

From all the generations living together to finding a flatmate in your 50s, in the last few years how we live has changed a lot. Now the pandemic has encouraged more of us to shift our living arrangements, we shine a light on some of the most popular new ways to live

By Katharine Wootton

There's no place like home," said Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. But what home means to us now is definitely rather different.

While home in the traditional sense has always been seen as a place for family and somewhere we might live for many decades, our changing lifestyles have meant that the traditional model no longer works for everyone.

From multi-generational households to living in a co-housing project, finding a flatmate to letting out a spare room to help a younger person, these are just a few of the growing housing trends that have boomed in recent years, as people seek alternative ways of living that better suit our lives these days.

Behind this shift are many different factors, but two that come up repeatedly are finances and loneliness.

At a time of rising house prices in a period of growing unemployment and pension age extensions, traditional home ownership just isn't viable for some people, meaning something like

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flat sharing may be more attractive. On SpareRoom, the largest flat-sharing website, it's reported a 700 per cent increase in women over 45 looking for flatshares, something director Matt

Hutchinson puts down to finances.

"Rent is so expensive, especially in the big cities, and if people find themselves in changing circumstances later in life - they may have lost their job or come out of a long-term relationship - renting alone just might not be an option," says Matt.

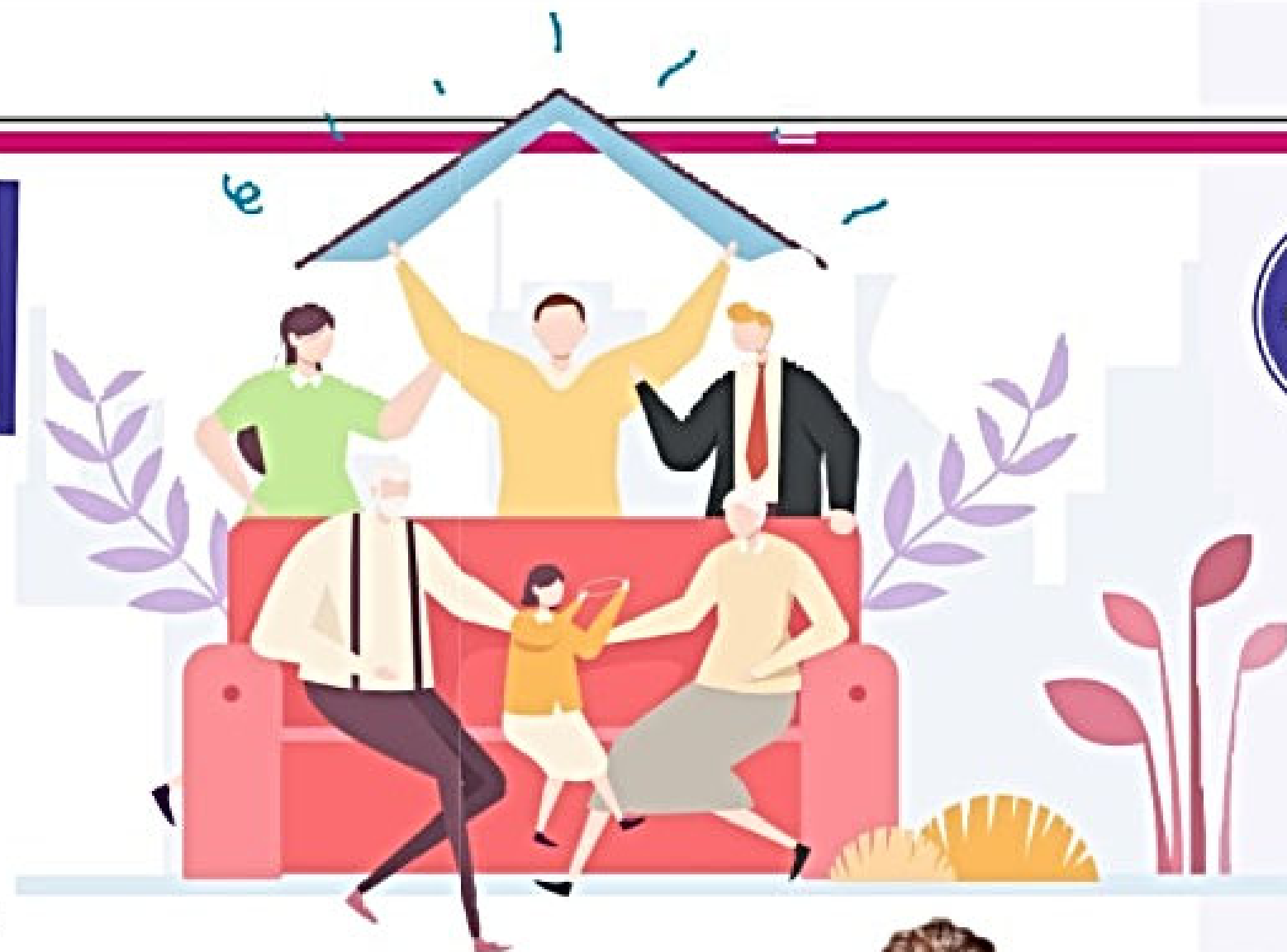
Meanwhile, loneliness continues to be a major issue, especially if you live alone or away from family and friends. Research from the Campaign to End Loneliness found 45 per cent of all adults feel occasionally, sometimes, or often lonely, and among older people that figure is much higher. With loneliness now thought to be as detrimental to our health as smoking 15

