

Summary of Observations of and Lessons Learnt from Study Tour Related to Seniors Hubs/Villages in the USA

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Preamble

The Study tour occurred between 13-20 September 2019 and involved project visits to four Hubs/Villages (including in-depth conversations with eight project staff) in Seattle and attendance at a three-day National Conference on Hubs/Villages in Chicago organised by the Village to Village Network. It was attended by 300+ Hub/Village staff and board directors and besides presentations and workshops, enabled participation in 20+ one on one superb learning conversations. The generosity of spirit in terms of their time and sharing of experiences and tools by so many passionate Hub/Village leaders and enthusiasts was truly amazing and most appreciated. Finally, many thanks to Jim Diers of 'Neighbor Power' in Seattle for coordinating such a learning experience, and the staff and Board of the Village to Village Network for a wonderful Conference.

Term Clarification

In the USA, the popular term is 'Village' which refers to a community run organisation that brings together older adults who have a mutual interest in supporting each other to age as long as possible, as well as possible and as inexpensively as possible in their own home, street and neighbourhood. There is great variation in structure and the type of support activities, but the primary goal of most 'Villages' is to promote member's independence and social connection and prevent unwanted relocations. In Australia, to prevent term confusion with lifestyle and age care 'villages', the term 'Hub' is increasingly being used.

US Snap Shot Summary

- **US Ageing Scenario** – by 2030, there will be more US residents aged 65+ years than 18+ years – this is already the reality in the states of Florida and Maine. Currently, 75,000 Americans turn 65 daily. 85+ age is the fastest growing population sector. Roughly one in three people older than 65 live alone, and half of those older than 85 live alone. In terms of women living alone, now 26% of 65-74-year olds, 39% of 75-84-year olds and 55% of 85+ years live alone in USA.
- **Extent of Villages/Hubs** – since the creation of the first Village in 2002 in Beacon Hill, Massachusetts, the movement now involves 260 operational Villages/Hubs, 80 in development, a total of 45,000+ members and examples in 45 US states and five countries. In 2010, there were only 35 operational Villages in USA!
- **Average Hub Creation Time** – 2-3 years. 15 months was considered quick for establishment.
- **Structure of Villages/Hubs** – 85% are free standing, with 15% being a unit or program within another 'lead' agency like senior housing provider, seniors centre, social service agency or a neighbourhood association. Almost all are not for profit organisations.
- **Geographic Location of Villages/Hubs** – A third (31%) were in a primarily urban setting, a third primarily suburban (37%), 21% were primarily rural and 11% served a mixed geographic setting.
- **Membership Fees** – 90% charge member fees (but growing number of 'no fee' or 'low fee' Villages/Hubs) and most (over 75%) provide generous discounts for lower income members,

often on a case by case basis. Inclusion was a targeted priority. Fees ranged from \$10 to \$900 and average \$400. Fees on average make up 44% of income.

- **Male/Female Ratio** – 32% of members were male.
- **Paid Staff** – 74% of Villages/Hubs had paid staff, ranging from 1-7. The average ratio of members to staff was 154 to one.
- **Volunteers** – Over 60% of Villages/Hubs use a ‘volunteer first’ model – trying to fulfil member requests through volunteers rather than using paid staff or referral to a provider. In 2016, average number of volunteers was 82 per Village/Hub. 90% of volunteers were Village/Hub members. Over 70% of Village/Hubs had a volunteer training manual, undertook some form of volunteer induction/training, maintained volunteer insurance and had active volunteer recognition/thank you initiatives.
- **Village/Hub Governance** – Almost all Villages/Hubs had a board of directors or similar governing body, averaging 10 members. On average 85% were Village/Hub members and 30% were founding members. In addition to the governing board, villages averaged 4.5 committees/task groups.
- **Dementia** – 450,000 people in Australia, 250 persons diagnosed every day.
- **Grants for Ageing** – estimated that only about 1% of US grant funding goes to ageing initiatives.
- **Loneliness** – US Studies show the prevalence of loneliness among people older than 60 years ranges from 10% to 46%. US studies now show that loneliness is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes per day in terms of contributing to diminishing physical health.
- **Ageing Poverty** – estimated that more than 50% of Americans have an income of less than \$40,000 – this figure is referred to as the new normal.
- **Elder Abuse** – estimated that one in 10 persons in USA >65 years is a victim. Last year it was estimated that 50,000 senior Americans lost \$342million through internet scams.

