

Age Friendly in Focus



Understanding Access and Inclusion for
Older Adults in the Built Environment



Katie Vaughan

Master of Planning Graduate

Dalhousie University

Meagan MacDonald

Regional Coordinator - HRM, Lunenburg

and Queens Counties

Community Links

Copyright© 2022 by Community Links Association. All rights reserved.

This document is not to be used or recreated, in part or full, without the permission of Community Links. To download a printable version of this document please email info@nscommunitylinks.ca or call 1-855-253-9355

The intent of this document is to spark conversation, build empathy and encourage community-based action in response to access and inclusion issues for older adults in Nova Scotia.



Understanding Access and Inclusion for
Older Adults in the Built Environment



In memory of Bob McDonald, an avid hiker, naturalist, and community leader. Thank you for your contribution to make the outdoors more accessible for Nova Scotians of all ages and for your participation in this project.

Acknowledgments

Community Links would like to acknowledge everyone who made this project possible!

Thank you to the 13 individuals who participated in the photovoice study from across Nova Scotia – Wendy McDonald, Bob McDonald, Stuart Moors, Maxine David, Claude, Janet, Andree, Valerie, Bridget, Joan, Maggie, Anne, Sharon. Your photographs and stories brought life to the project.

Thank you to the 38 individuals who attended an in-person or virtual community engagement session. We appreciate you sharing your time and experiences with us.

Thank you to our visual collaborators Mind's Eye Creative and Bryanna Chapeskie Illustration & Design for bringing our vision to life in a beautiful and engaging way.

Thank you to our five advisory board members. We are grateful for your constant support and guidance throughout this project.

We would also like to thank our partners at the PEACH Research Unit for collaborating and helping us make this project a reality. In addition, Community Links would like to acknowledge the work of Master of Planning graduate, Katie Vaughan, and her project “Spaces that Work for Me” that inspired it all.

Finally, Community Links would like to acknowledge that this project was funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Seniors and Long-Term Care through the Age Friendly Communities Grant.

