

From the Medicine Hat News:

Making a move during twilight years is hard on many levels

GILLIAN SLADE

Moving house is considered one of the top-10 most stressful events in life and if you're a senior, or the child of a senior that needs to move, the anxiety level is high too, but there are strategies that help and services to reduce the load.

"The decision to move to an independent living community, assisted living, or long-term care is only the beginning of a challenging journey," says local LifeCare coach Mary Lou Mccrodan and assistant manager at the Wellington Seniors Residence. "Helping someone through this important transition takes research and planning."

Looking at the change realistically is key, according to Dr. Avrene Brandt a clinical psychologist and author based in the U.S. If there is a discrepancy between expectations and reality you're setting yourself up for disappointment and frustration.

If it's a medical condition that necessitates the move there is the loss of familiars such as friendly neighbours and perhaps the loss of possessions that can't go with you. There is often a role reversal too for the senior and their children. Brandt says this can affect the senior's self-esteem.

The adult child has difficulty adjusting to the parent being dependent and vulnerable. Brandt advises in all the decisions the key is to ensure the senior has a sense of well-being, purpose and self-esteem adding it is important to explore options together. Mccrodan says planning well ahead is most important.

"If you can help a senior see the move as a positive transition rather than a defeat, you'll be off to a good start," said Mccrodan. If there is equity in a home it is a good idea to get it appraised but hold off on selling the house for a little while if it is at all possible financially.

A professional life-coach or Alberta Health Services Homecare can assess the needs of the person making the transition. A financial assessment will help to indicate the available options for alternative accommodation.

When you're looking at the range of seniors' homes it's a good idea to have a meal there and talk to other residents, says Mccrodan.

Brandt says placing a senior in a home without their input can lead to feelings of abandonment and could contribute to depression. Whether you're arranging the transition yourself or are an adult child helping a parent there is professional help available to take the load off your shoulders.

Judy Weber, Medicine Hat, runs Senior Transitions, a moving co-ordinator. Weber handles the arrangements with movers, packers, cleaners, charitable donation pick-ups and will even determine a floor plan for the new location before moving day. She also arranges for items such as pictures to be hung in the new home.

"Don't take with you what you won't have place for," is her advice.

The items people find difficult to get rid of are the collectible items and those with family connections, says Weber. Sometimes photographs of the items that have to be given away or sold, such as pretty bone china cups and saucers, can be turned into a collage and framed. You then have a work of art to decorate the walls of the new place, she suggests. There is also plenty that can be thrown away.

"We only use about 20 percent of what we own," said Weber. Senior Transitions' fees range from \$500 to \$2,000 depending on the services that are required.

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