

**Laramie Senior Wellness Gardens**

Maraia Rubin

University of Wyoming

Honor's College Capstone

December 16, 2022

## Introduction

Laramie is a rural college town that allocates many resources to younger residents who attend the University of Wyoming. However, in 2017 around 15% of Laramie's population was made up of individuals aged 60 years and over (Steinman et al., 2020). Awareness and care for older individuals in Laramie are in obvious demand throughout the city. There are multiple organizations in the community including *Age-Friendly Laramie* and the *Eppson Center for Seniors* that aid the community in addressing issues pertaining to the social, mental, and physical wellness of older Laramie residents.

Laramie Senior Wellness Gardens (LSWG) is a project affiliated with *Age-Friendly Laramie* and the *Eppson Center for Seniors* to address mental, physical, and social wellness by incorporating gardening into the daily lives of older Laramie residents. This project attends to 4 of *Age-Friendly Laramie's* 8 Domains of Livability: Outdoor Spaces & Buildings, Social Participation, Respect & Social Inclusion, and Community & Health Services (AARP, 2021). Six raised garden beds were added to the west outdoor space at the *Eppson Center for Seniors*. Older adult patrons of the senior center aided in the building of the raised garden beds, the planting of the various vegetables, and the maintenance of the gardens throughout the 2022 gardening season. A gardening committee, *Eppson Center Garden Committee*, was established at the *Eppson Center* so that this project can be organized, managed, and sustained by *Eppson Center* patrons. There were vegetables of all assortments including broccoli, tomatoes, kale, carrots, onions, peas, and cauliflower grown in the raised garden beds. Various herbs were also grown such as basil, cilantro, oregano, rosemary, thyme, and parsley. Grown herbs were given to the *Eppson Center* kitchen to incorporate into various meals. Also, many patrons of the *Eppson Center* took home the grown vegetables in order to incorporate fresh produce into their personal diet. Overall, the purpose of LSWG was to increase physical activity and improve the physical and mental wellbeing of older residents in Laramie, to normalize gardening activities within the community, and to support Laramie's need to promote food security by providing a garden bed for growing vegetables in the community.

## Literature Review

The activity of gardening as well as the nutrition from gardened vegetables has been shown to aid elderly individuals' physical wellness in past studies. A study by Haub et al. (2009)

demonstrated positive associations between gardening, bodily function, and hand functioning. The activity of gardening has also been shown to decrease blood pressure by increasing endorphin production and thus causing blood vessels to dilate (Aditia & Sholihah, 2019). The nutritional components of vegetables can also improve cardiovascular wellness. Vegetables are often high in nitrate which combats high blood pressure or hypoxia disorders by converting the nitrate to nitrite on the tongue when ingested (Wink & Paolucci-, 2008). Based on these findings, LSWG incorporated the planting of vegetables with high nitrate properties, such as dark leafy greens, including kale and bok choy.

*Age-Friendly Laramie* aims to provide a high quality of life for the older individuals within the community and mental wellness is an essential component to a high quality of life. Depression can lead to a decline of cognitive function, suicide, and displeasure in life achievements (Kim et al., 2016). Gardening activities can have positive effects on mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. Emotional satisfaction can occur from gardening activities regardless of age when vegetables are grown successfully thus decreasing the production of cortisol, commonly called the “stress hormone”(Aditia & Sholihah, 2019). Gardening activities can be used as leisure time for older individuals to inventory their thoughts and emotions or even brush aside any thoughts or emotions for a while. Kim et al. (2016) attested to the benefits of gardening towards depression with their study that evaluated elderly women that gardened in community centers in South Korea. The study resulted in increased symptoms and indications of depression for the control group who did not garden compared to the experimental group who gardened in their community center and did not increase their depression scores (Kim et al., 2016). This study indicates that depression can be maintained significantly from gardening interventions. However, more research on depression and gardening is essential for deciphering if gardening activities can moderate depressive symptoms. Gardening can also assist in the maintenance of anxiety. Research by Hassan et al. (2018) supports the assertion that horticulture is effective as a therapy to address anxiety. They found that anxiety levels of elderly women were diminished after a 15-minute plant activity as measured using a State-Trait Anxiety Inventory method. LSWG hopes to benefit the health of older adults in the community with a form of horticultural therapy.

