

## Civic Engagement for Health among Older Adults: A Strategy for Aging in Place

### Summary

- It is well documented that older adults prefer to remain in their own homes, supported by effective services as needed (*aging in place*).
- In New Brunswick, the percentage of the provincial population aged 65+ is the second highest in Canada (at 23%), with Saint Andrews being even higher (at 34%).
- The town of Saint Andrews and surrounding communities wanted to create an Aging in Place strategy, which would include the development of a community hub. To assure that the strategy and community hub would be useful to the community, community involvement was needed. This was achieved through a process of civic engagement, which is a form of social participation that can increase a person's connectedness in their community.
- This project was initiated by Passamaquoddy Lodge, a non-profit nursing home in Saint Andrews. The Lodge worked together with Silvermark consulting firm and St. Thomas University to answer the question "How does a community bring to realization an Aging in Place Strategy?"
- The study attempted to address 2 key questions: (1) What are the processes and practices that promote and develop the engagement of older adults in community development? and (2) What are the social, health and psychological health benefits of civic engagement for older adults?
- There were 81 participants (78 of these were seniors) involved in the community engagement process, which consisted of 5 community engagement events; 45 participants were involved in at least one research activity to assess the impact of civic engagement on their health. Of these 45, 27 individuals completed surveys at project initiation, and of these, 12 also completed the endpoint survey, which enabled comparison of results before and after civic engagement. Interviews were also conducted with 41 participants at project initiation, and of these, 22 also participated in an endpoint interview.
- A "Blueprint for Aging in Place" was developed as a result of the project, as well as a local community action plan that included a plan for the community hub.

### HSPP Focus Area

### Project Start & End Date

### Organization/Agency

### Location

### Principal Investigator(s)

Improving social and built environments to foster health aging

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Indicator	Impact / Outcome / Result	Quote
<b>Opportunities for Civic Engagement</b>	<p>The attitudes and behaviours of 12 participants toward civic engagement showed slight increases after they completed pre-test and post-test surveys. The measures of civic engagement saw up to a 6% increase.</p> <p>After attending community engagement events, 59% of the people who were interviewed said they felt more connected to the community through working together. They also felt united around a common need or goal.</p>	<p><i>"It was a good thing having people get together to discuss the future."</i></p> <p><i>"I met a lot of really great people. I was able to listen to other people's points of view because we all have our own thought processes and ways that we look at things. So, it's interesting to see how other people approach the challenges that we have and hear their comments and input."</i></p>

Indicator	Impact / Outcome / Result	Quote
<b>Personal Social Capital</b>	After taking part in community engagement events, a survey of 12 people showed that participants' knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes toward accessing resources for help improved.	<i>"You could see there was a lot of interest with these people that were there ... [for] the betterment of the town. ... I gained that I am not the only one to have and want things done for the population of this town, may it be young, semi-young, and older, that we just want to do the best as possible for all generations to stay healthy."</i>
	Specifically, over time, there was a 27% increase in the perceived number of organizations in their community and a 5% increase in the likelihood to receive help.	
<b>Sense of Belonging</b>	Many interview participants mentioned that this project had brought people together and allowed them to share their thoughts and opinion on a subject that affects their future and the future of their community. It fostered connection and provided an opportunity for collective participation.	<i>"It was a chance to participate ...in the community's planning for its own future. ...It was a very welcoming experience to participate in that plan for an important chapter that could well be my own. ...Could be yours. Could be mine. Could be all of ours."</i>
	Interviewees also mentioned that one of the best parts of the project was strengthening existing connections and forming new ones.	
<b>Personal Wellness</b>	Across the 12 participants surveyed before and after community engagement events, only their satisfaction with their future security showed a 5% improvement. Their remaining 7 domains of wellness (e.g., health, standard of living, safety) did not improve.	

### Methods and Comparison

This project used both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative work included interviews and focus groups with project participants. The quantitative work included surveys that measured participants' responses over time on changes in their civic engagement and well-being. Given the small number of participants who completed both the pre-test and post-test surveys, the project's scope did not include extensive statistical analyses. It is also important to recognize the limitations of interpreting quantitative data with a small number of participants.

### Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Overall, the evaluation findings suggest that several positive outcomes were achieved for local seniors with respect to their civic engagement attitudes and behaviours, as well as personal social capital and feelings of future security.

In addition, the learnings and recommendations from this project have supported the development of the "**Civic Engagement for Health among Older Adults: Blueprint for Communities**" document. In Saint Andrews itself, the community was and continues to be engaged and actively pursuing the action items raised through the engagement process. This blueprint can be applied to similar communities across the province.

Many learnings were found through this HSP project which will be valuable for other groups wishing to conduct community engagement projects with older adults in New Brunswick or elsewhere; some of these learnings were:

- Learn about the community, participants' relationship to the community and their level of engagement in the community prior to engagement.
- Planning time is essential.
- Involvement of peer researchers was a key to success.
- Using Universal Design for Learning principles enables participants to engage through multiple means (e.g., group discussions, individual response options).
- Location and accessibility matter (e.g. accessibility for those with physical mobility issues, hearing or vision loss, lack of transportation, etc.).
- Having a rigorous analytical process to make sense of the information received is essential.
- Asset mapping of resources and creating actions plans were very empowering processes for the community members.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that the Age Friendly Community networks be used to share learnings and support communities working on aging in place strategies.

## Next Steps

In Saint Andrews, the Passamaquoddy Lodge and the Age Friendly Advisory Committee have agreed to lead the ongoing work developed through this civic engagement.

It is hoped that the project's work and the reference document "**Civic Engagement for Health among Older Adults: Blueprint for Communities**" will be used to support similar work in other communities.

## Disclaimer

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