



Port Alberni: Partnerships to Promote Activity Participation

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Background Information

Port Alberni is using formal and informal partnerships to promote participation in fitness programs and other social, recreational and educational activities for older adults living in the Vancouver Island city.¹ One example is a long-standing partnership between the City of Port Alberni Parks and Recreation Department and the Echo Sunshine Club. Two other examples include one partnership with Island Health Community Health Services, Health and Wellness and another with the Port Alberni Better at Home program.

Partnership 1: The Port Alberni and Echo Sunshine Club

Back in 1967, the Echo 67 Community Centre was built in Port Alberni. Within this new Community Centre, space was set aside for a new seniors' club called the Echo Sunshine Club.

The Echo Sunshine Club is a senior-led, non-profit organization that provides activities to seniors (50+) living in Port Alberni. The activities are offered by volunteer instructors and include initiatives such as pottery, floor curling, woodworking and hiking. Seniors become members by paying an annual membership fee of \$60, which allows them to access most of the Club's activities (there are a few activities that require extra fees). The Club currently has almost 1000 members.

Since the establishment of the Echo 67 Community Centre, a mutually beneficial partnership has existed between the Echo Sunshine Club and the City of Port Alberni. The City provides support through office space in the Echo 67 Community Centre as well as in-kind support such as staff support and graphic design work. In turn, the Club provides activities for seniors in the community and pays the city rental fees for the rooms it uses for its activities. A staff liaison from the City is available to support the Club in an advisory capacity, but the members have complete ownership over the Club which is run by an elected executive team.

There are several factors that have contributed to the longevity of this partnership. Some of the main reasons it has been successful for more than 50 years are due to the Club's high level of community support, the continuity of municipal staff and long-term staff relationships with the Club, a supportive municipal leadership, and a good understanding of the value of each partner.

Partnership 2: Community Health Services, Health and Wellness

Community Health Services, Health and Wellness is an Island Health service that provides information and support to clients who are living with chronic conditions in areas such as lifestyle changes, health literacy, accessing community resources and self-management. The team of nurses, a social worker and a dietician take a health promotion approach to health and wellness. Service provision is person-centred and allows clients to connect with the health care system on their own terms. Referrals to the program come from a variety of sources, including

¹ Port Alberni is located on central Vancouver Island and has a population of 18,000 people.

physicians, friends, mental health services, Better at Home and self-referral. Community Health Services, Health and Wellness provides one-on-one support and offers free health promotion and prevention programs such as Healthy Summer (how to stay cool and healthy in the summer) and Nuggets for the Golden Years (4-session workshop focusing on a holistic approach to understanding the aging process and how to maintain health and wellbeing in later life). Programs are often developed as the result of client requests and provide community members with both education and support, as well as an opportunity for socialization and social connection.

Community Health Services, Health and Wellness has formed partnerships with other organizations in Port Alberni, including the City's Parks and Recreation Department. Their contract with the Parks and Recreation Department helps to support specialized (low-impact) adult fitness programs that are geared towards the needs of seniors and people living with chronic conditions. Each year, Community Health Services, Health and Wellness sponsors specific activity-based programs offered by the Parks and Recreation Department and provides funding to enroll clients into fitness programs. One example of a sponsored fitness program is Fit Beginnings, a fitness class for people just beginning to engage in exercise. There are plans to further build on this partnership. This fall, Community Health Services, Health and Wellness plans to offer regular workshops on health-related topics for a year-round indoor walking group that will be run by the Parks and Recreation Department.

In recognition of the value of both physical fitness and social activities to the health and wellbeing of older adults, Community Health Services, Health and Wellness also will purchase Echo Sunshine Club memberships for their clients so they can access the Club's physical fitness and social activities.

Partnership 3: Better at Home

While a number of free activities and fitness programs are available to seniors in Port Alberni through these partnerships, transportation is still a barrier to participation. Fortunately, the Better at Home program is helping to address some of these transportation needs. When the Port Alberni Better at Home program was initiated in 2014, transportation was identified as the greatest need for seniors in that city. In response, Better at Home initiated several measures, including a volunteer driver program and taxi coupons. Better at Home matches seniors in need with a volunteer driver who takes them to appointments, shopping, events and activities, including to local fitness programs and health activities. This service is available to any senior in need who is enrolled in the Better at Home program, including those living in rural areas. When scheduled transit is not available, Better at Home provides taxi coupons for seniors. To further support activity participation, Better at Home also purchases Echo Sunshine Club memberships for low-income seniors and seniors who are newcomers to the community.

How do these partnerships benefit seniors in Port Alberni?

The partnerships that have been formed in Port Alberni around fitness and activity participation benefit seniors by:

- Leveraging the strengths and resources of different organizations in the community
- Encouraging participation in social activities and physical fitness programs by seniors and younger adults living with chronic conditions
- Ensuring low-income seniors are able to access fitness programs and social/recreational activities
- Providing transportation to enable access to programs and activities for seniors for whom transportation is a barrier, particularly those living in rural areas.