

Serving Seniors, Adults with Disabilities, and Those Who Care for Them

# Island Senior Resources

fall & winter  
2020

Island Senior Resources is the trade name for Senior Services of Island County



## What Matters Most

**When I was seven years old**, a new family moved into our neighborhood. As their moving van pulled away, we walked down the hill and knocked on their front door to say, "Hello." The grandmother opened the door and said, "Buongiorno!" We didn't speak Italian, so we just smiled; she beckoned us in.

She called out for her daughter-in-law, who joined us, saying, "Buongiorno" with a big smile. We started talking, but she just shook her head. She didn't speak English, but she invited us into her kitchen and poured us lemonade; we handed her the basket of muffins we'd brought. She talked

in Italian and we talked in English; to this day, I am certain neither of us knew what the other was saying, but it was clear we wanted to welcome our new neighbors and she wanted to connect with us.

Soon their son came in from the backyard carrying a soccer ball. He looked at my brother who was about his age, gestured at the ball and out they ran. Soon they were calling out to each other, one in English, the other in Italian, neither understanding the words, but completely understanding their meaning. All through summer, the boys played soccer, and by the time

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school started, they'd taught each other to speak quite a bit of each other's language and formed a bond that is still close after 50 years.

In contrast, the grandmother smiled but chose to remain distant, comfortable with her family but not needing more. Her son said, "She didn't want to move from the old country where her neighbors all spoke Italian. She'd rather be alone than start over." I was only seven, but I learned an important lesson that summer. People either choose to connect, or they remain isolated.

Ten years later, I was living in Italy. My landlady, Mama Andriani, was in her eighties. She spoke no English, yet each month when it was time to pay rent, she invited my roommate and me into her home for espresso. We'd sit and eat sweet cakes she'd made that morning just for us. She'd show us pictures of her family, laugh and point, and tell us stories about each member of her family. We couldn't understand most of her words, but we understood her meaning; she wanted to share her family with us. Her smile said it all.

One August, she walked us out into her garden to harvest cherry tomatoes; they were essential for her slowly simmering sauce on the stove. As we went inside, the heavenly aroma enveloped us. Food is the language, and the table is the family center in an Italian home. It didn't take complicated gestures to communicate that to us. To tell her story, she only had to give us each a spoon to taste her sauce. She could have just taken our rent payment,



*"Forces beyond our control can take away everything you possess except one thing, your freedom to choose how you will respond to the situation."*

— Victor Frankl

said, "Grazie" and closed the door, but instead, she chose to reach out and connect in ways that any language alone could not join us. We became part of her chosen family. It was just like the boys playing soccer; all it took was her desire to get to know us despite the 65 years of life and the two languages that separated us. Her generosity and kindness, and her desire to welcome us, came from the heart, and nothing could have made the sauce richer or the cakes from her kitchen any sweeter.

In times when we are separated from others, we feel our need to connect more strongly. Connection is as fundamental to our survival as food, clothing, water, and shelter. Each morning upon waking, we are given the opportunity to cultivate our own garden of connections. Connection occurs when you choose to connect. In "The Horse Whisperer," Monty Roberts calls it the "sign up," the determiner if an individual horse is willing, interested, and able to join. In that way, humans are quite similar. To feel connection, we have to be *willing, interested, and able to join in*; it's what matters most.

The next summer, as I rocked on the porch swing with my grandmother, I told her the story about how warmly our new neighbors had greeted us so long ago, and how Mama Andriani had welcomed us into her home with food and stories. "It amazed me how easy it was to connect with each other even though we didn't share the same language," I said. She nodded and said, "It's simple; a smile speaks every language," ... and she smiled.

... Robin Bush,  
Outreach Director





*A single thread is easily parted,* but when we weave a social fabric of connections, our community is durable, resilient, and enables all of us to live our best lives, *with* each other. **In the time of COVID-19, one thing that remains unchanged is Island Senior Resource's resolve to be here to help you, your family, and your neighbors.** When we no longer could do things as we had, we designed new ways to connect our community and how you connect with us. As we continue to adapt, connecting will always be fundamental to our mission and what matters most.

## What Connects Us All

Since March, we have kept personal connections strong, expanded internet access to help, and strengthened relationships between service organizations across the county:

Meals on Wheels deliveries include a safe-distance “well-check” with each client. We saw a 70% increase in home-delivered meals (March-August).

Our Aging & Disability Resources and Family Caregiver Support Specialists spend twice as long on each call to be certain all needs are heard and responded to. Contacts have risen 70%, averaging 850 per month. We added an Intake Specialist so each caller is connected to the right resource.

When our facilities closed, our support groups and Time Together could not meet in person. We launched online support groups for Parkinson's, Dementia, Caregivers, Adults with Disabilities, and a Time Together@ Home program so personal connections remain strong.

We created help-request and volunteer sign-up systems on our website, connecting us to those who need help and those who offer their time, to help others.

Our Medical Transportation program continues providing rides to essential life-sustaining cancer treatments and dialysis, and doctor visits, driven by caring volunteers.

Our friendly volunteers make “well-check” calls and trips to the grocery or pharmacy for housebound seniors.

To bolster a community safety net, we have strengthened our interconnections with WhidbeyHealth, Island Transit, Sno-Isle Libraries, Island County Health Department and Human Services Department, The Center in Oak Harbor, Camano Center, and others.

