

The HomeShare Vermont Model: A 30 Year Success Story **By Kirby Dunn, Executive Director**

Thank you to our host HANZA, Homeshare International and everyone who is working to promote homesharing in your communities and around the globe. I am thrilled to be here in Melbourne and to participate in this 4th World HomeShare Congress and thank you for inviting me.

HomeShare Vermont has not only made it to the ripe old age of 33, but we have never been stronger. Today, in our small, rural state of Vermont, over 50% of the population has direct access to one of two homesharing programs that provide in-depth screening, matching and support services. Nationally, less than 1/10th of one percent of the population has access to such services in the US.

Vermont is a small rural state which until recently had more cows than people, over 50% of all households have a gun and we have an avowed Socialist US Senator who is running for President! What works for us may not work for California, Melbourne or somewhere else. But I do think we have a few components of our program that could be replicated elsewhere, and I want to share few ideas with you.

As any of you who work in the field will know, Match-up programs are deceptively simple in concept, but in practice they are incredibly difficult **to do well**. When I started as Director of HomeShare Vermont 15 years ago, I looked at the numbers of matches made that year and I proclaimed to staff & volunteers that our goal for next year would be to make 10 times as many matches.

I truly had no clue how difficult it was to make matches. I had managed various housing programs for the previous decade and I didn't see why this wasn't realistic, because it seemed so simple. What I quickly learned was that making matches is incredibly difficult because it's about people! Not buildings, rent subsidies, funding, sewer regulations, or the myriad of other components of traditional housing programs. It's about people, their wants, their needs and their expectations. And you have to get two people's wants needs and expectations to match up.

So, as homesharing programs, not only do we need to do all the things well that make strong and sustainable organizations, we need to do more. **We need to be excellent matchmakers and have a process AND people that encourage successful homesharing matches.**

But alas, I have a secret weapon for you! It will work in urban and rural areas, with differing target populations and is especially helpful if you don't have a bottomless pit of money.

With the boomer generation retiring, the opportunity to expand AND improve your service delivery thru the use of **community volunteers** should be considered.

Volunteers have been a cornerstone of our service delivery since we opened our doors in 1982. This year, HomeShare Vermont benefitted from the assistance of 14 staff volunteers who each dedicated an average of 8 hours per week to our organization. These volunteers are retired

teachers, social workers or guidance counselors. Working closely with our HomeShare Coordinator, the staff volunteers assist with everything from interviewing new applicants to creating matches. With about 300 active participants in our homesharing program at any given time, staff volunteers play a crucial role ensuring that our process runs smoothly and efficiently. You always know when it's Wednesday in the office as the volunteers are meeting and the office is abuzz with activity, laughter and energy.

“The Matchmakers” video 5 minutes

- Retired Volunteers have a lifetime of professional and personal experience we couldn't afford to hire for. Our volunteers are retired teachers, social workers and guidance counselors among others.
- They are links to the community which give us automatic credibility. They are not an “agency”.
- They don't work 9-5 Monday-Friday, but often after hours and weekends.
- They are constantly singing the praises of homesharing to friends and family which provides additional benefits to our organization and results in stronger outreach, more fundraising dollars and knowledgeable and dedicated board members.
- Organizationally, when we have been faced with staffing cuts, maternity leaves, or long hiring process, the volunteers have provided a continuity of service delivery that we wouldn't have had otherwise.
- Over the last decade we have expanded our program to four counties from one, solely with the use of volunteers. They have been especially helpful serving the more rural areas where it's not as cost effective to pay staff to drive back and forth.

Our staff volunteers are one of the key reasons we are stronger today than ever before.

As I said before, you need not only the right matchmakers but the right process for making successful matches.

A group matching process lets different ideas develop about who might work with who. Most programs can't have a group match making process as there is usually only one staff person making matches. Our process with the volunteers is focused on a weekly case conference meeting where all the activity of the previous week is discussed and potential matches are developed. Each volunteer has their own caseload and they do interviews, introductions, paperwork and stay in contact after matches are made-they do what our staff does. Some of our volunteers have now been with us for over 15 years.

A recent study of our program and how we use volunteers by Fred Fengler & Nick Danigelis University of Vermont, October 2010 entitled “The Dedicated Volunteers of HomeShare Vermont: A 28-Year Follow-Up” showed us that the volunteers love the mission of what we do,

but that isn't enough. The group interaction and the comradery of the volunteers with the staff are the major reason the Volunteers love what they do and keep coming back year after year and refer their friends to volunteer with us. Not only do you need individuals who have good matchmaking skills and a process that values their input, you need to make it fun!

Telling Our Story

Not only do we need to be good matchmakers, we then need to be able to say what the Outcomes of our work are and what benefits people receive because they are homesharing. (refer to Outcomes and Return on Investment page 4.)

From a 2015 AARP Survey of 500 residents age 45+ in a just released report: The Path to Livability: A Citizen Survey of Burlington VT

QUESTION:

Would Burlington Residents Age 45+ Consider Homesharing:
yes 56%, no 37%, not sure no answer 7%

The results show their willingness to consider homesharing decreases with age:

Age	yes
45-49	71%
50-64	59%
65-74	55%
75+	44%

This data tells us we need to market homesharing to those younger, before their needs are too great, when they are more open to sharing their home.

A similar survey in 2006 showed that overall, only 36% said they would consider homesharing- so we are up 20% in almost 10 years and we believe this is due to strong marketing of the service and the successful matches we have made during this time.

