

Newsletter For Mature Adults



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NORCs Help You Age in Place in a Supportive Community

When people think about where they'll age, two options that often come to mind are aging in place at home and moving to independent or assisted living facilities.

But Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) are another possibility to consider.

They're neighborhoods or buildings where a majority of residents are older adults. Such communities develop organically versus being explicitly built as senior housing.

It's a lifestyle that provides older adults with a built-in community and opportunities for socializing and activities that strengthen social connections and neighborly bonds. NORCs also can ease many aging challenges, like loss of autonomy, isolation, and loneliness.

NORCs, most frequently found in urban settings, are also in suburban and rural environments and can be groups of single-family homes, townhouse developments, or even entire towns.

In some cases, non-profit community groups and local governments support residents with transportation, social services, healthcare, and activities. Also, building owners and managers frequently offer communal spaces: gardens, shared kitchens, and meeting rooms to give residents gathering places for socializing and events.

DIY NORCs

Though NORCs typically evolve naturally, you can take a do-it-yourself approach and create one in your neighborhood or building.

A self-organized NORC can start with something as casual as bringing seniors together to watch movies, have potluck dinners, or do group walks.

Others may want to develop a formal program.

One starting point is a Do It Yourself Guide (<https://bit.ly/3KJ2d0O>) that provides a step-by-step for getting a NORC off the ground.

The guide is part of Seniors Empowering Seniors, an initiative by OpenLab. The Toronto-based OpenLab, a member of UHN University Health Network, works on several projects

to improve seniors' lives. Through the Ambassadors Program, for example, it partners with and provides programming support for seniors living in high-rise buildings who want to establish NORCs.

Using the guide, residents can develop a supportive aging-in-place community by identifying locals' needs, what services and activities—social, health and wellness, and education, for example—to provide, and how they want a program to operate.

Getting started, sustaining a NORC

The guide is divided into three categories: starting, doing, and sustaining.

Starting steps include:

- **Finding your people** – Recruiting and inviting like-minded people to explore creating a NORC within your building or town.
- **Defining your why** – Discussing individual goals and finding common ground to help you envision your ideal aging-in-place community.
- **Connecting with building management** – Seeing what services, spaces, and support your building would be willing to offer.
- **Picking a thing** – Starting small by picking two or three easy activities: movie night, a book swap, or inviting a speaker to discuss a topic that interests residents.

The guide also features the Idea Bank, a list of ideas for building a community around activities like health and wellness, lifelong learning, and civic engagement. Events within those categories may include support groups, fitness classes, developing recycling programs, and swapping skills—helping one another use technology, for instance.

Doing and sustaining are also critical.

Doing entails learning the mechanics of running a NORC, including budgeting, and finding appropriate space and helpers.

Sustaining focuses on ensuring the NORC continues: checking in with community members to see whether programming still serves their interests and identifying what's needed for the NORC to evolve and continue thriving.

Learn more about NORCs:

- Finding Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (<https://bit.ly/3Eymhiz>)
- New York State Office for the Aging (<https://on.ny.gov/3KYrVib>)
- NORC Ambassadors (<https://norcambassadors.ca/about/>)
- NORC Innovation Centre/It's Time to Unleash the Power of Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities in Canada (<https://bit.ly/3lke7eA>)

- NORC LAB (<https://bit.ly/3KCotJF>)
- What Is a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community? (<https://bit.ly/3KvIv9V>)

Philip Nastasi
REALTOR®, SRES®, ABR®
Rodeo Realty Inc.
818-489-1960
pnastjr@justtheperfecthome.com
www.justtheperfecthome.com
DRE# 01892875

