



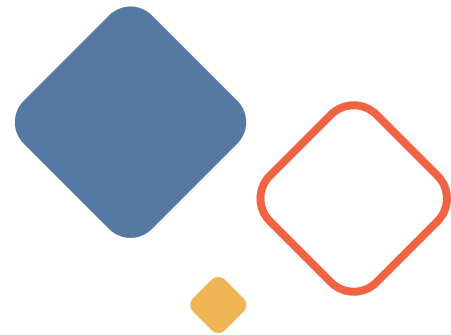
# Living in Argyle

A report from the Aging  
in Neighbourhoods study



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We gratefully appreciate the people who participated in this study, for sharing your stories and spending your time with us.

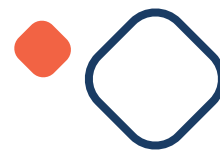
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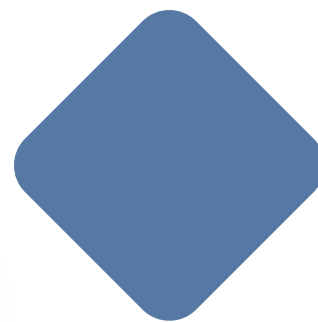
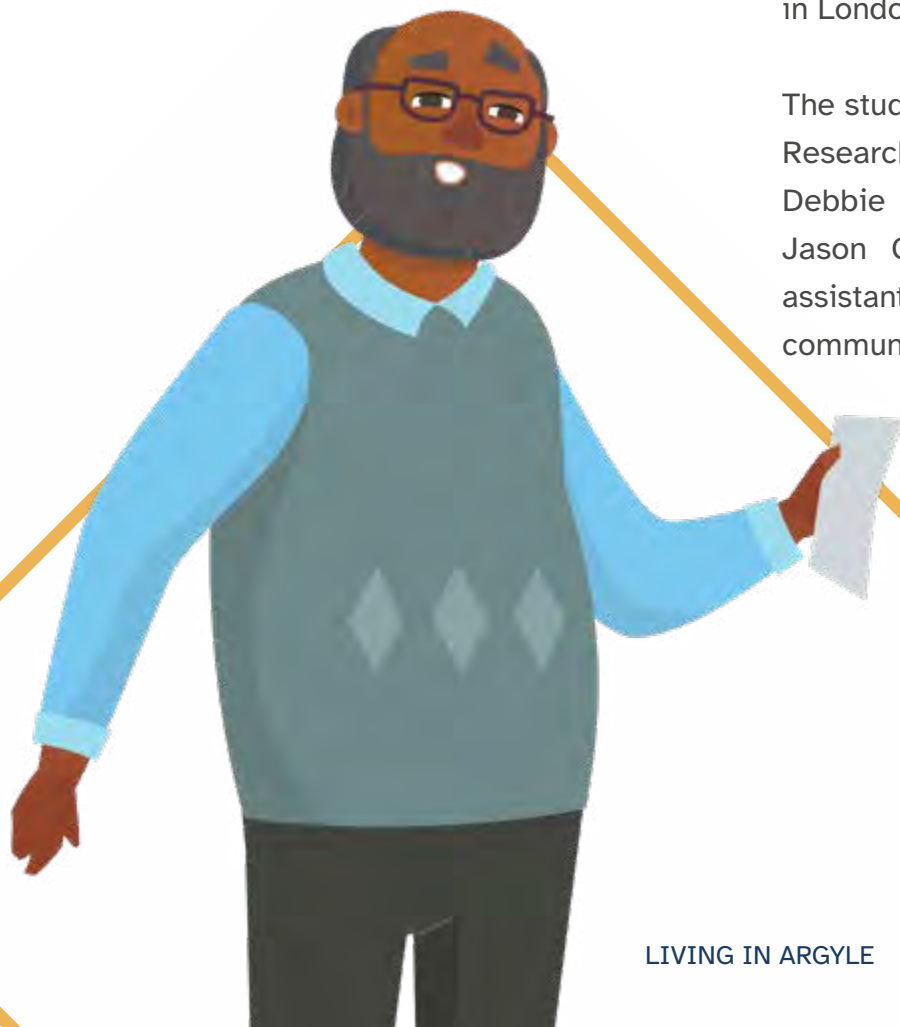


