



WHAT MAKES A

House a Home

1 OF 4 STRATEGIC LEARNING BRIEFS



INTRODUCTION

The *Future of Home: Inclusive Housing Solutions Lab* draws on the principles of human-centred design and social innovation to generate new and creative housing and support models that are accessible, affordable, and support the social inclusion of people with developmental disabilities.

Through its work, Lab participants generated a number of prototypes to address different challenge areas, ultimately collaborating on a single prototype model that would lead to more inclusive apartment-style living for people with disabilities.

This exciting new prototype - and a smaller spin-off prototype building on one of its features—is described in more detail below.

The *Future of Home* is a collaboration between Skills Society, Inclusion Alberta, Cvida (formerly Capital Region Housing) and Homeward Trust. Lab participants included people with developmental disabilities, their families and allies, service providers, funders, architects, advocates, and housing developers.

Visit our website to learn more about the *Future of Home* project and view Phase One Prototypes, lab tools, and other background information:

<https://skillssociety.ca/projects/future-of-home-inclusive-housing-solutions-lab/>

A Skills Society Action Lab project conducted in partnership with Inclusion Alberta, Cvida, and Homeward Trust.



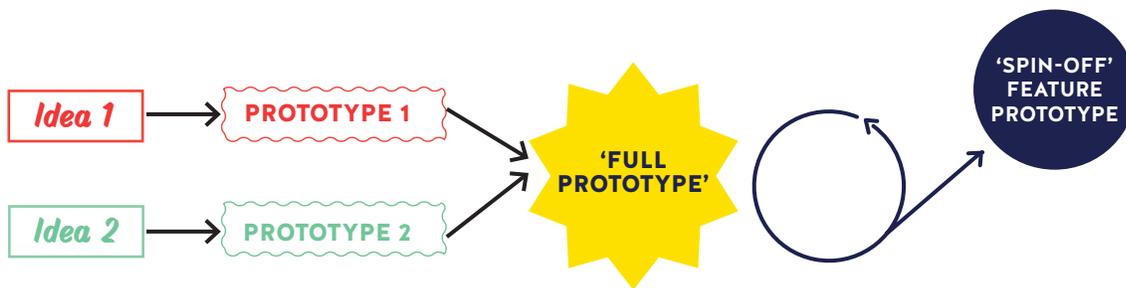
Inclusion Alberta



FOCUSED ON HUMAN-CENTRED DESIGN

The strength of a human-centred design process is its ability to build empathy and understanding amongst a diverse range of stakeholders. Through prototyping processes, family members, allies, service providers, funders, architects, advocates, and housing developers each had an opportunity to learn about the experiences of people with developmental disabilities in navigating current housing and support systems.

This *Inclusive Housing Solutions Lab* centred around understanding and defining **the meaning of home** for people with disabilities. This document summarizes what the group learned during this human-centred process - and how these learnings will come to life in each organization's housing and support work.



INCLUSIVE APARTMENT LIVING

Converged ‘Full Prototype’ Description

What could a new model for inclusive living look like? Imagine a six-storey, mixed-use apartment building located in a desirable, central neighborhood that is close to amenities and accessible by transit. Drawing on an Intentional Community model, there is a clause included in the rental agreement that outlines the inclusive philosophy of the building. The building has 90 units; 15% of these units are offered below market value in order to be affordable to someone living on AISH. Shared common areas in the building and vibrant retail spaces on the main floor create ‘bumping grounds’ for community connections to begin to form. A Community Concierge, a full-time paid position, regularly initiates community-building activities in the building. In partnership with a local disability service provider, people with disabilities receive PDD-funded support services in their own apartments on demand. Interested neighbors in the building are also contracted by the service provider to provide overnight support as needed.

AN ENHANCED PROPERTY MANAGEMENT SERVICE

The ‘Spin Off’ Prototype Description

Imagine a property management service that does not just maintain a property but enhances it. In addition to all your usual property management services, our team would build and nurture community within your building. A Community Concierge helps animate the building with the help of volunteer neighbours. Together, they match-make neighbours with similar passions or interests, coordinate community activities, and keep a pulse on what’s happening in the neighbourhood surrounding the building. A highly desirable service, we help combat tenant turnover, conflict, and property abuse. Through the incorporation of principles of asset based community development we nurture a sense of community amongst residents, increasing tenant satisfaction, sense of belonging, and pride of ownership.

