

Portage la Prairie Age Friendly Cities Advisory Committee – A History

How it all began...

In the summer of 2006 the World Health Organization (WHO) launched its global Age-Friendly Cities Project. The project included a proposal to conduct focus group research in thirty-three cities around the world.

Mr. Jim Hamilton, Executive Director of the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat for the Government of Manitoba, invited the City of Portage la Prairie to become a participant in the project. On April 10, 2006 Mayor Ian Mackenzie and the Council of the City of Portage la Prairie approved the request and Portage la Prairie became one of two cities in Canada to participate. Manager of Community Development, Ms. Jennifer Sarna, was assigned responsibility for coordinating the City's participation in the project.

Dr. Verena Menec, Director of the Centre on Aging at the University of Manitoba, was invited to lead the research.

The local focus groups...

In early fall of 2006 Jim Hamilton and Verena Menec met with a local advisory group brought together by Ms. Sarna. The role of the advisory group was to support the research through the identification of organizations and individuals for the focus groups and to provide community based guidance to the project.

Throughout the fall of 2006 four focus groups were conducted representing seniors, caregivers of seniors, professional staff, and business representatives. The focus groups were asked for feedback around eight domains. They included Outdoor Spaces and Buildings, Transportation, Housing, Respect and Inclusion, Social Participation, Communication and Information, Civic Participation and Employment and Health and Social Services.

Release of the findings...

In February of 2007 the Centre on Aging sent the findings to the World Health Organization to be used in the development of a Global Age Friendly Cities Guide.

In early fall of 2007 Mr. Hamilton and Ms. Menec met with Mayor Ken Brennan and the Portage la Prairie City Council to present both the WHO research report and the Portage la Prairie Age Friendly Cities Project report, which outlined the results of the local focus group discussions.

Follow up to the report...

On September 27, 2007 Mr. Hamilton, Ms. Menec and Ms. Mariam Omar (Centre on Aging) met with Ms. Sarna and representatives of the original local advisory group to review the local report.

On October 1, 2007 the World Health Organization launched **Global Age Friendly Cities: A Guide**, which was compiled using the data from the overall study.

The Canadian Rural and Remote Age Friendly Project...

At the September 27, 2007 meeting with the local advisory group, Mr. Hamilton reported that a parallel project of ten communities in smaller settings entitled the Canadian Rural and Remote Age Friendly project was being conducted across Canada using a similar methodology. Gimli, Manitoba was the Manitoba participant in this research. The WHO requested that the Canadian Government share the information once it was complete.

The Manitoba Initiative

Mr. Hamilton also announced that the Province of Manitoba would provide a \$5000.00 grant to both the City of Portage la Prairie and the community of Gimli for the development of action plans based on the findings in their respective communities.

The Centre on Aging received funding for the purpose of studying the development and implementation of the action plan in the City of Portage la Prairie. He also announced that Manitoba would be rolling out its own age friendly initiative within the coming months with the goal of encouraging communities across Manitoba to prepare for the demographic shift as boomers age.

In February of 2008 the Minister of Healthy Living, Kerri Irvin Ross, Minister responsible for seniors, officially launched the Age Friendly Manitoba initiative in Portage la Prairie at the first Age Friendly orientation, welcoming 10 new Manitoba communities to participate in making Manitoba the most age friendly province in Canada. The launch kicked off a set of rolling orientations, each designed to bring new communities on board. The Portage la Prairie group was privileged to participate in several of the orientations.

The Portage la Prairie Age-Friendly Cities Advisory Committee is born...

The Portage la Prairie Age Friendly Cities Advisory Committee began in an informal way with the formation of the initial advisory group to guide the WHO research conducted by the University of Manitoba. Following completion of the study and release of the report, Ms. Sarna brought the group back together on September 27, 2007 to review the results. Thus began the establishment of the Portage la Prairie Age Friendly Cities Advisory Committee.

The Committee began its work by identifying an action plan for the coming year. The plan centered around the development of Terms of Reference for operation of the committee, engaging additional stakeholders and seniors to round out membership on the committee,

reviewing the report to identify priority areas to tackle in the first year and seeking formal appointment of the Committee as an advisory committee to the Council of the City of Portage la Prairie.

On July 14, 2008 Council of the City of Portage la Prairie accepted the Terms of Reference and established the Portage la Prairie Age Friendly Cities Advisory Committee as an advisory committee to Council.

The inaugural Board was made up of representatives from Portage Services for Seniors, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Portage Community Network, Portage Regional Library, Central Regional Health Authority, Herman Prior Centre, the City of Portage la Prairie, Portage Friendship Centre and four seniors at large including one aboriginal elder. Representatives of the University of Manitoba Centre on Aging and Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat are ex-officio, non-voting members of the committee.

The Centre on Aging continues to conduct research into the implementation of the Age Friendly Cities initiative in the City of Portage la Prairie. The Committee continues to work towards making the City of Portage la Prairie as age friendly as it can be.

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