

Transitions: When Older Adults Have to Move

by Kevin K. Johnson, Certified Senior Advisor (CSA)[®]

Over our many years of providing homecare to older adults and providing relief for their family caregivers, we have had to assist in helping to relocate an older adult. Sometimes the relocation is required to have family closer together; seniors moving to be closer to grandchildren, or just closer to their children so they can assist with their long-term care.

Sometimes the relocation is required because even with living assistance services provided by Visiting Angels, the older adult has reached a point where a nursing home is absolutely required. Moving is almost always stressful. But there are few transitions in life more difficult than when an older adult needs to give up his or her home and independence.

Whether it's a move into a care facility, or giving up a house and friends of many years in a warm-weather state and moving back north to be near the children, such changes can be emotionally fraught and logistically challenging for both the older individual and family members.

There are many ways to ease the transition, most critically giving older adults an opportunity to make their own choices. And for everyone involved, getting an early start on decisions—rather than waiting for a crisis to hit—goes a long way to making the path smoother.

Starting early enables all involved to weigh and discuss housing options for that moment when living independently is no longer possible.

For many, initiating these kinds of discussions takes effort. That reluctance cuts both ways, notes Larry Minnix, president of LeadingAge, an association of nonprofit aging-services providers.

"Scratch the skin of a 60-year-old man and you'll get a seven-year-old child, and scratch the skin of a 60-year-old daughter, and you'll get daddy's little girl every time," he says.

Some older parents, of course, simply refuse to sit down and talk about options for living arrangements and care. "They could say, 'It's none of your business,' " Mr. Minnix says. "And you could leave it with, 'I can appreciate that, but understand that if ever there is an emergency, we're going to have to make the decisions, and we won't have your input.' "

But that notion—of "seeking input"—could be misconstrued, especially when older family members are struggling with the emotions surrounding independence and mortality.

Mr. Minnix suggests saying: "We want to do the best job in carrying out your wishes."

It's a small—but important—distinction. Adult children who ask for input are saying, in effect, that they will make the decisions, Mr. Minnix notes. "But saying, 'We want to carry out your wishes,' puts [the older family members] in charge."

The adult children, too, need to plan, says Bobbie Guidry, director of housing and community-based services for the Benedictine Health System. "Families should sit down and talk about who is playing what part: Who is going to help with the move, who is going to help with the finances, and who can visit when."

In families considering assisted-living facilities or other kinds of senior care, adult children will often do the legwork and present parents with a number of options to consider.

That should be only the first step, says John Hartmayer, a senior vice president at Atria Senior Living. Older adults should visit the community and meet the staff and other residents.

When it comes time for the actual move, again, allow the older adults to be involved with decisions, including what furniture and keepsakes they'll take with them to the degree that space allows.

For all the challenges involved in downsizing, families don't have to do it themselves. In recent years, there's been a boom in companies that specialize in helping older adults with the process. The National Association of Senior Move Managers has a website (www.nasmm.org) where you can find members.

To further ease the transition, family members should get the new residence unpacked and set up before the older adult spends the night, aiming to make it feel as homey as possible.

In the immediate weeks after the move, families should spend as much time as possible at the new home, Ms. Guidry says. "They need to get adjusted...and [not] feel abandoned," she adds.

At the same time, adult children shouldn't hesitate to set boundaries. "You have to work and you have your own family," says Ms. Guidry. "You can't be there every day even though you might like to."

It's a different matter for older adults who are moving in with a family member. In that case, families need to be realistic about the changes that will bring to their finances and lifestyle, says Gail Hunt, president of the National Alliance for Caregiving.

Says Ms. Guidry: "As challenging as all this gets, you can still get many wonderful moments together."

Thanks for content from Tom Lauricella, WSJ



Visiting Angels at Fairhill Partners is an award winning, full-service senior homecare agency providing a comprehensive range of non-medical services. Our experienced caregivers are bonded and insured. We are in our tenth year of operation and are honored to have served hundreds of seniors in the Greater Cleveland area and surrounding suburban communities.



Visiting Angels (at Fairhill Partners)

216.231.6400

Blog: www.seniorhomecareohio.com

www.visitingangels.com/Cleveland