

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE



This study series documents the experiences of supportive housing sites that gained neighbourhood acceptance. The purpose of this research is to help future sites better address neighbourhood concerns at the initial stages of a project. Sharing lessons learned also helps identify strategies to improve relationships with neighbours of existing social housing sites.

A summary report is also available: *Overview of Strategies from Case Studies of Supportive Housing Sites in B.C.*

Community Acceptance Series: Cardington Apartments, Kelowna

Supportive housing provides housing and support services to people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. These support services help vulnerable people maintain their housing. Supports can include: 24/7 staffing, life skills training, employment preparation, meal programs and referrals to other community resources. BC Housing works in partnership with non-profit societies who operate the housing projects and provide on-site supports to the residents.

In 2014, BC Housing conducted a research study looking at five supportive housing projects for homeless people or people at risk of homelessness that were initially met by concern from their surrounding neighbours. In some cases, these projects were the first of their kind in these neighbourhoods. Over time, initial concerns from some community members developed into positive relationships.

Project Background

Cardington Apartments in Kelowna is a supportive housing development for adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, managing mental health and addiction challenges. The project, opened in 2008 and operated by the **John Howard Society of the Central and South Okanagan (JHSCSO)**, was the first supportive housing site in the City of Kelowna. This project was made possible through a funding partnership between BC Housing, Interior Health, City of Kelowna and the Government of Canada. Before becoming supportive housing, the site was a municipal parking lot.

Street view of the entrance of Cardington Apartments





This study examines:

- › The types of concerns raised by neighbours of supportive housing developments and whether these concerns change over time, specifically from site proposal to after-site occupation
- › Strategies and actions taken by housing providers to address concerns and build positive relationships with neighbours
- › The number of police calls in the neighbourhood before and after-site opening
- › Lessons learned from this project

Project Background *continued from p1*

The building, located in downtown Kelowna, has 30 self-contained units. JHSCSO has two staff on-site during the day and evening with one on-site staff overnight. The following supports are provided to residents:

- › Life-skills support
- › Goal setting
- › Wellness plans
- › Referrals to support services such as alcohol and drug counselors and mental health workers
- › Recreational and social activities
- › Assistance with accessing food, including a hot meal program and ad hoc group meals

There is also a social enterprise coffee shop and catering service located on the ground floor of Cardington Apartments. This social enterprise partners with the JHSCSO to provide fresh local grocery and prepared food items. It is popular with the community and residents alike.

Public art surrounds the front door entrance to Cardington Apartments

Methodology

BC Housing’s Research and Corporate Planning conducted research for these five case studies by collecting data through the following methods:

- › Interviews with housing provider representatives from each supportive housing site
- › Working with local police departments, gathered data showing the number of police calls for each case study neighbourhood comparing before and after project opening





Neighbours

When it was first built, the neighbourhood around Cardington Apartments was primarily commercial. The area is moving towards more of a residential-commercial mix with new high-end condos also being built in the area. Neighbours provide a range of professional services, including: law firms, engineering firms, physiotherapy offices, acupuncture clinics, office buildings, banks, drug stores and restaurants.

Neighbour Concerns

When they first heard about Cardington Apartments, some neighbours had the following concerns about the project impact:

- › Increased crime rate
- › More vehicular traffic
- › Loitering issues
- › Decreased property values
- › More homeless people in the area
- › Safety of staff in nearby businesses

How Neighbour Concerns were Expressed

Neighbours expressed concerns in December 2005 when the project was first announced. At the time, project partners held a conference to explore housing alternatives for this population. A group called *Residents and Businesses for a Safer Society* formed to take the City of Kelowna to court with a land-use challenge. The group fundraised for a lawyer, but ultimately the court case was dismissed as the land was already zoned for this purpose.

During project development, neighbours expressed concerns directly to JHSCSO, also writing several letters to the editors of local newspapers. Complaints stopped about a year after the site became occupied and residents had the chance to stabilize.

Strategies to Build Positive Relationships During Development

When the project was announced, a site-review task force was struck to determine if the selected site was the most suitable for supportive housing. The task force included Interior Health, BC Housing, the City of Kelowna plus resident and

commercial associations. Task force considerations included: distance to transit, access to services and supports, access to recreation, well-being of residents and zoning of sites. Final task force findings concluded that the Cardington Apartment site was the most suitable.

