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# **PRELIMINARY AGE FRIENDLY COMMUNITY SUMMIT REPORT**

## **GATHERING #8 – COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION**

October 21, 2016 – Brantford Civic Centre

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**PRELIMINARY AGE FRIENDLY COMMUNITY SUMMIT REPORT**  
**#8 COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION**  
**October 21, 2016 – Brantford Civic Centre**

**11 Organizations**

**18 Participants representing:**

- Alzheimer Society
- Brant County Health Unit(3)
- Brantford Community/Social Services
- Creekside Village-Burford Housing Development (3)
- Contact Brant (2)
- Grand River Council on Aging
- Karlin Communications
- MP Phil McColeman Office
- Operation Lift
- Seasons Retirement Living (2)
- Six Nations Community Services (2)

**Retirees**

**28 Participants indicated they were retired**

**Where do Participants live?**

City of Brantford (31)	North end (13)
	Central/East Ward/Echo Place (9)
	West Brantford/Holmedale (4)
	South/Eagle Place (5)
County of Brant (10):	Paris (5)
	St. George (1)
	Burford (3)
	Oakhill (1)
Six Nations: (2)	
Other (3):	Woodstock, Dundas, Waterford

The participants were advised that this Gathering would provide an opportunity for them to identify what “age-friendly Communication & Information” means to them. They then had an opportunity to provide suggestions related to enhancing communication and information systems.

Table Facilitators gathered the demographic information and asked each participant to identify the reason for their attendance. These reasons are listed on page 4 of this report. The Table Talk then focused on identifying concerns/implications and providing suggestions for consideration.

It is important to note that this Gathering was a “brain storming” session designed to capture ideas “outside the box”. There has been no attempt to identify impact or cost implications. The suggestions apply to all three municipalities.

**INTRODUCTION**

MPP Dave Levac outlined the vision he has for the entire Age-Friendly Community Summit process and expressed his appreciation to everyone for their willingness to participate in each of the eight Gatherings. Their input will be included in the Final Report to be given to all levels of Government.

MP Phil McColeman confirmed his support of the Summit Process and also expressed his appreciation of the willingness of residents to be involved in a community planning process.

Lucy Marco, President of the Grand River Council on Aging, described what is meant by an “age-friendly” community. This was followed by questions that could help participants define what “age-friendly Communication & Information” could mean to them. Examples are: What does “age-friendly communication information” mean to you? What is working well? How could they be improved? What do you think about older people being consulted? Do you have difficulty filling out forms? Do you know what “Call 211 Information” is?

The Table Facilitators also reviewed the World Health Organization Communication & Information Checklist (Page 4) that was provided to participants.

**THE COMMUNITIES**

**Changing Demographics**

It was noted that people are living longer and that by 2030, the population of the City of Brantford and the County of Brant (including Six Nations) will be made up of 35.2% age 55 and over

**Communities and Services In This Report**

City of Brantford            An urban community (population 93,650) with an acute care Hospital and Services. As well, it is the central location for the delivery of Social and Health Services and includes a public Transit System, including Brantford Lift for physically challenged riders, and various community activities and services.

County of Brant            A rural municipality (population 35,638 including Burford, Glen Morris, Harley, Middleport, Mt. Pleasant, Oakhill, Oakland, Onondaga, Paris, St. George and Scotland) with farming as the major industry. With the exception of Urgent Care Services provided in Paris, residents must go to Brantford to access most services and a variety of social activities. However, there is no public transportation system but there is a subsidized service for medical appointments.

Six Nations of the Grand: Six Nations (population 25, 660) with no public transportation and limited social and community services.

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### Reasons for Attendance

The participants were asked to state their reason for participating in this Gathering. The first Six Gatherings had several reasons reported whereas the responses to this question for Gatherings #7 and #8 were quite specific as follows:

#### From Agencies/Organizations

18 To learn from seniors and then ensure services meet their needs

#### From Retirees

23 To meet other seniors, compare stories and make suggestions

3 To learn about seniors programming

2 To advocate for those with disabilities

### OVERVIEW OF PERSPECTIVES

Communication & Information can present different challenges for each individual. Specific suggestions will follow this summary. However, it is important to note that the following considerations for future planning were shared across the participants in this Gathering:

