

Bowmont Seniors Assistance Association

Annual Report, 2018



Time passes unhindered. When we make mistakes, we cannot turn the clock back and try again. All we can do is use the present well.

-- Dalai Lama.

Bowmont Seniors Assistance Association Annual Report, 2018

About Us

Our small board of Board volunteers has been active in the Bowness, Montgomery and Greenwood Village area of Northwest Calgary for 45-plus years.

We are, and always have been, seniors helping seniors. In the early days, our mission, as volunteers, was to help seniors fill in the complicated government forms that allowed them to access services they needed, plus help low-income seniors file their income tax forms. Over time, this morphed into the association needing to hire professional social workers to help with the more complicated issues the volunteers encountered.

About 10 years ago, the board entered into a formal contract with Carya (then Calgary Family Services), allowing them to take over the contract with our social workers. The contract allowed the social workers to be part of a larger, more recognized group with more resources and more training abilities, be paid more money and have benefits. For the Bowmont clients, it meant having more and easier access to services for their sometimes complex needs. Over the years since, we have kept up this close relationship with our Carya partners and the social workers – or Outreach Workers as they are now called – have kept up the passion to help, maintaining the traditions of our board.

With the weight of paying salaries and monitoring employees lifted from us, the BSAA board is now free to continue our work in other ways. Our links to the community through agencies and individuals with similar missions remain strong.

Our mission – to address issues that concern seniors and assist in creating community solutions so that seniors may live in health, comfort and dignity – has remained our reason to stay as a strong volunteer force.

The Bowmont Seniors Constellation

The Bowmont Seniors Constellation is an informal alliance of organizations working with and for seniors in the northwest Calgary areas of Bowness, Montgomery and Greenwood Village.

In 2017, BSAA banded together with the MLA for the area, the Bowness Seniors Centre, Bow Centre Place, Carya, a City of Calgary social worker, a representative from the University of Calgary School of Nursing (who trains first year nursing students working in the community) and Greenwood Village Enrichment Association.

The Constellation has four main purposes:

- To share information and concerns that affect all the different groups and the seniors they serve
- To create joint solutions, reached through discussion and experience-sharing, that meet our broader needs
- To develop and present opportunities to get critical information to seniors through a series of carefully chosen seminars

- To act as an information-sharing mechanism between the communities, social services and the various levels of government.

The constellation meets monthly and out of this collaboration has come some exciting ventures. We have held two information seminars for the seniors in the area this past year. The first was on Scams and Frauds and was attended by roughly 100 seniors from the area. The second was on living safely at home. While a snowstorm and its Friday afternoon timeslot contributed to a drop in attendance for the second seminar, over 60 people attended. Both seminars were well received and the group is continuing to put on critically important seminars in 2019.

The advantages of working in the Constellation are many – more hands to share the work of organizing a seminar, more ability to reach out for speakers and more ways to get the word out to the seniors we want to help. We, as BSAA, could not do this on our own as the workload for a small group of volunteers is too great.

Also, although this may change with the provincial election in 2019, the participation of the local MLA for the area has given us informal access to the provincial government, including the Minister for Seniors and Housing, Lori Sigurdson.

Seniors Secret Service

Each Christmas season, the Carya staff work with Seniors Secret Service that collects gifts for isolated and lonely seniors in Calgary. After months of gathering, sorting, wrapping and ensuring each person on the list over 70 of Carya's clients get a few presents to open, the staff, their family and friends gather on a Saturday just before Christmas to distribute the goodies. This year, our board members helped distribute the load. It was an honour to be able to share this day with the Carya staff, who work so hard to make this special.

The project gave board members a chance to see the connection Carya has to isolated seniors. It put names and faces to the people we seek to help.

Calgary Herald Christmas Fund

In 2014, The Calgary Herald awarded BSAA \$95,150 from their Christmas Fund Campaign of 2013. The money was to be used in Carya's Older Adult programs, by people who are in dire financial need on a one-time emergency basis.

When our board received the money, a decision was made to mete it out over a 10-year period. The remaining money is invested in Guaranteed Income Certificates (GICs), so that it is protected from the convolutions of the stock market, but it gains some interest.

Carya Outreach Workers decide how the money is to be used for the clients of the agency.

The money from the fund has allowed Outreach Workers to make lives a little easier. There is no funding for emergencies that often are very small, but \$50 can be an insurmountable amount when there is not enough money for food that month or a prescription refill.

In 2018, the expenditure was \$6,860.04, leaving a balance of \$42,510.51. Generally, we budget for approximately \$10,000 per year.

The challenge will be to maintain and increase this small pot of money long into the future.

Tea and Conversation

In conjunction with Carya, BSAA hosts an afternoon Tea and Conversation event on the fourth Tuesday of the month, eight months of the year. T&C is an event that gives isolated and lonely seniors a place they can come, enjoy a cup of tea, a snack and a chat as well as live music from yesteryear. Many of the participants are clients of Carya.

