FUTURE HOME & LIVING / PAPER 5

Relationships before real estate

Friendship, familiarity, housemate choice and social networks in future home-and-living transitions

Choice first. Compatibility tested. Community preserved.

Prepared for Peter Rheinberger and The Helpers

Original substantive version: 8 November 2026 | Series edition 2.0: 8 November 2026

Referenced narrative research review and practice synthesis. Not original research, a clinical assessment or an NDIS funding decision.

Future Home & Living series	Controlled six-paper set
1. Evidence and research	Planning a good life beyond the family home
2. Service model	The Helpers Light Program - Future Home & Living Pathway
3. Family workbook	Our next five years - family planning checklist and working records
4. Architecture plan	Building the system before the forms
5. Relationships research	Relationships before real estate
6. Master specification	Future Home & Living System Architecture and Alpha-Numeric Library

Central proposition: A home-and-living transition should not begin with a vacancy. It should begin with the person, the relationships that matter to them, and the people - if any - with whom they may genuinely want to share a home.

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Executive summary

This paper examines whether people with intellectual and developmental disabilities may be more willing to move from the family home when a proposed living arrangement includes people they already know, like and trust. The available research does not provide a reliable causal percentage showing that friendship increases acceptance of a move. It does, however, provide converging evidence that who a person lives with, whether they have meaningful choice, whether relationships are familiar and compatible, and whether important social networks can be preserved are significant features of housing preference, satisfaction, wellbeing and transition experience. [R01-R09]

The most direct evidence comes from Cahill and Guerin, whose interviews with ten Irish young adults with intellectual disability found a preference for familiar and compatible company and a unanimous desire to be the primary decision-maker about future living arrangements. Australian transition research similarly identifies the challenge of negotiating unfamiliar relationships after moving, while AHURI research documents graded transitions and explicit trials of compatibility before long-term shared housing. [R02-R04]

A second Australian AHURI report is particularly important for The Helpers. It recognises sharing with someone in an established friendship or intimate relationship as a legitimate Individual Supported Living arrangement, and explicitly cautions against shared arrangements created mainly for convenience or cost-saving. This moves friendship and relationship choice from a soft lifestyle preference into the design of the living model itself. [R05]

Larger US research also found that housemates and roommates materially affected satisfaction with where people lived. Positive views were associated with getting along, shared interests and similar habits; conflict increased dissatisfaction and desire to move. UK qualitative research similarly links positive housemate relationships with wellbeing and negative co-tenant relationships with anxiety, frustration, low mood and sleep disruption. [R06-R07]

The rights and policy position is consistent with the research. Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises the right to choose where and with whom to live. Current NDIS policy supports decisions directed by the participant’s own will, preferences and rights. Current ILO guidance expressly includes choice about where to live and who to live with, while SDA vacancy guidance requires consultation with existing tenants about prospective housemates. [P01-P04]

Recommendation for The Helpers: make Relationships, Friendship & Housemate Compatibility a formal fourth workstream in the Future Home & Living architecture, alongside Person & Choice, Family & Future Roles, and Housing, Support & Systems. Introduce a staged relationship pathway that maps important people, explores future living preferences, builds ordinary shared experiences, trials compatibility where appropriate, separately confirms each person’s choice, and only then designs housing around the relationship decision.

Two proposed principles should govern the model: PR-07 Relationships Before Real Estate - do not start by filling a house; start by understanding who matters to the person. PR-08 Compatibility Before Cohabitation - friendship creates an opportunity to explore living together, not an obligation to do so. Both principles require piloting and evaluation; neither should be advertised as a clinically validated intervention.

1. Purpose, scope and how to read the evidence

1.1 Questions addressed

This paper addresses five questions: whether existing friendship or familiarity influences housing preference; whether housemate relationships affect satisfaction and wellbeing after a move; whether trialling shared living before a permanent decision is supported by research; how supported decision-making should shape housemate choice; and how The Helpers should translate the evidence into a system architecture without overstating what the research proves.

The focus is adults and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, with particular relevance to people moving from a family home toward supported living. Research concerning broader disability groups or transitions from residential childcare is used only where it contributes a clearly transferable concept, such as paced transition, familiarity or choice.

