
Supported Living: Rental Subsidy for Home Sharers

1. Issue

The ability to provide a home rent free or at reduced rent enhances the capacity of people with disability to find people who will share their home and provide informal support.

2. Background

2.1 Policy Principles

Living Life My Way has encouraged broad and flexible thinking about the use of individualised funding consistent with the principles of choice, control and responsibility provided that the use is not illegal.

2.2 Research

Research into the *Effectiveness of Supported Living in Relation to Shared Accommodation* (SPRC:2007)ⁱ for people requiring 24 hour care found a range of approaches effective in terms of quality of life of people with disability and cost. ALL had moved away from providing 24 hour care because when the right elements of formal and informal supports were put into place, 24 hour care was not needed.

Key elements of the most effective models are:

- separation of housing and support;
- support tailored to each person with a notional budget upon which they could call;
- support provided through a mix of formal and informal support with an investment in developing informal support.

Many people with disability use reduced or rent free accommodation as an incentive to attract home sharers who provide negotiated informal support and assist the person in extending their networks, thus further developing informal support opportunities.

2.3 Benefits of reduced or free rent in exchange for support

It is cost effective

- Home sharers stay over a minimum number of nights per week, which is comparatively less costly than paying overnight support workers for equivalent hours.
- Home sharers offer support and contribution in daily living tasks like shopping, cooking and cleaning, saving dollars that would be spent on drop-in paid support for these tasks.
- Home sharers are often instrumental in widening the networks and friendships of people with disability, saving costs associated with providing paid support to undertake this work.
- If and when co-residents decide to move out they can often find a replacement through their networks, who in many cases will have already met the person socially. This reduces expenses and time associated with sourcing and familiarising with potential home sharers.

It improves the quality of life and outcomes for people with disability

- People with disability expand their relationships, friendships and opportunities through the relationships they develop with home sharers. In turn this increases people's safety and security in their community and their valued status as housemate.

- Home sharers often go above and beyond what was originally expected of them once a relationship has developed between them and the person.
- Home sharers reduce a person's dependence on paid people in their life. While home sharers receive an incentive to take up the arrangement, this is not comparative to the costs and differing dimensions of relationship associated with paid support workers.

Paying a home sharer changes the nature of the relationship

Directly paying a home sharer for the support they provide is likely to transform their role from 'house mate' into 'employee' or 'support worker', and the person with disability from 'housemate' to 'recipient of paid support'. House sharing lends itself to natural, freely given relations that are typical of more informal arrangements between people sharing accommodation in the community. This could be inhibited when people are in a paid role: they are likely to do the tasks that they are being paid for (in the 'job description') and go no further. The social activities and friendships that so often blossom between housemates are far less likely to occur in paid, professionalised relationships when people with disability are associated with 'work'.

2.4 Government policy in other states

Queensland Community Living Initiative (CLI)

The CLI provides funding up to a maximum of \$25,000 p.a. and is intended for people who have support needs that would equate to 10-12 hours of weekly paid support. Home sharing has not been a feature of the CLI because the low level of funding means that people tend to have the skills and competency to live on their own with limited drop in support. People with higher support needs are directed to the Register of Needs where their needs are assessed and they are put on a waiting list to receive individualised funds.

Queensland Housing

Queensland Housing enables overseas students to live in a home stay arrangement with an Australian resident of the Queensland Department of Housing. The rent that the student pays to their Australian hosts is deemed as non-assessable income and therefore does not impact on the household income for rent. This has been used by people with disability in social housing to negotiate the provision of informal support from a home sharer who pays no rent.

Western Australia Community Living Initiative (CLI)

The CLI provides funding up to a maximum of \$20,000 p.a. with additional administration funding provided to agencies (approx \$4000 p.a). The CLI enables people with disability to use their funding flexibly with no cap on the amount of money that can be used as a rent subsidy for a home sharer as long as it is an approved part of a person's plan.

3. Case studies

Case Study 1

Susan is a young woman who lives in Queensland in a three bedroom house provided by Queensland Housing. She had autism and needs regular support so that she can live in her own home. Susan shares her home with two housemates. One is a student from Kenya who lives with Susan in a home stay arrangement and is not required to pay rent in return for the support she provides. The other is an Australian student who pays approximately \$50 per week as calculated by Queensland Housing through an income/asset test.

Susan's home sharers both signed agreements that set out their obligations and the arrangements for living in Susan's home. For example, at least one housemate is required to be at home between 7pm – 8am four nights a week and both assist Susan with daily tasks like having breakfast, getting ready each day and getting to bed. Susan's home sharers are expected to pay their share (one third) of all utility bills and shared food items. They also pay a bond in the case that something in Susan's home is damaged.

