



Indigenizing Housing

**A Guide to Providing Culturally-Appropriate Housing for
Aboriginal Communities in British Columbia**

*Prepared by Emma Fineblit
for the Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA)*



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The content of this document was also informed by some of the excellent research that has been done on the subject of Aboriginal housing. A selected Reference section at the end of this guide provides some literature and resources that may be relevant or useful.

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About the Author:

Emma Fineblit is a Masters student at UBC's School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP), in the Indigenous Community Planning program. Emma is a settler of Jewish Eastern-European, English, and Scottish ancestry, who grew up in Winnipeg. She became interested in understanding the context of Indigenous communities and passionate about the work of decolonization after working in inner-city Winnipeg, home to Canada's largest urban Aboriginal population. Through her studies at SCARP, Emma has become especially interested in housing issues, as well as ways to draw on the strengths of communities and culture to meet the needs of community members. Emma worked as a Research Intern with the Aboriginal Housing Management Association in the summer of 2014 and had the opportunity to visit and interview several Aboriginal Community-Based Organizations from across British Columbia to investigate what they are doing to provide culturally appropriate housing for their communities. She is very grateful for the warm welcome and helpful insights she received from those she met through the process. She acknowledges that as a settler and a student, she is by no means the expert on this topic, and hopes that this guide will act as a starting point for conversation on how to provide housing that better meets the needs of those who live there.



Letter of Support from AHMA's CEO Ray Gerow

We would like to thank Emma Fineblit for all her hard work in compiling this excellent resource on Indigenous housing and suggested guidelines for adaptation that can be used both locally and nationally. We value the time and effort she spent contacting AHMA's Community-Based Organizations across the Province of BC in order to gather important information from the experienced and knowledgeable staff members in our organizations. The opinions in this document are not AHMA's, but we hope readers will find them useful, culturally appropriate, and well-researched. Inside this guide, there are easy to follow suggestions for starting conversations and interesting case studies that exemplify how others have made the process work in the past. We hope this document will go a long way toward helping both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations work together at whatever stage of the construction, renovation, or operations process they may find themselves in, in order to make the most authentic, culturally appropriate, and economic use of their time, energy, and resources.

Hoy-chewx-a Siyam (Squamish for "Thank you, respected one.")



Ray Gerow, Chief Executive Officer

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Introduction

This guide was developed with significant input and support from AHMA's partner Aboriginal community-based organizations (CBOs) from across British Columbia, including individuals from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit ancestry. It is an attempt to draw together best practices and lessons learned from Aboriginal CBOs in the province, so that organizations might learn from each others' innovations, challenges, and successes.

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to provide ideas for consideration when planning, designing, and operating social housing for Aboriginal tenants. The guide is meant to be used as a supplement to BC Housing's *Design Guidelines and Construction Standards (2012)*. The document poses the questions: "What are Aboriginal CBOs in British Columbia doing to meet the unique needs of their Aboriginal tenants?" and "What does culturally appropriate off-reserve Aboriginal social housing in British Columbia look like?"

Far from being prescriptive, this guide offers elements to consider, which may or may not apply to a specific context, and examples of how those elements have been incorporated into existing housing projects.

Section Breakdown

The first section of this guide provides 10 categories of guidelines for organizations to consider when initiating Aboriginal housing projects. The guidelines range from consultation to providing community gathering spaces to capacity-building.

The second section provides six case studies of existing projects in BC that have incorporated one or more of the guidelines described earlier. These cases provide real-world models for how some of the guidelines might be followed. Contact information is provided with each case in the event that a CBO should wish to follow up and get more information about a specific project.

This guide may be used by Aboriginal organizations or by anyone wishing to design housing or other spaces to be culturally-appropriate for Aboriginal communities.

GUIDELINE 1: CONSULTATION



Residents at Cwenengitel Aboriginal Society

“Consult early and often”

Consultation can take a range of different forms and involve several different First Nations and stakeholder groups. Aboriginal community-based organizations (CBOs) have reported that a thorough consultation process can make all the difference in the success of a project.

Community Consultation

CBOs expressed that community consultation (which may or may not be required by municipal government):

- Generates positive exposure for a new project;
- Provides an opportunity for public education (which may mitigate potential opposition from neighbours or backlash against tenants);
- Helps to determine the needs of the people who will access the housing;
- Creates buy-in and a sense of ownership over the project for those involved;
- Empowers the community; and
- Helps to establish positive relationships of trust with important stakeholders.

CBOs consult with different stakeholder groups for different projects and in different contexts, but the following groups were considered by CBOs to be important stakeholders, along with the respective First Nations and Métis Nation (discussed below), to consult with on a new project:

- Elders;
- Youth;
- Neighbours in the surrounding area of the project;
- Prospective tenants;
- Local service providers and other Aboriginal organizations (for example, health organizations or Friendship Centres);
- Local/municipal government;
- Funders;
- Local knowledge holders, such as cultural committees; and
- CBO staff.

Consultation will be carried out in different ways by different CBOs for different projects, but CBOs with experience in community consultation processes offered the following general guidelines for consultation:

- Allow the process to be driven by the community (for consultants from outside the community, engage a community member or employee of the local CBO as a liaison for the project);
- Involve all stakeholders;
- Consult early and often;
- Listen to community input and report back on changes made in response to feedback;
- Allow multiple opportunities and venues for engagement;
- Don't build false expectations; and
- Consult in a way that is appropriate to the target (consider language and accessibility, offer food, and reduce barriers to participation, such as providing transportation and welcoming children).

The following are some examples of common consultation methods used by CBOs:

- Open houses;
- Workshops;
- Design charrettes or targeted group planning events;
- Community meals;
- Interviews, surveys, and focus groups; and
- Committees and working groups.

Consulting with First Nations

Consulting with First Nations is an important part of the work of any CBO. Consulting with local First Nations before, and throughout, a new project can go a long way in building trust and maintaining a positive working relationship between the CBO and the Nation. Every context is different and protocols vary from culture to culture, Nation to Nation, and community to community.

CBOs offered the following general guidelines based on their experience consulting with First Nations. See the list below.

- Remember, consultation with First Nations is an ongoing process and should begin at the earliest opportunity.
- Build respectful relationships with local First Nations in a way that is appropriate for the context and satisfies the needs of the Nation.
- Learn about – and follow – local protocols.
 - For example, protocols might involve asking the Nation's permission to initiate a new project, harvest food or resources, and/or engage in ceremonies on its territory.
- If engagement with First Nations is approached in a respectful way and an organization develops a positive reputation for following protocol, the CBO may be given permission to carry out its work within a Nation's territory more quickly for future projects.
- Ask what the Nation's interests are in a project – don't tell or assume you know what they want – and practice flexibility and openness.
- Follow through on commitments with actions, not just words.

- Consider impacts on the environment and on sites that might hold historical, religious or cultural significance to a Nation.
- Contemplate how the housing project might impact the local First Nation's community (for example, can it be a resource for the community or will it take away from on-reserve activities?).
- Be flexible; consultation might involve providing a description of a proposed new project, modifying it based on a Nation's needs, and monitoring and reporting along the way.
- Act with patience, prepare to give the process the time it needs.

In order to have a successful working relationship with First Nations communities, some CBOs have employed the following strategies:

- Approaching Band offices or Chief and Council with new proposals for their approval first;
- Engaging Elders to establish goodwill on behalf of the CBO;
- Establishing Protocol Agreements or Terms of Reference to guide relationships with First Nations and to lay out clear expectations of responsibilities in a project; and
- Recognition of local territory at gatherings, in building design, in blessing the ground, and in opening the building.

NOTE: Refer to the Reference section for helpful resources on consultation with First Nations.

GUIDELINE 2: LOCATION



*Vancouver Native Housing Society's
Skwachàys Lodge in downtown Vancouver*

“People want to be housed in the community where they choose to live”

With limited land, funding, and other resources, organizations may not have much control over the choice of a site for new developments.

However, in cases where different locations are being considered for a new project, the following qualities may be important:

- Proximity to:
 - General services (consider which services prospective tenants would likely access, including health and wellness, childcare, seniors’ programming, etc.),
 - Aboriginal-specific organizations and services, such as a Friendship or Youth Centre,
 - Amenities (including shopping, recreation, and entertainment options),
 - Employment opportunities,
 - Education,
 - Public transportation and accessibility,
 - Families/home community, and
 - Parks and nature (and access to land-based practices, such as food and medicine gathering);
- Environmental assessments and/or archaeological or traditional use studies on land; and
- Environmental considerations, including:
 - Quiet locations,
 - Not isolated from community or resources,
 - Where tenants feel comfortable, and
 - Safety (especially important in transition homes or for those fleeing abuse).