We launched an online format for the Powerful Tools for Caregivers and Chronic Disease Self-Management classes, connecting our community with expert instructors.

We expanded community education and outreach through Facebook, our website, *Island Times*, our *Journal*, and selective advertising to educate the community about our programs and the multitude of ways we help.

**As 2020 comes to a close, we look toward 2021.** ISR will continue to innovate, adapt, and connect with you. Our board and staff are actively preparing us and our communities to sustainably meet the future. We are asking ourselves, “What evolution will yield the solutions so we can all live our best lives together?” We will create our future community through the dedicated efforts of our visionary board of directors, innovative and passionate employees, loyal volunteers, generous donors, *and you.*

●●● Cheryn Weiser,  
Executive Director



# Wired to Connect

## The Science of Why We Need Each Other

**Research tells us that feeling connected boosts well-being.** 71% of people turn to friends and family in times of stress. We are social beings. We both want and need to belong and form connections.

Connecting increases happiness and improves health. On the other hand, rejection, loss of someone dear to us, and the pain of loneliness are felt as deeply as physical pain. “He broke my heart,” or “They hurt my feelings,” are actual expressions of our physical experience, according to Matthew Lieberman, social neuroscientist, in an interview in *Scientific American*. The pain experienced when a social bond is broken means we feel vulnerable, and our brains tell us we need to form new connections for the pain to end. The health risks of social loss range from high blood pressure, to inflammation, and even accelerated aging.

Social connection is so embedded in our brains that we are naturally programmed for it. Lieberman explains that MRI research in his lab at UCLA shows that, “Whenever we finish doing some kind of non-social thinking, the network for social thinking comes back on like a reflex — almost instantly... the best thing for our brain to do in any spare moment is to get ready to see the world socially.” He has discovered we are motivated by the drive for social connection. We are wired to be interested in the welfare of others. Our brain’s reward center lights up more when we give than when we receive and when we comfort those in distress.

Connection leads to longer life, reduces anxiety and depression, and helps regulate emotions. You feel connected when someone relates to your challenges, lends a hand, or offers advice. **It happens when someone welcomes you, accepts you for who you are, listens, makes you comfortable, and has the courage to bring you different perspectives.**

We don’t expect someone with an injury to just “get over it,” as is sometimes thought after social loss, but we can take small steps toward healing our feelings of disconnection. This does not mean you need to become a social butterfly, but it may be time to make a conscious decision to move out of your comfort zone and try something new. There may be fear, even anxiety about stepping out of familiar patterns; you may need to balance your comfort level with risk. As your guide, look back on your life and see where taking risks has worked out for the best, and where it hasn’t. You don’t need to change everything, just pick one thing and try it on for size. If it feels right, keep at it. If it’s not an answer for you, try another on your list, until you find the one that puts a smile on someone’s face:

*“Our brains are wired for reaching out and interacting with others. These are design features, not flaws.”*

— Matthew Lieberman,  
Social Neuroscientist

### Be Generous:

Give to a charity or thrift store

**Laugh:** Share a funny story with a friend

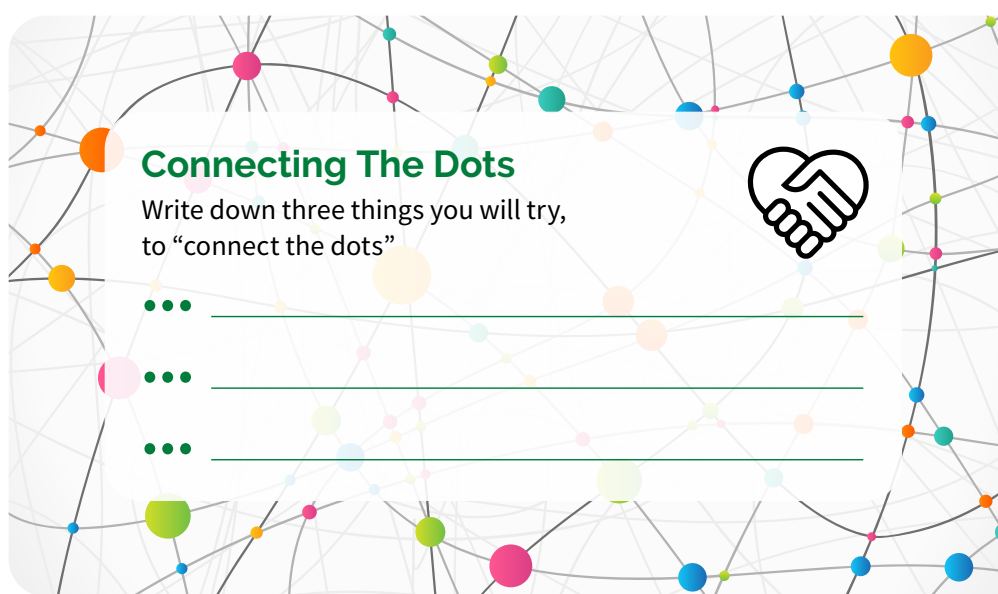
**Reach Out:** Message friends online, or call them.

