



2011 Age-Friendly London Conference Continues to Get Bigger & Better!



Since the City of London has partnered with the Council for London Seniors in organizing and funding two “Building an Age-Friendly London” conferences that have been hosted by the Council, we felt we should provide a brief report on the 2011 event and thank the City for its generous support. The second annual Building an Age-Friendly London conference held at the Hellenic Centre on Friday, November 4, 2011 was a memorable and successful event for many reasons:

- The 2011 conference was the largest event ever organized by the Council in our 23 year history with registrations sold out a week in advance. On the day, 450 seniors, support workers, caregivers, sponsors and exhibitors attended.
- Over 50 exhibitors were on hand to provide information about a wide variety of services ranging from retirement homes to health agencies from both profit and not-for-profit organizations.

Mandate of the Council for London Seniors

In 1989, the Council for London Seniors was formed to speak on behalf of the growing number of seniors in the City of London. Over its 23 year history, the Council for London Seniors has been dubbed “The voice of older adults” and this theme is seen throughout all of its work. The strength of the Council is in the strong involvement of seniors themselves. It concentrates on ensuring that seniors have a voice in terms of the services they need and that community issues are addressed with their experience and input in mind. Their Mission Statement is as follows: ***“THE COUNCIL FOR LONDON SENIORS IS A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO THE ENRICHMENT OF THE LIVES OF OLDER ADULTS IN THE LONDON COMMUNITY.”***

The Council of London Seniors boasts a current membership of 160, comprised primarily of London seniors and affiliated service providers. The Council depends on hundreds of hours of volunteer time from its many members with staffing limited to a part-time Executive Assistant. It operates on a very modest budget of about \$45,000 per year with funding received from the South West LHIN, City of London and various fundraising activities. One of the key objectives that the Council has become recognized for is: “To facilitate education for older adults and to exchange information with the community and all levels of government.” It was therefore seen as a good fit for the Council to take responsibility for spear-heading the Building an Age-Friendly London conference and it has been a win-win for all involved from the start.

Brief History of Building an Age-Friendly London Conference

The first conference was held at the London Convention Centre on October 28, 2010 with an evening of information for caregivers and a full day event for seniors on October 29th. The need for such an event was identified by the City of London following their designation in June of 2010 by the World Health Organization as the first Canadian city to be a member of its Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities. The planning for the first event was made possible with both financial and human resources provided by the City of London to the Council to host the conference. The 2010 conference attracted 175 seniors with 52 exhibitors providing a cross-section of community information. An ambitious program agenda combined both educational presentations and an opportunity to offer input into the eight WHO Age-Friendly key focus areas or pillars. A detailed report summarizing the feedback was

developed and submitted to the City. The 2010 conference was considered a success by both the attendees and planning committee alike with recommendations to continue it on an annual basis.

2011 Conference Highlights

The second Building an Age-Friendly London conference was held on Friday, November 4, 2011 at the Hellenic Centre on Southdale Road in London. This year, the Council for London Seniors assumed a hands-on responsibility for all aspects of the conference, made possible with the able assistance of an event coordinator, the Council's Executive Assistant and hundreds of volunteer hours from the many agencies on the planning committee. The City of London again generously sponsored the event and their support ensured that the event was affordable and open to a broad range of seniors across the city. In recognition of the appeal of the event, other smaller sponsors and in-kind donations were received to help defray costs and these are all gratefully acknowledged.

Attendance more than doubled in 2011 with registrations being capped at **375** more than a week before the event. The change of venue from the first year also proved to be a good decision with free parking and accessibility features being noted as improvements in respondents' evaluations. The 52 profit and not-for-profit exhibitors offered a range of information from retirement homes to social and health services and this useful information was again identified as a real benefit by participants. Participants left with bags full of resources and information and the door prizes provided by exhibitors also generated interest in visiting the exhibitors' tables. The enthusiasm and sheer numbers of seniors that visited the displays provided a mutually beneficial incentive for exhibitors to support the event.

The program for the event was designed to address the spectrum of issues impacting London's senior community, and was presented by experts in their field. Topics included; an update on mental health services in London and the region by Patrick Fleming from London Health Sciences Centre, an overview of the Home at Last program by Margo Collver from VON Middlesex-Elgin and a session on how to keep active and *in motion* by Susan Clements from St. Joseph's Health Care London. Fitness breaks were incorporated into the program which got everyone off their chairs and kept them full of energy. Registrants were also invited to provide feedback regarding the City of London's Age-Friendly London Task Force Initiative. Finally, Bob Finlay, a Therapeutic Music Recreationist led a session that focused on the Music of Your Life and how seniors can improve their sense of well being and memory function by incorporating music in their daily lives. Bob's talent and enthusiasm filled the room and by the end of the day the crowd was on their feet, singing, dancing and thoroughly enjoying themselves.

We received an overwhelming response to the day's program with **80%** of all participants completing evaluations, including a dozen responses in Spanish which were than translated into English. Respondents rated the presenters from **4.0 to 4.5** on a scale of 5, a high recommendation indeed for a day that offered a blend of learning, friendship and entertainment. The opportunity to learn about services in the community and provide input into the future of London seemed to be appreciated by all.

Several other details contributed to the success of the day. The availability of free transportation from key locations across the city was a definite benefit to enable 120 seniors who are less mobile and more isolated to enjoy a needed day out. The physical accessibility of the location and the availability of a note-taker increased participation for all seniors, regardless of their abilities. The assistance offered by the many volunteers, the delicious hot lunch and friendly, festive atmosphere all helped to ensure that everyone had a full and fun day out. All respondents indicated a high level of satisfaction with the day and unanimous support for future events.

Future Planning

The success of the last two conferences would indicate a high interest from seniors for another event and the support from the community and sponsors would encourage the Council for London Seniors to consider planning a third Age-Friendly London conference. The timing for the next conference is a consideration, given some of the other community activities that are currently being planned. In an effort not to deplete volunteer resources and duplicate the Stepping Out Safely 10th event activities planned for 2012 and coordinate with the final recommendations of the Age-Friendly London Task Force, a June 2013 conference date seems wise. The Age-Friendly London conference should be the pre-eminent event for Seniors in London – moving the date to June, which is Seniors month, makes a lot of sense and can capitalize on other promotional activities that are happening. The Council for London Seniors is very grateful for the past support of the City of London and other sponsors and volunteers who participated in 2011 and we look forward to the City of London's continued assistance in June 2013.