## Abstract

As Ontario's aging population increases, so do reports of loneliness and social isolation amongst seniors. Local-level strategies to curb loneliness amongst seniors have the potential to improve the health and well-being of seniors - and incidentally, the well-being of students. Student-senior homesharing draws students and seniors into a mutually-beneficial intergenerational living arrangement, where seniors gain social interaction and students secure affordable rental housing. By drawing insight from student-senior homesharing programs that have been adopted in Hamilton and Toronto, this report examines the potential viability of homesharing between students and seniors in Kingston. This research contributes to an overarching discussion on intergenerational living by providing additional insight into student-senior homesharing, and offering research-based recommendations that can be applied in the development of a student-senior homesharing program in Kingston. A multi-level case study was employed using a mixed-methods approach to data collection, utilizing an online survey to capture the perspectives of Queen's University graduate students on the student housing market and attitudes towards intergenerational living. Interviews with local informants explored attitudes towards, and need for, student-senior homesharing in Kingston, and interviews with informants from Hamilton and Toronto gaged the conditions for successful project implementation. The research findings demonstrate that loneliness and a difficult rental market serve as conditions for implementing a student-senior homesharing project. Despite these conditions occurring in Kingston, the majority of graduate students are not interested in living with a senior. Interest in living with a senior is highly variable and personal, but can be predicted by a number of factors. While student-senior homesharing projects occur at a small scale, the human connection generated within the community makes these projects highly valuable, providing a variety of benefits and opportunities to both students and seniors.

## Executive Summary

Adults aged 65 years and older are the fastest-growing age group in Ontario - projected to grow 25% by 2041 (Government of Ontario, 2017). As Ontario's aging population increases, so do reports of loneliness and social isolation amongst seniors. As early as 2004, the British Columbia Ministry of Health identified living alone and reduced social networks as two risk factors for social isolation among seniors, as elderly persons who live alone and/or experience little social contact are more likely to be lonely (British Columbia Ministry of Heath, 2004). While the Government of Ontario is developing ongoing strategies to address challenges associated with aging, local-level strategies that work upstream to curb loneliness amongst Ontario's seniors have the potential to improve the health and well-being of seniors - and incidentally, the well-being of students.

Intergenerational living models, such as student-senior homesharing, can be used to purposefully draw students and seniors into a mutually beneficial living arrangement, where seniors gain social interaction while students secure affordable rental housing (Labit & Dubost, 2016). European approaches to intergenerational housing have only recently been embraced in Canada, with student-senior homesharing programs being implemented in Hamilton and Toronto. Other Ontario cities, such as Kingston, could benefit from a similar homesharing program that leverages their student and senior

populations. However, understanding the mechanisms and conditions required to implement a successful student-senior homesharing project in Kingston is necessary.

By drawing lessons from intergenerational homesharing programs that have been adopted in Hamilton and Toronto, this report examines the potential viability of student-senior homesharing in Kingston. The research is guided by the following questions:
1. What are the current housing conditions for post-secondary students in Kingston, and how do these students feel about the possibility of homesharing with seniors?
2. What conditions supported the establishment of student-senior homesharing in Toronto and Hamilton, and are these programs achieving their aims?
3. What are the potential benefits, opportunities, costs, and challenges of adopting a student-senior homesharing program in Kingston?

Using Kingston as a study case, the research was employed using a mixed-methods approach that drew from two primary data sources: an online survey and key informant interviews. The online survey captured the perspectives of Queen's University graduate students on the city's student housing market and gauged their attitudes towards intergenerational living. Interviews with the Kingston-based key informants captured attitudes towards, and need for, student-senior homesharing in Kingston. Interviews with key informants in Hamilton and Toronto captured the conditions of success for student-senior homesharing in Ontario. A literature review was also employed to set the context for intergenerational living models, and to inform recommendations for a similar model in Kingston.

The research findings demonstrate that loneliness and a difficult rental market serve as conditions for student-senior homesharing project. Kingston faces similar issues such as loneliness amongst seniors and a competitive rental market. Despite having necessary conditions for student-senior homesharing in place, the online survey revealed that the majority of graduate students from Queen's University are satisfied with their current rental housing arrangements and are not interested in living with a senior. Students that are interested were more likely to have volunteered with seniors, rent a room in privately-owned house, and/or pay less than $500 per month for rent. Overall, the research indicates that interest in living with a senior is highly variable and personal.

