CREATING COMMUNITY WHERE WE LIVE

A Good Practices Guide

Foreword

There is snow predicted in tonight's forecast as this forward is being written. The sun sets late in the afternoon, and temperatures are dropping as we head into another winter season. Most of us will bundle up and head to our warm homes when the day ends. But 1609 Edmontonians aren't as lucky. They are the people in our city who are experiencing homelessness (Homeward Trust, 2019).

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The City of Edmonton, our many social serving organizations and agencies, and Edmontonians, are committed to ending homelessness. Since 2009 Homeward Trust has tracked more than 9500 Edmontonians who have been housed through Housing First and other associated programs. Despite this success, some in our city still face life challenges that lead to losing their housing, and becoming citizens without a safe, affordable place to call home. Given the many factors that contribute to housing insecurity - cycles of poverty, trauma, addictions and mental illness, job loss, loneliness, and social isolation – it can be extremely challenging to find ways to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place.

The researchers and partners who participated in Creating Communities Where We Live wanted to take on this challenge, but from a different perspective: one that asks what's going *right* when a person is, and remains, stably housed and doing well.

We know there are many affordable housing providers and market housing landlords who are kind, compassionate, and meet people where they are at. There are many tenants who look after their neighbours and engage in supportive relationships which help to create a sense of belonging and contribute to housing security and stability. There is now, however, not much literature or evidence on the impact these strengths-based practices of creating community and wellbeing can have on people's housing experience.

Creating Communities Where We Live – A Good Practices Guide is a locally-driven, community-based research project which seeks to begin a robust conversation in Edmonton, and abroad, about our collective role in community care. Our goal is to add this knowledge and practice to the many successful and emerging tools which are employed in the housing sector which support people to achieve a safe, secure, and affordable housing experience.

Acknowledgements

The development of this guide is a joint effort between e4c and the University of Alberta (UAlberta) Community Service-Learning (CSL) program. As the lead community partner, e4c facilitated the connection between CSL students and community partners to obtain primary research for this guide. The community partners include Capital Region Housing, e4c, Jasper Place Wellness, and Right at Home Housing Society.

David Prodan, e4c Director of Housing & Mental Health Services, provided expertise on community engagement. Dr. David Peacock, Director of CSL at UAlberta, North Campus, led the CSL 350 class (Intro to Community Based Research) and provided students with the tools to conduct research. Together, Mr. Prodan and Dr. Peacock put forth the foundational question for this project:

"What creates community and wellbeing in affordable housing?"

Thank you to the researchers, housing staff and residents who participated in and conducted the research for this report. It is because of your intellectual and emotional labour that these local narratives and practices can be highlighted and recognized.

Many thanks to Alexandra Parker, David Prodan and Shauna Young, who wrote this Good Practices Guide based on the wealth of research gathered in winter 2019.

And special thanks to David Berger, who helped to inspire the premise for this research.

Section 1: Creating Community Where We Live – A Good Practices Guide

The 10 good practices in this guide describe structures, roles, and relationships which promote community and wellbeing for tenants who live in affordable housing. The practices are informed, in part, by research into tenant and staff experiences at affordable housing complexes run by four Edmonton housing providers and relate specifically to these four providers' contexts. (See pages 16 – 30 for more information on the specific housing providers). It is important to recognize each affordable housing context is unique, and not all of this guide's 10 good practices will work in every setting.

What Are Good Practices?
Good practices are methods found through research and experience which consistently lead to a desired goal. Using good practices, means that one is exercising all the available knowledge and technology to achieve that goal (TechTarget, 2019).

Using This Guide
The 10 good practices are an information source for affordable housing policy makers, housing providers, and employees; a starting point to develop practical approaches for serving communities and for empowering people to achieve their housing goals.

Practices that facilitate healthy relationships can help tenants establish their own version of community and wellbeing, and stronger connections between everyone involved in the tenant's housing experience. This guide's 10 practices suggest a deeper understanding of the community-building experience in affordable housing. Positive outcomes from the practices include increased connection to neighbours and the community, increased feelings of safety, increased tenant stability, and financial security for tenants. These in turn can help tenants to build their human, social, physical and financial assets, which are the resources every person needs in order to be resilient in the face of life challenges (Department For International Development, 1999).

These 10 locally demonstrated good practices help to expand a growing body of research in community development and tenant supports in rental housing. Other housing providers will have their own practices that build wellbeing and community, yet these are often undercurrents which are not widely discussed or known within the housing sector. This guide seeks to share these types of knowledge and practices within the sector with all housing providers.

Practice #1 - Provide a Flexible Housing Model

Affordable housing models found in this study include market rent, near market rent, and rent-geared-to-income. For example, Canora Place offers near market rent, and Parkdale ONE offers market rent, near-market rent, and rent-geared-to-income in the same building (Asefaw et al., 2019; Lemma et al., 2019). Rent-geared-to-income allows tenants to pay exactly 30% of their income towards their rent; in near-market rent, tenants pay rent that is 80-90% of the market rate; lastly, market rent is when tenants pay the full market rate without subsidy (Lemma et al., 2019, p.8). The researchers found that incorporating all three models into a housing complex, also known as mixed-income housing, contributes to tenant stability and overall social cohesion (Lemma et al., 2019, p.8). Mixed-income housing provides affordable rent on units based on low-income measures for tenants who qualify, but will adjust rents as a tenant's income level changes. As a result, tenants will not be asked to leave if their income stops for a period of time, or if their income increases.

iStock.com/Lisa Marie, 2019

The mixed-income model has been observed to challenge the perception that people who live in affordable housing have no income or no income mobility, and to accommodate income changes to ensure tenants can maintain stable housing

When asking one senior tenant about her favorite part of living in Parkdale ONE, she replied, "the rent." This tenant has not had a rent increase in four years due to her pension, commenting *"It takes the stress off and you don't need to worry about being able to afford something."* (Tenant, personal communication, 2019). From this example, financial security is presented as a core factor in determining one's wellbeing. Parkdale ONE and its flexible rent model contribute to this sense of financial security by incorporating rent-geared-to-income as well as near market and market rent categories.

Like the above tenant, whose rent is not affected by market forces due to her pension, other tenants can be subject to a similar payment system if they are paying rent-geared-to-income (tenant pays 30% of income). Conversely, if a tenant's income did increase, they would not be evicted from their home but moved into a near market or market rent category.

This model, one staff member states, *"...really helps when keeping people [tenants] here long-term."* (Staff, personal communication, 2019). As a result, the model reduces incidents of eviction and there are more stable tenants in the building (Lemma et al., 2019).

Practice #2 - Provide Residents with Employment Opportunities

The researchers found that hiring from within can benefit the housing provider as well as its tenants (Elkadry et al., 2019, p.18). The provider saves money and time in the recruitment process, and the tenants have the opportunity to receive a steady income and feel valued in their building community. (Elkadry et al., 2019, p.18). Employment opportunities are granted based on interests, needs, and potential contribution (Elkadry et al., 2019 p.18). The researchers found that other residents accept and trust staff who are tenants:

> *"I get along with [Staff], the caretaker over there. He helps me out. I always phone him and ask him some things I don't know about a project, then I'll ask him and he helps me because he pretty well knows lots. [chuckles]. So, it's good. It's good to know someone. Everything is good. I knew [Staff] for 8 years too so yeah, we pretty well moved in together at the same time, so we got to know each other. It was good"* (Tenant, personal communication, 2019) .

