

Local group forms to support aging in place in Newton

By Chrissie Long / Staff Writer, Newton Tab
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NEWTON -

Tamara Bliss loves how the sun spills into her sunroom in her home on Lewis Street. She likes living next to neighbors who have just begun a family and she enjoys her wooded yard, which gives her the sense she is living in the country, even though she has all the conveniences of city life.

As she moves deeper into retirement, Bliss, 67, is doing everything she can to make sure she and her husband can stay put.

"I want to stay in my home as long as I can," said the 40-year Newtonville resident. "I am not keen on being in an assisted-living community that is age-segregated. People tend to focus on their illnesses, which can be a little depressing."

Bliss linked up with two other Newton residents in the spring of 2007 who are stitching together the base of an organization designed to help Garden City seniors remain in their homes. The grassroots organization, which has so far been publicized only through word-of-mouth, already has 80 people on its mailing list.

"It's very clear that people want to be part of this for mixed reasons," said founder Jeremy Warburg Russo, 73. "I think people have enormous concerns about the retirement community and the assisted-living route, and are looking for alternatives."

For Russo, who suffers from allergies, spending her retirement in a shared living space threatens her ongoing health. So, as she grew older, she began the search for something else.

"I had been planning to figure it out individually," she said. "But I soon learned that there was a way to figure it out collectively."

Modeled after the Beacon Hill Village, a community of residents that banded together in Boston, [Newton at Home](#) would work to help residents age

successfully in their homes by providing practical services such as transportation, grocery shopping and social opportunities. The soon-to-be nonprofit would be run by residents — not government agencies or social services — helping members become more involved in shaping their retirement.

“We want to think differently about how we grow older,” Bliss said. “I want control over where my life is going to be.”

For an annual fee, members would have access to a variety of services intended to help them stay in their longtime homes, including trips to the doctor, phone numbers for trusted carpenters and home-delivered meals. The group hopes to launch services in the fall of next year.

Arnold and Helen Meltzer are about to celebrate their 50th year in their home in Newton Centre. Despite their age — Arnold is 90 and Helen is 89 — they’ve been able to get by, sometimes with the help of home aids and also by making small adaptations to their home.

“We love our home and we love our neighbors, and we love the fact that we live in this house with all the space it provides,” said Helen, who serves on the steering committee for the fledging organization.

When she’s told others about Newton at Home and its mission, they respond enthusiastically. One woman said, “That’s exactly what I need.”

“This is the wave of the future,” said Helen, who helped establish the Newton Senior Center and has been working with the Newton Health Department for years. “There is such a need among older people who have been in the community for a length of time and who are very happy to be here to be able to have the opportunity to stay in their home.”

Though Meltzer admitted she and her husband are considering moving into an assisted-living home, she could have benefited from an organization like Newton at Home.

“When I heard about [Newton at Home], I thought it was only natural,” she said. “It’s already taking off throughout the country.”

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