1.2 Review approach

This is a targeted narrative research review and practice synthesis prepared on 8 November 2026. Sources were selected because they directly address housing choice, housemate relationships, individual supported living, social connection, transition experience or participant decision-making. Peer-reviewed research, AHURI reports, NDIA research and current official NDIS or rights guidance were prioritised. This is not a systematic review or meta-analysis, and it does not calculate a pooled effect size.

A key methodological constraint is that there is very little research asking the precise causal question: “Does offering a move with an existing friend increase the probability that a person will agree to move?” The evidence is therefore strongest for preferences, satisfaction, compatibility and transition experience, and weaker for a quantified effect on willingness to accept a move.

1.3 Four kinds of statements

Label	Meaning in this paper	Appropriate use
Research finding	An empirical study or research report describes preferences, experiences or outcomes.	Use to understand patterns; do not predict an individual decision.
Rights / official guidance	A UN, NDIA or NDIS Commission source describes rights, policy or current practice expectations.	Check currency and individual circumstances before acting.
Practice inference	Several findings support a reasonable design principle, but the principle itself has not been experimentally validated.	Pilot, document and review.
Proposed Helpers architecture	A system component developed from the evidence and The Helpers model.	Treat as an organisational design proposal, not research evidence.

Reference codes [R] identify research sources; [P] references are rights instruments, policy or official guidance; [I] references are internal The Helpers materials. Full references and access notes are at the end.

2. Evidence register: what the principal sources can establish

The table below is a reading map, not a formal risk-of-bias ranking. Small qualitative studies can be highly informative about lived experience, but they cannot establish population probabilities. Larger surveys can identify patterns, but cannot necessarily establish causation.

Source	Design and population	Main contribution	Main limitation
R01 Belperio et al., 2024	Scoping review of qualitative future-planning studies, 2012-2022.	Adults with intellectual disability and providers are underrepresented; participant voice needs elevation.	Maps literature; does not test housemate matching.
R02 Cahill & Guerin, 2022	Irish qualitative study; 10 young adults aged 18-23 living with family.	Preference for familiar and compatible company; unanimous desire to be primary decision-maker.	Small selected sample; does not measure move acceptance rates.
R03 Walker et al., 2025	Australian interviews; 8 adults with intellectual disability, 13 parents, 4 siblings.	Transition includes negotiating unfamiliar relationships and making new connections.	Small qualitative sample; several family perspectives.
R04 Wiesel et al., 2015	Australian AHURI study of housing transitions across disability groups.	Documents graded transitions and explicit compatibility trials before shared housing.	Older pre-mature-NDIS context; mixed disability groups.
R05 Thoresen et al., 2022	Peer-reviewed AHURI report; literature review, secondary analysis, interviews and workshops.	Recognises sharing with someone in an established relationship as an ISL model; warns against convenience-based grouping.	Small heterogeneous ISL evidence base; not a SIL funding rule.
R06 Friedman, 2019	US mixed-method housing study; 726 people with I/DD and family members.	Housemate relationships materially affected housing satisfaction and desire to move.	US service system; self-selected respondents and mixed participant/family reports.
R07 Smith et al., 2025	UK qualitative study; 87 people with intellectual disability and 120 support workers.	Positive and negative housemate relationships strongly linked to wellbeing; chosen relationships matter.	Community settings; some staff proxy data.
R08 Moesby-Jensen, 2026	Danish qualitative study; 17 participants with autism and/or intellectual disability.	Safety through relationships/familiar surroundings; pacing and participation affect transition.	Transition from residential childcare, not family home.
R09 NDIA & Scope, 2023	Mixed-method Australian home-and-living capacity-building research.	Explore early, have a go, build skills and use flexible supports across life stages.	Research report; not authority to fund a particular trial or placement.

3. What people say about where and with whom they live

3.1 Familiar and compatible company is a direct participant preference

Cahill and Guerin interviewed ten young adults with intellectual disability who were still living in the family home. Participants were generally open to moving in the future, although half preferred to remain in their current situation at that time. Their future-living preferences included familiar and compatible company, and all participants wanted to be the primary decision-maker regarding their future living situation. [R02]

This is directly relevant to the proposed The Helpers pathway. It indicates that the question “Who would you like to live with?” is not secondary to the housing question. For at least some people, the identity and compatibility of other residents are part of the housing preference itself.

