



aging better together



This is Age Friendly Edmonton



This is a different kind of annual report.

It tells the stories of regular Edmontonians who have chosen to work together to build a city that's happier, safer, friendlier, warmer, and more interesting, for everyone of every age.

We think this is the work of everyone in this city. It's everyone's job to connect people in caring neighbourhoods, to respect and support our neighbours no matter what year they were born, to make sure public decisions are made with every Edmontonian in mind.

It's the work, too, of Age Friendly Edmonton.



Our group, co-led by the City of Edmonton and the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, brings leaders and volunteers together to encourage Edmontonians to repeat the kinds of ideas you'll read about in this report.

Our motivation is simple.

Somewhere in Edmonton, a senior sits isolated and alone. She is disconnected from her neighbours and family. Her home – built in another era, for hearty youngsters – is increasingly tough to manage. She can't drive. She can't afford taxis. Her health care is confounding. Life is confounding.

In some cities, people might not understand – or care to understand – why this woman is worth our time, our best thinking, our investment.

In Edmonton, we understand. And even more importantly, we act.

Some of the examples here recount projects that Age Friendly Edmonton's working groups have decided to fund directly. We're highlighting other projects because they're simply worthy and powerful stories, the sorts of ideas a new generation of Edmonton volunteers, funders, and business leaders can emulate.

That idea – more projects, more examples, more acting and building by everyone – is the key to Age Friendly Edmonton's future.

We have done a lot of good thinking, studying, learning, and planning about age-friendliness. Now, we intend to be a group that invites and helps people to expand the idea through the whole city.

Demographic changes mean more seniors than ever live in Edmonton. That's a reason to celebrate, because it means more people ready to give, more people ready to create and contribute. It's a reason to invest.

It will take a different way of doing things – of doing everything. Before we put another shovel in the ground or sign off on another strategy, we must ask ourselves: Do these ideas and initiatives connect people of all ages? Have we thought of everyone?

In the coming years, we will persuade Edmonton to think of everyone, to keep age friendliness at the heart of decisions of all sorts — in infrastructure, health, business, culture, recreation. And we will invite the city to invent new ways, Edmonton ways, to connect people of all ages.

It's an approach that fits our city's unique culture: when we build something together we build it strong — it endures.



Home ^{for} Life

A new way to build yields beautiful homes for all seasons



There isn't enough room in seniors accommodations for today's Edmontonians over 65, let alone tomorrow's. And fewer seniors than ever want to be in traditional lodging. This inspired Peter Faid to study something called "Aging in Place" for the City of Edmonton.

If we can age in our homes, in our neighbourhoods, we will be happier and the community will be healthier. We won't have to embark on massive public building projects.

But most of our homes aren't set up for aging in place, not when the inevitable complications set in: reduced mobility, for example.

"That's where I came across the word 'visitable,'" says Peter. "And it really sparked my imagination, the idea of a home that anyone can visit."

Peter learned that across North America, individuals and developers and cities are building homes and neighbourhoods differently.

Different from what? Consider the standard single-family two-and-a-half-storey home.

There are plenty of stairs and a steep front driveway that ices up, but only a few times a year. Parks and grocery stores and clinics and community centres aren't terribly far – if you drive. It's only 30 minutes – by car – to theatres and downtown galleries and street life in Old Strathcona. When it snows, the windrows can get a little high, a little hard, but the nearest bus stop is just a 10-minute walk and there are sidewalks in most places.

It's perfect, this house and this neighbourhood and this city, for two able-bodied working parents and two children, nine and 11, with a couple of SUVs.

Yet the house is much less than perfect for a single mother with a baby, for a new immigrant family with no easy connections to other Edmontonians, or for anyone who can't drive, who can't climb stairs, who needs a cane or a walker or a wheelchair.



GROWING AGE FRIENDLY

Home matters. 82% of Edmonton seniors say staying in their own home as they age is important.

The neighbourhood wasn't designed to connect people in any central meeting places: social or civic or commercial. If you can't drive, you can be isolated.