# Introduction

From 2018 to 2019, Western University researchers conducted a study to explore older adults' experiences in their neighbourhoods in Old East Village and Argyle in London, Ontario. We focused on older adults' social activities, community participation, and mobility. This report presents a summary of the stories we heard from the 18 participants who live in the Argyle neighbourhood, and includes photographs that were taken by them. This report is part of our efforts to share findings from the study, with older adults who participated in the study, with community members in London, and more

broadly. The findings presented here provide a 'snapshot' of older adults' experiences in a particular time and place. This study was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic and identifies some relevant barriers and gaps experienced by older adults, which may have been intensified by the COVID-19 context. We ultimately hope that this study can help to increase understanding and awareness about older adults' lives in their neighbourhoods, including the challenges they face, strategies they use, and actions that can be taken to create physical and social environments that promote the engagement and well-being of older adults in London.

The study team consists of Western University Researchers Carri Hand (lead researcher), Debbie Laliberte Rudman, Colleen McGrath, Jason Gilliland, Jami McFarland (research assistant), and a panel of older adults and other community members who guided the study.



# Study Details

We interviewed 38 older adult residents of the Old East Village or Argyle neighbourhoods. Older adult residents offered stories about what they did, where they went, and with whom they interacted in their neighbourhoods. Stories were gathered through four methods.



In Argyle, we interviewed older adults about their experiences. This group of participants consisted of:

**18**  
**Participants**  
**(7 Men & 11 Women)**

**71**  
**Average Age of Participant**

**28**  
**Average Years Living in Argyle**

In this report, we have included quotations from these older adults to illustrate findings. To protect privacy, these quotations are labeled with a participant number (e.g. Participant 1).



# Study Findings

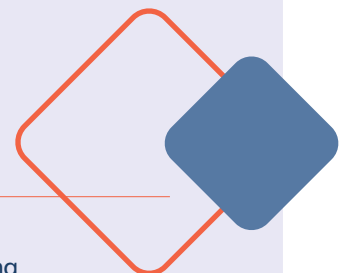
## Older Adults' Experiences of Living in Argyle



Across older adults' stories, Argyle was described as an area that has developed into a large neighbourhood with a distinct identity. Specifically, they suggested that Argyle 'became' a neighbourhood after the area merged with the City of London. Initially, the general area was known as 'East London,' but the neighbourhood eventually established an individual identity. Over time, Argyle has experienced immense local growth and development. Participants explained that they

witnessed considerable development take place over the years, with Argyle changing from a place 'in the country' to a part of the 'big city.' Though Argyle experienced an increase in resources after joining the city, older adults often described a lack of resources in the neighbourhood. In what follows, we identify five key themes that older adult residents discussed in their stories. The table below provides a summary of what the older adult residents shared with us and the following pages provide more detail.

<b>1</b>	<b>A Neglected Neighbourhood</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A lack of access to basic services and resources</li><li>• Dissatisfaction with the poor maintenance of parks, infrastructure, and snow removal</li></ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>Shopping &amp; Accessing Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Easy access to shopping for basic needs via Argyle Mall</li><li>• Cost factor limits older adults' abilities to shop locally</li><li>• Specialty items require leaving the Argyle area</li><li>• Disapproval of the recent shift to kiosks and self-checkout services, and declining quality of customer service</li></ul>
<b>3</b>	<b>Changing Social Landscapes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decrease in homeowners with an increase in renters and students</li><li>• Changing relations and challenges connecting with others</li><li>• Need for more affordable housing options for older adults</li><li>• Exclusion and discrimination experienced by newcomers and immigrants</li></ul>
<b>4</b>	<b>Engaging in Physical Activity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Argyle offers a variety of opportunities for physical activity at seniors' centres, gyms and community centres</li><li>• High costs of services limit participation</li><li>• Abundant green space</li><li>• Excitement for the East Community Centre</li></ul>
<b>5</b>	<b>Being Out &amp; About</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public transit services need improvement</li><li>• Increased traffic causing difficulty in navigation</li><li>• Feeling many parts of Argyle are unsafe for walking and cycling</li></ul>



## A Neglected Neighbourhood

Participants often suggested that resources were, and continue to be, unfairly distributed across the city of London. They described not having access to basic resources available in West London, or suggested that resources that were once located in Argyle or East London were being relocated to other areas. Participants frequently described Argyle and the East end as neglected or underserved. For instance, they expressed dissatisfaction with the inadequate and poorly maintained local infrastructure, including park equipment and road maintenance.

