

Older People's Motivations for Volunteering in Rural Communities

Grace Madigan-Aultman

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Proper acknowledgment must be made to Trent University on publication of this thesis or any
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Abstract

In Canada, 23% of the population of rural communities consists of older adults aged 65 and over. These communities receive less federal and provincial government funding due to their population size and demographics. Older volunteers often work to sustain their communities to compensate for that lack of support, and the present research seeks to understand what motivates them. A qualitative case study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 11 volunteers aged 65 and older within the rural communities of Callander and East Ferris in Northern Ontario. These interviews asked questions addressing the motivations of volunteers, the obstacles they have faced in volunteering, why they still choose to volunteer, why they volunteer in their community, and what experiences have validated their choice to volunteer. Data were analyzed using thematic code analysis to identify major themes within the research. This qualitative content analysis indicated that older people volunteer to support community cohesion, preserve rural community sustainability, and for the personal benefits of volunteering. This research has the potential to increase community appreciation for the work of older volunteers and positively influence stereotypes that portray older people as weak and frail. Future research should focus on methods of supporting older volunteers in rural communities.

Keywords: Older volunteers, Motivations, Rural communities

Older People's Motivations for Volunteering in Rural Communities

Volunteering comes in many forms and has multiple definitions (Kelemen et al., 2017). These definitions can change across context and culture; a prominent theme, however, is the donation of time and effort to help a group, person, or organization (Liu et al., 2017; Wilson, 2012). Volunteering has a long history that has changed over time in methods, requirements, and societal expectations (Ramsden & Cresswell, 2019). In Canada, volunteering occurs among people of all age groups, however, older adults dedicate the most time to it (Hahmann, 2021). Younger volunteers often have less time to dedicate to volunteering than do many older adults (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2016). Since there has been a change in family dynamics, particularly in the increased need for dual-income families, fewer parents have time to volunteer (Cyr et al., 2022). In general, people of lower income, often in rural areas, cannot afford to volunteer, as paid work must be prioritized (Southby et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, volunteering is still prevalent; however, the generations of people who can volunteer has shifted. Due to time constraints and economic changes, rural communities with less government support have begun to rely on the work of older volunteers (Colibaba et al., 2021). As a result, the ages of volunteers have changed; what has not is the value people place on volunteering, people's motivations for volunteering, and the community benefits of volunteering (Liu et al., 2017).

Recently, research has increasingly sought to understand the role of older volunteers on their rural communities (Warburton & Winterton, 2017). Older voluntarism refers to situations in which older people voluntarily work within their aging communities to increase vital supports and services necessary to age in place (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019). As such, the older voluntarism literature demonstrates that older volunteers sustain rural communities and their

volunteer-based programs (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019). However, there are often fewer services and supports in rural communities. Therefore, there is a heavier reliance on older volunteers to help the older adults in the community to age in place (Joseph & Skinner, 2012). Aging in place means having the safety and necessary support to be able to age comfortably in one's community for as long as one wishes (Joseph & Skinner, 2012). To make a positive difference, older adults may take on leadership positions in the community that allows them to allocate resources to support initiatives that benefit the community and aging in place (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019; Skinner & Winterton, 2018). Older adults accomplish this by inserting themselves into areas in need of their efforts, such as libraries, schools, firehouses, foodbanks and more (Brady et al., 2022; Colibaba et al., 2021; Colibaba & Skinner, 2019; Pandya, 2022). The burden of supporting these communities lies on older volunteers rather than younger generations because they often have more time, money, and motivation to volunteer (Aranda et al., 2019).

In many rural areas, younger generations of volunteers cannot dedicate as much time to volunteering, thus these communities begin to rely on older adults' work to sustain their volunteer-based services (Colibaba et al., 2021). However, researchers indicate that the community's heavy reliance on older volunteers can become demanding (Joseph & Skinner, 2012). In addition, due to the heavy reliance upon older adults, volunteers can begin to doubt their ability to volunteer, questioning their dedication to volunteering when they have other personal commitments (Colibaba et al., 2021).

Rural communities must support their older volunteers in keeping their community engaged (Russell et al., 2022). Despite sustainability challenges, older volunteers in rural areas may improve their personal health while strengthening their community's support systems (Warburton & Winterton, 2017). Research examines the positive effect of older volunteers on

their communities (Colibaba et al., 2021) and the positive effects on the volunteers, both physical and psychological (Pilkington et al., 2012; Warburton, 2015). Older volunteering can play a role in active aging and can be related to more significant health in older adults (Warburton & Peel, 2008). Nonetheless, there needs to be more exploration into understanding why older individuals want and need to volunteer within their rural communities.

While some volunteers fulfill their duties out of a cultural obligation (O’Dea et al., 2021), others contribute for a sense of purpose or to give back to their community (Chen, 2015). However, the current generation of older volunteers are baby boomers, and research has found that they are less likely to volunteer than previous generations (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). These authors expressed concern that with a reduction in the number of older people’s willingness to volunteer, it is more imperative than ever to understand the motivations of those who are still inclined to do so. Through semi-structured interviews, this honours thesis will study the motivations of older people living in rural communities and the impact volunteering has had on them as they age in rural communities.

Literature Review

Given Canada’s rapidly aging population and the over-reliance on older people to sustain the roles of rural volunteers, it is important to understand the motivations of older volunteers. As of 2022, the percentage of Canadians aged 65 and older makes up 18.8% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2022), causing a shift in Canada’s economy and fiscal sustainability (Yoshino et al., 2019). One of the most significant impacts of these shifts is in rural Canada, where approximately 23% of older Canadians reside (National Council on Seniors, 2017). As a result, older volunteers uphold the aging population within rural communities to provide support and

help to compensate for the changes that have made rural communities less sustainable (Gordon & Hattie, 2008; Yoshino et al., 2019).

Why Rural Communities?

Rural communities have become a point of interest in the Canadian aging literature because they have the highest proportions of older adults in Canada (Channer et al., 2020). Rural communities offer fewer career opportunities and are highly prone to outmigration (Cooke & Petersen, 2019), where young people choose to leave for more urbanized areas where they are likelier to find better job opportunities (Cooke & Petersen, 2019; O'Shea et al., 2019). This population change often leaves older adults alone and stuck in place without family to provide support and in communities lacking in resources and supports (Colibaba et al., 2021; Woolley et al., 2014). Stuck in place refers to older adults not being able to leave their homes despite them no longer being safe or accessible anymore (Colibaba et al., 2021). Older adults are more likely to become stuck in place in rural communities because of the lack of government-appointed services and supports (Colibaba et al., 2021; Garsia & Dobbs, 2019). In addition, Canadian governments do not provide enough age-friendly funding initiatives for rural communities to be sustainable without older volunteers (Russell et al., 2022). Older volunteers support rural communities to compensate for this lack of support or initiative (Colibaba et al., 2021).

What is Older Volunteering?

In many rural communities, volunteering is a civic duty that supports the community and the people within it (Gottlieb & Gillespie, 2008). In rural areas, the volunteer pool is composed of mainly older adults, providing integral community support and are often described as the foundation of their community (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019). Older volunteers have many reasons for volunteering; for some, the ability to volunteer is a chance to maintain a sense of purpose and

to give back to their communities (Chen, 2015). However, the central theme that has changed over time is that more older people are volunteering for personal reasons rather than societal expectations (Seamen, 2012). Despite media portrayals of older people being frail and in need of care, other reports indicate that the work of older volunteers who are more likely to donate more of their time and invest in more long-term commitments deserve special appreciation (Hahmann, 2021; Joseph & Skinner, 2012; Makita et al., 2021).

Many older volunteers take on different formal or informal volunteer roles within their communities. However, a common motif is the role of support and caregiving taken on by these older people (Breheny et al., 2020). Older volunteers focus on helping others and passing on their knowledge and experience to those willing to learn and accept their help. However, they are also people who care about others. For example, older volunteers may insert themselves in all aspects of their community, wherever needed (Colibaba et al., 2021). For example, older volunteers are responsible for the sustainability of services such as food banks that help to support the many Canadians who suffer from food insecurity, particularly in rural communities (Buck-McFadyen, 2015). More than food, older volunteers keep their communities safe and engaged through their work in public libraries, as volunteer firefighters, and more (Colibaba et al., 2021; Colibaba & Skinner, 2019). Volunteer firefighters for example, are responsible for more than emergency responses; they are active members of their community, encouraging engagement and facilitating programs that teach about fire safety and encouraging family time (Tuckey et al., 2012). Libraries are often community gathering areas that foster programs for all ages, from children's reading programs and physical activity to spaces for community programming, often including programs focused on older populations (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019; Lenstra, 2018). These are just a few examples of the work of older rural volunteers. These

people are members of rural communities that try to ensure they keep their communities safe, healthy, and happy while giving them room to grow.

