

# New Australian Homestay Network campaign to help struggling students

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Following a [report](#) that highlighted how international students are being exploited in Australia's housing market, a new initiative to help students who are struggling to adapt to life in the country has been launched by the [Australian Homestay Network](#).



The 'Start with Us' campaign is set to help international students coming to Australia.

The 'Start with Us' campaign will help orientate students to their new surroundings and will focus on accommodation, language, banking, transport, culture and individual problems as and when they arise.

As part of the initiative, approved Australian households will host international students for their first four weeks to help ease into their new life in the country.

"We want to partner with quality Education Providers and Agents to join us and promote the 'Start with Us' campaign to encourage even more international students coming to Australia," said AHN manager, Julie Manche.

"The 'Start with Us' campaign is designed to give international students the perfect start to their study adventure allowing them to make better-informed long-term decisions with the support and knowledge of an experienced local host."

The AHN is run alongside the American Homestay Network by MyStay International.

Executive director and founder of MyStay International, David Bycroft, told *The PIE* that they are expecting high numbers of hosts to enlist and that they have already started getting the message out to agents.

“We have just attended the ICEF and AIRC Conferences and the response has been very positive,” he said.

Bycroft explained that the AHN has 6,203 live hosts, 2,619 who are in the application stage, 1,187 for whom action is still required and 165 who are in holding. This makes a total of 10,174 potential hosts.

“We are also currently expanding our Host pool in the US as there is a strong interest there also,” he added.

“We have 242 contracted education providers in Australia. We have placed students in a total of 407 unique providers in the last 12 months.”

This December, [the first in a series of reports](#) from a survey of more than 5,000 international students detailed a wide range of problems for those seeking accommodation in Australia.

The “Living Precariously: Understanding International Students’ Housing Experiences in Australia” report funded by StudyNSW was co-authored by UNSW Sydney’s Bassina Farbenblum and UTS Law’s Laurie Berg.

According to the report, 36% of international students go into share housing for their first home where many encountered illegal or poor living conditions.

57% said they had experienced overcrowding, accommodation that is unsafe to live in, paying in advance for accommodation that does not exist, intimidation or harassment by a landlord or another tenant.

They also experienced landlords moving extra people into the accommodation without their consent, sudden increases in rent in the middle of a rental period, and unfair eviction.

Farbenblum said that researchers expected to find that students would be more vulnerable to scams and exploitation when they organized share housing online from their home country rather than in Australia.

“In fact, we found that deception and poor housing conditions were just as common for international students who organized their housing here,” she said.

“Exploitation is thriving unchecked in the wild west of the share house market, and international students can’t avoid it simply by organizing housing after they arrive in Australia.”

Berg said half of international students used online platforms to organize their share house and reported the highest rates of deception, overcharging, demands for money upfront and poor living conditions.

“We now know that it’s the advertisements on peer-to-peer sharing platforms like Gumtree and social media that lure the most international students into exploitative housing situations,” added Berg.

“In fact, 11% of students who used Gumtree paid for accommodation that did not even exist. These sites must invest resources in protecting and empowering these vulnerable users.”

In a statement, the AHN cited the survey, explaining that “difficulties settling into a new country have often led to poor health and unsatisfactory results for the international student.

“This damages Australia’s reputation globally affecting our third largest export industry worth in excess of \$30 billion to Australia’s economy,” the statement read.

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