

living together

Imagine a simple system that can solve housing shortages, alleviate loneliness, improve wellbeing and support people of all ages to save money.

It may sound too good to be true, but it's a reality. It's actively promoted in many countries of the world, and is the focus of a new initiative by Eastern Bay Villages.

It's called homeshare. People invite others to live with them. When I mention this idea listeners often shudder, remembering their days of flatting as early adults. Young people, who mostly have yet to learn to keep the music down, wash dishes or clean toilets, can make appalling flatmates.

Yet affordable housing is scarce and our penchant for living alone may leave us isolated and lonely. Shared housing is not new, it is an ancient method of survival and well-being. Maori families often have three or more generations under one roof.

Modern homeshare programmes work wonderfully in myriad ways and combinations. Consider two friends, both living alone but seeking more company. After carefully negotiating their space and need for privacy, they could move in together. Renting out their other home adds to the housing stock available and provides additional income.

Similarly, rent from boarders can assist retired people on reduced incomes to pay their mortgages, as well as providing companionship. But, best of all, in a new option being trialled here, it enables seniors to remain in their own home, avoiding moving to a rest home when they need additional support. In this situation, younger people share their home, living rent free in return for 10 hours a week of assistance.



COMPANIONSHIP: Syd Jarvis enjoys a cuppa and a laugh in the garden of his own home with his new homeshare partner Alana Glatter.

At the forefront in Whakatane is Sydney Jarvis, a man well known in our town. Now 89, Syd was a mechanical fitter at the board mills until his stroke in 1993. Now he is often seen on his mobility scooter making his way to meetings or shops.

When I met Syd he told me he was determined to stay living in his home, even though his wife is in a rest home and professionals keep telling him that he should be there too.

Eastern Bay Villages matched him with Alana Glatter. Alana had been house sitting for some time but was tired of continually moving around. Now Syd continues to have support from home care services but Alana fills the gaps. He also feels safer now to have someone with him at night.

But that is not the only benefit. "Alana works hard. She fetches things I need so it is less tiring.



grey matters by Ruth Gerzon

A fortnightly series by Ruth Gerzon from Eastern Bay Villages. Ruth can be contacted by phoning 027 4308149 or email easternbayvillages@gmail.com.

ing. She organised the house. I can move around more easily. She borrowed a wheelchair so we go in her car to the country or concerts."

Alana appreciates Syd's attractive home and her new role. "It gives me a sense of purpose. It is so much better than living on your own," she says. She also feels she has found a new vocation. "I love organizing things, making the house more light and airy. I'd love to support other older people to scale down."

They have both enjoyed their companionship, sharing many laughs and have widened their networks through meeting each other's friends.

Eastern Bay Villages supported Syd to negotiate an agreement, and ensured his other home care services remained in place. We have now been approached by another family seeking someone to live with their mother, so she can remain safely in her own home.

For a person who has been living alone, the decision to share housing is a big step, a major adjustment. Even when the benefits are clear, there are significant stumbling blocks. There are hesitations, fear, and simply not trusting oneself to choose a future home-mate who will be a good fit.

Bringing a stranger into your home is always a worry. What if they outstay their welcome? An older man we assisted to find a boarder elected to have a trial, just three nights a week at first, until both he and his boarder were sure they were compatible. That cautious approach worked well.

Homeshare programmes address safety concerns. Reference and police checks are made before matching people. Homeowners and homesharers are supported to negotiate agreements on how to live together without getting on each other's nerves. The situation is monitored and people supported to work through small disagreements, in order to maintain good relationships.

Homesharing is rapidly spreading throughout the world with programmes in 16 countries from Canada to Korea, Austria to Australia. Many focus on bringing together cash strapped students and older people, building relationships between generations.

This could be one answer to Auckland's housing crisis, but that's for someone else to take up. We can only demonstrate its benefits in our district. Our thanks go to Syd and Alana for pioneering this new programme and look forward to supporting more people to do the same.



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