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Oxford Word of the Month – September: cubby house

noun: a part of a family home organised or designed so that adult children can have privacy from their parents.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

Recently a survey found two-thirds of adult children report that they can't afford to move out of home, with some expecting to remain at home until the age of 30 or more. The company commissioning the survey used the term **cubby house syndrome** to describe domestic arrangements for such families:

CoreLogic chief executive Lisa Claes said this could see the rise of 'cubby house syndrome', whereby parents attempt to fashion independent living arrangements for their adult children inside the existing property. (News.com.au, 8 May 2017)

The term evokes an aspect of childhood for many Australians: a **cubby house** is a children's playhouse, usually solidly constructed. The Australian **cubby house** (recorded from the 1890s) is a specific use of the British English **cubby-house** 'a children's name for a snug, cosy place', or 'a little house built by children in play'.

The **cubby house** of childhood is typically a permanent feature of the backyard, but the new type of **cubby house** for the adult child is more likely to be indoors. It is the flip side of the parents' retreat, an Australianism dating from the 1970s, when parents decided they needed a private wing or room in the house away from their growing children. The new retreat for adult children is likely to be at the other end of the house, and possibly a converted garage, rumpus room, or house extension.

A newspaper headline recently interpreted it this way: 'Cubby-house kids take over the granny flat.' (*The Australian*, 9 May 2017) Granny may still have a say in this, but the prospects for under-30s home ownership are unlikely to change soon; she may have to share.

Cubby house and **cubby house syndrome** are being considered for inclusion in the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.

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