

Multigenerational households more in vogue

By Constance Rosenblum, New York Times

Khadija Benmakhlouf, wearing pink corduroys and a crimson shirt, is perched on a stool poring over her kindergarten math homework. Her grandmother, Tupper Thomas, who is curled up in a nearby armchair, offers encouraging shout-outs from the sidelines.

Around 5 o'clock, Khadija's mother, Phaedra Thomas, bustles in from her job as a community development consultant in Red Hook with her son, Teddy, 3, whom she has picked up from day care. Within minutes the kitchen is flooded with an intoxicating aroma as lamb chops from the halal butcher down the street sizzle in the oven.

The two women moved into the two-family house in February, dodging workers as their contractor, the M&H Art General Construction Corporation, transformed the century-old home into a dwelling suitable for a 21st-century family.

"I'm a big believer in this sort of arrangement, maybe because it never happened for me when I was a parent," said Tupper Thomas, a longtime resident of Park Slope who retired three years ago from a three-decade career as the president of the Prospect Park Alliance. "I didn't have that mom person around."

With several generations in residence, the Thomas household represents a housing model that social scientists are paying a lot of attention to these days, one that grows out of a phenomenon that economists call "shrinking households" or "missing households." The terms refer to an arrangement not uncommon today among some ethnic groups and viewed as an encouraging throwback to the way many families lived decades

ago.

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