



Embrace Aging (Eldercare Foundation)

<https://gvef.org/>

PROGRAM PROFILE: OVERVIEW

June 2017

Type of Program	Education, Recreation and Creative Arts Programs
Organization	Eldercare Foundation
Community Served	Vancouver Island as well as other parts of BC including Vancouver, Okanagan and the Gulf Islands
Program Goal	Raise awareness of and connect individuals with resources
Services Provided	Trade Expo, health and wellness workshops, various events and activities offered by community partners
Target Population	Seniors (50+) and their families
Staffing	2 full-time staff members assist with coordination plus volunteer support, Organizational partners provide in-kind staff support
Program Strengths	Events and activities are free and open to the public, Initiative brings together multiple community partners, Proactively connects seniors and their families with resources and educational opportunities to help navigate the journey of aging

Program Description

Embrace Aging Month is held every March to raise awareness of available community resources and to connect seniors and their families with these resources. During this month the organizer, Eldercare Foundation, partners with other organizations who open their doors and host free events, information sessions, and activities targeted at seniors and their family caregivers on Vancouver Island and beyond. This includes activities such as yoga classes, dementia education, chronic pain-self management programs, social and recreational opportunities and art exhibitions. Embrace Aging focuses on four key pillars of programming for seniors:

1. Be Well – health and wellness
2. Be Secure – safety and financial security
3. Be Connected – personal and community connections
4. Be Enriched – arts, culture, spirituality and education

The initiative is open to the general public but primarily targets seniors and their families, with the majority of participants aged 50 and up.

Embrace Aging Month was launched in 2006 and it took about two years of networking and planning prior to its launch to create the buy-in and collaborations necessary for the initiative to be successful. The Eldercare Foundation takes the leadership role and is responsible for coordination of the overall initiative and promotion of the events and activities. The Foundation partners with Inspired Senior Living, a monthly magazine for people 55+, to put on a Seniors Lifestyle and Trade Expo which attracts approximately 2,500 attendees. For Embrace

Aging Month, the Foundation works with Island Health's Yakimovich Wellness Centre¹ to scale up their free education sessions on health and wellness. (In March 2016, they offered a total of 31 education sessions). Organizational partners coordinate and offer their own events and activities for the month, including partners in Greater Victoria and other Vancouver Island communities (Sidney, Sooke, Courtenay, Nanaimo, Campbell River, Parksville and Oak Bay).

The annual budget for Embrace Aging Month is approximately \$10,000 each year. In addition to this budget, the Eldercare Foundation provides the in-kind coordination work of the two full-time staff and the Wellness Coordinator. Volunteers work on promotion and help with the education sessions offered by the Wellness Centre. For the first several years, Embrace Aging received funding from the Province of B.C. When this funding was no longer available they sought support from corporate sponsorships but now their revenue mainly comes from private donations. Sponsorships from media organizations have led to news coverage, advertising and editorials.

Impact

Embrace Aging Month provides education on issues relevant to seniors and their family caregivers; creates awareness of services, resources and educational opportunities; and connects seniors with service providers. The initiative provides opportunities for seniors to make connections, and engage in dialogue with other seniors. Feedback from participants (when asked what they appreciated about the initiative) illustrates the value of the workshops:

"Realizing that there is a caregiver's support group. I've only ever attended seminars about the needs of the care recipient."

"Lots of good information and things to encourage you to be proactive about your health."

"Encouragement and hope to branch out and meet friends. Just a reminder to reach out, make an effort."

Feedback from organizational partners suggests that Embrace Aging Month is effective in reaching seniors who need services, and in increasing the use of local services by seniors. It is difficult to calculate how many seniors the initiative reaches, but each year approximately 2,500 people attend the Trade Expo, 1,100 attend the Wellness Centre workshops, and there are many more people who attend the events and activities offered by organizational partners. Embrace Aging Month creates connections with, and strengthens relationships between, organizations providing services to seniors.

Strengths and Challenges

Embrace Aging Month offers a broad range of events and activities to appeal to the different interests and needs of seniors. Embrace Aging provides an opportunity for seniors to proactively learn about relevant resources and to connect with service providers. The events and activities are free and offered in multiple locations, making them easily accessible for both seniors and their families. Embrace Aging has extended beyond Victoria, to Vancouver

¹ Through a partnership with Vancouver Island Health Authority (who provide a coordinator and the space), the Eldercare Foundation runs a Wellness Centre which operates year round providing free education sessions for seniors. The Wellness Centre Coordinator arranges education sessions delivered by volunteers with expertise in different areas of health and wellness.

Island and now to the Okanagan, where UBC-Okanagan runs their own Embrace Aging Month. Another Inspired Senior Living Trade Expo is also organized in Vancouver each year.

The program is strengthened by being a collaborative initiative with multiple community partners, institutional partners and corporate partners across Vancouver Island. Some of the partners who put on workshops and offer activities in Embrace Aging Month include the University of Victoria, Inspired Senior Living, Beacon Community Services, Alzheimer Society of British Columbia, Ajna Yoga and Vancouver Island Health Authority. Eldercare Foundation serves as a connector organization and their role as a registered charity that raises funds to support facilities and programs (but does not run programs of their own) makes them well-suited for this coordination role.

Embrace Aging Month has strengthened relationships amongst seniors' organizations and raises awareness of the services offered by these organizations. The connections with community partners made through this initiative have inspired the idea of a new wellness navigation pilot project in Sooke. The Eldercare Foundation is currently working with B.C. Healthy Communities, and other local and provincial organizations to pilot a Seniors Wellness Navigation Hub unified system for communities, which will connect seniors and their families with local and provincial senior-focused resources all year round. This unified hub system will also help bring community resource and service providers together with the aim to reduce gaps and overlaps and increase capacity and communication.

"I received a telephone call from a concerned daughter who didn't know where to turn for assistance. Her dad had passed away a few months previously and she was worried about her mom who had become depressed and isolated. I told her about March's Embrace Aging Month and explained that she might want to select a few workshops, events or activities and take her mom.

When I picked up my phone in September and the voice on the other end simply said "I'm mad at you", I was speechless until I heard the laughter followed by the explanation. It was that concerned daughter calling to tell me that she had taken her mom to Embrace Aging Month events as I had suggested. She explained how her mom found so many new opportunities to engage, learn and connect that she's never home anymore. "I'm mad at you," she said, "because mom is never available to babysit for me anymore!" She expressed her gratitude for Embrace Aging month and how it opened her mom's world again."

Anecdote from Eldercare Foundation Staff
Member on Embrace Aging Month