



Elder Law Guys: Share your home?

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As elder law attorneys, we've seen many different living arrangements over the past several decades as seniors plan for or attempt to deal with the aging process.

Issues like medical care, loss of a loved one, location of family, companionship, social and physical activities and cost dominate the discussion when navigating the biggest transition of one's adult life.

Many years ago, the focus of society was on institutions to provide care in settings such as independent living, assisted living and skilled nursing facilities. This has further evolved into home- and community-based programs to provide care in the home setting in addition to other forms of congregate housing.

The other end of the in-home spectrum involves personal caregivers, sometimes paid, and family members, generally unpaid, to attend to the

senior's needs wherever they may reside. This arrangement may work when the senior's health care needs are more custodial in nature and only a few activities of daily living are negatively impacted. Furthermore, if more care is needed, this assumes the family caregiver can put their life on hold for potentially many years while additionally sacrificing traditional career opportunities. While there are a lot of pieces that have to fit together to make the family caregiver scenario work, what happens to those who don't have a family member who is willing to do this?

We need some new options.

Enter the recently created Pennsylvania Department of Aging SHARE Program. SHARE, which stands for Shared Housing and Resource Exchange, is an affordable housing program that brings together homeowners who need some help around the house with people who are willing to provide some help in exchange for a shared place to live.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA), in some cases, this shared living environment may allow the older adult to remain in their home and community. The "bargain" if you will, is an understanding between the homeowner and their "guest" as to rent, household chores and living arrangements. You may say, "Hold on. I'm not letting some stranger into my home!" Not to worry because there is an established application system to identify appropriate matches among those interested.

Here's how it works: A homeowner and home seeker meet separately with a SHARE Housing Counselor to discuss needs and preferences, complete the application and provide references. The SHARE Housing Counselor will:

- Conduct reference and background checks
- Identify potential home share matches
- Introduce the homeowners and home seekers
- Coordinate the written home-sharing agreement
- Oversee trial living periods
- Provide ongoing support during the term of the agreement
- Connect the participants to other community resources.

Who is eligible? Almost anyone: older adults, persons with disabilities, veterans, working professionals, college students, individuals at risk of homelessness, single parents or people simply wishing to share their lives

and homes with others. SHARE participants must be at least 18 years of age, and one of the individuals in the match must be over 60.

“We wanted to portray a positive perspective of a family of choice, and the fact all parties in the SHARE program bring something to the table to make home sharing successful,” said Margo Muchinsky, aging services specialist with PDA’s Division of Housing and Community Services. “This campaign is aimed at educating people of all ages about the home-sharing program and how it could work for them.”

Currently, the SHARE program is offered in eight Pennsylvania counties: Pike, Wayne, Monroe, Venango, Crawford, Adams, Union and Snyder. However, there are plans to expand the program to more urban settings.

For more information, visit www.aging.pa.gov/SHARE.

In summary, as the aging process continues to evolve and the need for services increases, so will the settings in which care is delivered. Not everyone is interested in a senior community nor is everyone enamored with aging at home alone. The SHARE program is simply another forward thinking initiative to address the age-old issue of, well, getting old.

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