About Homeshare International

Homeshare International is a UK charity set up in 1999 to encourage the development of new homeshare programmes around the world and to forge links between them. We aim to:

- develop a learning community of homeshare practitioners, enabling them to share information and working tools
- support and encourage good practice
- raise awareness of homeshare and its potential among policy makers
- foster new programmes and local networks in all parts of the globe
- encourage research on the contribution that homeshare can make
- raise awareness of the benefits of homeshare among potential householders and homesharers (but we do not arrange homeshare matches).

About homeshare

Homeshare enables two unrelated people to share a home for their mutual benefit. Typically older householders with a room to spare are carefully matched with a younger person who provides an agreed level of support in exchange for their accommodation. The support might include help with daily tasks, some financial support or a combination of these. Homeshare also provides companionship to both parties. It recognises that both have needs and something to give.

Homeshare programmes are known to be running in at least 13 countries.

www.homeshare.org

Homeshare International is a registered UK charity, number 1081517

A decade of change

This review celebrates the many new homeshare initiatives that have been launched across the globe in the last decade. Imaginative variations on the intergenerational model founded by the redoubtable Maggie Kuhn in the USA over 40 years ago have appeared, to reflect different cultures, countries and economies.

As our reach and influence has extended, Homeshare International (HI) has become increasingly aware of two key issues. The first is that to gain the active and continuing support of governments and local funding bodies, there has to be a stronger evidence base. Increasingly care agencies around the world need hard evaluative data about good and effective practice. Then there is the need to demonstrate the comparative economics, alongside other shared housing arrangements. HI has done some of this important work. But there is still much to be done.

For many years there was a single preferred model of homesharing which was intergenerational, arranged and managed by a ‘programme’ on a not-for-profit/charitable basis. There is still much to commend this model. But commercial programmes, digital-only matching, sharing which engages other groups and other new variations must be taken seriously. So too must the question of sustained funding, both for those who run programmes and for Homeshare International itself.

I am now stepping down as Chair after 15 years, on the grounds that no one should occupy such a role for too long. The death of our founder and President, Nan Maitland, in 2011, leaves an irreparable gap in our ranks but in other respects I leave the Trustees in fine shape. They embody all the good principles that make homesharing worth the celebrating. With Elizabeth Mills we have an outstanding and respected Honorary Director who is energetic, imaginative and skilled on our behalf. The Trustees and Advisers are now truly international and I want to thank them and their predecessors for their knowledge and commitment. We have been so fortunate to have such fine and capable people. I am delighted to have been invited to become HI’s President and hope there will be contributions I can continue to make.

It is a very special pleasure to welcome Rhian Bradley as the new Chair of the Trustees. Rhian is a talented Management Consultant with vast experience of how organisations work. Rhian was also Nan’s homesharer, the unseen hand and subtle mind behind much of what Nan sought to do in the formative years of HI. So there is no one better qualified to take up the leadership role. Nan would be thrilled, as I am, that Rhian is to carry on her work. My warmest good wishes go to Rhian, the Trustees, Advisers, volunteers and all of you around the world who care so much about making the lives of strangers in need, so much better.
Homeshare is a brilliantly simple idea but it is also a solution to several of society’s most pressing needs. This introduction puts homeshare into its global policy context.

Homeshare in context
Homeshare has its roots in the USA where the late Maggie Kuhn set up the first programmes in 1972. The concept spread to the UK in the 1990s and since its inception, Homeshare International has successfully fostered the idea in other countries. But the fact that the idea has also been independently ‘invented’ elsewhere indicates that homeshare is an obvious solution to many needs. From Germany to Japan, Austria to Australia, policy makers are faced with similar demographic, economic and social pressures to which homeshare is one solution.

A greying world
In most countries, the proportion of people in older age groups is rising fast. In 2012, people over 60 made up 11 per cent of the world’s population but 22 per cent of Europe’s population and 32 per cent of Japan’s. By 2050, more than one person in five on the planet will be aged 60 or over (United Nations’ figures). A high proportion of older people live alone, having outlived their spouse and with their families often living miles away.

