

The Wyoming Governor's Summit on Aging: “Challenges and Opportunities” Report on TimeBanking Workshop and Participation

The Wyoming Governor's Summit on Aging: “Challenges and Opportunities” was a three-day conference held May 18 – 20, 2005. According to the promotional material distributed by the sponsoring agency, the Aging Division of the Wyoming Department of Health:

The wave is coming -- 77 million “baby boomers” will start to turn age 65 by 2008, which will more than double the current population of seniors. Wyoming continues to be one of the most rapidly aging states in the country. The latest demographic projections indicate that, by the year 2020, Wyoming will be fifth in the nation for the proportion of its population over age 65. The time is now to examine the implications of this demographic shift for Wyoming, and find effective ways to meet the future challenges and embrace the opportunities.

Held in Cheyenne, Wyoming, the summit drew 163 registrants from all parts of Wyoming who represented a variety of aging services and agencies. The entire state was represented at the conference. Some of the agencies that sent participants were Adult Protective Services, Financial Planning Institutes, County Legislators, State Senator, Aging Advisory Council, Governor's office, Nursing, Home Health, Long Term Care, Senior Centers, Community Based In Home Services, Medicaid Waiver, State Medicaid, Social Security Admin, AARP, Dept of Health Pharmacy Program, Legal field, State Hospital, Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, Medicare Consumer Relations, Federal/Regional Office for CMS (Denver), Center for Independent Living and Veteran's Home. Community seniors also attended. The conference provided a forum for learning and interaction, and was also an opportunity for exploring solutions and formulating recommendations for addressing the growing aging population of Wyoming. There was a particular emphasis on the need for more creative use of services, especially health support services.

Dorothy Thomas¹, a Community Service Representative with the Aging Division of the Wyoming Department of Health, contacted the Time Dollar Institute in October 2004 regarding the possibility of providing a workshop on TimeBanking for conference participants. In January 2005, the Time Dollar Institute asked me to work with officials within the Aging Division to design and facilitate two 1½-hour workshops on TimeBanking for conference participants. As one of the key conference conveners, Ms. Thomas was my primary contact person and acted as a champion of the TimeBanking concept at the conference.

A little background on the state of Wyoming:

Wyoming is considered a rural frontier state with less than 5 people per square mile. The two largest cities, Cheyenne and Casper, each have populations of approximately 500,000. The state has one of the fastest growing aging populations in the country as well as a diverse network of human service providers around the state. Public transportation from one town to another is not

¹ Ms. Thomas is responsible for the National Family Caregiver Program, the Nursing Facility Transition grant, the Adult Protection Services liaison, and Legal Services program at the Wyoming Department of Health's Aging Division.

always available, making dependence on local infrastructures (including local senior and social service centers, businesses, etc.) is key.

Workforce Development Panel:

In addition to the two TimeBanking workshops, Dorothy Thomas also asked me to represent TimeBanking at a panel discussion on workforce issues for the state. The panel, entitled “*Workforce Issues: Who Will Fill the Need?*”, was facilitated by the former Wyoming Director of AARP and included the Director of Public Health for Wyoming, representatives from the Wyoming Health Resources Network and the Department of Work Forces, and myself.

A major focus of the panel was the depleted healthcare workforce due to ongoing retirement and the difficulty in attracting healthcare professionals to a rural state which has lower salaries than neighboring states. In addition, panelists talked about the diminishing pool of young people who choose to remain in the state. I was asked to share how TimeBanking might be a creative solution in these arenas. There seemed to be a number of positive responses and questions to my TimeBanking proposals and comments.

Workshops on TimeBanking:

Later that morning (and again in the afternoon), I facilitated two 1½-hour introductory workshops on TimeBanking, entitled “*Enlisting the People You Seek to Help: TimeBanking as a Strategy for System Change.*” I presented a short PowerPoint presentation on TimeBanking, and then facilitated a modified version of a TimeBanking game. As I introduced the game, I encouraged participants to enjoy getting a feel for being part of a TimeBank and to imagine that they were the founding members of the Wyoming TimeBank. I also showed a video with news clips on TimeBanking and fielded questions at the end of each workshop.

Both workshops were enthusiastically received by participants, and there were so many questions with the first group that there was no time to show the film that had been planned! There was a wide range of questions, with at least half of them focusing on the nuts and bolts of how to set up and run a TimeBank. Although participant information was not collected by conference organizers, several individuals have subsequently been in touch with Ms. Thomas to request further information and inquire about possibilities for moving forward.

General Session and TimeBanking Recommendation:

The next morning, I sat in on a general session on Social Security reform with several national and state officials and political leaders. There was an interesting debate that resulted from the varying viewpoints.

Finally, there was a breakout discussion as the participants selected those topics they wished to have addressed at the White House Conference on Aging this fall. TimeBanking was selected as one of those topics and was sent as a recommendation from the state of Wyoming!

My experience and that of the conference conveners was that the participants were very open to and interested in TimeBanking and its applications related to any number of social issues.

Suggestions and Reflections:

It would be very helpful in the overall national strategy of TimeBanks USA to link rural states and communities as they discuss TimeBanking applications and trainings. Because they share so many of the same issues and problems, this kind of connectivity and collective problem solving could promote ideas and solutions that have not previously been suggested or tested.

TimeBanks USA might consider colloquiums, for example, on rural community building, rural aging patterns, rural health services, etc. which attract representatives from each state and community which shares those issues. A focus on training and discussions related to each of these topics would generate significant interest and allow TimeBanks USA to market to the concerns of a particular regional area. TimeBanks USA should also consider linking marketing, training and problem solving efforts to the work of state governments, allowing them to link with state government leaders in political, financial and social problem solving initiatives.

Participating in the Wyoming Governor's Summit on Aging was a very enjoyable and stimulating experience, and I was delighted to have the opportunity to represent the TimeBanking community!

Respectfully submitted,

Octavia Allis, Founder and Director
SkillShare Network
Boulder County, Colorado