

Embracing a Full Life in Columbia City

NORA'S CORNER



I just finished watching an on-line presentation by Dr. Bill Thomas, a geriatrician who is working to change the cultural landscape of aging. Bill has long served as an inspiration to me and my team at Full Life Care.

He argues: “When older people can’t still do what younger people can do they disappear, or rather they are disappeared.” He references the 1.6 million people in our country living in nursing homes. This number still boggles my mind after decades of work to deinstitutionalize care for elders. “Their only crime is frailty,” he says. I would venture to say that frail elders and even younger adults can also disappear even when they still live in their own homes, where they can grow increasingly isolated, hampered by mobility and other challenges that keep them from participating in their community.

At Full Life we focus our efforts on helping frail elders and adults with disabilities become part of their community again.

This issue of The Full Life Times celebrates those who are connecting, engaging and experiencing a full life, particularly in Seattle’s Columbia City. The neighborhood was once struggling with a lost sense of community, shuttered storefronts and run-down houses. Revitalized over the last couple decades, its inhabitants now feel very much a part of a vibrant neighborhood and they embrace its remarkable ethnic diversity. In fact, the Columbia City zip code is considered to be the most diverse in the country.

Full Life helps those we serve to rejoin community life. Participants at our Columbia City adult day

health center are enrolled in specialized programs for those with chronic health conditions or memory loss. We also have a day health program for persons with developmental disabilities, some of whom have “disappeared” into group homes where they might otherwise remain inactive. Our Get Active Program is a godsend to these participants, who may be only in their early 20s yet suffering the effects of isolated, often sedentary lifestyles in the form of Type II diabetes and depression. In partnership with Seattle Parks and Recreation, our participants may go on a field trip to play basketball at the Rainier Community Center, teaching them activities to help manage their diabetes and providing an opportunity to integrate into the larger community.

Our Parks & Rec partnership has also allowed the frail residents of Buchanan Place, our Columbia City home for persons with memory loss, to go on regular trips out into the community, including visits to the Woodland Park Zoo, the Museum of Flight and the Seattle Aquarium.

Our board member John Peoples sees the importance of our work when he runs into our clients in Columbia City. Likewise, I am inspired and touched by witnessing the simple pleasure of a walk (or for some, a roll) in the neighborhood. I know a Buchanan Place resident who sometimes has breakfast at the Silver Fork restaurant where, like on the TV show Cheers, everybody knows his name.

I’ll never forget turning the corner on South Edmunds Street and seeing a group of our clients, including a woman who is at the end of her life, enjoying the warmth of the sun on her face as she rolled with others to help pick up food for supper from the farmers market. She was smiling.

[Click here to view Dr. Bill Thomas’ presentation.](#)