

The joys of village life

David Reaves tells us how retirement villages can help people retain their independence

Firstly, David, what is a retirement village?

Retirement villages are vibrant communities specially built and designed for the older person and include a range of accommodation, facilities and services to meet their needs. The accommodation at a Richmond Village includes large one- or two-bedroom Village Apartments; Village Suites which are predominantly 1-bedroom apartments but include a weekly 'Suite Package' to take away all the daily chores plus all our villages have a care home providing 24-hour nursing care. The villages have wonderful facilities including a Wellness Spa consisting of pool, gym, exercise studio, treatment rooms and hair salon. Other facilities include restaurant and bar, café, library with IT facilities, arts and craft room plus wonderful landscaped gardens. The villages also have a large staff group. Richmond Painswick, as an example, has some 80 full- and part-time staff including nurses, carers, hospitality, housekeeping, event organisers, drivers, maintenance and gardeners who all help to make the community.

So, how can a retirement village help people retain their independence?

First off, we need to understand what being independent is and what defines our independence. It's a word we use a lot and generally defines a state of being in control, making decisions for ourselves, and not being dependent upon others. But how realistic is that? We often hear that "mother is fiercely independent", but most of the time it means the person is living in their own home and is able to do a bit of cooking, a bit of washing, a bit of housework and a bit of shopping. However, the reality is the family are doing the majority of these daily tasks so this 'independence' is actually affecting two people's lives.

How would living in a retirement village help?

Using the example just mentioned, if this person was to move into a Village Suite at a Richmond Village, the most important thing is that they would still have their own home, all be it a new one, and would still



The rooftop garden at Richmond Village, Painswick

be in control of their life. What Richmond Villages would offer is the social life with like-minded people, and via the weekly Suite Package, help with things which they can't, or no longer wish to do. All of this ultimately results in an improved overall wellbeing.

What's included in the 'Suite Package'?

A weekly fee covers all of the household chores. A midday meals is provided in the restaurant whilst evening meals are more often taken in your apartment, though some prefer to dine in the restaurant. Each Village Suite has a kitchenette with fridge and microwave for preparing breakfast, snacks and drinks. A daily maid service ensures that apartments are regularly cleaned and rubbish is taken out. Personal laundry is taken care of along with bedding and towels. All utility bills are also included. This comprehensive package means people's needs are met leaving them free to do the things they enjoy. If residents require care, then our on-site care agency provide a bespoke care package depending on their needs.

This all sounds great, but how do you help with improving people's social life?

Everyone who lives in the retirement village pays a service charge which covers things such as external building maintenance, upkeep of the grounds as well as reception, administration and the cost of 24-hour on-site staff to respond to respond to any emergency. The service

charge also covers the transport provision which provides scheduled shopping trips, trips to places of interest such as National Trust properties, as well as taking residents to local GP, dental and hospital appointments. But most importantly, the charge covers social events and activity co-ordinators who organise a whole host of activities and events which can be anything from learning a new skill such as using computers or photography, through to creative writing. Obviously full use of the Spa facilities such as the pool, steam room and gym are free for residents to use, and a number of classes such as Tai Chi and aqua aerobics are organised by the spa team.

What advice would you give to someone looking at moving to a retirement village?

The thing we hear most often is "I wish I had done this sooner!" It is a hard decision to move so make sure you do your homework and ensure that the place you move to can meet your present and future needs. Richmond Villages are founding members of an organisation called Associated Retirement Community Operators and adhere to their code of practice. If you are looking to move to a retirement community then their website, www.arcouk.org, would be a good starting point. ■

For more information on Richmond Painswick call 01452 810203 or visit www.richmond-villages.com/painswick