HOME & SOCIAL INCLUSION

The purpose of the Lab was always about more than just creating new physical spaces for people to live in. It was also about creating spaces that people with and without disabilities can call **home** –because having a safe, stable, and comfortable place to call home is the foundation of a rich and inclusive life.

The work of the Lab was rooted in the fundamental principles that:

- ▶ Having a home is a basic need and right
- ▶ When you have a safe space to start your day, it is easier to go out and explore your neighborhood and community
- ▶ When you have a home you are proud of, you can invite others in and share food, experiences and laughter
- ▶ Home is where you can experiment and explore what it means to be you. It is a place to be comfortable, express yourself and be yourself. Your home is a reflection of you!
- ▶ Home can be a launching point for connection with others. When your home is part of a larger community, it's easier to build relationships with neighbors, contribute your gifts and talents, and access important resources and amenities.

WHAT DOES AN INCLUSIVE LIFE LOOK LIKE?

A rich and inclusive life involves all people living, working, and playing together in the same spaces. It means that people with disabilities are seen as friends, colleagues, neighbors and citizens – and they feel comfortable being themselves. An inclusive life means that everyone's authentic selves are empowered, celebrated and welcomed.

A 'HOUSE' IS NOT THE SAME AS A 'HOME'

A house is a physical space that provides shelter to people—whether it is a duplex, an apartment, a condo or a bungalow. In contrast, a *home* is a physical space that also offers distinct feelings of ownership, pride, belonging, and warmth that come from being comfortable in a space. Having shelter is important for survival, but the ultimate goal is having people *thrive* from a place they can call home.

Unfortunately, because of the way current housing and support systems are structured, many people with developmental disabilities do not have the opportunity to make their house a home. Enabling this shift was the essence of the *Inclusive Housing Solutions Lab*.

'HOME' FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IS THE SAME AS IT IS FOR PEOPLE WITHOUT DISABILITIES

Historically, and sometimes still today, it is assumed that people with disabilities need different or specialized places to live. This assumption is not accurate and has long been challenged by people with disabilities and their families and allies. It ignores the simple fact that people with disabilities desire the same things as people without disabilities –including a safe place to call home.



KEY INSIGHTS

The Lab explored and learned about the meaning of home for people with disabilities and how this definition should refocus and reshape stakeholder priorities in the housing and support space. These findings are summarized below:

INSIGHT 1: THERE ARE 'UNIVERSAL' QUALITIES THAT MAKE A HOUSE A HOME

Although everyone's homelife is unique, there are some consistent qualities to a home that is comfortable, inclusive and enriching.

1. SAFETY

Feeling safe inside and outside your home

- ▶ Being able to go for walks in your neighborhood
- ▶ Being able to be in shared/common spaces in the building

2. AUTONOMY AND CONTROL

Having autonomy and control within and over your space

- ▶ Having the freedom to make the space your own and express your identity by decorating, having plants, having pets, etc.
- ▶ Being able to choose your roommates or to be able to live with your partner
- ▶ Being able to choose your support staff

3. CONNECTION

Opportunities to connect with friends and neighbors

- ▶ Having a good relationship/spark with your support staff
- ▶ Knowing your neighbors, having a relationship with them
- ▶ Having open spaces in your home you can share with others and do things together in
- ▶ Having things to do with others in your home when they visit—food, games, comfy seating areas, a garden

4. INDEPENDENCE

Having your independence recognized and respected

- ▶ Space to do things on your own or in the way you like it
- ▶ Having private space
- ▶ Meaningful things to do on your own
- ▶ Having the built environment set up to enable your independence (i.e. incorporating accessibility into design)

5. BELONGING

A feeling of ownership and that you belong in your home

- ▶ A space to feel like you can be yourself and let your guard down
- ▶ A place to feel like you can stay as long as you want (i.e. you won't be kicked out)
- ▶ A sense of pride and ownership

Defining what makes a house a home can be difficult because most people without disabilities take the quality of their home life for granted. Taking the time to explore and be explicit about what *makes a home* enables stakeholders to focus their decision-making, communicate clearly and sharpen their advocacy.

INSIGHT 2: HOME IS FORMED OUT OF RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS

While 'housing' people is an important goal, it doesn't automatically mean that a sense of home comes with it. This is a common and longstanding misconception. Instead, partners and leaders now recognize that a sense of home, and a vibrant home life, is formed out of *reciprocal relationships*.