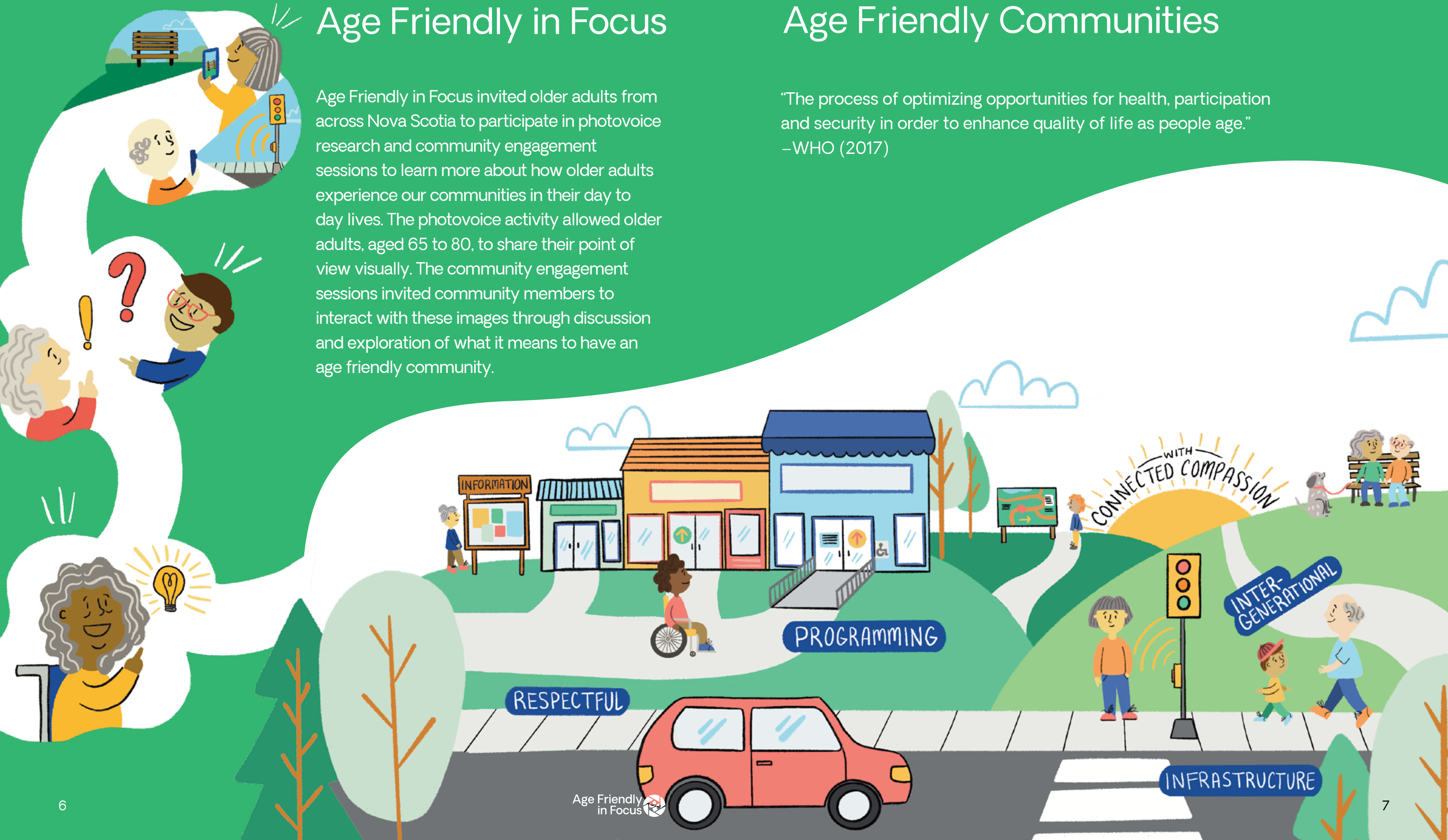


Age Friendly in Focus

Age Friendly in Focus invited older adults from across Nova Scotia to participate in photovoice research and community engagement sessions to learn more about how older adults experience our communities in their day to day lives. The photovoice activity allowed older adults, aged 65 to 80, to share their point of view visually. The community engagement sessions invited community members to interact with these images through discussion and exploration of what it means to have an age friendly community.

Age Friendly Communities

“The process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.”
–WHO (2017)



Photovoice

Photovoice is used to document and reflect reality. Using this data collection method, we can gain new insights about the community from the perspective of the participant. Older adults were asked to take photographs that provided examples of both accessible and inaccessible aspects of their communities. They then shared their stories and explained why each photograph was taken. All photographs and quotes published in this document were contributed by project participants.



Streets and Roads

Many older adults reported feeling unsafe as a pedestrian or cyclist. Traffic calming examples such as bump outs, speed humps, and signage offered a greater sense of safety and inclusion. Similar examples included raised sidewalks and protected bicycle lanes.



“Next to the public gardens, beautiful sidewalks, nice and wide. Nice to walk on.”
–Claude

“It is too dangerous, the gravel part. [...] I find people go too fast and where I am in a walker [...] I am nervous if all of a sudden I fall. [...] I don't have time to get out of the way.”
–Joan



“The worst one, I have to go there all the time. It can be pretty tricky, I have to watch the cars coming behind me and in front of me. It is just dangerous. There is quite a bit of traffic.”
– Doris



“You will notice also there is a bump out, this is an [...] attempt for traffic calming. [...] It definitely slows traffic down.”
–Bob



Crossing

Participants expressed that they felt scared, confused, unsafe, and often avoided crossing in certain areas. Details of preferred crossings included fresh paint, orange flags, changes in colour, grade and texture, medians, as well as signalized and narrow single-lane crossings.



“It’s a 4-lane highway style road and people go really fast [...] it puts people crossing at a very high risk. [...] There have been some nasty pedestrian collisions here.”
–Claude

“As both a pedestrian and a driver I find these things a lot easier [...] the crosswalks are narrower, the medians widened out, they are really well marked. [...] I feel quite comfortable here.”
–Mary



