

# Reframing Aging in Vermont

*Changing the Conversation on Challenging Topics*

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Aging in Vermont: Healthy Living Conference

Angela Smith-Dieng, State Unit on Aging Director, DAIL

Deb Bouton, Director of Marketing & Outreach, Cathedral Square





# Agenda



- Welcome & Why This Matters (5 min)
- Ashton Applewhite TED Talk and reflections (15 min)
- Presentation: Reframing in VT (15 min)
- Small group exercise (10 min)
- Large group discussion (10 min)
- Closing & Next Steps (5 min)



# Vermont's Changing Demographics

- ▶ 24.2% or 1 in 4 Vermonters are 60 years or older; this is expected to increase to 1 in 3 by 2030.
- ▶ Vermont is the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest state by median age and may be 1<sup>st</sup> by 2030.
- ▶ Average life expectancy (78.7 years) has increased 30 years in the past century. Those 30 years have expanded middle age. ("70 is the new 40.")
- ▶ Older Vermonters contribute significantly to the economy:
  - ▶ Adults ages 55+ = 27% of Vermont's workforce.
  - ▶ People in their 50s and 60s start businesses at twice the rate of those in their 20s.
  - ▶ Americans over 50 contribute nearly 70% of all charitable donations from individuals.
- ▶ Older adults with positive views about aging live 7.5 years longer than those with negative views.



# Ashton Applewhite's TED Talk on Ageism

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfjzkO6\\_DEI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfjzkO6_DEI)

For more, read Applewhite's book:

***This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism***

<https://thischairrocks.com/>

Questions/Thoughts?



# Language → Understanding → Policy

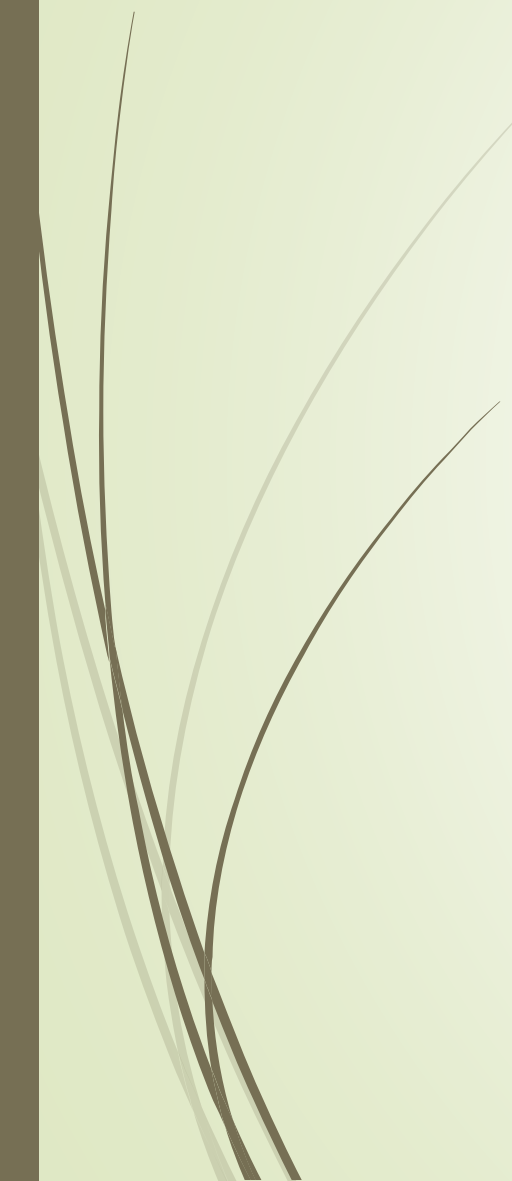


The FrameWorks Institute recommends we focus on the following strategic communications priorities:

- Redefine aging itself.
- Highlight the influence of social context and policy on aging.
- Elevate ageism and how it can be addressed through policy solutions.
- Create a sense of shared purpose and potential for improvement.

