

2014

Fort St. John, BC *Better at Home* Service United Way of the Lower Mainland

**Together, we can give
seniors a hand.**



**Better
at Home**

United Way helping seniors remain independent.

PUBLIC INPUT

We'd like input from seniors, family members and community agencies on how we can best support seniors who face challenges coping with chores, getting to appointments, or who would benefit from a friendly visit. This program is not designed to provide medical services — just helping hands. Come share your ideas.

Sarah L. Cunningham Consulting

Victoria, BC

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Fort St John *Better at Home* Service

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. *Better at Home* is a program that helps seniors with simple day-to-day tasks so they can continue to live independently in their own homes and remain connected to their communities. The program is funded by the Government of British Columbia and managed by the United Way of the Lower Mainland, with services delivered by a local non-profit organization. The *Better at Home* program is designed to address the specific needs of local seniors, allowing communities to choose from the following basket of services:

- friendly visiting
- transportation to appointments
- snow shoveling
- light yard work
- simple home repairs
- grocery shopping
- light housekeeping

Fort St John has been identified as a *Better at Home* site. In order to explore the needs and options for the Fort St. John *Better at Home* service, it was important to recognize that work providing non-medical supports to area seniors has been underway over the past two years. Specifically, the North Peace Seniors Housing Society, selected through a community process, has been providing non-medical services identified as needed by community stakeholders since October 2012. Their services included housekeeping, transportation, and friendly visiting to seniors in the area. Funding and support was provided by the United Way of Northern British Columbia in partnership with other organizations including Northern Health and the University of Northern British Columbia under an Instrumental *Activities of Daily Living* (IADL) pilot program. It has been operating for approximately 18 months. Formal evaluations of this service have been undertaken with positive results. The funding ceases as of March 31, 2014.

1.2. Description of Community Development Approach

The community development approach selected for *Better at Home* involved building on the IADL work. To that end community members were invited, by the North Peace Senior

Housing Society, to attend the *Better at Home* Community Stakeholder Meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to engage in a process that would result in a Fort St John *Better at Home* service that was supported by the community. The main goal was to provide an opportunity for community stakeholders to provide input in to the development of the Fort St. John *Better at Home* services. Facilitation was provided by Sarah L. Cunningham Consulting and the United Way of the Lower Mainland. This three hour meeting was held in the Peace Lutheran Apartments Drop-in Centre. A total of 32 community members attended the meeting. See Appendix A for a list of the community groups represented.

2. Community Profile

2.1. Description of the Local Senior Population

The total population of Fort St John is 18,699¹. The total population of seniors (people 65 and over) is 1210, of whom 515 are male and 710 female. The population 55 year to 64 years is 1500 of whom 775 are male and 725 female and, for the group 85 and older, the population is 350; twice as many females (235) as male (115).

Fort St John has a significant Aboriginal population at 11.5% (2150) of the total. Approximately 6.5% (1215) are First Nation and 4.7% (879) are Métis.

The vast majority of seniors, 1115, live in private households. The majority of these people (635) live with a partner or spouse while 415 live alone. Additionally 75 live with a relative or non- relative. A small number (95) live in supported or assisted living of some kind.

2.2. Summary of the Community Assets

The community of Fort St John appears to have a very active community of seniors. As the detailed descriptions that follow indicate they are well-organized and engaged in meeting the needs of this population. Other assets are also described below.

North Peace Seniors Housing Society IADL Program: Since late 2012, a program known as Independent Activities of Daily Living (IADL) had been operating in Fort St John. This program had been implemented with the support of the United Way of Northern BC

¹ Statistics Canada 2011 Census

(operating out of Prince George BC) through a community development process. At that time, the group identified to provide non-medical support to seniors was the North Peace Seniors Housing Society. Evidence generated through the IADL evaluation process indicated that the program has been successfully providing light housekeeping, transportation and friendly-visiting type services. Other North Peace Seniors Housing Society (and their Drop In organization) services include offering independent housing units, socialization opportunities, and a drop-in facility/program open to all seniors in the community. The drop-in centre is funded by members. They offer, among other social activities, a few meals each month.

