

# AMPLIFYING VOICES ON AGING IN NORTHEAST COLORADO

## NORTHEAST COLORADO (LOGAN COUNTY)

### PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Healthy aging and aging in place has become a significant topic for discussion in recent years as the Older Adult population continues to grow and the need for information on aging increases. Additionally, aging in rural areas may present other unique challenges as accessibility to resources and knowledge can be especially difficult in these communities. This internship aims to expand the knowledge about healthy aging and aging in place, specifically in rural towns in Northeast Colorado.

The objective of this internship overall was to learn more about the unique strengths and challenges of aging in these towns in Northeast Colorado. We also aimed to learn more about how we can best support Older Adults staying in their communities and how we can promote aging in place.

This internship used interviews to gain firsthand accounts of what it is like to grow older in a rural community in Northeast Colorado and understand the strengths and challenges from the individuals who know their communities best. We also included perspectives from both English and Spanish speakers as well as perspectives from Older Adults, Caregivers, and Healthcare Professionals.

### INTERNSHIP GOALS

The internship goals were to learn more about the strengths and challenges of aging in place in Northeast Colorado. We aimed to learn more about aging in these areas to influence public policy, funding, and research on how to improve the experience of aging in place. We also aimed to understand available resources in the community and how resources can best be used to help individuals age healthily in their communities.

### HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO YOUR EDUCATION

This applies to my education in many ways as a student of both Human Development and Family Studies and Spanish. I was able to apply skills and information that I have learned in the classroom relating to research, older adults, and Spanish in a real-life setting. This also applies to my education as I hope to work with underrepresented populations including Hispanic populations and Older Adult populations, so this helped me further my knowledge about the people I hope to work with in my education and career.

### WHAT YOU DID

Throughout the internship we focused on hearing voices from the communities that we were investigating through interviews. I visited many communities across Northeast Colorado including Limon, Hugo, Cheyenne Wells, Burlington, Sterling, Wray, and Yuma. We worked to create a wide variety of questions that covered topics relating to aging and health such as food, healthcare, social opportunities, ageism, and the overall experience of aging. I visited many local senior centers, meal service locations, healthcare facilities, and the CSU Extension office in Sterling. I also conducted several online interviews. We also submitted our project to the IRB to be able to expand the application of our research. Our preparations primarily included developing the questions and research methods to ensure that we covered everything.

I interviewed Older Adults, Caretakers, and Healthcare Professionals about their perspectives on aging in Northeast Colorado. I was able to gather a significant amount of data, and I gained knowledge about the strengths and challenges of aging in these smaller rural communities.

I also attended the Yuma county fair senior breakfast which was another unique opportunity to learn more about the community through experiencing it firsthand. I interviewed and interacted with many individuals at the fair which gave me a unique perspective on how older adults participate in their communities later in life.

I was also able to use my bilingual background to include Spanish speaking participants. This helped us gain a new perspective on the Hispanic population's experience of aging in Northeast Colorado, which is typically an overlooked and underrepresented population.

Image 1. (Interview between Lydia and an Older Adult at Yuma County Fair)



### WHAT YOU LEARNED

Over the course of the internship, I learned many things about Older Adults and how they are impacted by aging in a rural community as well as how rural communities function differently.

One significant thing that I learned is that contrary to many assumptions, rural communities oftentimes have a plethora of resources to support Older Adults, however the true issue is getting Older Adults to use the resources that are available to them. Many of the individuals that I spoke to mentioned how their communities support them and that there are resources for almost anything that they could need, but that there is a stigma around accepting help from others, especially governmentally funded programs.

Another thing I learned is that there is a significant need for the expansion of healthcare to rural communities. Many individuals must travel to the Front Range to get specialized healthcare, which is not always feasible as an Older Adult as traveling a far distance consistently can be an issue as accessibility to transportation and health issues can be a significant barrier.

One final thing I learned is that rural communities are very caring and close knit. Everyone that I interviewed mentioned that their neighbors always take care of each other and that they felt their sense of community was one of the biggest strengths and joys of living in a rural town.

Image 2. (Senior Breakfast at Yuma County Fair)



### NEXT STEPS

Our next steps include continuing to expanding the pool of interviewees and gathering as much data as we can to understand the experience of Older Adults in Northeast Colorado even more. We then hope to publish a paper and create resources to share our research to influence public policy and funding to aid in the improvement of aging in place for Older Adults in Northeast Colorado which can then be expanded even further to other rural communities across the country.