

# ELEVATE

NEWS FROM 2LIFE

SHARED SPACES PLAY A VITAL ROLE  
IN SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITIES.

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## IN THIS ISSUE

Why public spaces are essential for seniors • Overcoming funding challenges to develop senior housing • Opening a wall to bring people together • Community life • News in Brief

## From isolation to connection: The impact of shared spaces in senior communities

As we age, how we live is just as important as where we live. Having access to thoughtfully designed and welcoming community spaces can help older adults feel more connected to those around them — fostering an environment where they can thrive. Despite the range of benefits shared spaces offer, traditional funding programs for affordable housing rarely consider the need for socialization when developing senior housing.

### The importance of community spaces

Shared spaces provide a hub for socialization and should be integrated into every senior living community. From art classes and meals to informal chats with neighbors and special events, these spaces empower residents to connect with fellow residents as well as staff members. Meaningful connections help alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation to bolster overall well-being.

“At 2Life, we design spaces that make it easy for residents to step out of their apartments and find their way into the community,” says Emily Levine, chief of advocacy for 2Life. That means creating “village centers” — welcoming areas where people can relax, learn, engage in conversation, listen to music, and participate in fitness activities.

However, the benefits go beyond social connection. Integrating more communal spaces into a senior living community also creates a vibrant place for enriching programs and provides opportunities for partners and members of the surrounding community to engage more seamlessly with residents.

An exciting example is the J.J. Carroll House in Brighton which, in partnership with Element Care, includes a Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) Center. PACE’s comprehensive health and wellness services provide excellent, comprehensive care close to home for qualifying seniors who live on our Brighton campus as well as in the surrounding community.

### Funding models need to catch up

Despite increasing recognition of the value of community spaces, funding for affordable senior housing still lags. Many government programs aimed at supporting affordable housing developments fail to explicitly address the significance of these spaces for residents’ well-being. This oversight exacerbates the risk of loneliness, particularly for seniors, as reduced physical mobility often keeps them closer to home.

For 2Life, community spaces are non-negotiable. Our communities weave together different funding sources, and we are grateful for the generous support of private philanthropy and special programs that help us demonstrate the powerful benefits of our model. Unfortunately, without that support, this model lacks scalability, making it critical that we seek new and improved funding models to ensure these intentional spaces continue to be integrated into all future projects.



### Signs of promise

There are signs of growing support that could lead to much-needed systemic change.

“The success of our communities depends on nurturing partnerships with stakeholders, individuals, and organizations that understand the power of connected spaces in building community,” says Levine.

2Life’s advocacy efforts recently secured critical funding from the 2024 Congressional budget thanks to collaboration with the offices of U.S. Reps.

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Seth Moulton and Ayanna Pressley, and U.S. Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Edward Markey. These funds will directly support the development of Village Centers at two communities currently in development — Brooke House at Olmsted Village in Mattapan and Solimine House in Lynn.

“While these grants were a onetime allocation specific to these projects, they signal a broader, growing recognition of the importance of vibrant, connected spaces within communities like ours, and highlight the value of building partnerships,” says Levine.

Drawing attention to secure funding for community spaces takes patience and resilience, but there are many rewards. Every new project that goes beyond simply building apartments can bring about a positive change in the lives of older adults and redefine what it means to age well.

“We’ve seen the amazing things that happen when seniors live in a vibrant community that facilitates their independence, values their skills and lived experiences, and provides opportunities to meet new people who help them lead engaged, fulfilling lives,” explains Levine.

For these reasons, Levine says public spaces are essential when it comes to building senior communities, reiterating 2Life’s approach.

“We developed a proven model for creating modern, integrated living environments for seniors,” she says. “Our goal is to shift the mindset about the importance of shared spaces and make access to truly aging in community a fundamental component of the senior living experience.”



*THOUGHTS FROM ZOE WEINROBE,  
2LIFE CHIEF OF REAL ESTATE*

## Overcoming funding challenges to develop affordable senior communities



**Finding affordable housing can be an uphill battle for millions of seniors who live on fixed incomes.** It is a heart-wrenching truth that only three out of five eligible older adults receive federal housing assistance in the U.S. In Massachusetts, the high cost of housing is the single biggest cause of economic insecurity among older adults.

