



Learning & Impacts: Family & Friend Caregiver Programs

2024/25



Land Acknowledgement



Elder Glida Morgan and her daughter Jade from the Tla'amin First Nation, welcoming guests to the United Way BC Project Impact Healthy Aging Showcase in Vancouver.

We recognize the communities in which we work

At United Way BC, we dedicate ourselves to fostering understanding, respect, and an acknowledgment of the rich history of the lands and waterways we traverse. Our mission guides us across vast and diverse territories, each with its unique tapestry of languages, governance systems, traditions, and cultural heritage. The relationship with these lands and waterways has been stewarded by Indigenous communities since time immemorial, long before the establishment of contemporary boundaries, and we humbly recognize that many of these territories remain unceded.

We also acknowledge that our list of Nations is a work in progress, a testament to our ongoing process of improving our learning and understanding. Our commitment is to honor the cultural distinctiveness of each community as we continue to pursue improved and lasting partnerships built on the foundations of respect, humility, and open dialogue.

View the communities in which we work here:

Territorial Acknowledgement

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Looking Back: Reflecting on a Year of Connection, Learning, & Impact

This past year has been one of both deep reflection and meaningful progress for the Family & Friend Caregiver Support (FFCS) Programs across British Columbia (BC). Together, we have continued to support the well-being of caregivers—recognizing their essential role in supporting loved ones and the importance of ensuring they are seen, valued, and supported.

Through our annual co-creation session, we gathered voices from FFCS Programs across the province to share real-world experiences, celebrate successes, and identify where we can grow. We heard stories of resilience and innovation—programs reaching priority populations through culturally safe supports, creating spaces for caregivers to connect, and adapting services to meet evolving needs. We also heard honest reflections on the barriers that remain and the steps we can take together to overcome them.

In 2024/25, more than 2,100 caregivers were supported through FFCS Programs, with tens of thousands of services delivered by committed staff and volunteers. Behind these numbers are human stories from caregivers sharing moments of relief, understanding, and hope for caregivers who often balance immense responsibilities with little recognition. These stories remind us why this work matters, the power of working collaboratively, and the far-reaching impact of our collective efforts.

We know there is still more to do. We are committed to updating tools and resources, strengthening collaboration, and expanding access so that more caregivers can receive the support they deserve.

Our path forward will continue to be shaped by seniors, caregivers, staff, and volunteers—guided by shared learning and fuelled by the strength of our partnerships.

Thank you to the program staff, volunteers, partners, and, most importantly, the caregivers who have trusted us to walk alongside them. Your voices, experiences, and dedication are what drive this work forward. Together, we can continue to amplify our collective impact and ensure that no caregiver feels alone on their journey.

Sincerely,



Bobbi Symes
Director, Healthy Aging

United Way BC

What We Learned: FFCS Co-Creation Session

Background

Facilitating co-creation sessions has become an annual activity for the FFCS Programs. These sessions create a dedicated space for shared reflection, learning, and forward planning. They also align with our Healthy Aging guiding principles, particularly our ongoing commitment to community-driven work and adopting a 'learning systems' approach.

- **Community Development:** Our work is driven by the community and dedicated to serving it. Our programs are grounded in real-world evidence of specific strategies and approaches that have proven to be effective in communities across BC. Ongoing learning from communities enables our work to shift and adapt over time.
- **Learning, Growth & Accountability:** Our programs are supported by a 'learning systems approach'. The main intention with this is to create a safe space where identifying and addressing areas of needed improvement is not seen as a failure or something to hide, but as a learning opportunity. In a learning system, data, evidence, and experience are continuously collected and integrated into practice to support agencies to improve their programming.

Session Overview

In February 2025, all Family and Friend Caregiver Support (FFCS) Programs were invited to participate in a co-creation session facilitated by United Way BC's Healthy Aging team.

Purpose: To connect with FFCS Programs, reflect on progress, learn about on-the-ground implementation, and identify opportunities for support and adaptation moving forward.

Objectives: By the end of the co-creation session, we:

- Learned about real-world successes and challenges implementing FFCS Programming.
- Fostered connection and opportunities for peer exchange and relationship building.
- Reflected on interim program reach, including strategies and barriers in serving priority populations.
- Determined use of the FFCS intake form and program handbook.
- Explored opportunities for program growth and expansion.
- Identified key areas where United Way BC's Healthy Aging team can provide additional support.

