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CONNECT & ENGAGE

A SURVEY OF METRO VANCOUVER / 2017



vancouver
foundation

Foreword

When I joined Vancouver Foundation in 2013, two things immediately struck me about the organization and our work, which spans the province. The first was the extensive network of donors and volunteer advisors who choose to work with us to help make their local community “healthy, vibrant and livable.” The second was the impact our 2012 Connections and Engagement report was having on Metro Vancouver and on the discourse of what it means to be part of this community.

The report sparked enormous activity and conversation. Our own programs were shifting to address the challenges of building “bonds and bridges” within and between communities. Our partners began launching their own programs, using the findings of our study to enrich their own work and refine their organization’s role as a community builder. The media cited the report frequently in conversations that tried to explain, interpret or understand what it means to live in today’s rapidly changing urban metropolis. Our donors and volunteer advisors were energized by the findings, and wanted to address them.

But when the headlines today are dominated by the opioid crisis, record-breaking wildfires, rising inequality and escalating homelessness, do our feelings about “connections” and “engagement” really matter? Our answer, and the one we heard from community in 2012, is a resounding “yes”. We made a promise to check in five years later, and the results, overall, are reassuring. Yet at the same time, there are areas of concern. While some groups fare better than expected, others continue to be more vulnerable to social isolation.

Our new report continues the conversation we started in 2012, revealing more about who is experiencing these issues, and stimulating ideas about the work still to be done. But what it should lay to rest is any conversation about whether it “matters”. People in Metro Vancouver say it matters; therefore, as their community foundation, it matters to us.



Kevin McCort
President and CEO, Vancouver Foundation



What do we mean by
“connection” and “engagement”?

Connection

means our relationships with others and the strength of those relationships.

Engagement

means our commitment to community and the willingness to take actions to solve problems or participate in activities that make our community better.



Five years ago, our Connections and Engagement report revealed some challenging findings. We described Metro Vancouver as a hard place to make friends, our neighbourhood connections as cordial, but weak, and a declining level of participation in community life.

INTRODUCTION

We believe that strong personal connections contribute to more resilient neighbourhoods, which result in healthier and more vibrant communities.

Five years ago, our Connections and Engagement report revealed some challenging findings. We described Metro Vancouver as a hard place to make friends, our neighbourhood connections as cordial, but weak, and a declining level of participation in community life.

Since then, we've taken part in a growing conversation about social isolation and loneliness, focused on our own programs and initiatives, and watched as non-profits, municipalities, and other organizations turned their attention to this issue.

Our 2012 report helped us understand more about something we often hear – that our connections in Metro Vancouver tend to be more superficial than deep. But while our report established a useful benchmark, it raised even more questions. Who experiences greater feelings of social isolation? What do they think would help them overcome the obstacles to forging deeper connections? And how can we work together to build stronger communities that include everyone?

In 2017, we wanted to dig deeper. Our new report revisits some old themes to see if anything has changed, but it also explores new lines of enquiry to expand our understanding. We continue to measure the strength of

residents' connections and engagement at the personal, neighbourhood, and community level, but we also look closer at the barriers and opportunities people identify, and search for opportunities to move beyond the issues and catalyze action.



Photo by Lorraine Boogich

As a community foundation, our motivation is to incorporate this deeper understanding into our work building stronger communities across Metro Vancouver. But we know we're not alone. As we deliver our 2017 report, we ask ourselves the question, "Who can we work with to build a more connected and engaged community in Metro Vancouver?"

We hope it is all of you.

“Connecting and engaging are not just personal challenges – it is up to all of us to create the community connectivity and supportive conditions that enable everyone to thrive. Let’s weave the ties that allow us to enjoy each other’s company, adapt, and lean on each other in times of need. Let’s also shape our physical, political, social, legal, economic and cultural context to support connecting and engaging.”

— Dr. Vanessa Timmer, Executive Director, One Earth



OUR APPROACH

Our understanding of connections and engagement is built on some core principles we've developed through years of working to build healthy, vibrant, livable communities.

