

Abbeyfield House residents get security and support without losing independence

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From the street, the pale yellow house with green trim in a quiet Marpole neighbourhood looks like an ordinary home.

But walk through the front door and the first sign this isn't a regular house is parked in the foyer: Three motorized scooters and a walker lined up in a row.

Welcome to Vancouver's [Abbeyfield House](#), home to 17 seniors who don't want to live alone, but also want added security and support without a loss of independence.

"We are like family. You really get to know each other," said Feli Hampl, 79, one summer afternoon, fresh from playing Scrabble at the nearby seniors' centre and getting set for a rousing game of rummy with other residents.

Abbeyfield House is a cross between a private home, where seniors can get lonely or isolated, and a larger care facility. Fees, which range from \$1,350 to \$1,450 a month, include accommodation, two meals a day and utilities.

A live-in co-ordinator keeps an eye on residents, and there are bell pulls in bedrooms and bathrooms, just in case. But for the most part, residents are responsible for their own care. If they need it, they can avail themselves of outside home support (such as laundry or housekeeping services).

The Abbeyfield concept originated in England in 1955 and has spread to more than 1,100 houses worldwide, including 19 in B.C.

Ellen Fraser, 87, moved in a few years ago after a stroke. She chose Abbeyfield because it was welcoming and not too formal.

"We have the freedom of doing our own thing. We don't have to [play] bingo on Tuesday. Many of us have a busy life outside."

Vancouver's Abbeyfield House — actually two connected houses — definitely doesn't feel like an institution. It's more like grandma's country home, with cozy armchairs, fresh flowers in vases, sunny

atriums, a piano, a well-tended garden and the aroma of freshly baked peanut butter cookies cooling on a rack in the kitchen.

Fraser said she'd prefer living in her own home, of course. But Abbeyfield is the next best thing.

"It's a time of life, my dear. You can't look back. I can't change my age," she said. "But I'm going to live to be 126. I think I have to get a job, though."

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Ellen Fraser, Feli Hampl and Agnes Hill play cards at Abbeyfield House. Abbeyfield is an innovative success story, placing a group of seniors together in a house. It offers support to residents, but also maintains the look and feel of a private home.

Photograph by: Arlen Redekop, PNG