

## MUSIC

**ROBIN: This is Reimagine Aging – an audio series exploring the innovations that help older adults thrive in Massachusetts, a state that’s committed to being age- and dementia-friendly. I’m Robin Lipson, the Deputy Secretary of the Executive Office of Elder Affairs.**

ROBIN: Where we live matters...especially as we age. It’s no secret that finding an affordable place to live is difficult in Massachusetts. In her inaugural address, Governor Maura Healey pointed out that rent in the Commonwealth is 50% higher than the national average.

HEALEY: We have some of the lowest homeownership rates and some of the highest housing prices. Now one reason for this is because Massachusetts is a great place to live.

ROBIN: For older adults on fixed incomes, the high cost of housing here in Massachusetts is particularly challenging. In this episode, we visit a nonprofit senior housing developer called 2Life Communities. They create affordable housing by focusing on “community,” – which means having opportunities to stay engaged and living near neighbors, businesses, and supportive services.

AMY: We believe so strongly that every older adult should have the opportunity to age in community. And so, we are trying to go every place the market fails, which is everything but the most extremely high.

*MUSIC ends or xfades into the next narration.*

ROBIN: 2Life Communities receives a mix of federal, state, local, and philanthropic funding. There are six 2Life locations in the Commonwealth, including this one in Brighton.

### *Sound up on exercise class*

ROBIN: It's 11:00 in the morning, and about 20 older adults form a loose circle around a man named Patrick, who wears a black t-shirt that says "trainer" ...

### *Sound up*

ROBIN: Some residents stand and hold onto the back of their chairs; some remain seated. Exercise classes are offered twice a week, and all a resident has to do to attend is take the elevator from their apartment to this warmly lit common area. There are about 900 older adults living here in this mid-rise building...in seven hundred and sixty-three apartments. But this is not like most subsidized housing for older adults. 2Life Communities has a mission – and the heart of that mission is in the word community.

### *Music Birraj We Found Each Other*

AMY: We are zealots, in the belief that optimal aging happens when you age in community.

ROBIN: Amy Schectman is CEO and president.

AMY: when people come to live at 2Life communities, they've had a whole lifetime of experiences, a whole lifetime of curiosities and wisdom that they've gained. And our job is to help take that and weave that into a phase that's built on all the good things that have happened before. And all the ambitions people have for that phase of life. So it's about to life!

### **MUSIC POST**

ROBIN: The rising cost of living is especially hard for some older adults who find their retirement income isn't sufficient for today's needs. Fortunately, rents are subsidized in this 2Life housing community. Residents who qualify under federal housing guidelines

pay a percentage of their income toward rent, usually around 30%, and housing subsidies cover the rest.

CAROL: well, my name is Carol Gerrior. I used to live in my own apartment.

ROBIN: Carol worked for many years as an administrative assistant at Harvard University.

CAROL: But when I was getting towards retirement, the landlord kept raising the rates so high, I couldn't afford it. And when I retired, I knew I had to get out. And I lucked out coming into here.

Apartments at the Brighton campus range from studios to two Bedrooms. Emily Levine is Chief of Staff for 2Life Communities, and today she shows us around...

*Ambi+ “So welcome, you’re here in Brighton, where our HQ is based. And our largest campus of our 6 campuses...(FADE)”*

ROBIN: There’s an art room, a dining room for special events like a Valentine's Day dinner, and sitting areas set along sunny hallways. These areas are designed to make it easy for residents to connect to other people and combat the isolation that can happen when people live alone. There are also some conveniences for the residents...

EMILY: Yeah, so here, you're in the grocery store. And you'll see there's a lot of the Russian goodies and snacks and treats from home and people really make use of it. And they accept SNAP here. So folks can use their food stamp cards and their EBT cards.

ROBIN: Signs in multiple languages reflect the diverse campus population.

Emily: We automatically translate everything into about six languages. So we have Chinese, Russian, Haitian-Creole, Korean, Vietnamese, English, Spanish, and I think I said... is that six? Albanian is the other one.

