



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

FINAL GRANT REPORT BY THE
AREA AGENCIES ON AGING

JULY 2025





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	p. 3
AAA Project Highlights 1. Community Partnerships 2. Statewide Collaboration 3. Service Connections 4. Shared Learning	p. 4-11
Regional Strategies	p. 12
Lessons Learned	p. 13
Challenges & Structural Barriers	p. 14
Recommendations	p. 15
Acknowledgements	p. 16
Appendix A: AAA Services flyer	p. 17
Appendix B: Community Ambassador Reflections	p. 20
Appendix C: Community Ambassador Recommendations	p. 27



INTRODUCTION

The **Community Connections** project was led by Governor Mills' Cabinet on Aging from April 2025 - June 2025. The 15 month project aimed to create stronger connections across the state to support older residents. A key element of the project was the creation of a Community Ambassador role at each of Maine's Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) to better connect the AAAs to community-based partners in their region including the Age-Friendly Communities (AFCs).

This report will:

- Demonstrate the statewide impact highlights of the Community Connections project from the perspective of the Area Agencies on Aging;
- Share how each of the five AAAs implemented their programs regionally;
- Shed light on the shared learnings and challenges from across the state;
- Offer recommendations for continuing the momentum of the work beyond the grant period.

"The Community Connections program is an incredible resource for older adults in Aroostook County and for the Aroostook Agency on Aging. The Community Ambassador role ties together the shared community-based work of the Agency, the Age-Friendly communities, municipalities, and the State of Maine. It's been invaluable to have one person dedicated to community outreach and partnerships, which is key to connecting community members to our Agency and other critical resources."

**-Joy Barresi Saucier, Executive Director
Aroostook Agency on Aging**



PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

This section will offer details on the highlights of the project in the following key areas:

1. **Community Partnerships:** By creating one point of contact between the AAAs and the communities in their region, the Community Ambassadors created trust and partnerships resulting in more community events, education, and service referrals.
2. **Statewide Collaboration:** In creating a cohort of Community Ambassadors and convening regular meetings between the Ambassadors, there was greater collaboration across AAA regions which especially benefitted rural and geographically dispersed service areas.
3. **Service Connections:** Through building stronger relationships, the Community Ambassadors expanded the knowledge of services available in their region, allowing for greater service connections between Age-Friendly Communities, AAAs, volunteers and community partners all across their regions.
4. **Shared Learning:** Through peer learning between Community Ambassadors and through established professional development opportunities supported by the grant, the AAAs were able to implement lessons learned from other regions and to build skills for AAA staff members in public speaking and cultural competency.



1. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Relationships and in-person interactions were the heart of the **Community Ambassadors and their work**. There is no overstating the importance of having one trusted, friendly face to build the partnership between the Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) and the communities they serve.

The Community Connections project made it possible for the AAAs to have a stronger presence in their communities that simply was not possible before. Each connection point to a AAA was an opportunity to build trusted relationship with Age-Friendly Communities, town offices, libraries, local resource groups, and beyond.

For example, the Community Ambassador at SeniorsPlus visited nearly every town office and library in Franklin and Oxford Counties, delivering resources and making introductions that led to many community presentations and new connections.

COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR OUTREACH: APRIL 2024-JUNE 2025

2,390+

**TOTAL OUTREACH TO COMMUNITIES
AND MUNICIPALITIES**

462

**IN-PERSON
CONNECTIONS**

260

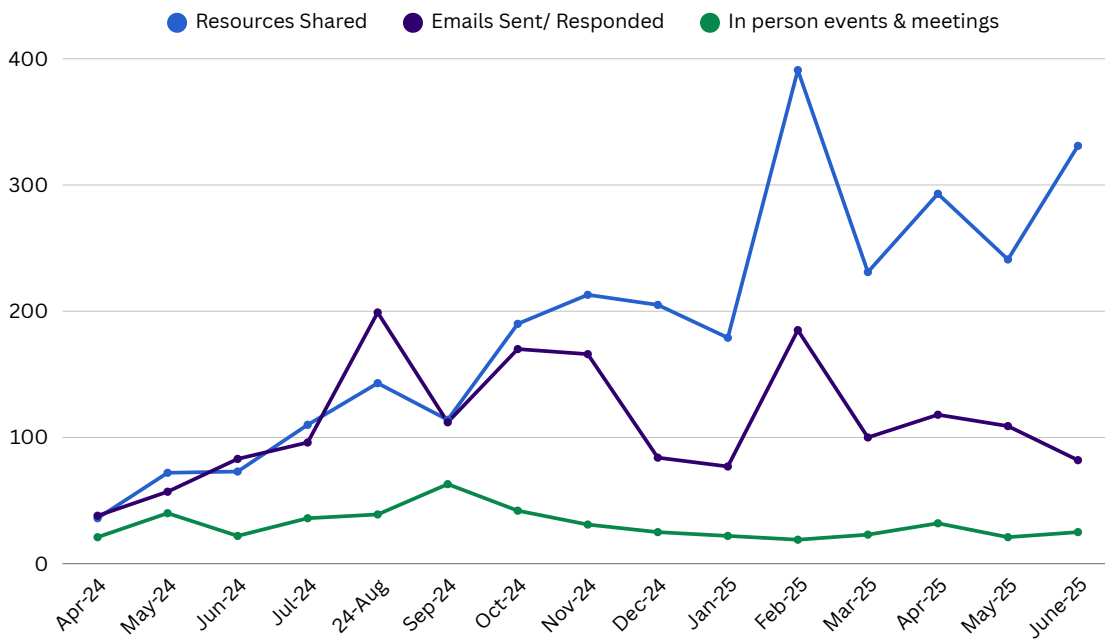
PHONE CALLS



SPOTLIGHT: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

In Aroostook County, the Community Ambassador’s connections to communities led to adjustments to the hot meal program in Madawaska and new weekly dining sites in Fort Kent, Caribou, Presque Isle, and Madawaska. These dining sites not only created opportunities for social engagement among residents, but also strengthened community engagement.

