

BEYOND NIMBY:

A Toolkit for Opening Staffed Community Homes in Manitoba

Community Inclusion Awareness Committee

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Table of Contents

Introduction and History	2
Not In My Back Yard	3
Housing and Human Rights	3
Myths and Myth Busting	4
The Human Rights Code of Manitoba	6
The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms	6
Municipal By-Laws and Provincial Licensing	7
Steps in the Municipal Approval Process	7
Provincial Licensing:	
Homes for Adults Eligible for Residential Care	9
Provincial Licensing: Child Care Homes	9
Communications and Community Relations	10
Building Community Support	10
Communicating with Municipal Governments.....	11
Choosing Your Outreach Approach	11
Taking a High Profile Approach	12
Taking a Low Profile Approach	12
Maintaining Community Relations	13
Creating Your Communications Plan	14
Local Success Stories	18
From Conflict to Resolution:	
A Made-In-Manitoba Human Rights Victory	18
A Lesson in Community Relations:	
A Local Service Provider Relocation	19
Resources	20
References	21
Appendix	24

Introduction & History

In Canada, we believe that everyone has the right to safe housing. Yet prejudice and stereotypes remain in our society, threatening every person's right to have a home.

This toolkit is intended for service providers who are opening or operating staffed community homes for youth in the care of Child and Family Services or for adults who are eligible for residential care. In Manitoba, adults experiencing mental illness or mental health concerns, for instance, may qualify for residential care through the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's Adult Mental Health Program or other initiative. For adults who have an intellectual disability, residential care may be accessed through Community Living disABILITY Services or another service provider.

While this is not an exhaustive guide, it does provide you with some key tools including:

- Suggestions for addressing community opposition to staffed community homes
- Descriptions of human rights protections in Canada and Manitoba
- Tips and ideas for building a communication plan and establishing community relations
- Guidelines for provincial licensing and municipal by-laws
- Suggestions for maintaining community relations

Organizations and service providers of staffed community homes in Manitoba still experience varying levels of community opposition while opening or operating homes. A highly publicized case in a rural community outside Winnipeg showed how intense community opposition can become. A local service provider, proposed a home in the community for three adults with intellectual disabilities that became an ugly flash-point of community and municipal opposition. Ultimately, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission successfully mediated the dispute between the municipality and the service provider and approval and construction of the home went forward.

While the mediation was considered a success, this case raised concerns for many service providers and organizations working in the areas of community development, human rights, disability advocacy, and social justice. Community organizations and service providers joined with government stakeholders to form the Community Inclusion Awareness Committee. Committee members shared knowledge and developed strategies to address opposition to staffed community homes. This toolkit is one of the key deliverables initiated by the committee.



Not In My Back Yard



Not In My Back Yard, or NIMBYism, is a defensive position taken by community members or groups against a project in their neighbourhood. People have been known to organize to oppose a wide range of projects from billboards to community gardens.

In the instance of staffed community homes for youth in care or for adults eligible for residential care, opposition typically focuses on common myths that a home will:

- increase crime
- lower property values
- put stress on local infrastructure

Opposition can also be founded on people's fears of, and prejudices against, the new residents. See the section on [Myths and Myth Busting](#) for some suggested responses to commonly raised concerns.

It can be difficult to tell if opposition to a staffed community home is based on legitimate concerns, or on people's fears and prejudices. It's important to think about the difference between legitimate concerns and outright discrimination before choosing a site for the home, beginning construction, or building a community outreach plan.

NIMBYism can stem from a number of root causes, so consider the community's history and context to build a solid outreach program. Research could reveal that the community has little trust in municipal officials, or maybe the community hasn't been adequately consulted on the direction of their neighbourhood in the past. Sometimes rumours about the home fuel

opposition and sometimes people carry prejudice against youth in care, people with intellectual disabilities, or people experiencing mental health concerns or illness. Each of these NIMBYism roots will require a different response. It's important to remember every strategy has weaknesses and it's helpful to remain flexible to changes.

Careful planning and a solid communication plan can address most community concerns. Tailor your outreach

program and your responses to opposition to the community you're working in and don't accuse people of NIMBYism or bigotry. Focus instead on commonly held values like equality and diversity and working together as a community to achieve these goals. You are not, however, expected to accept prejudice, as discussed in the section [Housing and Human Rights](#) (see below).

Expect the best in people, but don't accept their worst!



Housing and Human Rights

Human rights outline the inherent entitlements people have to live with meaning, dignity, and equality, such as:

- The right to freedom of expression
- The right to security and safety
- The right to adequate and nutritious food
- The right to clean drinking water

Similarly, equitable and adequate housing are cornerstones of human rights and dignity, yet not everyone has access to housing. Imagine trying to live a meaningful life without a home that meets your needs and allows you to participate in your community. Imagine, instead, being

housed in an impersonal institution or group home isolated from community and deprived of belonging and opportunity. Historically, this has been the experience of youth in care, people with intellectual or physical disabilities, and people experiencing mental illness.

In Canada, human rights, including those that prohibit discrimination based on age or ability, are outlined and protected by the Canadian Constitution and in federal and provincial law. While these laws do not ensure that every individual's rights are met, they prohibit discrimination against protected individuals or groups to ensure equal opportunities for them to get jobs or have a safe place to live.

Myths & Myth Busting

As described in the section on [NIMBYism](#), community concerns and opposition directed at staffed community homes often reflect unsupported fears and assumptions. The following list outlines some commonly held misconceptions and myths about staffed community homes and the evidence to bust them. This information can be used in formal and informal discussions and as part of fact sheets or other communications materials. You can share this information with community allies and municipal officials to help them address community concerns.

1. Surrounding property values will go down.

In short: they won't. Sometimes when there is strong, highly publicized opposition property values will decline briefly before rebounding. Overall, property values will rise and fall according to external market forces and larger trends.

In a review of 26 studies of supportive housing across North America, the [HomeComing Community Choice Coalition](#) found that 25 of the studies showed no impact on property values. A [recent study](#) in Toronto also found the values of property surrounding staffed community homes increased in pace with values across the city (de Wolff 2008).

2. This home doesn't belong because it's a business.

This is the residents' only home. Who owns or operates it has no bearing on this any more than it does for a family renting a home in the neighbourhood. The presence of paid staff is no different from a family hiring a personal care attendant.

Most municipal by-laws contain definitions of 'family' that aren't restricted to blood or legal relationships. For example, Winnipeg's zoning by-law defines

family as "one person or two or more persons voluntarily associated, plus any dependents, living together as an independent, self-governing single-housekeeping unit."

Single-housekeeping unit refers to all residents having access to the common areas of the house, in contrast to rental or boarding house units where residents don't have access to common areas.

3. The home won't fit into the neighbourhood.

This is usually based on the false assumption that the home will resemble an institution. Staffed community homes are regular family residences that must meet the same zoning and building requirements as other homes in the neighbourhood.

All buildings are required to meet existing zoning requirements and building codes. If a zoning variance is sought to build a structure outside normal regulations, the public will be notified and have a chance to give input through normal municipal channels. Generally, existing homes already fit into the neighbourhood and new buildings are designed to suit the neighbourhood's character.

4. This home is an institution in a residential zone.

Courts and human rights commissions across the country have ruled on this numerous times and confirmed that for the purposes of zoning, residents of staffed community homes are indeed a family. This is no different than a group of friends choosing to live together.

Definitions of family in municipal by-laws have been the subject of numerous court actions and Charter challenges in Canada. In particular, The Supreme Court of Canada's 1979 decision in *Bell v. Her Majesty the Queen* concluded that municipalities lack the authority to zone "by reference to the relationship of the occupants rather than the use of the building."

5. This home will bring too much traffic into the area.

When properly planned and managed, this is not the case. Service providers have plans to manage parking and pick-up/drop-off traffic if necessary. There is no reason this should be any different from a typical family with multiple residents and vehicles.

