

# The Practice and Promotion Pathways of Age-Friendly Communities in Chengdu City: A Case Study of Gaojia Community, Dafeng Sub-district, Xindu District

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**Abstract:** As the aging process accelerates, the issue of elderly care is receiving increasing attention, among which the construction of age-friendly communities has improved China's elderly care system. The article first combs through the concept of age-friendly communities and the theoretical connotations of constructing age-friendly communities both domestically and internationally. Through research on the Gaojia Community in Dafeng Sub-district, Xindu District, Chengdu, which was rated as an age-friendly community in 2021, it was found that the development path of Gaojia Community as an age-friendly community is as follows: leading with culture to create a community, fostering a harmonious and supportive atmosphere for the elderly; being good at utilizing surrounding resources to build a base for conveying concepts; improving the environment with both soft and hard aspects, focusing on creating spaces suitable for the elderly; exploring the application of digital devices to identify needs and provide precise assistance to the elderly; closely focusing on aging in place, exploring and innovating governance models; and linking various stakeholders to emphasize participation, helping to build a shared community.

**Keywords:** Age-friendly communities; Elderly services; Aging in place

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## 1. Introduction

As the global aging issue becomes increasingly severe, the construction of age-friendly communities has become a hot topic of research<sup>[1]</sup>. By the end of 2021, the population of people aged 60 and above in China reached 267 million, accounting for 18.9% of the total population; the registered elderly population in Chengdu reached 3.208 million, accounting for 20.61%, both higher than the national average. Aging is a significant challenge faced by China, with most elderly people preferring to age in place, which raises higher demands for community facilities

and services suitable for the elderly <sup>[2]</sup>. In 2005, the 18th IAGG World Conference proposed the initiative for age-friendly cities, and the World Health Organization subsequently promoted the global age-friendly cities project. From 2006 to 2007, opinions from elderly people in 33 cities worldwide were collected to formulate the “Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide”, which promotes the development of distinctive age-friendly policies and diverse city models in various countries. By September 2018, the number of members in the global age-friendly cities and communities network had increased from 11 to 760. In recent years, age-friendly communities have become a new trend in aging policies, aiming to meet the community service needs of the elderly and address the challenges of aging. In 2017, China issued a notice requiring the improvement of evaluation standards for the construction of age-friendly living environments and launched demonstration actions for the construction of “age-friendly cities” and “age-friendly communities.” Subsequently, places such as Shanghai and Zhejiang have introduced relevant policy plans. In 2020, China initiated the creation of age-friendly communities, and from 2021 to 2022, 21 communities in Chengdu were rated as national model age-friendly communities.

## 2. The concept of age-friendly communities and its theoretical connotations

Currently, there is no unified terminology for “age-friendly communities” both domestically and internationally, with common terms including “age-appropriate communities”, “elderly-adapted communities”, “senior-friendly communities”, “retirement communities”, and “all-age communities”, among others <sup>[3]</sup>. Scholars such as Menec VH believe that the “AdvantAge Initiative”, launched at the end of the 20th century, defines an age-friendly community as one that meets four objectives: (1) fulfilling basic needs (such as housing, safety, and service information); (2) promoting social and civic engagement; (3) striving to improve physical and mental health and well-being; (4) maximizing the independence of frail and disabled individuals by providing accessible transportation and support for families and other caregivers <sup>[4-8]</sup>. In 2000, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) defined it as a community that includes affordable suitable housing, comprehensive community functions and services, and a variety of transportation options <sup>[9]</sup>. The Age-Friendly Communities (AFC) initiative believes that its purpose is to promote the physical and psychosocial health of elderly residents and improve the overall quality of life in the community, a place where the elderly actively participate, are valued and supported, and where the infrastructure and services can effectively meet the needs of the elderly <sup>[9]</sup>. In 2007, the World Health Organization defined it as a community that improves the quality of life for the elderly by providing health care, social participation, and safety services and encourages the realization of active aging <sup>[11]</sup>.

Scholars such as Liebig P believe that age-friendly communities make local resources more “user-friendly” for the elderly, thereby maximizing the benefits that services, programs, policies, and facilities provide to the elderly and their families through convenience and support. Murray suggests that age-friendly communities should not only be suitable for the elderly but should cater to all age groups <sup>[12]</sup>. Some domestic scholars believe that the concept of “age-friendly communities” is a response to the elderly’s preference for “aging in place.” Similarly, domestic scholars such as Li Xiaoyun also believe that age-friendly communities are not just friendly to the elderly but are friendly to all ages <sup>[13-14]</sup>. Cao Fengjuan et al. argue that under the influence of the theory of active aging, age-friendly communities emphasize the value creation and identity recognition of the elderly in the process of social development, encouraging the elderly to fully utilize their potential and autonomy, and actively participate in the community <sup>[15]</sup>. This is not only friendly to the elderly but also a full-age-friendly community that promotes intergenerational harmony and interaction. The World Health Organization, in its publication “Global Age-

friendly Cities: A Guide”, has identified three major aspects of age-friendly cities (physical environment of the city; sociocultural environment; health, social environment, and services) and eight themes (outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, community participation and employment, communication and information, community support and health services), and the creation of age-friendly communities mainly revolves around these aspects and themes.

