

age
friendly
CITY OF KAWARTHA LAKES

City of
Kawartha Lakes
Age-friendly
Project
Assessment:

Report to the
Community



Creating a healthier place to live for all ages!

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Your input will inform future directions and create an age-friendly City of Kawartha Lakes (CKL).

Thank you to all the members of the CKL Age-friendly Advisory Committee for direction throughout this first phase of the Age-friendly CKL Project and your commitment to continue to involve older adults in building an age-friendly CKL.

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INTRODUCTION

What is an Age-friendly Community?

An age-friendly community is a place that encourages active aging by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. It is a place that works to improve the livelihood of people of all ages (World Health Organization, 2007).

The concept of an age-friendly city was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). According to the WHO (2007), an age-friendly city provides the policies, services, settings and structures that enable people to age actively by recognizing the wide range of capacities and resources among older people, anticipating and responding flexibly to aging-related needs and preferences, and promoting their inclusion in and contribution to all areas of community life.

The benefits of an age-friendly community extend beyond the senior population. Smooth, well-maintained sidewalks encourage walking by all. Women and children have greater freedom in safe neighborhoods. Consistent high quality care for those who require it reduces stress for caregivers. Rural transportation options benefit everyone. By creating environments that support our seniors, we are benefiting residents of all ages.

Why an Age-friendly Project in City of Kawartha Lakes?

Our senior population is growing rapidly. Just under 20% of our population is 65 years and over (Statistics Canada, 2006), and as the baby boomers continue to age, this proportion is expected to grow.

The aging of CKL residents brings with it both challenges and opportunities, many of which were outlined in this study. Needs for local access to health care, support services, alternative forms of transportation and housing options suitable to changing mobility needs are likely to increase. But many older adults are healthier and more active than ever before and are avid volunteers. That makes them a vital resource to our community.

The City of Kawartha Lakes is an attractive place to retire and get involved as an older adult. Offering natural beauty, lakes and many volunteer and social opportunities, this community of many smaller communities is drawing more retirees from larger urban centers each year. There are many organizations in CKL that cater to meeting the needs of older adults and have worked tirelessly to address some of the key needs identified by seniors in the past (e.g. in the areas of housing and transportation). This initial phase of the age-friendly project allowed us to gather detailed information and report on areas of concern and success across the eight theme areas identified by the WHO as key components of an age-friendly community. These eight theme areas are:

- Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings
- Transportation
- Housing
- Communication & Information
- Civic Participation & Employment
- Community Support & Health Services
- Respect & Social Inclusion
- Social Participation

Gathering data across these eight theme areas provides organizations and individuals in CKL with the unique opportunity to have a glimpse of what it is like to be an older adult in CKL in 2010. A group of committed agencies and individuals felt this was a critical step to finding ways to improve our current policies and practices to accommodate and celebrate an aging population.

What Was Done

HKPR District Health Unit took the lead on a funding application to the New Horizons for Seniors Program (Government of Canada grant) to start an Age-friendly project in CKL, beginning with a preliminary assessment of the community's age-friendly features. In early 2010, after successfully obtaining funding, an Age-friendly City of Kawartha Lakes Advisory Committee (AFAC) was formed with membership from various local organizations and community volunteers. The AFAC provided direction to the project consultant, oversaw the budget, and committed to sharing the results of the assessment with the community.

There were four parts to the age-friendly assessment: a City-wide survey, focus groups in six pilot communities, walkability assessments in four of the six pilot communities and care provider interviews.

The survey, focus group and walkability assessment tools can be obtained by contacting the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit at 1-866-888-HKPR.

Survey: A detailed survey was developed based on the WHO Age-friendly Features Checklist and the committee was charged with the task of distributing it throughout the City of Kawartha Lakes between May and August 2010. Surveys were targeted to residents 60 years of age and over as well as residents of any age with a disability. Surveys were distributed through libraries, service centres, Community Care City of Kawartha Lakes offices and volunteers, the Kawartha Lakes Accessibility Advisory Committee, the United Way for the City of Kawartha Lakes, and the Lindsay office of the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge (HKPR) District Health Unit. A printable version could also be found on the HKPR website. Over a three-month period, close to two hundred responses were received from all over the City, providing a cross-section of our senior population.

Focus Groups: After a preliminary analysis of the survey results, the advisory committee selected six pilot communities in which focus groups would be held to generate discussion among local seniors around issues specific to their communities. The pilot communities were chosen based on diversity in geography and population and interest expressed from survey respondents. Focus groups took place in Kirkfield, Fenelon Falls, Bobcaygeon, Janetville (which also included participants from Bethany and Pontypool – identified as CKL South throughout the report), Woodville, and Omemee. Each session was made up of eight to twelve local residents who were given the opportunity to share experiences living in their communities and provide suggested solutions for common problems. The focus group guide questions were those found in the *Age-friendly Rural and Remote Communities: A Guide* document, produced by Public Health Agency of Canada (2007). The information gathered added detail to feedback collected on the survey.

Walkability Assessments: Designed to add depth to our understanding of issues identified within the 'Outdoor Spaces and Public Buildings' section of the surveys and focus groups, walkability assessments were conducted by the consultant with the help of local volunteers by walking through areas with heavier pedestrian traffic. Physical barriers that presented accessibility challenges were identified and recorded. Assessments were carried out between September – November 2010 in the villages of Fenelon Falls, Bobcaygeon, Bethany and Omemee to better understand the struggles encountered by people with reduced mobility.

Care Provider Interviews: The consultant met with two local care providers who were recruited to be interviewed and speak on behalf of harder-to-reach segments of our senior population; people who for various reasons, may not have had the same access to the public survey, but whose perspective was deemed valuable to the project.

