IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The Elmira Developmental Support Corporation has created its own version of intentional community. The pages that follow explain the “Good Neighbours” housing concept as conceived by EDSC, based on the voices of the people who live there and what it means to them.

“I have always wanted to have my own place to live, to be independent, to make friends. This has been a dream come true.”

FROM A FIELD OF DREAMS TO LIVING THE DREAM

Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Community

Report Compiled and Produced by CMCS Consulting Services – January 2019
From Field of Dreams to Living the Dream:  
*Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Housing*

**History**

The Elmira Developmental Support Corporation (EDSC) is a non-profit corporation that was formed in 2003. It was part of Elmira District Community Living’s response to housing pressures for the people the organization supported and those who were looking for residential options in the near future.

As stated in its foundational documents, EDSC’s goal was the development of “supportive affordable housing” for people with intellectual disabilities as well as for “others without an intellectual disability but who create community within the housing complex”. This would be accomplished through the “development of relationships” with the people with intellectual disabilities living there.

In 2004, the government of Ontario passed the *Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act*. The Act signaled a move away from traditional ministry-funded housing models and block funded programs towards a more individualized approach that gave individuals control over the money allotted for their support, as well as a new direction related to housing supports that saw the government looking for innovative models in partnership with families and local communities.

This shift in philosophy and approach was the driving force behind EDSC developing its supportive affordable housing model (in partnership with Elmira District Community Living) in the form of two projects known as Snow Goose and Field of Dreams.

**Snow Goose**

Snow Goose is a four-plex on a residential street in Elmira that was built in 2008-9 by EDSC with investment from EDCL and in partnership with the Region of Waterloo.

In addition to the people with developmental disabilities who live in their own apartments, two students from the University of Waterloo/Renison University College live at Snow Goose rent-free and receive a full tuition scholarship for being a “good friend and neighbour” to the other tenants.

They do not fulfill the role of a paid staff support worker. Simply by virtue of their presence and their commitment to be open to others, a social safety net is provided and real connections are made, reducing social isolation and loneliness.

This “good neighbour” concept would become the defining feature of EDSC’s approach to intentional community moving forward.
From Field of Dreams to Living the Dream: 
*Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Housing*

Many years prior, EDCL had received a donation of a parcel of farmland. The donor hoped that one day that section of field would be transformed into housing for people with developmental disabilities.

Following the success of Snow Goose, EDCL negotiated a trade with a local builder, swapping the field for a piece of property in a multi-residential zoned sub-division development, and then gifted it to EDSC.

EDSC subsequently produced its Field of Dreams Proposal outlining a plan for four, seven-unit apartment buildings that would be developed on the property.

This multi-stage undertaking would expand on EDSC’s unique brand of intentional community, increasing the ratio of “good neighbours” in each location, including another student/scholarship recipient, and a variety of other Elmira residents wanting high-quality affordable housing and who were sincerely committed to helping create a sense of community where they lived.

The first building was completed and occupied in November 2014, and the second saw tenants move in 2 years later. Occupancy of the third building took place in January 2018. The fourth and last is slated for completion in April of 2019.

The Region of Waterloo has remained an important partner throughout, and a new scholarship relationship has been developed with the Faculty of Social Work-Masters Program at Wilfrid Laurier University as a result of a very generous private donation.

After the completion of the first Field of Dreams building, EDSC would complete the final three phases financially independent of EDCL.

**A Few More Words on Funding...**

The housing created by EDSC was built without funding from any provincial government ministry or body. (As noted earlier, the Region of Waterloo did contribute to the Field of Dreams project in Elmira through its allocation for Innovative Affordable Housing Funding.)

**Building Costs**
*(Snow Goose and Field of Dreams)*

**Total Expenditures:** $6 million

**Source of Funds:**
- Region of Waterloo - $2 million
- Elmira District Community Living - $2.3 million (including land donation valued at $1 million)
- EDSC - $1.7 million (including $1 million in fundraised dollars)

No government monies from any source are provided for the ongoing operation or maintenance of the buildings. The rent revenues cover the cost of operations and administration of both EDSC and its properties.
With regard to costs related to the provision of staff supports, many individuals with intellectual disabilities living within the Snow Goose and Field of Dreams intentional communities manage to do so independently, without any dedicated funding for housing/living services.

Their own abilities; support of family and personal networks; technology; community resources such as employment, day supports and volunteering; as well as the relationships built with friends and neighbours within the community, are all that is required.

For those tenants who do receive assistance from EDCL’s Supported Independent Living staff, the funding for those supports are attached to the individual and not to the building. If they were to move, the tenants would take those funding dollars and support with them.

Provincial Passport dollars (self-directed, portable funding which can be used by individuals with intellectual disabilities to purchase skill-building services and/or improve access to an inclusive community life) have also been useful in enhancing quality of life for those tenants who have received them.

(Summarized, in part, from The Elmira Developmental Support Corporation/Elmira District Community Living Partnership: “The Road Taken and Oh What a Difference That Has Made”).
The Present

Fast forward to the present.

There are now forty-eight additional affordable residential units in Elmira.

