



# Developing rural insights for building sustainable age-friendly community initiatives

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# Acknowledgements

SSHRC  CRSH



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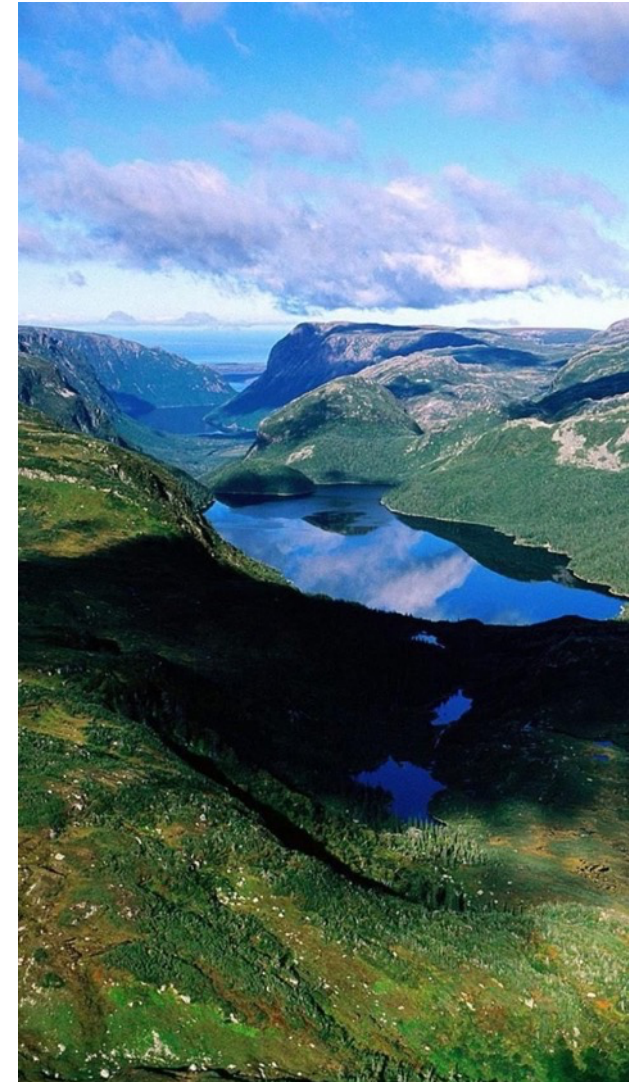


# Background on population aging



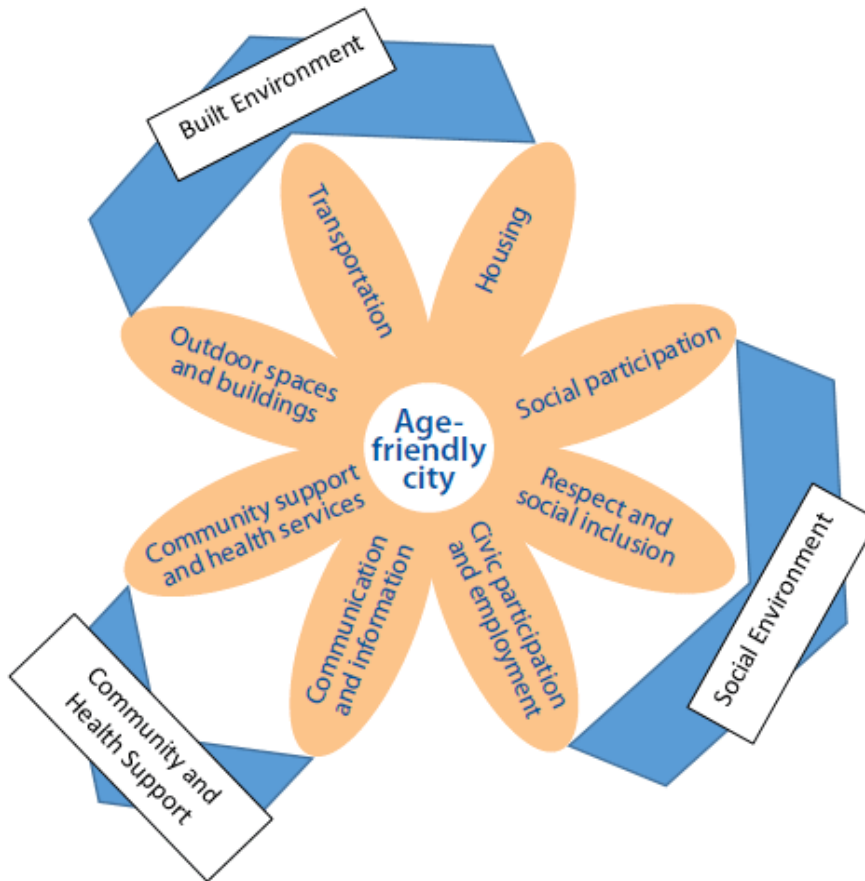
# Rural age-friendly communities research