Common Core Beliefs

- **Community Connection** – ageing is a vital and challenging phase of life best shared with a supportive community. Love the message from PNA Village – *‘We turn strangers into neighbors, and neighbors into community’*.
- **Richness of the Ageing Community** – *‘we are a thriving community full of capability, energy, enthusiasm, experience and laughter’*. Ageing members can contribute so much to the social capital, that glue that holds the wider community together.
- **Reciprocity** – the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit. The NEST Village in Seattle with 170 members experienced last year 380 member-led gatherings.
- **Intergenerational** – very few Villages/Hubs limited membership to only 65+ age group. 10% included membership for children.
- **Inclusiveness** – all members matter regardless of age or ability.
- **Diversity** – most Hubs had active initiatives to include lower income members, younger members, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities and more male members.
- **Organic** – organisation evolves from the grassroots, based on the wishes and contributions of the members.
- **Community Builders** – Hubs/Villages are in the vanguard of leading the revolution to change the stereotypes and limitations associated with ageing.
- **Collaboration** – partnership initiatives with other ageing service agencies and community groups was a key feature of most villages/Hubs.

Key Lessons

- **Loneliness and social isolation** – this critical societal issue and the importance of Hubs/Villages as an antidote was the most discussed theme in conversations and Conference presentations. Enhancing socialisation is a key focus.
- **Patience - Remember Rome!** – average Village/Hub establishment time was 2 to 3 years.
- **Importance of Asset Mapping - Know thy neighbourhood!** – considered an essential task in establishment is the creation of a local asset map of local community in relation to ageing and an *'asset map'* of the contributions members and willing to share; and a *'desire map'* of what they are wanting to learn and experience.
- **Importance of the Intergenerational Nature of the Hub/Village.**
- **Funding** – in 2016, average annual revenue was \$115,085. On average, 44% came from membership fees, 22% from individual donations, 12% from private foundations, 9% raised by fundraising efforts, 6% from businesses and 5% from government grants or contracts. 43% have some form of endowment fund.
- **Partnerships** – in 2016, about a third of Villages/Hubs received free or discounted office space and 20% received marketing assistance. Widespread recognition of the importance of collaboration with a host of other ageing, health and community groups. On average, Villages/Hubs in 2016 had 6 formal MOUs with other agencies/groups.
- **Founders/Establishment Group** – need to be known and trusted in the community. Important that they can cope with the effort and time to get established, and the expressed disillusionment of some potential members that things are not happening fast enough.
- **Importance of Shared Culture Among Membership and Board Members.**
- **Membership Fees** – as shown above, there is a wide diversity in fee levels with national US annual average about \$400. As mentioned, a growing number of Village/Hubs are no fee or low fee, with both the option to have fee waived (or greatly reduced) for financial hardship and the opportunity for some members to give more. One Village has an annual fee of only \$25, but also two other member categories – *'Double Donor'* (\$50) and the *'Awesome Fee'* (\$100) for those members who feel and want to give more. No Village/Hub depended only on membership fees to cover operations, thus the importance of ongoing income generation.
- **Biggest Volunteer Requests** – transportation, home handyman jobs, social drop-ins, technology assistance.
- **Age-Friendly Business Connection** – connecting members to vetted, discounted business providers was a critical service of most Villages/Hubs.
- **Balance Between Central and Local Neighbourhood Hub Activities** – the creation of Neighbourhood Circles/Pods/Buddy Groups that enable members to connect socially and supportively at local neighbourhood /street levels. One Village claimed that their high member retention was due to the the network of their neighbourhood groups *'where people really get to know each other well'*.
Description of Neighbourhood Circles:
 - Gatherings of people in *'natural-occurring neighbourhoods'*;
 - Providing social contact and immediate mutual support;
 - Restoring neighbourhoods to the way they use to be; and
 - Importance of local coordinator.
- **Member Retention and Attraction** – needs to be a continuous focus - need *'to be constantly growing the gene pool'*.
- **Role of Paid Coordinator/s** – akin to that of an orchestra conductor! Terms like connector, a doorway for gaining and sharing local intelligence. However, vital that the Coordinator does not become the organisation! Must remain member driven.
- **Hub/Village Visibility** – importance of keeping the Hub/Village very visible in the local community through an attractive website, social media, stories in the local newspapers, regular presentations to faith communities, service clubs, local government. Libraries were popular venues used for promotion. Proportion of time of Coordinator/s needs to be focussed

