

Extract from article titled "The rise of the extreme house-sitter", published 1 July 2013

By Lucy Wallis BBC News



In the current tough economic climate, with rents rising, people are finding unusual ways to cut back on living costs while they save up for a deposit on a place of their own.

Customer bookings manager Naomi Lumsdaine, who's 27, has found her perfect housemate. She is cultured, entertaining, well-educated and fun - and 97 years old.

Lumsdaine lives with Anne Schotts in central London in a four bedroom house. She pays £100 a month to a not-for-profit agency who set up the arrangement, known as Homeshare, but no rent to Schotts.

Homeshare is an initiative in which the householder provides the homesharer with accommodation in exchange for help - this can range from doing some minor household tasks like gardening or helping to use technology, such as a computer, to providing company. Many homeshare schemes are run by voluntary bodies or charities.

Alex Fox, chief executive of Shared Lives Plus, the national network for 12 homeshare schemes in the UK says there are about 150-200 people formally using this arrangement, with new schemes currently being set up in places like Cumbria, Oxford and Plymouth. He says home sharers often find they enjoy getting to know someone outside of their normal social circle.

"We've got an epidemic of isolation and loneliness among older people," says Fox. "and you've often got older people who are struggling to afford or find the right kind of support but who do have spare rooms in their houses, and younger people who are increasingly trying to get on the housing ladder."

After a screening process, criminal records check and meeting with Schotts to check they would get along, Lumsdaine moved in and has lived there for the last five months.

"Literally I'm there to make sure that she's OK if, heaven forbid, she does have a fall," says Lumsdaine, "because I'm in and out every day and I'm there to help handle the whole thing."

She does 10 hours of chores a week which include cooking dinner and washing up and also "hangs out" with her housemate.

"Dinner time is one of my favourite times of day. We'll sit and chat and we always have fruit afterwards," says Lumsdaine. "She buys the fruit and we eat it together and it's a very specific thing. We have to count the strawberries and have exactly the same amount. If it's odd we have to divide one in half."

Schotts does not want to live in a care home, but needs some extra support and so the arrangement gives her family peace of mind. The initiative has provided Lumsdaine with a set routine and she is using the money she saves to pay off debts and save for a deposit on her own home. She says it has enriched her life and turned out to be the perfect way to live.

"I've got the companionship of a really wonderful elder. I genuinely mean it when I say she is the best housemate I've ever had because she's no trouble at all."

A good homesharer is..

- Respectful - it is ultimately someone else's space and not your own
- Conscientious
- Reliable
- Clean and tidy
- Communicative
- Willing to share experiences
- Would suit someone who is studying for exams and needs a quieter living space