cigarettes a day, it's no wonder people have decided to do something about it by moving in with or near to family, friends or even like-minded strangers.

Multi-generational living is one answer to that and according to recent research from Aviva, one in three UK households are now multi-generational. What's more, that number is set to rise as almost a quarter of UK adults say that they will go back to living with their parents to ensure they're not on their own in later life.

Meanwhile homesharing, which is where an older person lets out a spare room to a younger person for mutual benefit, is a concept that has recently skyrocketed.

Deborah Fox, National Manager of HomeShare UK tells me that while five years ago there were just 150



THE NEW WAYS WE'RE LIVING

'We love our home of three generations'

It worked for The Waltons and now many families are finding that multi-generational living can bring a whole host of benefits.

Lucille Ash was living in Bristol when she decided she wanted to be nearer her family. "I hadn't really spent much time with my youngest grandson, Ben, and wanted to get to know him better, while also selfishly wanting someone to look after me if I get ill or frail as I get older," says Lucille (77).

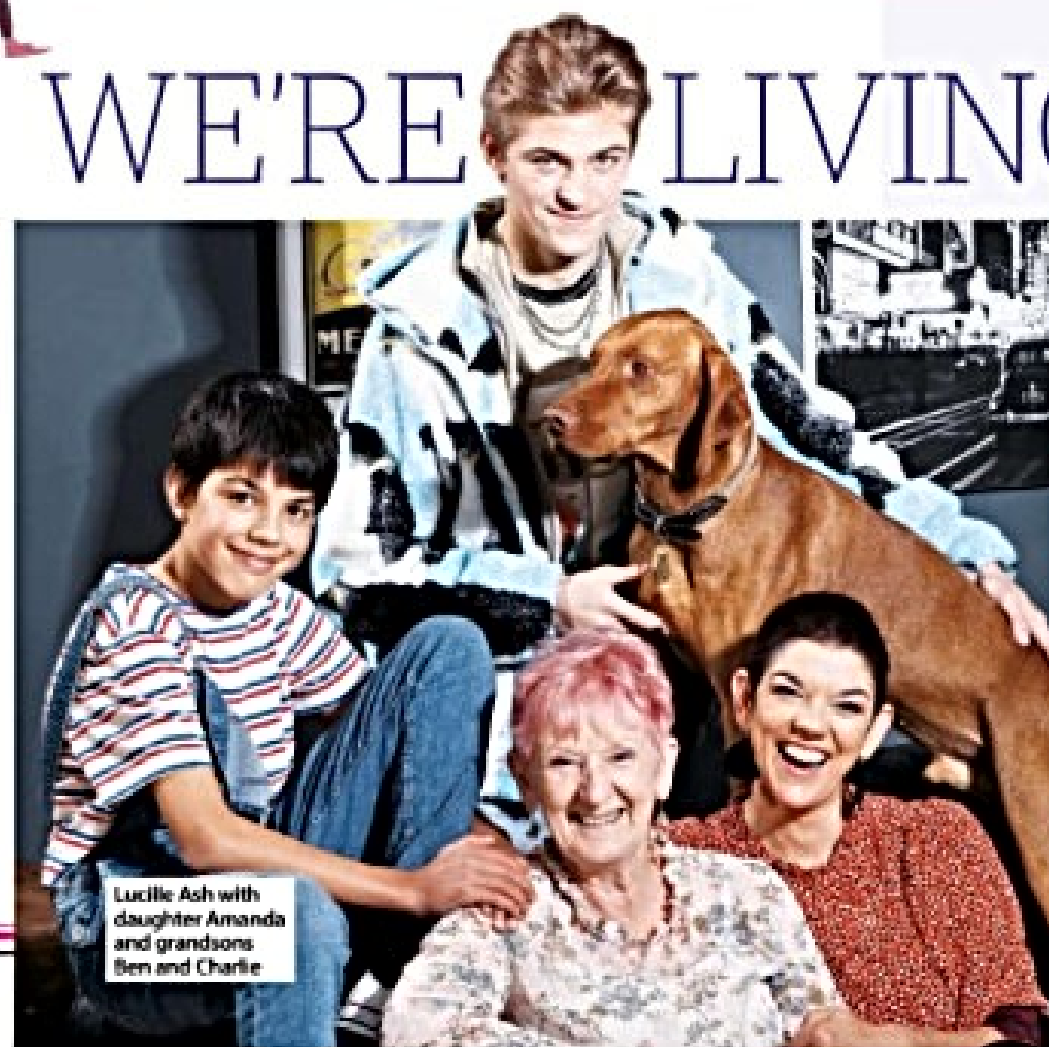
Also frustrated that her daughter Amanda and her partner were paying over the odds in rent in Maidenhead and were unable to get on the property ladder, Lucille decided to sell up and help Amanda find a place to live, with the proviso that she could live with them, too.

Having found a house in Peterborough, they converted the garage into a 'granny annex' for Lucille to live in, a common trend in many multi-generational

'Someone is always there if I need anything and likewise, I can help'

