Supportive housing project: Living Solidarity

Living Solidarity aims to transform the housing problem into a housing opportunity — a chance to build a more cohesive community and a new model of care.

The concept relies on cohabitation, based on the principles of mutual help and solidarity. It matches people who live in homes that are too large for their needs — primarily older people but others as well — with those who lack decent housing. The formula can apply to a variety of people in a variety of circumstances: an elderly person who needs minimal support in order to live in her own home and stay independent; a family with a spare room; or a woman who has been the victim of domestic violence and who is looking for a new home and opportunities for a new life.

Living Solidarity has achieved significant results, especially in terms of social impact. A small cultural revolution has taken place that has given participants a feeling of personal confidence and self-determination.

How it works

The basic principle is to build strong interpersonal relationships, a heightened sense of responsibility, a feeling of
community solidarity and, through the conscious sharing of the same living space, a strengthening of innovative social protection systems.

Living Solidarity has set up procedures and tools that are simple and clear to those who would like to replicate the model in their own communities.

As of 2015, the project had realised 121 opportunities for cohabitation, involving 242 families and 257 individuals. Participants are from a diversity of backgrounds and situations. Among those providing housing, the majority are elderly people, although single women and families are also involved. Those seeking housing include single women and single men, young couples, mothers with children, whole families, students and young workers.

History: From Florence to Europe

Living Solidarity is the brainchild of AUSER Volunteer Territorial Florence, a group that sought an innovative way to provide domestic care for local senior citizens. In 2009, the first project got under way in the form of a partnership that included the City of Florence and a network of community groups, including the Artemisia Centre Against Violence Against Women. The project won an Italian award for social innovation and thus obtained funds to turn the idea into a business.

After two years of experimentation, AUSER signed an agreement with the municipality to transform Living Solidarity from a project into a continuous service. After a successful run of several years, AUSER decided to disseminate the idea to other communities in Tuscany and throughout Italy. Between 2013 and 2014, memorandums of understanding were signed with 40 municipalities in the provinces of Pisa, Pistoia, Arezzo and Florence. They resulted in several new projects, all implemented through partnerships with voluntary associations and various third-sector groups.

As the good results poured in, the project was eventually taken up in Italy’s Social Health Regional Integrated Plan (PISSR) for 2012–2015. The concept has won accolades in Europe, including second prize at the European Awards for Social Innovation in Ageing.

Source: www.abitaresolidaleauser.it/