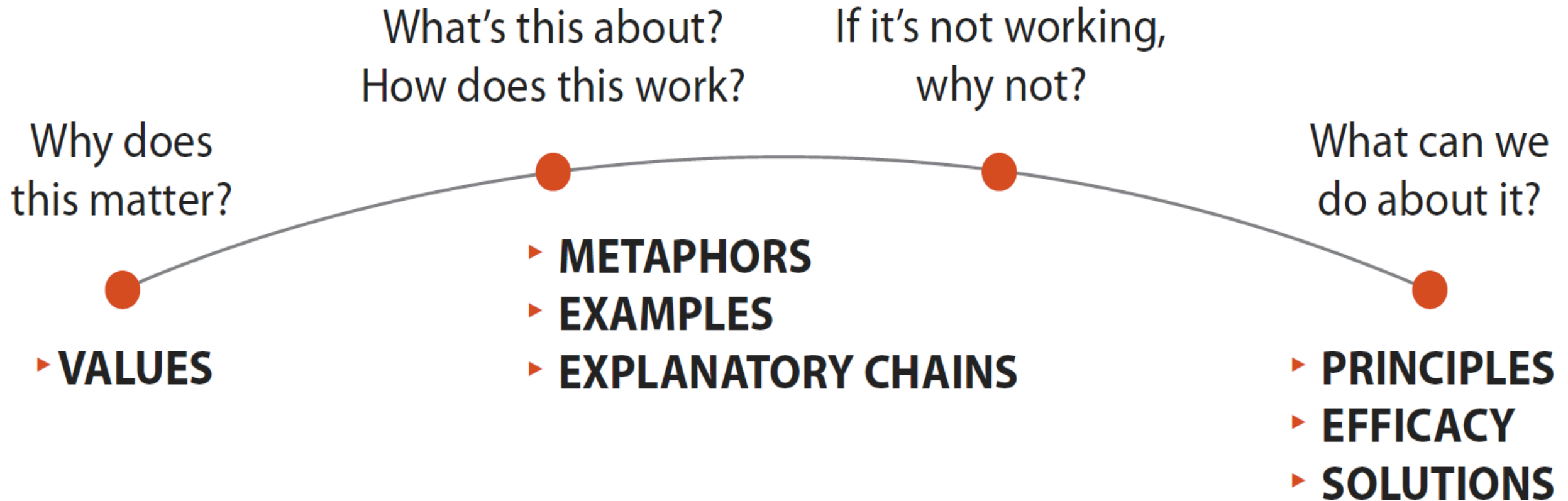


## Themes [frames] that help communicate those priorities:

- ▶ Value of Ingenuity
  - ▶ Metaphor of “building momentum”
  - ▶ Value of Justice
  - ▶ Building understanding of ageism: define it, give an example, explain its roots in implicit bias
- 



Tell the story in a well-framed narrative that answers the big social questions:



# How we describe people and the words we use can reinforce or counter ageism.



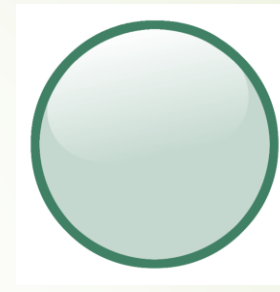
Elderly, Senior, Senior Citizen,  
Aged; "The" anything

They/Them (older as "other")

"Silver Tsunami"

Deterioration/decline/loss

Getting old, "battling" aging



Older Adult, Older Vermonter, Mature  
or Experienced Adults/Workers

We/Us/All of Us (inclusive)

Changing Demographics

Accumulation of skills,  
knowledge and experience

Building momentum





## Example...

“The aging of Vermont is the **biggest problem** the state faces today and it will be for the next decade and beyond. It will be **hard enough to deal with** the impacts of that change — on employers looking for workers, homeowners trying to sell their houses, on health care, assisted living facilities, voting patterns, and more — and **even harder to try to reverse or limit the aging** of Vermont.”


-- Economist Art Wolff, “Vermont Aging Faster Than Rest of U.S.,” *Burlington Free Press*, 7/21/16



## ...Reframed

“...Rather than feeling discouraged by the demographic shift, I have great hope for our future. I believe that Vermonters, young and old, are **creative problem solvers and will embrace the positive attributes of Vermont’s new demographics**, while tackling any challenges this may bring with enthusiasm, skill and collaborative spirit. The real story, beyond the numbers of births, deaths and taxes, is about **creating the kind of Vermont where we all, regardless of age, feel welcomed, valued, supported, and able to thrive**. I have no doubt that Vermonters can build this kind of world, and I look forward to doing it together.”

