

Communication and Marketing Workshop

By Kirby Dunn, HomeShare Vermont, USA

At HomeShare Vermont we have three times as many people looking for housing as we have homes available. We are limited in the numbers of people we can help by the number of homes we have and therefore we need to get more people to consider sharing their homes. We needed to understand what marketing messages can help us do this.

Earlier this year HomeShare Vermont along with AARP, an aging advocacy organization, and a local senior housing provider created an online survey using Survey Monkey. Each organization designed specific questions we wanted to ask regarding aging and staying at home. The survey was sent out to our various email lists over a four week period to people age 45 and over within a specific geographic area. We received 348 responses to the survey.

HomeShare Vermont asked four questions in the survey to learn if people understood what homesharing was and what barriers or problems they associated with homesharing as a way to stay at home. We also hoped the survey would help to educate people about homesharing.

The survey questions included:

1. The majority of older adults want to stay in their homes for as long as possible, and many would consider a “homesharing” arrangement to allow them to stay in their home as they age. Which of these statements best describes homesharing?
2. Would you consider sharing your home as a way to help someone else?
3. What would be your biggest concern about sharing your home?
4. HomeShare Vermont provides a number of services to people to homeshare. If you were to consider sharing your home, rank the services from HomeShare VT in order of importance.

The results of the survey showed:

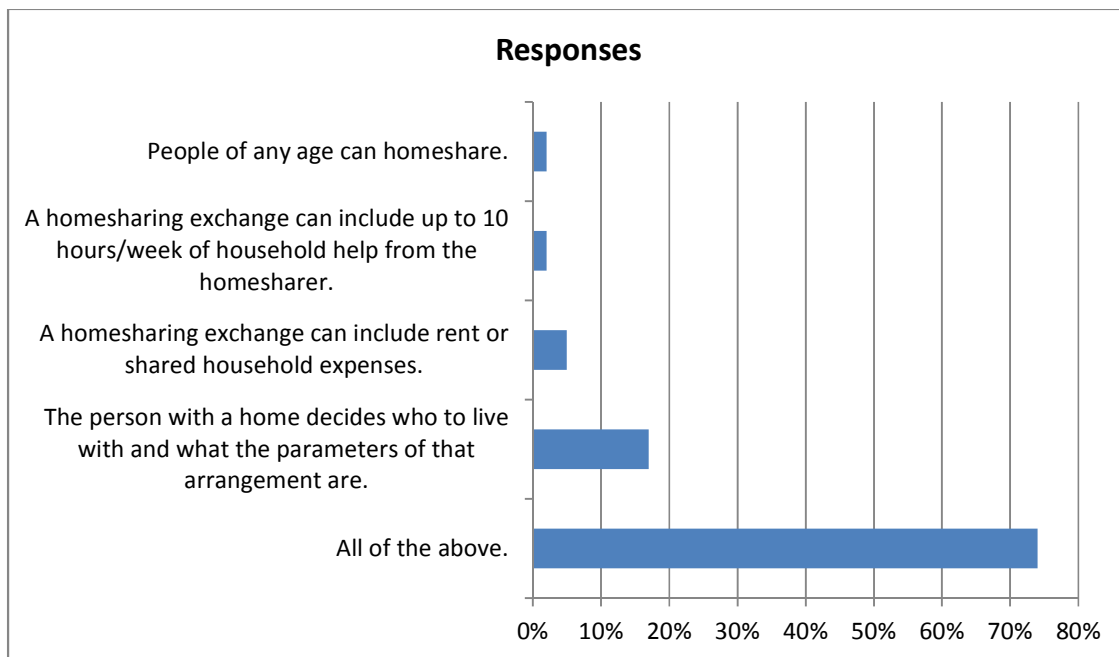
1. People did have a good knowledge of what homesharing is. However, some people may have the misconception you have to own a home to share it.
2. Most people don't want to share their homes and the older they get the less they want to consider homesharing.
3. Privacy, compatibility and safety are the biggest concerns about sharing.
4. Screening services are viewed as the most important services provided by HomeShare Vermont.
5. More work needs to be done around “helping others” as a marketing message.

