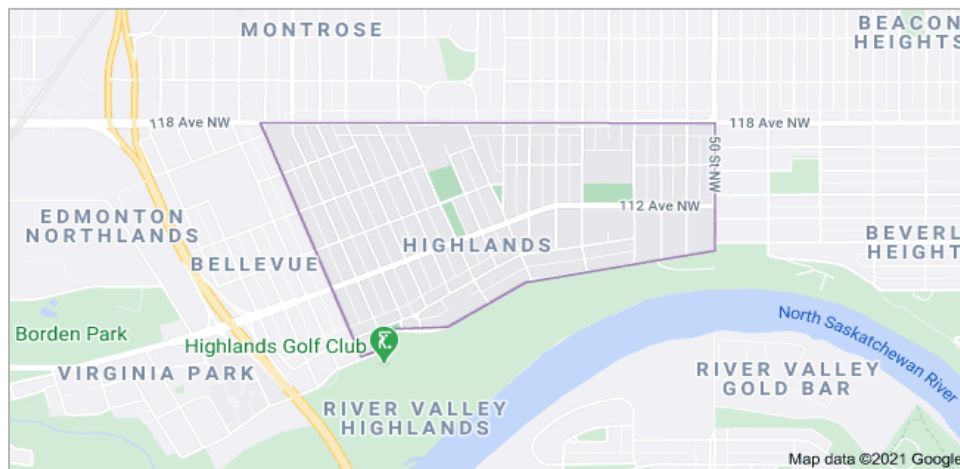


Evaluating At Home in Highlands Using the Theory of Change Framework



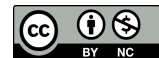
A welcoming initiative founded in inclusivity, diversity,
social connection and community.



At Home in Highlands is a program of the Highlands Community League.

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June 2025

COMMUNITY + WELCOMING = WELLBEING

Land Acknowledgement

At Home in Highlands acknowledges that the traditional land on which we reside is in Treaty Six Territory. We would like to thank the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory for centuries, such as nêhiyaw (Nay-hee-yow), Dene (Deh-neyh), Anishinaabe (Ah-nish-in-ah-bay), Nakota Isga (Na-koh-tah ee-ska), and Niitsitapi (Nit-si-tahp-ee) peoples. We also acknowledge this as the Métis' (May-tea) homeland and the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel. It is a welcoming place for all peoples to share Highlands as home. Together we call upon all of our collective, honoured traditions and spirits to work in building a great neighbourhood for today and future generations.

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Executive Summary

Community life matters when it comes to wellbeing. Decades of research has confirmed that feeling connected to and supported by others, be it extended family, friends or neighbours, contributes to personal satisfaction, happiness and fulfillment in life. Neighbourhoods are critical contexts in this regard. They can often serve as a site for the development of social connection and support among neighbours. However, this is not always a given: neighbourhoods in and of themselves are not naturally health promoting or predisposed to community-building. Harnessing the power of neighbourhood for community building requires intentionality.

This report documents and reflects upon a neighbourhood-based, community-building initiative called *At Home in Highlands* (AHiH) located in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. This initiative, led by a core group of neighbours, invited neighbours living in the Highlands neighbourhood to join together and actively welcome new neighbours, many of whom were beginning a process of abstinence-based recovery. The goal of this welcoming was to support these individuals through their journeys and foster a more connected, resilient and inclusive neighbourhood.

In the fall of 2022, the City of Edmonton provided funds through the Community Safety and Well-being Grant Program for those involved in At Home in Highlands to document their approach and reflect upon its impact on the neighbourhood. Towards this end, led by a research project team, At Home in Highlands utilized a Theory of Change framework. A ‘theory of change’ is a model that explains how a strategy or specific interventions is expected to lead to some kind of social change. It can be used as a framework for understanding how and why an intervention or program works. The framework was applied to better understand AHiH, its impacts, and how it might evolve.

AHiH is grounded in the shared belief that inclusive neighbourhoods contribute positively to wellbeing. AHiH has endeavoured to promote diversity, connection and hospitality in Highlands. The focus of AHiH strategies are people, community and systems. People are clearly being enriched through the relationships that have formed and been sustained through AHiH.

AHiH has assisted in the placement of people in adequate housing and has observed positive growth in these individuals. Highlands neighbours have also been positively impacted through their involvement and the community at large has benefited. But community and system changes are more difficult to achieve. These require more than individual efforts. Collective efforts are necessary to achieve the outcomes in these areas, particularly with regard to housing. While there is tremendous opportunity in Highlands as far as housing is concerned, there is some uncertainty and hesitation regarding the achievability of outcomes related to increasing the stock of affordable housing. Despite these barriers there are people in the community who share the vision of AHiH. It is possible to partner and collaborate with government and non-profit organizations to achieve our goals.

This work should continue.

1. Introduction

Neighbourhoods are a fundamental setting for personal growth and development, social support, community integration, and public and private service delivery. They are, in the words of Emily Talen (2018, 1), “the basic infrastructure of daily living.” Not surprisingly, neighbourhoods matter tremendously for health and wellbeing. For example, high neighbourhood density, mixed land use, presence of parks and recreation settings, and access to a variety of healthy food choices is associated with higher rates of physical activity and healthier food intake; moreover, high levels of social cohesion, social connection and trust among neighbours is associated with lower rates of depression and other mental health problems (Diez Roux and Mair 2010). Today, there is an abundance of evidence that community health and wellbeing is influenced by levels of social diversity, inclusiveness, affordability, and accessibility at the neighbourhood level (Pérez et al. 2020).

In short, where you live matters immensely for your wellbeing. In this regard, two neighbourhood characteristics are important pathways to wellbeing: housing and social capital. In terms of housing, both its physical condition (the quality of housing) and tenure (the rights and responsibilities that a person has over their dwelling) have implications for subjective wellbeing (Clapham et al. 2018). Understandably, things like dampness and condensation, poor lighting, neighbour noise, pests and inadequate living space negatively impact how people rate their wellbeing; however, in the case of tenure, links between tenure type (homeowner vs. renter) and subjective wellbeing depend largely on housing affordability, the quality of service provided by the landlord, and the social status of homeownership and renting more generally (Clapham et al. 2018; Rolfe et al. 2020).

A second important pathway is neighbourhood social capital. Social capital refers to associations and networks that, like economic capital and human capital, provide access to resources or opportunities. Social capital functions as an umbrella term encompassing things such as social support, social trust, social connectedness, social integration and social participation (Pérez et al. 2020). Neighbourhood social capital is itself widely recognized as an essential resource in the process of mental health recovery (see page 7, *Mental Health Recovery, the Social Model, and the Importance of Neighbourhood*). Forms of social capital, such as neighbourhood belonging, social connection and engagement, are positively associated with life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing (Helliwell et al. 2018; Lignier et al. 2024). Importantly, the development of such social capital is facilitated by the physical design of neighbourhoods (i.e. sidewalks, streets) and the availability of social infrastructure (i.e. libraries, parks, churches) that provide “bumping” and “gathering” places for sociability (Banwell and Kingham 2023).

Where you live matters
immensely for your wellbeing.

Studies such as these show how neighbourhood community life matters when it comes to personal satisfaction, happiness and fulfillment. In light of this research, it is becoming more common for urban planners, policymakers and citizens to redeploy the “power of community” in local initiatives to promote

individual and social wellbeing at the neighbourhood level. In this regard, many community-led initiatives leverage the power of social capital to promote diversity, inclusion and recovery.

One such “grassroots” example is At Home in Highlands (AHiH), a neighbourhood group formed by residents living in Highlands, a mature neighbourhood in east Edmonton, Alberta. Group members came together roughly 10 years ago around a shared belief in the power of welcoming, hospitality, diversity, and inclusion, and a shared concern regarding the lack of affordable housing options in the neighbourhood. Working collaboratively, and in partnership with several community-based organizations, AHiH implemented a number of community based activities to engage neighbours. After several years of experimentation the group embarked upon a process of self-evaluation. The purpose of this report is to summarise learnings generated through this process.

Mental Health Recovery, the Social Model, and the Importance of Neighbourhood

Today, mental health treatment is largely organized around the promotion of personal recovery, a deeply personal process of finding meaning and rebuilding a fulfilling life despite the restrictions of an illness. A seminal scholarly review of mental health literature by Leamy et al. (2011) linked mental health recovery with a number of key characteristics. In this regard, recovery can be conceived as a personal journey: an individualized, multidimensional, active, non-linear, gradual, trial and error process that can occur with or without professional intervention in stages or phases but never without struggle. Hence, a healing and supportive environment is integral to recovery.

This environmental dimension of recovery has long been a focus of mental health professionals, many of whom now conceive recovery as an ecological process. In this regard, recovery is a product of the dynamic interaction between the individual and their environment wherein individuals draw on internal and external resources to change how they understand themselves (first order change) and others see them (second order change). As Onken et al. (2007, 19) write:

Recovery relies not only on the individual's emerging sense of integrity and purpose (first order change) but also on society's increasing ability to acknowledge and support that integrity and purpose (second order change).

Building on this idea of recovery as an ecological process, Leamy et al. (2011) specify five broad recovery processes (described by the acronym CHIME): connectedness, hope and optimism about the future, identity, meaning in life, and empowerment. In each of these domains, recovery is an intrinsically relational process; while it is experienced as a subjective, inward-looking process, personal recovery is highly contingent upon interpersonal, place-based relationships (Price-Robertson et al. 2017).

The ecological nature of recovery, and the distinct role of the surrounding physical, social and cultural environment, is particularly salient with regard to the more specific experience of addiction recovery where the social model of recovery has long been a central paradigm. This model emerged out of the traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous and mutual aid/peer support (Mericle et al. 2023). According to Polcin et al. (2023, 174), the social model of recovery views addiction and recovery as “occurring via a reciprocal interaction between the individual and his or her social environment” and “acknowledges the personal responsibility for recovery as well as the importance of mutual aid (i.e., interdependence with others).” Relatedly, Zemore et al. (2023) point to four “core” elements of the addiction recovery process: a process of growth or development; being honest with oneself; taking responsibility for the things one can change; and reacting in a more balanced way. Each of these processes are context dependent. In their examination of recovery narratives, Bellaert et al. (2023) identified three contextual elements: interpersonal relationships, enabling and disabling places, and socioeconomic factors.

Under the social model of recovery, mutual aid and peer support groups have, for many decades, developed recovery housing as a residential treatment option for people with substance use problems (Mericle et al. 2023). Sometimes called recovery homes, recovery residences, or sober living homes, these environments provide a safe and healthy living environment where individuals can provide support for one another as each works on their recovery journey in a non-clinical, neighbourhood setting. Ultimately, the effectiveness of recovery housing in aiding personal recovery is contingent upon its place in the wider substance use continuum of care and the extent to which clients can reconnect with family, employment and wider community networks.