Many homeshare programmes have been driven by the need to enable older people to live independently for longer in their own homes. A good homeshare match is an ideal solution for someone who needs a little help in the home, companionship and, crucially, the security of someone living in the house, especially at night. Studies have shown that homeshare can delay the need for expensive options such as residential care. Homeshare also has the potential to support people with disabilities.

The pressure on housing
Many countries, such as the UK, face housing shortages, fuelled by growing numbers of households and low levels of house building. A mismatch between the housing stock and the population’s needs means that many older people occupy a home too large for them because there are few alternatives. Various co-housing solutions are being tried to make better use of housing stock – and homeshare needs to be seen as one of them.

Homeshare has also been considered a solution to the needs of key workers (medical staff, teachers, police officers and other public servants) who are often priced out of the housing market in expensive cities like London.

A student boom
Never in human history have so many young people had an opportunity to go to university. In countries such as Spain, homeshare has been driven by the need to provide accommodation for students. Indeed in some Spanish universities, students are offered a homeshare placement before any other housing option. Spain’s success deserves to be replicated in other countries where student numbers put pressure on local housing markets.

Across the generations
Many countries have become aware of the need to forge links across the generations – to break down the isolation of older people, to foster mutual understanding and to provide young people with positive role models. Homeshare can be seen as the ultimate intergenerational programme.

“I don’t want to go into an old age home”
Mrs Haar (left) was 90 when she started homesharing with Joanna who was studying social work in London, UK. Mrs Haar received 10 hours’ support a week and she and Joanna shared four evening meals, cooking two each.

‘Homeshare has enabled me to stay in my own home rather than go into an old age home, which I don’t want to do,” Mrs Haar said. “Joanna was very, very thoughtful and it just worked beautifully.” Joanna thinks “Homeshare is great for people like me who don’t have much money for rent and no family here. It’s a great life experience too, learning about other people and having company.”

Their homeshare was arranged by Crossroads Care.
Since its inception, Homeshare International has had little funding and no paid staff – merely an enthusiastic and hard-working Board of Trustees who have given their time and expertise. In the last decade we have had much to celebrate – but many frustrations.

Our achievements, our challenges

Developing a learning community
Perhaps our greatest achievement has been to run three international congresses (in Paris in 2009, Cologne in 2011 and Oxford in 2013) to bring the world homeshare community together. The meetings have enabled practitioners and others to share information and insights, learn from each other’s experiences and debate key issues.

We have further supported our learning community by linking practitioners for mutual support, providing newsletters and, recently, establishing a Homeshare International Network. Members of the Network agree to support the highest standards of professional practice and though we have no way of validating that, we believe that we have a role to play in setting standards for the ‘industry’.

In the UK we encouraged Shared Lives Plus to develop and publish a manual for practitioners available to all – see www.sharedlivesplus.org.uk/guides-for-homeshare

Fostering new programmes
A spin-off of the congresses has been to enthuse participants who have then gone on to set up programmes in their own countries – Japan, Ireland and Portugal have experimented with homeshare as a result. We have also supported many fledgling programmes, not least in the UK.

Nurturing national alliances
We have encouraged the formation of national networks in Australia/New Zealand, Canada, Germany, Japan, Spain and the UK. We have close working links with the USA’s National Shared Housing Resource Center – Elizabeth Mills is a member of the Board. These groups are critical to learning, good practice and raising awareness locally.

Influencing the policy agenda
Getting the ear of governments has proved challenging. In the UK we have met with several government departments but so far we have seen few outcomes. We have had more success in the voluntary sector where Shared Lives Plus has espoused homeshare as a service model and Age UK is beginning to experiment.

In France ensemble2générations is in discussion with the government about the legal framework as this limits homesharing to older people and students. The same legal restrictions apply in many other European countries. We should like to see this barrier dismantled.

