

**Network Minutes**

**Thursday April 14, 2022 Providence Farm**

**Present:** Denise Williams Chair, Sheila Service, Cindy Lise, Sue Kurucz, Elizabeth Croft, Debra Toporowski, Val Masuda, Rhoda Taylor, Gretchen Hartley, Robin Routledge, Madelaine McLeod, Cailey Foster, Tracy Pocock, Barry Gallo, Henry Wikkerink, Chris Hall, Rosalie Sawrie, Bob Day, Kristine Sandhu, Dave Gutscher, Amanda Vance, Anne Brunet

**Guest**: Kirsten Mah Capital Regional District Health Network

**Presenters**: Rosalie Sawrie

**Call to order** at 5:30 by Denise who welcomed members and initiated round table introductions.

**The agenda was approved** by general consent.

**The Financial statement** was accepted as presented by general consent.

**New Co Chair Nominations and Voting** Two OCCHN members were nominated for the position of OCCHN Co Chair following the vacancy of long-term member Rob Hutchins. Sheila Service and Bob Day. Following the vote Sheila Service was elected as Co Chair. Bob Day has agreed to fill the position of Administration Chair in which Sheila will be vacating to take on the new role as OCCHN Co Chair. We would like to thank and congratulate both members for their commitment to OCCHN.

**Ukraine Refugees and Access to Health Care:** A brief conversation was held in regards to anticipated refugees coming to the Cowichan Region. Local organizations are preparing for refugees with an unknown number expected to arrive in the coming weeks and months as they flee the atrocities of war in the Ukraine. The families will be coming with the clothes on their backs and will require the support of the broader community for their health and wellbeing. It was reported that they may not be covered for things such as medical care or health care services. If you or others you know are able to assist with the new comers to our community the Cowichan Intercultural Society would be the place for donations and offers of support.

**Poverty In Cowichan-** Presentation by Rosalie Sawrie Social Planning Cowichan. (Presentation Attached)

Social Planning Cowichan in conjunction with the town of Ladysmith/Stzuminus and Town of Lake Cowichan undertook extensive work on the development of poverty reduction strategies for those communities. The presentation today will share the findings and a deeper discussion regarding regional poverty and what we can begin to do will take place.

**What is poverty?**

* Poverty is complex.
* Affects many aspects of a person’s life
* Poverty exists on a spectrum, much of it is unseen/hidden
* Stigma, discrimination, racism
* People experience shame, fear, exclusion
* Causes stress, hopelessness, poor health
* Mentally, physically, emotionally
* There is hope! Together, we can make a difference...

**Common Themes Throughout the Projects**

* **Create more affordable housing opportunities** was most common request. Housing, Housing, Housing
* **Improve transportation options**
* **Resource sharing** –rides, accommodation, tools, skills, etc.
* **Donations by need** –more heavily relying on donating what is needed by community members
* **Education and Awareness** –eliminating stigma, discrimination and racism
* **Building community connections** –while also reducing stigma around sharing food, hosting events that provide education and awareness about poverty in the community, services available and encouraging skill sharing, resources sharing, etc.

**Discussion:**

How did COVID impact poverty in our community?

* For unhoused people there were NO bathrooms, no place to cover and no place to go
* With this came increased fear and anxiety which resulted in increased substance use
* Opioid poisonings and deaths increased
* “The opposite of addiction is connection”
* People did not know where to go to find food or resources in the early days
* Poverty impacted the poorest people the most
* In Lake Cowichan Housing disappeared and more homelessness was present
* The demands are more than Cowichan Lake Community Services can handle
* Public schools were not open and the children and families that required support with meals provided at school were at a loss until the food delivery and hamper systems kicked in
* The demand for counselling increased over 400% at Cowichan Family Life
* Meals on the ground felt the impact of not being able to eat together and the social connections that are so critical were lost for a period of time
* The Health Network and COVID temporary shelter task force did a fabulous job in pushing for shelter and temporary housing. Unfortunately, some of the key support services were not able to go to provide resources for cabins in Lake Cowichan.
* It was a time when we were able to get some resources into our community and trial housing first
* The CERB helped a lot of people who would not otherwise receive funds. On the flip side some who are on the cusp or applied for CERB without knowing that they may have to pay it back are now faced with a bill that they can’t cover.

**What can we do as individuals, organizations or the Health Network?**

* Take the models that are working such as the Village and continue to advocate for ongoing funding
* The work that has been done to house people even in the shelter sites and hotel has impacted the residents in regards to poverty. They have been provided with shelter and food that they could not have done on their own. Even living in poverty this has helped immensely.
* We are still living with and will continue to live with COVID for some time so our ability to adapt as needed is very important. Don’t let go of what we created as it may be needed in the future
* Continue to advocate for resources we need
* Capture the impact on the unhoused and respond differently if needed in the future (.i.e. bathrooms)
* Embrace our community members
* Help where we can
* Identify possible housing options (house share) or vacant homes
* Seek out people in our region who are willing to provide secondary housing or suites at a lower rate to lower income people
* The mental health framework is overwhelmed. We need to review it and the needs of people in our communities and build it up with the resources it requires
* Continue to advocate for the person who requires support
* Continue to survey your region regarding their voices and their needs
* Work with people with lived experience

**Next Meeting May 12: 5:30 PM Via Zoom**