GUIDELINE 3: MORE THAN A LANDLORD



Food pantry at Helping Spirit Lodge

“A community approach to being a landlord”

For many Aboriginal organizations, providing housing involves a lot more than simply a roof over their tenants’ heads – it’s about creating a sense of *home*. The difference between an effective Aboriginal CBO and a commercial landlord or the “mainstream model” is one of values.

An organization’s values play into how it hires and trains staff, how staff members interact with tenants, and how the organization relates to the broader community. AHMA’s CEO Ray Gerow describes this difference as “a community approach to being a landlord.”

The Importance of the Right Staff

When it comes to social housing, especially supportive housing, the people who run the program can be just as important as the physical home to tenants. Aboriginal CBOs have learned from experience how to hire and train staff members who will be able to provide the best culturally-competent support to their tenants.

For some CBOs, hiring Aboriginal employees is the best approach. Aboriginal staff members, especially those from the same backgrounds as the tenants, are more likely to have an understanding of where the tenants are coming from, including common life experiences, family structures, lifestyle practices, and the intergenerational effects of historical and current events. Because of this, Aboriginal employees are also more likely able to teach and practice cultural ceremonies with their tenants.

The CBOs surveyed highlighted the importance of having staff members that are passionate about their work – these employees believe in what they do and care about the well-being of the tenants. They are not just in it for the paycheque and will go the extra mile to support tenants in achieving their goals. Engaged employees also share the values (like non-discrimination and empathy) of the organization with the tenants.

One way to identify qualified staff for a role in an Aboriginal CBO is a ‘competencies’ model of hiring and staff evaluation. This approach sees competencies such as commitment, empathy, and cultural agility, as important qualities for an employee to be able to do their job effectively.

NOTE: See Reference section for one model of “Aboriginal Relations Behavioural Competencies” from the BC Public Service Agency.

Some CBOs make cultural competency training recommended or required for all their employees.

NOTE: See Case Study #1: Ts’i’its’uwatul Lelum for an example of cultural competence training.

Other CBOs report that competency training for employees has created a culturally-safe workplace for them and that tends to lend itself to higher rates of staff retention. The Provincial Health Services Authority in BC is one example of an organization that offers an online Indigenous Cultural Competency Training Program.

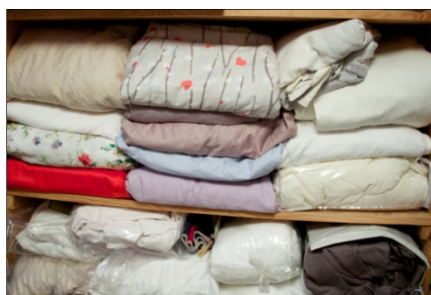
NOTE: See the Reference section for additional details about the PHSA's Indigenous Cultural Competency Training Program.

Tenant Support Systems and Services

Aboriginal housing is often a lot more than a “roof over the head” for a tenant. Aboriginal CBOs provide a variety of supports to their tenants, ranging from food to bus passes to child-minding to programming.

In some homes, especially transition or recovery homes, the focus is on healing, and often, in an Aboriginal CBO context, that means holistic healing. Holistic health focuses on the whole person and his/her complete wellness, including physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health.

In other programs, the focus is on capacity building or to help tenants develop life skills in order to eventually move on to more independent or market housing. These programs might offer training in areas such as budgeting, health, employment or parenting. The organizations might provide advocacy for tenants to outside agencies and help connect tenants to resources and services at other organizations.



Photos: Bedding and food are provided for residents at the Helping Spirit Lodge

Tenant Selection

Aboriginal CBOs tend to take a different approach to tenant selection than commercial landlords. They might give tenants an extra chance when others won't, and often, demonstrated need for housing is one of the biggest criteria for selecting tenants. Aboriginal CBOs might give priority to tenants who face multiple barriers to housing.

Some organizations limit their housing to tenants with Aboriginal ancestry or households in which some members have Aboriginal ancestry. Some organizations have a mix of tenants from different backgrounds, but give preference to Aboriginal tenants. Others select tenants based on their demonstrated respect for the importance of Aboriginal cultures. Still others make their tenancy decisions based on another set of criteria, regardless of background or culture. Decisions about what defines tenancy requirements for 'Aboriginal housing' generally are made by the organization based on its mandate and the needs in its community.

Challenges

- When support services in housing are sensitive in nature, confidentiality may be a concern. In small Aboriginal communities, where service providers are also community members, organizations may have to take extra measures to ensure the privacy of its tenants is respected. This might mean providing access to off-site support services, screening service providers or providing private rooms on site for counselling and other sensitive conversations.

NOTE: See Case Study 6: Helping Spirit Lodge and Spirit Way for more information on the challenge of confidentiality.

- When staff members from the local community are employed by the organization, they might be working with tenants who are related to them and a potential conflict of interest may arise. Similarly, while some cultural protocols encourage gifting, staff legally may not be allowed to accept gifts from tenants or clients. In both these situations, CBOs must create sensitive policies that allow tenants to receive culturally competent service without compromising the integrity of the staff.

NOTE: See Case Study 1: Ts'i'ts'uwatul' Lelum for more on conflicts of interest.

GUIDELINE 4: CULTURAL LIFESTYLE PRACTICES



*Smudging materials at
Helping Spirit Lodge Society*

“Be culturally flexible”

Aboriginal tenants may have different lifestyle practices than tenants of other cultures. The tenants might have grown up in traditional communities or may wish to reconnect with the lifestyle practices of their heritage.

When possible, cultural considerations should be incorporated into the planning, design, and implementation of housing to accommodate traditional lifestyle practices.

These practices will vary greatly depending on the individual and their community, and community consultation in the planning stages of a project will help an organization determine what the particular cultural needs of that community might be.

Some common practices among First Nations and Métis people living in British Columbia which have been incorporated by CBOs include:

- Smudging, which might include:
 - Providing space for smudging ceremonies, which may require special ventilation and/or fire code considerations and
 - Providing materials for tenants to smudge in the home and flexible policies that allow them to do so;



Photos: The above pictures show the ventilation system in Skwachàys Lodge’s Smudge Room and a smudge bowl at Helping Spirit Lodge Society

- Sweat lodges, which might include:
 - Creating a sweat lodge on-site for use by tenants or by the wider community and
 - Facilitating relationships with other community organizations to allow tenants to attend sweats off-site;

NOTE: See case studies 2: Cwenengitel and 3: Skwachàys Lodge for more examples on sweat lodges.



Photos: The above pictures show the sweat lodges at Skwachàys Lodge and Cwenengitel.

- Incorporating traditional food preparation techniques, including:
 - Canning,
 - Meat preparation (for example, after hunting or fishing),
 - Gardening,
 - Smoking, and
 - General cooking duties (for example, just having access to a kitchen is enough to make a difference. In Lu'ma's Aboriginal Patients' Lodge guests and their families can prepare traditional healing foods in their suites while they are visiting for medical treatment, rather than relying on costly hotel food or unhealthy fast food alternatives);

NOTE: See the Reference section for more information.

- Providing a place to prepare and store large amounts of food (for example, after a hunt or to host a feast for the community), including:
 - Offering provisions for food practices that may involve large/multiple fridges and deep freezers and/or Community kitchens,

NOTE: See Case Study 4: Friendship Lodge for more on community kitchens.

- Large kitchens in units that can accommodate multiple people cooking at once, and
 - Large cooking or serving dishes;
- Incorporating traditional craft-making into a hobby room, multi-purpose room, workshop or studio. Craft sessions may be guided by an Elder, community member or facilitator, including:
 - Sewing,
 - Making drums, medicine boxes, rattles, moccasins, paddles, etc.,
 - Regalia-making,
 - Carving,
 - Skinning hides, and

- Others;

NOTE: See case studies 2: Cwenengitel and 3: Skwachàys Lodge for traditional craft incorporation.



Photos: The above pictures show crafts made at Cwenengitel: a dream catcher, a paddle, and a drum.

- Incorporating space for other traditional practices, such as drumming, dancing or singing, including large spaces for community groups to practice; and

NOTE: See Case Study 5: Aboriginal Children's Village for more on incorporating traditional practice space.

- Allotting space for ceremonies and other cultural activities that may be hosted on-site or that staff might assist the tenants in attending elsewhere, including:
 - Pow Wows,
 - Round dances,
 - Sun dances,
 - Medicine-picking,
 - Fasting,
 - Pipe ceremonies,
 - Canoe journeys, and
 - Visits to historical/culturally significant sites.

NOTE: See Case Study 2: Cwenengitel for more information.