- Age-friendly communities (AFCs): World Health Organization
- The rural challenge of AFCs
- Aim of research collaboration: Understand factors limiting and supporting AFC sustainability





# Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide



# Our collaboration: A 3-part research project

1. Program evaluation,  $N = 35$  committee members in 11 rural NL communities
  2. Pilot study,  $N = 11$  committee members in rural NL
  3. Large-scale case study,  $N = 46$  committee members in 5 rural Ontario communities
- Total: 92 key informant interviews with age-friendly stakeholders in NL and ON, exploring rural AFC implementation and sustainability



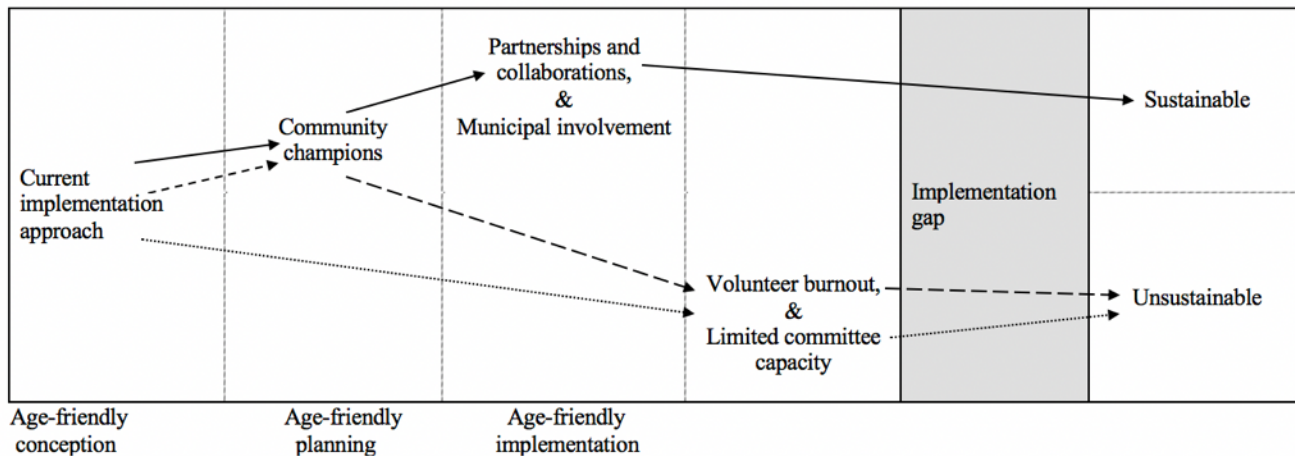


# Research findings:

## □ Key research findings:

### 1. Implementation gap concept (Russell, Skinner, & Fowler, 2019)

Fig. 1. Emergent challenges and opportunities to sustaining age-friendly initiatives



Typical age-friendly implementation pathways:

—————> = Pathway 1: Age-friendly initiative likely to be sustainable

- - - - -> = Pathway 2: Age-friendly initiative likely to be unsustainable

.....> = Pathway 3: Age-friendly initiative likely to be unsustainable

## Strengths: Community champions



“What it’s all about is finding local champions. You know, people who’s **got the expertise, got the time**...the success of any organization is **having the right people around the table** that can bring their **expertise and leadership** to any idea that you might be proposing. You need local champions of a cause.”