Additionally, some housing providers have developed social enterprises, or relationships with businesses in the community, to support entry level employment opportunities for tenants outside of their residences.

While these opportunities are not directly tied to these residents' homes, the ability for housing providers to broker meaningful employment for their tenants is an indicator that landlords have great capacity to support their tenants to achieve a sustainable livelihood. For example, the landlord at Canora Place shared with researchers about an employment opportunity facilitated for a tenant:

> *"We had a gentleman that started off on assistance and now works for one of our social enterprises. He works full time there and now pays all his own rent"* (Landlord, personal communication, 2019).

Practice #3 – Maintain a Quality and Secure Housing Environment

When cleaning and maintenance services are readily available, tenants feel safe and proud of their homes (Asefaw et al., 2019). Research reflected tenants feel comfortable and secure in their homes when maintenance concerns are addressed quickly after communicating these with staff.

For some tenants, building security is also a factor in feeling safe, and part of a tight knit community. Being able to manage visitors to the complex, and having a sense of ownership for their residence, results from knowing the housing provider has measures in place to create a sense of protection. For example, one tenant at e4c Affordable Housing wishes all tenants would "*stick up for [their] apartment,*" and take pride in promoting the cleanliness and security of their home (Kuhn et al., 2019). This tenant only buzzes in guests that she knows and has refused many people entrance *"for [her] own safety as well as everyone else's"* (Tenant, personal communication, 2019).

At Canora Place the landlord and staff uphold guest management rules in order to *"control the environment and not the people"* (Staff, personal communication, 2019). Guests are not allowed in the building after 11 pm or before 8 am without permission from the staff. The staff told researchers "*We like to get to know everyone... here because we are here every day... [We like] to get the tenants to introduce their guests and get to know them.*" (Staff, personal communication, 2019). Canora Place is equipped with surveillance, so staff know if any of the guest management rules are being broken.

Canora Place, courtesy of Grandin Media, 2010

Tenants will receive notice if the rules are broken and guests are banned when they come in without permission. The landlord will lift a guest ban if the tenant and that guest organize a meeting with him, noting that "*usually visitors are a lot better at following the rules if you get to know them and they build a relationship with you.*"

Practice #4 - Address Issues through Strong, Flexible Collaboration

The researchers found tenant issues could be transformed into positive outcomes if collaboration was used. For example, when tenants expressed concern with outsiders coming into the building, a meeting was organized with staff and tenants at McCauley Apartments to come up with a solution (Kuhn et al., 2019). As a result of the meeting, tenants felt their voices were valued and their best interests a priority. Ripple effects of this meeting were relationship building between staff and tenants, and tenants knowing and exercising their rights to safety and security. Staff recognized community was present when tenants suggested organizing the meeting and staff helped facilitate the process.

McCauley Apartments Community Clean Up, Shannon Donogh, 2019

Practice #5 - Support Staff Connection to Community and Social Services

While housing providers are not responsible to ensure their tenants are connected to support services which play an important role in a tenant's housing stability, being a liaison with such services can increase the respect and connection between staff and tenants, and can moderate social issues to be more manageable for all persons living and working in the building (Elkadry et al., 2019, p.11). Partnerships with other service providers were cited by staff as a way to:

- offer diverse and personalized support to tenants,
- secure a wide selection of available resources, and
- ensure wraparound supports are available for tenants when required.

When staff are encouraged to become connected with community and social supports, there is evident longer-term stable tenancy for people who struggle with various challenges such as mental illness or addictions, interpersonal conflicts, involvement with the justice system, physical disability, and other life challenges. For example, tenants from Rotary Millennium Place, operated by Right at Home Housing Society, can contact staff at any time, 24 hours a day.

The researchers spoke with staff who are onsite daily, and who will reach out to external organizations in order to connect tenants with support. One staff member

explained to researchers that he does not have a social work background or expertise in addictions counseling or mental health. Instead, he will reach out to expert services such as Mobile Mental Health Crisis Intervention to meet tenant needs to access mental health services.

In one instance, when a tenant had lost her child to illness, the tenant let some of her housing responsibilities go and stopped paying rent. This tenant was not evicted, but staff highly recommended she go to a counseling service which specialized in helping people who have experienced grief and loss. Eventually she chose to discontinue attending counseling and began to pay her rent again (Elkadry et al., 2019, p.11). In this circumstance, the tenant's personal situation was genuinely accounted for before staff made any permanent decisions, and the staff member utilized his knowledge of community resources to provide support for the tenant.

Staff at Rotary Millennium Place embrace their roles as leaders and use a caring approach to build trusting relationships with the tenants (Elkadry et al., 2019; Kuhn et al., 2019). They are able to communicate what they need from tenants while remaining approachable so tenants can offer their input and perspectives. Staff understand tenants who live in affordable housing may experience poverty in different ways. Staff are able to conduct themselves in a way that is sensitive to trauma and hardships. Staff model a safe and caring environment through body language, meaningful dialogue and tone of voice.

Practice #6 – Employ Staff for Community Engagement

Housing providers who participated in this study indicated staff with community engagement experience are able to provide positive social and community supports to residents (Elkadry et al., 2019; Kuhn et al., 2019). They help develop programs, involving residents in the community based on known needs and interests, while also supporting the tenants' strategies and suggestions for community building (Community Development Program Manager, personal communication 2019).

The researchers asked the Community Development Manager at McCauley Apartments when there was a strong sense of community apparent between the tenants. The manager explained tenants enjoy celebrating seasonal holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving in the communal office room, which is a hub for staff and tenants to socialize. Over the past two years, McCauley Apartments celebrated Ukrainian Christmas due to residents with Ukrainian heritage requesting the event.

The Community Development Program Manager told researchers these events *"are all generated from the community so people will actually come up to staff and say they want a potluck and celebration. And then we [staff] just help grease the wheels. So, we [staff] help make posters and maybe a sign-up schedule for food, and we will always host it here too"* (Community Development Program Manager, personal communication, 2019).

Practice #7 - Adopt a Pet-Friendly Policy

During the interview process, where loneliness and social isolation were noted as prominent concerns in affordable housing (Kuhn et al., 2019), the researchers learned some tenants consider pet ownership as contributing to their wellbeing and sense of community (Lemma et al., 2019, p.3-4). Tenants with pets often make friends with other pet owners, and community members feel inspired to engage with tenants when they are walking their dogs. Apart from social benefits, pets involve tenants in a care-giving routine. Practices such as feeding, grooming, and walking enhance the owner's sense of purpose while being grounded in principles of skill building and kindness (Lemma et al., 2019, p.3-4).

iStock.com/Chalabala, 2019

For example, a group of tenants in the Parkdale ONE building coordinate their dog walking schedules so they can all participate in the activity together. One tenant in the walking group told researchers, describing the community members who will approach her, "When you are out walking your dog, people talk to you that normally wouldn't" (Tenant, personal communication, 2019). In this instance, pets bring tenants in the building together, facilitating interactions between tenants and the larger community, and involving their owners in healthy fitness routines (Lemma et al., 2019, p.3-4).