Benefits of Volunteering in Later Life

Volunteering can positively contribute to active aging. It can benefit people's health, as active volunteering is related to longevity and can support injury prevention (Warburton, 2015; Warburton & Peel, 2008). Anderson et al. (2014)'s review showed that volunteering led to multiple physical health benefits for individuals, including increased independence and prevention of dementia. Research shows older adults in poorer health can display significant physical improvement after volunteering (Barron et al., 2009). Other studies show an improvement in more than overall health. For example, environmental volunteering (volunteering specifically dedicated to helping the environment) was related to improved grip strength, the ability to sit and stand more fluently, and walking speed in adults over 65 across 12 weeks (Chen et al., 2020). More than physical health, volunteering can also positively affect volunteers' mental health (Jiang et al., 2021).

Older adults' most common psychiatric diseases are depression and dementia (Leyhe et al., 2017). Often, both conditions are experienced either as precursors to the other or simultaneously, and both can induce mild cognitive impairments (Leyhe et al., 2017). However, studies show that long-term volunteering can help lessen these symptoms (Anderson et al., 2014). While volunteering does not treat dementia, it can help to reduce the risk factors associated with it (Han et al., 2020). A five-year longitudinal study conducted by Griep et al. (2017) also showed that long-term volunteers were more likely to experience milder cases or symptoms of dementia than those who do not volunteer. Older voluntarism is also directly linked to decreases in symptoms of depression and overall improved mental health (Jenkinson et al.,

2013). A lack of meaning in one's life can often be associated with depression (Sherman et al., 2011). Volunteering in older adults can lessen symptoms of depression while increasing levels of cognitive functioning (Anderson et al., 2014). However, different types of volunteering can have different levels of effectiveness against depressive symptoms (Lam et al., 2021). For example, cognitively demanding volunteering (e.g., mentoring) is much more likely to improve cognitive function while reducing depressive symptoms in older adults (Lam et al., 2021). In contrast, instrumental volunteering (e.g., food preparation) has little effect on improving either (Lam et al., 2021). Although the health benefits of volunteering are great, the effect on mood may be more significant.

One of the most common themes in the literature was the improvement of older volunteers' subjective well-being (Anderson et al., 2014; Aranda et al., 2019; Choi & Kim, 2011; Jongenelis & Pettigrew, 2021; Pilkington et al., 2012; Sherman et al., 2011). Older volunteers reported improving their overall quality of life, particularly when volunteering expanded their social circle (Pilkington et al., 2012). Additionally, compared to younger volunteers, older people experienced more satisfaction and less emotional exhaustion from volunteering (Aranda et al., 2019). Older adults who volunteer were generally happier and more content with their life (Saz-Gil et al., 2019). Often, the cause for these feelings of satisfaction stemmed from recognition, gratitude, and the belief that one's efforts are not only appreciated but are beneficial (Jongenelis & Pettigrew, 2021). Despite these benefits of volunteering, circumstances can still provide challenges for volunteers that may negatively affect them.

Challenges within Older Voluntarism

Researchers question the ethics of encouraging older people to volunteer (Martinsen & Halpern, 2011). Their concerns stem from the new pressures placed on older people to volunteer,

stating that it can lead to normative ideals that may not be achievable, set expectations on the aging process, and induce guilt about productivity (Martinsen & Halpern, 2011). Additional pressures are a result of federal and provincial governments' reliance on the work of older volunteers to provide necessary support within rural communities (Russell et al., 2022). There are many preconceived notions about aging, such as older people being fragile and needing to be taken care of; but contradictorily, older people are often depicted as or expected to be volunteers (Joseph & Skinner, 2012; Serrat-Graboleda et al., 2021). Joseph and Skinner (2012) argue against continuing the stereotype of frailty in older adults because it can create obstacles in aging in place. Could researchers argue that the pressures of volunteering have the same negative impact as frailty stereotypes?

Baby boomers comprise most of the population of rural volunteers (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). The expectations surrounding baby boomers are immense; due to their greater education and high population, predictions by researchers argue that boomers' volunteering efforts will become the pillars of their communities (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). However, recent studies are learning that fewer baby boomers are interested in volunteering because many are uninterested in positions that will not utilize them to their full abilities or make them feel invalidated (Seaman, 2012). In addition, many non-profit organizations struggle with the mismanagement of their older volunteers (Eisner et al., 2009). Older volunteers are less likely to commit to organizations where they feel their efforts or skills are not appreciated by the association (Eisner et al., 2009). By understanding and appreciating volunteers' individual skills, non-profit organizations recognize older volunteers' efforts while also improving the efficiency of their organization (Eisner et al., 2009).

Older volunteers may not be interested in committing to long-term volunteering. Instead, organizations need to be more flexible in what they ask of volunteers (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). When they do commit, older volunteers often work more hours than other generations (Hahmann, 2021). With there being a heavier reliance on the efforts of older volunteers, particularly in rural communities, they can feel a lack of support that can cause them to reduce hours or stop volunteering altogether (Jones & Heley, 2016; Kritz et al., 2021). Long hours can lead to an increase in volunteer burnout, resulting in increased stress, exhaustion and less volunteering (Colibaba et al., 2021). Older volunteers, who are often the pillars of their communities, must be given more significant support if they are to keep contributing (Russell et al., 2022).

Current Study

Following from the older voluntarism literature, this case study aimed to determine what motivates older people to volunteer. Previous work has attempted to categorize motivations for volunteering in older adults (O'Dea et al., 2021; Prouteau & Wolff, 2008). More research is showing that future generations of older volunteers seem less inclined to devote as much of their time as the older volunteers that rural communities rely on currently (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). As rural communities become more heavily populated by older people and more younger people leave for more urbanized areas, the government supports for these communities decreases (O'Shea et al., 2019; Russell et al., 2022). This shift in dynamic is why older volunteers have become so vital to rural communities (Colibaba et al., 2021). As the reliance upon older volunteers increases, it is essential to understand what motivates them to volunteer. This study worked to understand why older people volunteer and how it has impacted their life. This

motivated the development of a case study of the rural communities of older volunteers from Callander and the Municipality of East Ferris, Ontario, near the city of North Bay, asking:

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of older volunteers in the rural community of Callander and the Municipality of East Ferris?

Research Question 2: Why are older people motivated to volunteer?

Method

Study Context

To understand the experiences and motivations for older rural voluntarism, this research conducted a case study within the rural communities surrounding North Bay, Ontario, which are located on the treaty and traditional territory of the Nipissing First Nations. North Bay, Ontario, is a hub city surrounded by rural communities; its census metropolitan area is a more accurate representation of its population due to how intertwined the citizens are with the surrounding rural areas (pop. 71, 736) (Statistics Canada, 2022). This case study focused on older volunteers who live within two of the rural municipalities surrounding North Bay, including the Municipality of East Ferris (pop. 4750) and Municipality of Callander (pop. 3863) (Statistics Canada, 2021a; Statistics Canada, 2021b). Callander and the Municipality of East Ferris share a border, and both towns are approximately 330 KM north of the metropolitan city of Toronto. Both Callander and the Municipality of East Ferris are small towns with a rich history of logging and railroading (Dale, 2020; Greer & Bols, 2016). Callander is located on the Southeast end of Lake Nippissing, and people have inhabited it for over 10,000 years (Wiatr, 2019). The Municipality of East Ferris is close to Lake Nippissing, Lake Nosbonsing, and Trout Lake, initially inhabited by the Algonquin Indigenous peoples (Dale, 2020).

