

Are Preconceptions About Senior Living Communities Holding You Back?

The issue of ageism continues to be a hot topic lately—I'm not sure it's becoming *more* of a problem or if we're just becoming more *aware* of it. Perhaps it's because the Baby Boomers are reaching retirement age at a rapid rate, and people are living longer thanks to modern medicine, so there are simply *more* seniors than there used to be. (There are approximately 47.8 million people age 65 and older in the U.S., according to [census data](#), and the 65 and older population grew 1.6 million from 2014 to 2015.) Or maybe it's because we are becoming more attuned to how people are treated and the language we use.

Whatever the reason for our heightened awareness about age discrimination and biases, studies and surveys show that our society on the whole does indeed undervalue older people and the many contributions they make to the world. In [a 2001 study](#) of 60+-year-olds conducted by researchers at The Duke Center for the Study of Aging at Duke University, 80 percent of survey respondents said they had experienced ageism.

I believe these same negative sentiments and prejudices invariably bleed over into the false impressions that many people have about retirement communities.

Misperceptions about senior living communities

"Who wants to live with a bunch of old people?" If you are considering a move to a continuing care retirement community (CCRC, also called a life plan community) or some other type of senior living community, you may have heard this response from a friend or loved one. Or it could be that consciously or subconsciously, this sentiment is holding you back from even considering a senior living community.

What's at the heart of this visceral response? Maybe it's the false belief that "old people" have nothing to offer to society? That they're boring? It's almost like a fear that one might have of a contagious disease. "If I am around them too much, maybe I'll catch it." But in my mind, there is clearly still a misperception about what it's really like to live in a CCRC or other independent senior living community. It probably lingers from a time when the only senior living options were nursing homes, but today, there are so many more choices.

The real deal

But here's a reality check: After visiting literally *hundreds* of senior living communities over the years (the vast majority being CCRCs), I've found that residents, on the whole, are highly intellectual, successful, and outgoing. They have enjoyed brilliant careers as executives, business owners, professors, scientists, entrepreneurs, war veterans and high-ranking military officers, and much more. Some are highly distinguished and have won awards for various contributions to society or their profession.

In contrast to the stereotypes about “old folks’ homes,” many CCRC residents still lead very active lives and are integral members of their surrounding communities. Some are experts in their fields, who give talks to other residents and even to groups outside of the CCRC. Others are invaluable to local volunteer organizations and houses of worship. Still others enjoy athletic hobbies from golf to tennis to hiking. And for those residents whose physical capabilities have declined with age, many still find ways to stay engaged socially and find purpose in the world.

On visit to a CCRC a few years ago, I met a resident who leads a three-mile bike ride three times a week for her exercise group. I can tell you that she is far more active than many people her same age (or even younger!). And she’s just one example of how the reality of the type of people who choose to live in a CCRC debunks the “old people” stereotype.

I wanted to share a few other examples of people who have chosen to relocate to a CCRC and who remain active, engaged members of society. myLifeSite has recently collaborated with Senior Correspondent to highlight the personal stories of some of these thriving CCRC residents.

- Julia Wood, a resident of Galloway Ridge, a CCRC in Pittsboro, N.C., says, “When my husband and I retired from 40-year faculty careers, we were in our sixties, healthy, and active, so we had no interest in a senior community. Maybe later, we thought, but we’re not ready yet. Six years after retiring, we are living in a senior community, and we love it. We don’t need to live here, but we choose to because it enriches our lives.” [Read Julia’s full story >>](#)
- “After retiring, my wife and I moved from our home in Seattle to Tucson, where we lived in an active senior retirement community and lived for 15 years,” says Jim Patrick. “About six years ago, while in our early-mid 70s, we began to discuss and consider our options for where and how we would like to live when we reached our 80s and 90s...After several weeks of considering and discussing, we made the decision to apply and eventually move to Judson Park [a CCRC in Des Moines, Washington]...For us, life in a retirement community has been anything but boring. We are as busy as we want to be with fitness classes, continuing education lectures and trips, social interaction with our neighbors, and volunteer activities.” [Learn more about Jim’s story >>](#)
- Janice Daniels says, “We have lived at Royal Oaks [a CCRC in Sun City, Arizona] for two years and feel truly blessed knowing that we made a smart choice. Royal Oaks is vibrant, great management and staff, wonderful residents, and modern technology with a top-notch IT department.” [Read Janice’s story >>](#)

As you can tell, these are not seniors who are just idling into the sunset of their life; these are people who are enjoying retirement and remain eager to suck the marrow out of each and every day. And they have chosen to live in a CCRC.

Don't get me wrong: Some retirement communities are definitely more thriving and vibrant than others. (And, of course, I'm not talking about assisted living or nursing homes, but rather retirement communities that include independent living, such as 55+ communities and CCRCs.) As Janice Daniels notes in her comment about her CCRC, the culture and mindset of the CCRC is heavily influenced by the community’s management. This is why it’s important to visit several different communities and to

spend as much time as you can on the campus of your favorite(s) to get a real feel for the energy and character of the community. You want to find a CCRC that is the right fit for your own lifestyle.

The numbers game

If you are considering a CCRC or other senior living community, don't fall for societal stereotypes about age and aging or for the preconceived notions about what you think it must be like to live in one of these communities. Many are living vibrant, active lifestyles with busy social calendars. And if you ask them, I'd bet that most CCRC residents will tell you that they have zero regrets about their decision to move to a CCRC (...and I'd encourage you to ask them for yourself when you visit the communities on your list).

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