Staffed community homes, like any home, must meet municipal planning and engineering regulations including traffic regulations. Staff and residents will be subject to the parking and traffic regulations already in place for traffic safety and congestion issues. Any plans the service provider puts in place are subject to municipal approval.

6. The home will strain existing infrastructure and services.

Staffed community homes are no larger and have no more residents than many other homes, and are well within the capacity of existing infrastructure. Since residents are being properly housed and cared for, they typically use health and emergency services at the same, or lower, rates than other neighbourhood residents.

Infrastructure like water and sewer, schools, and roads are already in place and are designed to meet the community's needs. If a new home over-burdens public infrastructure then the problem lies with municipal planning and maintenance programs, not with new residents.

Because residents are well cared for in staffed community homes, they are less likely to need emergency services, extended hospital stays, or increased medical visits.

7. We have our fair share of these types of facilities.

This claim rests on untrue or offensive assumptions. Community members may believe that community homes are a burden on the neighbourhood, which the above reality checks disprove. Community members may also believe that the residents themselves are not good for the neighbourhood and need to be limited, which amounts to discrimination.

As discussed in the section on Housing and Human Rights, limiting housing opportunities for a group of people based on shared characteristics such as ability or "in care" status is unlawful discrimination in Canada.

8. The new residents won't fit into our neighbourhood.

No one has to ask permission to move into a neighbourhood, and the populations served by staffed community homes are already living in many neighbourhoods.

Inclusive and diverse communities are more vibrant and resilient than homogeneous ones, and they embody the shared Canadian values of respect, equality, and friendliness.

A study in *Community Mental Health Journal* surveyed residents of neighbourhoods in Virginia with a group home and similar control neighbourhoods without group homes. The report concluded that "the actual experience of group home neighbours was far more favourable than what residents of the control neighbourhood anticipated" (Wahl 1993).

9. Crime will increase and safety will decline.

There is no evidence to support this claim. Even if the home's residents are a potential risk, there is less chance of them acting out because they are supervised and their needs are being met.

An in-depth study of two supportive housing developments in Toronto found that neighbourhood crime rates in fact decreased in pace with overall city trends (de Wolff 2008).

A *Journal of Urban Affairs* study of 146 supportive homes in America serving a wide variety of clientele found no evidence that the homes "led to increased rates of reported violent, property, criminal mischief, disorderly conduct, or total crimes" (Galster 2002).



The Human Rights Code of Manitoba

Like the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Manitoba's Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination against people based on protected characteristics such as age and mental or physical ability. The Code applies to governments, individuals, businesses, and organizations.

While the Code does not specifically protect the right to housing, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission has interpreted the Code as prohibiting "unreasonable discrimination in areas such as ... housing." Prohibited unreasonable discrimination includes prejudiced attitudes and actions based on age or ability.

Section 9(3) of the Human Rights Code also prohibits systemic discrimination:

"Interrelated actions, policies, or procedures ... that do not have a discriminatory effect when considered individually can constitute discrimination ... if the combined operation of those actions, policies, or procedures results in discrimination."

This means that a municipality's individual zoning, planning, building, or any other regulations cannot be combined as obstacles to a staffed community home. Staffed community homes are subject to the same regulations as any private residence.

Ultimately, no one is allowed, by statements or actions, to discriminate against someone based on age or ability.

For more information about the Manitoba Human Rights Code please visit web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/h175e.php or www.manitobahumanrights.ca

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is embedded in the Constitution of Canada and outlines the civil and political rights of all Canadians. All levels of government—including municipal bodies—must adhere to the Charter in law, policy, and action.

While housing rights are not explicitly protected by the Charter, section 15 safeguards equality rights:

"Every individual is equal before and under the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability."

Courts have recognized that section 15 of the Charter applies to equal opportunity to housing. Through legal precedents, courts have established that the Charter protects housing developments like staffed community homes from unreasonable municipal planning or zoning by-laws. This means staffed community homes must be treated like any private residence or family home.

For more information on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms please visit the [Canadian Heritage Guide to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#),

or the [Government of Canada Justice Laws Website](#).

“ Every individual is equal before and under the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national, or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. ”



Municipal By-laws & Provincial Licensing



The by-law and licensing process ensures residents of staffed community homes live in a safe environment where their needs are met. The municipal by-laws and provincial licensing processes should proceed simultaneously as the individual processes inform one another. For instance, the provincial licensing body that oversees homes for adults eligible for residential care provides information on licensing requirements and standards over and above Manitoba Building and Fire Codes. Contacting both the municipality and the licensing authority at the same time, early in the process of finding a site for the home, will ease approval, licensing, and building procedures. For some additional information on zoning and municipal frameworks see [Appendix C](#).

Steps in the Municipal Approval Process

1. Siting and Zoning Regulations

Service providers of staffed community homes should become familiar with local zoning districts and by-laws before purchasing a site. Contact the local planning authority early in the process to establish how the planned home and site will fit into the municipality's zoning regulations, including:

- How the home is defined by zoning regulations. Staffed community homes could, for instance, be defined as 'group homes' or 'personal care homes' and fall under zoning regulations that govern those categories
- Which zoning districts are considered 'residential.' Staffed community homes should automatically fit into zones that allow family homes
- Which zoning districts could require zoning amendments, variances, or conditional approvals before a staffed community home could be established

Choosing the best site and zone for a staffed community home can be complicated, but establishing a good relationship with the local planning authority can ease the process. In most municipalities, service providers should contact the Chief Administrative Officer or the zoning office of the municipal government.

2. Amendments, Variances, and Conditional Approvals

For detailed information about amendments, variances, and conditional approvals, please see [The Planning Act Handbook: A Guide for Municipalities and Planning Districts](#), Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs.

Amendments

Service providers of staffed community homes can challenge zoning by-laws they believe are discriminatory by petitioning the municipality for a zoning amendment. Even when the municipality is cooperative, the amendment process can be time consuming and require one or more public meetings.

Variances

Variances address the unreasonable hardship an agency, individual, or organization would endure trying to comply with certain aspects of zoning by-laws such as building set-backs or height requirements. A variance can only be approved if:

- it is compatible with the general nature of the area
- it will not result in any negative impacts for neighbouring residents
- it is generally consistent with the development plan and zoning by-laws

Service providers can demonstrate that the staffed community home meets these requirements using the [Myths & Myth Busting](#) section to illustrate staffed community homes:

- are compatible with residential neighbourhoods
- do not have negative effects on neighbours
- are considered family residences for zoning purposes

An application for a zoning variance is made to the municipal council or planning district and usually requires a public notification and hearing. Municipal council and planning district board decisions are final.

Conditional Use

Conditional use permits are a common requirement for staffed community homes in Manitoba. Zoning districts often identify particular land uses, such as group or personal care homes, as being 'conditionally' permitted because they have unique characteristics that could potentially impact nearby properties. As with a variance, a conditional use permit can only be approved if:

- it is compatible with the general nature of the area
- it will not result in any negative impacts for neighbouring residents
- it is generally consistent with the development plan and zoning by-law

As mentioned above, experience and evidence show staffed community homes meet all of these requirements and should be granted conditional use permits if required by zoning by-laws.

Applications for conditional use permits are made to the municipal council or planning district board and will require a public notification and hearing. Municipal council and planning district board decisions are final.

3. Public Hearings

If the service provider applies for a variance or conditional use permit, public notification and consultation are required by the municipality or planning district board. Public hearings allow decision makers to hear from community members who may be impacted by the variance or conditional use permit.

While public hearings are often straightforward, there have been instances of community opposition degenerating into

flashpoints of confrontation, ignorance, and prejudice.

If a public hearing cannot be avoided, the service provider should:

- meet with municipal officials before the meeting to discuss the potential for confrontation. While municipal officials have a responsibility to consider the concerns of citizens, they also have the responsibility to stop discriminatory view points and behaviours from steering the course of the meeting
- mobilize community support and encourage community members to attend meetings and declare their support for the staffed community home

See the [Communications & Community Relations](#) section for tips on building community support and handling public hearings.

