

Homesharing

A rewarding commitment



My Place
my life, my choice

My Place's Homesharing is based on our belief that the family is the foundation stone of the society in which we live.*

*also known as foster care or host family care





My Place is a not-for-profit provider of individualised and flexible supports to people with disability and their families.

My Place supports some 400 people with disability to live in their own homes, to remain in their family home or to move in with another family. My Place does not provide any group home, day centre or other congregate care services.

My Place supports children and adults with varying disabilities including: intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, sensory disabilities, psycho-social disability, autism, muscular dystrophy

and spinal injury. They may live in Perth or the South West and Great Southern regions of WA.

My Place has a long history of supporting children with disability, including those in the care of the Department of Child Protection and Family Services, in homesharer arrangements. Many of these children are now adults. Some have remained living with their homesharer families while others have successfully moved into their own homes with ongoing support from My Place. This continuity of support as children move into adulthood has proven to be crucial in many cases to a smooth and successful transition.

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In every country, and in every culture, lifestyles and values differ. However, there's one aspect of every society that doesn't differ greatly: the central importance of family.

The homesharer (also known as foster care or host family care) arrangement is based on My Place's belief that family is the foundation stone of the society in which we live. People with disability want to be, and are entitled to be, warmly welcomed and fully included members of society. Being part of a caring and stable family is their passport to community inclusion.

A good homesharer provides:

- love, care and companionship
- consideration, compassion and kindness
- food and shelter
- comfort and support
- safety and security
- certainty and stability
- advice and guidance
- positive role models
- a feeling of belonging
- a feeling of self-worth
- greater self-esteem

Children with disability will experience the same emotional upheaval as any other child who moves from their biological family to a homesharer family, but they may experience additional challenges due to their disability.

Where a homesharer is keen to welcome a child with disability into their family home and life, they do so with a clear commitment to the following:

- Every child deserves to grow up in a loving, caring and stable family.
- Children with disability are entitled to a life as rich and rewarding and respected as any other child regardless of their disability.
- Children with disability will continue to grow, learn and change throughout their life and homesharers have a key role to play.
- Biological families should be encouraged to have an ongoing and positive involvement with their family member.
- A stable family home opens the door to meaningful participation in the community and the development of broader social networks.
- Maintaining a respectful and constructive relationship with all involved parties is important in helping the person reach their potential and live their life well.



Providing a safe, stable and happy home for a child with disability can have a tremendous and enduring impact on their life.

Your home can provide the perfect environment for such a child to have everything they need to reach their full potential. You will not be alone in providing care. My Place will be by your side offering all the necessary guidance and training you need. In most cases, children and young people with disabilities thrive in the right homesharer environment – they reach and exceed educational and health milestones, grow in confidence and become active and confident members of society in adulthood.

Homesharers are needed for children of all ages with a range of disabilities from intellectual disability and developmental delay, to physical disability, autism, foetal alcohol syndrome - and more severe disabilities that require additional clinical care.

In addition to younger children, there is a great need for homesharers for people with disability who are in their tweens or teens, which can require different skills and different approaches. Caring for a teenager gradually evolves from a traditional parenting role into a mentoring role where you build a good relationship and are able to provide advice and guidance on the strength of that relationship. You will not be in this on your own and will have the support of a My Place co-ordinator to discuss any issues or concerns you have as and when they arise.

Some people with a disability stay on with their homesharer beyond the age of 18 when it is in the person's best interests and accords with their desires. In this instance, My Place would work closely with you and the person you support to ensure the necessary funding and the needed supports are in place to ensure a smooth transition.





Leeanna with mum, Carmelina.

Leeanna

Leeanna came to My Place as a 14 year-old 'ward of the state' who had very little contact with her indigenous family.

Immediately prior to coming to My Place, she had been living for a long period in supposedly temporary group home accommodation with another disability services provider. My Place found the perfect homesharers, Susannah and Rick, into whose home Leeanna moved and gradually settled in. Rick and Susannah provided Leeanna with the welcoming, supportive and secure home that Leeanna craved - and the health and education support she needed. My Place also worked with Leeanna, the homesharers and the Department of Child Protection to gradually reconnect her with her mother, Carmelina, and her wider family.

At the age of 18, Leeanna was appointed an independent guardian from the Office of the Public Advocate. Her family relationships continued to blossom as My Place and the homesharers supported Carmelina to increase her involvement with Leeanna. This included obtaining her

manual driver's licence, so she could drive Leeanna's van, and moving to a more wheelchair-friendly home so that Leeanna could stay over. Leeanna was increasing the time she spent with her mum and siblings, and eventually moved back home full-time at the age of 23. Family and culture again now plays a huge role in Leeanna's life and she regularly participates in traditional activities such as hunting kangaroos, going crabbing and spending time enjoying her country.