- We believe that both the strength and number of our social connections influences the resilience of our community.
- We believe that if some of us experience weaker or fewer connections, the overall strength of the community is impacted.
- We believe that even those who feel well connected can benefit when everyone's sense of belonging is enhanced.

- We believe that our social and physical environment – including government policies, physical infrastructure, cultural and educational institutions, economic systems, and our natural environment, influences our ability to connect and engage.

We also understand connections and engagement on three different levels – personal, neighbourhood, and community. We believe that strong personal connections contribute to more resilient neighbourhoods, which result in healthier and more vibrant communities.

OUR GOALS

In 2012 we asked ourselves the following question: “What can we do to help build a more connected and engaged community in Metro Vancouver?”

It's still the right question for us to ask. But to help us answer it in more detail, our 2017 report aimed to:

- Measure how connected and engaged residents are in Metro Vancouver, and build on our 2012 findings.

- Understand more about who may be experiencing stronger or weaker social connections.
- Further explore the barriers to being more connected and engaged.
- Look for opportunities to move beyond the issues and catalyze action.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was administered by Mustel Group and completed online in either English or Chinese by 3,785 Metro Vancouver residents between June 15th and July 7th 2017. The final sample was weighted to match Statistics Canada census data on the basis of gender, age, and region of residence. Some responses included ‘select all that apply’ or ‘select up to three options’. Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding and ‘prefer not to say’ responses.

While the 2012 survey combined online and telephone data collection methods, the 2017 survey was conducted exclusively online, recruiting participants from an online panel and via the Vancouver Foundation website. As a result, any comparisons between the two surveys use 2012 online data only, which may differ slightly from the numbers published in our 2012 report. Focus groups were also conducted post-survey to provide a deeper

understanding of the themes and issues highlighted by our survey findings.

LIMITATIONS

Several steps were taken to ensure the sample of respondents is representative of the population, but the findings may not be generalizable to the entire adult population of Metro Vancouver.

All sampling methodologies have certain limitations; online surveys include individuals who have opted in to participate in market research, and therefore there may be certain populations that are underrepresented.

KEY FINDINGS

The summary below introduces our main findings, while the following chapters of our report dive deeper into each of these themes.

1

In many ways, people feel the same about the strength of their connections as they did five years ago.

Across several measures in our survey, the results are similar to 2012. Approximately two-thirds still report a sense of trust among neighbours, feel welcome, and experience a sense of belonging. But around half continue to find it difficult to make friends, and too many – approximately one in four – still find themselves alone more often than they would like.

2

Fewer than one-in-five Metro Vancouver residents experience loneliness often, and the overwhelming majority have someone to depend on.

Overall, loneliness rates are lower than expected – just 14% of residents say they feel lonely often or almost always. In comparison, nine-out-of-10 report having someone they can depend on, and four-out-of-five know at least one neighbour well enough to ask for help. This is heartening news.

3

Those experiencing weaker connections have clear ideas about how to make new friends, and are open to expanding their circle.

While people tend to share the same barriers to making connections, some experience these barriers more acutely, and for one-in-five this means not knowing any neighbours well enough to ask for help. However, our survey also reveals that those who are more likely to experience these issues – particularly young adults and people in low-income households – have clear ideas about how they would like to make new friends, and are open to expanding their circle. A promising finding to act on.

4

Residents are less active in community life today compared to five years ago.

Participation in almost every community-related activity has dropped since 2012. As a community foundation we're concerned, but we still see grounds for optimism. Three-quarters of residents take part in some way to make their community a better place to live, with popular activities including picking up litter, shovelling snow, and lending each other tools or kitchen items. Does this simply mean that the ways we participate in community life are changing?

INGS

5

People still prefer connecting in-person to interacting via technology.

Our survey shows that residents of every demographic prefer to connect with each other in-person. Less than one-in-five feel they spend too much time with technology, and more than half use technology to connect with people and friends in the community.

6

Neighbours want to get to know each other better through social gatherings, community festivals, and community projects.

