

Better at Home: Williams Lake

Final Report

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1. Better at Home Program Introduction

“Seniors are an important and growing part of our communities, and their active involvement enriches everyone’s lives. To ensure that seniors continue to play an active role in our communities, they often need support to live independently in their own homes, surrounded by family, friends, and neighbours. United Way of the Lower Mainland supports seniors to age with dignity and with funding provided by the BC government, will manage the Better at Home program in up to 60 communities across BC. Better at Home is designed to assist seniors with simple day-to-day tasks, thereby helping seniors maintain their independence and stay connected with their community. Better at Home is designed to be adaptable to the characteristics of a community and will address the specific needs of local seniors.” Services will be chosen from the following basket of services:

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

Better at Home Program Information, United Way of the Lower Mainland

1.1 Description of the local community development approach

All information was collected either through direct interviews, meetings, phone or email contact, or through local and community specific research (Census, City of Williams Lake reports, etc.). Beginning with key community contacts based on the recommendations of United Way and *Better at Home* staff, the Community Developer built a list of Key Stakeholders and potential Lead Agencies, including individuals who’s expertise was essential to the development

of the program in Williams Lake. The Community Developer consulted non-profit agencies of all sizes, seniors agencies/groups/organizations, local businesses, representatives of non-eligible groups (Interior Health, the City of Williams Lake, private home care businesses, etc.), and seniors and other key individuals for information and guidance throughout the community development and lead agency selection processes.

Consultation Categories	Number of Agencies/Seniors Consulted
Seniors' Focused Groups	3
Other Non-Profit Agencies	8
Non-eligible Agencies (IHA, City, for profit)	7
Seniors (individuals)	8
Total	26

Consultations were not directed solely on senior-focused groups, rather information about the history of community-based research and program development in Williams Lake and additional sources of information would come from all citizens. As an 'outsider', taking the position of 'learner' in Williams Lake allowed the Community Developer to hear the story of the community and to draw from local assets to mitigate concerns. For example, early on there seemed to be skepticism regarding the community-based approach for the *Better at Home* program and the suitability of this approach for Williams Lake; in the past similar approaches caused significant friction in the community. As a result, the Community Developer was able to slightly adapt the selection process based on information gathered through consultation. Originally, both Community and Key Stakeholder Meetings were planned back-to-back on the same day, however, for Williams Lake, scheduling the Community and Key Stakeholder Meetings on separate days would allow both the potential Lead Agencies and the Key Stakeholders additional time to address the information gathered in the Community Meeting, and to reduce any negative emotional reactions to the process.

As it happened, the practice of directly addressing concerns as they were shared, and consulting a wide range of agencies, key community members, and seniors as to potential solutions built a strong community of support for the *Better at Home* program and fostered a reciprocal working relationship between the Community Developer and the community. The community raised a large number of ideas for potential agency partnerships and program ideas, and also brought forward concerns including questions about the sliding scale, geographical boundaries (in particular to improve access for isolated seniors), and long-term funding. By the Community Meeting the attendees (which included many of the people who were involved in the consultation process as well as members of the public) and the facilitators were able to raise difficult questions and share open discussion. The community was able to identify specific qualities of a desired Lead Agency, which essentially pointed to one specific agency, and the selection of the Lead Agency in Williams Lake. The community development approach was a great success in Williams Lake - the lead agency was selected in the Community Meeting allowing for a wider scope of community influence, and the Key Stakeholder Meeting further addressed concerns and possibilities toward greater accomplishment with *Better at Home* in Williams Lake.

2. COMMUNITY PROFILE



2.1 Description of the local seniors' population

Information leading to a description of the seniors' population of Williams Lake was collected from research specific to the community including the 2011 Census, a 2011 Citizen's Survey for the City of Williams Lake, and information from the Social Planning Council as well as direct input from members of the community. Seniors (likely indicating people 65+) in Williams Lake represent roughly 15% of the population, and according to the 2011 Official City Plan, the community expects this number will rise to as high as 25% of the population by 2031 (1-3). Roughly 28% of the seniors in Williams Lake are over 80 years old. In addition to citizens who have based their lives within city limits, Williams Lake is also home to many seniors who have had to move to the city from outlying areas in order to gain better access to services. Age and isolation make service accessibility a high priority for the population of seniors in Williams Lake.