Along with physical and mental benefits from gardening and eating fresh, home-grown foods, there are also possible social benefits such as increased social participation of older adults. For LSWG specifically, the gathering of *Eppson Center* patrons to organize and maintain the community garden beds will give older participants opportunities to socialize with individuals of all ages within the community. Social Participation is a main *Age-Friendly Laramie* domain of livability and age-friendliness in the community (Steinman et al., 2020). Laramie's elderly citizens need an outlet for social interactions, especially multi-generationally. Multigenerational socialization can have positive effects on older adults' attitudes and mental well-being. One patron of the *Eppson Center* stated, "After my husband left it was hard to find things to do outside of my house and so it was fun to be a part of a project (LSWG) with this community. I most certainly would love to be a part of this project again next season". This patron expresses how gardening was a social experience that allowed her to make connections in the community. Baschiera et al. (2018) studied socialization with gardening by their intergenerational program in Italy where adolescents visited older adults in the community. This program benefited older adults by boosting their self-esteem and by breaking the continuous social exclusion of older adults. LSWG plans to encourage multigenerational relationships by involving various student groups at the *University of Wyoming* in activities with the patrons of the *Eppson Center*.

An additional social issue that was addressed by this project is food insecurity in Wyoming. In 2019, it was determined that Albany County had the highest rate of food insecurity in the state. Nearly 17% of Albany County's population is insecure about their ability to provide food for their families (Achs, 2019). Much of Laramie's food insecurity may be explained by the high number of college-aged students who reside in the city; nevertheless, significant numbers of older adults also experience food insecurity. There are organizations in Laramie that provide food to those in need such as *Laramie Interfaith*, *Feeding Laramie Valley*, *Laramie Soup Kitchen*, and the *Eppson Center for Seniors* congregate and home delivered meals program. LSWG can be yet another small resource for those in need of food sources.

### **Project Process**

The scheme for this community garden project was initiated with a research project design originally. Collaboration between Dr. Bernard A. Steinman, Dr. Karagh Brummond, and honors student, Maraia Rubin, led to an International Review Board (IRB) proposal submission

for a garden project designed to measure the effect of gardening on older adults' physical, mental, and social well-being. The plan of this research study was to have garden beds at various older adult homes in Laramie, WY. The older adults with garden beds would be visited by college students who would socialize with the older adults and aid in the maintenance of the garden beds. The older adults would be expected to do the upkeep of the garden beds.

Ultimately, this research project seemed implausible to complete as an undergraduate research project and would have been more attainable if the project were at the graduate level. The recommended changes by the IRB would have drastically extended the timeline of the project as well as altered the original purpose of the study. Therefore, new garden project ideas were synthesized upon communication with the *Eppson Center* staff. *The Eppson Center* staff were enthusiastic about the addition of gardening activities to the facility. The facility has another gardening group called the Gardening Grandmas who maintain the potting plants around the premises. However, the *Eppson Center* had never had garden beds on the property. The *Eppson Center* decided to collaborate with this Honor's Capstone project in order to cultivate a space and group of individuals geared towards gardening for older adults. The *Eppson Center Garden Committee* was established as a group of patrons and community members that meet regularly to plan and sustain the LSWG project at the *Eppson Center*.

The initial step of planning the project was determining the layout and building of the raised garden beds. Information and advice about design and horticulture were acquired from a variety of individuals in the community. *The Laramie Garden Club* was a contributor to the project as they gathered a group of gardening mentors to meet with the LSWG group and provided their insight on types of vegetables, best practices for growing vegetables, and designs for garden beds. This organization also donated an assortment of vegetable and herb plant starters to the project at the beginning of the planting season. Staff at the *Innovation Wyrkshop* at the *University of Wyoming* were also resources throughout this project. A member of this staff shared her raised garden bed design which was ultimately the design that was utilized in the ECS project. The design that was utilized is a raised garden bed that is three feet tall, four feet in length, and 2 feet in width (Attachment 2).

