
INFORMATION & RESOURCES

Winter 2022

Connections Through LIHHS With Our New Client Services Manager

by Wendy McClure

Lopez is such a remarkable community, resilient in many ways – with countless examples of neighbor helping neighbor. But sometimes people need a bit more help during recovery from surgery, during illness, at end of life, or to give relief breaks for their caregivers. LIHHS helps fill those gaps, building on the informal neighbor-to-neighbor approach to ensure that folks get connected for additional support.

As the new client services manager (CSM) at LIHHS, I am learning the ropes. The nature of the work is not unlike a matchmaker who strives to make a compatible pairing. The focus is on making good linkages after listening and assessing what someone wants or needs. Next, the CSM seeks out appropriate volunteers as sources of support, then makes the connection and checks in on each party after the connection is made. Volunteers may provide household help, do errands, go for walks, or read aloud, all to support and keep company with our fellow Lopez residents.

Another key role for the CSM is keeping in touch with the LIHHS volunteers as they provide support. I make follow-up calls to volunteers, host zoom check-ins, and will hold training sessions next year.

Linking people to resources is a key skill of community social workers and is essentially the work of the CSM at LIHHS. My preparation for this includes a Masters in Social Work and 40 years of related professional experience with community members. It is my pleasure to contribute by linking Lopez community members who are lending a hand to help our neighbors. Often volunteers say they gain as much from the connection as the neighbor who needs assistance. I am glad to help foster the linkages, knitting people together for greater resilience and quality of life.

LIHHS will be recruiting new volunteers in 2022. Please contact Wendy at (360) 762-5358 or csm@lihhs.org to become a volunteer or request support at home.

What LIHHS Offers

Lopez Island Home & Hospice Support provides volunteer home and hospice support services to the Lopez Island community experiencing illness, injury, and/or loss.

This includes: help around the home, companionship, respite for caregivers, bereavement support, and durable medical equipment.

Please contact our office at (360) 468-4446 or admin@lihhs.org for how we can best support you or your loved ones.

A Jingle Bell Thank You

by Nora McCloy

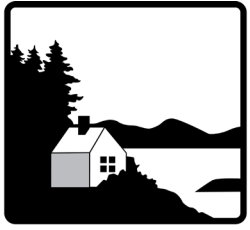
And here we are again... Having completed another choose-your-own adventure, figuring it out day-by-day as the situation changed, Jingle Bell event!

And here we are again... With deep, deep gratitude for a community that continues to travel along with us and support LIHHS at every changing step along the way.

This year we got a bit closer to a classic Jingle Bell Dinner. We had a three-course meal from the amazing Haven restaurant – albeit in boxes. We had a fabulous item-filled auction of quite a different style. We had wonderful music from the talented Hawk Arps. We had festive decorations. And in a safe manner, we got to come together in community and have FUN! It was easy to see there were a lot of holiday smiles and joy behind those masks.

Most importantly, we experienced the incredible generosity of this community, as you did it again... making us financially whole as we look to providing services to our most vulnerable for another year.

Thank you seems insufficient, but thank you all indeed: To our sponsors, supporters, volunteers, and local businesses, especially after a year which stressed many—personally, professionally, or financially—we at LIHHS honor YOU. Being a part of this community is quite the holiday gift!



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We are here for you

For questions, durable medical equipment, bereavement support, and donation inquiries, please call 360-468-4446 or email admin@lihhs.org

For client services and volunteer support, please call 360-762-5348 or email cs@lihhs.org

178 Weeks Road
PO Box 747
Lopez Island WA
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www.lihhs.org

Lopez Island Home & Hospice Support is a 501(c)(3) non-profit volunteer organization. All services are free.

How to donate

- At www.lihhs.org
- At smile.amazon.com via "Lopez Island Hospice and Home." .5% of your purchase prices will go to LIHHS.
- Check or credit card. An envelope is included for your convenience.
- Stock donations.

Many thanks for your continued generosity.

Brain Health and the Aging Brain

by Elizabeth Landrum, Ph.D.

Misplacing keys, forgetting names or why you entered a room are common experiences. For some older adults, such memory lapses can be frightening. Many even wonder if they are showing signs of dementia, yet dementia is not a normal part of aging. To help distinguish normal brain changes from signs of serious cognitive impairment, scientific investigations are providing insight into normal vs. abnormal cognitive changes, as well as into what can be done to maintain or improve brain health.

What is normal for older adults?

Researchers have refuted the idea that people, as we age, go into a general mental decline. Instead, psychologists are developing a model of specific deficits that show very different rates of decline. Although there are vast differences among individuals, some cognitive abilities continue to improve, some are constant, and some decline as we age.

Older adults are very capable of learning new skills, even late in life, yet learning may take longer. While the speed with which information is encoded, stored, and retrieved slows, older adults often outperform their younger counterparts on tests that draw on accumulated knowledge and experience. In fact, *semantic memory*, the ability to recall concepts and general facts unrelated to specific experiences, continues to improve for many. This type of memory includes vocabulary, knowledge of language, and verbal reasoning that remain constant or improved during the aging process. *Procedural memory*, the memory of how to do things, typically stays intact.

