

Home, health and happiness – for every older person

The NOAH --- model



Who is --- NOAH?

NOAH is a programme of the Catholic Welfare and Development (CWD) agency. We provide homes and services to the poorest elderly in the Western Cape.

We believe in keeping elderly people in their communities for as long as possible.

Our model, which speaks to our vision of providing home, health and happiness for every older person, is focused on providing an integrated package of housing and services to the elderly within their communities. We are therefore creating homes rather than institutions for our residents.

As a result of our work elderly people:

- Feel secure and happier
- Stay connected to their communities
- Retain their dignity and independence
- Remain healthy and active for as long as possible

Our values

At NOAH we:

- take time to listen
- are committed and dependable
- respond and adapt to real community needs
- value and respect the contribution of older people

The NOAH model

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Introduction

A powerful and enduring myth is that older persons are people who are at the 'end of their days', circumscribed by illness and unhappiness. Older people are as capable of having lives that are as vibrant, engaging and interesting as their younger counterparts.

Moreover research evidence strongly indicates that while older people have episodes of illness and incapacity, these illness episodes do not sum up the lives of older persons. In fact an older person's needs are no different to the needs of any other generation- the need to feel loved and cared for, to have access to adequate income, food, housing and health care. The difference lies in the fact that these basic human needs of the older person are frequently overlooked or deliberately ignored by families, communities, funders, politicians and policy makers. It is this fact that results in many older persons leading lives of severe impoverishment and ill health.

Yet this indifference need not be the defining experience of the older person living in the South

Africa of today because within this country's borders there is an innovation and experience tested model that provides families, communities, funders, politicians and policy makers with at least one 'viable solution' to the real and urgent challenge of providing appropriate and cost effective housing and services for the older person. This 'solution' is the model developed and refined by the Neighbourhood Old Age Homes (NOAH) programme, through 27 years of working to provide essential services for older persons.

In 1981 NOAH came into existence as a result of a decision by the Catholic Archdiocese of Cape Town to respond in a concrete way to the housing needs of poor older parishioners, who had been previously forced out of their homes by apartheid policies and, as pensioners, faced homelessness or living with relatives in conditions of gross overcrowding. This decision and the determination by the Catholic Church to help mitigate the consequences of apartheid suffered by older parishioners, was summarised by the motto 'a NOAH home in every parish of the archdiocese'.



27
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to provide
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The NOAH programme

This programme consists of three core aspects- housing, health and social centres

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Housing

Drawing its inspiration from the British “Abbeyfield model”, typical NOAH homes are ordinary houses on ordinary streets in ordinary communities. They run independently, with residents sharing rooms and daily household chores.

Each resident pays in the region of 15% of their pension as a service levy. This levy is used to pay ‘collective’ household services and costs (e.g. electricity, water, cleaning materials, the TV license and for the upkeep of the garden). A further 8% of the pension is paid over to NOAH

as an administrative levy which used to pay for minor household repairs and replacement of small household items from time to time.

The remaining 77% of the pension is held and used by each resident to buy food, clothing and pay for other living costs. The bigger household costs such as insurance and structural maintenance are paid for by NOAH. The number of residents successfully housed can vary, but experience indicates that there should be at least 6 residents, and not more than 12 residents, per home.

During the first decade of NOAH’s existence the establishment of homes in particular suburbs was the result of a donation (either of a house, piece of land or money) rather than a conscious decision. Consequently a ‘pattern of location’ has developed which is a combination of a cluster of homes

in one area, two houses in another area and a single house in another area. Experience now indicates that this dispersed pattern of location is not cost effective and there are definite organisational advantages to consolidating activities within particular geographical areas. This change of view arose because the

more scattered the homes, the greater was the organisational effort and investment required to support and maintain these homes. While the original motto ‘a NOAH home in every parish’ was useful to highlight the housing needs of older persons, it proved on implementation, to be an unrealistic policy goal.

Overtime a ‘checklist’ of questions has evolved that helps guide the decision as to whether to establish a new NOAH home. Questions include:

- ✓ Does the proposed site or area fall within NOAH's ‘operational reach’?
- ✓ What would be the cost of buying and renovating a house? As mentioned previously a NOAH house needs to be able to accommodate at least 6 residents (alterations maybe necessary). In the past NOAH has either been bequeathed a house or raised the necessary funds to buy and renovate the required house. Any house (bequeathed or purchased) that becomes a NOAH home is a house that is first and foremost bond free. This freedom from debt is very important as it removes the need and anxiety to provide money to meet the monthly bond repayments. This advantage in turn has saved NOAH huge sums of money as well as ensuring that NOAH has not had to divert resources away from core activities in order to pay any escalating bond costs.
- ✓ Can the funds for establishing a new home be acquired through fundraising or a donation?
- ✓ Who will own the house? It is vitally important that the house is owned by a credible legal entity to ensure long term tenancy for residents. In the case of NOAH homes they are all owned by the Catholic Church.
- ✓ Is there any reliable data about the actual number of older persons in need of affordable accommodation and the reasons why this need is not already being met in the area?
- ✓ Are there other organisations/community groups providing services for the older person in the area (e.g. service centres, a residential home, and social work services)? If there such services the potential NOAH residents would be able to make use of them as the need arises.
- ✓ Is the area already provided with a basic level of services and infrastructure that would be needed by the fit older person (e.g. shops, a public healthcare facility and public transport)?
- ✓ Is the area safe enough to enable older persons to live confidently in the area?
- ✓ Can a Steering Committee of community members be formed to partner with NOAH to establish this home?