For approximately 60 seniors, it's a highlight of their month. Held in the sunny front room of the Bowness Seniors' Centre, it's a lively, welcoming and non-threatening event. It's also free for attendees.

It's a community event. The hall is loaned to us by the Bowness Seniors. The Rockpointe Church volunteers serve and clean up for us. For the past three years, they have provided a ham dinner for attendees at the last T&C before Christmas. Simon House participants put away the tables and chairs after the event. Carya Outreach Workers are around to greet participants and informally chat to them about issues and services they can provide, while keeping a trained eye out for bigger problems. Past and present Board members mingle and look after the popular 50-50 draw.

Informal feedback from this year, as well as a more formal survey in 2017, tells us that participants want this to remain as a social event, with only a few necessary announcements. They like the food (bread, cheese, sweets, tea and coffee) and the ambiance. They want to continue with the 50/50 draw. They like the music. They want to chat and meet new and old friends. They don't want a lot of information sessions, although they appreciate being informed if a major change is coming. They like to be reminded of annual events, like the tax clinics at Carya's Bowmont office. Most wanted to be called and reminded each month about the event. They don't want to play games, cards or have big information sessions at the event.

Silver Alert

Like many events in life, this project didn't turn out at all like we expected. However, in many ways, it has turned out surprisingly well. We are proud of our kick start to a much bigger process. In starting this, we have helped make Calgary seniors, Alberta seniors and many other seniors across Canada safer.

A bit of our history in this project is critical to understanding the scope of the change.

Silver Alert, a program in many states in the US, is a way to track missing or wandering seniors who are vulnerable and typically have Dementia. In a system often based on Amber Alert criteria for missing children, this program cannot be found anywhere in Canada.

In 2015, we asked for and received a grant from The United Way to look into what is happening across Canada, what is happening in the US and other western world countries. Through 2016, we received reports from our researcher and met with assorted stakeholders in Calgary – from the Calgary Police to Carya to the Alzheimer's Society and others. All agreed it was an important project to pursue.

In late 2016 we passed it on to the Age Friendly Calgary group with the City of Calgary. Our Carya Liaison, Kim Savard has stayed as a key member of the group and brings us updates on the project at regular intervals.

Although the ongoing development of a Silver Alert program has passed from our hands into those more skilled, with financial resources and reach to carry the torch, we are still interested in what is happening on this.

Bill 210, a Silver Alert bill, was passed in our provincial legislature in December 2017 and came into effect on July 1, 2018. The bill gives police power to release information on a lost or wandering senior so that the public and key stakeholders can look for these folks effectively.

During the past two years, there has been enormous interest in Calgary, Alberta, Canada and around the English-speaking world on the issues surrounding these seniors. Through the work of the group that has carried this forward, they have been in touch with researchers at the University of Alberta.

Calgary Police, Carya, The City of Calgary, the Alzheimer's Association and others have carried on our work and carried it farther than we could have imagined to partner with Medic Alert.

While the project didn't become a Calgary reflection of Silver Alert, as we had expected it to, the discussions held with so many people and agencies, as well as government, has led to an increased awareness of the issues of wandering seniors who have cognitive impairments. It's also led to the police entering into a formal relationship with Medic Alert, to help the police and others bring the seniors home safely.

Discount Sheets

Our discount calendar, where we capture discounts offered to seniors in the Bowness/Montgomery and close environs, are still a popular item. Launched two years ago, in January 2017, the idea has been very successful.

Updated four times per year by Carya office staff, the single-page roundup of what deals are out there for seniors (usually a percentage off the regular price of goods and services) are offered to Carya clientele, assorted seniors clubs in the area, our T&C attendees and they are posted at numerous seniors' residences.

This year, groups in other areas of the city have asked if they can use our model.

Hearing Loss/Hearing Aid Recycling

This project has had a long lead-in, but may finally be ready to move. We have hearing aids. We have a criteria for who would be selected to get the hearing aids. Carya Outreach Workers have a list of willing participants. We have a small budget for incidental costs related to retooling the hearing aids. And the audiologist is indicating the process will start in May, 2019.

Here is an abbreviated history on this project. In 2016, the Board was approached by Dr. Carrie Scarff of Audiology Innovations. She wanted our help to set up a recycled hearing aid project, on a very limited scale, to test its feasibility. People could donate their unneeded hearing aids to us. She proposed that she could check them and ensure that they were still usable, sanitize them, reprogram them and give them to seniors who could not afford hearing aids and who could not qualify to get them through various programs in the province.

According to Dr. Scarff, hearing loss can often be a factor in developing a dementia and one key reasons that people are isolated. They can't hear clearly, so they stop going out to any social occasions. They stop answering the phone because they can't hear people on the other end. If they live alone, there is often nobody to socialize with, and the downward spiral into isolation, loneliness and possibly dementia accelerates.

During our journey to getting this started, we discovered that the Lions Club had started to collect hearing aids as well as glasses, to be sent overseas to developing countries. We didn't want to push our way in to a program the Lions Club had already defined and developed, so we needed to come to an agreement with them.