4. Provincial Licensing

Service providers need to contact the relevant provincial licensing authority and the municipal zoning authority once a suitable location has been identified. The provincial and municipal approval processes are intertwined and should proceed simultaneously.

Provincial licensing for staffed community homes serving youth in care and adults eligible for residential care ensure the service provider delivers a safe and healthy home that promotes the well-being of residents. Operating licences will outline the maximum number of occupants, the types of services offered, and the operational standards of a home among other conditions.

Staffed community homes for adults eligible for residential care require

approval from [Community Living disABILITY Services – Residential Care and Licensing \(RCL\)](#), or the [Adult Mental Health Program](#) in Winnipeg. Before construction or renovations begin, the service provider should contact the RCL office serving the home's area.

See the sections [Provincial Licensing: Child Care Facilities](#) and [Provincial Licensing: Homes for Adults Eligible for Residential Care](#) for details on provincial licensing.

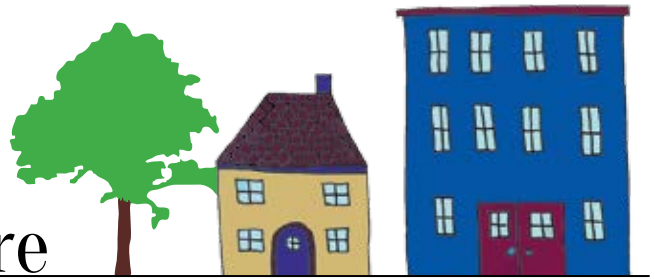
5. Building and Development Permits

Generally, the designer or contractor doing the construction or renovation will obtain all the required permits; however, it is the homeowner or operator's responsibility to ensure all the appropriate permits are acquired and all by-laws and codes are adhered to. Some key permits may include:

- A development permit issued by the municipality or district planning board once they are satisfied all zoning requirements are met
- A building permit issued by the municipality before construction begins to ensure the Manitoba Building Code and local building by-laws are fulfilled
- An occupancy permit issued by the municipality to ensure all fire, plumbing, electrical, and structural standards have been met

Additional permits for plumbing or electrical work during construction will usually be arranged by the building contractor. Most additional zoning regulations for the location will be identified in the development application process, but it's important that the service provider ask their planning authority if there are any additional requirements.

Provincial Licensing: Homes for Adults who are Eligible for Residential Care



Provincial licensing for staffed community homes serving youth and adults eligible for residential care ensure the service provider delivers a safe and healthy home that promotes the well-being of residents. Operating licences may outline the maximum number of occupants, the types of services offered, and the operational standards of a home among other conditions.

Service providers need to contact the relevant provincial licensing authority and the municipal zoning authority once a suitable location has been identified. The provincial and municipal approval processes are intertwined and should go ahead at the same time.

Staffed community homes for adults eligible for residential care require program approval from the Community Living disABILITY Services – Residential Care and Licensing (RCL), or from the Mental Health Program. Before construction or renovations begin, the service provider should contact the RCL office serving the home's area.

An RCL coordinator will give the service provider vital direction on licensing standards including structural requirements that go beyond basic building codes. The coordinator will inspect the home and issue a licence if all requirements are met and the home is ready for residents to move in:

- Construction work is finished
- The home is furnished
- All inspections are complete
- Staffing and operational plans and procedures are in place

Residential Care Licences for staffed community homes for adults eligible for residential care are valid for one year and may be renewed. The licensing authority will conduct follow-up inspections and reviews to ensure the home continues to meet provincial regulations and standards throughout its operation.

Full licensing regulations for staffed community homes for adults eligible

for residential care are governed by the Residential Care Facilities Licensing Regulation and The Social Services Administration Act.

Contact Manitoba Family Services to find your local RCL office.

Provincial Licensing: Child Care Facilities



Staffed community homes for youth in care require a licence from the Director of the Child and Family Services Division of Family Services. Obtaining a licence is a multi-step process including:

- an approved and detailed proposal for the program
- background checks on the applicant
- an account of the home detailing floor plans, compliance with building, fire, and health legislation, and operational policies and procedures

The provincial licensing authority will provide a full list of the application requirements. Once they receive the complete application, they may assign a provincial licensing specialist to assist with:

- advice on zoning, building, and safety approvals
- coordinate fire and health inspections

- conduct on-site licensing reviews and orientations to the licensing standards manual

Once all the requirements have been met an operating licence may be issued. Licences for staffed community homes serving youth are valid for one year and may be renewed. The licensing authority will conduct follow-up inspections and reviews to ensure the home continues to meet provincial regulations and standards throughout its operation.

Full licensing regulations for staffed community homes serving youth in care are governed by the Child Care Facilities (Other than Foster Homes) Licensing Regulation pursuant to The Child and Family Services Act. For more information on the licensing process see the Child Care Facilities Standards Manual.

Communications & Community Relations

Building Community Support

Building positive relationships with community allies strengthens your proposal for municipal officials and creates a balanced counterpoint to any opposition. Most community members are supportive of, or undecided about, staffed community homes in their neighbourhoods. Unfortunately, opponents of staffed community homes are usually more motivated, vocal, and persuasive than supporters. Opponents are not only more likely to write letters and attend meetings, but also to draw media attention because conflict is news. High-profile opponents can create the false perception that they represent the entire community or neighbourhood. Their opposition can persuade undecided community members, municipal officials, and supporters alike.

Yet the power of positive community support should not be underestimated. Begin mobilizing support for your project before filing municipal development plans or notifying the surrounding neighbourhood. Remember to be open and honest that you are in the beginning stages of the project. See the suggestions below to start building your outreach plan.

1. Connect with Like-minded Groups

Look for local organizations that share your commitment to community health, diversity, and inclusiveness such as:

- Social service agencies
- Community-based housing providers
- The regional health authority
- Faith-based groups
- Community healthcare providers
- Politicians and government agencies

Ask what kind of support these organizations can provide such as:

- Helping promote your messages about the positive aspects of the home, human rights and the value of diverse and inclusive communities, or the need the home will fill to their:
 - members or constituents
 - municipal officials
 - followers on social media

- Providing in-kind support such as hosting open houses or providing volunteers
- Identifying other potential allies in individual community members and leaders, government officials, or community organizations
- Providing history on community attitudes toward staffed community homes or similar organizations
- Offering pledges of support for your project to municipal officials and the community

2. Keep a Contact List

Compile a contact list of individuals and organizations who want to actively support your project (with contact information such as phone number and email address). If you need to mobilize their support you will want to have this information ready.

3. Maintain Your Relationships

Maintain your positive relationships with community organizations by making support a two-way street:

- Follow them on social media and distribute positive communications about them on social media
- Show your appreciation for their support with a card or other positive gesture
- Attend meetings, rallies, or fundraising that support their cause and your shared community

4. Make Being a Supporter Easy

Your supporters have busy lives so offer them a variety of ways to promote your cause such as:

- Attending or speaking at any community meetings or hearings related to the home
- Communicating their support to municipal officials and other relevant government representatives through letters, emails, or phone calls. Sample letters are included in [Appendix A](#)
- Promoting your cause through local media by writing letters to the editor or calling into talk radio programs
- Using face-to-face interactions and social media to promote accurate and positive information

5. Prepare Your Supporters

Make promoting your staffed community home easy for your supporters by providing relevant materials and information such as:

- Fact sheets
- Formal or informal information sessions
- Relevant online resources
- Relevant articles
- Buttons, posters, or stickers that support your project

Please see [Appendix A](#) for sample letters that can also be adapted into speaking notes for informal or formal conversations or speeches.

You can also help your supporters by offering them some of the following tips:

- Plan what you will say before you speak
- Say what you truly believe and be confident in the message you deliver
- Back up your points with sound supporting evidence
- Be positive and stick to the facts
- Address opposing arguments, but don't make personal attacks
- Know the difference between discrimination and legitimate concerns

Communicating with Municipal Governments

Open, two-way communication between municipal staff and service providers can ease the approval process for the municipality, service providers, and community members. Working cooperatively, the service provider and municipal staff can establish a mutually beneficial relationship that enhances the community. For more information on zoning and discrimination see [Appendix C](#).

