

2022-2023 Annual Report



Community Links

Aging Well Together

COMMUNITY LINKS

Community Links has been dedicated to supporting healthy aging through community connection in Nova Scotia for over 30 years. We know the many positive contributions older adults make in our province and the importance of ensuring seniors can live healthy, active and engaged lives in the age-friendly community each calls home.

Social connection helps combat loneliness and isolation, promotes mental health, enhances cognitive function and provides a sense of belonging and purpose, optimizing overall health. Community Links works in collaboration with many senior serving organizations to ensure older Nova Scotians are connected and valued, work that is particularly important as we emerge from the isolation and disconnects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vision:

All Nova Scotians can age well in their communities.

Mission:

Community Links is a province-wide organization that promotes and supports age-friendly communities by connecting individuals and organizations.

Values:

Collaboration, inclusion, respect, equity, compassion, transparency, accountability and engagement.

Follow us on social media



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PRESIDENT'S NOTES

MADELEINE DILLON

This year has passed by quickly, and here we are at our 2023 Annual General Meeting.

The restrictions of Covid-19 continued to hamper our ability to meet in person, but through determination, technology and innovation we stayed connected as a Board and with our dedicated staff working across the province.

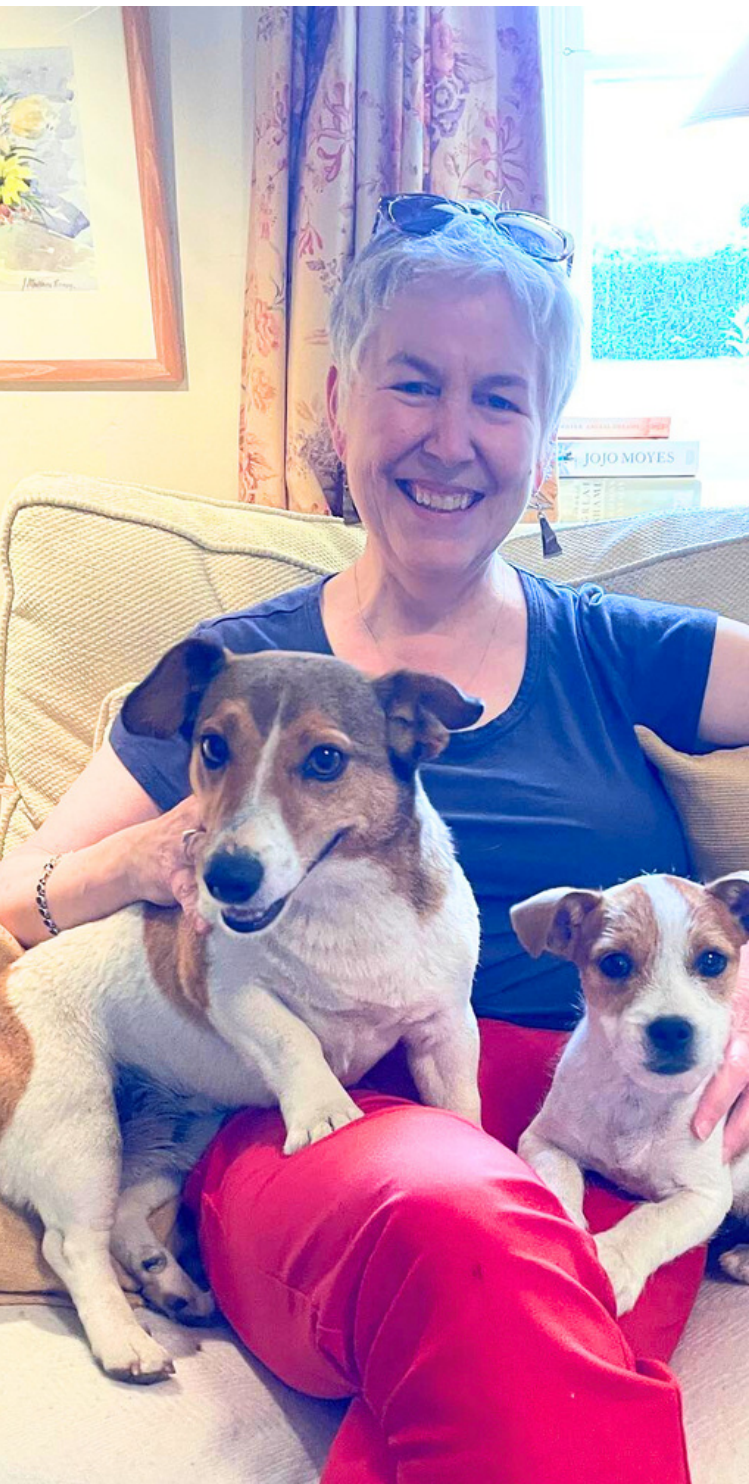
The majority focus of our work has been on the “project”, an initiative from the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care. It was no doubt monumental but exciting. Through the extensive work of staff, project manager, communication personnel and partnerships, the data collected will further support Community Links'

mission and help focus our strategic planning later this year.

