



Successful Practices for Supporting Aging Adults with Developmental Disabilities: Community Forum Findings

Information Report

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How did we get here?

In 2012, Community Living British Columbia (CLBC) released a *Strategy on Aging* to assist with addressing the support needs of individuals who are aging, their aging caregivers/family members, and allied community supports. It emerged from a wide-ranging consultation process, and identified five foundational values and beliefs as the starting point for implementation work:

- Rights and values matter
- This is a shared responsibility
- It is as much about families as well as individuals
- Relationships are key
- Responsive and proactive planning is essential

One of the things the *Strategy on Aging* highlighted was the need to work with key stakeholders to identify what is working well in communities across B.C. Understanding and sharing existing successful practices in an important step in supporting individuals, families, staff, service providers, and partners to improve the experience of aging for individuals supported by CLBC. To do this, we returned to a community engagement process and worked with partners to organize forums across the province.

How did the forums work?

Working with community service providers and the Ministry for Social Development and Social Innovation, STADD Early Implementation Site for Older Adults (Burnaby), we initiated nine forums in the spring of 2015. The intent was to facilitate a collaborative conversation about two things:

- Successful practices in the provision of respectful supports for aging individuals and their families/caregivers in both residential and community inclusion services
- AND**
- Stories about local community-based services and projects which are responding to the needs and creating opportunities for aging individuals with developmental disabilities

Service providers graciously hosted these forums in the following communities:

- Victoria (Community Living Victoria)
- Campbell River (Campbell River Association for Community Living)
- Richmond (Richmond Society for Community Living)
- Langley (Langley Association for Community Living)
- Kamloops (Interior Community Services)
- Kelowna (Kelowna Community Development Society)
- Prince George (AiMHi)
- Castlegar (Kootenay Association for Community Living)
- Cranbrook (Cranbrook Society for Community Living)

Approximately 800 people participated in total, including CLBC staff, service providers, family members and caregivers, community organizations, health care providers, and individuals with developmental disabilities. Many family members and caregivers offered powerful reflections on the impact of aging on their lives and the lives of their loved ones. Local presenters included service providers, health care professionals, family members and individuals with intellectual disabilities. They offered examples of successful practices from their experience, as well as their particular perspective on the challenges and opportunities for people as they age.

CLBC provided the initiative for the forums, as well as support to facilitate and document the sessions. However it was the energy and enthusiasm of the local hosts and participants that really made them a success.

What did we learn?

What people said at the forums aligns well with the foundations set out in the *Strategy on Aging*. This validates both the commonalities of experience across the province, and the general direction of the *Strategy*. The findings offer insight about what success looks like. We have organized these findings under three headings below – however they are complementary and overlap in their applicability and usefulness going forward.

1. Protecting personhood

- Re-framing the conversation helps – instead of perceiving aging as a negative experience, people are emphasizing the dignity, rights, contribution, and capacity of people to continue to add value to their communities as they age. This leads to a focus on things such as exercise, good nutrition, volunteer contributions, and supportive services that honour the aging person and their unique needs.
- Holistic approaches work best. Successful supports embrace and support the person's physiological, cultural, psychological and emotional needs.

- It is important that people's stories are held by people who know them. This makes it more likely that their preferences, choices, cultural traditions and life history will be reflected in planning and decisions, and that continuity in their lives will be honoured. Examples include memory books, using technology in innovative ways, and intentionally focusing on supporting relationships which help preserve histories.
- Successful conversations about aging are rooted in values. Successful services are those that consistently and authentically value individuals' rights and needs. Values-based planning means that the voice and choice of the individual is privileged and participation of their family and friends is honoured and safeguarded.
- Vulnerability and loneliness do not have to be heightened or inevitable as people age. Supporting meaningful and continuing relationships as people retire or change their interests is a successful practice to support healthy aging.
- It is important to remember that the heart of the work is the person, regardless of age, increased vulnerability, or diminished capacity. Vigilance and personal advocacy help – whether through support networks, service providers or families.
- It is important to acknowledge, respect and support the experiences of grief and loss through the provision of responsive and compassionate supports.

2. Focusing on safeguards

- Aging in the right place is key to success. This looks different for different people, depending on their preferences and changing health or mobility needs. Sometimes it means staying in the same home and making physical modifications or adding assistive or adaptive devices. Sometimes it means moving – where thoughtful planning that honours people's needs and preferences makes all the difference to the outcome. Regardless of where a person lives, long term relationships with caregivers and support staff are key to having good lives as they get older.
- Personal support networks can be a critical safeguard throughout people's lives, lessening social isolation as they age, among other benefits. Building and maintaining them requires intentional and sustained effort.
- Whole life planning works best - including consideration of health supports, legal and financial needs, appropriate technology and mobility adaptations, and crisis management and response. Successful planning is pro-active and person centred.

- Collaborative partnerships with community resources and professionals are critical. These include relationships with Health Services for Community Living or other health services, local doctors and dental professionals. Continuing education can be a good way to build knowledge and capacity among these and other professionals who are connected to people's lives as they get older.

3. Working and planning together

- Successful practice focuses on a broad network of collaborative partnerships with other service providers, funders, health professionals, and generic community resources.
- Promoting "age friendly" communities helps everyone age successfully in their neighbourhoods, towns and cities. This means engaging with local governments and community organizations to raise awareness about the needs and potential contributions of people with developmental disabilities.
- Service providers that have incorporated aging into their strategic planning report more successful outcomes in supporting older individuals. The conversation on aging impacts budgets, infrastructure, training, recruitment and retention, as well as linkages to community resources, and health and wellness considerations for employees.
- Effective utilization of existing resources is essential to successful aging. This includes thoughtful planning for end of life, accessing palliative and hospice resources, and building strong partnerships with legal and financial planners to support effective life planning for individuals and families as they age.
- Collaboration and advocacy within community are important in making sure we do not go backwards and end up with segregated institutional settings as people's only option.

Where do we go from here?

The next step is to document and honour people's participation in these forms by gathering their stories and examples of successful practices. This will be a resource available to all stakeholders for training and other purposes. The target completion date is the end of 2015.

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