Aroostook County’s Community Ambassador leveraged the agencies’ Access Points to reach rural residents. In one instance, residents, alongside the AAA’s Access Point leaders, advocated at a Town Council meeting, voicing support for Agency services. This reflects the powerful role of relationship-building and public education in sustaining community trust.



Community Ambassadors focused on relationship building in their communities: common activities included attending Age-Friendly Community meetings, sharing resources, and sending consistent updates about events.



2. STATEWIDE COLLABORATION

The Community Ambassadors program created a new space for collaboration between the AAAs across Maine. The Community Ambassadors met weekly or bi-weekly as a group throughout the grant period to collaborate, brainstorm, and learn together. This enabled the AAAs to better serve the communities in their region and to meet the needs of the state as a whole.

This collaboration led to shared solutions across boundaries, including:

- Jointly hosted community presentations;
- A unified presence from Maine’s Agencies on Aging at the Maine Library Association’s Annual Conference in May 2025; and
- The creation of shared educational materials so Mainers could understand more about what Maine’s AAAs offer, including
 - [Educational videos about AAA services](#),
 - AgeWise Maine Services Flyer (see Appendix A), and
 - A centralized website (AgeWiseMaine.org) for Mainers to find information and resources.



“None of us is as smart as all of us... talking through opportunities and brainstorming together is where the real power lies.”

-Louise McCleery, Spectrum Generations
Community Ambassador



SPOTLIGHT: STATEWIDE COLLABORATION

After months of building relationships with local libraries, Debbie Bechard and Mary Hadlock, the Community Ambassadors at SeniorsPlus and SMAA respectively, attended the Maine Library Association Annual Conference in May 2025.

They networked with an estimated 85+ library representatives from across the state, including the Maine State Library. The Community Ambassadors brought marketing materials from the recently renamed AgeWise Maine, Maine's Association of Agencies on Aging.

Many library representatives were pleased to hear about the increased collaboration among the AAAs in the state and were excited to have statewide information accessible in one place at [AgeWiseMaine.org](https://www.AgeWiseMaine.org). Maine's libraries are eager to partner with community organizations to connect more residents to services and opportunities and the Community Connections project was a great first step in building a stronger partnership between Maine's libraries and Maine's Area Agencies on Aging.



A snapshot from the educational video about Meals on Wheels. This is one of five videos that the AAAs produced through the Community Connections project. The videos are a vital tool to educate residents and community partners about key services that the AAAs offer.



3. SERVICE CONNECTIONS

The Community Connections pilot unlocked new resources in each community. Prior to the project, individual service providers might have inconsistent or incomplete information about where they could make referrals for older adults in the community and what services exist.

Referrals and resources were able to be shared both to and from AAAs and the Age-Friendly Communities thanks to a diverse and growing number of community partnerships.

The relationships built by Community Ambassadors were able to handle complexity, provide consistency, and offer an easy and natural way to connect communities, partners, and individuals to support. These relationships both improved resources like service directories and offered more pathways to connect residents and service providers to each other.




The Healthy Hibernation Fair in Blue Hill

COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR OUTREACH

APRIL 2024 - JUNE 2025

2,400

Resources shared by the Community Ambassadors with communities across Maine about services available for older Mainers

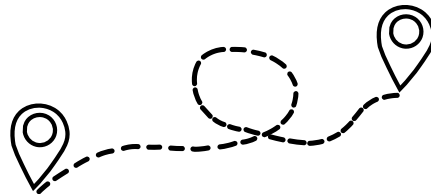


"The Community Connections project has been a fabulous pilot to connect residents with resources, and connect those resources with outreach efforts on a local level. Eastern Area Agency on Aging's Community Ambassador, Larissa Heanssler, has been instrumental in helping to expand access to EAAA services to residents throughout Sullivan and the Schoodic area."

- Candy Eaton, Coordinator at Age-Friendly Sullivan



SPOTLIGHT: SERVICE CONNECTIONS



Mary Hadlock, the Community Ambassador in Southern Maine, built relationships across sectors, which led to stronger collaboration to support older residents. In one example, the Community Ambassador connected with the Superintendent of Schools in Gorham and connected the Teens Teach Tech program and snow shoveling program to their local Age-Friendly Community.

The same Community Ambassador was integral in establishing a "Collective Action Network" (CAN) that meets monthly via Zoom in the Springvale/Sanford region. CAN created a consistent opportunity for towns, libraries, non-profits, and age-friendly communities to network, share information, and collaborate on projects and will continue beyond the project period.



