



Age-Friendly Communities of the Lower Kennebec

Arrowsic, Bath,
Georgetown,
Phippsburg, West Bath
& Woolwich

Progress Report 2023

**Everyone is respected.
Everyone is included.
Everyone belongs.**

Introduction

Age-Friendly Communities of the Lower Kennebec (AFCLK) is a grassroots volunteer coalition serving the municipalities of Arrowsic, Bath, Georgetown, Phippsburg, West Bath, and Woolwich with a population of 17500 residents, 25 % are 65+ years old. A steering committee with currently 17 members guides the activities and projects for AFCLK. Members are connected through their interests and work with the City of Bath and local organizations like Bath Area Family YMCA, Bath Housing, Catholic Charities SEARCH, First Responders, Habitat for Humanity 7 Rivers, Patten Free Library, and United Way of Mid Coast Maine. The City of Bath is our fiduciary agent.



AFCLK's Action Plan submitted in 2021 was the result of a detailed process that started with the creation of a community wide survey and input from five listening sessions. We received additional feedback from the community during public presentations and data assessment in 2018/2019. One thousand survey participants emphasized what is working in our area to support healthy, active, and engaged aging and identified areas for improvement. Action items were developed based on feasibility as well as impact. We identified potential community partners, required resources and communication strategies.

As a result of this process our work is focused on four themes: homes, mobility, social connections, and communication. Through strong partnerships AFCLK is continuously involved in projects aiming to make this region more livable, particularly for people 50+, and at the same time finding great opportunities to support the needs of all people in our communities.

Mission and Vision

AFCLK found direction by focusing on its purpose, mission, and vision statement.

Mission: To help our communities become the best possible home for people of all ages, by ensuring that public spaces, homes, programs, civic events, and social gatherings are set up to meet people's changing wants across the lifespan.

Vision: In our communities, people of all ages can live safely and comfortably in their homes; get easily to where they want to go, enjoy social connections that nourish their souls; contribute to community affairs; help others, and receive help they need to thrive. Everyone is respected, everyone is included, everyone belongs.

Outcomes

In this section we present highlights of goals achieved in the four focus areas.

Homes

Goals: Encourage options to allow older adults to age where they choose safely, warmly, and comfortably. Explore/promote development of more varied housing options which leverage existing resources and future opportunities, across the economic spectrum.

In partnership with Bath Housing, public presentations increased awareness of the nationally acknowledged Comfortably Home program that facilitates minor home improvements allowing eligible homeowners to remain in their homes.

In March of 2022 the City of Bath passed an ordinance allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) under certain conditions. An AARP 2022 Community Challenge Grant funded project created a toolkit to guide and empower homeowners interested in ADUs, thus increasing affordable housing options and opportunities for aging adults to remain independently in their homes. This educational campaign would not have been possible without the strong partnership with City of Bath, an intern from Bowdoin College, and Bath Housing.



We disseminated greater than 150 guidebooks and over 200 trifolds in print and at four presentations during in person meetings. Participants gathered at the Patten Free Library, Bath City Hall, the local Rotary Clubs, the Bath Area Senior Center during business lunch and in a virtual meeting with residents of the island community North Haven. The entire ADU presentation is also available as a recording on Bath Community TV and on our website www.agefriendlylowerkennebec.org.

Mobility

Goal: Increase transportation resources for people to participate in community and social opportunities, attend to personal needs, work, and volunteer. Support and promote opportunities to increase individual physical strength, and balance.

A cooperation with People Plus in Brunswick expanded an essential rides program, the Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN), to our region. On a currently very small scale with three dedicated drivers it enables residents without vehicle or driver's license to shop for groceries, seek medical treatment or attend to personal business.

The Bath Area Family YMCA opened its walking track on Tuesdays and Thursdays for non-members during the winter of 2019/2020. The Covid pandemic ended this program which is scheduled to restart in 2023.

During the Covid pandemic, members of AFCLK in cooperation with Arrowsic Healthy Aging facilitated an online class 'A Matter of Balance' in partnership with Spectrum Generations in Brunswick, our area agency on aging.

Another project in collaboration with the Bath Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee in 2023 mapped the location of downtown benches in Bath with the goal of including their locations in a future version of the city map. This process also identified locations for the placement of two additional benches. Funded by AARP and Davenport Trust, the installation was delayed by the Covid pandemic. In a neighborhood with affordable housing units the two new benches offer a resting place for residents out walking with their friends or shopping in nearby stores.



Social Connections

Goal: Increase the health and well-being of residents living in the lower Kennebec towns by increasing social engagement.

Our website has been a repository for information on regional resources, making it easier for older residents to sign up to needed help. We partnered with Catholic Charities Maine Seek Elderly Alone, Renew Courage & Hope (SEARCH) during the Covid pandemic and with the Bath Police Department and Sagadahoc Sheriff's Office to help promote the Good Morning Call. Both programs offer social interaction to older adults living alone.

In addition to accessible walking paths and benches envisioned in the Mobility section and the social benefit they make possible, there are several successful models of community improvements that foster outdoor socialization. For the 2021 AARP Challenge Grant application we chose a project focused on creating an intergenerational gathering space for people to meet, play chess/checkers or sit in downtown Bath. Funded by AARP and Davenport Trust students of Bath Regional Career and Technical Center constructed three outdoor chess and checkers tables. Bath Public Works installed the sets at Elm Street Plaza in the middle of the commerce center in the 6-town initiative. We now regularly host 'Chess with Friends' events as part of Main Street Bath's year-round activities like Spring into Summer, Autumn, and Winter Fest.