“

*It just seems like East London is being neglected.*

”

In particular, some participants described feeling as though Argyle was receiving poorer snow removal services than other neighbourhoods in London: “Well, we’re always looking for change but, it never changes. It’s—Argyle is Argyle. I would like to get our roads [snow] cleared off” (Participant 8). Participants explained that they do a large amount of informal advocacy work to try to ensure that Argyle is not forgotten by the city. For example, one participant explained that she had made several attempts to have local park equipment repaired:

“

*So, it’s really funny because I phoned the city councilor and just said, ‘I know this isn’t a high priority and I don’t expect it to happen in priority but you know, you think that you could put the nets back in the park?’ But there was no response. That was probably two years ago...[then] I saw City Works crew, Parks and Rec. They were back in the park checking the equipment...I just said, ‘you know, it gets used. This really gets used and I really think that they deserve to have nets.’ So, at least one is up now. They put one up.*

**- Participant 14**

”

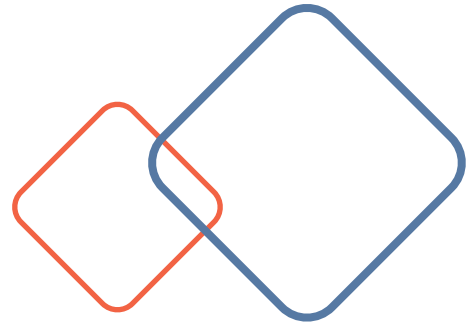






Repaired park equipment (Participant 18)

Participants also described poor public transit services in Argyle, especially when compared to well-served areas in London (e.g. Western University), and the effect this had on residents' abilities to engage in paid work in these areas:



“

*I would have LTC (London Transit Commission) go into our industrial areas in Argyle. We have an industrial [area] just here and on this side [of Veterans Memorial Parkway]. We have a lot of people here that work in the industrial areas and they could [only] take a bus so far and then they have to walk. On these freezing days, I don't care if you're 20 or 60, I mean, it's too cold to have people go that far. We have a Maple Leaf Foods plant that's going to be built. How are people going to get there unless they have a car? We found that we're in the blue-collar end of the city. People who live in Byron work out here and make all their money and go to Byron and live in a big swishy house, but you know, here we are...this is the working class [area] here.*

- Participant 14

”

## Shopping & Accessing Services

Participants described the ways in which resources available in the neighbourhood affected everyday life, including where they went, what they did, and who they engaged with in Argyle. In particular, participants discussed the wide variety of stores in the neighbourhood and suggested that they could obtain all the goods necessary for basic, everyday living. Participants particularly valued Argyle Mall for its variety of shops. Participants also described shopping locally to help keep businesses alive and thriving in Argyle. One participant explained:

“

*So, I can go and give my dollars to Home Depot, to a big corporation, or I can go and give my 15 dollars to a family-owned and operated business [the local Home Hardware]. So, it's just a matter of choice.*

- Participant 18

”

“

*They don't have a bookstore, unfortunately, but that's where I do my grocery shopping.*

”

However, participants described how cost could limit their intentions to shop locally:

“

*I don't like Wal-Mart but there's no more cheap places if I want certain clothes or whatever. A lot of times I'll go to Salvation Army because that's what I can afford but if I need certain things, sometimes I have to go to Wal-Mart.*

- Participant 13

”





Participants also stated they needed to leave the neighbourhood to locate specialty items such as furniture or ‘high-end’ clothing. One participant said, “[Argyle Mall] has enough basics. I could do almost anything there if I had to...[however] for something for a wedding, they don’t have that caliber of product there” (Participant 14). Participants also expressed increasing frustration with the lack of customer service and decreasing social contact they were receiving in the shops they visited. In particular, participants noted that shops had become more dependent on self-service kiosks rather than cashiers.