Participants

- 20 staff representatives from FFCS Programs.
- 10 Healthy Aging staff and leaders.



Key Learnings

Priority populations are being reached, but barriers remain

Most programs are successfully reaching the priority populations by using effective strategies:

- Offering informal respite to enable caregivers to participate.
- Providing snacks to help attract participants.
- Partnering with organizations already serving priority groups.
- Using inclusive and relatable language (e.g., using “care partner”).

Barriers in reaching priority populations persist:

- Transportation challenges in both urban and rural settings.
- Limited respite options prevent caregiver participation.
- Language diversity among participants and limited multilingual staff.
- Lack of clarity about how Community Connectors support referrals.

Core program elements are largely in place, but should be adjusted

Most programs deliver all core program elements, but some challenges exist:

- One-to-one support: Concerns about appropriateness, complexity, and urgency of mental health referrals.
- Support groups: Waitlists and lack of participant interest.
- Health care system navigation: Turnover in health care staff and lack of trust in the health care system from caregivers.
- Knowledge & skills enhancement: Easier to teach soft skills; hard skills training is often outsourced.

Suggested adjustments to core program elements:

- Some agencies suggested exploring informal respite as a possible core program element. However, this was not a consensus recommendation, as feasibility varies across programs.
- Permit alternative peer support models beyond support groups (e.g., one-to-one peer support, activity-based peer support outings, etc.).

Program tools & resources need updates

The majority (71%) are using the standardized FFCS Intake Form and have read the FFCS Program Handbook, but updates to such tools are needed:

- Intake Form modifications needed (e.g., ethnic origin, income).
- All programs need the latest Intake Form (some using outdated versions).
- Ensure alignment between the Intake Form and Quarterly/Annual Report templates.

Program expansion requires strong onboarding and resource sharing

To set new FFCS Programs up for success:

- Leverage knowledge of pre-existing FFCS Programs.
- Circulate key FFCS resources.
- Connect them with key contacts (e.g., Community Connectors).
- Provide clarity on United Way BC program expectations.

Increased funding should increase access and capacity

With increased funding, programs could:

- Offer additional services (e.g., transportation, informal respite).
- Expand service delivery to additional sites.
- Increase staff positions and staff hours.
- Offer professional development training for support group facilitators.

Supports Needed from United Way BC

Programs shared suggestions for how the Healthy Aging team can continue to strengthen its support for FFCS initiatives.



1. Enhance Collaboration Support

Clarify the purpose of Community Collaboratives, roles of partners involved, and guidance on how to effectively collaborate with partners.



2. Foster Ongoing Community Building

Continue annual co-creation sessions and quarterly COPs, as well as opportunities to support regional connections and collaboration.



3. Program Expectations

Provide clear expectations for program delivery, reporting, and administrative requirements, particularly for new FFCS Programs.



4. Improve Data & Reporting Support

Provide regular data summaries for FFCS reporting, Salesforce troubleshooting, and updates to the Intake Form based on proposed modifications suggested by FFCS Programs and evolving adaptations in the Quarterly and Annual Report template.



5. Build Capacity

Support FFCS new staff onboarding, professional development opportunities, and easier access to CORE resources for staff and volunteers.



6. Support Volunteer Recruitment Efforts

Distribute updated marketing materials and share successful strategies for volunteer engagement.



7. Ensure Stable Funding & Resources

Advocate for ongoing, sustainable funding for core FFCS programming, as well as improved access to formal respite services such as adult day programs and overnight respite.



What's Next

The Healthy Aging team sincerely appreciates the insights and reflections shared by FFCS Programs during the co-creation session. We clearly heard the areas where additional support and clarity can strengthen program delivery and our collective impact. This valuable feedback will directly inform our next steps as we work to improve resources, enhance communication, and better support the important work being done across the province to support family and friend caregivers.

Based on the key learnings from the FFCS session, here is a list of our key next steps:



1. Reframing the FFCS Model Together

The FFCS core program elements and handbook will be refreshed to support shared understanding and evolving needs, while maintaining program flexibility.



2. Updating & Developing Resources

The Intake Form and marketing materials will be updated, and a shared toolkit will be developed with onboarding resources, outreach templates, and program-contributed materials.



3. Evolving the Community of Practice

COPs will shift to a quarterly frequency, with a focus on collaborative problem-solving evolving and addressing evolving challenges faced by programs. Regional COP sessions will be piloted in areas where building collaboration has been challenging.