3.2 Housemate choice affects how the home is experienced

The US CQL/Arc study included 726 people with intellectual/developmental disability and family members. Housemate and roommate issues were a major component of reported housing quality. Participants described better views of the setting when housemates got along, had things in common and had similar habits; conflict quickly reduced satisfaction and increased the desire to move elsewhere. [R06]

The same study also documented substantial limits on actual choice. While many respondents reported some choice about where or with whom to live, the research repeatedly identified limited options, family-driven decisions and the effect of vacancies or service structures on the available choices. [R06]

3.3 Living alone remains a valid choice

Relationship-centred planning must not become a new rule that people should live with friends. Some participants prefer their own home or apartment, and many value relationships outside the household. Both the CQL/Arc study and AHURI work support the importance of individual choice rather than a universal shared-living solution. [R05-R06]

Evidence position: The research supports asking who the person wants to live with and whether that person is compatible. It does not support presuming that shared living is socially superior to living alone.

4. Relationships are a housing variable, not an optional extra

4.1 Established relationships are recognised in Australian individual supported living research

The 2022 AHURI report on Individual Supported Living for adults with intellectual disability and high support needs identifies four broad arrangements: living alone, host family, co-residency, and sharing with someone in an established relationship. The report describes the last of these as sharing based on established friendship or an intimate relationship. [R05]

Critically, the authors emphasise that such arrangements should be based on pre-existing relationships rather than created mainly for convenience or cost-saving, particularly when people with disability are grouped together. The report also warns that pooled-funding arrangements can reproduce vulnerabilities associated with congregate models when the grouping is driven by funding rather than existing relationships or friendship. [R05]

Practice implication: “We have three funded participants and a three-bedroom property” is not, by itself, a person-centred reason for three people to live together.

4.2 Friendship and cohabitation compatibility are related but different

A good friendship does not automatically predict successful cohabitation. People can enjoy one another socially while having incompatible sleep routines, sensory preferences, noise tolerance, food routines, privacy needs, visitors, smoking, pets or support arrangements. Conversely, people who begin as unfamiliar housemates can sometimes develop genuine friendship. The relevant design question is

therefore not simply “Are they friends?” but “Do they want to explore living together, and does experience show that the household works for each person?” [R03, R07]

Relationship concept	What it can tell us	What it cannot prove
Existing friendship	There is already affection, familiarity and voluntary contact.	That daily cohabitation will be compatible.
Familiarity	A person may feel safer or more confident with someone known.	That the known person should become a housemate.
Shared interests	Can support ordinary social connection and routines.	That support needs, sleep, privacy or behaviour will align.
Compatibility	Daily routines, boundaries and support needs can coexist.	That the relationship will never change.
Choice	The person wants the arrangement after accessible exploration.	That consent cannot later be withdrawn.

4.3 Housemate relationships affect wellbeing

Smith, Sumner and Powell asked 87 people with intellectual disability and 120 support workers about positive and negative aspects of life in community settings. Social relationships were a major theme. Positive housemate relationships were associated with companionship and shared activities; negative co-tenant relationships were associated with upset, anxiety, low mood, frustration and sleep disruption. The authors also note that people were sometimes grouped for logistical or funding efficiency rather than compatibility. [R07]

These findings support treating housemate relationship quality as an ongoing outcome measure after the move, not merely an intake matching criterion.