### Volunteer:

Discover ways you can help others

### Play Games:

Play a game with friends online



#### References:

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-we-are-wired-to-connect/>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/10/social-connection-makes-a-better-brain/280934/>

(some details of this portrait have been changed to protect privacy but remain true to how we serve our community)

**Carl has dementia.** His mind is loosening his connection with daily living. Each day, it is harder for him to care for himself and his home. After a fall, he was admitted to a care facility for rehabilitation, but being in an unfamiliar place disoriented him; he couldn't remember why he was there. People around him were strangers; he was scared and frustrated.

Addie Schille, one of ISR's Aging & Disability Resource Specialists, began seeing Carl weekly after she was contacted to help ensure his home would be safe for his return. In time, she became a familiar face, and he began to talk with her and trust her. As he confided in her, she discovered the many things he would need help with — his medicine and meals, transportation to doctor visits, and help with bills.

She reached out to his family to find out what support they might give Carl, but they live far away and were in no position to help. By the time he was released, Addie had arranged for regular in-home care, signed him up for Meals on Wheels, found a guardian to help pay his bills, removed loose carpets that were a trip hazard, and had grab bars installed. She sees him every week now and monitors his condition. She arranges the resources he needs to continue to live safely as he adapts to the changes in his mental and physical capabilities. Each time she arrives, he greets her with a smile.

*"We are all going to be seniors someday. This is not a 'them' issue, it's an 'us' issue. It is important to consider connecting with others now to create a community that you want to age into, not to put blinders on and say, 'that is not me.' It might be you, someday. We all need to work together to build a world that is ready for us if we do get there."*

— Addie Schille, Aging & Disability Resource Specialist, ISR



Addie says, "Often, when a person is referred to us for one reason, we uncover layers of needs. A person may not feel they need help, or they may be frightened, so they don't ask. Usually, they are afraid of what is going to be taken away from them — their independence, or their home. I build their understanding that I am here to help, that their goal is my goal, but that we need to get there safely. We go through each step together. Carl trusts me; he understands I am here to help. He knows and I know, we are side-by-side. It's an honor to be able to help him and to connect with seniors in our community."

## Reaching Out to Reach In: ISR and Others Connect



### Island Senior Resources and others throughout the county

support our communities every day.

Many hands reaching out to help is

the tapestry that weaves us together.

***Please ask us if you need help — ISR will connect you.*** Here are a few things that are happening:

- ISR is part of the Whidbey Island Food Security Consortium, coordinated by Goosefoot, to improve food security
- The HELP Network is connecting non-profits to encourage new collaborations
- Whidbey Community Foundation is providing COVID-related training for non-profits
- PSE is providing financial assistance to qualifying customers whose income has been impacted due to COVID-19
- Friends of Friends Medical Support is helping those having trouble paying medical bills
- Good Cheer Food Bank has coordinated with ISR's Meals on Wheels, the SW School District, and Whidbey Island Nourishes to provide food to families
- St Augustine's and St. Hubert churches, ISR, and Catholic Social Services, distributed a tractor-trailer load of perishable food boxes to people in need, Meals on Wheels recipients, and senior living communities
- The North Whidbey Church Coalition is offering information on health and survival support for church congregations



# IT'S HUMAN NATURE

## *The Natural Imperative*

**Humans have a physiological and psychological need for nature.** The human-nature connection *is* human nature. What happens when we connect with nature?

Beyond meeting our basic needs for food, shelter, and water, connecting with nature improves well-being, health, cognitive functioning, and our ability to connect with others. It restores well-being, lowers stress, and fosters emotional balance whether we gaze out the window at nature or take a walk in the woods. It also cultivates a culture of innovation and collaboration, creativity, productivity, and resilience that helps lead us through our most challenging days. In 1964, psychologist Erich Fromm named this, “Biophilia: a passionate love of life and all that is alive.”

Nature has a unique power to create connection. All living creatures thrive through their relationships. In our technologically advanced world, there is a profound need for connection with each other and the natural world we share. The web of life teaches us we are all connected to every other living being and that every action creates reactions that circumnavigate the globe; yet, in our daily lives, those connections are too often compromised. In our dis-connected megabyte world, we long for a place where we feel at “home.” We turn to nature to find our balance.

Nature cultivates positive emotions, which in turn have beneficial effects on trust, cooperation, and closeness with others. Those living near green spaces exhibit behaviors showing a strong sense of connection to neighbors and act with greater civility. Research shows that when immersed in nature for even a few minutes, feelings of personal concerns are less important, and we are bathed in a sense of belonging. We become more generous, cooperative, and kind.

When we surround ourselves with the inspiration of nature, we connect to nature’s power to focus thinking, improve health, engage collaboration, foster creativity, and inspire innovation. That’s not the future; that’s today. It’s essential, and it’s arguably an irresistible force... of nature.



*“To be whole, to be complete, wildness reminds us what it means to be human... what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from.”*

— Terry Tempest Williams

## *The Fabric*

Biology class, 10<sup>th</sup> grade... not the place you’d expect would nurture connection. One late spring day, Jack’s class went on a walk in the forest. They were each given a frame of cardboard 12” x 12” and told to put it down in the forest and see what they could discover in that square foot.

At first, all he saw were a few alder leaves and a few pill bugs. Gentle prodding uncovered a tiny hole into the earth that led to a colony of ants. Disturbing them sent ants scurrying in all directions. In about an hour they returned in a straight line, carrying chips of green leaves and other mysteries they had found to bring back to feed those remaining “at home.”

