



# Developing rural insights for building age-friendly communities

The International Federation of Ageing: 15<sup>th</sup> Global Conference on Ageing, November 10, 2021

# Research team and acknowledgements



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# Rural age-friendly communities

- The rural challenge of AFCs
- Rural age-friendly scholarship
- Implementation and sustainability
- Project aim: How do unique rural contexts influence rural age-friendly initiatives' implementation and sustainability

[Russell, Skinner, Colibaba, 2021](#)



# Method: 5 Rural Communities

- Case study analysis of 5 rural age-friendly programs in Ontario, Canada
- Rural typologies: Resource, agricultural, recreational, regional, small town
- 2 phase data collection
- N = 46 | 80% female | Mean age = 57 years
- Iterative Collaborative Qualitative Analysis (ICQA)

## Temiskaming Shores

- Northeastern
- pop. 9,920
- Implementing social and physical programming

## Arnprior

- Eastern
- Pop. 10,426
- Implementation of programs and creation of seniors' center

## District of Muskoka

- Central
- Pop. 60,599
- Conducted needs assessment, challenged to implement

## Perth County

- Southwestern
- Pop. 79,796
- Committee formation and needs assessment stages complete

## Regional Municipality of Durham

- Southern
- Pop. 645,862
- Implementation begun



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# Findings

1. Sense of community: An opportunity for longevity
2. Jurisdictional fragmentation: Challenged sustainability



# Sense of community: An opportunity

Look, we want you to really understand. We're Muskoka, we're not like everybody else. We're not Southern Ontario. We want a plan that is ours, that really fits Muskoka. We don't want a template.





# Jurisdictional fragmentation: A challenge

Because of the regional disparity in what is deemed important, as a voice coming from the North [the rural part of the region], it's not always seen as top priority. A priority for us is not always a priority for the South [the urban part of the region] and public transportation is a good example of that.



# Creating practical outcomes is critical to allowing research to support older rural residents and communities

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## ■ SENSATIONAL SENIORS

### MUSKOKA FEATURED IN TRENT UNIVERSITY RURAL AGE-FRIENDLY CASE STUDY

**ELIZABETH RUSSELL, MARK SKINNER, AMBER COLIBABA**

**MUSKOKA** - Several years ago, the District of Muskoka received funding from the Ontario government to support the community in becoming more age-friendly - more accessible to and inclusive of the aging population.

This process included conducting a needs assessment to identify local older adults' needs and forming a steering committee to assess and implement key recommendations. Age-friendly committee memberships typically are comprised of municipal, community, and private citizen members, often including

local older residents.

This community-level implementation process has, however, been shown to have challenges with sustainability e.g. not becoming permanent or institutionalized within a host organization.

Based out of Trent University in Peterborough, Ont., our project aims to

document the expert perspectives of rural and small-town age-friendly leaders about the barriers that may prevent, and factors that may support, sustainable age-friendly programming.

Between September 2018 and April 2019, we travelled over 6,000 kilometres (that's approximately the distance of travelling from St. Johns, N.L. to Victoria, B.C.) to five rural Ontario communities implementing age-friendly programming and spoke with nearly 60 age-friendly leaders. With multiple visits each to Temiskaming Shores, Perth County, District of Muskoka, the Durham Region (focused on the rural municipalities) and the greater Arnprior area, participants told us stories about the on-the-ground challenges of developing age-friendly communities, but also the successes, both major and minor, of achieving a more inclusive community.

We found that there is an implementation gap between short and long-term sustainability. However the involvement of community champions, partnerships (e.g. local businesses, nonprofits, faith groups, and health and community-based services) and active municipal involvement are pathways toward sustainability. Involving these important factors at the community level will help ensure age-friendly program-



Amber Colibaba



Elizabeth Russell



Trent University photos  
Mark Skinner

support local residents are they grow older.

Since receiving the funding, the District of Muskoka's age-friendly initiative has developed a diverse steering committee primarily comprised of representatives from the municipality and local stakeholders who conducted a robust needs assessment that evaluated the needs of older adults in Muskoka. Volunteers who were involved on the committee are currently working to move forward on implementing recommendations from the needs assessment.

Thank you for welcoming us to the District of Muskoka and showing us the momentum that exists within your community. We value the time and contributions of everyone involved with the study.

Dr. Elizabeth Russell is an assistant professor in the department of psychology at Trent University in Peterborough and an execu-

Centre for Aging and Society.

Dr. Mark Skinner is the dean of social sciences at Trent University and Canada research chair in rural health, aging and social care.

*Amber Colibaba, M.A., is the research co-ordinator for the Canada research chair program in rural health, aging and social care, and for the building sustainable rural age-friendly communities research project, both housed*

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# Discussion

- ❑ Considering individual community connectedness (social, geographic) critical for successful, sustainable rural age-friendly implementation
- ❑ Contextualizing the age-friendly implementation gap
- ❑ Towards a rural age-friendly agenda



Thank you!



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*For more information on this research, please visit:*  
<https://www.ruralagefriendlyresearch.com>



**BUILDING SUSTAINABLE RURAL AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES**

Led by Dr. Elizabeth McCrillis (Trent University) and Dr. Mark Skinner (Trent University), a SSHRC funded study of the factors that both strengthen and inhibit the sustainability of age-friendly community programs in rural Canada.

Building Sustainable Rural Age-Friendly Communities