on outreach. Creating opportunities for Hub/Village to participate in *'giving'* roles at community events and celebrations were vital, both for the members personally and for organisational visibility.

- **Avoid Meeting Via Email!**
- **Key Organisational Challenges** – most mentioned issues in Village/ Hub surveys were financial sustainability, volunteer recruitment, enough membership base, community support, meeting all member requests and visibility in the community.

Practical Hints Related to Roles and Activities

- **No Rule Book** – every Hub/Village is unique reflecting the DNA of their members, community and its assets and its founding members - *'once you see seen one Village, you have seen one Village'*.
- **Popular Services** – For Villages/Hubs that offered services by paid staff and/or volunteers, the following were the most popular in 2016:
 - Hosting social events - 95%
 - Transportation services- 94%
 - Classes or educational events- 90%
 - Companionship - 90%
 - Technology Assistance - 88%
 - Shopping Assistance - 87%
 - Information and Referral to Other Services and Businesses - 84%
 - Home Repair or Maintenance - 83%
 - Health Promotion Programs - 79%
- **Importance of Food** – the great bonding experience and the universal language! – use of potluck meals, cooking classes, ethnic meals, *'monthly mingles'* etc. were quoted as a vital ingredient.
- **Task Teams/Committees** – as mentioned, Villages/Hubs average 4.5 committees, with the most popular foci being member services development, fundraising, marketing and promotion, age friendly business vetted initiatives and volunteer programs.
- **Some Great Ideas Program Ideas** – Fireside chats; book clubs; conversation groups; happy hours; *'Living Library'* where members share an interest/passion; pop up activities – e.g. *'Anyone want to come to the community musical this Thursday type'* promotion; Veteran to Veteran Program; monthly Legal Clinic/ Fireside Chat; *'Monthly Mingles'*; *'Adult Daughters Caring for Their Mothers'* Support Group; Foster Grandparent Program; and intergenerational playgroup etc.
- **Importance of Men Activities and Connections** – given that women dominate in number regarding Hubs/Villages membership, vital to have some men orientated activities and strong links to groups like Men's Sheds. Loved the idea of a regular men's coffee group at a local coffee shop called *'Table of Wisdom'* (invited anyone to join them who wanted to tap into their opinions and experiences – *'Old Coots giving advice- it's probably bad advice, but at least its free!*) and the ROMEO's (Retired Old Men Eating Out) Group.
- **Robust Data Base** – creation and maintenance needs to be budget priority. Helpful Village – www.helpfulvillage.com is the most popular purchased system that Villages/Hubs were using including now one in Australia.
- **Referrals to Trusted Businesses** – many Hubs/Villages undertaking this activity had 90+ businesses in a directory. Most started with a list recommended by members. Vetting and background checks was coordinated by a Business Connection Committee. Most Villages/Hubs had developed simple processes for recruiting and vetting, and many of their websites (see examples below) contained form templates.

