Gaia Cares had the pleasure of hosting its first ever Appreciation Gathering in Richmond on November 30. After almost two years of Zoom meetings during the pandemic, we felt it was time to instill a sense of belonging for some of our active members through a face-to-face gathering. It was an opportunity for members to get to know one another and enhance their mutual support and wellbeing. We kept the event small to maintain safety protocols and invited a mix of 11 volunteers, seniors and caregivers, with one member joining the gathering via Zoom.

Participants exchanged their stories, and shared experiences and challenges in providing caregiving to their loved ones. In the spirit of joy, our new Executive Director Percy Wong, sang Cantonese opera and Christopher Wong, our Program Coordinator, led participants in a warm-up dance. Everybody enjoyed a tasty lunch and had a great time posing for pictures with the traditional lion head brought in by a participant. Overall, it was a very joyful and successful event with everyone expressing their gratitude for the opportunity to take a break and relax from their stressful caregiving and daily routines. We were deeply inspired when a participant shared that the event was a breakthrough for her after two long years at home. We encouraged her to continue getting in touch with her community.

Gaia Care is eager to regularly host more in-person events so more participants can benefit from the community connection. Stay tuned!
Caring for a beloved senior offers opportunities for families to build loving relationships and inter-generational understanding, despite the challenges. Children contribute joy and energy to families and, with a little creativity, elders and children can do great things together ... including providing a bit of respite to the main family caregiver!

**HERE IS A LIST OF GAIA CARES FAVOURITES:**

- **Family History Project** - There are inexpensive book-creating sites to tell the family story with photographs. Seniors often love taking the time to explain the family history and identify all those relatives in the box of old photos or on the computer.

- **Share a Hobby** - One elder we know got his three young grandsons building birdhouses for the garden. He cut the wood parts himself and gave the instructions. The three kids had ball building, sanding, and painting under his supervision and all of them were a hit on “show and tell day” at school. Grandpa got huge satisfaction, the boys learned construction skills, and their mom got three pretty birdhouses for the garden. There are inexpensive kits of all kinds to work on together if your elder isn’t as handy as the grandfather in this case.

- **Cooking & Baking** - Many seniors are excellent cooks and many have great knowledge of cultural foods and family recipes. Lots of children love cooking and baking and there are many simple ways for elders and children to have fun together in the kitchen. It can be as simple as a bucket of cookie dough from Costco that they bake together, to pizzas they add toppings to, to folding dumplings together, or to putting on an entire family dinner. Even elders who have challenges can contribute by small food prep chores, tasting sauces, or setting the table, allowing them to feel productive and included. And ... everyone gets the joy of sitting down to a meal made together by he family.

"Everyone gets the joy of sitting down to a meal made together by the family"
• Gardening - This is another elder and child friendly activity that gets everyone out in the fresh air and creating something that benefits the whole family. It can be as simple as a few pots of herbs on the back deck, a trattoria of grapes, a stack of old tires in which to grow layers of potatoes, or rows of vegetables in raised beds that require weeding and care. Old and young alike benefit from learning about, and working on, the production of fresh organic fruits and vegetables that can be enjoyed by the whole family and contribute to a healthy diet.

• Arts & Crafts - Most children love creative crafts! There are many inexpensive kid craft kits and projects that elders can participate in, even if they have small challenges. From coloring pages, to Christmas decorations, to Chinese New Year projects, arts and crafts can be a fun time for elders and children that doesn’t require mobility and produces fun keepsakes for all members of the family. How about making a simple gift or card for Christmas or Chinese New Year?

• Nature Walks & Playground Time - Bring your elder and the kids to a nearby park or playground to take in the sights and sounds of nature. Collect some treasures along the way, such as flowers and leaves, and make something special to remember the day. Hitting the playground with an energetic child is a great way for your elder loved one to get some fresh air and the entertainment of little kids racing around playing and getting exercise.

• Bird Watching - Bring your elder and the grandchildren to a local park or bird reserve to observe and feed the ducks or other birds. Or, how about attracting feathered friends to your own backyard by making a homemade bird feeder together like the grandfather mentioned above. Get the children excited about bird watching with their own set of binoculars.

• Puzzles & Games - Enjoy a little friendly competition between the kids and the elders! Many board games played when you were a child are still popular the grandchildren’s generation. Jigsaw puzzles and card games, such as Hearts and Crazy Eights, are also fun and easy options. Don’t forget floor puzzles such as the inexpensive Round the World Map Jigsaw Floor Puzzle available on Amazon.ca!

• Movie, Cartoons or TV Sports Events - Rainy days call for a movie, a cartoon feature or a favorite sports team event. There are many family friendly movie guides online for ideas on movies for the elders and children to watch at home. Check out the Disney Channel in particular - there’s also an anthology of classic Disney movies on DVD if your household still has the old technology.

• Reading - There’s a reason that reading to children is a long time favorite with families. Check out the library for classic children’s books that your elder can read with the grandchildren, head to your local bookstore or Amazon to find new children’s books. If your elder is not up to reading the book themselves, they can sit with the child as they read it to the elder or you can check out Audible for books both can listen to together. For example, no matter the age of the grandchildren, they will enjoy Roald Dahl's stories - check them out.