



Neighbours at Vancouver's [Gather Round](#) Traffic Circle

RESILIENT STREETS TOOLKIT

THE HOW-TO GUIDE FOR
BUILDING COMMUNITY



**BUILDING
RESILIENT**
NEIGHBOURHOODS



All links listed in this publication are live in the digital version, found on our website at:

www.resilientneighbourhoods.ca



Welcome!



This toolkit is designed to help you and your neighbours start making your street, building or block more resilient through fun, hands-on projects. We focus on activities that can be done by small groups of people with few resources, because finding creative ways to do lots with little is a big part of what resilience is all about.

Of course, the many examples that we give are just that – examples. They are wide open to change, adaptation or complete re-invention. And ultimately, only you and your neighbours can decide what you'd like to do together and how you'd like to go about doing it. With this toolkit, we're simply hoping to inspire and assist you in any way we can!

Here's what's included:

- A brief introduction to resilience and resilient streets
- Inspiring examples of projects big and small done by neighbours
- A "Getting Started" guide with tips on making those first connections
- Links to further information, learning resources and free tools



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What is Resilience?

Many communities and individuals today face a complex range of social, environmental and economic challenges. From climate change and resource depletion to growing financial disparities and declining public health, we know what these challenges are, but often they can seem too big to solve. However, there is a common underlying factor in these challenges that we can begin to address, right in our own homes, buildings, streets and neighbourhoods: We can build greater social connectedness, connection to place, and sense of community and belonging that many of us yearn for so deeply.

Resilience is all about strengthening our community's capacity to respond and adapt to major changes and deep challenges. And at the heart of this ability for us to take action together lie our relationships with our fellow community members — the people with whom we live, work, and spend our time. And today, there is growing energy and spreading optimism surrounding the many ways – both traditional and innovative – that we have available to rebuild these social connections, recognize and celebrate our interdependence, and create greater local self-reliance together.

That's what this toolkit is for:

To help inspire us all about the kinds of changes that are possible and readily within our reach. Sometimes it seems overwhelming to try to change entire cities or nations to make them more resilient, but we can make changes in our own lives, and reach out and change our relationships with the people near us. Then, as we knit those connections together, we're soon changing our neighbourhoods, and then whole communities!

If you'd like to learn more about resilience, see our ["Characteristics of a Resilient Community or Neighbourhood – A Checklist"](#).

This short primer provides a concise introduction, and can also be used as an icebreaker for conversations among neighbours.



"Resilience is our ability to **respond and adapt to change** in ways that are **proactive, build local capacity, and ensure essential needs are met.**"



What are Resilient Streets?

The Resilient Streets program is part of the Building Resilient Neighbourhoods project, a collaborative effort to help create more resilient communities in British Columbia, Canada. www.resilientneighbourhoods.ca

One way that we can begin to make our communities stronger and more resilient is by making efforts to meet, nurture and strengthen the connections and relationships between our neighbours on the street where we live, or between our neighbours in our apartment, townhouse complex or condominium building. In a resilient street or building, people who live close to each other may, for example, have more social events to get to know one another better, start sharing tools, be more available to help each other with errands or during emergencies, or work on different issues or projects together.



In our experience,
“Resilient Streets”
are places where neighbours:

- Know each other and over time develop strong ties
- Share resources and other items (like tools, yards, sports equipment, kids’ toys etc.)
- Are available to help each other out in small or sometimes big ways
- Are able to cooperate and share leadership in street or building issues and activities



Celebrations & Gatherings

Parties are easy to organize and a lot of fun, but they're also a great way to build "social capital." In a relaxed setting, neighbours have the opportunity to share stories, learn about each other's concerns, interests and skills, and network. The next time they bump into each other, they already feel more comfortable and connected. That growing sense of closer connection between people who live near each other in turn becomes a vital building block for fostering resilient communities. And there's certainly more than one way to throw a party...

Food Nourishes Connections

Sharing food is always a great excuse to bring people together, and it lifts people's spirits and energy while they socialize. When one resident moved into Victoria's Fernwood neighbourhood, she went from door to door introducing herself and handing out invitations for soup at her home.

On the big day, over the course of a few hours, 40 people dropped by her home for soup! Many of the neighbours were also meeting one another for the first time, too, and they soon started to meet for more meals and connect in other ways, like to help each other with gardening and home improvement projects and chores. In an interview with *Huffington Post*, the original party's host said her neighbours aren't just friendlier: they're better prepared. "If there was a disaster," she said, "its our neighbours we'd turn to."

The Big Lunch is an international, annual celebration that focuses specifically on sharing food. Their website has great resources and how-tos centred around sharing meals with conversations that focus

on building community in neighbourhoods. The site also has information on holding a Lunar Lunch – a gathering during the evening that allows for people with daytime work schedules to participate, and that also permits practising Muslims to participate, since the Big Lunch is often held during the fast of Ramadan.

LINKS

[A video about the Fernwood soup party](#)

[A Big Lunch how-to](#)



A Potluck of Diversity

Potlucks are a tried-and-true way of bringing people together, and food is a kind of "universal language" that can be especially helpful for hosting parties involving people from diverse backgrounds who might not yet know what else they have in common. You can encourage people to bring foods that reflect their family's cultural or ethnic history, or invite neighbours to teach one another how to cook some of their favourite multi-cultural meals. The East Van GrubCrawl is a roving potluck in East Vancouver: Participants enjoy one course of a meal at one neighbour's home before travelling to the next neighbour's home for the next course.