Much of the volunteer force in Williams Lake is represented by seniors, which points to a strongly committed group with the capacity to support many organizations and groups in the area significantly adding to the community's resiliency. The need for preventative services is a priority in the area given that over 50% of the community's seniors are less than 75 years old. The dedicated and protective nature of the citizens of the city, combined with the anticipated demographic shift, and the City of Williams Lake's desire to follow the principles to allow seniors to "age in place", *Better at Home* seems to be a strong fit with the community's needs.

For further information follow links below:

- Williams Lake Community Plan 2011:
http://www.mywilliamslake.placebrand.ca/sites/default/files/documents/doc_OCP_Final_April_2011.pdf
- Williams Lake Census 2011:
http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/search-recherche/frm_res.cfm?Lang=E&TABID=1&G=1&Geo1=PR&Code1=10&Geo2=0&Code2=0&SearchType=Begins&SearchText=williams+lake&PR=01

2.2 Description of the local seniors' population

The community development process revealed that Williams Lake has several strong assets that will directly contribute to the success of the *Better at Home* program.

- **Committed to the Cariboo region and the City of Williams Lake:** there is a genuine sense that the community is very proud of its beautiful surroundings and the particular characteristics of living in the Cariboo. In a citizen's survey completed for the City of Williams Lake in 2011, the community shared that their "favorite thing about living in Williams Lake", was the "proximity to wilderness".
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- **Vibrant and active seniors population - physically and socially:** an active seniors population who are strongly connected to their community make for a supportive and protective force, making this one of Williams Lake's most important asset.
- **Existing capacity:** Williams Lake is home to several non-profit organizations and individuals with capacity and experience to take-on the *Better at Home* program.
- **Many local service clubs and organizations serving seniors in Williams Lake:**
 - Seniors Advisory Council
 - Seniors Advocates
 - Elders College
 - Cariboo Friendship Society (Elder's programs)
 - Seniors Activity Centre
 - Several service clubs, churches, cultural groups, health centers, etc.
- **Strong and committed group of volunteers:** many services in Williams Lake require the support of dedicated volunteers. While the community is very proud of this accomplishment there is also a sense of concern that with added services like the *Better at Home* program, volunteers will be overstretched, thereby effecting existing services. The community is acutely aware of the valuable resource they have in its volunteers.

2.3 Seniors' needs related to non-medical home support services

For the purposes of this report, three factors will be outlined to highlight specific needs of the seniors of Williams Lake. This is not an exhaustive list, however, these are the most frequently mentioned concerns.

- **Rural Community:** the size and geographical location of Williams Lake contributes to available services for seniors. The nearest communities that larger than Williams Lake (and perceivably offers more services to
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seniors) are Kamloops and Prince George, both roughly 3 hour drives away. All of the services identified by Better at Home are needed in Williams Lake.

- **Isolation:** there are many seniors who live in the surrounding areas of Williams Lake. It becomes increasingly difficult for seniors to make the trip back and forth from the city/home as they get older; this isolation highlights the need for transportation and friendly visits.
- **Climate:** Williams Lake experiences challenging winter conditions lasting longer than many BC communities; Environment Canada indicates that generally, Williams Lake experiences average temperatures of 0 Celsius and below for 5 months of the year. The local climate, particularly in winter conditions, makes it difficult for seniors to maintain their mobility due to slipping hazards, and strenuous activities (snow removal, wood chopping and moving, etc.), especially for those in more isolated areas. Services including yard work and transportation.



2.4 Suggested opportunities for service integration/coordination

The *Better at Home* program offers many opportunities for the community to collaborate toward effective and community-specific services. Many non-profit agencies expressed offering services for seniors on an informal basis, either adapting existing eligibility requirements of programs to fit certain clients, offering non-existing services in an unofficial way to seniors in need, and occasionally creating a program that would otherwise not fit the mandate of the agency but was included based on the needs of clientele.

The *Better at Home* community development process has encouraged agencies, seniors and other stakeholders to gather around a table to discuss what is currently being offered to seniors, and how seniors' needs are being addressed. The act of facilitating this discussion brings to light the possibilities of collaboration, creative program development, and coordination of services in Williams Lake. Furthermore, by encouraging agencies of various expertise to work together, we help to build capacity with seniors' based agencies, thereby strengthening the potential for future programs and services in Williams Lake beyond the funding term.