2. The At Home in Highlands Story

At Home in Highlands (AHiH) is a group of like-minded residents living in Highlands neighbourhood in Edmonton, Alberta. Group members came together roughly ten years ago over conversations about welcome, hospitality, housing options, diversity, and inclusion. Over the years, these conversations sparked a number of neighbourhood-level interventions ranging from community potluck dinners, coordinating volunteerism, and relationship-building with businesses, faith communities and non-profit organizations operating in Highlands. These conversations have also resulted in partnerships with supporting agencies, advocacy with residential home builders, and research funded by the City of Edmonton. Today AHiH is a formal program of the Highlands Community League.

“We are neighbouring with people whose futures we can enhance.”

Harry Kuperus, Core Group Member

While AHiH was formed in 2015, the story begins two years earlier when neighbours Carmen and Howard Lawrence, inspired by the book *The Abundant Community* by John McNight and Peter Block, started the Abundant Community Initiative in Highlands. Their vision was (and remains) to build a connected community, the benefits of which are well studied and cited earlier in this document.

A connected neighbourhood fosters casual encounters where neighbours meet each other and, over time, share story and learn of experience, talents and interests. Casual relationships form, often around common interests or visions. The founding members of AHiH met through their involvement in the Abundant Community Initiative which, in turn, enabled them to establish the necessary initial volunteer capacity to launch the initiative.

Through their involvement in the Abundant Community Initiative and its broad effort to build a connected community, the founding members of AHiH learned helpful ways to build relationship among neighbours and they experienced the benefits directly. At its heart, AHiH is also about building relationship in the neighbourhood, intentionally including people who can find it especially difficult to feel a sense of welcome and belonging: people in recovery from substance addiction. The aligned visions of the Abundant Community Initiative (now operating as Connected Highlands) and At Home in Highlands have resulted in a symbiotic relationship between the two initiatives that continues to this day.



As the AHiH initiative formalized into an official program of the local community league, broad impact areas began to crystalize. These included the promotion of neighbourhood diversity, the strengthening of neighbourhood supports and

services, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples of Canada, and the promotion of neighbourhood social connection (see Figure 1). A core belief of AHiH is that social connection and belonging is vital to individual health and community wellbeing. Importantly, AHiH recognizes that neighbours have diverse, sometimes complex, circumstances and lived experiences and it is therefore necessary to be inclusive and responsive to their needs. Furthermore, the coming together of people with diverse lived expertise and the sharing of stories can bring about positive outcomes for both individuals and community.



Figure 1. AHiH Impact Areas

AHiH has organized some of its work through collaboration and partnership with social agencies that have been operating in the neighbourhood for decades. One example is its partnership with Recovery Acres, an agency that operates a residential treatment centre in Highlands as well as five transitional supported-living (sober-living) homes nearby for men and women with a history of addiction who are motivated to change. AHiH group members have been directly involved in supporting recovery in Highlands through meaningful relationships with Recovery Acres clients and staff. In doing so, AHiH has endeavored to make Highlands a welcoming place that enables sustained personal recovery. In this regard, a fundamental belief expressed by AHiH members is that we all, whether you are a person in recovery or a neighbour offering support, benefit from hearing the stories of others, especially among diverse peoples. Labels (e.g. “recovery”) fade, stigmas dissolve, and the inherent value of each person becomes evident and appreciated. Those that society often devalues become valued neighbours and contributors to the flourishing of the entire community.

Social connection and belonging at the neighbourhood level are vital resources in processes of mental health recovery. The importance of connection and belonging has encouraged the placement of treatment and recovery programs in community settings, a strategy that is supported by evidence.

2.1 Housing: A Vital But Complex Reality

During their time as clients of Recovery Acres, people in recovery live in or near Highlands for up to two years (from treatment to supported-living). Throughout this time, AHiH enjoys building relationship through events, activities and casual happenings in the neighbourhood. This, in itself, brings value and benefit for people in recovery and the community at large, and those who move on to other neighbourhoods take with them the positive impacts of their experiences in Highlands. However, the full fruition of AHiH's vision is to have people in recovery settle more permanently in Highlands—those who desire to do so—when their time comes to transition back into community, thereby sustaining relationships and benefit over the longer term. This moves Highlands towards becoming a more inclusive and diverse neighbourhood.

Amidst the mix of housing in Highlands, property values and rental rates are higher than the City average and the supply of rental housing is limited, whether it be multi-unit rentals or privately rented houses or secondary suites. These factors severely limit housing options for people with low income, often forcing such people, including people in recovery, to move to other more affordable neighbourhoods—neighbourhoods that often lack the health and capacity to reasonably support a disproportionately larger representation of economically vulnerable people. For people in recovery, a forced move away from the community that has welcomed them translates into more stress, greater possibility of isolation and, in turn, greater risk of relapse. Highlands loses valued neighbours and AHiH struggles to achieve its vision of inclusivity and diversity.

Housing is complex and current housing realities mean that affordability is eroding even further. With current demand, both locally and nationally, housing supply is grossly inadequate which causes property values and rental rates to increase. Furthermore, infill in Highlands is replacing moderately sized and valued homes with large, expensive homes with proportionally higher rental rates.

While there are many approaches to addressing housing affordability, government response often includes: 1) funding the construction and operation of purpose-built affordable housing that is rented at affordable rates and, 2) funding rent subsidies for individuals and families to make some market housing affordable to rent. Rent subsidies are especially helpful in neighbourhoods like Highlands that lack purpose-built affordable housing. They also provide people with more agency over where they might like to live, and when a person lives in rent-subsidized market housing their home is less likely to reveal their economic status which can be stigmatizing for the economically vulnerable.

Civida is one of the largest housing management bodies in Alberta, overseeing over 5,300 homes across the City of Edmonton and administering rent subsidies for more than 3,000 households every month (see civida.ca). In 2022, At Home in Highlands shared with Civida its vision and desire for neighbours and community to play a role in addressing the complex challenges of addiction and homelessness. Civida offered to partner and pilot a project whereby AHiH refers individuals in recovery, to a maximum of 10, into the Civida Rental Assistance

Benefit program (rent subsidy) for expedited approval and delivery of the benefit, a benefit that many have to wait months or even years to receive. This allows AHiH to enable a continuum of support for people in recovery who desire to remain in Highlands following their time in residential treatment and supported-living housing. Without this rent subsidy, many would be forced to move to other neighbourhoods too distant to remain connected to the Highlands community. AHiH applauds Civida's commitment to develop innovative and creative housing solutions and approaches, and to enrich community wellbeing through community partnerships.

AHiH accepts that government intervention and funding are necessary to sustainably address housing affordability in all neighbourhoods, and hopes that over time the housing options in Highlands will diversify to enable a more inclusive and diverse community. Within current realities, and as housing evolves over time, AHiH can:

- Support Connected Highlands and its broad effort to build a connected community. The more neighbour-to-neighbour relationships, the more AHiH will learn of hidden secondary basement suites or other rental housing not publicly advertised, potentially increasing the options for people in recovery seeking housing.
- Watch for new developments, whether it be new homes with secondary suites or new multi-unit developments, and explore tenancy referral possibilities.
- Learn about innovative housing approaches (e.g. housing cooperatives, neighbour-owned land trusts, etc.) and explore possibilities in the neighbourhood.

AHiH hopes that demonstrating the value of its vision and bringing attention to the barrier of housing affordability will inspire both community and government to respond and act further.

3. Using Theory of Change to Evaluate At Home in Highlands

The Theory of Change (ToC) framework is a theory-driven method for understanding how and why an intervention or program works (Breuer et al. 2016). More specifically, a “theory of change” is a model that explains how a strategy or specific interventions is expected to lead to some kind of social change. The model can be used as a tool in organizational evaluation and strategic planning. The Anne E. Casey Foundation has defined four key steps in the theory of change development process. These steps are:

Step 1. Setting Goals

Identify the goals that reflect the intent of a program or strategy.

Step 2. Identifying Strategies

Identify strategies and activities that are expected to lead to goals.

Step 3: Describing Outcomes

Clarify the outcomes that result from activities and lead to goals.

Step 4: Reflection

Test the logic of the theory of change, review key assumptions, & analyze external forces and context.

“This community has been able to reboot my ability to connect with somebody in a respectful level that’s really taking me into where I’m going now.”

Neighbour in Recovery

4. AHiH Goals, Strategies and Outcomes

Over time, the AHiH core group developed more explicit statements regarding their vision and goals. These AHiH source materials provide insight into the goals, strategies and anticipated outcomes of the program. These are summarized below.

4.1 Goal(s): Building Inclusive Community

AHiH envisions a neighbourhood that:

- a. values inclusivity, diversity and hospitality;
- b. becomes more inclusive, diverse and hospitable by welcoming all, including those overcoming and emerging out of challenging life circumstances;
- c. has adequate housing, community connection and supports; and
- d. in turn, thrives, grows stronger, more resilient, and more self-sufficient.

4.2 Strategy(s): Enriching by Welcoming

- a. Neighbouring to Create Community: Support personal growth and recovery through meaningful relationships and grassroots community-building.
- b. Advocating for Housing Choice: Encourage and enable a variety of housing options (i.e. apartments, townhouses, duplexes, garden suites, tiny homes, garage suites, cooperative housing).
- c. Partnering with Community-Based Agencies: Partner with social agencies that have been operating in the neighbourhood for decades (i.e. Recovery Acres) and who offer programs aligned with AHiH goals (i.e. Civida).



What Does AHiH Provide

For new neighbours, we offer relationship through regular connection and support, and through invitation to attend or participate in local events, groups and happenings. We connect new neighbours to helpful supports and services local to the neighbourhood. We consider opportunities for new neighbours to share their gifts, skills, abilities and life experiences for the benefit of other neighbours. If helpful, we explore possibilities for light work in the neighbourhood.

For Highlands, we invite neighbours throughout the community to join a network of support and connection that, ultimately, leads to a more connected, more resilient, more vibrant neighbourhood. From potluck dinners, to engaging the resourcefulness local to Highlands, natural supports grow for our new neighbours and our neighbourhood is enriched.

For landlords, we establish relationships with landlords of local rental properties who align with the goals of At Home in Highlands. We facilitate introductions and explore tenancy possibilities. We offer support to landlords and the landlord-tenant relationship.