Each of the four buildings (Snow Goose and three at Field of Dreams - McGuire Lane) has developed its own personality, unique in the ways it manifests and maintains a sense of community among the people who live there, and with the broader neighbourhood.

Each is different, because different people live there and it reflects how they want their community to be.

In one location, there is always something social going on, whether it’s a shared meal, a Bachelorette viewing party or going shopping together.

At another, it’s much more low-key, there’s more getting to know people one on one, groups of two or three who have a common interest just hanging out for a bit.

But the common denominators are the “good neighbours” whose presence and openness help address issues of safety and loneliness.

News of the success of Snow Goose, and especially of the Field of Dreams project, has travelled far and wide. There has been local and provincial news coverage, including a complimentary opinion piece endorsing EDSC’s approach to housing and intentional community in the editorial pages of the Toronto Star.

The Field of Dreams project was profiled in the federal government’s 2018 National Housing Strategy.

EDSC is fielding (no pun intended) requests for information from across the country on a weekly basis.

Currently the organization is evaluating future directions. One area of exploration is producing material that would be of assistance to other community groups looking to establish their own take on intentional community and who might find the experience and learnings of Elmira helpful.

With that in mind EDSC has been documenting its journey: all the twists and turns, setbacks, workarounds and unexpected windfalls that happened in between the first Snow Goose proposal in 2007 and tenants moving into building number three of the Field of Dreams early in 2018.

But even that’s not the whole story, is it?

The real story, or at least the next chapter, has to be: What would the people who are living there have to say about living in an intentional community?

Does it work?

Why?

Does it feel “less than” or “other” because it’s a “planned” community?

EDSC has certainly demonstrated its ingenuity and effectiveness, building its Field of Dreams...But are the people living there ‘Living the Dream’?
The Good Friends and Neighbours Summit

Realizing their vision of creating affordable housing in the region, and especially affordable housing that offers dignity and independence to some of its most “vulnerable” citizens, is a monumental achievement for EDSC and EDCL.

To paraphrase: They built it...and the people did come.

There have been many accolades and much praise for a job well done. There are “official” photos taken at Snow Goose and Field of Dreams buildings, beaming faces at dedication ceremonies, celebrations that mark the culmination of all the weeks, months and years of work by the many, many hands it took to get here.

And then there are the snapshots and video clips taken by family, friends and tenants on their respective move-in days, full of joy, pride, gratitude and...hope. For them, a finish line as well...but also a beginning.

Time for Reflection

For EDSC and EDCL the time has come for reflection.

Does the reality of living independently, in an intentional community, come close to meeting their expectations? What do the tenants and those that care about them think about their lives, neighbours and their communities now that the honeymoon phase is over? What do the “good neighbours”, those that society might not label as “vulnerable”, have to say? If it’s working, what makes it work? And what would they tell others about being part of an “intentional community”?

To find out the answers, EDSC contracted with CMCS Consulting Services (the authors of this paper) to design, facilitate, document and report on a day of sharing, listening and information gathering with the people involved with Snow Goose and Field of Dreams.

The Summit

“I am known.”

On Saturday September 29, 2018, a group of sixty people gathered for a full day, to talk and learn about intentional community done the “Elmira way”.

Attendees at the “Good Friends and Neighbours Summit” included:

- Tenants who live with developmental disabilities;
- Tenants who are “Good Neighbours”;
- Family members of both;
- Elmira District Community Living staff who had been involved in supporting people to transition to their new homes; and
- Representatives from several important partners as well as from other community organizations that were exploring or experiencing their own intentional communities.

The purpose of the day was to learn from those who could best speak to what it was like to live in an intentional community under EDSC’s “Good Neighbour” approach - i.e. the people
that call Snow Goose or one of the Field of Dreams locations home, and those that love and care about them.

The day was comprised of small and large group discussions, facilitated by Tom Little of CMCS Consulting Services. The feedback was captured and displayed on a screen so that participants could see their contribution. Attendees were also invited to leave behind any speaking notes they had prepared if they wished to do so.

Those involved in the communities were asked to comment on the following:
- What did intentional community mean to them?
- What made it work?
- What makes someone a good “Good Neighbour”?
- Does living in an intentional community make you feel different (in a bad way), segregated or institutionalized?

Following the day of the Summit, CMCS undertook the task of organizing all of the input received and writing this report.

“I feel like I belong.”
In Their Own Words: Tenants, Good Neighbours and Families

The question that elicited the most responses, by far, was **What does intentional community mean to you?**

Almost exclusively, tenants responded by describing what they had in their lives now, that wasn’t there before:

- Freedom and Choice;
- Relationships;
- Independence;
- Safety;
- Respect; and
- Growth.

Tenants described being able to make decisions for themselves on some of the most fundamental aspects of life: where they lived; how they spent their time; who they spent time with; what and when to eat; and having the freedom to succeed.

- *My place, my rules…*
- *I have freedom to come and go, freedom to live there or not.*
- *(I have) choice: I choose what to eat or where to go.*
- *I have complete control over my activities and schedule.*

For some of the residents, the opportunity to be in an intentional community meant the realization of a long-held dream to live on their own.

