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Trading favours: program matches skills with needs

Time banking makes it easier for neighbours to ask for help

Cindy Stephen
for the Federation of
Calgary Communities

As the world becomes more high tech, there are fewer people reaching out for help from their neighbours.

One northeast Calgary community has developed a program to connect people and re-establish that neighbourly spirit of co-operation.

The Whitehorn 55 Plus Group, together with the Northeast Support Group, run a Fair Exchange program in the community, matching people with skills with people who have needs. Based on the Time Banks concept, popular in the U.S. and Britain, hours spent volunteering in the exchange program are tracked.

Liz Tapley, an active Whitehorn 55 Plus community member, says the program was initiated by Calgary Family Services and funded by a federal New Horizons grant for seniors.

"How fair exchange works is I do something for you – say, mend your

fence, and it takes me an hour. After that, you owe time to the bank. You don't have to give it to me – it can go to someone else," Tapley explains.

The hours spent volunteering and the hours owed by those receiving services are recorded by a "match maker".

While neighbours have helped each other in this manner since the dawn of time, with no expectation of return, the formal approach of time banking makes it easier for people to ask for help.

"Some seniors don't like to ask," she says.

The program has united two communities – seniors in Whitehorn and the Asian populations in the Northeast Support Group – and is helping the two to develop trust amongst each other.

“There are opportunities to share past experiences and talents. Everyone has something to contribute that's important.”

Liz Tapley,
Whitehorn 55 Plus
Group member

"For example, our matchmaker got a request from a lady who had a small fire in her house and a hole was made in an outside wall. Someone from the Chinese group does that sort of thing. He came by, had a look, and told the lady what she needed to purchase. She went to the store, he came back and did the repairs," Tapley says.

She says, sometimes it's the smallest things that seniors need help with, like having someone explain new electronics or even purchasing groceries.

Members meet twice a week; once for Tai Chi and once just to socialize. An advisory group meets monthly with



Seniors are actively helping each other by volunteering tracked hours through the Fair Exchange Program in northeast Calgary.

Photo courtesy FCC

representatives from each association.

"There are opportunities to share past experiences and talents – everyone has something to contribute – that's important," she says. "Plus, most people don't like to have a stranger come into their home to do things, at least, on a volunteer basis. Getting together helps us to get to know one another."

Tapley has lived in Whitehorn for 29 years. She and her husband have served on the community association's board of directors and were the founding members of the 55 Plus Club. She says she's delighted with the response.

"This project has brought together neighbours who don't know each other.

As a community effort, it's one of the things we need to emphasize," she concludes. "Even after living here for so long, I've met a lot of people I wouldn't have otherwise."

For more information about Fair Exchange or to lend financial support, contact Lynda Cossins at lyndac@calgaryfamily.org or call Peter Chan at (403) 205-5260.



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