*-Committee chair, Inland Bay, NL*



## Strengths: Partnerships, collaborations, & municipal involvement



“You can’t do anything without buy-in, especially in a small town. You need buy-in, whether it’s the chamber of commerce or the library or the recreation component, you can’t do anything without partnerships”

*-Arnprior, ON, committee member representing community service (library)*

# Challenges: Volunteer burnout & limited capacity



“The people that you see here in volunteer roles, they aren’t only involved in one committee; they’re involved in *all* of them. It’s getting to the point now, like some people have said, next year is our 50th anniversary, that will be my last year. **We’ve been at it since we were 18 years old. And we are 70.**”

*-Committee chair, Crane Cove, NL*



# Research findings:

## □ Key research findings:

1. **Implementation gap concept** (Russell, Skinner, & Fowler, 2019)
2. **Limited scope and reach of age-friendly programming** (McCrillis, Skinner, & Colibaba, forthcoming)
3. **Jurisdictional fragmentation** (McCrillis, Skinner, & Colibaba, forthcoming)
4. **Aging in place vs. stuck in place** (Colibaba, McCrillis, & Skinner, forthcoming)



## Our research team



- Elizabeth McCrillis, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology
- Mark Skinner, Ph.D., Canada Research Chair & Dean of Social Sciences
- Amber Colibaba, M.A., Research Coordinator, Rural Aging CRC Program



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## □ Knowledge mobilization



# 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, non-profits, 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

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-



Trent University photos  
Mark Skinner

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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# Conclusion

- Age-friendly success & sustainability = Drawing on individual, community, and jurisdictional factors
- Maximizing the scope and reach of age-friendly programs
- This project will inform our new, critically-informed, community engaged rural aging scholarship projects:

<https://www.trentu.ca/aging/research/canada-research-chairs/rural-aging-research-program>



## OLDER VOLUNTARISM IN AGING RURAL COMMUNITIES

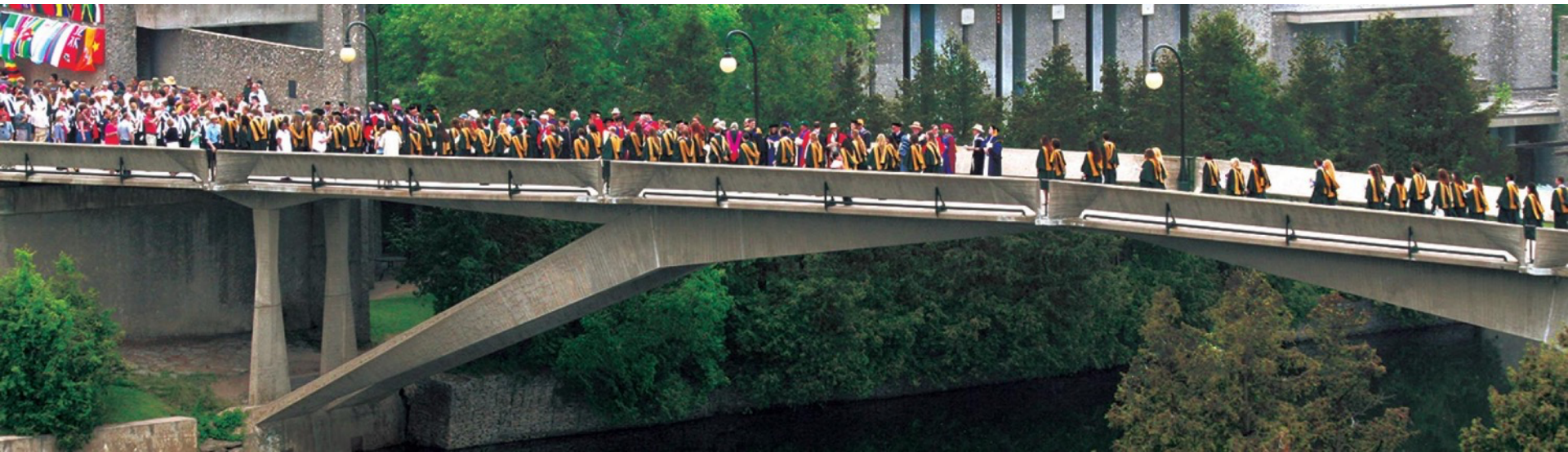
Led by Dr. Mark Skinner (Trent University), Dr. Elizabeth McCrillis (Trent University) and Amber Colibaba (Trent University), a CRC funded community-based investigation into the prospect and precarity of older rural volunteers and volunteer-based supports for older people in rural communities, based on foundational work in rural libraries.

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Older Voluntarism in Aging  
Rural Communities



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