In November of 2021, an Honor's Capstone Grant was awarded to the project which provided funding for the materials for building and upkeeping the garden beds. This grant was

utilized to purchase lumber, hardware, and sheet metal for the three-foot raised garden beds. *Eppson Center* patrons were recruited for the building of these garden beds and the build phase started in March of 2022. Two three-foot beds were built for the gardens and two three-foot assembled beds were purchased from Tractor Supply. John Jansen, patron of the *Eppson Center*, built two other raised garden beds entirely out of pallet wood. Therefore, in total six raised garden beds were added to the space at the *Eppson Center*.

On June 5<sup>th</sup>, the *Eppson Center* gardens planting event was held for the start of the gardening season. Patrons of the *Eppson Center* arrived at the outdoor gardening space and each patron helped plant seeds and seedlings in the assembled raised garden beds. This event was marketed in the *Eppson Center* Newsletter by the Activities Director (Attachment 4) as well as in the Laramie Boomerang and the *This is Laramie* website (Attachment 3). The purpose of this event was to bring awareness to the groundbreaking of the garden beds by the Laramie community, to allow the patrons to socialize over gardening, and to start the gardening season off for the six raised beds.

A consistent and regular meeting schedule was arranged for the *Eppson Center Garden Committee* whereby the patrons could meet each week and discuss updates and maintenance of the garden beds. Also, a watering schedule was established so that multiple patrons could water the gardens on different days of the week. The watering, pruning, and harvesting of the garden vegetables and herbs were completed by *Eppson Center* patrons and other community members. Patrons of the *Eppson Center* also utilized the basil harvested from the raised beds to make pesto gnocchi. Harvested carrots, tomatoes, and kale were used to create a mixed salad. The salad and gnocchi were given to the *Eppson Center* staff as a thank-you for their hard work and collaboration.

### **Sustaining the Garden: Future Visions**

This project is intended to be sustainable for many gardening seasons to come. Fence posts were purchased with Honor's Capstone Grant funding so that a fence can be installed around the garden beds in the spring of 2023. *The Eppson Center Garden Committee* hopes to cultivate the gardening space so that it can beautify the *Eppson Center* property and encourage the enjoyment of the plants. Plans for this gardening space include incorporating a painted mural

on the white wall of the transportation garage on the north side of the garden beds. *The Laramie Mural Project* or art students in the *UW Honor's College* could partner with LSWG in future years to create the mural. *The Eppson Center* also gifted LSWG with a bus that can be utilized as storage for gardening tools or can be converted into a greenhouse for plant production in the winter and spring months. Moving the bus to the garden space and transforming the bus into a greenhouse will be on the *Eppson Center Garden Committee's* prospective agenda. Collaboration with students at *WyoTech* college will be encouraged in future years for the transformation process of the bus into a greenhouse.

The Laramie Senior Wellness Gardens project can be expanded in subsequent years by adding more locations of garden beds. For example, Edgewood Spring Winds assisted living facility is interested in holding garden beds on their property for the Spring 2023 gardening season. Placing garden beds in more locations around Laramie can allow older adults in the community more access to gardening activities within their daily life.

### **Final Deliverable Analysis**

For the final deliverable of this Honor's Capstone project, a photo board collage (Attachment 1) of photographs taken was chosen during the planning, building, planting, and maintenance phases of the community garden project. I have always enjoyed photography as an artistic outlet from my science-focused major. It seemed presumable that a photo board could accurately capture the significance of the LSWG project through photographs of *Eppson Center* patrons and the elements of the gardening process. Also, I plan to print out the photo board and gift it to *the Eppson Center for Seniors* so that they can present the photo board on the walls of the facility. The hanging of the photo board in *the Eppson Center* can promote the encouragement of more seniors to join the *Eppson Center Garden Committee*. Furthermore, the patrons and staff can be reminded of the memories and connections made while working on the garden beds.