Elders, medicine men and women, Aboriginal organizations, and other knowledge-holders might be asked to facilitate or teach these practices and ceremonies on-site, where appropriate.

Though cultural activities may vary depending on the location, background or people present, participation in cultural activities may be:

- an expectation for participants in some programs (i.e. for addictions recovery);
- available to tenants or the wider community;
- simply enabled by providing the space and flexible policies to accommodate them;
- practised by staff to create a more culturally-safe environment for tenants; and

- signage, literature or meetings using different Aboriginal languages.

Some urban Aboriginal organizations express the need to be “culturally fluid,” reflecting and accommodating several different cultures to meet the needs of their diverse tenant populations. Vancouver Native Housing Society’s Skwachàys Lodge is an example of trying to represent several different Aboriginal cultures in one building.

GUIDELINE 5: BUILDING BRIDGES



*Jerry Whitehead mural at
Helping Spirit Lodge*

“Act as good neighbours”

Unfortunately, social housing is sometimes met with resistance from the community where it is situated. This resistance might reflect negatively on tenants, so it is in an organization’s interest to take proactive steps to build positive relationships with the surrounding community.

Some strategies for this include:

- Providing public education:
 - Hosting community conversations to provide members of the public with insight into indigenous histories and lifestyle practices to reduce stigma;
- Acting as good neighbours
 - Tenants and staff are engaged in the community, including:
 - Tenants cutting the lawn or shovelling snow for their neighbours or for Elders,
 - Tenants volunteering at food bank, and/or
 - Youth program providing neighbourhood clean-up;
- Being inconspicuous:
 - Some organizations report that simply quietly blending into the community is the best approach for them to receiving a positive reception from neighbours;
- Drumming up support from local political leadership:
 - Building relationships with strategic allies in positions of power and
 - Offering them solid statistics or local programming in return; and
- Welcoming the community into the building:
 - Opening up on-site programming (e.g. yoga, sweat lodge) to the broader community.

NOTE: See Case Study 2: Cwenengitel for more information.

Communication

“We’re not coming into your community; we’re becoming part of your community”

Some successful strategies for communicating with concerned neighbours include:

- Listening respectfully to neighbours’ fears and concerns in order to make a concentrated effort to address specific issues. Reporting back to the individuals or community members on steps taken to address issues is a great way to show that they have been heard;
- Inviting concerned neighbours to join committees or working groups to become part of the solution; and

NOTE: See Case Study 4: Friendship Lodge for more information on working with the community.

- Providing examples of similar projects that have been successful.

While many of the concerns that neighbours may have are valid and can be addressed simply with time and attention, there may be some critics whose opposition is based merely in prejudice or hatred – in these cases, advocacy or legal action may be the only important necessary and final steps.

Partnerships

“Social housing requires you to partner with everyone – you can’t do this alone”

Partnerships in Aboriginal housing can take a variety of forms, such as:

- Aboriginal service providers that offer programs to tenants on- or off-site, including:
 - Health,
 - Employment,
 - Counselling,
 - Child and family services, and
 - Basic needs;
- Resource organizations that provide funding, land or materials necessary to make a project a reality. Sometimes these partners come from unlikely or non-traditional sources;

NOTE: See Case Study 1: Ts'i'ts'uwatul' Lelum for more on resource partnerships.

- Networking or collaborating with organizations that meet through coalitions or umbrella organizations to address issues of common concern. Through these networks come many mutual benefits, including:
 - Program partnership,
 - Identification of gaps in services in order to avoid duplication and save money,
 - Coordination of wrap-around supports, effective case management, and referrals,
 - Letters of support for funding applications, and
 - Exchange and the sharing of ideas, best practices, resources, and funding opportunities;
- First Nations partnerships between on- and off-reserve groups that allow for smoother transitions, such as urban patients’ lodges for medical travel; and
- Businesses and other institutions that may support CBOs in a variety of ways, including donations of time and resources. Some examples include:
 - A construction company’s employees that donate their time to repair a playground,
 - A local school’s staff works with a transition home for women and children to accept students on a short-term, as-needed basis, and
 - Hotel suppliers donate furniture to rooms of a social enterprise boutique hotel, which internally subsidizes its low-income artist housing.

Aboriginal Housing projects can also act as a resource to other community organizations. Some examples of this are included below:

- Hey-Way-Noqu' Healing Circle for Addictions uses the Smudge Room at Skwachàys Lodge to counsel clients and smudge with them.
- Lu'ma Native Housing Society has acted as a resource to other community organizations providing them guidance to set up their own Patients' Lodges and Community Voice Mail programs.

GUIDELINE 6: ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN



A colourful pole carved by Nisga'a carver Mike Dangeli at Lu'ma's Aboriginal Children's Village

“Provide a home tenants can be proud of”

To some, Aboriginal housing should “look” Aboriginal. What this means, of course, varies greatly depending on the context and a variety of different cultures, territories, populations, needs, and available resources.

Some Aboriginal CBOs and tenants feel that the current, “mainstream” design of social housing is not appropriate for their communities. They expressed a preference to see Aboriginal housing that:

- Has a distinct look-and-feel and which doesn't follow uniform cookie-cutter design;
- Feels more like a home than a jail or institution;
- Has character or is a work of art;
- Creates a calming environment; and/or
- Expresses a relationship with the land upon which it resides.

The following are some design elements identified by Aboriginal CBOs as being indicative of culturally-appropriate design for their Aboriginal tenants:

- Exposed natural wood/logs (like cedar posts);

NOTE: See case studies 3: Skwachàys Lodge and 5: Aboriginal Children's Village for more information on culturally appropriate design.

- Outdoor space with greenery that includes trees, indigenous plants, and natural edible landscapes (like berry bushes on site);
- Round shape to the buildings;
- Totem poles;

NOTE: See case studies 5: Aboriginal Children's Village, 1: Ts'i'ts'uwatul' Lelum, and 3: Skwachàys Lodge for more on Totem poles.

- Carvings;

NOTE: See Case Study 4: Friendship Lodge to read more about traditional carvings.

- Views of the outdoors and access to natural light;

- Aboriginal art featured, especially art that recognizes local territory;
- House design inspired by local traditional dwellings (for example, “longhouse-style” homes);

NOTE: See case studies 3: Skwachàys Lodge and 5: Aboriginal Children’s Village for more on traditional dwellings and design.

- “Multicultural” Aboriginal themes that recognize multiple traditions;
- Welcoming entrance ways;
- Appropriate uses of colour*; and

NOTE: See Case Study 5: Aboriginal Children’s Village for more on colour selection.

- Local materials.

**NOTE: On use of colour: Nisga’a Architect Patrick Stewart reports that in the process of designing the Stó:lō Elders’ Lodge in Chilliwack, Elders expressed that they did not want to see the use of white or brick anywhere, as those elements reminded them of residential schools.*

Engaging Artists and Architects

To some Aboriginal CBOs, the work of an Aboriginal architect made all the difference in the end result and quality of the Aboriginal housing they designed. Other organizations have found non-Aboriginal architects who have shown respect, empathy, open-mindedness, and understanding to accommodate the needs and values of the Aboriginal communities they have worked with.

Housing can be an expression of identity. A home that matches the identity of the community it houses can help to foster a sense of pride and ownership among tenants. Some Aboriginal CBOs have taken steps to design housing that expresses the identity of its tenants through:

- Naming projects and rooms in local languages;

NOTE: See Case Study 1: Ts’i’ts’uwatul’ Lelum for an example of naming in local language.

- Commissioning local artists to produce art to recognize a local territory (for example, a totem pole or carving at the entranceway). In more diverse or urban Aboriginal communities, it might be important to represent more than one culture;

NOTE: See Case Study 5: Aboriginal Children’s Village to read more about commissioning local artists.

- Inviting local Elders or dignitaries to the grand opening or re-opening of the building;

- Engaging local artists to paint a mural that represents the community (for example, Vancouver Native Housing Society’s Orwell building brought together local artists and community members from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside to design and paint “Through the Eye of the Raven,” representing history, struggles, and hope in the neighbourhood); and

NOTE: To learn more, view a video about this project at:

www.urbanaboriginal.org/about

- Setting up a cultural advisory committee of local community members to choose appropriate cultural enhancements for the building, such as colour scheme, names, materials, and even menu options.

Finally, for some, the most important way to have a home represent the people who live there is to provide high-quality, well-maintained, clean facilities that tenants can take pride in.

GUIDELINE 7: NEIGHBOURHOOD IN A BUILDING



Play structure for children at Helping Spirit Lodge

“Building community in a community’s building”

The demographical needs for housing vary considerably from community to community. Many CBOs stated that they had a shortage of units to accommodate large families in their communities. Other CBOs expressed that small families and single people were the groups with the most housing need.