Through early contact with municipal officials, the service provider can learn about:

- local planning and zoning regulations
- ideal locations for the home
- likely community concerns or opposition
- community leaders and likely supporters
- community history with staffed community homes

While municipal staff are experts on their processes, they may not know a lot

about staffed community homes. The service provider can foster a cooperative relationship with the municipality by offering information such as:

- The size of the home and the number of residents and staff it will house
- The supervision and range of services residents will receive
- The benefits of staffed community homes for their residents and their community
- The level of provincial oversight for staffed community homes
- The service provider's plans for community relations and outreach

Additionally, municipal staff may not know about their human rights obligations under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Manitoba Human Rights Code. Use the information in the section on [Housing & Human Rights](#) to identify trouble spots in zoning and planning by-laws and to prepare municipal staff with responses to common community concerns or opposition.

Choosing Your Outreach Approach

Choosing between a high profile or a low profile approach to opening a staffed community home depends on several factors including:

- The philosophy of the service provider
- The community's past experience with staffed community homes
- The likelihood of smooth municipal approval
- The service provider's budget, resources, and experience

While NIMBY literature often recommends a high profile approach to opening a home, it is not always in the best interest of the service provider. Most service providers will aim for a balanced approach that minimizes risk and takes advantage of strengths and opportunities.

Taking a High Profile Approach



A high profile approach engages with community members and groups and maximizes the project's visibility. Maintaining a high profile approach works best when:

- the home does not fit smoothly into local zoning by-laws and a variance or conditional approval is needed
- the service provider has a mandate for public education and advocacy
- the service provider has sufficient resources and experience
- significant opposition is possible or likely

Advantages of a high profile approach include:

- Shaping the message early on to increase the chance that public hearings and community discourse will focus on relevant and appropriate topics
- Galvanizing local support in the event that significant opposition builds
- Challenging discriminatory bylaws or municipal processes to ensure a more socially just future
- Building long term community trust and acceptance with transparency and public engagement

If you decide to take a high profile approach to community outreach, keep the following suggestions in mind:

- Reach out to community members and groups to build support before the property is purchased and certainly before work on the property begins

- Thoroughly research the community's background to identify potential opponents and allies
- Thoroughly research all applicable laws including municipal bylaws, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Manitoba Human Rights Code
- Build and implement a solid communications plan that is tailored to your audience

Taking a Low Profile Approach



A low profile approach to opening a home minimizes community contact and project visibility. Keeping a low profile works best when:

- the proposed home fits easily into local zoning by-laws without variances or conditional use approvals
- the community has welcomed staffed community homes into their neighbourhood in the past
- the service provider has limited resources or scope

Advantages to a low profile approach include:

- Sparing residents or clients undue scrutiny
- Communicating from the beginning that the home is an ordinary part of the community like any family residence

- Avoiding unfounded opposition
- Saving time and money

If you decide to take a low profile approach to community outreach, keep the following suggestions in mind:

- Make communication with municipal officials and thorough zoning by-law research your first steps
- Build a solid communication plan to respond to community concerns or opposition
- Designate and train member(s) of your team to communicate with community members or groups
- Be honest and forthright when responding to community concerns or questions. Being evasive can undermine goodwill, encourage mistrust, and inflame opposition
- Make and maintain a plan to build community relationships

Maintaining Community Relations

You may choose to maintain a low profile after establishing your staffed community home, especially if you have limited resources or you feel a high profile will do more damage than good. Yet research and experience show that effective community relations can build and maintain neighbourly goodwill, improve the experience of your residents, and provide a positive example for future homes facing opposition. In addition to the tips below a sample neighbourhood communication plan can be found in [Appendix B](#).

1. Be a Good Neighbour

Being a good neighbour includes:

- Tending to yard maintenance
- Disposing of garbage and recycling properly
- Providing unobtrusive pick-up/drop-off and parking procedures

You could also share a [Good Neighbour Agreement](#) or pledge with surrounding neighbours that outlines the specific steps you'll take to be a good neighbor and how neighbours can voice concerns.

Consider including representatives of the home, staff, volunteers, or residents in community events. This shows that the service provider, staff, and residents are supportive neighbours.

2. Make a Plan to Manage Complaints

Create a plan for resolving complaints and disputes. Taking complaints seriously and responding quickly shows respect and commitment to being a good neighbour. Some suggestions for responding to complaints include:

- Create and share a simple and accessible process for neighbours to voice concerns
- Seek clarification about issues raised, rather than making assumptions

- Keep a careful record of all complaints and negative community interactions and their resolutions. This can help you identify and address any emerging trends in the community
- Appoint one or two staff or management members to respond to community concerns
- Respond to concerns or complaints promptly
- Provide information to concerned parties on the decisions and actions taken. If no action will be taken, explain your position. For instance, if attempting to resolve a complaint would violate the privacy or safety of your residents

3. Communicate with Your Neighbours

First, decide if you will reach out only to neighbours within sight and hearing distance of your home, a one or two block radius, or the entire community in the instance of a small town.

Get to know your neighbours:

- Hold an open house that includes staff, managers, and board members
- Circulate a periodic newsletter about your home
- Maintain social media accounts like Facebook and Twitter and invite neighbours to follow you

For a quick guide to social media see the [Social & Digital Media Toolkit](#) by Girls Human Rights Hub.

4. Prepare for Major Disputes

Prepare a plan for addressing seemingly unresolvable disputes. This process may start with informal meetings between the concerned neighbour or group and senior management or the service provider's board. You may want to form a committee to address such a dispute or involve a professional mediator.

[Mediation Services Winnipeg](#) offers professional mediation services to individuals and groups for free.

Be clear and firm on points that are non-negotiable. For instance, when the dignity, privacy, or safety of residents could be compromised.

Consider conflict resolution training for your staff. Conflict resolution skills can help your staff not only deal with complaints against the home, but also with prejudiced comments or actions in the community.

Organizations offering conflict resolution training in Manitoba include:

[Mediation Services' Learning Centre](#), a program of [Mediation Services Winnipeg](#)

[Facilitated Solutions](#), [Mediation and Conflict Management Specialists](#)

Creating Your Communications Plan

The following suggestions outline some tactics for building your communications plan. Don't make assumptions about the community and their concerns that could result in outreach attempts that come across as paternalistic or condescending. Instead, ask questions and conduct careful research to build the best communications plan possible.

1. Project Website

Websites can be useful tools for providing information and interaction with the public. This can be accomplished with a dedicated project website, a section of the service providers existing website, using social media such as Facebook, or a blogging site like WordPress, Blogger, or Squarespace.

Pros:

- Information is publicly available in one location
- Information is easily updated
- All public communications can refer to the website

Cons:

- Needs to be built, moderated, maintained, and updated
- Incorrect information or public relations mistakes can't be 'taken back'
- Websites are impersonal and don't allow messages to be audience specific

- Not everyone in the community has access to, or is comfortable with the Internet

Top Tips:

- Create an easy-to-remember web address and include it on all communications materials
- Use clear language and be concise
- Designate a person to regularly update the site
- Ensure that any interactive parts of the site such as comment forums are regularly moderated
- Have more than one person proof read the material to be posted

- Introduces accurate information and positive messaging
- Builds respect and trust

Cons:

- May inconvenience neighbours or make them uncomfortable
- Can overwhelm neighbours with too much information or arouse concerns they did not have before
- Has a limited audience
- Can be time-consuming

Top Tips:

- Develop a detailed plan for canvassing including the information to be delivered, a canvassing schedule, and how follow-up will be done
- Send an advance note to each household announcing the visit
- Listen attentively and don't engage in debate
- Schedule canvassing during convenient hours when people will be home
- Canvass in pairs
- Record the feedback and concerns of neighbours. This information can help you build and tailor the rest of your communications plan
- Speak only about what you know for sure and provide follow-up for unresolved questions or issues
- Designate personable and experienced canvassers (or provide training)

2. Canvassing

Going door-to-door to speak with neighbours can be an effective way to provide information and hear community feedback and concerns, while building trust and respect. This tool is well-suited to meeting people's desire to be consulted.