4. Supporting Collaboration

New tools and strategies will be introduced to strengthen connections across Healthy Aging program streams, including regional contact lists and case studies from the field.



5. Improving CORE

The FFCS section on CORE will be reorganized to improve navigation, highlight new resources, and remove outdated content.



6. Continuing to Learn Together

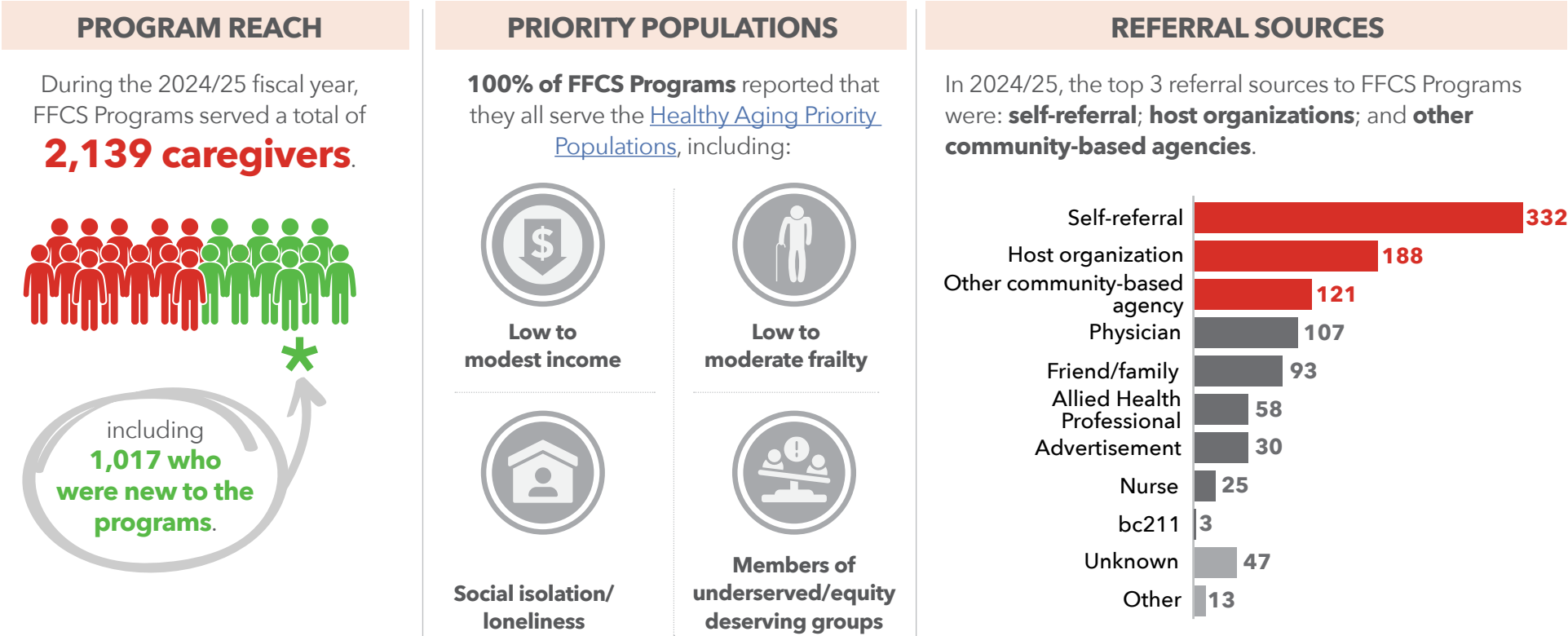
Tools, templates, and resources developed by FFCS Programs across the province will be collected and shared to address emerging needs and highlight innovative practices.

Training opportunities and program stories will also continue to be shared, helping to inspire new approaches and strengthen connections across the network.