LINKS

[Shareable's how-to for hosting potlucks that have a purpose](#)

[An article about building cross-cultural relationships](#)

[A video about bringing people from different cultural backgrounds together over food.](#)

[An article about the GrubCrawl roving potluck](#)

Throw a Party – On Your Government

In 2008, the municipal government of St. Albert in Alberta began encouraging residents to throw block parties in their neighbourhoods by providing easy online applications for free street closures, free activity kits and ideas, and even free food! By 2016, this city of 61,000 had hosted over 130 parties in 17 different neighbourhoods. Neighbours reported that the parties led to them feeling more connected and safer in their neighbourhoods. The program has been so successful that the government began to actively recruit and train “Neighbourhood Connectors” to go door-to-door meeting people and helping bring their neighbours together. Find out if your municipality or neighbourhood association provides any support such as posters, tents, equipment, or grants for street parties and neighbour connectors and, if not, send them information about the St. Albert program!

LINKS

[St. Albert Neighbourhood Network's Path to Neighbourhood Connection Guide](#)

[The City of Kitchener guide for neighbourhood events](#)



Porchfest

Remember when a home's front porch was a common place to socialize? The Porchfest music festival is held on the porches of the Fall Creek and Northside neighbourhoods of Ithaca, New York and has become such a hit that neighbourhoods in other cities have now started their own Porchfests.

Music genres range from classical and roots rock to country, reggae and punk, and bands play on their own or a friend's porch. Maps are provided so that people can walk or bike around the neighbourhood to catch all the bands. www.porchfest.org



Vertical Street Parties

People who live in apartment buildings or condos sometimes have to be creative in finding space for large community gatherings. In District Main, a 79-unit building in Vancouver, BC, the landlord took it upon himself to host three annual gatherings per year in the building's common areas. Events included a pumpkin carving contest, an outdoor movie night, and themed parties. These gatherings led to other initiatives like a communal wine rack and a closet set aside for sharing outdoor equipment. In other apartment blocks that may lack common space for gatherings, residents have chosen to host parties in nearby parks or beaches or around temporary, faux fire pits.

LINKS

[The District Main website
www.districtmain.com](http://www.districtmain.com)

[A how-to for hosting a campfire gathering](#)



Party with a Purpose

Have a “Party with a Purpose”: The Cool Neighbourhoods program of the Cool North Shore Society invites neighbours to get together to learn about reducing energy in their homes. Neighbours mingle, share food, and talk about their interests and experiences with energy reduction. Cool North Shore brings in experts to answer questions and provide feedback. Together the groups discuss and encourage one another to implement energy-saving measures from simple behavioural changes to installing better insulation and high-efficiency windows and furnaces. Of course, you could host a party for any particular “purpose” that you can think up!

LINKS

[A video about Cool Neighbourhoods’ “Party with a Purpose”](#)

[Cool Neighbourhoods
www.coolneighbourhoods.org](http://www.coolneighbourhoods.org)



Preparedness Parties

One group of neighbours in Ucluelet, BC threw an emergency preparedness-themed block party. People met over a barbecue to socialize and discuss how they could potentially help one another if a disastrous tsunami struck. The organizer provided information on grab-and-go emergency kits, evacuation strategies, and general preparedness, and neighbours learned who might need extra assistance in an emergency. San Francisco’s Neighborhood Empowerment Network has a toolkit full of ideas, including for parties centred around emergency preparedness. Many local governments offer free preparedness workshops that can be integrated into your block celebration, so find out if they offer this support in your community.

LINKS

[An article about the Ucluelet emergency-preparedness party](#)

[San Francisco Neighbourhood Empowerment Network’s Neighborfest Toolkit](#)



The Block that Plays Together...

There’s nothing like an outdoor game to bring neighbours together, and there are plenty of activities that are easy to organize and that people of all ages can enjoy – street hockey, basketball, sack and egg-tosses, shuffleboard, horseshoes, or chess or checkers tournaments are only the beginning!

LINKS

[A how-to for organizing a sports or game day](#)

[A list of fun team-building exercises that can easily be used by neighbours](#)



Join a Big, International Party

New Year's is fun partly because everyone already knows what it's all about, and lots of people are having parties at the same time. That's the idea behind events like Neighbour Day and 100 in 1 Day – these are annual, international movements to inspire neighbours to do activities on or around the same day that help connect them to each other and to the places where they live – from public art exhibits and outdoor games to urban gardening and pop-up bicycle repair stops. People post invites to their events on centralized websites and report back on what happened, generating a sense that neighbour connectors are all part of a bigger movement – which we are!

Of course, Canada's seasonal winter holidays are a time when many people are already feeling more sociable, and Patsy van Roost decided to put that to advantage one year by getting each of 23 of her neighbours in Montreal's Mile End neighbourhood to open their homes for a party on one of the nights between December 1st and 23rd. The immensely successful "23 Doors/Les Portes Qui S'Ouvrent" event got media coverage and van Roost was approached by other people to see if she would organize something similar in their neighbourhoods – but she naturally responded that organizing a neighbourhood event is best done by the neighbours themselves!

LINKS

[The Victoria Neighbour Day website](#)

[The City of Lethbridge Neighbour Day website](#)

[The 100 in 1 day website](#)

[A radio broadcast about the "23 Doors/Les Portes Qui S'Ouvrent" event](#)



Placemaking

Many community planners are starting to change how they think about designing places and spaces – and there are many ways that ordinary citizens can help these innovations along! For decades, streets have been mainly designed to help cars get through neighbourhoods on their way to somewhere else, while apartments have usually come with big parking lots and no communal spaces. That's not very resilient! It's important for a community to have vibrant places where people enjoy meeting, walking, sitting, shopping, hanging around or socializing. Together we can "reclaim our streets and buildings" with boulevard and rooftop gardens, impromptu parklets, street calming, a tire swing for all to share, micro-libraries, or other projects that help bring people together, make it more enjoyable for everyone to save energy spending time closer to home, and strengthen our collective "social capital".