Pros:

- Puts a human face on the service provider and proposed home
- Provides opportunities to identify the concerns and feedback of the community
- Introduces the idea of a staffed community home to neighbours early



3. Mail Outs

Mail-outs to select households or entire neighbourhoods are a good way to give information, provide notification, or to respond to questions from the community. Materials commonly sent in mail-outs include:

- notification letters
- project overviews
- fact sheets
- FAQs
- newsletters

Some sample mail-outs are included in [Appendices A and B](#).

Pros:

- Provides the same information to community members to limit the spread of misinformation
- Can communicate a range of information and messages
- Can be simple and relatively inexpensive once the materials are prepared

Cons:

- Messages are not necessarily tailored to an intended audience
- May feel impersonal
- Can be easily thrown away
- Information may be understood and interpreted from a variety of perspectives
- Controversial issues or material could raise concerns that were not considered by the community before
- Ignoring controversial issues may raise community suspicion

Top Tips:

- Develop a clear set of goals by asking what you want to achieve: Provide information? Address myths and misconceptions?
- Identify a primary audience: will you target immediate neighbours or the entire neighbourhood
- Develop materials and keep the following points in mind:
 - Be concise and do not overwhelm your audience with information
 - Create attractive and engaging materials that communicate information quickly by using images or infographics
 - Tailor your messages to your audience where possible by including local issues and concerns
 - Include contact information and invite feedback

4. Open House

An open house is an informal event that allows people to drop in at a local venue and engage with the service provider. An open house provides information to, and consultation with, the community through written materials and small presentations. Opportunities for small group discussion within the open house can enhance community engagement and foster mutual trust.

Pros:

- Allows some concerns to be resolved immediately through consultation
- Accommodates a large group and a variety of schedules

- Facilitates one-on-one or small group discussions
- Demonstrates transparency and builds credibility
- Multiple open houses can be held when necessary with little additional preparation

Cons:

- Consultation requires a number of experienced and knowledgeable staff
- Intimate discussions may discourage some people from participating
- Opponents may use the opportunity to be disruptive

Top Tips:

- Develop clear goals and a budget
- Advertise widely and in several mediums such as mail-outs, posters, or radio ads
- Staff the open house with knowledgeable employees or volunteers
- Choose a centrally located and accessible venue
- Provide comment or survey cards and an opportunity for participants to sign-up for a mailing list



5. Community Meeting

Small community meetings can create a safe, comfortable place to facilitate discussions about community concerns or issues and provide information to key members of the community. Small meetings give the service provider an opportunity to know more about the community and to foster mutual trust and respect. Unlike large public meetings, small meetings are easier to facilitate and they discourage expressions of prejudice or anger.

Pros:

- Creates a safe and respectful space to share information, concerns, and ideas
- Allows the facilitator to frame the issues and guide the discussion
- Provides a gauge for community support or opposition
- Participants can be chosen to ensure some supporters are present
- Discourages expressions of prejudice and heated debate
- Develops a network of support and community engagement

Cons:

- Conversations can become stifled or unruly depending on the skills of the facilitator
- Can raise concern and suspicion for those not invited
- Communication with strangers can be uncomfortable for some people
- Can be difficult to deal with heated exchanges or expressions of prejudice if they arise

Top Tips:

- Develop meeting goals, messaging, and follow-up plans for unresolved issues
- Designate an experienced or trained facilitator
- Invite people strategically including community leaders or organizations and known supporters
- Explain the purpose of the meeting and establish ground rules, especially around respectful behaviour and sharing
- Record meeting minutes
- Thank everyone for their participation and provide opportunities for them to stay involved where possible

6. Public Meetings

Required by the Municipality

Providers of staffed community homes in Manitoba will most often participate in a large public meeting only when municipal officials require it. In this instance, ensure the requirement isn't unlawful discrimination as described in the section on [Housing & Human Rights](#).



Pros:

- Communicates information efficiently to, and solicits feedback from, a large group
- Gathers together the service provider, community members, municipal officials, relevant professionals, and experts to build a strong case for the home
- Provides a far-reaching opportunity to frame the home in a positive light
- Creates a positive bandwagon effect when well managed

Cons:

- Can be difficult to manage and can encourage extreme positions
- Limits two-way communication and speaking time
- Can raise new questions and concerns
- Facilitation is under the control of municipal officials

Top Tips:

- Meet with public officials before the meeting to ensure they are prepared to facilitate the meeting including fulfilling their duty to stop discriminatory speech and behaviours
- Invite representatives from the applicable provincial licensing authority to attend. They can speak about licensing requirements and successful staffed community homes
- Invite supporters and allies to speak or have their support added to the meeting record

Hosted by the Service Provider

Open public meetings provide a large group of people with information and an opportunity to voice their support, concerns, or suggestions. While large meetings can be economical and efficient, they can quickly devolve into heated arguments or discriminatory language or behaviours. Because of their risks, large open meetings are generally discouraged for community outreach programs.

Pros:

- Can efficiently communicate information to, and solicit feedback from, a large group
- Can create a positive bandwagon effect when well managed
- Provides a far-reaching opportunity to frame the home in a positive light
- Gathers together the service provider, community members, municipal officials, relevant professionals, and experts to build a strong case for the home

Cons:

- Can be difficult to manage and can encourage extreme positions
- Limits two-way communication and speaking time
- May raise new questions and concerns if presentation and facilitation aren't done well

Top Tips:

- Designate or hire an experienced facilitator who will direct the meeting and ensure all participants behave respectfully
- Invite supporters to attend and speak at the meeting if possible
- Outline a concise and plain-language agenda to guide the meeting

- Select knowledgeable representatives to respond to questions and concerns from participants. This could include invited experts, municipal or provincial officials, or people who work for the service provider
- Plan for how people will ask questions or make comments (i.e. using microphones, questions on a white board, and so on)
- Prepare a brief presentation for the beginning of the meeting to provide information about the home and service provider
- Record the meeting and let all participants know it will be recorded. This document can not only inform future meetings, but can also help moderate participant behaviour
- Ensure the meeting is accessible for people with disabilities including mobility, hearing, and visual impairments

7. Media Relations

There are two general approaches to media relations, proactive and reactive. Contacting media to introduce the home and make your case for it is a **proactive approach**. A proactive approach is best if you expect widespread opposition or if you are taking a

high-profile approach to opening the home.

Contacting media in response to press coverage is a **reactive approach**. A reactive approach is best when you expect a supportive or neutral response or if you are taking a **low-profile** approach to opening the home.

Either approach requires thorough preparation and you should never take a "wing-it" approach to media relations. Hire a media specialist if you can afford one or if the situation warrants it.

Pros:

- Gain access to a wider audience
- Shape messages about the home early on
- Anticipate and address common concerns about staffed community homes
- Circulate accurate information about the home
- Raise a positive community profile for the service provider

Cons:

- Journalists must write balanced articles, meaning opponents may have equal "air time"
- Journalists are likely to seek stories that contain conflict because conflict is news
- Poorly presented interviews or quotes can't be "taken back"



Top Tips:

- Develop key messages about the home that respond to common or expected community concerns
- Build relationships with media professionals or journalists before opening the home if possible
- Develop strong media messages that can be communicated in 5-8 seconds, are plain language, and show the positive impacts of the home or service provider
- Designate one or two people to manage media relations
- Research the best media outlets, journalists, or bloggers to get your message out:
 - Have they covered similar stories in the past?
 - Do they write about municipal affairs, community development, or social issues? Local allies or municipal leaders may know who to approach and who to avoid
- Send out a news release to likely reporters or media outlets if you have events such as open houses that are likely to garner positive media coverage. See the sample news release in [Appendix D](#)
- Provide press kits to media professionals that include:
 - Service provider backgrounder or overview
 - Fact sheets about the home, the benefits of diverse neighbourhoods, or the need the home fulfills in the community
 - Photos or video that can be used in coverage
 - Contact information for media inquiries or interviews

Local Success Stories

From Conflict to Resolution: A Made-in-Manitoba Human Rights Victory

When a local service provider purchased a residence and property in a rural community outside Winnipeg they faced significant community opposition. The residence was to become the home of three men with physical and intellectual disabilities who needed 24 hour supervision and support.