In some contexts, like in an assisted-living facility or an emergency home for women fleeing abuse, it makes sense to target a specific demographic group with a housing development. In other cases, it is more desirable to build a “neighbourhood in a building,” with a demographic mix where community members at different stages in life can learn from and support each other.

While needs are different in every community, it seems that some trends are more common throughout British Columbia. Highlighted below are some of these needs.

- *Aboriginal family structures can vary from those of non-Aboriginal families.* Families may have more children and there might be a preference for multiple generations of a family to be housed together (for example, grandparents living with and caring for grandchildren or adult children remaining in their parents’ homes for longer). Furthermore, the high proportion of Aboriginal children in foster care and a preference for those children to be cared for within their extended family or their community creates a demand for larger homes to accommodate additional children in the family. All of these factors mean that Aboriginal communities often require large homes, with more and larger bedrooms, which are not commonly found in social housing developments.

Some Aboriginal CBOs are making an effort to incorporate larger units into their developments to accommodate these family structures.

NOTE: See Case Study 5: Aboriginal Children’s Village for more on changing accommodations to fit Aboriginal families.

- *Accessible units are in high demand.* Accessible units for seniors and those with mobility challenges are identified as a major need in several communities.

NOTE: See cases studies 3: Skwachàys Lodge and 4: Friendship Lodge for more information.

- *First Nations people living on- or off-reserve in remote areas are travelling to urban centres, such as Vancouver or Prince George, to receive medical treatment.* When medical issues require more

long-term treatment such as cancer treatment or dialysis, or when patients require their families to travel with them, appropriate, affordable, and comfortable accommodation can be a challenge. A Patients' Lodge, Medical Hostel, or short-term rental unit has been identified as a need in several communities. At least one organization, Lu'ma Native Housing Society, is already operating an Aboriginal Patient's Lodge successfully in Vancouver and mentoring other organizations to start their own.

NOTE: See <http://lnhs.ca/aboriginal-health-wellness/> for more details.

- *New demographics of need are being identified.* Youth aging out of care, individuals re-entering the community after being incarcerated, students, Elders, and lone-parent families were among other demographic groups identified as needing housing in their communities.
- *Increasingly fluctuating household structures need flexible housing.* Family size and structures in a home fluctuate over time as families grow. Grandparents and adult children move in and out. And, family members move from rural communities to join their relatives in the city. Some possible solutions to accommodate these fluctuating household structures are:
 - Flexible unit design,
 - Bigger bedrooms,
 - Semi-private "in-law" suites, and
 - Developments with a mix of unit sizes and layouts that allow families to relocate to a different suite in the same community when their family structure changes, without becoming disconnected from their community and support system.
- *There is an increased need for short-term accommodations.* In some cases, individuals only require short-term accommodation (for example, when families are gathering to celebrate or mourn the death of a loved one or have a visitor). Additionally, a relative who has recently moved off-reserve may need a place to stay in the short-term until he or she can find an apartment. In such cases, visitors might be accommodated by:
 - Flexible regulations surrounding guests in units,
 - Guest/ flex suites than can be booked by tenants in multi-family developments,
 - Emergency housing,
 - Short-term rental units,
 - Making vacant units available to short-term visitors, and
 - Providing areas/spaces that tenants can book to host family members for a meal or gathering.

Underlying the demand to accommodate visitors is the reality that in many communities, the wait lists are long for social housing, and that any provision of a visitor suite or short-term rental accommodation could take up resources that could have provided a long-term home for an individual or family at risk of homelessness. Decisions about priorities of this nature will be made based on the needs, missions, and values of each community-based organization.

Building Community in the Community's Building

Regardless of the makeup of the tenant population, building community within a housing development is an important goal for many Aboriginal CBOs. Tenants may have moved recently to an urban centre and feel isolated from their home communities or may enjoy the support of a neighbour for childcare.

CBOs have identified that it is important to foster a sense of community in a housing development, in order to:

- Help each other survive in the urban environment;
- Maintain kinship, family or community ties;
- Build social cohesion;
- Maintain a multi-generational, extended family structure;
- Keep families together;
- Create tenant support or to rally around each other in times of need; and
- Allow tenants to learn from each other and allow youth to connect to culture through interactions with Elders.

Some strategies that Aboriginal CBOs have used to build community in their housing projects include:

- Building a diverse tenant community with members of different genders, ages, and abilities;
- Hosting community gatherings and cultural events;
- Hosting communal meals, programs, discussion circles, and ceremonies for tenants;
- Enforcing expectations of respectful tenant interactions with each other;
- Drawing in support from the broader community (for example, Elders, counselling, and use of facilities);
- Keeping extended families together in the same neighbourhood or complex by providing a mix of housing types in a development and allowing tenants to move within the same community when their housing needs change;
- Creating a “community currency” system that encourages tenants to share and barter time and services with each other; and
- Selecting tenants based on assessments of who would ‘fit’ well in the community.

GUIDELINE 8: GATHERING SPACE



*Amenity Space at
Lu'ma's Aboriginal Children's Village*

"Communities need gathering spaces"

Perhaps the most common theme amongst Aboriginal CBOs interviewed and surveyed for the creation of this guide was that *communities need gathering spaces*.

Aboriginal CBOs reported that communal gathering space was needed in their developments for a range of purposes and uses, including:

- Hosting community or family events;
- Community meals;
- Workshops and educational opportunities;
- Practice space for cultural groups, such as drumming, singing, and dancing;
- Traditional arts and crafts;
- Large-scale food preparation and hosting community kitchens;
- Tenant meetings;
- Programming and support services, such as health and wellness, employment services;
- Children's play space;
- Recreation, such as socializing or watching TV; and
- Talking with Elders.

The type of communal gathering space provided will vary based on the availability of space and the needs of the community, but might include:

- Carving, painting, and art spaces or workshops;

NOTE: See Case Study 3: Skwachàys Lodge and Case Study 2: Cwenengitel for more on art spaces.

- Elders' room;
- Communal kitchen;
- Entrance, greeting or lounge area;
- Meeting room;
- Gym;
- Cultural or spiritual room;
- Common living room; and
- Service provider room (for medical, lawyer, counselling, etc. services that need to meet with clients privately).

In many housing projects, the communal gathering space can be booked free-of-charge or for a refundable deposit by building tenants. Some organizations open their gathering space up for use by the broader community and others charge a fee for use to help subsidize the cost of housing. In housing developments where space is limited, or in scattered single-family home models, other community gathering space might be used, such as a Friendship Centre.

NOTE: See case studies 1: Ts'i'ts'uwatul' Lelum, 2: Cwenengitel, 4: Friendship Centre, 5: Aboriginal Children's Village, and 6: Helping Spirit Lodge to explore this need further.

Access to outdoor space can also make a big difference in the experience of tenants, especially those in urban areas. Outdoor space can provide a connection to the land, to traditional practices (such as food or medicine gathering), and a pleasant, peaceful place to gather. Some CBOs make an effort to locate their housing in proximity to parks or natural areas, and others try to incorporate outdoor communal space into the design of their facilities. Some of the best design examples include:

- Inner courtyards (a green space in the inner section of a multi-family development, which can be surveyed from units or indoor common spaces, was described as ideal for the safety of children playing);
- Community gardens (gardening was described by some CBOs as useful for therapeutic purposes, for building a sense of responsibility and ownership, and also for the ability to grow herbs and medicines);
- Outdoor play spaces, play grounds, and sports fields or courts;
- BBQ and eating areas;
- Edible landscapes (including native plants and trees);
- Fire pits and outdoor seating areas; and
- Footpaths.

GUIDELINE 9: SUSTAINABILITY



Table built from repurposed wood at Vancouver Native Housing Society's Skwachàys Lodge

"Value our resources"

Sustainability is an important consideration in any new project. Sustainable buildings can be identified as being:

- Less harmful to the earth, which promotes indigenous values of environmental stewardship and planning for future generations);
- Easier and cheaper to maintain;
- Energy efficient (and therefore less expensive in the long term) or LEED certified;

NOTE: See Case Study 4: Friendship Lodge for additional information on energy efficiency.

- Safe, clean, and healthy;
- Built with quality, durable materials;
- Provide adequate space and facilities to prevent the effects of overcrowding;
- Maintained preventatively;
- Mitigate damages to land;
- Landscaping choices, which are more efficient for maintenance, water use, and ease of tenants to assist with up-keep;
- Designed to minimize common health and safety risks, such as pest and insect infestation;
- Use local or recycled materials, where possible;
- Designed to last for the long term;
- Respected by the tenants who live there and by the broader community; and
- Financially viable through use of diverse, creative funding sources and mixed-use developments.