4. SHARED LEARNING

The Community Connections program was a key resource to strengthen the existing capacity and skills of AAA staff statewide. Instead of each AAA needing to create and offer their own separate professional development opportunities, Community Connections supported centralized training and development opportunities.

AAA staff members attended a Public Speaking training to bolster their capacity to speak in a clear and compelling way about the services the AAAs offer. AAA staff also participated in a 5-part training from Cross-Cultural Community Services focused on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). This built stronger cultural competency among staff on how to better support racially, culturally, and ethnically diverse clients.

SHARED LEARNING

39

AAA STAFF MEMBERS REGISTERED FOR THE EDI TRAINING SERIES

15

AAA STAFF WHO ATTENDED THE PUBLIC SPEAKING TRAINING

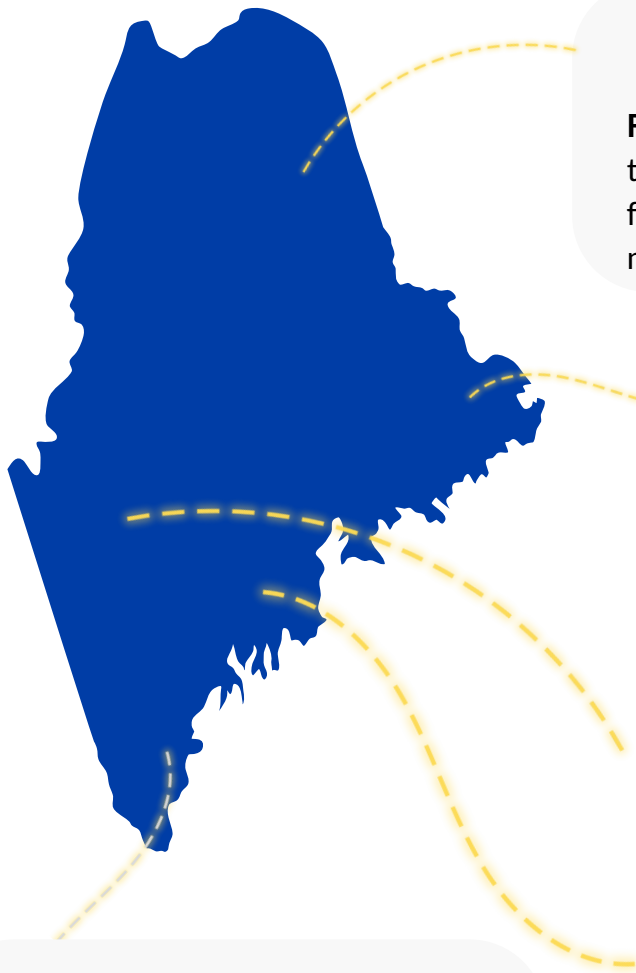


Pictured above, AAA staff attended a public speaking training in Hallowell in November 2024. The training focused on how the AAA staff members can more effectively spread information about their work and its impact.



REGIONAL STRATEGIES

In addition to the statewide collaboration highlighted in the previous section, a foundational part of the project's success was how it enabled regional strategies by each AAA. The chart below highlights the unique strengths of each AAA region through strategies highlighted in their Community Connections work. *See Appendix B for deeper reflections from the Community Ambassadors on regional successes, challenges, learnings, and impact.*



AROOSTOOK AGENCY ON AGING

Aroostook

Fostering Access Points: Aroostook focused on ways to bring services closer to their residents through fostering and expanding their regional Access Points model.

EASTERN AREA AGENCY ON AGING

Hancock, Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Washington

Cross-county connections and stronger partnerships between Age-Friendly Communities, EAAA, and regional AAAs.

SENIORS PLUS

Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford

Outreach with town offices and libraries led to increased regional knowledge and successful partnership-building with local libraries.

SPECTRUM GENERATIONS

Cumberland (Harpowell and Brunswick only), Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc, Somerset and Waldo

Focused relationship-building with Age-Friendly Communities and regional coalitions led to increased collaboration in the region.

SOUTHERN MAINE AGENCY ON AGING

Cumberland (except Harpswell and Brunswick only) and York

Strong communication and partnership with Age-Friendly Communities led to new **service connections and direct referrals** to the resource specialists.



LESSONS LEARNED

The Community Connections project offered many lessons for the continuation of the momentum of the work with the AAAs and AFCs in Maine.

- **Communication is Critical:** Ongoing communication between the AAAs and the AFCs is critical to maintain the success and momentum of the Community Connections project. Whether providing essential updates or new information between and among the AAAs and AFCs, the importance of communication cannot be overstated.
- **Grassroots Partnerships Are Powerful:** Collaborations with local leaders, volunteers, and informal advocates often led to the most successful community outcomes—like new dining sites or support at town council meetings.
- **Consistent Visibility and Clear Points of Contact Build Trust:** Regular visits, communications, and presence at community events hosted by Age-Friendly Communities and others significantly increased public confidence and engagement with their local AAA.
- **Referrals Are Powerful—but Hard to Track:** Many residents learn about services through community outreach efforts. Tools like WellSky don't capture this nuance so the scope of the impact of the outreach work is hard to understand and demonstrate.
- **The AFCs can spread the word:** The boots on the ground in the communities most often know of the people who may most benefit from some of the programs available through the AAAs and other organizations.
- **AAA staff love to hear about the Communities:** Sharing AFC newsletters and activities within the agency was greatly beneficial and utilized.