The Potlucks

The monthly potluck held at the Highlands Community Hall is, arguably, the “flagship” AHiH activity. As a concept, the potluck is remarkably simple: Highlands neighbours and their neighbours in recovery from Recovery Acres gather together on the first Monday evening of the month to enjoy a home cooked meal and to share stories, thoughts and get to know each other. The potlucks began as a “coffee get-together” which, over time, morphed into an evening dinner with an open invitation to neighbours and neighbours in recovery. When AHiH inquired about using the community hall as a gathering space, the community league board invited AHiH to operate as a program of the league, with free access to the hall.

As the name suggests, the potluck is a communal meal. All are invited to bring a dish. AHiH core group members each contribute a food dish and at least a few neighbours in recovery bring dishes. Attendees are seated facing each other in a circle or square. As people are eating, an AHiH group member initiates a sharing circle using a very simple and straightforward question, such as “what are you grateful for this week.” Attendees are invited to respond, one at a time, sharing as much or as little as they feel comfortable. As the sharing moves around the circle, attendees build upon each other’s stories and respond to each other’s questions. After the sharing circle and dessert, people often stay and visit casually. In early times, neighbours in recovery would visit more with themselves. As relationships formed over time, a nice intermingling of neighbours and neighbours in recovery has become the norm.



4.3 Impact(s) and Outcome(s):

Short Term Outcomes

- Strengthened social connection, resiliency and vibrancy at the neighbourhood level;
- Increased housing options for graduates of Recovery Acres and others who are overcoming and emerging out of challenging life circumstances and want to make Highlands their home;
- Increased access to social, cultural, educational, housing and mental health supports for Highlands residents.



Figure 2: AHiH Theory of Change

5. Evaluating AHiH using the Lens of Lived Experience

Understanding the perspective of those with lived experience is essential when evaluating whether a program or intervention is working. Lived experience can provide insight into how individuals and groups interpret or respond to the world around them. Exploring these lived experiences can help build empathy and understanding, especially for those who face different life experiences and challenges. Examining lived experiences can provide a more holistic understanding of a person's health condition or situation. By focusing on lived experiences, researchers and policymakers can better understand how an intervention like AHiH is impacting individuals in real life and, by extension, whether the theory of change is valid.

5.1 Recovery Acres Residents

The AHiH research project team members held two meetings (one in November 2023 and one in November 2024) with individuals who had received services from Recovery Acres and were regular participants in AHiH activities such as the monthly potluck. In total, seven individuals shared their experiences with the AHiH team and two of these individuals participated in follow-up conversations (see section 5.1.1).

In conversations, individuals routinely made a distinction between “the program” - treatment centres, recovery homes and A.A. meetings - and “the community” which existed outside of the program. An important step in the recovery process is re-engaging with “the community” and rebuilding healthy relationships (see page 7 *Mental Health Recovery, the Social Model, and the Importance of Neighbourhood*); however, transitioning out of recovery homes and engaging with “the community” was not without its challenges. The “real world,” as some individuals called it, was full of uncertainty. Individuals were all navigating life on very low incomes. The costs of housing were high as were transportation costs. Relapse into substance use was an ongoing concern.

At the same time, avoiding these challenges by insulating oneself within “the program” led to an unbalanced recovery, one in which the “outside world begins to be distant,” as one individual remarked. Enter AHiH: AHiH provided a critical “stepping stone” for individuals to move forward in their lives. The monthly potluck was pivotal in this regard. Individuals all referenced the monthly potluck as a wonderful source of healthy foods. As one individual remarked, “*the first thing, the food is extraordinary*”; however, every individual agreed that the potlucks were more than just food. The themes below describe the way in which the potluck gatherings served as a “stepping stone.”

Social Connection

Social isolation is common among people in recovery and among people with very low incomes. The monthly potluck gatherings provided individuals with the opportunity to connect with others in a non-judgmental and relaxing atmosphere. Individuals described the potluck as their opportunity to “*get out and get to know people*.” Some individuals spoke about the potlucks

more specifically as opportunities to overcome social anxiety. As one individual remarked, *“it’s helped me get out of my skin around people I don’t know.”*

Learning From and Assisting Others

Several individuals spoke about the potluck gatherings as a place to get information or assistance from others. This included information about services and programming in the city. Several individuals also spoke about the potluck gatherings as an opportunity to give back and help others. This responsibility towards others is an important ethic in recovery, as one individual remarked: *“it gets you out of your own ego.”*

Belonging

Individuals pointed to the open and welcoming atmosphere of the potluck gatherings which encouraged a sense of belonging. As one individual remarked, *“As soon as you walk in the door, you belong. You just belong.”* Individuals who had been coming to potluck gatherings for several years had developed a strong sense of place that extended beyond the walls of the community hall. For example, one individual described Highlands as *“a part of my home now.”*

Genuine Care

Individuals spoke frequently about the kindness and care that was present at potluck gatherings. As one individual remarked, *“they’re just nice people, just to be around.”* It was common for people to provide support to each other at the potluck gatherings or to follow up afterwards. AHiH also practiced the tradition of acknowledging birthdays which several individuals noted: *“That was a big thing for me. It melted my little heart. I was like, no one’s sang happy birthday to me for a long time.”*

Safety

Individuals characterized the potluck gathering as a safe space. This was undoubtedly connected to the non-judgmental care and assistance that was available and the open and welcoming atmosphere. As one individual remarked, *“it just feels very safe. Having a safe space to go and to catch up.”* In fact, this sentiment was common. Individuals felt safe not only at the potlucks but in Highlands more generally because there were people there who were *“looking out for them.”* It was a neighbourhood where individuals felt they could go when they felt unsafe. As one person remarked, *“I can feel safe at Highlands, where I can grow and move on with my life.”*

Shared Vulnerability

The combination of belonging, care and safety allowed for a sense of shared vulnerability which was of immense value. Allowing oneself to be vulnerable was an important part of stepping out and establishing connections in the community. Seeing other’s vulnerability, through the telling of stories, was inspiring because it showcased humility, which served as a source of sameness despite the differences in the room. As one individual remarked: *“I really enjoy the vulnerability across the board from everybody. There’s so many different backgrounds of different people coming in there. And just having that sense of humility.”*

Personal Growth

Navigating this vulnerability while stepping out into the community was made easier through participation in activities such as the potluck gatherings. The gatherings provided opportunities to “*bring a balance to my life.*” Individuals shared that seeing their peers outside of treatment settings, in the community, interacting with others was immensely positive. As one individual put it, “*there’s a lot of relapse, very few that are making it, and it’s good to be around people that have made it.*” In participating in potlucks, they were able, as one individual put it, to “*step outside of the institutionalized mentality*” and see others and themselves as more than “*an addict living at Recovery Acres.*” “*It provides,*” as one individual said, “*a reality check for people that there is life outside of recovery.*”

5.1.1 Rental Assistance Benefit (RAB) Sub-Group

In November 2023, the AHiH research project team convened a group conversation with three individuals who had received services from Recovery Acres, were participating in AHiH activities and were receiving rental assistance benefits (RAB) from Cividia. This sub-group provided the opportunity to explore the added benefits of receiving assistance with rental costs.

All three individuals had completed residential treatment for substance use problems, had lived in sober living homes, and at the time of the first interview were renting apartments near the community. The conversation covered a range of different topics including how each person came to be involved with AHiH, what kinds of activities they participated in, their relationship to community, and whether there were important moments in their journeys.

All three individuals spoke to specific recovery processes that were formative in their experience. Three in particular stand out. First, all three individuals expressed a *strong sense of purpose and renewed sense of personal integrity*. Individuals spoke passionately about experiencing a moment of clarity, before entering treatment, when they recognized that they were heading towards premature death and instead “chose life.” This was an important “turning point” in their lives, one that is itself indicative of the emergence of a sense of purpose, seeing life as meaningful, and being honest with oneself, all of which are important processes of recovery identified in the literature above.

Second, all three individuals spoke adamantly about *feeling supported by AHiH members*. More specifically, individuals stated that AHiH activities, such as monthly potluck dinners at the community hall, made each person feel welcomed and part of the community. As individuals discussed their participation in activities it was clear that interpersonal relationships with AHiH members were of great value and importance. These relationships were meaningful because AHiH members were dependable, trustworthy, non-judgmental, and open to being vulnerable themselves.

Third, individuals expressed that they *felt empowered by their involvement in AHiH and through their relationships with AHiH members*. This was evident in the recognition of their strengths (“*my cup is not empty*”), feeling more in control over their lives, feeling part of the community and a desire and willingness to give back to the group and the community.

While it is affirming to acknowledge these positive impacts and experiences it is important not to lose sight of challenging socio-economic factors and disabling environments that remained and were still prominent in each individual's lives at this time. For all three, this was the first time having a stable home, and yet housing was still stressful and was a formidable challenge. One of the principal challenges was the cost of housing relative to incomes, even while receiving the RAB. In addition, the adequacy of housing was particularly poor. Individuals spoke of longstanding issues with pests and difficulty finding remedies with landlords. The location of housing presented challenges as well. The Highlands neighbourhood and surrounding area provided relatively poor access to healthy foods. Finally, the landlord screening process for rental housing was stressful. Many of the routine, standard questions posed by landlords were demeaning and triggering. Completing the application processes was reported to be a negative experience.

In November 2024, the AHiH research project team met with two of the individuals interviewed the previous November. The conversation covered a range of different topics including their housing experiences, relationships with AHiH group members and notable accomplishments and achievements. This conversation provided the opportunity to revisit some of the challenges that were identified a year prior and explore how AHiH supports factored into their experiences.

Both individuals had significant updates regarding their housing situations. Both were *satisfied with their housing situation*. One individual had changed their housing situation for the better, a choice made possible by the portability of the rental assistance benefit (RAB). Another individual had recently renewed their lease, remarking: *"They asked me to renew my lease. They did not kick me out. Holy man, that's a first. I celebrated that day, when it was like, are you staying? That was a good thing."* Moving to a better apartment and remaining in the current apartment were both significant benchmarks as far as housing satisfaction and stability is concerned.

This housing stability provided the foundation for *experiencing personal growth* in numerous areas. Both individuals spoke to growth in the areas of education and employment. Both had returned to school, one was working as a client support worker in addictions treatment and the other individual had nearly completed a post-secondary program in addictions counseling. Both spoke to increasing confidence, both in terms of communicating with people and taking on new responsibilities. One individual commented:

"This community has been able to reboot my ability to connect with somebody in a respectful level that's really taking me into where I'm going now. I couldn't go through school the way I acted before, the things I was used to doing, right? But getting that back was really, really good."

