

Connections and Engagement

A Closer Look



The benefits of neighbourliness

A neighbourhood is so much more than a geographically localized area. It is the place we call home, where our children play, and where we have the most invested financially and emotionally. If we care about any place in our community, it would normally be our immediate neighbourhood.

One of the most surprising findings from our 2012 metro Vancouver Survey on Connections and Engagement was that so few people visit their neighbours. Only about one quarter of survey participants had a neighbour over to their house or apartment in the past 12 months. The same small percentage was invited to a neighbour's home during the same time period.

And patterns of neighbourhood connections are pretty much set after a few years. People who have lived in their neighbourhood for 20 years are no more likely to socialize with neighbours than those living in the neighbourhood for three years.

Does connecting with your neighbour really matter anymore? More than you might think!

Key findings

- 74% know the first names of at least two of their immediate neighbours
- 40% speak to a neighbour once a week or more
- 73% have not asked a neighbour over in the last year
- 72% have not been asked over to a neighbour's place
- 57% have not done a neighbour a favour, like picking up their mail or newspapers while they're away
- 46% say the reason they don't know their neighbours is that they rarely see them
- 36% say they have little interest in getting to know their neighbours or that they prefer to keep to themselves.



The more we know each other, the stronger we are

We lead busy lives. We work hard and sometimes commute long distances. We have families to care for and errands to run. Who has time to socialize with the neighbours? We hardly ever see our neighbours, thanks to automatic garage door openers and locked-down apartment towers.

There will always be people who prefer to keep to themselves. They are content with the occasional wave across the fence or smile in the elevator.

But our survey found significant benefits to connecting with neighbours in more than just a superficial way.

This is backed up by other research that shows that when neighbours know and trust each other, streets are safer, people are healthier and happier, our children do better in school, there is less bullying and less discrimination. We are simply better off in many of the ways that matter.

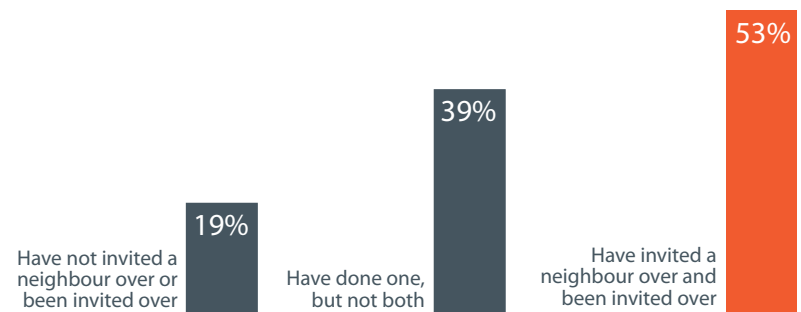
Having the neighbours over

We asked people if, in the past 12 months, they had any of their immediate neighbours over for dinner, a barbeque or some other kind of get together. We also asked if their neighbours had them over.

- 69% had not done either of these things
- 10% had done one or the other but not both.

This left 21% who had done both. This is the group that really stands out — the people who invite neighbours over and are invited back.

This group shows the **highest levels of neighbourhood trust** and **the most optimism** that ties in their neighbourhood are growing stronger.



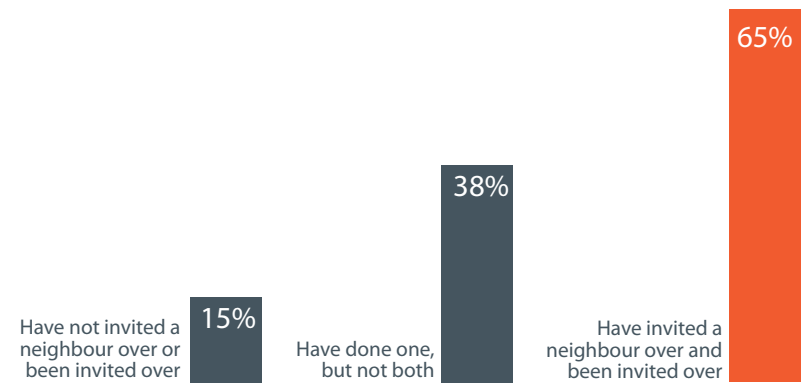
Percentage who agree that the ties in their neighbourhood are growing stronger



Doing neighbours a favour

It also turns out that neighbours who get together, and especially those who reciprocate by asking each other over, are far more likely to do simple favours for each other, like picking up the newspapers or mail while the neighbours are away.

