



Senior Housing Companion Program

A sustainable housing solution for seniors in the wake of COVID-19



Program development collaborators

Abstract:

Covid19 has exponentially increased awareness of the need for safe alternatives to our current senior housing models. To address this, Happipad is seeking funding to deliver a national Senior Housing Companion Program to all existing senior-serving organizations across Canada, providing them the tools, materials and training needed to guide seniors through the steps of establishing their own companion home. This program can be implemented remarkably fast and affordably as it uses existing homes and agencies. This solution reduces costs of living and addresses senior loneliness and social isolation by allowing seniors to safely remain in their home and neighborhood by adapting the companion model home.

Companion Housing: A collaborative Program.

Happipad recognized that to achieve the full benefits of a senior housing companion model, a national collaborative effort was required. To provide the greatest benefit for Canadians, Happipad reached out and openly collaborated with two of Canada's established housing-companion organizations, Home Together Canada and Senior Ladies Living Together.

Happipad is a Canadian social enterprise founded in 2016 by a UBC student-professor team. Happipad operates Canada's largest housing companion platform and are leaders in developing innovations to support and expand housing companion opportunities.

Happipad is a sought-after invitational speaker, recognized as a leader in its field. Happipad won the 2019 Staples Canada "This is how I grow my business" national contest, the 2020 Purppl Changeup social enterprise competition and was the recipient of 2018 and 2019 NRC IRAP grants, and 2020 IRP grant for the development of home-sharing innovations for seniors.

Home Together Canada (non-profit 2017) Provides a neutral companion and resource registry. This nation-wide resource will serve to maximize and expedite the success and growth of companion homes for the individual, the agency and service providers.

Senior Ladies Living Together (#11552619 non-profit 2019) Began as a Facebook group serving the niche group of older women in Ontario wishing to create independent companion homes, specifically in rental accommodation. With over 1700 members Senior Ladies Living Together is not only moving toward expanding their services to a web platform with chat rooms and forums, they are reaching out and coordinating affiliate rental housing to serve this group.

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Proposal

Happipad in collaboration with Home Together Canada and Senior Ladies Living Together are proposing to deliver this program to help seniors in Canada connect with and create a companion home. This program will be delivered to all relevant Canadian community-serving agencies and non-profit organizations that serve seniors and those precariously housed across Canada.

This program increases the capacity of organizations to serve and support Canadians who are vulnerably housed, socially isolated, or wish to age in place but cannot logistically do so alone. Service providers are given all needed tools and information to guide seniors through this step by step self directed program

The deliverable will comprise of a training component for the organizations providing support, and a step-by-step resource component for seniors which provides all information and tools needed to support them through the process of finding and connecting with prospective housing companions and forming a harmonious housing arrangement. The training materials will be delivered through an online course for the organizations staff and volunteers. Client resource materials will be provided in electronic format to each organization's offices. In addition, a free online housing companion and service registry is provided by Home Together Canada which facilitates the process of Canadians independently finding housing companions.

Benefits to Agencies / Non-profits

This program is designed to integrate into the existing portfolios of community agencies and non-profits to increase their capacity to help seniors who are vulnerably housed;

social isolated, or struggle with housing affordability. Organizations incur minimal liability offering this program as clients are self directed through the structured step by step program modules. The program can be implemented quickly, within the current bounds of COVID-19 restrictions and does not require any specialized skills or technical expertise.

Benefits to Canada

This program provides a highly scalable, low cost, and fast to implement solution that will help reduce the financial burdens on our public services while improving the quality of life for seniors within the confines of COVID-19 and beyond. The program is intended to serve the eighty five percent (3) of Canadian seniors that wish to age in place in residential homes, even if they have a disability or health condition (1). Companion housing is a socially responsible and cost-effective method to support 'aging at home' which helps reduce the reliance on public healthcare and home support services.

A 2015 report by The Australia Institute showed a \$34,000 economic benefit per housing companion in Australia (2). Most of this benefit was attributed to the reduced cost of living and in-kind social and physical support provided by the companion. The same report also showed a \$5600 annual savings in hospital and residential care services per senior living with a housing companion.

Canada has the opportunity to achieve similar economic The shift towards this housing model of helping seniors stay in their home also creates diverse opportunities for small business and new industry sectors to emerge, helping Canada create new jobs and drive innovation to support and expand upon companion housing. Ultimately, this is a solution that provides immense benefit and opportunity with little to no operational cost to government.

Household Structure

Whether the home is owned by one senior or to be rented together, the housing companions decide upon and create their own unique housing agreement. Housing companions typically split the costs of rent, cable, internet and utilities, divide household chores like food preparation, cleaning etc and provide each other social companionship.

Individual choice and control is fundamental to success. Homes begin with compatible companions and in time form a family-like household dynamic culminating in a stable, affordable mutually supportive home. Although housing companions are not a replacement for professional home support, the natural support created through companion living markedly lessens dependency on outside supports.

Why Now

COVID-19 has shown the vulnerabilities of our current senior support model, the ramifications of which have left great economic and psychological stress on individuals and government alike. We must provide alternative models for senior housing and support that are more sustainable and cost effective.

- 1) Large senior housing complexes are highly susceptible to virus spread throughout their facilities. Alternatively, seniors that are able to remain in their homes have limited risk.
- 2) Seniors choosing a companion model are equipped to safely remain in their homes and are less reliant on public support services.
- 3) Companion model homes can be very implemented quickly and at minimal cost.
- 4) The Companion housing model provides the 80% of Canadian Seniors wishing to remain in their home and neighborhood the tools they need to do so.
- 5) The implementation of companion housing will create a migration toward this safe, efficient senior housing / support model, reducing the future numbers entering large scale housing complexes.

