

Co-housing: Would you share your home with a complete stranger?

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Like your neighbours? Could you live with them? Pictured: Members of Murundaka Co-housing Community in Melbourne.



Rohan Smith

IT'S harder than ever to land that dream home.

The white picket fence, big backyard and inner-city location are out of reach for a growing number of young Australians but all hope is not lost.

The solution could be a simple one: move in with the neighbours.

It's called co-housing and it's finding popularity with segments of the population squeezed out of the housing market. It's been proven to work overseas and is booming in the US. There's no reason it can't work in Australia.

In Heidelberg, a hop, skip and jump from the Melbourne CBD, a thriving community shares intimate spaces. The traditional boundaries are blurred there and it works.

The building resembling university accommodation goes by the name Murundaka — the local meaning fittingly translates to “a place to call home”.

There are 20 households under the one roof and residents share a library, cooking facilities, a common area, cleaning costs, cars and a vision — to live sustainably. The savings to the bottom line are simply a bonus.



Love thy neighbour taken to a whole new level. Pictured: Murundaka. Source: Facebook

Melbourne-based architect with DesignInc, Hiedi Lee, knows the co-housing philosophy back-to-front. She works with clients looking to incorporate shared living spaces in their designs and she herself lives at Murundaka.

Ms Lee told news.com.au the idea is taking hold in a big way.

“It’s absolutely a popular idea for people who are entering the property market but wanting to do something different as well, people who don’t want a mortgage in the outer suburbs,” she said.

“They want a life in the inner city.”

She said co-housing is about “lifestyle savings”, not financial savings, and people who choose to live with one-another want to know their neighbours.

“There’s normally a common house, a big kitchen but everyone has their own kitchen. (Murundaka) has multipurpose rooms and shared bathrooms, a loungeroom and a library.”

She said Murundaka hosted a festival recently, the proceeds from which raised enough money to buy solar panels for the community.

Ms Lee said there were other ways young Australians were creatively solving the housing puzzle without turning to official co-housing arrangements.

“The [tiny house movement](#) is huge in the US (and) we’re seeing that spill over to Australia. It’s taking off in a big way here.”

Ms Lee, who also chairs Co-housing Australia, a not-for-profit advocacy group for like-minded individuals looking to share a home, said she routinely heard creative solutions from young people.

“There are a lot of people I see that are just interested in helping their sharehouse run more efficiently. I also see friends who are getting together and purchasing a big house together or a small house and a bungalow.”



Could you live with your neighbours? Residents at Murundaka love it. Source: Facebook

Around the country there are similar projects taking shape. Ms Lee said there are projects in development in Melbourne, Perth and Fremantle.

A group of 35 open-minded individuals have come together in Melbourne with a shared goal of home ownership but not the means to make it happen alone. [They call themselves Urban Coup](#) and they're actively recruiting others to their way of life.

The group's website declares its wishes to build "a sustainable inner urban co-housing community" close to the Melbourne CBD. The plan is to pool funds from as many individuals as possible and purchase land to be shared.

The Australian Financial Review reports the group would ask investors to pay \$450,000 for a one-bedroom home and \$720,000 for a three-bedroom unit within walking distance from the Melbourne CBD.

Ms Lee said the relationship between neighbours was changing.

“Co-housing is about positive interactions with your neighbours, rather than fighting over the fence.”