Her previous homesharers have continued to work with Leeanna's extended family to provide ongoing support in the family home, as well as some planned time away for Leeanna so Carmelina can have a break. These relationships continue to this day and Leeanna, now 29, is secure in the knowledge that she has a great support circle around both her and her family. This includes a My Place personal assistant, who has known Leeanna and the former homesharers for a long time, and who provides in-home support to her each evening during the week.

Steps to becoming
a My Place
Homesharer

*We make the process as simple
as possible for entering into our
Homesharer arrangement.*

1
**Information
pack**

Make contact
and we will send
you one.

2
Contact

We will call you to
make a time to
meet at your home.

3
**Application
and screening**

We need to do police
and departmental
background checks.

4
Assessment

We will visit you in
your home to discuss
required skills and
experience to decide
which type Homeshare
would best suit you.

5
Training

You will need to undertake 19
hours of preparation training
whereby you will learn why
children enter care, as well as
the roles and responsibilities of
all involved.

7
Matching

My Place will endeavour
to provide a positive
match with the child
and the homesharer
that will maximise
benefits for all involved.

6
Decision

A My Place Assessment
Panel which will make a
recommendation as to
whether you would be a
suitable homesharer for
My Place.

8
**Ongoing
training and
support**

My Place will provide
ongoing training and
support.



Whilst you are undertaking the day-to-day parenting responsibilities, the person's legal guardian is still the Department for Communities, which operates Child Protection services in WA. Child Protection services still have the ultimate responsibility and decision-making authority for the person in your care.

Types of support

My Place is looking for individuals, couples and families who can provide a home to a young person with disability long-term, short-term or on an occasional basis.

Long-term arrangements typically involve a child who has been placed in the care of Child Protection services until they are 18 years old. They are generally not expected to return to live with their biological family.

Short-term arrangements generally last from 6-12 months, while decisions are being made regarding the long-term care of a child. During this time, My Place works closely with the Child Protection services, the child's biological parents and possibly their extended family in an effort to reunite the child with their family. The biological parents may need ongoing support for this to occur.

Occasional support arrangements involve short breaks of one or two weekends a month, where you provide back-up to a full-time homesharer to enable them to have regular breaks. This can also extend into school holidays. It is expected that you would commit to having the child on an ongoing basis to build a known and positive relationship over time.



Your role

Your primary responsibility is to provide a safe, caring, nurturing home that meets the person's physical, emotional and social needs. Other important responsibilities include:

- Working together - the person has the best chance of having their needs met when they, you, your My Place co-ordinator and the Child Protection services case worker all work together.
- Attending meetings and contributing to the person's support plan.
- Providing input into therapy programs in areas that might include communication, mobility, counselling and independent living skills.
- Encouraging and supporting the person's interests in hobbies, sport, music, dance and art.
- Supporting the person to maintain their family identity and cultural heritage.
- Providing advocacy support to the person and helping them to plan for the future.
- Respecting the person's privacy and maintain confidentiality about their previous and present family circumstances.
- Preserving the person's connection with their biological family, if agreed appropriate, and significant others.
- Assuring the person that they are valued and accepted for who they are, with all of their strengths and their weaknesses.
- Promoting the interests and talents of the person and acknowledging what is important to them.
- Establishing, communicating and monitoring limits for the person and implementing any agreed positive behaviour support strategies.
- Maintaining proper health and school records for the person.
- Providing an environment for the person to learn social skills and independent living skills.



Homesharer allowance

Homesharers are considered to be volunteers so you will not be paid a wage, as would an employee. Instead you will be paid an allowance. This allowance is provided to help you cover the costs of caring for the person. You are expected to use the allowance to cover the day-to-day costs, such as:

- Food and sustenance
- Clothing and footwear
- Furniture and fittings
- Power and water
- Private and public transport
- Hobbies and activities
- General education expenses
- Pocket money
- Holidays
- Outings
- Personal items

Your allowance will vary depending on the person's specific needs and the subsequent costs of properly meeting those needs. The allowance is not counted as income by the Australian Taxation office, Centrelink or financial institutions.

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to be married or have a partner? What if I am in a same-sex relationship?

My Place does not discriminate on age, race, religion, sexuality or gender. Carers come from all walks of life, you can be male, female, single, married, de facto, coupled or in a same-sex relationship.

What If I've never had children?

It does not matter if you have not previously been a parent. What is important is that you can relate well to young people, can identify and meet their needs and are able to provide a safe, stable and nurturing home environment.

What if I have children still living at home?

Everyone in your family will be part of the homesharing experience, so it is important to discuss it as a family before you decide to become a homesharer. It is usually better if your biological children are older (ideally by two or more years) than the person you welcome into your family. However, this is not a hard and fast rule.

