

SHEDD Webinar #2 Summary

Title: Built Environment Stories from Group Homes

Date: January 28, 2022 12:00pm – 1:30 pm

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For information on SHEDD and to access the tool: www.toolSHEDD.ca

About SHEDD

Successful Housing Elements and Developmental Disabilities (SHEDD) began as a research project to identify key elements of housing design and construction (e.g., materials, space) that can help to support people labeled with developmental disabilities and exceptional behaviours that challenge.* The SHEDD tool was developed to promote built environments that can improve the wellbeing and community participation of adults with developmental disabilities. Further information about SHEDD can be found at www.toolSHEDD.ca

The current project is funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Connection Grant (2021-2022) and aims to:

1. Share information about the SHEDD research and tool;
2. Make connections and share ideas about housing design with self-advocates, families, housing design and planning professionals, developmental service professionals and researchers; and,
3. Identify future research collaborations and ways to improve the SHEDD tool.

** Our team uses the term 'behaviours that challenge' to emphasize that behaviours such as self-harm, aggression, and property damage are forms of communication that may challenge people such as caregivers who provide support for people labeled with a disability.*

What was the *Built Environment Stories from Group Homes* webinar about?

This was the second webinar of a four-part series that will help to make connections and share ideas about improving built environments, such as the physical characteristics of homes and universal housing design. This webinar included:

- Two videos of families discussing how important the built environment was for a family member with developmental disabilities;
- A presentation from Vita Community Living Services describing a home renovated to create a comfortable space for residents with behaviours that challenge;
- A presentation from Reena Homes describing the design and construction of a purpose-built home for behaviours that challenges; and,

- A panel discussion where the presenters answered audience questions.

Who were the presenters?

Moderator:

- Yani Hamdani, PhD; Assistant Professor, Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University of Toronto; Clinician-Scientist, CAMH

Panelists:

- Chanelle Salonia, M.A., BCBA; Director of Clinical and Educational Services, Vita Community Living Services and Mens Sana Families for Mental Health
- Gabriela Severino, CYC; Supervisor, Vita Community Living Services
- Simon Sodhi, HSC, RSSW; Direct Support Supervisor, Reena

Family Video:

- The parents of a resident at Vita Community Living Services describe their son's transition to a new home.
- A resident living in a Reena home and their parent describe the current home and their process of finding housing.

What was presented?

Presentation 1: [Vita Community Living Services \(Vita CLS\)](https://vitacls.org/) (<https://vitacls.org/>)

Vita Community Living Services (Vita CLS) is a not-for-profit organization that supports adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as complex mental illness. Vita Homes include independent living apartments, apartment style housing, and group residences across the Greater Toronto Area.

- The presenters discussed a recent project in which they renovated a home to meet the needs of people with behaviours that challenge.
- An interdisciplinary team was created to ensure safety, community involvement, and quality of life were at the forefront of planning and development. The goal of this team was to utilize a person-centered behavioural lens to build a home with a stable and supportive environment. They highlighted the following considerations for purpose-built housing:
 - Accessible location to medical services and community programs;
 - A deep understanding of each person, keeping their preferences, wishes and needs in mind when creating spaces and environments within the home;
 - Previous placements should be reviewed to identify what worked well to support the person, and what failed to meet their wishes and needs;
 - Building layouts should include shared and private spaces; and,
 - Frequent communication with the person and their family was necessary to understand preferences.

- The house has six personalized apartments, each with a bathroom, bedroom, and living room. Each unit was created specific to the person's sensory and behavioural preferences and needs.
- Environmental modifications continue as preferences and needs change. Some environmental modifications included:
 - Recessed lights/fire alarms with protective casing;
 - Recessed toilet tank, shower head, and vents;
 - Shut-off valves outside of bathrooms;
 - Commercial-grade bathtubs;
 - Seamless baseboards;
 - Medium density fiberboards for walls; and,
 - Non-slip ceramic bathroom floors.
- The renovated home resulted in:
 - Reduced instances of physical aggression;
 - Decreased medication interventions (i.e., use of PRN or 'as needed' medications);
 - Increased coping and communication skills;
 - More quality time with visitors/family members; and,
 - Residents feeling that they were finally in their permanent and forever home.

Presentation 2: [Reena](http://www.reena.org) (www.reena.org)

Reena is a nonprofit organization that supports people with intellectual and developmental disabilities through a variety of programs and services, including housing, within a framework of Jewish culture and values.

