


It Takes A Village

There is an old proverb of African origin that says it takes a village to raise a child. Should we not apply the same proverb to the increasingly crucial issue of eldercare?

In actual practice, it appears the opposite is true in all too many cases. After a lifetime of togetherness, the often painful task of caring for aging parents is delegated to a single sibling. The criteria for anointing the sibling caregiver range from proximity to compatibility. In the end, some families are more than willing to leave that single sibling alone, hanging in the wind.

And even those overburdened single siblings who are responsible for providing eldercare forget a basic fact of human existence. We are social animals and we develop networks of people with whom we interact.

Children who have been gone from the nest for decades forget the fact their parents have continued to develop networks of people around them.

They have young neighbors with whom they interact. There are neighborhood children who might stop to say hello to an elderly parent rocking on the front porch. There are community centers for seniors  .

In 1999, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Business, William Isaacs, introduced the term collaborative intelligence in his book *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. He defined collaborative intelligence as the ability to create, contribute to, and harness the power within networks of people.

Much of what we do is governed by the assumptions we make. If you start with the assumption that old age obliterates the

network of people formerly surrounding your elders, you will never see the opportunities around you.

Try thinking of eldercare as a collaborative process amongst a network of people concerned about the well being of your aging loved ones. Collaboration also implies incorporating your parents into the process of determining their own care.

If your parents are determined to remain in their own homes as long as possible, what is the point of showing up with a briefcase full of brochures from assisted living retirement centers? In contrast, why not tap into their network of people to make it happen? [“Senior -Proofing”](#) a home requires research on methods and resources, a task ideally suited for distant siblings. Spending extended time in your parents' home to get to know their neighbors and friends opens up a world of volunteers. People are more than willing to help. Often, all they need is to be asked.