Practice #8 - Encourage Tenant-Led Activities

Activities which are tenant-led enable natural leaders to give back to their neighbors and communities. (Community Development Program Manager, personal communication, 2019). This approach is effective in increasing event turnouts due to the close relationships a tenant might already have with other residents.

Tenants who actively organize with each other create an environment of shared purpose and ownership. Residents who have lived in the community for many years and are familiar with the events and activities that have taken place before are able to make new tenants feel welcome. Activities organized by tenants range from social, such as barbecues, potlucks, or games, to advocacy, such as tenant meetings to discuss important issues around their buildings.

One tenant at McCauley Apartments hosts Wellness Wednesday each week. This tenant first attended the program, but then began to give suggestions to staff about new activities and themes. Because of her expressed interest, this tenant began coordinating the activity each week and promoting it to the other residents. The Community Development Program Manager told researchers *"for neighbouring to begin we need to have a few leaders like [Tenant]. If there was someone like [Tenant] in every apartment building then we would not need so many staff"* (personal communication, 2019).

Community Garden outside McCauley Apartments, Shannon Donogh, 2019

Practice #9 - Encourage the Use of Communal Spaces

Shared spaces give tenants opportunities to meet their neighbors and form relationships with staff. (Community Development Program Manager, personal communication, 2019) They can be a hub for recreational activities or for knowledge sharing, especially for new tenants who might not be familiar with the neighborhood or who do not have friends or family nearby.

Tenants from complexes with community rooms shared with the researchers that they enjoy using the room to bond with other tenants while playing games, doing crafts, or meeting with guests (Kuhn et al., 2019). In complexes that do not have shared space, other community resources can be utilized. For example, a local church and wellness centre with a communal kitchen and weekly programming are promoted by one housing provider's staff (Asefaw et al., 2019). Communal spaces can help fulfil a tenant's need for social engagement and also help connect them to the larger community.

Practice #10 – Offer Recreational and Wellness Activities

Activities and events are a useful tool to engage people in a variety of settings and can eliminate barriers of unfamiliarity between tenants and staff (Lemma et al., 2019, p.5). In all five affordable housing complexes, researchers identified at least one tenant who appreciated these organized events or recommended more of them.

Capital Region Housing is one housing provider that hosts events at many of their Edmonton properties. For example, they collaborate with the Edmonton Public Library to host a weekly mobile library. This event connects tenants to community resources and creates an opportunity for tenants to meet one another (Lemma et al., 2019, p.6).

Informal activities are beneficial to tenants through fostering exploration and discovery. e4c runs Wellness Wednesdays, a weekly drop in group that is discussion-based or

Wellness Network, Alberta Health Services, 2019

focuses on skill building (Kuhn et al., 2019). Tenants influence the weekly topic and will sometimes lead the activity. Although less structured, this approach successfully reflected the tenants' immediate interests.

Researchers found the following strategies increased event participation:

- Providing clear notice and communication when events are happening. This can be done through word of mouth or notice boards. Some tenants found the mention of an event might be present in one place and not highly visible, therefore, communicating in multiple forms is most effective.
- Labelling accessible common space as a community room (Elkadry et al., 2019, p.20).
- Identifying "connector tenants" (Lemma et al., 2019, p.6): those who regularly inform and invite other tenants to events, and ensure neighbors are familiar with the upcoming schedule.
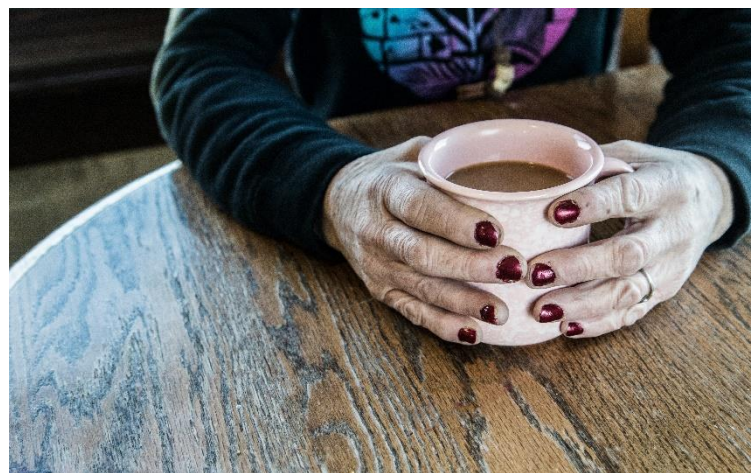
Section 2: Insights

A number of future considerations emerged from this study based on the researchers' observations and personal communications with tenants and staff. The researchers learned from the housing providers' staff:

- There is an overrepresentation of Indigenous people in affordable housing complexes (Asefaw et al., 2019).
- Many female tenants brought up safety in their interviews and used it as criteria to measure their housing experience (tenants, personal communications, 2019).
- The importance of buildings' infrastructures and the need to design for disability and the aging population (Community Development Manager, personal communication, 2019).

The researchers also learned that to create community and to achieve wellbeing, it takes more than putting a roof over someone's head. Community and wellbeing result from the relationships and security that tenants find in their homes (Elkadry et al., 2019), and in the collective efforts it takes to achieve these things. The quality of a building and the type of programming, if the landlord provides programs, also contribute to the kind of experience a tenant will have (Kuhn et al., 2019). The following insights expand on the complex and personal feedback received from participating tenants and staff.

Colonial Legacy of Indigenous Homelessness

A Place to Call Home: Edmonton's Plan to End Homelessness presents colonialism, intergenerational trauma, and residential schools as the source of high numbers of Indigenous homelessness (City of Edmonton, 2017). This study's researchers also observed a similar overrepresentation within the affordable housing complexes. At Canora Place, among individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness, 50% were Indigenous (Asefaw et al., 2019). At McCauley Apartments, where the majority of tenants have experienced mental illness, brain injury or physical disabilities, 33% were Indigenous (Kuhn et al., 2019). To address this issue, *A Place to Call Home* recommends a greater

Curtis Comeau Photography, 2017

response to Indigenous needs, and more partnerships with First Nations governments to identify Indigenous-led solutions (City of Edmonton, 2017).

Some efforts to create community and wellbeing do not adequately speak to this history of colonization and the concerns of Indigenous peoples. For instance, one participant spoke about what the community events represent for him in the building and remarked:

> "But I mean, we have a Christmas party here every year and I quit coming to them because the same thing reminds me of residential school – you gotta sing for your supper, right? Sing Christmas carols and then they'll feed you" (Tenant, personal communication, 2019).

This impactful account underscores the need to consider Indigenous perspectives when providing programs in the context of community. Staff can be more intentional in creating more culturally appropriate and inclusive practices, with Indigenous tenants positioned in key advisory roles.