Callander received its name after a bookkeeper named George Morrison named his general store and then the town after his parent's hometown of Callander, Scotland (Wiatr, 2019). Callander, ON, was a prosperous town filled with logging and railway industries; however, it became less popular when the railway station burned down in the Great Fire of Callander in 1931, and the mills closed in 1959 (Wiatr, 2019). The Municipality of East Ferris also suffered due to the loss of the Callander railway station (Dale, 2020). Both Callander and Corbeil (a town within the Municipality of East Ferris) was briefly famous after the birth of the Dionne Quintuplets occurred there (Wiatr, 2019). Both towns became significant tourist attractions for a time; now there is still tourism but not to the same degree (Wiatr, 2019). Today, Callander and the Municipality of East Ferris appeal to tourists who enjoy Lake Nippissing, Lake Nosbonsing, and Trout Lake. Twenty percent of Callander's population consists of people aged 65 and over, in the Municipality of East Ferris, the population of older adults aged 65 and older is 18.1% (Statistics Canada, 2021a; Statistics Canada, 2021b). This is consistent with the proportion of people aged 65 and older in rural communities across Canada (23%)(National Council on Seniors, 2017). Both rural communities rely on volunteer-based services to support their community both physically and socially, including through a beautification committee, libraries, volunteer fire services, food banks, and local museums.

Research Design

A qualitative case study was utilized for this research. A case study was the most effective study format to provide meaningful information regarding the interviewees and their communities (Howitt, 2019). A qualitative approach provided richer data that gives a more in-depth comprehension of the social world from the participant's perspective, giving an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the individual (Billups, 2021). This flexibility is essential to

learning and appreciating individual standpoints that provide variability and help foster the development of qualitative themes (Howitt, 2019). Theories were built based on the information learned rather than being pre-developed; it built hypotheses rather than predicting them (Billups, 2021). Qualitative data leads to a more literal understanding of the social world rather than observational assumptions.

Participants and Sampling

Once approval was granted from Trent University's Department of Psychology's Research Experiences Subcommittee recruitment began. Participants included older volunteers who were 65 or older and volunteered within either the rural communities of Callander or the Municipality of East Ferris. We were interested in the potential challenges faced by those volunteering in later life as well as their different motivations or determinants for volunteering. We recruited 11 participants from different volunteer organizations within either Callander or the Municipality of East Ferris to allow for a more diverse range of data collection. Nine of the participants were female (2 male) and their ages ranged from 65 to 78. One of the interviews was conducted as a group while the rest were done individually. This sample size allowed for the focus of the research to stay on the individual, rather than personal perspectives becoming overlooked within a larger sample of data. This sample size allowed for variation while also keeping the focus of the research on each participant. Participants were recruited by telephoning and/or emailing local volunteers within the community that I already know personally or know of due to my connection to the community. I was raised in the Municipality of East Ferris but my family has lived in both communities for generations. I reached out to the volunteers I already know and then I used snowball recruitment to expand my participant pool. Snowball recruitment allows researchers to recruit other participants based on the recommendations of previous

participants (Howitt, 2019). Due to my personal connections within the community, I feel it was easier for me to contact and develop a professional relationship with the participants. I did not know all of them, but given my personal connections I was able to use a warm handoff strategy to meet others, meaning that I asked people I already know to introduce me to others that could help me further. This involved providing me with the email addresses and phone numbers of the new people, provided by the initial participants.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Age	Community	Where they volunteer	First Year of Volunteering
P1	F	68	Callander	Callander Christmas Cheer	2003
P2	F	76	Callander	Callander Food Bank	2009
P3	F	73	Callander	Callander Legion	2006
P4	F	72	East Ferris	Callander Legion	2011
P5	F	75	Callander	Callander Lions Club	1990
P6	M	78	Callander	Callander Legion	1970
P7	F	67	East Ferris	Callander Food Bank	1981
P8	M	69	North Bay	East Ferris Knights of Columbus	1991

P9	F	70	Callander	Catholic Women's League	2013
P10	F	65	East Ferris	East Ferris Council	2012
P11	F	Undeclared	East Ferris	Callander Legion	Undeclared

Ethical Considerations

Data were kept confidential within the research team to protect participants' confidentiality. All data was stored on my password-protected, personal computer, and any information being shared between my supervisor and second reader regarding the study was done through Trent University's secure email accounts. Upon study completion, all transcripts were organized and released to my supervisor using a USB drive and will be retained for five years (April, 2028), after which it will be destroyed from my supervisor's computer. One of the goals of this research was to provide recognition and appreciation for the work of the older volunteers participating in this study. To increase the appreciation of the work of local volunteers, and share this research with the community, a poster was created as a form of knowledge mobilization. This poster features photographs of participants volunteering to contextualize this study and their work. No identifying information was used in the final written piece (the thesis). However, identifying photographs were necessary to create a visual snapshot of this research. Taking or soliciting photographs of the participants was one of the only ways to provide actual context for the work that they do. These photographs were necessary to provide community recognition and appreciation for the work of the participants while also sharing what this research is about in a way that will make sense to everyone. This may help to spread community awareness and knowledge of the importance of older volunteers in rural

communities. While all identifying information regarding participants remained anonymous in this thesis, there was potential for confidentiality to be broken through the recognition of participants from the photos used in the poster that was made clear in the Letter of Information and Consent.

Both verbal and written Informed consent were obtained during recruitment using a Letter of Information and Consent. Participants were given a copy of the Letter of Information and Consent to review immediately upon confirming interest in the study via email, to give time for them to understand the study and be able to ask any questions they may have had. This document outlined the length of the interview, indicated the goal of the study and the interview, identified the risks and benefits of participating in the study, and identified the forms of data being collected, recorded, and used. There were minimal risks to participating in this study. Some risks of participation included any potential feelings of embarrassment regarding participating and (if they chose to) having photos taken of them. On the contrary, potential benefits to participating could shed light on all of the work that older volunteers give to their communities, leading to community recognition and appreciation.

Participants' personal information collected during recruitment was kept confidential, as was all data in regard to the written study. There was however the potential for them to be identified as a participant through the photos that were used for the community poster. The research team were the only individuals with access to the interview data. Participants were free to answer or decline to answer specific questions. They were also free to decline to have their photo taken. Eleven photos were gathered for this thesis, 6 of them were taken by me and the rest were shared with me by participants. Participants could end their participation in the interview at any time without consequences and they could choose to have their interview answers omitted

from the study. However, none of them did. Participants could choose to have their interview data removed from the study up to 14 days after the interview, whereafter it would have been destroyed. They could also choose to revoke their permission to use any potential photos taken of them at any time.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews with each participant. Recorded interviews were approximately 45 minutes in length and focused on the experiences and motivations of older volunteers. A predetermined interview protocol (Appendix C), composed of open-ended questions regarding participants' motivations and experiences with volunteering, was used to conduct the interviews. Interviews took place through 3-weekend trips from Peterborough back to Callander and the Municipality of East Ferris. To achieve both flexibility and comfort, interviews were conducted over the telephone, within local public spaces (ensuring they are quiet, for recording quality and privacy reasons), or in-person in the participants' homes. Participants likely felt more comfortable eliciting richer data due to my personal connections to both communities. As a member of the community, I had a preconceived understanding of the intricacies and importance of the work done by the participants. Even though I did not know all the participants personally, I often had a connection of some sort with them, likely either through previous interactions or family ties.

With participant consent, photos were also collected to create products of knowledge remobilization in the form of a poster. Photographs were taken of the work conducted by volunteers, the volunteer locations, as well as the participants while volunteering or at their place of volunteering. These photographs were used to create a fabric poster to be returned to the Callander Royal Canadian Legion to share this research back to the community and potentially

increase the admiration and appreciation of volunteers. These photos were taken using a digital camera and all data from the camera was stored on my password-protected computer. These photos were taken at prearranged times that were coordinated with the participants to ensure that it did not impede in their volunteer work or the work of their organization.

Materials

Immediately following their confirmation of interest in participating in the study, participants were emailed a demographic survey (Appendix A) and an information and consent form (Appendix B) for them to review and inquire with questions they might have had. If the interview was conducted in person, prior to it starting, a paper copy of both forms was given to participants a second time to review and complete while I prepared myself for the interview. Once these forms were completed, the interview began. If the interview was conducted over the phone, participants were asked to give verbal consent. The demographic survey asked the participants to identify their age, where they volunteer, which community they are from, and if they have a history of volunteering. The interview followed a semi-structured format and was conducted using a predetermined interview protocol focused on using open-ended questions to further understand the experiences and motivations of the participant's time as a volunteer (Appendix C). Specifically, topics generally considered peoples' time as a volunteer, their present volunteer work, previous volunteering experiences if there are any, and how those experiences impacted their life. Participants were also asked about their motivations for volunteering, why they did it, and what challenges they had to overcome volunteer. While a predetermined interview protocol was used, the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed for follow-up questions to be asked as needed.