Two ants carried another ant that appeared to have a missing leg. Another group worked together to carry a much larger chip of leaf they carefully placed over the hole like a trap door to cover their entrance, then disappeared beneath it. They were caring for each other, providing food and shelter, and perhaps safety from further interference by a curious 14-year-old.

The ants worked together for collective survival. That was fertile ground for long conversations back in the classroom about connections in the natural world. The ants could not exist without each other. Jack's teacher had them look around the room and think about how they, too, depend on each other. Without those who organized bake sales, they wouldn't have treats at the basketball games. Without those who were artists, the long hallways would be devoid of color. Without those who could sing, they wouldn't have school musicals. Even if they didn't all know each other, they were still connected.

That night, walking home from school, Jack made a point of not stepping on the ants he saw were following a long trail across the sidewalk. No doubt, they too had a job to do that others depended on.

Nature teaches us lessons in unusual ways, and some of the finest are found in observing the smallest things. What happens on a small scale in nature is repeated in larger and larger patterns like rings in the water after a pebble hits the surface. Try it. Just smile at someone, and chances are it will change their day, and they'll smile to someone else. We all play a part in sharing our best life. (These days, masks make it difficult to see smiles, but your eyes light up when you smile, and a friendly wave can say it all).

*"The human body, mind, and spirit evolved in a complex matrix of interactions with the natural world that to this day continues to affect our ability to think critically, to be creative, to discover, to show compassion, to care, and to realize a purposeful existence."*

— Dr. Stephen Kellert, Senior Research Scholar, Yale University



## Man in the Rain

Will was running a burgeoning record company, managing ten musicians, performing his own music, and building a house by himself. Swinging his hammer was great for stress relief, but he always noticed that when he stopped making that racket, the birds would start singing right away. It was as if they were trying to reply and out-sing the song of his hammer.

Sitting on the roof one afternoon, he saw a four-point buck in the yard below, staring at him. They locked eyes for a long while, sharing a common language without words. He told everyone at the office about it the next day. "Not surprising," they said, "maybe we should call you Dr. Doolittle instead of 'Splash!'" They always called him 'Splash,' because whenever it rained, he'd put on a jacket, ask one of them to join him, and out they'd go for a long, wet walk to find answers to challenges. "We do our best work out there," he says. "The woods in the rain transform the conversation; we engage in a different way. It frees us to think beyond walls. I can't think sitting at a desk."

He adds one more thing, "I write my best music when I am deeply connected with nature, and," he laughs, "it's worth getting soaking wet to hear the music that nature composes."

●●● Robin Bush, Outreach Director

### References:

Association for Consumer Research Labovitz School of Business and Economics, University of Minnesota  
ScienceDirect.com, SemanticScholar.org, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology  
Researchgate.net, Health Effects of Viewing Landscapes  
Greater Good Magazine — What Happens When We Re-connect With Nature



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There was a 36% decrease in Housing, Health, & Human Services funding between 2000-2016.\*

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Seniors 60+ years were responsible for 78% of Island County's total population growth from 1990-2018.\*\*

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There was a 95% increase in demand for Meals on Wheels delivery at the onset of the pandemic.

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Since the pandemic hit, phone calls with our Resource Specialists have doubled in length.

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Our services reach about 10,000 of the approximately 28,000 seniors on Whidbey and Camano Islands. Many are isolated without local family, adequate food, or connection, and we need your support to reach them.