*A house becomes a home when....
you have friends and family to
invite over and you have neighbors
who know your name and stop by
to chat.*

During the Lab, participants quickly learned that they were not just prototyping a physical space and support model but rather a ‘way of living’ that encapsulated values such as interdependence, community and care. This way of life would involve people sharing their life with one another – regardless of their differences.

This might look like people:

- ▶ Spontaneously checking in with one another
- ▶ Offering food and conversation when someone is going through a difficult time
- ▶ Celebrating wins together
- ▶ Sharing a job opportunity they heard about with a neighbor seeking employment

The features outlined in our Phase One prototypes reflect different ‘hunches’ as to what might help nurture this desired ‘neighbourly’ way of life:

Shared community spaces that create opportunities for neighbours to gather and engage in shared activities together.



Retail and commercial spaces that offer ‘bumping grounds’ to spark social connection and draw the outside community in.

A community concierge to help animate the building with the help of volunteer neighbours. Together, they match-make neighbours with similar passions or interests, coordinate community activities, and keep a pulse on what’s happening in the neighbourhood surrounding the building.



A shared social contract that ensures neighbours understand and remain committed to this way of life and outlines opportunities for sharing gifts and talents with the community.

A community inspired and organized to participate:

- ▶ A social committee facilitates care packages for those facing challenges
- ▶ A pride-of-ownership committee spearheads a community art project for the lobby and invites neighbors to help plant flower beds that improve the curb appeal of the building
- ▶ A team of neighbours are paid to be part of the ‘community night watch,’ providing overnight problem-solving support as needed to people with developmental disabilities and create an added sense of security in the building.



Importantly, teams recognized this ‘neighbourly’ way of life required nurturing - intentional efforts on the part of key paid supports, like the community concierge, to build and sustain a vibrant community culture.

IMPLICATIONS

THE IMAGE OF TRANSFORMATION IS CLEAR(ER) BUT THE PATH IS MURKY

To a large extent, it is clear what a vibrant and rich home life for people with developmental disabilities looks like. While these qualities and values were quick to emerge during the Lab's work, the path to achieving them was less clear.

This exploration affirmed how wickedly complex it is to create an inclusive home life for people with developmental disabilities within our current systems. As with other complex social challenges, change is required across multiple systems and on multiple levels (see the brief titled **"A Portfolio of Possibilities"** for a deeper look). Furthermore, building towards this inclusive vision requires a relentless, iterative process of trade-offs and creative resolutions in order to be successful (see the brief titled **"Navigating Tensions in Building an Inclusive Home Life for People with Disabilities"** for a deeper look).

NURTURING A SENSE OF HOME IS A COMMUNITY EFFORT

There are everyday actions everyone can take in their work to build a more inclusive future for people with developmental disabilities. Together, these micro actions begin to shape the much larger vision for an inclusive, enriching home life.

Examples of immediate, individual actions:

- ▶ If you are a support person or family member:
 - Always keep the person you serve at the centre of all decisions related to their home life
 - Help the individual make their space a reflection of their personality by helping them decorate or arrange their home the way they want
 - Support people to have guests in their home if they want
- ▶ Everyone can explore creative ways to build connections with neighbours
 - Make an effort to learn neighbors' names and chat with them every once in a while

- Welcome new neighbours to the neighbourhood by saying hello or baking them a treat
- Offer to take a neighbour's dog for a walk
- Invite the CommuniTEA Infusion Van to your neighborhood or help host a block party

Examples of larger systems changes to advocate for:

- ▶ Increase the amount of funding available for 'innovative' home building projects that reinforce connection and community
- ▶ Advocate for people to be able to have pets where they live
- ▶ Ensure buildings are held to a high standard of physical accessibility and incorporate elements of universal design
- ▶ Break down stigma associated with affordable or supportive housing models, combatting prevalent 'not in my backyard' attitudes
- ▶ Demand more affordable housing options that are also inclusive. For example, rather than being complete, separate buildings for affordable housing, offer affordable suites in regular buildings or a few units in a larger townhouse development
- ▶ Keep trying to understand the patterns and principles that prevent people with and without disabilities from forming lasting relationships
- ▶ Advocate for sustainable and meaningful paid employment for people with disabilities

SOURCES

Key insights for this brief were generated from data gathered by two Core Teams in the prototyping process. Additional insights were gathered in a workshop held with Core Team members as well as through numerous reflexive conversations amongst stewards and Core Team members.

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