Data Analysis

Once collected, data from the interviews were transcribed using the auto-transcribe extension in Microsoft Word. Once the transcripts were manually edited and refined to correspond exactly with the audio recordings, the data were analyzed using thematic code analysis. Thematic code analysis is a qualitative methodology that helps to identify and develop patterns and themes within the data (Howitt, 2019). To become familiar with the data, all of the transcripts were reviewed line by line to look for any patterns or commonalities that had the potential to become codes. Originally, more than five codes were identified, but they were merged due to overlap. A potential code list was developed, but to ensure its accuracy it was tested on the first 3 pages of each transcript. At the end of this process, a detailed code manual was developed. The final code list is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Final Code Manual

Code	Code Description
Rural Community	Know everyone in the area, want to take care of each other, sense of pride over the community being home, feel responsible for those in the community, feel a need to improve the community, feel more responsible for helping others due to fewer available services in the area.
Social Capital	Want to help others and feel a need to help others, creating trust within the community, and supporting people, satisfaction from helping others.
Personal Challenges	Health, personality conflicts, time/scheduling conflicts, burnout, political barriers such as extra training, insurance, new rules or protocols that can restrict volunteers, fear of being sued.

Personal Benefits	Recognition, encouraging generational volunteering, provides a sense of purpose, encourages social relationships or connections, a sense of accomplishment, being able to use personal skills, fulfilling religious needs to help.
Sustainability of Older Voluntarism	Fear over who will take over, fear that all volunteers are aging, cannot get enough people to volunteer, political barriers such as obtaining insurance to cover, fear of being sued, financial barriers with acquiring funding, fear that younger generations are not interested. However, there is hope because of the few young volunteers who do show interest, community initiatives encouraging it.

Following the development of a code manual, each transcript was coded. Next, to organize a stronger results section and develop themes, coded transcripts were broken down by each individual code, creating code outputs. These code outputs were used to analyze the data. Data within these code outputs were reviewed carefully, with notes being made beside each line to determine major themes. A summary was written for each code that highlighted themes and quotes to be used in the results section of this study. These summaries were used to identify the major findings within the data.

Results

The motivations and experiences of 11 older volunteers within Callander and the Municipality of East Ferris in Northern Ontario were explored through in-depth interviews. These interviews revealed three themes: older adults volunteer because 1) of the rural community cohesion associated with volunteering, 2) for rural community sustainability, and 3) for the personal benefits of volunteering that each participant experienced. Table 3 summarizes all of the themes and sub-themes identified within this study. This analysis will discuss and demonstrate these themes through representative, anonymized participant quotes.

Table 3.

Summary of Findings on the Motivations and Experiences of Older Adults in Rural Communities

Theme	Description
1. Community Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Rural community pride <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improve the community b. Take care of the people in the community B. Taking the initiative to support rural community cohesion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Going beyond the expectations of volunteering
2. Rural Community Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Fear for the sustainability of volunteering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Do not receive enough support b. Lack of recruitment B. Personal challenges to volunteering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Health Complications b. Personality Conflicts
3. Personal Benefits of Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Sense of purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Keeping busy b. Keeps them physically and mentally active B. Social Connection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A way to meet people b. Creates social support groups

Community Cohesion

Community cohesion refers to the fact that through volunteering, participants created a connection to the community and each other. Participants in both communities had a resounding need to care for each other and their homes. To them, the community was home both by being where they lived and through the people they cared about. Most wanted to give back to the

community to take care of or improve it and show appreciation for what they felt the community gave them, a home. Participants worked to improve their community through volunteering for larger organizations or projects like the local Legion, building local arenas, or running a local food bank. They also volunteered more informally, like maintaining walking paths, donating food, raising money for the food bank, and knitting socks or sweaters. Within the community, many participants had an ingrained need to help others. This may have been due to internal reasons such as personal morals or family traditions, but no matter what, the need to help was deeply intrinsic. Most of the participants got a deep sense of satisfaction from helping others, and it is part of what inspired them to volunteer, helping others made them feel good. Through this finding, sub-themes were identified as rural community pride and taking the initiative to support community cohesion. These sub-themes help to explain the connection participants felt to the community.

Rural Community Pride

For the participants, the community they lived or volunteered in was their home. It was a place that they felt connected to no matter if they had always lived there or if they had moved there: “I have lived in this community, in this house for almost 46 years. Yeah, this was my husband's and my first and only house” (Participant 9). One of the most important things that this study identified is that volunteers within rural communities care for each other. Community pride inspired many participants to volunteer to care for their home and the people within the community. “So we could just say to ourselves, you know, if we're going to these meals, why don't we join the Legion and do something with it and help out and whatever. So that was our start of getting into it” (Participant 6). Participants felt responsible for improving their community however they could. “Yeah, you often see things where you could make it better”

(Participant 1). With or without recognition, many participants worked with, knew of, or organized means of volunteering to improve the lives of their fellow community members while maintaining the community and supporting each other:

You use them all the time; there we go. Yeah, you know, so you know that there's no, there's no paid labor there; it's all volunteers. All the equipment was bought by; they get no money from the Municipality. They're on their own; the gym is on its own. So I mean, to your point, there are many, many amenities, amenities that the public enjoys that are the result of volunteerism. (Participant 10)

Participants consistently spoke of feeling welcomed by the community and wanting to care for each other because many felt that even if they did not know everyone, they still felt responsible for them. Many attributed this to the area's rurality; it maintained its communal atmosphere even with new people consistently moving in or out. “Well, we're fortunate that the size of the community. Even though it has expanded and I don't know everybody on the street anymore, I still think it has a small-town environment where we take care of each other and care about each other” (Participant 1). Residents who had moved to the community from larger areas also felt the communal atmosphere. They compared their experiences in their community to where they originally came from and said it was just a different feeling, a sense of belonging, and support:

See, I grew up in Mississauga, and the volunteer thing wasn't as big down there like I mean, I was in Girl Guides and went right through from brownies right up to being a leader. The volunteer mentality isn't the same I found when I was growing up down there, not the same as it is up here. There's more of a volunteer close-knit. (Participant 7)

This same participant attributed the volunteer mentality to habit “I think that's the key because, we're used to helping and taking care of each other and watching out for each other, and I think that's why you don't maybe get it as much in a, like a city setting” (Participant 7). One participant who grew up in a larger city had to move to Callander for his job, and his original plan was to return after some time. This plan changed after he realized how much residents cared for each other, attributing it to the area's rurality. “It seems rural people are more inclined to help other people or strangers or whatever than big city Municipalities are. It's just a closer community, I think” (Participant 6).

Another participant attributed the rural connections fostered within the Municipality of East Ferris to the history of the area, believing that some of the first families who moved to the area started working together to keep everyone taken care of, and that mentality just continued through time:

Historically, it is the rural nature that made a difference absolutely...OK, when they came here. So they were connected and wanted to work together, and so, and in Astorville, it's another stream of people that came from the region of Quebec, and they all came together. They're all from the same village as you go, what we call (French City). It's all the same people, the same families. There's like, you know, thirty of them; they all came together. So when they started to when they all came here, they did work together, and they created and a spirit in the community that has lived on, I would say. And so I would say East Ferris that has made it different. The rural character and the nature of we can't call them founders because we certainly have the First Nations in our community, but certainly the development that occurred was made with people that had ties, and they

were, they came here with the desire to work together. So that in that sense that the real character history has coloured our past. (Participant 10).

This participant grew up in the Municipality of East Ferris, and the social connections she built from volunteering felt like being at home with family. She attributed living in a rural community to one large family that made her feel more comfortable when she was a part of something with others. Volunteering allowed her to maintain the social network she valued so much while enabling her to help others and make a positive difference within her community:

So basically, if you grew up in large families or you grew up in environments where you were out. So because volunteering is also about social connection, and so if you are, you know you've been brought up in that versus maybe in a larger city where you're always on your own kind of thing. Well, you want to seek out, you know other people and other seniors. (Participant 10).