NOTE: See Case Studies 3: Skwachàys Lodge and 5: Aboriginal Children's Village.

GUIDELINE 10: CAPACITY-BUILDING



“This is my home”

Aboriginal CBOs have the ability to build capacity and generate income and employment within their communities through the planning, construction, and operations of housing.

*Photo supplied by M’akola
Group of Societies*

CBOs can build capacity and generate employment in local Aboriginal communities through:

- Construction, including:
 - Hiring local Aboriginal carpenters/labourers/contractors,
 - Partnering with local Aboriginal employment programs,

NOTE: See Reference section for more on Aboriginal employment programs.

- Providing access to trades training and apprenticeships to local youth or unemployed community members through local schools, colleges, and community organizations, and
- Working with contractors to encourage them, through conditions in contracts or through positive relationship building, to hire qualified Aboriginal labourers and
- Operations, including:
 - Hiring local Aboriginal community members as managers, support workers, maintenance, kitchen and cleaning staff, etc.,
 - Mentoring staff in support positions to develop skills to move into more senior roles,
 - Investing in staff training programs, and

NOTE: See Reference section for more on staff training programs.

- Sourcing services and supplies from local Aboriginal businesses, where possible.

Capacity-Building for Tenants

Involving tenants in every stage of a housing development – from planning to construction to management – creates buy-in and a sense of pride and ownership over housing, as well as helping to support tenants in developing new skills. Power and responsibility over their own housing can lend to tenants feeling self-confident and empowered.

Some strategies that have had success at building capacity and a sense of ownership in tenants are as follows:

- Hiring tenants to do maintenance/landscaping/painting;

- Building tenant participation in chores/cleaning/cooking into a tenant's program expectations in supportive or transitional housing;
- Supporting tenants in seeking employment with partner organizations;
- Providing life skills and professional development programming for tenants to facilitate a shift to more independent/market housing;

NOTE: See case studies 2: Cwenengitel and 3: Skwachàys Lodge for more on tenant programming.

- Giving tenants choices where possible (for example, in unit colour, layout, menus, programming, etc.);
- Giving tenants decision-making power over the operations of a project (for example, at Cwenengitel Aboriginal Society, household members have the power to collectively decide whether a resident who has broken the rules will be allowed to stay at the house);

NOTE: See Case Study 2: Cwenengitel to read more about tenant decision-making.

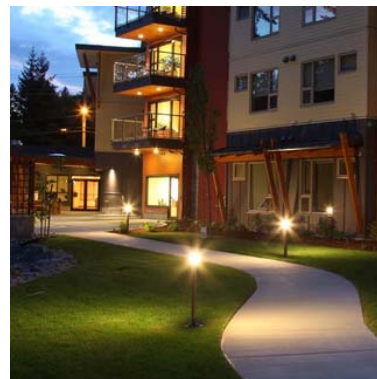
- Supporting tenant activities that personalize and improve the environment of a home, such as gardening, crafts or artwork;
- Supporting tenants' associations and hosting regular tenant meetings;
- Maintaining high-quality, clean facilities and responding responsibly to tenant maintenance requests;
- Involving tenants and the broader community in beautification efforts, such as neighbourhood clean-ups, mural painting or community volunteer work;
- Hosting community kitchens or meals where tenants can participate in cooking for each other and sharing a meal;
- Supporting tenants in moving along the 'housing continuum' from first stage or transitional housing to more independent living;
- Providing guidance and coaching for life skills, such as parenting and cleaning;
- Asking tenants with special skills to contribute to the home (for example, resident artists donating art to the building or Elders teaching youth about traditional medicines); and
- Offering a 'Ready to Rent' program, or similar financial literacy education.

NOTE: See case studies 2: Cwenengitel, 3: Skwachàys Lodge, and 4: Friendship Lodge for more information on tenants sharing their skills to contribute to the home.

Case Studies:

CASE STUDY 1: TS'I'TS'UWATUL' LELUM

- Project Name:** *Ts'i'ts'uwatul' Lelum Assisted Living*
- Location:** *Duncan, BC*
- CBO:** *M'akola Group of Societies*
- Housing Type:** *Assisted Living*
- Major Partners:** *Cowichan Tribes, Vancouver Island Health Authority*
- Target Resident:** *Cowichan and other First Nations Elders and people with disabilities*
- Architect:** *Jackson Low*
- Number of Units:** *50*
- Year Opened:** *2012*
- Web:** <http://www.cowichanelders.com/>
- Contact(s):** *Kevin Albers, Executive Director, M'akola Group of Societies, 1-877-384-1423, Kalbers@makola.bc.ca*



Pathway to Outdoor Gathering Place at Ts'i'ts'uwatul' Lelum Assisted Living

Partnership

Ts'i'ts'uwatul' Lelum is the result of more than 10 years of partnership between M'akola Group of Societies and Cowichan Tribes. The project was guided by an Aboriginal Enhancement Advisory Committee (AEAC), comprised of representatives from M'akola, Vancouver Island Health Authority, Ts'ewulhtun Health Centre, Cowichan Tribes, and two Elders recommended by Cowichan Tribes. The committee started meeting before the ground was broken for the project and met monthly until the facility opened. Terms of Reference were established from the beginning to lay out clear expectations of the roles and responsibilities for each of the partners. Due to the facility's unique position of being located on Cowichan reserve land, Cowichan Tribes negotiated with the Vancouver Island Health Authority an agreement that Aboriginal Elders get priority for spots in the Assisted Living Facility. This unique partnership has served as a model guiding M'akola's subsequent partnerships and protocol agreements with other First Nations groups.

Identity through Design

The AEAC was successful at incorporating several unique cultural elements into the design of Ts'i'ts'uwatul' Lelum (the name, which means "Home for helping each other," was gifted to M'akola by the Elders on the committee), making the building itself and its programming a celebration of Cowichan identity. All names in the building are written in Hul'qumi'num and English, and the building colours were chosen by the AEAC. The building features a four-storey totem pole carved by Cowichan Elder and Carver, Harold Joe. The Gathering Room has a separate HVAC system to accommodate smudging. Traditional foods are incorporated into the menu. An effort was made to follow protocols at every step of the way, including for the breaking of the ground and the opening of the building.

Capacity-Building

Cowichan Tribes members were involved in every stage of the Ts'í'ts'uwatul' Lelum project. Cowichan members were, and are, employed in the construction and as kitchen staff, wait staff, and managers in the project. The idea for the project is that once the mortgage is paid off, the project will be turned over to 100% Cowichan control and ownership.

Cultural Competency Training

All M'akola staff members, regardless of their heritage, receive Cultural Competency training. The training focuses on mutual responsibilities and respect in the way people interact with each other. The curriculum M'akola uses is partly inspired by the Provincial Health Services Authority's online Indigenous Cultural Competency Training Program.

NOTE: See Reference section for details about the Indigenous Cultural Competency Training Program.

M'akola staff members report that the training has led to better communication within the staff team and has created a culturally safe workplace. This has, in turn, led to higher rates of staff retention.

Challenges

Since Ts'í'ts'uwatul' Lelum gives priority to Cowichan Elders as residents and also hires Cowichan community members as support staff, there is a risk of conflicts of interest between staff and residents who may be related to each other. Furthermore, the rules of the Assisted Living Registrar do not allow staff to accept gifts from residents, despite cultural protocols for gifting. M'akola has worked carefully to put specific policies in place to address these challenges and that respect and accommodate culture while still maintaining the integrity and accountability of the facility.

Other Considerations

The site features a craft room, theatre room, lobby with a fireplace, outdoor gathering space, and walking paths with indigenous plants. The Recreation Coordinator plans activities everyday for residents. The Building is designed to LEED Silver Standard.

CASE STUDY 2: CWENENGITEL

Project Name: *Cwenengitel Aboriginal Society*

Location: *Surrey, BC*

CBO: *Cwenengitel Aboriginal Society*

Housing Type: *Recovery Home*

Target Resident: *Aboriginal men recovering from addictions*

Number of residents: *12*

Web: <http://www.cwenabso.org/>

Contact(s): *Tom Oleman, Executive Director,
Cwenengitel Aboriginal Society, 604-
588-5561, cwenabso@shaw.ca*



Sweat lodges at Cwenengitel

Cultural Lifestyle Practices

Cultural programming is the heart of Cwenengitel's approach to recovery. The site features two sweat lodges, a carving and woodworking shop, a tipi in the summer, and a spiritual room for ceremonies. Two Elders are on staff to guide the residents in ceremonies on- and off-site, including fasts, Sun Dances, Pow Wows, and medicine-picking. Residents learn how to make traditional crafts, such as drums, paddles, medicine boxes, and rattles. Cwenengitel's Elders build relationships with First Nations in surrounding areas and ask permission to do ceremonies and collect resources, like medicines and sticks for the sweat lodges, on their territories.