- **Information Dissemination** – so much useful information and kits on ageing well in place that needs to be shared through newsletters, information boards, website. Making people aware of what is available is a key function. Operation of an Electronic Noticeboard is a great idea to share member interests and needs.
- **Seamless Support** – Hub/Village needs to be part of a seamless support system for ageing residents.
- **Managing Memory Loss** – so many interesting activities being run in this area e.g. Dementia Friendly Ceramics, Parkinson’s Spouses Group, Alzheimer’s Café, Re-ignite the Mind with Improvisation & Play, Early Stage Memory Loss Support Group, A song Circle, Gentle Zumba, Spousal Loss Support Group.
- **Volunteer Recruitment** – needs to be an ongoing activity. Importance of volunteer induction/orientation sessions. 30-60% of volunteers become members. Importance of criminal checks – some Villages/Hubs use a commercial checking company, but can become expensive.
- **Acknowledgement** – recognising and acknowledging all forms of sponsorship and support was a critical ongoing action.
- **Virtual Vs Print** – importance to recognise that communications need to be both. Many Villages commented on the poor response to just website messaging. Printing and distribution of an annual Vetted Business Directory was recommended. Printing and postage need a good budget.
- **Have Fun!** – when people feel it is no longer fun, they walk away.
- **Day of Giving** – this is a designated ‘Day’ in Seattle where many businesses (including Boeing and Microsoft) encourage staff to do volunteer work in the community including help for seniors through activities like a ‘Get Rid of Junk’ Day.

Common Village/Hub Issues

- **Managing Expectations** – not every request and need of members can be met.
- **Founding Members Not Letting Go** – high level of ownership and ‘peacock’ behaviours. Succession planning always needs to be a priority.
- **Ageism.**
- **A model of interdependence in a very individualistic society.**
- **Growing Number of People Experiencing Dementia** – importance of activities related to supporting memory loss and helping bring dementia out of the closet.
- **Links to Community Age-Friendly and Dementia-Friendly Plans and Initiatives** – vital to connect and relate to the World Health Organisation eight domains.
- **Asking for Help** – this is an issue that many ageing community members struggle with.
- **Common Ageing Challenges** – elder abuse, business scamming, vendor and stranger trust, dealing with loss – partners, friends, pets.
- **Ageing denial** – not ready to accept ageing is happening!
- **Having Too Many Chiefs and Not Enough Indians!**
- **Dealing with Bureaucratic Service Agencies.**
- **Getting Members to Read their Newsletters!**

Key Collected Resources

- **Books**
 - *‘Living Room Revolution- a handbook for conversation, community and the common good’* by Cecile Andrews
 - *‘Lost Connections- Why You’re Depressed and How to Find Hope’* by Johann Hart.

- *'Disrupt Aging'* by Jo Ann Jenkins
- *'How to Live Forever- the enduring power of connecting the generations'* by Marc Freedman
- *'This is Where You Belong- finding home wherever you belong'* by Melody Warnick

- **Useful Website Links**

- Village to Village Network - https://www.vtvnetwork.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=691012&module_id=248579
- Neighborhood Falmouth - www.neighborhoodfalmouth.org
- NEST- www.nestseattle.org
- Wider Horizons: Central Seattle's Village for Life! - www.widerhorizonsvillage.org
- PNA Village- www.phinneycenter.org/village
- Northampton Neighbors – www.northamptonneighbors.org
- NEXTVillageSF – www.nextvillageesf.org
- VillagesOKO- www.villagesokc.org
- Seacoast Village Project- www.SeacoastVillageProject.org
- Clayton Valley Village – www.ClaytonValleyVillage.org
- Marian Villages – www.marinvillages.org
- JP@Home – www.ethocare.org
- Helpful Village – www.helpfulvillage.com

- **Articles**

- *'2016 National Survey of US Villages'* (University of California, Berkeley, 2017)
- *'Secrets of Living Longer'* in National Geographic, November 2005.

- **Tools**

- *'Dementia Roadmap'*
- *'NEST Volunteer Manual and Policies*
- *'NEST Business Vendor Application''*
- *'PNA Village Volunteer Handbook and Training Manual'*
- *'PNA Village Vetted Business Application'*
- *'PNA Membership Form'*
- *'PNA Membership Questionnaire'*
- *Wider Horizon's Business Vetting Procedures'*
- *'Wider Horizon's Volunteer Procedures'*
- *'NEST 2018 Annual Report'*
- Flyers from NEST, PNA, JP@HOME and Villages OK
- Seattle Village Comparisons

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