AGE-FRIENDLY CHAMPAIGN-URBANA

Progress Report to the AARP

APRIL 29, 2022

Overview

The Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana Action Plan was completed in April 2019 and concentrated on initial focus areas: **Communication, Inclusion, and Transportation.** A group of thoughtful and ambitious community leaders came together as the Age-Friendly Steering Committee to draft the plan. At the time that we worked together to engage the community and plan, we never could have imagined the challenges that lay ahead with the onset of the COVID19 pandemic. There was much enthusiasm and momentum for our goals, however the challenges of the last two years kept us from accomplishing everything we set out to achieve. Despite this, we did manage to make significant progress in all areas of our plan. What follows is an overview of our accomplishments in each area, the challenges we encountered, some thoughts for the future of Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana, and appendices detailing specific goals and their status.

Communication*: We will work to enhance existing resources for communicating with older adults, their families, and caregivers through the development of a centralized web presence to share resources and events with the community and especially older adults.*

The [ChambanaSeniors website](#) was launched in the Fall of 2019 and continues to provide a calendar of events and activities. The site was initially conceived as a for-profit endeavor, run by a local media group, with input from the Age-Friendly Steering Committee. There was a lot of momentum at the launch, but it was quickly dampened by the pandemic. The owner of the site felt she was not able to properly market a site that relied heavily on events both for content and advertisement revenue. Staffing challenges combined with an overall drop in revenue motivated the owner to evaluate where they were investing their time as a company. The owner decided that although she believes in the mission of Chambana Seniors she would not put further resources into or continue to sell advertising for the site. Currently, the calendar is the most active part of the site and they are still taking submissions and keeping it live.

However, because the initial enthusiasm was so great and the need for this resource was clear, the site owner is currently working with a local non-profit social service agency to transition ownership to their organization, where the model will not rely on advertising and there will be more of a focus on resources. The Age-Friendly Steering Committee will continue to advise and help with content for the transitioned site.

Transportation: *We will work to identify and address barriers to older adults' use of public transportation and ride-share services to ensure that individuals of all income levels and abilities are able to reach their desired locations in our community.*

Although some of our specific goals were not accomplished there was still much progress made in this area. Most notably, the [C-CARTS](#), the rural transit system, has expanded. Ridership has increased 25% in 2020, and they have had record overall ridership. The service went fare free as of March 18, 2020.

Due to the pandemic and staffing challenges at transportation agencies that had many of the office and planning staff operating bus routes to avoid gaps in service, many plans either needed to shift or be put on hold. We were not able to move forward with the Bus Buddies Program, due to both staffing challenges and our inability to host interns in-person throughout much of the past two years. Although

the goal of applying for grants for One-Call, One-Click Center in Champaign County was completed, unfortunately none of these were awarded to our community.

Although we were met with challenges in this area, there is much continued enthusiasm for supporting public transportation in our community. Steering Committee Members Mimi Hutchinson and Evan Alvarez recently penned a column for our feature in the Central Illinois Business Magazine on the importance of public transportation to an economically vibrant community.

Moving forward, we have identified that one of the biggest transportation gaps in our community is the need for increased travel trainings, teaching people how to ride public transportation. This, combined with continued work on an online transportation directory for the community will address these issues.

Inclusion: *We are committed to fighting ageism by working with, rather than for, older adults, to acknowledge the value older residents bring to our community, and to focus on meeting the special needs of diverse populations. We will work to increase the availability of people who can be reached for help when needed, assuring the overall feeling of safety for older adults.*

Despite the challenges of the past two years, we have made strides to be more inclusive and to fight against ageism.

One of our goals was increased positive media coverage of older adults. The News-Gazette (our local paper) and Clark-Lindsey (a local life-plan community) partnered to induct two classes of 70 over 70 honorees. Additionally, this past winter the Age-Friendly Steering Committee began authoring a regular column in Central Illinois Business Magazine.

A group of talented interns in 2019 researched different housing models for older adults and presented them to the Steering Committee. This research was particularly useful in our interactions with city planners and the Champaign City Council, which reconsidered city codes to allow for the building of Accessory Dwelling Units. We have created a robust Age-Friendly internship program and since 2017 have hosted 17 Age-Friendly undergraduate interns who have worked on programs and research to support the work of our group. Most excitingly, many of these interns have opted to pursue careers or additional training focused on working with older adults.

We served as a mentor and resource for other communities who plan to pursue Age-Friendly status, and this was accomplished in several ways. First, we partnered with the University of Illinois Extension for presentations that reached Illinois residents statewide. One presentation was directed at Extension employees from across the state, explaining how they could work in their communities to become Age-Friendly and how Extension could support those community efforts. Another presentation was a webinar for government officials and employees from rural communities on Age-Friendly in rural environments. Our Action Plan was translated into Spanish to reach a broader readership, not just local Spanish speakers, but to serve as a resource for Spanish-speaker communities globally who are interested in developing their own Action Plans.

