

How are housing and human connection inter-related?

Hypothetically, if one wished to build a community from scratch, they would need to begin with humans, and a place for those humans to live. It follows that, as two of the primary aspects on which an entire community rests, human relationships and housing are fundamentally inter-dependent. Naturally, connections are formed within a household, and wider connections are developed through neighbourhood networks. In the same way, housing development projects come out of necessity to hold, or to better hold, an established physical community; but these would remain empty without human relationships that fill them. So, as we consider the human need for housing, we must also consider the human need for human connection.

An effort to build community often begins with those physically easiest to reach: our neighbours. Neighbours are the ones we go to for a cup of sugar or to watch our plants when we go away. We rely on them for the kind of immediate support that only closeness can offer. Though close connections do not rely as much on physical proximity, with today's online communications tools and social media, despite those relationships some barriers may remain. Whereas online relationships can connect you with anyone in your community or even around the world, because neighbours relate to your immediate geographic, and often sociocultural contexts, they can become an extension of your family. Those direct human connections, which range from passing conversations and quick favours, to the formation of deep friendships that could stand in for family, are supported through the shared proximity of living arrangements. Dependable housing drives the ability for us to connect. Regardless of where we live or the type of housing, we are able to find common ground in our living arrangements. This could be new owners learning maintenance responsibilities or established neighbourhoods collaborating on community projects.

The connection between housing and relationships is an important system and not left to chance. City planners, architects, and designers carefully conceptualize traffic flow, building heights, green spaces, and every other detail in a residential area in order to achieve efficient and pleasing housing design. As members of a community, we want to navigate neighborhoods and housing that provide natural light and access to nature, for physical and mental health, intuitive pathways and transportation systems, for safety, and common space, for community building. After living in a neighbourhood for any amount of time, we find our preferred spots to make and share memories. We build relationships with businesses such as the 'local pizza place' where the connection is that we live close by, enough of a factor to claim ownership over our places. These investments are what make the difference between basic housing and a home that gives a secure launching place from which to explore and welcome others to intersect in our daily lives.

If housing contributes so much to human connection, one might wonder about the impact of homelessness on the human psyche. While there are some of us comfortable enough to offer a coffee or meal to an unhoused person, or even to strike up conversation, many of us shy away from such interactions. When we are privileged to have secure housing, it is unthinkable that everyone does not share that entitlement and it can be hard to understand. Shelters and temporary housing such as tent cities are more than just shelter. They can provide an opportunity for human connection that we all need. In groups we find security, can share food and possessions and amplify voices to advocate for needs, so housing even in unstable fashion still supports human relationships. Another way to look at this question is to consider that broken human relationships can have an impact on housing. For example mental illness, addiction, chronic unemployment can fuel behaviours that cause relationships to fail and can lead to broken living arrangements and precarious housing. Because of this, homelessness is an example of this interrelationship because it demonstrates a lack of each (housing and human connection) and how they have a proportional

effect on one another. This underlines that the interconnection between housing and relationships goes both ways.

To combat some of these challenges, innovations in the housing market have become more popular. Young adults are willing to enter into long-term rental agreements and even purchase homes as groups of roommates. This spreads the financial burden while providing the security of home and equity-building behaviour. In some urban settings, laneway or granny suites are being permitted by municipalities to allow families to expand their homes either as rental property or as an option for older adults to stay close to home support in a safe living arrangement.

In an economic climate such as our current one many question whether they will find housing security or see a future in home-ownership. It is worth considering the direct and indirect effects of housing shortages on our relationships with each other. Notably, examinations of the housing crisis across Canada tend to focus on those direct impacts. Things like affordable shelter, rental capacity, municipalities' reliance on property taxes, etc. We hear less often, however, about the indirect consequences on our relationships: a longer commute to workplaces can impact building work-social friendships; living at increased distances from family can reduce emotional and financial support, and the mental strain caused by worry about the future can impact overall well-being.

Humans are not meant to survive alone: as a species we are dependent on our relationships with each other. And as people, we also need to protect our bodies from the environment which can be unsafe, harsh or detrimental to life. Future generations may trend away from viewing home ownership as a symbolic measure of 'reaching adulthood,' but we almost universally will maintain housing as a symbol of pride in ourselves, our livelihoods, and especially, our communities. There

is a clear and undeniable relationship between human connection and housing: the choices we make about how we build and maintain relationships, and the buildings that serve as containers to help them grow.