Participating in AHiH activities and developing relationships with core group members were empowering in this regard. As one individual remarked, *"I think that's a space where we can actually connect the dots and see who we want to be in society and what we have to offer and build that... It was, for me, building that confidence and seeing what I have to offer."*

This personal growth had manifested development of a **renewed sense of meaning in life**. For both individuals this involved “*giving back to the community*.” As one individual remarked, “*now, it’s more how we can help out and what we can do*.” Both agreed that this represented a kind of “*domino effect*”: receiving support and giving support back to the community. Both individuals were volunteering as core group members, attending meetings, and assisting with the planning of AHiH activities (including the preparation of this report).

5.2 AHiH Core Group Members

In January 2025, AHiH research project team members met for a conversation with eight core group members which by this time included two former residents of Recovery Acres. This conversation covered a range of questions including how AHiH began, how AHiH has impacted core group members, what have been the greatest successes, and where the initiative is headed in the future. Individuals spoke passionately about the personal benefits they experienced through their involvement in potluck gatherings and other AHiH activities. These included the following:

Changed Perceptions and Attitudes

Addiction is highly stigmatized in society. Individuals who had long called Highlands home spoke about how building relationships with neighbours in recovery shifted their beliefs about addiction and substance use and broadened their understanding about persons in recovery. For example, one individual explained that participating in potlucks was eye-opening:

“People have endured traumas and experiences far more difficult than I have ever endured in my lifetime. And that was important for me because it changed how I perceived these people. It created a sense of honour for people in recovery.”

Potluck sharing circles typically went deeper than “superficial” conversation, often touching on intensely personal experiences, and in reflecting on these conversations core group members expressed a deeply-felt sense of respect and esteem for neighbours in recovery. As one individual stated, “*I come away feeling honoured to have been able to enter into people’s lives and share something of your own in that*.”

Shared Vulnerability

Sharing, in fact, is one of the defining characteristics of the potluck gatherings. The above-mentioned respect and esteem was the product of “*opening up*,” oftentimes through personal storytelling; however, opening oneself up is associated with vulnerability. As one individual commented: “*you share a part of yourself with a story. And usually, it’s a vulnerable story. It makes you vulnerable. But as a result of that, it makes it easier for the next person to share*.” Core group members repeatedly referenced how this vulnerability was an essential ingredient in the potluck gatherings and facilitated deeper social connections than would otherwise be possible.

Feeling Enriched

Participating in these deep and meaningful conversations was associated with innumerable shifts in core group members themselves. Many repeatedly mentioned feeling “enriched” through their participation in potluck gatherings and other AHiH activities. As one individual commented:

“Personally, the courage, honesty and openness with which people in recovery share, inspires me to be more vulnerable, more open, more honest, courageous when I share there, and then when I go about living my life.”

In other words, the insight and wisdom gained through participating in potlucks spilled over into other areas of life. As one individual commented, *“I think I can only speak for myself. I leave at the end of the evening feeling different and enriched compared to when I arrived.”*

Reduced Social Distance

People in recovery often have to overcome feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. Core group members did not feel that their efforts were, in the words of one individual, *“a paternalistic thing”* or *“a charity thing.”* Coming to see each other as equals was a prominent theme in core group members’ accounts of AHiH. Core group members believed that they were *“equals on the journey together as neighbours.”* The shared vulnerability and mutual enrichment associated with potluck gatherings generated feelings of equality and mutual respect in this regard. Core group members felt blessed to be part of the journey. In fact, as one individual expressed, *“[this] is what gives us the energy for doing it every month.”*

Community-Building

Reducing the social distance between Highlands neighbours and their neighbours in recovery corresponded with deep and lasting social connections that extended outside of the monthly potluck gatherings. Core group members often used the word community to describe how the social interactions at potlucks evolved with time. As one individual described:

“In the past, there would tend to be still neighbours talking with neighbours, people in recovery talking with people in recovery. And now there's a lingering afterwards, and it's neighbours and people in recovery sitting and just chit chatting.”

In this regard, showcasing shared vulnerability and reducing social distance, the potluck gatherings supported a sense of community. As one individual remarked: *“You can't look into the room and see two groups anymore. It's a community.”*

Coming to see each other as equals was a prominent theme in core group members’ accounts of AHiH.

5.3 Highlands Neighbours

In November 2024, AHiH research project team members met for a conversation with four neighbours living in Highlands who had participated in or supported AHiH activities such as the potluck gatherings. While these neighbours were not as involved as core group members in the planning and coordination of AHiH activities, they were nonetheless integral in supporting neighbours in recovery and were personally impacted through their own participation in AHiH activities.

Community-Building

Overall, neighbours agreed that AHiH had positively impacted the community by broadening people's understanding of the backgrounds and experiences of their neighbours in recovery who are navigating challenging and difficult circumstances. The potluck gatherings were viewed as a special opportunity for neighbours to come together and build relationships in this regard. As one individual commented:

"The welcome of myself, but also the non judgmental and supportive way in which folks in the community were welcomed, there was a mix between residents of the area and clients of Recovery Acres participating equally, [it] was to me a very impressive element of community as a whole."

The potluck gatherings, as well as other activities organized through Highlands United Church, were instrumental in expanding the "community" to include neighbours in recovery. As one individual explained, without the potluck they may not have met and built friendships with their neighbours in recovery:

"I've gotten to meet a lot of people that I normally would not have met otherwise and so you and your life's enriched because you hear their stories and what they're going through and how it's changed by being in the community."

Feeling Enriched

All four neighbours agreed that their understanding of addiction and recovery was broadened and their sense of community was elevated as a result of AHiH activities. In this regard they experienced the same feeling of enrichment referenced by core group members. As one individual explained:

"It has had a personal impact on me, just like having so many people that I see around the neighbourhood that I know I think is really positive and yeah it makes me feel a part of the community."

This enriched experience of community was related to coming around to see the diversity of people living in Highlands and, in the words of one individual, developing a new understanding of Highlands as "a more diverse, more accepting community." In this regard, all four individuals believed that AHiH had positively impacted Highlands. One individual explained it in this way:

“I would say the community is generally more welcoming than it was before. I think that having interactions with different types of people is very important [as well as] fostering that kind of openness.”

These neighbours agreed that through their involvement they had developed a new sense of Highlands as an “inclusive community” and felt enriched in the process.

6. Reflecting on the Whole Picture

The final step in the theory of change development process is a process of deep reflection. This involves testing the logic of the theory of change, reflecting on key assumptions, analyzing external forces and contexts, and exploring refinements of the strategies. A number of data sources were available to the core group for this step.

- The lived experiences documented in the previous section serve as instructive data points for testing the logic of the theory of change (i.e. is AHiH strengthening social connection, increasing access to supports, and increasing housing options thereby fostering inclusivity in Highlands?).
- The neighbourhood itself is a critically important context for reflecting on these changes. In this regard, the core group developed a neighbourhood profile (see Appendix 1) and a neighbourhood survey (see Appendix 2) to better understand the socio-demographic profile of the neighbourhood and the perceptions of their neighbours regarding housing.

To facilitate reflection on the “whole picture,” the core group met repeatedly over several months to discuss observed changes, reflecting on key assumptions, analyzing external barriers, and exploring refinements of the strategies. To facilitate this process of reflection, a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire consisted of ten short answer questions. Questionnaire responses from core group members were contrasted and compared. A general response to each question was synthesized based on this analysis and these responses are presented below.

Why do the AHiH goals matter to us and to our neighbours?

Our goals matter to us and our neighbours because we believe that neighbourhoods affect our wellbeing; moreover, a connected neighbourhood that welcomes all and cares for its own becomes vibrant, engaging and abundantly resourceful. The coalescence of diverse backgrounds and experiences, including diverse experiences of adversity, increases resilience, capacity and creative potential. If applied broadly throughout the City, the responsibility and opportunity to become more inclusive and diverse, with benefit for neighbours and community, is extended to other neighbourhoods.

What does our goal imply about the status quo and the change we are working toward?

Currently, the housing options in Highlands are inadequate. People in recovery who desire to settle more permanently in Highlands are forced to live outside of the community which inhibits inclusivity and diversity and contributes to the concentration of economically vulnerable people in other parts of the City. The status quo places unfair burden on people emerging out of difficult life experiences, hindering their ability to flourish and thrive. Achieving our goals depends on a connected neighbourhood, neighbours who welcome and engage with people in recovery,

affordable access to adequate housing options within the community, and incentive for landlords to rent housing to rent-subsidized tenants.

What is the focus of our strategies? Are they aimed at affecting people, systems or both?

The focus of our strategies is people, community and systems. Enhancing the wellbeing of neighbours and people in recovery is achieved through regular relationship building activities, the benefits of which ripple out into the community. Welcoming people in recovery into independent living in the neighbourhood requires strategies to address housing options and affordability. Change at the systems level is necessary to impact housing economics in favour of people with low income, and to incentivize the diversification of housing options.

Do outcomes logically flow from strategies?

Building relationships among neighbours, including neighbours with diverse backgrounds and experiences, brings positive outcomes regarding wellbeing, mental health and safety.

Dependence on change in external systems to increase housing options and address housing affordability creates uncertainty regarding the strategies to achieve these outcomes.

Are the outcomes realistic and reasonable?

People are being positively impacted through relationships, with benefits to the community. Neighbours and community have limited agency to, themselves, address housing options and affordability. We hope that strategies to partner with external organizations, learn about the complexities of housing, and raise awareness in the community, along with incentivizing change to housing policy, regulations and strategies at all levels of government, will bring about desired outcomes.

Are the strategies and outcomes in our theory of change meaningful and compelling to our Highlands neighbours?

A point-in-time community survey conducted in Highlands revealed that neighbours agree or strongly agree that “A good neighbourhood is one that values inclusivity, diversity and hospitality.” (86%) and “Everyone should be welcome in our neighbourhood, including those overcoming and emerging out of challenging life circumstances.” (78%) The willingness of neighbours to participate in or support solutions to increase housing options (e.g. development of secondary suites, infill, etc.) varies. Changing the housing mix in the neighbourhood can directly impact neighbours and, therefore, can be contentious.

Are there certain outcomes or relationships between outcomes that our theory most hinges on? If those outcomes are not met, would we still have a viable path toward reaching our goal?

Addressing inadequate housing options relies on systems change to stimulate housing development, whether secondary suites, multi-unit infill, or larger multi-unit developments, and to incentivize property owners and landlords to rent to people emerging out of difficult life circumstances. Addressing housing affordability relies on ongoing availability and expansion of

our Civida Rent Assistance Benefit pilot, acknowledging that this pilot is not broadly available throughout the City. Dependence on such external change and support introduces risk in achieving our desired outcomes. If adequate housing options and affordability are not achieved, we will not reach our goal of becoming a more inclusive and diverse community.

