

"WORKING TO PLACE OLDER PERSONS' CONCERN ON THE BELIZE NATIONAL AGENDA"

The National Council on Ageing Quarterly Newsletter



Have you seen
this Senior
Steps thing?

You should
check it out
on page 7

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From the Editor

This edition of the NCA Newsletter covers 2 quarters and closes with our last activates of 2010.

The Country Poverty Assessment (CPA) was also completed and information emerging from this report has indicated that 34% of older persons in Belize live in poverty and so this has highlighted the need for improved financial security for older persons.

The NCA collaborated with HelpAge International in August who, as part of a Caribbean Regional Project, visited to discuss the possibility of conducting a feasibility study that would consider the introduction of a Universal Pension as a means of providing social protection in old age.

The need for greater social protection was highlighted in the results of the 2010 Situation Analysis completed by the NCA. Interviewers across the country collected data from over four hundred older persons. It was sobering to note that 63.6% of older persons surveyed do not receive a pension or benefit and 84.3% do not receive employment income. It is not surprising that 65.2% of the respondents defined themselves as poor.

The Situational Analysis also brought to head the need for family support and community inclusion of older persons. Many of the respondents are caregivers for family members; there are no programs or resources available to support these older persons. There are also gaps when it comes to medical care and coverage.

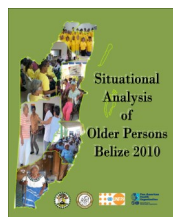
If you are interested in receiving more data concerning the Situational Analysis contact the National Council on Ageing.

Ix-Chel Poot

Programme Officer



*Ix-Chel Poot
Editor*



Senior Steppers Step Out

The Senior Steps members in Belmopan came together under the leadership of Mr. Paul McCord and decided to participate in the Independence Day Celebrations in Belmopan. The Senior Steppers teamed up with VOICE members and designed the float. The colors were red, white, blue and yellow. From conception to completion the float took approximately six weeks; the older persons met in groups and made all the decorations

The senior steps program began in June 2010 and membership has continued to grow over the past 6 months. At weekly meetings the members continually expressed the desire to be more involved in their community and as the September Celebrations began to approach they made a decision to participate in the national celebrations.



Senior Steps Float Committee

Under the leadership of Mr. Paul McCord, who is a member of VOICE, Senior Steps and HelpAge Belmopan, the members organized themselves and preparing to enter into the Belmopan float competition. They picked traditional colors red, white and blue adding yellow, as an accent a symbol of their golden years. The older persons did not seek external funding for their float but pooled together their resources and donated materials, time and effort to make their vision a reality. They were meetings everyday for two weeks leading up to the parade where the ladies met to sew rosettes and ruffles. The men built benches and ensured safe seating for all the senior steppers.

On the 21st of September the group assembled at 6:30 in the morning to put on the finishing touches on the float and see it off to

its position in the parade. The Senior Steppers were dressed in their orange t-shirts and black pants and while all the moods were bright and sunny shortly after the parade moved off the rain came down. The day's showers did not affect the senior steppers who still braved the pavement and danced the 2 ½ mile parade route.



Senior Steps Float

As the parade came to a close the impression the older people left on the Belmopan community was undeniable. They were seen as members of the community who still have much to offer and who want inclusion in activities.



Senior Steppers dancing around the Belmopan Ring Road on September 21

Alzheimer's Disease: The Early Stage by Christy Kessens

In the early stage of Alzheimer's disease, signs and symptoms are often unnoticed, over-looked, or seen as part of growing older. As we age all of us will experience a change in memory. We may forget an appointment, not remember the day of the week, or misplace our keys. So how do you know if you or a loved one has Alzheimer's disease? People in the early stage of Alzheimer's may forget recently learned information, not be able to recall simple words, become lost in familiar areas, and

misplace items in unusual places. They can have trouble with numbers, keeping track of time, and experience changes in their thinking. If you or someone you know has these signs, it is important to visit with a doctor.

A person in the early stage of Alzheimer's disease will notice that they are changing. They can become angry, embarrassed, and scared. They may withdraw from activities they normally took part in and experience a change in their mood. Be patient. Knowing that something is wrong can be very scary. Allow your loved one to do as much as they can. Give them time to rest, write reminder notes if needed, and encourage them to take part in familiar activities to avoid loneliness.

Supporting a person with Alzheimer's disease can be challenging. You will witness changes in their personality and behavior. You may have to take on added responsibilities. But there are things you can do to make life easier for you and the person you are helping. Educating yourself about the disease will allow you to better understand the behaviors your loved one is experiencing. Accept the changes you witness and manage your own stress level. Most importantly, give yourself credit for doing the best that you can.

Alzheimer's is nothing to be ashamed of. It is a disease that affects millions of people worldwide. As with any illness, having the support of those around you is so important. Go ahead and talk with your family, friends, coworkers, and those at church. Allowing others to help can give you the strength needed to provide care for your loved one. Working as a team, your family and friends will help guide you and your loved one through this disease.

If you would like to contact Christy Kessens for additional information contact the NCA: 822-1546

Beans a Brain Food

Beans are a part of the legume family which also includes peas and lentils.