The enormity of the current affordable senior housing crisis demands a rapid response as well as a strategic, sustainable, and cost-efficient approach. However, many obstacles slow the process of designing, building, and operating supportive senior housing developments, with adequate funding being chief among them.

Over the past two decades, significant changes in federal, state, local, and private funding options available for affordable housing have complicated the process by decreasing the amount and availability of both capital and operating funds for new affordable senior housing developments. Public and private funders are often inundated with five to 10 times the number of applications they can fund or award. Complex and lengthy permitting and entitlement processes along with rising construction and soft costs further slow progress for those of us looking to create more housing options. In Massachusetts, 351 cities and towns have 351 different permitting and local funding processes, which can significantly hinder affordable housing development.

In addition, typical affordable housing funding programs direct dollars to apartments and not to spaces for fitness and wellness activities, arts and culture programs, communal dining, and community events. Such spaces are lifelines for seniors — essential for their physical and emotional well-being — and funding them, in addition to apartments, must be prioritized. Data show that seniors with access to these resources are able to remain in their homes longer and often avoid the need to transition to costlier facilities that provide higher levels of care.

Increased funding is also needed for project-based rental assistance. Senior household incomes typically decline over time while their expenses rise to cover medical needs and extended support and services. Affordable apartments without project-based assistance have a set monthly rent based on the Area Median Income. Residents are required to pay that rent regardless of a change in their income. Project-based housing vouchers, which allow residents to contribute 30% of their income toward rent, go a long way toward filling the gap between what it costs to operate a building and what seniors can reasonably afford. This also prevents seniors from having to choose between housing and other essential expenses such as health care and nutritious food.

2Life Communities has successfully adapted to the twists and turns of funding affordable senior housing, but we’re advocating for even more change — at the federal, state, and local levels — to drive out inefficiencies and allow innovation to flourish. We will continue to work with government leaders to affect policy changes and make capital and operating funds more accessible. That means dispelling age-old misconceptions about affordable senior housing — what it is, how it works, who it is designed for, and what it costs.



## Opening a wall brings people together

**Cindy Katzeff, executive director of the Brown Family House, knows the power of community spaces.**

“More than 10 years ago, we began examining the emotional well-being of seniors and saw that loneliness and isolation were major problems,” says Cindy. “These issues can be as detrimental to health as smoking and obesity.

“That’s why social spaces are as important as residents’ apartments when it comes to combating social isolation and loneliness,” she continues. “Aging well and living in a community require physical space for residents to come together. We know that programs such as art and fitness classes, lecture series, book clubs, and social events enhance their lives, drive engagement, and reduce loneliness.”

The multipurpose room at Brown Family House was limited to just 40 people and Cindy recognized an opportunity. She advocated for a retractable wall that would open the room to the other common areas, increasing the usefulness of all spaces.

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**WE CREATED A TRUE VILLAGE CENTER FOR RESIDENTS AND THE GREATER COMMUNITY. IT HAS BEEN AMAZING.**

**– CINDY KATZEFF**

“Our goal is to build and sustain community, and that wall was in the way,” she says.

She brought the issue to Amy Schectman, 2Life’s CEO, and the organization secured funding for a retractable system. Now, when Cindy looks at the wall — one she knows opens with ease — she is grateful for the generous support of 2Life’s donors.

“Moving the wall allows us to accommodate larger celebrations, such as the annual summer barbecue, holiday parties, and, most recently, Chinese New Year, when we had the space to host a traditional lion dance,” says Cindy. “We created a true village center for residents and the greater community. It has been amazing.”

Common spaces also make engagement more accessible for residents who may be hesitant to leave their homes or have mobility issues. Cindy notes that having such a large and welcoming space in the Brown Family House empowers them to invite outside organizations to participate in their activities, fostering an even greater sense of community and collaboration.

“These spaces are vital to building a community of individuals and groups who can empathize with and support each other,” she says. “We will continue to use these spaces to create even more opportunities for residents to participate in activities that bring them connection and joy.”



