

Creating an age-friendly society

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Brendoncare is a charity that provides care and support for people in later life. We do this through our range of care homes (which provide residential, nursing, dementia and end of life care), assisted living accommodation sites, a membership program of social and activity clubs and a community support service that provides advice and information by phone and online. Our 7 homes and 100+ clubs operate across Hampshire, Dorset, Wiltshire and Sussex.

Brendoncare traces its origins back to Mrs Phoebe Bacon, one-time resident of Winchester, who recognised (in the 1950s and 1960s) that care provision for older people at that time was very limited and highly institutional. She wanted to allow people to continue living independently and making their own choices, whilst having access to support as needed. She acquired a house in Winchester where people could come and live in community whilst being independent. The house was named Brendon House, and thus Brendoncare was born.

It is a privilege to follow in the footsteps of such a pioneering woman as Phoebe Bacon, who with the help of local GP and specialist in elderly care, Sir Ronald Gibson, founded Brendoncare in Winchester in 1984. Brendoncare today continues to uphold that philosophy: our vision is to create an age-friendly society where people are kind and value age. We do this by empowering people to live their whole life well, and our work is founded on values of being kind, empowering, dedicated and forward-thinking.

Brendoncare is a charity and not for profit. That means we don't answer to any share-holders and we will always place people before profit; any surplus from our care services is re-invested into our places and people to allow us to continue to grow and support more people. We also have two areas of charitable funding. One is our access fund which supports people wanting to access our community services but unable to cover the membership subscription; the other is our Care for Life promise, whereby anyone who comes to live in a Brendoncare home and funds their own care, should they run out of funds in the future they will never be asked to leave and Brendoncare will cover the shortfall of any fees not covered by social services funding.

Brendoncare seeks to ensure that people can access all of its services easily and as needed, wherever they live. So we work to ensure that our services are connected and integrated, so that you can benefit from our support as and when you need it. We also work hard to ensure that our services are firmly embedded within local community life, not separate from it. For example, this home Otterbourne Hill where we are meeting today, comprises a care home providing nursing and dementia care for 64 people, 20 apartments available to rent specifically for people living with dementia, and a community hub available for activities for people both living on site and in the local community.

Our vision for an age-friendly society is key; our population is growing and living longer. And yet ageism is all around us, and we are all guilty of it – whether using language such as “old dear”, “dinosaur” etc, or making comments about how well someone is doing considering their age, we have a tendency to belittle age rather than to celebrate it. Structurally society also doesn't help; older people will experience longer waiting times for ambulances for example, as they are deemed to be lower priority than someone younger.

We seek to celebrate the wisdom, skill, knowledge and experience that older people bring, and to ensure that they are able to continue contributing to society as much as they want to. This is going to be essential as our population continues to age: for all those born in the year 2000, half will live to be 100 and that longevity increases as each year goes by. At the same time, there will be fewer younger people (to support older people) and fewer family support networks (today around 25% of couples in their 40s/50s don't have children, and therefore no family support in later life, that number is expected to increase in the years ahead).

We have to change how we think about people as they age. The current model of younger people caring for older people is going to become less and less sustainable. We will need people of all ages to engage, contribute and add value -and we all can!

So, my challenge to you today, is to think differently about the experience of ageing and what you might want to get from later life. In particular, think about how you may experience or encounter ageing – and most importantly, call it out! Only by highlighting the negative can we expect people to change their behaviour for the better.

Consider also what you want for yourself in later life – we often avoid talking about getting older because we don't want to think about it. I encourage you to talk about it, make plans and think about what you want – we see too many people at Brendoncare having to make big decisions at a point of crisis, when open discussions about your plans could make things so much easier.

Finally, please consider helping out in your local community and in care homes – they don't exist in isolation from the rest of the world and we want to dispel the myth of care homes being sad and scary places.

Thank you.