The moment Peter encountered the word 'visitable' and began studying it, he discovered another way. He and his wife Alison were so convinced by what they read, and saw, in cities like Tuscon and Winnipeg that they bought a plot of land in Mill Creek, in Old Strathcona, close to downtown. They worked with Ron Wickman, an architect whose father was an Edmonton hero and an advocate for the disabled.

"It was a risk," he says. "We had to learn as we went along. But I wouldn't say it was difficult. It was fun."

Their home has a no step entry, wider doors, and a wheelchair accessible washroom, bedroom and kitchen. It has an elevator. It's a home designed for everyone: toddlers who like to see out windows and people in wheelchairs who like to see out them too. It has fewer stairs, latch handles, lots of light. It's a home for life.

And it's gorgeous. People wanted to visit their visitable home, take photographs of it, write about it. Peter and Alison became advocates. Imagine if every new house were built to similar standards. We would have to construct far fewer seniors' lodges, Edmontonians would have the emotional and spiritual comfort of aging in their beloved homes, and real estate developers would have an expanding new market.



By promoting Home For Life™, a set of guidelines for builders to design and construct visitable homes, Age Friendly Edmonton is helping more buyers like Peter and Alison Faid age in place.

Today if you want a Home for Life you don't have to import strategies from Melbourne or Tuscon. All you have to do is tell your designer and builder to get in touch with Home for Life (HomeforLife.ca), here in Edmonton, and they'll help. The more Homes for Life we have, in the city, the easier it is to build the next one.

If you want a Home for Life, tell your designer or builder to contact HomeforLife.ca

GROWING AGE FRIENDLY



Engaging seniors in decision-making and civic issues is a hallmark of an age-friendly city. Focus groups and surveys are helping the City of Edmonton learn about seniors voting needs, so that access can be improved, and these important voices are heard.



AFE Transportation Information Hubs have been installed in 12 locations around the city. These kiosks provide seniors with transit maps, and printed information about driving services, driver safety and cessation.



AFE supported the Pride Seniors Group in developing training materials that help ensure seniors activity centres and housing are inclusive and welcoming to LGBTQ2S seniors.



One in four Albertans provide unpaid care for someone living with illness, disability or age related challenges. AFE support helped Caregivers Alberta offer Navigator Workshops to train professionals to identify, assess and support caregivers.



Sunshine Community Garden

Community garden radiates inviting glow, energizes neighbourhood

Last summer, in the long mid-evenings, the magic-hour light would fill the front yard of St. Augustine's Anglican Church, and the people of Fulton Place would gather where none had gathered before.

What was once a lonely lawn was now the Sunshine Garden, 38 raised wooden garden boxes radiating smartly out from the church's signature steeple.

The Fulton Place Community League and seniors Doreen and Eldon Wyman envisioned the new garden as a showcase: for native plants, for the promise of urban agriculture and locally grown food, for the ornamental handiwork of helpful Scouts and daycare cuties and Hardisty Junior High students.

What the Wymans perhaps didn't anticipate was how water, soil and seed would energize a neighbourhood's corner and invite all who lived in Fulton Place: seniors, families, new Canadians, and, remarkably, young children drawn from their smartphones and gaming systems by the mysteries of growing things.

"We would see young children wander over, no parents, and start asking questions. 'What's this plant over here? Can you eat that over there?' It was a safe place, a fun place," says Doreen.

"It was a place for everybody. You didn't have to be a member of the church. You didn't have to be enrolled in sports. It didn't matter what nationality you were."

Funded in part by \$5,000 from the Age Friendly Edmonton Innovation Fund, the garden reserved the taller boxes for Hardisty's thriving senior population.

Lyla Klinger used to live on an acreage but couldn't satisfy her yen for gardening in her nearby apartment. She can now, tending to a box easily reachable from her multipurpose walker.

"We're doing it to see the pleasure of seeing things grow. But also for that feeling of togetherness you have when 20 people are out here on a lovely evening."