Women in Affordable Housing

In *Canada's National Housing Strategy* women are considered one of the groups most in need of housing, based on the prevalence of domestic violence which affects both women and children (Government of Canada, 2017, p.5). For women who have experienced trauma, safety and security must be considered throughout every part of their housing experience. One tenant told the researchers they had chosen not to participate in building activities because the majority of the tenants in the complex were men, commenting *"Well, there's not very many ladies in this building. Period. Yeah, kind of intimidating sometimes"* (Tenant, personal communication, 2019). Promoting a gender-balance or gearing programs towards women, recognizes the lived experiences of women and encourages female participation (Community Development Manager, personal communication, 2019).

Expansion and Redevelopment

This study revealed that each housing provider was either engaged in expansion and redevelopment projects or planned to be so in the future. (Tenants and Staff, personal communications, 2019). Since some affordable housing properties date back to the early 20th century, there is a demand for repairs, retrofits, and integration of new, sustainable technologies into building designs. Researchers found tenants who lived in new building projects felt an increased sense of security and pride in their homes.

Building improvements for affordable housing are often based on funding cycles and periods of uneven growth. This is problematic if the same energy and care needs to be given to every property, old and new, to ensure every tenant's wellbeing.

Avoid a One-Size-Fits-All Approach to Community

Every housing experience is unique, and each housing complex has its own method of creating community. For example, the researchers found that while one complex wanted more events to establish community, another building did not (Elkadry et al., 2019; Lemma et al., 2019). Factors such as age, gender, disability, and overall health, including physical and mental health can determine the type of engagement and amount of engagement suitable for a tenant. Asking tenants "what community means to them?" or asking for input on activities they would like to participate in, are ways to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to community.

Designed for Accessibility

In one complex without an elevator, staff noted the barriers this causes for community building, because those with mobility issues will either have to move to a lower floor or leave the building altogether if they could no longer access their suite (Community Development Program Manager, personal communication, 2019). The researchers learned in the study that more vulnerable and older tenants preferred to be living on higher floors (Tenant, personal communication, 2019), away from the hustle and bustle of the lower floors and the entrance/exit way. Yet if there are not properly serviced elevators, this becomes a challenge.

Basic accessibility features such as wheelchair ramps, elevators, and widened doorways respond to the needs of the aging community and to everyone with mobility issues.
However, for many, more advanced technology is needed as well as on-site assisted living supports. *Canada's National Housing Strategy* acknowledges the demand for inclusive,
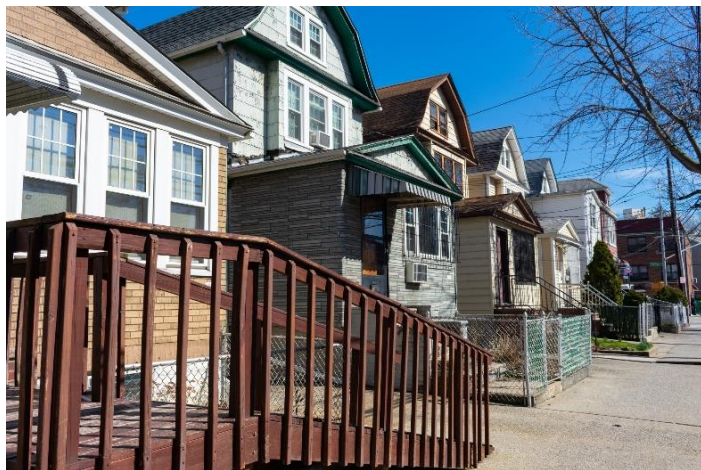
iStock.com/James Andrews, 2019

accessible design by promising at least 12,000 new affordable units created for seniors and at least 2,400 new affordable units created for people with developmental disabilities (Government of Canada, 2017, p.11).

Section 3: Next Steps

Canada's National Housing Strategy

In June of 2019, the National Housing Strategy Act received Royal assent and became an official law on July 9th, 2019 (Government of Canada, 2019). The National Housing Strategy Act declares housing a fundamental human right and requires that the federal government maintain a National Housing Strategy. This achievement results from years of dedicated efforts by housing advocates, people with lived experience, civil society organizations, and government. The Right to Housing movement is a reaction against the homelessness crisis, and the recent National Housing Strategy prioritizes vulnerable individuals who are most in need, including: women and children fleeing family violence; seniors; Indigenous peoples; people with disabilities; those dealing with mental health and addiction issues; veterans; and young adults .

Canada's National Housing Strategy plans to re-engage and invest in affordable housing across Canada. With a national fund, the government will examine existing rental housing and develop new, high-performing affordable housing integrated with supports and services. There is a target to create up to 60,000 new units of housing and repair up to 240,000 units of existing affordable and community housing.

Canada National Housing Strategy, 2019

The Strategy adopts a community-based approach which will aid in addressing the challenges and barriers faced by people living in community housing. Local organizations will be funded to assist people experiencing housing need, fostering increased local representation and participation in housing policy and housing project decision making. Through these partnerships, the learnings and insights that already exist within housing communities can be shared. Multiple partnerships are central to maximizing investments, ensuring coordination of efforts, and removing barriers to the development process.

Canada has fallen behind in the collection of housing data. As a result, the Strategy addresses the need for an evidence base, formed by government and non-government organizations, to create a complete set of data. Multi-stakeholder engagement to inform this data base will tap into the collective knowledge which can help overcome housing challenges. With access to information, housing policy can be developed in anticipation of changing housing needs, conditions and market forces.

Provincially and Locally

The Government of Alberta is focusing increasing attention on supports within affordable housing, including tenant support workers, which aim to increase wellbeing for individuals in affordable housing (Government of Alberta, 2017). At the local level in Edmonton, Shovel Ready, under the Edmonton Non-Profit Housing Provider Working Group, has a plan to build 5000 new affordable housing units (Edmonton Non-Profit Housing Provider Working Group, 2019). The plan aligns with both national and provincial affordable housing strategies by contributing to the count of new affordable housing units promised in the national and provincial strategies.

Together, at every level of government, there is a dedicated commitment to provide more affordable housing options to enrich tenants' wellbeing.

Section 4: Background

Methodology

The research for this guide was guided by a Community Based Research (CBR) approach. CBR is rooted in the principle that knowledge is found in the community and exchanged through trusting partnerships. Research informed by CBR relies on all partners contributing expertise and sharing in decision-making to ensure knowledge gained will benefit community members.

The pre-existing relationship between e4c and the UAlberta CSL class enabled the students to collect insightful primary data from housing providers, their staff, and their tenants. Five affordable housing complexes were chosen because the housing providers for each property have taken steps to enhance community and wellbeing for their tenants. The complexes are Canora Place, e4c Affordable Housing, McCauley Apartments, Rotary Millennium Place, and Parkdale ONE.

During the study, the students doing research conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with tenants and staff and carried out ethnographic observations to study interactions at the properties, and also reviewed academic literature related to the topic of community care.

The researchers used the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach. AI focuses on what's working best in each subject's environment, without dwelling on negative experiences. This approach can empower and uplift participants, as they reflect on past and existing strengths. (Elkadry et al., 2019, p.9) The researchers identified and presented community care good practices through poster presentations (Asefaw, Boulos, Roone, & Sahadevan, 2019; Kuhn, Gebregiorgis, Mogale, & Lewis, 2019) and two good practice guides (Elkadry, Kigunda, Hewer, & Votta, 2019; Lemma, Cooper, Bullale, & Cook, 2019).