The Board is saying goodbye to Directors Earl Muise and Paul Rowe. Both have been tremendous assets, bringing commitment and experience to their positions. They will be missed.

Community Links will welcome several new board members this coming term. We all look forward to continued conversations with seniors and the communities they call home.

I am excited to start a second year as Board Chairperson, working with my colleagues from across the province and our incredible staff.



HELEN MACDONNELL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S SUMMARY

2022-23 has been a time of learning for Community Links, thanks to deep work we've done to understand the assets, needs and opportunities among the almost 1200 community-based senior serving organizations in our province.

Guided by our partner, IONS (Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia), we travelled from Yarmouth to Cape Breton to meet with representatives, hear what's happening and discuss what we can collectively do to help ensure older adults live longer, healthier lives, engaged in and supported by the communities each calls home.

Groups were energized by the chance to meet and would like more such gatherings. They were frustrated by the lack of a central place where information can be curated and shared. Everywhere people were clear the challenges are tough, yet optimistic that by working together, seniors will not be forgotten.

We're taking this information and setting our strategic direction based on what we heard. We'll also be sharing it with the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, which funded the work and is deeply interested in the outcome. We'll be reporting back to you, because we're confident that through collaboration, we can create a better Nova Scotia where all of us age well together.

ACTIVITIES & IMPACT SNAPSHOT

This past year was about reconnecting, re-vitalizing, and re-imagining our work.

Regional Coordinators created or re-established five Aging Well Together Coalitions, doubling the number and expanding to new regions and new members. Coalitions included a cross-section of older adults and service providers who shared information and worked to address local issues.

Funding from the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care for our Community Connections research project allowed us to expand staff from five Regional Coordinators to eight and add a Project Manager and Outreach and Communications Lead.

This broadened reach meant we were able to connect with senior serving groups across the province, working together to reduce social isolation and bring a seniors' lens to issues impacting healthy living including food insecurity, transportation, accessibility and housing.

We provided community-based senior serving organizations \$106,000 in micro-grants targeting immediate low cost needs (see page 9) and with \$10,000 from the Department of Community Services, high food costs.

In collaboration with coalition and community partners we organized, supported & participated in many programs and initiatives including:

- KitchenTok
- 3 Aging Well Together Days
- Memory Cafés
- Community fairs & expos
- Food security projects
- 9 Fall Prevention workshops
- Energy efficiency reviews
- Pride & cultural events
- Grant writing sessions
- Provincial Homeless No More initiatives

GREAT conversations and connections today!
~ Lunenburg/Queens coalition member

We're all so in need of connection. This session has re-energized us!
~Yarmouth Community Conversation

30TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

We partnered with the **East Preston Senior Citizens' Association** to celebrate Seniors' Week and Community Links' 30th anniversary by bringing together seniors' clubs from historic African Nova Scotian communities in the Halifax Regional Municipality.

Former Lieutenant Governor Dr. Mayann Francis addressed the theme of Celebrating the Contributions and Resilience of Older Adults; over 80 guests shared a wonderful meal and heard stories of resilience in these communities.



NET ZERO COMMUNITY BUILDINGS PROJECT

We worked with **Efficiency Nova Scotia** and 18 community halls in Pictou County to conduct energy audits and seek funding for upgrades, as a pilot for sharing across the province.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

We provided **Mental Health First Aid Supporting Older Adults** training to over 50 people, including Senior Safety Coordinators, seniors' centres volunteers, and a targeted session for African Nova Scotians.

"Our Regional Coordinator has been instrumental in helping our community centre find funding sources. With Andy's help, we received a New Horizons for Seniors Grant for \$25,000. This grant enables the hall to provide the community with an up-to-date and up-to-code accessible facility."

~ West Branch and Area Community Association

315

Coalition
representatives

77

Coalition meetings

300+

Community groups &
organizations supported

BRINGING AN OLDER ADULT LENS:

- by hosting a discussion table on supporting and recruiting older workers at the **South Shore Labour Puzzle**
- through collaboration with **Mentoring Plus** creating opportunities for older adults to support youth and new business owners
- by highlighting the value of a **Voluntary Vulnerable Persons Registry** through a webinar and discussions with municipal leaders.

