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A RESIDENTIAL ALTERNATIVE TO INSTITUTIONS FOR OLDER ADULTS LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

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It is often stated that there are “some people who will require an institution”. In the case of older adults the “some people” often refers to those living with dementia.

The lack of appropriate government-funded in-home support tailored to them and their caregiver’s needs prevents them from being able to continue to live in their own homes and communities.

For those currently struggling to maintain an older person with dementia at home, and who are considering institutional placement, there may be another way – small memory care homes and care co-operatives located in ordinary neighborhoods that offer comfortable, personalized accommodation to elders who require this kind of residential support.

“...cooperatives are emerging as an innovative model in the care sector, both as care providers and as employers. This is particularly the case when there is an absence of viable public or other private options” (Waki, 2017). In Japan, there is actually a Japan Older Person’s Co-operative Union that is operated by, and for older people.

Some care cooperatives are multi-purpose in nature providing services as diverse as child care, foster care, mental health support, and support to other disability groups.

Cooperatives of this nature seem to have a broader group of stakeholders involved including service users and their families, governments, and community organizations.

Cooperatives provide benefits for both service users and employees in that they can provide better wages and benefits, as well as promote professionalization and training while formalizing home-based care. Services users and their families are more directly involved in care planning and participate more in the activities of the cooperative. They are democratically included and their input is respected.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If this kind of program is not offered in your community, please share this information with your local municipal and regional councillors, and ask that they consider supporting its development. This is also information that can be shared with local non-profit service providers, religious, union retiree, and other service organizations to see if they would consider similar initiatives in your area.

Memory Lane Home Living Inc. offers this kind of service to individuals living in Richmond Hill and throughout York Region, and this is a model that needs to be expanded across the province.

About Memory Lane Home Living

Memory Lane is a co-operative way of living, based on a European framework entitled “Friends of the Elderly”. It supports older women to live in the community in an ordinary small neighborhood home environment, and encourages friends and family to continue to be actively involved. This is a resident-directed model where those living there and their families are involved in decision making. Residents feel more socially connected and happier living in this kind of environment as opposed to a large, more impersonal long-term care institution.

For a look at a Memory Care home, the photo gallery can be found here:

<https://www.memorylanehomeliving.ca/pages/gallery/house-gallery>

Programs and services like this that promote friendships and reduce social isolation are critical in facilitating older people’s quality of life, health, and well-being, and act as a buffer against depression (Blieszner et al, 2019).

As well as providing a co-operative living experience for women with dementia, Memory Lane Home Living Inc. also provides other programs including:

- A half day for women to socialize with others over a hot lunch;
- Respite care for a day, an evening, or a weekend to allow caregivers a break;
- A walking program;
- Conferences and information.

These kinds of co-housing initiatives are referred to as intentional neighborhoods that promote a sense of community by mixing private and shared spaces while maintaining residents’ independence (Robitaille, 2016). Germany has thousands of these kinds of neighborhood homes and this model exists in many other European countries as well, but almost nowhere else in Ontario.

The Importance of Involvement by Family and Friends

Research has shown that the continued involvement of friends and families in older adults’ lives is very important for their well-being (Luna et al, 2020). Contrast this approach with what occurred in long-term care institutions, where friends and family were barred from seeing their loved ones who were subjected to total isolation during the pandemic which may have contributed to their demise.

Research also supports alternative models of housing that offer independent living and incorporate a sense of purpose, increase reciprocity, and include mutual help, while stressing aging in place (Jolanki, 2021).

The History

Mona Lancaster founded Memory Lane Home Living Inc. to support her own mother, who felt disconnected and lonely in a “large, impersonal setting where person-centered care was not part of the culture of care”, nor was recognition for people with dementia’s continued need for a sense of purpose, and access to the outdoors to enjoy nature. Mona knew that too many people

congregated together create stress for people with dementia. She also recognized that institutional staff members were not interested in family input. She aimed to change all of that, receiving guidance and support from others, including the Alzheimer Society of York Region, and the local community college Gerontology Program.

Sadly Mona's mom passed before this home's completion, but her efforts are now benefiting others.

Programs like this deserve public support. Together we can advocate for more residential services of this nature across Ontario with elected officials and with non-profit service providers.

Those wishing to know more about Memory Lane Home Living Inc. can visit their website at: [Memory Lane Home Living Inc. | Dementia Care Home Richmond Hill ON](#)

Or contact them at:

905-237-1419 or mlliving14@gmail.com Monday to Saturday 9-5 PM

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