After an enormous amount of quality feedback was gathered and study data were analyzed and broken down at length, the information was compiled into a comprehensive report, with the intention of sharing project results with the public. While scientifically rigorous sampling methods were not used, the convenience sample for the project successfully included most CKL communities. Furthermore, the study created awareness of and promoted citizen engagement in the Age-friendly project. The results recognized existing services available to older adults in CKL and shed light on current efforts being made to support a growing senior population. Most importantly, the project involved local older adults, a primary objective of any age-friendly initiative.

This report is a compilation of what the AFAC heard from you: what makes the CKL a great place to live as you age, and what would make it a more age-friendly community.



GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS

In the first section of our public survey, we collected general information about our respondents to better understand the feedback that we received. We found that nearly three quarters of survey participants were female and most respondents fell in the 70 –79 years age range. The vast majority were full-time residents and many responded they were fortunate enough to live within a one-hour drive of their nearest family member. Roughly 60% of participants have lived in the City of Kawartha Lakes for eleven years or more. From those who did not grow up in CKL, we heard fascinating stories surrounding the circumstances that brought them here.

No surprise, given how the population is distributed in CKL, Lindsay accounted for the largest portion of survey responses, followed by Fenelon Falls and Bobcaygeon.



- Lindsay: 39%
- Fenelon Falls: 15%
- Bobcaygeon: 13%
- Woodville: 5%
- Little Britain: 4%
- Kinmount: 3%
- Janetville: 2.5%
- Coboconk: 2%
- Dunsford: 2%
- Oakwood: 2%
- Bethany: 1.5%
- Norland: 1.5%
- Omeme: 1.5%
- Cameron: 1%
- Pontypool: 1%
- Downeyville: 0.5%

- No Identified Community: 6%

KEY FINDINGS

#1. Older adults enjoy living in the City of Kawartha Lakes.

Generally speaking, older adults living in CKL consider their respective communities as wonderful places to live. “Friendly”, “quiet”, and “fun” were words commonly used to describe various CKL villages and towns. Older people are very happy with the support they receive from their community and in all six pilot communities, residents were able to easily draw upon specific examples of what made their towns so special. CKL villages were also described as very tight-knit communities. When asked to elaborate, residents quickly pointed to good friends, neighbors, seniors clubs, churches, and plenty of social activities geared toward older adults. With so many long-time residents of CKL responding to our survey, many said they enjoyed the familiarity of their community. Where services are available, they are generally easy to find, according to participants.

“We have a good Community Services office and some wonderful, kind people who just like to lend a hand. It’s a good town. We wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.”

~ Bobcaygeon resident ~

With accessibility concerns on the minds of an aging population, residents generally agreed that CKL’s public spaces and buildings could be improved. Sidewalks in dire need of repair and outdated public buildings are just two examples of accessibility issues encountered by respondents. Despite these factors, older people in CKL reported feeling safe in their community and the vast majority of study participants insisted they would like to remain in their homes and/or communities as long as they can.

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#2. Older adults in the City of Kawartha Lakes are generally well informed and keep extremely busy.

For the purpose of ‘staying in the loop’ in a rural community, CKL seniors are very socially active. Older people sit on local committees, enjoy regular leisure and recreational activities and participate in numerous social and political events. As a result, they also stay in close communication with their peers. ‘Word of mouth’ was one of the most commonly selected forms of communication used by survey respondents and its effectiveness was echoed in all six focus groups. Local media, such as newspapers and radio, were praised for their thorough news coverage and widespread distribution (note: there are several communities that do not receive CKL newspapers as they are close to the border of another county). However, many felt they were often not given enough notice to attend some community events, especially if these events were held elsewhere in the city. Furthermore, some older adults suggested increased communication among CKL communities would result in more social engagement and political interest.

“There seems to be an active volunteer force here.”

~ Survey respondent ~

#3. Older adults called for easier travel in and between CKL communities.

At the time of this assessment, apart from Lindsay, there were no CKL communities with a regular public transit system and very few with accessible taxi service. Community Care CKL's transportation service was commonly mentioned as a reliable way to travel with friendly drivers. However, this service comes with a cost and requires notice from residents wishing to access it. Many respondents felt fortunate to live in a community in which they can ask neighbors, friends, or family for rides. Yet, others felt relying so heavily on others severely limited one's independence and feared by doing so, they would be inconveniencing their peers or family.

"If I did not drive I would be stuck at home - no affordable transportation in communities outside of Lindsay."

~ Survey respondent ~

Community Care CKL provides over 63,000 rides per year through their volunteer driver and specialized transportation programs. These services are well used and could be built on through increased awareness and funding support. The City of Kawartha Lakes is working towards solutions to rural transportation issues and it is important that seniors provide their input on what these solutions look like.



FINDINGS BY THEME AREA

Outdoor Spaces & Public Buildings

The World Health Organization identifies outdoor spaces as having a major impact on mobility, independence, and the quality of life of older adults affecting their ability to ‘age in place’.

In this section, we are referring to the environment all around us the minute we leave the house to go shopping, take a trip to the bank, or go to medical appointments. Throughout the study, we took a close look at our sidewalks, parks, and storefronts as well as our libraries, municipal service centers and other public buildings. As our population ages, accessibility is a major concern. With the help of our study participants, various barriers posing accessibility issues were identified. For many older adults and people with reduced mobility, these barriers are encountered on a regular, sometimes daily, basis.

Key Issues:

Shortage of suitable rest areas
Lack of accessible public restrooms
Poorly maintained sidewalks
Inaccessible storefronts
Snow removal methods

Based on feedback from the survey, focus groups and walkability assessments, the City of Kawartha Lakes was described as a relatively safe, quiet and clean city. However, despite a generally positive response to this section, CKL residents pointed out several factors that make carrying out fairly routine activities problematic. Many older adults cited a lack of rest areas on our downtown streets. More benches and seating along sidewalks allow residents to take breaks while running multiple errands in one outing and encourage walking from one location to another. On a related note, others mentioned a lack of accessible public restrooms. Respondents expressed a need for automatic doors, grab bars in stalls, and frequent maintenance in all public restrooms.