While most participants believed in the altruistic nature of the rural community, one participant thought that it did not matter whether the community had the population of a small town or that of a city. She believed that the people working together mattered, not what area they volunteered or lived in that made a difference.

I don't know if it makes a difference whether it's a rural or non-rural. For instance, (name) knows everybody. I mean, that would be the difference in the city...But I honestly think rural. I really don't think there's much difference. People for people, I really don't rural or city. My opinion. (Participant 4).

Despite the differences in opinion, it became clear that many participants had an intrinsic need to help others and support their community. Participants expressed that they personally felt that if they saw someone or something in need, they were going to take the initiative to help them.

Taking the Initiative to Support Community Cohesion

While all participants felt the need to help others, what stood out was that many of them took the initiative to do more than was required or expected of them to help support community cohesion. This sense of initiative could mean doing more than they had to while volunteering, seeking out other ways of volunteering, or just seeing where there was a problem and taking it upon themselves to try to fix it. Participants recognized that sometimes people needed extra help, and they gained personal satisfaction from being the one to help them:

I can't explain the need, but I just it's there. I just, I just want to help you know can I put a fire out can I make something easier for somebody else? I started with a woman I met. I met her in the bank, and she had a bill problem with Bell and Cogeco, and I went to help her clarify to clean that up, and it took a while. And while I was there. Well, I can help her with this. Oh, I can help; I can do that for you, yeah. Like, and it just evolved.

(Participant 1).

Participants would also find ways to take initiative within their organizations and develop pride in improving their situations. For example, Participant 4 found satisfaction in her ability to radically increase the fund used to support the military veterans within her local Legion when she became the Chair, "I found that really, when I took over myself and then another person took over poppy, it was they had very little money in the poppy fund. And we brought it up thousands and thousands of dollars." Many participants would also volunteer in more informal ways that may not always be seen as volunteering but had a significant impact on those they helped. It should be reiterated that participants did not provide these extra services because they had to but because of their values that encouraged them to help others wherever they could. For example, another participant who volunteered at the local food bank decided to truly connect and help the

clients she worked with by coming up with ways they could use the food they were given by providing recipes or inspiration, “Like I would take in some recipes sometimes...well, here there's these beans. What do you do with them? They do all kinds of things with them, and they're good for you. You know, anything to help” (Participant 3).

When visiting her mother at her long-term care home, another participant found that many residents seemed lonely, so she decided to make it a part of her routine to visit her mother and those who also wanted or needed a little extra company, “I used to go and visit them because there's a lot of people there didn't have people that went to visit them, and it was really nice. It gave you really good feeling, eh” (Participant 5). The need to take the initiative and help others extends to participants who may encounter personal challenges. However, they would still do extra if someone else needed help.

Yeah, it's hard, I. Because I work where I see a need. If it's a void and I a lot of times I'll sit be sitting, you know somebody will say, oh, we need somebody to do that and I'll be sitting there putting my head down sitting on my hands saying no, don't say it, don't say it. Come on, somebody put their hand up, and then nobody does, and I'm like, okay, fine, I guess I'll do it, I'll figure out how to fit it in. (Participant 7).

While many volunteers took on extra responsibilities because they enjoyed being able to support their community and help others, the second major finding suggests that many also did it out of a deep fear of what would happen to the community if they were not there to take care of it.

Rural Community Sustainability

Many participants were older adults struggling with keeping up with the demands of volunteering in their communities without replacement support from younger volunteers. Many feared for the sustainability of volunteering in their community due to personal challenges that

prevented or made it more difficult for them to volunteer. This fear would intensify when they had to slow down or stop volunteering because of their difficulties. The participant's experiences with rural community sustainability were expressed through two sub-themes, fear of the sustainability of volunteering and personal challenges to volunteering. The participants' experiences indicate that current trends in the community make them fear for the sustainability of volunteering, which is worsened by the challenges that make it harder for them to volunteer.

Fear for the Sustainability of Volunteering

Multiple participants expressed fear about the sustainability of volunteering within their community, in the present and the future. Many older volunteers tried to provide the same services they did in the past despite losing many volunteers and having no one to replace them.

Well, the trends right now to me involve seniors, and as seniors grow older, health and age become a, could become an issue. And so, just working here at the Legion, we've lost some Legion members in the last year just involving my Knights of Columbus; I've lost a few Knights because of health and death for health reasons. And so it's a challenge now to keep that momentum going to volunteer, which is why you need to hire or not hire, but you need to have volunteers join you at a younger age. (Participant 8)

Others expressed how exhausted and overwhelmed they felt about volunteering with limited numbers of older volunteers. One participant and her organization were so desperate that they had two volunteers who drove approximately four hours roundtrip to be able to support them at meetings or events. This was not sustainable for them, so many responsibilities were placed on her to manage with little to no help.

And then if you say, OK, like I said, we go in there, and we don't have a lot of help, and then we just I just have to say, OK, just don't be, you know, don't get too over excited and

everything you do, it's going to be worse. So we just try to, you know, yeah, a little bit at a time. Just keep going, and then the end of the day comes. (Participant 5).

Even organizations with more than enough members suffer because participants noticed that it is often the same small group of people taking on significant responsibilities within the organization. This fostered frustration and weariness among volunteers who need more peer support. "I don't; I don't know why they don't, but even in the Legion, they're like, we're well over 400 members, and I'll bet there isn't 15% or 20% that do the majority of the work, but that's the same with any organization" (Participant 6). In addition, with the imminent threat of volunteer burnout becoming more prominent, participants described becoming more desperate to recruit younger generations of volunteers. Hence, the apparent lack of interest in volunteering from younger generations and the attitudes participants have witnessed regarding volunteering in younger generations exacerbates their fears.

I'm finding that most groups that I volunteer with are older volunteers. That the younger generation, for lack of a better way of saying it, have their time so packed full they don't have time for volunteering. Unfortunately, a couple of people I've run into, they're like, well, why would I? What do I get out of it? (Participant 7).

Some participants expressed suspicions that part of what intimidates recruited volunteers and makes it more difficult for them to do their jobs are some of the financial and political barriers that are relatively new. For example, one participant who volunteered with the local Lions Club used to sit inside the local grocery store to sell tickets for fundraisers within the community. They cannot anymore due to changes to insurance policies that force volunteers to sit outside, "and then this time, we sold tickets; it was in the winter. I said I can't sit up there in December, November, see. We used to be able to go inside, but I think it's because of insurance,

I don't know, and yeah” (Participant 5). Other political movements were creating barriers to recruiting volunteers with new legal requirements that were scaring or barring people from being able to volunteer. While many of these practices are in place for protection, governing bodies do not always realize the impact it has on communities that rely on volunteers to function.

I forgot to mention that there's a lot of people that, you know, they shy away because there's risks they don't want to be sued and you know. Also, the Government's just passed legislation now where everyone has to sign non-conflict, you know they're not in conflict with any of the activity that's going on in the organization. That has also shy scared people away because now people feel, Oh my God, you know, what am I getting involved in... (Participant 10).

Many participants feared the sustainability of volunteering within their communities because of younger people's lack of interest or commitment. The stress caused by fears of sustainability increased when participants were forced to stop or reduce the amount of volunteering they could do because their personal challenges became a barrier to volunteering.

Personal Challenges to Volunteering

Participants faced many challenges that potentially prevented or made it more difficult for them to volunteer. A few of these challenges caused some participants to stop volunteering with specific organizations. While some of these obstacles are individualized, multiple participants shared these challenges. For example, health significantly impacted participants' abilities to volunteer. Some health implications were cited by participants as being aging-related (e.g., memory deficits or restricted mobility). Other participants suffered from severe ailments like heart problems and autoimmune diseases. As a result, one participant had to take a break from volunteering and reduce her responsibilities:

And she, she said uh; first she would come with me, said I'll go with you, but I hate shopping. Well, I had a heart incident; they're not sure if it was a heart attack or not. So while I was off for a week or two, she and her husband did the shopping, so they are doing the brunt of it right now. We still do some of it. (Participant 2).