Thanks for attending, and for the pamphlet. You always add to our meetings, and may I say it is so helpful to have someone as organized as you helping me put my best foot forward for this community.”

- Community Connector reflecting on their local Community Ambassador



CHALLENGES AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

- **Persistent Transportation Gaps:** Despite immense demand, few services exist to support non-medical transportation that fosters social engagement and connection to appointments, grocery stores, and other errands.
- **Capacity Limitations:** Staffing and funding shortages result in multi-year waitlists for services such as home repairs and care coordination.
- **Uneven Volunteer Support:** Programs like Friendly Techies and Home-Delivered Meals struggled to maintain a steady base of volunteers, particularly in rural areas.
- **Referral Frustrations:** When a AAA can't offer a service and needed to provide a referral to another organization, consumers and communities sometimes expressed frustration of needing to make more calls.
- **Varied Expectations:** Not all AFCs want or need to scale their efforts. Growth isn't always the goal, and volunteer burnout is a real risk.



“Cindy Slocum, one of our Grey New Gloucester Connectors, is like the town crier for the Southern Maine Agency on Aging. She arrives at our coffee and tea times with flyers in hand and proceeds to expound on the benefits of the Medicare Savings Program, the importance of the Winter Wellness Checklist and how to find heating and energy assistance this winter.”

- Julie Fralich, Age-Friendly New Gloucester



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Institutionalize the Community Ambassador Role:** These positions bridged critical gaps and should be funded as a core offering for the AAAs to outreach to their communities and connect with more residents.
2. **Continue consistent, intentional communication** between and among AAAs, AFCs, Lifelong Maine, the Cabinet on Aging, and towns and municipalities. Specifically:
 - a. Ensure that a AAA representative receives AFC communication (ie: newsletters) and is included in regional annual meetups facilitated by AARP/Lifelong Maine.
 - b. Ensure outreach from the AAAs to: Parks and Recreation Departments, libraries, General Assistance officers
 - c. Ensure regular, timely updates shared from AAAs to AFCs (ie: FarmShare, Medicare updates, etc.)
3. **Centralize and Simplify Referrals:** Explore “no wrong door” systems and tools that are accessible and non-bureaucratic. For instance, the AAAs could collaborate to build a more streamlined referral process that provides a warm hand-off to clients when that client needs to connect with another AAA.
4. **Invest in Regional Transportation Solutions:** Expand pilots like Saco Rides and build new models with community partners.
5. **Continue a focus on AAA collaboration across the State,** identifying and removing barriers (including geographic boundaries) for the benefit of older Mainers. Specifically, it’s recommended that the AAAs:
 - a. Utilize [AgeWiseMaine.org](https://www.AgeWiseMaine.org) to develop a shared online referral form and statewide staff training on referral process.
 - b. Ensure continuity with timely revisions of shared materials (statewide flyer, videos, etc.).
 - c. Support more centralized volunteer training and processes.
 - d. Explore other statewide opportunities for AAAs to combine forces for staff trainings, professional development, and enrichment.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was written and prepared by Carly Williams and was directly informed by the insights and recommendations from the Community Ambassadors. This report built off of the mid-grant report, which was prepared by Carly Williams and Em Burnett.

This project and report are made possible by the work of the Community Ambassadors, all of whom were instrumental in the creation of this report:

- Larissa Heanssler, Eastern Area Agency on Aging
- Ginny Joles, Aroostook Agency on Aging
- Louise McCleery, Spectrum Generations
- Mary Hadlock, Southern Maine Agency on Aging
- Debbie Bechard, SeniorsPlus

Other contributors were the directors from the Area Agencies on Aging, the Age-Friendly Communities, and the University of Maine Center on Aging.

We'd like to thank the Cabinet on Aging, Governor Janet Mills, and Elizabeth Gattine for their leadership in making this work possible.

Thank you to all who provided quotes and photos for this report.



Community Connections



APPENDIX A: AAA SERVICES FLYER

Maine's Agencies on Aging Support Communities

Maine's Agencies on Aging offer services and programs statewide that support older Mainers and Mainers living with disabilities to age in their homes and communities with dignity and independence. The Agencies on Aging are a core part of the fabric of supports for older Mainers, providing information, direct services, and resources to older adults (60+), adults with disabilities, and their care partners.



Wellness Classes



Nutrition



Caregiver Support



Supportive Services

Each year, Agencies on Aging provide critical services to support **53,000** older Mainers and Mainers living with disabilities stay in their homes and communities, including...