Fort St John Seniors Society provides recreation opportunities, such as dances. They support socialization and are open Monday and Thursday. They also offer some meals and have a hall they use for a variety of seniors-related activities.

Save Our Northern Seniors (SONS) advocates on policy issues impacting northern seniors. They communicate with their local government, with support from a city councilor, and the provincial government through the MLA. They develop the Community Health Guide; send out information through a fan-out e-mail list; and have a Costco Membership.

Northern Health provides a range of home support services, such as personal care and food preparation. They provide a '12 minute check' for people who may need assistance i.e. to take medication. They also have a 'SILP' (Senior's Independent Living Program) worker who provides support for independent living including, for example, grocery shopping, socialization, outings, and referrals.

City of Fort St John has a councilor who acts as the senior's liaison. In addition, the city supports transportation to meet the needs of seniors including handyDART and the 'Ticket to Ride' program. They work with local seniors to address issues impacting seniors.

Fort St John Senior Care Foundation supports fund raising. The money is used to improve nutrition, help purchase personal care products, and purchase items such as walkers and canes.

Fort St John's Women's Resource Centre offers Legal Support Services, including general legal support, assistance to fill out forms, help with wills and estate issues, free income tax

help and offers a variety of other services such as the knitting club, an outreach store, food and clothing

A. *Calder* is a community volunteer who offers free grocery shopping support.

United Way of Northern BC (North East (NE) Region) funds programs in northern communities.

2.3. Seniors Non-medical Home Support Service Needs

As noted above, when the original IADL project was developed community consultations were undertaken to identify the most needed service. These were housekeeping, transportation and friendly visiting.

2.4. Suggested Opportunities for Service Integration/Coordination

Opportunities to partner were discussed. J. Olson clarified that partnership can refer to those situation where *Better at Home* may fund another group to look after a piece of the work i.e. link to an employment service to provide home repair people. In addition people saw opportunities to reach out to multicultural organizations, and men. People in single family dwellings were not original serviced by the IADL agreement and there may be a need to clearly communicate that “*Better at Home* is not IADL”

3. Community Readiness

3.1. Explanation of Community Readiness

The North Peace Seniors Housing Society indicated that they were prepared to continue to provide and expand their IADL services in order to evolve into the *Better at Home* services community members want and feel are needed. The participants responded very positively to this indicating considerable support for the North Peace Seniors Housing society and the work of the IADL coordinator and supervising manager in particular.

It was confirmed that no other group was interested or positioned to take on this work. People were happy to not have to ‘re-invent the wheel’. The discussion then moved on to an exploration of partnerships that could enhance the current service and move it away from the IADL framework and in the direction of the *Better at Home* program.

In particular people were interested in the composition of the Advisory Board. Many suggestions were made regarding groups that could potentially provide appropriate representation on the Advisory Board. These included:

- One member from each senior's organization (i.e. Fort St. John Seniors, Save our Northern Seniors, and FSJ Seniors Care Foundation)
- Northern Health Representatives, such as the SILP worker, the Aboriginal Liaison Worker, the Men's Health Regional Person, and Home and Community Care staff
- Aboriginal organizations such as the Fort St John Friendship Centre, the Métis Association, and Treaty Eight.
- City of Fort St. John Councilor/Senior's Liaison
- Other community groups such as the Pan African Association, the Filipino association, and the United Way of Northern BC (NE Region)

3.2. Potential Risks Going Forward

One risk moving forward is that North Peace Senior Housing Society finds it difficult to expand the services and develop the capacity to meet the new needs as identified by stakeholders at the community meeting. Support from the United Way of the Lower Mainland especially in the early days of the new agreement will help mitigate this risk.

