

“Being socially connected in meaningful ways is actually key to human health and survival.”

Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad

Chronic loneliness and social isolation can be as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day & increases risk of premature death by as much as 50%.

Strong social supports are protective for physical and mental health and cognitive decline.

Evidence Backgrounder

HOW DOES SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS BETWEEN NEIGHBOURS SUPPORT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING?

By Meridith Sones, MPH, PhD(c)

Decades of research shows that being socially connected helps us live longer, healthier, and happier lives. But it isn't just our family ties, close friendships, or group membership that make a difference. Evidence reveals that the health benefits of social connectedness can be unlocked starting at home, with our own neighbours.

BACKGROUND

Social connectedness is vital to our health and well-being. Substantial evidence shows that people who are socially connected live longer. A lack of social connection — marked by social isolation and loneliness — increases risk for premature death by as much as 50%, comparable to major health risks like obesity, smoking, and air pollution. The effect of social connectedness on life expectancy is independent of other risk factors like age, sex, initial health status, lifestyle factors, income, and education. In addition to premature mortality, poor social connectedness has been linked to a range of other adverse physical, cognitive, and mental health outcomes, including increased risk of heart disease and stroke, respiratory infection, dementia, depression and anxiety.

The influence that social connectedness has on our health and well-being can be biological, psychological, or behavioural. For example, social connectedness influences immune functioning and inflammation,

which has been linked to several chronic diseases. Supportive social connections also help us cope with stress, and influence healthy behaviours like sleep and physical activity.

Given mounting evidence on its health effects, local and global declines in social connectedness are increasingly recognized as a public health crisis that requires policy action at all levels. New data shows that more than 1 in 10 British Columbians reported feeling lonely always or often. For young adults or those living alone, the proportion of people experiencing loneliness doubles to more than 1 in 4. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States Surgeon General has described social connectedness as equally important to global recovery as vaccines. Evidence shows that one way to curb social isolation and loneliness is to start at home, by building connections and community among neighbours.



WHY ARE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS *WITH YOUR NEIGHBOURS* IMPORTANT?

- **Higher levels of happiness, well-being and life satisfaction**
- **More likely to give and accept help in a crisis**
- **Deeper localized sense of belonging**
- **More likely to volunteer, vote and otherwise engage in strengthening civil society**
- **CHILDREN:** twice as likely to engage in daily outdoor play
- **YOUTH:** better mental and physical health, enhanced feelings of safety and self-esteem, and less risky and violent behaviour
- **OLDER ADULTS:** decreased loneliness, increased self-reported health, lower risk of mortality

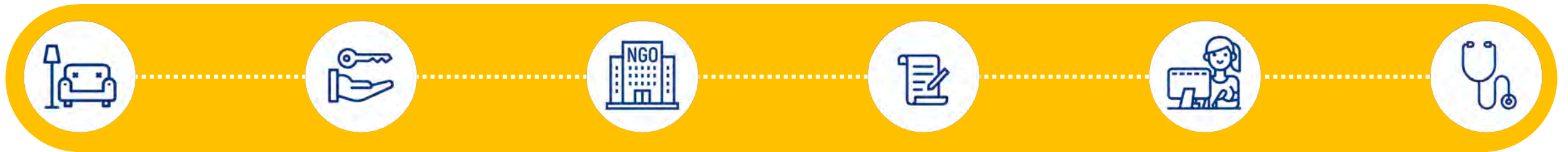
<https://www.heyneighbourcollective.ca/2022/06/how-social-connectedness-between-neighbours-supports-health-wellbeing/>

HEY NEIGHBOUR! Collective

2019 - ?



MORRIS J. WOSK
CENTRE FOR DIALOGUE



Residents of Multi Unit Housing

Housing Providers (Landlords & Property Managers)

- Concert Properties
- Brightside Community Homes Foundation
- Catalyst Community Developments Society

- BC Non-Profit Housing Association
- LandlordBC

Non-governmental Organizations

- West End Seniors' Network
- Seniors Services Society of BC
- Building Resilient Neighbourhoods (& City of Victoria)

Policy Makers, Local & Regional Governments

- Cities of Vancouver, North Vancouver and New Westminister
- Metro Vancouver Regional Government

Researchers

- Simon Fraser University
(Urban Studies, Gerontology & Health Sciences)
- Happy Cities

Health Sector

- Vancouver Coastal Health

How do we do our work?