5. Trial before tenancy: experience can make compatibility visible

5.1 Australian research documents explicit compatibility trials

The AHURI 2015 study documents several transitional arrangements used before long-term housing decisions. In one example, three people with intellectual disability rented together to trial their compatibility before buying a shared house. In another, a mother moved out for a week so her daughter and another young woman could see whether they liked living together. Some participants used graded transitions over several months, increasing time in the new home while reducing time in the family home. [R04]

The same report describes a shared-home trust model that used an entry strategy including a three-month trial period for a prospective new resident to test compatibility. These are observational examples rather than proof that one trial duration is optimal, but they demonstrate that compatibility can be explored before an irreversible property commitment. [R04]

5.2 “Have a Go” should include relationships, not only skills

NDIA/Scope research identified four areas that help people work toward home-and-living goals: explore options early, have a go at different options, build and maintain skills, and use flexible supports across

life stages. The Helpers can reasonably extend this concept to relational learning - for example, shared meals, day activities, evening routines, overnight experiences or short shared stays - provided the activity is safe, genuinely chosen and has an appropriate funding basis. [R09]

A relational trial should not be framed as an examination that the participant must pass. Its purpose is to learn what each person likes, dislikes, needs and wants to change.

5.3 Trial experience is evidence, not automatic consent

Enjoying one weekend together does not establish consent to a permanent tenancy. Equally, one difficult experience should not necessarily end a friendship or rule out future shared living. The participant should have accessible opportunities to reflect, ask for changes, try again, choose another model or stop the process. [P02, R08]

6. Participant voice and supported decision-making

6.1 Plan with the person, not only about them

This paper extends the finding already recorded in Paper 1. Belperio and colleagues' scoping review found that parents' and siblings' perspectives dominate qualitative future-planning research, while adults with intellectual disability and service providers are underrepresented. The authors conclude that adults' views need to be elevated and that they need to be meaningfully involved in planning processes. [R01, I01]

The implication for housemate matching is significant. A family meeting can produce a tidy plan while still failing to establish whether the participant actually wants the proposed house, location or housemate. Attendance is not the same thing as influence.

6.2 Current NDIS policy supports the same direction

The NDIA Supported Decision Making Policy states that all adults have an equal right to make decisions that affect their lives; people must have access to support to communicate and participate; decisions should be directed by the person's own will, preferences and rights; and safeguards should protect against abuse, neglect, exploitation and undue influence. [P02]

This is particularly important when a provider, family or housing partner has a strong view about the "best" vacancy. Supported decision-making should help the person understand and compare meaningful alternatives, not simply make a predetermined placement easier to accept.

6.3 Accessible relationship and housing decisions

The decision process should be adapted to the individual. Possible methods include photographs, easy-read profiles, repeated visits, visual choice boards, social stories, videos, familiar communication partners, observation of approach/avoidance behaviour, supported comparison of alternatives, and time to revisit the question. For people with complex communication needs, interpretations should distinguish direct communication from supporter inference and should be revisited as experience accumulates. [P02]

Core test: Can the record show what the participant prefers, how that preference was communicated, what support was used to make the decision, and whether the person had a genuine way to say "no" or "not yet"?

7. Community beyond co-residence

7.1 A connected life does not require a shared house

The importance of social relationships extends beyond co-residents. Smith and colleagues found that friendships, family relationships and romantic relationships were repeatedly identified as positive aspects of life. Walker and colleagues also found that moving from the family home can create opportunities for new relationships and neighbourhood connection. [R03, R07]

This supports a broader design question: where should the person live so that important relationships can continue and new relationships can grow? The answer may be shared housing, but it may also be separate apartments, neighbouring dwellings, a cluster model, or simply living near friends, work, family, clubs or day activities.

7.2 Social proximity can be designed without forced cohabitation

Possible model	Relationship opportunity	Main caution
Friends share one home	High day-to-day contact and shared routines.	Compatibility and privacy need testing.
Separate units in same building	Easy contact with private space.	Do not assume neighbours want identical supports.
Nearby homes	Friendship can continue without household dependence.	Transport and scheduling still matter.
Shared community hub / activities	Relationships grow through ordinary participation.	Paid programming should not replace natural friendship.
Living alone with chosen network	Maximum household privacy with intentional social connection.	Isolation risk must be actively monitored if relevant.