- Font is too small on all consumer products, instructions for use and drug information sheets
- Written instructions should be in "lay" language and in point form
- Telephone answering responses speak too fast and provide too much information and options to go through
- Difficult to understand people with accents, speaking too fast, use of acronyms, unfamiliar language
- Should have an option on phone systems that allows recording the service call
- Not everyone uses the internet....by choice.... due to lack of funds, expertise or desire
- Fixed incomes can deter from personal investment in technology
- Communication/information retrieval is getting more and more difficult
- Simplified technical training should be available in the community
- Community access to technology should be available
- Lack of knowledge of availability of Call 211 and what it can offer.....needs promotion
- Preference for a "local" source of information and appropriate promotion of availability
- Business and Service organizations need to incorporate AODA standards for those with hearing and/or sight challenges
- Use of technology by younger generations has resulted in loss of communal family time
- Customer service representatives often blame the customer and are not willing to assist in resolving the problem
- It should be possible to talk to someone when calling for assistance and/or information
- English language used should be at Grade 6 Level
- Seniors Resource Centre not easily accessible for other than East Brantford – nothing for other areas or the County
- Seniors Resource Centre does not have all the information available at the Library
- No help anywhere for understanding federal, provincial or municipal government regulations/legislation

- Limited computer skills in majority of participants

**"IT IS IMPORTANT TO LISTEN TO AND UNDERSTAND THE VOICES OF LIVED EXPERIENCE"**

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**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION CHECK LIST**

✓ **Information offer**

- Basic, universal communications system for written and broadcast media and telephone
- Regular and reliable distribution of information is assured by government or voluntary organizations
- Information dissemination is coordinated in an accessible community service that is well-publicized as a 'one-stop' information centre
- Regular information and program broadcasts of interest to older people are offered in both regular and targeted media

✓ **Oral communication**

- Oral communication accessible to older people is often preferred, for instance through public meetings, community centres, clubs, the broadcast media, and through individuals one-to-one
- People at risk of social insolation get information from trusted individuals, such as volunteer callers and visitors, home support workers, hairdressers, doormen or caretakers
- Individuals in public offices and businesses provide friendly and courteous person-to-person service

✓ **Printed information**

- Printed information is readable – including official forms, television captions and text on visual displays
- Has large lettering, bold-face type and clear headings

✓ **Plain language**

- Print and spoken communication uses simple, familiar words in short, straight-forward sentences

✓ **Automated communication and equipment**

- Telephone answering services give instructions slowly and clearly and tell callers how to repeat the message at any time
- Users have the choice of speaking to a real person or of leaving a message for someone to call back
- Electronic equipment, such as mobile telephones, radios, televisions, and bank and ticket machines, has large buttons and big lettering
- The display panel, of bank, postal and other service machines, is well-illuminated and can be reached by people of different heights

✓ **Computers and the internet**

- There is wide public access to computers and the internet, at no or minimal charge, in public places such as government offices, community centres and libraries
- Tailored instructions and individual assistance for users are readily available

**ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**Issue/Opportunity**

**Suggestions**

**Written Communication**

-Application Forms (government, insurance, employment, etc.)

- Increase Font to facilitate reading
- Provide brief instructions in "lay" language
- Reduce waiting time for response to government applications

-Instructions for Use/Advertising/Promotion – Products, packaging, Information sheets, flyers, letters, etc.

- Simplify Messages/instructions – in "lay" language
- Increase Font
- Plainly Differentiate Expiry Dates
- Do not use reverse printing (i.e. white on colour)
- No jargon/slang

-Phone Books, Listings, Internet

- Increase Font
- Standardize set-up i.e. alphabetically
- No acronyms
- No jargon/slang

-TV – closed captioning and running text

- Spell check
- Increase Font on Closed Captioning

-Legal Documents (wills, leases, etc.)

- Increase Font
- Simplify language

-Emergency Procedures

- Simple Instructions in "lay" language/diagrams

-Identify Acronyms

- Precede the acronym with the appropriate words before continuing to use the acronym i.e. Grand River Council on Aging (GRCOA)

-Business Cards, Promotional Items

- Increase Font

Issue/Opportunity

Suggestions

Oral Communication

-Telephone Answering Systems

- Answer in four rings maximum
- Simplify option descriptions
- Provide choice to speak to someone
- Provide opportunity for call back instead of waiting
- Recorded messages & service representatives – proper enunciation, speak slowly & clearly
- No acronyms/lay language
- If waiting is necessary, pick a “classic” piece of music (not symphony, rap, rock or heavy metal) or a classic radio station like Jewel 92
- Provide an option for recording the conversation
- Representatives should be trained on “how to listen” to understand nature of call and work to resolution

-Advertising – TV & Radio

- Speak slowly & clearly
- Provide readable closed (font & spelling) captioning for hard of hearing

-Customer Service Practices

All agencies, organizations, businesses should provide customer sensitivity and clear language training that supports demonstrating consistent courtesy and respect, no matter the physical or communication challenge

Automated Communication (also see Telephone Answering Services above)

-Residents without access to technology

- Basic training and e-mail available at community “stations”

-Residents with unused technology

- Provide basic in-home training for shut-ins
- Banks should offer training to customers

-Unsolicited and fraudulent phone, e-mail and door-to-door sales

- Develop friendly “hotline” services to report, verify and/or assist with decision making