“Most stores do not have automatic doors or handicapped buttons nor ramps.”

~ Survey respondent ~

Other factors disrupting our ability to move about comfortably within our community are a lack of, or poorly maintained, sidewalks, and inaccessible storefronts. Since CKL is uniquely made up of 18 small communities, the bulk of our essential services, if available, are centralized in our many “downtowns”. Many agreed that these stretches of sidewalk are in need of repair. Furthermore, on many streets surrounding our downtowns, sidewalks are missing altogether, making it difficult and dangerous for residents to walk from neighboring residential areas. Inaccessible entrances to shops and public buildings was also a common concern heard from study participants. Although many CKL retailers have been proactive in their efforts to make their businesses more inclusive and welcoming to people of all abilities, further action is required to become fully accessible.

“The main problem is the uneven sidewalk - older pedestrians trip easily and fall.”

~ Survey respondent ~

Finally, City of Kawartha Lakes is a beautiful place in the winter months. However, extreme weather conditions can be a burden for all residents. After heavy snowfalls, plows create large snow banks along our streets that are often not removed for several days. Since the majority of respondents use personal vehicles to get around, many claim the trip from a parked car, over the snow banks, to building entrances can be very treacherous.

Things to think about:

- When it comes to accessible modifications for businesses, we must promote buy-in at the municipal level and from individual business owners. As becoming age-friendly is the responsibility of all CKL residents, we must recognize and promote the *profitability in accessibility!* For more information on making your business more accessible, check out the Making Ontario Accessible web site.
<http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/en/mcass/programs/accessibility/index.aspx>
- Snow removal methods need to consider accessibility to the sidewalks, not just clearing of the road or sidewalk surfaces.
- We must take the necessary steps to ensure parks, trails, and green spaces remain clean and welcoming to all residents.
- Given the expansion of virtually all CKL communities, additional stretches of sidewalk to enhance pedestrian safety may be needed.

At a closer glimpse...

Bobcaygeon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many Bolton Street storefronts have steps leading up to entrances; however, very few have handrails. • Interlocking brick sidewalks on Bolton Street have proven to be challenging for older adults with reduced mobility; especially for those who use walkers or other assistive devices.
CKL South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functions in Janetville, Pontypool, and Bethany are often held at local churches. Yet, Bethany United was the only church found to be wheelchair friendly, with wide doors and an accessible elevator.
Fenelon Falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A large dip in the road at the corner of Colborne Street and Francis Street was identified as hazardous as heavy rainfall creates a deep puddle, forcing pedestrians to take unsafe detours when crossing the road. • With two seniors' residences close by, Fenelon Falls focus group participants pointed out a dangerous lack of sidewalks on Lindsay Street. • Aside from just being an eyesore, goose droppings were also said to be walking hazards in Garnet Graham Beach Park.
Kirkfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The building in Kirkfield housing the local nurse practitioner, Community Care CKL and other important services could be better identified with proper signage, according to study respondents.
Omeme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With only one controlled traffic light (King St. and Sturgeon Rd.) and no other crosswalks, Omeme pedestrians often choose to cross the street elsewhere. However, this is no easy task when battling heavy traffic traveling between Lindsay and Peterborough.
Woodville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group participants praised Woodville's newly revitalized park outside of the Town Hall. The park features adequate seating and an attractive gazebo.

Transportation

The World Health Organization found that transportation, including accessible and affordable public transport, is a key factor influencing active aging. It found that people's ability to move about their community determined their social and civic participation as well as access to community and health services.

For the purpose of this section, we gathered feedback from older adults regarding driving, road conditions, signage, parking and public transit options in the City of Kawartha Lakes. Transportation was examined closely within each community. However, this topic was particularly important to CKL residents because of the need to travel safely between communities as well.

Key Issues:

Lack of public transit or transportation options in most CKL communities

No shuttle system between CKL communities*

Shortage of accessible parking spots and by-law enforcement

Road conditions

Unsafe drivers

* As of June 2011 there is a pilot rural bus project that connects several outlying communities with Lindsay.

Personal vehicles were said to be the primary mode of transportation for most study participants. Most described fellow CKL drivers as generally considerate and were happy with their experiences driving locally, particularly when compared to “city driving.” Aside from some very specific exceptions, residents were satisfied with signage and the placement of streetlights in their communities. Conversely, respondents were quick to point out a shortage of accessible parking spaces in some parking lots and, more importantly, a lack of enforcement around existing accessible parking spaces. Increased enforcement, according to residents of smaller CKL communities, would also effectively persuade drivers to reduce their speed when driving through towns, such as Kirkfield, Omeme, Oakwood, Little Britain, Woodville, and Bethany.

When asked about the biggest deterrents to driving in our city, the most common responses were road conditions and inclement weather. Given the geographical layout of the City of Kawartha Lakes, rural roads (many of which are not paved) are very common travel routes. Although the weather is beyond our control, many respondents applauded the City's ability to respond swiftly to snow and ice build up on our roads.

For those who are not able or choose not to drive, transportation is a major issue. Although Lindsay currently has a public transit system, residents of every other CKL community must rely on alternative means of transportation. Community Care volunteer drivers were commonly mentioned as a great way to travel. However, there is a cost and residents must provide adequate notice for their service. Rides from friends, neighbours, and family were also cited as frequently used travel options, but are not always available.

Furthermore, these options limit independence and do not allow for much flexibility. For older adults who make frequent trips outside their immediate community, transportation is an even bigger concern. Without an affordable, accessible, and inclusive shuttle system between communities in place, many residents who live in more remote towns are having to consider relocation prematurely.

