



Food Services Program (Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre)

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PROGRAM PROFILE: OVERVIEW

April 2017

Type of Program	Nutritional Supports
Organization	Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre
Community Served	North Vancouver
Program Goal	Provide nutritional support for seniors in a social environment
Services Provided	Hot lunches 5 days a week and drinks/snacks
Target Population	General seniors population (55+) living in North Vancouver
Staffing	1 full-time chef, 1 part-time assistant chef, 6+ volunteers each day
Program Strengths	Provides combination of high nutritional value and good taste; provides opportunities for socialization; meals are subsidized to make them more accessible to low-income seniors; stable, long-standing program

Program Description

Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre is a centre for older adults living in the North Vancouver area that offers a range of programs and activities. One of their core programs is the Food Services Program, which offers hot lunches (Mon-Fri) and snacks/drinks throughout the day. The program is staffed by two chefs (one full-time and one part-time) and several volunteers (at least six volunteers per day, each of whom work a four-hour shift). To support seniors to attend Centre activities (including to the food program), Silver Harbour runs a Go Bus service (operated three days a week) and coordinates volunteer drivers.

The program costs about \$200,000, approximately 25% of Silver Harbour's total budget. Lunch costs the organization about \$11 per person, and seniors pay \$8 of this cost. The kitchen equipment needed for the program (e.g., oven, fridge, etc.) can be quite expensive, but fortunately, there are grants available to cover equipment costs that Silver Harbour has been able to access (e.g., New Horizons for Seniors Program provides funding for equipment).

Impact

The Food Services Program provides seniors with affordable and nutritional supports in a welcoming social environment. Seniors share in a generous full course meal, and are encouraged to take leftovers home. Meals may also be purchased specifically for takeout, supporting seniors to eat well when at home. The subsidized low-cost of the meal makes it more accessible. When they come for lunch, seniors connect with other programs and resources offered by Silver Harbour.

The Food Services Program is a major staple of the Silver Harbour's programming. Each week, the Centre serves approximately 350 lunches, along with 380 drinks and snacks. There are approximately 37,000 visits each year, which amounts to about one quarter of all annual visits to Silver Harbour.

The program also benefits its volunteers, who range in age from young to old, by providing them with opportunities for personal growth, fulfillment, and socialization. Volunteers are provided with a free meal, a key incentive and benefit to many volunteers.

In a 2015 evaluation, the majority of seniors using food services rated the program as very good or excellent (average rating 4.32 out of 5). Feedback from participants identified several benefits including the nutritional benefits, the food itself (quality/taste/variety), socialization opportunities, convenience, and a good price.

Strengths and Challenges

The Food Services Program is a stable program, which is important as there are seniors depending on this program for their nutritional needs. Its stability is fostered by the core funding Silver Harbour receives from local municipalities, and by Silver Harbour's decision to make food services a cornerstone of their programming. The program has been operating for as long as the Centre has been open (40 years) and is key way in which they connect with seniors in the surrounding community. While some meal programs try to recover all the costs of providing food (by charging seniors the full cost), Silver Harbour subsidizes their meals to make them more accessible, with the goal of preventing seniors from having to choose between eating a meal or meeting other essential needs. This is a strength of the program, but also means that the organization must offset the difference.

The chef of the program has a good reputation with the participants, as was highlighted in the 2015 evaluation. The chef does a commendable job of producing a variety of tasty and quality meals that appeal to those on a minimal budget. Socialization opportunities are also a key benefit made possible by the supportive communal setting.

Due to the high demand for their food services and other programming, Silver Harbour is considering what would be required to offer more meals per day and more days per week. One of the main challenges to achieving this is the limited staffing levels, which currently only allow for a lunch meal. In order to increase the meals offered, additional funding would have to be found, which is a very difficult prospect as many grants do not fund ongoing operational costs. One way Silver Harbour compensates for their limited hours is by offering meals for seniors to take home with them.

Partnerships are important to Silver Harbour. In the past, they have partnered with a local food recovery organization, which provided them with free recovered perishable food (from grocery stores, restaurants etc.). Unfortunately, this partnership ended when the food recovery organization's national policy limited food donations to services where there was no final price on the meals prepared with the donated food. Silver Harbour is hoping to secure another relationship of this nature again in the future. Silver Harbour also has partnerships with community and volunteer organizations (e.g., Mental Health Services, Disability Services) that provide them with volunteers to support the program. The organization is interested in forming more partnerships to support and enhance the program and ensure its sustainability into the future.

"I rely on the weekday lunch program on a daily basis...An awful lot of people (at least 20 or 30 that I know) come for every meal and rely on it in their own way. I often bring home half the meal and can eat it later for dinner. I knew about Silver Harbour for many years but didn't start going till after my second heart operation. It's not just the food but also the people you can chat with about many things. They have windows on the world that I would never have."

-Silver Harbour Food Services Participant