7.3 Paid staff are not a substitute for friendship

Support workers can enable relationships and community participation, but the professional relationship is not the same as friendship. High staff turnover can disrupt social continuity, while a life dominated by paid relationships can remain socially narrow. The Helpers Light model should therefore track whether the person has chosen, reciprocal relationships as well as whether rostered support is delivered. [R03, R07]

8. Rights, NDIS policy and current SIL expectations

8.1 The right to choose where and with whom to live

Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises the equal right of people with disability to live in the community and to choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live, without being obliged to live in a particular arrangement. [P01]

The UN Committee's General Comment on Article 19 further emphasises that choice is not limited to the address; it includes living arrangements, daily routine and lifestyle. This is consistent with treating housemate choice as a rights issue rather than simply a provider matching exercise. [P01]

8.2 Current NDIS guidance recognises the same choices

Current ILO guidance says participants can make choices about where they live, who they live with and how they want to be supported, and recognises support from family, friends and community. Current SDA vacancy guidance requires providers preparing a home for a new resident to consult existing tenants about prospective housemates and respect their right to choose where and with whom they live. [P03-P04]

The 2026 SIL Practice Standards apply to registered SIL providers and expressly include supported decision-making, safeguarding, practice governance, and agreements about tenancy, housing and support arrangements. [P05]

8.3 Vacancy pressure creates a conflict-of-interest risk

Where The Helpers has an available property, a support vacancy or a commercial interest in forming a household, that interest must not override the participant's choice. Current NDIA conflict-of-interest guidance expects providers to avoid conflicts where possible, declare and manage unavoidable conflicts, document management strategies and provide alternative options so participants can exercise choice and control. [P06]

Safeguard: The Helpers should never record "compatible" simply because support ratios and funding fit. Relationship and lifestyle compatibility must be considered independently of provider utilisation.

9. Proposed Relationships, Friendship & Housemate Compatibility architecture

9.1 Add a fourth workstream to Future Home & Living

The existing architecture separates the person, family and system. This review supports making relationships sufficiently visible to stand as a fourth workstream rather than being dispersed across family and community records.

Workstream	Core question	Typical outputs
1. Person & Choice	What life and home does the person want?	Preferences, communication profile, supported decision record.
2. Family & Future Roles	What does family willingly provide now and in future?	Carer sustainability, sibling choice, contingency.
3. Relationships, Friendship & Community	Who matters to the person and how should those relationships shape future living?	Relationship map, social network plan, housemate exploration and compatibility records.
4. Housing, Support & Systems	What housing, support, funding, workforce and legal arrangements make the chosen life possible?	Housing model, roster, evidence, funding, tenancy and governance.

9.2 Provisional REL pathway

The codes below are proposed for incorporation into the Master System Specification. They should be treated as provisional until the alpha-numeric library is finalised.

Code	Stage	Purpose / system output
REL-01	Map important relationships	Identify friends, partners, siblings, relatives, work/day-program peers, neighbours and chosen family who matter to the participant.
REL-02	Explore future living preferences	Ask who the person wants nearby, who they may want to live with, and whether they prefer living alone, shared or co-located arrangements.
REL-03	Identify potential compatible peers	With consent, identify people who already know or may genuinely enjoy knowing one another; do not match solely by funding or vacancy.
REL-04	Build ordinary relationships	Use ordinary social experiences before framing people as prospective housemates.
REL-05	Have a Go together	Progressively trial shared routines or stays when appropriate, safe, chosen and lawfully funded.
REL-06	Review compatibility	Consider lifestyle, communication, sensory, privacy, behaviour, support and household factors without reducing the result to one score.
REL-07	Confirm each person's choice separately	Ask each prospective resident whether they want the arrangement after experience; allow yes, no, maybe, more time or own-home-nearby.
REL-08	Design housing around the relationship decision	Only after choice and compatibility are sufficiently understood should the property, tenancy and support model be finalised.

9.3 Proposed compatibility domains

Domain	Questions to explore
Relationship quality	Do they voluntarily seek one another out? Is contact reciprocal? Do both want more contact?
Communication	Can each person understand, tolerate and respond to the other's communication style?
Daily rhythm	Wake/sleep times, meals, work/day program, quiet time, shared routines.
Sensory environment	Noise, light, touch, movement, television/music, visitors.
Privacy & boundaries	Bedrooms, bathrooms, personal care, property, intimacy and time alone.
Household habits	Cleaning, food, smoking/vaping, pets, shared spaces, spending.
Behaviour & safety	Known risks, triggers, escalation patterns and impact on other residents.
Support model	Ratios, active support times, overnight needs, staff presence and compatibility of rosters.
Community & relationships	Will the arrangement strengthen or restrict important external relationships?
Conflict & repair	How do the people respond to disagreement, frustration or a need for space?