- *I feel more independent. I’ve been able to do more than I did when I lived at home.*
- *I love to live independently, love exploring the town and taking the bus which gives me new independence as well.*

- *It fulfilled my dream of being able to live in my own apartment.*

For others, it was an opportunity to continue to live independently without the social isolation and exposure to risk that were making previous living arrangements challenging and stressful.

- *I was more isolated where I lived before.*
- *I used to have a lot of problems with neighbours ...knocking on my door at all hours always wanting to borrow stuff. Here the neighbours are better, and I don’t have that trouble here.*
- *I didn’t really know my neighbours where I lived before; I like that I feel safer and am building relationships with people around me.*
- *Was more isolated where I lived before, now have opportunity to be with people more.*

Virtually all of the tenants recounted examples of positive, reciprocal relationships with those around them, in a way they had never had before, and in a way that made them feel like they belonged and were valued.

In fact, of all the different categories of input related to what intentional community meant to them, the pages for “Freedom/Choice/Independence” and “Relationships/Belonging” had the most comments.

- *I like that there are opportunities for other people to get to know me and see that I’m a good person and good to hang around with.*
- *I’ve made friends.*
- *(Everyone) made me feel welcome; I like that the intention is to build*
relationships with people; It gives me a sense of security and belonging.

Still others talked about changes in themselves, or in the way others saw them:

- **People see you**: it’s not just about people with special needs.
- **The community recognizes the needs of the people living there**: now the bus stops right in front of McGuire which means even more independence than before.
- **I’ve learned about meal plans and following along with a recipe on YouTube.**
- **I learned how to trust myself.**

For parents and family members, the struggle between wanting independence and dignity for their adult children and the fears for their safety, happiness and well-being, can be all-consuming.

It’s not that they want a support staff with their son or daughter 24-7; it’s the “what ifs” that are paralyzing. Yes, they can manage the tasks related to living on their own, but what if in the middle of the night this happens... or what if a neighbour does this...what if...what if...

Parent after parent spoke about how much relief they felt that their family member was surrounded by people who were interested in getting to know them, who wanted them to succeed. It meant independence but with a safety net; social connection without encroachment. Knowing that a helping hand was just knock away if it was needed brought immense comfort to them.

And they recounted the gratitude and the joy they felt upon realizing that being a part of intentional community had resulted in their son or daughter, brother or sister, having friends and neighbours who ‘knew them and cared about them’, as opposed to people with an interest in ‘taking care’ of them.

The Summit also pursued the question of how family members see intentional community being manifested in their loved one’s lives:

- **If we could’ve come up with our own idea for what we would want for our daughter, this would be it. She can live her life the way she wants, but within a community that is safe.**
- **Intentional community means safety to me. It provided a community of people for my daughter to build relationships with and become friends with who are well-intentioned and safe for her to be with. In the time my daughter has lived there, she has surpassed me. She has her life, is happy, is safe and secure.**
- **The realization of her dreams related to living independently, right down to things like ownership and control over own appliances...in a way that as a family we could never accomplish; a joy to see; such a load off siblings as well as parents; their dreams have come true and they have a security blanket around them.**
- **(There is) Infectious building of acquaintances and friendships in the broader community through the social network we have built with each other.**
- **There is respect for each other, respect for boundaries.**
- **Comfort: Introverts get what they need when they need it, without being forced to live with people or join in activities they don’t want to be a part of.**
- **(I see an) increased capacity and capability to be independent.**

Perhaps the most surprising perspective came from the group of tenants Elmira calls the “Good Neighbours”, the ones who, in return for
affordable rent, commit to a vision of a community where fellow members are open to, and interested in, getting to know one another—in other words, providing a social safety net that reduces loneliness and isolation.

They are not landlords, property managers, personal support workers, paid staff or people with a religious or philosophical vocation to serve others. Just regular folks who need an affordable place to live and who promise to be—simply—good neighbours: friendly, respectful and aware.

Why would they want to be a part of this? What do they get out being a part of an intentional community? The answer may surprise you. Their motivation was the same as everybody else’s: A home you can take pride in; a safe environment, the kind of community where neighbours want to get to know each other; a place where you are respected and differences are accepted.

- (This) is a community where people trust each other. (It) exceeded our expectations that we were trusted by our neighbours... (This) is a safe community where we know our son could knock on a neighbour’s door if he needed help and he would get it without a problem. (Everyone here is) welcoming to all people, including new Canadians... This is our home now.
- The lines become blurred over time, we’ve all become good neighbours to each other.
- Everyone living there is working to develop that sense of community, it’s not the exclusive domain of the good neighbours; reciprocity is a key element.
- (There is) a sense of belonging that evolves and develops over time.
- (I) value the relationships I have established and the sense of safety I feel.

### What Makes It Work?

It was abundantly clear that the people who were experiencing or witnessing intentional community the ‘Good Neighbour’ way were all-in on the concept, and the reality met or exceeded those expectations.

