



Bob Williams,
Uniitee Ltd.,
3, Buckingham Drive
KNUTSFORD
Cheshire
WA16 8LH

Monday 15th April 2013.

The Right Honourable Norman Lamb MP,
Minister of State for Care and Support,
Department of Health,
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS

Copy to :

Alex Fox, CEO Shared Lives Plus.

RE: Homesharing – Follow up from introductory meeting Thursday 21st March.

I was a pleasure to meet with you; thank you once again for your time to understand a little more about the concept of Homesharing for the elderly in the constant strive to increase the quality of life of our ageing population.

I shall format this letter, as you requested to highlight some details about Homesharing and then cover some of the areas the market in general could do with some help with.

- 1) Homesharing – an overview. There are two forms of homesharing.
 - a) Traditional (more established) where a student or young professional will live with an elderly person providing company and perform “non care” tasks for the person in the form of shopping, cleaning, laundry and cooking. Rent is minimal and generally offset against the level of assistance (generally measured in hours) that is provided by the homesharer. This format is very suited to cities and urban areas. It can be viewed as quite transitional since the homesharer tends to move on after an average of 6 months.
 - i) Shared Lives Plus, which Alex Fox is CEO, supports the UK network of traditional Homeshare schemes
 - b) Peer to Peer where we seek to place like minded and aged people together on the understanding that they “share” the home and the household tasks to their mutual ability. The homesharer pays a rent to the homeowner which can be increased by mutual consent should additional services be required in the house in the event of one or both of the participants are unable to complete such tasks. Programs are viewed as longer term companionships.
 - i) Note – for simplicity of this letter sharing will be referred to as 2 people sharing although the concept can support sharing between a number of individuals limited only by the size of the house.

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

2) The Homesharing Business model.

- a) Homesharing businesses aim to be self sustaining, although generally require a nominal amount of start up funding, primarily to support the initial administrator / Homeshare Coordinator.
- b) The primary business model is a monthly fee paid as a part of the Homesharing rent that supports the on-going safeguarding procedures which include a 24 hour hotline, Homeshare Coordinator support, dispute resolution and regular visits.
 - i) The rent fee has a very delicate price point since it primarily pays for contingency actions and can seem excessive while things are going well. This does place volume as a key driver of any successful homesharing business.
- c) Other revenue streams come from an initial subscription to have access the pool of opportunities, an administration fee for the initial move and very limited online advertising.

3) Common, personal, features and benefits of homesharing.

- a) Companionship. There are statistical studies that prove the link between loneliness / isolation and reduction in life expectancy. One recent article stated that loneliness is not only miserable but a severe threat to life. Lonely people tend to take less exercise, eat badly and suffer from mental illnesses due to a lack of sound personal interaction. Homesharing provides a level of interaction and companionship that increases confidence and general well-being; regardless of all there is social interaction within the home.
- b) Increased care and support. Care and support is more prevalent in the traditional model where the homesharer assists in day-to-day tasks. That said; in the peer-to-peer model; work around the house is halved since it is shared between the participants and in the case where a certain task cannot be completed, the saved monies by both parties can pay for assistance. With specific reference to support; homesharing provides a set of caring eyes that are present all the times, reducing the time that incidences of illness or falls being detected and reported to the appropriate services.
- c) Financial comfort. Since there is a nominal amount of rent coming in in both models (more in the peer-to-peer model) there is an opportunity to increase cash flow for both the homeowner, in cash coming in, and the homesharer, in moving to a cheaper living scenario. The simple fact that a house with two residents does not consume twice the amount of energy the same house with only one resident, therefore reducing the utility consumption and bills between the two. A similar scenario is true when cooking for two rather than one.
 - i) There is great development in the collaborative economy, emphasising the effects of sharing. Many successful examples of car, utility sharing are proving very popular and profitable for participants.
- d) Sense of security. Having someone else in the house can bring a sense of security, which manifests in confidence to go out and general do more.

4) Big picture benefits of homesharing.