households. As a result, Lucille has her own space but is able to spend lots of time with her daughter, son-in-law and her grandchildren. "It's great because I know there's always someone there if I need anything and likewise, I can help Amanda with things such as childcare," says Lucille.

As well as living at the same address, Amanda and



Lucille Ash with daughter Amanda and grandsons Ben and Charlie

Lucille also work together, spending their days sewing for Amanda's business www.spottedoghandmade.co.uk. In fact, since lockdown they've made more than 3,000 masks together.

But living in such close proximity also means mum and daughter have lots of opportunities to just have fun together, including their

'It's been great for my boys to grow up with another generation around'

morning routine where just after they've dropped the children at school, they close the curtains and binge-watch TV together for an hour before work starts.

"I've always been close to my mum but now I love to spend so much time with her. I think it's been great for my boys, too, to grow up with another generation around," says Amanda. In fact, in their free time, Lucille, Amanda and her two youngest sons, Charlie and Ben, all take part in their local amateur dramatics group together.

"There are not that many young boys or teenagers who want to hang out with their mum and nanny, so we've clearly done something right," laughs Amanda. "Family is everything and having Mum so close is really important."



'Co-housing made me feel part of a community'

After 38 years in their London home, this year Jenny Borden and her husband finally took the plunge to move into a co-housing project in Cambridge called Marmalade Lane.

Having first heard about co-housing through her friend in Canada, where the idea is much more mainstream, Jenny knew it was the best living option for them. "We were thinking about the future and knew we wanted to stay active and independent and didn't want to end up isolated," she says.