Lyla says she imagines the Sunshine Garden will be a community magnet for years.

"We're getting them young! We have time to sit and talk, which is maybe not something kids get in their busy lives, a listener.

"And we learn from their enthusiasm. It's not just an education for them. It's for us."

GROWING AGE FRIENDLY

Edmonton seniors are volunteering more than ever—
54% have volunteered in the last 12 months.





LIFT Drive Happiness

Independence, wisdom, new friendships: all are gained behind a volunteer's wheel

When Chandrima Kapoor's husband of 46 years died a decade ago, she lost the love of her life, and something else she hadn't considered at risk.

"I'd never thought of losing independence. Who thinks this way? I didn't even realize it was something to lose," says Chandrima, now 86.

"When my husband passed away, my family surrounded me with so much love. But they are so busy, my two sons, my wonderful daughters-in-law, with their own children. I don't drive, but I didn't want to add an extra load.

"I didn't want to sit back depressed, either, missing my husband. So I decided: I'm going out."

Chandrima called LIFT Drive Happiness, an Age Friendly Edmonton-supported volunteer driving program.

Chandrima's three weekly rides for canasta, art and camaraderie at the library and senior centres in Mill Woods and southeast Edmonton are among the over 12,000 rides LIFT Drive Happiness provides annually for a token fee.

Chandrima has met 15 different drivers. "They fight to give me my rides, I think," she says, winking and laughing. "I'm going to be 87. I have wisdom. I was a teacher, I've written children's books. I try to give them my experiences of life. Sometimes when they're not happy, I try to calm them. Being angry, it affects the body. But being content and happy, this is the secret to a good life."

One of Chandrima's drivers – he laughs, too, when he confirms her popularity among LIFTies – is Peter Salahub, a chef and long-haul truck driver who found his own days wanting after he hurt his back.

"I was on disability, I wasn't doing a thing and I was only 63, I was discouraged with life, I couldn't do nothing. Sit 12 hours by yourself in a room and see what that's like," Peter says.

"So I started driving (for LIFT Drive Happiness). I say: 'I can do this. I know how to put a route together.' And I do it. My wife says: 'I've never seen a guy who changed his life as much as you did. You're excited to get up in the morning. You come home and you have 15 stories about your clients.'

GROWING AGE FRIENDLY

Social isolation among seniors is an important concern. 12% of Edmonton seniors socialize with two or less people a week.



"This word: clients. After a year driving, I don't call them ladies, or my clients. I call them my friends. I've gained 30 or 35 new friends."

Peter says he thinks LIFT Drive Happiness is about more than affordable rides. It's a program that offers hope.

"These seniors I drive: You wouldn't believe how lost they can be. How do they get to the doctor if they have no family? How do they get out and do things?" he says.

"One of my friends, she's 94. Every Wednesday, it's a ride to the church for dinner and cards. She looks so forward to this. Her daughter says to me: 'If it wasn't for you, Pete, my Mom would be sitting at home looking at the walls.'

"You hear something like that, about a difference you're making, well..."

Asma Qadri, the executive director of LIFT Drive Happiness, says she sees an uplifting pattern emerge when LIFT Drive Happiness drivers meet clients who start using the program.

"As they age, some seniors close themselves off, they go inwards. But after one, two, three rides, our drivers see them start to bloom again. They're happy.



They're socially engaged. They rediscover their community. Worlds of possibility open up to them again."

For Chandrima Kapoor, this has been EXACTLY her experience.

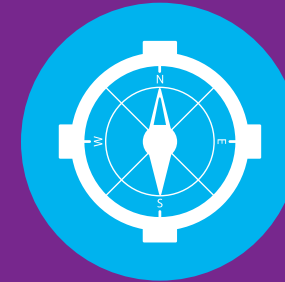
"I know what people say: 'Age is just a number.' But if I didn't get out to the library, to South East Edmonton Seniors Association, my mind would be on that number. Now I have so much more to look forward to than just this number."