ROBIN: A core part of the 2Life mission is to create connections between residents and their surrounding neighbors. One way they do that is by opening their social and educational programs to older adults who don't live in the building. Also, partnerships are key. For example, the grocery store is run by an outside business, and a cafe rents space on the ground floor. It's got two entrances - one connects directly to 2Life residents in the building...and the street entrance is open to the public. And there are larger collaborations, too. Emily points through a window to some construction happening next door.

Emily: So we partnered with the Boston Housing Authority, who designated us to redevelop the JJ Carroll, senior and disabled housing there, that was pretty out of date..... part of that first wave of public housing stock. So we ended up completely demoing it, and we're turning those 64 units into 142. And it will have a PACE center on the ground floor.

ROBIN: PACE stands for Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly. It's a program that provides medical and social services for older adults so they can stay at home as long as possible. The PACE Center will be run by a separate agency but be an integral part of the 2Life housing community, with services available to both building residents and other older adults in the Brighton area.

EMILY: PACE as a program really understands the opportunity of being co-located with housing. So we're actually proving that model, and our future, in our pipeline to be building in Lynn, will have the same PACE partner who's very, very motivated by our mission.

ROBIN: 2Life works with outside organizations to provide specific services, such as an adult day care program for those with memory loss. Resident service coordinators act as the community concierge. They coordinate transportation to medical appointments, help people access digital tools, and assist residents looking for health and wellness opportunities. CEO Amy Schectman says 2Life Communities also give a great deal of thought to the physical structure of the buildings. They work with architectural design firms that specialize in housing for older people. They've also developed design guidelines to make apartments adaptive to the needs of residents as they age.

AMY: So for example, we spent three years going to every campus, talking to the staff, talking to the residents. What worked? What didn't? Oh, those doorknobs aren't good. Oh, those door knobs were good. Let's have a design standard that these are our door knobs, our window openers. Those are too hard. Those are easy, good. And so we've documented in a set of design guidelines, everything we've ever learned. And then we go back every couple of years and revisit that. Well, is there a new product that makes doorknobs easier? You know, what happens when people have arthritis? Well, they can't turn, so you have to, right? So we're always learning and always trying to document that learning and put it on our website, so anyone can benefit from that.

ROBIN: This attention to detail makes 2Life Communities a best practice for creating housing for older adults. In fact, the state released its own age-friendly housing design guide incorporating 2Life's findings. And after years of providing housing for older adults

with extremely low incomes, 2Life decided to tackle another hurdle – lack of community-based housing for middle-income older adults.

AMY: To do what we do with the kind of programs and services and individual supports that we do for our elders in our affordable communities. We rely a lot on government money. Once you get to the middle, there is no government money.

ROBIN: 2Life Communities spent seven years developing a financial model for housing for the middle class. This required a different approach since federal, state, and local funds that are available for subsidized properties cannot be used. In 2023, they broke ground on a complex in Newton called Opus. It's financed in part by money from future residents; other savings come from the location. It's being built next to existing 2Life affordable housing... so the two can share campus staff and services. In addition, residents will sign a contract to volunteer time within the 2Life community to help keep costs down. Amy says housing is critical for doing anything great.

### **MUSIC IN - Muted Silhouettes Only Piano**

AMY: I mean, think about it is the cost driver that makes life unaffordable. It is the security blanket that gives people a safe place to - to grow and blossom. It is the most efficient place possible to deliver services. Housing is the essential platform for everything good.

ROBIN: 2Life Communities plans to double the number of people they house in the next few years.

AMY: Which we need to do because the waiting lists are so painfully long. And the need is so vast that we're determined to do everything in our power so that no older adult in Massachusetts ever has to be denied the opportunity to age in community. And so we've got a lot of work to do.

**ROBIN: To hear more age- and dementia-friendly stories in this series visit [reimagineaging.net](https://reimagineaging.net). And to learn how your community can become more age- and dementia-friendly, visit [mass.gov/reimagineaging](https://mass.gov/reimagineaging). This story was produced with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs and the Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative. Funding was provided by Point32Health Foundation. I'm Robin Lipson. Thank you for listening.**