### **3. Development pathways for Gaojia community in Xindu district**

Gaojia Community is located in Dafeng Sub-district, Xindu District, Chengdu, and is one of the 13 rural communities. It covers an area of about 1.7 square kilometers and includes 7 residential groups. With the inclusion of the population from outside, the total population of the community is about 45,000 people, among whom there are 2,200 people aged 60 and above, accounting for more than 22% of the total population, and about 70 people aged 80 and above. In 2021, Gaojia Community was named a “National Model Age-Friendly Community in 2021.” During the creation process, Gaojia Community fully leveraged its cultural heritage advantages, integrated resources, encouraged resident participation and explored a creation model with distinctive Gaojia cultural characteristics.

#### **3.1. Culture leads community creation to create a harmonious elderly-friendly atmosphere**

During its development, the Gaojia community has undergone several territorial integrations. To promote effective integration between the local residents and the incoming population, the Gaojia community has rooted itself in the local “home” culture, adopting the cultural theme of “Noble and Upright, Family Full of Great Love.” Based on Limin Road, it has created a themed street called “The Way Home”, encouraging mutual assistance among community residents to build a warm and friendly community atmosphere and a culture of respect for the elderly. The “home” culture is integrated into the lives of community residents through distinctive activities and environmental design.

Furthermore, the community has established a basic information database and a weekly meeting system. In response to the demands of the public, it assigns specific people, responsibilities, and timelines to ensure that every matter is addressed. For instance, in the Greenland City residential area, where the proportion of non-local residents reaches 76.6%, the community has organized “Sunshine Afternoon Tea” and other ice-breaking activities, established public spaces such as mobile vegetable gardens and fitness areas, and incubated self-organizations like “Baking Time” to create a “24/7, all-age, doorstep” social space, helping residents to break down barriers.

#### **3.2. Skilled use of surrounding resources to build platforms and convey concepts**

Gaojia community fully leverages its spatial advantage of being close to the sports venues. It sets up promotional slogans along the streets and on exterior walls, establishes cultural stations, and creates “sports” and “health” themed streets to convey the concepts of “Everyone should exercise” and a healthy, positive lifestyle to residents. In addition, the Gaojia community makes good use of its spacious area to create open public activity spaces. For instance, a square is built near the kindergarten, where children can play after school. At the same time, facilities such as basketball courts and ping-pong tables provide opportunities and spaces for leisure and entertainment for people of all age groups.

In terms of platform integration, the practice station consolidates various resources and coordinates efforts

from all sides to set up functional rooms such as a convenience service room, multifunctional meeting room, dance room, children's area, calligraphy and painting room, cultural and creative area, book pavilion, and outdoor activity square. It constructs a comprehensive civilized practice platform that integrates educational services, health and wellness, theoretical propaganda, peace and rule of law, fitness and sports, community convenience, science popularization, and cultural services.

### **3.3. Combining soft and hard measures to improve the environment, focusing on creating spaces suitable for the elderly**

In recent years, the community has established a home-based elderly care service center, built a day-care center, a cultural activity square, and a health walkway. It has also set up elderly activity rooms, a library, cultural and artistic activity rooms, and a card room, and established eight community elderly cultural and sports teams such as Tai Chi and square dancing, carrying out a variety of colorful leisure activities. At the same time, for special elderly people such as the elderly and those with disabilities, the community actively carries out geriatric transformation. It regularly visits their homes every month to conduct safety inspections of water, electricity, and gas facilities and provides long-term health education, safety training, legal publicity, and other educational activities for the elderly. It shows concern, warmth, and comfort to the elderly, and guides them to contribute their remaining energy to grassroots governance, ensuring that the elderly are well cared for, happy, and active.

Gaojia community uses rest chairs, safety handrails, and barrier-free walkways to connect transportation services and create a safe and convenient environment for the elderly to go out. For example, on the riverside street of Gaojia community, there is a love seat every 10 meters, with the slogan "Rest if you're tired" on the seat, ensuring convenient and comfortable travel for the elderly.

### **3.4. Exploring the application of digital devices to identify needs and provide precise assistance to the elderly**

Gaojia community actively explores the application of smart elderly care service systems. The elderly wear monitoring bracelets and the system's backend monitors health information such as blood pressure, heart rate, and blood sugar in real-time, synchronizing the information to the family members' mobile phones. This provides comprehensive monitoring of the elderly's health status, enabling timely response to emergencies. At the same time, the community dispatches volunteers to help the elderly learn to use smart devices.

