

Second Principle of Universal Design: Flexibility in Use

N. Yaprak Savut, PhD, CKE, and Hunt McKinnon, AIA, NCARB, NCIDQ

In this article, we focus on the second principle of Universal Design: *Flexibility in Use* (see the September/October issues of *ALC*, p. 19, www.assistedlivingconsult.com/issues/04-05/alc910-Universal%20Design-922b.pdf, for an introduction to universal design and to our imaginary resident at Any-Home Manor). The definition of this principle is that “*The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.*”¹ This principle is one of the most challenging principles since it covers an all-inclusive approach. In essence one design solution must accommodate similar needs of individuals with diverse abilities and tastes.

My Life in Any-Home Manor

I have been in Any-Home Manor for more than 4 months now. I am getting used to the routines, and this makes me feel happy. When I first came to this place with my son David, we were shown a model apartment that I found to be very plain. There were very few pieces of furniture, and the color of the walls was creamy white. It looked like a hospital room to me. I remember that I thought to myself that there was no way I could spend my days in a room like this, looking at these plain white walls. However, the attendee, who showed us the room, explained that the residence was allowing patients to paint the walls of their room the color of their choice before moving in.

This was exciting news, and I

think this was when I started feeling “at home” at Any-Home Manor. I was told I could paint the room my choice of color—light apple green. Later, when I started to make new friends and visit them in their rooms, I noticed that each one of us had used our favorite colors and treasures from our family to personalize our rooms. Each of our rooms has a little memory box outside the door where we can place items that are special to us. This makes the space seem like it is mine, and it makes it easier to identify the front doors of my friends’ units. One friend has a little table by the door to her apartment where she can put down packages, and she decorates this to celebrate the different holidays. I think I am going to do that too!

One of my friends has been at Any-Home Manor for a long time and tells me there was not this much flexibility when the building was new. She said that during the first director’s tenure, a woman was found wandering the hallways. The woman couldn’t remember her name and told the director she was trying to find “her cave.”² The policy about door decorations and painting the rooms changed soon after that conversation.

Anyway I was telling you about making my room feel like it was my own. When my son and one of his friends painted my room in my most favorite color, they also helped me move in my most precious furniture pieces, some of which were inherited from my mom. The ceiling is so high in my bedroom; it is really more like a cube than a rectangle.



The P.T.Rail™ system by HealthCraft™ folds up when not in use and offers offset dual rails which allow ease of access and use of the lower rail and help prevent wrist strain when using the lower rail.

This was an advantage to making my canopy bed fit in the room and in organizing my other pieces of furniture in the space. I put my most favorite armchair right by the window, where I can see the trees outside and also the TV set without hurting my neck. We can put our furniture anywhere we want as long as it is not a safety hazard and doesn’t complicate how the staff clean our room or help us.

Guideline 2a. Provide choice in methods of use.

Another helpful thing I discovered when we painted my room

was the transmitter for an alert necklace that I can wear around my neck all day long and even put on my nightstand when I go to sleep at night. I had seen the alarm cords in the older apartments where my friends live, but David was able to get a new apartment for me. I now understand that those older alarm cords are limiting because there are only two in the whole apartment. The use of the cords requires residents to put their beds in only one location in the room so they can reach the cord in an emergency. But with my alarm necklace that I wear, I can be anywhere and be safe; it is so much more flexible. I can ask for help anywhere in Any-Home Manor rather than be limited to being close to the pull cord.

I also felt thankful to the person who thought of providing both a fixed and a handheld shower head in the bath tub. I never had this luxury in my house. I sometimes feel dizzy. If this happens in the shower, I can open up the foldable shower seat to sit on and rest while I am taking my shower, and I can even use the shower wand to bathe rather than have all the water pouring out from the shower head like in my old bathtub. David, who is an engineer, measured the shower head hose and it is 6 feet long! That is longer than me, and while I do not care exactly how long it is, I do like using the portable shower head with my right hand and shifting it to my left hand when I reach for the soap. I can even clip the shower head on the wall near the grab bar and use it comfortably without worrying about falling down.

Guideline 2b.
Accommodate right- or left-handed access and use.

The toilet also provides me the option of using my left hand if I need to use the grab bar on the left side. The fold-up grab bars (I heard one of the nurses called them “armed safety bars”) are very sturdy even though they are fixed to the

wall behind the toilet. I noticed that the organization of the bathrooms is exactly the same for all the resident rooms, and with the help of these fold-up grab bars on both sides, residents can choose to use the left or the right or both of them according to their needs. So a left-handed person like me doesn't have to wait to find a suitable bathroom for left-handed people. This is very convenient.

While I am walking the hallways and corridors of Any-Home Manor, I can also use the handrails on both sides. I think this is another convenience provided for both left-handed and right-handed residents. And they

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are not ugly, like in the hospitals. They are made of wood that feels good when I touch it and contrasts with the wall color so I can see the rails even when I am not wearing my glasses. That is another thing. I sometimes lose my glasses and can't find them because if I do not have my glasses on, I can't see them. Maybe I should get a necklace for them just like my alarm necklace!