- The presenter discussed a purpose-built home for behaviours that challenge created in 2017 for residents from a previous Reena home.
- The Reena team considered safety, sensory stimulation, accessibility to indoor and outdoor spaces, and quality of life when deciding on elements for the new home environment. Some examples of elements incorporated into the new residence were:
 - Private spaces for each resident (bedroom, bathroom, dining area) in addition to communal spaces;
 - Air exchange system for improved circulation;
 - Fully accessible bathrooms, elevator, chairlifts;
 - Safe spaces for emergency services;
 - Weighted and rounded tables and couches;
 - Beds secured to the floor;
 - Sticky decals to decorate walls rather than framed photos or art;
 - Tankless water system;
 - Industrial appliances to withstand frequent use; and,
 - High fences for backyards.

- Another important aspect was the involvement of family and caregivers in planning for the home. Prior to moving in, families were able to visit the home, provide ideas about how their family member might benefit from the space and how to decorate and personalize the units.
- Neighbours were invited to tour the house in order to learn about their new neighbours and the concept of the house. They were very welcoming to the new residents.
- The purpose-built home resulted in:
 - Significant decrease in medication interventions (i.e., decreased PRN use);
 - Fewer aggressive behaviours;
 - Fewer fire alarm pulls and calls;
 - Residents spending more time engaging in skill-building and community participation; and,
 - A notable impact on staff who experienced fewer incidents and injuries, reported less work-related stress, and took less time off due to physical or emotional fatigue.

How can the SHEDD tool help with housing planning and design?

The SHEDD tool provides information about:

- Design considerations: Let's look at the building (inside and out): How bright is it? How big are the rooms? How is the outdoor space used? Is the environment contributing to self-injury, aggression towards others or destruction of physical property?
- Design principles: Where are the rooms located? How do people use the space? Is the space accessible and comfortable? What colour are the walls?
- Design modifications: What are some specific suggestions for living areas, kitchens, bedroom, and bathrooms? Are locks in high-risk areas needed?

Who can use this tool?

- People labelled with a disability, people who care for them, and people who design and care for the buildings in which they live. This includes self-advocates, families, housing planners, builders, architects and building managers.
- The tool can be incorporated into universal home design elements for everyone.

Where can you find this tool?

You can access the tool for free on www.toolshedd.ca

Panel Discussion and Audience Q&A

Question: **What were some of the materials that were used to prevent destruction, decrease agitation, and reduce overstimulation?**

Answer:

- Bathroom flooring was poured epoxy compound.
- Shower faucets included hydrostatic mixing valves that regulate the outlet temperature of water to ensure the water is not too hot.
- Windows are made from tempered and laminated glass with blinds embedded between the glass.
- Doors are fire-rated.
- Tubs and washing machines are industrial grade.
- Polycarbonate beds for hygienic purposes.
- Automotive vinyl covering for couches that are puncture resistant.
- Non-permeable laminate flooring that looks like wood but is much more resilient.

Question: **Please describe the financial aspects of purpose-built housing.**

Answer:

- This type of project can cost up to \$500,000, plus the cost of staffing.
- Vita CLS and Reena utilized grants, funding from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, as well as community fundraising to fund these projects.
- For families who are looking for financial support, there are some options, such as Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) after 18 years of age. Families can access information about housing and funding through Developmental Services Ontario (DSO).
- The developmental service sector also funds a group of Housing Navigators who speak with individuals, families, and agencies about housing solutions.

Question: **How is flexibility considered in the design of the home if the resident/family moves out or leaves the area, or are the built environments considered “universal design”?**

Answer:

- The units are very individualized. Built environment modifications can be changed as behaviours that challenge change.
- If a resident chooses to leave, the organization will try to match the unit to find someone with similar preferences and needs, but ultimately the units are tailored to each person.

Question: **How many staff work in the homes and are staff there 24/7?**

Answer:

- At Reena and Vita CLS, each resident with their staff was transitioned into the new home one at a time.
- Each resident has different needs which might look like 3:1 or 2:1 support.
- Residents had more staff in the beginning and this was reduced following the transition.
- The aim is 1:1 support for each resident.

Question: **How did you get neighbours involved when building the homes?**

Answer:

- Team members from Reena and Vita CLS connected with the municipality, fire, safety, and worked with the Ministry (MCSS) from the start.
- Neighbours were very open to learning about the residences.
- Supervisors introduced themselves to neighbours to explain the home. Neighbours were very open to learning about the residences.

Question: **Is there a plan or possibility of having these design elements included in some of the government housing funding programs so families/agencies can include them in mainstream funding for affordable housing solutions?**

Answer:

- The [4th webinar](#) (estimated for end of April 2022) will introduce and discuss policy more broadly. The SHEDD team is always interested in sharing what they have learned with self-advocates, families, agencies, builders, housing planners and designers, policymakers and others.