A photograph of two women laughing together outdoors. The woman on the left has short grey hair and is wearing a light green cardigan over a floral patterned top. The woman on the right has curly hair, wears glasses, a green headband, and a dark blue Adidas track jacket over a green top. They are standing in front of a building with a brick and wood panel facade.

## THE RESIDENT EXPERIENCE

# Cheryl Pavlik: Forging friendships in community spaces

J.J. Carroll House resident Cheryl Pavlik believes creating a sense of community begins with something simple: a comfortable, cozy space where you can sit down, talk, and be yourself. Shared, informal spaces allow people to connect casually and build relationships, one interaction at a time.

“Community cannot take root without places to meet,” says Cheryl, who highlights the importance of spontaneous interactions. Since moving in, she has connected with many residents via the common spaces on every floor. One of her favorite places is just outside the laundry room, where a seating area allows residents to unwind and socialize while waiting for their laundry. Cheryl says these common areas make the campus feel alive and serve as catalysts for social engagement.

“As we age, we lose the connections that are so vital to our sense of belonging. We stop working, move away from familiar places and friends, and find ourselves with a lot of time on our hands,” says Cheryl. “I didn’t realize how isolated I was until I moved here. We have so many inviting common areas, and I have spent countless hours in each, getting to know my neighbors. It has been a wonderful experience.”

Reflecting on her experience, Cheryl adds, “I feel so lucky to be here. Every day, I feel like I have won the lottery. And I am not the only one. I have never been in a place where people are so happy.”

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— CHERYL PAVLIK

## THE RESIDENT EXPERIENCE

# John Covington: Staying fit at J.J. Carroll House

For John Covington, visiting the on-site gym at the newly built J.J. Carroll House is part of his daily ritual. Every morning, he uses the Nautilus equipment and lifts weights to maintain his strength. This is more than just a fitness routine for John; it is a testament to his belief that staying active is one of the most important steps you can take to maintain your health as you age.

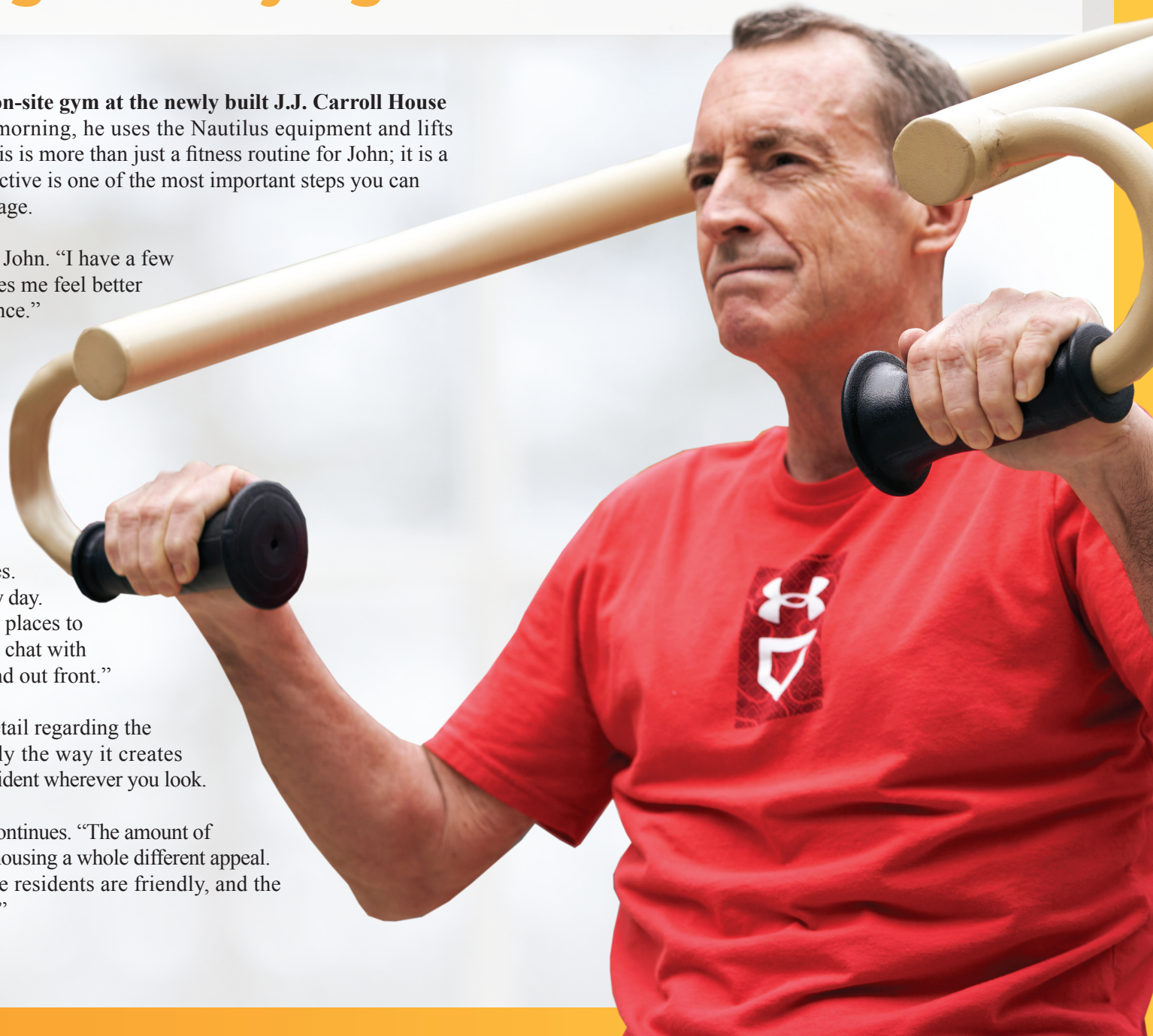
“Being active is so important,” says John. “I have a few small problems. Staying active makes me feel better and lets me maintain my independence.”