Am I able to still work full or part-time?

This depends on the homesharer arrangement, who else is living in the house and the needs of the person. Occasional homesharers, who may open their home one or two weekends per month, may have other employment. A full-time homesharer arrangement would require the primary caregiver to be at home full-time so they can adequately meet the needs of the person. The carer allowance would reflect this.

Who makes a good homesharer?

If you're already thinking about becoming a homesharer, you are probably suitable to be one! Ideal homesharers are those that have room in their heart to welcome and nurture a person who has had a less than ideal start to life. A big heart, a caring nature, a common sense approach, a can-do attitude, and a determination to help a child have a brighter future are important qualities.

In addition, you must be:

- Over 25 years (if you are wanting to be a full-time homesharer)
- An Australian citizen or permanent resident
- In good health
- Without a criminal record
- Willing to undertake all criminal screening checks and apply for a working with children card

Do I need a spare room?

A person entering your home is likely to be confused, scared and feeling very vulnerable. Having a space all their own can help them to maintain their identity while feeling safe and secure under your roof.

Do I need to own my own home?

You do not need to own your own home. You may apply if you are renting, but it is preferable that you have a long-term lease so as not to cause further disruption by moving regularly.

Ryan

Ryan was made a ward of the state and put into state care at the age of eight.

Over the next eight years Ryan was placed with six different foster families and attended six different schools. There was documented abuse in four of those foster homes. At the age of 15, Ryan was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and prescribed amphetamines. This marked the beginning of a destructive cycle of drug and alcohol abuse, self-injury, challenging behaviours and illegal activities. He was headed for the justice system.

In 2006 the Department of Child Protection referred Ryan to My Place when he turned 18. When My Place asked Ryan what he most wanted, he first said his own house with a few of his mates. However, over time, he revealed what he really wanted was a stable family that he never had - a family that would offer him safety, security and love. My Place found the right homesharers for Ryan in the form of Rob, Kim and their teen-age daughter. They were keen to welcome Ryan into their home, but with a few conditions. Ryan had to

agree to give up his chaotic lifestyle, learn to live within boundaries, respect himself and others, and accept his responsibilities as a family member.

Ryan kept his part of the bargain, with a few hiccups along the way, and got the stable and loving family he always wanted - and he wouldn't trade it for the world. In just two years Ryan became medication free, attended work every day and no longer exhibited challenging or illegal behaviours. He and Rob have become great mates and do lots of father/son things together. Ryan has since re-established a relationship with his mother and his siblings.

Several years after Ryan moved in, Kim and Rob decided to go their separate ways. Ryan continues to live with Rob (although he still sees Kim regularly). Last year he celebrated his 30th birthday surrounded by his two families and his friends. That year also saw Ryan enjoying holidays as far afield as Queensland, Bali and Mauritius.



Ryan with Homesharer and great mate, Rob.



Your suitability

Now that you've read through the information above, answer the questions below as honestly as you can to help you determine whether becoming a homesharer really is right for you and your family:

- Are you loving, caring, kind and respectful to children and young people?
- Are you able to respond and empathise with children and young people who have experienced significant trauma?
- Are you able to set boundaries and use positive behaviour support strategies so that children and young people know what is expected of them?
- Are you able to help a child or young person talk about and maintain connections with their family and other significant people in their life?
- Are you open to learning about ways to best meet the needs of the child or young person in your care?
- Are you able to listen and provide hope, support and encouragement to a child or young person in your care?
- Are you able to work as part of a multi-agency team?
- Are you tolerant, flexible and adaptable?
- Are you able to learn new things, experience new situations and be prepared to have days that don't always work out as planned?

- Are you able to take things one day at a time and work towards long-term goals?
- Are you understanding, patient and able to persevere?
- Are you able to put yourself in someone else's shoes and appreciate how a child or young person is feeling or understand the reasons for their behaviour?
- Are you able to hang in there and appreciate that things often do take a while to change?
- Is now the right time for you and your family?
- Are you able to provide a young person or family with the support they need without neglecting your own family?
- Are you able to commit the time and energy to being there for school drop-offs and pick-ups, therapy and medical appointments, helping with homework, taking them to sport, and spending days at home when they are unwell?

If you ticked all the boxes above, and have room in your heart and home, then you may have what it takes to make a very real difference in a young person's life. The homesharer family journey is not easy, but it is exceptionally rewarding and can make a real difference to the life of the person you have welcomed into your home.



Your next step...

Call Katerina Corrigan at My Place
on 0414 715 171 or email
homesharer@myplace.org.au
for an initial conversation on becoming
a homesharer for a young person with
disability. It won't just change *their* lives!



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