[Read more about the value of placemaking](#)

Gardening – Condominium Rooftop Style

In 2012, a group of residents in a 14-story condominium in Vancouver's Olympic Village put a motion before their strata corporation to allow individual vegetable gardening spaces on their building's rooftop. So many residents loved the idea that they voted unanimously to create a massive communal gardening space. A small group of volunteers organized cleaning up the roof, getting soil,

purchasing seeds and doing the first plantings. Soon, many more residents were participating, while the inviting outdoor seating and tables led to lots of impromptu meet-ups and casual get-togethers. The residents then raised money to buy an industrial composter that began turning all of the building's food waste into usable soil. Today, residents often cook together at planting and harvest times, meet for gardening work parties, and host formal and informal events on the beautiful rooftop.

In a 2016 report on the project, one

resident commented that, "Our homes might be just 600 to 800 square feet, but because of this community and the people we have up here in the garden, it feels much, much bigger."

LINKS

[A video of the Olympic Village Condominium rooftop garden](#)

[Information on how to build a rooftop garden](#)



from: Guide to Setting Up Your Own Edible Rooftop Garden



Carlson Hui and Matt Cooke at the communal roof garden on the top of the James condo complex in Olympic Village. MARK VAN MANEN / PNG / Vancouver Sun

Gardening – Boulevard & Apartment Style

Not everyone owns the building or land where they live – but that hasn't stopped some renters from getting into communal gardening! One simple way is to turn those drab, publicly-owned spaces between sidewalks and roadsides into boulevard flower or vegetable gardens. Two residents started planting communal boulevard gardens in the Fernwood neighbourhood of Victoria, BC in 2007, and the "Haultain Common" has become a permaculture food forest and pollination corridor.

In East Vancouver, one landlord encouraged tenants in her Salisbury Drive apartment complex to convert the building's private lawn space into garden beds. She trucked in soil and the residents did the rest, creating both private and communal plots. Tenants started bumping into each other much more often in the garden, where they'd exchange produce and gardening tips. The developing relationships among the tenants soon led to other types of small and large get-togethers that had nothing to do with the garden, and a greater sense of community was created throughout the rental building.

In Montreal, Prévention NDG has added a great twist – they help connect seniors with years of gardening knowledge and youth who want to work and learn, so they can provide "mutual aid" to each other.

LINKS

[A video on planting traffic circles and corner bulges](#)

[The City of Victoria's guide to boulevard gardening](#)

[An article about Salisbury Drive](#)

[How Intergenerational Gardening can make a difference](#)

[A video about the creation of Haultain Common](#)



from: Victoria.ca - Boulevard Gardening

Paint the Neighbourhood Red! – Or any other colours...

On McCaskill Street in Victoria, BC, residents turned an old retaining wall from an eyesore into an eye-catching mural. The quirky result brought them all closer together and “branded” their street for visitors. Just a couple of neighbourhoods east, the Fernwood Neighborhood Resource Group holds an annual Pole Painting where artists and the neighbours who reside near particular electricity or street-light poles collaborate on developing art designs before painting the poles. Together, all of the uniquely painted poles bring a lively, colourful atmosphere to the streets. Sometimes such public paintings are even interactive: In New Orleans, one artist turned an abandoned house in her

neighbourhood into a giant chalkboard, asking a fill-in-the-blank question: “Before I die I want to___.” Her neighbours answers became a dynamic portrait of the community.

It’s also becoming common in cities for neighbours to paint and chalk art onto intersections, in alleys, pedestrian tunnels and playgrounds, and on the barren walls of businesses and community centres near where they live. These kinds of public art have been linked to increased neighbourhood safety as well. For example, in a poor neighbourhood in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Lily Yeh became tired of seeing trash littering her street, so she started picking it up herself. This drew the attention of local kids, then their parents, and before long many neighbours were involved in cleaning up the area, painting murals, and creating an “art park” in a vacant lot that became a symbol of the spreading sense of

neighbourhood pride. The City of Boulder, Colorado has developed a comprehensive guide called the “Paint the Pavement Packet” that can easily be adapted for use in any city and for any type of public painting project.

LINKS

[A video about an intersection painting project in Minneapolis](#)

[A video about the McCaskill Street mural](#)

[A guide to pole painting projects](#)

[A website that shows you how to build your own “Before I die” wall](#)

[The City of Boulder “Paint the Pavement Packet”](#)

[An article about the impact of “art alleys” on safety](#)

[The story of Lily Yeh](#)



(Re)Discover the Story of Your Street

One way to build a stronger connection to the places and people near where you live doesn't require making anything at all, but simply sharing knowledge and stories about yourselves and your street, building, or block. Residents in Vancouver's South Hill neighbourhood created an interactive online representation of their street where neighbours and visitors can click on a home or business and learn more about the people who live or work there. This can be done more easily with a simple online directory or, like the residents of the independent living facility Somerset House

by the Sea in Victoria, BC, do, in the form of a binder in the lobby that has pictures and short biographies of all the building's tenants and workers. More creatively, a group in the Newton neighbourhood of Surrey, BC collected stories and poems from their fellow residents and put it into a self-published book, and a Montreal artist posted a series of creative notes around the neighbourhood describing how particular places made her feel.

In a different approach, some neighbours organize group story-telling nights, start reading or discussion groups, or invite local experts to help them learn local history and answer questions like: When was our street first built? Who lived in the area

before the street was there? Are there any interesting architectural, historical, native or invasive plants, or First Nations landmarks along the street? This is especially interesting when older, long-time residents and younger, newer residents can share their different perspectives and experiences of the area with each other.