Municipal officials decided the service provider would need to apply for a re-zoning of the property from Rural Residential to Institutional. This process required a public hearing before a decision could be made. When the time came, about 300 community members attended the meeting and almost all who participated were opposed to the re-zoning. Community members expressed common concerns of decreased property values, increased crime, and strain on existing infrastructure. Other objections included concerns about who the future residents might be and the chance that the rezoned property could be sold to another business owner, changing the character of the neighbourhood.

There was also a troubling and lengthy airing of the potential neighbours' unfounded fear, anger, and prejudice that continued without the intervention of those in charge. Community members suggested that the residents, who they did not know, might be dangerous sexual deviants, criminals, or drug and alcohol users. People demanded to know details about the residents' diagnoses and treatment histories—information protected by law for all Canadians. A family member of one of the residents attending the meeting described the statements made about their relative as, “offensive, hurtful, and outrageous ... completely disregarding his right to privacy, dignity, and respect.”

The municipal council voted unanimously to reject the application for re-zoning. The decision led to a public outcry including protests led by disability organizations and critical media coverage.

The service provider filed a complaint with the Manitoba Human Rights Commission that resulted in a lengthy investigation of the rural municipality (RM) that concluded the municipal handling of the case amounted to discrimination. A lengthy mediation process began between the RM and the service provider and a settlement was eventually reached.

“When there is a public interest and a human rights component, it is important to pass on to other municipalities what we have learned.”

While the investigation and mediation was difficult, it was considered a success by all involved. “This mediation was a complex one,” said Azim Jiwa, then executive director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. “It was a matter that’s systemic, so it was a difficult one and a very positive outcome.” Working with the Manitoba Human Rights Commission was a positive experience, said one local official: “When there is a public interest and a human rights component, it is important to pass on to other municipalities what we have learned.”

A Lesson in Community Relations: The Relocation of a Local Service Provider

A local service provider for youth was forced to relocate one of their homes after the building they were renting was no longer available. A home was purchased in a new neighbourhood and the necessary renovations were quickly done to complete the move in the time available. However, this did not allow time for the community notification and outreach the service provider usually does well ahead of establishing a new facility.

The home's program manager became aware that some community members learned the service provider was opening a home in their neighbourhood and, lacking information about the home, there was some apprehension and concern. In response, the service provider drafted and sent an information letter from their executive director to neighbouring residents, explaining what the home was and why they were relocating to the

neighbourhood on such short notice. A copy of this letter is included in [Appendix A](#). The letter was promptly followed with in-person visits by the home's program manager to introduce herself to neighbours, provide further information, answer questions, and hear any concerns they had. The program manager also provided her contact information and invited community residents to contact her directly with any questions or concerns they may have in the future.

The program manager reported that this combination of an information letter and door-to-door canvassing made a real difference in alleviating concerns, and the in-person contact was appreciated by the neighbours. The home was subsequently opened without incident and has been operating since then with the general support of the community.

Community Building Take Aways:

Even rushed relocations to new neighbourhoods can be success stories as the adjacent story shows. Lessons drawn from this experience include:

- Ideally, community notification and outreach should begin before neighbours learn from other sources that a staffed community home is planned for their neighbourhood. This example, however, illustrates that open and honest communication, even at a late date, can be very effective in dealing with community concerns
- Communications from persons in higher level positions, in this case the executive director and program manager, adds credibility to information and confirms a genuine interest in building relationships with community members
- Person-to-person, two-way communication demonstrates respect, builds trust, and provides for immediate feedback and clarification. In-person communication from managers or supervisors also allows for decisions and/or action to be taken immediately to address some concerns
- Initial concerns are often rooted in a lack of information and a desire for consultation, and prompt action to provide these can both alleviate concerns and build community support
- Planning for the unexpected with a detailed communications strategy and a willingness to be flexible are key in managing community relations



Resources

Conflict Resolution

Menno Simons College, University of Winnipeg:
<http://www.mscollege.ca/academics.php?s=crs>

This is a three or four year degree program in conflict resolution studies offering numerous courses covering the principles and practice of conflict resolution. It may be possible to request customized training through the faculty as well.

Mediation Services' Learning Centre, a program of Mediation Services Winnipeg: <http://www.mediationservices.ca>

Offers:

Numerous in-house one to three day training courses on conflict resolution and mediation.

Presentations, keynote addresses, and more intensive workshops, which can be customized to meet specific needs.

Certificate programs in conflict management, mediation skills, and resolution skills.

Facilitated Solutions:
<http://www.workplaceconflict.ca>

Offers:

Tailored and contextualized training for workplaces on conflict prevention, management, and resolution. Training is via "lunch and learn," keynote address, or 1-2 day skill building session formats.

Event Planning, Social Media, and Communications

ActiveVoice:

Although this toolkit was intended for an event following a film screening, many of it's principles apply. You'll find lots of useful tips here: http://www.activevoice.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Welcome-to-Shelbyville_Event-Planning-Toolkit_lowres.pdf

Global Giving:

For an excellent template of a social media toolkit, visit <https://www.globalgiving.org/learn/social-media-toolkit/>

The Opportunity Agenda:

While based out of New York City, The Opportunity Agenda's Communications Toolkit offers a plethora of information, tips, and guidelines: <https://opportunityagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2019.05.06-Toolkit-Without-Comic-Book.pdf>

Grand River Council on Aging:

This non-profit has created an event planning guide and checklist with a focus on being age-friendly and accessible. <https://grcoa.ca/site/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Age-Friendly-Checklist-June19-2024Final.pdf>

Disability Issues

Manitoba Disability Issues Office:
<http://www.gov.mb.ca/dio/>

Society for Manitobans with Disabilities:
<https://www.smd.mb.ca/smd/>

Human Rights and Community Living

Manitoba Human Rights Code:
<https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/h175e.php>

Manitoba Human Rights Commission:
<http://www.manitobahumanrights.ca>

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms:
<http://www.pch.gc.ca/eng/1356631760121/1356631904950>

http://www.parl.gc.ca/about/parliament/education/ourcountryourparliament/html_booklet/canadian-charter-rights-and-freedoms-e.html

Canadian Human Rights Commission:
<http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/eng>

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:
<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:
<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

Community Living Manitoba:
<https://www.aclmb.ca>

New Directions for Children, Youth, Adults, and Families:
<http://newdirections.mb.ca>

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Appendix A – Sample Letters

These letters are adapted directly from Pivot Legal Society’s Yes In My Backyard! Toolkit, available at http://www.pivotlegal.org/yes_in_my_backyard_toolkit.

The following samples can be customized using the information in the Myths and Myth Busting section.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Date:

Re: [previous article or letter]

Dear Editor,

I would like to respond to the article you recently published about [project] at [location]. Like many of your readers, I am a concerned resident of [neighbourhood] and I want to feel safe and secure where I live. I do not, however, share [journalist or person quoted in article’s] concerns about this project.

Consider the following brief points about staffed community homes:

- Two separate studies, conducted in BC (2000) and in New York City (2008) found no evidence of lowered property values or increased crime around the areas where supportive housing was built
- It costs tax-payers less money to provide adequate housing and support to youth in care and people who have intellectual disabilities than not to
- Most residents living near staffed community homes do not even know that the facilities exist

On top of these facts, remember that the Human Rights Code makes it illegal to discriminate against people based on their age or intellectual ability. Everyone has the same rights we all enjoy and no one should have to ask permission from their neighbours before moving in next door.