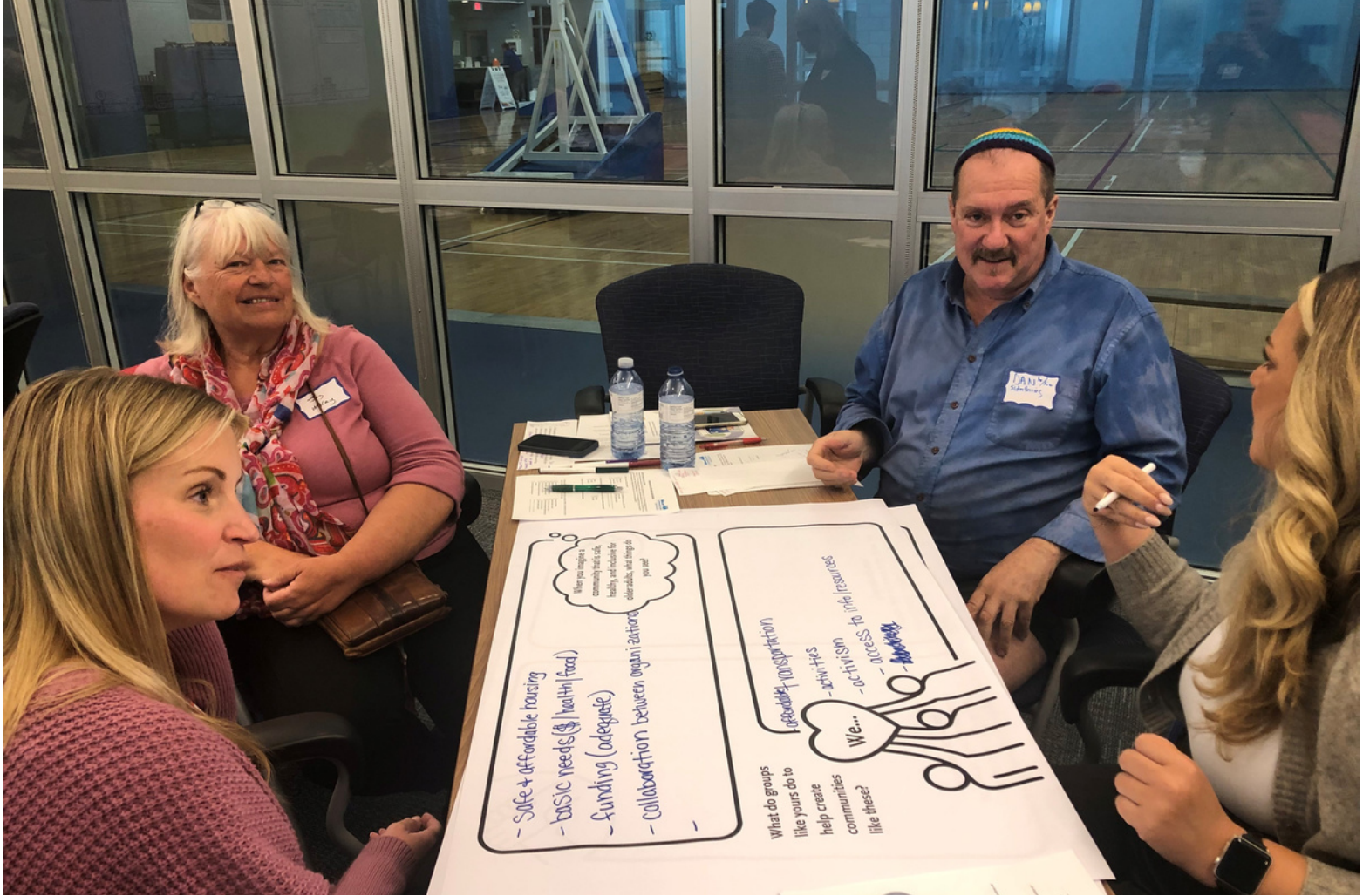
KITCHENTOK

A new project reducing isolation among older Nova Scotians, KitchenTok is a recipe for community development created by members of the Annapolis Valley Aging Well Together Coalition.

15,000 COPIES DISTRIBUTED

The annual Year of Aging Well Calendar serves as a guide featuring wellbeing, fitness, and health tips, as well as information on community resources for older adults. Demand is high for this practical, low tech tool.