LINKS

[South Hill Community's interactive website](#)

[A news video about the Surrey neighbourhood-based book *We are Newton*](#)

[A how-to for hosting a storytelling event](#)

Creating Amenities on Private Land for Public Good

The residents of Clare Street in Oak Bay, BC turned underused spaces on their own private properties into vibrant meeting places. They've animated their street with homemade traffic signs and boulevard tire swings available for anyone's use, and some residents even moved their patio sets into their front yards to give neighbours somewhere to sit and chat together. In creative twists on this idea, some people put pianos in public parks or on their own front lawns to invite impromptu music sessions, while others have installed cob or brick



ovens for the neighbourhood to use. In one instance in Seattle, grandmothers in the Yesler Terrace public housing community set up lawn chairs at crime-ridden corners where they would knit and chat with passing neighbours and crime in those areas instantly dropped! One popular method for increasing "bumping spaces" and sharing at a street or building level is community book boxes, or little free libraries – simple constructs that are weather-proof enough to serve as a place to leave, store and take books. Some neighbours have also built bulletin boards, street-side benches, or even glass cases that feature ever-changing poetry.

Re-shaping Streets & Buildings

There are many ways to “take back our streets” (or buildings) with small, if slightly more ambitious construction projects. For example, a group of neighbours in East Vancouver created a “mini-park” in a traffic circle; the parklet acts as a traffic-calming measure and offers a table, artwork and well-tended plants. Neighbours collaborate to store a table and chairs, and then supply water and a kettle every summer Sunday when free coffee is donated by a local shop and offered to passers-by. An international movement has sprung up to encourage similar temporary “conversions” of street parking spaces.

In Toronto, ON, the StopGap Foundation helps build simple wooden ramps that make local businesses and other buildings more accessible for the elderly and people in wheelchairs. StopGap founder Luke Anderson points out that it’s something that any group of neighbours could do to increase accessibility to residences, community spaces and businesses on their street. “All the materials and the skill set exist in every community,” he says. “It’s just four pieces of wood.”

In Portland, Oregon, City Repair helps neighbourhood groups realize projects ranging from intersection painting to the construction of park



benches, pergolas, and even full-scale public buildings. Australia’s Smart Blocks program includes comprehensive advice, tips and strategies for assessing and improving the energy efficiency of condominiums, particularly the common areas. And in Dallas, Texas, Better Blocks helps neighbours organize events during which they paint bike lanes, make art or host art crawls, install temporary “pop-up businesses” in vacant buildings or squares, or throw a party with street performances. And in case you’re feeling like these bigger projects might be too ambitious to take on, SFBetterStreets has written a guide to building neighbourhood support for your project ideas, whatever they are!

LINKS

[A description of the East Vancouver mini-park](#)

[A video about the power of little free libraries](#)

[San Francisco’s parklet guides](#)

[A case study of solar panel installation as part of the Smart Blocks program in condominiums](#)

[StopGap’s ramp building toolkit](#)

[Better Blocks](#) www.betterblock.org

[City Repair](#) www.cityrepair.org

[SF Better’s Streets’ guide to building neighbourhood support for your project idea](#) www.sfbetterstreets.org

[An article about Clare Street](#)

[Sample little free library designs](#) www.littlefreelibrary.org

[Rethink Urban’s “10 Tips for launching a street piano in your neighbourhood”](#) www.rethinkurban.com

[The story of Yesler Terrace](#)

[How to build a cob oven](#) www.thecobovenproject.blogspot.ca

Sharing and the Local Economy

“Sharing economy” has existed since humans first gathered into tribes and cooked meals on big, community fires – and probably before then! Today, public libraries, public transit, car pooling, and canning bees are just a few examples of the legacy of humanity’s ancient communal roots. And recently, growing economic challenges, the high costs of land, and desires to reduce energy and resource use have led to a resurgence in interest in practices like tool sharing, work parties, and even micro-scale, pooled money lending. As you’ll see in these examples, even one simple sharing agreement between a few neighbours often attracts other people to join in, and soon leads to many other types of sharing until entire communal micro-economies can start springing up – sharing economies that deepen and broaden people’s social connections and lead to many other spin-off benefits for everyone involved!

[“Collaborative Consumption Groundswell” – the rise of the sharing economy](#)



Some things to consider about sharing with neighbours

Trust is key: Sharing is fundamentally about relationships of trust, and so it’s important to build clear understandings about expectations and responsibilities for borrowing, lending and other types of exchanges.

Proximity is a factor: People want to share with the people they live near, because it’s more accessible and there is usually more trust already in place.

Time, cost and durability are factors: It’s easier to start with items or services that are not too costly or time-consuming – and don’t break easily!

Privacy and safety are important: Some people aren’t comfortable sharing homes or child-minding services, for instance, until they are familiar with everyone involved.

Sharing is Easy – and Creates Community

You don't need any formal method or system for starting a sharing economy. For example, processing foods and cooking together are two time-honoured traditions – like neighbours in Brent, England who got together to make wine from the wild grapes growing in their area. And simply giving stuff away or lending it



is one of the easiest and most natural ways to get something going! Lots of folks appreciate being able to borrow something from a neighbour that they don't need all of the time, like a lawnmower, pressure cooker, sports equipment or camping gear. Sharing subscriptions to newspapers or magazines is also becoming more common. Sometimes just asking for or offering something is enough to start a sharing relationship among a few neighbours. Apartment building laundry rooms are often great places for people to leave freebies for one another.

Some neighbours become more ambitious and organize what are essentially street garage sales, but without any prices – people swap items directly, or simply leave some items that they no longer need and take others that they do. Shareable and similar websites have how-tos and information on the benefits of sharing everything from clothes, seeds, and cars to cows and chickens – and even outdoor refrigerators. Many communities now also have online “freecycling” groups for offering and receiving items.

