

Vancouver seniors staying connected at Barclay Manor

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Ida, who is 90, Evelyn, who is 86, chat outside Barclay Manor after a Happy Hookers knitting circle.

As a young woman growing up in London, England, Ida could never understand why the young women from Ireland and Wales complained about being homesick. London was such a vibrant, busy city, how could anyone want to live anywhere else?

But decades later, when Idas husband died and she moved to Vancouver from Kelowna to be closer to her daughter, Ida suddenly understood how those young Irish women had felt. My first years here, I was nearly demented, Ida says, sitting at a table at Barclay Manor with other members of the Happy Hookers knitting group.

Ida loved Vancouver as a city but it was an unwelcoming place as a home. This has saved my life coming here, says the energetic 90-year-old.

Living happily on her own, Ida craved social interaction, whether it was just saying Lovely day to someone she passed on the street to being able to make new friends. A retired buyer for The

Bay, shed started to work when most women stayed at home her husband was so upset he didnt talk to her for the first three weeks and she didnt want to sit still just because she didnt have a job to go to. She could afford to go to Mexico twice a year to escape the wet winter cold, but what about breaking the social ice in what can be perceived as a cold city?

She found exactly what she needed at Barclay Manor, a gracious Victorian home owned by Vancouver Parks and leased to the [West End Seniors Network](#) for \$1 a year. No one lives at Barclay Manor but it is home-away-from-home for hundreds of people who take advantage of its social programs, everything from the knitting group to Spanish classes to guest lectures to drop-in activities for people who are older than 55

The programming is as varied as the membership, says Eric Kowalski, the WESNs executive director. Seniors are like all of us theres a huge variety, he says. The WESNs goal is to keep them socially connected as a way of combatting the mental and physical risks of being isolated.

Loneliness is worse than any illness, Ida says. Human interaction is the most important thing and it doesnt cost anything.

Evelyn, whos 86, has brought her knitting needles to the Friday morning club but shes soon on her way to volunteer at Clothes and Collectibles, a thrift store at Denman Place Mall operated by WESN to raise money for its programs. (The Happy Hookers sell their handcrafted items there, too.) Her husband is a lawn bowler who sits on the executive of his club so they both are very active.

Ive never seen so many women with so many talents, Eveylyn says, referring to the women who are happily chatting with each other as their knitting needles clack away.

Become a WESN volunteer

West End Seniors Network welcomes more of everything more members, more programming ideas, more volunteers. It wants to expand its volunteer driving program, for instance, and at Kays Place, where senior volunteers provide information and referral services on a drop-in basis, every talent or skill can be put to work.

To find out more about how to get involved as a participant or volunteer, drop by Barclay Manor at 1447 Barclay Street weekdays from 10 to 4:30pm or call 604-669-5051, or visit [WESN.ca](#)

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- See more at: <http://www.wevancouver.com/lifestyle/vancouver-seniors-staying-connected-at-barclay-manor-1.880539#sthash.XWY3DiN.dpuf>