One participant described the recent change to kiosks as “a big deal” (Participant 17). He said, “I’m a face-to-face kind of person. If I go to the bank, I want to talk to the teller. I want to see his face, her face. Talk to them. See their smile. Hear about their day...I like the interaction with people” (Participant 17). Participants indicated that self-service kiosks negatively affected their social interactions in the neighbourhood.

Participants also noted other negative effects of the kiosks:

“

*I won’t use them because they put people out of work. In fact, in No Frills, when they put them in, I told them I would never use them and he [the manager] was surprised and he said, well don’t you have a debit card and I said, ‘no, I only do cash.’ I go to tellers. I don’t use machines...I’m real old fashioned.*

- Participant 13

”

As well, participants expressed frustration with a perceived decline in knowledgeable, reliable, and friendly customer service in the shops they frequented in the neighbourhood: “I think the world’s changing and everything is becoming self-checkout. People are not concerned so much about helping you choose a product or explain to you how a product works” (Participant 17).



## Changing Social Landscapes

Participants described changes to neighbourhood demographics, and often not in a positive light. For instance, some participants reported a decrease in the number of homeowners among their neighbours, and an increase in renters and students living in Argyle. Participants sometimes suggested

“

*There are some townhouses and some student housing where it's just not as nicely kept up as what they could be doing.*

”

that non-homeowners lead to increased crime. Participants also described non-homeowners as being less likely to care for their properties, and mentioned having trouble forming relationships with these neighbours. Participants suggested that students, though polite, were particularly difficult to form meaningful relationships with:

“

*They're [student neighbours are] always pleasant—they're polite. That's just kind of a social thing: 'Hey how are you.' Like very, like that. It used to be that we had a group of people [from the neighbourhood] that got together, just like at Christmas. We would always like have a small house party.*

**- Participant 14**

”

Participants suggested that close relationships between neighbours had historically been the norm in Argyle. For example, one participant talked about how the “door was always open” in her neighbourhood when she was a child (Participant 10). Relations with neighbours were, she explained, “really kind of nice. You could come and go and basically open doors and they [neighbours] knock and walk in. You never bothered [anybody] then” (Participant

10). Participants discussed how they continued this tradition of positive relationships with neighbours today. Specifically, participants looked out for other neighbours: “Our neighbour across the street...we watch out for each other to the point even, at times of helping him if there's a health issue or sending a meal from time to time” (Participant 9). Participants noticed that it was usually older neighbours who maintained these types of relationships.



Participants also suggested that the neighbourhood's age dynamics were changing and that they saw fewer children living in Argyle. Beyond maintaining relationships with neighbours and giving and receiving support, participants suggested that the loss of familiar neighbours was related to the neighbourhood's older population; that is, participants often noted that longstanding neighbours had passed or moved away. Participants were very clear that more affordable housing in Argyle was needed to allow older adults to remain and grow older in the neighbourhood:

“

*We need more affordable housing for intergenerational [groups] and for seniors. We have approximately 50 seniors in the Argyle area who are our age and older who want to sell their homes, but we have nowhere to go because we don't want to live anywhere else. We want to stay in Argyle because our friends are here, our church is here, [and] we've raised our children here.*

**- Participant 4**

”

Participants also mentioned that they saw increasing rates of ethno-racial diversity in the neighbourhood. A few participants in the study identified as immigrants, and described the challenges they faced living in Argyle, especially when forming new social relationships. For example, one participant said:

“

*Since I am new here...I don't have many friends of my [own]. There are a lot of people in McDonalds and Tim Hortons. I find, especially [in] the mornings, there are a lot of senior guys sitting there that are enjoying a cup of coffee with their friends. But I am not able to get into that group because it looks, you know, [I] don't know anybody. I just cannot approach [that group].*

**- Participant 15**

”



Another participant explained that she felt ostracized when she moved to Argyle: “[the neighbours] were kind of sceptical of me. I could tell by their eyes they weren’t trusting me, so I was not really welcomed” (Participant 11). Another participant noted that she had observed anti-immigrant speech in her neighbourhood: “he [a Dutch man] was busy saying, ‘send all the immigrants home.’ And I asked him, I said, ‘are you getting on the boat because unfortunately that’s what you are and all of [the people who came to] Canada [are]’” (Participant 16).