LINKS

[An article about the wine-making project in Brent, England](#)

[Shareable](#) www.shareable.net

[A website about freecycling](#) www.freecycle.org



A Yardsharing Revolution

Many streets include a mix of buildings with big yards and buildings without any green space at all. So it's becoming increasingly popular for neighbours to do quick surveys and then link people who want access to gardening space with people who have yards and aren't using them. But the yardsharing revolution has gone much further than that!



In 1986, people living in two neighbouring houses in Davis, California tore down the fence dividing their properties. Neighbours joined in and other community-minded people deliberately purchased homes on the street when they came available. By 1999 there were no more fences left between the 19 houses on the block. And this simple shift in attitudes among the neighbours about their previously “private” backyards soon started shifting much more! The residents created a common green space that included a sprawling lawn along with orange and apple trees, garden plots, and a chicken coop.

Many of them began sharing meals, fruit and vegetables, helping one another with gardening, and taking on small projects together. Children played throughout the vast common area with their parents comfortably knowing that they were always safely within eyesight of neighbours. In 2005, the City of Davis officially recognized the block as the N-Street Co-housing project, which led to the building of larger secondary suites by some homeowners and the construction of a building for communal use with a laundry, large dining room, and space for meetings and events.

LINKS

[A how-to about sharing yards](#)

[A sample yardsharing agreement](#)

[A website that links people who want to garden with people who have yards to share](#)

[N-Street's website](#)

www.nstreetcohousing.org



Sharing Tools and Equipment

It's common for residents in rural Argenta, BC to share tools informally – and even purchase them together if there's going to be broader community benefit. For example, several residents purchased a chainsaw to help maintain some of the area hiking trails and paths that interconnect many of the homes. The chainsaw is kept in a private shed and anyone headed out to clear trails just checks in with the owner first, while the shed's owner maintains the saw in exchange for being allowed to use it for personal projects.

If someone on your street has a section of garage they aren't using or a toolshed, that can become a place where all the neighbours store the tools, sports equipment or other items that they're willing to share, while a simple sign-out sheet can help keep track of where things are. Or if you're in a condominium or apartment, maybe there's a storage locker that could be set aside for an equipment library. Larger groups of neighbours

might benefit from a more formally structured approach: A non-profit, volunteer-run library in Esquimalt, BC offers access to over 500 donated and salvaged tools. Memberships range from \$50-100, and just like a book library, items can be reserved and checked out for a set amount of time, while fees are charged for overdue items.

LINKS

[Victoria Tool Library](#)

www.victoriatoollibrary.org

[An article about challenges and solutions for creating tool-sharing neighbourhoods](#)

[Tips on how to start a tool library](#)

www.sharestarter.org/tools



Skills Exchanges

Anne Slepian went door to door in her area of Arlington, Massachusetts, asking people what skill they had that they might be willing to offer in a skills exchange. Her neighbours volunteered everything from guitar lessons to childcare. Anne wrote it all down on a four-page document that she copied and handed out to all of the neighbours. But it soon became clear that nobody was using it because they didn't know each other – so Slepian organized a potluck where everyone wore a nametag labelled with one of the skills they wanted to swap, and that's when the project really took off. "Once people got to know each other," Anne said, "they were more inclined to call each other."

Recognizing elders as assets reminds us that it can be worth specifically reaching out to seniors during such efforts, because, though they may not still be working they often have decades of accumulated experience and knowledge that can bring substantial benefits to any skills exchange system! Similarly, skill and knowledge sharing is

often especially rich for everyone when deliberate efforts are made to bring together neighbours from different cultural backgrounds.

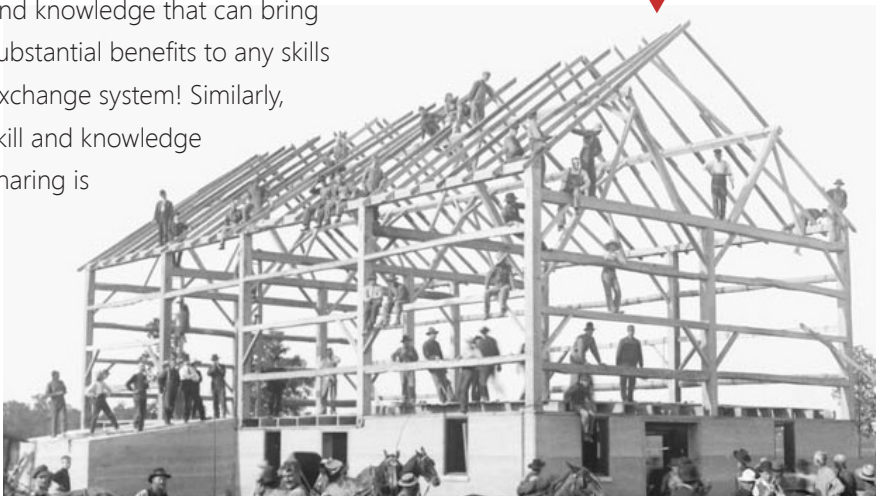
A more elaborate method for skill sharing is creating a "Time Bank", where people agree to exchange an hour of their labour for an hour of other people's labour – whatever the type of labour – and exchanges are tracked in a central registry.