Encouraging research and evaluation
In 2006 we received funding to carry out a study of UK local authority commissioning managers’ awareness of and receptiveness to homeshare. Its findings were helpful to us if disappointing, indicating our need to prove the case for homeshare and raise awareness of it.

As a result, we developed an outline proposal for further research to investigate the barriers to homeshare, on a wider European scale. To date we have not been able to secure funding for this project but our planned research advisory group will take this forward.

Several programmes have evaluated their own service, demonstrating that homeshare is cost effective and much appreciated by the beneficiaries. Providing the evidence for homeshare was the theme of our 2013 Congress and the papers from this can be found on our website.

Raising awareness
We have focused our efforts on running our multi-lingual website, establishing a presence on Facebook and contributing an article to Wikipedia. Our website is critical to our global profile and sadly we have been beset with technical difficulties and lack of resources to develop it as we wish. We have had some success in the media with recent coverage of homeshare in the UK and France. This typically generates enquiries from would-be homesharers but often there is no programme to which we can refer them.

For two years Anna (on the right), who is from Poland, shared Marie’s home in Belgium. Anna helped Marie with household tasks while Marie helped Anna to master the French language. Their mutual support blossomed into a very warm relationship. Anna left to get married.
Homeshare programmes have now sprouted up in at least 13 countries across the globe. Some are well supported and very successful, others are more fragile – and for a variety of reasons. This is why we need to learn from each other.

Homeshare around the world

Homeshare International tries to maintain contact with all the programmes operating across the world to offer support, information and links. Many programmes are ‘stand-alone’ services working in isolation and welcome being linked with us and with others. A minority of programmes are part of wider service provision. This section is a brief overview of homeshare in late 2013.

Australia – the value of mutual support

Our founder, Nan Maitland, planted the seed for homeshare in Australia in 1997. It took root in Melbourne with the establishment of Homeshare Victoria in 2000. This programme went on to promote and encourage the development of homeshare across Australia and New Zealand, becoming the umbrella organisation, HANZA – the Homeshare Australia & New Zealand Alliance.

Now HANZA has six full members who are running or about to start programmes in Perth, Adelaide, Canberra and Melbourne, plus eight associate members who are receiving support to set up programmes in Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia and Victoria.

Belgium – a vibrant newcomer

1 toit 2 âges (‘One Roof 2 Ages’) was set up in 2009 in Brussels by pioneer, Claire de Kerautem, with support from her husband Régis. Thanks to a highly-motivated team, the programme is now operating in six cities and expects to extend further. Its homesharers are all students who are matched with older people. One of its early matches lasted four years.

Canada – adapting to needs and crises

We are aware of four programmes, in Calgary, Red Deer in Alberta, Newfoundland and Quebec, with their own informal network. Interest seems to be growing in other areas. Some of the programmes provide homeshare as part of wider service provision to older people. As with many American programmes, the homesharer usually contributes to household costs.

When devastating floods caused significant loss of housing stock in Calgary in June 2013, the programme started accepting younger householders. The flexibility of the homeshare concept is one of its greatest strengths.

France – a huge success story

Three networks are active throughout France, between them running over 40 programmes in major cities and towns. The first to be set up was Le Pari Solidaire (réseau COSI) in 2004, followed by ensemble2générations in 2006, which has close links with the Catholic Church. The third one is réseau LIS. All three organisations link students with older people. Ensemble2générations is leading negotiations with the Minister for elderly people in order to get official status for this kind of mutual service and avoid fiscal complications.

Germany – a growing presence

Our Vice-President, Anne-Lotte Kreickemeier, set up the first Wohnen für Hilfe (‘Housing for Help’) programme in Darmstadt in the 1990s to meet the need for student accommodation. The concept has since been taken up in other university towns and there are now 22 programmes across the country. There is also an active national network, Wohnen für Hilfe in Deutschland, which brings practitioners together annually to share their learning.

Loneliness and social isolation are as harmful to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Social networks not only reduce health risks, they also help individuals to recover when they do fall ill. In the UK, around one in ten older people admit to being lonely most of the time.