Photos on the final deliverable include images of patrons standing to assemble and paint the garden beds during the building phase. These images display the promotion of physical health and exercise since the pictured older adults are outside and active while building the beds. There are also a couple of photos of the older adults standing and kneeling while planting and

harvesting vegetables. These images also capture the project's encouragement of physical health since older adults are having to utilize fine muscle movements in their hands as well as bigger muscle groups in their legs and trunk when standing or kneeling during gardening. One photo at the bottom center of the photo board shows Lucille Norwood, an *Eppson Center* patron, and me at the LSWG booth at the *Laramie Home and Garden show*. Laramie Senior Wellness Gardens attended the Home and Garden show in April of 2022 to promote the *Eppson Center* garden project to the Laramie gardening community as well as to raise money for funding the project. This photo was also placed on the photo board since it illustrates the multigenerational relationships that were formed during this project. There is another photo to the right of this photo that presents Dr. Karagh Brummond next to Marian Showacre as they both plant seeds at the gardening event on June 6<sup>th</sup>. This photo also presents multigenerational connections that are being formed over a gardening activity since the two women spent the afternoon chatting while planting seeds. There is a photo in the center of the photo board that exhibits a variety of individuals meeting in the Board Room of the *Eppson Center* with Tammy Comer, *Eppson Center* Director, to plan the layout and logistics of the gardening project. This photo was of one of the *Eppson Center Garden Committee* meetings and illustrates the teamwork of multiple organizations and individuals in the Laramie community working towards incorporating public gardens into the city. In the lefthand upper corner of the photo board collage, there are multiple photos of the crops that were grown from the *Eppson Center* gardens. There is also a photo of Nancy Sindelar at home creating a pesto gnocchi dish out of ingredients from the *Eppson Center* gardens. These photos support the nutritional purpose of the LSWG project. The older adult patrons of the *Eppson Center* utilized the freshly harvested and nutrient-dense vegetables and herbs from the community garden in their home-cooked meals. The remaining pictures of older adults paired up at the *Eppson Center* gardens display the socialization of patrons while participating in the activity of gardening. These older adults often had meaningful conversations while simultaneously building beds, planting seeds, or harvesting vegetables.

### **Conclusion**

This Honor's Capstone project promoted my professional and academic development by strengthening my skills in project management, research, aging studies, and networking. I will be graduating with a Physiology major and minors in Aging Studies and Honors. Although this

project was not confined to studying physiological processes, I learned about a plethora of physiological processes involved in healthy aging. This LSWG project contributed to the understanding of issues relating to aging which aligns with my aging minor. Through this Honor's Capstone and my aging minor, I have realized my passion for working with and advocating for older adults. This realization has shaped my recent career choices as I aspire to go to graduate school for Health Services Administration with a concentration in Geriatric Care Systems. Along the journey of my Honor's Capstone, I also connected with a multitude of different professionals. I met with the *Laramie Garden Club* president and members, *Eppson Center* staff, *Honors College* professors, staff at the *UW Innovation Wyrkshop*, and many others. One individual I met through this project was Jeff Clark, manager of the *Wyoming Department of Health-- Aging Division*. Mr. Clark provided advice on the garden bed design since he is an avid gardener. Meeting Jeff led me to multiple career opportunities such as an internship with the *Wyoming Department of Health-- Aging Division*. After my internship, I accepted a full-time position as a Health Program Specialist with the Aging Division. Therefore, my current job opportunity would have never happened without the networking I did for this Honor's Capstone. There were quite a few setbacks during the process of this project such as the IRB review feedback which altered the direction of this Honor's Capstone. I practiced critical thinking about how to properly accomplish a project and how to direct others to do the same. I also learned how to manage difficult situations with individuals working together but having opposite visions and opinions. For example, when choosing the type of soil to use in the beds, there was a variety of differing opinions on this matter within the *Eppson Center Garden Committee*, and I had to find a way to compromise so that everyone on the committee felt as though their opinion was valued. This was great practice for situations that may occur in the healthcare field within my future career. Overall, I am glad that I had the opportunity to complete this Honor's Capstone since the gardening project has genuinely enhanced my personal, professional, and academic well-being.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my faculty advisors, Dr. Bernard Steinman and Dr. Karagh Brummond, for their commitment to this project and their plethora of guidance and feedback. I would like to acknowledge the *Eppson Center for Seniors* for partnering with this project to better their patron's lives. I want to acknowledge all the patrons that joined the efforts of this

