Vibrant Communities
TAMARACK INSTITUTE | REDUCING POVERTY
DEEPENING COMMUNITY
BUILDING YOUTH FUTURES

CASE
STUDY

CASE STUDY |BUILDING A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – DOING *WITH* NOT *FOR*

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Traditional models of housing services are that they are responsible for social housing programs and property management of houses. But what if we changed the purpose of housing services so that they build a sense of community and support the development of neighbourhood plans? This is what Coordinators at the Lakeview Harbourside neighbourhood have been working on for the past year as members of Cities Deepening Community. This case study explores the role of the Coordinators and how they shifted away from doing for residents to supporting residents to do for themselves.

OVERVIEW

The idea came about when the Coordinators began working in the community trying to bring programming into their community room. They realized that, in a lot of cases, there was a lack of interest from the community to attend the programs that they, along with their colleagues and local agencies, thought the community needed. It was not until a group of residents approached them and asked to run a crochet group in the room that they realized that they were doing it all wrong. This group had become the most regularly attended program in the community room. It is entirely led and attended by residents. Housing's role was simply to arrange access to the room.

This experience made them reflect on their role in building community in the complex and how they have been organizing programming. The Coordinators soon realized that in order for the programming in the room to be successful, they need to ask the community what they

> **About the Organization**
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> Durham Region Local Housing Corporation (DRLHC) provides subsidized housing to 21 communities across the Regional Municipality of Durham. Lakeview Harbourside is their largest community, consisting of 173 townhomes and a 12-unit apartment building. Lakeview Harbourside is located in Oshawa, Ontario alongside the picturesque shorelines of Lake Ontario.
>
> In 2017, Housing Services created two new Housing Coordinator and Community Programs positions with a focus on supporting the Region's social housing communities, developing innovative programs and services that enhance the comfort, safety and security of residents while encouraging the sustainability of vibrant, inclusive neighbourhoods through partnership with other departments and service agencies.

want instead of assuming they knew what the community wanted. The Coordinators started to think big and posed the questions: what if we created a complex where people are involved in the creation of a community that they can call "home" and be proud of where they live?

WHY THIS MATTERS

Deepening community has effectively demonstrated how positive changes can occur in a short period of time by investing in meaningful community engagement and the creation of partnerships between organizations and citizens.

The studies of the 1995 heat waves in Chicago showed that the importance of social connections in reducing loneliness and increasing physical and mental health. When you know your neighbours you are also increasing safety in neighbourhoods because you have a better understanding of who lives in the neighbourhood, and outdoor social gatherings put more eyes on the street. Here are some ways that Durham housing is hoping that by building a sense of community can help to have:
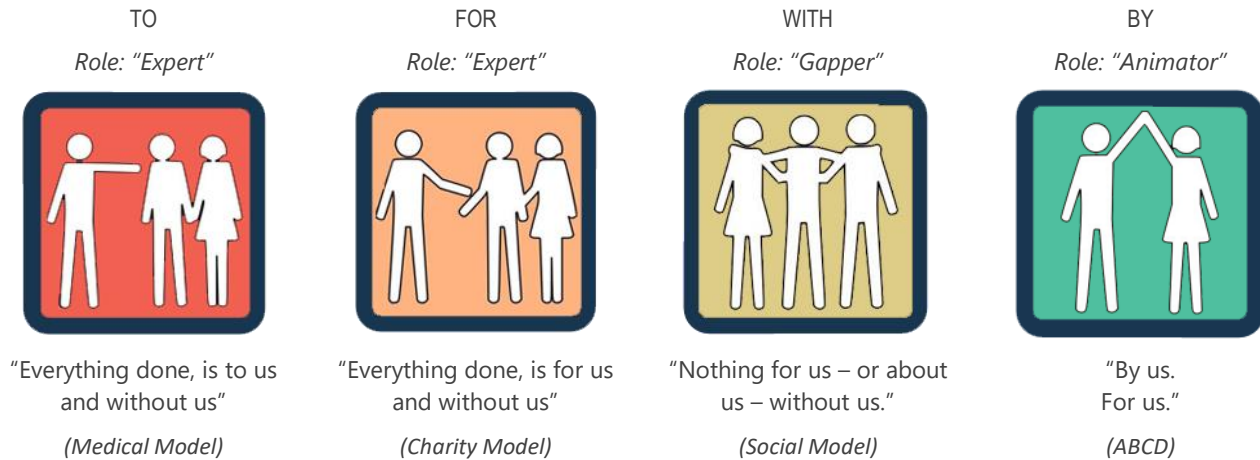

Community Tree

- Less complaints
- Lower costs associated with turnover
- Tenants share gifts and assets, and lead programs and activities that better the community
- Less work time to dedicate towards community programming
- Less work time dedicated towards tenant support
- Services become more cost effective because they produce more sustainable outcomes.

The idea to build a sense of community for Lakeview Harborside came about when the Coordinators realized that they were planning programs that were not of interest to the residents. It became clear that the crochet group was successful because it was a group of people who had the same interest coming together and planning their own projects. The Coordinators role was simply to arrange access to the room.

This experience led the Coordinators to soon realize that in order for the programming in the room to be successful, they need to stop doing for the community and work on supporting residents to do for themselves. This is when the coordinators started their Asset-Based Community Development journey. The Coordinators embarked on supporting the complex to develop a neighbourhood strategy where the residents are at the center of the planning.