Between the researchers and housing providers, staff and tenants, there emerged relationship of benefit to all. Researchers learned from the community, while housing providers, staff and tenants received the researchers' posters and Good Practices Guide.

Community Partners in Research

The research which supports the recommended good practices in this Guide would not have been possible without the support and involvement of four key non-profit affordable housing providers in Edmonton: e4c, Capital Region Housing, Right at Home Housing Society and Jasper Place Wellness. As the lead partner in this project, e4c worked to broker its relationships with the other three providers, to lay the groundwork and to set up logistics for the work of the researchers.

In the winter of 2019, these agencies came together to begin an informal community of practice around affordable housing in Edmonton, along with a few additional partners including ARLA (Alberta Residential Landlords Association), GEF Seniors Housing, YMCA of Northern Alberta and C5. This community of practice has been engaged to support research projects like this one, to collaborate on complex challenges in the affordable housing sector, and to foster greater collaboration and sharing of good practices among participating agencies.

Each of the four providers participating in the research has a different context for providing affordable housing to Edmontonians. Capital Region Housing is a large housing management body with thousands of units in operation, e4c and Right at Home Housing Society are mid-sized companies with a few dozen properties each, and Canora Place, operated by Jasper Place Wellness, is a single apartment complex. The scale and scope of operations for these providers may differ, but all four providers subscribe to the notion that with coordinated efforts and sharing of resources, housing providers can work together with tenants and their community supports to act as supportive landlords with clear interests in creating community and wellbeing for their tenants.

The following portraits describe both the scope and mandate of these community partners, and some narratives which dig deeper into the research. It is important to note that these providers are not the only ones in Edmonton which have made inroads to be supportive landlords, nor are their experiences and practices necessarily groundbreaking. Rather, the research for this project is hopefully the first of many more opportunities to illuminate the actions of landlords and tenants who strive to create an environment of community and wellbeing for residents in rental housing.

Capital Region Housing – Parkdale ONE

Capital Region Housing (CRH) is the largest provider of social and near market housing in the Edmonton area. Their current mandate is to manage housing and to provide housing assistance to households in core income housing need in the Edmonton area (Capital Region Housing, 2018, p.4).

CRH manages over 4,500 social housing units contained in 800 buildings across 120 locations in the City of Edmonton, in addition to owning and managing over 600 near market housing units (Capital Region Housing, 2018, p.4).

Parkdale ONE. Photo courtesy of GEC Architecture, 2018

CRH administers over 3,000 subsidies in Edmonton and surrounding communities, enabling households to live affordably in rental accommodation. Through its various programs, CRH serves more than 25,000 Albertans including over 9,000 children. CRH also delivers tenant education training across Alberta and administers the HOME Program, a program that supports low- and moderate-income households move into home ownership through education and down payment assistance (Capital Region Housing, 2018, p.4).

CRH believes that everyone deserves a home and that home is more than four walls and a roof. It is that belief which guides CRH's involvement and partnerships with other

agencies and organizations to support Edmontonians and to frame decisions around new programs and buildings (Capital Region Housing, 2018, p.4).

Diversity Drives Community at Parkdale ONE

With growing demand for social and affordable housing, CRH is redeveloping and/or revitalizing many of its existing properties within the capital region (Capital Region Housing, 2019). Parkdale ONE is one of CHR's recently completed redevelopment projects, and they are currently redeveloping facilities in the Londonderry, Lendrum, and Youngstown neighbourhoods. By combining market, near market and community (social) housing into one development, CRH is able to provide affordable housing in a sustainable way to help families live in a community without the need to move.

As part of a revitalization project called *It Starts With Home*, the Parkdale Redevelopment Plan uses a mixed income approach to ensure financial stability while providing homes for approximately 230 people. Parkdale ONE is a new building, the second phase of the Parkdale Redevelopment Plan which complements a 66-unit apartment building completed in 2013.

Parkdale ONE is located in the Parkdale Cromdale neighbourhood, one of Edmonton's heritage communities near the downtown core. The complex includes two buildings with 70 units of social housing, completed in 2017, and featuring one, two and three-bedroom suites. The neighbouring near market housing complex has also transitioned into mixed income housing. This new model increases housing retention by allowing tenants to stay in their homes, adjusting rent as their income changes.

With a sleek modern design, the additional redevelopment of Parkdale ONE challenges the stigma of what affordable housing should appear to look like. The building is safe, equipped with key fobs and accessible underground parking. Inside the complex, diversity of income, age, and furry friends - Parkdale ONE permits pets! - creates a lively and balanced environment for tenants.

Parkdale ONE. Photo courtesy of GEC Architecture, 2018

Mixed Income Housing and Mixed Age

Parkdale ONE's flexible housing model promotes housing security for each of its tenants. There is a three-tiered system of rent, which provides payment options that are consistent with a tenant's income level. This system encourages economic mobility without the fear of losing housing, and increases the likelihood of a longer occupancy. Tenants do not have to move out if their rent increases, they simply graduate to near market or market rent. Mixed Income Housing also adds privacy to rental agreements. With different income levels at the complex, individualized tenant agreements ensure each agreement remains unknown to other tenants and to members of the public.

A defining feature of Parkdale ONE is its relatively high senior population. With this in mind, the mixed ages at the complex, including both seniors and children, encourage dynamic connections between the old and the young. Most of the older tenants appreciate the mild noise and energetic atmosphere that children bring into the buildings. One senior tenant enjoys that there are kids around, engaging in their playful banter and offering extra Halloween candy to them (Tenant, personal communication, 2019). The presence of children helps this tenant maintain an active and social lifestyle. Her routine is dependent on keeping busy and forming relationships, regularly conversing with neighbors and seeking out community resources such as SAGE (Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton).

Integrating Community Spaces

In the Parkdale ONE complex, a new multipurpose room contains moveable chairs, tables, and a small kitchen. When asked about the room, tenants were excited for the opportunity to talk to more people. *"Potlucks or seniors' gatherings,"* as one tenant remarked, are events they would enjoy (Tenant, personal communication, 2019).

The housing staff at Parkdale ONE would like to rent out the room for community events, commenting, *"The more we can get them together, the safer they will be, and the happier they will be"* (Staff, personal communication, 2019). Staff suggest utilizing communal spaces is a great way for tenants to meet their neighbors, whether for informal recreation or to host large-scale events. Staff care about residents and are pleased when they see tenants taking initiative to plan events:

"There are a couple tenants who bring people together. The last two Christmases they hosted Christmas parties for tenants, having people gather in their units for Christmas. It would be great if we could get something like that going in this room every year" (Staff, personal communication, 2019).

Pets Are Welcome at Capital Region Housing

Capital Region Housing allows small pets in their housing (Capital Region Housing, 2018), asking tenants to register the pet and to pay an initial deposit fee. At Parkdale ONE, pet ownership has helped strengthen bonds between tenants, increased interactions with the surrounding community, and increased overall well-being (Lemma et al., 2019, p.3).

