

The Garth Homer Society
A Vision for the Future
April 2011

Introduction

Like other organizations that provide services to people with developmental disabilities, the Garth Homer Society must come to terms with the aging of its clients. The baby boom generation of adults with developmental disabilities is now getting old. Studies suggest that the total population of people with developmental disabilities aged 55 and over will double by 2030, the consequence of two factors.

First, as they are in the general population, the boomer generation of the disabled is disproportionately numerous; the demographic bulge that is creating major impact on our health and geriatric care systems is also moving through the disabilities care system.

Second, not only will there be many more people with developmental disabilities approaching later life, but those that do will live much longer than they used to. Excluding the minority with Down's syndrome, most of whom will develop early dementia, the life expectancy of people with developmental disabilities is now approaching that of the general population, the result of rapid improvements in the last 50 years.

For Garth Homer, these changes are significant. The organization has already begun to adapt to the new emerging reality with the development of Pathways, its program for seniors, and especially for those with dementia. However, by 2017 more than 50% of Garth Homer's current clients will be more than fifty years old. We also expect to see many new older clients approaching the agency for care – either as family caregivers of developmentally disabled people themselves age; or due to potential increases in late onset disabilities in the community. In the coming years, the impact of aging on the organization and its services will grow rapidly. For example, in order to maintain appropriate services as the needs of its clients change, Garth Homer may need to

- adapt the facility to the needs of older clients
- increase the capacity of dementia programs
- increase utilization of the facility as older clients retire from community and employment programs
- provide service flexibility to accommodate rapid changes in health among older clients
- provide some health-related services such as physical therapy or nursing support
- better integrate day services with residential long-term care to accommodate the changing physical and care needs of older clients
- increase the provision of quality-of-life services for harder to care for clients
- extend the hours of service provision
- increase training and skills within our staff to specialize in geriatric issues.

Clearly, to meet future care needs, innovation and entrepreneurial vision will be essential. For these reasons, the aging of its clients was one of the central issues addressed in Garth Homer's recent

strategic planning initiative, which focused on the long term objectives that would guide the development of the organization over the next ten to fifteen years. In its deliberations over the course of four planning sessions, the board determined an overall direction for GHS based upon six fundamental strategic goals:

- to become a provider of geriatric services
- to develop operational alliances in order to deliver geriatric day services that are closely integrated with residential long-term care
- to diversify and increase revenue through fundraising and social enterprise initiatives
- to maintain the current diverse service mix
- to grow the agency in order to maintain programs at adequate scale for both older and younger clients
- to redevelop its facility to accommodate a changing population mix and modernized services.

These goals will drive the development and evolution of services for all Garth Homer clients, not just older adults, because the kinds of flexible, inclusive services needed to meet the needs of older clients are congruent with those needed to meet the changing needs of younger clients and their families. At their best, the purpose of day services is not only to provide basic care and safety for their clients, but also to help them learn and grow as individuals, and live and work as independently as they can, integrated in the life of their communities. This is true for clients of all ages, but especially evident in the case of older clients. The Garth Homer Society is a leader in the provision of day services and is now poised to build upon its excellent reputation through service expansion and public/private alliances.

Work is now underway to detail these key initiatives in a three-year transition plan aimed at building organizational capacity, developing expertise in geriatric care, increasing revenue, and positioning Garth Homer to undertake renewal of its facility. Four principals guide the planning.

- i) *Maintaining and enhancing inclusion:* As clients age and they move into geriatric services, services should maintain an emphasis on community inclusion wherever possible.
- ii) *Aging in place:* Support services should be developed which enable older clients to age in place for as long as possible and which will defer or prevent any transition to institutional long-term care.
- iii) *Appropriate long-term care:* If and when clients' health issues progress to the point where they may require institutional long-term care, they should be able to receive it in an environment which not only provides a continuum of care of health services, but which continues to provide appropriately for the specific needs of those with developmental disabilities.
- iv) *Relevance and sustainability:* Programs are relevant when they fulfill a community need and community need must be balanced with economic sustainability.