Quoted by the Campaign to End Loneliness

How does homeshare work?

There is no single model of homeshare and practitioners have devised local solutions to meet local needs. Three main models include:

The counselling model – programme coordinators screen all applicants, suggest ‘matches’ and support people to choose a suitable match, devise a contract, monitor the outcome and provide ongoing support to both parties.

The referral model – programmes interview applicants and suggest matches. It is then up to the applicants to take things forward.

The do-it-yourself model – some providers have issued guidelines for people to arrange and manage their own matches.
Ireland – an embryonic service

The first Irish programme, in Cork, was set up recently by husband and wife team Sean and Jacqui Feely who attended our congress in Cologne specifically to learn how to set up a programme.

Italy

Several projects are running in Italy, carried out by a wide range of public sector and private bodies. Funding is quite a difficult challenge for most of them. The majority of projects match older adults and students but as the ‘collaborative economy movement’ expands, programmes are experimenting with new kinds of matching, for example people with disabilities, and workers. It is hoped to build a national network to enable knowledge sharing, in particular concerning evaluation, promotion and funding.

Japan – overcoming the hurdles?

Japan has the highest proportion of older people in the world but considerable challenges in introducing homeshare, partly because the room layout in existing housing stock is unsuitable, and partly because of cultural factors. Nevertheless homeshare is being trialled in four places. The organisers are now working to establish a national network to share their experiences and support each other.

Netherlands – new and growing

Stichting SOLink, based in Dordrecht, has been running for three years and is gradually expanding. It covers the whole of the Netherlands and matches students and older people. It is now experimenting to see whether it can maintain the quality of its matches with less service support. One of its early matches lasted almost three years and the elderly householder is now matched with a new homesharer.

Spain – when recession bites ...

A few years ago Spain was the undoubted champion of homeshare in Europe with about 80 programmes, driven by the need for student accommodation. Many programmes were however funded by the big banks and lost their funding as result of the economic downturn. About 15 homeshare programmes survive in university cities such as Madrid, Barcelona and elsewhere. Two of these programmes will accept disabled householders as well as older people.

Switzerland – an experiment

Pro Senectute, a national foundation with local branches, set up a Wohnen für Hilfe (‘Housing for Help’) programme in the city of Zurich in 2009. The charity provides homeshare for people over 60, matching them with students. It now hopes to extend the service to more people and to the wider canton of Zurich.

UK – one step forward, two back

Homeshare was introduced to the UK by our founder, the late Nan Maitland, in London in 1993. Currently there are 12 programmes, all of them spurred into being to meet the needs of an ageing population. The national network, the UK Homeshare Association, is run by Shared Lives Plus and brings practitioners together for mutual benefit.

Nowhere illustrates the fragility of homeshare better than the UK where funding has sometimes been cut off just as programmes are starting to make headway. In part this is the result of the UK’s recession, but in part it may reflect unrealistic expectations – homeshare needs time to bed in.

USA – whither the pioneers?

America was the birthplace of homeshare in the 1970s and in its heyday there were around 200 programmes. Most of those were driven by the need to support older people in their own homes and many had a rental element in the exchange to boost the incomes of older people.

Some programmes have experimented with the basic model to meet the needs of groups such as disabled people and single parents.

There are around 65 programmes now, some of them, like Vermont, having survived and thrived for over 30 years. Others have folded for various reasons, including lack of secure funding.

Most programmes are members of the National Shared Housing Resource Center. This has taken on a new lease of life, with a modernised online presence and renewed national advocacy around issues of aging in place, affordable housing, and shared housing’s role in creating meaningful support systems and stabilising communities.
What have we learned?

1. Homeshare programmes vary widely, meeting local needs and service frameworks.
2. Local evaluations have proved that homeshare is a cost-effective solution to the needs of older people.
3. Many programmes are fragile, often because of insecure funding.
4. The concept of homeshare arouses suspicion in some countries because it is assumed to be a ‘risk’ for older people. Yet there is no known case of abuse, anywhere in the world.
5. Homeshare is hard to establish in rural areas and works best in large towns and cities where housing costs are high.
6. Householders and homesharers love it! One survey showed that all participants would ‘recommend it’. Homeshare enriches people’s lives.

