

Family-Friendly 'Burbs Turn Senior Friendly

Programs provide chefs, home repair and other services to help suburban seniors age in place.

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March 5, 2008

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was originally published in the November 2007 issue of Kiplinger's Retirement Report.

The staircase in Adele Youngblood's two-story house in the Minneapolis suburbs is a daily challenge. The 76-year-old, who's had back and knee surgeries and a hip replacement, crawls up and down the stairs using her hands as well as her feet. But Youngblood refuses to move from the home where she has lived since 1963 and raised her three [children](#). "I get a lot of flak from my friends about moving," says Youngblood, who has been divorced since 1979. "I tell them to be quiet. It's my decision, and they know I am happier in my home."

Thanks largely to a program run by the Jewish [Family](#) and Children's Service of Minneapolis, Youngblood has been able to continue living in memory-filled surroundings. The program arranged for a walker for each floor, grab bars in the shower and an emergency button if she needs help.

This program is part of a growing movement nationwide to help aging suburbanites like Youngblood stay in their homes safely for as long as possible. About 90% of retirees and 80% of baby-boomers say they want to remain in their longtime neighborhoods indefinitely, according to an AARP survey.

Like many seniors, Youngblood moved to the suburbs when her [kids](#) were young. But now those family-friendly communities of the 1960s are graying and becoming what's known as naturally occurring retirement communities, or NORCs. Following this generation are their children. "More baby-boomers have lived in the suburbs than any other generation, and the majority will continue to age in place or move within their same community," says William Frey, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and author of a report, *Mapping the Growth of Older America: Seniors and Boomers in the Early 21st Century*. Frey says they'll require health care, transportation, social services and other public aid.

Many community planners believe that aging-in-place programs could help many elderly homeowners avoid institutional care. More than 100 programs exist in places as diverse as Boston's Beacon Hill, New Canaan, Conn., Madison, Wis., and the Indianapolis suburbs. Often, it's the small, inexpensive service -- a ride to a doctor's appointment or home-delivered groceries -- that can make all the difference.

The program that helps Youngblood was developed in 2003, when the Jewish Family and Children's Service received nearly \$1.2 million in federal and state grants to test strategies for helping seniors in the suburbs of St. Louis Park and Hopkins remain in their homes. The project helps make seniors aware of existing aid. "The community is rich in resources, but people do not know what they are, how to access them or who qualifies for them," says Annette Sandler, the project coordinator.

Local seniors helped produce a directory that includes transportation services, home-care agencies and even hairstylists who make house calls. They also created a cable TV program on topics such as health-care directives

and fall prevention. Besides helping to run the program, seniors also volunteer their services to other aging-in-place residents. They teach classes, deliver meals and drive other seniors to appointments.