Hadley

Vision Loss and Senior Living Communities

Presented by Ricky Enger

**Ricky Enger:** Welcome to Hadley Presents. I'm your host, Ricky Enger, inviting you to sit back, relax, and enjoy a conversation with the experts. In this episode, Hadley's Director of Community, Marc Arneson speaks with Kris Meagher about transitioning to an independent living facility. Welcome to the show, both of you.

**Marc Arneson:** Thanks, Ricky.

**Kris Meagher:** Thank you.

**Ricky Enger:** So good to have you here and so good to actually be starting a really cool and important conversation. I know that we get questions about this sort of thing all the time, and I'm really looking forward to jumping into that, but I'm also looking forward to learning a bit more about each of you. So, before we get to the questions and the conversation, let's just get a couple of quick intros. Marc, you've been on the show before, but give us a little background about who you are and what you do at Hadley.

**Marc Arneson:** Sure, Ricky, thanks. So, as you mentioned, my title is Director of Community, but one of the things I get to do is just visit different support groups or conferences and meet with individual people and just share all the stuff we're trying to do here at Hadley to help.

**Ricky Enger:** Awesome. And then Kris, tell me a bit about yourself. So glad to have you here.

**Kris Meagher:** Thank you, Ricky. So good to be here. So, I am living in an independent living in King City, Oregon. I'm from a big family of nine, and so it's a little chaos all in one, but a lot of laughter and just learning and growing as I dive into more of my low vision blind world.

**Ricky Enger:** That's fantastic. I know it's a different journey for everyone, but I think one thing that's really a universal thing, whether you are blind, low vision or have full sight, doesn't matter. I think we all want to find that sanctuary, that safe place that we call home, where we know where everything is, and we feel super comfortable there. I think that looks different for everybody, and that actually does change depending on where our journeys take us. I thought it would be interesting to just get your perspective, Kris, on moving to an independent living facility and what was behind that decision, how you found things as you've gotten accustomed to that, and just get a little bit of that story from you. And actually, Marc, I know you have some great questions to kind of get us going on that, so I will throw it over to you and I can't wait to hear Kris about how you ended up where you are and what you're thinking about it.

**Marc Arneson:** Thanks Ricky. Kris, I also want to thank you. I've just been so grateful to get to know you through the support group that I've been able to join a few different times, and you're always so outgoing and I thought this would be a perfect conversation to have with you. Thanks for joining us, Kris. I am curious, I do have some questions for you, but I'd love to start with the idea of even making the decision to move to King City Senior Village, I think you had said. I was wondering, did your vision loss have any impact on making that decision?

**Kris Meagher:** Well, it's an interesting question because initially how this even began is I lived in Downtown Portland, Oregon. It was actually my family that was looking for a safer place for me to go not just because of the chaos, but also safety for me and cooking and cleaning. I just didn't see what I missed, or I cut myself or I needed stitches now and again. It was getting to that point where I needed a little more assistance, but never would've thought of independent living. It was my family that found it, and when I initially looked into it, I thought, no way. But I love it. Overall, it was a good decision, but it was a stepping process of looking for that.

**Marc Arneson:** Oh, that's so interesting. So, were there specific things that you and your family were looking for when you were considering different options that you had available?

**Kris Meagher:** Originally, it was to try and get me closer to one of my family members. Really, it was in connection with transportation to be able to stay active. At that time, the city was shut down as everybody was for COVID. So, it was a little different time that we were trying to find that. Overall, it was just to find a safe place for me, and a safer environment for me to where my meals would be prepared or causing any other health issues for my own self. I think it was good communication. It was a good connection. I just wouldn't have thought of going to an independent living. Again, I’m so grateful that we did though.

**Marc Arneson:** Gotcha. Gotcha. Thanks. And so just so I understand, were you living on your own prior to this move?

**Kris Meagher:** Yep, 100%. In a little one-bedroom apartment all by myself. It was great. I'm very independent that way. My biggest thing has always been that as long as I'm on mass transit, I’m accessible to a grocery store and motivated to be able to do it on my own within my realm. I never would've thought of living outside of downtown Portland, but this has worked.

**Marc Arneson:** That's great. Well, I imagine it was kind of a big transition, and I know for a lot of people, any kind of move is oftentimes difficult. It's just something new and there are challenges that can go along with that. I am curious, when you moved to King City Senior Village, what was the experience like in making new friends or new relationships? Has it been easy, challenging? Do you mind sharing a little bit about that?