John says the common spaces at J.J. Carroll bring warmth and vitality to the community, offering residents ample opportunities to experience life when and how they choose.

“We have everything here,” he says. “There are ping-pong and pool tables. You’ll find activities and classes every day. The piano is always going. We have places to walk inside and outside or to sit and chat with neighbors. There’s even a playground out front.”

John believes 2Life’s attention to detail regarding the needs of older adults — particularly the way it creates vibrant spaces for socializing — is evident wherever you look.

“2Life has done a beautiful job,” he continues. “The amount of space is phenomenal. It gives public housing a whole different appeal. People can spend time together. The residents are friendly, and the staff is wonderful. There’s life here.”





## THE RESIDENT EXPERIENCE

# Susan Weisberg: Finding unexpected connection and joy

**Susan Weisberg, a tried-and-true New Yorker who feels most comfortable wearing her combat boots and leather jacket, admits she was hesitant about moving into 2Life's Brown Family House.**

"I was worried about moving into senior housing," she says.

Any reservations she had quickly faded upon entering Brown's lobby.

"One of the first things I noticed when I walked into the lobby was people. Yes, the lobby was beautiful and spacious, but I was struck by the people sitting near the fireplace, talking and laughing together," she says. "There was an energy I had not expected. Every misconception I had about senior living flew out the window."

In addition to hosting Brown's many events and activities, the common areas are casual gathering spaces for many residents. If she leaves her apartment and goes downstairs, Susan knows she will always find someone to spend time with, which also helped

her quickly establish a footing in the community when she was a newcomer.

"It's very comforting to know there's always someone around the corner or sitting in a chair, ready to say hello. It is so meaningful. The common areas bring warmth to our campus, and they bring us together," says Susan.

Susan adds that these areas also create room for lifelong learning, fitness, social, and other programs.

"The classes and events that we hold in these spaces bring so much joy to everyone. We have art classes, tai chi, book clubs, movie night, discussion groups, lectures, Thanksgiving lunches, seders, you name it. It is wonderful," says Susan.

These days, Susan's calendar is packed. She participates in many of the classes and activities offered at Brown and finds fulfillment in the friendships she has made.

## FRONT ROW LEADERSHIP

# Abdel Ait Chaib and Ghizlane Bellacen: Practicing a tradition of helping others

**For Abdel Ait Chaib and Ghizlane Bellacen, assisting older adults is not just their job — it is their culture.** In the couple's native Morocco, living in multigenerational families is the norm. That has proven to be the ideal background for their roles at Shillman House in Framingham.

