

Upper Sandusky: How Age-Friendly is My Community?

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ABSTRACT

What makes a community age-friendly? The purpose of this comparative analysis was to evaluate my hometown of Upper Sandusky, Ohio specifically focusing on components consistent among age-friendly communities such as housing options, necessary outdoor spaces, transportation, adequate social environment, community support, as well as health and wellness services. In addition, this analysis breaks down demographic information specific to my hometown and offers clarity on particular findings such services and amenities that are available to the aging population. Why is this important? Communities are now realizing the relevance of becoming age-friendly and the weight it holds as our population continues to age.

CRITERIA FOR AGE-FRIENDLINESS OF A COMMUNITY

Common components among age-friendly communities include:

- Housing
- Outdoor spaces and built environment
- Transportation
- Social environment
- Community support
- Health and wellness services

HOUSING

The community of Upper Sandusky offers its residents many housing options that are both accessible and affordable. This includes several assisted living facilities, nursing homes, apartment complexes, as well as a retirement community. Most generally, all housing options have access to retail, transportation, and social services. This is unless an individual were to live outside of the city limits. Even then, Upper Sandusky is located in close proximity to several other cities all within twenty to thirty minutes away with major cities only an hour away. Upper Sandusky experiences very little crime and is therefore rather safe.

OUTDOOR SPACES AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Upper Sandusky is home to nine parks - all with pleasant and clean environments that are well kept. All parks have large green spaces, places to rest, age-friendly pavements, safe pedestrian crossings, accessibility, walkability, cycle paths, and adequate public restrooms. Most parks offer features for older adults including public shelters and facilities for events, ponds for fishing, picnic areas, as well as an outdoor concert shell. There are countless farmer's markets throughout the year, a yearly music festival highlighting local talent (Wyanstock), as well as several seasonal events that draw large crowds and are suitable for the older population. In addition, there are many accessible shops, a local theater, museums, historical landmarks, libraries, and various recreation and leisure opportunities.

TRANSPORTATION

Serving Upper Sandusky and the surrounding area are two transportation services offering affordable and reliable transportation. Both services, the Wyandot County Council on Aging Transportation and the Wyandot Ride Service, offers residents age-friendly vehicles, specialized services, priority seating, as well as an assurance of safety and comfort. It is worth noting that both services require trained drivers to assure the safety and wellbeing of its customers. In general, the community has rather suitable driving conditions with very little traffic and provides plenty of parking (including handicap parking). As mentioned, Upper Sandusky is located rather conveniently between many major cities in Ohio. This provides the community with two major highways that offer additional transportation options and variation.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Given the slow pace, few crowds, low crime rate, and a sense of a close-knit community, a reputation of respectful behavior is indicative of Upper Sandusky. The Wyandot County Council on Aging is one of the

primary social services offering various programs such as transportation, homemaking, trips, nutrition, as well as numerous activities and socialization opportunities. In terms of engagement and meaningful connections, there are countless opportunities including clubs and organizations, religious congregations, councils, committees, and volunteering. Through volunteering, REACH, religious programs, mentoring, tutoring, and various library activities to name a few, intergenerational interactions are capable. To promote the widespread distribution of information, numerous modalities are utilized such as newsletters, mailings, newspaper, local news, radio, email, online websites, social media, phone calls, and even text messages.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Like social environment, there are several ways to volunteer through many programs. Upper Sandusky offers its older population many active engagement and leadership opportunities through clubs and organizations, religious congregations, councils, committees, boards, and elected positions. Despite the smaller size of the community, there are quite a few employment and entrepreneurial opportunities through small businesses, farming, and other organizations essential to the community. While there are no trade schools or higher education facilities directly in the community, there are several in the surrounding area that offer programs to older adults. Directly in the community are some specific local library programs and an adult education/GED preparation course that is offered. Perhaps the area of adult education and learning could be an area of focus and growth in the future.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS SERVICES

For a smaller community, Upper Sandusky has a rather wide variety of health and wellness services directly serving the community. All services are within or closely surrounding the immediate community. As far as preventative and medical care are concerned, there are many private practices and physicians, an urgent care, local health department,

and a local hospital (Wyandot Memorial Hospital). Both the Wyandot County Home Health Agency and Freedom Caregivers serve those individuals who wish to receive care from home. Palliative care is offered through the local Hospice of Wyandot County. There are two assisted living facilities in Upper Sandusky and three nursing homes. The older population has access to mental health services through two local counseling and therapy services. Through a network of community services such as support groups, food pantries, local organizations, local grocery stores, the Wyandot County resources website, job and family services, the local health department, and the local hospital, there is access to quality care, food, resources, and positive health.

CONCLUSION

Upon comparison of my hometown of Upper Sandusky, Ohio to the criteria that establishes an age-friendly community, I conclude that my community does meet the criteria. With that being said, I do believe that there is certainly some room for growth - perhaps in the area of older adult education in community support. However, for a smaller community, it is rather encouraging to see just how age-friendly Upper Sandusky is. With 20.3% of the community population 65 years of age or older, the need for the community to be age friendly is essential to the quality and wellbeing of the aging population.

REFERENCES

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