

It's all about relationships

Rose (left) and Belinda Bannerman, homeshare coordinator at Care Connect.



Homeshare coordinator Belinda Bannerman, facilitated the successful match of Rose, 85, and Olympia, 49, who have just celebrated their first year living together as part of a homesharing arrangement.

ROSE'S STORY

I have lived in Rosanna (in Melbourne's north-east) for 39 years now. It's a beautiful area and I didn't want to go into a home because we have terrific neighbours and all my friends are nearby.

I had a slight heart attack at Christmas in 2013. My daughter, who lives in Paris, was looking after me because I had a stent put into my heart, and then after that I had a fall. So instead of only staying about a month, like she usually does, she stayed with me over a year. When the social worker came over, my daughter mentioned I was alone and that it would be nice if I had someone. I'd read about homeshare in the paper years ago and I thought it would be a great idea. Eventually we got onto Belinda at Care Connect.

They interviewed me three times and they interviewed Olympia three times. Belinda organised all of that. We also met each other a couple of times to see that we were compatible. We each had to have a police check and a children's check and that gives you more security.

I used to be a clutterer and Olympia put more than 10 hours' work in at the beginning – she helped my daughter declutter my home, which was wonderful. She cooks for me, she does shopping for me and she takes me to the club. It's marvellous. Belinda, as the coordinator, worked out a program for us.

Belinda gives us a lot of support. There was a stage we had a bit of friction and we called Belinda and she helped to sort it out. We can phone her anytime when we want to speak to her. She sees us and checks on us to make sure everything is going alright.

I have a double storey place. It's a big home and I feel much better having Olympia here. I couldn't have lived there on my own and I just love being at home.

Olympia and I have been together for a year now and it has worked out very well. It's gone quickly and the family feel happy that she is with me.

It's like she's part of the family now.

BELINDA'S STORY

I began working as a homeshare coordinator almost a year and a half ago. Rose had been on the homeshare program for a little bit but we hadn't found anyone, so I went out to do a reassessment of her.

That was a very difficult time for Rose. She had also just lost her husband in June, 2014. Her daughter, Leanne, was over here looking after her.

Rose is very lively and extremely active. She is a real people person.

What I thought was a real strength that Rose had was her openness to people and to life, and then when she started telling us a little bit about her life and some of her adventures, I was so intrigued. She has had

such a full life. I've done a bit of backpacking myself, but she told me she was backpacking with her sister around Europe in the 1950s, and she worked in London for two years. She told me some amazing stories.

She was just as open to meeting new people and experiencing new things now and I thought it was incredibly brave of her, also given that she was grieving the loss of her husband of many, many years. I was very sensitive to that and checked in with her and her daughter, Leanne. I was aware that we were asking them to trust us at a very difficult time in their lives and to invite somebody different into their home. She was incredibly trusting in us and we did that process carefully and slowly.

Olympia, who had returned to Australia after living in Greece for 30 years, was also coming into this with lots of change happening in her life. In some ways they both came together needing similar types of things – needing some companionship and understanding that they were both having some big changes in their lives.

The program is not about having a full-time carer. It is two independent people sharing a home and exchanging their resources. Rose really understood that and was prepared to see if it might work for her situation.

It's quite inspiring to see how Rose and Olympia interact and what it means for both of their lives. It really is a mutual benefit. ■
As told to Linda Belardi.