Health complications are scary for those who experience them but also highly frustrating for the participants who became restricted by their situations. Other participants who experienced similar frustrations had to adjust their lifestyle, volunteering, and interests to accommodate their age. One participant expressed resentment that she could not process and remember information as she used to. Her frustration was so intense that she had to stop one of her primary forms of volunteering because she no longer felt confident in her abilities. She still volunteers in other community areas, but not to the same degree:

I'm, you know, I'm a little slower at learning, and (name) can attest to that, the computer. And remembering like remembering is frustrating. In fact, that's why I didn't run the last time for Council, was because I was frustrated with myself. I would read everything, and I would do all my homework, but to remember it and retain it or retrieve it quick enough to deliver was so frustrating. (Participant 1).

Personal Benefits of Volunteering

Many participants experienced personal benefits from their work as older volunteers, making volunteering more enjoyable and valuable. Volunteering was a way for people to feel useful and to use skills they had beneficially acquired through their life without the pressures of working. In addition, participants used volunteering to connect with their families and peers and provide solid examples for the younger generations in their families. This connection will foster generational volunteering that will benefit the community and instill a sense of pride in the

families that can continue a legacy of volunteering. For other participants, volunteering was a way to practice their religion in a way that allowed them to feel closer to their faith while helping others. The personal benefits that participants experienced were clearly expressed by two sub-themes: sense of purpose and social connection.

Sense of Purpose

Many of the participants had different reasons for why they started and continued to volunteer throughout their lives. However, as they aged, many participants described volunteering as a way of finding purpose. Many participants had extra time after retiring and wanted to find a way to keep themselves busy, “After I retired, it was something productive to do” (Participant 3). After retiring, one participant felt lost in a way. When working full-time, much of her day was focused on her career, which helped shape her identity and gave her meaning. When she retired, she struggled with what her new meaning could be. By volunteering, she found a sense of purpose that she enjoyed and gave her a reason to get up in the morning, “We've also all worked all our lives, and then all of a sudden you're retired, and it's like what am I going to do with my time? So you're used to having a purpose to get up every day” (Participant 7). However, participants also noted that finding purpose could keep them more physically and mentally active. Volunteering gave participants a reason to get up in the morning and gave them something to look forward to during their day “And honestly, it does help fill your day, you know, especially when you're used to doing.” (Participant 4) Participant 6 feared becoming stagnant from not having anything to do. “Do you sit and vegetate?” Volunteering was a way to prevent that. However, he also noticed that volunteering gave him a reason to go out into the community, interact with others and increase his mobility. He found that volunteering gave him something to do each day that kept him active and happy:

It keeps you active, gets you out into the community. Some personal growth, they get growth just it keeps you it keeps you younger enough, but it certainly keeps you, keeps you moving and you meet a lot of nice people there. You certainly do expand your friends, your friend circle. (Participant 6).

For another participant, volunteering was a way to keep her mind active. She had noticed that her memory was not as accurate or accessible as it used to be, so she wanted to do everything possible to keep herself busy and her brain stimulated in a way that still helped others.

Volunteering also gave her a reason to go out and do things within the community after the death of her husband; it helped to keep her from getting lonely, “Well, it gets you out of the house, and it gets your mind going. You don't, you think you're not sitting in a place here by yourself, and you know it keeps your mind going” (Participant 5). Finally, participants were able to use volunteering as a way to help others and themselves. While volunteering provided volunteers with a sense of purpose, it also created a sense of community of helping others and provided participants with invaluable social connections outside their families.

Social Connections

Volunteering was socially beneficial for all participants, whether they were from the area or chose to move there. For many, volunteering was a social outing that allowed them to have fun with their peers and help others simultaneously. In addition, volunteering was a way for participants new to the area to get into the community, meet people and start building social connections with their peers. “Well, as soon as we moved out here because we didn't know anybody, we joined the Legion just to get to know people, and that's, yeah, I've been working here and volunteering here ever since” (Participant 4). For one participant, the social connections she built from volunteering became more than friends or social relationships. Many of the people

she volunteered with became a “sisterhood of like-minded women” (Participant 9). While she appreciates how much fun she has volunteering and values being able to help others, this participant truly realized how grateful she was for the people she volunteered with when they helped support her through the death of her husband. It was one of the saddest times in her life, and she attributes part of her comfort to the support network she had become a part of while volunteering:

Oh, OK, I think I think that one, probably the one of the biggest ones, was when my husband died, and all the members are so many members of the Catholic Women's League, all reached out to me. Attended the visitation, offered condolences like it was just prayers, and just they're just so much, yeah. That, you know, had I not been involved, that support wouldn't have been there. (Participant 9).

Overall, participants found that the benefits they experienced from volunteering were enough to keep them motivated to continue despite their challenges and fears. Despite the sustainability challenges, participants found volunteering was critical for their communities and lives.

Discussion

This qualitative study examined the motivations and experiences of older adults within the rural communities of Callander and the Municipality of East Ferris in Northern Ontario, Canada. Key research findings demonstrated that participants experienced community cohesion through volunteering, struggled with rural community sustainability, and enjoyed the personal benefits of volunteering. Participants took pride in their rural communities, motivating them to care for the community and its inhabitants. Results also demonstrated that participants had their own intrinsic needs to help others which inspired them to take the initiative to support community cohesion in ways that went deeper than typical volunteer efforts. While volunteers

indicated that they enjoyed their work, results suggested that they feared for the sustainability of volunteering in rural communities due to the inability to recruit younger generations. Many participants experienced personal challenges that forced them to slow down or stop volunteering. Still, they were often stressed by the thought of having to stop volunteering out of fear of who would take their place in supporting the community. Despite these challenges, participants continued to volunteer because volunteering gave them a sense of purpose that many had started to lose as they aged. In addition, findings suggest that through volunteering, participants created and maintained social connections that they found invaluable. These findings will be discussed further to explain the motivations and experiences of older volunteers in rural communities.

The participants in this study had a strong sense of community that motivated them to want to improve their homes while supporting its residents. Aranda et al. (2015) indicate that older adults volunteer because they have more time and motivation. While this is true for many, results from this study suggest that the participants also volunteered because of the rural nature of the community, which encouraged them to want to take care of each other. Qin et al. (2022) found that volunteering is more prevalent across rural communities than in urbanized areas. This mentality was consistent across participants who had lived in the community their whole lives and those who had relocated from urban cities. The rural nature of the community fostered community cohesion that encouraged volunteering out of a sense of pride, responsibility, and connection. This is because the participants, the people, and the area they volunteer in is home, and they wanted to be able to support it.

Consistent with the literature (Colibaba et al., 2021), participants volunteered in any area of the community they felt they were needed to ensure that the community was cared for. This included essential formal community support such as creating and maintaining a local food bank,

volunteering with non-profit organizations like the Lions Club, multiple programs within the local Legion, and more (Buck-McFadyen, 2015; Colibaba & Skinner, 2019; Warburton & Winterton, 2017). Through older voluntarism, participants allowed the people in their community to age in place (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019; Skinner et al., 2016). In addition, participants volunteered in more informal ways, the outcomes of which brought joy to the community despite the expected lack of recognition for this work. These methods of informal volunteering included the maintenance of local walking trails, working to support non-profit affordable housing for older adults in the community, and more. Through older voluntarism, participants also formed essential connections with community members that benefitted them both (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019; Colibaba et al., 2021).

Previous research has indicated that older adults may have intrinsic motivations for volunteering, such as wanting to help others (Gil-Lacruz et al., 2019). Some participants attributed their need to help others to familial traditions influenced by the community's rural nature. Other participants felt they had a moral responsibility to help others as much as possible. Stukas et al. (2016a) argue that one of the most significant reasons people volunteer is to express their need to help others. This internal need led to many participants taking the initiative to support members of their community in ways that fell outside traditional methods of volunteering, such as visiting residents in long-term care homes that participants did not know and thought they could use the company.

Rural community sustainability was a primary concern for the participants of this study. Winterton and Warburton (2016) found that there are too many services in rural communities that rely on volunteers, but an insufficient number of volunteers are willing to provide those services. Older voluntarism sustains rural communities and allows residents to age in place, but it

can be threatened when there are not enough volunteers to continue it (Colibaba et al., 2021). Recent studies are finding that, in general, fewer people are willing to volunteer than ever (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). Participants expressed concerns over needing more interest or commitment from new volunteers to sustain the support they provide to the community. However, this lack of interest from younger volunteers may stem from the traditional structures of volunteer organizations that do not readily adhere to the needs of younger generations (Warburton et al., 2018). This study found that younger volunteers want to help. However, they also want volunteer organizations to be willing to change their methods of volunteering to allow for new ideas and flexible hours (Warburton et al., 2018). Participants also noticed that many young people seemed uninterested in volunteering because they needed to understand how it would benefit them. This is consistent with Stukas et al.'s (2016b) findings that indicate that newer volunteers are often more extrinsically motivated.

