

Virtual Village Helps Elderly Stay in Own Home

Difficulty:

DIFFICULT

Date of release:

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Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson

Today's report was about ways of helping people in the US as they become more dependent in later life. What would most of them prefer to do as they grow older? What new concepts are being developed to help them, and what details does the report give us about these concepts?

Extension discussion topics

A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text

Introduction = Virtual villages, their services and their clients

1. What is a virtual village, and what do you remember about them from the report?
 - Local network of volunteers and service providers dedicated to helping the elderly age in place.
 - Not a charity, but a non-profit charging a membership fee.
 - Seeks to help the elderly live in their own homes as long as possible.
 - Helps seniors with a variety of activities (e.g., transportation, grocery delivery, home repairs, dog walking, snow shoveling, yard work, computer tech support, etc.)
 - More than a 150 in development or already serving clients in the US.
 - Not for daily care (24/7 care) or bathing services.
2. What do you remember about potential clients Philip Theil and his wife?
 - He is a former naval architect, 91 years old.
 - They live in a century-old two-story house in Seattle's University District.
 - Their house is 'stuffed to the rafters' with books, artwork and projects of a life well lived.
 - Mr Theil doesn't want to move, couldn't tolerate the idea of living in a nursing home, and says he would rather kill himself first.
 - He feels they manage 'pretty well' with the household chores at the moment, although jobs like changing the light bulb on the landing worry him.
 - They are aware that they will soon need more help, and are thinking about joining a virtual village.
3. Who is Tom La Pointe, and what do you remember about him?
 - Recently-hired coordinator of My Own Home, a non-profit virtual village in Moscow, Idaho.
 - He is planning to get ready for a glut of baby boomers retiring within the next 20 years.
 - He aims to serve a vast middle ground of seniors who are too well off to qualify for public services, but cannot afford their own staff.
 - He hopes to have 40 seniors signed up by the end of the year.

B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Growing old in one's own house, or moving to a nursing home

1. What do you think of the concept of 'Aging in place', in the United States? What are its benefits? What problems can you foresee?
2. Many elderly Americans spend their final years in a nursing home. Why do you think this is? What happens in your country? Who looks after the older members of the community? their family? the state? private nursing homes? Has the situation changed in the last few decades? If so, why? What do you think about this?
3. What can a virtual village offer that an elderly person's family cannot always provide? Do many working people from your country live abroad or a long way from their parents' home, as Philip Theil's children do? What social or technological changes have encouraged this? Do you think adult children should live near their aging parents so that they can look after them?
4. Where do you think you will want to live in your later years? Do you think there will have been social changes between now and then that limit your options or perhaps give you more options?

OR, Topic = Beacon Hill Village, Boston

The concept of virtual villages began in Boston a decade ago, with the Beacon Hill Village. Visit their website then prepare to tell the group or your teacher what you have learned about the community there.

http://www.beaconhillvillage.org/content.aspx?page_id=0&club_id=332658

C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Living in a group.

1. Philip Theil said in the report that he would rather kill himself than live in a 'group situation' (in an old people's home). Why do you think he said that? What aspects of living in a group do you think he might not like?
2. Have you visited an old people's home or a nursing home? When, and where? Describe your experience. Do you think it was typical of such homes? Are there many nursing homes in your country? Do you think all nursing homes are similar, or do you think there are big differences in the way they are run, and the atmosphere inside them?
3. Did you go to boarding school when you were younger, or do you have any friends or family members who did? Was it a good experience? Explore some advantages and disadvantages of boarding school life.
4. What other types of group living can you list? (university halls of residence on campus; monasteries and convents; ecovillages; the Indignants and the Occupy movement; hippy and other alternative communities. Others?) Do they have a common theme? What differences are there between them? What type of community would you be happy living in, if any? Explain your reasons.

Audioscript

The United States has a rapidly-growing aging population. Many elderly Americans spend their final years in a nursing home or assisted living facility that provides services they can no longer manage on their own. But the vast majority of seniors would prefer to live in their own homes as long as possible.

A new breed of non-profits seeks to help the elderly do that. The concept is called 'Aging in place'.

Philip Theil is 91 years old. The naval architect lives in a century-old house in Seattle's University District and that's where he wants it to stay.

"As far as I'm concerned, I would not like to leave this place. Living in a group situation is something I couldn't tolerate. I'd kill myself before I had to do that."

Theil says he and his wife manage pretty well right now. Their two-story house is stuffed to the rafters with the books, artwork and projects of a life well lived. But the couple can feel their advancing age and realize they'll soon need more help with basic household chores, like changing that light bulb at the top of the stairs.

"To change that tube, I have to bring in a stepladder and put it partly on the landing and partly on the stairs and climb up. And it's kind of trepiditious."*

In the old days, you'd ask your kid to climb up there or maybe the teenager from down the street when he comes over to mow the lawn. But here, those young helpers have grown up and gone.

"We have kids and we call them occasionally, but one lives in Munich, Germany, another lives in London and a third lives in Los Angeles, and they're not going to drop around for a weekend call, type of thing."

So the Theils are looking into joining a "virtual village". It's not a village in the literal sense, but a local network of volunteers and service providers dedicated to helping the elderly age in place.

They help seniors with anything from transportation and grocery delivery to home repairs and dog walking. The concept originated in Boston a decade ago and has since grown into what you might call a national movement. An informal network of villages includes more than a hundred fifty others in development or already serving clients.

Tom La Pointe was recently hired to start a village organization in the small town of Moscow, Idaho. "The 'silver tsunami' is the term that's being tossed about. We are trying to get ready for what is anticipated to be a glut of baby boomers retiring within the next 20 or more years."

La Pointe's nonprofit, named 'My Own Home', aims to serve a vast middle ground of seniors; those who are too well off to qualify for public services, but not rich enough to afford their own staff to do things like change light bulbs.

At a village already in operation in central Oregon, the most-requested services are rides to the doctor, simple home repairs, help with grocery shopping and picking up prescriptions or big items.

In Moscow, Idaho, Tom La Pointe imagines snow shoveling, yard work or computer-tech support will also rank high.

"On the other hand, if you need daily care, 24/7 care, that is not what we do. We don't do bathing services for example, etcetera. We are here and we exist for the folks who might need a little extra assistance. That light bulb that I talked about earlier."

La Pointe says his nonprofit is not a charity. It, like the others, will charge elderly clients a membership fee. He hopes 40 seniors will sign up by the end of the year.

Those who do will find out if it's possible to recreate old-fashioned social connections to suit a modern world.

For VOA news, I'm Tom Banse in Seattle.

* The speaker probably means "trepidatious", which means nervous or apprehensive, but "trepidatious" is used to describe people, not the things that make them nervous or apprehensive.