Responses to Specific Questions

Question 1 looked at what knowledge people had about our services. Of those who responded 74% answered this multiple choice question correctly and were considered very knowledgeable about what homesharing is.

Question 1: *The majority of older adults want to stay in their homes for as long as possible, and many would consider a homesharing arrangement to allow them to stay in their home as they age. Which of these statements best describes homesharing?*

Answered: 291



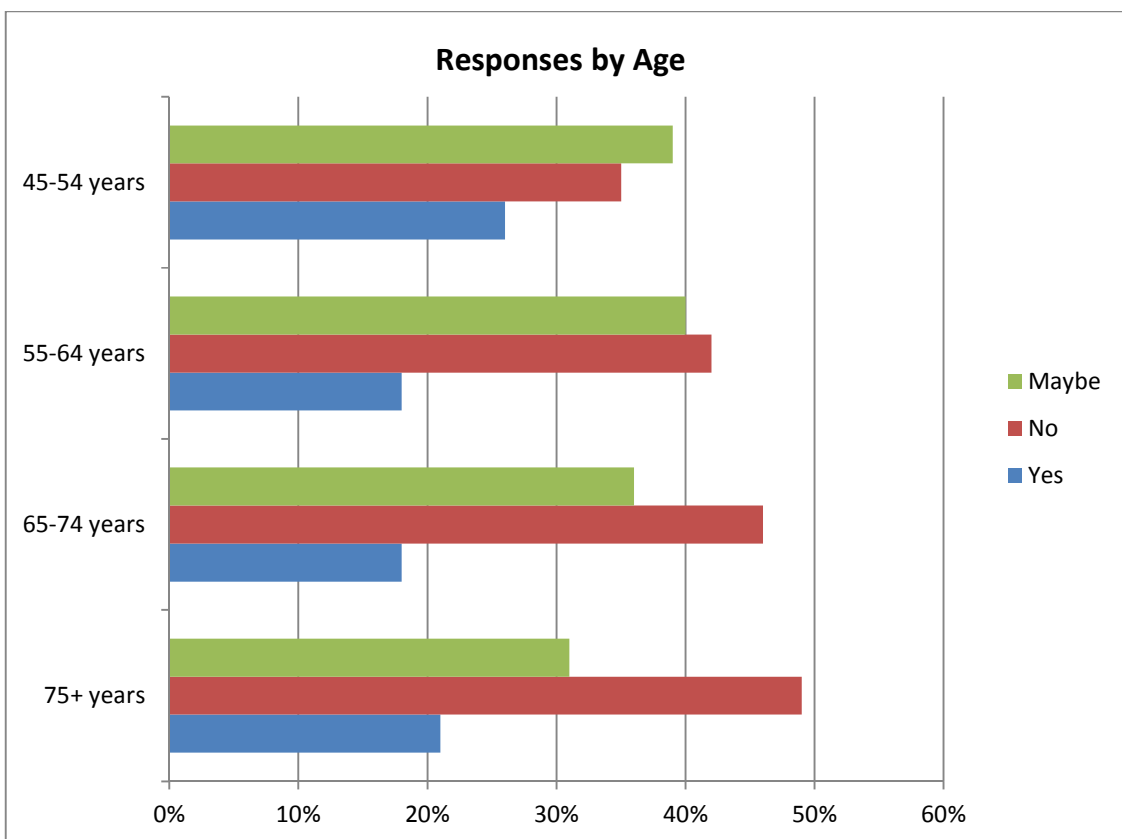
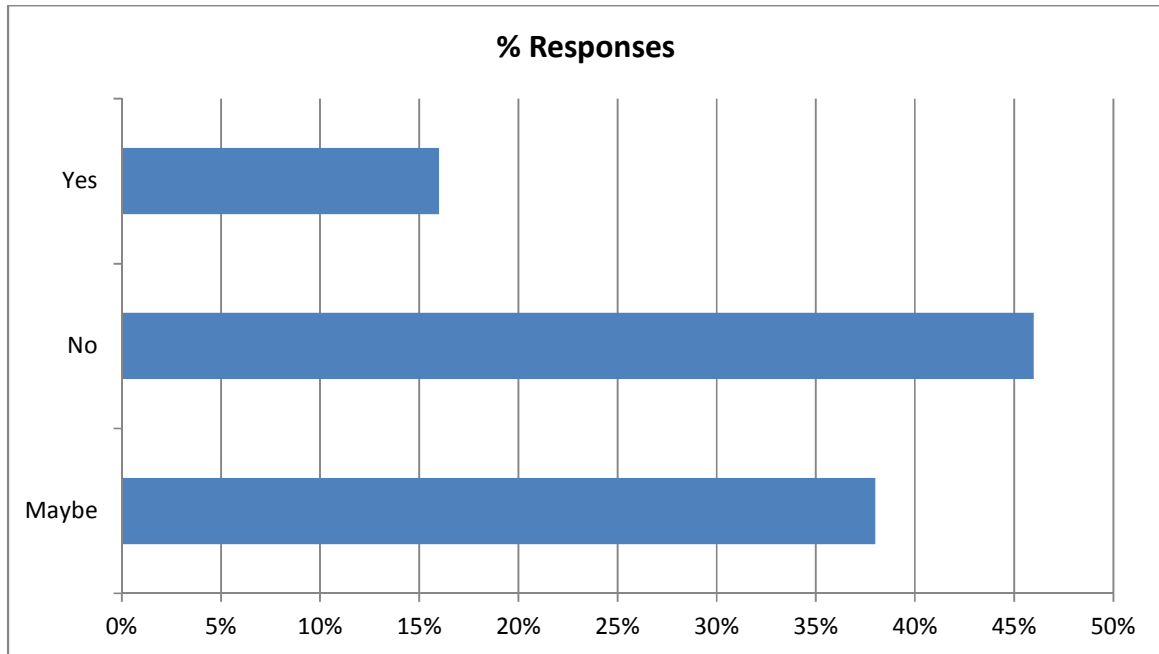
Question 2 asked if they would consider homesharing as a way to help someone else. This is a marketing message we are exploring and is a very different message than what we have done in the past. Of the 298 people responding, only 16% said “yes” and 38% said “maybe.”

