



The way to get started is to quit talking and start doing. –Walt Disney

Neighborhood Clusters Ready to Roll

By Lorraine Barnes

As part of the Neighborhood Cluster Action Plan (approved by the Leadership Council at the end of 2017) BAH will conduct a pilot project, starting in February. BAH's southernmost area will serve as our first cluster, consisting of South, Samish and Cedar Grove neighborhoods. Cedar Grove has a number of BAH members as well as a community club house, which will be a handy meeting place for our pilot project. You will recall that the cluster initiative was launched in response to requests for closer connections among members who live in the same areas.

After researching techniques used by other villages and developing an initial cluster project design, the Cluster Committee (Lorraine Barnes, Linda Knudsen-McAusland, and Lynn DeFehr) has defined geographic boundaries to form six neighborhood groups. Following our pilot, other clusters will be organized:

1. Pilot: South and Samish, including Cedar Grove
2. Fairhaven, South Hill and Chuckanut
3. Sehome and Puget
4. Columbia, Cornwall Park, Sunnyland, Lettered Streets and Birchwood
5. Silver Beach, Roosevelt, Barkley and Geneva
6. King Mountain, Cordata and Meridian

With local residents, planning for the pilot is under way. Results from the pilot cluster will help define the rest of the program. We hope to have a report for you soon.

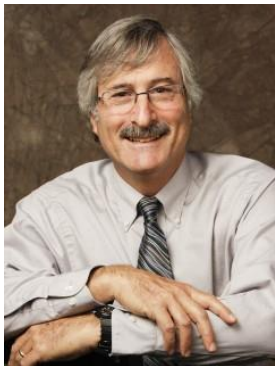
The committee will conduct assessments of the clusters at six and 12 months, refining the concept as needed based on member feedback. Questions? Suggestions? Please get in touch with me at lorraineowenbarnes@icloud.com.

Bad News, Good News: What You Need to Know About Guardianship for the Elderly

By Lauren Phillips

Last fall an article appeared in The New Yorker (10/9/17) called "How the Elderly Lose Their Rights" (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/10/09/how-the-elderly-lose-their-rights>). In it, Rachel Aviv described in

horrifying detail how paid guardians can sell the assets and control the lives of senior citizens without their consent—and reap a profit from it. At least they can in Nevada. Could they do it in Washington?



Barry Meyers

I asked the founder and owner of the Elder Law Offices of Barry M. Meyers, a local law firm providing a broad range of legal services to elders, their families, persons with a disability, and vulnerable adults. I figured he would know. He did. They can.

To be sure, Washington has a number of protections in place that Nevada does not. If a guardianship petition is filed and someone is found to be an incapacitated person (IP), a judge of the superior court of the county will appoint a guardian, who is then responsible for reporting back to the court—every one to three years if the guardianship includes financial management, at least

annually if it includes guardianship of the person. And in fact, most guardianships are established for good reasons and most guardians act appropriately.

The thing is, Meyers explained, the oversight here is minimal.

“I honestly don’t believe the judges have the staff in every county to review all of these reports thoroughly. They may just get filed. Even when there is a hearing for the judge to review and approve the reports, if no one has specifically asked to be notified, there may well be no one else who gets a copy. And if a guardian doesn’t file a report, there’s no statewide system to detect that.”

A handful of counties do have guardian monitoring programs. “King and Spokane counties have a paid person doing the monitoring and a few counties have a volunteer cadre of folks to staff the program; I believe there is a clerk assigned to do the monitoring in Whatcom County but this is, in all likelihood, not that clerk’s only responsibility.” Once again, a lack of resources can render the legal protections we do have toothless in some cases.

There are two types of guardians: lay guardians, typically relatives or friends of the IP; and certified professional guardians. The former have to take a two-hour training class online, which is better than nothing, I suppose, but not a whole lot better. Certified professionals are governed by the state; they must meet certain requirements set by the state’s Certified Professional Guardianship Board, which has the authority to investigate, discipline, or kick them out—but only if the judge determines they may have done something inappropriate and refers them to the board. Which is likely only if someone complains to the court.

So yes, said Meyers, people can lose their civil rights. A guardian in Washington could, like the one in the article, take all of someone’s money and do whatever they want with it; they could cut off all contact between the person and their children, unless and until they’re caught—by which time the damage would be done. And the only way they would be caught is if someone complained to the court—the incapacitated person, the person’s children, or someone else.

In short, you really want to steer clear of guardianship altogether.

And here’s the good news: You can definitely do this, said Meyers, by taking a few fairly simple steps.

1. Make sure you have in place a good power of attorney (POA) for both your finances and your health care. You want a comprehensive, flexible document that gives that person full powers to act on your behalf; not all documents you can download on line do that or address all of the kinds of issues the elderly often face (Example: How will incapacity be determined?), so you should consider consulting a lawyer.
2. You can name the same person for finances and health care, or separate ones. The key is to name competent persons that you absolutely trust.
3. Ask the person if they are willing to take on this responsibility before you write them into the document.
4. Give them a copy of the completed document—and tell them where you keep the original.
5. Make sure your healthcare professional and local hospital have a copy of the POA for health care.

Do these things now, said Meyers, and you’ll never have to go to court.

Mark Your Calendars!
Town Hall Meeting
February 14, 1-3 pm, Rm. 16

There's no better place to be this Valentine's Day than with Bellingham At Home to "Support What You Love!" This is your opportunity to...

- Hear about the exciting new services BAH is creating to enrich our members and strengthen our community, including health advocates, neighborhood clusters, and targeted fundraising;
- Learn about our current status and goals for 2018—more members, more volunteers, more satisfaction and engagement, and greater financial strength;
- And get your questions answered.

