State: Massachusetts
Community Name: Franklin County and North Quabbin
Population Size: 86185
Percentage of Residents Above Age 60: 33
Community Structure: Other (explain below)
Other: The region includes all 26 towns of Franklin County in addition to 4 North Quabbin towns in Worcester County. There isn't a centralized governance structure for the area as the former Franklin County and Worcester County governments were abolished in the late 90s.
Community Type: Small Town, Rural, Remote/Frontier
Elected Official Signing the Letter of Commitment
Name: Multiple Signatories (see commitment letters)
Title: Select board member / Mayor
Office Mailing Address: Multiple addresses (see commitment letters)
Community Contact Name: Nour Elkhattaby Strauch
Email: [redacted]
Position: Age-Friendly Program Manager
Telephone: [redacted]
Role: Our primary community contact, Nour Elkhattaby Strauch, is the full time age-friendly program manager hired by LifePath to assist area towns in going through the age-friendly process. He is supported by Lynne Feldman, Director of Community Services, and the LifePath management team. Since late 2020, Nour has engaged a wide array of community stakeholders to build a regional age-friendly coalition, including meeting with Councils on Aging and Select boards in participating towns to introduce the project and request commitment letters to enroll them into NAFSC. He has also been working with different area organizations to offer age- and dementia-friendly workshops and educational program. Post enrollment, Nour will coordinate the coalition's needs assessment effort to determine the most urgent needs facing older adults in the region, which will include a community survey, interviews, listening sessions and findings from other local organizations. Later on, he will oversee the process of creating an Action Plan with recommended steps and projects responding to these identified needs.
Older Adult Involvement: Older adults will play, and are already playing, an essential role in our effort to make Franklin County and the North Quabbin a more age- and dementia-friendly region. As the focus population of this
project, we will only succeed if older adults are involved and empowered to be part of the decision making at every phase of our age-friendly process. Our first successful step in this regard has been the creation of a regional age-friendly steering committee that is leading and coordinating the regional effort. The majority of this committee's members are older adults from different area towns and with different backgrounds, creating a very valuable space with multiple elder perspectives represented. Our partnerships with local organizations representing older adults have also allowed us to involve more elder voices. The vast majority of Councils on Aging members, Senior Center staff and Village program leaders we've consulted and engaged with have been older adults. Moreover, we have to this point organized four community education programs on the topics of Reframing Aging and Dementia Awareness, and again the majority of our attendees have been older adults. By continuing to offer these workshops and conversations on age-friendly issues, both virtually and in person when that is safe again, we will be able to connect with more and more of our local elders and engage them in the work we are doing. Since the launch of our project, we have directly engaged with over 200 older adults, including professionals and other interested residents, and we will continue to inform, involve and empower our elders as we move forward.

**Increasing Collaboration and Coordination:**

By nature of our regional age-friendly initiative, collaboration and coordination between different agencies, departments and municipalities are a must. Creating our age-friendly steering committee was the first real step to bringing different stakeholders together to work on age-friendly issues. Represented in this committee are COAs, Senior Centers, healthcare professionals, the regional planning agency, LGBTQIA elders, the interfaith community, higher education, and other sectors. The presence of these different perspectives and areas of expertise has allowed us to create a unique approach and vision for our project; one that combines a regional outlook and a collaboratively built needs assessment strategy with the flexibility to seek implementation on a regional, sub-regional or a local level. Indeed, we have heard from multiple participating towns that they have some issues they would like to tackle in partnership with their neighboring communities, especially relating to the domains of transportation and housing. We will continue building on these connections to bring in even more voices to the planning efforts. The workshops and community education programs we've started offering are another way in which collaboration efforts are already bearing fruit. Some of the local organizations we've collaborated with to host these workshops include the Western Massachusetts Medical Reserve Corps, the North Quabbin Community Coalition, the Greenfield Public Library and Greenfield Community College's Older Adult Advisory Council (OASIS). Moreover, we will soon start offering free dementia-friendly customer service training to local businesses and vendors that deal directly with older adults, ultimately resulting in a regional network / listing of age- and dementia-friendly businesses. Our partnerships with the Alzheimer's Association, the MA Healthy Aging Collaborative and others will prove very valuable in this regard.
AARP Team Member Contact Info: Antron Watson / AARP Massachusetts Age-Friendly Director

Most Instructive Area of Work: Just as we have been inspired by the work of various age-friendly initiatives throughout the state, we hope that the work we are doing will help other communities become more age-friendly. Specifically, our unique and hybrid approach to implementing the project might be useful to other regional initiatives. While we are applying for designation as a region, which should gain us more exposure to the public and the media, we are aiming for all our towns to issue the commitment letters and not just one anchor community. Approaching all of our 30 towns and encouraging them to make the commitment will result in more ownership of the project by the individual communities and not just one centralized entity. More than that, our action plan will include strategies and recommendations that can be implemented on a regional, sub-regional or local level, giving us and our participating towns more flexibility in prioritizing action items to pursue.

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Website: 
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Additional Social Media: