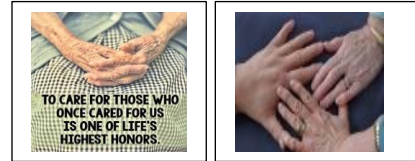




CARING FOR SENIORS January 28, 2025

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SONS – Save Our Northern Seniors - Registered Non-Profit Society 2005

Our mandate is:

- To advocate/lobby for the building of a facility, especially Peace Villa which will ensure the safety, respect and dignity of our seniors;**
- To provide current and reliable information for the number of facilities and beds available in our area;**
- To pursue all avenues of support for our community – rural and urban - such as Supportive Living, Assisted Living, Intermediate Care, Extended Care, Special Unit, Psycho-Geriatric Care, Adult Daycare, Home Care, and Emergency Care.**

Peace River Regional District Leonard Hiebert, Chair
Directors

Dear Mr. Hiebert and PRRD Directors,

On behalf of SONS – Save Our Northern Seniors, I am providing the PRRD with our presentation detailing the many issues facing our Seniors in the Northeast. Your work on the PRRD is noted and appreciated.

The following Ministers received the following letter addressing Health issues in the Northeast.

- Hon. Josie Osborne - Minister of Health
- Hon. Ravi Kahlon - Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs
- Hon. Mike Farnsworth - Minister of Transportation and Transit
- Hon. Lana Popham - Minister of Agriculture and Food
- Hon. Brittny Anderson - Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities

In addition, the letter will be sent to various agencies such as United Way Community Based Seniors Sector Leadership Council and the BC Rural Health Coalition. As an appointed member of the CBSS Leadership Council, I am able to present our Northeast issues on a provincial level.

Together, we will make a difference.

Yours truly,
Margaret Little
SONS – Save Our Northern Seniors

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Dear Ministers

On behalf of SONS – Save Our Northern Seniors, I am inviting you **to plan a visit to Peace River North** and to learn for yourselves the issues that face our communities. SONS has always worked with all groups, including Northern Health, Peace River Regional District and the City of Fort St. John. Our FSJ Seniors’ Task Force is one way that we share information and provide support to those in our community who are making a difference. We also recognize achievements gained by the dedicated and determined people of the area as well as to share our concerns for the future.

Healthcare is very important to the people of the Northeast. We have compiled our concerns which overlap the Ministries. For our community, we are seeking major steps instead of mini-steps. Our Seniors cannot afford to wait for another 5 years before action is taken. Having

spent the last month with a loved one at our Fort St. John Hospital, **I can personally speak about the dedication of Staff despite the shortages.**

SONS – Save Our Seniors achieved official status on June 5, 2005. Our community advocates for our Seniors in the Peace area as well as the Northeast when necessary. The Fort St. John Peace Lutheran Care Home was built with thanks to the people of the day who had a vision for their loved ones. It opened in 1977. The Fort St. John Hospital and Peace Villa were opened in 2012. Heritage 1 was opened in 2002 and Heritage 2 – Assisted Living in 2003. This month, there are over 50 people on the list for Peace Villa. **Time for the Third House at Peace Villa.**

In the late 1990's, people were sent away from their community to stay in other facilities. Today, they stay in hospital until there is a place which puts strain on the hospital system especially in terms of staffing. It was heartbreaking then and now it is **heartbreaking to see people in the hospital awaiting their final days.**

If Government's mandate is to keep people in their communities, then there must be **financing for local and regional governments** to ensure facilities and supports are put in place. We recognize that Health and Senior care is an issue across the province but this needs to be a top priority. In addition, this is not the time to download costs on Municipalities and Regional Districts. **This is not the time to cut Health budgets. Data from the past demonstrates our local needs and we would like the opportunity to share our local solutions.**

SONS Initial Concerns For 2025:

Facilities And Information:

Increasing numbers waiting for placement is reaching a critical high. Today, January 2025, there are 50 people in the Peace waiting for a place to go. **We have long advocated for the Third House at Peace Villa. Time to say yes and to make it happen.**

We are fortunate that our community has very progressive citizens and support networks. The Fort St. John Housing Committee is working with many agencies to provide facilities for our loved ones. The Housing Needs Report clearly demonstrates the need for more housing and adequate funding in a timely manner.