LIFT Drive Happiness connects seniors with their community and helps prevent social isolation.

GROWING AGE FRIENDLY



Cloverdale Community League started an urban poling walking group with the funding they received from the AFE Innovation Fund. They meet to walk, socialize and enjoy Edmonton's beautiful green spaces all while getting a full body workout.



Edmonton's growing population of immigrant and refugee seniors face unique challenges accessing services. The AFE funded Age of Wisdom report has many recommendations for senior serving organizations, community groups and funders to address gaps.



AFE offers free, interactive educational sessions on over 40 healthy aging topics presented by knowledgeable professionals. The Healthy Aging Information Series speakers will present to your group or you can participate in the Healthy Aging Phone Chats and enjoy a small, interactive group conversation from the comfort of your home by telephone.



Seniors Information Phone Line (211) funded by AFE, provides information about programs, services and resources for seniors in Edmonton. Calls can be transferred to outreach workers at seniors centres for more information and assistance if needed. Since 2014, the number of calls from seniors has more than doubled.



Edmonton Library

Then and Now

Library mines memories to encourage “good collisions” between seniors and youth

Not long ago, libraries were stand-alone buildings. They were quiet places with books and readers and diligent librarians who could help you with your research project.

Some people worried that the digital revolution would make the library obsolete. But as we’ve seen in Edmonton, thoughtful leaders have invented a new and even more relevant sort of library, a fusion of books, readers, and other social and cultural goals.

When Edmonton Public Library’s new Mill Woods branch was set to open, sharing its space with a seniors and multicultural centre, it seemed a particularly Edmonton thing to do.

“But we did worry, in the beginning, about all the kids that come to the library and how they might collide with the seniors,” says Jennifer Waters, a youth services librarian at the Mill Woods Branch. “The seniors themselves were worried. We wanted to avoid any headbutting.”

Rather than focus on it as a problem, Jennifer and her colleague Kate Charuk, a community services librarian, wondered about making the shared space between youth and seniors into a strength. “The fact is, these are two groups that are both discriminated against,” says Jennifer. “We knew there had to be a way to bring them together.”

They learned about a grant program with the City Council Seniors Initiative that encouraged intergenerational projects. Nudged by a \$5,000 grant, Jennifer and Kate called their idea “Then and Now,” and imagined bringing youth and seniors together to create memory kits. Maybe they would be suitcases. What would they put inside them? They would let the participants decide.

Youth and seniors from Mill Woods met for 10 weeks, on Friday afternoons, to brainstorm ideas for five kits. They started with 25 or 30 potential topics, and discussed their way down to a more manageable list. They decided to look at school, then and now, at food and cooking, at toys, at music. How about clothing?

GROWING AGE FRIENDLY

Five Edmonton organizations have piloted a Toolkit to create intergenerational programs. Learnings from these pilot projects will be catalysts for even more connections between generations.



The greatest “product” wasn’t tangible. It was getting youth and seniors together to discover what bound them.

“It was fascinating but also a little jarring,” says Jeanine Alexander who, at 64, isn’t quite a senior but enjoyed gathering with the group on Fridays.

“We were talking about footwear, about shoes for style, all these kids and all these shoes. I thought back to

cold Manitoba days when we had one pair of boots — one! — and they were passed down. I was lucky, as the oldest, because I got new ones every few years. But the younger kids? Never. It is so different today than it was in my rural town.”

Sidharth Sharma, 14, sits across from Jeanine and relates his own most memorable moment — also about fashion. “The elders talked about the itchy bitsy teeny weeny yellow polka dot bikini. They actually sang the song. That is how they sold clothes back then, made trends, with songs and commercials and ads. Today we never sell clothes with songs. It’s all social media.”

The youth and seniors talked a lot about fashion, a lot about technology, and differences between the day of an average kid now and 50 years ago. One point

of similarity: music. Many seniors today were born in the same era as rock’n’roll and came of age in a time of great cultural change — much of it propelled by popular music. Fundamentally, there isn’t much difference between Elvis Presley and Justin Bieber.

