

**OWCH (OLDER WOMEN'S COHOUSING) COMPANY LTD**  
**MUTUAL SUPPORT POLICY**  
(Agreed 5 July 2011)

One of the guiding principles of a CoHousing Community is that its members are willing to act as friendly and helpful neighbours to each other, to help each other out on occasions and especially in emergencies and to be generally aware and supportive of each other's needs. This is a principle adopted as policy by the Older Women's CoHousing Company Ltd.

Any woman joining OWCH needs to understand that

1. she needs to take full responsibility for herself and her own welfare
2. she needs to be capable of independent living without recourse to the group
3. she is committing herself to be neighbourly and she may herself expect reasonable support from the group.

'Helpfulness' for one person can be experienced as 'intrusiveness' by another; someone else's 'respectful distance' can be interpreted as 'lack of support' - it is important therefore that from the beginning members share and take responsibility for communicating a broad understanding of what they mean by 'being neighbourly' and what is to be understood by 'reasonable support'. This shared understanding will provide a basic starting point from which the group will grow its own experience as its members share a life together.

**Guidelines**

1. A group commitment to 'mutual support' means that members undertake to provide reciprocal services and benefits in a spirit of neighbourliness. This is understood to mean one-off or short-term assistance for a range of minor contingencies, but not long-term and regular personal care that more properly should be supplied by the professional or welfare services. Its basis is entirely voluntary and cannot be required or expected as of right. By 'short term' is understood 'no longer than six weeks'.

**What mutual support means in general:**

- The maintenance of a spirit of helpful and reciprocal caring in the group
- Watching out for the safety, security and wellbeing of fellow residents

**What mutual support might mean in particular instances:**

- Someone is unwell and needs a prescription fetched, eye-drops administered, shopping done or a meal provided;
- Someone needs a lift to a hospital appointment or the doctor called
- Someone needs plants watered and a pet fed while away from home

- Someone needs a neighbour to watch out for a delivery
- Someone notices and investigates a neighbour's unusual absence

**What mutual support would generally not mean:**

- The right to expect the regular cleaning and upkeep of a member's home or the regular provision of meals
- The right to expect personal care such as dressing, showering, toileting, changing dressings or other services of a personal nature
- The right to expect shopping or other services to be carried out on a regular basis.

2. The OWCH group will establish (and from time to time review) a 'buddy' system whereby a named person of someone's choice will take responsibility when needed for co-ordinating any care, visiting etc.

3. Services rendered must be at the request of an individual needing them or with her agreement