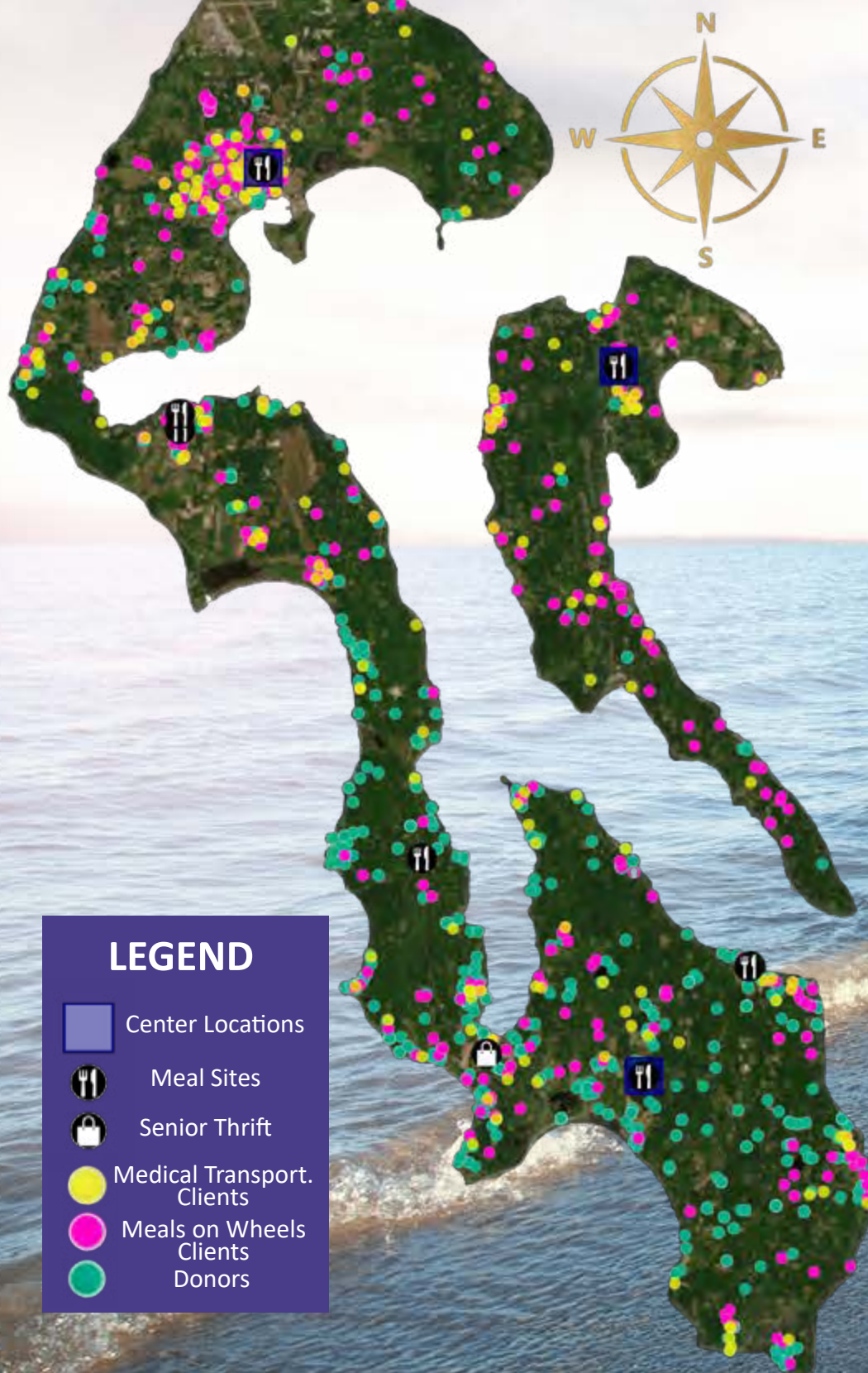
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\*Overall Block Grant Funding; Source: cbpp.org

\*\*Source: Island County Report Trends 2019

# Service Distribution

July 2019 - June 2020





*Your support is needed more than ever.*

Over the past year, demand for our services has nearly doubled and the needs of our community have grown and become more complex. Help us serve Island County seniors, adults with disabilities, and those who care for them.



*Become a funding partner today.*

For questions, or to make a gift or pledge that supports these essential services, use the enclosed envelope, or visit [www.senior-resources.org/donate](http://www.senior-resources.org/donate) or contact Charles LaFond 360-210-3011 [charles@islandseniorservices.org](mailto:charles@islandseniorservices.org)

## Connecting Across The Years

February 23, 1899    Coupeville

Dear Bentha Anne,

The winter has been so wet this year. I tried to walk down to the Rollins' cabin last week for a visit. It's just two miles away, but I had to give up when my boots sunk into mud over the tops. We tried to ride the old mare to church on Sunday and she couldn't make it either. So, it's just my dear Samuel and me here on the farm. Likely we are stuck here for weeks. I'll probably knit a year's worth of socks before the spring sun dries up the mud. I miss you.

Your loving sister,  
Rose

July 16, 1902 Coupeville

Dear Bentha Anne,

The new cart track down to Langley is open now. Last week, Samuel and I took the mare and the cart and made it in six hours!

We brought the bits and bridles he made to sell at Anthes' General Store, picked up feed, and spent a long while visiting with folks. That's the place to learn everything about everybody! We got back by sundown, in time for supper.

The cart track makes it so easy that we'll make it to Langley at least once a month now. There's talk of a summer fair even, and a Christmas sing we can get to. The minister will come up to Coupeville every other month now instead of just twice a year.

Your loving sister,  
Rose



Photo courtesy of South Whidbey Historical Society

October 11, 1915 Coupeville

Dear Bentha Anne,

There are 20 party lines on Whidbey now with 16 houses on each line. Those gals on the switchboard are busy! It's so easy to dial up Betsy Rollins now. Remember it used to be impossible to visit when the path was too muddy to get there? Now I just call.

The other afternoon I listened in on a call that wasn't for me. It was Mildred calling the switchboard to ask if they'd look out the window to see if Pete's truck was outside





Photo courtesy of South Whidbey Historical Society

the Dog House Tavern in Langley. Mildred was hopping mad when she found out he was there. Vera said she'd send one of the local boys over to tell him to get home right quick. I know I shouldn't have listened, but sometimes it's fun to eavesdrop. I know it's naughty. These party lines sure do let us find out about our neighbors! Probably no one knows more than the gals on the board!

Your loving sister,  
Rose

May 7, 1922 Coupeville

Dear Bertha Anne,

Samuel opened a second shop up in Bellingham in addition to ours here in town. The ferry boats run regularly now to Seattle and up to La Conner and Bellingham. He takes one from Coupeville to Seattle, buys all he needs, and the next day it's at the dock in Bellingham. The new shop should do well with all the folks who come and go on the boats. Folks squeeze on, cozied right up next to the freight and the mail bags!

