Rural age-friendly communities: Insights from Trent University

Utah Association for Area Agencies on Aging (U4A) Elder Justice Conference – May 13th, 2021

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The Rural Aging Research Program:

Left: Amber Colibaba, M.A., Research Coordinator, Rural Aging CRC Program
Centre: Mark Skinner, Ph.D., Canada Research Chair & Dean of Social Sciences
Right: Elizabeth Russell, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Psychology; Director, Trent Centre for Aging & Society

Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario

Salt Lake City
Collaborators and funders

SSHRC = CRSH

Trent University
Trent Centre for Aging & Society

Trent University
Psychology

CIHR IRSC
Canadian Institutes of Health Research
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Canada Research Chairs
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Canada
Perspectives on population aging
Presentation outline

- 3 goals: Share insights from our research related to...

1. Services for an aging rural population
2. Building sustainable rural age-friendly communities
3. Next steps
1. Services for an aging rural population
1. Services for an aging rural population: Healthcare & community support services
Ontario announces new nursing home with 36 additional beds in Arnprior

Premier Kathleen Wynne was in Arnprior Wednesday to announce the construction of a new nursing home, assuming residents in the community can pay for it up front.

Wynne attended a breakfast with residents at The Grove, which is currently a 60-bed nursing home, and announced plans for the construction of a new 96-bed facility which will have much more modern accommodations.

The news about a new facility came as a surprise to area residents who had been involved in a letter-writing and fundraising campaign aimed at increasing the Grove’s capacity.

As recently as February, the chief executive of Arnprior Regional Health, which oversees the Grove, stated that without significant investment in the nursing home and the ability to add additional beds, the facility would be forced to close.

The province has not agreed to provide any money prior to the construction of the new nursing home, leaving Arnprior Regional Health to raise the cash for the project through a mix of charitable donations and debt. However, requiring health-care facilities such as hospitals or nursing homes to secure their own financing is a fairly normal practice in the province.
1. Services for an aging rural population: Housing
Abbeyfield House Society of Lakefield:

“I think there's a great need for affordable housing for seniors.”

An Abbeyfield House for Lakefield seniors is one step closer to reality.
1. Services for an aging rural population: Transportation
A Look at Temiskaming Shores’ Age-Friendly Community Plan

- Temiskaming Shores
  - Created a 1–800 number to call in order to be connected to the appropriate transportation
  - Credentialing process in place for non-municipal transportation providers
1. Services for an aging rural population: Recreation
WITH VIDEO: Arnprior opens Canada’s only men’s shed linked to health group

COMMUNITY  Mar 03, 2019  by Derek Dunn  Arnprior Chronicle-Guide

During the official opening of Canada’s 22nd Men’s Shed, in the township of McNab/Braeside, participants gathered around a plank and circular saw instead of ribbon and scissors. Joining building owner Judi Asselin is township Mayor Tom Peckett, Jean-Guy Asselin, Seniors Active Living Centre’s Darrel Olé’s Sheughnessy, Arnprior Mayor Walter Stack, and Arnprior Regional Health’s Eric Hanna. - Derek Dunn/Metroland
2. Building rural age-friendly communities
Exclusion in rural age-friendly programs

1. Program evaluation; Rural Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada (Russell et al., 2019)
2. Pilot study; Rural Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada (Russell, Skinner, & Colibaba, under review)
3. Case study; Rural Ontario, Canada (Colibaba et al., 2020; Russell, Skinner, & Colibaba, 2021)

Total: 102 interviews with older adults and age-friendly stakeholders in NL & ON

Goal: Explore rural AFC implementation and sustainability

2. Building rural age-friendly communities
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- Prior research: Established “implementation gap” concept (Russell, Skinner, & Fowler, 2019)
Fig. 1. Emergent challenges and opportunities to sustaining age-friendly initiatives

Typical age-friendly implementation pathways:

- = Pathway 1: Age-friendly initiative likely to be sustainable
- - - - = Pathway 2: Age-friendly initiative likely to be unsustainable
- - - - - - - - = Pathway 3: Age-friendly initiative likely to be unsustainable
2. Building rural age-friendly communities

- Prior research: Established “implementation gap” concept (Russell, Skinner, & Fowler, 2019)
- Follow up Q: Who is excluded by age-friendly policy?
- Ontario case study
  - $N = 56$ interviews with committee members, older adults in 5 rural ON communities
2. Building rural age-friendly communities

- Prior research: Established “implementation gap” concept (Russell, Skinner, & Fowler, 2019)
- Follow up Q: Who is excluded by age-friendly policy?
- Ontario case study
  - \( N = 56 \) interviews with committee members, older adults in 5 rural ON communities
- Key findings: Limited sustainability, scope, & reach
Limited **sustainability** of rural age-friendly programs

“You cannot push volunteers forty hours a week.”

Limited **scope** of rural age-friendly programs

“All this saying about housing, transportation, isolation... a good attempt has been made. But, solve the problem? A big no.”

Limited **reach** of rural age-friendly programs

“If you live in a rural community, somehow your healthcare needs aren’t as important as those who live where the critical mass can give you programs...people who live in rural communities are just expected to survive and rely on their communities. Our most vulnerable citizens are seniors, they’re traveling the furthest, they live in rural communities, and some of them don’t even drive.”
2. Building rural age-friendly communities

- Who benefits from age-friendly policy?
2. Building rural age-friendly communities
2. Building rural age-friendly communities

Age-friendly programs and policies…. 

...fundamentally exclude older people marginalized by social, economic, and cultural factors... (Russell, Skinner, & Colibaba, 2021)

...and may not be effective, sustainable approaches that support the well-being of older adults in rural communities. (Russell, Skinner, & Fowler, 2019).
2. Building rural age-friendly communities

Creating practical outcomes is critical to allowing research to support older rural residents and communities.
Older voluntarism and the global pandemic

“Addressing the need to understand how volunteer-based programs and older volunteers in rural communities are coping with the impacts of physical/social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic”

Colibaba, Skinner, Russell, 2021

Aging During COVID-19: Older voluntarism video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRNjRTx-iXk&list=PL1TT3FxszUJ5zANyP_y_drn0wXyl2yFuMb&index=1
3. Next steps: Age-friendly services and sustainability in the 2020s

- Aging in place vs. stuck in place
- Rural services
- Age-friendly success & sustainability:
  1. Program specific factors: Drawing on individual, community, and jurisdictional factors to extend the scope, reach, sustainability, and inclusion of age-friendly programs
  2. Funding: Consistent, renewable funding that considers these factors is needed
Thank you for taking the time to listen to this talk!

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

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