**Kris Meagher:** No, that's a very good question in that I learned more at my age now. Again, I'm one of the younger ones living here in a 55 and older community. Just the dynamics are different, and I still want to maintain that independence. Here we are given the opportunity, they provide so much here to be safe, provide a number of our meals, but also to go to the grocery store, to go to the doctor's appointment, to go to transportation within a certain radius of miles. It's just still to maintain that independence in a safe way. Does that make sense?

**Marc Arneson:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So, I'm curious Kris, with your vision loss. I've oftentimes heard that many facilities don't quite know how to accommodate things for folks who are managing vision loss and staying independent and being safe. I was wondering if there's things that you've had to advocate for yourself or are there accommodations that you've had to ask for? I even think about the menus at the dinner table, are they offered in large print or does somebody help you get to the table and maybe help identify things that are on the table and things like that? Just any accommodations that you've had to advocate for yourself that they've had to put in place.

**Kris Meagher:** That's another really good. I can't read the menu really, but they've never provided larger print. I don't want to say I've asked for it but insinuated towards that. But really what's worked for them is just to tell me what's on there today, the special, and then I kind of know what's on the main menu, but they certainly will read through it if I need it. But after a while, you kind of get to know the regular stuff that's on there, and then I ask what the special is. They're so kind and gentle to be able to let me know what's on there. Regarding sitting at the table, they will either escort me in or some nights we have a candlelight dinner, which is so sweet that they do these, but it's so dark in there. So, I need a little assistance to get in there.

And then my secret to see where my food is, it's easier for me to put my light from my phone amazingly enough on an empty water glass. Then, I have that extra light on there where I can see at least a portion of it. And then usually someone that I'm sitting with will be more than willing to help me and say where things are. I'm so lucky that I feel comfortable to ask whoever's sitting next to me. We usually get a little group together to do it, but everybody's so helpful to each other for whatever that is. Mine dealing with the low vision blind, they are so eager and kind to reach out to help when I need it.

**Marc Arneson:** Well, it sounds like a great situation and a great place too. So, kind and so generous. You talked about reading the menu and helping you get to your table and things like that. Kris, do you mind sharing with me what your actual living space is? It sounds like you went from a one bedroom. Is it similar to your living space at King City?

**Kris Meagher:** Mine here is just a studio. I shouldn't say just, because I love it. It's such a cute little room and it's got a huge bathroom because they are very wheelchair accessible. The shower and the bathroom are so big. Of course, I have enough room for my computer and my bed, and I do have a little TV that's over there. I have my own refrigerator if I want to have my own things here, as well as a little tiny sink and a very small counter space and some cupboards in the kitchen.

So, it's kind of up to you what you want to do with it. Some people I know don't always go down to the dining room and eat, they choose to provide their own meal somehow. It's just interesting, people's different perspective of what independent living is to them. I am more apt to have very little and eat downstairs. That's part of the rent that we pay. And again, I love the community. When I go down and sit, there are a lot of options living here at an independent living, which your options are for that, a benefit.

**Marc Arneson:** Right. Part of the benefits there. I am curious. I know oftentimes folks who are managing different levels of vision loss need different accommodations even within their living space. Maybe accessible thermostats or different window treatment to help with glare and things like that. Have you had to ask for any of that or talk to anybody about that? Or even if you haven't, Kris, how do you think that they might respond if you needed to?

**Kris Meagher:** Those were great ones because I never thought of asking them about that. I have one of those little heaters and air conditioners that would sit somewhat in a window. So, I can alter that. But I will tell you, without my magnifiers and my tools to help me read it, that is difficult. Where it would be so much nicer if I had a thermometer reader somehow. I've talked to many others with my form of RP that they have gotten some tools like that and said it's so much easier. So, I would look into that. And then Marc, that's an interesting question because I've never known about something to help with the window glare, and I don't get any direct sun, but even the glare that I get is strong. I'm now going to look into that.

**Marc Arneson:** Good. Well, let us know how that works out, how accommodating they are, Kris. You mentioned before that you transitioned to King City when you were living in your apartment, public transportation was kind of a big deal, and having that available to you and easy to get to. Is that something that went into deciding about King City being the right place? Or what is it like trying to get to different places and what public transportation is available?

