



Neighbours Helping Neighbours

As you walk into Co:Here, you're greeted with the chatter of friendly neighbours, a large open space with communal tables, a seating area by a warm fireplace, and a small library.

Believing that loneliness is a universal human condition, Salisbury Community Society aims to reduce the experience of social isolation in housing. Salisbury has been providing housing in the Grandview-Woodland neighborhood for over 25 years, and its most recent building, Co:Here, just celebrated its five-year anniversary.

"We're co-creating 'brave housing' here. Housing where people feel safe enough to be known, to belong and feel at home," says Jeanette Moss, Team Lead, Director of Strategy & Development, Salisbury Community Society.

Streetohome supported the Co:Here model, partnering with Co:Here Foundation and Salisbury Community Society in their vision to create a community that fosters tenant-led mutual support among a diverse group of people; a sense of belonging, community, friendship; and a shared stewardship of the building.

The model is innovative not only in its use of land, but also because it facilitates mutual support among neighbours in affordable housing, rather than requiring publicly funded wrap-around support services.

While everyone can benefit from a caring community, some will need more support than the model can reasonably provide, says Jeanette.

"Co:Here is very much a typical apartment building but with a prying landlord. We're a bit of a nosy operator – we want to know how you're doing and give you some support if needed, but we're not supportive housing. It's a unique bunch that find themselves at Co:Here, and it's important for both staff and tenants to realize it won't be the best fit for everyone," explains Jeanette.

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Described as ‘shared living,’ Co:Here facilitates connections between operator and tenant, as well as between neighbours. It’s not only a home, but an opportunity to belong to a community. The most important role isn’t that of the operator, but the friendship and care of neighbours – when people do childcare for one another, or someone tutors another resident, or celebrating birthdays together, she says.

“We talk a lot about ‘warming our welcome.’ How do we not only unlock the door, but really usher in that sense of warmth and hospitality? And it’s as simple as empowering staff to look up from their computer, and just be present. Asking someone to come along for an errand or to join them while they clean out a cupboard or make some tea, to try and nurture a real sense of openness,” says Jeanette.

“We have this role of setting up the environment so people can connect, and then stepping away and giving them access, giving them room keys, giving them booking systems, giving them the empowerment to use the space as they want.”

Best Practices and Learnings

Tenant selection is probably the most important work staff, alongside current residents, do, Jeanette explains. When there’s a vacancy, staff identify potential candidates from the wait pool, and then work collaboratively with community members to discern who a suitable tenant might be.

“The goal is to be sensitive to the experience of those who call Co:Here home, and help them recognise that their voice is heard and encourage them to feel invested in their new neighbour.”

Another best practice – simple documentation. Co:Here has a community handbook, which goes through an orientation to the community and its values, and what the expectations are from community members. When there’s a new procedure or policy, they get as many people as they can to engage and offer feedback. Even staff are evaluated yearly by tenants, along with other staff members and the board.

Two tenants from each floor and a staff member gather on a monthly basis to provide community members with the tools to be good neighbours. Called the Community Builders Group, they play an important role in providing the relational foundation for setting community norms and responding to conflicts. If there are festering issues, or if training is needed, it comes to this group.

“With the pandemic, it’s been very heartening to see what Co:Here is about – the desire to build community with people who are different from themselves and help one another. This really came into action during COVID, when staff weren’t onsite. There were challenges, but neighbours were taking care of and supporting each other, very informally, organically, and even unknowingly,” says Jeanette.

“Our success is in these very small, humble signs. People who wouldn’t have had an opportunity to connect before, are now connecting and have found a home with community.”

About Co:Here Housing



Co:Here Housing is mixed-income housing located on the former Grandview Church parking lot. Designed for community and connection, Co:Here features 26 self-contained units, an open main floor with shared kitchen, seating and meditation room, as well as community gardens. 60% of the tenants are low income and come from insecure housing situations, and 40% are middle/higher income earners. The mix of tenants which include young families, immigrants, seniors, students and professionals all support one another to thrive in this unique and diverse community.