Certain types of memory lapses, and slower reaction times can be expected. **Normal age-related declines are subtle and affect speed of thinking and the ability to sustain attention.** It also becomes more difficult to quickly find words, to multitask, and to shift focus between tasks.

Episodic (what did I have for lunch yesterday?) and *source* (where did I learn about that new car?) memories decline the most, even in healthy older adults. *Episodic memory* captures the what, where and when of our daily lives. It's the associative links between pieces of memory (a face and a name, or the time and place in which a story was told), not necessarily the pieces themselves, that become increasingly fragile.

Storage capacity is not the issue; the brain is not an overloaded hard drive. Rather, **changes appear to come in how people encode and retrieve information.** Any interference, like from distractions or inattention, can block the encoding or storing of information. Slower processing may affect retrieval. Most people have had many experiences of "wait to see if it comes to me."

So what's happening inside the brain? The brain's volume peaks in our early 20s and gradually declines for the rest of life. In our 40s, when many of us start to notice subtle changes in our ability to remember new names or to do more than one thing at a time, the cortex starts to shrink. As the brain changes, so does behavior. With a reduction in blood flow, the normally aging brain becomes less efficient in recruiting its various areas into operation. Given that blood flow drops the most in the frontal cortex, people commonly

experience declines in verbal fluency, and we have to work harder at *executive functions*, like planning and organizing activities.

Beyond normal aging declines, and the more pathological signs of dementia, there are **other possible causes for memory problems.** Many are treatable conditions and include: dehydration, insomnia, anxiety, depression, infections, medication or chemotherapy side effects, thyroid imbalance, poor nutrition, and substance abuse. Recent **pandemic-related declines** in memory function and distortions in time perception are multi-faceted. With the combination of fatigue, anxiety, a lack of usual cues, and fewer social interactions, it's no wonder that many of us feel our memories are letting us down.

Tips for maintaining and improving memory

Scientists have identified some ways to minimize age-related changes and improve everyday memory function. While many are familiar recommendations for general health and mental health, there is a body of emerging evidence to support what helps keep older minds fit. Research suggests that the combination of good nutrition, physical activity and mental and social engagement provide real benefits in promoting brain health. Changes made at any stage can truly add up.

Maintain excellent cardiovascular health (blood pressure, cholesterol levels). We now know that what is good for the heart is good for the brain. Blood flow matters.

Get moving. Physical exercise has been shown to boost and maintain brain function. Exercise stimulates the brain's ability to maintain old network connections and to make new ones. Studies have demonstrated that exercise even increases the size of brain structures and that aerobic exercise is more beneficial to cognitive health than non-aerobic stretching and toning. Federal guidelines recommend that all adults get at least 2.5 hours/week of physical activity.

Maintain a healthy diet. Focus on plenty of fruits, vegetables, and water. Researchers are looking at whether a healthy diet (e.g., a *Mediterranean diet*) can help preserve cognitive function and/or reduce the risk of dementia.

Try new activities. This can be a great way to challenge your brain to make new brain connections. Many older people report that pursuing any new cognitive challenge helps them stay sharp.

Get regular, good quality sleep. The benefits of sleep hygiene are well-documented, and researchers are finding that certain stages of sleep (especially rapid eye movement sleep) play distinct and vital roles in our memory capacity.

Socialize and stay involved. Participation in social and community activities can improve both mood and memory function.

Believe in your control. Maintaining a sense of control and confidence helps, as do positive beliefs about aging. Findings from a large national study suggest that those who believe they have greater control over their physical and cognitive health have better mental functioning as they age. When people feel they don't have control, they're likely to be anxious and distressed, which can then interfere with performance and with finding alternative strategies to compensate for losses.

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Brain Health Continued

Remember, it's more realistic to compare one's performance to healthy same-age adults than to our younger selves.

Memory devices like mnemonics, or linking new learning to something personally meaningful, can give your memory a boost. Good memory is actually good learning. That means forming a strong association with new information as you learn it. Use associations (e.g., repeating a name along with another familiar name or word) and visualizations (e.g., picturing a unique feature of someone's face) to tag information you want to remember.

Avoid distractions that divert your attention. Preoccupations, noise, or attempts to multitask will interfere with focusing and remembering. Keep to-do lists. Establish routines. Use your calendar. Organize your home, keeping things in their usual places. Don't rush. Remind yourself to slow down throughout the day.

Although our brains remain capable of learning and retaining new facts and skills throughout life, gains can come from accepting normal age-related changes and then taking steps to compensate for them.

Upcoming Community Events on Dementia

LIHHS is excited to collaborate with LOHO, LIFRC, Senior Services and San Juan County Health to bring the Lopez community two events on dementia – one on March 5th and one on April 2nd.

The first event will focus on community awareness and support resources, and will be led by Marigrace Becker, Program Manager of Community Education and Impact at the UW Medicine Memory and Brain Wellness Center. The second will feature "Meet Me At The Movies" by Mary Jane Knecht, Manager of Creative Aging Programs at the Frye Art Museum. We invite caregivers, family and other support individuals, and anyone living with dementia to join us for these educational and interactive opportunities.

Look for further details on our website www.lihhs.org.



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