**Issue/Opportunity**

**ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**Suggestions**

**Information Availability**

-CALL 211/One stop community information

- Province needs to actively promote through all media options
- Contact Brant to be funded to promote local 211 information base
- Local Agencies to keep their information current
- Should have a local source for referral on any question – accessible in person, by phone or on-line

-Residents without access to technology

- Information posted where public gathers
- Physically accessible Technology “stations” placed throughout the community
- Basic training available at technology “stations” on how to use the technology and access information
- Use of “coming events” one month in advance (radio, newspapers, community bulletin boards
- Clubs/organizations/businesses use “phone trees” for specific contacts
- Consider transportation and parking options when designing programs

-Access to Education and Resources

- Involve seniors in all levels of education – teaching and learning
- Provide home service to shut-ins
- Transportation and parking options to be available for accessing services/education

-Community Catalogues/Resource Guides

- Ensure proofreading by agencies listed in order to remove spelling, grammar and content errors before printing
- Promote availability
- Distribute throughout community



-Quality of Information

-Ensure all responders, by phone or in person, have been trained in information related to the item or service and how to handle referrals when appropriate

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### Issue/Opportunity

#### -Internet Technology

-Unaffordable for fixed incomes

-Not User-Friendly

-Distrust of security of on-line personal transactions (examples: income tax, Credit card purchases, banking)

-Can see no benefit in personal life

### ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

#### Suggestions

-Implement physically accessible free "technology" stations to access e-mail/skype/information retrieval (libraries, seniors buildings, etc.)

-Implement computer "buddies" programs

-Involve high school students in tutoring options

-Maintain a community waiting list for free rebuilt technology

-Federal/Provincial Tax refundable tax credit to encourage technology connections

-Promote registering for available Federal/Provincial Tax credits/grants for assistive sight, hearing and mobility devices by completing income tax returns, even if no tax is paid

-Increase Fonts

-Web-site standardization specifications (layout, colours, etc.)

-Standardized language

-Free Basic Training – how to use and use of signs and acronyms

-Redesign electronic forms to be easily accessed and readable

-Develop "How To" instructions for ever-changing technology

-Banks to offer training to customers

-Make phone numbers easily identifiable on web site home pages and in printed material

-Implement media communication plan that highlights the benefits (examples: keeping up to date on news events (globally and locally), finding information about anything, keeping in touch with family and friends, researching savings in purchases, participating in "on line" surveys

-Futuristic Lifestyle Options

- Safety/accident alerts
- Security systems
- All options to be physically accessible
- Large Print Technology Options

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### **CLOSING REMARKS**

Throughout the previous seven Gatherings, the need for information was identified over and over again and always with the same theme. The participants all had different issues and did not know how to get the information they needed. In fact, they often complained but the complaint was not a issue but, rather, indicated a lack of knowledge about available services and information systems. This resulted in the following phrase being adopted when talking about people and their information needs:

**“PEOPLE DON’T KNOW WHAT THEY NEED TO KNOW  
UNTIL THEY HAVE A NEED TO KNOW  
AND THEN THEY DON’T KNOW WHERE TO GO”**

This phrase was at the base of this last Gathering as well. Added to that were the facts that very few people were aware of the Ontario Call 211 Service, and very few were proficient in using the internet. In fact, technology was identified as being unaffordable for those on fixed incomes. Of those participants with access to technology, most of them were limited to using it for keeping in touch with family and friends.

Communication is integrally related to the human experience and wellbeing. As technology has developed and continues to evolve, the need for human contact has been replaced by “more efficient and accessible” technology. Automated communication can lead to social isolation among all ages. Also more time is spent in learning and using associated techno-skills and replaces the development of social interaction. Seniors are a social generation that prioritized social awareness and communication abilities.

Older adults expressed difficulty connecting with younger generations because they communicate online and with technology. Similarly, younger adults are more comfortable interacting with others online and are losing out of the benefits of in-person relations. There is a concern regarding increased differences in abilities to communicate with this tech-driven cultural change in the generations following – the generations providing and delivering services to seniors, many of whom are technology-challenged. The challenge is to increase personal interaction possibilities for youth and to ensure seniors are comfortable with the use of technology when optimal.

Health may be at the top of the hierarchy of needs. However, if transportation, housing, finances or isolation (to name a few) are major stressors, then health and everything else is impacted.

**IT WAS ONCE AGAIN THE GENERAL CONSENSUS OF THE PARTICIPANTS THAT IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO BRING FORTH THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE:**

**“IT IS IMPORTANT TO LISTEN TO AND UNDERSTAND THE VOICES OF LIVED EXPERIENCE”**

**Sincere appreciation is extended to Seasons Retirement Living for support of all eight Gatherings.**