Young Dorothy has started teaching school in Bellingham. We just catch a Mosquito Fleet boat and get there in an afternoon. No one feels far away anymore. I do hope you will consider coming west so I can take care of you. I know how much you like Boston, but it's so pretty here. It's not hard at all to get around anymore. Please come.

Your loving sister,  
Rose



Photo courtesy of South Whidbey Historical Society

January 1, 1959 Coupeville

Dear Bertha Anne,

I know I could just call you in Boston, but I'll never stop writing you every week. I bought myself a present for my 25th birthday - a blue princess phone! It's so pretty, and I put it on the nightstand right next to the bed. The dial lights up, so it's easy to find at night if I need to call for help.

Now that Samuel is gone, it's a comfort to know I can reach out to neighbors so easily. That young couple next door keeps an eye on me. They brought me tomatoes from their garden yesterday and a casserole that will be dinner all week. Another friend took me to the dentist; I got to ride in their new Studebaker! It's so nice to have people in the community who care.

Don't worry;  
I'm doing fine.  
Call me.

Your loving sister,  
Rose



# Journal

## Zooming Toward Each Other

**Who has not had an internal tantrum** over some of the changes that we have begrudgingly embraced during these unimaginable, isolated times? Before now, for many, Zoom was just the sound of a jet flying past. Now, that word means so much more. Enter our invisible superhero ZOOM! Tah-dah! ... drum roll! and dramatic superhero music!

In the beginning, much like the unassuming Clark Kent, who wasn't recognized for his transformational power to save the world from evil, we puzzled our way through finally accepting our first Zoom invite. Once we realized that this, and Alexander Graham Bell's invention, were our only lifelines out of our own home and our thoughts, we opened to the freedoms this digital world is offering.

When COVID hit, we were all faced with reinventing every aspect of the ways we connect, including how these vital lifelines could be used by people who rely on support groups. Traditional in-person support groups were places where folks with similar life situations gathered to support, understand, and learn ways to cope with deeply life-changing challenges. What we at ISR have seen is that the introduction of Zoom groups has *increased* connection, and brought together those who previously had been unable to attend in-person groups. Zoom has broken down geographical barriers that once had stopped us from connecting with one another. Now there is no north, south, east or west, just here and there... just you and me... just us, *all of us*.

For some, Zoom means *more* connection than before COVID, which is a revelation into the world of isolation for anyone listening. We all understand what it means to feel isolated. Hopefully, this understanding will help us expand our hearts and minds and enable us to look for ways to connect with those who are isolated, even after the pandemic becomes a memory. For now, let's celebrate the Clark Kent of these uncommon times. Here's to Zoom! ... our invisible superhero, that makes us more visible to each other.

... Mel Watson, Volunteer & Support Group Coordinator



*"I love that we get to join the north and south support groups via Zoom. It's been great getting to know each other better."*

— Parkinson's support group participant

### Island Senior Resources connects

#### ISR's Zoom Support Groups

- Time Together @ Home
- Parkinson's Support Group
- Alzheimer's & Dementia Caregivers Support Group
- Yoga for All

*We will be creating more Zoom support groups to respond to needs in the community.*

*Call for information: (360) 321-1600 or (360) 678-3373*





## Connecting Through Books

**Read a book...** travel (in a story) to foreign lands, go on an adventure, unravel a mystery, live in another time. Books are our windows to other times and places. Try inviting friends to read the same book then talk about it together over Zoom or by phone, with a cup of tea. You'll find it gives you something new to talk about.

*Live a little wilder, stretch your legs...  
in the pages of a book!*

••• Nancy Bolin-Romanski,  
ISR Board Member

### **A few books our staff and board have found inspiring during COVID:**

*Belonging* by Toko-pa Turner

*The Secret Wisdom of Nature*  
by Peter Wohlleben

*Max the Miracle Dog* by Kerry Irving

*Breakfast at Sally's*  
by Richard LeMieux

*The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho

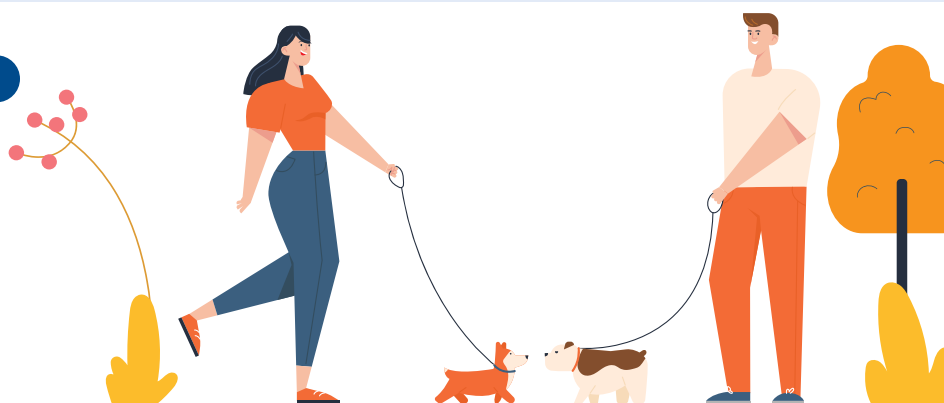
*Children of Blood and Bone*  
by Tomi Adeyemi

*Keep It Moving* by Twyla Tharp

*The Hidden Life of Trees*  
by Peter Wohlleben

*The Tiger's Wife* by Téa Obreht

*The Splendid and The Vile*  
by Erik Larson



## The Warp, Weft, & Woof of the Neighborhood

**Rain or shine, hot or cold, young or old,**  
some neighbors are roaming local streets every day:  
we are the dog walkers. Dogs need out, no matter what,  
so we, at the end of the 6-foot leash, also head out.

