

## Homeshare offers hope to elderly

A program matching live-in volunteers with elderly people is making a difference

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Homeshare is an innovative pilot program that offers a simple but effective way of helping older people who need support and younger people who need accommodation in Melbourne's north west.

Aiming to keep people out of nursing homes as well as fight homelessness and the effects of unemployment, the Commonwealth and state governments are backing the idea financially, under Home and Community Care (HACC).

With several elderly Greeks already opting to join, this initiative has the potential to help many newly-arrived Greeks without connections seeking a place to stay.

The older person, or the person with disability, dementia even, is the householder who offers free accommodation to the homesharer in exchange for companionship.

Support does not include personal care or administering medication, therefore doesn't take the place of support workers and care services.

The matches are determined according to the candidates' schedules. Household support may include meal preparation, transport to appointments, cleaning, light gardening, shopping or help with the computer.



Rose and Olympia enjoying each other's company at home. Photo: Simon Birch.

“ *If it wasn't for Homeshare I would be in a nursing home for sure, alienated from my friends and neighbours.* ”

"As part of the Homeshare program, a homesharer will come and live in the home with the householder and provide up to 10 hours of support," says Belinda Bannerman, Homeshare coordinator.

"The homesharer will also contribute to utility bills and purchase their own food."

Rose, a lively and outgoing 85-year-old woman, was one of the first applicants to be accepted into the Homeshare program together with her husband Peter, in February 2014.

A few months later, Peter passed away and the need for a companion became imperative, as Rose wished to stay living independently.

At first, Rose's daughter Leanne, who resides in Paris, moved to Australia, leaving her family behind in order to support her.

"In some instances, family members might have stopped their own social outings or household activities as they can't leave their parent or loved one home alone," says Bannerman.

Care Connect, in collaboration with Spectrum MRC, found Olympia, a 49-year-old Greek woman who had been living in Greece for 30 years, and who recently returned to Australia.

Family members are part of the matching process, the ongoing monitoring of the homesharer and are asked for regular feedback.

Before Olympia began a trial stay in Rose's home, they were both assessed and underwent a family police check. Homeshare coordinators monitored the match, and after the trial period, an ongoing agreement was signed.

"Olympia assists Rose with cooking, outings, and shopping and is great company, especially in the evenings when life slows down," Bannerman adds.

"Leanne has returned to Paris, assured in the knowledge that her mother is well supported and happy remaining in her family home."

The arrangement provides a sense of stability and companionship for Olympia, who feels Rose has become her friend and family. The two have been living happily together in Rosanna for more than eight months now.

"We go lots of places and it's nice to take care of someone again," Olympia says.

"I also met Leanne, who is wonderful, and we speak regularly and have established a beautiful connection."

Olympia is keen to share her experience with more Greek newcomers finding it difficult to survive in Australia.

"This is a free, government-funded and supported program which will still allow people to work or study," she says.

"This program has helped me feel like an active member of the community."

"Neither Rose nor I feel like victims or obligated to each other. Our relationship is based on mutual help, respect and understanding.

"With Australia's population ageing and the proportion of individuals who live alone on the rise, we need to find new ways to support each other as a community."

Two of Rose's friends were found dead recently. One was discovered days later lying on the floor of her home.

The other was an active member of an elderly citizens' club, living alone. When she didn't show up her friends realised something bad had happened.

"I feel secure and safe with having someone else in the house, particularly overnight," says Rose, whose own health is declining.

"If it wasn't for Homeshare I would be in a nursing home for sure, alienated from my friends and neighbours."

To find out more about Homeshare, contact Care Connect on 03 9362 8000 or [homeshare@careconnect.org.au](mailto:homeshare@careconnect.org.au)



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