



HNC PARTNER FEATURE: Building Community into the Bottom Line

Dave Ramsle explains the vision and rationale behind Concert Properties' financial investment in fostering social connections and community in its buildings.

Most people want to feel a greater sense of community where they live – but for property managers, it can be challenging to move that off the “nice to have” list and into an actual budget line item. However, **Concert Properties** recently did exactly that by hiring a full-time social sustainability coordinator to nurture resident-driven community activities across thousands of homes throughout eleven rental buildings in British Columbia.

How did such a significant investment gain traction? According to Dave Ramsle, Concert's Vice President, Innovation & Sustainability, the initial spark came directly from the research. Concert employees had become engaged with the growing body of research around community, belonging, and well-being explored in papers and books like Charles Montgomery's **Happy City**.

“We were not tracking that kind of information before,” says Ramsle. “We do annual resident satisfaction surveys that cover issues like cleanliness, service, and safety, and we've always done well. But we'd never asked about social connections, loneliness, or well-being. When we saw these studies and the data showing that many people in large, mixed-use, urban buildings like ours are actually *miserable*, it was a gut punch. It was a moment of reckoning.”

This realization – coupled with mounting awareness of the links between diverse

“The belief that strong, sustainable communities are fundamental to the social well-being of all Canadians is fundamental to how and why we operate, and we want to live our values.”

social-support networks and people's overall health and happiness – compelled Concert to embrace a 2018 opportunity to partner with the City of Vancouver in the **Hey Neighbour pilot project**. Concert ran the pilot at their twenty-storey Remington rental building in Collingwood Village with support from Luna Aixin, the City's coordinator and now Hey Neighbour Collective Project Facilitator. They offered honorary stipends to encourage residents to organize social events and activities big or small for each other.

“People loved it,” says Ramsle. “And that informed a lot of our thinking.”

Concert's interest in fostering more social connections and vibrant communities in their complexes quickly progressed.

“First, it's purpose driven,” explains Ramsle. “The belief that strong, sustainable communities are fundamental to the social well-being of all Canadians is fundamental to how and why we operate, and we want to live our values. From a business-case perspective, we want to be a landlord of

choice, so if it's fun and exciting to live in a Concert property, hopefully that word gets around.”

Concert got to work implementing strategies that could help deliver on these values. With help from Happy City, Concert recently added fifteen new questions to its annual survey, asking residents how many people in their building they know personally, if there were neighbours they can rely on in an emergency, and whether they would like to know more of their neighbours. Then in 2020 Concert hired a social sustainability coordinator, Nicole Viduka.

By thoughtfully analysing survey results and combining them with a related space assessment of some of the buildings, Happy City was able to suggest **creative design and programming ideas** to try out with future community connectors.

“Our goal is to have resident community connectors in every one of our buildings in BC by early 2021,” says Ramsle. “And we'll be hosting a community of practice where those people can talk to each other, share ideas, and get support and training.”

Ramsle says the company understands it may be a couple years before their efforts bear visible fruits. The whole project is so innovative for Concert that, the next steps will be more “adventure” than “proven model”.

CONCERT™



Concert continues to collaborate with Happy City and other partners in the Hey Neighbour Collective to develop and test creative approaches for resident engagement that respect physical distancing. Resources like the [Together, Apart Toolkit](#) help to get creative juices flowing, even amidst the challenges of COVID-19. “For a while we thought we’d hold off to wait out the pandemic, but there doesn’t seem to be a clear end in sight,” says Ramslie. “And in fact, people seem to need to be connected now more than ever.”

For more information on Happy City’s work with Concert Properties, visit their Happy Neighbours microsite [here](#).