

For immediate release



In the last year there has been a 37.5% growth in the number of Homeshare schemes from 16 last year to 22. Adult children of elderly parents participating in Homeshare are recognising the benefits. 'It has given us piece of mind that our mother has a lovely and responsible person living with her.' The recently published Homeshare UK 2017 Sector report <https://homeshareuk.org/hs-resource-library/homeshare-uk-sector-report-2017/>

My mother, myself and Homeshare Oxford

Sara Higgins writes about her experience of supporting her 90 year old mother into a Homeshare scheme in Oxford. The Homeshare model provides a sustainable solution to the parallel social issues of loneliness among older people and unaffordable housing costs for younger people.

'In her mid-80s, my independent, sociable and stubborn mother was determined to continue living alone. The only concession she made was to build an ensuite bathroom in the spare bedroom, so that one day, far in the future, and only in the event of a crisis, it would be possible to have a live-in helper. She outright rejected the idea of sheltered accommodation, moving into a home or anything of that order. She has a vibrant social life, lots of local friends, kind and helpful neighbours. As her children we support and admire her desire for independence. But as the preparations for her 90th birthday celebrations got underway, I became increasingly anxious about her living alone.

She has a pacemaker and is so deaf that even phonecalls can be difficult. Despite her energy, my mother is becoming increasingly frail. Nevertheless, she still has a tendency to rush into the garden just before dark in order to mow the lawn, if the forecast is for rain the next day. But even she was beginning to admit that despite the pacemaker, dashing about was more difficult than before.

I had a writer friend in London who was living as a Homesharer and I thought Mum might approve of a scheme which aims to give affordable housing to people on low incomes in return for some help around the house. I contacted Age UK Oxfordshire to see if they ran a Homeshare scheme and discovered one was being planned, so I asked to go on their waiting list from the start. As a former NHS physiotherapist, Mum is appalled by the lack of social housing in Oxford, a city with three major hospitals but housing costs which price key workers out of the market altogether. As a committed Socialist, she is more interested in helping people than making money – but it was a selling point that Homesharers do provide a contribution to the bills, to mitigate any additional costs incurred.

Homeshare Oxford coordinator Mary tactfully and patiently explained the scheme to Mum, reassuring her, answering questions and helping her to define exactly what kind of help she wanted. For someone who has lived alone since I left university in 1986, this isn't an easy process. It was helpful for both of us that Mary was able to anticipate practical issues and offer solutions. Mum was worried about money for groceries – Mary suggested a kitty. Mum gets tired in the evening and wanted to have the sitting-room to herself – Mary encouraged her to be clear about what she wanted and not feel she had to be polite.

From my point of view, the advantage of the Homeshare scheme was peace of mind. We knew that whoever came to live with Mum would be verifiably trustworthy, and that if any problems arose they could be dealt with directly by Homeshare.

Then the happy news came through that a potential sharer had been identified. We tidied up, got out the best tea pot, bought biscuits and had coffee on standby just in case she preferred. Watching from the sofa, I thought the first meeting was a disaster. The Homesharer, Sophie, drank neither tea nor coffee, and spoke so quietly that I wasn't sure whether Mum had heard anything she'd said. But after she left, the first thing Mum said was, "I can't think of anyone I would rather share my house with."

Later I asked Sophie what her initial impressions were. "She was very smiley," she recalls. "I remember we parked up outside the house and she was out of the front door and running across the gravel with a big smile on her face. She was very welcoming."

They agreed to give Homeshare a go.

From Mum's point of view, the plus points about Sophie moving in were that she was clearly a considerate, kind and socially conscious person. She had a full-time job, and so would not be around in the house too much if they didn't get on. It was also an advantage in Mum's eyes that she had a boyfriend living in another city, whom Mum had met and liked. This meant that she would be able to have the house to herself for some weekends.

On the down side, Sophie couldn't drive and – horror of horrors – was a vegetarian.

Gradually they learned to overlook each other's eccentricities, and became fond of each other. One problem was their different attitudes towards food. Cooking has been a life's journey and pleasure for Mum, starting as a young woman teaching herself from the books of Constance Spry and Mrs Beaton, learning French cuisine from Lucie Marion. At first their ideas of a tasty supper differed, but Sophie applied herself to learning recipes that both of them could enjoy, or which Mum could add meat to. However, they agreed about the puddings, bonding over chocolate cake, cheese cake and strawberries.

The companionship of having someone to chat to over a meal had a positive effect on my mother's quality of life. This and having someone on hand to cope with everyday

emergencies made Mum noticeably less anxious. When the freezer malfunctioned and blew all the fuses, throwing the house into darkness the day before Christmas Eve, Sophie was on hand to fix it. When we emailed attachments and links which Mum didn't know how to open, Sophie was able to help. She tried very hard to teach Mum to text, but that was one step too far for a talkative 90 year-old.