The community establishes a "1 + 1" pairing volunteer service database for the elderly, creating service need files for the elderly they serve. Through these need files, volunteers organize "one-on-one" home visits for elderly people who are alone and elderly families who have lost their only child, among others. The service content includes: cooking and cleaning in the home, checking home safety, measuring blood pressure and blood lipids, shopping on behalf, daily companionship, psychological comfort, and spiritual care. For example, in the homes of elderly people living alone, younger volunteers accompany them in chatting and listening to their hearts, reducing their sense of loneliness and helping them realize their personal value after retirement.

### **3.5. Categorizing volunteer teams and incentivizing resident participation with "hours"**

Led by resident leaders, the community has developed a volunteer force of over 400 people. Currently, the community has organized 12 volunteer teams, each with its own distinctive flag and corresponding service content, such as the "Old Friends" Volunteer Service Team and the "Rhythm" Service Team. Community residents



can choose to join the team that aligns with their strengths and interests. Through neighborhood mutual assistance and interaction, the community has encouraged more nearby volunteers who are willing to participate in “younger serving older” volunteer services. This pairing of younger volunteers with older adults promotes the younger elderly to stay active and engaged in volunteer work while ensuring that the older elderly are well cared for through the services they receive. To date, the community has “paired” 49 couples, an increase from the initial 20 pairs.

In addition, the community has established a “Time Bank” system, which provides precise records of service hours, content, and feedback for volunteers after their service is completed. Residents can exchange accumulated service hours for necessities such as rice, flour, and oil, or enjoy free volunteer services provided by others. The “Time Bank” system has been implemented in the Gaojia Community for six years and has effectively motivated residents to participate actively.

Community Staff A: “The community has grown from just over ten volunteers to more than 400 now. Many young people and elderly individuals are joining our volunteer ranks, making our volunteer team quite large. During the pandemic, the volunteers were very enthusiastic, and afterward, the community issued certificates of honor and prizes to residents who participated in volunteer services.”

Resident B: “I mainly work shifts at the Gaojia Community Service Center. We have people taking turns, so the working hours are relatively flexible. As a volunteer, there is no salary, but the community records the volunteer hours in the “Time Bank.” This credit can be used to exchange for things like rice, flour, and oil. When I’m older, I will also be able to enjoy volunteer services provided by other elderly people.” (The information is sourced from interviews conducted during the research period.)

### **3.6. Closely focusing on aging in place to explore innovative governance models**

In practice, the Gaojia community has gradually explored a “2+4+N” elderly service model. This model begins with the development of both software and hardware aspects as the foundation, then constructs a four-linkage operation mechanism that can achieve protection, collaboration, evaluation, and supervision. Finally, with the support of infrastructure construction and operational mechanisms, the community leverages its advantageous resources, including the enthusiasm of the elderly to participate in community activities, the development and vitality of community self-organizations, the continuous provision of community social worker services, and the harmonious neighborhood relationships among community residents. This encourages the elderly in the community to actively participate in a variety of community resident activities, forming a “2+4+N” implementation model.

Specifically, under the coordinated leadership and converging role of the community’s “large Party committee”, focusing on “aging in place”, the community relies on the Party-mass service center, community day-care center, neighborhood spaces in residential areas, and public spaces in building corridors, totaling more than 2,500 square meters of infrastructure, to build service platforms. At the same time, through the linkage of the community, social organizations, and various social forces, multiple elderly service teams are established. This fully connects and integrates the strengths of various parties, collects and classifies service needs, builds linkage platforms and collaboration mechanisms, combines activities with care, and provides targeted services. This covers approximately 5,000 residents, gradually improving the quality of life for the elderly in the community.

### 3.7. Collaborative entities focus on participation to aid in shared community construction

Under the concept of a “shared community”, the Gaojia community actively explores localized models, linking resources from dozens of social enterprises such as Yuanrong Health and Wellness Studio, Guicheng Rural Bank, Ultimate Dance, and Zhijia Academy. They have established a “neighborhood station” that integrates multiple functions such as learning and leisure. The station includes “two rooms, two stations, and one center”: a dispute resolution room, a grid worker studio, a convenience service station, a social organization workstation, and a party-mass activity center. It also features several shared functional areas, such as a library, meeting room, and children’s area, aiming to provide residents with precise, close-to-home, and considerate convenience services. During the construction of the neighborhood station, community workers and resident leaders fully mobilized the broad community members to contribute ideas and suggestions for the station’s development. In the subsequent operation, this approach will be continued, gradually transferring the management of the space to the residents, enhancing their capabilities, and truly achieving co-governance and sharing.

### Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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