“If I could no longer drive, we would have to move to Lindsay close to bus routes.”

~ Survey respondent ~

Things to think about:

- Becoming age-friendly is a shared responsibility. Older adults should be involved in city planning and policy development regarding transportation if their needs are to be met.
- In an effort to enhance mobility within our city, expanding existing transportation options needs to continue to be explored and pilot projects evaluated.

At a closer glimpse...

Bobcaygeon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondents made it clear that, if offered, Bobcaygeon’s older adult community would benefit greatly from its own transit or in-town shuttle system. Locations with large concentrations of seniors, such as 10 Riverside Drive, 123 Need Street, Port 32 and Victoria Place, were listed as potential pick-up and drop-off sites.
CKL South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pulling onto Highway 35 South was found to be a concern for many older adults as one focus group participant described it as a “racetrack”. Mount Horeb Road and Highway 35 was said to be a particularly dangerous intersection because the hill on which it is situated reduces visibility for drivers.
Fenelon Falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondents expressed the need for more stop-lights on Lindsay Street. • Although there is no transit system in Fenelon Falls, Community Care and Sobey’s work in partnership to offer a free weekly shuttle service for groceries.
Kirkfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group participants agreed that rather than allowing for a short 80km/h zone, County Road 48 should remain 60km/h all the way to Coboconk.
Omeme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At Coronation Hall, Omeme’s community centre and host to many local gatherings, there is no immediate parking. This forces patrons to fend for themselves and walk the extra distance - a tall order for some older adults.
Woodville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the addition of the stop sign at Woodville’s main intersection (King St. and Country Rd. 46), residents say safety has been drastically improved for pedestrians and drivers.

Housing

Housing is essential to the safety and well being of everyone. The World Health Organization study found that housing and related supports allow older people to age comfortably and safely within their community.

As our senior population increases, accessible and affordable housing must be a consideration in all communities. While most survey respondents and focus group participants were adamant about staying in their homes, many admitted to having had a slip, trip or fall in the past year. As mobility needs change, older adults are urged to plan for their future. These plans may be as simple as retrofitting homes to accommodate reduced mobility (which many respondents claimed to have already done), but in many cases, older adults are forced to consider relocating altogether. Unfortunately, since the City of Kawartha Lakes is made up of many small towns, relocating does not only mean leaving a home, but for some, it can mean leaving behind a community.

Key Issues:

Lack of accessible/affordable housing
Availability of home maintenance services
Knowledge of safe home adaptations
Proximity to friends and family
Waiting lists for long-term care

As our city moves toward becoming more age-friendly, aging in place becomes a top priority. In our case, this means making sure services are available for those who choose to live in more remote locations within CKL. This also means new housing developments must take into account our aging population. Why should a relatively able-bodied older adult relocate to a new, unfamiliar town if all they need is a cleaning person in the area? Why should a mentally sharp 90-year old have to leave her friends behind, when all she needs is a one-story house?

Of course, for many older adults, their situation is more severe. Some require more frequent or more specialized care. Some have spouses or loved ones needing care that they can no longer provide. In these cases, there are very few options for long-term care facilities outside Lindsay. Furthermore, where these options do exist (Fenelon Falls, Bobcaygeon), many respondents pointed out unreasonably long waiting lists.

The desire expressed by most study participants to remain in their homes and respective towns, speaks volumes to our tightly-knit communities and the natural beauty with which we are surrounded. However, in order to facilitate healthy aging in place, the study results revealed a need for more geographically inclusive services, subsidies for safe home adaptations and more affordable and accessible housing options.

“(There is a) lack of affordable rental housing.”

~ Survey respondent ~

*“With Boomers aging, I think suitable housing is very important.
Retirement communities and assisted living is necessary.”*

~ Woodville resident ~

Things to think about:

- A variety of accessible living options geared toward older adults should be included in all new housing developments. This could include one-level homes and/or rent-geared-to-income apartment complexes.
- Older adults should take part in the development planning process. By providing education first-hand, seniors can help developers to better understand their specific needs.
- Planning ahead by making accessible home modifications is a smart move. Anticipating changing mobility well in advance allows for healthy aging in place.

At a closer glimpse...

Bobcaygeon	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Despite a large population of older adults, there is no retirement complex in Bobcaygeon.• Once exclusively for seniors, apartments on Snake Point Road are now open to all ages (also the case at 40 Francis St. in Fenelon Falls). Since the change, residents have noticed increased noise levels and some unruly occupants.
CKL South	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Although new homes are being built in Bethany (around Ski Hill Rd. and Highway 7A), they are too costly for older adults living on modest pensions. Many new developments attract new retirees from elsewhere, but neglect current residents wishing to remain.
Fenelon Falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fenelon Area Independent Living Association (FAILA) provides great living accommodations for older adults. However, more units are needed, according to focus group participants.• Fenelon's unique rock structure dramatically restricts the feasibility of new developments.
Kirkfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If forced to relocate, residents claim their closest options would be Lindsay to the South or Orillia to the West.
Omeme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Although seniors' complexes have been proposed, a sewer system badly in need of an upgrade prohibits any new development within the village of Omeme.
Woodville	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relating to the plight of Omeme residents, respondents from Woodville claimed any plans for a local long-term care facility have been stifled by septic issues.

Communication & Information

The World Health Organization reports that staying connected with events and people and getting timely practical information is vital to active aging. The central concern expressed by older adults was to have relevant information that is easily available to older people of all income levels and in all circumstances.

In the City of Kawartha Lakes, older adults' ability to remain active and contribute to their community is largely dictated by access to information. The ease with which older adults can learn about community events, local news and political developments, is a key determinant of how involved they can be. With a variety of communication methods available, including print, radio, television and the Internet, we sought to identify the channels preferred by older adults in CKL.