In addition, Susan has a team of six paid support workers who assist her with daily living, complimenting the informal support from home sharers. Susan's family believe that home sharers have made a big difference to Susan's quality of life. One of her past home sharers has maintained contact and is now a part of Susan's circle of support.

Case study 2

Rahul is a 26 year old man who moved from a rural area of Western Australia to Perth 3 years ago. He has Asperges Syndrome, and while he may present as being highly capable, he finds it extremely difficult to make and sustain relationships, do everyday tasks like showering, shopping and cooking and often displays challenging behaviours. Rahul has a Community Living Fund of approximately \$20,000, and uses \$17,000 of this to enable 2 home sharers to live with him at reduced rent and provide informal support (the house sharers each pay \$90 per week and split the utility bills evenly). This highly reduced rent is in the recognition that Rahul is not an easy person to live with. The home sharers agree to support Rahul in a variety of ways including ensuring one person is always home over night and assisting with house hold duties like shopping, cooking and cleaning. They also know that part of their role as Rahul's housemate is to help him to expand his relationships and friendships, and hosting BBQs and gatherings at the house (from time to time) is encouraged.

When Rahul first moved to Perth he had no connections or friendships. Through his housemates his networks have expanded vastly, although he continues to need substantial support in maintaining these relationships. Rahul's agency play a facilitative role in supporting Rahul and his home sharers to form positive, healthy and friendly relationships. For example, they provide information and advice to Rahul's home sharers and are available if they have any questions or concerns.

Rahul receives approximately 10 hours a week of paid support in his home.

Case study 3

Simon is a man with autism and high support needs who has a range of valued roles as a result of his family's energy and commitment. These include delivering the local paper one day per week, working in a local hardware store 2 half days and delivering vegetables for a local co-op.

Simon lives in his own home but is not yet safe to be alone. To meet this need for safety and to help Simon to meet more people, he shares his home with Tom who works full time in the city and has committed to sharing his life and providing informal support. Tom spends 4 evenings per week with Simon, sharing a meal, watching TV and generally hanging out. A further 2 nights, Tom is expected to be home by 10. On all 6 nights, Tom assists Simon to get ready for bed. In recognition of this commitment, particularly given the support required is active and persistent, Tom does not pay any rent. Without this unpaid home sharer, Simon would require 24/7 paid support.

Case study 4

Jennifer is a middle aged woman who has significant cognitive impairment. She has lived in her own home for many years with paid support that come in daily to assist with personal care, washing and shopping. During the day, Jennifer attends a day program. Integral to Jennifer's wellbeing is the fact that she has shared her home with Wendy for the past 3 years. Wendy works full time and has committed to spend time with Jennifer in the evening, sharing a meal, watching TV and helping Jennifer get ready for bed including assisting with her medication. In addition, Wendy prepares Jennifer's breakfast before she leaves for work in the morning. Wendy believes she is very fortunate to live with Jennifer. She enjoys Jennifer's company and does not pay rent.

Case study 5

David is a 28 year old man who moved from a group home to live in his own home close to family, friends and his community. David shares his home with Jason who provides the pivotal support role. David's family have been very clear in crafting out Jason's role because they don't want paid support to dominate David's life. David's family used their friends and networks to connect with Jason who for the past 12 months has lived rent free with David assisting him to experience the ordinary life of a young man. In this context, Jason is there overnight and provides 12 hours of active support in the morning and a couple of evenings. In addition, Jason helps David to solve problems, to learn and do housework, to take medication and have good personal hygiene.

Paid staff and friends and family assist David at specified times. All know that supporting a good relationship between David and Jason is a key priority.

4. Considerations in the use and level of rent subsidy for home sharers

Rent subsidy for a home sharer should be available if the home sharer:

- Provides negotiated informal support
- Reduces the need for paid support
- Contributes to the quality of life of the person with disability
- Contributes to the sustainability of a supported living arrangement

Ownership of the property is not a relevant consideration because the rental subsidy is provided in recognition of support provided.

The level of rent subsidy should be determined in relation to:

- The level and nature of support that will be required from home sharers – taking into account the amount the housemate would be paid if the assistance was provided by a support worker
- The temperament of the person with disability and how easy/difficult they are to live with

5. Recommendation

That ADHC enable people with disability in receipt of SLF and IASP packages to subsidise the rent of home sharers giving people choice and control over the level of subsidy consistent with their vision documented in their plan.

Social Policy Research Centre, (2007) *Effectiveness of Supported Living in relation to Shared Accommodation*, at <http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/research-areas-and-strengths/effectiveness-of-supported-living-in-relation-to-shared-accommodation-56.html>