

Home Match Connects Homeowners, Renters Amid Housing Squeeze

After Linda O'Brien's husband died, the Marin County fashion consultant found herself in need of both companionship and help with expenses. "To hold onto my house, I had to have a roommate," said Linda, 71, who has lived in her neighborhood for 32 years. A neighbor suggested she try Home Match, a program of Front Porch Community Services that connects homeowners and prospective homemates. The Home Match team interviews participants about their priorities and lifestyle needs and facilitates matches based on a wide range of factors. The team then provides income verification and background checks for reassurance to both parties.



Da'Shonda Parks and Linda O'Brien, who found each other through Home Match, a program of Front Porch Community Services, have made a true bond as roommates and friends since moving in together in Linda's home in February 2023.

The free program, which is growing in popularity across Northern California as the cost of housing continues to rise, emphasizes social compatibility and lifestyle preferences, while also offering lower-cost rents for the tenants and extra income for the homeowners. Some arrangements also offer what the program calls "task exchanges," or help for homeowners with physical limitations in exchange for lower rents.

In February, after interviewing more than a half-dozen potential matches, Linda met Da'Shonda Parks, a 49-year-old academic counselor at San Francisco State University. They quickly felt a bond.

"We are like best friends," Linda said. Da'Shonda agrees.

"There's such a synergy," she said. "It's like a match made in heaven."

Da'Shonda, who relocated from Texas to accept the college post, initially applied with Home Match's San Francisco office. But after looking at about 10 places in San Francisco without finding one that

felt right for her, she expanded her search geography.

Her first Home Match interview in Marin County was by telephone with Linda. Da'Shonda said she felt immediately connected with Linda in that first phone call. When she visited Linda in person, she said she knew her search was over. She moved in on February 14 of this year.

Home Match Marin program manager Lucie Ashley said Linda is one of an influx of home seekers "who more traditionally would be looking for a one-bedroom rental apartment and are coming to us out of frustration with the rental market."

"The average cost for a studio in Marin County right now is about \$2,200," Lucie said. "Rents with Home Match range from rooms with task exchanges — such as taking out the trash — at \$500 per month, to \$2,200 for a detached one-bedroom, self-contained apartment, such as an accessory dwelling unit."

Home Match started in Marin County in 2012 as a service to help older adults stay in their communities and age in place. Now, the service has evolved to accept younger applicants.

"Our home providers tend to be age 65 and up, because that tends to be the population that owns homes," Lucie said. "However, anybody over 18 is eligible." She said the length of stay can range from several months to as long as six years. College students, for example, might just need a room for a semester or two — and some home providers might be fine with that.

Luke Barnesmoore, strategy director for Home Match, said there were 55 new matches across the program, which serves San Francisco, Alameda, Marin, and Contra Costa counties, between April 2022 and 2023 (up from 48 the previous year), stabilizing housing for 111 community members. During the past year, there were 5,094 inquires and 554 participant intakes.

Luke said Home Match can be a solution to ease homelessness among older adults on fixed incomes. Though the number of unhoused older adults is increasing rapidly, "older adults have not been prioritized" in the way that youths, families and veterans have been, he said.