

In this guest blog, Jenny Kartupelis MBE, author and Director of Faith in Society, explores what 'mutuality' means in practice and why it matters to planning for an ageing population.

One of the critical factors in creating supportive relationships between older people, carers and families is enabling a strong element of 'mutuality' to flourish. In the context of adult social care, we are accustomed to 'person-centred' practice with its emphasis on the individual whose preferences and needs should be the guiding principle in care decisions; however, it is essential to recognise that every individual occupies a unique place in relation to friends, family, carers, their community and society. The great majority of people thrive on 'mutuality'; knowing and trusting others, being known and accepted for who one is, achieving a balance between privacy and company without the imposition of either.

But the concept reaches further than just these goods. With the current Archbishops of Canterbury and York Commission on Reimagining Care in mind, we need to give as well as receive, to be recognised as having an intrinsic value, rather than as a collection of needs and demands to be met by others. I believe it is therefore critical to live in environments that empower contribution to the community, whether this be one's care home, road, housing estate, town, faith or interest group. This does not mean making demands, but opportunities.

Older people are at continual risk of losing visibility and self-worth. Mutual relationships based on reciprocity, in which they are needed as well as respected, are associated with a sense of purpose and meaning.

In my view, reciprocity can be realised in numerous ways: care homes that prioritise genuine involvement such as residents offering tuition, gardening, befriending, whatever uses their talents and experience. For example, we know about nurseries and schools setting up intergenerational programmes to share help with reading and play, or with history projects. Older people welcomed by local charities, hospitals, places of worship and gathering, as having something valuable to offer. Houses designed for multigenerational living. The possibilities need only be limited by imagination.

Virtually every scheme of this sort requires suitable accommodation, to favour and facilitate easy interaction, and to ensure that people are not inadvertently trapped in silos. Sheltered, extra care and residential care homes located in or near towns, parks, schools and shops; flexible housing that can be re-purposed for various family sizes and offer privacy and company to different generations; town centres that are navigable for all; Age Friendly Cities. Mutuality in relationships is both a vision and a reality, still often looking for a home.

Jenny Kartupelis MBE is author of 'Making Relational Care Work for Older People: Exploring innovation and practice in everyday life' published by Routledge, London and New York in 2021. Jenny is an expert adviser to the Archbishops' Commission on Reimagining Care and is writing in her personal capacity. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Archbishops or the Church of England.

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