A second risk is that, given the extensive array of senior-serving organizations that are interested in being part of the Better at Home Advisory Group, it will somehow get coerced into the role of overall Senior's Council. To mitigate this risk it will be important to ensure the Advisory Group has clear terms of reference that focus on supporting the delivery of *Better at Home* services. It may help if the North Peace Seniors Housing Society, potentially with support from the United Way of the Lower Mainland, draft general terms of reference prior to the first Advisory Group meeting. It may also help to plan annual community meetings where *Better at Home* updates can be provided to everyone. This type of inclusive process can mitigate fears of being left out, or having no influence.

4. Local *Better at Home* Program Details

4.1. List of Preferred Services

The meeting participants broke into small groups, and discussed which *Better at Home* services were important for seniors in Fort St John. This was followed by a prioritization exercise using dots. The results indicated that the most important service (consistent with the original IADL project) continued to be Housekeeping (26 dots), followed by Transportation, both for medical and for social needs (22 dots) Friendly Visiting (including check-ins) (16 dots), Grocery Shopping (15 dots), Minor Home Repairs (12 dots) with the final three items including Snow Shoveling (8 dots), Information Sharing (4 dots) and Access to Physical Activities/Exercise (1 dot).

4.2. Key Lead Organization Criteria

We did not specifically explore lead agency criteria however the North Peace Seniors Housing Society did provide a presentation that outlined the work they are currently doing and the results of that work. It was evident that they have excellent overall financial management and human resource management capacity; they were able to report that they have a relatively stable roster of eight volunteers and several housekeepers. They have been managing a sliding scale fee-for-service. In addition, the United Way of Northern BC reports they have done an excellent job with IADL. The high number of people who choose to attend this community meeting (at short notice) and the support provided by this audience spoke to the capacity of North Peace Senior Housing Society to build partnerships and work collaboratively. The IADL research data illustrated the capacity of the program coordinator to complete needs assessment.

5. Recommendations and Next Steps

Thoughts about ways to improve the current service were discussed and included the following:

- Promote and market the new *Better at Home* services to ensure local people know that all seniors will now be eligible. This is needed to overcome perceptions left over from the early days of IADL when services were limited to people who actually lived in the Peace Lutheran Apartments.
- Explore the currently very low participation of men in the IADL services (only 11%). Are they being missed or does it just appear that way because of how the data is collected?

- Explore and facilitate participation of Aboriginal Elders.
- Consider using a 'by exception' approach and service people as young as 50 and/or people who live in rural communities around Fort St. John. Perhaps use the Advisory Board to explore these situations on a case by case basis, at least in the early days of this new service.
- Understand that support provided under *Better at Home* can be short-term and as needed; people don't need to sign up permanently.
- Apply the idea of including (or at least even just considering) family members in discussions about needed supports. This inclusive approach gives families the opportunity to think about how they might want, or be able, to help.

The participants indicated that they felt important considerations for the development of a meaningful FST *Better at Home* services included:

- *An awareness that we are unique, what works here will be different than what works in a city like Vancouver*
- *We are rural with large distances and a long winter*
- *It can be hard to find volunteers. Our unemployment rate is very low and wages quite high*
- *We are a town impacted by transience*
- *Housing costs are very expensive. Getting people back in to a house, once they lose their house is next to impossible*

Appendix A: Organizations with Representatives at the Community Stakeholder Meeting

1. **Seniors groups** including:

- Fort St John Seniors Care Foundation
- North Peace Seniors Housing Society, and the North Peace Senior Housing Society Drop-In Organization
- Save Our Northern Seniors
- Fort St John Seniors

Many Board members from each of these groups attended.

2. **Northern Health** including Home and Community Care staff, Recreation Programmers, the SILP worker, the Aboriginal P. Liaison Worker, the Hospital Discharge Worker, and the Primary Care Manager

3. **Community groups** including:

- Treaty 8 Tribal Council,
- Fort St John Women's Resource Centre
- City of Fort St John - Seniors Liaison Councilor
- United Way of Northern BC (North East Region)

4. **And others**, such as an individual who offers a volunteer shopping service