Key Issues:

Use of Internet

Awareness of community newsletters

Information provided well in advance

Old fashioned 'word of mouth'

Considering the geographical layout of CKL, mass distribution of information can be a challenge. People or organizations hoping to spread news or promote an event effectively must be aware of all communication methods and how far and how many these methods reach. In order to be thoroughly inclusive of all CKL residents, a variety of methods may be necessary. Information must also be delivered in a user-friendly manner that is easily accessible for people of all ages. Although email and other electronic media are becoming increasingly popular, only half of survey respondents claimed to have regular access to the Internet. Relying solely on the web excludes those who do not have access and severely limits the spread of important information. Unfortunately it seems the Internet is often used exclusively to communicate because people are unaware of alternative methods. Through feedback from focus groups, we learned of several bulletins, brochures and newsletters put together by community groups and organizations, or run entirely by keen volunteers. Once proper channels are identified, study participants expressed the need for news to be published in a timely manner and promotional information to be published well in advance.

On a positive note, participants spoke highly of our local newspapers for their thorough news coverage. *Kawartha Lakes This Week* was praised for how widely distributed it is, making it accessible for residents of most communities in CKL. *Kawartha Lakes This Week* was also commended for a popular monthly senior's section, listing social events, interesting columns and a range of available services for older adults. When asked about other popular methods of communication, many participants pointed that word-of-mouth had not gone by the wayside. Many respondents described word-of-mouth as the most effective way to transmit information, especially in rural communities, and also recognized the significant social benefit of spreading information in person.

"The local papers are great at letting us know what is going on and they are free."

~ Survey respondent ~

Things to think about:

- Despite the reliability of print media and word-of-mouth, Internet use is clearly on the rise. Computer classes are offered through local organizations, such as Technology Alliance Group (T.A.G.) and local libraries.
- 60% of survey respondents have lived in CKL for eleven years or more and no one knows their communities like they do. Local residents looking to spread news should explore new and innovative ways to distribute information that would suit the unique specifications of their communities.
- Members of local seniors' clubs suggested communication with city council, both ways, has been improved with the formation of the Seniors Advisory Committee.

At a closer glimpse...

Bobcaygeon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Promoter</i>, based out of Bobcaygeon was highly praised as a valuable source of local news and events. Currently, the bi-weekly publication is delivered to every household in Bobcaygeon, Fenelon Falls, Kinmount, Burnt River, and Dunsford. • A quality newsletter is put together and issued every month by Bobcaygeon's Seniors Club.
CKL South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many residents in southern communities pick up mail from P.O. boxes. Focus group participants suggested promoting local events by including flyers and/or brochures with mail delivery. • To the frustration of local residents, Bethany and Pontypool were not included in CKL's most recent Bell telephone book.
Fenelon Falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Fenelon Falls Adult Education centre located on Market Street, offers courses for all ages, including computer classes for people interested in learning more about how to use the Internet and email.
Kirkfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondents from Kirkfield explained that the best way to remain informed in a rural community of that size is to remain socially active. Kirkfield boasts a very active senior population that relies heavily on personal relationships.
Omeme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As some deliveries were deemed unsafe for mail carriers, residents living outside the village of Omeme have recently been made to pick-up mail at community mailboxes. This change was said to be inconvenient and unsafe for some older adults. • Focus group participants said that more effective means of communication in the area would likely result in more community involvement.
Woodville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entirely run by volunteers, the Woodville and District Lions Club issues a monthly newsletter that reaches over 1500 homes in the area.

Civic Participation & Employment

The World Health Organization acknowledges that older people do not stop contributing to their communities upon retirement. An age-friendly community provides options for older people to contribute to their communities through paid employment, volunteer work, and to be engaged in the political process.

From all accounts, older adults in the City of Kawartha Lakes are committed to their civic responsibilities. While most are retired, some still engage in paid employment, and many are active volunteers. Furthermore, nearly all study participants claimed to have a vested interest in remaining involved in the political process. CKL provides many opportunities for older adults to contribute in any of these ways. Feedback from surveys and focus groups suggested several ways to improve access to these opportunities.

Key Issues:

Access to elected officials and local council

Voting methods

Professional development and training opportunities

Volunteer recruitment

After reviewing survey data and hearing insightful focus group discussions, one thing became clear - older adults in CKL are very politically active! From voting regularly to signing petitions and sitting on local committees, our senior population has a very powerful voice in our community. With strong representation on council, focus group participants generally agreed that older adults in CKL have fair access to local councillors. Councillors and other local representatives were said to be familiar faces at many different social functions and municipal events.

After seeing so much interest in municipal affairs from survey respondents, we asked focus group participants to tell us about any barriers they have encountered to participating in the political process. Some concerns of older adults included; a lack of awareness of existing local committees and advocacy groups, lack of knowledge regarding the role of local council, and fear that their voice would not be heard if they were to reach out to an elected official. Some participants also suggested that voting methods be re-thought. Many were not in favour of the new 'mail-in' ballots. By physically submitting a ballot to cast their vote, these participants felt a heightened sense of trust that their votes were being properly counted. Many also claimed to enjoy the social interaction in the process and feared local politics were becoming too 'impersonal'.

Aside from keen political involvement, older people in CKL also make significantly valuable contributions through countless volunteer hours. Nearly all survey respondents claimed to engage in some form of volunteer activity and many said they were open to contributing more of their time if an interesting opportunity came along. Although awareness of certain volunteer positions could be increased, most focus group participants said there was no shortage of opportunities to volunteer in their communities. With numerous church groups, youth sport programs and a myriad of events put on by seniors' clubs and other community groups, older adults explained to us that there are volunteer options available for people of all ages, provided they are willing to look for them.

