

Creating Social Connection Is the Next Frontier in Affordable Seniors Housing

By Victoria Siplin

As the population of individuals over the age of 65 continues to grow in the U.S., more older adults are entering a stage of life that brings major transitions. This might involve downsizing from a longtime home, grieving the loss of a spouse or living farther from children, family members and familiar support systems. Many aging Americans are facing two challenges at once — finding housing they can afford and staying connected to the people around them.

According to the National Council on Aging, one in every three older adults faces economic insecurity. AARP reports that 40 percent experience loneliness, and the U.S. surgeon general has designated loneliness as a public health crisis.

With thoughtful design and intentional programming, affordable seniors housing communities can address both challenges, helping residents stay connected while easing the financial pressure that many seniors on fixed incomes face.

Hawthorne Park, a community in the Pine Hills neighborhood of Orlando, Florida, can serve as a case study, illustrating what happens when affordable housing is intentionally designed to help residents live independently and with purpose.

Engaging Design and Amenities

At Hawthorne Park, socialization was treated as a key design objective, rather than an afterthought. The amenities at Hawthorne Park were designed to generate daily, low-effort interaction. These elements include a clubhouse theater that fills for weekly movie nights, a shared garden where neighbors work side by side, a craft room programmed with a fresh activity each week, a swimming pool, a dog park and an onsite food pantry.

This kind of planning and programming allows for connection that feels natural rather than forced. Residents do not have to travel far, spend extra money or coordinate complicated plans to engage with neighbors. Instead, they can attend a movie night or stop by a weekly activity just steps from their residences. As a result of the community spaces and programming, residents who arrived as strangers have formed real friendships.

By prioritizing connection and independence, Hawthorne Park provides residents with a place to remain active and engaged in their community. Studies show seniors who regularly socialize experience better physical and mental health, making these spaces even more valuable.

Connecting Residents with Support

In addition to amenities, curated services and classes at Hawthorne Park support wellness by bringing everyday resources directly to residents. For seniors, convenience is more than a perk. It can be the difference between accessing support and going without it. Hawthorne Park offers onsite health screenings, wellness seminars and health fairs that connect residents with local providers in a familiar setting.

Educational programming, such as fraud-prevention seminars and social assistance benefits coordination, helps residents navigate online tools and better understand resources like Medicare or U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs assistance. Lifestyle-focused classes, including fitness programming and arts and crafts, also create natural opportunities for residents to gather and build friendships.

These types of services help transform affordable housing from merely a place to live into a true support network, allowing residents to maintain their independence while knowing resources and peace of mind are close to home.



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Hawthorne Park, a 120-unit affordable seniors housing community in Orlando, Florida, opened in 2022. Wendover Housing Partners developed the property.

Broader Communities Can Benefit

The 120-unit community was also created to help seniors remain in Pine Hills, a neighborhood where many residents have deep roots. Rather than removing older adults from familiar surroundings, Hawthorne Park gives residents an affordable option to stay close to the people and places that shaped their lives.

This impact also extends beyond the property line. Hawthorne Park was built on the site of a neglected shopping center, bringing new life to a stretch of Pine Hills that had faced years of disinvestment. Since the community opened, the surrounding area has benefited from measurable improvements in public safety. The Orange County Sheriff's Office compared crime data in Pine Hills from 2021, before Hawthorne Park opened, to data from 2023, after Hawthorne Park opened. The analysis found that crime decreased by 41 percent.

The development has boosted the local economy as well. Nearby businesses have reported new foot traffic and stronger revenue, while residents and community partners have described a renewed sense of pride in the area. For seniors, that neighborhood momentum matters. A stronger surrounding neighborhood can help residents feel safer and more rooted in the place they call home.

Hawthorne Park shows how affordable seniors housing can do more than provide apartments. When thoughtfully developed, it can foster belonging for residents while strengthening the broader area around them.

Where Affordability Meets Belonging

Affordable housing should do more than provide a place to live. It should provide a place where seniors feel supported and connected. When communities are intentionally designed to foster independence and belonging, they improve not only the lives of residents but also the neighborhoods around them. As demand for seniors housing continues to grow, creating places where people can age with dignity and community will be just as important as keeping housing affordable.

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