- a) Hospital admissions. As I mentioned, in the winter statistics from Age UK suggest that people will "heat not eat" and the largest admissions to hospital are the elderly, malnourished. Given better home conditions, financial, heating and company the incidence of bad eating will be reduced and therefore the admissions to hospital.
- b) Hospital Stays. With respect to falls and illnesses, the sooner these are identified the easier they are to treat and the less time people spend in hospital. In shared living people will watch out for each other and while not being able to cure / repair they can identify and alert which can make a huge difference in the potential recovery.
- c) Potential reduction of Local Authority Expenses in:
 - i) Shared welfare, nursing and care visits.
 - ii) Shared transport.
 - iii) Reduction in housing under-occupancy.

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

- d) Release of housing stock. As a country are do not have enough housing stock and we have admitted the issue of underoccupancy, both in the public and privately owned sectors. A successful sharing culture would release essential housing stock in both sectors which can go a significant away to dramatically reducing the required capital spend required to solve the housing problem.
 - i) Subsequent environmental issues pertaining to reduced utilities.
 - e) The contribution to the "Big Society" by rebuilding small communities and the collaborative economy.
 - f) Reduction of stress on the "sandwich generation". One of the issues regarding elderly care is the lack of family support which can be partly attributed to increased pressure in the workplace and the inability to work and live close to family bases. This generation also finds itself having to support a complex younger generation, increased university costs and a higher percentage of under 25 unemployment. Reducing the stress of caring for parents and elderly relatives is essential for maintaining a solid workforce.
- 5) Issues facing Homesharing – as discussed following are some key areas that require policy assistance since they are headwinds to mass adoption.
- a) Safeguarding through vetting. One of the key elements for success is trust and safeguarding and this has to be initiated from the outset; which is through the vetting of the participants. The natural choice of vetting would be through the Criminal Record Bureau checking or Enhanced DBS. Given the current requirements for a CRB check are working with vulnerable adults, homesharing fails to merit checks since lodging does not pass for working with, and by rationale that somebody is old does not predicate them being vulnerable. The CRB have even gone so far as the state that a request for a CRB certificate would place the homeshare organisation in breach of the Rehabilitation of Offenders' Act. Here we would ask:
 - i) A legitimate change in policy to allow and positively encourage CRB checking for Homesharing.
 - ii) A reduced fee structure, even simple online look up, to protect the narrow margins that Homesharing organisations work to.
 - b) Understanding of benefits and protection thereon. As mentioned in 4c and 4d, there are a significant amount of benefits to Local Authorities and Local government through scaled Homesharing, yet when considering primarily to the public housing scenario, significant questions arise regarding benefits and what will be lost in the case of entering into a program. Such benefits that we would look to have protected / adjusted in order to continue to make Homesharing an attractive scenario are:
 - i) Tax on rental income.
 - (1) Homeowner in the program.
 - (2) Potential income for a homesharer if they move out of their previous home and rent it out.
 - ii) Council tax single persons living allowance.
 - iii) Reflection on the new under-occupancy benefits reclaim – could homesharing count as legitimate use of a spare room.
 - iv) More specifically – if a couple were to rent a room where one of the couple were receiving care – can the rental income be protected as opposed be being considered as income which will be absorbed into care costs.
 - c) Legitimacy to approach Local Authorities. In my experience, having approached Manchester City, Cheshire East and West Local Authorities there is always, quite rightly, a risk factor that prevents discussions from progressing on a decent level. Despite having sound support from Shared Lives Plus and a sound track record from established Homesharing businesses, the intellectual capital cannot be committed within the teams to legitimately review the risks and potential contingencies. Some central government officer time to review procedures and safeguarding to legitimise Homesharing would go a long way to progressing with Local Authorities.
 - d) Charity support. Rather controversially, I have to say that the general response from charities is initially very positive until they go away and think about it and then the shutters come down.

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

This could be a from a risk perspective but I am more inclined to think from in-depth experience that there is an element of market protection here despite going against the guiding principles of the charities mission. Since these said charities have access to many of those that could benefit from and would be open to Homesharing I would ask if interest could be stimulated in some way.

In summary; Homesharing is widely accepted form a conceptual point of view and all trends in elderly population, loneliness and poverty lead to an absolute requirement for Homesharing now and more in the future. Yet, it remains increasingly difficult to get audiences with game changers despite the current government's Big Society initiative and the Social Impact Act. By addressing the points above, within ministerial boundaries, we will have a much greater chance of making Homesharing a legitimate solution in the interests of increasing the quality of life of our ageing population.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bob Williams', is displayed within a light gray rectangular box.

Bob Williams.
Founder, Uniitee Ltd.