FEASIBILITY OF A GENERIC FFC INTERVENTION FOR LONG-TERM CARE: EVIDENCE FROM INTERVENTIONS IN VARIOUS CARE SETTINGS
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Function Focused Care (FFC) interventions support nurses to adapt their level of care to the capabilities of older people and to optimize their self-reliance. Recently, three FFC-interventions were implemented in various Dutch care settings. Lessons learned and implications were synthesized and an advanced FFC-program ‘SELF’ was developed for wide application. SELF comprises interactive and multidisciplinary sessions, is theoretically grounded, primarily focuses on behavior change in nurses, and is tailored to the team’s needs. It also includes policy and environment review, goal-setting, and coaching-on-the-job. SELF was tested in one Dutch psychogeriatric ward. Afterwards, focus groups were conducted with nurses, trainers, manager and coaches. The interactive content, mutual discussions, and practice-based working methods were highly valued. SELF increased awareness and willingness to practice FFC and was considered feasible in practice. Increased involvement and support of allied health professionals and the manager was preferred. A nationwide effectiveness trial is planned after refining SELF.

Session 3630 (Symposium)

RURAL RESILIENCE THROUGH COVID-19
Chair: Shannon Freeman Co-Chair: Raven Weaver
Discussant: Shannon Freeman

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been felt globally affecting everyone, but have disproportionately harmed some of the most vulnerable and marginalized including individuals residing in rural and remote areas. The geographic isolation initially thought to protect rural and remote communities from the pandemic soon became a disadvantage, requiring individuals to navigate long-standing systemic barriers (e.g., lack of transportation issues, limited access to healthcare resources, and fragmented accessibility to vaccines), alongside the new challenges posed by COVID-19 restrictions to mitigate the spread of disease. The purpose of this symposium is to showcase examples of rural resiliency in the face of significant struggle. Taking a strength-based approach, the papers discuss efforts to identify healthy coping and positive aspects of physical distancing (Paper 1; Weaver), explore social support and psychological mindset (Paper 2; Fuller), inform successful strategies to pivot programming to remote coalition engagement for obesity prevention (Paper 3; Buys), implement a peer mentoring program to spur development of new strategies to build community resilience (Paper 4; Oh), and review elements of ruralism that empower or exclude older people and the implications for a post-COVID world (Paper 5; Curreri). As we continue to uncover and learn about the short and long-term implications...
of living through the pandemic, these papers describe ways in which rural communities demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity. Our presenters will showcase a range of US and international perspectives and offer policy and program recommendations for building resilience in the longer term.

ADAPTATION AND COPING AMONG RURAL OLDER ADULTS THROUGHOUT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
Andrea Huseth-Zosel,1 and Heather Fuller;2 1. North Dakota State University, Fargo, North Dakota, United States, 2. North Dakota State University, Fargo, North Dakota, United States

In the past year, older adults have faced challenges due to COVID-19, yet many have also shown great resilience. This qualitative study explores older adults’ experiences and perceptions of adaptation, social connection, and coping across the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on unique resilience factors among rural older adults. A Midwestern sample (35% rural) of 70 older adults aged 70-97 completed three phone interviews (April, June, and October 2020) about their experiences with social distancing due to COVID-19. Thematic analysis of qualitative responses identified themes of resilience including: 1) purposeful and flexible social connections, 2) positive psychological mindset, and 3) hardiness and life experience. Strains related to the loss of community connections were evident, yet older adults demonstrated signs of adaptability and coping as compensation. Implications and future directions will be discussed in the context of change over time and geographic variation.

EXPERIENCES WITH PHYSICAL DISTANCING: COPING STRATEGIES AND POSITIVE EXPERIENCES
Raven Weaver, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington, United States

A representative U.S. sample of adults completed an online survey (N=360) about perceived changes in social health and well-being since the implementation of physical distancing restrictions in April. Analyses are conducted on a subsample of aged 60+ (n=93; m=65.7 years; SD=9.7). Baseline bivariate descriptive analyses showed no geographic-based differences in self-rated health, resilience, perceived financial wellbeing, or family/friend support measures. Content analysis of rural residents’ responses about coping strategies and positive experiences across three time points (April/July/November) revealed aspects of resilience. Individuals coped via acceptance and planning; engaging in activities; and keeping with routines. Positive experiences were relatively stable over time, with individuals describing improved health habits and enhanced social connectedness with family/neighbors. Individuals identified societal betterment and saving money as unintended benefits of the efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. When faced with adversity, identifying positive experiences may help individuals cope with challenges in the long-term.

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED OLDER ADULT-LED POLICY, SYSTEMS, AND ENVIRONMENT INTERVENTIONS IN THE MS HIGH OBESITY PROGRAM
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Older adults in rural areas are at unique risk for poor outcomes due to social isolation and limited access to resources. The Mississippi High Obesity Program (HOP) aims to enhance access to social connections and resources like community gardens, food pantries, and physical activity as part of its broader objective to prevent and reduce obesity. Through policy, systems and environment strategies, development of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between aforementioned entities, and community based participatory research approaches, Mississippi HOP efforts enhance food systems improvement efforts; grow multi-sectoral collaboration; and evaluate the effectiveness of new policies, and specifically MOUs, in reaching these goals. Older adults represent more than 40% (n=27) of all coalition members and stakeholder leaders (n=61); they are essential for the success of these initiatives. This presentation will highlight the work done during the COVID-19 pandemic and the role of and benefits to older adults, especially ones in rural communities.

PEER MENTORING TO FOSTER RESILIENT AGE-FRIENDLY RURAL COMMUNITIES IN MAINEN
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Maine has a growing number of age-friendly community initiatives (AFCIs); 116 communities are actively working to adapt the social, service, and built environments for aging and 71 have formally joined the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. During COVID, rural municipalities were faced with dynamic changes that limited older resident’s access to services and social engagement. To overcome these limitations, it is critical for emergent AFCIs to have tools and strategies to maintain and further enhance healthy environments and resilient communities. This study uses group interviews with 6 leaders of established AFCIs and 6 leaders of emergent AFCIs to explore how the Lifelong Fellows Program, a peer mentoring model that matches experienced leaders with newly formed initiatives, was able to spur development of new strategies to build community resilience. Prominent themes were (1) engaging new local and regional partners; (2) intergenerational volunteering; (3) fun and flexibility; and (4) relationship-building.

FEATURES OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA THAT INFLUENCE WELL-BEING OF OLDER PERSONS
Andrew Banda,1 Norah Keating,2 Jaco Hoffman,3 Jose Parodi,4 and Nereide Curreri,5 1. University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia, 2. Swansea University, Swansea, Wales, United Kingdom, 3. North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, Gauteng, South Africa, 4. San Martin de Porres University, Lima, Lima, Peru, 5. North-West University, South Africa, Vanderbijlpark, North-West, South Africa

In their recent volume, Critical Rural Gerontology, Skinner et al (2021) challenge us to set aside unidimensional notions of rural communities as bypassed vs very supportive; and to identify the elements of rurality that empower or exclude older people and how these differ across cultures and settings. Covid-19 has