AGOG – ACTIVELY GROWING OLDER GRACEFULLY

Rocky Hill Cohousing, Northampton, MA

June, 2013: a call went out inviting to a meeting any residents interested in forming a group of older folks to meet regularly and discuss issues of aging. A dozen Rocky Hill residents responded and have been meeting monthly since then on the third Friday evening of each month. A dozen attendees have been remarkably consistent in participation, with a few additional residents less active. About half are original founders of the inter-generational cohousing community, which was constructed 2005-2006, and the remainder, newer residents. The age range is from mid-fifties, with several in their sixties and half a dozen in their seventies, to the oldest, age 80.

AGOG started out as a discussion group, but quickly added a pot-luck supper to start, and devoted considerable time each meeting to a round-robin “check-in.” The check-in’s became increasingly personal and meaningful. This sharing enhanced the group’s bonding, bringing about a high level of caring for each person. We have seen members through difficult parent deaths, a not fully successful knee replacement operation, and the growing vicissitudes and adventures of aging.

We have devoted significant amounts of time to the following activities and conversations:

1) Discussing and completing health care proxies
2) Filling out State MOLST form for end of life decisions
3) Meeting with the palliative care doctor in our local hospice program
4) Meeting with an elder services referral consultant to learn about various services
5) Reading and discussing Atul Gawande’s Being Mortal and Ezekiel Emanuel’s “Why I Hope to Die at 75”
6) Beginning to explore information on green burials
7) Pondering legislation for medically assisted end of life
8) Discussing aging in place with the younger members of our community.

In addition, we invited local cohousing communities to send representatives to a two hour conversation and potluck meal to share what we are doing and hear about their experiences. About twenty people from nearby communities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island attended. Two of our members attended the cohousing conference on “Aging Better Together” in Salt Lake City in May, 2016, and offered a workshop on our experiences.

Of course a major focus has been our desire to age in place in our cohousing community as long as possible, ideally to the end. We have talked about ways to help ourselves achieve this goal. In the past year, using the guidance from Laird Schwab’s workshop at the “Aging Better Together” conference, we have developed guidelines for a “Care Committee.” We presented the proposal for a Rocky Hill Care Committee to the Community Life Committee and then to the entire community. The proposal received community consensus this past winter. The Committee has been constituted, with five initial members. In addition, our annual operating budget now includes $200 as an initial amount for the Care Committee. The Committee has begun developing resources for planning and supporting a member through upcoming serious heart surgery.

Each of us really looks forward to the camaraderie and sharing of our monthly meetings. The bottom line is getting to know each other deeply, coming to appreciate the remarkable diversity of life perspectives, and drawing inspiration from one another. We feel this is aging at its best. No one can predict their future needs, but community is making it possible to be more hopeful, creative, and generous.

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