3. COMMUNITY READINESS

3.1 Explanation of community readiness that reflects community consultations and meetings

The community of Williams Lake demonstrated willingness, the infrastructure and the volunteer base to sustain the *Better at Home* program. In terms of capacity, there are several non-profit agencies that have more than enough resources (infrastructure, staff, financial experience, administration, etc.) to offer this program, however, none of these larger agencies in Williams Lake have seniors as the focus of their mandates; the agencies that focus on seniors are comparatively 'smaller'. It became evident that the 'smaller' seniors agencies and groups, however, seemed to enjoy the strongest volunteer base. It is likely that the Lead Agency will draw from the expertise of other local agencies to fill in any gaps in capacity for the success of Better at Home in Williams Lake.

3.2 Potential risks going forward



- **Concerns with volunteers:** The community of Williams Lake very clearly indicated a level of concern with the reliance on volunteers, both in recruiting the number of volunteers (which they perceive to be “high”, although a number was not identified), and in mitigating the potential for “volunteer drain”. “Volunteer drain” refers to the limited number of volunteers supporting a wide array of causes.

There is potential to over extend the volunteers in this small community

if adequate attention is not given to supporting the volunteers of *Better at Home*. Recalling that the community of volunteers is a strong asset in Williams Lake, it is of utmost importance that navigation of the volunteer component is done carefully and caringly.

- **Collaboration:** If the lead agency is unable to find supporting agencies/groups (which is highly unlikely given the excitement and outpour of support for the program), the *Better at Home* program risks being one-dimensional. Which is not to say that providing only one service from the proposed basket is not important, however, without the connections to other agencies/groups the true value and potential of the *Better at Home* program in Williams Lake is muted.
 - **Short Term vs. Long Term Funding:** Given the three-year term outlined by the *Better at Home* program, there is some disillusionment and distrust with continued support by government for similar services looking beyond 2015. Williams Lake is familiar with services, businesses, talent and wisdom leaving or being taken away from the community, so much so, that “Retention and Succession” is one of the three sub-committees of the local Social Planning Council. The community recognizes the importance of reliable long-term funding, and there is potential to foster continued dissatisfaction with government funding at the end of this three-year cycle.
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4. LOCAL *BETTER AT HOME* PROGRAM DETAILS



4.1 List of preferred services from the *Better at Home* basket of services that reflect community consultations and meetings and how they link to the identified needs

All services outlined in the basket of services are needed in Williams Lake, however, the community development process, as well as the Community Meeting revealed specific priority areas:

Community Development Process:

- *Transportation*: concerns with isolation of seniors, and inclusion of outlying areas.
 - *Light Housework*: focusing on specific daily and more
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- strenuous jobs (vacuuming, laundry, etc.)
 - *Snow Removal*: outlined due to climate, slipping hazard, and strenuous nature.
 - *Fire Wood*: not included in basket of services, however, this is a specific need as many seniors, many of whom live in outlying areas, rely on wood heat in the colder months.
- Community Meeting:**
- *Friendly Visits*: recognizing that this service can be paired with any of the other services.
 - *Transportation*: to appointments, for community activities, and to encourage inclusion.
 - *Recreation*: the term “recreation” was not specifically identified, however, discussion in both meetings indicated that a potential solution to concerns of isolation is through community engagement.

The discrepancy between the two lists indicates the range of services required in Williams Lake. Fire wood and snow removal highlight the climate-based yard work specific to Williams Lake and are likely to be included under one service heading. “Recreation” could be provided as a combination of “Friendly Visits” and “Transportation”.

It is the combination of complimentary services that is likely to most effectively address the complex non-medical needs of seniors in Williams Lake.

4.2 Proposed lead agency – including commentary on the identification process and rationale for why they were chosen

Proposed Lead Agency:

Seniors Activity Centre

Glenda Winger, Manager

The Seniors Activity Centre (SAC) was consulted early in the Community Development process, showed immediate interest and remain engaged throughout the process. The SAC demonstrated a willingness to collaborate with local agencies and groups and currently boasts a long list of existing community relationships:

- Old Age Pensioners' Organization (OAPO)
- Canadian Cancer Society- office on site
- Seniors Advocates – office on site
- The City of Williams Lake – potential upcoming support involving local Food Security project
- Service Clubs – providing meeting and activity space
- Local Seniors Housing – provides recreation and connection with community
- Elder College – classroom space



The SAC offers many opportunities for seniors' recreation:

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- Daily lunch provided by volunteers at very affordable prices,
- Weekly bingo,
- Lending library (books, puzzles and more),
- Monthly birthday celebrations,
- Welcoming place to connect and feel included.

