Age-friendly Kitchener Action Plan

2021 Progress Report

A community where we can live well and age well.
The Mayor’s Advisory Council for Kitchener Seniors (MACKS) is pleased to provide its fourth progress report on the implementation of the Age-friendly Kitchener Action Plan (approved by Kitchener City Council 2017). This report builds on the successes presented last year at this time, and speaks to some of the continuing challenges presented by the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic continued to create unprecedented challenges in planning for and responding to the needs of older adults in the community. 2021 saw nearly 5 months of tightened restrictions that led to some difficult challenges in adapting programming and services to meet the needs of older adults. MACKS and Older Adult Services staff remained committed to identifying and advocating for the needs of Kitchener Seniors.

Here are a few of the successes from Older Adult Services:

- 104 older adults enrolled in Connected@Home Program
- 1,024 activity kits delivered to isolated older adults
- 89 Tech Connects classes with 862 participants and launch of device lending library
- 20 Zoom training sessions attended by 463 individuals
- 19,500 social support calls to over 390 older adults
- 4,800 older adults attended virtual fitness, music and social programs
- 265 attended Rockway Centre Outdoor Summer Cafes
Successes from MACKS:

10 virtual meetings

13 nominations and organized Senior of the Year

MACKS also provided input to the following initiatives:

- Annual Operating Budget
- Mayor’s Task Force on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- Vision Zero Project
- Love My Hood Grant Selection Committee
- City of Kitchener Assisted Sidewalk and Windrow Clearing Program
- Cycling and Trails Master Plan
- Places and Spaces: Parks and Open Space Strategy
- Waterloo Region Age-friendly Network

Indeed, the list of successes is very impressive given the circumstances of 2021. However, concerns regarding social isolation, the digital divide and access to vital community and health resources have been substantially heightened. As we work towards a “new normal”, the collaboration between municipalities, the Region and community organizations has never been more important. We need to continue to creatively problem solve, plan and leverage resources to assist older adults to continue to navigate their daily lives.

MACKS wishes to recognize and thank members of City Council, staff and community volunteers for their leadership and commitment to supporting residents of all ages throughout this very challenging time.
AGE-FRIENDLY KITCHENER ACTION PLAN

2021 Achievements

1. Accessible and Affordable Neighbourhoods

Improve Access to Programming at the Neighborhood Level

• Expanded program offerings within community centres to ensure programming is responsive to the varied needs and interests of the neighborhood.

• Staff re-started in person programs and offered 62 programs to over 500 older adults.

• Older Adult Services staff launched the Connected@Home program that delivers monthly activity kits to isolated older adults in the community. Program participants are encouraged to join daily teleconference or video conference programs to connect with other older adults in a variety of activities. Since January 2021, 104 older adults have registered for the program with 1024 kits delivered.

• Older Adult Services staff participated in collaborative needs-based program planning with community centre staff and partners.

Age-friendly Neighborhood Programming

• City staff participated with the University of Waterloo’s Body and Brain Lab in a participatory action research, Dementia Capable Communities. Research aims to identify actions needed for dementia-inclusive communities on multiple levels, from interpersonal to planning and policy.

• Kitchener Council approved zoning by-law changes to allow backyard homes. MACKS supported and advocated for this action to encourage affordable housing options.

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• MACKS participation in walking workshop to improve walkways and to increase pedestrian safety around Kitchener Market and ION station.

• Kitchener Cycling and Trails Master Plan awarded Transportation Planning Project of the Year by the Ontario Traffic Council. MACKS provided representation to the project committee.

Transportation Training

• Three transportation training programs offered in partnership with Grand River Transit and Waterloo Region Age-Friendly Network in both online and phone-based program formats.

Age-friendly Parks, Trails and Outdoor Spaces

• Staff facilitated two older adult weekly walking groups to encourage social connections and outdoor physical activity.

• In partnership with Sport Development, older adult services staff worked collaboratively with the Easy Riders Cycle Club to incorporate and access grant funding.

• MACKS provided input to Places & Spaces: An Open Space Strategy for Kitchener.

Sidewalk Maintenance and Snow Clearance

• Staff and MACKS promoted and circulated City’s Assisted Sidewalk and Windrow Clearing Program information.

• Council approved an increase of four additional staff to support the proactive sidewalk enforcement program for the 2021-2022 winter season.
2. Access to Information

Age-friendly Communication

• With support from corporate communications, a comprehensive strategy was developed to inform older adults about the City’s pandemic programs, services and supports. This multi-faceted approach included advertisements in print, radio, and social media.