CHANGE MAKERS

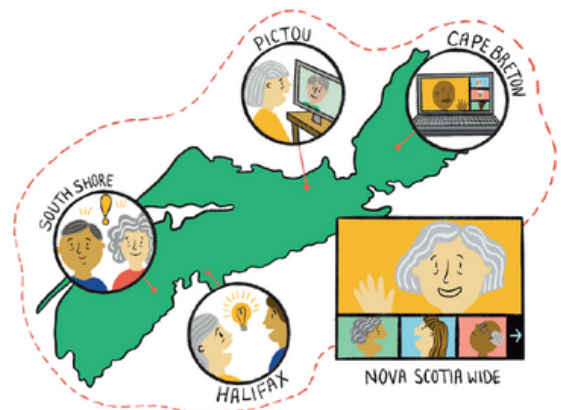
Community Links staff engaged in more than 50 community initiatives including working toward providing French Fall Prevention training in Acadian regions and partnering with Cape Breton Housing, Victoria County Home Support and a local area youth group to create intergenerational gardens in Baddeck.

746 SUBSCRIBERS

We gained almost 100 new subscribers to our e-bulletin. Contact info@nscommunitylinks.ca to receive updates on grant opportunities, government programs and community activities. Connect with us on social media as well.

NATIONAL SUMMIT

Executive Director Helen MacDonnell sits on a National Advisory Committee planning a Community-Based Senior Serving Sector Summit to elevate the work of senior serving organizations June 2024 in Ottawa.



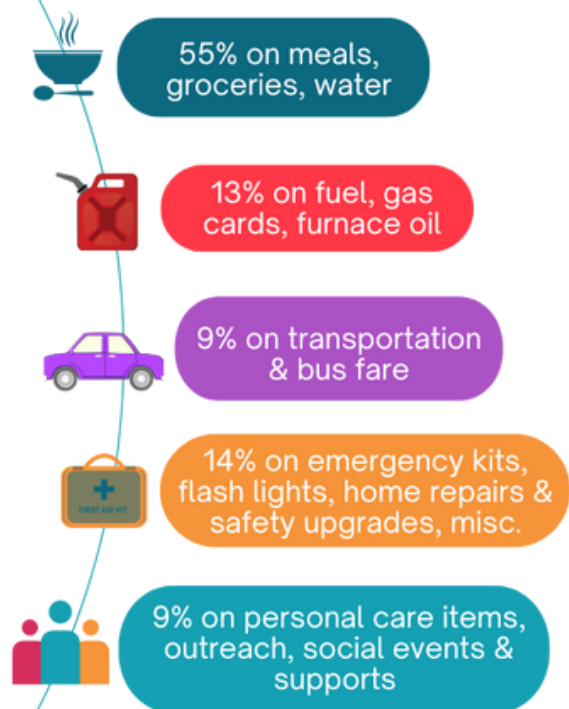
2022 MICRO-GRANTS

In autumn 2022 **Community Links** awarded **\$106,000** in micro-grants to **community-based senior serving organizations across Nova Scotia**. We distributed 109 micro-grants, the majority \$1000 each, for the immediate low-cost needs of seniors including those impacted by Hurricane Fiona. Funded organizations included:

- 41 **Formal and informal community groups**
- 22 **Community centres/halls**
- 8 **Organizations providing transportation services**
- 7 **Health centres and service providers providing home care**
- 7 **Rural volunteer fire departments**
- 7 **Churches**
- 6 **Farmer's markets and food banks**

The remainder included **libraries, municipalities and First Nations**, as well as several programs.

How the micro-grants were spent:



I am grateful to **Community Links** for its inclusive understanding and leadership on addressing the needs of citizens who become vulnerable in wide-scale emergencies. Seniors and Nova Scotians with disabilities have unique needs when facing disasters and emergencies.

Community Links is ahead of almost everyone on understanding this, and leading action in this urgent area of need, which is connected to successful Aging in Place.

~ Anne Camozzi, Disability Advocate

HES



RESEARCH PROJECTS

Community Links contributes to multiple research initiatives:

- Dalhousie University - ACTing Collectively - identifying aging well resources and providing individualized and regional plans
- St. Francis Xavier/Queen's University - assessing opportunities and challenges for making Antigonish an Age-Friendly Community
- Université de Montréal - mitigating Lyme disease risk
- NS Centre on Aging, Mount Saint Vincent University - A New Lens on Older Nova Scotians
- Pictou County Municipality - assessing community accessibility

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS PROJECT

The Community Connections research project carried out by Community Links in partnership with Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia (IONS) aims to shine a light on community-based senior serving groups and their impact on older adults in Nova Scotia.

