requiring protective equipment. She feels that the transition to "normal" is going to be long.

Ying stated he still more social contact than many people, due to going into the office for work. Family Care Network is using 2-week on/2-week off scheduling as a workforce preservation strategy. About 400 staff members were tested, all with negative results. He observes a sense of paralysis, and an attitude of "waiting it out" but is seeing that the COVID situation is more a way of living than an event, and that we need to figure out that new way of living. He agreed that COVID highlights existing problems, and he's concerned about racializing COVID – assigning a disease to a particular ethnicity – which historically has often happened. He noted that national disasters tend to bring people together, but disease pushes people apart. There is a lot to be learned from New Zealand, where success with handling COVID is partly due to the safety net that existed pre-COVID.

Ryan has been focused on advocacy efforts at the state level. In-home caregivers were recently assigned as “Tier 1” [*the category of workers most in need of personal protective equipment.*] This is good news in that it makes them eligible for getting PPE through the state Unified Command system. However, they still aren’t actually receiving the needed supplies.

## Review and Approve Minutes

Minutes from the February 7, 2020 AWW meeting were approved as written.

Vinson asked about the committee’s approval process, noting the absence of a motion for approving minutes. Decision-making was later addressed as part of the discussion regarding the Charter, and revisions include the use of Robert’s Rules of Order when appropriate.

## Approve Steering Committee Charter

**The committee reviewed the draft charter and suggested additions and clarifications.**

➔ ACTION: Lara will make these edits and send out to the group for a final approval.

## AARP Designation

Ying stated that he sees the AARP designation as an outreach tool for engaging elected officials and decision makers in AWW. It would be a way to get the Aging Well voice and perspective a seat at the political table. It’s not a “be all and end all” but would be realistic for this year and appears to be low-barrier and low-maintenance. An annual report is required – Seattle’s is intimidating, but there are others to review. He’s emailed with Carol Frazey and she is interested in exploring the designation. Based on conversations with Summit participants from AARP and Age-Friendly Seattle, most of the work for the application has been completed by developing the blueprint. He noted that we would want **Whatcom County** to be designated; we’d be the first county in the state of Washington to be designated, which might add to the appeal for politicians.

Dave said that thinking about it from a high level, he asks the question, “Does [the AARP designation] help us, or would it be a distraction?”

Tonja concurred that it could be a good way to get buy-in from elected officials. She wondered if the annual report could be one we would want to do anyway for our local efforts, perhaps in conjunction with our annual meeting.

Marie commented that while we don’t want to do double work, the advantages she sees are: access to funding, more opportunities for networking with other communities, and engaging with politics and policy making.

Carol reported that in Puyallup, joining the network brought some key issues to the city council for the first time.

Lara clarified that a governmental entity must be the applicant. AWW could not apply.

Ryan said he worries it could be a “shiny object” that wouldn’t create any significant difference. While it may draw political attention to aging issues, there is the risk that after achieving certification political leaders would think, “OK, we’re done.” In spite of his concerns, he is comfortable with moving ahead with the process.

Heather stated she thinks the designation could help Whatcom County stay committed, and it would be there to point to in the future. If needed, CHF could provide extra resources to help with the annual report. If the perception of AARP is unfavorable, she would want to consider that from a PR perspective for CHF.

Lara proposed that a smaller group look at additional annual reports from other communities to get a better understanding of the burden, and map out a plan for moving forward in Whatcom County to share with the committee.

➔ ACTION: Ying, Carol, Dave and Lara will work on this.

## Community Challenge funding opportunity

AARP funding is available through its annual Community Challenge grants. What projects from the workplan could we proceed with even with the restrictions of COVID?

Marie said that building out the information and navigation portal could still be worked on, and was a high priority.

Ryan and Chris, who have been leading that project, don't have capacity to work on it right now. Ryan mentioned one option would be to create access to the resource information stored in an existing database *Community Living Connections*.

Ryan commented that currently there is actually extra funding coming through the Area Agencies on Aging, and the NW Regional Council will be distributing it to community programs and services. He is most worried about future funding.

Chris said the WCOA is just starting to discuss how their annual Senior Day in the Park might be re-created in another way, with the same goal of connecting older adults to resources. Some kind of virtual event? A mailing? Info panels with Q and A? A series over a month? He would welcome support to apply for the AARP funds. (Ryan suggested renaming it "Senior Day at the ZOO(m)").

Re-envisioning Sr Day in the Park would also dovetail with the information and navigation project, and would help move that forward.

Ying suggested a multi-prong approach that addresses the issue of connection, isolation, and loneliness.

- **ACTION:** Lara will review the grant information in detail and follow up with Chris and Heather about a possible application.

## AWW newsletter

Heather reported that an AWW newsletter is being developed, to include some information about the impacts of COVID and isolation, what people can do to help, and general AWW updates. It would also be a venue to highlight members' organizations.

She envisions it as a quarterly newsletter, going to people on the current mailing lists (250 for AWW, 250-300 for CHF). There could also be blog posts on the AWW website.

This conversation was short due to lack of time.

- **ACTION:** Heather will send out the draft of the newsletter content and requested that people respond with their suggestions and ideas.

## Wrap Up and Next Steps

The next AWW Steering Committee meeting will be Friday, June 5, presumably by Zoom.