**Kris Meagher:** It is. Amazingly, I was very lucky when I lived downtown because of that. But here, I do still have some public transportation walkable from home. I now know where it's at to be able to get to the bus and it will take me downtown if I need it, or pretty much all around the Portland area with the assistance of knowing where I'm going. Also, at King City Senior Village, they’ll provide within about a five-mile radius and most grocery stores, it's four days a week, they go to different stores, and you just are there to go if you need that or to doctor's appointments or things of need like that. There's just so much available right here, and that's part of the sell, helping people that need that assistance with a transportation route. So, it's been wonderful on that end.

**Marc Arneson:** Good. Sounds like a wonderful place. I would love to come visit sometime. With your vision loss and your level of vision, looking back now, would you say that this felt like the right decision, and you feel like you're in the right place now?

**Kris Meagher:** Without any doubt, I know this was meant to be, if that makes sense. I just feel like it's a blessing that I now live here. I feel safer. I don't have to worry about all the little deals of cutting and preparing food for myself or worries about that. I don't have to do that anymore. That was all taken away when I moved in here, so I have no regrets. The only one thing that's different, but it's not like I don't have it, it just takes longer to get around Portland. But I'm okay with that. You kind of flex and bend a little on all aspects of it. And now I feel like when I'm looking ahead, I don't have to look any further for where I'm going to be in 20, 30 years. I just feel like this is my place now. This is where I'll be.

**Marc Arneson:** This is home. That's cool. I have to ask, I've heard different people talk about trying to get their mail, and oftentimes in places like King City, independent living facilities, the mailboxes all look the same, and it's like this big wall or sea of mailboxes. I'm always curious, is it tricky finding your own mailbox, Kris?

**Kris Meagher:** I can't tell you how many times I've put my key into the wrong box.

**Marc Arneson:** So, do you have a system? How do you do that?

**Kris Meagher:** I do because you kind of get it down and I'm a numbers girl. Really, a lot of things in my structure of reminding myself. I just feel over them, and I know that I hit this big gap of where the mailboxes are, and then the next strip is mine, and I go to number four down and then put the key in. What do you know? It opens every time.

**Marc Arneson:** Look at that. That's great.

**Ricky Enger:** So, as I was listening to all of this, I was just marveling at apparently how lucky you've been to really land in this place where everything is so positive. I don't know how much of that is luck and how much of it is a lot of research beforehand. As we wrap things up, I’m wondering if there is someone listening who's thinking about this, and maybe they have a great family who is assisting with that research, and maybe they're doing it on their own, but in either case, I imagine there's some things that you would tell them, here's what to look for or here's what to consider.

Do you have advice about that as well as any advice on actually making that decision to go ahead and do it? Because you mentioned that you don't think you would ever have done this if your family hadn't talked you into it. So just give us a little bit about what helped you to decide this was right for you and what kind of advice you would give to people who were looking for something like this.

**Kris Meagher:** Great question, Ricky. I was with my sister, and we were looking at a couple of places. The biggest thing that was recommended is for me to come and spend a night or two before you even make a decision. So, if you find a place that kind of feels good or you kind of have a good gut feeling that it's nice, but then I’ve known some people that move in, and they are not happy. So, I do think most places will offer it, but take it on, spend a night or two and spend those couple of days, see how it feels, see how the people are, feel the area. Walk around as much as you can with other people that can orient you with what is where and how you could make that work.

That's what I know was a big decision factor. Again, my first night here when I was just checking it out, I thought, oh, I don't know. But the second night I knew. It was the confidence of this feels right. So, I just highly recommend that and look at several places, not just one. Really consider a lot of it, not just what's under the roof, but what's around there as well for safety, sidewalks, things like that. There’re things to consider and then talk to other people if you can. That's the best thing.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah, I think word of mouth can be so important, and if you can find someone who has lived there themselves or they have family who's lived there and can just give that feedback, that's wonderful. Kris, this is again, just been such a positive experience that you've described. I know when a lot of people approach even having this discussion, there is that trepidation, but it sounds like it's worked out wonderfully for you. I appreciate that you have stopped by and shared that with us. We really appreciate your time and sharing your story.

**Marc Arneson:** Yeah, thanks so much, Chris.

**Kris Meagher:** My pleasure, both of you. It's been wonderful to chat about it. So, with the two of you, thank you for the offer to do so.

**Ricky Enger:** Got something to say? Share your thoughts about this episode of Hadley Presents or make suggestions for future episodes. We'd love to hear from you. Send us an email at podcast@hadley.edu. That's podcast@hadley.edu. Or leave us a message at 847-784-2870. Thanks for listening.