



WELCOMING COMMUNITIES: CREATING VISITABLE HOUSING IN WINNIPEG

January 2008- June 2009

Background

A more unified approach to the design of cities and communities is needed in Canada to make them more livable and inclusive. While great strides have been made in creating accessible public spaces, there is a shortage of even minimally accessible private housing in Canada for seniors who want to 'age in place' and those with reduced mobility. VISIBLE housing is a concept that supports a community by enabling anyone regardless of mobility to enter your home, visit and use the bathroom. *Can you invite your elderly parents to your home?* A shift in thinking and planning is needed to make the three features of visible housing (no step entrance, wider doors and a bathroom on the main floor) a standard in home construction practices. Dialogues with community members (seniors and people with disabilities), home builders and policy makers from previous CCDS projects, concluded that affordable, accessible and available housing is highlighted as a priority area whose qualities are displayed in the promising practice of visible housing.

Introduction

The Canadian Centre on Disability Studies received a grant from the Winnipeg Foundation in 2008. This community capacity building project has developed and implemented a Winnipeg-based "Visitability Education and Awareness Campaign" which has been a catalyst for learning and action in private housing in Winnipeg.

Objectives

1. Build community capacity by increasing understanding of crosscutting issues and develop joint strategies and programs of action.
2. Build partnerships with community groups, organizations and government that have a stake in the housing industry.
3. Education and awareness on visible housing by developing educational materials to share and present at a range of community events.

Results

Visible Housing Working Group

In 2006, CCDS initiated a Visible Housing Working Group based in Winnipeg. The group is active and coordinated by CCDS. Membership includes seniors, people with disabilities, planners, builders, architects and government representatives. The multi-sector, action-oriented group has access to innovative research and their vast knowledge and experience with visible housing assists in facilitating community learning and action.

This Working Group is part of a larger National Visitability Network that was established as part of CCDS' 2006 project on visible housing funded by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. CCDS maintains the network to link professionals, individuals, and advocates with a bi-annual newsletter that updates members on activities, initiatives and progress made on visible housing in Canada.

Visitability Speakers

CCDS staff and working group members have provided leadership in developing educational materials to share at a variety of community events and make presentations online, at conferences and public events on the concept and benefits of visitable housing.

Education and Awareness Campaign

As a part of public education and awareness campaign, CCDS and Working Group members focused efforts on translating the concept of visitability in a visual media-based social context in a variety of ways:

- a) CCDS purchased space on 23 Winnipeg Transit buses for a 6 week period of time from December 15, 2008 to January 26, 2009. The working group selected this time of year to capitalize on the Holiday season to bring the social context of community, neighbourhood, family and interconnection; visiting each other is a central part of our social lives and everyone should be able to visit each other especially during the holidays. (See image below);
- b) The City of Winnipeg Community Relations Bus was utilized for the month of

February 2009, using the same graphics as for the campaign above;

c) CCDS composed a Holiday Greeting Card that was distributed throughout our networks including our funders, community organizations and CCDS membership.

Recommendations

The feedback on the education campaign was very positive from both the working group and community members. The working group suggested continuing the public transit campaigns and depicting other users such as a bike rider or a parent with a stroller, to expand the understanding that this concept benefits all people. Recommendations include:

- a) Community members should develop and lead a Speakers Bureau to promote knowledge and experiences with visitable housing;
- b) Continue the Winnipeg-based visitability public education media campaign;
- c) Maintain the Working Group on visitable housing to facilitate change in the government, share information and work towards establishing more visitable housing;
- d) Continue research and validation of the



*Invite friends over...
Make every new home **visitable**.*

**No step entry • Wider doors
Washroom on main floor**

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visitability premise with Canadian perspectives;

e) Identify how to change the National Building Code which legislates and regulates building standards in Canada.

Conclusions

As a result of this project, visitability as the concept is gaining momentum. The leadership capacity of the community has increased, the number of key partnerships with housing and community organizations has grown and the awareness and understanding of community members has improved on the concept and benefits of visitable housing. The education campaign proved to be a success and is just the first step in sharing information that will change the way we build our homes.

For more information visit

CCDS' website:

**www.disabilitystudies.ca or
www.visitablehousingcanada.com**