1 Piloting Community-Building Programs

2 Research & Learning

3 Sharing stories & knowledge

4 Housing Industry & Policy Engagement

- **6 partners, each with their own program approach & context;**

3 landlord organizations

(Brightside, Concert, Catalyst)

3 non-profit community

organizations (Building Resilient Neighbourhoods, West End Seniors' Network, Seniors Services Society)

- 40+ buildings between them
- Facilitated community of practice (peer learning)

Foundational principals

Housing as
a Human Right

Equity

Relationships
& Trust Building

Asset-based
Community Development

Addressing
Root Causes

Multi-sector &
Interdisciplinary Collaboration

How do we do our work?

1 Piloting Community-Building Programs

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OUR BIG LONG-TERM QUESTIONS:

- What is the impact of our 6 partners' programs on residents' sense of well-being and social connectedness?
- Do partners' approaches help older adults to stay happy & healthy in their homes for longer?
- What benefits are landlord partners seeing for their organizations?
- How can we work in buildings that are poorly designed for neighbourly connections? How can we advocate together for better design of future housing?

Foundational principals

Housing as
a Human Right

Equity

Relationships
& Trust Building

Asset-based
Community Development

Addressing
Root Causes

Multi-sector &
Interdisciplinary Collaboration



Supporting a culture
of learning and
experimentation



Facilitating
organizational
partnerships



Convening and
promoting more “joined
up approaches”
through multi-sector
dialogue and action

Impacts of peer learning, research & education



Raising awareness
and building evidence
about social
connectedness and
resilience in multi-unit
housing



Building a field of practice and
beginning to identify “best
practices”

How do we do our work?

- 1 **Piloting Community-Building Programs**
- 2 **Research & Learning**
- 3 **Sharing stories & knowledge**
- 4 **Housing Industry & Policy Engagement**




LANDLORD AND HOUSING OPERATOR-LED APPROACHES TO GROWING COMMUNITY IN MULTI-UNIT HOUSING

Practice Guide #2



DEVELOPING ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS TO BUILD COMMUNITY IN MULTI-UNIT HOUSING

Practice Guide #3



Learning from the Community Connectors

Practice guide for implementing resident-led social programming in multi-unit rental housing

October 2022



SUPPORTING RESIDENTS TO BECOME COMMUNITY CONNECTORS IN MULTI-UNIT HOUSING

Practice Guide #1



ROLES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN STRENGTHENING SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND RESILIENCE ACTIVITIES IN MULTI-UNIT HOUSING

Practice Guide #4



HEY 
NEIGHBOUR!
Collective

CONNECT & PREPARE

Neighbours Helping Neighbours



Connect & Prepare





Why Connect & Prepare?





Survivors leave Tohoku a day after the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami. // Warren Antiola/Flickr

Social ties,
not just sandbags

In Disaster Recovery, Social Networks Matter More Than Bottled Water and Batteries

DANIEL P. ALDRICH FEB 14, 2017

*WHO*is in your kit, not just
*WHAT*is in your kit



Increasing Shocks and Stresses

How can we be better prepared AND strengthen our resilience?



SHOCKS: Severe weather, power outages, building fires, pandemic outbreak

STRESSES: Climate change, food/economic security, health, isolation

Canada: Disastrous Impact of Extreme Heat

Failure to Protect Older People, People with Disabilities in British Columbia

595 people were killed by heat in B.C. this summer, new figures from coroner show

Seniors under pressure amid B.C. wildfires

B.C.'s frail elderly vulnerable as wildfires rage across province





How it Works



Connect & Prepare

- Resident Champions (HOST)
- Groups of Neighbours
- 3 facilitated workshops (on location)
- Resources, funding, support to access grants (+ \$500 shared supplies)
- Build connections and develop collaborative projects