We know from our early survey data that the campus was not seen as a particularly Age-Friendly place for older adults. Under the leadership of a university professor, Dr. Wendy Rogers, with support from the university administration, the University of Illinois was accepted into the Age-Friendly University Global Network. Plans are currently underway to develop the agenda for this group to welcome more older adults to campus.
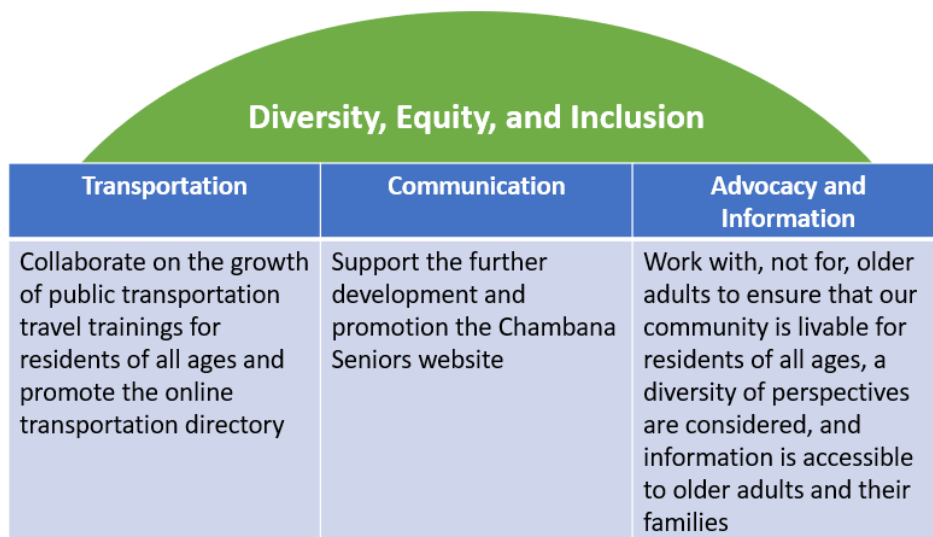
Lastly, while many of our goals in this area planned for the development of in-person events, which were not feasible during the past two years, there has been progress in the development of Age-Friendly events for diverse populations, specifically low-income older adults in subsidized housing, led by the Urbana Parks District (UPD). The UPD now employs a full time Age-Friendly Programs Coordinator and has a mobile recreation unit dedicated to bringing community, outreach, wellness, education, and environmental programs to where people live.

Moving Forward

There is much enthusiasm for continuing the work of Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana and making our community more livable for all ages. We successfully completed many of the goals in our original Action Plan, some goals are still in-progress or ongoing, there are also goals that require modification.

Our original focus areas of **communication, transportation, and inclusion** are still at the forefront of our actions, but with some changes. Most importantly we no longer conceptualize **inclusion** as a separate focus area. Moving forward, the Age-Friendly Champaign-Urbana Steering Committee sees it as vital that diversity, equity, and inclusion be deliberate and purposeful in all our goals and actions. As such, we propose that moving forward, **diversity, equity, and inclusion** will be the overarching theme of all our efforts.   Lastly our group, plans to continue to advocate with and for older adults in the community as issues or concerns arise.

Image: Focus and Goals Moving Forward

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Transportation	Communication	Advocacy and Information
Collaborate on the growth of public transportation travel trainings for residents of all ages and promote the online transportation directory	Support the further development and promotion the Chambana Seniors website	Work with, not for, older adults to ensure that our community is livable for residents of all ages, a diversity of perspectives are considered, and information is accessible to older adults and their families

Appendices: Progress on Specific Past Goals

Green = Completed

Yellow = In Progress/On-going

Red = Not Completed

Appendix A: Progress on Specific Communication Goals

Domain	Goal	Evaluative Measure	Status
YEAR 1			
Communication	Secure funding to launch a website that connects older adults with community resources and one another (Chambana Seniors)	The site was launched	
YEAR 2			
Communication	Evaluate success of website and identify next steps to broaden reach	Number of subscribers, financial stability, number of sponsors/investors, and page hits	
Communication	Explore the value of a non-on-line supplemental resource and consider expanding scope of on-line links	Online and print resources meeting the needs of older adults in our community	
YEAR 3			
Communication	Explore potential for a Champaign-Urbana area app that connects older adults with this community and the broader surrounding area	If feasible, mobile app launched	

