



PREPARING FOR RETIREMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN

Many Caribbean elders living in the UK return home to the islands of their birth for their retirement. Sophia Mwangi spoke to **Lyn Kennedy-McKenzie**, Director and Founder of Ken Health Care, a residential care home for seniors in Mandeville, Jamaica about what returnees should expect, and how they should prepare for the sunset years of their life.

With increasing numbers of black seniors returning back to the Caribbean islands of their birth, there is a growing demand for residential care homes that meet their needs. One such home is Ken Health Care, a residential care home, based in Mandeville run by Lyn Kennedy-McKenzie, a former nurse and committed Christian.

'Jamaica, like many other countries in the western hemisphere, has an increasingly ageing population. We're all living longer which means there is a greater demand on public services to care for elderly people,' explained Lyn.

Lyn believes Jamaica has inadequate provision of quality care, 'Family networks have been depleted because of migration and it is very difficult to find consistent, competent care personnel. Add to this the inadequate level of supervision and enforcement of standards, seniors become extremely challenged to find quality substitute personal care at a time when they are ill or otherwise potentially vulnerable,' she says.

She stresses that returnees must address their own expectations and needs in a much less family orientated and empathetic society from the one in which they lived while out of the island. Says Lyn, 'Conditions such as diabetes, dementia, stroke and visual impairment can further hinder the person's ability to care for himself. There comes a time when seniors may be unable to administer their own medication or prepare a meal in safety or make visits to the places where services are available. Therefore they need sheltered accommodation with attendant care to retain a sustainable, suitable safe quality of life.' The government of Jamaica subsidises medicines and public medical care, however, according to Lyn, chronic conditions need specialist care which is often open-ended and quite expensive as well as expensive to access.

Ken Health Care residential home is set in beautiful gardens. Many of the 11 residents have lived in the UK or US, all are committed Christians, like Lyn and her staff. It is not unusual for residents to break out in song or prayer.

A State Registered nurse in the UK for 34 years, Lyn is also a State Certified Midwife and Health Visitor, 'I knew that using my experience and knowledge to open an optimum care facility in Manchester would be beneficial to the seniors and their families in and across the island and further afield,' she recalls. She describes herself as a 'Child of Manchester' who grew up a few miles from Mandeville. As a Seventh Day Adventist her faith 'is intrinsic to who I am and I give God thanks that my parents instilled in me a lifelong passion for loving God from a young age. It is my faith in God that has brought me a mighty long way.' Lyn has no doubt who motivates her, 'As His follower, I am under divine obligation to be Jesus' head, heart and hands for those who are in need. He motivates me.'

Lyn has the following advice for seniors in the UK planning to return to the Caribbean after a long absence:

- Begin to return slowly and establish concrete links with family, close friends and community! Make at least two or three trips home to look around and 'remember' the familiar
- Make good financial plans for your sunset years. Returnees underestimate the cost particularly when it comes to health. Families also need to understand that providing care is expensive both in time, emotionally, physically and in energy, so there is a need to factor this into their budgets
- Be realistic about your expectations of returning to Jamaica and since a return to the island is for many meant to be about leaving stress behind, as far as possible, enjoy what Jamaica has to offer and leave the stress behind!



For family members of seniors, Lyn has this advice, 'They must understand that their body systems are ageing and possibly breaking down, that they will not 'improve' in the long-term but will continue to deteriorate. It is therefore critical for families to face and accept this and to mediate the process by helping seniors to take charge of the changes. Families can support by looking for suitable residential accommodation with attendant nursing, medical and social support since often, the physical layout of the family home becomes less suitable to seniors as they confront their increasing limitations.'

Lyn recognises that culturally Caribbean people feel that their senior relatives should be cared for in the family until death, 'The decision to use residential care is therefore often taken too late when the senior is in no position to be an active participant in the decision making process,' she explains. Family members can also become anxious about possible public comments of the 'neglect' of their senior because they have opted to use residential care,' she says.

She has big plans for the future which includes developing the property to accommodate a maximum intake of up to 20 residents, 'so that we can continue to offer first-class, Christ-centred and individualised care for our clients,' Says Kennedy-McKenzie.

To find out more about Ken-Healthcare email Lyn Kennedy-McKenzie at kenhealthcareja@yahoo.com