The designers of Any-Home Manor have helped those of us with aging eyes by making the signs large and bright. I can also find the thermostat, which I can easily use. The screen is big with big contrasting numbers and Braille markings. Even my old eyes can see the numbers easily. I can push the buttons easily, and it doesn't matter how hard I push, every time I touch the buttons (up or down), the degrees change one digit at a time and it makes a sound so I can count how many degrees I have changed

the temperature. I sometimes feel cold easily; in those cases, I just turn up the heat. I know that one of my newest friends, George, doesn't like heat as much as I do. Whenever I go to his room to listen to big band music with two other friends, I feel chilled and always ask him to increase the temperature at least 5 degrees. George is a good man with a heart of gold. He always increases the heat for me; sometimes I listen and count six chimes from the thermostat and I can tell how much he likes me. I know that he always lowers the temperature as soon as I leave because it is always cold in his apartment. Did I tell you that George is almost blind? He has cataracts in both of his big blue eyes, but he is still a great dancer.

Guideline 2c.
Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision.

Another thing that I like about all our rooms is that there is a small kitchenette with a small sink, microwave, and refrigerator drawer that's right under the countertop just as you go in the apartment. The height and the size of it are just right for me. I don't have to bend over to see what it has in it. When I go on a shopping trip with my friends, I can get a couple of snacks and some ice cream for myself, and stock them in my refrigerator drawer. I sometimes bring dessert back from the dining room as well—like the fruitcakes they are making now that it is almost Christmas. Then I can reach them whenever I want, even in the middle of a night when I want a snack. I can also make my own tea very early in the morning without waiting for the breakfast service at the dining room. I can keep my own pace of life without bothering someone else. I also don't worry if I miss one of the lunches or dinners while I am taking my afternoon nap. This kitchenette gives me the freedom to eat when I want

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marketing device but also provides a fulfilling multigenerational interaction that is so rewarding for home-bound seniors. In addition, the community has the opportunity to support and participate in the community service project these residents created.

One year, the residents held a baby shower on Mother's Day to collect gifts for A Baby Center. The many families and children in need across the Cape and islands are truly appreciative of the help that EPOCH residents provide. With recent budget cutbacks at ABC, the center is in even greater need of donations of baby wipes and pull-ups for the 533 children they assist. The costs for these two items alone exceeds \$1300 per month, according to ABC Director Mary Pat Piersons.

Smiling from ear to ear, 95-year-old Fred Zacheus, the resident who runs the program at EPOCH said, "We are doing our best to make Cape Cod the dry bum capitol of the world." Under his direction, the EPOCH residents make a monthly donation to ABC. For 6 years, Fred and other residents have filled that playpen in the lobby with items for the children of the needy families serviced by ABC. "When the playpen is full, we load it up and deliver it to these wonderful people who do so much." A recent delivery consisted of diapers, wipes, toys, baby blankets, and some beautiful handmade items too.

Fred says, "EPOCH is full of wonderful, generous people that are dedicated to A Baby Center." When he visits ABC to make his delivery, you can see the joy on his face as he greets babies that receive assistance at the center. As Fred smiled and touched the hand of a 10-day-old baby, the nearly 100-year difference in their ages melted away. This wonderful, caring man could not stop offering compliments to the staff about what they do for the families in need. "These people are wonderful, what they do," remarked Fred. ALC

Joan Horvath is Editorial Director of *Assisted Living Consult*.

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When you cease to make a contribution; you begin to die.

**Eleanor Roosevelt
1884-1962
First lady, diplomat, and activist**

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to; some people have too much freedom though. George's kitchenette is always a mess, and I clean it up for him since he cannot see well enough to do it for himself. It does not seem to bother him for some reason. That is the only thing about the flexibility of Any-Home Manor that may not be so great; personal choice is good, but a stack of dirty dishes is unsightly.

Guideline 2d.

Provide adaptability to the user's pace.

David said the other day that I do not call him nearly as much since I moved into Any-Home Manor. I do not have as many needs and I am making friends with people who I have things in common with. I like the dining room too, since I got tired of cooking for myself in my old kitchen back at home. The attractive colors of the walls and the curtains and beautiful dining chairs with armrests and wheeled front legs are great. I can easily get out of the chairs since I can push against the arm rests or roll over to chat with a friend and never have to get up at all. There are also different-sized tables for two, four, and six people and big windows letting in sun during the morning. The dining hall is one of my favorite rooms, and I always see a friend there. Sometimes they put the tables side by side to provide bigger groups for playing cards or board games. This flexibility was a great design invention. George and I have our own table for two in a quiet part of the dining room near the garden; we can hear the birds sing from here and the squirrels come to borrow seed from the birds too. This room answers the needs of the residents in so many ways. It is no surprise to see that most of the events are organized in this homey room.

Well now that I think about it, David found a pretty good place for me to move to. I did not like leaving my home and the people that I knew in my neighborhood. But this place is so much more flexible and convenient. I think I will write to my family and let them know about the things that I like about my new home when I send out my Christmas cards this year. ALC

N. Yaprak Savut, MFA, PhD, CKE, CBE, and Hunt McKinnon, AIA, NCARB, NCIDQ, are assistant professors in the Department of Interior Design and Merchandising in the College of Human Ecology at East Carolina University.

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