In what context or external environments does our theory of change operate? What are our assumptions about that context or external environment?

Our theory of change operates in the neighbourhood context, which is embedded in the City. Building relationships among neighbours, including people in recovery, is achieved holistically within the neighbourhood and without constraints imposed by external environments. In Highlands, this work is synergistic with a broader effort to build a connected community—the Connected Highlands initiative. Complex as it is, housing change is constrained and affected by external environments, from municipal regulations to provincial and federal housing policy and strategies.

What external conditions would help enable our ability to achieve our outcomes? What external conditions would be hostile to our work?

Movement towards establishing adequate housing options and housing affordability in Highlands can be achieved through change to housing policy, regulations or strategies at any or all levels of government. The City of Edmonton, for example, has stated its aspirational goal to establish 16% affordable housing in all neighbourhoods. We hope that public impacts of the status quo, along with the positive outcomes for people in recovery and community we demonstrate, will incentivize the government to implement change. Inaction by the government would risk sustaining the status quo.

What is the evidence that anticipated outcomes are being realized?

Research interviews with people in recovery and neighbours have revealed positive impacts from participation in our activities and events. Interest is growing and we are expanding the ways in which we connect. The core group that guides and manages our work now includes two people in recovery who are flourishing in the community. Still, though, of the 10 people in recovery who have transitioned from supported living into independent living, six are housed outside of the Highlands boundary making evident the ongoing lack of housing options in the community.

6.1 Summary

AHiH is grounded in the shared belief that inclusive neighbourhoods contribute positively to wellbeing. We have endeavoured to promote diversity, connection and hospitality in Highlands. The focus of our strategies is people, community and systems. People are clearly being enriched through the relationships that have been formed through AHiH. We have assisted in the placement of people in suitable and affordable housing and have witnessed positive growth in these individuals. Highlands neighbours have also been positively impacted through their involvement and the community at large has benefitted. However, community and system changes are more difficult to achieve. These require more than individual efforts. Collective efforts are necessary to achieve the outcomes in these areas, particularly with regard to housing. While there is tremendous opportunity in Highlands as far as housing is concerned, there is some uncertainty and hesitation regarding the achievability of outcomes related to housing affordability. The neighbourhood survey demonstrated that there is strong support for the AHiH vision. It is possible to partner and collaborate with government and non-profit organizations to achieve our goals.

This work should continue.

7. Moving Forward

7.1 Recommendations

It is evident that the activities of At Home in Highlands bring value and benefit to people in recovery from substance addiction, to neighbours who extend the hand of welcome, and to the neighbourhood at large as the expertise, talents and gifts of all are expressed into the community. AHiH envisions ways to evolve the initiative so that value and benefit grow further.

Connect more

Monthly potluck dinners have been the cornerstone activity for building connection with people in recovery and they will continue. Recreation (e.g. music, sports), education (e.g. workshops, book clubs), work (e.g. volunteering in the community), celebration (e.g. personal/communal achievement), grieving (e.g. loss) are additional ways that relationships can grow. Efforts to connect in these ways are being explored and initiated.

Employment

While employment can be challenging for many, people in recovery can find it especially difficult to find work. Like many neighbourhoods, Highlands has local expertise in Human Resources and can offer support for those struggling to find work—assistance in writing effective resumes, coaching individuals to prepare for job interviews, etc. Furthermore, the neighbourhood is a source of employment opportunity as many neighbours are business operators with occasional need for workers of varying skill among a great diversity of industries. Efforts to identify local business operators and match needs with those looking for work are being considered.

Partnerships

AHiH shows that the neighbourhood—particularly, the connected neighbourhood—has a role to play in addressing disparities and the unfair struggle that many experience in our society. However, careful discernment is essential regarding what a neighbourhood can offer sustainably and what is better delegated to service and support organizations, government or otherwise. Partnering with such organizations enables the community to gain awareness of relevant supports and refer neighbours who need them. Such partnerships also inform support organizations about how community involvement can lead to good outcomes for people emerging out of difficult life circumstances. AHiH will continue to partner with organizations around housing and social supports.

Transitional Housing

Along the continuum of recovery, supports are comprehensive at the start and gradually ease as recovery progresses. For many, housing is initially residential treatment (accommodations with meals, daily recovery programming and supports), followed by supported-living housing (accommodations with supports and more freedoms and independence), followed by a return to full independence in community. Waitlists for residential treatment and supported-living housing suggest that the supply of these supports is inadequate given current levels of need.

Furthermore, for some, the continuum of recovery is enhanced with an additional housing stage between supported-living and community where supports and the monitoring of sobriety are eased and independence expanded. Residents live in community with others in recovery, share the costs of housing, and are accountable to each other and their landlord for maintaining their sobriety. AHiH has partnered with a local property owner to support the operation of such housing and aims to watch for additional opportunities in the neighbourhood.

Annual Alumni Gatherings

Over time, neighbours come and go as life leads to opportunity and change. Both Highlands neighbours and those in recovery with whom relationships have formed desire to remain in contact even when proximity no longer allows regular connection. AHiH is considering alumni gatherings to maintain contact.

7.2 Roadmap

The members of At Home in Highlands could not have planned or predicted the unfolding of their efforts over the past 10 years. Perseverance has enabled experience and learning, along with much benefit. In reflecting on its learning, a roadmap on how to approach AHiH's vision can be proposed for consideration by other neighbourhoods.



While the particular expression of AHiH's vision is centered around welcoming people in recovery from substance addiction, this roadmap can be considered in regard to any people who find it unfairly difficult to feel welcomed, included and supported. Details of activities, supports and partnerships may vary, but the general steps outlined below can be a guide for any neighbourhood to approach a vision of welcome, inclusivity and diversity—to become a neighbourhood that welcomes all and cares for its own.

1. Build a Connected Neighbourhood

A connected neighbourhood brings well studied benefits, from safety to resilience, from a vibrant local economy to the enhanced mental and emotional wellbeing of neighbours. As a neighbourhood becomes more connected, neighbours that share common interests and visions are more likely to meet each other and organize around such. An initiative like At Home in

Highlands requires adequate volunteer capacity and a connected neighbourhood assists in growing this capacity.

In Highlands, the Abundant Community Initiative (now operating as Connected Highlands) began the long, slow, intentional work of building a connected community and, in turn, provided inspiration and valuable experience for the founding members of AHiH. If a neighbourhood has not yet begun a broad effort to build a connected community, consider doing so a first step, as though a prerequisite.

2. Identify People to Welcome and Support

Through its relationship with Recovery Acres, At Home in Highlands welcomes people in recovery from substance addiction. In other neighbourhoods, is there a presence of support organizations that offer services or advocate for people of a particular circumstance? Consider people with physical disabilities, newcomers, indigenous peoples, people exiting homelessness, and so on. Is there congregate seniors housing, group homes for intellectually challenged, or permanent supportive housing within the neighbourhood? Whether internal or external to the neighbourhood, consider such organizations as potential partners to connect with and welcome people into the community.

Consider, also, people already living independently in the neighbourhood such as seniors, youth or others who might be struggling, feeling isolated, and whose wellbeing is fragile or precarious. As a neighbourhood becomes more connected, awareness of such neighbours grows and an initiative like AHiH can respond and support.

3. Welcome and Build Relationships

Given the age, abilities and limitations of people being welcomed, discern appropriate ways of connecting and begin doing so. AHiH has found the monthly sharing of a meal to be an especially meaningful way to connect. For others, sports or other forms of recreation may be more appropriate. Ideally, consider a casual sharing circle as part of a regular activity. Offer a simple, non-threatening question, such as “What was your favourite job?” or “What’s the best place you’ve ever lived?” or “What ways do you enjoy helping others?” and invite anyone comfortable to respond. This simple activity activates the slow sharing of story over time. The sharing of story in a safe, welcoming, nonjudgmental environment, in itself, can deepen a person’s sense of belonging and connection. Over time, evolving relationships help to reveal the otherwise hidden talents, expertise and abilities that people being welcomed may desire to offer each other and the community.

Over time, experience will reveal other ways of connecting, whether it be learning opportunities, work or volunteer service activities, additional recreation, connecting skills and resourcefulness with need in the neighbourhood, or even connecting to celebrate or grieve together when there is reason to do so. Each shared experience nurtures relationships and helps to further permeate the benefits of a connected community throughout the neighbourhood.

4. Learn

Connecting over time is essential for learning of the unique challenges of people being welcomed and any gaps in supports that may exist. This learning leads to a deeper understanding of what might precipitate challenging circumstances and what it's like to live with barriers that limit one's ability to flourish and thrive. AHiH, for example, has learned that substance addiction is a disease that often comes when substance is used as a coping response to trauma or difficult life experiences of the past, and that stigma and challenges in accessing income support and housing present barriers to healthy recovery.

An understanding of the particular challenges of people being welcomed leads to an understanding of how a community can offer support and what is best delegated to support organizations, whether government or non-governmental organizations. It is important that a community offer support in ways that are sustainable, and AHiH has discovered that the greatest offering of a community is a welcome into social, neighbourly relationships so that all feel welcomed, included and valued.

5. Explore and Establish Partnerships

If support gaps are identified, neighbours can learn about resources available from government and NGOs, develop a resource guide or directory, and share it with people being welcomed. This creates efficiency in connecting people with supports and eases the burden of navigating what can be complex, fragmented support systems. Neighbours can take further initiative and establish partnerships with relevant support organizations to streamline the process for people seeking support. Such partnerships can help organizations see the role that neighbours and the connected community can play in assisting people towards health, wellness and vitality while, at the same time, enriching the community as a whole.

Acknowledgements

At Home in Highlands is a collective of neighbours who, with one another, are creating connection in the Highlands community. Acknowledging the many people and organizations involved in this initiative and the Community Safety and Well-being grant project is our honour.

Thank you to our neighbours in recovery for sharing your experiences and lives with us. We are forever enriched.

Thank you to Recovery Acres for offering wisdom, guidance and support of the At Home in Highlands vision.

Thank you to the Highlands Community League Board for their ongoing support, and with this grant project particularly, administrative assistance.