The next part of the agenda focused on gaining insight on whether there were aspects of the model (and how it was manifested) that they saw as key elements of its success. **What were the key ingredients that made it work?**

A number of themes emerged in the responses we heard:

**1. The Good Neighbours concept has a clear vision (and a lot of planning went in to doing it right!)**

E.G.: A community of independent people and/or families open to getting to know their neighbours and building relationships, one where the social connections that are developed provide a safety net that is unencumbering yet prevents social isolation and reduces risk for people with developmental disabilities

People are open to you.

A place where everyone looks out for each other.

**2. The process for choosing people who would live there was well-planned and well-executed (and hinged on being committed to the vision)**

(It) meant that people have common goals about the kind of place they want to live—that leads to trust and respect for each other, laying the foundation for informal, unplanned but meaningful interactions to happen.
From Field of Dreams to Living the Dream:  
Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Housing

There is a shared intention to come together, network and build a sense of community; everyone actively desires to connect.

3. EDSC made very effective use of social architecture
The physical layout of the building promotes socializing within the units and through the use of shared common spaces.

It even comes down to the design of the building: the design facilitates interaction and the creation of a sense of community while maintaining independent and private space.

Planning and design took into account people’s present and future needs, ensuring stability and sustainability of housing for the people living there.

The design of the building was adapted to meet people’s needs. The planning meant it was accessible to everyone.

We will be able to stay independent longer as we get older.

The buildings are well-located within the broader community and are not differentiated from neighboring dwellings.

People are not socially or geographically isolated. Homes are part of established communities.

Buildings fit within the rest of community they are part of.

4. And not surprisingly, given that the success of many endeavours hinges on the people in key roles...The Good Neighbours themselves
There are many characteristics, skills and attributes that each brings to their role, but chief among these is the sincere belief that they are receiving just as much value from being a part of the community as everyone else. They see it as their home too, and the kind of home and neighbourhood that they chose to be a part of.

They are also: respectful, comfortable with people and differences, see everyone as equals, approachable and accessible but not intrusive, able to understand and accept cues from tenants about how much interaction they prefer, good listeners, excellent relationship “smoothers”, genuinely interested in others, able to set boundaries that they need and want themselves, willing to develop and add relationships to their lives, demonstrate good discernment and respect other’s privacy.

“People’s dignity, rights and citizenship are realized and recognized by others.”

Good Neighbours as “Institution Substitution”

The field of developmental services can be one with polarizing views on how services should be planned and delivered. There is a school of thought that says that if any housing arrangement encroaches on a 10:1 ratio (as in ten non-disabled people for each person with a disability) it is essentially a reinstitutionalization of intellectually disabled persons. It asserts that situations that involve more people with disabilities than would be expected to occur in population will eventually become stigmatized and expose vulnerable
From Field of Dreams to Living the Dream: 
Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Housing

tenants to risk at the hands of less desirable neighbours who end up living there.

Obviously, EDSC and EDCL do not subscribe to this point of view. If they did, only four or five people with intellectually disabilities would have been afforded opportunities to live independently in the four buildings it has constructed thus far. But it did want to ask the tenants, their families and the Good Neighbours how they felt about this.

A robust discussion followed. Participants unanimously rejected both the validity of the 10:1 ratio and the characterization of Snow Goose and Field of Dreams as institution substitutions.

- These projects are the antithesis of what makes an institution an institution. Good Neighbour communities are built on pillars of, and a shared commitment to, self-determination, freedom, choice, respect, equality, dignity, inclusion, connection and growth.

- The “Good Neighbours” were clear that they don’t see themselves and their families as living in an institution, and the tenants certainly don’t believe there is less value to a place just because they are living there.

- The whole premise of an intentional community is that people choose to call it home because they want to be there, they are committed to the vision, and they want to be an integral part of building and belonging. That translates to value. And others who don’t share the same appreciation for it simply wouldn’t be living there.

- Adhering to an arbitrary ratio ignores the individual’s right to choose where they live and who they live with. It also ignores the possibility that perhaps some people don’t view disability the same way as others and that it might not be a label that they readily attach to those around them, people are just…people, and

- Intentional communities are common all over the world and becoming more and more prevalent in Canada. Many people with shared interests and needs are choosing this lifestyle, and for many of the same reasons: maintenance of affordable independence while reducing risk and preventing social isolation. They are not stigmatized; in fact, many are celebrated and copied again and again by other groups.

One of the attendees captured the sentiment of the group thus: (An intentional community is a group of) people with shared interests defined by people’s needs and wants; other people don’t define it, the people who choose to live there do.

Last Words...

So, what do tenants and good neighbours think about intentional community now that they are part of one? It’s a place that:

- I have chosen, and it has chosen me.

- Feels safe and welcoming.

- Allows people to choose what community and home means to them.

- Just feels like home, I don’t think of it as a “community”, it’s just home;

“I have always wanted to have my own place to live, to be independent, to make friends. This has been a dream come true.”
Appendix
Participant Input -
Good Friends & Neighbours Summit

September 29, 2018

The following notes represent the input captured as participants shared their thoughts on being part of one of EDSC’s intentional communities. A number of these statements have been incorporated into the attached report “In Their Own Words: From a Field of Dreams to Living the Dream. Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Community”. Where participants elected to give the facilitators their own personal speaking notes, comments not already captured during the discussion have been incorporated under the most appropriate heading.