Interviews with participants from existing student-senior homesharing projects in Hamilton and Toronto reinforced the notion that despite the small scale of student-senior homesharing projects, the human connection generated within the community makes the projects incredibly valuable. Benefits and opportunities for students include lower rent, new perspectives, better living conditions, help transitioning to a new environment (for international students), and professional development. Benefits and opportunities for seniors include greater socialization, assistance with household tasks, added income from rent, and immersion into the larger community. Challenges include lack of interest and misconceptions about student-senior homesharing among students, as well as a lack of trust and openness among seniors.

The report concludes with seven recommendations for further assessing for the viability of, and potentially implementing, student-senior homesharing in Kingston:

## 1. Gather additional data to establish the interest level and locations of potential homesharers

While demand for student-senior homesharing was measured among graduate students, further data must be collected to measure the demand for student-senior homesharing among seniors. This further research must establish how many seniors are willing to homeshare, but it should also gather information about the homes that are available to students. If this research reveals that there are not enough interested seniors, or that all willing homesharers live in areas of Kingston that students are not willing to live, then there would be little impetus to pursue the development of a student-senior homesharing project in Kingston.

## 2. Develop partnerships to support a potential homesharing program

Developing community partnerships with local organizations that work with seniors, or engage in research on aging, may increase the legitimacy and viability of a student-senior homesharing project in Kingston. Facilitating a partnership between a homesharing program and interested post-secondary intuitions in Kingston, such as Queen's University and St. Lawrence College, would increase its viability. These schools could use student-senior homesharing to support their students in finding accommodation, while offering an institutional presence that would help get seniors involved.

## 3. Gain support from the City of Kingston and Age-Friendly Advisory Committee

The Kingston Age-Friendly Advisory Committee provides expertise and input on age-friendly initiatives in alignment with Age-Friendly Kingston. As both the City and members of Kingston's Age-Friendly Advisory Committee have been actively exploring homesharing, conditions appear to be in place for municipal support for a homesharing program. Involvement from the City of Kingston and the Age-Friendly Advisory Committee would ensure that homesharing between students and seniors aligns with and helps achieve the aims of Age-Friendly Kingston, such as reducing isolation amongst seniors and increasing intergenerational connectedness.

## 4. Include undergraduate students as potential candidates for homesharing

The survey component of this study focused on graduate students, as it was assumed that undergraduates are neither mature enough nor have a lifestyle that would be compatible with homesharing with a senior. Multiple interviewees, however, did not view all undergraduate students through the same lens, suggesting that undergraduates may also be viable homesharing candidates. Involving undergraduate students would provide a larger pool for potential applicants for homesharing to be drawn from and could in turn facilitate more matches.

## 5. Use homesharing as a challenge for the City of Kingston Mayor's Innovation Challenge

The Mayor's Innovation Challenge is an annual competition hosted by the City of Kingston that could be leveraged to provide additional ideas and resources to help develop, or further explore the viability of student-senior homesharing in Kingston. The competition calls upon current and recently-graduated students from Kingston's major post-secondary institutions, Queen's University, St. Lawrence College, and the Royal Military College, to develop proposals to address challenges of the City of Kingston's choosing. Involving a

potential homesharing program for Kingston as a challenge in the Mayor's Innovation Challenge could student insight on development of a potential project and provide potential funding to build the project.

## 6. Test homesharing in Kingston through a one-year pilot project
Both the *Symbiosis* project and the Toronto HomeShare Pilot Project arose out of one-year pilots that tested the viability and suitability of the program within their respective environments. Therefore, it is recommended that a potential homesharing program for Kingston take a similar, one-year pilot approach to further explore its viability. A one-year pilot would test the success of the program, and if necessary, enable the evaluation of different approaches to the homesharing process. It will also create an opportunity to confirm or disprove the anticipated challenges, costs, benefits and opportunities associated with homesharing. The short nature of the pilot will allow smaller changes to the program to occur if needed.

## 7. Promote program and garner public awareness of homesharing by hosting community events
As revealed in both the survey responses and key informant interviews, many community members hold fears and misconceptions about homesharing. Ongoing events could provide opportunities to market the program, raise awareness about its availability, and soothe potential fears or debunk misconceptions about homesharing by clarifying the matchmaking process. Social events would also be a positive setting to highlight the benefits and opportunities of homesharing, and create an opportunity for seniors and students to engage with each other, which may also ease worries about compatibility.