In co-housing communities, each household has its own self-contained private home as well as a shared community space, meaning there's always someone there to chat to or lend a hand. In the case of the Marmalade Lane co-housing project, it's also a mixed-age community so the different ages can help one another.

"There are young people here who can help us with techy things and heavy lifting while us retired people have time to help with things such as tending the shared garden or sorting the accounts."

Unlike something such as a retirement complex, in co-housing the whole site is managed and run by the community. "What's great is that I feel actively involved in discussions about how the place is run and that gives me a sense of purpose."

Another benefit of co-housing that really appealed to Jenny was that it encourages a more sustainable way of life. Here resources, such as washing machines, garden tools and even bikes are shared, meaning everyone saves money. Meanwhile all the houses at Marmalade Lane have been built as eco-houses, to reduce their impact on the environment.

"For us, we feel as if we're living among a whole lot of friends and neighbours and that gives a great sense of security, ease of living and stimulation. It's a great place to live."

■ To find out more about co-housing, visit cohousing.org.uk



Did you know..? One in eight UK homes now have granny flats or annexes, or the owners have plans to develop one



Amanda and Lucille, right, work together at home



'My flatmate became my friend'

When Libby came out of a long-term relationship last year, she decided it was time to move from her home in New Zealand to London - a dream she'd had since she was a little girl.

Knowing living alone in a new country would be really difficult and expensive, she decided instead to live in a shared house and found one she liked through cohabitas.com, the housemate-finding website for over-40s.

Although she was nervous about who might end up being her housemate, she was delighted when she met Cinzia, an Italian lady of about the same age, and was surprised to find friendship soon blossomed between them.

"Cinzia and I get along really well and slowly we got into the habit of sharing a couple of meals together every week," says Libby.

Cinzia even showed Libby how to cook authentic Italian food which she loved. When lockdown happened and both Libby and Cinzia were forced to

It has been a blessing to have someone to talk to during lockdown'

stay at home, they found themselves even more grateful to have each other, buying jigsaw puzzles to do together and trying to learn to crochet to pass the time.

"Living together during Covid-19 has been really fun and it's been a blessing to have someone to talk to and share the hours with," says Libby. "I'm really happy how things have turned out and now I'm looking to move to Yorkshire, I'd definitely look to share with other people again."



Celebs do it too!

Even celebrities are trying out some of these new ways of living. For example, last year Maureen Lipman started flat-sharing with her actress friend Rula Lenska (pictured), while the actress-turned-politician Glenda Jackson (left) currently lives in a basement granny flat with her son and his family.



Did you know..? 'Quaranteaming' as it's called in the US is another trend of the pandemic in which people around the world temporarily moved in with their friends to make lockdown a less lonely experience

'Homesharing gave me a new zest for life'

Every evening, Iris and Johanna head into the kitchen to cook their evening meal together.

They may not eat the same food and they may be decades apart in age, but in this moment, they find a lovely opportunity to chat about their days and enjoy one another's company.



Iris and Johanna are homesharers, living together for mutual benefit. Iris gives up the spare room in her house so that Johanna can live in London more affordably, while Johanna gives up around ten hours every week to help Iris with any odd jobs, cleaning and gardening as well as being a friendly face she can chat to. The pair were matched up by Share and Care HomeShare, based on their interests, almost nine months ago and so far Iris says it's changed her life.

"Having Johanna around has made me feel secure, happy and that I can go on enjoying life," she says. "Johanna sees things that need doing and gets on with them and it's so nice to have my spare room being used."

Over lockdown, Johanna was also a help running small errands and getting bits of shopping for Iris who was shielding. "Doing this has definitely stopped me from feeling lonely and I'd recommend homeshare to anyone who wants companionship."

■ To find out more about homesharing, call 0151 227 3499 or visit homeshareuk.org

■ All formal co-housing, flatsharing and homesharing organisations follow strict guidelines to meet coronavirus rules and restrictions. Please check the latest government guidelines before considering changing your living arrangements