In areas where NOAH already has one or more homes, questions from the checklist are also used to guide any decision that is taken.

If all goes to plan and a NOAH home is created efforts are then directed towards the selection and admission of new residents into the home. Each potential resident is interviewed to determine whether the person would be able to live communally. In addition each person is assessed to determine whether he or she is fit enough to meet their own personal requirements (e.g. bath, dress, clean and cook for themselves) and undertake other routine household chores.

The assessment also identifies whether

the individual has any ailments or chronic illnesses that need treatment and or ongoing management. Regardless of how good a resident's health is, all NOAH residents are required to join NOAH's PHC service, so that their health can be regularly monitored. Finally, the next of kin of each resident completes and signs a binding agreement with NOAH, which requires the next of kin to be responsible for making alternative accommodation arrangements should the resident require frail or assisted living care.

Once a NOAH home is established, ongoing support is provided to residents by the NOAH staff.

Each resident, on entering a NOAH home, is presented with a 'Code of Conduct'. This document, combined with support from the NOAH staff, helps residents to develop their own domestic routine and ways to manage the tensions and conflicts that may arise from time to time when a group of individuals live together in close proximity.

2 Health



Although NOAH's 'target group' is fit older persons, health is nevertheless an important concern. Firstly a considerable number of NOAH residents have chronic illnesses associated with ageing. Secondly over time the health needs of residents increase as they grow older. As NOAH residents live in a number of suburbs within the greater Cape Town area and beyond, NOAH has developed a nurse-led primary health care service which harnesses both public and private sector health resources, to address the spectrum of health needs of NOAH residents.

This PHC service is based at NOAH's Woodstock Centre and comprises the following key services:

- Monitoring and evaluation of residents' health
- Scheduled consultations with the clinic's nursing sister and a general practitioner
- Supervised distribution of prescribed medication (for acute or chronic illnesses)
- Podiatry
- Physiotherapy
- Massage
- Health talks
- Exercise classes

NOAH residents, who live in areas, which are a considerable distance from the

Woodstock Centre, are visited by the nurse in charge of the PHC service to assess the health of the residents. If it is necessary, residents are referred to the local community health centre for treatment.

In the case of NOAH's Khayletisha residents a beneficial relationship has developed with the staff at the local health care facility. As a result of this relationship, NOAH residents are seen by the medical and nursing staff on an appointment basis and prescribed medication is provided by the dispensary on a scheduled basis. In addition there is an emergency/ weekend cover arrangement which provides for 'home visit' of a general practitioner if and when the need arises.



The fact that NOAH's PHC service is a nurse-led health care service is not accidental. Initially the PHC service was created through a 'partnership in health' with the Geriatric Unit of the Department of Medicine, UCT. In essence NOAH paid a block grant to the Unit and in exchange, a registrar from the Unit provided a weekly consultation service for NOAH residents. In addition there was a registrar on call providing an after hours' emergency service.

By 2000 the arrangement had come to an end. After reviewing the actual health needs of residents, it was recognised that a nurse led PHC service was the appropriate health care service for NOAH residents.

3

Service centres

Apart from providing housing and health services for its residents NOAH has an outreach service through its two centres (in Woodstock and in Khayletisha) for fit older persons living in the community.

For a small membership fee community members can make use of the following services:

- Companionship and social support
- Skills training classes (e.g. handicrafts)
- Talks on a range of topics of interest
- Organised outings
- Fundraising and community events



Governance Structures

When NOAH started in 1981 it had a Steering Committee comprised of interested volunteers to guide and support its work. 27 years later the governance structures have evolved to enable:

- The highest level of stakeholder representation in policy formulation and decision making
- The efficient implementation of policy decisions
- NOAH's policy, decisions and activities to meet 'best practice' benchmarks
- NOAH's management to respond appropriately to the needs of NOAH residents and community members
- Transparent financial accountability to NOAH's funders and supporters (i.e. state, corporate, and private)

In summary NOAH's current governance structures consist of a Governing body, a Management Forum and Steering Committees.

The Governing Body

This body provides overall management of NOAH and provides the expertise to strengthen the programme it manages. With the exception of the programme manager, it is a voluntary group of individuals assembled to advise and support the programme. It is responsible for taking decisions that affect the lives of residents, the staff and work of NOAH.

The NOAH Management Forum

The role of the Forum is to provide community contact and communication channels to strengthen the programme it serves. With the exception of the programme manager and NOAH staff members, the Forum is a voluntary group of individuals assembled to advise and support the programme.

