

Age-Friendly Communities Report

December 2012



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WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT?

The Age-Friendly Communities Project was rolled out in the spring of 2010 with funding from a New Horizons grant as a collaboration between the Toronto Seniors' Forum – the seniors' advisory group for the City of Toronto – and Downsview Services for Seniors. One of Toronto's high needs 'priority neighbourhoods,' Bathurst-Finch was chosen to host this project because the area boasts more older adults than any other in the city. This diverse community, home to many newcomers, is also missing many necessary services. The Age-Friendly Communities Project proudly encouraged this community to come together to ensure that all residents, particularly older adults, are able to age well in a friendly and healthy community environment.

WHAT DOES AGE-FRIENDLY MEAN?

Age-friendliness is about improving our communities so that everyone's needs are met. It's about creating welcoming, inclusive, fun, nurturing and diverse communities. In an age-friendly community, everyone has the opportunity – living independently or with relatives – to live a safe, healthy and vibrant life. An age-friendly community also provides access to healthy food, help for newcomers and access to education. There is choice, community pride, strong resident involvement and politicians who listen and act.

"It is almost impossible to cross Bathurst Street to go get coffee, (groceries) or to the pharmacy because it is dangerous for pedestrians."

An age-friendly community is a place where everyone belongs; where people of all ages are respected and encouraged to engage in the



shaping of their communities; where people can play happily and safely and where everyone can grow old. In an age-friendly community, everyone's opinion matters, and there is a culture of inclusion shared by people of all ages and ability levels.

In practical terms, this means that policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to support and enable older people to "age actively" – to live in security, enjoy good

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health and participate fully in society. The World Health Organization identified eight domains or age-friendly features of city living:

- Outdoor spaces and buildings including access to recreational facilities;
- Access to transportation;
- Wide range of housing options;
- Social participation including cultural activities, civic engagement and interaction with all age groups;
- Respect and social inclusion through community programs;
- Civic participation, employment and volunteer opportunities;
- Access to information and technology;
- Community support and health services including home care, clinics, and programs that facilitate active aging.



WHY IS AGE-FRIENDLY IMPORTANT?

When places, spaces and things are age-friendly, it means that people who live, work and play in the area are getting their needs

met. As our populations age, it makes good sense to create spaces that support and encourage healthy aging.

AGE-FRIENDLY IS GOOD FOR PEOPLE, IN THAT IT:

- Promotes the sharing of resources, talents and gifts of people of all ages;
- Promotes the physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being of people of all ages;
- Ensures people are able to thrive throughout their life course;
- Ensures that people continue to be contributing members of the community.

AGE-FRIENDLY BUSINESSES:

- Meet the needs of customers and increases access to services for all people;
- Have a competitive edge over those that are not friendly to all people;
- Include older adults and youth in decision-making which may strengthen their capacity to understand and better meet the needs of a growing market.

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FOR ORGANIZATIONS, AGE-FRIENDLINESS:

- Encourages organizational policy, practice and behaviours that meet the needs of people of all ages;
- May help to obtain funding from government or other agencies that expect inclusive and accessible practices;
- Helps to mobilize strong collaborations and partnerships.

HOW WAS THE RESEARCH DONE IN THE BATHURST-FINCH NEIGHBOURHOOD?

The Project Coordinator worked with facilitators and volunteers to organize five separate community conversations. We spoke to 213 participants with the help of facilitators, translators and volunteers. Participants were provided with some background and discussed the definition of age-friendliness. Participants then explored these questions:

- What is age-friendly in our community of Bathurst-Finch?
- What are some things in our community that allow us to age well?



- Looking at the flower and the eight domains, what changes would make our Bathurst-Finch community more age-friendly?
- What are you willing to do to make Bathurst-Finch become more age-friendly?

**FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS**

Out of the eight domains, participants identified the following issues as of top importance in the Bathurst-Finch area:

1. Outdoor spaces and buildings;
2. Respect and social inclusion;
3. Transportation; communications and information; and community support and health services.

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TRANSPORTATION, STREETScape AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

“Staying in our apartments particularly in the winter time for days or at times weeks, is a depressing experience... We suggest a local, community bus to come and take us to places such as malls and other places of interest.”

“If we could see more benches in the neighbourhood for people who need to rest, that would be an age-friendly improvement.”

“Walking is healthy, but there is the question of pedestrian safety. The lights could be timed differently to allow for a longer time to cross the road. We are concerned about dangerous right-hand lane turns too.”

“I feel very strongly that we are isolated from others in the community – that we are on an island. It is almost impossible to cross Bathurst Street to go get coffee, (groceries) or to the pharmacy because it is dangerous for pedestrians.” (6250 Bathurst Street – referring to the light at Bathurst and Steeles.)

“We could lobby the Community Care Access Centre for more supportive housing services such as laundry services, housekeeping and bathing.”