We then looked at these results based on age. In terms of age, the higher the age the more likely they were to say “no” or “maybe” to considering homesharing as a way to help others. The youngest category (45-54 years) showed the highest yes responses followed by the oldest category (75+ years).

We hope to follow up with focus groups of those answering *maybe* to better understand their responses and to develop a marketing message around the concept of helping others as a reason to homeshare.

Question 2: Would you consider sharing your home as a way to help someone else?

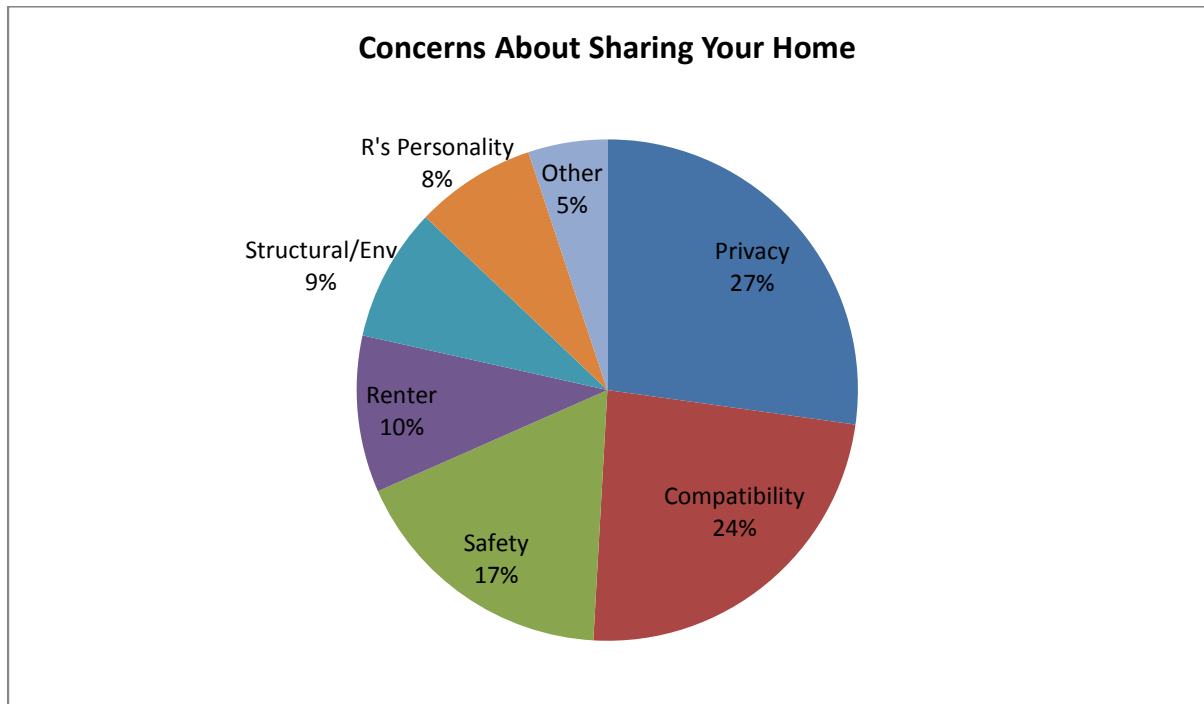
Answered: 298



Questions 3 was the most interesting. It was an open ended question that asked what would be their biggest concern about sharing their home. Let us dig into those responses as they will give us some excellent direction in how to market our services to address concerns people have about sharing their homes.

Question 3: What would be your biggest concern about sharing your home?

Answered: 275



A total of 275 respondents answered this question. For those who included several items in their answer we included only the first response. People who said they were homeless, only had one bedroom, etc. were included in Not Applicable (N/A) and not included in these totals.

Privacy was the greatest response. (27%)

Compatibility included a number of different types of responses including lifestyle, the type of person they would want or not want and overall concerns about living with a stranger. (24%)

Safety was the third highest but a number of folks who said privacy also said safety. (17%)

Renter was an interesting category. These responses noted they rented or they didn't own a home. By the large number of these responses we believe that people think that you can't share your home if you rent. (10%)

Structural/Environmental were the responses related to the size or shape of the housing they had and that it wasn't good for sharing as it was too small, had one bathroom, etc. (9%)

Respondent's personality included those who said they didn't want to live with anyone as they were hermits, they didn't want to lose control, etc. This is almost like not applicable (N/A) as they are basically saying they can't or won't share. (8%)

From these results we have the topics that should be addressed when discussing potential homesharing arrangements and in marketing our programs. First, privacy is a huge overall concern. Encouraging matches to be respectful of privacy concerns and to ask about this during the interview and include it as part of the match agreements may help people consider sharing their home. Thinking about house rules in terms of privacy such as when guests can visit, quiet hours, kitchen, TV, bath times, etc. can be ways to make people feel like they are maintaining their privacy.

Compatibility and safety are all about our screening and matching process. That is what we do. We need to tell people all the things we do to ensure safety and compatibility.

Lastly, we have to let people know that they can share their home even if they rent as long as they have a separate bedroom and we follow the rules of the landlord.

Question 4 asked people, if they were to share their home, to rank the services we provide in order of importance. Of the 279 people who answered this question, nearly half responded that an extensive screening process was the most important service followed by a clearly written homesharing agreement, then the trial period and then ongoing support from staff. Again, we see that screening is a key service that people want from a homesharing organization.

Question 4: HomeShare Vermont provides a number of services to people to homeshare. If you were to consider sharing your home, rank the services from HomeShare VT in order of importance.

Answered: 279

