

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: Christine Lamb Residence, Abbotsford

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

Christine Lamb Residence opened in 2012 in Abbotsford and is operated by **SARA for Women** (formerly Women's Resource Society of the Fraser Valley). The building has 41 self-contained units ranging in size from studio suites to four-bedroom apartments. This project provides transitional housing for women and children who are at risk of homelessness or fleeing violence. The project offers a fixed-term program of up to two years to help women transition into longer-term stable housing.

*Christine Lamb Residence
front entrance*





This study examines:

- › The type 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 has staff on duty 24/7. There are four program staff members, including three full-time support staff. A live-in caretaker provides additional coverage on weekends and evenings. Supports for residents focus primarily on referrals and helping residents navigate community support services such as: legal services, counseling, income assistance and permanent housing options.

On-site programming includes:

- › Morning inspirations where residents read inspirational quotes
- › Meditation
- › Art classes
- › Workshops to prevent addiction relapse
- › Child minding during on-site programming for moms
- › Lunches three times a week with volunteer and donor support
- › Speaker events (e.g. budgeting)
- › On-site medical support offered by public health (e.g. flu shots, dental services)

The City of Abbotsford was one of eight municipalities in B.C. to sign a *Memorandum of Understanding* with BC Housing in 2008 to provide land to create new supportive housing for those who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. The Christine Lamb Residence site was owned by the City of Abbotsford and donated to this project. Once a former park, the site was rezoned for supportive housing.

Methodology

BC Housing Research and Corporate Planning collected data through the following methods:

- › Key informant interviews with staff representatives from each supportive housing site
- › Working with local police departments, data was gathered showing the number of police calls for each study neighbourhood before and after project opening



Courtyard and community garden at Christine Lamb Residence



Neighbours

Christine Lamb Residence is in a central location in Abbotsford, with lots of nearby services for residents to access. Closest neighbours are primarily community amenities. There is a recreation centre next door, a pre-school and daycare, as well as a middle school. A rental apartment building is next door to the site.

Neighbour Concerns

Neighbours first heard of the proposed development through letters distributed by the City of Abbotsford. The recreation centre and schools did not raise concerns. Instead, concerns came from a small group of tenants from the apartment building next door. Concerns were about open drug use, criminally active residents, increased crime in the area, compromised personal safety and noise from children.

How Neighbour Concerns Were Expressed

Leading up to the opening of the site, neighbours raised concerns at public consultations held by the City of Abbotsford. There were also a few letters written to the City and some media coverage, but overall, coverage was not too negative.

Strategies to Build Positive Relationships During Development

Several outreach techniques were used to inform and get neighbor input on the project. In terms of public notifications, the City of Abbotsford held public consultations giving neighbours the opportunity to voice concerns. The City also sent letters to neighbours informing them of proposed site changes.

SARA for Women met personally with one neighbour who was particularly concerned about noise and inappropriate behaviour. Because her unit overlooked the new site, staff asked her to keep a look out and report any concerns once the building was occupied.

The society also reached out to introduce the project early to the local fire department, police, nearby schools, the recreation centre, and the daycare. Staff asked police to drive by regularly to alleviate neighbour concerns that the opening of the project would bring inappropriate behaviour into the



Side view of front entrance Christine Lamb Residence

area. Meeting with nearby services also provided a chance for staff to develop relationships with support services, allowing client referrals for those in need of the housing offered at Christine Lamb Residence.

Strategies to Build Positive Relationships After Opening

After the building opened, staff continued to reach out to neighbours and other community stakeholders. For example, local politicians were invited to see the building. The local police and fire departments were also invited so they could see the building in a situation that was not related to a critical incident plus gain a better understanding of the program, its clients and the supports offered. Christine Lamb Residence staff continue to meet with staff at nearby services to maintain relationships, especially if a staff change occurs at nearby service providers. To help women navigate the area services and immediately address any experiences of discrimination, Christine Lamb Residence staff often accompany women on their first visit. Staff further engage neighbours by inviting those who drop off donations or volunteer to join them for holiday celebrations.

Residents are asked to take responsibility for promoting positive relationships with neighbours too. They must sign a program agreement that includes their neighbourhood behaviour guidelines, which includes reporting incidents or suspicious behaviour outside of the building. Staff also host floor meetings four times per year to discuss expectations of residents, address concerns and build a sense of community.



Challenges

A drug dealer was operating near the recreation centre the first week after project opening. Neighbours blamed the new site for the incident although criminal activities such as drug deals were happening in the neighbourhood well before the site was developed. Site staff went to the recreation centre right away to explain that the dealer was not one of their residents. As previously mentioned, to address these on-going challenges, staff and residents are expected to report suspicious behaviour they may witness in the neighbourhood.

Current Relationship with Neighbours

According to the site administrators, the current relationship with neighbours is positive. Despite some initial complaints, for example about excessive noise, these dropped off quickly after opening. Residents now regularly access the services and amenities in the neighbourhood, such as the recreation centre, schools and the daycare.

Neighbours show their support for the project through their generosity. Teachers from the schools often come with donations and one neighbour brought thousands of dollars' worth of items, such as high chairs, linens and food.

Residents show neighbourhood support too by being proactive in reporting any suspicious outside activities. Residents go to the caretaker on-site or call police directly if they see inappropriate behaviour in the neighbourhood. For example, a resident noticed a man loitering at the next-door rental building one night. The next night they noticed another man with a flashlight digging in the same area. The resident took it upon herself to call police and it turned out to be a drug deal in progress. The resident also informed the nearby schools of the incident so they could be on alert.

Lessons Learned to Address Neighbour Concerns

- › Empower neighbours to keep a watch out and inform staff of any incidents of suspicious behaviour
- › Encourage neighbours to contact staff right away if they have any concerns
- › Address concerns immediately
- › Engage with neighbours early in the development process
- › Invite neighbours to see the program in action and the sense of community that has developed among building residents



Christine Lamb Residence, exterior view





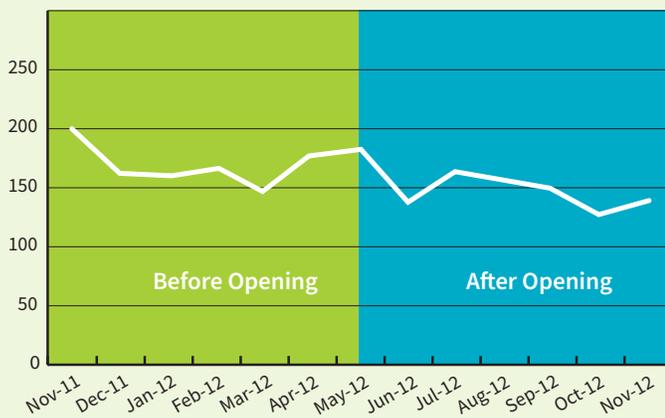
Police Calls Before and After Opening



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

In the six months leading up to the opening of Christine Lamb Residence (SARA for Women Society) there were 971 calls to the police. In the six months following the opening of the supportive housing site, the number of calls dropped to 819.

Figure 1: Number of Calls to Police in the Christine Lamb Residence (SARA for Women Society) Neighbourhood Before and After Site Opened



Source: Abbotsford 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 tenants 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 of the case study sites, providing valuable, comprehensive insights and perspectives. Clear common themes emerged across the case study sites supporting the validity of the comments made in preparing 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 study 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:

To find out more, 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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