

When I was 30 I found myself alone with two preteens, a dog and a cat to raise on a single mother's pension.

We had always rented so I had no security of tenure and very little in the way of resources ie no money. In those days, you could still make a bit of 'black' money (cash in hand) through waitressing and bar work so while this was supplementing my meagre income (no child support in those days and an ex partner who refused to pay any sort of maintenance) life was extremely difficult.

I had a very generous and supportive family, but they can only do so much, I was really starting to despair of mine and my children's future. I had formed some very strong bonds at my children's primary school with other mothers – we had started a 'drop in centre' and were all members of the mothers club.

One of the other mothers, Wendy was also a single parent, with children of almost identical ages to mine. I suggested we pool our resources and find a place big enough and cheap enough for us all. After a month or two of solid searching, we stumbled across a fabulous property in a more affluent suburb to the one in which we were currently living. Pooling our money we still were paying less together than when we were living separately – yeehah – we could now splurge on a bottle of something (or two). The kids could have new shoes AND dessert. The house was on three levels, 4/5 bedrooms and wonder of wonders – a laundry chute! This became the kids' favourite pastime, running up the stairs, flinging themselves down the chute and running through the house and back up the stairs again. This occupied them for hours – even up until their teenage years. There was a bedroom each for the children – two girls, two boys and one each for the mothers. We were also able to make a playroom for the children as well – heaven on a stick until the day they decided to build a model truck my son had and didn't open any windows or doors – glue sniffers, anyone?

We quickly, born out of necessity, made some VERY strict rules about what they could and couldn't do in there. The landlords were a pharmacist and a vet who had five children themselves so kids were not a problem and the dog was welcome too – there was even a 'dog run' in the huge grassy, garden left by the vet (the cat, unfortunately ran away – no kids – good -two kids okay – four kids – bad).

We quickly settled in and it became apparent even though Wendy and I had very different talents and weaknesses, with a bit of manipulation and cooperation, this could work. Wendy was the domestic goddess (insert 'clean freak') and I was a bit more laid back ('insert slob') and two of our children – her daughter and my son really, really did not get on – way too much alike so they constantly butted heads (among other things). I became the 'cook' (ask me what I can do with a bag of rice, frozen peas and \$2); she was the maintenance engineer. I helped all the children with homework and games etc, she did all our ironing (how lucky was I?). It wasn't always smooth sailing and we had some frosty periods but we managed it for five years. The kids went to a great primary school and then a great high school which was highly regarded. We made some wonderful long lasting friends in the community.

As time went on, our situations slowly started to change. I had started work in community development with a housing group and was finally earning some decent

money. With financial help from my mum; I was able to move into my own place much closer to where I was working – I didn't have a car and public transport wasn't great where we were.

This was 20 years ago – Wendy and I are now grandmothers but are still close – once or twice a year we have a 'sleepover' and recall those glory, hectic, frustrating, hilarious and incredibly rewarding days. We both agree sharing our resources at the time was the best option for us and our children (who are still like 'brothers and sisters' – even my son and her daughter are now close and spend time together socially) and would recommend it to any one who finds themselves in a similar situation.

With a few ground rules, the ability to compromise and not sweating the small stuff these arrangements can work and be incredibly successful.

Footnote: I still live in a share situation – with my 30 yr old daughter, her partner, two kids, two dogs, one cat and NO laundry chute! My only wish is my 31 yr old son NEVER needs or wants to move home.