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Contact

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Appendices

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Highlands Neighbourhood Profile



1,311

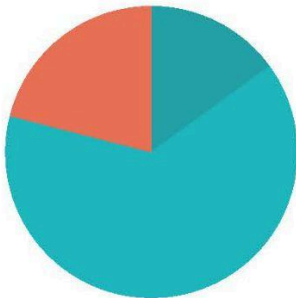
Dwellings in Highlands



1,220

Households in Highlands

Population Distribution by Age

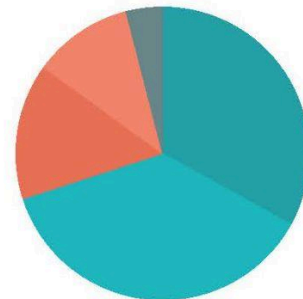


0 to 14 (15%) 15 to 64 (64%)
65 + (21%)

2.2

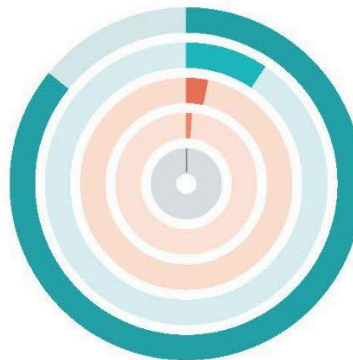
Average household size in
Highlands

Household Size



1 Person (33%) 2 Persons (37%)
3 Persons (15%) 4 Persons (11%)
5 + Persons (4%)

Dwelling Types



Single-Detached House (85.71%)
Apartment in Building Fewer than Five Stories (9.39%)
Apartment or Flat in Duplex (3.27%)
Semi-Detached House (1.22%)
Other Single Attached House (0.41%)



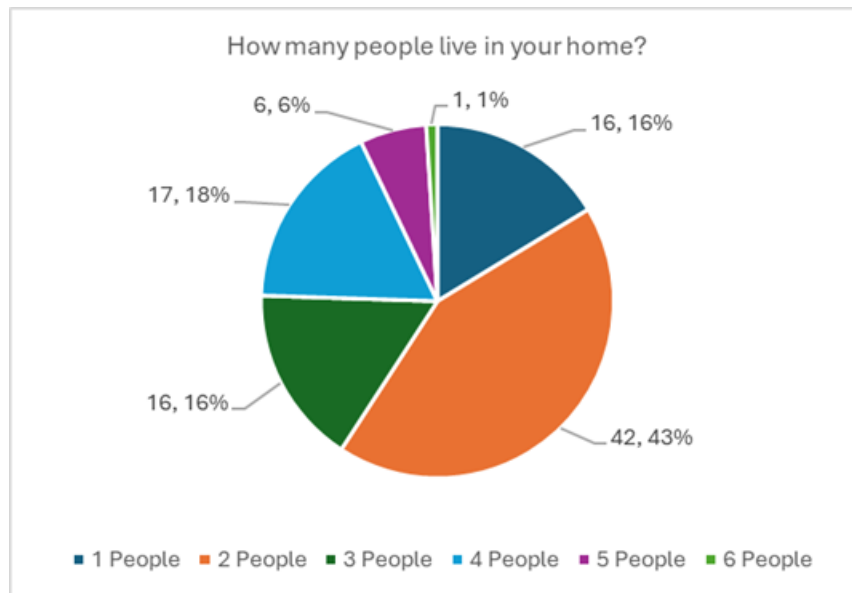
www.athomeinhighlands.org

Highlands Survey Report Data

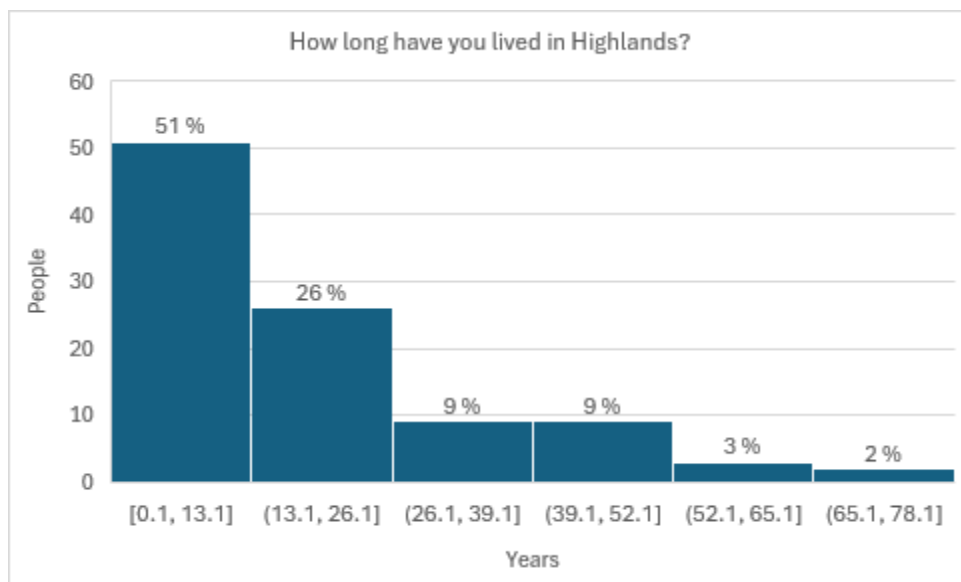
In June 2024, two surveyors collected survey responses from 99 randomly selected households in Highlands. The results are presented below.