Legumes are typically low in fat, contain no cholesterol, and are high in folate, potassium, iron and magnesium. They also contain beneficial fats and soluble and insoluble fiber. A good source of protein, legumes can be a healthy substitute for meat, which has more fat and cholesterol.

Beans are often an “under-recognized” and “economical” food source that boosts brain health and function. They also stabilize glucose (blood sugar) levels. The brain is dependent on glucose for fuel and since it can’t store the glucose, it relies on a steady stream of energy – which beans can provide. Bean color is also important, generally speaking darker color beans such as red and black beans have stronger antioxidant properties that contribute to heart health.

Perhaps one problem with eating beans is the intestinal gas which they seem to create. These can be tackled in two possible ways. Firstly, beans can be cooked with spices and herbs, for example cumin, garlic, fennel seeds, rosemary, lemongrass, coriander and turmeric.

Secondly, one could soak the beans for 12 to 15 hours before cooking. The soaking water should then be poured away, the beans rinsed and new water be added for cooking. This process helps to remove or reduce the compounds in beans which cause the intestinal gas.

The recommended serving for beans is ½ cup of cooked beans every day.



Hurricane Richard - The Recovery

The 2010 Hurricane season has been an active one and after two hurricane scares Belize was hit by Hurricane Richard on October 24, 2010. The category one hurricane hit central Belize and the damage it caused left many Belizeans shaken; as they recognized the power of a hurricane. In Belmopan the damage was visible; houses had lost roofing and trees and power lines were down.

In Hattieville the Golden Haven Rest home sustained major damages to its roof and experienced flooding; residents had to be relocated until repairs were completed. In the weeks and months that have followed the NCA has tried to stay abreast of the developments in the clean up and recovery of older persons in the affected areas. The NCA received a container of relief supplies: blankets, pajamas, cups, bowls, bed shields and food trays through NEMO. Through coordination with our partners in Belize City and Toldeo we were able to distribute these supplies to older persons in the affected areas.

The road to recovery is not an easy one; many older persons affected by the storm find themselves waiting for help as they are financially or physically unable to perform their own repairs.

International Day of Older Persons

October 1st is observed as International Day of Older Persons; a day set aside to acknowledge the presence of older persons in your society and their contributions it is also a day of celebration. This year the National Council on Ageing host-



Senior Steppers getting busy on the dance floor

ed a one day celebration for the Senior Steps groups at the Hazel Hutchinson Centre in Belmopan in honor of October 1st.

The Belmopan Senior Steppers decorated the center and welcomed the members from Corozal. Invited guests included the U.S. Ambassador Vinai Thummalapally and Belmopan's Mayor Simeon Lopez. Mayor Lopez was also present on official business as he presented a certificate of recognition to the Belmopan Senior Steps group for their participation in the 2010 September Celebrations Parade. The day's program was facilitated by Mrs. Karen Chaleki who directed the dancing sessions and got everyone up and moving.

The seniors were led through Square Dancing steps, Basics for Salsa and Ambassador Thummalapally and Mayor Lopez joined in the Macarena. The day ended on a high note when the seniors danced to the traditional September Celebration songs. As they left the Corozal group and Belmopan group shared well wishes



*U.S. Ambassador
Vinai Thummalapally
and Belmopan's
Mayor Simeon Lopez*



Senior Steps Belmopan First Place in float competition

and pledged to celebrate next year.

Universal Pensions: The Case of Belize Part 1

Financial security is a much debated issue whenever we discuss ageing and as our older population increases every year it becomes an even greater area of concern. It is undeniable that certain factors need to be in place in order to maintain a certain quality of life as we age chief among them the ability to access an income that meets their basic needs. However, like many developing countries, Belize is faced with the reality that a large part of its work force did not have access to a pension scheme or retirement planning, so this translates into a generation of older persons who were unprepared to meet the financial constraints that come with ageing.



The *Universal Pension Consultation Meeting*

Country Poverty Assessment (CPA) and the NCA's Situational Analysis reveal the difficulty older persons face in meeting the cost of living. Some older persons must choose between purchasing medication and purchasing food on a monthly basis. There are two facets through which older persons can access financial support if they do not receive a pension; Social Assistance (\$40 monthly) and the Non-Contributory Pension (\$100 monthly). Both schemes address poverty alleviation and are accessible only to those older persons who meet specific criteria.

It is undeniable that there is the need for providing financial security for older persons in Belize that is planned and sustainable. Recognizing that, as the population grows, the need for social protection in old age becomes

even more important, HelpAge International selected Belize as one of the countries in which to conduct a feasibility study to assess the introduction of a Universal Pension Scheme. Ms. Lindy Jeffery, the NCA's Executive Director, held meetings with older persons across the country sensitizing them on what the Universal Pension Scheme would mean to Belize. The process cumulated with a National Consultation Forum held on August 4, 2010 at the Guadalupe Mercy Center in Belize City.