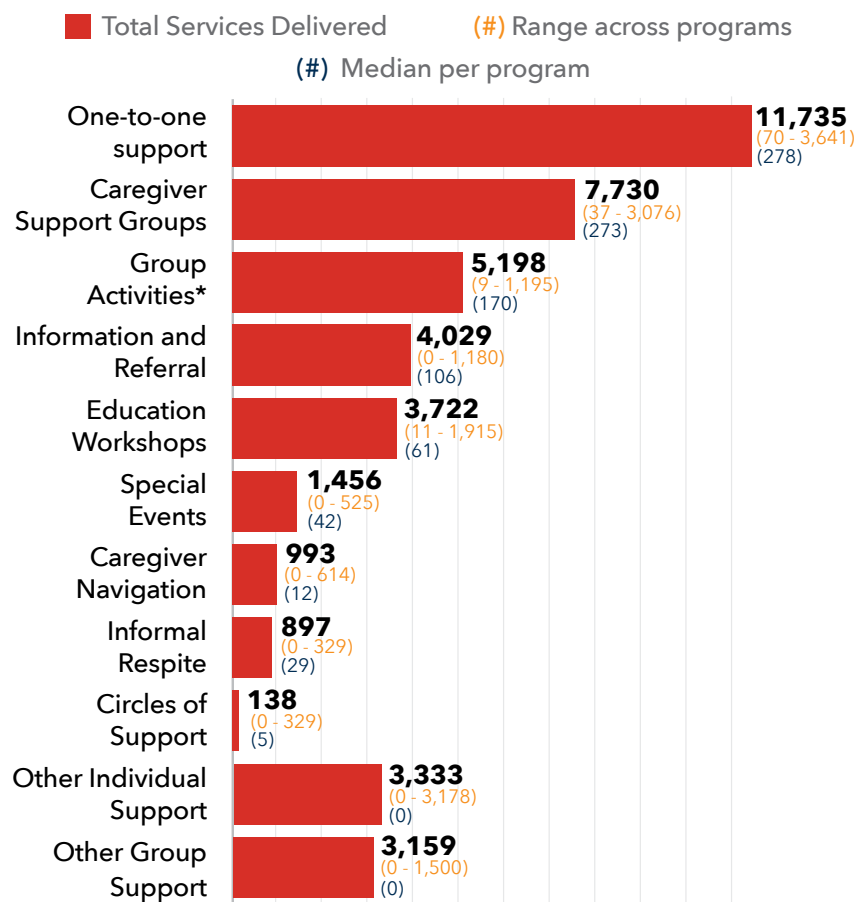
What We Accomplished: Key Findings from FFCS Reporting

This section provides a brief summary of key findings from the 2024/25 FFCS Quarterly and Annual Reports. We encourage programs to reflect on these results, both to recognize our collective achievements and to situate your respective contributions to the broader provincial picture. Together, let's celebrate the meaningful impact we have made for caregivers and their loved ones across BC.



SCOPE OF SERVICE DELIVERY

A total of **42,390** services were delivered to caregivers by FFCS Programs in 2024/25. Most FFCS services provided were: (i) one-to-one support sessions (28%; N=11,735); (ii) caregiver support groups (18%; N=7,730); and (iii) group activities, such as social and self-care events (12%; N=5,196).



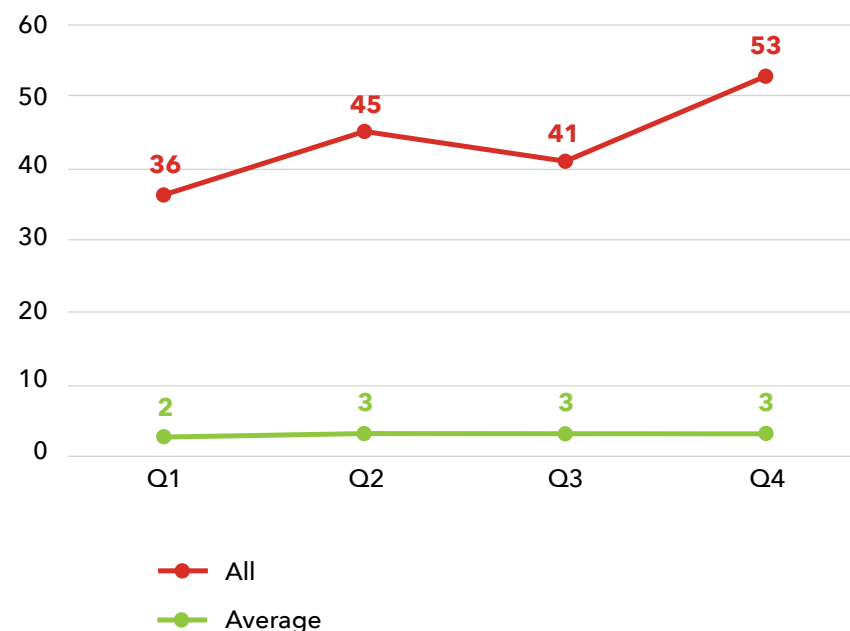
* (e.g., social and self-care events)