--Angela Smith-Dieng, Letter to the Editor, Burlington Free Press, 7/5/17



# Steps we're taking at SASH & Cathedral Square

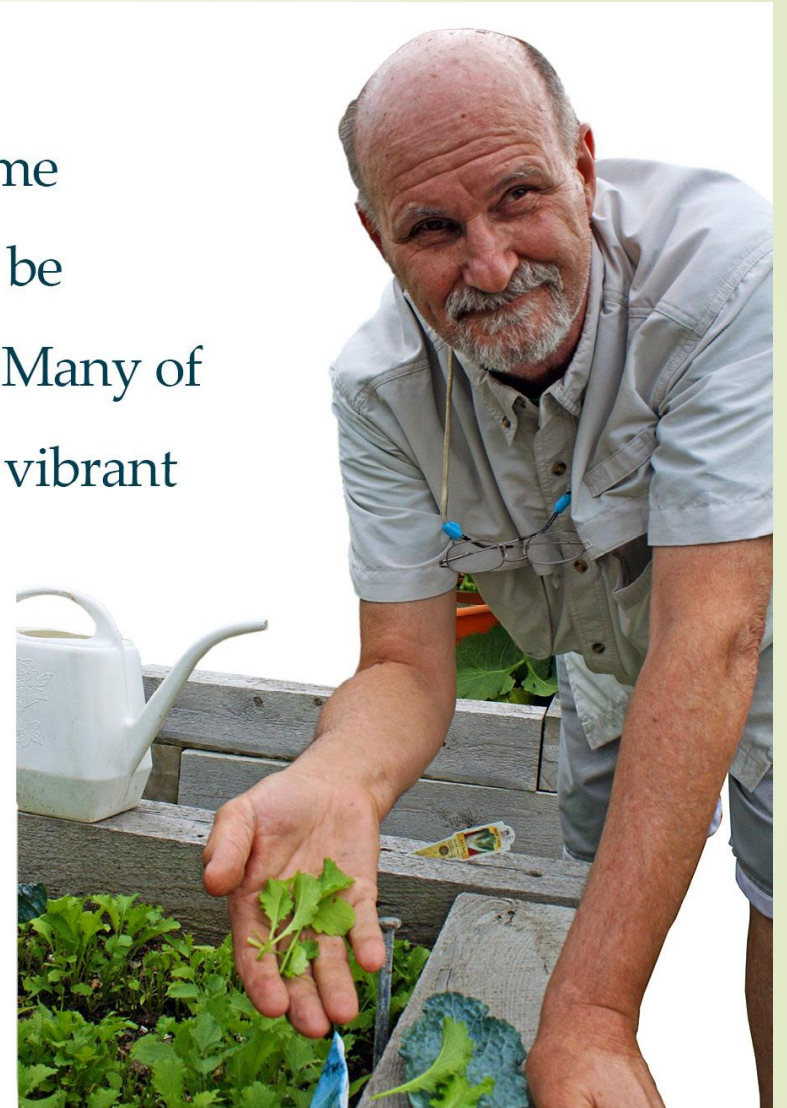
- ▶ Educational presentation at CSC all-staff meetings
- ▶ Tips in monthly staff e-newsletters
  - ▶ *Did you know that older adults with negative views about aging live 7.5 fewer years than those who hold positive views? Are YOU helping to change this narrative? [Learn more.](#) [link]*
- ▶ Style Guide for SASH and CSC to ensure consistent language across programs and materials
- ▶ Calling folks out! (in a nice way)
- ▶ Installing positive-image messaging at Cathedral Square properties

“Now that I’m older, I’m able to spend more time doing the things I like. I love to be of service, to be useful, to work on projects with my neighbors. Many of them are older than me. They’re all all creative, vibrant people who can hardly wait to get up in the morning to see what the day holds. That’s really precious to me.”