As homesharing programs we need to learn what works and what doesn't in order to standardize the model. If there are 100 programs out there, there are 100 different ways we are doing things. So as we expand, my word of wisdom is to replicate what is working and not reinvent the wheel; yet allow for change and improvements as other ideas and networks and needs are incorporated into what we do. Our challenge is to broaden our base, to help more people while maintaining and improving a quality service delivery system.



**Improving Lives and Communities
by bringing Vermonters Together to Share Homes**

WHAT: HomeShare Vermont helps the State of Vermont meet two important goals by assisting our aging neighbors to stay at home, where they want to be, while simultaneously helping others find an affordable place to live.

WHO: While there are no age or income restrictions for homesharing, most people sharing their homes are elders or persons with a disability while most people looking for housing can't afford market rents. The vast majority of all applicants have low incomes. In FY 15:

- 67% of applicants had very low incomes by HUD standards (50% median or below) and
- 88% of applicants had low incomes (80% or below)

HOW: We provide a comprehensive screening and matching service with ongoing support to those persons matched.



FY 15 HomeShare Vermont - Results Based Accountability (RBA) Outcomes

How Much?	Unduplicated # of Persons Served	1,119 people contacted us for assistance	
	Unduplicated # of Persons in Match	154	
	# of Housing Units Created	106 homes available to share	
	# of Service Hours Exchanged	26,572 hours of assistance to seniors & others	
How Well?	Homeshare Average Match Length	386 days	
	Participant Satisfaction: Satisfied with services & would recommend us to family and friends	99% very or somewhat satisfied 97% would recommend	
Is Anyone Better off?	Ability of Seniors to Stay Safely at Home	Over 25% of those sharing their home reported they would not be able to live safely and comfortably at home without a homesharer.	
	Improved Quality of Life: Those having someone live with them report they.....	Feel Safer in their Home	82%
		Feel Happier	70%
		Feel Less Lonely	74%
		Sleep Better	50%
		Feel Healthier	50%
Affordability of Housing	Average Rent	\$226	

Return on Investment

In FY 2015 the State of Vermont provided \$77,545 of General Fund dollars (level funding since 2007) and \$102,395 of matching federal funds to the two homeshare programs in the state.

In FY 2015, this investment had the following return:

- Homesharing provided approximately 26,572 hours of assistance to seniors and others. This represents an estimated **savings of \$ 301,592 for those sharing their home and their families if they had to hire help.**¹
- By sharing their homes, low income seniors and others received **\$251,982 in rental income to help them make ends meet.**
- The average rent of a homesharing match was \$226 with 30% of matches paying \$0 rent. Using the difference between market rents and homeshare actual rents, it is estimated that **home sharers saved an estimated \$537,572 in rental expenses.**²
- Assistance to seniors and rent savings demonstrates **over a 10 fold return for the General Fund investment or over a 4 fold return for the total General Fund and federal funds investment.**

In addition:

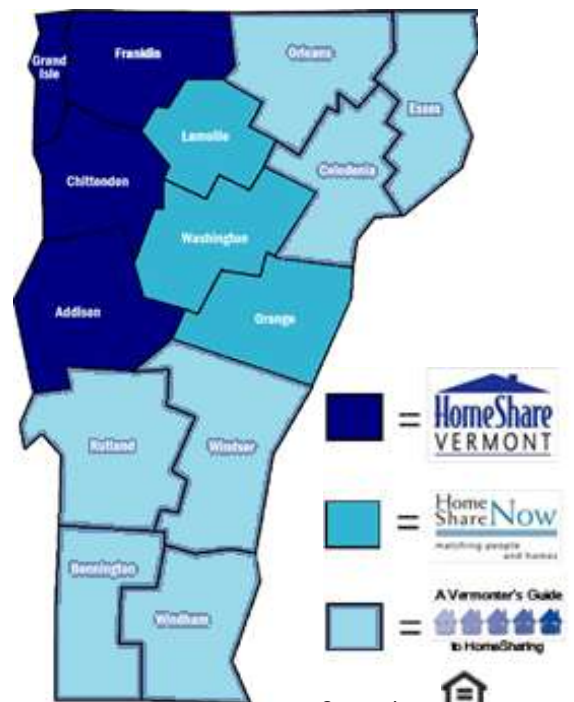
- While new affordable housing infrastructure is important in meeting housing needs, the **106 units created by homesharing in FY 15 by utilizing existing housing stock could cost \$20,670,000 to build as new construction.**³
- 100% of matched homesharers report an improvement in at least one quality of life indicator. **The value of improved quality of life is priceless.**



412 Farrell Street, Suite 300
South Burlington, VT 05403
(802) 863-5625
www.homesharevermont.org

Improving Lives and Communities by Bringing Vermonters Together to Share Homes

Homesharing programs are few across the United States, and Vermont has the largest geographic coverage of any state in the country. HomeShare Vermont currently serves Addison, Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle counties. A second program in the state, Home Share Now, covers Lamoille, Orange and Washington County. To assist Vermonters outside of our direct service area, we provide a do-it-yourself guidebook, "A Vermonter's Guide to Homesharing" and are available to provide consultation and support to all Vermonters who call with questions or need guidance.



¹ Calculation based on personal care attendant median wage - Bureau of Labor Statistics, VT State Occupation & Employment Wage Estimates

² Calculation based on fair market rents for Addison, Chittenden, Franklin & Grand Isle Counties - VT Housing Finance Agency

³ Calculation based on new building average - Downstreet (formerly Central Vermont Community Land Trust)