

Our Place, Our Space: Resident Stories and Place Priorities

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March 7, 2016

As the population ages, affordable housing in Metro Vancouver is needed to support low income, vulnerable seniors. Affordable housing that meets the needs of seniors is crucial. Solutions and strategies must involve tenants in their design, maintenance and sustainability. To illustrate we present findings from a community-based participatory study with older adults living in affordable housing.

The research explored housing transitions of older adults who were relocated from a 2-storey low rental housing accommodation, Kiwanis Court, in the City of Richmond, into, two 16-storey Kiwanis Tower Condos, on the same land. The original building had become run down with significant water damage, which initiated the redevelopment process. Through guaranteed affordable homes in the new building, tenants of the original building were required to relocate for three years while the new building was being constructed.

To learn from these experiences, 25 interviews and 16 photo-

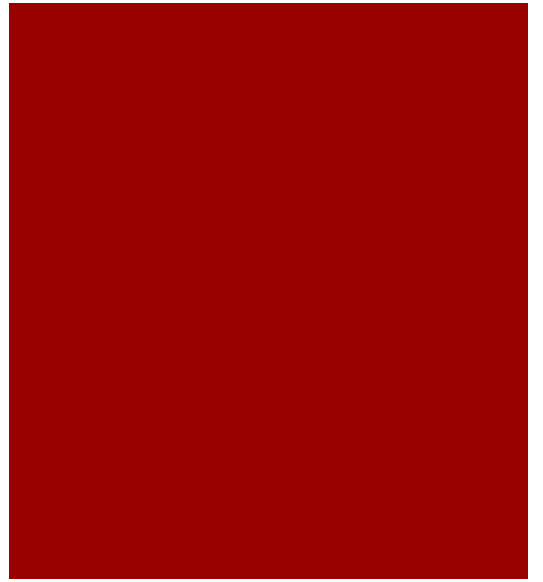
What did we learn from tenants about sense of place?

Making 'Sense' of places

Aging in place is the “ability to live in one’s own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably regardless of age, income, or ability level.” (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2013)









4

Ability to maintain control over their lives

Having choice and control was voiced as an important aspect of home because for the tenants a space was only a place of dwelling if they could not call it “my home.” This meant having the freedom and ability to have it “set up the way I wanted it” and keeping it “nice and clean because I am able to look after it to make it homey and comfortable.”

i) Keeping one’s homes the way they want

For some, freedom in the home meant having the autonomy and ability to keep their home the way they wanted. This gave tenants a sense of ownership, which distinguished between “a home” and “my home.”

“What makes it homey is because I got the place set up the way that I want it. I didn't have to ask anyone how to do it.”

“The next four months, I'll be going around looking at the things, and searching for cheaper and new stuff, good stuff, that is comfortable for me. My new sofa! I'm looking forward to having this. I'm looking forward to moving in with my new things with me. My new furniture.”

ii) Providing new living accommodations


“I'm going to be the first person to move in to a brand new suite, which is nice.” Moving into a brand new apartment, as many emphasized, was “a privilege.” Despite having limited income, transitioning into a new place provided a special occasion for tenants to get new furniture despite challenges in finding affordable, quality items.

Many of the seniors also reported that the idea of moving into a new place made them see themselves differently. It helped elevate their social status, especially in an area like Vancouver’s Lower Mainland where housing costs are extremely high. Several individuals described some of the poor living conditions where they had previously lived; places with rodents, bedbugs and bad neighbours. It was evident that limited financial situations prevented tenants from living in comfortable and safe environments. The opportunity to move into a new home made many seniors feel that they “weren't poor.”



Challenges tenants faced

Overall, key challenges were cost-related and encompassed fulfilling basic needs, such as affordable rent, transportation, and food.



"We are always happy when we are able to spend less money. It would be easier to adjust the convenience and comfort of the environment if we ignored the cost, but this is the society we live in. The more you pay, the more enjoyable your living environment."

Many of the tenants indicated that living in Kiwanis Towers enabled them to live within their means. All of the residents

Human resources to coordinate accessible & available opportunities

The design and implementation of age friendly activities for seniors requires time, appropriate space, and organization. One of the main challenges is accessing human resources to organize and implement programs that *“involve our hands and minds.”*

4

Time & effort investment needed to establish social networks

The redevelopment process meant that tenants needed to move twice—once from Kiwanis Court and once into Kiwanis Towers. Transient dwellings impinge older peoples’ ability to firmly adjust and re-establish themselves in a new community. According to some seniors, this has had an impact on their ability to establish new social networks and

Acknowledgements

This project would not be possible without funding from the Vancouver Foundation. We