Creating a space that increases social interactions through chess and checkers was a first step to address social isolation and loneliness, another opportunity to interact with people of all ages to get out and get moving.



With funding from the Davenport Trust Foundation and AARP Challenge Grant we installed two additional chess and checkers table sets outside the Bath Area Family YMCA. Everyone enjoyed cookies and company during the kickoff event documented [here](#) by Bath Community TV. The YMCA is offering a home and many programs to a diverse group of regional residents of all ages.



Communication and Information

Goals: Provide reliable information in a way that ensures access across the community. Research a plan for using assistive technology, funding, and training.

During the Covid pandemic members of AFCLK edited and contributed to the monthly newsletter for the Bath Area Senior Center supporting the community with access to reliable information about many topics including the pandemic and vaccinations. We provided information about food resources for families and older adults available for viewing on Bath Community TV and distributed in print.

AFCLK developed a logo and a website, funded by Maine Community Foundation, focused on regional resources and our group's activities. Through regular and frequent postings, we increased the visibility of our Facebook page with now 187 followers.

An assistive technologies grant, generously funded in 2021 by Maine Community Foundation and organized in cooperation with the National Digital Equity Center (NDEC) currently offers computer tablets and smart phones to older adults at no cost for one year. In 2022 the Patten Free Library provided basic computer skill classes to device participants on topics like internet safety and participation in social media. In 2023 three of our steering committee members received training from NDEC to facilitate in person classes locally. This project represents a cooperation with one of our strongest partners, Age-Friendly Georgetown.



To prevent fraud and supported by AARP Maine, Age-Friendly Georgetown and AFCLK organized a super shredding event that collected over 9000 lbs of personal documents to be shredded on site. 158 residents from surrounding communities signed in and many were waiting at the site an hour before the official start.

Goals for the Future

Our initial activities focused largely on the City of Bath, a member of AARP's age-friendly communities since 2018. Bath functions as a hub for local resources and services, shopping, and medical treatments and is a gathering center for residents of our region. Currently our greatest challenges include new involvement of residents and projects in the smaller communities. We aim to strengthen our connections to local town governments and bring activities to all residents of our region.

We will update our Action Plan based on what we learned in the past years, especially during the Covid pandemic, considering available funding, and current capacity.

This year we are focusing on a communication plan to increase awareness for our group and the age-friendly work in the region with a focus on engaging volunteers for our program ideas. To bolster our social media campaign, we will add an Instagram account to reach a more diverse age group. This will support adult children who are caring for their aging parents and are searching for resources to accommodate them safely in their homes. We have started the work on a rack card that will be distributed to town offices, the Bath Senior Center, Bath Housing, public spaces, churches, and local stores.

In cooperation with emergency services, we plan to create an emergency responder resource card aiming to bring information about much needed support directly into residents' homes.

AFCLK hopes to continue our collaboration with NDEC to expand digital literacy throughout the regional municipalities.

For the fall and winter of 2023, we are planning public in person presentations on the following topics: 'Declutter and Downsizing', 'Sagadahoc Communication Center Who coordinates the emergency response in our municipalities?' and 'Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia'.

Challenges

Volunteer recruitment and succession planning: As a regionally active group we promote the work and activities of many organizations that offer help and supportive programs for aging residents in our communities. Consequently, we may be competing for volunteers looking to engage in activities with their neighbors. We continuously seek to attract new members to the steering committee who will take on leadership roles and will foster our group's progress for the benefit of all residents on the lower Kennebec River.

Acknowledgements

Our work to date was generously funded by AARP Maine and the AARP Community Challenge Grants, Davenport Trust, and the Maine Community Foundation. Our progress would not have been possible without significant support from the City of Bath. We are very thankful for the encouragement and embrace the advice we are receiving from our community stakeholders.

List of Embedded Weblinks in Alphabetical Order

Age-Friendly Communities of the Lower Kennebec
www.agefriendlylowerkennebec.org



Age-Friendly Georgetown
<https://www.agefriendlygeorgetown.org/>



Catholic Charities Maine: SEARCH Seek Elderly Alone,
Renew Courage & Hope <https://www.ccmaine.org/search-program-elderly-services>



Chess Tables at Bath Area Family YMCA Ribbon Cutting
Presented on Bath Community TV
<https://cloud.castus.tv/vod/bath/video/646bb1c2225a0a0008032a98?page=ALL>



Comfortably Home
<https://www.bathhousing.org/comfortably-home/>



Good Morning Call
<https://www.cityofbathmaine.gov/news/post/1858/>



Food Resources Presented in 2020 on Bath Community TV
for Families
<https://cloud.castus.tv/vod/bath/video/63d880c7b472bd561bbcb1f6?page=ALL>



and Older Adults
<https://cloud.castus.tv/vod/bath/video/63d880c7b472bd561bbcb1f8?page=ALL>



Planning for Accessory Dwelling Units Presented on Bath
Community TV
<https://cloud.castus.tv/vod/bath/video/64075e84cd52e60008d199a6?page=HOME>



Volunteer Transportation Network
<https://peopleplusmaine.org/volunteer-transportation-network>

