

Sharing homes: a new approach to social support

A Greek migrant opens her heart to an 86-year-old disabled Aussie

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NELLY SKOUFATOGLOU

An innovative program has helped a disabled Australian woman and a Greek widow living in Melbourne create a relationship of stability and companionship.

Non-profit organisation Care Connect brought together 86-year-old Rose and 48-year-old Olympia, offering them a chance to continue living independently and assist each other in a safe, supported environment via Homeshare.

The program is matching seniors and people with a disability with housemates who are happy to lend an extra hand in exchange for rent-free accommodation.

"If it wasn't for Homeshare, I would be in a nursing home for sure," says Rose, whose health is declining due to heart problems and mobility issues.



A Greek migrant, 48, found a new purpose in life by sharing a home with an 86-year-old Aussie disabled woman.

"Olympia is just marvellous and helps me with so much."

The two have been living together in Rosanna for eight months.

Rose's husband passed away in 2014 and her adult children live far away, whereas Olympia, who returned to Australia after living in Greece for the past 30 years, craved for a sense of belonging. Homeshare has been operated internationally for more than 25 years, but this is the first time it's been offered across Melbourne's north and west.

"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," Care Connect Chief Executive Officer Paul Ostrowski said.

"By providing additional support at home, Homeshare can also help to alleviate some of the pressure on family and friends to bridge the gap between services and need."

Mr Ostrowski emphasised that Homeshare did not take the place of existing or future support workers and care services, however it is a fresh way of bringing together people with complementary needs.

For many of the program's clients, the biggest bonus is not so much the chores that the homesharer can help with, but the sense of security and safety that comes with having someone else in the house, particularly overnight.

All participants undergo thorough security checks and sign an agreement outlining their obligations, which usually include about 10 hours of household duties per week. Homeshare coordinators provide ongoing monitoring to ensure the arrangement remains mutually beneficial.

"It was Olympia who pushed us to inform other elders in your community about the home-sharing program, which helped her connect and enjoy a better quality of life," Rachael Guthridge, Media and Communications Coordinator tells Neos Kosmos.

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

"I'm very happy; I feel secure here."

"The Homeshare program delivered by Care Connect in partnership with Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre Inc is supported by funding from the Commonwealth and Victorian Government under the HACC program. For more information go to www.careconnect.org.au or phone 1800 116 166.

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