How It Works

Agency staff and volunteers complete the provided online training modules familiarizing themselves with all aspects of the client led program and online companion and service registry. Staff is then prepared to guide clients as they use the registry and move through each step of the program supporting them as they independently make the choices and decisions needed. Organizations will be responsible for printing materials,

the distribution of program resources, and the running of educational sessions and workshops for the public, whether those be offered on-line or in small groups.

Deliverables

Organizations will be provided with: An online educational course to train staff and volunteers, online library of tools and resources needed to serve their clients, and a nationwide housing companion and service registry.

Educational course delivery:

The educational staff training course will be delivered to participating staff and volunteers through an online education platform. The course will consist of 10 self-paced modules with a comprehension assessment at the end of each module. Information will be presented in both video and text format with images. A certificate will be issued upon successful completion.

Module Content:

1. Introduction and background

- Introduction to companion housing
- Types of housing arrangements
- Reasons to have a housing companion

2. Benefits and limitations, is it for me?

- Benefits
- Limitations
- Considerations for homeowners
- Considerations for renters
- Personal assessment tool

3. Choosing housing companions

- Understanding personality types, culture, and values
- Interviewing housing companions

- Renting with housing companions

4. Preparing to share a home with a housing companion

- Understanding needs, values, and boundaries
- Preparing your home for sharing
- Preparing to move into a shared home

5. How to structure a living arrangement with companions

- Establishing house rules and expectations
- How to share space fairly
- How to share house chores
- How to fairly share expenses
- Homeowners: the option of tasks in exchange for rent
- Writing a housing and companion agreement

6. How to maintain a healthy home environment

- Setting boundaries and expectations
- Preventing conflicts
- Ensuring safety within the home
- How to establish private space and time
- Building a culture within the home

7. How to handle conflicts with housing companions

- Setting expectations
- Steps to resolve problems
- What to do if there is a major problem
- Discussing financial problems
- Common issues and solutions

8. Considerations for legal, financial, and insurance

- Legal rights and responsibilities

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- Financial considerations and taxes
- Insurance considerations
- Working with landlords and strata's
- Future decisions when health declines

9. How to support seniors wanting a housing companion

- How to support a client to make their own choices
- Understanding liability
- Helping clients identify housing needs
- Helping clients identifying their personal needs
- How to use tools, guides and resources
- Why and how to use the housing companion and service registry

10. Running workshops and promotion in your community

- How to run a housing companion workshop
- working within the restrictions of covid19
- How to promote companion housing in your community

Resources

The online resource library will include:

1. Housing companion agreement templates
2. Move-in checklist and house rules guideline
3. Conflict resolution guide
4. Interview and compatibility guide
5. Home preparation and task sharing guide
6. Housing companion guide - steps to get started
7. Personal assessment - suitability test for companion living
8. Introduction to housing companions - video and power-point presentation

Material and resource preparation

Happipad will oversee the creation and updates of all materials with input from Home Together Canada, Seniors Ladies Living Together, academic researchers, and participating senior societies in Canada. Materials will go through a final peer and legal review.

Online housing companion and service registry

The Home Together national housing companion and service registry is a free and neutral place which helps individuals find housing companions and service providers in their area. This will be open to all Canadians where they can register as an individual seeking a housing companion, or a companion home. The registry will provide free listings to all participating organizations delivering this program to the public, ensuring individuals can easily find this service in their area.

We anticipate new services will arise as the number of companion homes grow and other demographic groups wish to join in the advantages of the housing companion model. Whether this be landlords providing for the unique needs of a senior companion group, insurance companies providing new group insurance policies, or companion homes for single mothers; Home Together mandates they provide free and equal listings, ensuring those seeking what they offer have easy and immediate access to their information.

Delivery and Funding Timeline

We are seeking funding for a two year period in which the Senior Housing Companion Program described will be openly distributed to all community agencies and non-profits across Canada that strive to serve the housing needs of Seniors and other vulnerably housed Canadians.

This time frame provides sufficient time to establish this program across Canada and collaborate with staff, volunteers, and individuals to refine the program for long-term operation. This continued collaborative approach ensures the program will be successful at filling the needs of all and engaging Canadians in this national conversation and creation of safe affordable housing for all.

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The course materials and registry will be available online within 90 days of project approval and funding.

Terms

- It will be mandatory for the staff members in groups and organizations take the training before providing the educational programs to the public
- Happipad will listen to and collaborate with organizations over the two-year time period and will update training materials and resources accordingly.
- Virtual training and technical support for all training materials and resources will be provided by Happipad
- Happipad will provide technical support to the organizations Monday-Friday by email and phone
- Happipad will require current contact information for all applicable community-serving organizations across Canada
- Course materials will be made available in English and French

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Contact information

Please reach out with any questions regarding this program proposal.



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References

- (1) Turcotte, M. (2014). Canadians with unmet home care needs. Statistics Canada Article: Insights on Canadian Society. Available at:
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2014001/article/14042-eng.pdf>
- (2) Campbell, R., 2015. On for young and old the economics of home share, The Australia Institute. www.tai.org.au
- (3) According to the results of the 2016 census, Canada is home to 5.9 million seniors (Statistics Canada, 2016). Over 85% of aging seniors would prefer to “age in place” in their homes and communities
<https://caot.ca/site/adv/aginginplace?nav=sidebar>