In contrast, older generations are often more intrinsically motivated to volunteer (Stukas et al., 2016b). Stukas et al. (2016b) theorized that the generational divide is caused by younger volunteers often working towards career advancements or believing that volunteering can benefit themselves and others. In contrast, older adults simply want to help others (Stukas et al., 2016b). Despite the differences in reasoning, rural communities need to find ways to attract younger adults to volunteer to sustain older voluntarism and the ability for the people in the community to age in place (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019).

This lack of new volunteer recruitment has steadily led to a decline in the number of volunteers within rural communities, leading to fewer volunteers taking on greater responsibilities. This causes researchers to question the sustainability of volunteering in rural communities (Joseph & Skinner, 2012). Many participants need more support to provide the

community's services and sustain older voluntarism (Colibaba et al., 2021). Current trends in the volunteer literature have found that with shifts in society resulting in fewer young volunteers, there are increased levels of volunteer burnout found in older adults that often cause them to withdraw from volunteering (Kragt & Holtrop, 2019). Participants suspected that a potential reason for the challenges in recruiting young volunteers came from the political and financial barriers that are relatively new to volunteering. In addition, participants indicated that many new policies or insurance practices in place make it harder for them to volunteer while also intimidating potential volunteers. To follow Canadian rules and regulations, volunteer organizations have greater human resources involvement than they did in the past to ensure that Canadian volunteer guidelines were being adhered to; for example, conflict of interest guidelines (Volunteer Canada, 2017). While these policies are in place to protect volunteers, they are often intimidating. They can cause potential volunteers to feel that they are becoming involved in something more serious or intense than they had initially intended. Paradoxically, these regulations and insurance policies can create extra challenges in sustaining voluntarism in rural communities.

This study's results indicate that many older adults wanted to volunteer, but their personal challenges prevented them. It is common for older adults to experience health complications (Rea et al., 2018). Some participants experienced health complications that forced them to take a break or stop volunteering. Other participants had to alter their responsibilities to accommodate changes to their ability to recall information. It is normal for older adults to experience some mental decline, such as memory deficits or reduced attention spans (Eshkoo et al., 2015). However, it was still highly frustrating for many participants to have to alter their routines as a result. The stress or pressure multiple participants experienced when they had to stop

volunteering has become a common theme among older adults who cannot sustain their old volunteering habits (Martinsen & Halpern, 2011). Many participants felt guilty that they could no longer volunteer. It added extra pressure on their peers when no volunteers took their place, increasing the concern for the rural community's sustainability. However, despite their challenges, many older adults continued to volunteer; some just had to change their type of volunteering.

Many participants were motivated to volunteer because of the personal benefits they received from it. One of their most significant reasons was that volunteering gave them a sense of purpose. Congruent with the literature, participants expressed that after retiring, they struggled with their identity and finding new meaning in their life (Mazzonna & Peracchi, 2017). This study suggested that volunteering gave participants a reason to get up in the mornings and find something to do with their day. Participants ascertained that through the purpose they found from volunteering, they were able to be more physically and mentally active. Volunteering caused them to move around more and kept their mind engaged in their tasks. This was highly beneficial for participants as physical activity is one of the best ways to prevent symptoms of biological aging (Duggal et al., 2019). Similar to the finding by Pilkington et al. (2012), volunteering improved the life of the volunteers; it made them happy and increased their mental stimulation. In addition, findings suggest that volunteering has the potential to affect cognitive function in older adults positively (Anderson et al., 2014). Beyond a sense of purpose, volunteering created social connections for participants.

Many participants, particularly if they were new to the area, started volunteering to immerse themselves in the community and meet people. Research has found that a beneficial outcome of older voluntarism is that it can provide social connections that can improve social

well-being (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019). Many participants used volunteering as a fun social outing with friends while helping their community. For older adults, strong social relationships with peers can increase overall physical health and reduce morbidity (Valtorta et al., 2018). What surprised some participants of the present study was how volunteering became more than a peer outing; it became their social support group. Warburton (2015) found that volunteering created social support groups for older adults that could help them through difficult times in their lives, such as the death of a loved one. Many participants were surprised to discover how much they had come to rely upon and appreciate their connections with other older volunteers. However, they found it one of the most beneficial aspects of volunteering.

Older volunteers are essential to rural communities. However, they often do not get the recognition they deserve for their efforts. Sometimes this results from a lack of awareness within the community; however, it is more commonly a result of ageist stereotypes (Carlson et al., 2022). Many ageist stereotypes are encouraged by media platforms portraying older adults as frail, vulnerable, and incapable of independence, let alone acting as the pillars of rural communities (Joseph & Skinner, 2012; Makita et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential to understand the motivations and experiences of older volunteers to get the recognition and appreciation they deserve. Older voluntarism is essential for rural communities, but it will only be sustainable if older volunteers get the support they need (Colibaba et al., 2021).

Limitations and Future Research

This study was conducted within two small rural communities in Northern Ontario that share a border. A limitation of this study is that it did not consider the potential difference in the experiences of older adults in rural communities in different geographical locations. These data could also be more substantial if the sample had more variance. For example, only two of the

eleven participants were male, and there was a lack of ethnic diversity in the sample that might have given more varied data and unique experiences. Additionally, the data were collected and analyzed by a single person, which can lead to potential bias in the conclusions drawn.

Future research should focus on developing strategies to support older volunteers in rural communities so they can sustain their community and allow older adults to age in place (Colibaba & Skinner, 2019). However, research has shown there are challenges to maintaining older voluntarism because of the lack of support they receive (Colibaba et al., 2021). The most important way to assist older volunteers is to provide them with support. Future research into methods of recruiting younger adults to be able to support older volunteers is essential. Understanding what prevents younger adults from volunteering is the key to learning how to create opportunities for them to volunteer according to their needs. By bridging the gap between the needs of older volunteers and younger generations, older volunteers can continue to volunteer, with adequate support, in rural communities.

Conclusions

There is an increasing reliance on older voluntarism to sustain rural communities but a lack of understanding of why older adults volunteer. To shed light on this issue, this research explored the motivations and experiences of older adults who volunteered in two rural communities. It showed that older adults volunteered to support community cohesion, preserve rural community sustainability, and for the personal benefits of volunteering. We did not determine how to best support these volunteers, but this thesis may increase recognition and appreciation for their efforts in sustaining their communities. This research also aimed to reduce ageist perspectives by displaying their strengths and advantages to society as volunteers, hopefully inspiring people to give them the respect and gratitude they deserve.

Reflexivity

Study Development

Beginning this research, I unknowingly had preconceived notions of what I thought older voluntarism was based on my own personal experiences with it. I believed that volunteering at an age was just something to do to fill the time after retirement or as a social outing for older adults who were lonely. I did not realize how broad or important older volunteers actually are to a community and that there are more reasons for volunteering than I had previously thought. It was not until I began to conduct a serious literature review as well as speaking informally to older family members who used to volunteer in my rural community that I realized this. The start of this research was rocky because of this bias, however, when I allowed myself to open my mind to what I was learning rather than what I thought I already knew, the study started to unfold much more smoothly and I was able to develop stronger research questions. Additionally, I became passionate about this research due to my own family's experiences with volunteering. However, once I started to learn more about older voluntarism, I grew eager to study and promote the efforts and experiences of older volunteers within my communities.

Recruitment Process

Recruitment occurred through my connections to the community. My first volunteer was recommended by friends and family within the community however no one knew her phone number. My family did have personal connections to her son though, so I was able to contact her through him and she was lovely. I will always be grateful that she was my first participant because her kindness really helped me to gain confidence. She also recommended and introduced me to 7 of my 10 other participants. Originally, contacting participants was extremely nerve wracking for me, but over time, as I realized how kind so many of them were, I started to

become more comfortable with starting these conversations. I was very lucky that recruitment of all participants were a result of snowball sampling. I contacted participants through both phone and email. While emailing with participants was highly effective, through this process I learned that recruiting through phone calls was a great way to build rapport with participants even before the interview started. I feel like being able to have a conversation made both myself and the participant more comfortable even before we met. This made meeting in person for the first time slightly less stressful especially because it felt more personal to be able to explain who I was over the phone rather than email. I think it made participants realize that even though I was a stranger, I didn't fully feel like one after talking to them.