“... it would be better for seniors and parents with babies and children if we had more stop signs – so that we have longer times in which to cross the roads.”

“If the number of the bus was on the pole at the bus stop, that would help newcomers and seniors.”

“There are such long stretches of distance between Steeles Avenue, Finch Avenue and Sheppard Avenue. If we could see more benches in the neighbourhood for people who need to rest, that would be an age-friendly improvement.”

FOOD SECURITY

“When we have access to grocery stores that aren’t too expensive, that is good for our health.”



ACCESS TO RECREATION AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

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“It would be good to have local programs that always consider joining seniors into group activities.”

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HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

“One good idea is to bring a doctor or nurse to the building, because it is hard for some residents to leave the building for doctors’ appointments or tests.” (6250 Bathurst Street)

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**SOCIAL INCLUSION**

“We need to find a way to communicate with each other, so that we’re not isolated from one another.”

HOW CAN WE CREATE AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES?

There is a great deal of enthusiasm within progressive, local organizations and from individuals to create age-friendly communities. The ideas that were generated at the community conversations in Bathurst-Finch were thoughtful, informed and numerous. Shaping a community for the betterment of others of all ages was a popular vision.

To position an entire neighbourhood – or perhaps the City of Toronto – as an age-friendly community requires a coordinated effort. The will to create spaces that are friendly, supportive, caring and healthy is there. Many key people familiar with age-friendliness have been meeting over the last few years, dreaming together about launching an age-friendly initiative of this scope. Many agree that it needs to happen for the health of our future generations. Coordination is the missing piece of the puzzle. While it is true that the small acts of volunteering for an older adult or designing healthier spaces for children

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to play certainly contribute to a better society, implementing a city-wide age-friendly initiative will improve community health on a large scale. We have the recipe to become age-friendly – and a lot of people willing to make it happen. Now we need coordination to engage stakeholders at all levels to make it a reality.

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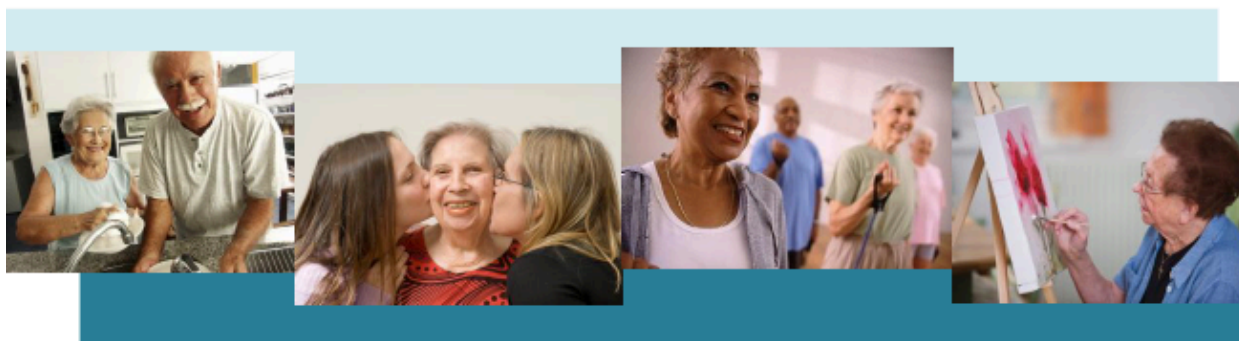
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WHAT CAN YOU DO NOW?

- Facilitate focus groups in your community asking seniors what age-friendly means to them.
- Use the information from your focus groups to inform programs, projects and planning processes in your community.
- Take the information from your focus groups to other community agencies and local groups. Share it with decision-makers such as your City Councillors, municipal planning staff, Members of Provincial Parliament and Federal Members of Parliament. Work with them to create a more age-friendly community.
- Consider creating an 'age-friendly' committee in your neighbourhood to move forward age-friendly initiatives. Include local seniors, community agencies, city staff and other stakeholders.
- Present the information from your focus groups and your ongoing age-friendly work in the community to stakeholders such as faith groups, schools and small businesses.
- Communicate with funders about the importance of age-friendly projects. Demonstrate how it works!
- Connect with other age-friendly groups and initiatives across the city.
- Draw inspiration from other age-friendly initiatives around the world.
- Continue gathering information about what would make your community more age-friendly.



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THANK YOU

Thank you to Debra Flanagan, who wrote the original, longer version of this report and to Hamda Mohamed for her excellent editing skills. Thank you to the Toronto Seniors Forum, Downsview Services for Seniors and the Bathurst-Finch age-friendly advisory committee. And the biggest thank you of all to the wonderful people who shared their ideas for making Bathurst-Finch an age-friendly community!

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about this report, and resources for seniors in the Bathurst-Finch area, please contact us at caring.matters@downsviewservices.com

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