

From Our Readers

AGING IN PLACE: MADE EASIER BY A VILLAGE NETWORK

by Owen R Houghton

A lot has been said about aging in place in the media—I recently heard an NPR program on the growing need for geriatric care, and read a USA Today article warning of the pressures on social services from the 79 million Baby Boomers turning 65.

I found an article by Howard Gleckman, a resident fellow at the Urban Institute, author of *"Caring For Our Parents"* and a frequent writer and speaker on long-term care issues to be most interesting. Entitled *"Aging In Place Is Not So Easy"*, he indicates that while 'aging in place' is the popular rallying cry in the senior community, living at home is not so easy.

Gleckman asserts that the transition from home to assisted living facilities or nursing homes is driven more by social issues than medical concerns, citing a "lack of qualified caregivers, an absence of basic services such as

transportation, no access to appropriate housing, and loneliness" as primary reasons for leaving one's home.

However, he also suggests that while assisted living and nursing home care may still be necessary for those with no families or those suffering from severe dementia, "if we work at it, we can postpone the transition for months or even years. It is worth trying."

The AARP estimates that 95% of folks over 80 stay in place. Almost everyone could receive the care they need at home, even if they suffer from multiple chronic illnesses, but lack of knowledge and resources often lead to a "give-up" decision by elders and family.

Last fall I attended a conference in Washington, D.C. sponsored by Beacon Hill Village with assistance from the Village to Village Network. The concept being promoted was simple and designed to make aging in place more like it was "back in the day".

One of the speakers from the federal Agency on Aging (AOA) suggested that "staying where I am" is not an aging issue but a "livability issue". The grass roots village movement is at the core of our need to live life as successfully as possible. Folks have come to recognize that their options to remain at home as long as possible increase if they pool their resources and come together to personalize, customize and humanize home and community based services. This is the essence of the village movement which is

sweeping the country. May this be so for all of us.

As one of the founders of an Eastern Monadnock answer to the aging in place trend, I participated in the celebration of the opening of Monadnock at Home in September, remarking that it was very appropriate to be celebrating at the Peterborough Historical Society since Monadnock at Home is part of a village movement which is sweeping the country.

Under the direction of a non-profit Board and Executive Director, the cooperative provides access to a wide range of prescreened providers, transportation to appointments and once-a-week grocery trips, help with simple maintenance or basic technical problems, social and educational opportunities, safety review of the home, telephone check-ins, and volunteer opportunities.

Monadnock at Home members now have another form of long term care insurance which gives confidence and peace of mind to combat the fears and struggles of remaining at home as long as possible. The opportunities to "share the caring" in the member volunteer network adds value to this aging wellness model. More information may be found at www.monadnockathome.org

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