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The Emergence of Age-Friendly Communities:

Highlighting the Town of Bucksport

by James Bradney

A few miles up from the mouth of the Penobscot River sits the town of Bucksport. It is a town of roughly 5,000 stalwart individuals, many of whom have spent the better parts of their lives working for, or connected to, the recently closed paper mill. Bucksport is a hard-working community, closely knit together through its schools, churches, local businesses, social service agencies, and town government. The Bucksport Bay area is rich in history and scenic beauty. While warmly receptive of visitors from across the country who come to experience this history and beauty firsthand, Bucksport is more than anything a community that takes care of its local residents.

Now more than ever, Bucksport's ability to meet the needs of its older adult population is paramount. Although Bucksport's median age is in line with the Maine average of 44, there are more families in Bucksport living in poverty, more people without health insurance, and more people living with a disability per capita than

throughout the state (U.S. Census 2010; American Consumer Survey 2008–2012).

To create healthy communities and citizens, we must all do our part to demonstrate a strong commitment to taking care of our own personal health as well as helping our family members and neighbors. This is the mission of the Bucksport Bay Healthy Communities Coalition, a nonprofit, grassroots community health organization with a particular focus on designing programs and services for pockets of the population who are traditionally underserved and underinsured.

Through grant funding and municipal allocations, and with the help of many highly committed local organizations, the coalition has helped create a true age-friendly community. The most recent example of this is the Bucksport Bay Thriving in Place Partnership, which was made possible through grant funding from the Maine Health Access Foundation (MeHAF). MeHAF made it possible for our community to design



Town of Bucksport, Maine, viewed across the Penobscot River from Fort Knox.

a local program tailored to the needs of our older residents. We listened to what seniors were saying—to the things that were important to them in order to stay healthy, safe, and happy as they age in their homes. Out of that process, the Bucksport Bay Thriving in Place Partnership was born.

Thriving in Place is an organized response that includes local health care and service providers, municipal departments, Bucksport Regional Health Center, the senior center, church-based volunteer organizations, Hancock County Home Care and Hospice, Eastern Area Agency on Aging, Gardner Commons (a 26 bed Housing and Urban Development-subsidized housing complex), a community care team, Regional School Unit 25, and Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman's Program. Together we created a continuum-of-care partnership program in which older adults enroll as participants entitled to a wide array of supportive services, at no cost to them other than a nominal suggested donation.

For adults who no longer drive, opportunities abound to access a variety of low- to no-cost transportation options. A volunteer driver program provides transportation to local medical appointments at no charge. A \$1 subsidized round-trip taxi service, a \$1 weekly shuttle bus, and a monthly \$3 roundtrip bus to Bangor are all running and well used. The town operates a lively senior center that hosts a low-cost adult meals program, which is provided by the school district's food services department. The senior fitness program, "Growing Stronger" has been growing larger by the day, with an increased membership that prompted the recent training of new facilitators and more classes,

and a state-of-the-art fitness center is available for anyone in the community to use for \$10 a month.

A variety of educational trainings and workshops help older adults to prepare for future challenges. In partnership with the Eastern Area Agency on Aging, the Matter of Balance program helps prevent falls, while Living Well classes help individuals to maintain health and wellness. The United Way of Eastern Maine funds a program for older adults called Healthy Living, facilitated by the Bucksport Bay Healthy Communities Coalition in cooperation with the senior center. Guest speakers help older adults by assisting with legal documentation, powers of attorney, navigating Medicare, end-of-life choices, and a range of other useful topics.

Whatever the need, organizations and people committed to working together towards a common cause can make great things possible. We've certainly seen that in Bucksport. Our older adult residents love living here and want to remain in their homes for as long as possible. 🐟



James Bradney is the health planning director for the Bucksport Bay Healthy Communities Coalition, a nonprofit, volunteer-powered, community health organization serving Bucksport, Orland, Verona Island and Prospect. Through his work at the coalition, he has

seen the power of organized volunteerism create positive social change and improved health and wellness among its community members.



Matter of Balance class participants learn how to reduce fear of falling and increase activity.