

Partnership Creates Possibilities in an Urban Setting

by Carol Barbour and Theodore Reed

Changes in longevity, new science related to healthy aging, the costs of health care and the onrushing generation of baby boomers are all converging to prompt a new look at options for healthy aging.

Two particular trends have pushed [Friends in the City \(FitC\)](#), a center-city Philadelphia group of seniors, to look for new models:

- The movement of empty-nesters to enjoy the amenities of urban areas
- The strong preference among older people for aging at home within a supportive multi-generational community

FitC is designed to help provide center city residents of Philadelphia with both the supportive social networks that are acknowledged to be critical for healthy aging, and the various support services that will enable them to continue to live independently.

From a Self-Contained Community to a Citywide Campus

FitC was started 10 years ago by four Quaker couples with the objective of providing the benefits of a traditional CCRC in an urban setting. The founders wanted to stay close to the cultural, civic, volunteer and religious activities that provided the grounding for their lives. Instead of building a cookie-cutter self-contained CCRC in the city we decided to make the city our campus.

Friends Life Care

Residents at Friends Center City – Riverfront participate in Friends Life Care's VigR™ program.

Lifetime health care was the second strong priority for the Quaker founders. Their model had been the independent living/assisted living/skilled nursing organization exemplified by area CCRCs. But other models were developing that better meshed with the goals of the members of this emerging organization. In particular, the pioneering work of [Friends Life Care \(FLC\)](#) as a “CCRC without walls” provided a structure for addressing changes in health that require long-term care services, while focusing on wellness and on enabling people to continue to live in their own homes. Over the 20 years of FLC's experience, 98% of its members are able to live in their own homes and do not need to move into the type of institutional setting (memory unit or skilled nursing facility) that is familiar to many CCRC residents.



The incentives for provider and member were aligned—to encourage wellness and provide the supports that enabled independent living. Rather than build a new organization, FitC has partnered with FLC to provide its members with long-term care services, care coordination and ongoing wellness programming.

FitC's organizational efforts to build a self-contained residential community for older people also transformed

into a new vision which includes two components:

- First, our residential community ([Friends Center City – Riverfront](#)) is nestled in a multigenerational condominium building. (Ten of the 40 units are occupied by FitC members, and we expect that over time up to half of the residents will be members.) Riverfront residents participate in a wide range of FitC programs and activities that are built upon the fabric of the city's cultural, civic, and religious institutions. Long-term care services and wellness-focused care coordination for Riverfront residents are provided by Friends Life Care.
- Second, FitC is our community without walls. Since many FitC participants had already downsized and/or live in age-friendly spaces, we recognized that supportive social networks in high-density center city Philadelphia did not require a residential community base.

An active program of events and activities draws hundreds of people who have chosen to age in center city, to volunteer in the community, to share cultural events, and to participate in programs designed to address specific needs or interests. Participants in these activities include residents of FCC-Riverfront and non-resident FitC members who live across the city. Programs take place in many venues, including some programs in the commons area of FCC-Riverfront.

There are so many resources, amenities and opportunities available in Philadelphia that our role is primarily to facilitate access and opportunity in support of existing institutions. As part of FLC's wellness initiative, VigR™ (Vitality, Independence, Growth, Resilience), special programs offered in center-city Philadelphia draw heavily from the FitC membership. In addition, FLC and FitC jointly sponsor several health-oriented activities for members of both organizations.

From Social Isolation to Mutual Support

Recently FitC has been working in individual high-rise buildings (most are naturally occurring retirement communities, or NORCS) to provide services and the benefits of community association to older residents, many of whom currently lack the supportive social networks that are critical for healthy aging.

Using FitC programs and activities as gathering points, long-term neighbors who are strangers are becoming friends, and together they are addressing common needs and problems. We are in the process of identifying FLC supportive services (again, using existing resources rather than developing them from scratch) that can enable aging high rise residents to continue to live independently within the context of new supportive communities.

For an Aging-Services Provider, a New Model for the Future

FLC pioneered the CCRC without walls concept, now known as continuing care at home (CCAH), in the 1980s as an alternative to campus-based CCRCs for those individuals who prefer to remain in their own homes. Building on and partnering with existing resources within neighborhoods and communities has been an integral part of FLC's operational strategy from the outset; its care coordinators utilize a network of carefully screened provider agencies to deliver the hands-on care required by the plan's membership as it ages.

With the proliferation of 55-plus communities and type C (fee-for-service) CCRCs in recent years, some of these communities look to FLC to provide the coordination and coverage for long-term care services they lack. Great opportunities to partner are created so the concepts complement each other.

Innovation has been critical to the success of FLC over the years. When the market for the type A CCAH plan eroded, FLC developed a new pricing model that allows members to build a long-term care plan that makes the most sense for their personal circumstances. As more boomers began planning for future long-term care needs, FLC initiated the VigR program to provide an even greater emphasis on wellness and build on the

research on the science of aging.

The unique FitC/FLC partnership creates a whole new model for addressing the needs of this population, such as intergenerational living, supportive social networks, care coordination and long-term care services, and an emphasis on wellness—all part of one urban campus.

Lessons Learned

Would a similar program work for your community or organization, and if so what are the critical elements?

- Be member-centric. Members should provide overall direction and initiate programs and activities that are important to them. Organizations can help them do this with back-office support.
- Keep focused on your core mission of enriching the lives of older people. How you realize your core mission should change over time in response to changing conditions and new information. Be responsive to your members regarding how that plays out.
- Partner, don't build from scratch. Urban centers typically house institutions that offer amenities and opportunities for service of all kinds. They need your support. You can help them by providing your members with friendly access and volunteers to help in their programming and activities. They can help you by simplifying the work that is necessary to help enrich and sustain the lives of your members.

For its VigR program and continuing care at home model, Friends Life Care is the winner of the 2013 LeadingAge Innovation in Care and Services Award, to be presented at the [LeadingAge Annual Meeting and Expo](#) in Dallas, TX, Oct. 27-30. To learn more about all of this year's LeadingAge Award winners, see the article "[LeadingAge Awards Winners for 2013: Expanding the Possibilities for Aging.](#)"