Two dog owners at Parkdale ONE found that having dogs increased their connections with fellow tenants and the community. When they encounter each other in the building, they are more likely to talk if a dog was around. Outside of the complex, they notice many people will start-up conversation or ask to pet their dog (Lemma et al., 2019, p.3). One of the tenants, in her mid-seventies, expressed how pets have heightened her sense of community:

> *"I have a dog, so I have a major inroad with people, because lots of people want to pet your dog. Everyone wants to pet Missy! ... It's amazing how you can talk to people, there's a few people in the building I talk to just because of the dogs!"* (Tenant, personal communication, 2019).

Apart from facilitating social interactions, owning pets increases individual well-being. (Lemma et al., 2019, p.3) Caring for a pet can enhances one's sense of purpose and is an abundant source of companionship. Tenants reflected that they are not lonely because of their pet, and are more involved in physical fitness via dog walking.

e4c - Affordable Housing

e4c is a non-profit, charitable organization that has been working for almost 50 years to help vulnerable people here and now (e4c, 2019). At the same time, they work to prevent and eventually eliminate poverty. It's a big task, but one which is possible with the help of others who are ready to see the strength in the people they serve. Currently e4c operates more than 20 distinct programs to meet the changing needs of the community and touches the lives of close to 17,300 Edmontonians each year.

e4c's focus areas are:
- Shelter & housing - a place to call home is essential to quality of life;
- Food security - hunger makes life more difficult;
- Community & collaborations - strengthening connections leads to positive change; and
- Education & skill development - learning helps people discover their potential and explore new opportunities.

Within the area of shelter and housing, e4c operates a diverse portfolio of housing facilities, including emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing and affordable housing. With all of these programs, e4c is working to holistically address the root causes of poverty for individuals and families, to expand community wide efforts to end poverty, and to build strategic management capacity and resources to achieve this important work.

e4c operates two distinct affordable housing programs. One, simply called Affordable Housing, is comprised of six facilities owned by e4c, which houses over 60 residents. The second, McCauley Apartments, is a partnership with Capital Region Housing, where CRH is the landlord and e4c provides onsite staff to connect over 40 residents. Both of these programs offer residents safe, secure housing with below market rents, in some cases as low as 30% of residents' incomes.

Finding Security at Stollery Place

Stollery Place is a three-story walk-up building located in the heart of McCauley, just north of the busy Bissell Centre, which operates a drop-in program for homeless Edmontonians. The 18 units at Stollery Place are bachelor suites, and while there is ample street traffic from the homeless passersby, the building is secure and clean, and residents overall report feeling safe and comfortable in their homes.

Stollery Place is one of six facilities in e4c's Affordable Housing program, where a Property Manager and maintenance staff conduct the daily building operations. The Property Manager collects rents and promotes quality standards for each building, while managing leases and occasionally assisting tenants with systems navigation such as liaising with income supports like AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped), Alberta Works or Canada Pension Plan.

For one tenant, who transitioned from the Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre (WEAC) to Stollery Place, she experiences wellbeing when she feels safe in her home (Tenant, personal communication, 2019). This tenant has experienced a history of abuse, which has led to anxiety and depression in her daily life. For this tenant, the staff help maintain a peaceful and comfortable home, working quickly to resolve any issues that are experienced.

The tenant appreciates the support offered from e4c, such as an apartment starter kit, and she trusts in the Property Manager's decisions. The tenant notices that the Property Manager sets clear rules for the building and provides solutions for resident concerns, as well as directing the maintenance staff to keep the property clean and presentable. From once having lived under an overpass, this tenant has been at Stollery Place for about one year and recognizes the progress she has made on her healing journey.

"e4c has been my lifesaver" (Tenant, personal communication, 2019).

Making Connections at McCauley Apartments

Owned by Capital Region Housing, the McCauley Apartments complex is a fifteen-minute walk from the Kingsway/ Royal Alex Station and is a part of the McCauley neighborhood (Lewis et al., 2019). McCauley Apartments adopts an interdependent housing model, and includes 38 two-bedroom units. Most of the individuals housed here have experienced mental illness, disability, or live with a limited income. e4c is a liaison between the landlord and tenants, vetting tenants through the CRH application process, and coordinating a community development program out of an office on the main floor.

Functioning like an artist's studio, filled with pictures, art supplies, and a guitar, the office of McCauley Apartments is a unique space where tenants can be creative while socializing with staff and other residents. This communal space is managed by e4c staff and led by a Community Development Manager.

By providing supports and connections to the greater community, e4c's main role involves connecting tenants to the neighbourhood and to other residents in the building. This service encourages tenants to become active contributors in the McCauley

The East Side of McCauley Apartments
Taro Hashimoto, 2019

community, and is achieved through volunteer activities and community development initiatives.

Activities and events are facilitated by the Community Development Manager. The program accounts for occupants transitioning out of homelessness and/or experiencing mental health challenges. Staff use a flexible approach when planning activities, catering to tenant suggestions while allowing certain tenants, who have assumed leadership roles, to participate in the planning and delivery of events. Some of the activities and programs that have taken place are holiday potlucks, a puzzle club, a weekly drop in group called Wellness Wednesdays, and the annual McCauley Community Clean Up.

The focus on relationship building through activities has been a successful strategy for finding community connectors in the building. One tenant, who hosts Wellness Wednesdays on a weekly basis, finds her own sense of well-being by sharing in other's happiness. This tenant lived in McCauley, moved out, and eventually was drawn back when she coincidently attended a summer BBQ at the building. At the time, this tenant had lost her dog and felt a great sense of companionship spending time with the people at the complex again. This tenant increases the shared sense of community at McCauley by bringing people together:

> *"A few of the tenants don't really know the staff here, and they don't want to come down and participate. But if I go up and tell them 'hey I'm going to do this today, wanna come down and hang with me?' and they're like 'oh yes!'. Or I tell them, 'hey I'm going down to work on the garden tonight. Wanna come over and help me garden?' Like I get people out there that [staff] hardly ever see." (Tenant, personal communication, 2019)*

Problem Solving Through Collaboration

Because of McCauley Apartment's interdependent housing model, e4c has been able to build strong relationships with the tenants through their supports and programming (Lewis et al., 2019). This model has eased tenant and staff relations, and has influenced tenants to take proactive measures when voicing concerns with their landlord (Capital Region Housing, 2019). For example, one prominent issue within the complex is outsiders entering the complex, usually those who are homeless from the surrounding streets. As a result of this, meetings have been arranged involving e4c staff, CRH staff, and the tenants to come up with solutions and strategies.

The Community Development Manager explained tenants have raised concerns about this issue and say that they are worried. In response to these concerns she stated *"that is another role we [Staff] play. We support them to have their voice with the landlord… and then, we will send a message or write a letter or meet with the CRH Manager of Housing Services"* (Community Development Manager, personal communication, 2019).

> *"We advocate, but we really support people to advocate for themselves. This is their space. This is their voice. These are their concerns"* (Community Development Manager, personal communication, 2019).

