

Creating Communities to Spend a Lifetime In

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MIDDLEVILLE, MICHIGAN, UNITED STATES, August 9, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Aging adults are

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a subpopulation of the disability community that grows every year, and ensuring they can live independently and with self-determination is a crucial part of our mission. “Aging in place” is a concept that enables older adults to remain in their existing homes and communities as they age through individual and community-wide changes that support inclusion. Post-Americans with Disabilities Act, many of these changes have been “accommodations”—increasing resources and services within a community to help people adapt to challenges associated with aging. However, a more proactive

approach involves modifying our communities with an understanding of people’s diverse needs at the forefront. Together, community leaders can ensure older adults and those with disabilities can influence their living arrangements and lives like any other person.

At the individual level in Michigan, aging residents who meet income criteria can receive accommodations through the MI Choice Waiver program, which permits caregivers and other service providers to provide home-based support with chores, meal preparation, counseling, nursing, and more, instead of relocating clients to a nursing home or assisted living facility. Many local municipalities also have specialized services for older residents that can be found at <https://www.osapartner.net/miseniors/SearchByGeography.aspx> or by connecting with your local [Area Agency on Aging](#).

More proactively, organizations like MISILC are working to make [universal design](#) the standard—an approach that envisions a world beyond the requirements of the accommodations-focused Americans with Disabilities Act. This world has playgrounds and sidewalks that accommodate wheelchairs and mobility aids, wayfinding tools, and a variety of other design features that promote the universal use of spaces and amenities by community members of all ages, with and without disabilities. Universal design captures the spirit of Independent Living and applies it to the physical aspects of our neighborhoods and communities.

Core principles of universal design include equitable and flexible use that allow users to interact with an environment without unique accommodations, and amenities that are simple and easy to use from both cognitive and physical perspectives. Examples are sensor-operated doors, ATMs with visual, tactile, and audio feedback, and signage that uses pictures and/or tactile stimuli to communicate information. Other priorities are providing sufficient space to move around and interact with a feature, such as controls on the front of an appliance or wider doorways and hallways, and a tolerance for error, such as keys that can be inserted in a lock in multiple directions. Together, these attributes remove barriers to access and inclusion that disproportionately impact people with disabilities, aging adults, and aging adults with disabilities.

Ultimately, developing communities that are attractive to people of any age or disability status starts with changing our mindset—how can we design with everyone’s needs in mind from the start, or pursue accommodations that are seamless and make people feel valued and included in their own communities? Greater inclusivity and access allows people to invest in their communities for a lifetime, enhances our society and environment, and allows every person to maximize their potential.

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