

Help for Tri-City seniors is just a phone call away

By Sarah Payne

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It's not easy getting older. Between failing health, friends and family members passing away, and a world that gets ever faster just as you're slowing down, life can get downright stressful and overwhelming.

Tri-Cities Senior Peer Counselling is here to help.

The non-profit organization consists of trained peer counsellors who are available, free of charge, for confidential talks with seniors who are having a difficult time coping.

They meet with clients in private rooms at Wilson Centre and in Port Coquitlam or Coquitlam's Dogwood Pavilion or Glen Pine recreation centre; some of the seven counsellors are also available for home visits for seniors with mobility difficulties.

"We deal with financial issues, family problems, grieving, emotional problems — especially depression, anxiety and loneliness — and housing," said co-ordinator Helen Sturdy at the group's latest meeting.

"We do whatever a clinical outreach counsellor would do but elderly people often prefer talking to people their own age rather than a professional counsellor."

Many of the people they help are going through a difficult time and feel isolated from friends and family — or simply don't have anyone they can turn to.

"Their wife or husband is gone, they may be alienated from their children or their children can't be bothered to talk to them," one counsellor explained. "They just need someone to sit down on a one-to-one basis and talk."

Often, the senior already



When seniors have problems, they often know the solution but need to talk it out, something Tri-Cities Senior Peer Counselling helps with.

knows what he or she needs to do but needs the kind of reassurance that comes from an objective sounding board, he added.

"And sometimes, they don't know what decision to make until they've had a chance to verbalize it," said Sturdy. "When they're down and feeling helpless, we're there to explore the options and bring out the best in them."

The service has been around for the last 15 years, often taking referrals from social workers, hospitals and Tri-Cities Mental Health. The counsellors, with backgrounds ranging from a teacher to a bank manager to a nurse, are trained through Seniors Peer Counselling of BC.

They're well equipped to help seniors work through difficult emotional problems but they're also happy to help with other challenges unique to the elderly, like navigating government forms and applications for housing and pensions. If a senior just needs a friend to visit with, or help with groceries, the counsellors can also refer them to more appropriate resources.

To set up an appointment with a counsellor, leave a voice mail for Sturdy at 604-945-4480. She'll call back, discuss the issue and arrange a meeting with the most suitable counsellor. And any messages left for seniors are kept private, she emphasized.

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