Connect & Prepare Projects

- Neighbour skill sharing
- Food security projects
- “Grab and Go Party”
- Shared emergency plans & kits
- Placemaking
- Buddy systems
- Communication networks
- Block or building parties/gatherings
- Mutual Aid





“Together we focused on our abilities rather than our individual disabilities”



LeBlond Place

- Low-rise, seniors with disabilities
- Healthy Food distribution
- Shared emergency supplies & buddy system
- Accessed small grants for “Grab and Go” part

Results from Pilot



- **94%** got to know each other better
- **100%** became more connected with each other
- **100%** achieved better understanding of their collective strengths, assets and vulnerabilities
- **100%** took action to be better prepared for emergencies

CONNECT & PREPARE

Scaling Pilot Partners

City of North Vancouver

- North Shore Community Resources (NSCR)
- Silver Harbour Seniors' Centre
- North Shore Emergency Management (NSEM)
- City of North Vancouver's Planning & Development Department

City of New Westminster

- City of New Westminster's Office of Emergency Management
- Senior Services Society of BC
- City of New Westminster's Social Planning Department

City of Vancouver

- Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House
- City of Vancouver Resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction Department

Building Resilient Neighbourhoods

Hey Neighbour Collective





Scaling Pilot Goals

Learn Together...

- Test
- Implement
- Adapt
- Evaluate
- Develop a Sustainable Scaling Model



Stacy Barter

Executive Director,
Building Resilient Neighbourhoods

stacy@resilientneighbourhoods.ca



HEY NEIGHBOURS!
LET'S
*Connect &
Prepare!*
TOGETHER!

Brightside Community Homes Foundation

Supporting our Residents through Connection and Sociability



Independent Living:

no daily living services or supports

26 buildings:

20 self subsidized, 6 BCH Operating Agreements, 4 under development

Income Levels:

Must not exceed:

- \$57,500 for a bachelor or one-bedroom unit
- \$69,000 for a two-bedroom unit
- \$80,000 for a three-bedroom unit
- \$88,500 for a four-bedroom unit

Minimum of \$32,000/year

Rents:

- 30-40% of gross annual income, adjusted every year or every 2nd year.
 - Rental fees are calculated on a rent-geared-to income basis (ie. 30-40% of household total gross income, subject to minimum rent based on # of people).
- Minimum rent (for \$32,000 income) is \$800/unit



Community Development and Resident Support Department (CDRS)

Director of Community Development and Resident Support

- Oversees development and implementation of strategic priorities related to supporting ongoing wellbeing of Residents

Community Engagement Coordinator

- Inclusion of Resident voices / Resident Advisory
- Development and use of physical assets: Amenity spaces, Community Gardens, Service Provider In-services and education sessions
- Working with Community Groups, Service Providers and CRNs

Resident Support Specialist

- Information and Referral to Residents and Families
 - Cross department support – Resident and Employees
 - Liaising with community services and health authorities re. specific residents.
-
- **Academic research**
 - **Systemic advocacy**



Brightside Residents



Survey:

What Information do you already have?

Formal, Informal, Active, Passive

Work with others, especially on larger or more complex issues.

Report Back!



MY IDEAL COMMUNITY:

- How would you describe it?
- What values might your ideal community hold?
 - brief, pleasant interactions
 - welcoming feeling
 - opportunities for longer visits / interactions
 - safety / feelings of safety
 - accepting the differences of others = culture
 - religion
 - etc.
 - celebrations together / gathering for special

Re/Connect to Residents

Challenges:

Power imbalance, post covid social malaise, not all buildings have space. Capacity can be an issue in terms of staff and budget. We know from the surveys that more than 1/3 not interested in getting to know their neighbour better.