LINKS

[An article about Anne Slepian's skills swap](#)

[Directions on creating a skills inventory](#)

[A video about people engaged in skill and knowledge sharing](#)



"Barn-raiser" Renos

In a modern form of the traditional "barn raiser", one resident in Oakland, California spearheaded what ultimately became the Maxwell Park Neighborhood Home Improvement Group. After 30 neighbours responded to a simple post on a neighbourhood email list about the idea of helping each other with home renovations, they got together and organized themselves into work-groups with roughly equal distributions of skills, tools, and abilities. The groups then worked on one member's home each month, rotating households in an agreed-upon order. The person whose household was receiving the work that month was responsible for organizing all of the needed materials and notifying members about which tools to bring, as well as for providing lunch for everyone. Together, the residents painted houses, constructed fences, built gardens, and installed mosaic paths and much more!

LINKS

[A how-to article about Maxwell Park's home improvement group](#)

[A how-to for starting a community work group](#)



Group Buying

One group of people living in a multi-unit building in Toronto, ON pooled their resources to lease a car for communal use. They drafted an agreement for joining or leaving the group and split all of the main costs, and then each person paid for the gas they consumed during their time using the car. It was so successful that, after some members moved to other parts of the neighbourhood, they decided to adapt their agreement to park the car at alternate homes each week.

Bulk buying – especially of less perishable food items – is another popular form of group purchasing that neighbours can easily do together. There are many wholesalers and distributors willing to sell and deliver larger quantities of food to small groups of people. The ordering and delivery systems are usually easy to set up and provide a significant savings.

Similarly, one of the best ways to prepare for emergencies in your building or on your street is to take this kind of a sharing-economy approach. It can be invaluable to have a list of essential tools, assets, skills and other resources that could be needed after a disaster, while being able to obtain and share these things among your neighbours. See the Learning and Changing Together section of this toolkit for more on that!

LINKS

[An article about the Toronto car-sharing project](#)

[A how-to for setting up a shared ownership agreement](#)

[A video about how to set up your own food-buying club from Live Green Toronto](#)



Gift and Lending Circles

In a gift circle, people gather over food and conversation, and then each person offers something that they would like to give others, and describes something that they need – such as items, services, skills or anything else. One group of neighbours in Toronto set up a gift registry to help a family of new immigrant refugees in their neighbourhood and raised \$50,000 for clothes, furniture and more.

A relatively low-risk way to actually lend and borrow money among neighbours is to start a lending circle. Members of the group pool some of their money, and allow each other to borrow from the pool for a period of time at zero interest. Ideally, each person gets their turn to borrow, of course!

LINKS

[An article about a neighbourhood gift registry for immigrants](#)

[An article about setting up gift circles](#)

[Information about lending circles](#)

Neighbours Networking

One sociable neighbour knocked on every tenant's door in their three-story walk-up apartment building on Fort Street in Victoria, BC and gave out invitations for a cocktail-and-snacks get together at her apartment. The party was so successful that the tenants decided to set up a private group on Facebook, and this simple online page quickly began to function like a dynamic, interactive apartment bulletin board for arranging more parties, sharing items, helping each other with errands or during emergencies, and much more. And safety problems in the building disappeared as turnover in the increasingly community-minded building dropped to nearly zero!

At a bigger scale, Abundant Communities Edmonton began in 2013 when Howard Lawrence, a resident of Edmonton's Highland's neighbourhood, went from door to door introducing himself. He asked

about his neighbours' hobbies, how they liked to spend their time, and what their skills and abilities were. He put this information into a database and within weeks, the neighbours were using the database to form parenting support groups, find nearby babysitters and yoga classes, get together for gardening and walking, help each other during emergencies or on building projects and share tools and skills. More neighbourhoods joined, the local government became involved, and today the database software is available for free download.

Every day there are more popular websites, online databases and apps that are specifically designed or are easily adapted to facilitating diverse forms of communicating, helping and sharing between neighbours. Some are specifically designed for people living in apartments or condominiums such as MyCoop. Others such as Lotsa Helping Hands connect people who want to help with people looking

for support for errands like preparing meals or getting to medical appointments. It all depends on what kinds of technology you and your neighbours are comfortable with, what you'd like to use the tools for, and whether you're willing to pay a little for extra features. But you can start by doing something as simple as facilitating easier group communications by sharing email addresses or phone numbers!

LINKS

[A video about Abundant Communities Edmonton](#)

[An in-depth ACE webinar](#)

[Go Neighbour interactive platform](#)

www.goneighbour.org

[Lotsa Helping Hands](#)

www.lotsahelpinghands.com

[My Coop](#) www.mycoop.com



Learning Together for Change

Ongoing learning with an eye towards innovative social change is an essential foundation of resilience. And when neighbours set out to learn together – whether in a short, one-time event or through a longer-term project – it builds deeper social ties that can produce many unforeseen spin-off benefits and set the stage for taking collective action on issues as well. From learning about home energy efficiency to exploring the “inner transitions” and shifts in attitudes, beliefs and values that are required to truly change our relationships and society in enduring ways, there are many fun and engaging projects and programs designed to bring neighbours together to strengthen resilience!

Transition Streets

Transition Streets is an education-and-action program where neighbours learn about and explore ways of reducing energy use and saving money. Working together occasionally over a period of some months, neighbours examine five topics: local food, water use, energy use, transportation and waste/consumption. Individuals and families then identify the actions they wish to take in each area to increase their resilience and help each other complete them.

A group of neighbours on McCaskill Street in Victoria, BC participated in a Transition Streets program. While following the program helped them achieve significant energy reduction, it also produced many unanticipated spin-off benefits. One of the leaders of the group said that he'd lived on the block for

15 years and while he knew his neighbours he'd never had anything concrete to engage them with. Having the Transition Streets curriculum gave him the reason and the courage to reach out, and from there much more happened. Above is some of what emerged from the McCaskill Transition Street.