Members of each group learned new things, and changed the way they saw one another. Sidharth translated for a man from the Punjab, who told fascinating and elaborate stories about growing up through wars, assassination attempts, and public floggings in a very different time and place.

“To be honest, I used to think elders were a joke,” says Sidharth.

Across from him, Jeanine laughs.

“No no, I mean... I don’t know what I mean. But when they told us what they had gone through, what they’d built, how they improved their lives and our lives, I see it all differently. My neighbours are elderly. Before ‘Then and Now’ I never talked to them. I never noticed them. Now I go see them. I spend time with them. I don’t think they ever had children of their own. I like talking to them when they’re watering their lawn. They have lots of cool stories as well.”

It was easier to find youth for the program, from nearby schools, than it was to market to seniors — who have very busy lives. Jennifer remains focused on putting



the kits together but she realized, in the middle of the program, that the greatest “product” of Then and Now wasn’t anything tangible. It was simply getting youth and seniors together to discover what bound them, what made them different. Everyone learned: it’s not scary or weird for teens and seniors to work together.

When they are finished with the kits they will take them to seniors groups and to schools, and present them. They also plan to spread the program to other

branches. They will market Then and Now more carefully, targeting seniors, and they will spend more than 10 weeks on the program.

“We’ve already succeeded,” says Jennifer, “and the kits aren’t even done yet. These interactions are so meaningful. It’s odd that we traditionally have programs for kids, for teens, for adults seeking work or second languages, and then for seniors. Yet we so rarely think to bring them together — which is the whole point.”

GROWING AGE FRIENDLY

Every year AFE runs a workshop for community leagues to encourage programs for (and by) seniors. Many leagues have also established Senior Liaisons positions on their Boards.



GROWING AGE FRIENDLY

11 creative projects were funded via the AFE Innovation Fund, these included: university students teaching piano to seniors with dementia, and multicultural cooking demonstrations by seniors.





Crestwood Snow Angels

For seniors who treasure their home, every cleared sidewalk is an act of grace

Bob Burch is a spry guy, still throwing skip rocks at 76 at the local curling rink. And while his wife Parveen endorses his time on the ice, she draws the line at the snow in their Crestwood yard.

“Curling, OK. But I don’t want him to shovel. That’s how men have heart attacks. If we want to stay in this house – and we do, we raised our daughter here – we knew we needed a little help,” she says.

Help came from Oliver Cheng and his fellow army of volunteer snow shovellers from Crestwood School, a K-9 near the Burches. When the snow piles in the Burches’ massive yard, out come the Crestwood Snow Angels.

Oliver, a cheerful, athletic 13-year-old in Grade 8, learned about the Snow Angel program from his older sister. “My sister said: ‘You should do this. I did it, and it was great. You get volunteer hours (every Crestwood student needs them), you get to help,’ ” Oliver remembers.

“The first time, I was a bit nervous that someone would open up their door and yell ‘Get off my lawn!’ And the

door DID open and a senior DID come out, but he was really kind and really happy we were there.”

Oliver remembers meeting Bob Burch, a retired teacher who knew all about Crestwood. “He said: ‘Ah, great academic program there.’ And it made me think: ‘Whoa. People notice this school, they know we’re here.’ ”

Bob, his mind still tuned to the lessons young people learn, says he can see intangible benefits for the Snow Angels beyond exercise and volunteer hours.

“I would bet that it gives them a better sense of what it’s like to be part of a community in a real way. It teaches them to be humble, to know they’re part of something bigger,” Bob says.

Parveen jumps in: “It shows them that there are people who need a little caring for, and what just a little act of service can do.”

The Snow Angels are young, but they’re building something enduring. In only 63 short years, Oliver will spend HIS ice time on the curling rink instead of the sidewalk.

GROWING AGE FRIENDLY

AFE helped establish the Seniors Home Supports Program which screens and recommends providers of snow removal, yard help, housekeeping and home repair. www.seniorshomesupports.com





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