“Volunteer activities are as good or better for the volunteer as for the one (s) receiving the service.”

~ Survey respondent ~

Things to think about:

- Older adults can explore new ways to become more politically involved by supporting local action committees or forming community advocacy groups.
- Victoria County Career Services (VCCS) regularly posts new and interesting volunteer positions as well as full and part-time employment opportunities.
- Older people in CKL were found to be very keen volunteers and many enjoy the flexibility to contribute several hours per week. Some participants suggested more training and professional development opportunities should be available to older adults in order to optimize the valuable work they do in the community.

At a closer glimpse...

Bobcaygeon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past attempts to build a medical centre in Bobcaygeon have been unsuccessful. It was suggested that heightened interest from residents and more opportunities for community involvement in the planning process would be helpful for future attempts. • Bobcaygeon is home to scores of keen volunteers. Community Care alone has over 60 volunteer drivers in Bobcaygeon!
CKL South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group participants indicated political interest needed to be better promoted in the area. In the most recent municipal election, the councillor of Ward 16 (former Manvers Township) was elected with only 603 votes, according to one participant.
Fenelon Falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents have expressed frustration over a lack of access to the development plans for a new community centre to be built in Fenelon Falls.
Kirkfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondents linked the lack of employment opportunities in Kirkfield to a high turnover for local businesses.
Omeme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group participants noted that many of the same volunteers were involved in various different community events and programs, suggesting a need for increased volunteer recruitment in the area.
Woodville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to focus group participants, Woodville’s annual Family Festival is a source of new and interesting volunteer opportunities and welcomes any extra help.

Community Support & Health Services

Health and support services are vital to maintaining health and independence in the community. Many concerns raised by older people, caregivers and service providers deals with the availability of sufficient, good quality, appropriate and accessible care.

In this section, we attempted to identify the services that are in place and the services that are needed to promote healthy, active aging. These supports were said to be critical in helping older adults maintain their health and remain in their own homes and/or communities. While so many older adults in CKL choose to live in our more remote, quiet communities, they are often met with significant barriers to accessing essential health services as a result.

Key Issues:

Shortage of family doctors and nurse practitioners

Lack of specialty clinics

Reliable home maintenance services

Access to existing services

Like many rural communities in Ontario, CKL suffers from a major shortage of family physicians and nurse practitioners. Study respondents found this to be particularly serious, given the size of our senior population. Some admitted to going far too long between check-ups, while many residents of CKL reported traveling as far as Toronto just to see their family doctor. Although physician recruitment is an ongoing priority, some respondents feared the bulk of the recruitment efforts are geared toward Lindsay. The need for more family physicians and nurse practitioners was consistently voiced across the entire City. Participants also called for more specialty clinics, especially in the more densely populated communities outside of Lindsay, such as Bobcaygeon and Fenelon Falls. Clinics in these towns would save a trip to Lindsay for local residents and at least shorten the trip to a specialist for residents of neighbouring villages. Eye doctors and foot clinics were commonly mentioned as essential medical services.

“Need more doctors in small rural towns - gas is costly to drive.”

~ Survey respondent ~

Medical issues aside, older adults also rely heavily on local service providers. In fact, when asked what services were needed most in order to remain in their own home, survey respondents chose yard work and home repair services. While many reputable service providers were mentioned and praised for their hard work, many participants claimed that if a service provider were not referred to them, it would be difficult to distinguish reliable companies from untrustworthy ones.

“Help is often just too expensive.”

~ Survey respondent ~

Things to think about:

- The Kawartha Lakes Health Care Initiative (KLHCI) is responsible for family physician recruitment and retention in CKL. Residents can support KLHCI through financial donations or by providing helpful feedback, including ways to enhance the appeal of CKL communities outside of Lindsay.
- There are services in place to link older adults with the help they need to remain independent within their own home. Silver Connections and Community Care CKL both provide links to reputable local businesses that will help older adults with jobs such as yard work and home maintenance and repair. The link is at no cost, but there is a fee for the service. Contact Community Care CKL or Silver Connections for more information.

At a closer glimpse...

Bobcaygeon	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Already in need of more family physicians, Bobcaygeon recently lost one of its busiest doctors.
CKL South	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Residents appreciated mobile clinics that provide flu shots, foot care and check blood pressure, but insisted more dependable and consistent health services were needed.• In Bethany, there is currently one nurse practitioner that is housed in the local municipal office.
Fenelon Falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Although Fenelon Falls has a new medical centre located on Francis Street East, two doctors have left or retired in the past year, leaving few options for ‘orphan patients’.• A foot clinic exists in Fenelon Falls; however, it can only be accessed by patients of the doctors operating out of the medical centre.
Kirkfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kirkfield currently has one doctor and one nurse practitioner working out of the local community building.
Omeme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A step in the right direction, Omeme received funding and recently built a brand new medical centre and has since recruited two new family doctors.
Woodville	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Woodville is home to a medical centre and two doctors. However, like many family physicians in CKL they are not currently accepting new patients due to already full workloads.

Respect & Social Inclusion

The World Health Organization reported on behaviour and attitudes toward older adults. Reasons for poor attitudes include; changing social norms, poor contact between generations, and ignorance about aging. It also found that older adults who felt included participated more.

A testament to our friendly communities, the vast majority of survey respondents did not recall being treated disrespectfully due to their age or disability. In fact, some focus group participants praised local business owners for recognizing the major economic contribution seniors make. While most respondents felt like valued members of the community, others said more could be done to include seniors.

Key Issues:

Perceptions of seniors

Lack of intergenerational collaboration

Lack of awareness regarding disabilities and mental health issues

To see the high level of social inclusion for older adults in CKL, one must look no further than the many senior-oriented social events offered on a regular basis, sales or discounts offered to older adults by local business, or general day-to-day interaction among older adults and younger generations. According to focus group participants, these positive attitudes towards seniors can be attributed to sheer numbers. With a senior population well above the provincial average, youth in CKL are in regular contact with older adults. Therefore, they are more likely to see first-hand the contributions seniors make than they would elsewhere in Ontario.