An Innovative Vision for a New Care Environment

As noted, the provision of geriatric care for people with developmental disabilities necessitates much closer integration of day and residential services. As a provider of day services only, Garth Homer faces a difficult question in determining how that integration ought to be achieved. In its strategic

deliberations, the board concluded that most likely Garth Homer would not become an independent provider of residential long-term care, but would probably seek operational alliances with other service organizations already delivering it.

Our research into geriatric issues noted that organizations that provided both residential and day care had fewer difficulties in providing integrated services. However, it was also noted that integrated services were most easily provided by organizations that also provided geriatric services and residential long-term care for non-disabled clients because under these circumstances it becomes possible to deliver health services in the context of disabilities care. The example given was the Christian Horizons network of facilities in southern Ontario. The example raises the intriguing possibility of a cross-sectoral operational alliance between a disabilities organization and a long-term care organization in order to provide comprehensive care services for older adults with developmental disabilities.

The Garth Homer Society will be a leader in providing a comprehensive suite of geriatric services delivered through an innovative shared services, multi-client “campus of care” type of relationship in which a facility for disability services and a facility for non-disabilities long-term care are co-located. This is our vision.

This would enable residential, health, and disability-specific services to be provided through an operational alliance between the two organizations, with both organizations pooling and sharing expertise and programs, and residential services for clients with developmental disabilities provided in a normal long-term care environment. From Garth Homer’s perspective, the focus would remain on supportive services that enable clients to age in place in the community for as long as possible. However, the operational alliance would also provide for a continuum of services into a health-based eldercare environment when necessary, with full support for disabilities.

A Garth Homer campus of care arrangement will provide other significant synergies.

- It will support inclusion by providing the context for co-location of an expanded range of accessible care, community, commercial, and housing services and facilities. The campus could be located and designed to support residents’ engagement with the community, both by enabling access to the surrounding neighbourhood, and by the collocation of community and commercial services that are available to the surrounding community.
- It will provide cost savings through shared infrastructure and overhead.
- It will provide the context for an innovative built environment that will look, feel, and function more like a domestic residence than a health institution in order to provide residents with flexibility for the personalization of their own space and daily schedules, opportunities for privacy and social interaction, space for their personal relationships, and the flexibility to accommodate individual interests and lifestyle choices that change over time. The facilities model will be developed by adapting best practices in the design of assisted living for seniors to the needs and special care requirements of developmentally disabled older adults.
- It will be an innovative “leadership facility” providing an exemplary level of care and service — one of the best of its kind in the world.

A New Vision for Garth Homer

The vision of a community inclusive, multi-client, shared services campus of care suggests the possibility of a new kind of role for the Garth Homer Society within the community of care providers. We envision that Garth Homer will become a specialized centre for service excellence in geriatrics and disability, not only taking the lead in delivering services, but also as a leader in service innovation and learning. In this role we envision Garth Homer will

- become a centre for the academic study of developmental disabilities in an alliance with scholars at UVic and UBC
- provide a focus which attracts funding support for research into developmental disabilities
- generate support from VIHA and other health-focused funders
- become a specialized training organization on geriatrics, serving other DD providers
- become an international learning destination.

Current Initiatives

These are ambitious and bold objectives that would transform the Garth Homer Society. They will not be easily achieved and much careful preparation and planning, and many new alliances, will be needed before they can be made real. Within the current planning cycle, Garth Homer will build its capacity to act on these ideas and begin to take the early steps for transformation. New initiatives will include:

- expansion of the dementia program
- development of geriatric expertise for staff and management
- development of service-based social enterprises such as respite for family and other care givers for older clients
- development of flexible services for non-dementia older clients
- development of social enterprise and fundraising to realize long term sustainability.
- exploration of the possibility of operational alliances with long-term care organizations
- renovation of the current facility to accommodate the changing needs of older clients
- co-location within the facility of other geriatric services
- expansion of the hours of service to provide for more flexible services
- expansion of services which promote community inclusion.

Over the next several years, the mission of the Garth Homer Society mission will expand to encompass opportunities for independence, growth, and participation in the community for people at all stages of life who are striving to overcome developmental and physical obstacles.