The Challenges of Isolation

According to the Edmonton Community Foundation, low income renters are among the people most at risk of social isolation (2017). For the tenants at McCauley Apartment, isolation is sometimes intensified due to many tenants being diagnosed with mental illness, relocating or immigrating, or severing ties with friends, family and other supports because of past trauma (Lewis et al., 2019). The Community Development Manager spoke about how onsite support can alleviate some isolation, commenting that "*A lot of people don't have strong relationships with family... so it is important to have an alternative to family connections if you don't have that*" (2019*).*

As many tenants experience social isolation across the affordable housing spectrum, not all affordable housing is able to address this isolation with support models or additional programming. Supports with community engagement, as delivered by e4c at McCauley Apartments, are seen by tenants as a good way to help make connections and build relationships between renters and their neighbours (Kuhn et al., 2019).

Jasper Place Wellness - Canora Place

Jasper Place Wellness (JPW) is focused on making the community stronger, healthier and more resilient through employment, health care, food security, education, and housing (Jasper Place Wellness Centre, 2019). Their focus on housing has been in partnership with Homeward Trust, the City of Edmonton, and the Province of Alberta. These strong relationships enabled JPW to open Canora Place apartments in 2011.

Canora Place is located in west Edmonton, half a block away from Jasper Place Wellness. The building has 30 units, is home to both women and men, and has affordable rents which are 20% below market rate. Canora Place serves the most vulnerable groups by providing voluntary support services to assist with housing retention. In the complex, on-site staff provide residents with guest management services and connect them to external supports.

Canora Place has onsite supports which ensure residents have easy access to wrap-around services such as health care, employment, advocacy, and meaningful daily life activities. In fact, many residents at Canora Place are involved and active in their community, annually engaging in the City of Edmonton's Capital City Cleanup, along with growing beautiful gardens around the building which has led to nominations in the city's prestigious Front Yards In Bloom Awards.

JPW is part of the "Shovel Ready" Edmonton Non-Profit Housing Provider Working Group, which plans to build 5000 new units of affordable housing in the next five years, 900 of those being Permanent Supportive Housing. JPW plans to build a second development with 36 units in the community of Glenwood, building on the success they have had with Canora Place.

Community Leaders at Canora Place

In a quiet neighborhood near Stony Plain Road, the colourful and modern design of Canora Place characterize this building many people call home. Home not just in the sense of providing a shelter, but a place many tenants see as a long-term investment for a hopeful future. One tenant explained *"they only lasted a maximum 3 months at other places,"* but he has now lived at Canora Place for one year and does not have plans to move out (Tenant, personal communication, 2019).   For this tenant, pitching in with building maintenance and introducing new tenants to the neighborhood services is something important in his daily life. For example, he has participated in the building's snow removal during the winter, and has shown new tenants how to access the foodbank.

Canora Place charges near market rent and follows a harm-reduction model (Asefaw et al., 2019). Harm reduction is typically characterized by meeting substance users "where they're at," addressing conditions and motivations of drug use (or other risky behaviors) along with the use itself, acknowledging an individual's ability to take responsibility for their own behavior (City of Edmonton, 2017, p.57). With this in mind, staff believe that residents are capable of change and progress (Staff, personal communication, 2019). As a result, this approach encourages tenants to act independently and voluntarily seek out the resources and supports that they may need.

Staff help structure a lively environment by maintaining daily interactions with tenants, by being available to address maintenance requests and mediate tenant complaints and by sharing knowledge about community supports and social services in the area. Through regular conversation with the landlord and additional staff members, tenants' needs are routinely met. One tenant recalled the elevator being broken and the landlord was able to fix it immediately (Tenant, personal communication, 2019). Another time he forgot his entrance fob, and the landlord buzzed him in after a phone call.

Community Support at Canora Place

Canora Place is half a block from Jasper Place Wellness, which offers a variety of health and social services (Stolte, 2017). The staff at Canora Place recommend JPW as an excellent community resource because, as one staff stated, they *"understand the clientele that we're dealing with… there's a little less stigma when they go in there, so they feel a little less pressure… And there's a drop-in centre there with painting classes and cooking classes and* all kinds of that kind of stuff" (Staff, personal communication, 2019).

Fusion Church is a community partner with Canora Place, hosting the Canora Place annual BBQ and sharing its communal kitchen with the tenants (Staff, personal communication, 2019). Fusion Church is involved in many community initiatives, including The Fusion Community Kitchen which teaches people to make affordable and nutritious meals while forming community connections in the process. Additionally, Each Friday Fusion provides an outreach supper for community members to enjoy a simple meal and build relationships with other community members. At this weekly outreach event, the Salvation Army supplies bagged lunches and clothing items (Fusion Fellowship, 2019). Both staff and tenants agree these community supports help tenants successfully integrate into their community while receiving specialized services that can assist them with their housing experience (Asefaw et al., 2019).

Employment Opportunities for Residents

Canora Place is also a broker of employment relationships between residents and local businesses. Through trusting relationships with local employers, staff assist employers by finding tenants ready to work in roles, such as mattress recycling or landscaping. This unique support allows for tenants, who in the past may have had struggles holding down a job, to gain meaningful employment in a setting that recognizes their current circumstances. While there are not many residents who have accessed jobs through Canora Place, this type of support adds value to some residents' experiences of creating a sense of community and wellbeing.

Right at Home Housing Society – Rotary Millennium Place

A community-based non-profit that delivers quality and safe affordable housing for Edmontonians, Right at Home Housing Society provides homes for over 1,000 people, owning and managing 25 properties (Right at Home Housing Society, 2019). Its supportive management model employs project managers dedicated to supporting a positive resident experience.

Rotary Millennium Place is an affordable housing facility that provides safe, secure housing for tenants living on a low income in Edmonton's inner city. The facility got its name from the local chapter of the Rotary Club, which contributed a major portion of the required funding for construction. Fundraising began in 1998 as the Edmonton Rotary Club's Millennium Project. Rotarians remain involved to this day by hosting summer barbeques and Christmas parties for the tenants.

Although not the norm, partnerships like this are welcome as Right at Home Housing Society strives to make limited resources go as far as possible in providing high quality, well-maintained housing through the lens of a supportive management philosophy. In conversation with staff, one tenant described this support as involving cheaper rents, the opportunity to earn extra money through the Society's casual labour program, and the pleasure of meeting "pretty good people" (both neighbours and service club members) in the context of the Rotarians' social events (Staff, personal communication, 2019). Right at Home Housing provides resource referrals through staff and community liaisons, including addiction and health supports such as Mobile Mental Health and Crisis Intervention, day-to-day living supports such as Meals on Wheels, cleaning services, general building maintenance, and tenant employment which includes casual labour and volunteer opportunities (Right at Home Housing Society, 2019).

The Opportunity for Community at Rotary Millennium Place

When asked what community looks like, the tenants at Rotary Millennium Place value trusting relationships over large-scale events. (Elkadry et al., 2019, p.6). The tenants react positively to relationships that are friendly and aware of privacy. Positive interactions between tenants include greetings in the hallway and helping out each other with daily tasks. The gestures did not need to be grand, and as one tenant suggested, community can be built in the simplest of places, through subtle acts.

"There was three of us in my corner there, that you know, were all in the same hallway there…We all knew each other, we all talked to each other, we all got along. The guy used to go out in the mornings and, you know, he'd buy me the paper, slip it under my door, and he always said hi, and we visited. I talked to that, my neighbor quite a bit, both of them! So, we had our own sense of community in that corner" (Tenant, personal communication, 2019).

