Successful Municipal Practices:
Responding to New Challenges

Tools for Change

BETTER MUNICIPAL BUSINESS PRACTICES:
Building an Age Friendly Community
The Town of Gladstone

The Town of Gladstone is a small rural community located 150 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg and known by many travelers for its "Happy Rock" roadside attraction. The council of the Town of Gladstone continually strives to build a community that provides a great place to live for all of its more than 800 residents.

Gladstone recognized that seniors were one its greatest assets – and worked to transform the Town into an Age Friendly Community.

In recent years, Gladstone, like many small municipalities, has experienced a decline in population, and the closure of several major businesses. Council has been challenged to continue to improve services and infrastructure, while maintaining low taxes for ratepayers.

In 2007, Gladstone's council began looking for solutions to rebuild their community. Council had learned about the Manitoba Age Friendly Initiative program, designed to help communities to support seniors in living healthy, active and independent lives, from the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. Council believed that, with assistance from the program, Gladstone, with a health centre, hospital, nursing home, three apartment complexes for seniors and a Senior Centre, had the potential to become an attractive community for retirees. Council also believed that improving existing and offering new services to seniors would make Gladstone a very appealing destination.

In 2008, Gladstone was accepted as one of first ten communities in Manitoba to participate in Manitoba's Age Friendly Initiative program and to be designated an Age Friendly Community. The Mayor along with the Town's Senior Support Program coordinator and two other community members attended a two-day workshop hosted by the Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat. At the workshop, attendees undertook an assessment of programs and services available to seniors and started to consider changes that would transform Gladstone into a more Age Friendly Community.

The Town and community stakeholders identified strengths and weaknesses in existing programs and ways to create new programs to enhance community supports for seniors.

After the workshop, a committee was formed with community stakeholders that included representatives from the Town, Regional Health Authority, school, legion, senior centre, golf course and Gladstone NorthWest Handi-Transit committee. The committee's task was to identify strengths and weaknesses within existing programs and establish goals to create new programs and enhance community supports for seniors.

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Since 2008, significant changes have taken place within the community. Upgrades have been made to the Senior Centre, using grants from the federal government through the New Horizon for Seniors Program and from Manitoba Community Services. Improvements to the centre include improvements to the outside wheelchair ramp, widening interior doors, and wheelchair accessible washrooms.

Also, with funding from the New Horizon for Seniors Program, the Centre purchased six laptop computers to provide seniors with free internet services and free training in computer programs for beginners and advanced users. To date, 64 seniors have participated in this hugely successful program. The Town has also purchased Wii videogame consoles, games, and televisions for senior's apartments and the Centre to promote physical activity and a healthy lifestyle. Senior Centre membership has increased from about 38 members to over 146 members now.

Age Friendly initiatives have improved the quality of life for residents of all ages. Residents are now more optimistic than ever about the future of their community.

The Town has also created a number of new programs for seniors including:
- The "Safari for Seniors" Program – offers seniors five out-of-town trips per year as well as free transportation within the Town one day per week. The Program is operated by the Gladstone Handi-Transit Committee, with funding from the Portage Plains United Way.
- Tenant Companion Program – provides for a worker to visit a seniors' apartment complex for eighteen hours per week to assist with daily tasks.
- Local Newsletter – provides information on activities for seniors.

In addition, several intergenerational activities to foster connections between seniors, children, and youth have been created. Examples include youth visits to seniors in their homes, family dances, and a program for Grade 5 Students called "Across the Generations: Accept, Respect and Protect One Another" designed to enhance intergenerational relationships, encourage empathy and prevent elder abuse.

For more information on better municipal business practices, Successful Municipal Practices, and the Tools for Change program, see the Association of Manitoba Municipalities' website, at

Gladstone's Age Friendly Community program has been a success since it began in 2008. Residents are now optimistic about the future of their town, and the community is starting to experience economic growth and development. The completion of two new apartment buildings has also benefited seniors by helping to remedy a housing shortage that had forced some seniors to leave Gladstone to seek affordable housing.

The Town of Gladstone is proud of its success in improving the quality of life for citizens of all ages and would encourage any municipality, large or small, to become an Age Friendly Community. More information on the Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat's Age Friendly Manitoba Initiative is available at http://www.gov.mb.ca/shas/agefriendly/index.html.

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