Subsequent community consultation processes looked at issues of design and site safety. Community associations, the RCMP and anyone else who wanted to comment was included. The program aspect of the project was specifically left off the table for later discussion. An advisory committee was organized to provide input on building design. JHSCSO surveyed neighbours to find committee participants. With building design experts, the committee worked through design issues addressing lighting, the green roof and safety. The committee held three, large public meetings to share the progress of the project design. As requested, presentations were given to smaller groups too. This process took about a year.

Despite opportunities to provide input on the design and safety features of the site, the public reported wanting to know more about the level and type of supports that would be available to residents. As property manager, JHSCSO was the public face for site development; originally it was planned that they would not be responsible for providing site supports (Site supports were to be provided by Interior Health). JHSCSO did not want to speak for the service provider about the types of services offered. Later, JHSCSO and the service provider did some joint public presentations, communicating plans around the residents supports.

Eventually a second committee was organized to discuss the available building supports. Once again, the neighbourhood was surveyed for committee participation and a lot of interest was generated. Committee terms of reference were established and, well in advance, meeting dates were set. Advisory meetings continued for about two years after the site opened. Complaints quickly dropped off once the appropriate level of resident supports were put in place. JHSCSO felt this committee was very important as it created a space for neighbours to feel heard.

With input from the advisory committee, JHSCSO put together a Good Neighbour agreement. The agreement included a



Declaration of Rights for both neighbours and residents. Advisory committee members helped circulate the agreement and JHSCSO shared it at site presentations. JHSCSO felt the agreement helped set a positive tone for public discussions.

Throughout the development process, JHSCSO was open and transparent. They put the resources necessary into answering questions and public consultations. Consistent public outreach such as letters to the public with site updates and progress reports were distributed. JHSCSO also distributed neighbourhood notices and put up posters for project open houses to ensure neighbours were well aware of all public consultations.

Strategies to Build Positive Relationships After Opening

As building residents settled into their new home, and support levels adjusted, some incidents arose that caught media attention. JHSCSO thought it was important to acknowledge these incidents, explaining how they addressed the issues to ensure they would not happen again.

Neighbours made their concerns and expectations very clear. For example, some neighbours expressed their dislike of loitering. In response, staff monitor outdoor activities, asking residents to move along if they stop too long in front of neighbouring businesses. If necessary, staff call the RCMP to address a resident's behaviour.

JHSCSO also maximizes opportunities to contribute to the community through some of the building's design features. For example, the design includes public art on the first-floor exterior of the building allowing Cardington Apartments to take part in a public art tour. As well, the project coffee shop participated in Taste of Kelowna. JHSCSO reported that participation in these activities normalizes the building and that the coffee shop helped the project blend into the neighbourhood.

Residents help build positive relationships with neighbours too. Shortly after the building opened, residents wrote a letter to the editor of their local newspaper to thank neighbours for welcoming them to the neighbourhood. This helped build positive relationships with neighbours. Residents also sign an

"expectation of behavior" contract which provides behavior guidelines for them when they are out in the neighbourhood. As well, many residents have volunteered to clean up garbage or shovel snow in the area.

Challenges

A main challenge in getting neighbourhood buy-in for the project was that the messaging used to describe the site scared many neighbours. For example, before JHSCSO was involved the building was called a "wet facility". This raised concerns about seeing open drug use and potentially having more drug dealers in the area. It was difficult to change the messaging once the terms were used publicly.

As this was the first building of its kind in Kelowna, neighbours had no experience of supportive housing to ease their concerns. JHSCSO saw themselves as supportive housing ambassadors. It was very important that the project succeed.

Another challenge was the lack of clarity around the on-site support model for Cardington Apartments. The roles of JHSCSO and Interior Health for provision of supports was unclear to both project partners and to the public. The initial level of provided supports were not adequate to ensure a building with a calm atmosphere. Because supports were not adequate, there were incidents that caused concerns for neighbours. The service provider responsible for the on-site supports was not accountable to JHSCSO, but JHSCSO was accountable to the public for the stability of the residents and the atmosphere of the site. Eventually, JHSCSO took over the on-site supports with the original support provider taking on a liaison role. This change resulted in a more positive relationship between the two project partners.

Current Relationship with Neighbours

When the building first opened, there were some complaints from neighbours as on-site support levels were still being worked out. Once the level of on-site support service was adjusted, there were few complaints from neighbours. Initially, there were some garbage complaints in the area, also loitering, but these were quickly addressed.

If neighbours have concerns, they immediately approach on-site staff. According to project representatives, a trusting



and respectful relationship has developed; neighbours are confident that staff address concerns right away. There was a critical incident at the building a few years after the building opened and neighbours did not complain. They trusted the staff to look after the one-off incident. Today, the building has a good reputation in the neighbourhood. Neighbours

look out for tenants when they are out and about in the neighbourhood, as well as homeless people camping out in the area. Neighbours often bring donations by, help with fundraising and frequent the coffee shop. A nearby business offered free services to tenants. Tenants feel comfortable accessing nearby businesses, such as the pharmacy.