Dogs love routine. They make their rounds. If we could see the trails they make, we'd see a patterned tapestry of sniffing and marking. They sense danger where a coyote has left its scent, and anticipate pleasure when they see the man with the dog treats coming.

During this time of COVID isolation, daily interactions that we used to do in community we now experience in isolation. Dog walkers and dogs can be an informal "Neighborhood Watch." We are a team that weaves the neighborhood together. While the dogs tend their routines, the humans on the leash tend ours, crisscrossing patterns of observation and interaction. Does the 90-year-old still wave from her window? Is the neighbor who uses a wheelchair, waiting at the top of his ramp to offer dog biscuits? Are the little girls doing chalk drawings on the street? Do the busy mid-lifers roll down the car window to say hello?



As we cross paths, I ask, "Are you okay? Do you need anything?" I listen to their stories. I pass along neighborhood news. Through simple interactions from the end of the leash, we weave the delicate threads of relationships that make a tapestry of safety and belonging. We are the warp and the woof.



••• Christina Baldwin, ISR Board Member

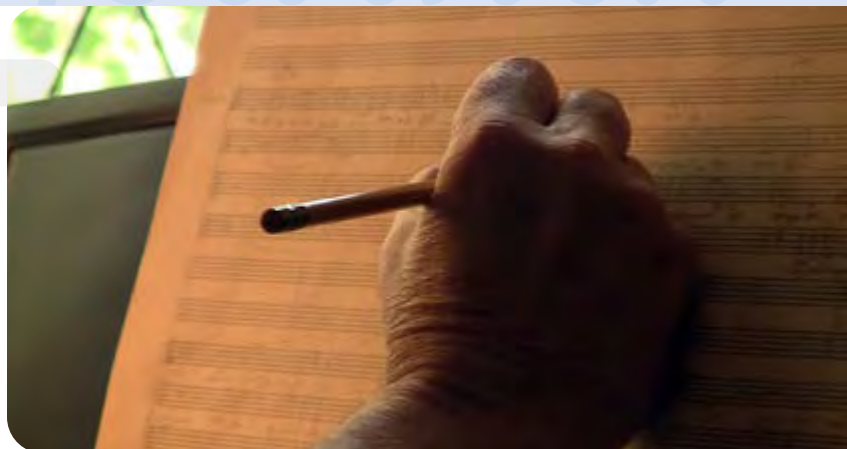
# The Art of Being Alone

*"A Man, an Island, and  
Music that Moves the World"*

## Turning Aloneness into Enriching Solitude

**Morten Lauridsen lives a solitary life** during summers on Waldron Island in northern Puget Sound. There is no ferry service, no stores, no paved roads, and no electricity. He is alone, but not lonely. His isolation and passion for nature are his source of inspiration for the creation of music that moves the world. He composes on a \$50 piano he brought to the island many years ago. This quiet, gentle man is the most-performed American choral composer alive today. His music is performed hundreds of times a year, "singing" across continents in a language common to us all — music. We do not need to understand the lyrics to feel his message, to understand his reverence for nature and how it enriches the human spirit. Why? What is it about the music? His music "connects directly with your heart," says renowned composer and pianist Ola Gjeilo.

"I fell so deeply in love with this island, the serenity of it, the beauty of it, the smell of the air, walking in the sand on the beaches... they are part of me." His music reflects the reverence he has for the natural beauty of the islands, sea, sky, and light that surrounds him. Picture the clouds moving above you, the soft sounds at the water's edge, the magnificent colors of sunset over the islands, the cry



of an eagle amidst the gulls, and you will be in the place, physically and spiritually, that Morten Lauridsen inhabits when he composes, inspired by reverie and exultation of nature. "This is the way it was in primeval times here." He often walks along the water or sleeps on the beach looking across to Canada with no one else in sight.

You might think he would find it lonely to be in such a remote place, spending hours by himself. Far from it. He chooses to connect with others on the island for musical cabaret nights at the local schoolhouse, or to sit together at the water's edge, or swap stories with the boat captain while making the crossing to the island. To hear others talk of him, you get the sense his connection to them is as deep as his connection with nature. Both nourish him deeply, and both become the fountain from which he draws to compose the music that he sends into the world to bring others together. "I have good friends here," he says, "we are very close."

"I was composing Lux Aeterna, a work based on texts about eternal light, when I got the news that my mother was dying. As so many people in the arts especially do, we turn to art in some shape or

*"Loneliness has more to do with our perceptions than how much company we have. It's just as possible to be painfully lonely surrounded by people as it is to be content with little social contact. Some people need extended periods of time alone to recharge, others would rather give themselves electric shocks than spend a few minutes with their thoughts."*

— Farnam Street blog: *The Art of Being Alone*

The view from Waldron island



form to give us comfort us and give us strength in these life-changing situations... I chose the theme of light, illumination, understanding... to give me strength to cope. It was a great comfort to me... [it is] a quiet meditation on illumination and people connect with that. It makes no difference where it is or who it is. It connects with something very deep inside of them... I wrote this piece to heal myself, and this piece is now heard throughout the world." When the piece is performed, he asks people to think of their loved ones and find comfort, courage, solace, and strength.