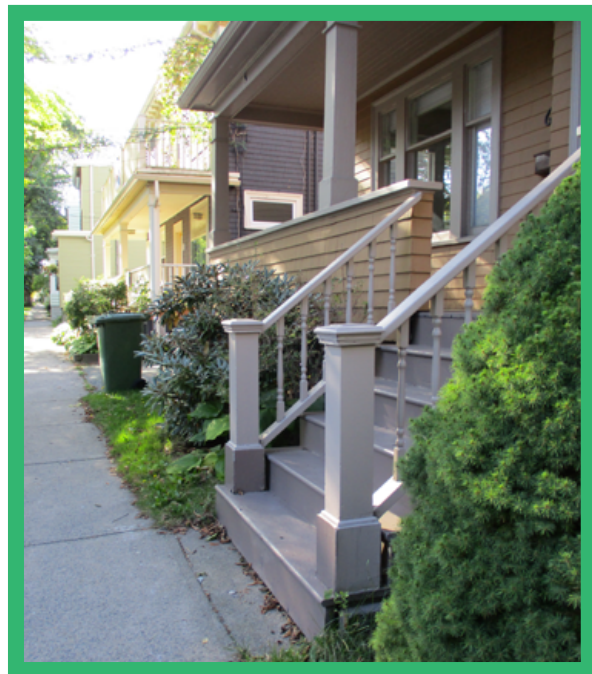
Seating

A common theme among participants was access to seating and rest areas in their communities. Some shared that they have experienced difficulty when there is a lack of appropriate, convenient or accessible seating.



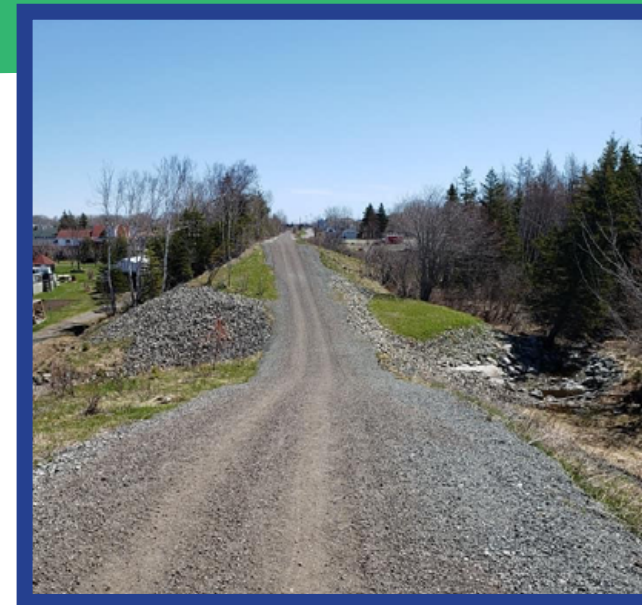
“That’s the best bench in the city. [...] It is the design of it, the wide boards, the flat seat, relatively comfortable back. [...] Extremely comfortable.”
-Janet

“This is where I have to sit down when I get in trouble. [...] You park yourself down on a piece of residential property because there is nothing else to lean on.”
-Mary



Parks and Recreation

Participants used words such as “therapeutic, natural beauty, and connection” to describe trails, parks, and recreation areas in their community. Accessible green spaces need to be connected to the community, have good signage, wayfinding, seating, bathroom access and regular maintenance.



“Connects the centers of historic coal mining communities. Multi-use with walkers, horses, cyclists, and ATV. An exercise in inclusion.”
-Andree

“That’s the main sign advertising the park to people in the neighborhood and that is 35 meters away from the road. [...] Unless you know about it, you cannot read that sign from the street.”
-Stuart





Destinations

Many participants reported feeling frustrated when they were not able to access an entrance to a business or service independently. Examples of easier access included sidewalks leading to the entrance, ramps, railings, and automatic sliding doors. Easy access led to feelings of gratitude and safety.



“Plazas [...] those are very beneficial to allow people [...] to just have the convenience of a small store to get what you need. [...] As people get older, I think that it is important to easily access things.”

-Stuart

“Along this whole route, which is quite a distance, there is no gas station whatsoever. From where I live it is about 50km to where the gas stations are [...]. There is a distance to not just gas, but how far we have to travel to access other services.”

-Alice



“I pushed the button, and nothing happened. I was just sitting there depressed about the whole thing and someone came over [...] to help open the door for me [...] so I could go right in.”

-Bridget

“The doors that open as you get there [...] they are double doors so anybody could get in and they seem to stay open long enough. [...] We are not as fast [...] they are good.”

-Nancy





“There are long stretches of road where there are no streetlights [...] I do not like it. Also, I do some biking [...] it has gotten to the point where we don't feel comfortable with our bikes anymore because it's really too dangerous.”