TOTAL SERVICES: 42,390

WAITLIST DATA

Over the 2024/25 fiscal year, the total number of caregivers on the waitlist to join a FFCS Program increased steadily, reaching its highest point in Q4. Waitlist numbers varied substantially across programs, ranging from 0 to 24 caregivers. As of March 2025, a total of 53 caregivers were waiting for support—a modest number in absolute terms, but indicative of growing demand. There were an average of 2 to 3 caregivers per program on the waitlist each quarter.

The **waitlist to attend FFCS programs increased steadily** over the 2024/25 fiscal year, although the absolute numbers remained relatively low.



Overall Successes & Challenges

Program Successes

FFCS programs identified key areas of success over the last year, highlighting how programs adapted, expanded, and deepened their impact to better meet the evolving needs of caregivers and their loved ones.



Delivery of flexible, responsive programming

Programs adapted to emerging needs, including grief support, informal respite, and delivering caregiver services in hybrid formats (in-person, phone, online).



Value of one-on-one and group support

Caregivers felt less isolated, more confident in their roles, and better equipped to support their loved ones due to one-to-one support and support groups.



Strong social connection & peer support

Caregiver services helped to create a strong sense of community among participants, both within and beyond the program. Programs fostered connection through regular group meetings, peer mentorship, and culturally safe environments.



Delivery of culturally & linguistically inclusive supports

Programs reached diverse caregivers through culturally safe, first-language services.



Partnerships & Community Collaboration

Collaboration with partner agencies and organizations enhanced referrals, access to resources, and program visibility.



Increased Reach & Awareness

Programs expanded geographically and demographically through marketing, communication, and outreach efforts.



Navigation of Health & Social Systems

Caregiver participants gained confidence accessing health services and benefits, ultimately improving their quality of life.



Grief and Loss Support

Programs addressed caregiver grief with empathy and structure, offering continuity of care after a loss (e.g., dedicated grief support group).



Program Infrastructure & Sustainability

Investments in staff, transportation, and physical spaces improved program delivery and accessibility.



Education & Skill Development

Workshops and training built caregiver capacity in mental health, system navigation, and self-care.



Volunteer and Staff Capacity Building

Programs leveraged training and mentorship to enhance service delivery and peer leadership.

Program Challenges & Solutions

FFCS programs faced a range of on-the-ground challenges in the last year, but implemented practical strategies in response, demonstrating adaptability and resilience across the sector.

Key challenges and how they were overcome:



Volunteer Recruitment & Retention

Programs recruited former staff, tailored roles to volunteer interests, and promoted informal peer support.



Staff Turnover & Capacity Gaps

Staff were supported through onboarding, mentorship, and targeted caregiver-related training.



Limited Program Funding & Waitlists

Programs adjusted service delivery by prioritizing group sessions and managing demand through waitlists.



Transportation Barriers

Programs offered ride support, partnered with transport services, and delivered activities at accessible locations.



Caregivers Unable to Leave the Home

Virtual programming and side-by-side respite models enabled participation from homebound caregivers.



Caregivers Reluctant to Identify or Seek Support

Outreach campaigns, trusted referrals, and non-committal engagement helped caregivers connect.



Cultural & Language Barriers

Programs hired culturally reflective staff and delivered services in caregivers' first languages.



Program Attendance & Engagement

Casual, flexible formats like coffee chats and self-care sessions helped increase participation.



Navigating the Health Care System

One-on-one navigation support and partnerships with health authorities eased system access.



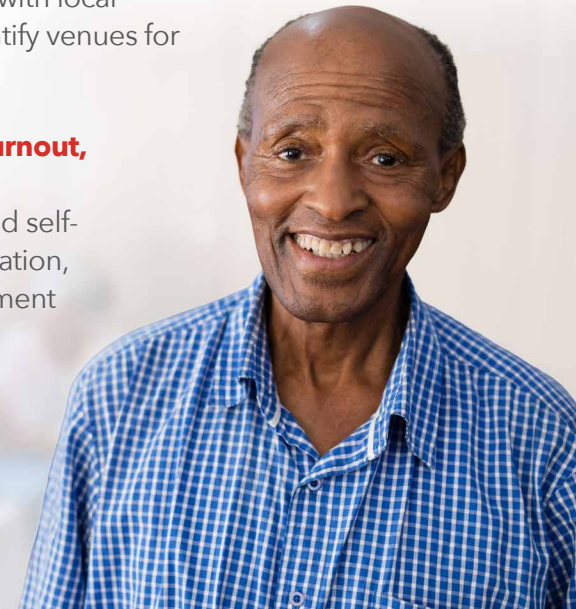
Limited Access to Physical Space

Programs partnered with local organizations to identify venues for programming.



