

COVID-19 pandemic reveals gaps in older adults' care

By LILLIAN NAKAMURA MAGUIRE

Who would have guessed that I could be facing some of the same issues as an older person that I did as a parent of a toddler?

There was a time in the mid-1970s in the Yukon when there were no standards for childcare. As well, no standards for training nor certification levels for childcare workers linked to their wages.

The pay was a little above minimum wage, and there was no government funding for operation of facilities or subsidies for parents.

Many of us were vocal in our call for change. Change happened...slowly.

Although there's still much to do in the way of adequately compensating childcare workers and making childcare accessible and affordable for all, we've advanced somewhat in the last 45 years.

As I reflect back on that time, I can't help but draw some parallels to the conditions for some in long-term care and residential facilities for older people. (I shall refer to "older people" as "olders" in this article.)

Vulnerable population

Just as babies and toddlers are unable to speak for themselves, many olders in long-term care or residential facilities or hospitals may be unable or reluctant to speak up for themselves.

They may have dementia that affects their ability to express their care needs or they or their family members may be hesitant to make requests or complaints due to fear of retaliation or harassment or mistreatment.

One way to address this concern is an advocate for Yukon olders, similar to the child and youth advocate.

The advocate could investi-

gate and ensure olders are being treated equitably and their needs are being heard.

A complaint process needs to be readily available for caregivers and those people in residential or long-term care facilities.

Standards and regulations

The publicly-funded, government-operated long-term care facilities such as Whistle Bend Place and Copper Ridge have regulations and standards in place that meet Accreditation Canada certification.

COMMENT

Due to the standards and health measures put in place in Yukon, we've been fortunate not to have experienced the COVID deaths and infections faced by long-term care residents in mainly private facilities, particularly in Quebec, Ontario and B.C.

Currently, there are no non-government, independent assisted living facilities for olders in Yukon.

There are two being planned in Whitehorse – one by a private developer and the other a non-profit society.

Currently, there are *no* regulations in place for standards of care in private or non-profit residential or long-term care facilities in Yukon.

Regulations and standards need to be in place for non-government, operated-assisted living and residential care facilities being planned in the near future.

We need to ensure the standard of care, staffing levels, training of workers and their working conditions are monitored and maintained at a high level.

In the same way that childcare centres receiving government subsidies must meet specific standards, non-government, operated-assisted

living and residential care facilities should also have to meet standards, particularly if they are receiving government grants and subsidies.

Private and non-profit facilities

Dr. Pat Armstrong, a distinguished researcher and professor of sociology at York University co-authored a report, *Re-imagining Long-term Residential Care in the COVID-19 Crisis*.

It identified that for-profit care homes tend to have lower staffing levels, more complaints, more transfers to hospitals and higher rates for both ulcers and deaths.

According to the researchers, those homes with managerial practices based on a business approach are geared for making a profit, rather than providing good care.

Often, staff are paid low wages, work casual or part-time with little or no benefits.

Laundry, cleaning, food and security are often contracted out, thus increasing the risk of exposure to more people in the home.

We need to monitor the situation in Yukon to ensure that the proposed private and non-profit facilities maintain the standard of care we have grown to expect from our existing public facilities.

Aging in Place action plan

The government is expected to release its *Aging in Place* action plan as well as its follow-up to the recommendations of the Independent Expert Panel for the Comprehensive Review of Health and Social Services.

I look forward to seeing what plans are being proposed.

I hope that it won't take 45 years to bring about progressive changes for improved care of olders in Yukon.

The writer is the co-chair of Seniors Action Yukon in Whitehorse.

Sharing a COVID gift of lessons

Yes, corona is not only a challenge, but also a chance.

I hear that some of my German friends are realizing how wonderful life can be if we are able to leave the treadmill.

Two business owners told me: I never want to go back to the same spot. I missed out on the beauty of the present moment. Life is more than numbers and worrying about the future.

Just some food for thought.

A pandemic with isolation is a gift of time to reflect on human choices. To see the best in humans through creative gestures and generosity and experience the losses that so many in other areas of the globe experience every day of their lives.

All things will improve here for everyone through this life experience, but will there be lessons learned?

I hope we are smart enough to consider an improved lifestyle that benefits the global community.

Economically, nothing has disappeared here.

There are no shortages here; we are experiencing a realization of how others live outside of our culture. A brief lesson taught many times through our history.

We need to learn what is essential to all and determine

Presenting an Ode to the Wood Street Centre

To experience your education	Coring old growth trees to learn the ages
More than just being in attendance	Dissecting sea cucumber on Vancouver Island seaside
Hands-on learning, something rare	ES 11 brought scuba, sailing, cave spelunking
Opportunities too good to let pass	A real understanding of biology, chemistry, and earth sciences
Applying had worthwhile challenges	Last in this tribute but impossible to forget
Just to call this school your own	MAD (12) – always full of excitement
Immersed in French, while experiencing Voyager ways	Singing, dancing, acting, set, and costume design
Paddling canoes, sleeping in wall tents, and eating Sagamite	Built confidence and determination in all those who tried
Learning of a developing Canada was much easier to comprehend	Today I am successful because I had these opportunities
Such were the ways of PASE 9	These programs shaped my future and gave me confidence to follow my dreams
ACES 10 flowed like the Yukon River	For the future of Yukon
The time escaped, much was learned	Bring back Wood Street Centre
Field studies meshing with classroom time	Please.
Biking, skiing, and survival skills	A Wood Street Centre student 2010-2014,
Done to the tune of Mr. Bell singing "Arrogant Worms"	Sara Burke-Forsyth Whitehorse

They weren't all learning

I read in a local newspaper (Victoria, Australia) that 97 per cent of students were learning at home.

This should have realistically read 97 per cent of students were at home. They were not all learning – or even studying.

I doubt that any teacher, even in the best of classes, could claim that only one in 30 students wasn't

learning or even paying attention. I wouldn't make that claim myself as a retired teacher. Perhaps the best answer is to close all schools and only have home schooling, as the parents know everything about teaching and are so good at it.

Dennis Fitzgerald
Melbourne, Australia

YOUR OPINION

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how to distribute the non-essentials with greater and wider consideration.

A global view would be far more comforting. Lots of time to *think* and hopefully take positive action.

Love is the answer. Words borrowed from a wise thinker,

Sue Greetham
Marsh Lake