Appendix B: Progress on Specific Transportation Goals

Domain	Goal	Evaluative Measure	Status
YEAR 1			
Transportation	Ensure that appropriate local agencies will have the current transportation directory on their website	Number of agencies with a directory link on their website; Tracking directory hits through Google Analytics	
Transportation	Analyze survey data identifying seniors' barriers to public transportation	Two stakeholders and one potential funding option identified	
Transportation	Find out why some seniors do not take public transit or use ride-share services	Number of surveys, from seniors, assisted living homes, and senior centers	
Transportation	Apply for at least three grants for a Champaign County One-Call One-Click center	Three applications submitted	

Transportation	Identify high-density areas of Dash Pass users (reduced public transit fares for community members 65+)	Map of urbanized area with Dash-pass data developed	

YEAR 2

Transportation	Community actively uses the transportation directory	Number of agencies with a directory link on their website; Tracking directory hits through Google Analytics; Tracking directory hits through Google Analytics;	
Transportation	Continue development of a feasible Bus Buddy program to train and/or assist seniors to use mass transit using survey data and Dash Pass route maps	Amount of funding secured	
Transportation	Implement Champaign County One-Click One-Call center based on available funding	Amount of funding secured	
Transportation	Conduct three travel trainings within the year addressing barriers listed in year one surveys	Number of travel trainings conducted; Number of attendees; Number of locations travel trainings held	

YEAR 3

Transportation	Implement the Bus Buddy program to train and/or assist seniors to use mass transit	Implementation by November 2022; Number of volunteers; Number of seniors who use the service; Number of trips by type	
Transportation	Implement the Champaign County One-Click One-Call center	Number of updates to transportation directory; Number of callers; Type of information requested	

Domain	Goal	Evaluative Measure	Status
Transportation	Conduct three additional travel trainings within the year addressing barriers listed in year one surveys and considering year 2 results	Number of surveys; Number of travel trainings conducted; Number of attendees; Number of locations travel trainings held; Number of volunteers	🟩

Appendix C: Progress on Specific Inclusion Goals

Domain	Goal	Evaluative Measure	Status
YEAR 1			
Inclusion	Develop a list of and build connections and/or partnerships with underrepresented groups in the community	The development of a list of relevant groups, relationships with community leaders from these groups, and a plan to sustain interactions	🟧
Inclusion	Run a series of focus groups with older adults from groups whose perspectives were not adequately captured in initial survey data, including a focus on the safety needs of older adults in the community, both in their homes and neighborhoods	The completion of a series of focus groups that adequately capture diverse perspectives, including representatives from the LGBTQ communities, racial and ethnic minority groups, and lower and middle income older adults	🟥
Inclusion	Support the development of positive feature articles on older adults in local media	The increased appearance of positive and useful media features about older adults	🟩
Inclusion	Explore and support the development of regular Age Friendly social events in locations that reach our diverse population	The development of and diverse attendance at regularly scheduled social events	🟧
Inclusion	Research nationally and regionally available diverse models of senior living outreach (for example, Villages concept, immigrant welcome and outreach, and shared housing)	Increased knowledge of alternative models for community services and housing for older adults and the initiation of conversations about how to integrate models into our community	🟩
YEAR 2			
Inclusion	Seek admission into the Age-Friendly University Network	Admittance into Age-Friendly University Network and compliance with their goals	🟩
Inclusion	Develop targeted outreach to and communication strategies for underrepresented groups based on focus group data and input from community partners	Clear and sustaining strategies for interacting with our diverse community partners	🟥

Inclusion	Conduct research on best practices for reaching and better communicating with diverse populations and for eliminating ageism in communications generally. Begin a communication audit of local organizations and their communication	A report that details best practices for communication and the development of materials to disseminate to local organizations	
Inclusion	Explore the development of a volunteer infrastructure	The development of relationships with volunteer service organizations and a database of organizations from which older adult service providers might draw	
YEAR 3			
Inclusion	Based on findings from communication audit, communicate best practices for local organizations and businesses to communicate with a diverse population of older adults	Sustained interactions with local businesses and organizations in the forms of training materials or seminars on eliminating ageism from communications	
Inclusion	Continue to advocate for the safety and inclusion of all older adults in our community based on work started in years 1-2	Survey results indicate progress	
Inclusion	Work with local groups and organizations to continue to develop a series of intergenerational programs	The continued attendance and sustaining of regular intergenerational activities and programs	
Inclusion	Work to diversify Age-Friendly Steering Committee	The presence of community leaders from diverse groups in Champaign-Urbana on our Steering Committee	
Inclusion	Serve as a mentor to, resource for, and partner with other smaller Champaign County villages and towns as they seek to join the Age-Friendly Network of Communities	Additional Champaign County communities apply to join the Network of Age-Friendly Communities and commit to making their cities livable for people of all ages	