Most people want to get to know their neighbours better – even more so among those that have lived here for the shortest period. Events such as social gatherings, festivals, and participating in a local project are the most popular ways for neighbours to meet and form connections.

7

Most people are satisfied with where they live, but many still expect to move on soon.

Although three-quarters of residents indicate they are happy with where they live, about half either expect to move in the next five years, or are simply unsure of what the future holds. The main reasons people expect to move include affordability, wanting more space, downsizing, road congestion, and to be closer to friends and family.



PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

We're heartened to find loneliness rates are lower than expected. But to build stronger communities we must look closer at why some of us feel less connected.

WHAT WE ASKED

Personal connections bring meaning to our lives. We explored the state of our personal relationships, and searched for insights into who feels connected and how residents can develop meaningful relationships with each other.

In 2012, our survey revealed that one-quarter of respondents reported spending more time alone than they would like. Our analysis, and the significant media coverage that followed, made a connection between time spent alone and loneliness.

But in the years since, we've often asked ourselves a critical question: "Is finding yourself alone the same as feeling lonely?" In 2017, we asked people to tell us more about how often they feel lonely, and how satisfied they feel with the amount of time they spend alone.

Our family and friends are our most important personal connections. Our 2012 survey showed us that almost a third feel it is difficult to make new friends in Metro Vancouver. We were curious if this perception had shifted over time, and wanted to know more about the obstacles people identify when building friendships. We also wanted to better understand the strength of our existing connections, and what people think would make it easier to make new friends.

In an age of digital connections, it's easy to measure our personal network in terms of likes and followers. But does technology hinder our ability to form deeper connections? We asked people to tell us how they prefer to connect with each other, and if they feel spending too much time with technology takes them away from in-person relationships.

WHAT WE HEARD

Fewer than one-in-five Metro Vancouver residents experience loneliness often, and the overwhelming majority have someone to depend on. Overall, people report much lower rates of loneliness than expected – only 14%

report feeling lonely 'often or 'almost always'. In fact, a third (34%) report never feeling lonely, while half (50%) experience feeling lonely only occasionally.

Who spends time alone more often than they would like?

All Metro Vancouver residents <small>BASE</small>	23%
Age 18 to 24	31%
Not employed	36%
Household income \$20K to <\$40K	37%
Household income <\$20K	47%

QA9. Do you find yourself spending time alone more often than you would like?

Total respondents = 3,785

ARE WE LONELY?

14%

report experiencing loneliness 'almost always' or 'often'

57%

are spending the amount of time alone that they would like

86%

have close relationships that provide a sense of emotional security and wellbeing

91%

agree they have people they can depend on for help



QA10. How often do you feel lonely?
 QA9. Do you find yourself spending time alone?
 QA6 To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements (B - I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotion security and wellbeing.)
 QA6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements (A - There are people I can depend on to help me if I really need it.)
 Total respondents = 3,785

Who experiences loneliness often?

All Metro Vancouver residents <small>BASE</small>	14%
Age 25 to 34	23%
Household income \$20K to <\$40K	23%
Not employed	26%
Age 18 to 24	30%
Household income <\$20K	38%

QA10. How often do you feel lonely?
 (Answer='Almost Always' or 'Often')
 Total respondents = 3,785

The results for spending time alone are similar. The majority of people (57%) feel they are spending the amount of time alone they would like, while 18% would actually prefer to spend time alone more often.

Compared to our 2012 survey, the proportion of people who report finding themselves alone more often than they would like stayed the same – still a significant share at approximately one-in-four (23%). This does not, however, mean that they describe themselves as “lonely.”

Metro Vancouver can still be a difficult place to make new friends, but an overwhelming majority have someone to depend on. In 2012, we found that 31% of respondents agreed it is “difficult to make new friends here”. In 2017 we asked, “How easy do you find it to make friends in the city you currently live in?” The results were similar. While 44% of people report that making new friends is easy, half (50%) find it difficult.

But are there people we can depend on to help us if we really need it? The answer is “yes”. An overwhelming majority of Metro Vancouver residents – 91% – agree that there are people they can depend on to help them. In addition, 86% report that their close

relationships provide a sense of emotional security and wellbeing.