Currently, the City of Fort St. John and the Fort St. John Association for Community Living are working on a potential downtown housing project next to Harlequin City Centre for Seniors which is already in progress.

Retention And Recruitment Of Staff At All Levels And Facilities:

Educational opportunities for Staff at all levels is critical to attract and retain Staff. Enabling programmes provided by Northern Lights College and UNBC have been a tremendous asset to our community. There are people in our community who wish to stay in the Northeast and having these opportunities available is important.

Staffing levels must be increased and incentives for people to come to the Peace. We appreciate the importance of Agency Nurses and the Northern Health Travel Nurses which helps to provide that important care for our loved ones. Incentives for coming to the Peace would benefit the entire system by ensuring that we have more than adequate staffing in our facilities. All closures of ERs have been caused by a shortage of Staff.

The recent Physician Assistants' pilot project in Saanich and other initiatives are examples of improving the Staffing shortages.

Transportation:

HandyDART services with increased hours are needed. Fort St. John has buses with drop-down steps which is very useful, but again, more time for the HandyDART. It appears that there will be a service review conducted by Translink and we look for increased hours not at the expense of the City.

The Northern Health Bus with the latest enhanced connections have helped many people but again, scheduling is an issue. Depending on the scheduling of Specialist appointments, patients have often had to stay over extra days which is an added expense.

Ambulance Services And Paramedics:

In the North, the overtime ban instituted by the BC Emergency Health services makes it almost impossible for Paramedics to provide the ambulance services without additional arrangements made for overtime work. Staffing levels are also at a critical level.

Travel For Medical Appointments And Out Of Province Referrals:

When referred to larger centres for medical appointments province is very expensive. We want to see the **continuation of the reciprocal arrangement** that we had with Alberta so that our loved ones can travel three hours to Grande Prairie or 8 hours to Edmonton. Yes, it is only 7 hours to Prince George but in the winter time!!! This would also save money for the future. Costs for out of the area medical travel and lodging is becoming more difficult for people in our community. To help alleviate the cost to the patients, a reciprocal arrangement with Alberta would benefit many people waiting for treatment.

Fee Structure For Long Term Care, Home Support/Nursing:

It is time to examine the fee structure for Long Term Care as those on the higher end of the scale are paying up to \$4000 per month which is steadily increasing. People don't mind paying but universal care costs to the Resident is becoming a major factor.

From personal experience in 2012, we would have had to pay close to \$100 per visit by Home Support. Due to lack of staffing we usually had a Staff member for up to one hour per day. We recognize that this type of support is important but it far less costly than a stay in the hospital or facility.

Supports:

Keeping people in their own homes is very important but we must have the support system such as transportation, medical care such as Home Support & Nursing, increased funding for Better At Home.

People in rural areas wish to remain in their community but need a system of support such as enhanced Better At Home services.

SAFER – Shelter Aide for Elderly Renters:

The amount given for those who need support does not allow for increased rental rates and many of our Seniors are using the Food Banks and in danger of losing their homes. Time to increase SAFER.

Volunteers:

We would suggest that there be incentives for those who volunteer their services making a difference for others. Possible income credits for volunteering could be a solution. Volunteering is not cheap!

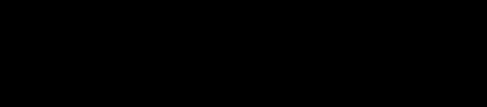
Food And Nutrition:

The Peace is well-known for their agricultural products and food. A pilot project for utilizing our own produce would provide opportunities for locally grown produce. Having home-grown food would mean an increase in food budgets for our facilities and there would not be so much wasted food.

It is to be noted that the Peace contributes to the provincial economy through our natural resources such as gas, oil, hydro, forestry products, and agricultural products. In summary, our issues revolve around funding for facilities, recruitment and retention, and transportation.

We look forward to your visit to the Peace.

Yours truly,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Margaret Little.

Margaret Little, President SONS – Save Our Northern Seniors
Cell/Text: 250-261-1071