



*Age-Friendly Sarasota, UPLIFT
Florida Network*

It Takes a Village

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"It takes a village to raise a child" is an African proverb that means that an entire community of people must interact with children for them to experience and grow in a safe and healthy environment.

The phrase and its intrinsic meaning demonstrate the collective approach necessary to bring about or achieve meaningful change. I believe this phrase can apply to people of all ages.

The development of Villages with a focus on aging well and neighbors supporting neighbors started as a grassroots movement more than 20 years ago. The first U.S. Village, Beacon Hill, began in the Boston area and was built on the idea that we're stronger together. It emphasized peer-to-peer networking to promote an active lifestyle, improve health, and reduce isolation. The village movement took root, and now there are more than 300 villages throughout the U.S., Canada, and Australia – either established or in process – including the exploration of the Southwest Florida Villages.

Sarasota is home to one of Florida's largest proportions of older adults, with more than a third (34%) aged 65 and older. With the national shift in declining births and an increased life span, projections demonstrate a continued increase of older adults living in our community. A national survey conducted in 2010 by AARP found that nearly 90% of older adults want to remain in their homes and communities as they age.

Southwest Florida Villages seeks to connect with community, neighbors, and services to enhance quality of life and wellbeing. This can include social, educational, and volunteer opportunities as well as connections to supportive services.

Many professionals and those in public office are seeing the tremendous benefit of the village model and the natural fit it has with Age-Friendly work. There are many commonalities across the [eight domains of livability](#) (Civic Participation & Employment, Communication & Information, Health Services & Community Supports, Housing, Outdoor Spaces & Buildings, Respect & Social Inclusion, Social Participation, Transportation). Communities have started incorporating Villages into their age-friendly action plans, and California has included wording in their State Master Plan on Aging.

The Village-to-Village Network was established in 2010 as the National Association of the Village Movement. The goal is to help communities gain knowledge and access tools to develop and manage their own village. The Village-to-Village Network offers many resources, including webinars, mentor programs, a national village conference, membership opportunities, and a toolkit on starting a village from the ground up.

I wanted to take the time to acknowledge Beacon Hill Village founder Susan McWhinney Morse. Susan sought to change the paradigm of older adults being passive participants in their own lives to starting a movement for living a vibrant and active life where older adults continue to contribute and chart their course. Well done!

So now what? The Patterson Foundation is once again at the forefront of making connections and is working with an exploratory team to research and develop the Southwest Florida Villages. More to come on this exciting adventure as this process evolves.

If you would like more information, please visit vtvnetwork.org or contact initiative manager Deborah Gauvreau: dgauvreau@thepattersonfoundation.org.