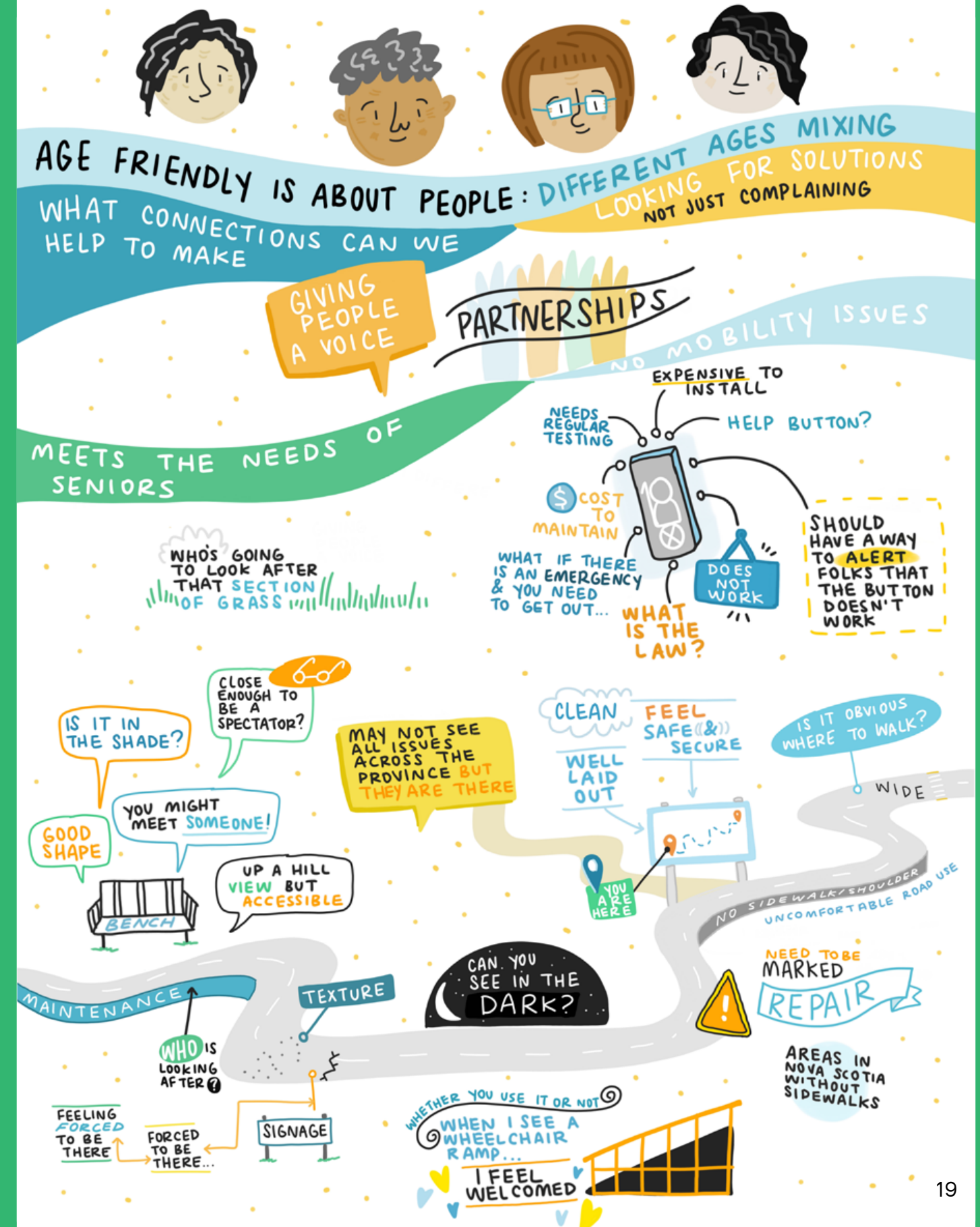
-Alice

“I think for older people benches are really important. [...] Benches are not just access to a pause or rest [...] a bench gives you access to other human beings. [...] A bench can be a destination for some of us.”