10. Two proposed principles for The Helpers

10.1 PR-07 - Relationships Before Real Estate

PR-07 Relationships Before Real Estate: We do not begin by filling houses. We begin by understanding who matters to the person, which relationships they want to preserve or develop, and how those relationships can form part of a safe and chosen future home.

Operationally, this means property acquisition, vacancy filling and roster efficiency should not get ahead of participant preference and relationship exploration. It does not mean a home can never be offered before friendship develops; it means the provider must not treat the property as the primary design constraint.

10.2 PR-08 - Compatibility Before Cohabitation

PR-08 Compatibility Before Cohabitation: Friendship creates an opportunity to explore living together; it does not create an obligation to live together. Prospective housemates should have meaningful opportunities to know one another, experience shared routines, express concerns and independently choose whether they want to live together.

This principle protects friendship as well as housing. If two friends discover they do not want to share a home, the desired outcome may be separate homes nearby rather than treating the exploration as a failure.

11. How this should change the Future Home & Living pathway

11.1 Strengthen PTH-04 and PTH-05

Current step	Proposed wording	Additional required outputs
PTH-04 Explore the Options	Explore Homes, Relationships & Living Options	Relationship map; preferred social proximity; prospective housemate possibilities; living-alone option retained.
PTH-05 Build Skills & Have a Go	Build Skills, Build Relationships & Have a Go	Ordinary shared experiences; trial notes; participant reflection; compatibility observations; decision-support record.

11.2 Add relationship evidence to stage gates

Gate	Relationship requirement
Before formal option design	Participant's important relationships and preferred living company are documented using accessible methods.
Before shared-housing shortlist	Prospective co-residents are not being grouped solely for vacancy, funding or staffing convenience.
Before a shared-living commitment	Each person has had a meaningful opportunity to know or experience the other person and to express a separate preference.
Before move-in	A compatibility and safeguarding review is complete; unresolved concerns have named actions.
After move-in	Housemate relationship quality, privacy, choice and external social connection are reviewed alongside incidents and roster performance.

11.3 Do not create a "friendship score"

The Helpers should resist turning relationship quality into a single numerical score that could be used to approve or reject people. A dashboard may use Bright / Steady / Needs Attention or similar prompts

across domains, but the underlying record should retain narrative evidence, the participant's own view, changes over time and any differences between participant, family and professional perspectives.

12. What the evidence does - and does not - justify

Proposition	Evidence position	Appropriate The Helpers use
People often care who they live with.	Directly supported across participant research.	Ask and record housemate preference as a core housing variable.
Familiar and compatible people can make a future arrangement more attractive.	Supported by qualitative preference evidence; causal uplift is not quantified.	Use as a planning hypothesis and test through supported exploration.
Housemate relationships influence satisfaction and wellbeing.	Supported across multiple settings and methods.	Monitor relationship quality before and after move-in.
Compatibility can be explored through trials.	Supported by Australian transition examples and graded-transition research.	Use structured "Have a Go" experiences where safe and appropriate.
Friends should live together.	Not supported as a universal rule.	Never presume cohabitation; retain living-alone and nearby options.
A provider should fill vacancies with people whose funding fits.	Inconsistent with person-centred choice when used as the dominant criterion.	Separate commercial vacancy decisions from participant matching decisions.
A relationship-first pathway improves long-term outcomes.	Plausible and evidence-informed, but not yet validated as The Helpers intervention.	Pilot and evaluate before claiming effectiveness.

13. Recommendations for the Master System Specification

1. Add Relationships, Friendship & Community as a formal fourth workstream in the Future Home & Living architecture.
2. Reserve the provisional prefix REL for relationship mapping, housemate exploration, compatibility and relationship review objects until the final alpha-numeric library is approved.
3. Add PR-07 Relationships Before Real Estate and PR-08 Compatibility Before Cohabitation to the principle library.
4. Require a participant relationship map and living-company preference before shared-housing design progresses beyond early exploration.
5. Create a Housemate Exploration Record that captures shared experiences without prematurely labelling people as matched.
6. Create a Housemate Compatibility Review that uses domains rather than a single score and records each participant's view separately.
7. Create a Supported Housemate Choice Decision Record showing options presented, communication supports used, participant preference and the ability to change the decision.
8. Build "social proximity" into housing design so the model can consider nearby apartments or homes, not only co-residence.

