

HOMELESSNESS ACTIONS AT CHRIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH TACOMA: THE SHARED HOUSING PROGRAM

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Actions to Address Homelessness

Our congregation is currently active in addressing the issue of homelessness in our community in several ways. Our weekly collection of food and other necessities that are brought forward to the altar during the offertory and then delivered to area food banks is one example. Another is our twice-yearly hosting of participants in Catholic Community Services Family Housing Network Program that serves people making the transition to permanent affordable housing. We also provide funding to Habitat for Humanity- Tacoma/Pierce County, which focuses on increasing affordable housing for families in our area.

But There is More We Could Be Doing

With that in mind, the Christ Church Community Service Leadership Team (CSLT), with vestry support, has decided to initiate publicity about Shared Housing Services. Shared Housing Services came to our attention via our participation in the Associated Ministries Quarterly Meetings focused on homelessness. I have offered to coordinate Christ Church's actions that are focused on addressing homelessness.

As the next step the following description of Shared Housing Services is provided.

About Shared Housing Services

Shared Housing Services is a 501c3 nonprofit organization located in Tacoma, Washington. Its mission is "connecting people and fostering independence through innovative and affordable housing, because everyone needs a place to call home."

The organization was founded in 1991 with the launch of its signature "Adult Homesharing Program". Currently, it has 12 units of housing and has initiated a "Transitional Family Housing Program."

At the end of 2012, it established, in partnership with the REACH Center (Resources for Education and Career Help), a "Host Home" Program to address the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults.

All of these programs provide for basic human needs and promote self-sufficiency for some of the most vulnerable in our community. Shared Housing Services aims to:

- 1) reduce and prevent homelessness by providing low-income individuals and families with safe, stable, affordable housing,
- 2) find innovative ways, tailored to each individual, to address homelessness,
- 3) reduce dependence on public funds by providing low-cost housing alternatives, and
- 4) help struggling families and individuals, including youth, by connecting them to vital community resources.

What Is Homesharing?

It's a simple idea available to many: A home provider offers accommodation to a home seeker in exchange for an agreed level of support in the form of financial exchange, assistance with household tasks, or simple companionship.

The local community is also a beneficiary of Homesharing. Shared living makes efficient use of existing housing stock, helps preserve the fabric of the neighborhood and, in certain cases, helps lessen the need for costly chore/care services and long term institutional care.

Home providers might be senior citizens, persons with disabilities, working professionals, those at-risk of homelessness, single parents, or simply persons wishing to share their life and home with others. For these people, home sharing offers companionship, affordable housing, security, mutual support and much more.

Rising health and housing costs, and longer lives account for home sharing's recent popularity. Many emotional and physical benefits derive from home sharing's friendship and engagement. Those who home share can split household chores, feel safer with companionship, and can grow older at home without feeling isolated.

Shared Housing Services' "Adult Homesharing" program offers a more secure alternative compared to other roommate options. Its staff is trained to carefully screen each program applicant through interviewing, background checks, and personal references.

So, How Do You Know That Homesharing Is Right For You?

Homesharing is a safe option for all ages. Young people have been homesharing for years. Today, more and more middle-aged and older adults are discovering that homesharing suits their needs as well.

Homesharing makes use of existing housing whether it is a single-family dwelling, apartment, or a mobile home.

Adaptable and flexible, homesharing allows those involved to shape their own arrangements. Home providers set their own price and expectations for home seekers who in turn offer unique situations and rich experience. Each arrangement may be as structured or as loose, and may extend as long as the individual participants wish.

Homesharing is a way to secure (or continue in) adequate housing at a reasonable cost while maintaining privacy, independence, and self-determination.

Homesharing can prevent the too-early institutionalization of the elderly by providing needed services for the elderly home provider. The home seeker may provide services, or the home provider may use the additional income to afford required services. Homesharing is not only an option for older persons or persons of low-income; it is an option for many who can benefit from mutually-shared expenses and communal living.

What are the benefits of sharing your home?

- Income from renting an extra bedroom.
- Mutually shared living expenses.
- Help around the house.
- Help in the yard.
- Companionship

- Safety of having someone in the house at night.
- Help with running errands.

What are the average rents?

Although financial arrangements are negotiated between home providers and seekers based on their individual needs and the nature of the arrangements, some rents average \$400 - \$500 per month (includes utilities). However, several factors allow for free rent or rental reduction, such as: trading of services for rent, care giving, etc.

How do I apply? What is the process?

- Complete the Shared Housing Services Application. Shared Housing Services completes a background check on all applicants. Cost: Home seeker \$20 for background check; Home provider \$20 includes background check and site visit.
- Based on the information on your application and from your conversation with a Shared Housing Services case manager, first names and phone numbers are shared for home providers and home seekers to connect. If both parties enjoy their phone conversation, both parties typically meet at the Shared Housing Services office, a coffee shop or for lunch. It takes both parties to want to be roommates. Shared Housing Services does not place people in homes. They give a referral for a Homesharing match.
- Shared Housing Services also recommends a trial period (week-end, week, month), which is a good way for both parties to become acquainted and to test compatibility.

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