1: What does intentional community mean to you?

A: “Testimonials”/First hand

• A place that just feels like home, don’t think of it as a “community”; it’s just home
• I am safe, secure and happy in my own place
• A big stepping stone for me to learn how to be good neighbours to people I meet, I feel so safe living there, and I learned how to trust myself and how to be comfortable with people of all different abilities. It has also been helpful to get to know other people with the same disability as me and I like that there are opportunities for other people to get to know me and see that I’m a good person and good to hang around with. I like doing my best to be a good neighbour and set a good example for the neighbours I live with by helping them with anything they can’t do by themselves
• I like living on my own, I’ve made friends with Sam and Alexis
• Fulfilled my dreams of being able to live in my own apartment, such a relief and took so much stress off me to know I was chosen to live there
• I love to live independently, love exploring the town and taking the bus which gives me new independence as well
• Takes a lot of stress off our shoulders as parents knowing that its more than just a place to live, but that others in the community will and are looking out for our daughters
• Friends and neighbours know them and care about them rather than having staff to take care of them
• The realization of dreams related to living independently, right down to ownership and control over own appliances in a way that as a family we could never accomplish; a joy to see; such a load off siblings as well as parents; their dreams have come true and have a security blanket around them
From Field of Dreams to Living the Dream:
Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Housing

- Where I used to live, I used to have a lot of problems with neighbours smoking and drinking, knocking on my door at all hours always wanting to borrow stuff. Here the neighbours are better, and I don’t have that trouble here.
- We will be able to stay independent longer as we get older (e.g.: moving into new building with elevator)
- I feel more independent. I’ve been able to do more than I did when I lived at home
- I feel safe and welcomed, everyone is so nice
- Was more isolated where I lived before, now have opportunity to be with people more
- Within one week of moving in “my place, my rules”
- Huge piece of mind to know sons are there, also helps with relationships between parent and child
- Made me feel welcome, gives a sense of security; didn’t really know my neighbours where I lived before; many apartments but we just did our own thing. I like that I feel safer and am building relationships with people around me; I like that the intention is to build relationships with people; it gives me a sense of security and belonging
- Is a community where people trust each other. Exceeded our expectations that we were trusted by our neighbours even though we come from Pakistan which doesn’t have a good reputation sometimes. It is a safe community where we know our son could knock on a neighbour’s door if he needed help and he would get it without a problem. Welcoming to all people, including new Canadians. We haven’t lived in our own home since leaving it as refugees in 2012. Have lived in guest house when we first arrived in Canada but it wasn’t our home. This is our home now
- Means being more independent and not being afraid to ask for help when I need it
- If we could’ve come up with our own idea for what we would want for our daughter, this would be it. She can live her life the way she wants, but within a community that is safe and with a purpose of supporting each other
- It feels like home
- Intentional community means safety to me. It provided a community of people for my daughter to build relationships with and become friends with who are well-intentioned and safe for her to be with. In the time my daughter has lived there, she has surpassed me. Has her life, is happy, is safe and secure. Greg needs to start a building for the parents now that we’re getting older!
- Moved in across from McGuire when it was a field, now it’s a field of dreams. Dream come true for me and him. To son, intentional community means a place he is comfortable, surrounded by things he likes, is independent, feels safe and most importantly, gets up every morning with a sense of purpose
- I find it difficult to interact with people, when I didn’t come out of my apartment for a while, first person who came to interact with me was my neighbour
- At first it was hard to leave home because I had two maids picking up after me, well, one really. My dad would clean up all my stuff but my mom wouldn’t. But I am so glad I’m on my own now, I would never go back to living with my parents. I love Greg because he gave me a place to call home and I never have to live at my parents’ house again

B: What benefits accrue(d) as a result of living there
- Independence/Freedom/ Self-determination/Choice
- Relationships
- Safety
From Field of Dreams to Living the Dream:

*Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Housing*

- Respect
- Opportunity
- Empowerment
- Hope

*Independence/Freedom/Self-determination/Choice*
- Sons and daughters live independently in the community
- Independent living with a social security net
- Safe environment that is independent
- People have their own space and independence
- Independence and peace of mind for families
- Have an independence they didn’t have before; Freedom to choose
- Son has freedom to live on his own and still be safe
- Freedom of choice, in a world where limitations restrict one’s freedom to choose, or realize the choices they would like to make
- Freedom for son, freedom for us, he’s pursuing his interests and goals, and we are able to do things that interest us as well
- Life is nimble and fluid, changing and flexible, not always the same from week to week
- People are safe but make their own choices in life
- Choice. I choose what to eat, or where I want to go.
- A choice that comes with a desire to manifest what we consider important
- Allows people to choose what community and home means to them
- Encouraged engagement without encroachment
- Opportunities to shine and do...or not
- A place I have chosen and it has chosen me
- A place where I feel like I belong and feel safe
- Freedom to be independent and succeed
- Increased capacity and capability to be independent