9. Add post-move relationship outcomes to Light reviews: friendship, privacy, conflict, belonging, external relationships and participant-reported satisfaction.
10. Build conflict-of-interest safeguards so vacancies, property utilisation or pooled support economics cannot be treated as evidence of compatibility.
11. Pilot the REL pathway with the initial family design cohort and document whether it changes participant understanding, confidence, preference clarity, transition quality or post-move satisfaction.
12. Review the research base annually and before The Helpers makes any public claim that its relationship-first model improves acceptance, retention, wellbeing or NDIS outcomes.

14. Limitations, evaluation and conclusion

14.1 Research limitations

The evidence base remains heterogeneous. Several studies are small qualitative studies; some combine participant and family reports; service systems differ across countries; and the precise causal question about whether an existing friend increases willingness to move has not been directly tested in a way that supports a percentage estimate. The Australian AHURI work provides particularly useful practice examples, but these are not randomised trials of housemate matching.

Relationship quality also changes over time. A strong friendship today may not remain equally close; an initially unfamiliar co-resident may become a valued friend; and a person may choose to live alone while maintaining a rich social network. The architecture should therefore support revision rather than treating matching as a permanent classification.

14.2 Evaluation priorities for The Helpers

If The Helpers pilots this approach, baseline and follow-up evaluation should distinguish participant voice from proxy opinion. Useful measures include whether the person can identify who they want around them; whether they understand available living choices; whether they feel free to decline a proposed housemate; whether prospective housemates have genuine opportunities to know one another; whether post-move privacy and relationship quality are acceptable; and whether important friendships and community connections are maintained.

The pilot should also record adverse or unintended effects: pressure to befriend another participant, family-led matching that overrides the person, excessive disclosure of private information between families, disruption of existing friendships when a shared-living trial fails, or housing delays caused by an overly rigid matching process.

14.3 Conclusion

The best-supported conclusion is not that people with disability should move out with friends. It is that relationships and housemate choice are central parts of home-and-living decisions and should be explored with the same seriousness as funding, property and staffing. Familiarity and compatible company can make a future living arrangement more understandable and attractive; poor compatibility can make a technically adequate house feel wrong.

For The Helpers, the opportunity is to reverse the conventional vacancy-first model. Start with the person, make their relationships visible, build ordinary experiences, test compatibility where appropriate, preserve the right to live alone, and only then design the home and support model. This approach aligns with research, Article 19 rights, supported decision-making and current NDIS expectations, while

remaining honest that the specific The Helpers relationship-first pathway still needs to be piloted and evaluated.

Proposed design principle: Build the home around the person's chosen life and relationships - not the reverse.

References and source notes

Web and official sources checked on 8 November 2026. References identify evidence used in this review; they are not endorsements of The Helpers. Current NDIS rules and guidance should be rechecked before individual decisions.

Research and reviews

[R01] Belperio, I., Walker, R., Bigby, C., Wiesel, I., Rillotta, F., & Hutchinson, C. (2024). Whose voice is it anyway? Adults with intellectual disabilities and future planning: A scoping review of qualitative studies. Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability, 49(2), 215-228. https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2023.2293334. Open-access scoping review; participant and provider perspectives are underrepresented.

[R02] Cahill, C., & Guerin, S. (2022). Current and future living arrangements: The perspective of young adults with intellectual disabilities. British Journal of Learning Disabilities. First published 29 August 2022. https://doi.org/10.1111/bld.12498. Ten Irish participants aged 18-23; qualitative preference evidence, not a causal move-acceptance study.

[R03] Walker, R., Belperio, I., Bigby, C., Wiesel, I., Rillotta, F., & Hutchinson, C. (2025). The transition from family home to alternative living arrangements: Experiences of adults with intellectual disabilities and their family members. Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 38(2), e70047. https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.70047. Australian qualitative study; three themes include negotiating unfamiliar relationships and social inclusion.