I encourage you [or journalist, or interviewee] to look deeper into the benefits this project will have in our community and reconsider the reasoning behind opposition to this project.

Sincerely Yours,

Name
Address
Phone #
Email

Sample Letter to City Council

Date:

Re: [proposed home, zoning variance application, etc.]

Dear City Council,

I would like to add my support to the proposed project to open a staffed community home at [location].

As a resident of this neighbourhood, I recognize the need for this service in our community. I am concerned that a vocal minority of residents is presenting an unbalanced picture of the range of views about this project among people in my neighbourhood.

I urge you to uphold the [city's/municipality's] responsibilities under the Manitoba Human Rights Code to treat all prospective residents equally. Everyone has the same rights we all enjoy and no one should have to ask permission from their neighbours before moving in next door.

Thank you for your dedication to building neighbourhoods that are vibrant, safe, inclusive, and welcoming places for everyone. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information about my support for this project.

Sincerely Yours,

Name
Address
Phone #
Email

Sample Letter to Home Opponents

Date:

Re: [proposed home]

Dear [Neighbourhood Association, BIA etc.],

I would like to respond to your recent opposition to the proposed staffed community home at [location]. Like you, I am a concerned resident of this neighbourhood and I want to feel safe and secure where I live. I do not, however, share your concerns about this project.

Consider the following brief points about staffed community homes:

- Two separate studies, conducted in BC (2000) and in New York City (2008) found no evidence of lowered property values or increased crime around the areas where supportive housing was built.
- It costs tax-payers less to provide adequate housing and support to youth in care and the intellectually disabled than not to.
- Most residents living near staffed community homes do not even know that the facilities exist.

On top of these facts, remember that the Manitoba Human Rights Code makes it illegal to discriminate against people based on their age or intellectual ability. Everyone, even those who require 24-hour support, have the same rights we all enjoy and no one should have to ask permission from their neighbours before moving in next door.

I encourage you to look deeper into the benefits this project will have in our community and to reconsider your opposition.

Sincerely Yours,

Name
Address
Phone #
Email

Sample Notification Letter

The following letter was sent to neighbours of a home purchased by a local service provider in Winnipeg. The letter is a good example of providing clear, positively framed information, and was part of outreach efforts that were successful in alleviating community concerns even though they communicated with neighbours only a few days ahead of moving into the neighbourhood.

Dear Neighbour;

RE: Re-locating of XYZ Services facility

Later this week, an XYZ Services facility will begin to move into a group care facility on ABC Street. The owners of our current facility are returning to their home after an absence of several years so we were forced to relocate. We purchased the home on ABC Street in order to allow the three residents and staff to establish themselves within a community without the fear of having to relocate.

The home on ABC Street has undergone extensive internal and external renovations in preparation for this move. We want to ensure that we add to the value of the neighbourhood, not detract from it in any way. Normally when we move into a new neighbourhood XYZ Services provides information ahead of time to the neighbours. We apologize for not communicating with you much earlier.

We have heard that some neighbours have concerns about our clients moving into the neighbourhood. At XYZ, we pride ourselves in being good neighbours. We believe strongly that our youth should live in homes in the community, but that we also have a responsibility to ensure that both the youth entrusted to our care and the neighbours are safe. It provides an opportunity to set an example of community spirit, while we are providing care and healing.

In addition to the information being provided in this letter, the Program Manager who is directly responsible for the day-to-day operations of the home will be visiting the immediate neighbours to introduce herself/himself and address any specific concerns. She/he will provide her/his own contact information to ensure that any concerns are addressed promptly and effectively, so that we are able to be good neighbours in this neighbourhood as we are in our current neighbourhood.

While sad to leave their old neighbourhood, XYZ staff and clients are excited to move into their new home on ABC Street. I want to personally assure you that we will do our utmost to be good neighbours and contribute to the community.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email or call me at [phone number].

Yours truly,

[director's name, position, and contact information]

Appendix B – Sample Mail Outs

The following mail-outs, including a letter and neighbourhood communication plan, are taken from the Lethbridge, Alberta, Municipal Planning Commission. This sample was developed to illustrate their neighbourhood communication policy, adopted in 2003 and amended in 2006.

Sample Annual Neighbourhood Communication

[Service Provider name and address]

[Date]

Dear Neighbour:

We are sending out Neighbourhood Communication Plan to people who live within [a block, two blocks, etc] of our group home at 123 Main Street. For those of you who are unfamiliar with a Neighbourhood Communication Plan, let me explain.

As the operators of this group home, this document outlines a means of regular communication with our neighbours and a formal mechanism for resolving neighbour complaints and concerns. We are pleased to do so. We are absolutely committed to being good members of our neighbourhoods. After all, the whole notion of placing group homes in neighbourhoods is to create belonging and to share in community.

I'm pleased to tell you that in the last year neighbours expressed concerns regarding the 123 group home [number of incidents]. In response, staff have been cautioned to avoid parking in front of neighbouring houses for even a short period of time and, in order to allow the handibus to back fully onto the driveway when loading and unloading, the driveway has been widened by 6 feet [or other specific instances of neighbourhood concerns].

You may have noticed some other changes in our group home in the past year. Sadly, Thomas passed away last August. In September, Charles Bicks became our newest resident. You've probably seen him on walks in the neighbourhood with his mom. She regularly brings Bing, her dog, to go for a walk with Charles. You may also have noticed a new paint job on the house. Long awaited and it looks so much better [adapt this section to suite your residents, while maintaining confidentiality].

Please take some time to read the attached Neighbourhood Communication Plan. If you have any concerns with it or some aspect of the group home operation please give one of the staff: [list appropriate staff members and contact information]. Any one of them would be pleased to chat with you.

Yours truly,

[facility director or other appropriate representative]

Above persons title

Address

Phone #

Email

Sample Annual Neighbourhood Communication Plan

Neighbourhood Communication Plan

123 Main Street, Lethbridge Alberta

1) Who are we?

a) In case you are unaware of our existence, this is a group home located in a single-family home at 123 Main Street. It was established in 1998. The group home provides residential care for four mentally disabled adults, two of whom are also physically disabled. The clients attend a day program, leave the home by handi-bus at approximately 8am, and return at approximately 4pm. Clients or staff people are not usually home in the daytime hours.

b) Staffing and parking

There are two shifts at this group home. A night shift of one 'awake' staff person who is at the home from 11pm to 8am with assistance from a morning staff person who arrives at 6:30 am and leaves at 9am. Two staff people are on the evening shift: one from 3:30 pm to 9:30 pm, and one from 4pm to 11pm. Occasionally there may be a third staff person on the evening shift. There are four parking spaces in the driveway of this group home. There is room in the driveway for handibus pick-up and drop-off.

c) XYZ Services

This group home is operated by XYZ Services. We have been providing residential care services in Lethbridge since 1976 and operate 8 group homes in the city. All of our group homes have a Social Care Facility Licence obtained through the Children's Services department of the Province of Alberta. All of our group homes are operated in accordance with the standards set by the Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families. XYZ Services conducts a yearly review of each of its group home operations – neighbour relations is one of the areas examined. We review the Neighbourhood Communication Log (see 3(a) below) and we review and up-date the Neighbourhood Communication Plan.

d) Funding & Ownership

The group home is funded through [funding organization]. The home itself is owned and maintained by [owner].

e) Property maintenance

Alberta Infrastructure contracts the maintenance of the group home to A-1 Property Management Ltd. The contract includes snow removal of driveways and walkways, regular yard maintenance from May to October, and year round exterior and interior maintenance. Periodic upgrades such as exterior painting or interior renovations are scheduled as needed.