6,500 Mainers with home delivered meals and **6,000** with social dining sites Health

insurance counseling, information, and application support to over **5,500** Mainers

3,200 caregivers w/ information, respite and support

27,000 Mainers with supportive services, such as information & referrals to other services



AgeWise Maine

Association of Agencies on Aging

Maine's Agencies on Aging

Spectrum Generations

Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Somerset, Sagadahoc, Waldo, Brunswick & Harpswell

Aroostook Agency on Aging
Aroostook County

Eastern Area Agency on Aging
Hancock, Penobscot, Piscataquis & Washington

SeniorsPlus
Androscoggin, Franklin & Oxford

Southern Maine Agency on Aging
York & Cumberland (excluding Brunswick & Harpswell)

“ It means survival. Meals on Wheels, it’s survival. I’m grateful and pleased that there is an Agency that cares.” —Meals on Wheels client, Brewer

“ Respite 4 ME not only improved the quality of life for my mom and father but it also provided much needed respite for my wife and me.” —Family Caregiver, Saco



207-764-3396
1-800-439-1789
arostookaging.org



207-795-4010
1-800-427-1241
seniorsplus.org



207-396-6500
1-800-427-7411
smaa.org



207-941-2865
1-800-432-7812
eaaa.org



207-622-9212
1-800-639-1553
spectrumgenerations.org



APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR REFLECTIONS

Community Connections Final Reporting Reflections from Community Ambassadors: June 2025

What key **SUCCESES** would you like to highlight from your region? Please think of highlights related to the Community Ambassadors, Community Connectors, or any other part of the project.

- **Aroostook Agency on Aging**
 - **Reinforced Local Engagement:** Community Ambassadors and Resource Specialists reconnected with 21 Access Points including 6 Age-Friendly Community leaders, hosted open houses, and supported presentations that rebuilt visibility and trust in remote areas.
 - **Revitalization of Age-Friendly Communities:** Previously inactive communities like Fort Kent and Van Buren re-engaged with Age-Friendly goals, supported by grassroots outreach and pilot projects.
 - **Innovative Community Programming:** Projects like Danforth's Livable Community Center upgrades, programming for unhoused at Homeless Services of Aroostook, and Caribou-Limestone's nurse navigator pilot showcased creative, community-driven service solutions.
 - **Strong Statewide Collaboration:** Through the Community Ambassadors, the region helped lead cross-agency initiatives—developing shared training modules, promoting awareness of the Older Mainer's Act, and sharing changes to Medicare Saving Plan, to name a few.
 - **Expanded Access through Technology:** Use of teleconferencing equipment and staff training ensured continuity of services closer to home in rural and weather-challenged areas.
- **SeniorsPlus**
 - **Strengthened in-person connections with local communities:** The Community Connections project has boosted the 'personal touch' that helps connect aging community members with the resources and programs they seek or may be unaware of. In our post-COVID world, it has taken time for relationships to be re-established, and having staff (ambassadors and connectors) dedicated to this effort has supported this goal.
 - **Outreach to local libraries led to mutually beneficial relationships:** Library directors are eager to help distribute information that supports the well-being of their patrons and the wider community. Some libraries added SeniorsPlus presentations to their community offerings that drew returning and new visitors and helped further spread the word of what SeniorsPlus has to offer. In April, AgeWise Maine participated in an exhibitor opportunity at the Maine Library Association annual conference, resulting in personal contact with over 85 library representatives. In a time when nonprofit organizations are grappling with how to do 'more the less', developing partnerships between AAAs and libraries is a win-win.
- **SMAA**
 - **Expanded Outreach:** In collaboration with Age-Friendly Communities and Community Connectors, we expanded client outreach to provide information and resources, including transportation, vaccine clinics, the Medicare Savings Program, nutrition, heating, and home repair resources, among others.
 - **Partnership:** Identifying new partners enables us to provide more client services utilizing additional resources beyond the lifelong community. We were able to connect the age-friendly communities with resources, such as the Teens Teach Tech program, through the Greater Portland Council on Aging's Digital Access Coalition, Medicare Savings Program through Consumers for Affordable Health Care and MaineHealth, and Vaccine Clinics with Northern Light Health Care.
 - **Collective Action Network (CAN):** Establishment of a "Collective Action Network" that meets monthly via Zoom. This group encompasses Springvale, Sanford, and surrounding towns. The goal is to share our collective expertise, resources, and services for older adults and their caregivers across our respective organizations. CAN has created the opportunity for towns, libraries, non-profits, and age-friendly communities to network, share information, and potentially collaborate on projects.
- **Spectrum Generations**
 - **Built and Rebuilt Meaningful Relationships:** When I first connected with many of the AFCs in our service area, they expressed hesitancy around this role and factually stated they hadn't had

much luck connecting with Spectrum Generations in the past. That is no longer the case, as this role has allowed me to hear the need, seek assistance, even if it didn't come from Spectrum Generations, and to at least point the folks toward resources.

- **Building relationships with non-AFCs that can support AFCs:** Identifying and connecting other organizations in our region that could support AFC needs is a huge success. Bowdoinham was able to take advantage of securing IT technology. Others provided education or tech support. SEARCH became a resource to me and the AFCs. The Bath Brunswick Resource Coalition and Triads became go to resources.

- **EAAA**

- Getting to know more about Age-Friendly Communities and what they are, and which ones are in EAAA's coverage area.
- Presenting EAAA's programs and services to Community Connectors and AFCs.
- Community Connector Misty in Sullivan establishing a resource guide for her area, and seeing her help individuals and families in need, such as home repairs or Medicare Savings Program.

What LEARNINGS would you like to highlight from your region?

- **Aroostook Agency on Aging**

- **Consistent Visibility Builds Trust:** Regular visits, communications, and presence at community events significantly increased public confidence and engagement.
- **Virtual Programming is a Critical Access Point:** Online programs like "Monday Mini Talks" and dementia education reached residents who might otherwise be isolated, proving that digital tools are not just supplemental, but essential.
- **Grassroots Partnerships Are Powerful:** Collaborations with local leaders, volunteers, and informal advocates often led to the most successful community outcomes—like new dining sites or support at town council meetings.
- **Flexibility Is Key:** Communities are at different stages of engagement; tailored support, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, produced stronger partnerships and outcomes.