*(Reciprocal) Relationships*
- Opportunity to develop relationships, circle of people you know keeps getting bigger
- Sense of community, events that everybody participates in and enjoys doing together
- A place where you belong
- A group of people helping each other out
- Opportunities to make friends, build relationships and have fun with people who are open to you
- A place where everyone looks out for each other, home should be more than four walls and a television
- Reciprocal relationships, everyone contributes, everyone benefits
- The lines become blurred over time, we’ve all become good neighbours to each other
- Infectious building of acquaintances and friendships in the broader community through the social network we have built with each other
- Acceptance of, and welcoming to, neighbours beyond those immediately close
  - Network extends to relationships and ideas of people in the extended networks of the people who live in the intentional community
From Field of Dreams to Living the Dream: 
*Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Housing*

- Everyone living there is working to develop that sense of community, it’s not the exclusive domain of the good neighbours; reciprocity is a key element
- A sense of belonging that evolves and develops over time
- You can tell people care when you walk in the building
- Everyone feels welcome across all their differences, sense of “open door”, people contributing to each other’s lives in all manner of ways
- I value the relationships I have established, and the sense of safety I feel
- Safety, and the networks/relationships that have been established with the families of fellow tenants
- Responsive to each other in times of crisis
- Shared interest in being there creates a bond of connection; new comers work a bit harder to fit into the spirit of the community
- There is a state of belonging and being
- Welcoming. People drop by, share meals, join impromptu conversations on the front steps
- Relationships are reciprocal, friendships are formed
- I am known
- Connecting to the broader community (neighbours outside the intentional community) is the next step
- A place where you offer what (gifts) you have (to share)
- people around who are there to support him in whatever way he needs; made up of people contributing in different ways
- Everyone brings their strengths and gifts
- Have a sense of connectedness through meaningful relationships; Not isolated

*Pride*
- Pride in ownership/pride in one’s home
- Way to improve people’s quality of life, everyone deserves to have choice, feel happy about where they are and where they live
- Confidence
- Nice place to live, with air conditioning

*Respect*
- There is respect for each other, respect for boundaries and respect for each other’s lives
- People see you; it’s not just about people with special needs
- Respect from others and in self
- Develop The community recognizes the needs of the people living there. Now the bus stops right in front of McGuire which means even more independence than before
- People’s dignity, rights and citizenship are realized and recognized by others

*Opportunity/Empowerment*
- Personal growth
- Acquire new skills
- I learned about meal plans and following along with a recipe on YouTube
- Comfort: Introverts get what they need when they need it, without being forced to live with people or join in activities they don’t want to be a part of
- Fosters attitudes of caring for others in those who have often been recipients
• Became unafraid to get support and to offer it
• Empowered to trust your own gifts

2: What were the key elements that went into the establishment of Field of Dreams that makes it successful?

Vision/Design
• On purpose, by design, consciously reflecting the goals of that community
• We are all equal and all have different needs
• A community with a sense of purpose and safety
• A place that isn’t staff-driven
• Doesn’t just happen, takes a lot of planning
• A place with a vision and the people that can make it happen
• Built to promote independence, opportunity and confidence while maintaining independence outside of a group home setting but in a way that is safe for people living there
• Community is a state of being that is created through opportunity and also creates opportunity
• Independent but with a safety net if its needed
• Pillars of respect and inclusion
• It’s not something you make, it’s something you grow
• Education and growth within the community
• A community that makes it possible for people living there to realize their dreams
• Overcome restrictions on limitations by pooling resources, partnering with people with a variety of talents and ideas
• Requires intent and a model (e.g.: good neighbours), you can build anything, anywhere, but without a coherent model and design it won’t work
• Involves networks of relationships and opportunities, willingness and opportunities to meet, share and learn from each other, to give back
• Designed to be a neighbourhood with a variety of people living there, different backgrounds, young and old. Come together, attend events get to know each other
• Based on respect and inclusion
• Community where everyone has a shared purpose, everyone has their own private life but there are times when we come together, spend a bit of time, talking, venting, just being with one another
• There is a plan to get to know each other (not just live in the same building)
• People living as a neighbourhood with similar and specific purpose
• Housing with a specific intended target
• There is a shared intention to come together, network, and build community; everyone actively desires to connect via relationships
• Community within a community
• Acceptance within community
• A different level of commitment from organization to residents (there is a different kind of relationship between support organization and the residents than if they were “in service”?)
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Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Housing

• A place where I approach my neighbours with the attitude of “what can I do to put them in a position where they can succeed?”
• Creative
• No routines like in a group home
• Relationships matter
• Relationships between tenant/manager/owner are different
• There is an energy that says ‘The whole building is your home, not just your own apartment’
• Intentional model designed to create and support relationships
• These relationships encourage individuals to recognize their own assets and how they can use these talents to help and be helped by others

