

media release

11th February 2010

We need a granny state, not a nanny state

Looking after our ageing population

In the fourth of our Marriage Week press releases, the Relationships Foundation, a Cambridge based think tank, is calling on the government to encourage co-location, enabling relatives to live near other family members, as part of its response to looking after our ageing population. This means relaxing planning laws and incentivising investment in granny flats, ensuring our housing stock has more multi-generational homes and encouraging social housing providers to prioritise family co-location. Relationships Foundation researcher Peter Lynas commented, 'Co-location works in other countries. Families are the basic unit of welfare in society. Enabling extended families to live close to each other makes it much easier for them to provide practical support. This brings extended families closer together and has the added bonus of saving the taxpayer money in the long-term.'

The Care Quality Commission's annual report on health and social care services in England predicted that 1.7 million adults will need care by 2030, creating a significant financial burden. The Personal Care at Home Bill proposes free care at home for 400,000 vulnerable elderly people. The opposition question how this will be funded. The question we all face is who will look after our ageing population and where will they live?

Lady Deech said recently that children should be forced to care for their parents and grandparents. In Singapore, the Maintenance of Parents Act 1995 allows anyone over 60 who cannot maintain themselves to apply for an order against their child to provide for them. The result is that more than 69% of elderly people in Singapore co-reside with their children (1).

Family and marriage bring with them rights and responsibilities, including care obligations for elderly relatives. Researcher Peter Lynas commented, 'Lady Deech's suggestion and the Singapore model are a step too far for the UK, but it is surely time we made it easier to look after our elderly relatives. Planning law should adopt a presumption in favour of granny flats and the tax system could incentivise this type of living arrangement. We welcome the contributions of Baroness Deech and the recent suggestions of the Centre for Social Justice to this important debate.'(2)

Co-location involves the extended family living in separate houses in close proximity. In Singapore married children or elderly parents who apply to live near each other receive increased housing grants and a reduced waiting time for social housing. The rationale for this scheme is that the government saves in welfare costs as family members assist one another. Multi-generational living involves living on one site. Recent research by Lloyds TSB Insurance found that 500,000 homes in Britain are occupied by several generations.(3) However, this type of housing is very limited in the social sector preventing many extended families from living together and providing support.

There can be benefits for all concerned. Grandparents living on the same site or nearby can easily help with childcare. As grandparents become more elderly, the younger generation can return the favour by keeping an eye on them. Many parents are part of the sandwich generation squeezed by two sets of care responsibilities. Bringing them together on one location can save a great deal of travel time and worry.

Peter Lynas continues, 'As we celebrate Marriage Week, we are encouraging more people to consider bringing their extended family closer together. Increased life expectancy, falling pension funds, rising childcare costs and a stagnant housing market are likely to lead to an increase in demand for this style of living. We need to rethink housing policy, relax planning laws and offer tax incentives to enable more multi-generational living and co-location. As house-building slows and the sandwich generation grows they are set to increase. Extended families are then better able to exercise their care responsibilities and burden on the taxpayer falls.'

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NOTES TO EDITORS: □

Marriage Week runs from 8th-14th February 2010. Marriage is one of a number of key family relationships which can increase wellbeing and reduce long term public spending. Despite the continual flow of family policy announcements, the political parties' thinking on the family remains too small. The Relationships Foundation will be issuing a series of press releases for Marriage Week ultimately calling on all politicians to commit to 'family proofing' all policy.

The Relationships Foundation, established in 1993, is a Cambridge-based independent think tank seeking a better connected society. It studies the effect that culture, business and government have on relationships. It proposes new ideas for strengthening social connections, campaigns on issues where relationships are being undermined, and trains and equips people to think relationally for themselves.

1.

http://www.unescap.org/ESID/psis/meetings/Ageing_Change_Family/Living%20arrangements%20among%20the%20elderly%20in%20South-East%20Asia%20by%20Ms%20Yap%20Mui%20Teng.pdf

2. The Centre for Social Justice has recently called for CGT on granny flats to be abolished to encourage more intergenerational living.

3. <http://www.insurance.lloydstsb.com/personal/general/mediacentre/three-generation-households.asp>

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