- **SeniorsPlus**

- **The cross-AAA work of the Community Ambassador team is a template for potential increased statewide AAA collaboration.** Ambassadors have worked to problem-solve when geographic (or other) barriers have hindered the delivery of services or resources to aging Maine residents. Examples include dual-AAA presentations in communities that border two service regions and sharing age-friendly resources to avoid duplication of work.

- **SMAA**

- **Communication is key!** Ongoing communication between the AAAs and the AFCs is critical to maintain the success and momentum of the Community Connections project. Whether providing essential updates or new information between and among the AAAs and AFCs, the importance of communication cannot be overstated.
- **Collaboration:** No need to reinvent the wheel! The ability to leverage resources, learn, and share best practices maximizes impact and benefits all. Offering joint presentations with Community Connectors to age-friendly communities on topics such as SMAA and local programs, accessing home care services, falls prevention, and Medicare resulted in increased visibility and community engagement.
- **Connection:** Identifying and providing a point person at each Area Agency on Aging is crucial. The Lifelong Communities benefit from having a trusted resource to reach out to directly as needed with questions and/or client referrals. Providing opportunities for social connection through Area Agencies on Aging and Lifelong Communities is vital for maintaining the mental and physical health of older adults.

- **Spectrum Generations**

- **None of us is as smart as all of us!** Collaboration, talking through opportunities and challenges, brainstorming solutions together, whether it was among the Ambassadors or with the AFCs or with other community organizations. There is great strength and collaboration available when we are open to it.
- **Using the AFCs to spread the word:** The boots on the ground in the communities most often know of the people who may most benefit from some of the programs available through the

AAAs. Though we can't prove it through the Wellsky referral data, but we saw increases in inquiries.

- **AAA staff love to hear about the Communities:** Sharing AFC newsletters and activities within the agency was greatly beneficial and utilized.

- **EAAA**

- Learning that even if a location is labeled as "Age-Friendly" through AARP, they may not be active or in tact any longer.
- Learning about what local resources are available in AFCs, such as sand bag brigades, Bridging Neighbors, and food sources.
- Learning more about what is offered at local libraries for older adults.

What CHALLENGES would you like to highlight from your region?

- **Aroostook Agency on Aging**

- **Volunteer Recruitment Shortfalls:** Despite increased outreach, many programs struggle to find and retain volunteers—impacting services like friendly techies, home delivered meals, and food pantries.
- **Transportation and Isolation Barriers:** Limited transportation options continue to hinder access to services in the rural parts of The County.
- **Leadership Turnover and Capacity Gaps:** Frequent changes in municipal leadership and staffing shortages disrupted continuity in some partnerships.
- **High Demand vs. Limited Resources:** The growing needs of older adults sometimes outpaced available resources, highlighting the importance of advocacy for increased funding and support.

- **SeniorsPlus**

- **Growth is not the goal of all age-friendly communities:** Some age-friendly communities have part-time paid staff (with some wearing multiple 'hats'); many do not and rely solely on volunteers. With limited capacity, they provide what they can for aging community members and do not have the time, capacity, or desire to seek growth. Volunteers come and go, sometimes with the seasons, and the exit of volunteers can sometimes collapse an already fragile program structure. It should not be assumed that age-friendly communities want to grow what they are currently doing or want to (or would be approved to) collaborate with other communities.

- **SMAA**

- **Transportation:** Transportation needs were a frequent request from the age-friendly communities, and is a service that the Southern Maine Agency on Aging currently does not offer. Research has shown that social connections play a significant role in combating the damaging effects of social isolation and loneliness on the physical and mental health of older adults. Although many Lifelong Communities offer transportation, this is mainly for medical appointments. Few, if any, provide transportation to engage in social activities, such as attending an adult day program, Community Café, or an activity at the local Senior Center.
- **Capacity:** The capacity of Area Agencies on Aging to provide programs and services to the Lifelong Communities was often limited due to staffing and funding constraints, which included Medicare counseling and Wellness classes. Waitlists for services were another challenge and source of frustration. Several Lifelong Communities reached out for client assistance with home repairs. With limited resources available, it was challenging to meet clients' needs, and some organizations had waitlists of 3 to 5 years.

- **Spectrum Generations**

- Some communities believed that a AAA should be able to help with any request. And that's not the case.
- In the instances where our Agency wasn't able to meet a need, but rather share other resources to check into, the best we could do was to provide a list of names and numbers. Older Adults or Caregivers were often bumped around to many different agencies or community resources. There should be a better way to one-stop shop, so to speak, to identify the one resource, if it exists, that might be able to assist in a specific need. Instead, we send people dialing for dollars, and add to the frustration and angst of older adults and those who care for them.

- **EAAA**

- Even though there are some AFCs, there is still a need for more resources in rural areas.

- Tracking referrals is difficult at times. One never really knows how someone might come across an AFC or a AAA – whether referred by a friend or relative, or hearing word “on the street”. What is important is getting word around about what resources are available to older adults, no matter the “how” of it.