Questions

1. How many people live in your home?

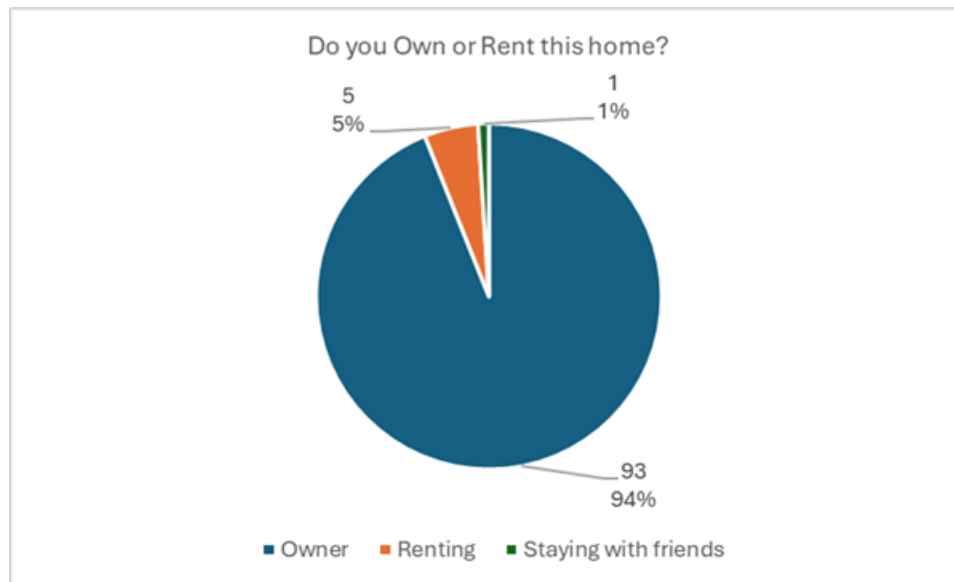


2. How long have you lived in Highlands?

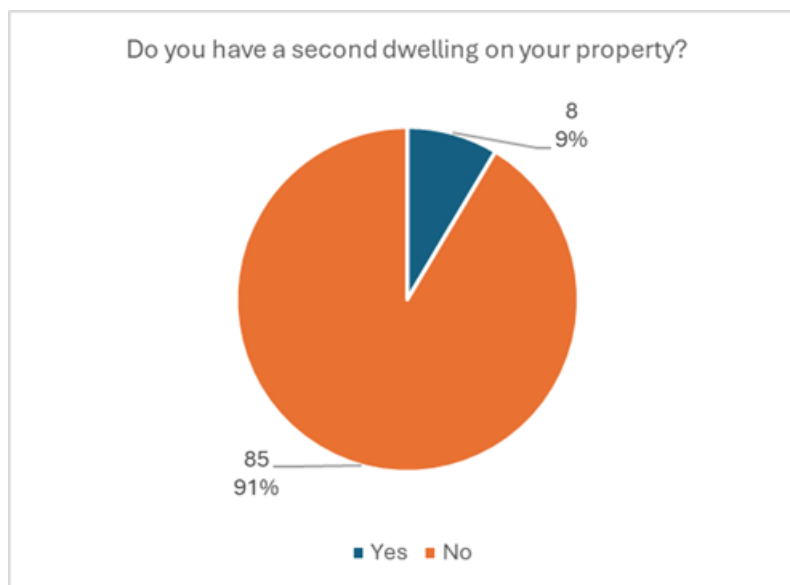


3. Do you Own or Rent this home?

- O: Owner
- R: Renting
- S: Staying with friends

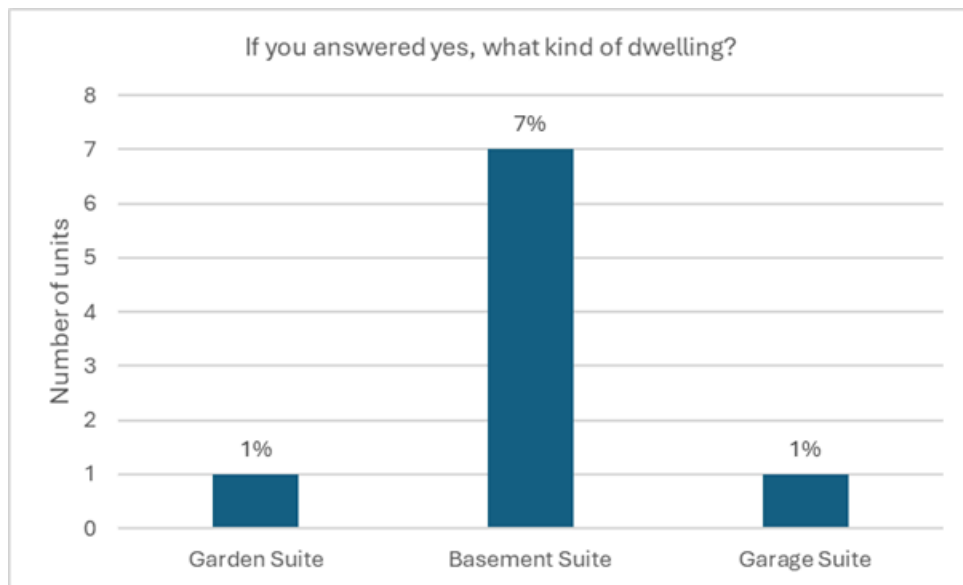


4. Do you have a second dwelling on your property?

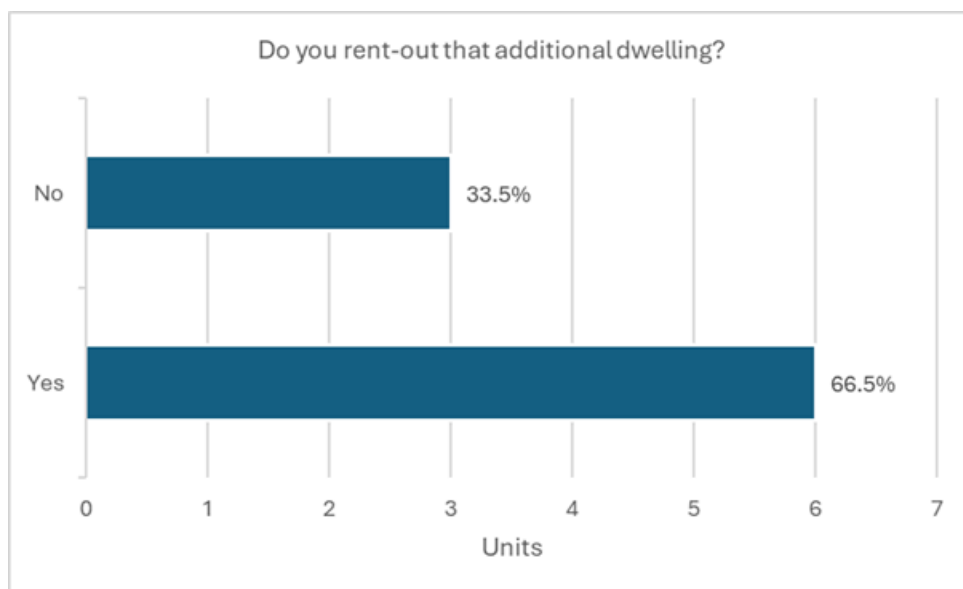


5. If you answered yes, what kind of dwelling?

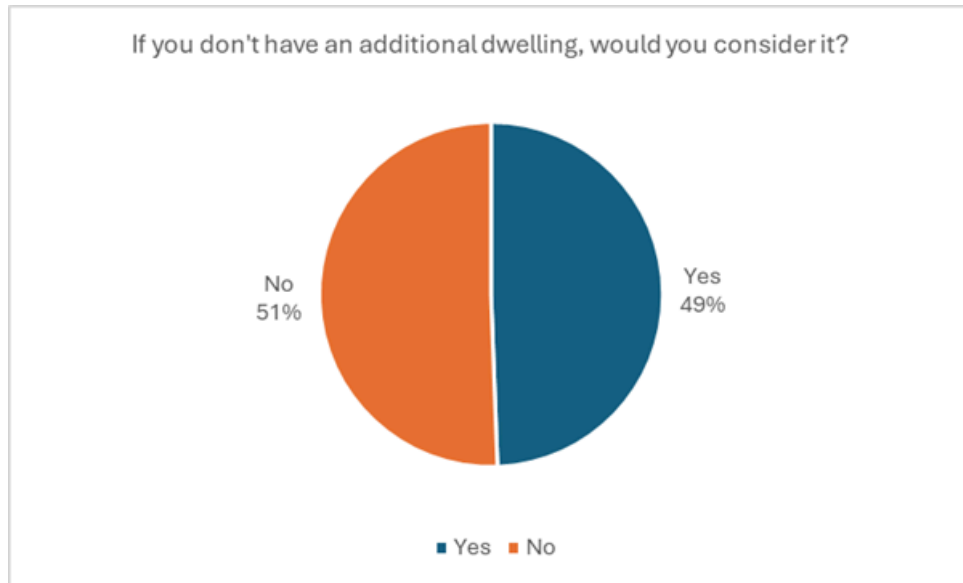
- Garden Suite
- Basement Suite
- Garage Suite
- Other



6. Do you rent-out that additional dwelling?

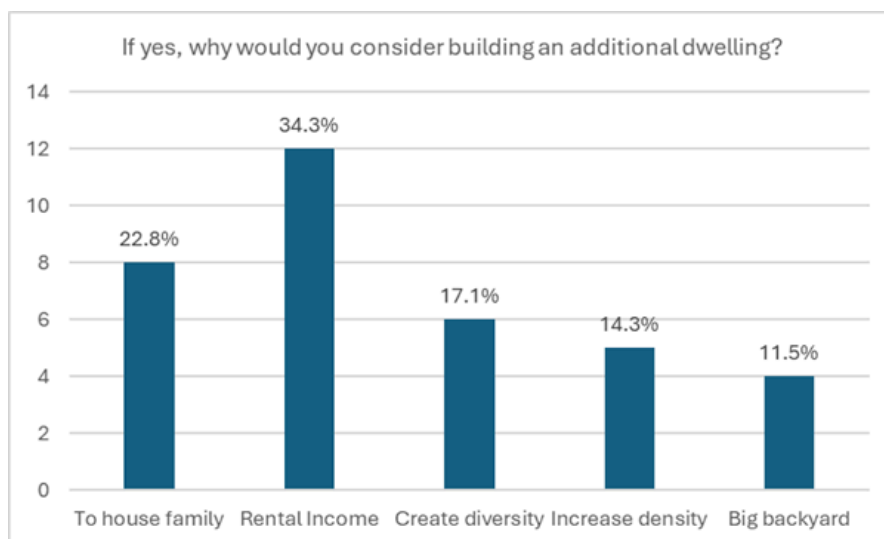


7. If you don't have an additional dwelling, would you consider it?



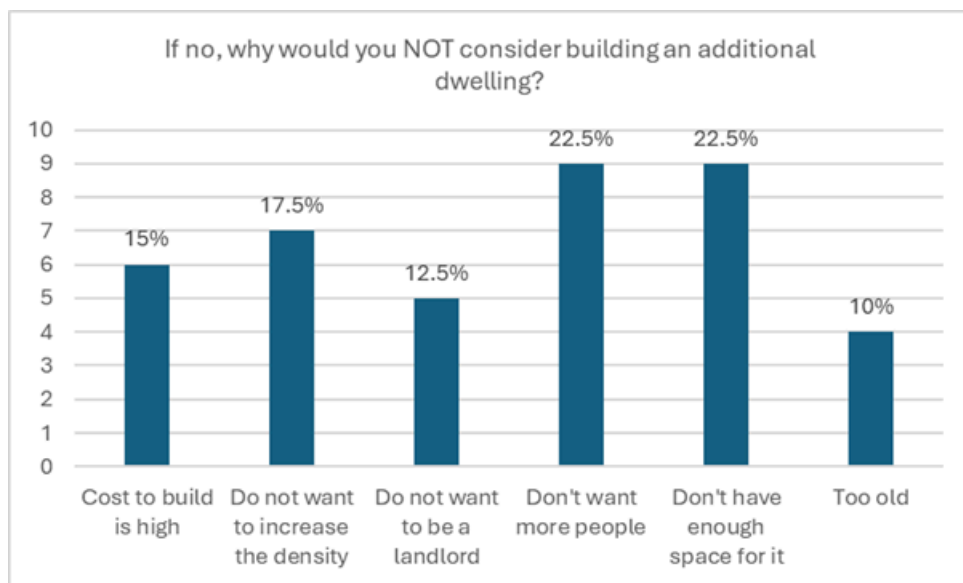
8. If yes, why would you consider building an additional dwelling?

- To house family (in-law suite, etc.)
- Rental Income
- Create diversity in the neighbourhood
- Increase the density in the neighbourhood
- Big backyard



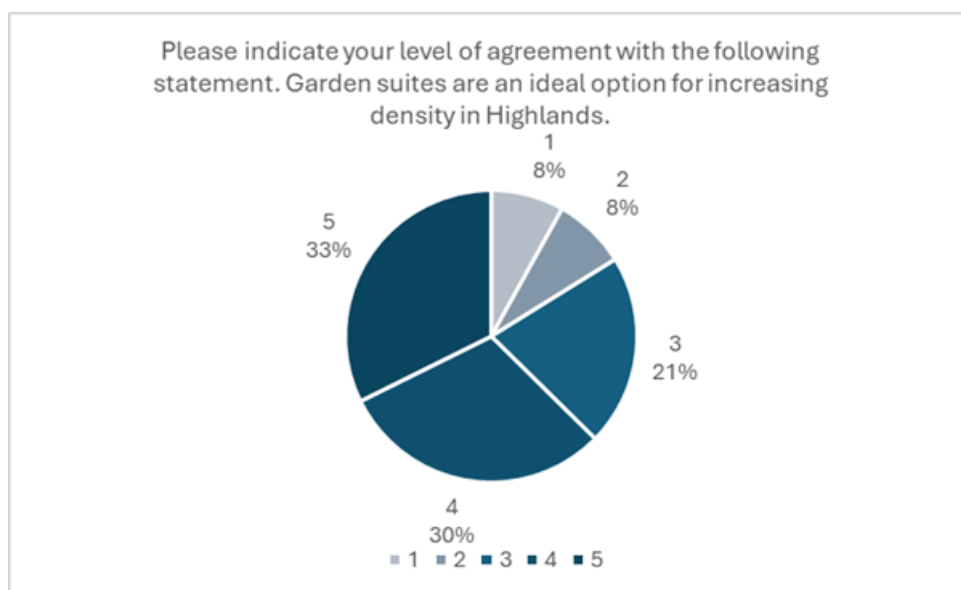
9. If no, why would you NOT consider building an additional dwelling?

- Cost to build is high
- Do not want to increase the density in the neighbourhood
- Do not want to be a landlord
- Don't want more people
- Don't have enough space for it
- Too old

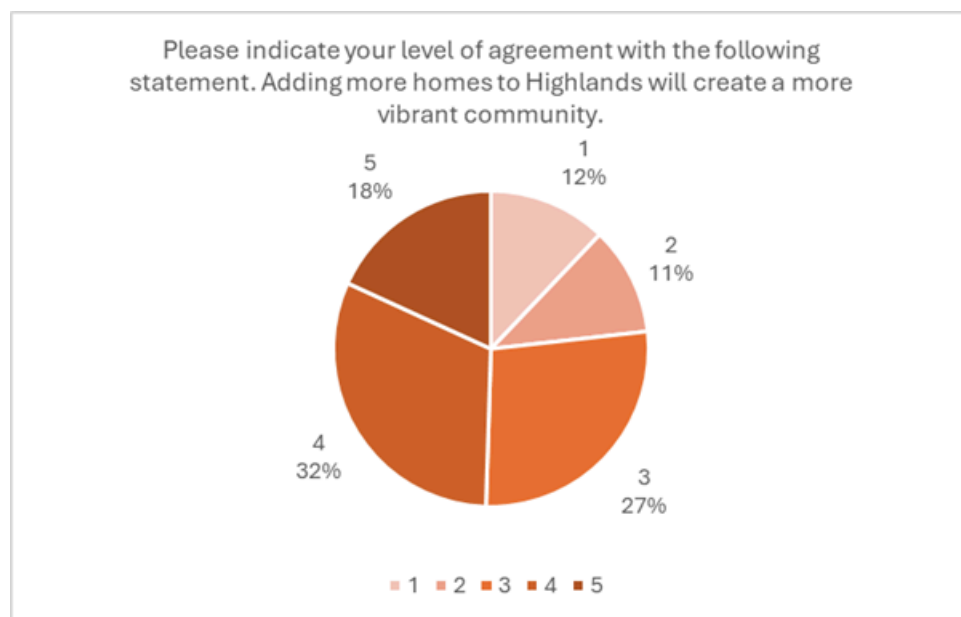


The last 4 questions were designed to gain some insight into people's attitudes and perceptions regarding secondary suites and density. The responses are 1-5, where 1 is strongly Disagree, 2 is Disagree, 3 is Neutral, 4 is Agree, and 5 is strongly Agree. Please indicate your level of agreement.