Ownership

The residents of Cwenengitel are expected to contribute to the household and, with such responsibility, are given ownership over their collective home. Residents participated in the renovations of the home's backyard and construction of the sweat lodges. Residents are expected to take part in cleaning the house and participate in wellness and cultural programming.

There is a circle every morning that the residents take turns leading. The first round is smudging; and, the second round allows residents to talk about their own lives. In the third round, residents discuss any house issues that have come up and are given the power to make collective decisions on house issues, such as how to deal with a resident who has broken the house rules.

Building Bridges

Cwenengitel opens up all of its programming, including sweat lodges, healing circles, and feasts, to the broader community. Cwenengitel's residents make an effort to be good neighbours and give back to their community (for example, by cutting a neighbour's lawn or volunteering at the local food bank). Because of acts like these, Cwenengitel has earned the respect of the local community and political leadership.

In addition, staff members make an effort to facilitate re-connections between the residents and their families and create a safe environment to welcome visitors into the home, including supervised visits between men and their children or grandchildren.

More than a Landlord

Cwenengitel staff members are passionate about their work and go above and beyond to provide a high quality, comfortable home for residents. There is always a fully-stocked fridge available to residents and quality meals are prepared by a trained chef. Days and evenings are kept busy with programming and activities. The accomplishments of residents are recognized with certificates, as well as with sashes decorated with beads that mark weeks, months, and years of sobriety. Staff and Elders provide counselling to the residents and connect them to outside service providers. Some participants maintain their connections with the home after they leave by continuing to attend programming and some choose to return to live in the house again.

CASE STUDY 3: SKWACHÀYS LODGE

- Project Name:** *Skwachàys Lodge*
- Location:** *Vancouver, BC*
- CBO:** *Vancouver Native Housing Society*
- Housing Type:** *Independent apartments for artists, boutique hotel*
- Target Residents:** *Aboriginal artists at risk of homelessness*
- Number of units:** *24 units artist housing, 18 hotel suites*
- Architect:** *Joe Wai*
- Year Opened:** *2012*
- Web:** <http://skwachays.com>
- Contact(s):** *David Eddy, Executive Director, Skwachàys Lodge, 604-320-3312, deddy@vnhs.ca*



Front facade of Skwachàys Lodge

Design as Identity

Skwachàys Lodge has a unique iconic design in downtown Vancouver, having preserved the heritage Victorian facade of the original Pender Hotel. It also incorporates a longhouse-style frontage on top of the building with a totem pole in the centre carved by Aboriginal artist Francis Horne Sr.

For the transformation to a boutique hotel, six Aboriginal artists, including two resident artists in the building, collaborated with hotel designers to create 18 unique hotel rooms. A cultural committee, in consultation with the Aboriginal community, chose appropriate cultural enhancements for the building, such as the colour scheme and the artwork. As Vancouver's urban Aboriginal population comes from across the country, it was important to Vancouver Native Housing Society (VNHS) to represent diverse Aboriginal cultures in the art and design of its buildings, this one in particular.

Ceremonial Space

The top floor of the building has a Smudge Room with a special ventilation system, which also is used by partner organizations to smudge with their clients. The room leads outside to a rooftop area with a sweat lodge that can accommodate 10 people.

Capacity-Building

The need for Skwachàys Lodge was inspired, in part, by impoverished Aboriginal artists living in downtown Vancouver, selling their art at undervalued rates just to get by. Skwachàys Lodge aims to empower Aboriginal artists by supporting the development of their personal and professional skills throughout their three-year tenancy in the building. A fully-equipped shared workshop space is provided for resident artists in the basement and artists can sell their art at the hotel's fair trade gallery. Outside facilitators are brought in to work with the resident artists, and some of the residents have been employed by VNHS to design hotel rooms and paint murals.

Other Considerations

The re-construction of the building made use of re-purposed original fir wood from the old Pender Hotel. Four of the artists' units are specially-designed with wider doors and special kitchen appliances that allow for wheelchair access.

CASE STUDY 4: FRIENDSHIP LODGE

Project Name: Friendship Lodge
Location: Prince George, BC
CBO: Prince George Native Friendship Centre
Housing Type: Independent apartments
Target Resident: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults at risk of homelessness
Number of units: 30
Architect: Anthony Boni
Year Opened: 2009
Web: http://www.bchousing.org/Media/Stories/2011/05/16/5590_1105161123-462
Contact(s): Barb Ward-Burkitt, Executive Director, Prince George Native Friendship Centre, 250-564-3568, bwardburkitt@pgnfc.com or Jennifer Harrington, Director of Supportive Housing, 250-564-3568, jharrington@pgnfc.com



Friendship Lodge

Consultation

In anticipation of resistance to this new project, Prince George Native Friendship Centre undertook an extensive community consultation process to get the community onboard with the project before approaching the City of Prince George for approval. Staff printed out information packages and went door-to-door in a four-block radius of the project, inviting neighbours to a community consultation at the Friendship Centre.

Dinner was provided and anyone who attended the public consultation was invited to join a working group called “Friends of the Friendship Centre,” which also included opponents of the project and some potential tenants. The monthly working group meetings involved Elders, opened with prayers, and offered dinner. The working group’s feedback helped shape the final plan and the group members were recognized for their volunteer contribution at the grand opening. The overarching message of the consultation was, “We’re not coming into your community; we’re becoming part of your community.”

Protocol with Local First Nation

PGNFC has a formal protocol agreement with Lheidli T’enneh (LTN), the local First Nation. Before moving forward with any major proposal for a project on their territory, PGNFC meets with the LTN Chief and Council to consult and continues to keep them updated throughout the project. The First Nation is recognized at every PGNFC gathering, and the recognition goes beyond just words to actions, such as the naming of projects.

Elders

PGNFC makes an effort to involve Elders in everything they do. Elders are invited to every event and are frequently consulted for guidance. There is a designated Elder's seat on the Board of Directors and two of PGNFC's buildings have Elders' Groups. Elders lead ceremonies and have been involved in creating the artwork for a new project.

Communal Space

All of PGNFC's buildings have cultural rooms where Elders can go to feel comfortable and keep medicines and cultural objects safely. The Friendship Lodge has the "Four Corners Room," a large space with a full commercial kitchen that can host large gatherings. Tenants can use the room for free, and it is used to bring the community together for events like community kitchens, circles, and family re-connection. The building also has an outdoor courtyard with a BBQ and foliage, where tenants can go to interact with each other and see anyone who is coming and going from the building.

More than a Landlord

PGNFC builds strong long-term relationships with its tenants, and tries to move tenants along the housing continuum to different buildings in their portfolio based on their changing needs. An effort is made to foster a safe, positive environment in their buildings and to build community through group cooking and meals, and facilitating activities like group buying of groceries. Staff members form relationships with organizations and individuals in the community in order to provide reliable referrals to their tenants.

Sustainability

The Friendship Lodge was BC Housing's first LEED Gold-certified building, incorporating green technologies, such as geothermal heating and cooling, high energy efficiency, and safe cleaning products. An overview of some of the building's sustainability features can be found at:

http://www.bchousing.org/Media/Stories/2011/05/16/5590_1105161123-462.

CASE STUDY 5: ABORIGINAL CHILDREN'S VILLAGE

- Project Name:** *Dave Pranteau Aboriginal Children's Village*
- Location:** *Vancouver, BC*
- CBO:** *Lu'ma Native Housing Society*
- Housing Type:** *Family units, youth-in-transition units, market townhomes*
- Target Resident:** *Aboriginal children and youth in care, as well as their foster families*
- Number of units:** *24*
- Architect:** *Patrick Stewart, Nisga'a Architect*
- Web:** <http://www.terrahousing.ca/our-work/dave-pranteau-aboriginal-childrens-village>
- Contact(s):** *Marcel Swain, CEO, Lu'ma Native Housing Society, 604-876-0999, marcel@lnhs.ca, Andrea Foster, Manager, Lu'ma Native Housing Society, luma380@hotmail.com or Patrick Stewart, Architect, Patrick Stewart Architects, 778-246-1862, patrickreidstewart@gmail.com*



Totem at Dave Pranteau Aboriginal Children's Village

Partnerships

It took several years of discussion and negotiation with potential partner organizations before the right partnerships were forged to allow the Children's Village to be a success. Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services Society (VACFSS) ended up being the perfect partner to rent suites and allocate them to children in care. One of the commercial units on the main floor of the building was rented to Hollyburn Family Services, who provide training and support to foster families living in the building.

