

# News Feature Release

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **If High Rents Have You Reeling, Try Homesharing**

After her husband died, Angela heard about Homesharing while attending a Senior lunch program at her local center. Her first thought was, "Well that's a good idea. I think I'll give it a try."

Ten years later, Angela is still in the program, having been successfully matched with a variety of homeseekers, some who still remain friends with her today. Angela, who recently celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, smiles, her eyes twinkling, when she recalls her first match in the Homesharing program.

"This young man had built his own sailboat and sailed around the world alone, and I thought, 'Oh boy, I'll take two or three of those'—I liked the spirit of it. But, he was so macho. He thought he was God's gift to women." She laughed again.

The memory of it clearly struck her as funny.

After about six months, Angela decided the young man might be happier somewhere else.

But it was a good learning experience, and Angela has fond memories of many of her subsequent matches, including one woman in her early 40's who moved in for a time, a nursing student at the University of Washington, who became like a daughter. "She was just wonderful. She would give me suggestions for gardening

and was helpful in so many ways. I ended up going to visit her in Vermont one Thanksgiving. Now she's married and has a daughter and is about to graduate as an architect. Such an interesting person."

Angela is one of the more independent homeowners who are active in Senior Services' Homesharing program. She participates primarily for extra help with monthly expenses, but may occasionally depend on a tenant for a ride to the store or some help with the yard. Other homeowners are much more reliant on a tenant to provide not only companionship, but help with household chores and errands. For these homeowners, the program affords them the security and practical assistance they might need to be able to remain independent, and living in their own home.

Angela's ideal tenant is a student, preferably foreign, which she particularly enjoys since she speaks three languages herself and has traveled and lived in many parts of the world. "Oh, and I like people who do 'little' cooking at home because my work is all over the kitchen table. I'm a writer you see. And it's great if they like yard work and can pull a weed now and then."

After thirty minutes spent chatting with this very special person, it becomes obvious that matching "personalities" with "needs" is a crucial component of the Homesharing program. And although the homeowner is the person who ultimately makes the decision to accept a homeseeker or not, Homesharing advocates spend many hours screening and interviewing potential candidates before referring them to a homeowner. According to Mike Rolls, director for the program, it usually takes several weeks to make a

successful match, although in some special cases, it can happen in as little as two weeks.

“Our goal,” says Rolls, “is to match people for mutual benefit and compatibility. The clearer both parties can be in their expectations, the more efficiently we can help.” Rolls goes on to explain that this means people need to be open about communicating their likes and dislikes, and that they understand the limits of their comfort zone, especially in relationship to a close living environment.

In Angela’s case for example, it took only one interview to determine some very clear preferences:

- She enjoys intellectually stimulating conversation and a good debate now and then.
- She admires independent, free thinkers.
- She has a decided preference that people spend little time in her kitchen.

Those were just a few personality preferences (quirks you might call them), but clear indicators that go a long way toward assisting the advocates in determining a good prospective match.

With quality, affordable housing options continuing to be in high demand and short supply throughout the Seattle area, Senior Services’ Homesharing program is an option that has many benefits to offer:

- Much lower rent for living accommodations not usually available at that price.

- Compensation for work and/or care support which may include errand running, transportation, light housekeeping, and/or cooking.
- A life enriching experience that may be cherished for years to come.

Homesharing is an intergenerational program, part of Senior Services, a United Way partner agency supporting the independence of seniors. The program is available within the city limits of Seattle and stipulates that one person in the match must be 55 years of age or older. All parties must undergo a background check and homeseekers must provide three long-term references.

The Homesharing program has been in existence for over twenty years and has about 65 matches ongoing with a wide range of combinations: young people with seniors, seniors with seniors, and younger homeowners matched with seniors.

In February of '2000, an affiliate Homesharing program was added in the Des Moines/Normandy Park area. This added program is slightly different in that there are no age requirements. But homeowners must live within the specified geographic area and all parties must undergo a background check. Homeseekers must also provide three references.

Seattle Homesharing is one of three pilot homesharing projects that have served as inspiration and as an informational resource for a growing number of similar programs being implemented around the country. Locally, the program has inspired other pilots such as Eastside Home Share, Snohomish County Homeshare, and Shared Housing Services in Tacoma.

Potential participants interested in receiving more information about the Homesharing program is available by calling (206) 448-5725, or by visiting the Senior Services website at [www.seniorservices.org](http://www.seniorservices.org).

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Sidebar.....

### **Senior Services' Homesharing Program Facts at a Glance**

The Homesharing program has been successfully matching people together for mutual benefit since 1979.

Some arrangements are "rent only" based, while others may include an exchange of household chores such as yardwork or cooking. Work exchange is valued at \$10 per hour.

The only eligibility requirement is that at least one person in the match must be 55 years of age or older.\*

All homeowners in the Seattle program reside within the city limits.

\*There is no age restriction for the affiliate Des Moines/Normandy Park Homesharing Program.

### **Benefits to Homeowners and Homeseekers**

Helps senior remain independent and in their own home.  
Provides them with the added security of having another person living in the home.  
Helps offset costs of maintaining a residence.  
Reduces living costs.  
Provides a life enriching experience for both parties.

