

HOUSING

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Home share initiative targets isolated seniors

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home share schemes bring together ageing home owners with younger community members.

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Two Sydney councils have helped launch an initiative that brings together ageing home owners and younger community members with the aim of reducing social isolation among seniors and delaying the move into residential care.

The HomeShare arrangement, delivered by home and community care provider Holdsworth Community and funded by council, is designed to allow older people to remain in their own homes while offering an affordable housing option to a younger person.

The initiative affords the owner security, social interaction, financial support and/or practical help, while the sharer has access to safe and affordable housing. It also means companionship for both.

Home share schemes have had positive social impacts in the UK, US, Europe and some other states in Australia. However the concept has failed to take off locally, often due to mismanagement or a lack of planning.

However The City of Sydney and Woollahra councils are determined to make the idea work.

Establishing home share matches

SHORTLIST 0

Catering for localities where housing costs are well above the Australian average and almost a third of people live alone, the two councils are advertising for people to come forward so matches can be established.

Peter Cavanagh

Holdsworth Community will facilitate the matching process and ensure the home is neat, tidy and appropriate for sharing. It will also conduct police and safety checks, help build an agreement between the parties and provide ongoing support to both the owner and sharer.

The program offers huge potential benefits for the local community, Woollahra Mayor Peter Cavanagh said at the program's February 7 launch.

Ruth Kestermann, CEO of Holdsworth Community, says while the program is still in its pilot stage, there has been a lot of interest, especially from sharers.

“

We're hearing from young people and students but also middle-aged people going through a transition in their lives, particularly women," she says. "I think a lot of people see it as a great affordable housing option and they just want to connect with someone else, so that's really great."

For the owners, it's often a bigger decision, she says. "A lot of them have perhaps been living on their own for a long time and we don't expect them to make a decision as quickly as the younger people might."

A good match is essential for the program to work, and may have been responsible for failures in the past. Holdsworth will spend time making sure that personalities, interests and requirements of the sharer and owner align.

In South Australia, aged care provider Enabling Confidence at Home (ECH) has been designing its own home share scheme and has been conducting focus groups and conducting one-on-one interviews with interested owners and sharers. But ECH chief executive David Panter says there is a limitation, as fewer older people these days own their own home. For this reason, ECH has discovered an even greater interest among older people for co-housing.

Co-housing is alternative home share arrangement where people of a similar age with similar needs rent a multi-roomed house. They can enjoy secure accommodation, and the support and company of each other, while a home carer can respond to all their needs in the same place.

Mr Panter believes that as more people move away from home ownership towards renting, demand for both shared and co-housing options will only increase.

In Sydney, Ms Kestermann hopes home sharing will take off as both older and younger people see the benefits.

"We hope if we can get a financially sustainable model up and running and demonstrate its potential, then it can really offer great options for people across Sydney and in other parts of Australia as well."

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