



Little Bear  
Creek:  
The Journey  
from  
Assisted Living  
to Housing  
with Services

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# Overview

- The Idea
- A Plan
- The Location
- The Consultants
- The Construction
- Lift Off
- Houston, We have a Problem...
- The Landing



# It Began with a Conversation

- Spent time with elders to discuss problems they wished to solve
  - Substance abuse in youth
  - Crime
  - Rez dogs
  - No respect for elders from community members
- Steered toward “Title VI” issues
  - Too many wieners
  - Not enough traditional foods
  - Hooligans cannot spawn
  - No huckleberry pies
- “When we have to go to town and stay in a nursing home, we die.”

# What Can I Do?



- Thought about the comments and went back with a couple of Huckleberry pies
- The Army Corps of Engineers dredged the Nooksack and the Hooligans could spawn Haunted by the go to town statement...

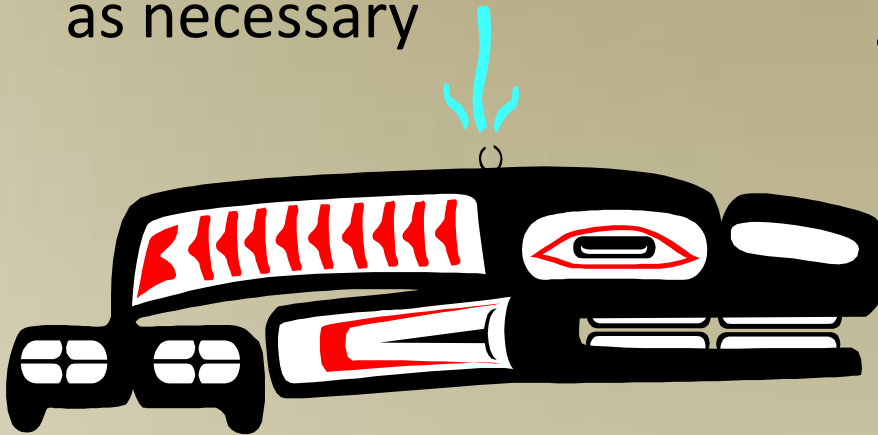
# Elders Went to Council

- Asked for a review to determine the viability of a nursing home on the reservation
  - Quickly became Assisted Living
  - Committee was established to work on the plan
    - Funding the building
    - Business plan for operations



# The Plan

- Build an Assisted Living facility with a common area which would double as a Senior Center
- Building would be constructed to be “doubled” down the road as necessary
- Commercial Kitchen
- 20+ Apartments
- Health Room
- Home Care Licensure
  - Provide care for both the elders in the facility as well as the community
- Administrative offices
  - Assisted Living
  - Title VI
  - Home Care



# Funding



- A variety of sources
  - USDA—Senior Center
  - State and federal grants and loans
  - Commercial Mortgage
- Operations
  - Medicaid would cover most costs
  - Home Care would be a way to spread the costs among several funding sources

# Location

- Took the elders from place to place on the reservation to look at possible sites to locate the facility
  - Stomped around
  - Eagles Nest
  - Draw strength from the water...



# Final Decision



- Waterfront acreage near the Stommish grounds
- Faces west for beautiful sunsets
- Looks at Lummi Island
- All elders approved
- No Eagle Nests!

# Consultants



- One consultant was hired to oversee the business plan, financing, and find architects
- Architectural firm with extensive experience in assisted living facilities
- Many regular meetings to keep everyone informed

# Construction

- Ground Breaking was done with elders, song, and prayer
- Construction was not a problem
  - Project Manager was tribal and used tribal contractors when possible
- Took just about one year from the first steps
- Challenges
  - In floor heat
  - HVAC
  - Some kitchen issues
  - Windows
  - “Décor”
- Blessings
  - Elders’ comments as the building progressed
  - Excitement in the community as the day nears

# Ready for Residents

- Before occupancy, began to sign people up for Medicaid
- Hired staff
  - Experienced administrator
  - Experienced LTC Maintenance



# But Nobody Came...



- Potential residents had been identified from elders who were living in facilities in the region
  - Moved one or two
- Other residents who were eligible for Medicaid and for whom Little Bear was very appropriate said “No Way”
- Even those who had originally planned to move in

# Why?

- In the “assisted living” world—elders must surrender all of their income to pay for their support
- They get to keep around \$50 (some states it is \$30) for their “personal needs”



# And...

- The business plan was based upon the average reimbursement from Medicaid for AL
- The elders needed to pay their part or “spend down” to the eligibility level for Medicaid
- The elders used their money to support family needs--grandkids
- The tribe could not send an elder to collections to get the elder’s participation
- The Medicaid reimbursement for the government part of the payment was often substantially less than needed to operate
- With 26 residents all needing care and not participating, the facility was not sustainable

# The Struggle

- The tribe struggled to get people to move in
  - Eventually opened it up to elders from other tribes as well as AN
- The Administrator was let go
- The Maintenance Man left
- The Title VI Program continue to bring elders into the facility for lunch



# Housing



- After struggling with the AL model, the building was sold to Housing and became elder apartments
  - Kitchens have refrigerator, 2 burner stove, microwave, sink and cupboards
  - Meals continued 3 times per day, seven days per week

Elders who needed help were facilitated to enter the HCBS waiver which allows them to keep much of their income

# Lummi Home Care



- Continues to have licensure and provides care to elders who live at Little Bear and in the community
- Some elders at Little Bear demand care without service
  - Culturally it is difficult to turn them down
- Participation continues to be a problem

# Lessons Learned

- Participation in care not a given
- Business plan did not take into consideration cultural issues
- Transitioning to apartments with services was a winning model, but needed to be done in a different way
- Must be careful to focus on the entire elder community, not just those who live in elder housing or care
- If “Do-over's” would build a senior center with health offices and administrative offices
- Duplexes? Or other detached housing

# Cooking Salmon for the Elders



**“You have paddled all day. You are tired and hungry.  
You have permission to come ashore. We have food.  
You are welcome here.”**