— Zed Zabski, Cathedral Square  
resident since 2003



Cathedral  
Square



“Last year I heard someone say, ‘Oh my God, Rainbow lost her spunk — she went into senior housing.’ Well, I didn’t lose my spunk. It took a hell of a lot of spunk for me to decide to embark on this next adventure. I’m so grateful that I gave it a chance. I’m having a blast.”

— *Rainbow Cornelia,  
Cathedral Square resident  
since 2016*



Cathedral  
Square

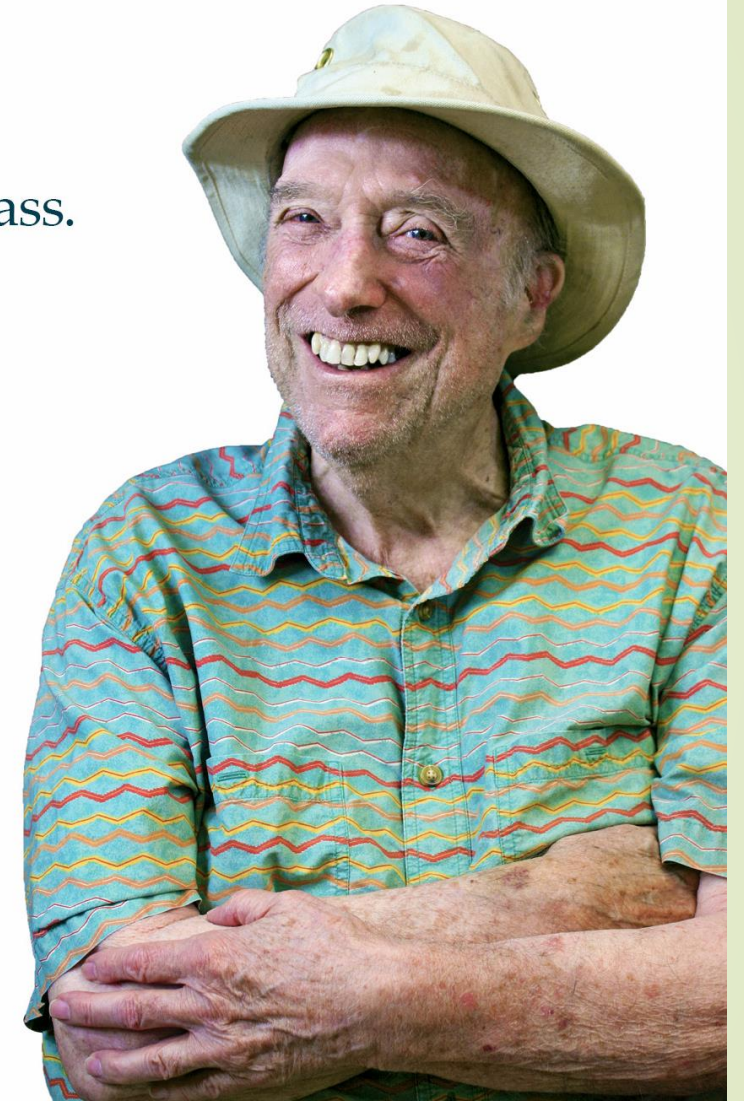


“For the first time in my life, I’m taking a writing class. I really enjoy it. It’s interesting to hear how people express themselves. They give me ideas. The class stimulates social interaction. I like how it helps me think more about myself.”

— *Stuart McHenry*  
*Cathedral Square resident since 2015*



Cathedral  
Square







Questions?





# Reframing Takes Practice: 10-minute small group exercise

- ▶ Three topics to choose from: dementia, falls, elder abuse
- ▶ Together with people at your table, choose one topic on which to focus
- ▶ Use worksheets – dominant narrative, reframing narrative
  - ▶ Highlight the key words/phrases/frames in the dominant narrative that trigger negative understandings of aging
  - ▶ Brainstorm alternative words/phrases/frames that could trigger productive understandings of aging (use frame cards to help)
- ▶ One person scribe and report back to large group



# Large Group Discussion

- What negative words/phrases/frames did you focus on, and how did you go about reframing them? What themes and language did you use?
- What did you learn? Are there some phrases/perceptions that are more difficult to address or find alternative frames for?
- Other reflections or questions?



