



grey matters by Ruth Gerzon

As we get older we are more likely to live alone.

Our families have become smaller and more scattered. Just over half of all women over 75, and 25 percent of men of that age, live on their own. The numbers are considerably higher among Pakeha than among Maori, Pasifika or Asian people.

Once a partner dies or children leave home, few of us seek others to share our homes. In previous generations, it was more common. In fact, it was an economic necessity for many. Now we seem more protective of our privacy and autonomy, more reluctant to make the compromises needed. Ever smaller flats and now, "tiny homes" are built in response to these trends, yet they may leave us isolated.

Renowned academic Sir Hugh Kawharu wrote, in his book on Orakei, "Housing is not about putting roofs over heads, it's about building community." He wrote that over five decades ago and, given the increasing atomisation of families since then, it is high time to explore new ways to retain our privacy and autonomy and still meet our need for connection.

I rarely attend conferences, preferring to gain new knowledge from the vast brain of the internet, in the comfort of my own home. However, my interest in new housing options lured me to a one-day hui on co-housing in Wellington late last month. It was well worthwhile, with planners, architects, and members of cohousing communities looking at options here and overseas.

Co-housing communities vary from three-to-100 homes. They are self-organised, democratic, community-led, and sustainable. The most well-known New Zealand example is the Earthsong community of 34 homes in Auckland, where building began in 2001. There, everyone has their own home as well as access to a communal hall, dining room and kitchen. Two social dinners are held each week, and there are movie nights and parties in this mixed-age community.

Earthsong (<https://sites.google.com/earthsong.org.nz/home>) runs on a complex system of focus groups and resident input. Founding member Robin Allison facilitated an intriguing workshop on decision making, showing us how they reach consensus while ensuring everyone has input into decisions.

Social researcher Bev James specialises in issues of housing for older people and has recently written a report on co-housing for the Western Bay of Plenty. She sees co-housing as having the potential, given certain conditions, to enrich the lives of older people. Private dwellings can be simple, smaller and efficiently utilised, with communal amenities such as laundries and



accommodation for guests reducing costs. Increased social engagement and reduced isolation comes with the territory. With a focus on mutual support, co-housing may reduce or delay older people's need for residential care.

Cohousing can also bring improved urban design, compact urban form, community regeneration and affordable housing. At Earthsong, clustered houses have twice the density of surrounding homes, yet there is more usable, shared green space.

There has been considerable discussion about a need for a retirement village in the Eastern Bay. Some former residents have moved to one out of town, seeking security and conviviality.

A co-housing community could be a positive alternative, functioning as a democratic retirement village where decisions are made by residents in accord with their desires and wellbeing. In contrast, decisions in retirement villages owned by international corporations are made by people with no local knowledge and a focus on profitability.

In co-housing communities the profits from rising property values stay in residents' hands. Earthsong homes are bought and sold on the open market, though intending residents must sign up to the Earthsong agreements.

Personally, I would prefer to live in a multi-age community rather than a co-housing retirement one. When facilitating health promotion courses I learned that once I am over 70, if I gain one new younger friend I will live an extra two years. A retirement village, even a co-housing community restricted to people my age, might not be good for my health.

Readers interested in exploring these ideas are invited to a public meeting on co-housing to be chaired by deputy mayor Judy Turner. This is planned for Monday, March 18, from 10am to 12.30pm at Knox Presbyterian Church, Domain Road.

Researcher Bev James and others will present ideas and a panel will answer questions. If there's enough interest a working group could be set up to investigate possibilities for our town. All welcome.



A fortnightly series for seniors by Ruth Gerzon from Eastern Bay Villages.

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Equestrian What's On!

Your monthly guide to equestrian events in the Eastern Bay of Plenty.

Rotorua Bay of Plenty Hunt Inc "Hunt School"

Sunday 10th March 2019

Dalbeth Lodge, 105 Dalbeth Road, Ngongotaha
Lessons starting from 9:30am
Cost: \$30 per horse/rider combination
Master the art of jumping hunt style fences
New/interested and current members welcome
Spaces are limited

For more information contact Kylie Burt 027 462 6565
kylie.burt@seeka.co.nz

Te Puke Pony Club NZPCA First Start ODE

Sunday 24th March 2019

ENTRIES CLOSE: midnight Wednesday 20th March
ENTRY FEE: \$25 per rider/mount combination
1st start Level 2
Te Puke Pony Club and A&P Showgrounds,
Showgrounds Road, Te Puke
Competition run under NZPCA rules
NZPCA First start ODE aim is to provide an opportunity for new and inexperienced riders to enjoy their first competitive experiences in a safe and controlled environment, combining elements of dressage, games, jumping and cross country.

Enter online at www.equestrianentries.co.nz
General event enquires to Wendy Barnett - 027 326 2122
Event entry enquires to Megan Richards - 027 533 2471

To add an event, please email egoldsmith@pggwrightson.co.nz

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