Steering Committees

These committees, as their name implies, are formed to 'steer' and support their particular NOAH home (s). These committees are made up of concerned community individuals who have made a decision to make a positive and practical contribution to the lives of older persons in their community.

To help each steering committee to work effectively, a portfolio system has been developed so each committee member has a particular area of responsibility. This system means that the tasks of a steering committee can be efficiently distributed between members preventing task overload

on one or more people, or a situation where certain tasks are neglected because 'everyone is responsible' for the task. Tasks undertaken by steering committee members range from assisting individual residents, organising social activities, undertaking minor household repairs, engaging the wider community to support the home, and helping to fundraise/ obtain donations. Whatever the task undertaken, the focus is on maintaining the autonomy and wellbeing of residents.

In essence Steering Committees are vital in enabling NOAH each home to fulfil its key goal of providing an affordable, safe and secure home for the fit older person.

Summary

of the NOAH housing model

The following are the essential 'bricks and mortar' that are needed to establish and maintain a functioning NOAH home.

A NOAH Home is a house:

- In an ordinary street, yet large enough, to house between six and twelve residents (generally with two persons sharing a bedroom).
- With sufficient shared facilities to meet the domestic requirements of all residents (i.e. an adequate number bedrooms and bathrooms, a sizeable kitchen and lounge).
- Within easy reach of essential services (e.g. public transport, shops, post office, banks, and public health services).
- That can be managed by residents without reliance on outside staff.

When selecting residents for a NOAH home the following personal qualities, skills and resources must be taken into account.

A potential resident (or couple):

- Needs at least to be in receipt of a state pension
- Needs to be self reliant and take responsibility for their health and well being.
- Needs to have the maturity and flexibility to adjust to the demands of communal living
- Needs to be able to develop relationships with other residents that are based on mutual respect and understanding of each others' cultures , creeds, values and ideas

- Needs to understand that it is the residents' collective responsibility to work together to make their house into a home
- Needs to participate in scheduled house meetings. (These meetings are used to deal with matters that affect the smooth running of the home)
- Needs to be willing to take responsibility, on a rotational basis, for one of the home's portfolios (e.g. finance, gardening, orientation of new residents, maintenance and catering).
- Has (or has applied for) a state pension so that he or she can meet the financial responsibilities of contributing to the shared costs of the home.
- Must be aware of the limitations of the home to meet their needs if he or she requires frail care

Families of residents have an important role to play in providing ongoing support to their relative so that the resident is able to adjust and 'grow into' the role of a NOAH resident.

Consequently families are a major support system for a resident by:

- Assisting their relative to move and 'settle into' their NOAH home
- Assuming and fulfilling their legal responsibilities as the next of kin (particularly in the event of serious illness, an accident, or death)
- Regularly visiting their relative to provide reassurance that the resident has not been abandoned by the family



- Keeping the relative connected to other members of the family through invitations to important family events
- Helping their relative monitor and manage his or her health through regular contact with a health care practitioner (e.g. nurse or GP)
- Supporting their relative to achieve the best possible quality of life for as long as possible

Community involvement with a NOAH Home is essential and is achieved through a home's Steering Committee. This committee needs to be in existence before a NOAH home is created.

The committee should consist of at least six persons who:

- Believe the NOAH model is the means to provide cost effective and appropriate housing for the fit older person living in their community
- Are committed to upholding residents' dignity, privacy and independence
- Have the time, capacity and skills to create a meaningful partnership with residents
- Through this partnership, help residents appropriately address needs and issues as they arise (e.g. help with conflict resolution, provide social support, help residents fundraise, undertake routine maintenance and minor household repairs)
- Are able to set up a basic record keeping system for the home (e.g. a system that records the finances of each house, expenses incurred on a monthly basis and money acquired through fund raising events)
- Provide links for residents to enable them to be part of the wider community and make use of community resources
- Have a working knowledge of the community and of local, provincial and national departments who are mandated to assist the older person



“NOAH has given me a home and friendship over the years. I feel safe here. I thank God for that.”

Gladys, 93 – one of the first residents at NOAH.

Legal guidelines

One of the key issues of this model of housing is the matter of house ownership. This issue can't be over emphasised as a dispute over the ownership of a house will directly affect the security and wellbeing of the house's residents.

In South African law the relevant arrangements can be made to ensure that a house can be legally protected from unwarranted attempts to sell or dispose of a house. A popular arrangement is for the ownership of a house to be vested in a trust which clearly spells out who owns the house and under what conditions the ownership of the house could change or it might be sold. For more detailed information on options available concerning house ownership please consult the NOAH website www.noah.org.za.

Concluding remarks

It is now 27 years since the inception of the NOAH model. Over this period the model has grown in size and developed in ways not envisaged at its inception. However two features of the model have remained consistently in evidence- its adaptability and cost-effectiveness. While the NOAH model to date has only been used to house and support fit older persons with limited financial resources, there is no cogent reason why this housing model should not be adapted to provide a cost-effective and sustainable 'solution' to the needs of other socially and economically vulnerable groups. Such a possibility becomes all the more apt when one considers the national context of significant development imperatives with only limited financial and human resources available to address such imperatives.

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