2) Maintaining Neighbourhood Relations

a) XYZ Services is committed to keeping communication lines with the neighbourhood open. Each April staff from the group home deliver a current Neighbourhood Communication Plan to all the homes, businesses, or apartment building managers within a one-block radius of 123 Main Street.

b) Should some significant aspect of group home operation change in the course of upcoming year (particularly, the contact names and numbers), neighbours who have received this Neighbourhood Communication Plan will be notified of the changes by letter.

c) Most XYZ Services group homes host an annual open house for friends, family, and neighbours. If you attended 123's open house last year you'll know what a fun time it was. You can expect a personal invitation in June.

d) Interested neighbours are welcome to participate in XYZ Services' "Friends of XYZ" committee that works to improve public acceptance of the disabled in the community. If you're interested call [name] at [phone number].

e) Please note the letter accompanying this plan. It asks if you've experienced any concerns with the group home in the past year. If you have, please read the 'Responding to Complaints and Concerns' section below.

3) Responding to Complaints and Concerns

a) If you experience a problem with the operation of the group home at 123 Main Street please contact the group home at 346-2100 (there is an answering machine that will record your message should you call during the day) or simply drop by and talk to one of the staff people.

The group home staff are required to record your concern in the 'Neighbourhood Communication Log' so they will take a little of your time to get the details. They will ask your name, address, and phone number and ask for a full description of what you have been experiencing. The action taken and resolution to the problem is also recorded in the logbook. The Neighbourhood Communication Log is examined during the yearly operational review mentioned in 1(c) above.

b) If the solution to your problem is simple and under staff control, they may immediately implement the solution. If the problem is more complex, your concern will be relayed to the XYZ Services administrator for the group home, [name]. [name] will try to reach you within 5 working days to discuss the circumstances with you. In case she is unable to, you may reach her at [phone number]. We will do our utmost to solve the problem to your satisfaction.

4) Resolving Disputes

a) Please allow Ms. Mills adequate time to derive a solution. If, after 4 weeks from the time of your original complaint, that appears to be impossible, you may take your concern to the 'Good Neighbour Relations' sub-committee of the 'Friends of XYZ' Committee mentioned in 2(d) above. This sub-committee is comprised of 1 XYZ board member, 2 parents of clients served by XYZ, and 2 neighbours of XYZ group homes. The sub-committee rigorously adheres to unbiased protocol for dealing with complaints. Contact [name] at [phone number] for further information.

b) Should you be dissatisfied with the outcome of the sub-committee hearing you may contact:

i) [name], Executive Director
XYZ Services
[address]
[phone number]
[email]

c) In the twenty-eight years that XYZ Services has been in operation only 3 complaints have proceeded to the 'Good Neighbour Relations' sub-committee. XYZ Services is committed to being a good neighbour at all its group home locations and is proud of its record for cooperative relations with neighbours. XYZ is especially proud to have received the "2003 Mayor's Good Citizen Award" for its community education campaign that helped achieve greater acceptance of group homes in residential neighbourhoods.

Appendix C – Zoning

Zoning

Municipalities are divided into various zones that define how the land and buildings can be used. For instance, pieces of land can be zoned as business, industrial, residential, or some combination of uses. Municipalities use zoning by-laws to achieve their planning and development goals including:

- Maintaining community character and cohesion
- Providing proper services to residents
- Enhancing economic development
- Protecting land-owners from nuisance
- Ensuring compatibility between adjacent zones

Zoning officials are the main point of contact between staffed community housing providers and municipal governments during approval processes. When a proposed home meets all of the land-use requirements in a given zone it will be approved 'as of right.'

Zoning and Discrimination

At its best, zoning by-laws give local residents some control over creating and safeguarding vibrant and healthy communities. At its worst, zoning by-laws have been used to exclude classes of people and reinforce damaging stereotypes and social hierarchies.

Zoning by-laws regulate land uses, not what kinds of people can use them. While this type of 'people-zoning' is not legal, as discussed in the section on [Housing and Human Rights](#), municipalities have been known to maintain discriminatory by-laws and practices including:

- Requiring zoning variances, conditional approval, or property re-zoning in residential zones
- Requesting or requiring extra safety standards or amenities as a condition of approval
- Mandating separation distances between staffed community homes
- Defining staffed community homes as institutions, group homes, or boarding houses

- Banning staffed community homes from residential zones
- Limiting the number of residents below provincial licensing requirements

Courts and human rights commissions have clarified that municipal by-laws may exclude certain kinds of development for legitimate planning purposes, such as maintaining neighbourhood integrity, preventing nuisances, regulating density, or ensuring provision of services.

Service providers can challenge discriminatory by-laws through courts and human rights commissions, or by petitioning the municipality to amend them. While both options can be costly and time-consuming, if successful they can save future service providers from similar lengthy processes and legal challenges.

Most often, service providers choose to work through existing zoning and approval processes to achieve their goals even though they may technically be discriminatory.

Municipal Framework

The provincial Planning Act defines three local planning authorities: Municipal councils, planning district boards, and planning commissions. These bodies adopt, administer, and enforce development plans, zoning by-laws, and other by-laws that regulate land use.

Municipal Councils

Municipal councils are the elected government of rural or urban municipalities that regulate development plans and zoning by-laws. Municipal councils are the most likely contact for service providers opening a staffed community home.

Planning Districts

Planning districts consist of two or more municipalities joined together to regulate land use and other municipal matters. A service provider establishing a home in a planning district will likely work with a planning district board.

Planning Commissions

Planning commissions are groups established by a municipal council or planning district to administer zoning by-laws and other development or planning regulations.

Appendix D – Sample News Release



For Immediate Release
Date

XYZ Services and a Rural Municipality in Manitoba find success by working together

Zoning and human rights were at the centre of a successful Manitoba Human Rights Commission mediated settlement. The minor hurdle left is the final court approval of the settlement.

“We’re pleased to announce that through human rights mediation, [XYZ Services] and the [Rural Municipality (RM)] have worked together to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities can live in a community, with choices equal to others,” says Azim Jiwa Executive Director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

XYZ Services provides residential options for individuals with developmental disabilities in a 24-hour shift staffed setting. Individuals in the program are able to live and work in the community.

A human rights complaint was filed against the RM after attempts were made to establish a home for up to three adults with intellectual disabilities. The RM denied the request stating that it would require XYZ Services to apply for re-zoning from “Rural Residential” to “Institutional.” The municipality considered the residence to be a group home, whereas XYZ Services said it was a home for three individuals living together.

Also at issue was whether or not municipal by-laws can be challenged by human rights commissions as well as whether or not the particular by-law in question was discriminatory.

After an investigation, the Human Rights Board of Commissioners determined that the complaint should go to a public hearing. The parties were also given an opportunity to meet with a human rights mediator to find a possible resolution.

“Some of our greatest successes come from mediation, where parties that often have divergent points of view work together and move forward,” says Mr. Jiwa.

The human rights settlement agreement includes a requirement to bring forward a proposed amendment to the residential zoning by-law within eighteen months; until then the RM will ensure the current by-law will not be interpreted in a discriminatory way.

There is also an education component to the settlement. Current RM staff will attend human rights programs offered by the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. As well, a policy will be implemented recommending that the current and future Reeve and councillors also attend such programs.

The municipality will ensure that internal policies and procedures are compliant with The Human Rights Code and that job descriptions for the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and Human Resources Director positions are revised to include a requirement that the individuals occupying those positions have knowledge of The Human Rights Code (Manitoba).

And finally the parties will continue to work together. The CAO will provide input to XYZ Services on a toolkit currently under development by a committee on community inclusiveness for municipalities and service providers. The committee is composed of members of provincial government departments and service providers who work with children in care and adults with intellectual disabilities.

According to one official for the RM, the decision to go public with this settlement was not a difficult one. “When there is a public interest and a human rights component, it is important to pass on to other municipalities what we have learned through this process.”

XYZ Director, Jane Everywoman, says that making this settlement public is one way of showing how municipalities can work towards removing

the housing barriers faced by people with intellectual disabilities. “XYZ Services is very pleased to have reached a resolution with the RM so that their community will become an inclusive one; welcoming persons with intellectual disabilities to live, as others do, in this municipality.”

Similar issues concerning zoning and barriers have been reported across Canada. Both parties hope the toolkit addressing discrimination will be used by other municipalities.

For further information please contact:

[Contact person and their title]

[Contact information]

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