NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

INDEPENDENT LONG-TERM CARE COUNCILS ASSOCIATION OF BC

Written by Lisa Dawson

Have you ever had a friend or family member enter long-term care? Can you imagine a future where you, your partner, or a loved one may need that level of support?

If so, this story matters to you.

This is the story of why the voices of residents and those closest to them matter in long-term care communities and how using those voices can improve quality of life.

Why should you concern yourself with long-term care now?

Because the facts tell us we must.

In British Columbia, there are approximately 29,200 publicly funded long-term care beds, and demand already far exceeds supply. Projections indicate a need for 16,000 additional beds by 2036. At the same time, the largest population surge of seniors (65+) is happening now and will peak between 2030 and 2036, when one in three British Columbians will be a senior.

Despite this growth, long-term care infrastructure and funding models have not kept pace. Those who live with the experience of long-term care every day — residents and their families — have valuable insight. Their voices matter.

THE ROLE OF FAMILY COUNCILS

Family Councils emerged when groups of people closest to residents began coming together to discuss concerns, share ideas, and advocate for improvements in their own care homes. Advocacy is not confrontation. It is relationship-building, based on curiosity, collaboration, and constructive dialogue with decision-makers.

Effective Family Councils work alongside receptive management to ensure voices are heard and acted upon. Even within systemic limitations, this partnership has led to tangible improvements in residents' quality of life. Examples include library and garden revitalization, improved name tags and education around care team roles, and improved food and dining experience through regular food advisory committee meetings.

A CAREGIVER'S PERSPECTIVE

For many of us caregivers, the family council is our community within the long-term care home that provides peer support, education and conversation. Through participation in a local care home council (Family Council), involvement with a regional association (Vancouver Coastal Association of Family Councils), and contribution at the Independent Long-Term Care Councils Association of BC (ILTCCABC), long-term care has a pathway for elevating its voices to our Ministry of Health.

When we choose to engage — respectfully, persistently, and collectively — continuous quality improvement can happen.

Long-term care is evolving. Residents are entering later in life, often with multiple health challenges, neurocognitive disorders, diverse languages, and cultural backgrounds. The transition into care is profound, bringing loss and uncertainty for residents and families alike. While we may not choose this chapter, we can influence how it is lived.

Family Councils provide peer support, a forum to raise concerns, celebrate successes, and contribute to policy and practice that shape daily life in care homes.

"Nothing about us without us" captures the heart of this work. Frailty does not erase a person's right to be heard, to belong, or to influence decisions that affect their life.

YOUR CALL TO ACTION — BEFORE YOU NEED IT.

You do not need to be in crisis to get involved. In fact, the best time to learn about long-term care is before you need it — before decisions are rushed, emotions are high, and options feel limited. Help shape a system that you — or someone you love — may rely on in the future.

To learn more about long-term care, how to start or participate in a Family Council, or how to get involved locally, connect with your regional association:

Because when the time comes, you will be glad you did not wait.

Learn more about Independent Long-Term Care Councils Association of BC:
Email: iltccabc@gmail.com
Visit: www.iltccabc.ca

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person in their life. The novel recounts the internment of Japanese-Canadians along British Columbia's west coast in early 1942 as the Second World War rages on. The story is told through the eyes of best friends and school mates, Esther Shulman and Michiko Suzuki. The tension in their friendship is tested against a backdrop of increasing hostility toward the Japanese Canadian community. Author Ellen Schwartz is well-known for her children's stories about social justice issues. Her novel is enhanced with pen and ink illustrations by Mariko Andro, a Vancouver printmaker originally from Japan.

As the story unfolds, Michiko and her family are sent to an internment camp in Kaslo, BC. Esther bears witness to Michiko's empty desk at school and her family's vacated house and abandoned grocery store. Esther's grandmother notices her distress and helps her to talk about it so she can make amends with Michiko. Another plot thread spotlights the fear Esther's parents endure when their relatives in Germany plan an escape to Switzerland — and succeed.

On a separate note connected to Canada's internment of Japanese Canadians, a monument wall is under construction in Victoria, BC to permanently honour the 22,000 Japanese Canadians uprooted from their homes in 1942, and stripped of all properties and possessions. Meticulous research has gone into compiling the database of the names to be engraved onto the wall.

More information about the project is available at - https://jclegacies.com/programs/monument/.

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