



SENIORS FOR SOCIAL ACTION (ONTARIO)

Editorial

Keeping Care in Our Communities

April 24, 2024

As we age, we frequently become less mobile, and less willing to explore, and we begin to lose friends and colleagues; and become prone to social isolation – processes that can affect our sense of purpose and well-being. This is especially so for individuals who live alone and do not have a partner to share their daily events.

While the aging-at-home movement attempts to increase support for older adults, it often fails to provide the engaging processes that we all desire. As a result, we observe individuals prematurely enter institutional long-term care facilities that further erode their autonomy and independence.

However, there are ways to structure our communities so that individuals maintain the involvement and engagement with others while receiving the instrumental support required.

The Abbeyfield Model

One of these ways is the Abbeyfield model. Abbeyfield was started in England in the 1950s by Major Carr-Gomm, a social reformer who started a non-profit society caring for the lonely elderly. His vision was “providing support and companionship, in an ordinary house in an ordinary street, returning to the community instead of moving away from it, retaining their independence and privacy, and being part of a family where regular activities occur and everyone is invited”. He set out to establish a home that provided a mixture of support, independence, and companionship, a place to bring people together, where they were supported by the neighbours and remained part of the community. This is what Abbeyfield Houses still stand for today.

Abbeyfield is a not-for-profit charitable social enterprise that provides affordable living to older adults on their own and in need of the support of others. Each resident has their living quarters - usually with a fully accessible washroom. Meals are prepared and provided in a collective setting. Residents decide what they do and continue to live integrated in their communities.

There are 20 Abbeyfield houses in Canada with 400 houses throughout the world. Today several community groups are in stages of exploration and development across our country.

Abbeyfield's small, affordable, and community-integrated care model is the ideal long-term care solution. This model relies heavily on community volunteers and has a family-like approach. If individuals require scarce professional healthcare, clusters of houses can be established to ensure cost-efficiencies. Adopting this approach would allow seniors to continue living as they please - in every neighborhood and town.

Abbeyfield is a social enterprise that does not receive operational grants from governments. Houses are intentionally kept small (12 -16 residents). Abbeyfield avoids the programmatic and rigid approach that is prevalent in most long-term care facilities. To expand the model in Canada, investment is required. We believe governments should invest capital in this model instead of more institutional facilities.

Abbeyfield Canada invites you to join, become involved, and support their mission.

Joe McReynolds is President of Abbeyfield Canada. He is also a former CEO of the Ontario Community Support Association, a Chair and Founding President of the Central West Local Health Integration Network, and a Strategic Advisor to numerous non-profit organizations.

To learn more about Abbeyfield Homes, please go to: <https://abbeyfield.ca/locations/ontario/>

Joe McReynolds can be reached at president@abbeyfield.ca

**Comments on this and other SSAO Editorials may be sent to
seniorsactionontario@gmail.com**