

## COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITIES RESPOND TO PALLIATIVE CARE NEEDS OF OLDER ADULTS

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Greetings from Spain! I begin with the story of Moraima, who lives in Sevilla with her husband but who has no extended family. When Moraima entered the compassionate community program called “*Sevilla Contigo*” after being diagnosed with ALS, her husband was her sole caregiver. *Sevilla Contigo* built a network of support for them that includes professionals, neighbors, friends, and volunteers who mobilized to meet her needs.

Although many older persons are active participants and volunteers in their communities, others have become frail and dependent, and often live far from family members who live in other countries or cities. Modern health systems now have the challenge of developing and implement health policies and programs that address the loneliness and dependency associated with aging and frailty.

“All with you” – The translation of “*todos contigo*” means “we’ve got your back!” It is a methodology developed IN the community, WITH the community and FOR the community. It is a New Health Foundation innovation to develop compassionate communities and cities, based on a model of public health, palliative care, and integrated care that addresses the health and social dimensions of persons as members of a community. To do this, it builds public awareness while training and activating the community.

“Sevilla With You, Compassionate City” began in 2015 as a Living-Lab for the development of a compassionate city, following to the “All With You” methodology. The three-pronged approach has spread to other cities in Spain, Portugal, and Latin America as it can be replicated and adapted to other environments.

Community Promoters assess the needs of individuals and families referred to the program in accordance with their priorities and preferences. They develop care plans and coordinate existing resources, to improve the quality of life and well-being during the sometimes-prolonged processes of serious illness, death, and grief.

In five years, the project has served two districts of Sevilla that is home to 200,000 residents. The model is based on resource availability and synergies, collaborating with the town council public health service as well as universities, colleges, senior centers, day care facilities, associations, and foundations, designating the person's home and community environment as the preferred spaces for care. The results show that the program improved the quality of life and well-being of patients and their families. We have expanded the care network, met expressed needs, reduced loneliness, alleviated caregiver burden, and increased the satisfaction of family members.

The social isolation measures imposed by the government to prevent spread of COVID-19 aggravated the vulnerability and loneliness of older persons. The number of people at risk of social exclusion with reduced economic resources grows daily, increasing the need for supportive social networks. Fear of infecting family members has prevented people visiting the homes of those who need visits the most. Many people have died alone, and many family and friends are experiencing complicated grief, unable to say goodbye to their loved ones.

In the context of the pandemic, the program "Seville with you, compassionate city" adopted innovative and strategic measures to guarantee the continuity of care through telephone contact and video. We also created a direct phone line to provide help at home, offering physiotherapy, psychological support and care. We activated "bubble networks" to maintain continuity of care and provide emotional and psychological accompaniment for patients and families, also attending complicated grief.

I will close with the story of Antonia, a widow suffering from chronic degenerative disease whose two adult children were unable to visit her due to the lockdowns. She was alone and very afraid. Sevilla Contigo assigned her three volunteers who have been calling her on the phone, bringing her music and recreational activities, and delivering her shopping. Thanks to them, Antonia feels supported, and she continues in the program to this day.

Community solidarity since the beginning of the pandemic has been phenomenal. More than ever, it was clear that a compassionate city is one that mobilizes at the service of those most in need, providing the essential care that prevents the health system from further collapse.

Community involvement is the best indicator of a society's compassion for the most vulnerable. Relief of suffering through accompaniment is an essential community function and should be recognized as a universal right. Until then, let us awaken society to the essence of what is the privilege of caring, from the most authentic experience of humanity.