community garden project. Thank you to the *Laramie Garden Club* who contributed their advice from the advisory committee and donated their vegetable bedding plants and seeds from their plant sale. I have immense gratitude for the *University of Wyoming Honors College* for this Capstone opportunity and for disbursing the Honor's Capstone Grant to this project. Thank you to *Maker's Space Innovation Wyrkshop* for sharing your raised garden bed design ideas and for taking the time to work with LSWG. Finally, I would like to acknowledge *Age-Friendly Laramie* for collaborating with the LSWG project and teaching me about aging in the Laramie community.

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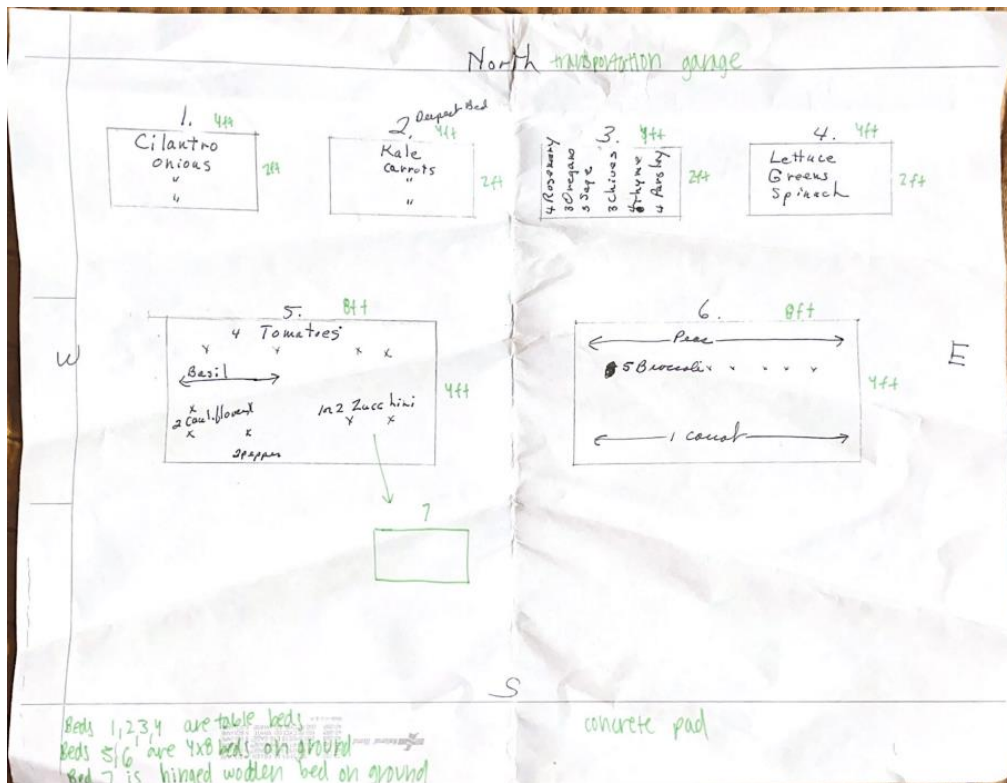
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## Appendix

### Attachment 1: Laramie Senior Wellness Gardens Photo Board



### Attachment 2: Garden Bed Design and Layout



Attachment 3: This is Laramie News Article

## THIS IS LARAMIE



COMMUNITY EVENTS

COMMUNITY NEWS

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

ABOUT US



# Raised Garden Beds Coming to the Eppson Center for Seniors this Summer

**May 17, 2022** by *This Is Laramie Staff*

<https://thisislaramie.com/2022/05/17/raised-garden-beds-coming-to-the-eppson-center-for-seniors-this-summer/>

