

## Cross Generational Housing Ideas

By Kathleen Lee

What do college students and seniors have in common? Not much it would seem – different interests, different sleep schedules, and different food preferences. But these two very different groups often share two common problems – economic insecurity and lack of affordable housing. According to the National Council on Aging, 25 percent of Americans over the age of 60 are “economically insecure” and 30 percent have no money left over or are in debt at the end of each month. In addition to the economic issues, seniors often suffer the negative effects of isolation due to their inability to drive and simply to have the opportunity to interact with others.

College students also face rising tuition and housing costs. Since 1963, college tuition (tuition, fees room and board) has increased an astounding 1,640 percent. While most are aware of the rapidly increasing cost of medical care, few realize that tuition costs have increased at a rate almost double that of medical care. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, 70 percent of Americans enroll at a four year college but only 59 percent graduate within six years. HUD also estimates that 50,000 college students are homeless. A recent California State University Study found that 12 percent of CSU students were homeless and almost a quarter were experiencing food insecurity. Although most studies examining the effects of homelessness on educational success focus on K-12 populations, a study examining the correlation between food security and housing stability at University of Massachusetts reported the high rates of housing instability affected class attendance and performance and that there were few programs targeting the college population.

One of the innovative approaches to addressing economic and resulting housing insecurity in seniors and students is to bring these two groups together. Far from being a new idea, cross generational housing is actually a return to earlier concepts of housing. For most of human history, multigenerational households were the norm. In many parts of the world they remain the norm. It was only after World War II that the two generation (parent and children) household became the norm in the United States. At the same time, it became expected that children would move out on their own, either to student housing or apartments, upon graduation from high school. Economic pressures have resulted in an increase of multigenerational households in recent years. In addition to relieving economic stress, cross generational housing can provide benefits in giving both young people and seniors a sense of purpose and reduce social isolation.

There are many examples of innovative ways of pairing students with seniors. In the Netherlands, students live rent free at a nursing home, and volunteer 30 hours per month working with residents. Similar programs have been established in Lyon France, and Barcelona Spain. In Cleveland, Ohio, six students from the Cleveland Institute of Music live with 120 elderly residents in a converted hotel, where they regularly provide music recitals. New York

University partnered University Settlement, a Lower East Side nonprofit that provides social services to low-income seniors to place students in a program called “Grandma’s Spare Room.” Although the NYU students do pay rent, their costs are about half of what housing would otherwise be.

In our own area of Humboldt County, housing costs are high and affordable housing is limited. Humboldt State University provides housing for less than a third of its student population. Recognizing the problem and the partial solution that could be offered by student and senior homesharing together, the Area 1 Agency on Aging (A1AA) is collaborating with both senior and student advocacy to explore ways of implementing a local homesharing program. To learn more about A1AA’s homesharing support program, go to [www.a1aa.org/homesharing](http://www.a1aa.org/homesharing) or call 707-442-3763.



A student lives rent free in the Humanitas retirement home in the Netherlands, while volunteering 30 hours per month helping residents. (PBS – photo Humanitas)