



West Kootenay Seniors Transportation Pilot Program (Nelson CARES Society)

<http://kootenayseniors.ca/seniors-transportation/>

PROGRAM PROFILE: OVERVIEW

June 2017

Type of Program	Transportation
Organization	Nelson CARES Society
Community Served	Nelson, surrounding towns and rural communities (Castlegar, Kaslo, North Kootenay Lake, New Denver, Nakusp, Slocan Valley, Salmo, Trail, etc.)
Program Goal	Assist seniors with navigating available transportation resources and advocate for services when problems arise due to gaps in transportation resources
Services Provided	Connects seniors with different transportation resources; Provides information and education on transportation resources; Advocates for needed transportation resources
Target Population:	Seniors with transportation needs
Staffing	1 part-time Transportation Coordinator
Program Strengths	Regional program that is highly mobile and flexible and part of a broader collaborative and community development initiative to improve transportation services for seniors living in the West Kootenays

Program Description

The West Kootenay Seniors Transportation program is a three-year pilot that began in January 2016 that is coordinated through the Nelson CARES Age Friendly Community Initiative and the Moving Together Project¹. The goal of the program is to support seniors, particularly rural seniors, to navigate existing transportation resources in the West Kootenay region and Nelson, and to identify what systemic changes are necessary for seniors to access needed social, community and health care services.

The program is coordinated by a part-time Seniors Transportation Coordinator (who reports to the Nelson CARES Age Friendly Community Initiative Coordinator). Their role is to:

- provide outreach and education to seniors and service providers about the program and transportation services in the West Kootenay region;
- support individual seniors in navigating the existing and often confusing array of transportation services (such as the volunteer driver programs, regional public transit services, HandyDART and West Kootenay Ecosociety Rideshare program) (This support can often include riding along with seniors the first time they use public transit and/or another transportation resource);

¹ The Moving Together Project (MTP) brings together a broad range of stakeholders to address seniors' transportation issues in the West and Central Kootenay region under the umbrella of Nelson's Age Friendly Community initiative with the goals of connecting seniors to transportation services and working with stakeholders to make changes at the policy and practice levels. (for more information on the Moving Together Project please see the [Moving Together Sector Profile](#)).

- work with the Age Friendly Community Initiative Coordinator to identify areas where regional transportation services need to be expanded and schedules/routes changed to better meet the needs of seniors.

The West Kootenay Seniors Transportation program is available to seniors experiencing transportation challenges for any reason (including because they have lost their driver's license). Seniors may refer themselves to the program, or may be referred by their doctor, health services, social services, or community service providers. The program outreaches to seniors prior to any changes in their driving status, to support them to proactively plan for their future needs.

The Transportation Action Plan developed by the Moving Together Project sparked the decision to create, and fund, the West Kootenay Seniors Transportation Coordinator position.

Impact

The West Kootenay Seniors Transportation program recognizes how essential transportation is for supporting seniors to “age in place”. Transportation helps seniors access health and social services and meet their everyday needs such as grocery shopping and recreation. The program is designed to address the unique transportation challenges in the West Kootenay region, which includes: a large geographical area; challenging terrain and weather; heavy reliance on cars; regionalization of health and social services; declining volunteer capacity; high costs of rural transportation; inadequate or unavailable public transportation services; lack of (physically) accessible transit; and social isolation and exclusion.²

Normally, 5-10 seniors contact the program for assistance a week. The Seniors Transportation Coordinator engages in community outreach activities, and a single community presentation can reach up to 40 or more seniors. Seniors particularly appreciate the one-on-one support that helps them negotiate the different transportation resources and figure out what will work best for their specific circumstances.

The Program operates out of the Nelson office one day a week. This means that the Senior Transportation Coordinator is out in the community two days a week, doing home visits and connecting with seniors over the phone. This structure makes the Program well-suited for meeting the needs of multiple communities and for working with seniors who are not able to make it to an office in Nelson.

Strengths and Challenges

The Seniors Transportation Program builds awareness of, and helps seniors to figure how to access, the existing transportation resources in ways that work for them. However, the Program is limited by the availability and capacity of transportation resources in the communities it serves – which is why it is so important that the Seniors Transportation Coordinator is linked to the Moving Together Project. When the Program identifies challenges that require more systemic solutions, they are referred to the Moving Together Project, which is comprised of key decision-makers who have the capacity to address systemic challenges (such as the provision of wheelchair accessible transportation).

² See Lutz, H. (2014). *Transportation Solutions for Rural Seniors: A Literature Review*. Report prepared for Nelson CARES Society.

The Program is effective as it does not focus on one type of transportation or service, but uses a collaborative and community development approach to engage with multi-stakeholders in finding solutions. At the same time, it takes time to build relationships of trust with stakeholders and service providers, and to agree on solutions that increase the capacity of existing services to meet the needs of seniors. The Program is still relatively new and there is a lot of potential to build new relationships with more stakeholders, including with staff at Interior Health. Currently, the Program is heavily reliant on the work of the Seniors Transportation Coordinator and there are plans to include volunteers in the program model in the future to increase capacity.

As this is a pilot program, an evaluation is planned for the program and its impacts including pre-test and post-test surveys of program participants.