Unit Size

With a disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in foster care¹, the first choice is often for Aboriginal children to be put in the care of their extended family members. However, the shortage of affordable housing in Vancouver, especially for large families, can be a barrier preventing extended families from taking in additional children. In the Children's Village, there are some larger units to accommodate this need, including one four-bedroom unit and some three-bedroom units. The 10 VACFSS-rented units are allocated to a child or a sibling set, so that if the relationship between the children and the foster parents doesn't work out, the children remain in their home and the parents

¹ "2011 National Household Survey: Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit," Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/130508/dq130508a-eng.htm?HPA>, (August 20, 2014).

move out. VACFSS also provides an emergency suite in the building, primarily for use by women and children fleeing abuse, and three youth-in-transition units for older youth aging out of care.

Communal Space

The Children's Village features a large, 2,100 sqft amenity space that can be used by tenants or by services benefitting the tenants. The amenity room has hosted a variety of gatherings including community meetings, dance groups, family visits, tutoring, health and wellness programming, and training. In the building's first year of operation, the amenity space was used 299 times, demonstrating the demand for large gathering spaces of this type in the community.

Identity/Design

It is hard to miss the Children's Village if you pass by it – the building clearly stands out from the surrounding neighbourhood with its red, yellow, and black paint, yellow cedar house posts, natural stone siding, and colourful totem poles. Although it was a challenge for Lu'ma to convince the City to accept Nisga'a architect Patrick Stewart's unique building design, it was important for the building to reflect the identity of the people who live there.

The totem poles, carved by Nisga'a carver Mike Dangeli, were designed with children in mind, using bright colours, and featuring a beaver, the house builder. Furthermore, the poles represent the diverse urban Aboriginal population, featuring Haida and Chilkat blankets, in addition to Nisga'a design. Some of the bedrooms feature art done by children or empty frames for children to add their own art. The youth program room was painted in graffiti-style by youth with a facilitator. Bright interior paint colours and donated custom-designed wooden children's furniture also contribute to making the Children's Village a unique, comfortable home for Aboriginal children and youth.

CASE STUDY 6: HELPING SPIRIT LODGE AND SPIRIT WAY

- Project Name:** *Helping Spirit Lodge and Spirit Way*
- Location:** *Vancouver, BC*
- CBO:** *Helping Spirit Lodge Society (HSLs)*
- Housing Type:** *First and second-stage transition housing*
- Target Resident:** *Women and children fleeing abuse*
- Number of units:** *10 beds (Helping Spirit Lodge), 14 units (Spirit Way)*
- Year Opened:** *1991, 2001*
- Web:** <http://www.hslls.ca/s/Home.asp>
- Contact(s):** *Tabitha Geraghty, Executive Director, Helping Spirit Lodge Society, 604-874-6629, tabitha.g@hslls.ca*



Wall Mural at Helping Spirit Lodge

Location

In choosing a site for a transition home for women and children fleeing violence, safety and privacy are of utmost concern. Both Helping Spirit Lodge and Spirit Way are in undisclosed locations, outside of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside from where some women may be fleeing abusers or old lifestyles. HSLs maintains a 'respectful distance' from neighbours to protect the identity of the home's residents.

Partnerships

Strategic partnerships are key to making HSLs's work possible. Businesses and organizations donate supplies ranging from bedding to toiletries to clothing – even construction services – to improve the quality of life for HSLs residents, many of whom had to flee their homes with very little. HSLs builds relationships with other agencies for referrals, service provision, and to allow their residents to develop resources in the community in order to help them continue to access these services after moving on from transition housing.

The organization has reached out to schools and community centres near their homes so that children staying in transition housing can attend school on a short-term basis or get priority entry to the day care. HSLs's Executive Director sits on boards and committees with other urban Aboriginal organizations to facilitate collaboration, identify gaps in services, and share resources and opportunities.

More than a Landlord

HSLs provides support workers in both of its transitional housing locations, in order to go the extra mile to make transition housing feel like "home" to the women and children living there. Basic needs are provided, including groceries and meals, bus passes, and subsidized laundry. In addition, all the suites come fully furnished with dishes and bedding. In Helping Spirit Lodge, women participate in meal planning and take turns cooking meals to share with their house mates. In Spirit Way, women are

expected to participate in their choice of free on-site programming, including counselling, art, music, and traditional teachings. The residents also have access to yoga, massage, employment programs, gardening, and life-skills workshops. Both homes have regular tenant meetings and feasts. Support staff work with residents to create a safe, tolerant, supportive, and empowering home environment for women and children to heal holistically. Residents have access to spiritual medicines and rooms are smudged before new tenants move in.

Staffing

It is an important consideration for HSLs to hire support staff members who understand the challenges and barriers faced by Aboriginal women; therefore, HSLs tries to hire Aboriginal women whenever possible. Finding qualified Aboriginal women to fill those roles, when competing with higher paying jobs in government or the private sector can be a challenge, so HSLs uses the following approaches to overcome this challenge:

- Mentor practicum students and support staff to advance into leadership positions in the organization;
- Provide training and orientation to staff and volunteers that includes culture, tradition, and history of Aboriginal peoples and of HSLs as an organization; and
- Hire and evaluate staff based on a cultural competencies model that examines elements, such as empathy or awareness of the impacts of colonial violence. To do this, HSLs draws on the newly developed competency model adopted by the Society and created from many sources, one of which is the BC Public Service Agency's "Aboriginal Relations Behavioural Competencies."

NOTE: See Reference section for details about the BC Public Service Agency's Aboriginal Relations Behavioural Competencies.

Culture

At HSLs, an effort is made to embed culture throughout the program. There are traditional teachings-based programs offered to both women and children at Spirit Way. There is a summer "cultural camp" for residents as well as other cultural activities throughout the year, such as canoeing and visits to cultural sites. Culturally appropriate children's books, toys, art, and decorations fill the homes to assist in providing a culturally-appropriate environment for residents in both buildings.

Conclusion

Aboriginal Community-Based Organizations do incredibly valuable work in communities across British Columbia, providing supportive, culturally appropriate homes for the Aboriginal tenants who need them. These CBOs are often faced with challenging circumstances, ranging from inflexible municipal bylaws to unsupportive neighbours to funding cuts. CBOs are finding creative ways to overcome these challenges and continue to find innovative approaches to housing Aboriginal communities. This guide is based on the ideas, insights, and experience of many of those CBOs, who are gratefully acknowledged at the beginning of the guide.

The underlying theme that qualifies all the guidelines listed in this document is that everything depends on context. Different organizations, different communities, different cultures, and different resources and opportunities allow for very different projects. What works for one project will not necessarily work the same way elsewhere. Therefore, this guide should be understood as a collection of ideas for consideration rather than a prescriptive design blueprint to be followed. For this reason, Guideline 1: Consultation, might be the most important one in the guide because it is nearly impossible to effectively provide housing that meets a community's needs without involving the community in the planning process.

If you have questions, feedback or ideas, please contact AHMA at reception@ahma-bc.org or 1-888-921-2462.

Thank you for your interest in providing culturally-appropriate homes to Aboriginal communities in British Columbia; I wish you all the best in your extremely valuable work.