 "Asset Based Community Development" or ABCD looks for and starts from people's gifts and strengths (assets). These assets equip people to create local opportunities and respond to needs and challenges in their neighbourhoods. ABCD goes beyond any individual's gifts or particular group's strengths to consider how these may come together to create broader changes for the common good within a community. Where a deficit-based approach starts by identifying needs, ABCD identifies and builds upon community strengths. It empowers individuals, associations to come together, with institutions in support when required, to develop their strengths, working together to build on the identified assets of all involved!

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TO	FOR	WITH	BY
Role: "Expert"	Role: "Expert"	Role: "Gapper"	Role: "Animator"

"Everything done, is to us and without us"	"Everything done, is for us and without us"	"Nothing for us – or about us – without us."	"By us. For us."
(Medical Model)	(Charity Model)	(Social Model)	(ABCD)

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The Coordinators realized that they were doing "for" the community and needed to change the way programming happened so that they can support residents to do "by" themselves. The solution was to use an ABCD approach to develop a neighbourhood strategy. The purpose of their strategy was to:

- Engage the Lakeview Harbourside residents to obtain what is strong in their community
- Identify the assets (or strengths) that the community currently has
- Support residents to work towards creating an action plan to achieve their goals.

THE PROCESS

Form Leadership

All organizations and associations that support the community, and residents that made up of almost half of the group, were invited to form a leadership group to help guide the process. Local agencies, organizations and Regional Departments who were already working in the community and had developed relationships were also approached. Advertisements were also shared within the community for residents interested in participating. The Leadership Group was formed, consisting of 12 people, 5 of which were residents.

Hosting Conversation

Eight conversations took place over the summer of 2019. Approximately 45 people attended, and 36 surveys were completed. There was a corn roast in September to wrap up the conversations and 41 surveys were completed at that event. All together 80 surveys were completed representing 43% of the residents who live in the neighbourhood.

Celebration

A celebration was planned to thank all those who contributed to the conversations and engaged attendees in identifying and prioritizing shared opportunities for action. This helped to facilitate and encourage broad community engagement and shared leadership in advancing community projects.

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Build the plan

During the celebration, an Open Space exercise was done. The 6 main themes from the conversations were put up on the wall and 5 questions were asked:

- What do we do together about this?
- What do we already have to work with?
- What else might we need and from whom?
- What does success look like?
- Using the stakeholder wheel - how would you like to contribute?

Stakeholder wheel example

Using this information, a draft plan was created that outlined resident's role and how organizations and associations can support the work.

LESSONS LEARNED

Learning how to change the way to support residents to do for themselves has not been an easy process. Here are some lessons we learned along the way:

Build relationships and trust - Not only are we building relationships with the leadership team we are building relationships in the community. In order to do this work well, trust is essential. However, we realized that we will never be able to develop the same type of relationships with residents as they will with each other and that is okay. The key for us is to be transparent in our role in the community and support the residents in creating relationships with one another.

Stay on track - It is very easy to come up with ideas for the community that we think are fantastic. It's easy to lose sight of the project goals in this excitement. The goal of ABCD is for the community to decide and lead the way. So, while we may think we have great ideas, it is important to not get away from ABCD and to ensure that we are focusing on what the community wants.

Shifting attitudes - In order to do this work, it is necessary to shift your own attitudes and that of your colleagues, the residents and the rest of the leadership team. It can be difficult to relinquish control. The conversations for the project were entirely led by the residents. When Tamarack first suggested this, we were taken aback because we thought we needed to be a part of the conversations. But emphasis was placed on how important it was for this to be led by the residents, and in fact we were not needed. We are not the experts and we simply needed to support. It is difficult to switch from being the "doer" to the "supporter" when we are so used to being in that role. But in order to enable the residents to lead, we need to take a step back.

Shift attitudes from what is wrong to what is strong - What assets do you have in your own communities? Think about people – do you have gardeners, tinkerers, story tellers? What about geography – are you close to a park, by a lake, close to community centers, or doctors' offices? How can you leverage the strengths and use them to make communities better?

Identify red table that can become yellow or green - I'm sure everyone in this room has been frustrated by the inevitable red tape we all face. Sometimes that red tape is non-negotiable but sometimes if you can get creative there are ways around it or perhaps you come to the realization that it never should have been red tape in the first place. Our crochet group for example, it was a little bit of a challenge to give the residents access to the community room. Eventually we were able to make that happen and now that group is run entirely by the residents, with no staff support or funds from us.

> *"I hope for the community to feel more like a community, I hope for the people in the community to feel like they can do things, I hope for the people to feel safe"- Resident*
>
> *"I've enjoyed taking part in and seeing everything that the community has done to grow and look forward to seeing it grow further" -Resident*

Encourage everyone to have fun - We have really enjoyed working through this project with the residents and it has been incredible to watch them come out of their shell, let their passions and creativity flow and really connect with their community.

CONCLUSION

We need to rethink the role of organizations and professionals in community. They are not the solution to community problems; it is residents who must be at the center of any authentic and powerful democratic response to challenges. According to Cormac Russell, organizations cannot do community-building work without addressing power dynamics and relocating authority to the community. We can start to shift authority through the intentional use of questions. This is what happened at Lakeview Harbourside neighbourhood, the Coordinators hosted conversations and asked questions and listened to what the residents had to say.

The process provided many benefits to the Coordinators and housing management. By catalyzing resident leadership, the community has the foundation to be more self-sufficient and united in crisis and more proactive in creating a sense of community for their neighbours. It is important not to under-estimate the value of having a dedicated staff role focused on community engagement. This staff leadership is essential in acting as a catalyst: helping to establish trust and provide initial leadership to the project.

A Flyer that was used to promote the conversations

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LEARN MORE

- Check out the Cities Deepening Community website
- Watch Using ABCD to Build Community in Social Housing

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