Where next?

Our priorities for the coming years are to:

Develop and resource the Homeshare International Network, which provides a forum for practitioners, enabling them to learn from and support each other

Develop our website – it will be key to the Network as the only viable means to reach an international community. And it’s our shop window to the world

Develop a research advisory group to support our research agenda.

Support the development of national associations of homeshare practitioners. This is particularly important as a means to overcome language barriers as we do not have the resources to translate our website and materials into multiple languages

Continue to hold our bi-ennia congresses as the most effective means of bringing together practitioners, policy makers and researchers. Our experience has shown that these can help kick-start new programmes and re-energise participants, as well as developing lasting relationships among the homeshare community. The next one will be in Melbourne, Australia in November 2015.

Secure funding and resources to take us forward with greater confidence.

Contact us! Join us!

We’d love to hear from you if you have information to share, need to know how to start a programme or evaluate one, or if you’d like to join the HI Network.

Please note: we do not arrange matches between householder and homesharers. If you are interested in this, please refer to our website for local contacts.

You can contact us at HI@homeshare.org – other details are given on the back page.

Homeshare in action – Chris’s story

At 96, Chris is a wonderful man, sociable, active and fiercely independent despite significant sight and hearing loss. He has been a widower for many years and lives on his own in Melbourne, Australia. His two daughters adore him but live a long way away, one in Western Australia and the other in the USA. The Melbourne programme has arranged a succession of homesharers for him and he has loved their company.

Match 1 in 2009 was a short-lived trial of only four weeks when international student, Mai, needed to study on the other side of town and commuting was impossible.

Match 2 was with Jennifer from late August 2009 until June 2011 when she had to return to New Zealand – so 93 weeks – just short of two years. A very successful match.

Match 3 lasted from June 2011 until March 2013 when the homesharer moved on to her own accommodation – so 42 weeks.

Match 4 began in June 2013.

So Chris has now stayed safely at home for over four years. Homeshare has been the perfect solution for Chris’s situation, not least for his daughters, who have peace of mind knowing that Chris has the support and companionship of a carefully chosen homesharer.

Chris is pictured with Beris Campbell, one of our Trustees and founder of the Melbourne programme.
Management ...

Homeshare International is a UK charity run by an international Board of Trustees with support from a group of International Advisers.

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We are most grateful to the volunteers who have supported us in this period: John Chegwyn, Georgia Crucoli, Stefano Pietroiusti, James Roberts, Peter Raeburn-Ward, Michelle Sanson, Judy Winchester and Vicki Woodthorpe.

... and finances

In the period 2004-2013 our income included: grants and sponsorship for our three congresses; subscriptions from members of the Homeshare International Network; donations in memory of our Founder, Nan Maitland and other donations.

Our expenditure included running our website; providing three congresses; and administrative expenses. We had no paid staff in this period.

Our warmest thanks go to those organisations and individuals who have supported our work. We would particularly like to thank:
Age UK
Bruderhaus Diakonie, Germany
Building and Social Housing Foundation
City of Cologne
University of Cologne
Elderly Accommodation Counsel
Ensemble2générations Foundation
GB Sasakawa Foundation
Housing Learning and Improvement Network
Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Methodist Homes
Oxfordshire County Council
the staff of PA Consulting
Shared Lives Plus
Worshipful Company of Grocers
Worshipful Company of Leathersellers

Please contact us if you would like further details of our finances.

Homeshare International is entirely dependent on voluntary donations for its continued existence. Donations may be made by PayPal in any currency – see our website.

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‘People aren’t just looking to have their physical needs met. They are looking to have a good life, which involves relationships and being able to give back and be a citizen as well as a service user.’

Alex Fox, Chief Executive, Shared Lives Plus and International Adviser