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12/14/22, 3:28 PM

Raised Garden Beds Coming to the Eppson Center for Seniors this Summer – This Is Laramie

Gardening can provide a plethora of benefits for individuals of all ages. However, Laramie Senior Wellness Gardens hopes to help older adults in the Laramie community by adding raised garden beds to the Eppson Center for Seniors this spring. The Eppson Center is so excited to embrace gardening as it will beautify the space and is a great form of physical activity and socialization. The addition of these garden beds is directed by an Honors student at the University of Wyoming named Maraia Rubin. Maraia is majoring in Physiology with a minor in Aging and is so excited to bring these gardens to life in the heart of Laramie. Dr. Bernard Steinman, Dr. Karagh Brummond, Age-Friendly Laramie, and volunteer John Jansen are also helping to make these gardens possible.

The garden beds will be located outside the Eppson Center building on the west side by the transportation garages. There will be around six raised garden beds that will grow vegetables and herbs for the Eppson Center kitchen and home delivered meal services.

On Monday June 6th at 10am the Eppson Center will be holding a planting event at the Eppson Center building on the outdoor west side. They are looking for seniors to help with planting seeds and seedlings in the garden beds. All gardening skill levels are welcome to join. Gardening gloves and tools will be provided at the event. The Eppson Center asks participants to wear clothes that can get dirty. No prior sign-up is required, just show up with your best green thumb!

If you have any questions, feel free to contact Maraia

<https://thisislaramie.com/2022/05/17/raised-garden-beds-coming-to-the-eppson-center-for-seniors-this-summer/>

- September 2020
- August 2020
- July 2020
- June 2020
- May 2020
- April 2020
- March 2020
- February 2020
- January 2020
- December 2019
- November 2019
- October 2019

**CATEGORIES**

- A Slice of Laramie
- Community Events
- Community News
- Featured Property Listings
- Governor Bulletins
- Job Postings
- Laramie Lifestyle
- Laramie Weather
- Local Business Highlights
- Local Photos & Videos
- Movie Reviews
- Only In Laramie
- Pet Of The Week

3/5

## Laramie Senior Wellness Gardens



**Gardens will be coming to the outdoor spaces of the Eppson Center this spring/summer!** The garden beds will be raised and will contain plenty of veggies and herbs that can be enjoyed by everyone. The addition of these beds has been in the works for a while and will be directed by an Honors student at the University of Wyoming named **Maraia Rubin**. Maraia is majoring in Physiology with a minor in Aging and is so excited to bring these gardens to life in the heart of Laramie. Dr. Bernard Steinman, Dr. Karaugh Brummond, and volunteer John Jansen are also helping to make these gardens possible. There will be plenty of activities and events surrounding these garden beds during this summer. You might even see these veggies and herbs in meals made by the Eppson Center Kitchen! We are so excited to have gardening a part of the Eppson Center as it will beautify our space and is a great form of physical activity and socialization. Keep your eye out for future events regarding the gardens. **If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to Maraia at [Mrubin1@uwyo.edu](mailto:Mrubin1@uwyo.edu).**



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Dept. 3226 • 1200 E. University Avenue • Laramie, WY 82071  
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Laramie WY 82070  
*City, state, zip code*

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*Sign full name*

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509 S. Spruce Street

*Street or box number*

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Laramie, WY 82072

*City, state, zip code*

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**Area(s) of Study:** Family and Consumer Science

**Home Town:** Laramie, WY

**E-mail address:** bsteinm1@uwyo.edu



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\* If under the age of 18, signature of a parent or legal guardian is required to participate.

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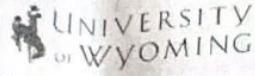
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 1. Cheryl A. Fiegener 25  
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 other \_\_\_\_\_

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