Selection Process/Good Neighbours
• Not just anyone can live there, there is an interview and selection process
• Access to people with shared interests defined by people’s needs and wants; other people don’t define it, the people who choose to live there do
• Creating relationships and space where people share common goals, explore undiscovered interests, give a sense of belonging, being together in relationships with the people around you
• Important element is the people who get involved in the planning and in living in and supporting the intentional community
• Higher degree of connectedness, higher level of helpfulness
• The planning meant that people have common goals about the kind of place they want to live, that leads to trust and respect for each other, laying the foundation for informal, unplanned but meaningful interactions to happen
• Choice of tenants
• Great deal of planning about the community including who ends up living there, not just who is next on the list
• Diversity
• Residents are committed to inclusion and being interdependent; they share qualities such as empathy and understanding
• People have made a choice to be a neighbor
• Chosen lifestyle

Physical Design
• It even comes down to design of building, the design to facilitates interaction and building community while maintaining independent and private space
• Some elements have been so well planned, including the physical layout (living rooms, shared family room) and good neighbours, while other elements of community have happened organically because the groundwork and intentions were already there
• Family room is a shared space where spontaneous, organic or planned get togethers can and do happen (e.g.: “viewing parties” when The Bachelor is on, having lunch together)
• Planning it meant that it was accessible to everyone. The design of the building was adapted to meet people’s needs
• A mini neighbourhood
• Strategic location
• Integration of neighbours
• Design of the buildings
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• Location of buildings

3: What makes a Good neighbour?
• Open-minded, take a genuine interest in others
• Willing to help
• A person who helps when you need help e.g.: a ride to hockey
• Ability to set boundaries
• Respectful
• Comfortable with people
• Willing to get to know people
• Seeks meaningful connections with people
• Reciprocal
• Come into relationships as equals
• See value in what they experience and receive by being part of the community (e.g.: safety, connection)
• Want to be a part of something more
• More than just an apartment to them
• Compassionate
• Not support staff
• Plan events, interactions that appeal to the people you’re living with
• Ability to solve problems
• Respectful of privacy
• Approachable, accessible but not intrusive, or overstepping bounds
• Recognizes that everyone has equal rights
• Good listening skills
• Look out for each other
• Quiet, simple time together, balance of 1:1 time and group
• Takes time to get to know people, takes their cues from their neighbours, whether they like being social or prefer being alone
• Don’t have to be the one planning everything
• Comfortable with people’s differences
• Comfort with letting people get to know them
• Good communication skills
• Empathetic
• Don’t act like staff
• It’s not a job, it’s a state of being
• Relationship smoothers
• Intentionally instigating ideas
• Creator of opportunities
• Someone who helps make ideas happen
• Event good neighbour vs relationship good neighbour
  • Differences?
  • Regardless, have to want to be there with the intention of connecting
  • Is more than a place to live for them as well
• Making an effort to be a part of conversations
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Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Housing

- Be present
- Going in as equals
- Ability to help
- Honest & trustworthy
- Compassionate
- Wanting to be involved, ensures that all know they are available for assistance, not intrusive
- Ability problem solve
- Reliable
- Supportive of neighbourhood and neighbours
- Good discernment/judgement/awareness
- Ability to deal with conflicts
- Genuine desire for community to thrive
- Genuine interested in others
- Willingness to develop and add to relationships in their lives
- Someone who understands that the safety and security as well the reduction of isolation that occurs in intentional community benefits them as well
- Helpful
- Ability to keep up their own life
- Approachable
- Flexible
- Open-minded
- Ability to plan
- Recognition of equal rights
- Respectful
- Compassionate
- Concerate
- Thinks about others
- Is aware that others are around
- Plan events/help others plan
- Ability to help solve problems not solve problems for people all the time
- Good listening skills
- Available
- Respectful of privacy

4: Are Intentional Communities Institutions?
- NO
- Exposes people with challenged opinions (about integration, limitations of people with disabilities) to a different way of thinking and doing things
- A positive tool to teach our community
- Different ways to realize intentional communities; can be older people; people with any kinds of needs; have empathy for other people’s needs as well; all end up helping each other
- Reduces silos of helping people with specific needs together
- Vision of society where everybody is respected and everybody’s voice is heard; great place to learn about respect, how to treat others; acceptance
- A great place to grow up and learn about these values
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Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Housing

- Discover things about yourself; learn skills or realize you have ones you didn’t know that can help you face your own challenges
- Place of building bridges and tearing down walls
- Teaches us things, help us grow as individuals, people have a common sense that it is a celebration to be together an to know each other; a sense of belonging, people are treasured, are missed when they are not there; spaces for people who aren’t necessarily easily welcomed elsewhere have a place where others are welcoming and see that they have talents and gifts to share
- What transpires from integration in society
- There are a mix of people
- Look out for each other and respect each other
- Everybody knows how things work, everyone takes ownership and everyone takes responsibility
- People have their own independent space
- People are connected, there for each other in good times and in loss
- People are learning to do things for themselves
- People have choices, circles of friends and a sense of belonging
- People can laugh with each other because we know each other well, and see each other on equal footing
- Shared values including re: equality, dignity, citizenship and ways we agree to live those shared values
- People will hear the success stories like the ones shared today and know it’s nothing like an institution
  - Need to be amplified to counteract negative perspectives
- No stigma, people are proud of where they live, buildings fit within rest of community they are part of, broader community is involved in the buildings
- Pride of home, not socially or geographically isolated
- High quality
- McGuire is home, don’t want to leave
- Anger that people would consider McGuire or Snow Goose institutions
- No one calls gated communities institutions
- Gated communities and condo complexes have many rules governing the behaviour and choices of the people who choose to live there, nobody would call them institutions for the affluent. May even have to meet certain criteria to live there (or even criteria to keep people out). Much more restricting and controlling than an intentional community
- I know what an institution is. I don’t live in an institution.
- No different than the common denominator for low income housing
- If passion and commitment continues, don’t see it ever devolving
- The fact that the buildings are well-managed and well-maintained doesn’t make them “institutional” in terms of how it affects the people living there (while being important and desirable characteristics)
  - People are served
  - Are elevated
- Intentional communities are all over the world, addressing a variety needs and none of them would be considered institutional
- It’s not organized around paid staff, the good neighbour model is organic. People are there because they want to be there
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Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Housing