Our vice-president, Margaret Hildebrand, met with the Lions Club representative who is responsible for this effort, and he agreed to let us have first dibs on any hearing aids. Marg and a couple of our other board members toured the facility where the Lions Club cleans and sorts the glasses and hearing aids they collect and were impressed with the operation. They were given boxes of used hearing aids to inspect and see what was useful to us.

The next step was to go through the boxes and figure out what we had, but first Marg and Directors Marian Fox and Dee Vincent had to find out what we were looking for. Doctor Scarff met with them and showed them how to sort effectively for what was useable, from her perspective.

Our next task was to figure out what criteria would be used to select the candidates for these hearing aids. That has now been done. It's a blend of need, inability to pay, a desire to participate and commitment to be part of the process. Carya Outreach Workers are selecting eligible candidates.

Through an endowment fund from The Calgary Foundation, the board has agreed to pick up the minor costs of having the hearing aids refurbished for these candidates. Board members have also been distributing boxes for the Lions Club in their collection efforts.

The spring of 2019 should see the beginning of this recycling project, where 3-5 people actually get the hearing aids. It's been a long journey to get to this stage. If this small project is successful, it is the first step to expanding the reach of this to all of Calgary.

Casino

Traditionally, BSAA has a casino every 16-18 months. This was our year to participate, which we did in spring, 2018. With the downturn in the economy, we were warned that our take would be substantially less than it has been in the past. However, when the actual amount was calculated, we received \$70,351.30, only a few thousand under what we received in spring, 2016, the last casino we participated in.

This ability to work in and receive profits from the casinos is part of the program that non-profit organizations are allowed to participate in through the province. It has, over the years, given us some operating funds – most of which we turn over to Carya, to help support the salary of an Outreach Worker specializing in seniors issues in Calgary. A minor amount is kept by the board to pay our administrative costs, like board insurance and auditing costs.

Our next casino will be in the first quarter of 2020.

BSAA Website

Our new BSAA website is launched. Complete with drop-down windows, current information and pictures of some of our Tea and Conversation participants. It's a friendly, accurate and has an updated feel.

Our website guru has been Lana Berrington, a web designer and computer expert who is also the daughter of our past president Ella Berrington. With modern technology at her fingertips and a keen understanding of what we wanted and needed, Lana worked with Board members Marg Hildebrand and Marian Fox, as well as Carya's Kim Savard, to develop the website. Board member Colleen Groves took the pictures we used.

In keeping with the ability of computers to allow people to stay in touch across the miles, Lana designed the website from her London, UK, home.

Financials

As in previous years, our volunteer board member and accountant Ross Fujino has provided expert and excellent support to us as a board. He keeps our books, ensures that the money is managed appropriately by the bank, deals with Cary requests for cheques to be signed and keeps us on track.

Our auditor is Shahid Naqi Professional Corporation.

Future

As with life, little is certain. However, we are on a strong trajectory, buoyed by a strong team, great support from many people and a passion for trying to help make seniors' lives easier.

Our partnership with Carya remains strong. They are our eyes and ears into the issues of the elderly. As seniors from Northwest Calgary, we have our own experiences to add to the mix. Our links with Bowness Seniors, the Bowness Constellation, local and provincial politicians, the Calgary Police, Dr. Carrie Scarff, the Lions Club and others help us in our mission.

We have long-held projects we will continue. These include our Tea and Conversation, our Casino, the discount sheet and our advisory capacity on many topics that come our way.

We are exploring new avenues that will allow us to help others, but those are in their infancy or need a re-vamp in the way we want to tackle them. These projects include continuing to explore hearing aid recycling, possibly setting up a program for handing out cane tips/picks for winter and non-slip pull on Yak Traks or something similar to help seniors **NOT** fall. Working with Carya's Sophie Burns, we are exploring other ways of helping seniors stay connected with each other, so they don't get so isolated.

Our website is up and running in the latter part of 2018. That will help launch the tone for the future, as we learn to use it effectively.

We need to find a few new board members or board assistants to help share the load and to do some specialized work like apply for grants for projects we would like to have funding for. This year, to that end, we added two board members to our team – Caroline and Rebecca, both of whom live in Bowness. They bring new life experiences and insight into our team.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Mary Coulson for her 11 years of service with the Bowmont Seniors Association and congratulate her on her well deserved retirement.

We are busy. We are committed. We are motivated to help seniors. And we give thanks that we are part of a strong network of people who really want to help seniors.

Our Board Members

President:	Kerry Tremblay
Vice President:	Margaret Hildebrand
Treasurer:	Ross Fujino
Director:	Mary Coulsen
Director:	Marian Fox
Director:	Colleen Groves
Director:	Deane (Dee) Vincent
Director:	Caroline Frenette
Director:	Rebecca Westecott
Carya Liaison:	Kim Savard

3 board positions are currently vacant