

Neighbourhood Houses in Metro Vancouver www.nhproject.ca

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE

BY MAYA REISZ & SEAN R. LAUER

Funded by SSHRC (Grant No: 435-2012-1276), the NHIMV project explores the contributions of neighbourhood houses to local communities. Neighbourhood houses have a long history of operation in Vancouver, dating back to 1938. They began as part of the Settlement House Movement made famous in North America by Jane Addams and her work at Hull House. While time and distance have created differences to that early model, the houses remain neighbourhood-based, locally governed, multi-service, community development oriented organizations. Visit www.nhvproject.ca for more information.

This research brief examines the social nature of neighbourhood houses. We look at social ties in regard to recruiting new members and the importance of social activities in regard to participation at the neighbourhood house. As part of the NHIMV project, we conducted survey research in February and March of 2014 at 15 neighbourhood houses located in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Respondents were recruited through requests made on the premises of the neighbourhood houses on randomly selected days, in order to reach a target population of all neighbourhood house users in the Metro Vancouver area. In total, we collected questionnaires from 687 users.

The Social Life of Neighbourhood Houses

A neighbourhood house is a touchstone of social life for the community. Getting involved in and participating at the neighbourhood house is built on and builds relationships with family, friends, and neighbours. These include recreational activities, workshops, and programs based around art, culture or food.

Holiday celebrations and festivals are an important part of the social life of a neighbourhood house. A year's festivities may include a Chinese new year, a Diwali celebration, or other events reflecting groups in the community, large and small. Diverse groups also gather around popular activities such as morning tai chi or regular potlucks. Neighbourhood houses also welcome people to gather comfortably and casually outside of scheduled programs. It is not uncommon to see members helping themselves to some tea or coffee and chatting with the front desk staff, parents exchanging information while

their children attend programs, or seniors gathering together before a hot lunch.

This informal social atmosphere, alongside the many other cultural and recreational activities provided, make neighbourhood houses unique and vibrant places where people can strengthen and build a social life.

Key Findings

A total of 65% of our respondents learned about the neighbourhood house through family, friends or neighbours, and 59% have also recruited new members to join the neighbourhood house.

Social activities are the most popular aspect of the neighbourhood house among all our respondents, particularly for those who were recruited through family, friends, and neighbours.

Neighbourhood Houses in Metro Vancouver www.nhproject.ca

Table 1. 10 Most Popular Programs and Activities at Neighbourhood Houses

	Total		Recruitment			
	Never	Once or More	Family, Friends, Neighbours		Other	
<i>Please consider how often you used or volunteered for each of the following</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Once or More</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Once or More</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Once or More</i>
Socializing with friends*	37	63	32	68	47	53
Festival/celebration or other special event*	42	58	37	63	52	48
Recreational activities*	45	55	38	62	58	42
Arts and cultural programs*	55	45	52	48	62	38
Workshops	56	44	54	46	61	39
Food programs	57	43	55	45	61	39
Health education	66	34	63	37	70	30
Leadership and volunteer opportunities	69	31	70	30	66	34
English language and literacy programs	69	31	67	33	74	26
Drop in services, such as classes on computer use	71	29	68	32	75	25

All figures shown are percentages. * Differences between recruitment type are statistically significant.

The Two Way Street of Recruitment

Recruitment to a neighbourhood house is social. When asked how they learned about their neighbourhood house, 65% of our sample said it was through a family member, a friend or a neighbour. This recruitment is not a one way street. Our respondents also commonly recruited new people to join the neighbourhood house through their own ties. A total of 59% of our respondents stated that they have recruited a person to visit or get involved in the neighbourhood house.

Participation in Social Activities

Table 1 shows the 10 programs and activities that our respondents were most likely to participate in last year. The three most popular are primarily social activities: socializing, festivals and celebrations, and recreational activities. These are also the most popular programs among those recruited by family, friends, and neighbours. For instance, 62% of respondents that were

recruited through social ties participated in recreational activities, compared to 42% of others.