Caregiver Stress, Burnout, and Low Energy

Programs emphasized self-care, emotional validation, and flexible engagement options.



Impact Stories

DARYA'S STORY



NAVIGATING DEMENTIA WITH DIGNITY | BURNABY NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE

Seven years after Hamid's (pseudonym) Alzheimer's diagnosis, his wife Darya (pseudonym) found herself struggling to access the care they needed—complicated by the language barrier they faced as Farsi speakers. That changed when a Farsi-speaking case manager introduced her to Burnaby Neighbourhood House's caregiver support programs. Through the Farsi caregiver support group and the Dementia Friendly Café, Darya

was matched with a compassionate senior peer support volunteer who helped open doors that once felt closed. The volunteer translated their grocery lists, connected Hamid with a friendly visitor, and helped them access Better at Home services. Thanks to a network of culturally responsive care and a dedicated Caregiver Coordinator, Darya and Hamid are no longer navigating this journey alone.

RAJ'S STORY



FROM RELUCTANCE TO RENEWAL | DIVERSECITY COMMUNITY RESOURCES SOCIETY

Once hesitant to join a caregiver program dominated by women, a devoted husband and full-time caregiver named Raj (pseudonym) slowly found his place. He began attending the support group sessions, at first reluctantly and often with his wife. Over time, the support became essential. The program not only lifted his mental health but helped him discover community resources

and the importance of caring for himself. After his mother passed away, grief left him lost. Through DIVERSEcity's culturally and linguistically appropriate support-group sessions and one-on-one counselling—he found comfort, connection, and a renewed sense of self. "I finally have a place to go," he says, reflecting on the strength and community he has built along the way.



RESTORING BALANCE THROUGH CONNECTION | FAMILY SERVICES OF THE NORTH SHORE

Rob had been caring for his wife with dementia around the clock. Tired, losing patience, and feeling hopeless, he joined the Family Services of the North Shore in-person caregiver support group. At first, he quietly listened. But over time, he began to share his story—and found encouragement from others who understood. The group offered him ideas and inspiration to carve out time for himself. Gradually,

Rob transformed from feeling overwhelmed to someone who now takes regular breaks from caregiving and supports fellow caregivers with empathy and strength. His story shows how connection can restore both resilience and hope.



STRENGTH THROUGH SUPPORT | NELSON & DISTRICT HOSPICE SOCIETY

Gail (pseudonym) has been caring for her husband with Parkinson's for 12 years. For the past two years, she's found strength and connection through the caregiver support group in New Denver, offered by West Kootenay Boundary Caregiver Support and the New Denver Hospice Society. Meeting every two weeks, the group has helped Gail feel less isolated, more prepared, and better able to care for

herself. Through shared stories, expert speakers, and a warm, supportive environment, she's found community, confidence, and the reminder that she's not alone on this journey