Abdel serves as a maintenance mechanic and Ghizlane as a site representative, providing on-site assistance to residents in the evenings and overnight. But that does not begin to describe how they view their roles. "The residents here are like our own grandparents," says Ghizlane. "It's a great pleasure to talk with them and help with whatever they need."

That sense of family extends to their two young children, who enjoy living at Shillman House. "They love visiting the people here," Ghizlane notes, sharing that the children often deliver packages to residents, who look forward to these youthful visits.

In addition to his day job doing maintenance, Abdel pitches in as

a site representative in the evenings. In fact, both Abdel and Ghizlane routinely assist with tasks that are not part of their job descriptions. You can often find one or both of them helping to set up for an event, for example. "We never say no," says Ghizlane.

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**THE RESIDENTS  
HERE ARE  
LIKE OUR OWN  
GRANDPARENTS.**

— GHIZLANE BELLACEN

It is all about people supporting each other, they say. "Where we grew up, if your neighbor needed help, you helped them," Abdel explains. "If you can help someone, just do it."



# 2Life News in Brief



## Opening of J.J. Carroll House redevelopment makes headlines

The air was filled with excitement and joy on March 18 as the ribbon-cutting celebration for the new J.J. Carroll House in Brighton marked a significant milestone in affordable housing. The event, attended by more than 200 people, was covered by media highlighting the partnership between 2Life Communities and the Boston Housing Authority. Speeches by residents, U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Rep. Ayanna Pressley, Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll, Boston Mayor Michelle Wu, Boston City Council President Ruthzee Louijeune, and other elected officials and policymakers emphasized 2Life's role in addressing housing shortages and the needs of older adults by creating vibrant, affordable communities. Coverage by Boston Neighborhood Network News, GBH, and the Boston Business Journal celebrated this impactful public-private collaboration.



## Cummings Foundation awards grant for Solimine House

2Life received a \$225,000 grant from the Cummings Foundation to help low-income older adults from Lynn thrive by the building of Solimine House — an energy-efficient, service-enriched senior living community with 150 affordable apartments abutting a newly constructed PACE Center on the former Union Hospital site. The funds will be particularly instrumental to ensuring the building will be fully adaptable for all levels of accessibility and will include vibrant common gathering and program spaces critical to fostering social connection, purpose, and a sense of community. Solimine House will be especially impactful in Lynn, where a majority of seniors are housing-cost burdened.

“We firmly believe in the value of community living for older adults because we’ve seen the life-changing effects when they come together in a supportive community,” says 2Life CEO Amy Schectman. “The generosity of the Cummings Foundation will make this type of living possible in an area where it is urgently needed.”



## 2Life receives three major funding awards for projects in development

Two awards for 2Life projects in development were tied to the FY24 Housing and Urban Development budget, for which our leaders at the federal level, including U.S. Senators Warren and Markey, were able to secure funding to support critical projects in their districts. Thanks to Rep. Seth Moulton (MA-6), Solimine House in Lynn received \$1 million to help construct its Village Center. And thanks to Rep. Ayanna Pressley (MA-7), Brooke House at Olmsted Village received \$500,000 to build its Village Center. The third award came courtesy of the Wu Administration as well as Boston's Community Preservation Committee and Neighborhood Housing Trust, which announced that Treehouse at Olmsted Village will receive a \$7 million award — an investment in multigenerational community living in the heart of Mattapan. Scan the QR code to read the full story and learn about the impact these projects will have on their communities.



## Amy Schectman is one of Boston's busiest housing developers

2Life CEO Amy Schectman was recently profiled in *The Boston Globe* as one of Boston's busiest housing developers. The story emphasized Schectman's passionate advocacy for senior housing, driven by her own experience searching for a suitable community for her mother. Since joining 2Life in 2010, she has expanded our portfolio significantly. Despite a slowdown in for-profit development, 2Life has opened new buildings in Newton and Brighton, with additional projects in Waltham, Lynn, and Newton on the horizon — all funded through a mix of public and private sources. We are proud of her achievements as our leader. Today, 2Life serves a diverse population with nearly 1,900 people living on six campuses. But with a waitlist exceeding 9,000 individuals, our work continues.



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