



Senior Connectors (Seniors Come Share Society)

<http://comeshare.ca/>

PROGRAM PROFILE: OVERVIEW

June 2017

Type of Program	Information, Referral and Advocacy
Organization	Seniors Come Share Society
Community Served	Surrey and White Rock
Program Goal	Connect seniors to programs and services available in the community
Services Provided	Information and referral, Assistance with filling out forms to apply for benefits, Income taxes
Target Population	Seniors and their families
Staffing	Program Coordinator, 12 Senior Connector volunteers
Program Strengths	Have partnerships with Cities of Surrey and White Rock to offer services at multiple locations, Service available in multiple languages, Compile an annual seniors community resource directory

Program Description

The Senior Connector program was introduced by the Seniors Come Share Society in 2009 to connect seniors with local programs and services, to help them fill out simple forms, and to be a starting point for navigating government and other systems. Before the Senior Connector program was introduced, similar work was being done by Outreach Workers who were funded by the Fraser Health Authority. After the funding for these positions was cut, the decision was made to introduce the volunteer Senior Connector program in order to continue to provide this needed service.

The Senior Connector Program offers drop-in information and referral at ten locations in Surrey and White Rock including at senior centres, libraries, recreation facilities and other community locations. How frequently there is a Senior Connector available at each site (e.g., once a week, twice a month, etc.) depends on the availability of volunteers. The program also responds to phone requests and provides in-home services for those who are not able to easily leave their homes. Volunteers provide information on a range of issues such as housing, meal programs, groceries, transportation, caregiver support and income tax. For help with applying for government benefits and filling out forms, seniors need to make an appointment ahead of time. A volunteer lawyer is available by appointment to assist with wills, power of attorney and other similar basic legal needs.

Come Share produces an annual [Seniors Resource Directory](#) (available both in print and online). The resource directory is over a 100 pages and provides a comprehensive listing of services for seniors in Surrey and White Rock (e.g., grocery delivery services, day programs, legal assistance, etc.) and is updated each year by a summer student. Copies of the Directory are distributed to various public locations and given out at health forums and seniors' events.

The Senior Connector program is coordinated by a Program Coordinator who spends about one quarter of her time on this information and referral program. This position coordinates the 12 volunteers (most of whom are

seniors) who serve as Senior Connectors, who usually work out of a specific information and referral location. The Program Coordinator assists the volunteers with support as they need it with things such as phone calls, home visits and filling out forms. New volunteers receive extensive training which includes 5-7 information sessions that are held each February and March. As part of this training, volunteers practice relevant mock information and referral requests. There are also ongoing education sessions on various topics (e.g., Caregiver education, Income benefits, etc.), which are offered to both volunteers and the public.

The Senior Connector program budget is approximately \$41,000 per year, with funding coming from Community Gaming Grants, fundraising, donations and other sources. The Cities of Surrey and White Rock are important partners for Seniors Come Share Society, providing them with space at different locations for their Senior Connector services. Seniors Come Share Society has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the City of Surrey about this use of space as part of a seniors services partnership (for more information see the [Partnerships and Memorandums of Understanding \(MOU\): City of Surrey Senior Services Sector Profile](#)).

Impact

The assistance Senior Connectors provide ranges from talking with, and providing pamphlets to, seniors who walk by the Senior Connector outreach tables, to much more complex cases. It is really important for seniors to have this support in order to be able to access their full government benefits such as GIS, SAFER, Fair Pharmacare, etc. The income received from these benefits can make important differences for the quality of life of seniors.

The Senior Connector program receives approximately 200 phone calls a week while each individual Senior Connector location reaches approximately 20-30 seniors a week, and Seniors Forums and Health Forums reach approximately 1,000 seniors a year.

Strengths and Challenges

Thanks to partnerships with the Cities of Surrey and White Rock, Seniors Come Share Society has expanded the reach of their Senior Connectors to multiple locations. This means the program is able to reach a wider range of people, including families and caregivers. Having Senior Connectors at multiple locations can be a challenge though, as not all of the locations have computers available, which are necessary for addressing many information and referral requests. The Senior

Connectors also assist with running the Seniors Come Share Society's Share and Care programs, which provides the Senior Connectors an opportunity to be more engaged with participants, as a part of these supportive and social group programs (for more information please see the [Share and Care Program Profile](#)).

I have had the privilege of helping a lady with the helplessness and sadness she is experiencing as her husband has been gradually deteriorating physically and mentally and now needs full care. Her story commenced with a quiet chat...and her despair was palpable. As the weeks passed she would stop to chat after exercise...until one day she asked me if I knew of someone to help her husband with [his] new computer...as it had become obvious that his main pleasure to keep in touch with friends all over the world was now proving more difficult. I was happy to be able to comply. Now she had arranged for a Physical and Mental assessment through the Social Worker at the hospital where he had just been admitted due to needing more care than could be provided at home. Her main concern was of course where he could be placed. She had already taken the Seniors Come Share Directory and a check list of what to look for in a Care Home and it was suggested that she pick one close to her home right now...Luckily payment for full care was not a problem, but she had not thought of the prospect of travelling back and forth until it was mentioned to her.

Story from a Senior Connector Volunteer of Assistance Provided to a Senior

Senior Connectors offer services in multiple languages, and through multiple modes of delivery (phone, home visits, services at community sites), making them more accessible to traditionally underserved communities. As part of this goal, they partner with various ethnocultural and immigrant/refugee support organizations in Surrey to outreach to diverse seniors (such as Progressive Intercultural Community Services (PICS), DIVERSEcity and Options Community Services Society). The publication of the Resource Directory helps seniors to easily find an accessible listing of all the local services they may need. The Directory is used as a key source of information for the Surrey/White Rock Division of Family Practice's community resource database called [*For Everything That's Community Health \(FETCH\)*](#), and Seniors Come Share Society receives a small amount of funding from the Division to manage the FETCH database. This partnership ensures that family physicians are easily able to access information on resources for seniors in their community.

Volunteers are central to the operation of the Senior Connector program, but there are some challenges to relying on volunteers for information and referral services. Volunteers may not feel comfortable being responsible for filling out applications for income benefits, and there are limits to their capacity to deal with complex problems. Retaining volunteers is critical to the success of the program – having a core group of dedicated volunteers is what enables the program to be offered in multiple languages and at multiple locations, and to be able to reach so many seniors.