[R04] Wiesel, I., Laragy, C., Gendera, S., Fisher, K. R., Jenkinson, S., Hill, T., Finch, K., Shaw, W., & Bridge, C. (2015). Moving to my home: Housing aspirations, transitions and outcomes of people with disability. AHURI Final Report No. 246. https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/246. Peer-reviewed Australian report; includes graded transitions and trials of compatibility.

[R05] Thoresen, S. H., O'Brien, P., O'Donovan, M.-A., Walter, B., Mueller, A., Westermann, G., Whittle, E., & Buchanan, A. (2022). Accommodating adults with intellectual disabilities and high support needs in Individual Supported Living arrangements. AHURI Final Report No. 380. https://doi.org/10.18408/ahuri8124101. Recognises sharing with someone in an established relationship and warns against convenience-based pooling.

[R06] Friedman, C. (2019). There's no place like home: A national study of how people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their families choose where to live. The Arc of the United States and CQL | The Council on Quality and Leadership. https://www.c-q-l.org/resources/projects/theres-no-place-like-home-a-national-housing-study/. Mixed-method US study; 726 participants across 45 states and DC.

[R07] Smith, E., Sumner, P., & Powell, G. (2025; online 2024). The lived experience of people with intellectual disability in community settings: A comparison of self-reports and staff reports. British Journal of Learning Disabilities, 53(2), 259-271. https://doi.org/10.1111/bld.12629. Qualitative study of 87 people with intellectual disability and 120 support workers.

[R08] Moesby-Jensen, C. K. (2026). Participation Tempo in Care-Leaving Transitions to Supported Living among Young People with Autism and Intellectual Disabilities. Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 28(1), 200-214. https://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.1464. Danish qualitative study; relationship/familiarity and transition pacing are key themes.

[R09] National Disability Insurance Agency & Scope. (2023). Having a go: Exploring the use of supports to make individualised living a reality. https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/research-and-evaluation/home-and-living-supports/using-capacity-building-supports-help-make-individualised-living-reality. Mixed-method Australian government research; exploration and trialling are research findings, not funding approval.

Rights, policy and official guidance

[P01] United Nations. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 19 - Living independently and being included in the community. https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-19-living-independently-and-being-included-in-the-community.html. See also General Comment No. 5 on living independently and being included in the community.

[P02] National Disability Insurance Agency. (2026). Supported decision making policy. https://www.ndis.gov.au/policies-rules-and-legal/policy/supported-decision-making-policy. Current page checked 8 November 2026.

[P03] National Disability Insurance Agency. (2026). What are individualised living options (ILO). https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/home-and-living/types-home-and-living-supports/what-are-individualised-living-options-ilo. Current guidance checked 8 November 2026.

[P04] National Disability Insurance Agency. (2026). How to manage specialist disability accommodation (SDA) vacancies. https://www.ndis.gov.au/providers/home-and-living-providers/specialist-disability-accommodation-sda/how-manage-specialist-disability-accommodation-sda-vacancies. Current guidance includes consultation with existing tenants about prospective housemates.

[P05] NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. (2026). Supplementary module: Supported independent living (SIL). https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/rules-and-standards/ndis-practice-standards/sil. Current standards include supported decision-making, safeguarding, governance, and tenancy/housing/support agreements.

[P06] National Disability Insurance Agency. (2026). What is a conflict of interest. https://www.ndis.gov.au/providers/working-provider/provider-responsibilities/what-conflict-interest. Current guidance checked 8 November 2026.

The Helpers internal source

[I01] The Helpers. (2026). Planning a good life beyond the family home: Sibling choice, family sustainability and NDIS home-and-living transitions. Future Home & Living / Paper 1, version 1.0. Internal research review. Section 6.1 is extended by this paper.

[I02] The Helpers. (2026). Future Home & Living System Architecture - Plan of Action. Future Home & Living / Paper 4. Internal system design document. Proposed REL architecture in this paper is intended to be incorporated before the master alpha-numeric library is finalised.