Lessons Learned

Addressing Neighbour Concerns

- › Community consultations should include everyone who wants to be involved
- › Be prepared for opposition to mobilize quickly and to be well-resourced
- › Communicate a set amount of time for public consultations to avoid attempts to delay to the project
- › Allocate resources necessary to work with the public in a meaningful way to address their concerns
- › Ask neighbours for time to get settled before they judge the success of the project
- › Trust that opposition will eventually fizzle out once the project proves itself
- › It is important to take every concern seriously, as this allows neighbours to feel heard rather than dismissed

Partners

- › Project partners need to be open and transparent when addressing neighbourhood concerns
- › Roles of project partners need to be clear from the beginning
- › Having a shared understanding of the vision and purpose of the project is important, so that consistent messaging is communicated to the public
- › Having one project partner as the lead agency working with the media can help ensure messaging is consistent and that stakeholders do not get a runaround when trying to voice concerns
- › It can work well to have the non-profit agency as the public face for a project facing community opposition
- › Having project partners who act as champions for the project is helpful, especially when the non-profit society is stretched with responding to the public's concerns

Messaging

- › There is no need to apologize for the services they are trying to provide
- › Having a strong and articulate spokesperson to work with the public and media can help ensure consistent messaging
- › Carefully think through the language to describe the building, the clients, and the services provided before communicating the project to the public, as it is difficult to change neighbours' minds once they have an image of the building
- › Naming the project early on helped limit some of the negative descriptions of the site in discussions with the public



Police Calls Before and After Opening

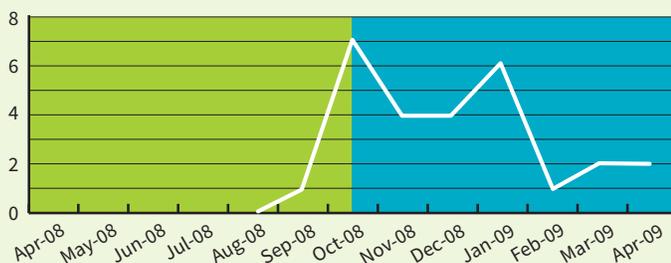


in police calls between the periods 6 months prior and 6 months post opening

In the six months leading up to the opening of Cardington Apartments, there was one call for service to the police. In the six months following project opening, calls increased to 19. Additional Kelowna police data show that the rate of police calls have typically remained at about 40 per year, an estimated 20 calls for a comparable six-month period in the years' following the opening of the site.

It is possible that the increase in calls is related to Cardington Apartment residents, the site is for vulnerable residents with higher support needs, including active addiction and a potential history of criminal behaviour. Increased calls could also be a result of some other group of completely unrelated individuals. The higher call rate may indicate heightened concerns amongst neighbours making them more likely to report an incident to the police. Key informants reported that after the building opened, there were some incidents of resident misbehavior. After trying to address the issue, staff called the police, which could explain the increase in calls. Though the increase appears significant, the number of incidents per month is still low, typically less than five per month.

Figure 1: Number of Calls to Police in Cardington Apartments (JHSCSO) Neighbourhood Before and After Site Opened



Source:
Kelowna Police
Department, 2014

Data Limitations

- 1) Police call data was requested for the neighbourhood around the case study sites. Neighbourhood boundary definitions vary by police department.
- 2) Key informant interviews were limited to representatives from each of the case study sites. Most other stakeholder groups, such as neighbours, other community members, funders and residents were not consulted for this study. While this limits study reliability, the key informants selected played a lead role in all aspects of the development and operations, providing valuable, comprehensive insights and perspectives. Clear common themes emerged across the case study sites supporting the validity of the case studies. Quantitative data from police departments also aligned with comments from key informants. Further research could be done to broaden the scope of stakeholders consulted to further validate the views expressed by those consulted for this report.
- 3) The case studies in this series only explore the experience of supportive housing sites that have achieved successful community integration. In the future, additional case studies could be conducted with supportive housing providers that have not fully achieved community acceptance. This would help measure the effectiveness of some of the strategies proposed in this report and identify additional lessons learned for future community integration best practices.

More Information:

Visit BC Housing's Research Centre at www.bchousing.org to find the latest workshops, research and publications on the key challenges and successes in building and operating affordable, sustainable housing.

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