Assets:

Resident Champions (find & develop), Information about needs (formal and informal survey responses), many buildings have ample amenity space and/or community gardens. **Resident Advisory Connections with networks, community organizations and universities.**

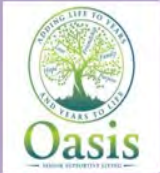


Mount Pleasant
Neighbourhood House

QUEST food exchange

reduce hunger with dignity, build community, boost sustainability

NEXGEN HEARING



HEY NEIGHBOUR!
Collective



wellnesspharmacy
NAZ'S PHARMACY



United Way
Lower Mainland

SFU SIMON FRASER
UNIVERSITY



Connect to Community

Actively seek relationship and partnerships

Know your needs, gaps and interests

Be open AND strategic

Be clear on the exchange



**Helping neighbours make
friendly, lively places.**

JENNIFER CONROY | MANAGER OF PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES
PROGRAMS@WESN.CA | WESN.CA/CLOSE-TO-HOME





- activities & services
- 3 sites, 100 activities
- age 60-90 <women
- Farsi, Cantonese
- mixed income, mobility, wellness
- new EDI plan, out-trips, cultural events
- **activate connection**





- 3 years 4 buildings
- varying types & starts
- shared spaces
- enthusiastic residents willing to lead
- support of building management
- **consistent help and encouragement**



the SURFCREST 55+ SOCIAL CLUB join us!

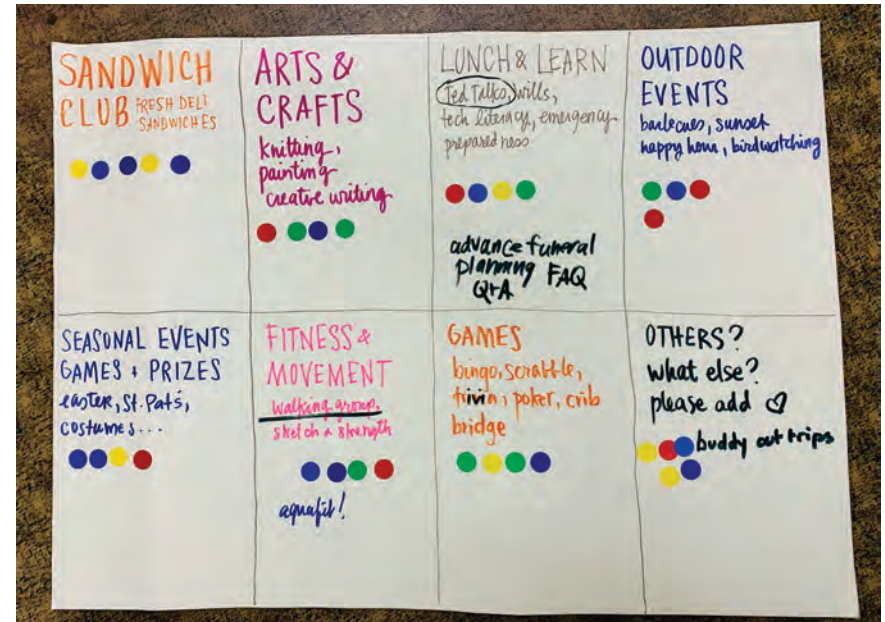
1 PM IN THE LOBBY
TUESDAY APRIL 12



Join residents Dianne, Sheila, & Brenda, with Jennifer (West End Seniors Network). You are invited to visit and share your activity ideas for Spring/Summer 2022.

How do you start?

- relaxed, fun ways to spark their ideas
- Lunch & Listen
- Lobby Intercept
 - friendly meeting
 - prizes & visuals
 - gathers interests
- build rapport & trust



the
**TUESDAY
SANDWICH
CLUB**
join us!





And then what?

- talk through plans
- start a contact list
- be in touch regularly
- help promote events
- buy snacks, supplies
- gather more people
- **document & report**





What if nobody joins?

- **slow build = normal**
- **3 people is enough**
- **this isn't for a grade**
- **imagine next season**
- **invite them to things**
- **encourage self-care**
- **repeat, refine, share**





It can go badly!

- **too demanding ... forms, teams, commitments**
- **too complicated ... out-trip w pre-pay minimum**
- **too many cooks ... big personalities & opinions**
- **the shoulds ... your supervisor's long list**
- **too directive ... with them, not for them**
- **let them lead ... what they want to do and share**

Helping neighbours make friendly, lively places.

PROUD MEMBER OF THE HEY NEIGHBOUR COLLECTIVE
FUNDED BY THE CMHC NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY



Supporting community-building with how-to's
and resources. We can help you make it happen.

JENNIFER CONROY | MANAGER OF PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES
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