“Most often citizens are helpful and considerate of (our) slower pace.”

~ Survey respondent ~

Despite the overwhelmingly positive response to this section, some participants felt seniors were under-appreciated or neglected at times. Some survey respondents described situations in which they were dismissed by retail staff or disrespected by younger people. Although these tended to be isolated incidences, respondents felt any acts of elder abuse or ignorance surrounding aging, disabilities and mental health must be addressed. Older adults make up the fastest growing segment of our population and focus group participants pointed out that our efforts to include seniors in policy development and social programming must grow accordingly. Maintaining a high level of social inclusion for older adults must remain an ongoing priority, as their contributions will become increasingly evident.

Things to think about:

- Community projects linking older adults with youth would help younger people better understand issues faced by seniors. Focus group participants suggested students could fulfill volunteer hours by collaborating with older adults.
- Social inclusion is influenced by age, ability, health, and economic status. Extra effort may be required to reach out to older adults who have been isolated due to any of these factors.

At a closer glimpse...

Bobcaygeon	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many new residents of Bobcaygeon are recently retired and coming from more urban centers, such as Toronto. Some of these residents participated in our study and claimed they were extremely impressed with how polite and welcoming the community was.
CKL South	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respondents from the southern communities of CKL found it hard to reach out and include new residents. Some suspect a high turnover of residents makes newcomers reluctant to get involved in community affairs.
Fenelon Falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus group participants in Fenelon Falls pointed out how their population changes significantly seasonally. Some recalled witnessing disrespectful behaviour perpetrated by cottagers visiting Fenelon Falls for the night.
Kirkfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kirkfield has many community groups and clubs that involve older adults. Kirkfield's T.O.P.S (Taking Off Pounds Sensibly) program currently has roughly 50 members and hold regular meetings at the local Lion's Building.• The Kirkfield Annual Festival has run for over two decades and is a great opportunity for older adults to socialize with younger generations.
Omeme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many older adults in Omeme are members of the local Lion's Club. Events organized by the Lions and Lionesses, such as bike rodeos for youth, help seniors connect with other members of the community.
Woodville	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus group participants said older people in Woodville could enjoy an affordable meal with friends 2 – 3 times a month. These meals are organized by churches and other community groups and are offered in the daytime as well as in the evening to include people with varying schedules.



Social Participation

The World Health Organization found that although participation was strongly connected to good health and well-being, it also depended on; awareness of activities, being able to get to a function, appropriate supports, affordability, safety and integration with other age groups. In this section, we use the term socialize to mean connecting to the world outside the home.

Socially, study participants City-wide described the City of Kawartha Lakes as a wonderful place to live. Offering a variety of recreational, athletic and spiritual events, CKL provides older adults with an abundance of opportunities to meet new people, stay fit and remain socially engaged. For this section, we asked older adults to tell us how they stay socially involved in their community and what would prevent further involvement.

Key Issues:

Transportation to events
Events offered at inconvenient times
Affordability
Event promotion
Health issues

When focus group participants from all six pilot communities were asked what they do to remain socially active, we heard a wide range of positive responses. Respondents praised seniors' clubs, Legions, Community Care, church organizations, and even local businesses for providing an array of social opportunities geared towards our senior population. We were told about bridge and euchre groups, yoga and fitness classes, theatre and live music, and countless functions where older adults can meet up with friends and enjoy an affordable meal. When asked how 'social life' in the City of Kawartha Lakes could be improved, respondents suggested enhancing access to social events in other communities outside their own. When organizing an event, providing transportation and offering food and refreshments was generally seen as a plus.

Finally, we asked participants what factors have ever kept them from participating in a social activity they would have otherwise attended. We received a variety of responses, citing very relatable issues. Many older adults explained that they simply do not drive at night, suggesting that events held too late in the evening were inconvenient for them. The cost of events was also commonly mentioned as a deterrent to attending certain functions. Others claimed they are often not aware of events until after they pass, suggesting the promotion for events could be improved. For many however, health issues and reduced mobility were major inhibitors to social participation. Despite these very legitimate issues, focus group participants generally agreed that there was no shortage of accessible and affordable social opportunities and therefore, older adults in CKL must accept some of the responsibility for being as socially active as they would like.

"I feel I can enjoy an active social life because I drive. Several friends also attend because I'm able to take them. I fear and dread the loss of my independence when I am forced to 'retire' from driving."

~ Survey respondent ~

Things to Think About:

- Some survey respondents claimed that they often did not have anyone with whom to attend certain social events. What if there was a system in place that paired these individuals up with others in the same situation?
- Our city is made up of several different communities, each with its own culture. To maximize attendance and promote the diversity within CKL, event organizers should consider providing transportation for local residents as well as residents from other CKL communities. Where cost is an issue, organizers could actively recruit volunteer drivers and coordinate carpools.

At a closer glimpse...

Bobcaygeon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Among many other social events that take place in Bobcaygeon, one survey participant spoke very highly of free concerts in the park and other shows organized by the Bobcaygeon Music Council. • Visiting Settler’s Village was commonly mentioned as an interesting and fun way to spend a day in Bobcaygeon.
CKL South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group participants reported that there was room for collaboration among CKL South communities that would increase attendance to social events. Due to a lack of communication, it is not uncommon for neighbouring communities to hold popular social events at the same time.
Fenelon Falls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In focus group discussions, older adults from Fenelon Falls said all 7 churches work collaboratively to provide regular affordable meals to the public. • A local business, Coffee Way, offers an annual Christmas dinner to the public, free of charge.
Kirkfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With two local churches, the Lions Club, and a very active SAGES (Community Care Falls Prevention) group, one focus group pointed out, “You could be busy every day of the week if you wanted to be!”
Omemee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Omemee Lions and Lionesses are involved in the organization of a popular Santa Clause parade, Canada Day celebrations, and pancake breakfasts, just to name a few. These events encourage local older adults to socialize and welcome new residents to the area.
Woodville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Woodville, attending school Christmas concerts, performances put on by community groups and grassroots sporting events are a great way for older people to spend time with friends and family, while supporting and promoting extra-curricular involvement among youth.