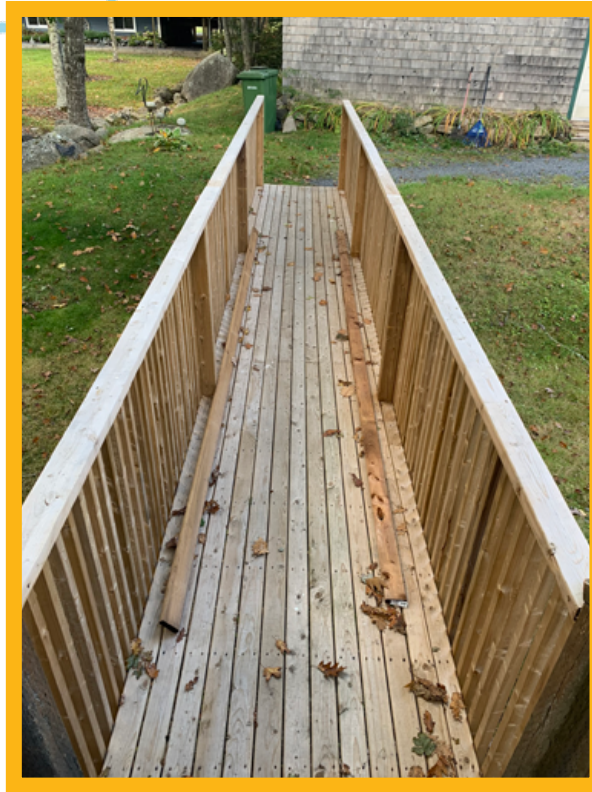
-Mary



GRAPHIC RECORDING:
Halifax Session



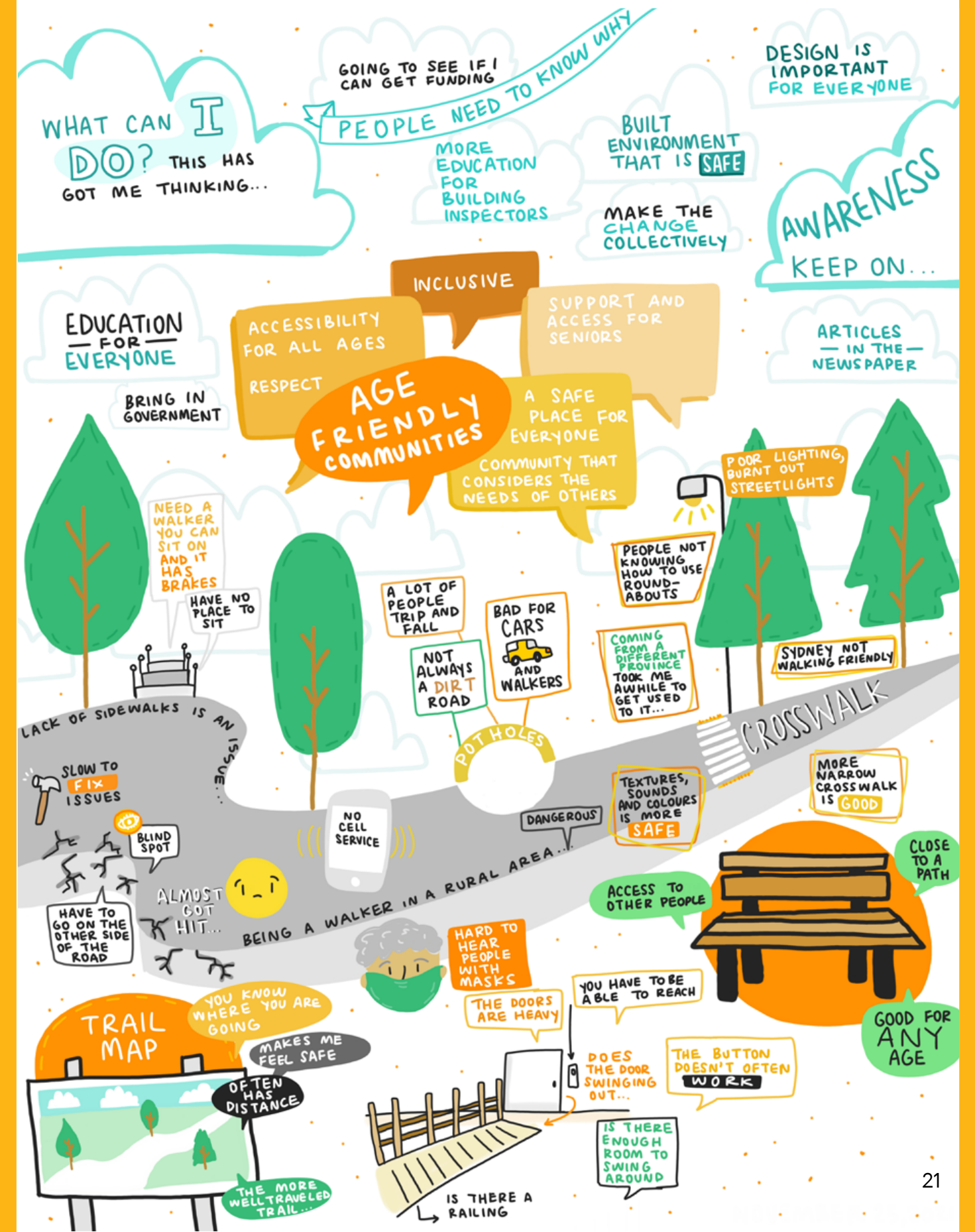
GRAPHIC RECORDING:
Cape Breton Session



"That ramp, I just had it built. [...] To help me go and get to the house. The way that it is now, I don't have to worry about the upheaval, I just go on it. And it's got good railings."
-Joan



"This is a killer, this is a crosswalk to nowhere. [...] There should be a sidewalk here."
-Urban Hiker





“Bad big pothole [...] if you’re walking a dog, or are distracted even momentarily, you can certainly fall or twist an ankle near potholes like this one.”
-Sharon

“It’s a great bench to sit on. The hike is basically up hill and once you get to the top, this bench is up there. You can sit down and take a breather.”
-Stuart



