

# Island Elder Care conference tackles tough issues facing an aging population

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Participants in the 2010 Island Elder Care Conference to discuss issues facing the aging populations of island communities with year-round residents and no bridge access to the mainland, gather for a photo.

## LINCOLNVILLE —

Representatives from 12 island communities with year-round populations and no bridge access to the mainland gathered at the Point Lookout Conference Center on Nov. 9 and 10 to discuss the issues facing the aging populations on the islands. The conference topic also included a discussion of available resources and what different island communities are doing to meet the needs of their elderly residents, as well as identifying the next steps that could be taken to address the issues.

The conference was hosted by the Maine Sea Coast Mission and led by Director of Island Health Services Sharon Daley, R.N. Scott Planting, executive director of the Maine Sea Coast Mission, welcomed the island representatives to the conference and told them how important he thought it was to address the issues being faced by an aging population on the islands without access to the resources that mainland residents have.

A total of 26 people attended the conference. Resource representatives included Noel Merrill, director of Eastern Area on Aging, and Kathy Poulin, director of community services in the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Elder Services.

As a result of the conference, representatives of several islands are planning to make field trips to visit other island clinics elder care facilities, and, for those islands not currently being served by the Mission's boat, *Sunbeam V*, to see how telemedicine works to provide access to health care, especially for the elderly. Also, being at the conference helped many attendees appreciate what they have in place and what they have been able to accomplish through dedicated volunteers.

One participant said that it was one of the best conferences she had ever attended in making contacts and establishing relationships with others that are dealing with similar challenges. Another participant said, "If you have a half dozen passionate people behind a project who believe in it and are staying, then great things can happen." A third participant said, "This has been an eye-opening and uplifting experience."

The participants at the conference agreed that they needed to stay in touch and work collaboratively to address the challenges they face in responding to the needs of the elderly on their islands. Two committees were set up – one researching grant funding and another interested in exploring the feasibility of a one- or two-bed boarding-type home or respite facility for residents coming back to their island home after a hospital stay. In addition, the participants agreed to stay in touch through conference calls with the committees and, perhaps, a quarterly conference call for all of the island representatives.

The three islands with full-service elder care facilities (Chebeague, Islesboro and Vinalhaven) also agreed to stay in touch and explore ways that they can work together. The Maine Sea Coast Mission also agreed to set up a group e-mail for ease of communication with each other, and to send hard copies of e-mail exchanges to those without e-mail.

Frankie Doughty, a lifelong resident of Chebeague Island in Casco Bay and the care manager of the Island Commons Resource Center, said, "What drives me to do my job is the success of taking care of our elderly and meeting their needs. It is not about making a profit. What you get is end-of-life care for a person that might have taken care of you when you were young. This is about taking care of elders who are our friends and family. Everyone here is not in it for the glory or the money."

Conference participants said that Frankie's statement went to the heart and soul of why they are interested in elder care on the islands.

The following islands had representatives at the conference: Casco Bay – Chebeague Island, Cliff Island and Peaks Island; Penobscot islands - Isle au Haut, Islesboro, Matinicus, North Haven, and Vinalhaven; Down East islands – Frenchboro, Great Cranberry, Islesford, and Swans Island. Long Island and Great Diamond Island were not able to send representatives and the two representatives from Mohegan were not able to attend due to rough seas. It was agreed that having representatives of 80 percent of all islands with year-round populations and no bridge access to the mainland was an affirmation that elder care on the islands is of great importance to island residents.