CARE PROVIDER INTERVIEWS

Apart from being hard working and compassionate people, care providers proved to be very helpful in the information-gathering phase of our age-friendly project. After interviewing two Personal Support Workers, employed by Community Care, the advisory committee discovered a large number of older adults and people with disabilities are isolated due to reduced mobility and/or mental health issues. Our interviewees explained that inaccessible outdoor spaces and buildings discourage many of their clients from leaving their homes. Moreover, many residents do not enjoy the same level of access to social and civic opportunities as others, and as a result, become increasingly cut off from the rest of the community.

The support workers we spoke to provided us with very insightful information regarding much needed accessibility modifications in public spaces. They also told us of how existing accessibility features do not account for the most extreme cases of reduced mobility. They explained how scooters and other assistive devices can easily tip (especially in winter) if the graded portions of sidewalks do not meet the road evenly. In some cases, after a heavy snowfall, they have recommended clients leave their assistive devices at home, as they would be more inconvenient than helpful. Keeping with outdoor spaces, care providers mentioned a shortage of streetlights and crosswalks. This shortage was particularly evident near accessible and rent-gear-to-income housing. They also went on to mention a lack of automatic doors where they are obviously needed, such as in supportive housing complexes. Similarly, automatic elevator doors in some buildings were said to close too quickly and often do not re-open until they come into contact with something or someone. For many older adults, that contact can be enough to knock them on the ground and cause an injury.

Common Barriers:

- Lack of automatic doors
- Elevator doors that close too quickly
- Too few street lights and cross-walks
- When organizing social events, organizers must consider hearing/vision impairment; not only mobility issues
- More expansive bus service needed
- Consistency around seniors discounts
- One-on-one support often required to engage isolated residents

As far as being actively involved in social and civic affairs, the support workers we interviewed mentioned various barriers that restrict their clients from doing so. The transit system in Lindsay, although appreciated and well used, was said to be inconvenient at times and does not run after 7:00pm. No Sunday service and inadequate bus shelters were also said to be major deterrents to socializing in our community. Consistency was said to be a major struggle for many clients. For example it is very confusing for clients when shops, drug stores and theatres offer seniors' discounts for different ages. It was suggested that more consistency around what age was considered 'senior', would facilitate and promote further social engagement. In order to garner more civic participation from clients, the interviewees recommended mobile voting polls in supportive housing complexes, similar to those offered in long-term care facilities.

When asked how the City of Kawartha Lakes could improve upon its support and health services, interviewees indicated walk-in clinics could be more inclusive and convenient by expanding service hours. Existing health education around falls prevention and home safety was applauded. However, according to caregivers, the importance of this type of education cannot be understated and more is always needed.

The *Home at Last* (H.A.L.) program is a free service offered to older adults and people with special needs. Through a partnership of local agencies, and the support of the Central East Local Health Integration Network, H.A.L. helps patients settle back into their homes after hospital stays. The service assists with the transition out of the hospital and identifies potential safety issues in the home to ensure a smooth recovery. *Home at Last* benefits the whole community by freeing hospital beds in a timely manner and eases the burden placed on family members.

Find out more at:

http://www.centraleastlh.in.on.ca/uploadedFiles/Home_Page/Connected_with_Care/Kawartha_Brochure.pdf



NEXT STEPS

We hope that this report will generate awareness and public discussion about our findings and proposed actions. This report will be circulated to agencies that work with older adults and made available on the websites of all CKL Age-friendly Advisory Committee (AFAC) members. The report will also be circulated among City departments and Advisory Committees of Council for comments, suggestions and direction. The aim is to use this report to encourage Council's endorsement of the project and as the basis of a proposed 'age-friendly lens' to be considered by Council in future decision-making.

The following is a list of next steps to which the AFAC has committed to in the coming year.

1) Continue to share the results through presentations to:

- Pilot Communities
- Mayor's Seniors Advisory Committee
- Kawartha Lakes Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Transit Advisory Committee
- Community Services Committee
- Safe Communities Kawartha Lakes
- Directors at the City
- City Council
- Chambers of Commerce

2) Raise awareness of the importance of an age-friendly community and the work to date of the AFAC through:

- Creation of promotional materials (brochures/display/web page)
- Participation in community events
- Keeping the results on the agenda of local decision makers
- Providing an annual update on the project to the community

3) Support pilot communities in the creation of local action committees. The intent of the AFAC in gathering this data was to share results with the communities that participated and support local seniors in taking action on the issues that are important to their specific community. Several pilot communities have already participated in results sharing sessions and formed local action committees (Fenelon Falls, Omemee & Bobcaygeon).

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

An age-friendly community is everyone's responsibility and to everyone's benefit. A community that is safe, socially active and accessible encourages quality of life for all ages and abilities.

Get involved by:

- Sitting on the City-wide Advisory Committee
- Participating on a local action committee
- Sharing the results with your community
- Writing letters to local Councillors with your ideas on how CKL can become more age-friendly
- Promote the age-friendly project at your event by borrowing the display and brochures.

For more information contact:

City of Kawartha Lakes Age-friendly Project

c/o HKPR District Health Unit

www.hkpr.on.ca

1-866-888-4577

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