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## NEWS YOU CAN USE

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Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

### **Community response networks reach vulnerable adults**

VICTORIA – Following the creation and introduction of the Adult Guardianship Act in 1993, the B.C. Association of Community Response Networks (BCCRN) was piloted with five networks.

The organization has grown into 81 community response networks (CRN) serving 233 communities throughout the province, carrying out a range of grassroots projects and public awareness campaigns addressing everything from adult abuse to trans phobia.

“The brilliance of the CRN model is each local network is free to target its work toward whatever is most needed in its own community,” said Sherry Baker, executive director, BCCRN. “It’s amazing how creative the projects are.”

Each CRN can access up to \$3,000 a year for projects, all of which are personally vetted and approved by Baker.

In the Agassiz-Harrison area, there’s the Seniors Connect Café, which brought isolated seniors in to socialize with others, along with a free beverage. In Kamloops, the Intergenerational Mother Goose Program brought together adults and children over books, reading and storytelling.

Ladysmith’s Day of Service provided eye exams, haircuts and flu vaccination to seniors living at risk of homelessness. CRNs in B.C.’s Northwest – Smithers, Hazelton and Houston – launched Magical Backyard Medicines, a program that helps Indigenous communities reconnect with ancestral healing practices and share this knowledge with interested non-Indigenous members.

“This is grassroots work. You’re reaching out to the health centres, the pharmacies, the places where vulnerable people receive services,” Baker said. “It’s the CRNs who know what needs to be provided in their communities. The function of our provincial body is to provide mentors, materials and funds for that work.”

The CRNs aren’t diverse only in the kind of projects they select, they’re diverse in their makeup.

In addition to Indigenous and First Nations CRNs – including one in the Hazelton region formed by five First Nations – there are Chinese-language CRNs, francophone CRNs and plans for a new Punjabi-language group. Some CRNs focus their work on 2SLGBTQ+ populations, where the vulnerability of older adults in long-term care is a growing concern.

“That is a major issue, especially for people who are transitioning gender or have been living as one gender but whose bodies present as a different gender to the facility staff now caring for them,” Baker said. “What seems to be happening in many such cases is people are feeling like they have to go back into the closet. There’s a ton of work to be done on that issue.”

The BCCRN raises awareness across the spectrum of abuses – physical, emotional and financial. “It’s that last one most common for vulnerable older adults to experience,” Baker said. “Whether it’s an email scammer closing in on a potential victim or an adult child taking money from their fixed-income parent, people interacting with vulnerable adults need to know how to spot such abuses and act.

“The BCCRN seeks opportunities to work with some of the big long-term care providers to ‘train the trainer’ in how to spot abuse in their facilities, which can emerge between the family caregiver and the patient, patient to patient, or between the care provider and the patient. This past year has seen many pandemic-related projects, as isolation is a major concern for vulnerable adults. When a CRN is preparing lunch or delivering food, our abuse and neglect informational materials are packed in there along with the meal.

“CRNs are also helping community members learn how to use technology to connect, as many programs and events have shifted to an online format for safety. It’s great to see our CRNs so nimble in addressing needs in their communities.”

The B.C. government has proclaimed March as Community Social Services Awareness Month in appreciation of the more than 42,000 people who work in the community social services sector. They provide help and assistance to those who need it most.

**Learn More:**

B.C. Association of Community Response Networks: <https://bccrns.ca/>

For the Community Social Services Awareness Month Proclamation, visit: <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/proclamations/proclamations/CommSocSerAwarenessMonth2021>

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