



Creston seniors en route to the Therapeutic Activation Program for Seniors, or TAPS. Provided by Valley Community Services.

Local advocate to share success of Creston-born seniors' program at United Way Provincial Summit on Aging

Creston, B.C. A local leader is heading to a provincial summit on aging to share the successes of an innovative community-based program developed in Creston, now a model for similar programs across the province.

Justine Keirn, Executive Director of Valley Community Services Society, is one of over 350 seniors' advocates attending the summit. It is hosted by United Way and the Community-Based Seniors' Services Leadership Council, leaders in programs for older adults across B.C.

The second biennial summit will bring together leaders from local organizations, older adults, family and friend caregivers, academics, funders and government representatives, as they connect and collaborate on key issues related to aging in B.C.

"The summit is a great opportunity to connect with other people doing similar work," says Keirn. "It can sometimes be isolating for those of us working in small communities. These events bring us all together to learn and strengthen our services."

For almost 15 years, Valley Community Services has been the umbrella organization under which an innovative program called the Therapeutic Activation Program for Seniors, or TAPS, has operated. In 2005 Valley Community Services stepped up to provide administrative and

governance guidance, while widespread community collaboration, fundraising and volunteerism attested to the need for – and value of – the TAPS Program for our vulnerable seniors.

The program offers seniors engaging activities in a group setting, while maintaining their independence. Participants enjoy art, singing, music, physical activity, meals and outings, based out of the seniors' centre at the Creston & District Community Complex.

Seniors also receive a phone call every morning, choice on which activities to attend, and transportation to and from the centre. Keirn says these three simple program components can be life-changing.

"This program is unique because of how much quality time seniors can spend together, and with other community members, but with the freedom to return home every day," says Keirn.

"It's a wonderful way to help older adults stay active and engaged in their communities, but happy and healthy at home, too."

The program is especially critical in Creston, where adults over 65 represent 29% of the population, compared to only 18% across B.C. on average. Creston's population over 85 years old is 3.4%, compared to 2.2% of the Canadian population. (Figures are derived from the province, Statistics Canada, Office of the Seniors' Advocate, and the Interior Health Authority).

Advocates see how TAPS programs generate countless benefits for both participants and the local community. They say seniors build strong social connections and maintain their health, while caregivers receive valuable respite. They also believe programs like these reduce costs to local health care providers.

It's no surprise TAPS became a model for other communities, after a boost from United Way.

Keirn attended the same Provincial Summit on Aging two years ago, where the TAPS program was highlighted. The program caught the eye and the praise of not only other service providers, but of government representatives and funders.

Now TAPS programs will be strengthened or launched in communities across B.C., with support from United Way of the Lower Mainland and the Ministry of Health.

"We believe every older adult in British Columbia has the right to age with dignity, at home and in their own community," said Kahir Lalji, Provincial Director for Population Health at United Way of the Lower Mainland. "That's why we're proud to support and invest in agencies like Valley Community Services Society, and to share their innovative program across the province."

"We're proud to see the TAPS model take root in more communities, and look forward sharing countless other successes from the community-based seniors sector, at the summit."

The Provincial Summit on Aging, hosted by Healthy Aging at United Way and its partners, takes place at the Executive Hotel Vancouver in Richmond, B.C., November 6 to 8.

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