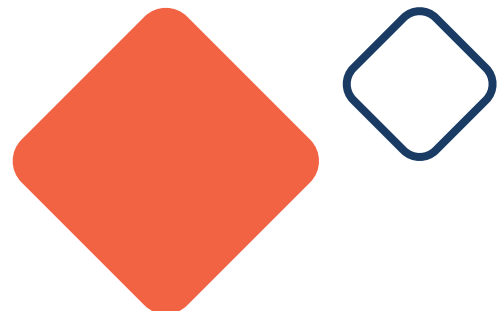


Some participants also described the changes to Argyle Mall as a substantial loss for the neighbourhood in general and for older adult residents in particular. Specifically, the mall has been converted from an indoor to a box-store mall:



*At one time, you walked inside [Argyle Mall]. All the stalls were covered. And I wish it was [like] that again because it was a unique place for seniors. It was a safe walking place. You would run into people. They had a little place you could have coffee and donut or something in there. And when they were going to tear it down we signed a petition not to do that. That took away a seniors’ gathering place. So that was a huge loss to this community.*

**- Participant 1**



## Engaging in Physical Activity

Participants often discussed participating in various types of physical activity. This included attending classes, such as salsa dancing, offered by the local library and seniors' centres. Many participants mentioned attending fitness classes or exercising at the gym almost every day. Participants described a 'need' to keep busy in older age, especially following retirement, as a reason for participating in fitness classes on a frequent basis. Participants also discussed the high costs of engaging in such programs, which affected where they could exercise:

“

*I used to go to the Bob Hayward Y [YMCA] when I was working because—well, I [would] go after work and go swimming and stuff there. And that was great, but it was so expensive. It became totally unaffordable when I wasn't working anymore. Carling Heights costs you, I think, \$80 a year and you can go as often as you want almost. And then the Bob Hayward Y was I think over \$600 a year.*

- Participant 10

”

“

*The Y, that's my second home these days.*

”

Participants also talked about going for daily walks in local parks, including Kiwanis and Fanshawe Conservation Area. On a go-along interview, one participant explained:

“

*We're going [to Fanshawe Conservation Area] because it's one of my very favourite places to walk. I've been walking in that spot for like, as long as I've lived in this end of town, which is a lot longer than I've just lived in this house and I've seen the forest when it was planted, like when the trees were a foot high. And it's a lovely place to walk and it's sheltered when it's cold in the winter and it's shady when it's sunny.*

- Participant 12

”







Fanshawe Conservation Area  
(Participant 2)



Forest Lawn Cemetery  
(Participant 1)

Several participants also described Forest Lawn Cemetery as an unconventional, but accessible and pleasant place to go for a walk:

Although many participants were able to access physical activities within the neighbourhood, others described needing to travel long distances to exercise or attend seniors' programs:



*Though it's a cemetery...there are a lot of people who walk through here...the funeral home will put coffee on, or tea, [or] whatever, [and they] will let you go into the lounge and I think it's from eight until ten or something like that...when the weather's nice, and you can walk through it; and I've been there taking pictures and I've seen lots of seniors walk [there].*

**- Participant 1**



*We [seniors] need it [a local community centre]. You know, we need to not always have to leave our [neighbourhood]. You know, I think our community is our home. So, for us not to leave, to go to North London or Hyde Park or something, or even downtown...So, the nearest senior centre here is Hamilton Road. I don't know if that [is] Pottersburg area or whatever it's called. But that's too far.*

**- Participant 1**







East Lions Community Centre  
(Participant 1)

Most participants discussed a new community centre being built, the long-awaited East Lions Community Centre. They expressed excitement at having this new neighbourhood resource, and one participant described the East Lions Community Centre as the neighbourhood’s “dream” (Participant 3). Although participants expressed frustration with the length of time being taken to build the community centre, they had hopes for what it could offer.