Mr. Jeffery James, Regional Caribbean Director for HelpAge International, and Mr. Charles Knox from HelpAge International, London, were present to facilitate the meeting. Whilst in Belize, Mr. Knox and Mr. James met with many government representatives, to discuss the issue and to obtain statistical information from the Statistical Institute of Belize. All the information collected is currently being analysed and so we await the results in



Mr. Charles Knox, HelpAge International London

the form of a feasibility study for a Universal Pension Scheme in Belize. If you have any questions about this matter please contact the National Council on Ageing.

Older Person Outreach

During the past few months the NCA has enhanced its working relationship with the Ministry of Health through the Health Education Team (HECOPAB). Mrs. Rose Anderson the HECOPAB Coordinator for the Belmopan area, along with Nurse Marion Casey, informed the

NCA of their concern for Mrs. Rosaura Rivera, an older woman of 105 living in Armenia Village.

During one of their community visits they discovered that Mrs. Rivera's back appeared to have welts and bruises, and upon further investigation it was revealed that she was sleeping on a rope mattress which caused the



Mrs. Rosaura Rivera



Mrs. Rivera's bed with string mattress

markings on her back. Mrs. Anderson and Nurse Casey reached out to the NCA for help in locating a suitable mattress for Mrs.

Rivera and through coordination with HelpAge Belmopan and Mr. Evan Dakers; HelpAge donated a mattress to Mrs. Rivera. Mrs. Rivera's case highlights the need for support and care for older persons in rural communities who cannot access services or organizations based in towns and cities.

Belmopan International Women's Group makes Christmas Donation



BIWG installing floor covering

The Belmopan International Women's Group (BIWG) contacted the NCA in November asking for information about older persons who needed support as they wanted to help during the Christmas Season.

The NCA identified Mrs. Elisa Barrientos aged 98 years, who is blind and lives in a one room cement home with her

grandson in the San Martin area of Belmopan. Her little home was in need of new floor covering and her beds were in need of new mattresses. The floor covering was torn and raised in some areas creating a falling hazard for Mrs. Barrientos.

The BIWG ladies donated two mattresses to Mrs. Barrientos and, with the help of some of the husbands, the floor covering was put down and some basic cleaning undertaken in time for the Christmas.

Mrs. Barrientos was also provided with a new small gas tank which would provide a cooking facility in the house.

Since making this contact with Mrs. Barrientos the ladies at BIWG are now providing this family with a food basket every month. The NCA is happy to work with the BIWG ladies and would like to extend special thanks to Mrs. Amanda Brown and Mrs. Jessie Valle, who coordinated this activity.

Senior Steps Ends With A Bang

The Senior Steps pilot project came to an end in November 2010 and to celebrate the success of the program Minister Pablo Marin and the Ministry of Health organized a Christmas Party for the Senior Steppers on the 10th December, 2010 in Corozal Town.

Both groups were eager to show off their dancing steps and each club created a routine to perform at the party.



Senior Steppers gathered in the Corozal Convention Center

with bright smiles and eager faces as we headed to Corozal. The Corozal Civic Center had been decorated by Mrs. Ruby Magana, Ministry of Health, and the Corozal Senior Steppers had provided breakfast for the Belmopan group. After the opening ceremony the dancers came together and were lead through their warm up routine by Mr. Leroy Morgan. The Corozal group was the first to show off their dance steps and performed a routine coordinated by Mr. William Marin, the Corozal dance instructor.



May I have this dance?

Mrs. Karen Chaleki led everyone in practicing a few basic dancing steps. The Belmopan group then showed off their square dancing steps.

Lunch was served and, after the plates were cleared, Minister Marin and Ms. Jeffery presented the dancers with certificates of participation and a Senior Steps engraved mug.



Min. Marin and Ms. Lindy presenting tokens

As the day came to an end all the dancers made it known that they wanted this program to continue in the new year. Both the Ministry of Health and the NCA are committed to seeing this project continue.

The benefits of the Senior Steps Program have been visible, not only in the increased mobility of participants but also through health checks that have indicated an improvement in the control of blood pressure, glucose and weight.

The Belmopan club hit the road at 7 am



Senior Steppers: Belmopan and Corozal Group at December 10th Party



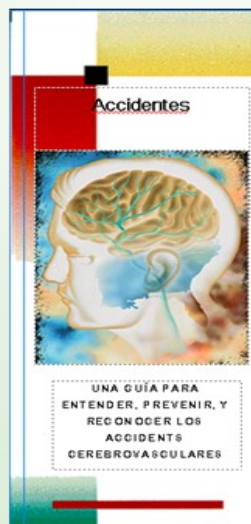
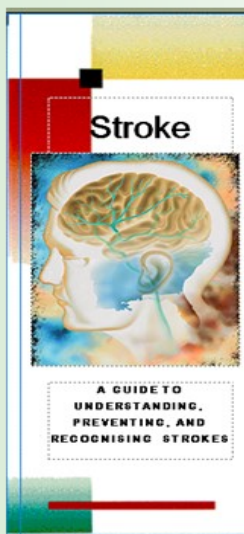
Senior Step Float 21st September 2010



Senior Steps Party



Senior Steps Party December 10, 2010



**Available at the NCA:
Stroke Brochures in English and Spanish**

***Where to find the N.C.A.
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