GRAPHIC RECORDING:
Pictou Session

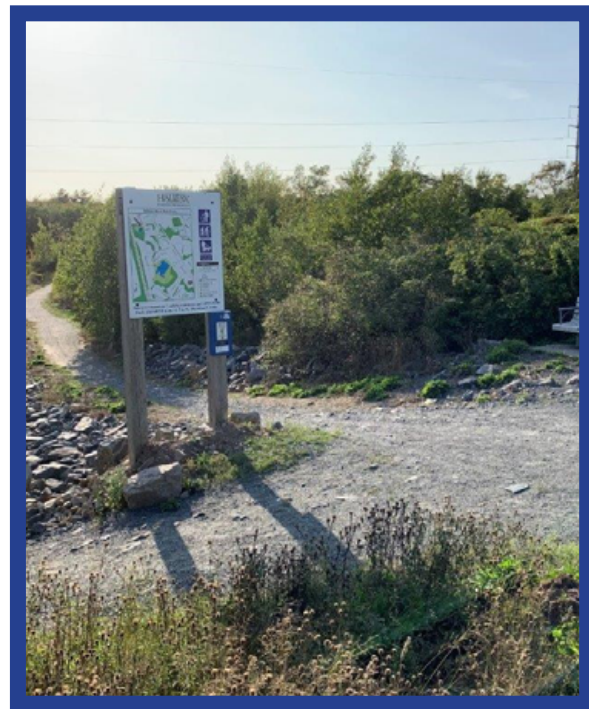




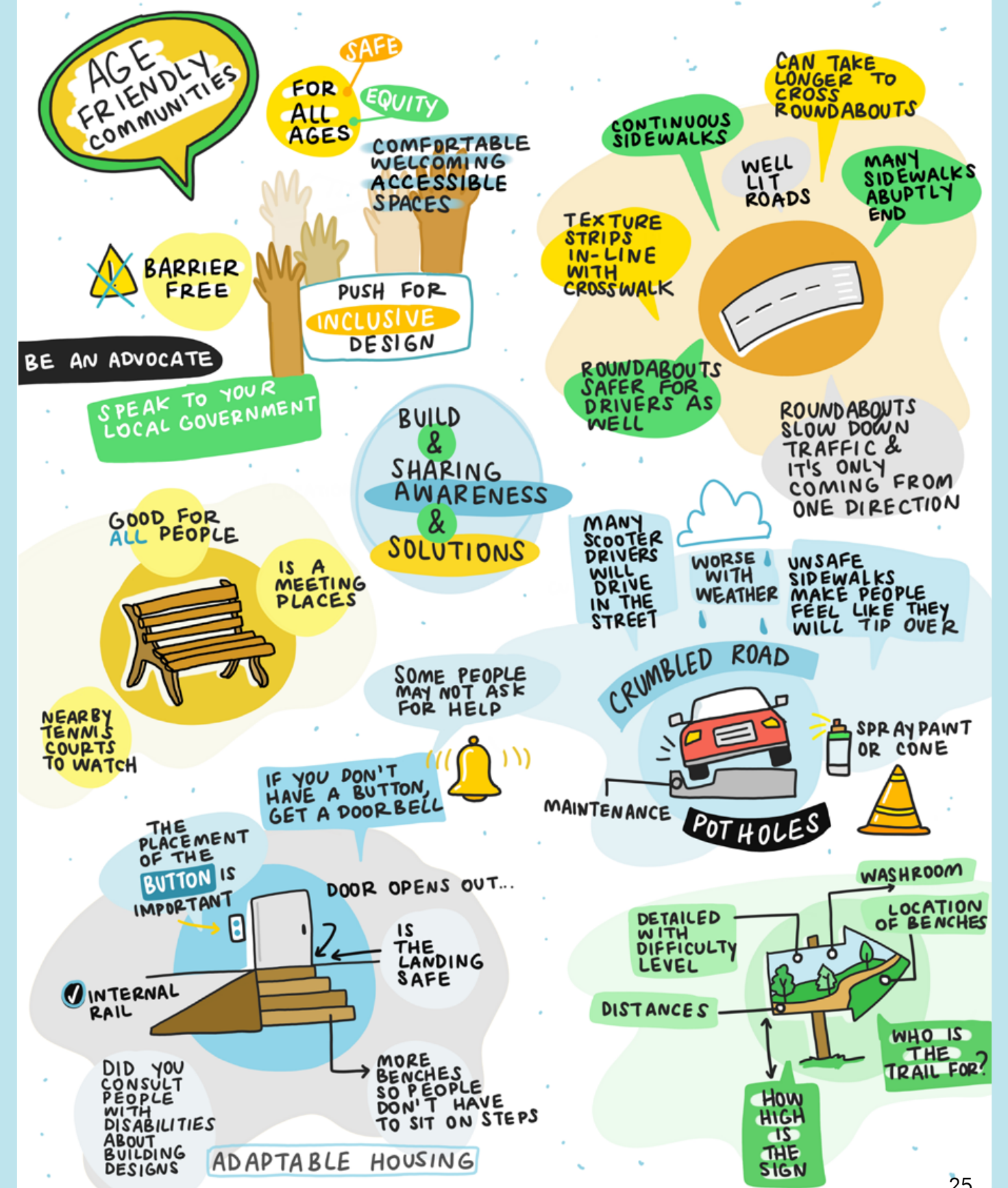
"This is why it is hard to get in many, many places. The weakest link. There could be a perfect ramp, but the threshold is a huge obstacle."
-Doris



"This is a map sign that does help you find your way."
-Urban Hiker



GRAPHIC RECORDING:
Bridgewater Session



Lessons Learned

Some of the key messages we heard through the photovoice and engagement sessions included:

- Age friendly communities are respectful, inclusive, accessible to all, intergenerational and connected by compassion
- Whether they use it or not, when some older adults see a wheelchair ramp/automatic door push button/bench, they feel welcomed