References

History/Context

- **Aboriginal Housing in Canada: An Informal Background Discussion Paper**
The Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network, 2010
 This paper summarizes the history and current context of Aboriginal housing programs in Canada.
 Access at: http://caan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/CAAN_Aboriginal-housing-in-Canada_2010.pdf
- **Bringing Housing Home: Researching Aboriginal Housing Authorities & Assessing the Feasibility for BC**
The Aboriginal Business Development Centre, 2004
 This report demonstrates the desire and need among Aboriginal leaders in BC for self-management of housing in the province.
 Access at:
<http://abdc.bc.ca/uploads/file/09%20Harvest/UAED%20Research%20Reports/Bringing%20Housing%20Home.pdf>
- **First Nations Housing Memorandum of Understanding, 2008**
 This MOU was signed by representatives of the First Nations Leadership Council, Government of Canada and Government of British Columbia. It outlines an understanding of roles, responsibilities, priorities and actions for collaboration on Aboriginal housing matters in BC. The MOU commits to meaningful involvement of First Nations in the design, development, decision-making, implementation and management of housing programs for First Nation individuals, families and communities in British Columbia.
 Access at: http://www.housing.gov.bc.ca/pub/FN_HousingMOU.pdf
- **Housing Matters BC: Housing Strategy for British Columbia**
Province of British Columbia, 2014
 This is BC Housing's Provincial Housing Strategy. "Strategy 3" focuses on meeting Aboriginal housing needs through the Aboriginal housing sector.
 Access at:
http://www.bchousing.org/resources/About%20BC%20Housing/Housing_Matters_BC/Housing-Matters-BC.pdf

Housing Needs

- **Aboriginal Housing Assessment: Community Design Needs & Preferences and Application of Local Materials- Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), 2004**
 This report provides case studies of Aboriginal communities from across Canada, documenting their housing design needs and preferences and their use of local building materials. The report highlights the disconnect between current housing design and the needs of the communities studied.
 Access at: [ftp://ftp.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/chic-ccdh/Research_Reports-Rapports_de_recherche/eng_unilingual/Aboriginal%20Part%201%20\(W\).pdf](ftp://ftp.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/chic-ccdh/Research_Reports-Rapports_de_recherche/eng_unilingual/Aboriginal%20Part%201%20(W).pdf)
- **Closing the Gap: Housing Needs and Priorities of BC's Urban Aboriginals**
Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AHMA), 2007
 This report is based on a survey of 13 communities in British Columbia, highlighting the existing Aboriginal housing provision in those communities and the gaps and priority areas which need to be addressed, including Emergency Housing, Short-term and Transitional Housing, Housing with Supports, more appropriate family and elders housing, and Capacity Building.
 Access: Via AHMA
- **Assessment of Sustainable and Cultural Housing Design in the Clayoquot Sound First Nations: A Decision Framework for Residential Housing Developments- University of British Columbia, 2011**

This report gives examples of sustainable housing design and traditional design and architecture in Northwest Pacific Coast indigenous communities. It also lays out the housing needs of the Clayoquot Sound First Nations communities under investigation and proposes a framework for planning to meet these housing needs in the future.

Access at:

http://www.sauder.ubc.ca/Faculty/Research_Centres/ISIS/Resources/~media/D585B7B20CCF4C86851A3075590696FC.ashx

- **Aboriginal Off-Reserve Housing Needs in the Cowichan Region: A Report for the Regional Affordable Housing Directorate Social Planning Cowichan, 2014**

This is a report on the off-reserve Aboriginal housing situation in the Cowichan Region of Vancouver Island. It includes the context, history, and contributing factors to the region's current housing situation as well as projections for the future and the community's needs, first and foremost of which is identified as self-determination.

Access at: <http://www.cvr.d.bc.ca/DocumentCenter/View/63086>

Consultation

- **Best Practices for Consultation and Accommodation New Relationship Trust, 2009**

Governments have legal responsibilities to consult with First Nations on new developments which may affect Aboriginal rights in their traditional territories. This is a guide to achieving success for all parties in these consultations and can also be applied to consultations between First Nations and non-government bodies such as CBOs and developers.

Access at: <http://www.newrelationshiptrust.ca/downloads/consultation-and-accomodation-report.pdf>

- **Building Relationships with First Nations: Respecting Rights and Doing Good Business – Province of British Columbia**

This guide explains the Province of British Columbia's approach to consultation and relationship-building with First Nations.

Access at:

http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/topic/9EFBD86DA302A0712E6559BDB2C7F9DD/first_nations/building_relationships_with_first_nations_english.pdf

- **5 Keys to Achieving an Aboriginal Engagement Strategy Frank Busch, 2013**

First Nations author, businessman and entrepreneur Frank Busch provides 5 short tips for engaging with Aboriginal communities.

Access at: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/frank-busch/aboriginal-engagement_b_3685069.html

Design

- **BC Housing Design Guidelines and Construction Standards BC Housing, 2012**

This is BC Housing's official set of Design Guidelines for social housing in British Columbia. Aboriginal CBOs in BC are recommended to follow BC Housing's design guidelines in addition to the guidelines laid out in this document.

Access:

http://www.bchousing.org/resources/Partner_Resources/Construction_Standards_Procurement/Design_Construction_Standards/BCH_Design_Guidelines_and_Construction_Standards.pdf

- **Green and Culturally Appropriate Building Design Ecotrust Canada, 2011**

This is a prototype design for Green and Culturally Appropriate housing designed by architect David Wong, for Nuu-chah-nulth communities on Vancouver Island.

Access: <http://ecotrust.ca/sites/all/files/ECBriefing-GreenHousing.pdf>

- **Improving Aboriginal Housing: Culture and Design Strategies**

University of Calgary Thesis, 2012

This Master's thesis, by Johann Kyser, examines the context of Aboriginal housing in Canada, looks at three case studies of approaches to housing design in First Nations communities (including one in Seabird Island, BC), and make recommendations for incorporating Aboriginal cultural considerations into housing.

Access at: http://theses.ucalgary.ca/bitstream/11023/303/2/ucalgary_2012_kyser_johann.pdf

- **Native Child and Family Services Toronto: Sensitive Design supports native culture in the heart of the city- SABMag, 2011**

This article features Native Child and Family Services of Toronto's newly renovated office building which demonstrates innovative ideas for providing a connection for urban Aboriginal people living in Toronto, to diverse Aboriginal cultures and to nature.

Access at: <http://www.sabmagazine.com/blog/2011/05/20/native-child-and-family-services-toronto/>

Cultural Competency

- **Aboriginal Relations Behavioural Competencies**

BC Public Services Agency

This resource defines competencies such as Empathy, Commitment and Cultural Agility, which are likely to make employees more successful in their work with Aboriginal people. The website also lists behaviours which would indicate that an employee is demonstrating each competency or needs improvement.

Access at: http://www2.gov.bc.ca/myhr/article.page?ContentID=55246cff-6276-7a2d-e7e3-71356191492f&dcr=/templatedata/sitepublisher/articles/data/myhr/jobs_hiring/aboriginal_relations_behavioural_competencies.xml

- **Indigenous Cultural Competency Training Program**

Provincial Health Services Authority in BC

This is an online interactive training program designed for employees working with Aboriginal people to help them develop individual competencies and skills for building more effective relationships.

Access at: <http://www.culturalcompetency.ca/>

Capacity-Building

- **Residential Energy Efficiency Works (REnEW) Program**

Fortis BC and BC Hydro

This program partners with community groups to train community members to work in energy efficiency retrofitting.

Access at:

<http://www.fortisbc.com/About/OurCommitments/REnEW%20Program/Pages/default.aspx>

- **SkillsPlus**

BC Housing

This training program teaches staff to do basic property maintenance and repairs and is available to any provincially-funded non-profit CBOs.

Access at: <http://www.bchousing.org/Partners/Ongoing/SkillsPlus>

- **Housing Quality Matters: Workshops for First Nations**

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)

CMHC offers workshops to on-reserve First Nations communities such as "Basic Home Maintenance" and "Mold Remediation."

Access at: https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/ab/bumaho/bumaho_006.cfm

- **Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society (ACCESS)**

ACCESS provides supports to members of the urban Aboriginal community to overcome barriers to self-sufficiency, such as training, counselling, and financial services. ACCESS funds and delivers several training and employment programs, including Bladerunners, which gives basic job

readiness training to at-risk youth and connects them to employment opportunities with construction contractors.

Access at: <http://accessfutures.com/>

Other Examples

- **Aboriginal Patients' Lodge**

- **Lu'ma Native Housing Society**

- Lu'ma operates a Patients' Lodge in Vancouver to accommodate patients and their families who have to travel to Vancouver from other communities for medical care. The lodge features culturally-appropriate family and accessible suites with full kitchens and other comforts to make the Lodge feel like a home for those who might stay there for extended treatments. Lu'ma has helped mentor other CBOs to start similar Patients' Lodges elsewhere.

- Access at: <http://lnhs.ca/aboriginal-health-wellness/>

- **Towards a design framework for remote Indigenous housing Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), 2008**

- This is a framework for designing housing for remote Indigenous communities in Australia. The framework outlines important considerations including sustainability, consultation, design and planning, employment and training, and post-occupancy management.

- Access at:

- http://eprints.qut.edu.au/13362/1/AHURI_Final_Report_No114_Towards_a_design_framework_for_remote_Indigenous_housing1.pdf

- **Ki te Hau Kainga: New Perspectives on Maori Housing Solutions Housing New Zealand Corporation, 2002**

- This Design Guide explains Maori cultural considerations and gives practical design recommendations with diagramed examples, for appropriate housing design for Maori communities in New Zealand.

- Access at: <http://www.hnzc.co.nz/our-publications/design-guidelines/ki-te-hau-kainga-new-perspectives-on-maori-housing-solutions/ki-te-hau-kainga-new-perspectives-on-maori-housing-solutions.pdf>