Funded by the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care, the project included focus groups, interviews, community engagement sessions, environmental scans, and a survey.

These were used to explore the needs, strengths, opportunities and challenges of groups focused on or including older adults (55+) across the province.

Although there are many clubs, groups, and organizations that help older adults to stay connected, engaged, and supported in Nova Scotia, there was no comprehensive understanding of their locations, operations, or support systems. We identified almost 1200 groups and invited them to take part.



A few key details:

- In 2022, 43% of Nova Scotians were aged 50 or older, and roughly two in 10 were 65 and older. Most older adults want to age in place, in their homes and communities, with appropriate supports to accommodate the changes associated with aging. Less than 5% of individuals will ever reside in long-term care facilities.
- Eight community conversations were hosted across NS in Spring 2023; most events reached full capacity. These events provided an opportunity for more than 150 representatives from senior serving organizations to connect, share experiences, and learn from one another while informing the research. The feedback received was overwhelmingly positive.
- The goal of the survey was to obtain a clearer understanding of seniors' groups and organizations across the province. With 295 surveys collected over a period of 32 days, the survey submissions will provide a rich source of insight, in combination with the other research methods utilized.
- The survey was designed to be as inclusive as possible. It was available in both French and English, and could be completed online, on paper, or over the phone.

LOOKING AHEAD

Much has changed since Community Links got its start by connecting six far flung rural communities in Nova Scotia to share what they were doing for older adults. Technology has made communication continuous but people feel less connected. COVID and climate change have made life more threatening while ageism undervalues and stigmatizes seniors even as we're living longer lives.

It is more important than ever to work collaboratively, recognize the diversity of Nova Scotia's older population, and find equitable solutions to ensure all seniors can age well in this province.

Community Connections research findings will be provided to the Department of Seniors and Long-term Care in a **What We Heard** report in late summer 2023. The research will also shape micro-grants for community-based senior serving groups to meet low cost, immediate needs of older adults in fall 2023.

Community Links will be working to bring more stakeholders together to connect on cross-sector issues and build capacity to support sustained, healthy age-friendly communities. We hope support for this work will continue and grow as we demonstrate the value of community connections and their importance to the health and wellbeing of all older Nova Scotians.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Community Links' Board of Directors draws on volunteers from across Nova Scotia who bring wisdom, experience, regional perspectives and specialized learnings to provide direction and oversight to the organization.

We want to express our gratitude to all Board members and wish a heartfelt thank you and warm farewell to retiring Directors Earl Muise, Past President, and Paul Rowe, Treasurer. Your guidance has been steady and true over many years of service.

REGION	BOARD MEMBER	
Central	Madeleine Dillon	President
Eastern	Eleanor Gallant	Vice President
Northern	Jim Vance	Secretary
Director at Large	Paul Rowe	Treasurer
Western	Earl Muise	Past President
Western	Penny Carver	
Eastern	Aaron Acosta	
Central	Pamela Fancey	

Thank You

Community Links is grateful to the **Department of Seniors and Long-term Care** for funding our work, to the **Department of Community Services** for food-related cost of living funding, and to **HelpAge Canada** for responding to Hurricane Fiona with a \$6000 contribution to our micro-grants.

Special thanks to:

Impact Organizations of NS, the **Community Connections Advisory Committee**, and everyone who helped with our research; **Aging Well Together Coalition** members, colleagues and community partners committed to working towards an age-friendly Nova Scotia, and **Community Links staff**:

Amy Coady, Regional Coordinator
Andy Thompson, Regional Coordinator
Belinda Tupper, Regional Coordinator
Darlene MacInnis, Research Assistant
Dawn Gallagher, Regional Coordinator
Dawn Parks, Outreach & Communications Lead
Deneen Newport, Regional Coordinator
Erin Henderson, Administration & Communications
Glenna Jeffers, Bookkeeper
Jazmin Bye, Regional Coordinator
Julia Kemp, Project Manager
Meagan MacDonald, Regional Coordinator
Phyllis MacLellan, Regional Coordinator
Taryn Martin, Communications Intern



Photo details:

1. SS Atlantic Heritage Park, Terence Bay (cover photo)
2. 30th anniversary celebration (page 6)
3. Regional Coordinators at work (page 7)
4. Halifax Community Conversation (page 8)
5. Aging Well Together Wellness Day (page 10)
6. Collaborations string activity photo courtesy of the Town of Kentville (page 11)
7. Middleton Community Conversation (page 12)
8. Community Links Board member Jim Vance (page 13)