McCaskill Transition Street:

8 households

4 energy audits

2 new heat pumps & Improved insulation

Improved laundry & dishwasher use habits

More bike & public transit use

New low-flow toilets, shower heads & rain barrels

Increased gardening, local food buying, a group buying

Tool sharing

Teaching each other skills

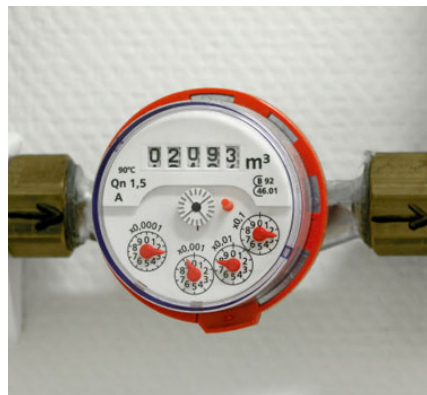
A new sense of community on a street where no one knew each other before!

LINKS

[The Transition Streets complete course](#)

[A video about the McCaskill Street Transition Streets project](#)

[More information about Transition Streets: \[www.transitionstreets.org\]\(http://www.transitionstreets.org\)](#)



Emergency Preparedness

Emergency preparedness experts in most cities, towns and rural areas advise that when a disaster like an earthquake or tsunami hits, all of the standard responders like fire, police and hospital personnel are usually overloaded. At times like that, neighbours need to be able to help each other! Recognizing this, one woman in Burlingame, California hosted a get-together with her neighbours to discuss their preparedness, and that seed has since grown into a city-wide initiative and interconnected grass-roots emergency response system. Now, many households in Burlingame have lists of contact information for people who live in their neighbourhood including what resources they have that might be useful in an emergency, and neighbours meet regularly to socialize and swap preparedness information. The Burlingame Neighbourhood Network's website provides many tools and resources for learning and preparing, including tips for organizing and running initial meetings, downloadable forms and checklists to keep track of what you and your neighbours will all need and where to find these things, basic first aid instructions, and drill scenarios.

The Get Prepared program in Wellington, New Zealand similarly provides an outline for making those crucial first connections and

developing the planning and social cohesion that neighbours will be able to rely on during an emergency. Their 10-step guide helps you and your neighbours work through what you'll need and how to go about getting prepared. Many local governments have similar kinds of locally-tailored preparedness programs, kits, and tools that can be used for collaborating with your neighbours on preparedness.

LINKS

[An article about how the Burlingame Neighborhood Network got its start:](#)

[The Burlingame Neighborhood Network's resources for neighbours](#)

[The Wellington Get Prepared program](#)

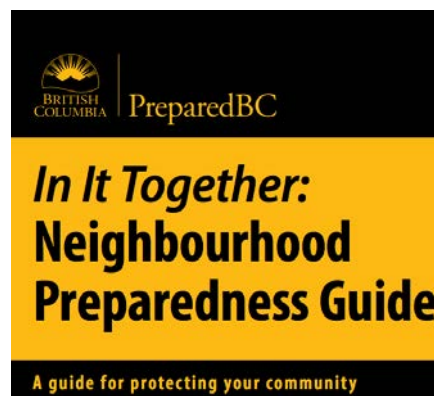
[PreparedBC's In It Together: Neighbourhood Preparedness Guide](#)

Block Watch

Block Watch (or Neighbourhood Watch) is a program that is overseen and assisted by local police departments, where neighbours come together to learn more about how to create safer communities with less crime. Neighbours learn to network and proactively watch out for each other, their homes and their neighbourhoods. Increasingly, Block Watch "captains" are recognizing that reductions in crime come hand in hand with greater social cohesion and pride of place, and so activities in some Block Watch programs are expanding to include more placemaking efforts, outreach to isolated and vulnerable neighbours, and social events.

LINK

[Block Watch](http://www.blockwatch.com) www.blockwatch.com



Community Theatre & Arts-based Engagement

Do a lot of creative, playful folks live in your block or building? You might want to try some arts-based engagement! As part of Building Resilient Neighbourhoods' pilot project in Victoria West, Victoria, BC, a group of people who shared both an interest in their community and a quirky sense of humour were trained in theatre and physical comedy techniques by community-based theatre director Will Weigler. They then collaboratively developed a short comedy show called "Laughing Allowed! – The Slapstick World of Neighbourhood Activism" that explored the "rewards, pitfalls and pratfalls" of neighbourhood volunteering. During the training period, show, and post-show conversation with the audience, people continually remarked on their renewed sense of the vital roles of artistic creativity and humour in building resilience. After it was over, one participant even took clown noses to give to everyone to wear at the meeting of their community organization to liven things up!

While mounting a play is ambitious, just bringing a group of neighbours together for a craft workshop, improv training, or a music jam session where spoons and bucket-drums are allowed can be a fun way to deepen connections with people who might not participate in more 'serious' projects.

LINKS

[Videos of Laughing Allowed! – The Slapstick World of Neighbourhood Activism](#)

[Laughing Allowed! – A How-to Guide for Making a Physical Comedy Show to Build Neighbourhood Resilience](#)

[ArtBridges' database of how-to resources for using the arts to do community engagement](#)



Talking Circles, Resilience Circles and Inner Transition

Talking Circles, Resilience Circles and Inner Transition groups usually draw members from beyond any one street, building or neighbourhood – but it's also easy to create such groups with a few neighbours who are interested in sharing their feelings and perspectives and developing closer ties.

Resilience Circles involve small groups of people coming together to increase their personal security through learning, mutual aid, social action, and community support, all with an eye to increasing collective resilience. The Resilience Circle Network has produced a seven-session guide that includes tips on choosing topics, facilitating conversations so that issues get explored deeply, and employing inclusive techniques so that everyone gets to participate. Discussion topics might

include, for example, how to deal with feelings of isolation, ways to rebuild our communities, or moving from powerlessness to empowerment in our lives.