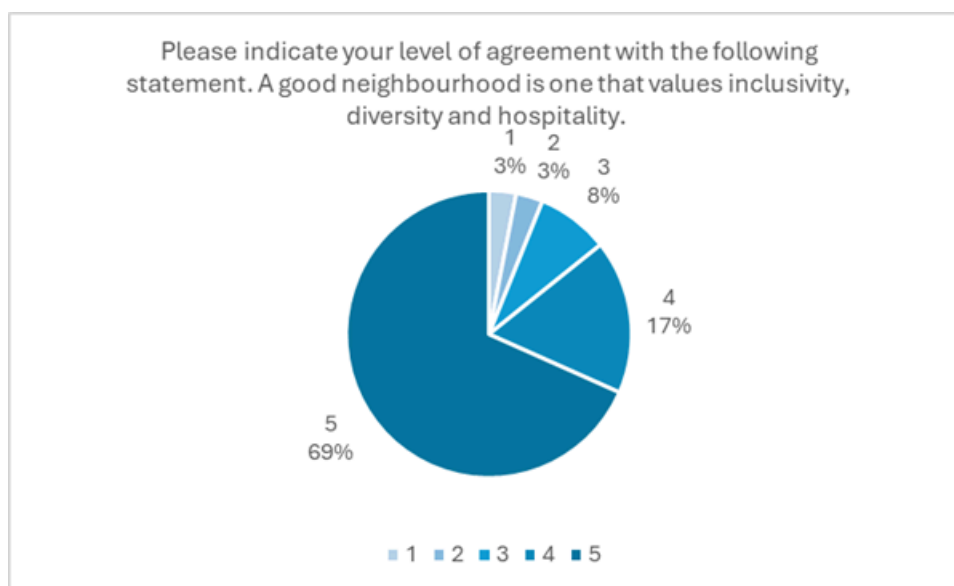
10. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. Garden suites are an ideal option for increasing density in Highlands.



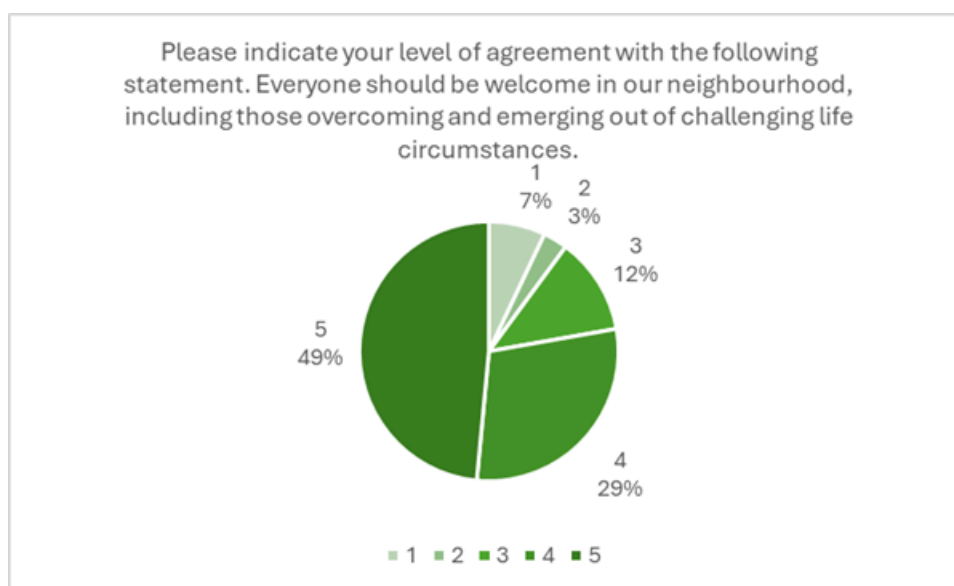
11. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. Adding more homes to Highlands will create a more vibrant community.



12. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. A good neighbourhood is one that values inclusivity, diversity and hospitality.



13. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. Everyone should be welcome in our neighbourhood, including those overcoming and emerging out of challenging life circumstances.



How My Flabbers got Ghasted

A Poem by Felicia Niedbalka

I carry myself differently now, the only words strung together that I have to those in recovery to describe my stride on a journey that I have only just started. If you pick that apart in every possible way, then like me your brain tends to do way too much, and trying to put on paper what is in my spastic brain is as easy as finding a needle in a haystack.... After I organize each strand by size and colour. So more importantly, I will add that I won't carry myself like I once did.

Pause for dramatic effect

The perspectives of myself I had etched in stone started as repeated whispers in front of a mirror. Things like Addict, Useless, and Disappointment stained my personality and were then molded into a measurement of my worth that I believed defined me. I carried these labels like aggressive guard dogs at my side that I convinced myself were protecting me. Through scenarios and situations that would make Stephen King grip the pages, I found myself on a Monday evening sitting at a table determined to prove I couldn't belong, avoiding the eye contact of a room of strangers.

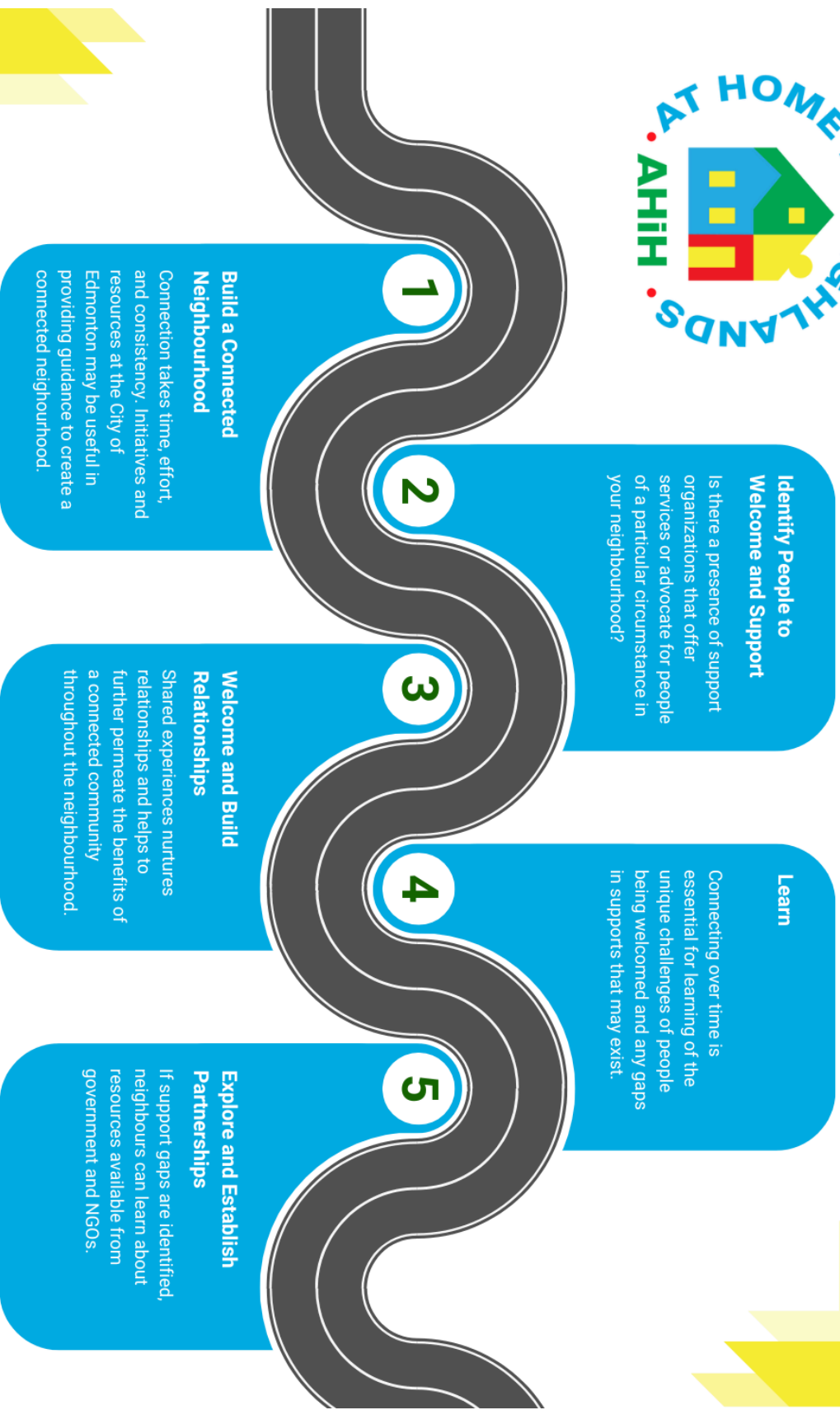
Fast forwarding through dozens of tear-jerking moments and realizations, a community of neighbours unknowingly challenged my obscured view of myself. Words like empathy and understanding wore away the stone-etched conviction that I carried, my excessively high defensive walls that only reflected what little value I decided I could have were finally something that I could analyze. This was an extremely important step, shedding light on the purpose they held deflated them taking the power they held, and opened a view I'd never had before.

Connection, connection, connection

A word heard a thousand times in the recovery life,
but only understood as something detrimental when felt.

And with that, I don't believe everything I think anymore,
and every time I remember I can forgive again.

Felicia is a person in recovery who has been welcomed into the Highlands Community and has become a beloved friend of At Home in Highlands. She is now a valued member of the core group that guides the work of At Home in Highlands.



At Home in Highlands' Welcoming Community Roadmap

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