From my point of view, the very mild grumbles that Mum voiced about Sophie not cleaning the microwave, or using the washing-machine too often, were entirely normal. And Sophie in turn learned to put up with her own irritations, and to politely but firmly request that if, for example, Mum woke up at 4am she should not turn on her radio at full volume without her hearing-aids in, because it would wake Sophie up.

Ironically, after a few months the main complaint from Mum changed to something that had originally been a plus point – the fact that Sophie was out of the house all day. For me this was a sign that in spite of herself, Mum had begun to rely on her help and company. Perhaps also her needs have changed, and that when we come to choose the next candidate, the specifications will be different from what they were a year ago.

As the day for Sophie to move out grows near, I asked each of them what their lasting memory of each other would be. "It's Sophie arriving back from work in the evening, coming into the kitchen triumphant after the long bike ride home. She's always good natured and cheerful," says Mum. And for Sophie: "In the morning, coming down the stairs in her nightie with her breakfast tray. She's always smiling. Even if she's had a rubbish night's sleep, she has a big smile on her face. That smile is the main thing I will remember," she says.'

For more information about Homeshare Oxford please visit our website www.homeshareoxford.co.uk , email us Homeshare@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk or telephone 01865 410 670

Homeshare Oxford is funded by Lloyds Bank Foundation as part of the Homeshare Programme, developed by Lloyds Bank Foundation and Big Lottery Fund in partnership with Age UK, Shared Lives Plus, and the Foyer Federation.

ENDS

About Age UK Oxfordshire

Age UK Oxfordshire is an independent local charity dedicated to giving older people in Oxfordshire comfort, support and opportunities and enabling them to love later life.

We provide free local information, advice and support; commercial products and services; and research and campaign on the issues that matter to people in later life. We work with our national partner, Age UK, and our local Age UK partners in England. Our work focuses on five key areas: money matters, health and wellbeing, home and care, work and training and leisure and lifestyle.

You can find further information on all our services and volunteering opportunities by telephoning 0345 450 1276 or by visiting our website: www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire

Age UK Oxfordshire is a charitable company limited by guarantee (registered charity number 1091529 and company number 4328143). For all media enquiries please contact Sophie Dyer on 01235 849 403 or 07827 235405 or email media@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk.

Notes to Editors:

'The Homeshare Programme' refers to a three year £2m national Homeshare Programme which has been developed by [Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales](#) and [Big Lottery Fund](#) in partnership with [Shared Lives Plus](#), [Age UK](#), [The Foyer Federation](#) to put homesharing on the map as a viable solution to the parallel issues of a lack of affordable housing for young people and the growing number of older people who are lonely or isolated and in need of practical support and companionship.

Homeshare matches young people seeking a place to live with older people with a spare room who need a helping hand at home. The younger party typically pledges around 10 hours of companionship and light domestic help (not including personal care) to their host in return for accommodation. Both parties contribute an affordable monthly fee which contributes towards the cost of the matching process, running the scheme and creating a sustainable service.

Homeshare Oxford is one of a number of schemes which operate nationally.

For more information about Homeshare Oxford please visit www.homeshareoxford.co.uk email, telephone 01865 410 670

For more information about the national Homeshare Programme visit <https://homeshareuk.org>

For further information about the national Homeshare pilot programme please contact Sara Guy Sara.Guy@ageuk.org.uk or Amisha Koria at Lloyds Bank Foundation akoria@lloydsbankfoundation.org.uk

The Partners

The Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales www.lloydsbankfoundation.org.uk

The Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales is an independent, registered charity which invests in charities supporting people to break out of disadvantage at critical points in their lives, and promotes practical approaches to lasting change. The Foundation derives its income from Lloyds Banking Group. It has awarded over £300 million in grants to 42,000 charities across England and

Wales over 30 years. The Foundation has invested £1m in the Homeshare Programme to support pilot programmes and evaluation.

Big Lottery Fund www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

The Big Lottery Fund supports the aspirations of people who want to make life better for their communities across the UK. We are responsible for giving out 40% of the money raised by the National Lottery for good causes and invest over £650 million a year in projects big and small in health, education, environment and charitable purposes. The Big Lottery Fund have allocated up to £1 million to the Homeshare Programme.

Shared Lives Plus www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk

Shared Lives Plus is the UK network for family-based and small-scale ways of supporting adults. Members are Shared Lives carers and workers, homeshare programmes and enterprises. They use different approaches to enable people to achieve goals such as; being in control of their services and their lives, pursuing ordinary lives within their chosen families and relationships and being valued by their communities and feeling like they belong. Shared Lives Plus will support the Programme by providing connection to their network of existing homesharing schemes and helping to identify areas for growth.

Age UK www.ageuk.org.uk