

Citizens Bank of Canada
Shared Interest Program
Grant Application

Organization

Cowichan Valley Seniors Advisory Society: **Registration # 0875666-59**
Family Caregivers Support

Address

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**Match with
Citizens Bank
Area of Concern**

1. What is your organization's Mission or Mandate?

Our mission is to acknowledge and support people in their caregiving role to alleviate stress and improve the quality of life for the caregiver and the person receiving care.

A caregiver is anyone who gives care and support at home or in a care-facility to adult family members or friends. Caregivers are a generally silent but large group of people (one in four people in BC) who give service at a significant cost to themselves. Often relinquishing their own activities and even jobs, many are thrown into a life of poverty. Without them, our healthcare costs would spiral out of control as 80% of eldercare is provided by family caregivers. They deserve recognition, appreciation and support.

2. Which area of concern best describes the work of your organization?

Community and Family Health.

**Activity and
Effectiveness**

3. How active and effective has your organization been in pursuing your Mission or Mandate?

Our service in the Cowichan Valley is based on the recognition of people's strengths and belief in their ability to help each other. There are 5 key programs: Support Groups, One-on-One Emotional Support, Resource Information and Referral, Edu-

cation, and Advocacy.

These will be illustrated through specific scenarios to bring the activity and effectiveness of the program to life.

Support Groups Program

There are three existing support groups with plans for a fourth underway. Meeting content is determined by the caregivers with the assistance of a volunteer facilitator.

One group arranged for a workshop on healing touch. Group members left with practical tips with which to help the person they are caring for.

In another group, a local RCMP officer explained the procedure for assisting a “wandering person”, listened to the group’s concerns and left with a better understanding of their needs.

Beyond the general good that comes from social contact, sharing and exchange of ideas, the change in the lives of certain members stand out.

One young woman, looking after her ill 78 year old father in her home, first came to our meetings under medication for depression. Within one year, she was better able to handle stress and her joyous, humorous personality returned.

Another woman who said the group was her only social life, now meets regularly with new friends, goes to dances and other social events.

A man looking after his wife with multiple sclerosis, had been quiet at group meetings for some time except for angry outbursts. He now gladly shares his “respite outings” plans for his one free day a week.

One-on-One Emotional Support Program

Not everyone feels comfortable in a group. This program is for those who prefer to speak confidentially to one person. We match caregivers with trained volunteers.

A man in his thirties, looking after his mother in his home, was having difficulty dealing with a critical brother. A male volunteer listened to his feelings of anger and resentment towards this brother and acknowledged his caring feelings for his mother and the hard work involved in looking after her. This helped him find the energy needed to continue caregiving.

Resource Information and Referral

Often caregivers call to ask questions about a specific need (such as transportation, medical equipment and supplies, nursing services).

An elderly woman asked if financial assistance was available. Her husband, whom she had been looking after at home since his stroke,

was now diagnosed with cancer and required treatment in Victoria. They could not afford the 4 night stay. We referred her to relevant resources and followed up to see that she had found the assistance she needed.

Education

We have a library of books and videos for caregivers and professionals to use. The coordinator also chairs the community's Eldercare Education Committee which has hosted events that provided general financial and legal information (resources for aid, power of attorney, trusteeship, wills). The Committee also furthered the understanding of dementias and how to help people suffering from them.

Advocacy

Many caregivers are too tired to question a "no" from a service agency or the government. We support caregivers by making phone calls or speaking to professionals on their behalf.

In addition to this personal advocacy, we help caregivers raise societal awareness of their issues to make government and services more responsive to their needs.

We facilitated a meeting between caregivers in the Cowichan Valley and their local MLA, Jan Pullinger, to discuss issues of respite. Several important points were addressed and the minister arranged for a subsequent meeting with the caregivers, herself and the Regional Health Board CEO and Chair. Not only did the caregivers feel empowered, this latter meeting resulted in some significant changes in respite options.

Accountability

4. What are your organization's primary funding sources?

The Seniors Advisory Society receives funds for Family Caregivers Support from the Regional Health Board through a community partnership program grant.

5. What was your organization's annual budget for the past fiscal year?

We reached approximately 100 caregivers last year on a budget of \$7,800.

6. What proportions of the annual budget were for administration and for program?

Administration: 5% (\$390) Program: 95% (\$7,410)

7. What has been the most significant accomplishment of your organization in the past 5 years?

Significance of Accomplishments

The most significant accomplishment is the expansion of our service on a shoestring budget. The recent change from only support groups to the present range of pro-

grams enables us to fill a wider range of needs and reach more caregivers.

8. How has this accomplishment contributed to achieving your mission and promoting social change?

This change has enhanced our ability to support caregivers and improve the quality of life of both the person giving care and the person receiving care. We have been able to raise awareness of caregivers' needs and issues. We have advocated on a personal and societal level for change in attitudes and services.

One example of change is the recent birth of a new committee composed of caregivers and professionals working in partnership for the first time in this community to plan respite services.

The stage is set for more far-reaching social change. A two year pilot project is planned to develop support circles around caregivers using a paid facilitator. Some of the features of this new model are:

- partnership, caring bonds, meaningful connections between people in a community
- reassurance of assistance that extends beyond service hours of professionals
- reducing reliance and demands on the present service delivery system
- a model that will be transferable to other communities
- caring for elderly people with respect and love

Our budget for this project is approximately \$66,500 over the two years and so far we have raised \$31,000. **We need the support of the Citizens Bank to get underway.** Together, through the results of this project, we can impact positively on the lives of many people and help create caring communities throughout Canada.