Are there any quotes from clients, community connectors, librarians, or others that you’d like to share about the value of the Community Connections project?

- **Aroostook Agency on Aging**

- *“I love the idea of connecting five communities to offer a chance to build health and strength through movement that anyone can do.”* – **Cara Miller**, yoga instructor, on launching a regional class in August
- *“I don’t know what I would do without your assistance. You have helped me tremendously to be able to stay in my home.”* – Community Connector Dee Saucier reports experience with **83-year-old resident**, vision impaired and living alone
- *“Since I started volunteering for you, it has changed my life. I now have something productive to look forward to.”* – Community Connector Dee Saucier reports that a **70-year-old blind volunteer**, Danforth
- *“As a Community Connector, I’ve had the time and space to ‘push the envelope’—this is what I call down-in-the-dirt social work.”* – **Dottie Sines**, Community Connector, making a difference
- *“A Fort Kent Resource Fair and Age-Friendly Coffee Hour brought new people to our services and increased our visibility.”* – **Rory Collings**, Age-Friendly Fort Kent member

- **SMAA**

- *My father accessed the Saco Rides Program for medical appointments. It was a lifesaver for me! He was resistant at first, but because I work, there were little options left. Either I would have to miss work, OR my days off would be consumed. He loved the program and the volunteers! They were accountable, prompt, and reliable volunteers. And it gave him another source of social connections.* **Saco Caregiver**
- *I found myself needing to use the transportation program for follow-up appointments with my surgeon. It was easy to access the scheduler, and the volunteer checked in with me prior to picking me up. While I’m recovered and back to work, I know that, if the need arises again, I will be taken care of by my community.* **Katie Koles, Saco resident**
- *The Community Connections grant has made it possible to expand our Volunteer Network to help more older adults in the Sanford area. This grant has also helped us get the word out to our community that these services are here to help our older adults. Our Age Friendly Sanford team is incredibly grateful for this grant as without it we would not have the equipment we need.* **Robin Bibber, Co-Chair Age Friendly Sanford/Thriving in Place**
- *I have so appreciated your help, your availability, your passion for SMAA projects, and for your friendship...Thank you for being someone I always knew I could reach out to. Great communication from lovely folks like you keep the sunshine in my soul.* **Nedra Sahr, Coordinator Age Friendly Eliot**
- *I am sending a big “Thank You” for all your assistance to Aging in Buxton. I have learned so much and have shared so much with the residents!* **Ellen DeCotiis, Co-Chair, Age Friendly Buxton**
- *I want to thank each of you for the NDEC presentation and the essential information provided by AARP, our McArthur Library, and the Southern Maine Area Agency on Aging. Our residents' great turnout shared valuable information, and we received excellent “thank you’s” from the many attendees. This was a great lunch and learn event as Age-Friendly Biddeford provided the luncheon for all guests. This was another successful event for our community, and we look forward to more events in the future.* **Betsy Martin, Chair Age Friendly Biddeford**

- **EAAA**

- Not really quotes, but by being out in the community more, I have heard many people tell me how much EAAA’s services have assisted them or their family members, whether it be through Medicare assistance, the Family Caregiver Program, a food resource such as Commodities Supplemental Food Box, or resource center assistance.

Please share anecdotes or stories of impact from your time as Community Ambassadors. This can be about particular clients, communities, or other areas you'd like to highlight. Please be specific!

- **Aroostook Agency on Aging**

- **Danforth Livable Community Center Pilot Project:** Upgrades transformed the center into a multipurpose facility, including emergency warming/cooling shelter capabilities. Residents engage in programs like *Breaking Bread* and *Make One-Share One*, while also accessing monthly online education through Access Points. The project is led by a dedicated team addressing issues like transportation, housing, food insecurity, and emergency support.
- **Community Dining and Advocacy:** Adjustments to the hot meal program in Madawaska and new weekly dining sites in Fort Kent, Caribou, Presque Isle, and Madawaska strengthened community engagement. In one instance, residents, alongside Access Point leaders, advocated at a Town Council meeting, voicing support for Agency services. This reflects the powerful role of relationship-building and public education in sustaining community trust.