Casual and informal interactions result in tenants feeling comfortable with one another while limiting any obligation to build the relationship outside of a tenant's personal boundaries (Tenant, personal communication, 2019). Many of the tenants have never been inside of each other's units, and they are happy about it. The tenants like the sense of community they feel in the building, which includes a sense of privacy.

iStock.com/fizkez, 2019

"Nobody prying into your business or anything. You're all close, yet you have your privacy at the same time… My neighbours, I don't know how many years they've lived here. They've never been inside my house. Yet we're outside, we're always talking. We know each other really well" (Tenant, personal communication, 2019).

When assisting tenants, staff from Right at Home Housing Society follow a mentor-based approach (Elkadry et al., 2019). This method focuses on relationship building and allowing individuals to learn and grow from their own experiences. For example, services are introduced through one-on-one discussions and assessing individual needs. In one instance of a service being offered, a staff led the conversation by asking how a senior resident was eating before they had begun to discuss food service options. In another instance, staff brought garbage bags to help a tenant clean-up before introducing professional cleaning services (Elkadry et al., 2019, p.12).

Through personal interactions, staff are able to understand the complex and varying needs of each tenant. From building this rapport, staff are also able to work with tenants to address concerns and find solutions to them. For tenants, one common source of tension is their relationship to the outside setting. The prevalence of squatters and non-residents around the building have sparked conversations about the building's security, bringing staff and tenants together to work on a solution. Tenants and staff have discussed the possibility of installing security cameras to better know who is in the building, remarking that the presence of surveillance might deter petty crime from occurring in the first place.

Hiring from Within - Tenant Employment

Right at Home Housing Society operates a casual labour program, hiring from within, which is a practice that helps tenants build a sense of belonging in their building and in the broader community. The benefits of hiring a tenant include increased tenant morale, increased financial security, and increased cost effectiveness for Right at Home Housing Society (Elkadry et al., 2019, p.18). An indirect outcome of this practice is that it nurtures community leaders in the building who, in turn, positively impact other residents. The tenants, who are also staff in the building, have strong connections with other residents and act as peer supports.

> *"I get along with [Staff], the caretaker over there. He helps me out. I always phone him and ask him some things I don't know about a project, then I'll ask him and he helps me because he pretty well knows lots. [chuckles]. So, it's good. It's good to know someone. Everything is good. I knew [Staff] for 8 years too so yeah, we pretty well moved in together at the same time so we got to know each other. It was good" (Tenant, personal communication, 2019).*

The tenants in Rotary Millennium Place challenge the popular ideal of what community means and focus it towards trusting relationships, privacy, security, and empowerment. (Elkadry et al., 2019, p.22). Staff at Right at Home Housing Society incorporate the tenants' ideas through forming close one-on-one relationships, offering personalized support, and hiring internally. Since tenants prefer an organic version of community building that comes from their own willingness for engagement, one suggested change for the future is to advertise the lounge room as a "community room." This way, if they so choose, residents might be more inclined to have informal gatherings with their neighbors.

Alignment with Affordable Housing Strategies

This Guide to Good Practices is informed by the discourse of several key strategies: The City of Edmonton's *Affordable Housing Strategy* (2015) , a plan designed to direct the City's involvement in building more affordable housing over the next ten years; *A Place to Call Home: Edmonton's Updated Plan to End Homelessness* (2017), which addresses the pressing need for Permanent Supportive Housing in Edmonton; and Alberta's Provincial Affordable Housing Strategy, *Making Life Better* (2017), which discusses the evolving need for tenant supports in the housing sector.

Edmonton's Affordable Housing Strategy

The City of Edmonton is committed to supporting efforts to develop a sufficient supply of safe, quality, affordable housing. There are four main goals outlined in the City's Affordable Housing Strategy (2015):

1. Increase the supply of affordable housing in all areas of the city;
2. Maintain the supply of affordable and market rental housing;
3. Enable stable residential tendencies and transition people out of homelessness;
4. Anticipate, recognize, and coordinate action to respond to housing and homeless needs.

This Guide explores goal 4, objective 4.1 which is to increase understanding of affordable housing best practices, and objective 4.2 which is to enable external organizations to address affordable housing needs.

A Place to Call Home

In 2009, a 10-year plan was launched to end homelessness in Edmonton. Although strong progress had been made toward the targets of the original plan, an update was necessary to indicate the urgency for more resources. Edmonton's Updated Plan to End Homelessness (2017) asserts three goals, and their associated targets and outcomes:

1. End chronic and episodic homelessness;
2. Prevent future homelessness;
3. Develop an integrated systems response.

This approach focuses on shifting resources over time to homelessness prevention and to integrating longer-term supports for those who need them. The researchers from this study spoke with some tenants who were once homeless, at risk of becoming homeless, or had previously experienced housing instability. For example, one tenant used to move multiple times in a year and now has been settled for one year at Canora Place (Asefaw et al., 2019). Another tenant had been homeless and now has been living in e4c Affordable Housing for one year (Kuhn et al., 2019). In these instances, the tenants' access to affordable housing helped increase their housing stability.

Making Life Better – the Provincial Affordable Housing Strategy

Intended to improve the lives of Albertans in affordable housing, the Provincial Affordable Housing Strategy proposes a need for more tenant supports for persons living in affordable housing. The Ministry of Seniors and Housing has determined a need for tenant support workers, in affordable housing and in market rentals, to ensure those struggling with tenancy retention can achieve housing stability. Support workers serve the wellbeing of tenants and mediate relationships between tenants, landlords, and community support services. *"For example, they can give advice to upgrade education or help them to find the right medical services"* (Government of Alberta, 2017, p.5). The growing need for tenant support is based on a holistic approach – to achieve housing security, we must also work to build a better quality of life for tenants in the rental market.

The housing providers featured in this study have been observed to provide varying levels of tenant support. This Guide highlights practices such as employing staff for community engagement and supporting staff connection to community and social services. These good practices have resulted in tenants being connected to the right social services through community liaisons and staff (Elkadry et al., 2019), and there being more opportunities for social engagement because of programing implemented by a Community Development Manager (Kuhn et al., 2019).

Section 5: Conclusion

Our hope is that *Creating Communities Where We Live – A Good Practices Guide* is the beginning of a push to grow the body of evidence of good practices in the housing sector. There are new efforts emerging among market housing landlords to incorporate social connection into their business models. The best known of this is Apartment Life, a U.S. - based initiative which educates landlords on how to hire social connectors from among their tenants. Edmonton is the site of Apartment Life's first foray into Canada, in a pilot project by Boardwalk Properties, as this (Boardwalk, 2019).

Rather than focus on statistical data to inform affordable housing practices, this study reports on instances and actions that take place in a person's immediate setting; the experiences of tenants and staff in affordable housing complexes which were observed to improve the quality of day-to-day life, and in doing so creating innovative opportunities for community and wellbeing. These are what make up the good practices in this Guide, are they are worthy of sharing.

Working with community partners, market housing providers, governments and social service nonprofits, there are tremendous opportunities for tenants in rental housing to become leaders in promoting wellness and community building through collaborative efforts such as this study. This moment represents a genuine opportunity in Canadian history for citizens to assert their power to truly create community and wellbeing where they live.

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