They are also much more likely to have been left a spare key by a neighbour, or to know where the spare key is in case of an emergency.

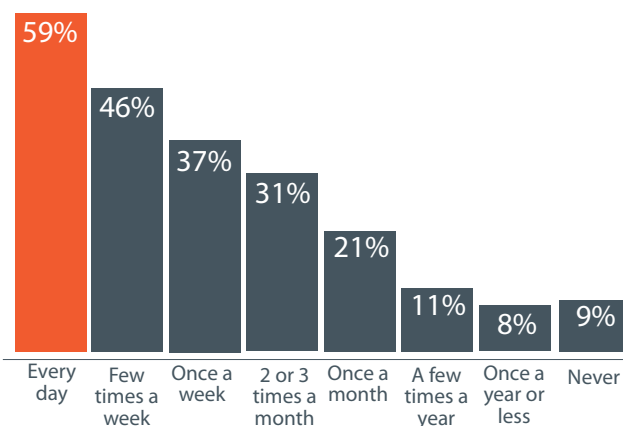


Percentage who have been left with a neighbour's spare key or know where a neighbour's spare key is

Trust matters

Trust is a key factor driving these large differences in actions and attitudes. When strangers living in close proximity become trusting neighbours, then trust can 'jump the fence' and spread to the larger community. Care and compassion can grow when people trust one another. People can set aside their differences and work together to solve small, local problems like cleaning up a park, or large, complex problems like poverty and homelessness.

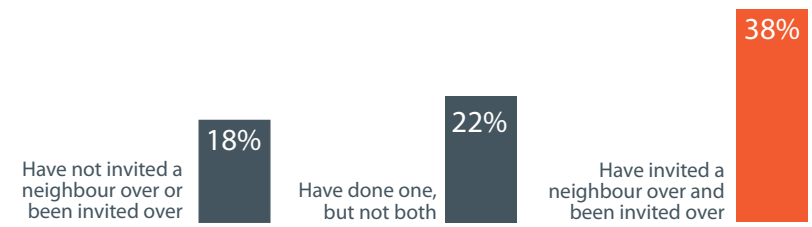
Our survey shows that trust is higher when people socialize in one another's homes. But even smaller interactions have a significant impact on trust. Just talking to neighbours on a regular basis makes a big difference.



How often people talk to their neighbours has a direct result on their belief that the ties in their neighbourhood are growing stronger.

Reciprocal relationships lead to greater involvement

Neighbourly relations — especially the reciprocal ones — are associated with other forms of neighbourhood and community engagement. People who have had neighbours over and have been invited over by their neighbours, are also most likely to have participated in a neighbourhood or community project in the past year, and to have attended a neighbourhood or community meeting.



Percentage who have, in the past 12 months, participated in a neighbourhood or community project

We thought all these differences may simply be due to how long people have lived in their neighbourhoods. But that's not the case. There is no significant difference in habits, whether people have lived in their neighbourhoods for fewer than five, or more than 20 years. The differences seem to stem from the kind of neighbour people want to be — separate and distant, or connected and engaged.

Stories

There are so many great stories about people connecting and engaging for the greater good. We are happy to support amazing projects that build bridges between people, turn strangers into neighbours, and strengthen community. Eleven-year-old Nathan is an origami kid and stealth community nurturer. Read how he helped build community with a \$60 Neighbourhood Small Grant from Vancouver Foundation.

www.vancouverfoundation.ca/origami-kid

Share your ideas on how to connect and engage or tell us your personal stories at info@vancouverfoundation.ca

About this publication

A Closer Look is a series that explores, in more detail, some of the interesting findings from our Connections and Engagement Survey released June 2012. The survey and analysis was done by Sentis Market Research, who interviewed 3,841 people across metro Vancouver.

The full survey report is on our website at: www.vancouverfoundation.ca/connect-engage

vancouver
foundation

Web: vancouverfoundation.ca
Email: info@vancouverfoundation.ca
Facebook: VancouverFdn
Twitter: @VancouverFdn

SENTIS 
measuring what matters

Web: sentisresearch.com
Email: ad@sentisresearch.com
Tel: 604.566.8912
Twitter: @SentisResearch

July 2012



Vancouver Foundation, 2015

© 2015 by the Vancouver Foundation. *Connections & Engagement Closer Look: The benefits of neighbourliness* is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>