The Lux Aeterna was played on 9/11 as an antidote to the horror in NYC. "There are too many things out there that are away from goodness. We need to focus on those things that ennoble us and enrich us... In order to make this message as widely available as possible, with dedication and lot of hard work it can be done by amateur choruses... I wanted to write a piece that would be within reach of many people... It's a piece with a message and I didn't want to complicate that message with complicated musical language... If we are to find joy and meaning in life in the midst of affliction of all sorts, we go to music especially."

When Morten speaks of his piece, "Sure on This Shining Night," he describes it as, "feeling at one with nature and the wondrous awe that one has in being within nature, at one with nature and the world." Morten lives serenity; it is his wellspring for creativity. He never slips into a sense of loneliness because he chooses to be in the natural world and be with people with whom he shares life's richness. If there is a central theme around which he builds his life, it is that inspiration comes from choosing to connect. "For those of you who have an inner song to share, be it in the form of poetry, dance, or music, sculpture, or singing, to fulfill that calling is not an easy task for you to persevere, but by doing so, you will change lives."

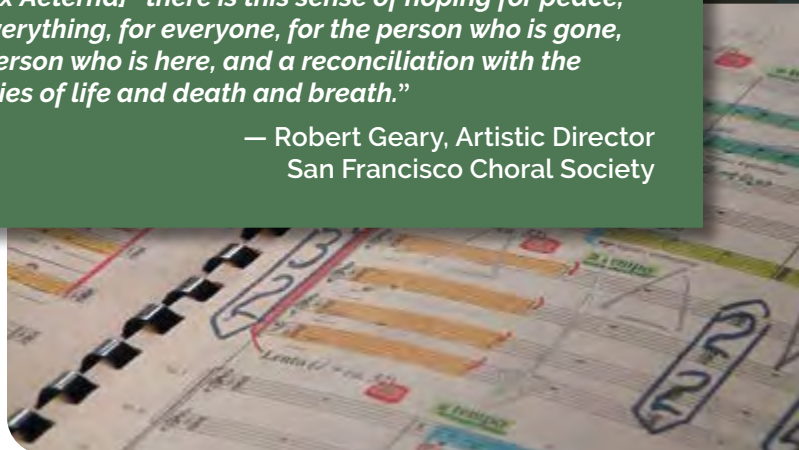
Out of solitude comes soulfulness and connecting to ourselves; out of that connection with ourselves comes sharing and connecting with others. Sharing in a deep and meaningful way is something we all can, and can choose to, do.

... Robin Bush, Outreach Director



*"In Lux Aeterna" "there is this sense of hoping for peace, for everything, for everyone, for the person who is gone, the person who is here, and a reconciliation with the realities of life and death and breath."*

— Robert Geary, Artistic Director  
San Francisco Choral Society



Morten Lauridsen

Photos (by Michael Stillwater)  
and quotes from the award-winning  
documentary, "Shining Night:  
A Portrait of Composer Morten Lauridsen"  
[www.shiningnightfilm.net](http://www.shiningnightfilm.net)

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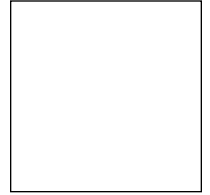
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## Island Senior Resources

14594 SR 525, Langley, WA 98260

[www.senior-resources.org](http://www.senior-resources.org)

*Island Senior Resources is the trade name  
for Senior Services of Island County.*



## Our Locations

### Island Senior Resources (Bayview)

14594 SR 525

Langley, WA 98260

Just south of Bayview Road

### Island Senior Resources (Oak Harbor)

*in collaboration with*

*The Center in Oak Harbor*

51 SE Jerome St.

Oak Harbor, WA 98277

Opposite OH Elementary School

### Island Senior Resources (Camano)

*in collaboration with Camano Center*

606 Arrowhead Rd.

Camano Island, WA 98282

By Utsalady School

### Senior Thrift

5518 Woodard Rd.

Freeland, WA 98249

Just north of Main Street

*In an effort to reach community members not yet on our mailing list, we send the Journal to several postal routes in addition to our mailing list. Because of this, you may receive a copy addressed to your name and another to "Postal Customer." **If you do receive a second copy, please share it with a friend and help us connect with those who may need our help.***

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## Random Acts of Kindness

*Random acts of kindness improve quality of life for someone else.*

They can be something as simple as a welcoming smile, bringing flowers to a neighbor, sharing bounty from the garden, making cards to be delivered to Meals on Wheels recipients, calling someone who might not have much interaction with family or friends, or writing a letter that can be read again and again. Giving is a good feeling to get.

Looking for ideas? There are 103 suggestions at [www.bradaronson.com/acts-of-kindness/](http://www.bradaronson.com/acts-of-kindness/). We will feature Random Acts of Kindness on our Facebook page, so if you do something that makes a difference for someone else, please let us know what you did, send us a photo if you have one, and we'll let others know. (Your name can remain private if you wish). Send to [feedback@islandseniorservices.org](mailto:feedback@islandseniorservices.org).