If we want to see this organization grow and prosper, we all need to take responsibility for recruiting new members. *So please bring a friend with you!* This is a perfect occasion to introduce someone new to BAH. If that person (or anyone else you refer) becomes a full member, you'll get a \$25 Visa card.



What's New?
Housing Options as We Age
February 28th, 9 am-2 pm, BSAC

Whatcom County offers a wide range of housing for older adults, from shared housing and in-home attendants to adult family homes, rehabilitation facilities, and independent and assisted living. This annual event, presented by the Whatcom Council on Aging at BSAC, is your opportunity to get your questions about any or all of these answered by experts.

Presentations on housing options in the community, including aging in place, will be held throughout the day. BAH will be one of many organizations and services to host vendor tables with information and resources in the lobby and coffee bar.

If you are trying to figure out your future, or the future of a parent, plan now to attend.

Leslie Checks in

By Leslie Jackson, Program Manager

Leslie.jackson@bellinghamathome.org

I'm very happy to report that Leah Olver, an environmental science student at WWU, is joining us as a volunteer fundraiser through May. We're setting her right to work with the goal of getting an eFunding campaign up and running on the Internet by February. Next up: Create a strategy for a fundraising event by April, possibly an online silent auction. Her third project will be to create a canvassing kit that volunteers will use to promote our Neighborhood Clusters. On an ongoing basis, Leah will be

researching available grants that we can apply for. She'll be in the office Thursday afternoons if you'd like to pop in and thank her for her generosity.

Also, please check out our newly updated Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/BellinghamAtHome/>) and like us. This is a good place to catch up with BAH news and events and to post items of interest to the BAH community.

Finally, we're off to a great start for the year—three new volunteer applications and two new members in January! Welcome Shirley Morlan and Virginia Pieters!

Health Advocacy Program on the Cusp

By Nanette Davis

After nine months of intensive work, Bellingham At Home introduced its new service--Volunteer Health Advocacy (VHA)—at an open meeting on Wednesday, January 17 at BSAC. Five VHA Committee members presented different aspects of the program, ranging from legal issues, levels of advocacy, and special concerns in assisting seniors through a medical crisis. In some instances, a member may simply seek support in today's overly complicated medical milieu.

The enthusiastic audience of 20, most of whom were BAH members or volunteers, raised pertinent questions that signaled their approval of the program, and for some attendees, willingness to sign up for further training. A significant number plan to take the January 24 training, Medical Note Taking in the Doctor's Office, in preparation for our launch of this service in mid-February. The training will be held at BSAC, 2-4 p.m. and is open to all volunteers as well as those who are not yet vetted but who are planning to take the regular volunteer training on February 7. (You will not be able to start working as a note taker until you are fully vetted.)

Poetry Contest Invites Poems from Whatcom County Residents



Ever wonder about the Poetry Walk poems, the ones on metal plaques in front of the library or displayed on WTA buses? They are the work of winners of the annual Sue C. Boynton Poetry Contest. If you have a poem eager to escape your brain, yours could be displayed next year. The contest is accepting previously unpublished single-poem submissions from local residents, March 1-31. Twenty-five winners will be chosen by this year's judges, prize-winning local poets Richard Widerkehr and Jane Wong.

Full contest guidelines are available on the contest's webpage: <https://thepoetrydepartment.wordpress.com/contest/>.

February Birthdays

Barbara Balfour
Burl Harmon
Iris Jones
Joanne Kurtz

Donna Klander
John Lawler
Sharon Morris
Joanne Porter



Members: If you'd rather this newsletter didn't show your name when it's your birthday month, please let the office know.

Make Yourself Safer Behind the Wheel with These Simple Vehicle Adjustments

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety would like you to know that there are a number of simple and inexpensive features that can greatly improve your safety (and the safety of others) on the road.

This is important for two reasons. First, more than 70% of older drivers have muscle and bone conditions that impact their driving—things like diminished vision, reduced leg strength, limited upper body range of motion (shoulders, arms, backs, necks), and arthritic hands and diminished motor skills. Second, drivers 65+ are more than twice as likely as younger drivers to be killed when involved in a crash.

Here's a third eye-opening statistic: More than 90% of older drivers don't make any of the available vehicle adjustments that could help them stay safe—and stay on the road longer.

Here are some of the adaptations researchers have identified, all of them inexpensive.



- Cushions and seat pads: Improves line of sight and can help alleviate back or hip pain.
- Convex/multifaceted mirrors: Improves visibility and minimizes blind spots.
- Pedal extension: Helps drivers maintain a safe distance from the steering wheel/airbag and optimizes visibility.
- Steering wheel covers: Improves grip for drivers with arthritic hand joints.
- Hand controls: Allows the driver to perform all vehicle maneuvers and functions without the use of lower extremities.

Even among drivers who do use one or more of these devices, few of them work with a trained technician on installation, which is a key recommendation of both the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the American Occupational Therapy Association.

Information drawn from ScienceDaily (<http://newsroom.aaa.com/2017/11/90-percent-senior-drivers-dont-make-vehicle-adjustments-can-improve-safety/>), based on material from AAA.

What Did You Think?

So you called the office and got a referral for a plumber. How did that work out for you? Is that pipe still leaking? Was the experience a good one? Your fellow members would like to know!

Help strengthen our commercial service provider recommendation service with your reviews. Please call back and let us know if you'd use the person again or if you think we should take him or her off our list—and why. Thanks.

Bellingham At Home Contact Information

Location: Bellingham Senior Activity Center, Room 14, 315 Halleck Street, Bellingham, WA 98225

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Website: <http://BellinghamAtHome.org>

Bellingham At Home is a program of the Whatcom Council on Aging, which is a 501(c)(3) organization, and a member of the Village to Village Network.