Improve Access to information on the City’s website

• Staff developed an Age-friendly Program Planning Framework to take a holistic approach to program and service information. All programs offered will be reviewed through the Age-friendly Decision-Making Lens and will be categorized as Wellness, Active Living, Learning and Connecting (W.A.L.L.C). Information will now be viewed through interest-based approach as opposed to location, assisting older adults to access information and register for programs more easily.

Improve Digital Access and Literacy

• Launched Kitchener Tech Connects program with grant funding provided through New Horizons for Seniors Program (with support letter from MACKS). This program provides free essential technology training by qualified City instructors. To support digital access, older adults can borrow a Chromebook or iPad with or without wireless data for up to 30 days. To date 89 classes have been offered with 862 individuals in attendance.

• Volunteers from the Bits and Bytes computer club developed and offered 20 Zoom training sessions that were attended by 463 individuals. These training sessions were a key means of supporting older adults during the pandemic to maintain connections with friends and family through videoconferencing.

• Onboarded more virtual programs and participants, by providing one on one technology support for program instructors and volunteers.
3. Belonging

Development of Supportive and Inclusive Programs and Activities

- Staff provided 19,500 social support calls to over 390 different older adults in the community. These calls have been a means to connect with individuals, who may be feeling isolated, or just want to talk. Due to the success of this program, and the need that exists in the community for this service, these calls will continue post-pandemic with the support of trained volunteers who are supported by older adult services staff.

- Throughout 2021, staff continued to offer a variety of virtual programs that included fitness, music, and social programs. In total 4,880 attended these programs.

- Partnered with the Alzheimer’s Society Memory Boosters group to ensure the continuation of social programs and opportunities for individuals and their care partners who are living with dementia.

- Rockway Centre hosted 43 outdoor cafes attended by 265 participants.

- Over 200 participants attended Mayor’s virtual Strawberry Social in June to celebrate Seniors Month.

- Provided equipment loans through Rockway Centre for virtual fitness classes.

- Transitioned several indoor programs to outdoors at Rockway Centre to minimize cancellations.

- Reintroduced the in person Sharing Dance program in partnership with Canada’s National Ballet School.

- Reintroduced in person art programs and fitness classes at Rockway Centre with safety protocols in place.

- Due to pandemic restrictions, the City of Kitchener Senior Day Program was only able to open in March, and from July – December. Many enhanced safety protocols were developed and implemented by staff to ensure safe participation.

- Participants who paused their return to in person programming received social support calls, activity kit deliveries, and phone-based and online social programming.
Inclusive Volunteer Opportunities

- Initiated and developed training program for volunteers to provide social support calls to keep up with continuing needs in community.
- Older adult Services Staff provided Age-friendly Program training to the Visiting Library volunteers from KPL.

Recognizing the Contributions of Older Adults

- Staff hosted 5 ice cream socials on the patio at Rockway to re-connect with volunteers and to thank them for their ongoing service.
- In cooperation with municipal partners, staff organized an online social event for participants of Senior Centres Without Walls programs to celebrate Seniors Month in June.
- MACKS organized Senior of the Year Award recognition program in partnership with the Mayor’s Office. 13 nominees and one recipient were presented certificates with doorstep visits and invited to attend Virtual Strawberry Social. Outdoor presentation to award recipient Donny Hishon at Rockway Centre.

Age-friendly Community Engagement

- MACKS provided input to Kitchener’s Annual Operating Budget.
- MACKS representation to Kitchener’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee.
- MACKS engagement with City of Kitchener Director of Planning to discuss age-friendly City Planning.
- MACKS advocacy regarding Long Term Care concerns shared with policy makers, municipal and provincial government representatives.
- MACKS input to City of Kitchener Vision Zero Project — road safety plan for the next 5 yrs. with goal of reducing the number of collision-related serious injuries and fatalities.
4. Connectedness and Wellbeing

Block Connector Approach
• Older adult services staff participated in the Waterloo Wellington Neighbours Program training offered by CMHA. This program trains not only staff but community members in how to identify at-risk and vulnerable older adults, and how to connect older adults to community supports by a simple phone call.

Prevention and Education Workshops
• In cooperation with Waterloo Region Age-Friendly Network, offered three online workshops on the theme of Pathways to Aging.

5. Age-friendly Kitchener

Coordination of External Grant Opportunities
• Older adult services staff applied for several provincial and federal grants to support the sustainability of newly developed programs.

Age-friendly Kitchener Planning
• Older Adult Services staff supported the coordination and planning of the new Waterloo Region Age-Friendly Network. Comprised of volunteers and staff representing age-friendly initiatives across the Region’s municipalities and townships, actions include Affordable Housing and Transportation, advocacy to Regional Council, information sharing, and presentation of educational workshops.

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