# Alzheimer's and Dementia

## The Dominant Public Narrative:

- Rapid increase in numbers of people with Alzheimer's/dementia; crisis language; *they* are the problem - othering.
- Alzheimer's/dementia is determined by genetics; there's no cure; there's nothing we can do to stop it; fatalism.
- Alzheimer's and dementia cost too much; it's a burden on society and our healthcare system; us versus them; fixed/finite resources.
- Frailty, deterioration, dependence, incompetence; aging = declining.



# Alzheimer's and Dementia

## Reframing the Narrative:

- ▶ Inclusive language: we/us/all of us want a healthy brain as we age.
- ▶ Value of Ingenuity: We are problem solvers, and we will find innovative solutions to meet the challenge of ADRD. For example, new research is showing how we can build cognitive reserve as we age and how behaviors like exercise help maintain good brain health.
- ▶ Value of Justice: We believe in justice and equality; people living with ADRD deserve to be fully included in community. Concrete example: we can build dementia-friendly communities where all people can fully participate.
- ▶ Building Metaphor: We need strong social supports for people with ADRD and their caregivers. From a well trained medical community to caregiver education and respite, every support beam must be strong and secure.



# Aging and Falls

## **The Dominant Public Narrative:**

- ▶ Falls are the #1 cause of injury-related death for those age 65+; crisis language.
- ▶ Everyone falls as they age, it's part of getting older; fatalism.
- ▶ If people made better choices, they wouldn't fall so much; individualism drives outcomes; othering.
- ▶ Falls cost a lot of money – more hospitalizations, nursing home stays and deaths; fixed/finite resources.
- ▶ Frailty, deterioration, dependence, incompetence; aging = declining.



# Aging and Falls

## Reframing the Narrative:

- ▶ Inclusive language: we/us/all of us want to stay strong and independent as we age. We don't have to fall and be injured as we age.
- ▶ Value of Ingenuity: the causes of falls are complex, but we are problem solvers. We know there are proven preventions, and we can work together to make them happen.
- ▶ Metaphor of Building Momentum: Let us empower each other to stay healthy and strong as we age, because we all have more to contribute – more skill, wisdom, experience. Let us create an environment that fosters health and well-being and prevents falls for all of us.



# Elder Abuse

(abuse, neglect, exploitation)

## **The Dominant Public Narrative:**

- This is a problem? I don't hear about it much; lack of public understanding of problem, no urgency to solve.
- It's a perpetrator/victim problem; there's nothing the public can do; individualism.
- Times have changed; families don't help each other; fatalism.
- Old people are vulnerable and need to be taken care of; paternalism, othering.
- Frailty, deterioration, dependence, incompetence; aging=decline.



# Elder Abuse

## (abuse, neglect, exploitation)

### **Reframing the Narrative:**

- Inclusive Language: we/us/all of us want to live freely and safely as we age.
- Value of Justice: We believe in justice and equality for all. Creating a just society includes treating older people as equal and full members of our community.
- Empowerment: In a just society, older people are equal, active, important participants in community.
- The Building Metaphor: our society needs strong and secure support beams to prevent and quickly address abuse.





# Next Steps

- Be aware. Identify and challenge implicit bias and ageism at every opportunity.
- Review materials & tools by the FrameWorks Institute:  
<http://frameworksinstitute.org/reframing-aging.html> (we put a few on the app but there are many more)
- Reframing takes ongoing, intentional effort. Begin with the concrete: Choose one talking point you use regularly in your work: reframe it, practice it out and use it often!
- Keep watching for opportunities to change the narrative (your website, press releases, newsletters, presentations and events, etc.) Keep practicing. Keep supporting each other. *Do a “frame check.”*
- Spread the word! Together, we have the power to CHANGE THE CONVERSATION!



# Thank You!



Angela Smith-Dieng

State Unit on Aging Director

Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living

[Angela.smith-dieng@Vermont.gov](mailto:Angela.smith-dieng@Vermont.gov)

802-241-0309

Deb Bouton

Director of Marketing & Outreach

Cathedral Square

[bouton@cathedralsquare.org](mailto:bouton@cathedralsquare.org)

802-859-8880