- Areas without sidewalks are very dangerous
- Well-marked crossings, with contrasting colors, auditory signals, and tactile indicators feel safe
- A bench not only allows access to a pause or rest, but also provides opportunities to engage and socialize with others

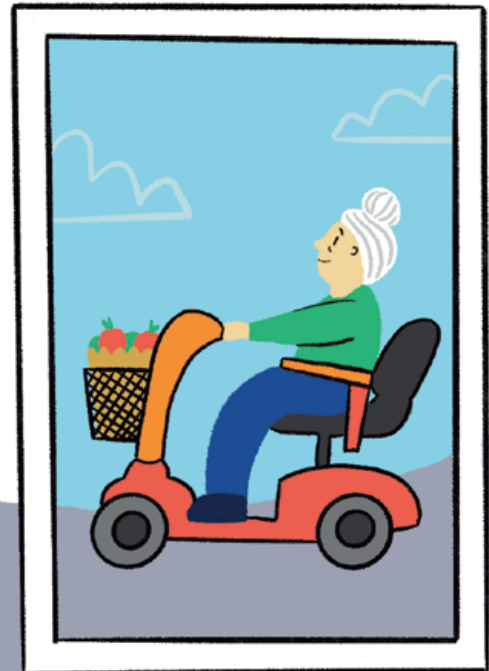
What's Next?

We asked people who attended the community engagement sessions what was next for them after the presentation and discussion. Some reactions included:

- Planning to apply for funding
- Continuing to build awareness
- Identify problem areas
- Speak to local government
- Chat with councillor
- Keep advocating for inclusive spaces

HOW ABOUT YOU?





Age Friendly
in Focus 

To learn more, visit our website:
nscommunitylinks.ca/age-friendly-in-focus