

## Chapter 4

### DIVERSITY

## Making Our Housing Communities More Inclusive

*Adapted from “Diversity in Action” and “Living with Diversity” by the Co-operative Housing Federations of Canada and BC.*

Inclusive communities welcome everyone. An inclusive community does not exclude certain people or groups of people from becoming members. The community includes everyone in its activities and decision-making.

We live in a diverse country and this is reflected in our co-operative and non-profit housing communities. Different groups express their own unique values and attitudes in everyday activities. Many of these differences emerge in the housing communities where people live and participate.

The majority of Boards, residents, and managers of housing communities support the ideals of community inclusiveness, tolerance, and acceptance of diversity. However, significant problems can arise related to diversity issues. These problems result not only from the interaction of different cultural groups, but also from other dimensions that create personal identity. Many problems have to do with questions of class and socio-economic status; intergenerational differences; education; parenting standards; diverse aesthetic and moral standards and value conflicts; physical and psychological abilities and challenges; various approaches to environmental awareness, safety, cleanliness, and conceptions of leisure; use of space; and different definitions of interpersonal boundaries.

Board members, non-profit staff, and property managers understand they are in a complex double role as an authority responsible for social order, and as agents of social change and community development. They are concerned about how often residents (especially newcomers) have pre-conceptions about management, which range from fear and mistrust in the face of authority, to overall dependency and uncritical obedience. As a result, they must work beyond their job description to cope with problems of all kinds, from health issues to lending support, from administration to community leadership, from handling maintenance to community organization.

Most agree the use of common areas in a housing community is a strong indicator of the quality and health of the community. Communities that use the common areas tend to show more community integration and inclusiveness than those that lack common areas or do not use them. Property managers and staff of non-profit societies tend to have closer links to the community in developments where common rooms are widely used. The best ways to address problems resulting from encounters among people with different backgrounds are for people to know each other and for a community to be in place. Communities in which residents know each other



and are involved in managing the community experience fewer conflicts than communities where problems are handled by the property manager or by external agencies. Conflict is inherent to all communities, but a community where people know each other has more resources to deal with conflicts than those where isolation fuels fear, suspicion, and more isolation.

### How to Help People Become Part of the Community

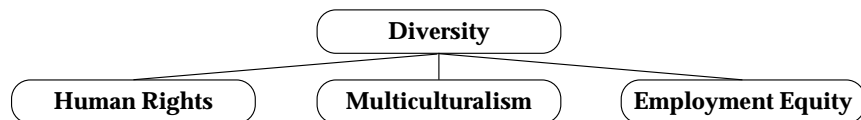
- Make sure there are no barriers to residents becoming involved in the community.
- Tell new members/residents how the co-op/society works.
- Offer ongoing education or training.
- Have free babysitting for meetings.
- Have translation at meetings.
- Translate written materials.
- Use plain language.
- Make arrangements for people with special needs.
- Plan social events so everyone can attend and feel welcome.
- Do not hold meetings on major religious holidays.
- Make your meeting room accessible.

## Respect for Diversity

BC Housing supports and encourages respect for diversity and healthy, inclusive communities. Respecting diversity means valuing people’s differences, and working to ensure fair, equitable and respectful treatment for everyone. Respect for diversity:

- Results from positive action and not simply the absence of discrimination.
- Removes barriers to access and promotes opportunities for full and equal participation by all.
- Fosters better decision-making, problem solving, service delivery and increased participation.

Diversity involves a commitment to promoting human rights, multiculturalism, and employment equity.



*"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."*  
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)



Human rights legislation emphasizes fair treatment, inclusion and non-discrimination to ensure everyone has the right to live, work and learn in an environment that is free from discrimination and harassment.

Multiculturalism recognizes and values ethno-cultural diversity to foster a society where there are no barriers to full and equal participation in employment, the community, cultural, and political life.

Employment equity identifies strategies for recruiting, retaining and promoting individuals within designated groups, such as women, visible minorities, aboriginal people and persons with disabilities.