- **SMAA**

- The following is an example of extended client outreach resulting from SMAA's collaboration with the Gray-New Gloucester Community Connectors, who have gone above and beyond in spreading the word and assisting residents with the enrollment process for the Medicare Savings Program:
 - *One of the early goals of the Gray New Gloucester Community Connector program was to introduce the Medicare Savings Program to area residents and help them apply. Since September, the GNG connectors have successfully helped 65 residents, most of whom had not heard of the program before meeting the Connectors. This effort has resulted in average annual savings of \$2,220 per individual and more than \$144,300 for all those who have been helped. The response from those who have benefited from the program locally has been huge. One person reported that she had been paying over \$2,000 quarterly for out-of-pocket drug costs. Once enrolled in the Medicare Savings Program, those costs were reduced to only \$17 a quarter. (Reported by Julie Fralich, BLING/Building Livability in New Gloucester)*
- Under the Lifelong Maine mini-grant award, Berwick For A Lifetime (BFAL) created a Resource Center at the library to bridge the digital divide. Using trained volunteers to staff the Resource Center to provide residents with tech support for accessing online services and resources. This Community Ambassador connected BFAL leaders with SMAA Resource Specialist Melissa Paquet to give the volunteer training for their new Resource Center. Melissa provided hands-on training for volunteers on accessing SMAA's website, reviewed all SMAA resources, and instructed them on how to make online referrals. Melissa provided volunteers with copies of SMAA's brochures and the Benefits Checklist, which lists the resources and contact information to local agencies for volunteers to use while working with folks who access BFAL's Resource Center for support.
- Following a community presentation to an age-friendly community, this Community Ambassador received an email from a representative in Senator King's office regarding an older constituent's experience navigating the Section 8 housing application process.
 - *The client holds a housing voucher from MaineHousing that is set to expire. They requested an extension, which was denied. However, based on the client's understanding of the number of days they have held the current voucher, they appealed that decision and are awaiting a supervisor's review. In any case, the client is struggling mightily to apply for housing, and I am hopeful that someone on your Community Resources Team might give them some pointers, if not direct assistance. The client commented that their voucher covers a rent of up to \$1,300 per month, and they haven't been able to find housing for that amount. In short, they believed that the voucher thresholds should be adjusted in light of the current rental market rates.*
 - *The Community Ambassador completed an internal referral to SMAA's Resource Specialist, who contacted the client and informed them about Maine State Housing Section 8 Programs, whose applications, unfortunately, were frozen due to a lack of funds. The Specialist explained that Maine State Housing is unable to increase funding for current voucher holders to keep pace with inflation in the rental market. The Resource Specialist, however, was able to provide and assist the client with applications to landlords that participate in the Section 8 voucher program.*

- Spectrum Generations - quotes

- *I was sorry to miss the last Pilot Gathering where announcements were made about the Ambassador role ending June 30. To me that has been one of the more innovative parts of the Pilot - providing a go to person when it is hard to know who at Spectrum to contact. A while back you shared an extensive resource list on excel spreadsheet that is used by the Agency that could be helpful as we move forward. Is that something that can be shared?*
- *Thanks for everything yesterday. Quick question, does Spectrum offer a service for help with estate planning?*
- *Hi Louise. I had a wonderful chat with Diane. I think I may be “getting it “. Plan is for Michele to address it next age fr steering committee meeting, I think it's worth another explanation, maybe some residents in town will benefit. Thank you for your help.*
- *Thanks Louise. Everyone was very appreciative of your presentation. The Legal Services program looks promising.*
- *Louise provided a list of announcements and opportunities. She will forward this to us via email so that we can attach it to the minutes. She also announced that the funding for her position and in June. This was expected, but it is a loss to us to have her position end.*
- *Thanks for attending, and for the pamphlet. You always add to our meetings, and may I say it is so helpful to have someone as organized as you helping me put my best foot forward for this community.*

- EAAA

- I attended an event for Age and Ability-Friendly Bucksport, where a representative from FEMA spoke about disaster preparedness. I then took the suggestion of him presenting to Age-Friendly Sullivan to Candy Eaton and Misty Gleason in Sullivan. It turns out it had been three years since he had spoken to AF Sullivan, and they got him as their speaker at their June meeting.
- Community Connector for Age-Friendly Sullivan, Misty Gleason, learned of resources available to older adults in her area. As a result, she was able to help a family apply for a USDA home repair grant, which was accepted, and this family has been able to make very needed repairs to their home because of Misty’s assistance.



APPENDIX C: COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Ambassadors Sustainability Recommendations

Ultimately, it's the responsibility of each AAA to commit to ongoing engagement, and long-term sustainability of community engagement and outreach

1. Recommendation: Intentional communication between/among AAAs, AFCs, Lifelong Maine and Cabinet on Aging and towns and municipalities.
 - a. Ensure that a AAA representative receives AFC communication (ie: newsletters) and is included in regional annual meet-ups facilitated by AARP/Lifelong Maine.
 - b. Ensure outreach to: Parks & Recreation Departments, libraries, General Assistance officers
 - c. Ensure regular, timely updates shared from AAAs to AFCs (ie: FarmShare, Medicare updates, etc.)
 - d. Ensure a clear referral process to/from communities and individual AAAs.
2. Recommendation: Each Community Ambassador will facilitate a clear process/point person(s) for future communication to/from AAA and AFC including but not limited to:
 - a. Newsletters
 - b. Regularly scheduled calls or virtual meetings
 - c. Responsibility for email responses (ie: requests for resources, etc.)
 - d. Supporting Community Connectors
3. Recommendation: Provide Age-Friendly Community Representation on Each AAA Advisory Committee and/or Board of Directors to ensure that AFCs have a voice at the leadership level of each AAA.
4. Recommendation: Continue a focus on AAA collaboration across the State, identifying and removing barriers (including geographic boundaries) for the benefit of the people we serve.
 - a. Ensure streamlined, barrier-free referral process whereby any AAA provides a warm hand-off to clients when that client needs to connect with another AAA.
 - b. Utilize the AgeWise website to develop a shared online referral form and statewide staff training on referral process. Ensure continuity with timely revisions of shared marketing materials (statewide brochure/flyer, videos, etc.).
 - c. Ensure cross-AAA reciprocity with regards to volunteer training. For example, a volunteer trained by one AAA in Money Minders could volunteer with clients in another AAA service area.
 - d. Ensure other statewide opportunities for AAA staff trainings, professional development, and enrichment.