Data Collection

This research took place in my hometowns, both of where I grew up in. One is the location of my family home, the other is the location where I grew up working, participating in local events, and making my own connections within the community. I have a rich history within both communities because my family has lived and contributed to them both for generations. In those communities, I can often mention my last names or where I work, and people will often know exactly who I am thanks to both my family ties and my own.

Despite the ease in recruiting my first participant, I was still terrified before leaving for my first interview and I actually practiced interviewing my family multiple times so I would sound more familiar with my protocol. However, I was pleasantly surprised when I found myself truly enjoying my interview because it felt more like getting to know a new friend than anything else. I decided to use this same approach for all of my other interviews and it really seemed to work. Some participants took longer to open-up than others and some became recorder shy, but I can honestly say that by the end of most of my interviews I felt like I had collected excellent data

and made a friend at the same time. All in all I think I can honestly say that interviewing participants was my favourite part of the whole thesis process; despite the fact that I was starting to become tired of my own questions by the end. I truly loved when I was able to interview a couple of participants while they were volunteering and I was able to learn about exactly what they did for my community.

Conducting this research, I had to be conscious of the fact that like when I first started, I already had my own opinions of how I thought the communities were run. I had to make sure that I kept an open mind to the data I was collecting rather than what I already thought about the participants I was interviewing. However, I think that being given tours and talking to participants is what helped me to broaden my perspective and really learn from these people.

Data Analysis

Transcribing all of my data took longer than I thought it would but I felt a great sense of accomplishment when I finished. This was deflated quickly when I realized I now had to make sense of everything in front of me. Data analysis was difficult at the start because I thought I had a firm grasp on the process but I realized I did not. It was a struggle at first but I became more successful when I slowed down my thought process and started moving step by step through the analysis. Coding my data was helpful for me to start organizing my data into categories that were easier to understand. I originally started with 8 codes, community, social capital, health, time, working with others, recognition, generational volunteering and fear for the future of volunteering. By looking at how each of these themes affected the participants I realized that there was overlap and was able to narrow my list to five codes. I think the most challenging part of this process but really taught me the most was analyzing my codes and creating summaries.

This was one of the most time-consuming processes but it is what truly allowed me to understand my data and develop significant and meaningful findings more effectively.

Dissemination of Findings

These findings will be disseminated both community-based and academically. The poster that was created to represent this thesis will be presented first at the Trent University Department of Psychology Undergraduate Honours Thesis Poster Day in April, 2023. The thesis poster will also be presented at two different conferences. It will be presented at the Annual Ontario Psychology Undergraduate Thesis Conference in May, 2023 and the Canadian Psychological Association's 84th Annual National Conference in June, 2023. After the final conference in June, the poster and a bound paper copy of this thesis document will be returned to the community to be hung in the Callander Royal Canadian Legion as a method of knowledge mobilization.

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Appendix A: Demographic Form

Pre-Interview Demographic Form

1. Name: _____

2. Gender: _____

3. Age: _____

4. Which community do you live in? (Please circle one)

Municipality of Callander

Municipality of East Ferris

5. Where do you volunteer? _____

6. Have you volunteered elsewhere in the past, if so please list a few key places?

Appendix B: Letter of Information and Consent Form

Older People's Motivations For Volunteering

Letter of Information and Consent Form

You are being invited to participate in a research study, based out of Trent University's Psychology Department. Please read this information and consent form so you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand the nature of the project and your participation.

Project Title: Older People's Motivations for Volunteering

Investigators: This research study is being conducted by Grace Madigan-Aultman, a fourth-year Trent University Student conducting her Honour's Thesis Study. The supervisor of this study will be Dr. Elizabeth Russell, an Associate Professor at Trent University.

Purpose of the Study: This study is examining the motivations of older volunteers in the rural communities of Callander and the Municipality of East Ferris, Ontario, near the city of North Bay. The purpose of this study will be to understand the motivations for volunteering among older adults and study the individual experiences of older volunteers to understand their motivations for volunteering and the impact volunteering has had on them as they age in rural communities.

What Participation Means: I am interested in interviewing you to learn about your personal experiences as a volunteer. The interview will be approximately one hour in length either in-person, at a location of your choosing, or over the telephone and your participation is entirely voluntary. I am also interested in creating a poster as a way to share my research with you, the participants, and the community. This poster will be created once my research is complete that will be focused on the data I collect from the interviews. Additionally, I am interested in either borrowing or creating new photographs of you at your place of volunteering. Data from the project will be used to inform my honour's thesis and, conference presentations. The poster I am creating will be used to increase community awareness and appreciation for your work. This poster will be placed in the Callander Royal Canadian Legion as a way of sharing this research with the whole community. I will share smaller paper versions of the poster with you as well so you have your own copy of the work you participated in.

Risks of Participating: Risks are minimal but may include feelings of embarrassment if you are recognized through your photo in the poster.

Benefits to Participating: Participating could shed light on all of the work that older volunteers give to our community, leading to community recognition and appreciation.

Confidentiality and Withdrawal: Your personal information for recruitment will be kept confidential, as will all of your data regarding the written study. However, you will be identified as a participant through the photos that will be taken of you and used for the community poster. The research team will be the only individuals with access to the interview data. You are free to answer or decline to answer specific questions. You are also free to decline to have your photo taken. You may end your participation in the interview at any time without consequences and you may choose to have your interview answers omitted from the study. You may choose to have your interview data removed from the study up to 14 days after the interview, whereafter it will be destroyed. You may choose to revoke your permission to use any potential photos taken of you at any time. If you choose to withdraw, please contact Grace Madigan-Aultman (gracemadiganaultman@trentu.ca, 705-358-1160) within 14 days of the interview.

Questions about the Study: If you are willing to participate in the study, or if you have questions about the research, please contact Grace Madigan-Aultman (gracemadiganaultman@trentu.ca, 705-358-1160). This study has been approved by Trent University's Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, please contact Dr. Mowei Liu, Department of psychology research experiences subcommittee (moweiliu@trentu.ca, 705-748-1011 ext.

As a participant in the above project, I understand and agree with the following:

- I understand that this study has been approved by the Trent University Department of Psychology Research Experiences Subcommittee
- I have been fully informed about the nature and extent of my participation in the study;
- My participation in the study is entirely voluntary;
- I may withdraw my participation in the study without consequence up to 14 days after the interview;
- I consent to have photos taken of me on a digital camera to be used for a knowledge mobilization product
- I consent to have loaned photos of me used for a knowledge mobilization product
- The information supplied during the interview will remain confidential;
- My identity will remain anonymous in written analysis and reports and will only be known to the research team;
- My identity has the potential to be recognized in connection with the photos being taken of me
- The interview will be digitally recorded;
- The information gained from this study will be stored responsibly by the research team for five years;
- I have been provided with a copy of the information and consent form for my own records;
- All my questions regarding my participation in the research project and consent process have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant Name: _____

Participant Contact Information: _____

Participant Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Draft Interview Protocol

Intro

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your history of living in this community?
2. Can you give me a small timeline of your experience as a volunteer? (it is okay if it is different places)

Lifelong Volunteering

3. What motivated you to become a volunteer?
4. Why did you decide to volunteer at (____)?
5. Can you describe any obstacles you might have faced in trying to become a volunteer?
 - a. Clarification: extra training or Criminal Record Check, level of commitment, or conflicting priorities such as family?

Current Volunteering

6. Why did you decide to keep volunteering as you got older?
7. How have the demands of volunteering evolved in your time as a volunteer?
 - a. Clarification: extra training or Criminal Record Check, level of commitment, or conflicting priorities such as family?
8. How do you think volunteering will be continued in this community?
9. Can you explain any reasons why you may feel the need to volunteer for more or less time in this community?
10. How do you think that the work of older volunteers has benefited this community?
11. Can you explain some personal challenges you have faced as a volunteer?
 - a. How did you overcome them?

Conclusion

12. Can you speak specifically to a situation that made you feel most validated for your work as a volunteer?

13. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

14. Now that you know the types of questions I am asking, could you recommend anyone else in the area that you think I should speak to?