



Mind: Communities by Design – Not Default – Part 1

Body: Positive Thoughts and Longevity

Spirit: A Great Discovery

Communities by Design–Not Default–Part 1



There is much talk about “aging in place of choice.” The key word is choice. In the Report on the State of Public Health in Canada, our Chief Public Health Officer offered this definition: *“Aging in place of choice is the ability of individuals to choose to live in their own communities for as long as possible, and to have access to home and community services that will support this ability.”*

Why do you live where you live?

Perhaps your choice is based on:

- lifestyle,
- access to amenities, commercial and professional services,
- walkability,
- closeness to family and friends,
- proximity to schools, hospitals, and your place of worship.

Some people thrive on the energy of downtown, activity and people, while others need their back door to open into the peace and tranquility of the great outdoors.

Regardless of the reasons, we know that how we live is directly related to where we live.

It’s the ‘how’ that impacts and informs our quality of life. This principle remains true as we transition through all our life stages. Where, why, and how may be complicated when partners want different things – especially in later years. I witnessed this personally and first-hand with Mary and John. They have been married for 60 years. Together they built a successful family business, and John was unyielding about continuing to live in their large and stunning home overlooking a breathtaking ocean view. Their adult children had taken over the day-to-day demands of the business. Every morning though, John established himself at the kitchen table, reviewed and signed-off on business work quotes, and would drink in the view as he still navigated the direction for the family business. This was a fitting reward for all their years of building and sacrifice.

Mary, on the other hand, was living in a gilded prison. She was living with age-related macular degeneration and advanced arthritis. Mary’s lack of vision coupled with mobility challenges now prevented her from continuing to take care of the business office. She was no longer able to enjoy even recreational reading. Each day, she sat at the kitchen table, watching her husband manage business papers, unable to contribute in a way that provided her traditional sense of influence and value. She needed to be around people. She needed to be in-service.

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She was isolated and lonely, and suffered in silence.

Too often, we think in terms of ‘either/or’ instead of ‘this/and.’

It would be easy to reduce the options to two binary choices – one favoring John and another favoring Mary. But what if the possibilities were more wide-ranging than that? Could we look at these situations and consider ‘this/and’ options that would allow John and Mary to remain in their home while optimizing Mary’s need to be engaged, connected and involved in her community? If this were a situation within your own family, how would you help John and Mary explore their alternatives?

With our aging demographic, communities are increasingly promoting innovative ways to keep our lifestyle options rich and rewarding. Are you familiar with the programs and services available in your community? Are there gaps that need solutions? Are there opportunities for engagement at all stages of our lives? Are there persons in your neighborhood who are unseen or left behind?

In the next Maturity Matters, we’ll review a sampling of some of these promising approaches. Creating a community we want to ‘age into’ is everybody’s issue. It happens by design – not default. Perhaps there is a need and opportunity in your own back door just waiting to be filled.

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Positive Thoughts and Longevity

A study conducted by Yale School Professor of Public Health, Becca Levy, revealed that persons with a positive attitude toward aging lived on average 7.5 years longer than those who feared aging or viewed it as something that was bad.

Levy believes that positive thinking about aging likely influences lifestyle changes that contribute toward longevity. Good nutritional choices coupled with active and engaged lifestyles may have been strong factors.

Although skeptical at first, Dr. Luigi Ferruci, geriatrician and director of the Baltimore Longitudinal Study on Aging found similar results. Dr. Ferruci’s study found that those with a positive attitude toward aging had less cardiovascular disease, produced less cortisol (often referred to as the stress hormone) and had a lower frequency of dementia. He cautions that while we need to learn more before generalizing these findings to the overall population, the initial indicators are provocative.

A Great Discovery



“The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future by merely changing his attitude.”

Oprah Winfrey