- There is potential for any place where multiple people live to be run as an institution; it’s all in how it’s managed; if it continues to be intentional then it cannot be an institution.
- Essential that we continue to live by the principles underpin this model and pass them down to people involved in the future so that they remain sacrosanct.
- Nothing about me without me.
- People choose to come, and they can choose to leave.
- Based on self-determination and choice.
- The fact that people choose to live in a building that may have among its residents more than a 1:10 ratio of people with developmental disabilities should not negate because others have come up with an arbitrary right number.
- People are not paid, creating an equality disparity.
- While everyone, including good neighbours may have a need or needs that are being fulfilled by living in an intentional community, those needs are diverse.
- People are not socially or geographically isolated. Homes are part of established communities.
- I have freedom to come and go, freedom to live there or not.
- Pride in home.
- There is no “authority” with control over tenants.
- People have choice & independence.
- It is home to everyone who lives there (including good neighbours).
- Buildings are diverse.
- Connections are built beyond neighbours into broader community.
- I have complete control over my activities and schedule.
- Homes are of high quality with lots of visual appeal in desirable areas, not stigma inducing.
- People are connected to family and friends as much or as little as they choose to be.
- No hierarchy, power imbalance.
- Sense of belonging for self and others, people notice when you’re gone.
- Welcoming.
- Not a business or a social service.

Final Comments

- Wonderful thing that’s been developed here, enjoyed the day.
- Appreciate the viewpoint that nobody else should have the right to tell someone else where they can live.
- Have always wanted to have my own place to live, to be independent, to make friends. Has been a dream come true. Am so glad that it has helped my parents and my sisters as well. Am so thankful to Greg and my family for making this a possibility.
- Very glad to be a part of this, very inspiring to see.
- Very enlightening, good learning experience to meet people with different areas/levels of involvement.
- This whole project has been a testament to the saying: No man is an island unto himself
  - Would encourage those involved to keep working at it.
  - So helpful to families.
- Really enjoyed being involved, sharing my experience and meeting everyone.
-Thank everyone who came today.
- Enjoyed seeing the passion that people have to create intentional communities all over.
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Elmira’s Good Neighbours Approach to Intentional Housing

• Look forward to taking what we have heard back as we continue on our own adventure
• Have enjoyed being a part of model, year has gone so fast
• If there is anything that could be done (e.g.: information sharing; advocating with gov’t etc.) we should coordinate and do it to ensure that those in power are always aware of the value of what we have here and work to protect it in the face of any changes that might encroach on it
• Need to forget about how other people define institution, is irrelevant
  o Our model is based on choice, self-determination. We can call it whatever we want, it is what it is regardless of the name.
• Have had a lot of experience welcoming people home from institutions and this is nothing like that, although those places do still exist in Canada
• Grateful for the opportunity to have a conversation like this, to lean into it, explore it and learn from others
• Looking forward to reports etc.
• Have been on the edge of my seat the whole time after initially being unsure about how today would go. Have enjoyed everybody’s contribution. My sister has blossomed since being at Snow Goose
• Think we’re a lot better off than we were when we had institutions, hope we continue to move forward like we have here and never go back
• Will always be naysayers when you lead the back. Critical approach means you are doing something right
• If people who are criticizing are not creating vast amounts of housing at their 1:10 ratio then they are doing nothing more than harming the people that they say they are helping. We are with you, we have your back
• Day was filled with passion, emotion and learning opportunities; stood out from the kind of learning we usually participate in; This was the only concept out of all the housing strategy that caught the attention of important politicians. Believe this is only the beginning of a coming trend not a blip on the radar
• Hope that more students in the future will be able to experience the incredible opportunity that I have been a part of
• Think that this is something that appeals because it is so doable; impressed by the level of involvement by all different parts of the community and Greg’s ability to bring them all together
• Believe the Elmira community as a whole is a patron of the work done by EDCL and the housing corp (in the sense of those who used to support artists and craftspeople)
• Thanks for asking me
• Really excited to see the sharing that can come out of all the great work we have done, looking forward to other groups being helped by what we can tell them about our experience
• Excited to go back to my community and light a fire under some people to try and get things started there
• Glad to be a part of the day
• Really liked all the different perspectives
• Maintenance of intentional community requires intent. Fact that all the perspectives were included today is an example of that