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REINVENTING RETIREMENT: It takes a village

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You've likely heard the old proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child." Societies across the globe have adopted the idea that it takes an entire community of different people interacting with a child in order for them to experience their full growth potential. If you're a parent, you likely agree with this philosophy — as do I. So when I came across an organization called, "Village to Village Network," it really caught my attention.

Back in 2010, this national organization took the idea of a village and reengineered it. Like the old adage, they believe it takes an entire community of people interacting in order for a person to have the best experience, but they're not talking about children. They are focused on our growing population of "older people" (meaning the nearly 10,000 Baby Boomers who are turning 65 every day until 2029).

By their definition, Villages are nonprofit, grassroots, membership organizations that are redefining aging by being a key resource to community members wishing to 'age in place.' They are a social support network for their members that provides services including transportation, technology assistance, running errands, community engagement activities and other important resources crucial to aging interdependently.

the “age-in-place” movement. It started in Boston and has grown to more than 200 open Villages and more than 150 in development in 45 states and the District of Columbia.

So why is this idea spreading across our country? There are likely a multitude of reasons, but let’s take a look at what we know about independence, purpose and socialization.

Independence

No one is ever ready to give up their independence, and yet if we live long enough there comes a time when health or transportation limitations will challenge our ability to maintain it. More often than not, the process of aging simply has a way of forcing people out of their independence. Bottom line, we need each other. People, no matter their age, were designed to be in community with others.

The Village Movement aligns with their members’ choice to “age in a place” (i.e. in their own home), but not at the sake of losing access to people who can help. It keeps members closely connected to their community through the use of supports and tools that members need. It allows members to create their idea of successful aging by their own design.

Purpose

We spend our whole lives looking for purpose and if we’re successful, we find it. While a full-time career may come to an end and life may slow down as we get older, maintaining (or perhaps finding) purpose is equally as important. Research shows that the happiest aging people continue to be mentors, teachers and volunteers. When we continue to improve our physical and mental fitness throughout our later years, we make important strides toward avoiding isolation. We see this today as Baby Boomers are working longer, taking second or third careers, prioritizing hobbies, etc.

The Village Movement creates opportunities for individuals to use their talents. In fact, members play an important role in making an impact and benefiting the overall community of their Village. Should a neighbor in a Village need support, members find purpose by providing services such as transportation, assistance with chores, navigating the health care system, companionship or setting up a computer or smart phone. Members (along with Village partners) are able to use their unique talents to support the Village.

Socialization

Studies show the prevalence of loneliness among people age 60 and older is alarmingly high and lack of relationships (such as friendship) can have negative results on other areas in our life. Dr. Carla M. Perissinotto, a geriatrician at the University of California, San Francisco has said, “The profound effects of loneliness on health and independence are a critical public health problem. In fact, 60% of health outcomes are based on behavioral, socio-economic and environmental factors.” Based on this fact, we can see how independence, purpose and socialization all work hand in hand.

The Village Movement provides members with social activities that minimize isolation and promote interaction and trust within the Village community by matching members who offer their help with members who ask for help when needed.

It has not been my intention to provide an endorsement of the Village to Village Network, but rather to bring to your attention to societal shifts that are taking place. The way organizations and businesses are beginning to think about aging is changing. And Baby Boomers are showing support for organizations like this one.

As a professional, I believe Baby Boomers have considered the facts and decided that this generation (and beyond) deserve something different and they’re making strides toward going after it. That’s a reinvented retirement possibility that I am excited about, and I hope you are as well. Have a safe and happy holiday season and I’ll be back in the New Year!

For more about the age-in-place “Village” movement visit <https://www.aarp.org/home-family/friends-family/info-2017/age-in-place-village-movement-fd.html>.

ed by how Baby Boomers are changing retirement trends and lifestyles in the 21st century. He believes in inspiring his readers by talking less about money and more about reinvented possibilities — particularly when things don't go as planned. He can be reached by emailing thomasakalejta@gmail.com.

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