Amenities include:

- Fully functioning kitchen (currently undergoing expansion with the support of the City of Williams Lake),
- Fully accessible building,
- Meeting rooms/classrooms,
- Office space - including space for Better at Home coordinator,
- Large open area downstairs for dances, tai-chi, floor curling, etc.,
- Property connects to tennis courts, field, and housing complex that is home to many of the seniors who attend the centre,
- Walking distance to the library, shopping, restaurants, etc..

Selection Process:

The Community Meeting was scheduled to have two potential lead agencies present; the Seniors Activity Centre and the Williams Lake Association for Community Living. During the meeting the Community Developer noted on a flip-chart responses to the question, "What qualities would make a good Lead Agency?"; the Community Developer check and/or clarified with the group before noting the responses on the paper. Of particular importance was the suggestion that it was critical that the funding "stay peer"; this statement revealed that it was important to the community that the Lead Agency have a seniors' focused

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mandate. The priority was clear – Williams Lake wished to see a seniors’ agency receive the funding.

Following this discussion the Executive Director of Williams Lake Association for Community Living (WLACL) expressed his agency’s willingness to support the program, but recognized the community’s request for a seniors-centered agency. The WLACL then rescinded their drive for the funding, and in doing so graciously endorsed the Seniors Activity Centre as Lead Agency for the *Better at Home* program in Williams Lake. The Community Meeting resulted in the selection of a Lead Agency, much to the surprise and excitement of the attendees and the Better at Home representatives.

During the Key Stakeholder Meeting, the preliminary selection was re-evaluated and as in the previous meeting, the group strongly supported the decision. Additionally, the Key Stakeholder Meeting solidified the value and importance of collaboration and creativity for the *Better at Home* program in Williams Lake. Several local agencies were present at the meetings and offered their support, including volunteer recruitment and retention support from the Central Cariboo Hospice Palliative Care Society and a potential connection with Communities That Care (a preventative approach for youth programs) that identifies the willingness of youth in Williams Lake to volunteer with seniors in the community.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS/CONCLUSION

- **Service Coordination:** understanding the roles various agencies have in lives of seniors in Williams Lake to better identify gaps in service is a strongly suggested starting point; this step will also encourage strong community engagement.
 - **Collaboration:** given the complexity between Williams Lake’s assets, needs, and existing services, it is highly recommended that the Lead
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Agency collaborate with local agencies and groups to coordinate effective services.

- **Creativity:** evidenced in the excitement and the generation of creative ideas at the Key Stakeholder meeting, it is recommended that the Lead Agency follow appropriate “out-of-the-box” program suggestions from the Advisory Council.
- **Communication:** regular contact and contribution to the online Community of Care, open and supportive meetings with the Steering Committee and scheduled meetings with Field Coordinator are all recommended for the continued success of the program.

Conclusion:

The *Better at Home* community development process was a great success in Williams Lake; the process revealed community the needs/assets for seniors in the area, identified potential Lead Agencies, gathered local stakeholders, and



established space designated to address the non-medical needs of independent seniors in Williams Lake. Based on the support and potential partnerships offered by other non-profit agencies, local businesses, the Health Authority and the City of Williams Lake; the engagement of several local experts willing to help guide the process while protecting the community; and a dedicated and active volunteer core, there is great confidence that the Seniors' Activity Centre will achieve continued success in offering the *Better at Home* program in Williams Lake.

6. APPENDIX- List of Community Assets

- Central Cariboo Hospice
Paliative Care Society
 - Cariboo Friendship Society
 - Meals on Wheels
 - Seniors Activity Centre
 - Seniors Advisory Council
 - Seniors Advocates
 - City of Williams Lake:
commitment to social
development
 - Elder College
 - Thompson Rivers University
 - A number of seniors
residences
 - Several service clubs (Legion,
Lions, Rotary, etc.)
 - Interior Health
 - Large number of churches
 - First Nations communities in
close proximity
 - United Way
 - Communities that Care
(youth services)
 - RCMP – community policing
 - Social Planning Committee
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