An Opportunity for Shared Living

When Co:Here Housing first started, not everyone was sure the model, featuring mixed incomes and mutual support by tenants rather than wraparound services, would work.

“I was at a meeting a few years ago, where an executive from BC Housing was at Co:Here, and he said, ‘You’ve all proved me wrong. I now believe that this model can work well,’” recounts Tim Dickau, Director, CityGate Vancouver.

Co:Here incorporates a shared living concept where the architecture of the building

itself helps to foster a sense of belonging and community among tenants. With shared facilities on the main floor, and independent units opening into a common living room on each floor, tenants are able to get to know one another easily. You can often find them chatting away, cooking and having dinners together, or watching over each other’s children.

Co:Here got its start when Grandview Baptist Church decided to use their parking lot to build affordable housing for diverse populations.

“The church purchased a house beside our parking lot, with the intention of establishing a drop-in center. We couldn’t use it for that purpose, and it launched us into a visioning process as a community about what we could do with that land,” explains Tim.

After a lot of twists and turns, Co:Here Foundation was created to oversee the development of the Co:Here Housing project.

“We arrived at a vision to help other churches and faith communities with underutilized land think about how they could use these assets to develop affordable housing or another community use in their neighborhoods,” explains Tim. Co:Here Foundation and CityGate Vancouver are trying to nurture that vision not only with faith communities, but also non-profits with buildings or land that could be used for a broader purpose.

“People have been living in insecure housing for decades, and now at Co:Here, they can



Co:Here Housing

finally relax and don't need to be worried about their housing security. They can find a sense of belonging in the building, where they step into their little living room space just outside their suite to chat with somebody who's also stepped out. It's been a real gift knowing that Co:Here is fostering a sense of belonging and connection among tenants and we hope others will be inspired to do the same."

Tim's own family has welcomed people into their own home for two decades. "We've lived with 37 people over the last 20 years, and there are many who find it's a good fit to share their home with others," says Tim. "There are so many larger houses where only a single person is living, and there are two or three unused bedrooms."

He says that while Vancouver has an affordable housing problem, there's also an opportunity with so many empty bedrooms.

Shared housing, or as Tim likes to call it, shared living, can benefit many, including older adults, students, newcomers, young workers, and those on a

fixed income, or experiencing social isolation.

The concept not only addresses affordability challenges, but also challenges around loneliness and isolation, says Tim. It's an avenue that has been underexplored here in Vancouver.

"Shared living is a way of helping people out of isolation into more of a shared, communal life, where they can feel like they belong and are an engaged member of the community. What's not to explore?"

A Message from the President & CEO

John McLernon, Streetohome Board Chair, is the first to applaud innovation and efficiency. He's been a fan of Co:Here Housing since its start, recognizing the innovative design for providing communal spaces that promote opportunities of mutual support and a sense of community to flourish among the diverse residents.

"We can't keep doing what we're doing if we truly wish to create a marked impact on homelessness," says John. "We need to use the knowledge we've gained, and be creative in what we build and how we support people. Ask yourself what you have readily available that hasn't been tapped."

That's what Grandview Calvary Baptist Church and

Salsbury Community Society asked themselves. They had a community with a willingness to share their lives with others and support those in need, and an underutilized land asset. And so, Co:Here Housing was conceived.

We hope you enjoyed reading about this innovative model embracing neighbourly mutual support instead of publicly-funded wraparound services to help their diverse community thrive; and Tim's thoughtful efforts to build on Co:Here's work to ensure shared living becomes an option in communities across Canada.



Rob Turnbull, Ph.D., CHE
President & CEO

about us

Streetohome is changing lives and building better futures by working with the private sector to broker and leverage new funding, innovative ideas, and opportunities for collaboration with public and nonprofit sectors to implement sustainable solutions to homelessness in Vancouver. Streetohome strives to address gaps in services to meet the housing; employment & volunteering; education, skills & training; health & wellness; legal & advocacy; and community & belonging needs of vulnerable individuals with lived experience of, or at-risk for, homelessness.

**Homelessness is a community challenge.
Join us and become a part of the solution.**

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