



Design Principles Deck

Find people living at the extremes.

Unfortunately, it's likely that the most vulnerable older adults and caregivers, by their very nature, are some of the hardest to reach. Their needs are often more complex than the people we tend to interact with day-to-day. Seek out these complex, hard-to-reach people—services designed to meet their needs will often satisfy the needs of a larger audience.

This principle in action: As part of the Aging By Design Street Team activity, one organization worked through informal networks to meet the elders of local refugee populations. Translators were used to have conversations with older adults from Nepali, Somali, and Ethiopia about aging and life in America.

HOW ARE WE LIVING THIS DESIGN PRINCIPLE AT OUR ORGANIZATION?
HOW AREN'T WE?

Welcome and make time for storytelling.

We often only see one side of person—the side they are comfortable showing. By building authentic relationships, we begin to welcome each other into the hidden sides of ourselves. Everyone has a story and most are happy to share it—especially with younger generations.

This principle in action: Aging By Design learned of the Life Recorded program—offering employees, patients and families an opportunity to share meaningful stories and life experiences through personal recorded interviews—mementos that can be shared with loved ones.

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Champion and enable meaningful social connection.

We are social creatures, yet it becomes shockingly easy to grow disconnected from established social networks—and the world more generally—as we age. Disconnection, isolation, loneliness and restlessness compound and can quickly become overwhelming. Create space for social opportunities to happen naturally, and recognize that some might need patient encouragement.

This principle in action: Aging By Design activities routinely bring program staff, clients, and caregivers together through facilitated activities, but there is always time for socialization throughout sessions. Don't forget to have something to snack on!

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Nudge toward healthy planning for the future.

'Healthy' is a relative term. Gently help older adults and caregivers consider and plan for financial, social, physical and emotional aspects of their future. This can begin in middle age or even earlier depending on individual readiness. For some, "considering and planning" feels more like worrying and obsessing and may be counter-productive. Nudge at a pace that feels right for the person you're serving.

This principle in action: Aging By Design asked over 150 older adults what they wish they had known twenty years early. Learning from the hindsight of others can help us build healthier futures.

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Simplify. Again.

Even when you're functioning at your best, when you're approaching 100 years old the body just doesn't work the same as it did when you were younger. Work to simplify confusing or laborious situations, tasks and activities so that older adults and caregivers don't have to. Present information in small pieces, and if using jargon can't be avoided, take time to define terms.

This principle in action: What's the easiest route for the end user to get from point A to point B?

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Use language people understand.

People have a hard time maneuvering through services—rigid, institutional language can feel overwhelming and intimidating. Effective communicators know their audience, explain things clearly and check for understanding. Be mindful that older adults and caregivers may have impairments (e.g. vision, hearing, etc.) that strain communication. Promote service offerings through channels that make sense for older adults and caregivers using language they would use themselves.

This principle in action: How can you most effectively communicate for understanding? The Aging By Design team regularly revised project documents to improve their communication with older adults. Font sizes, contrasts, and extraneous information were top priorities.

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Nurture the mind regardless of physical limitation.

Physical ailments can keep older adults and caregivers from the parts of life they once enjoyed. The world quickly feels a lot smaller with much less to do, leading to boredom and contributing to social isolation. Behind these physical limitations is a mind that still races. Services and solutions that satiate these energetic minds help people remain active, stimulated and engaged in life.

This principle in action: When a member of the Aging By Design project team shared his last name, a table of older adults with similar heritage launched into endless conversation about the past, holidays and festivals, and the best places to dance a good Polka.

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Reduce impact on already strained routines.

Recognize that routines have been built over time. Forced changes to these routines can cause frustration and anxiety, especially when it involves loss. Be flexible—respect the time and privacy needed for people to process these life changes. Provide comfort knowing their living situation could be anything but comfortable.

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Start with real needs.

When we make decisions based on inaccurate information and assumptions, our solutions are at risk of missing the mark. Seek out the people we serve; ask questions; invite honest responses; and listen to understand. Everything we do should be able to be traced back to satisfying their needs.

This principle in action: Aging By Design leveraged the enthusiasm of a handful of organizations who went out and heard from real people to learn about their lives, hopes, challenges and aspirations. These design principles—as well as other tools and materials—were crafted using the learnings from those conversations.

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Absorb discomfort so the people we serve don't have to.

Many things take more time and effort as we age and become less able—we might move slower, start the day with less energy or struggle with foreign technology. Someone has to absorb the added time or effort needed to complete tasks. Be mindful of when services can bare this.

This principle in action: Rather than always asking older adults to come to us, members of the Aging By Design project team spent a workday with a volunteer driver to better understand the highlights and challenges of the job as well as the experience from the riders' perspective.

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Make it easier to ask for help.

Asking for help can be difficult—really difficult—especially for older adults and caregivers with a stubborn streak. Coming to terms with the realities of growing older happens differently for different people. Admitting a limitation to someone else means being vulnerable, and many people aren't comfortable with this. Take every opportunity to show genuine interest, and take time to develop the trust and safety needed for courageous conversations.

This principle in action: Aging By Design spent time at a full care spectrum community that strives to have the same staff working with the same residents. Residents and staff build deep connections with one another—breaking down barriers (real or perceived) to communication.

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Celebrate life and have a little fun.

See the value in people and the positives in their lives. Follow their lead and share in the celebration of those positives. Being mindful that some may not be up for it, bring a little levity—joke, laugh and smile together. We all age, and our attitudes towards that fact have profound influence on the experience.

This principle in action: Aging By Design spent time at an assisted living building where staff refer to walkers as ‘cadillacs’ and jokingly warn residents to “keep it under 30mph”.

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Spread dignity.

Create safe and non-judgemental environments to encourage sharing of realities. Give space for older adults and caregivers to be their whole selves. Be mindful of people's capacity for learning and always be respectful of the boundaries people set for themselves. Embody kindness, patience and decency regardless of situation or ability.

HOW ARE WE LIVING THIS DESIGN PRINCIPLE AT OUR ORGANIZATION?
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Steward inclusivity.

Everyone deserves help and support as they age, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual preference and socioeconomic class. Period.

See beyond numbered age—making seemingly arbitrary decisions about age of eligibility often disadvantages the most vulnerable (e.g. people who have prematurely aged due to the stresses of poverty, significant lifelong health issues, etc.)

This principle in action: “I have 90% left, but my partner, she only has 25% of what she used to. But we’re still here, and I’m helping her with what she can’t do anymore.” One of the Aging By Design ‘personas’ in the Stakeholder Lab made one participant comfortable enough to share more about herself.

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