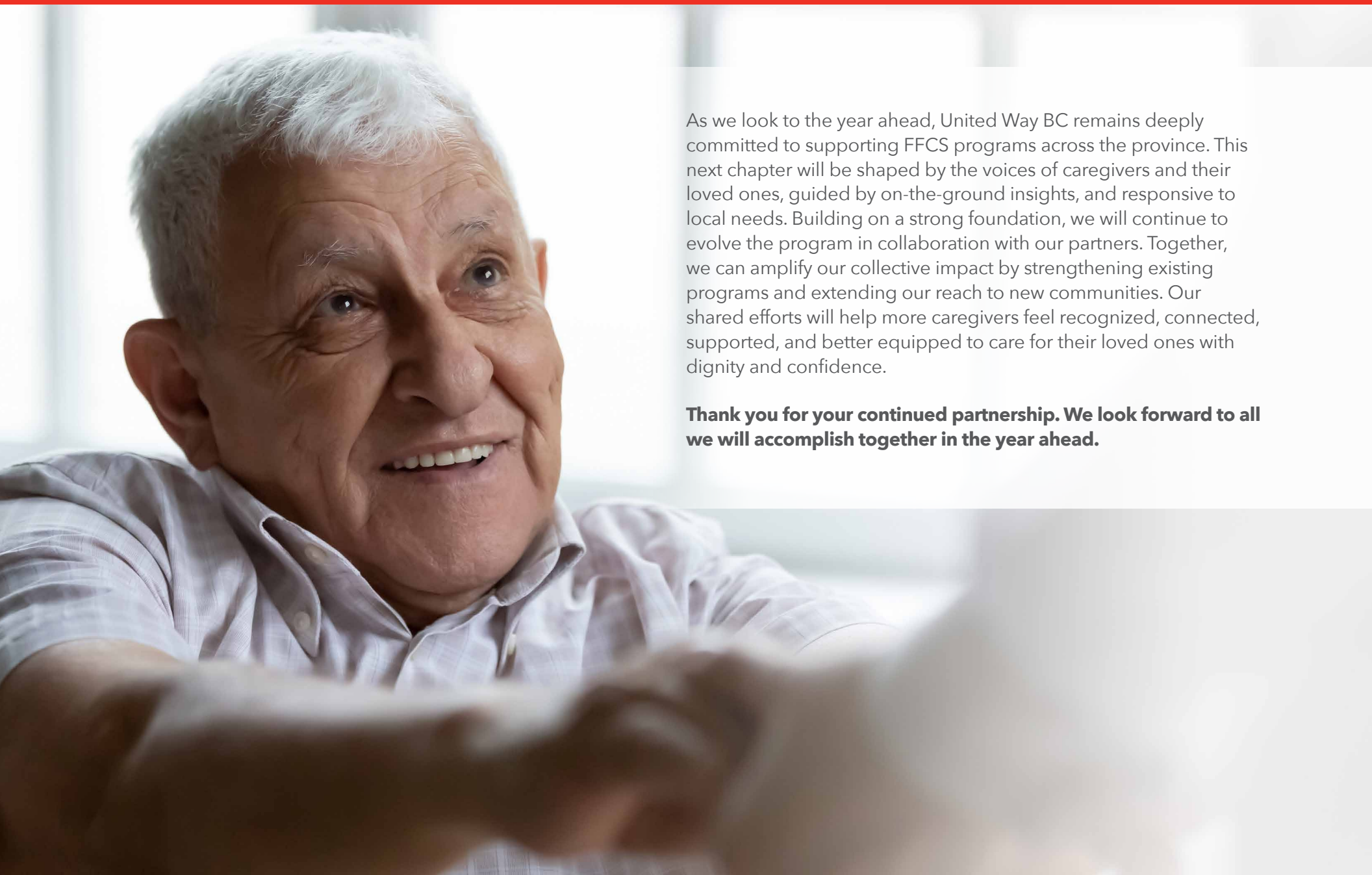


FROM CAREGIVING TO CONNECTION | ONESKY COMMUNITY RESOURCE SOCIETY

Dorothy had long been the rock of her family, but as her husband's illness progressed, caregiving took a toll—leaving her exhausted and isolated. At a caregiver support lunch, she met Jean, whose husband also battled dementia. Their shared experiences created an instant bond. Through OneSky's programs, Dorothy and Jean found not just emotional relief, but genuine friendship.

They supported each other through caregiving, grief, and now, life beyond loss—carpooling to appointments, volunteering, and giving back to their community. What began as shared hardship became a lasting connection. Together, they discovered that while caregiving is hard, it doesn't have to be lonely.

Looking Ahead: Our Path For the Future



As we look to the year ahead, United Way BC remains deeply committed to supporting FFCS programs across the province. This next chapter will be shaped by the voices of caregivers and their loved ones, guided by on-the-ground insights, and responsive to local needs. Building on a strong foundation, we will continue to evolve the program in collaboration with our partners. Together, we can amplify our collective impact by strengthening existing programs and extending our reach to new communities. Our shared efforts will help more caregivers feel recognized, connected, supported, and better equipped to care for their loved ones with dignity and confidence.

Thank you for your continued partnership. We look forward to all we will accomplish together in the year ahead.

Appendices

Detailed Notes from the FFCS Co-Creation Session

Please see detailed notes [here on CORE](#).



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