Participants, however, also worried that the community centre might not be created with the needs of seniors in mind:

“

*We’ve even had the alderman from the area and, you know, different big shots in the city [come to discuss plans for the East Community Centre]; when they were first breaking ground they were over at the school and [my spouse] and I went to a couple of the meetings, yeah, and she [spouse] brought that up too like, ‘you should have a walking path or, you know, some place that seniors can go and walk.’ And no, they weren’t even interested. [They] didn’t want to hear it. They said, ‘there’s some in the city that have them, you just have to travel there.’*

- Participant 2

”

## Being Out & About

“

*Cars are king and neighbourhoods are built to accommodate cars, not pedestrians.*

Several participants relied on public transportation to go about their everyday lives, and described a number of challenges in using the public transit system. Participants noted that taking the bus during the winter was particularly difficult: “the bus system is not the best for some seniors. It’s too long in between buses... [and] not all bus stops have seats either, or shelters” (Participant 2).

A participant with a chronic knee injury mentioned that he faced physical barriers and negative attitudes when using public transit, especially in overcrowded buses: “It’s just I’m a little slow getting out and you get the odd, ‘hurry

up’ type of thing. But that’s the way it always is” (Participant 13). The participants’ stories illustrated the high level of skill needed to use public transit, especially to navigate the complicated and limiting schedules.

Participants who owned cars described moving around Argyle in a very different way, and discussed being able to travel within and outside of London on a regular basis. Though mobile, participants who owned cars noted that navigating the neighbourhood had become more difficult over the years because of increasing rates of traffic, especially around the college:

“

*You notice traffic differences, with buses especially on Oxford St. If you’re heading [on] Oxford St. West in the morning between say, 8 o’ clock and 9 o’clock, there’s a ton of traffic there. But it’s all the students and the teachers, all getting onto campus.*

**- Participant 18**

”



Participants also described having difficulty getting around the neighbourhood on foot as well as on bicycle. Again, they described a lack of sufficient resources in Argyle to support safe community mobility, especially with the neighbourhood's dramatic development and increase in traffic in recent years. For example, participants suggested that Argyle Mall was only safely accessible via car, and that it was not a safe place for pedestrians or cyclists:

Further, participants noted that a lack of infrastructure for safe community mobility was of particular concern for certain residents, including children and those with mobility challenges:

“

*The parking lot at Argyle Mall, that is horrible. That is the worst place to be [that] I could possibly imagine – absolutely horrible. You can't walk there safely, and you can't bike there safely. And I bike a lot. I like to bike over [to] the grocery store, but I don't do it anymore. People don't watch out for walkers, they don't watch out for bikers.*

- Participant 12

”

“

*I think they had a crossing guard [at a dangerous crosswalk] at one point. Anything four-lane, I think, is taking your life in your hands. Even with lights, you're never sure. I mean, even if you're right on the curb, [and] you're a decent walker, you get to the middle of the street when it [the crosswalk light] turns and says, "Don't walk." So, that, I think has to be a detriment for any pedestrians. I mean, if you think of people who can't walk fast, you get somebody with a walker or cane that can't hustle across. I think that's a problem.*

- Participant 3

”

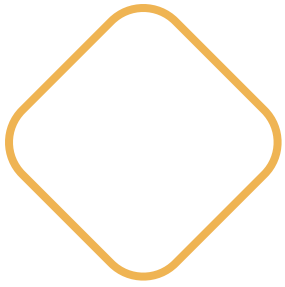


# Parting Thoughts



In summary, the stories of everyday life for older adults living in Argyle focused on neighbourhood changes, including shifts in the social composition of the neighbourhood and availability of resources over time. This document contains a range of perspectives to show both the shared and individual experiences of what it is like to live in Argyle as an older adult. Participants discussed the challenges, benefits, and joys of living in Argyle, as well as opportunities for change.





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