Inner Transition groups are part of the international Transition Town movement, and often include experiential elements alongside discussions. People participating in Inner Transition groups might discuss a book about living more compassionately, host a guided visualization workshop led by a First Nations elder, bring in a speaker who critiques social norms and conventional attitudes in relation to the natural environment, or provide each other with emotional support or advice for navigating the difficult challenges of daily life while trying to contribute towards positive change. The Totnes, UK Inner Transition group, for example, ran a "speed dating event" in a popular public market where they paired passers-by to sit and share their points of view with each other on a highly polarized political issue – but

only after giving the participants' tips on speaking and listening with an open mind and heart! Some of the participants described the experience as touching, perspective-changing and transformative.

Talking circles are a traditional First Nations approach to learning and conversation that encourages respect and sensitivity towards others. A sacred or symbolic object is usually passed between participants in the dialogue. The practice of ensuring that everyone who is holding the object gets to speak for as long as he or she needs to without interruption can bring much more depth, nuance, diversity of perspective, inclusiveness and a sense of completion to conversations about important shared issues.

[The Resilience Circles website](http://www.localcircles.org)
www.localcircles.org

[The International Transition Network's page on inner transition](#)

[Transition Town Totnes' Inner Transition group page](#)

[An introduction to facilitating First Nations' Talking Circles](#)



Getting Started Guide

So you like some of these project ideas that you've been reading about, and want to see one of them happen in your building or on your street – Great! That's exciting! But what now? Sometimes this is the hardest part, but it's also the most rewarding. It's time to reach out to your neighbours!

Suggestions for First Steps



If you're feeling a little nervous about reaching out to those neighbours whom you don't know, that's perfectly natural. In fact, surveys have shown that most people would like to know their neighbours better, but feel this same nervousness about breaking the ice – so rest assured when you go through the effort of reaching out to them, your neighbours will really appreciate it!



If you already have emails or phone numbers for your neighbours, that can make getting going really easy. Generally, though, it's most effective to make a personal, face-to-face connection by walking right up and knocking on neighbours' doors. See the "Tools for Getting Started" section for conversation icebreakers or messages that you might leave behind.



Maybe you don't know all your neighbours, but do you know one or two of them a little? And maybe they know one or two others. So consider asking a couple neighbours to help you make those initial connections with other neighbours.



Invite your neighbours for a "party with a purpose" and share a "menu" of possible activities. See what interests or excites people and where the energy is. Use this toolkit or some of its links to videos or resources to stir learning and discussion.



If you're feeling passionate about a particular project or activity, just go ahead and start trying to make it happen in collaboration with your neighbours – many people appreciate right away having a specific focus and reason for connecting.



What We Know About What Helps People Stay Involved

Often there is a lot of initial excitement, and then the energy in a group fades a little. Here are some things we've learned about what helps people stay engaged:

GET CONTACT INFO

Make sure to get contact information for everyone and share it around so that different kinds of connections and activities can happen outside of formal meetings.

INVENTORY SKILLS

Get everyone to share information about their backgrounds, knowledge and skills because, until they do, people often don't realize all the different ways that they can learn from and help each other!



ROTATE HOSTS

Rotate who hosts get-togethers, provides food, takes minutes, chairs meetings, or leads activities so that no one person feels that they are 'doing it all'.

BE INVENTIVE!

This toolkit is certainly not a complete list of everything neighbours can do together, and there are many more things that haven't been tried. Periodically touch base about what interests your neighbours have, and collaborate to come up with activities that excite you all.

BE FLEXIBLE!

Some people like to focus on doing hands-on, practical projects, others enjoy discussing ideas, and still others most want to socialize and really get to know others personally. Some like to engage in structured activities, and others just want to participate only if and when they feel inspired. So try to find a balance that allows everyone to participate in the ways that they're most attracted to.



GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Create space at meetings and social events for general group sharing of updates from people's lives, because this in turn creates opportunities for spontaneous networking and mutual aid to emerge.

BE ADAPTIVE!

Everyone's circumstances are different, and those circumstances can either limit participation or stimulate opportunities for action and change. Is there any chance your apartment manager might allow the lobby to be used to host a tenant get-together or turn a parking spot or two over for mobile garden plots? Can a meeting time, place or process better accommodate neighbours who are single parents with children, immigrants with language difficulties, or elderly people with mobility limitations? Can a project to make the street safer be adapted to also make the street more green, beautiful, and welcoming?



Tools for Getting Started

Our online Resilient Streets Toolkit provides other resources that can help you take the initial step to connect with your neighbours and decide on a project for your street or building. You can download the following free tools on the Building Resilient Neighbourhoods website at www.resilientneighbourhoods.ca

RESILIENT STREETS FLYER

Want to explain to your neighbours what this opportunity is all about? You

can use this flyer to provide an introduction. Drop it in your neighbours' mailboxes with an invitation to an initial gathering, or use it as a handout when going door to door.

RESILIENT STREETS BLANK INVITATION/POSTER

Print this invitation/poster, grab a black marker, and fill in the details to invite your neighbours to a Resilient Streets gathering at your house.

RESILIENT STREETS CHECKLIST

This is a tool you and your neighbours can use to help think about

how resilient your street, building or community is now, and to think about what types of Resilient Streets projects might be a good fit. You can also use the checklist as a discussion starter for thinking about what is most important to people or what people have in common.

ONLINE LEARNING RESOURCES

Our website provides links to many other organizations, examples and tools related to resilience building.



All links in this publication are live in the digital version, found on our website at:

www.resilientneighbourhoods.ca

Contact us at:

info@resilientneighbourhoods.ca