Some residents are more likely to experience weaker social connections, particularly younger people, those living in low-income households, and those who are not employed. Compared to an average loneliness rate of 14% among all Metro Vancouver residents, 38% of people with household income of less than \$20K report feeling lonely either ‘almost always’ or ‘often’, followed by 30% of people age 18 to 24, and 26% of people who are not employed. These groups are also more likely to report spending time alone more often than they would like, and those between the ages of 18 to 24 (60%) and 25 to 34 (67%) also report greater difficulty making new friends.

Those experiencing weaker connections have clear ideas about how to make new friends, and are open to expanding their circle. For residents of Metro Vancouver, the most common obstacles to getting together with friends include work or school obligations (48%), not having enough time (40%), family obligations (32%), being too far away (32%), personal finances (20%), and feeling overwhelmed or stressed (18%). These obstacles are experienced more acutely

IS TECHNOLOGY DRIVING US APART?

60%

prefer connecting with others
in-person

55%

of residents use technology to
connect with people and friends
in the community



17%

believe they spend too much time
with technology, and that it takes
away from in-person connections

QC11. Which of the following describes your views of
technology including: social media, connecting with
people online and mobile cell phone use?

Total respondents = 3,785



CASE STUDY

PLAN Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network

PLAN uses an asset-based approach to develop personal support networks for people with disabilities. Staff identify the gifts of an individual, and then carefully explore their community to help them meet new people who share similar gifts and interests.



CASE STUDY

Emergency Preparedness Block Parties

Residents across Metro Vancouver have begun organizing block parties, BBQs, and other gatherings to strengthen connections among individuals in the context of earthquake preparedness. These informal occasions not only connect people in good times, they enhance the resilience of the community in the event of an emergency.

among people age 18 to 24, of whom 76% say work or school obligations prevent them from spending time with friends, 45% report being too far away, and 29% feel overwhelmed or stressed.

Five things people think would make it easier to make new friends include finding people with similar interests, more personal time, people being friendlier or more approachable, more community or common spaces, and having more financial resources. Compared to all Metro Vancouver residents, younger people and those living in low-income households are more likely to select some of these top five over others.

Many people believe technology helps to increase their connections, but most still prefer to connect in person. Half of all residents in Metro Vancouver feel that online technology increases their connections to others, while only 19% believe it decreases their connections. When selecting preferred ways to stay connected, 60% choose in-person, followed by 19% who prefer text messaging, 15% by phone, 14% by email, and 9% via social media.

Most people report feeling comfortable with the amount of time they spend online – only 17% feel they spend too much time with

technology and that it takes away from in-person connections. This proportion rises to 28% for people age 18 to 24.



Photo by Stacy Rigets

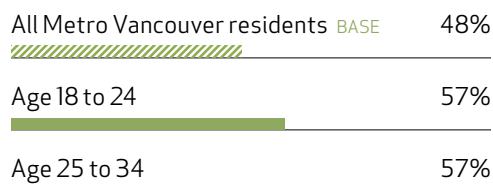
Residents age 65 to 74 were the most likely to report using technology to connect with people and friends in the community (62%), closely followed by people age 18 to 24 (61%), compared to an average of 55% for all residents.



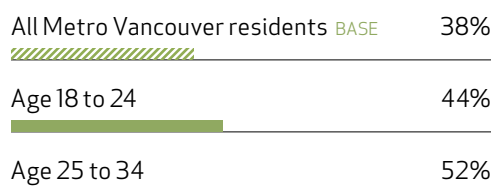
Photo by Stacy Rigets

WHAT WOULD MAKE IT EASIER TO MAKE NEW FRIENDS?

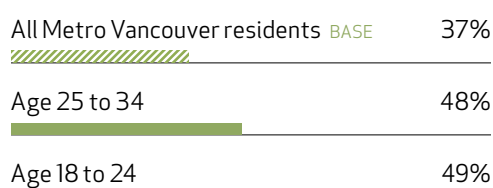
Finding people with similar interests



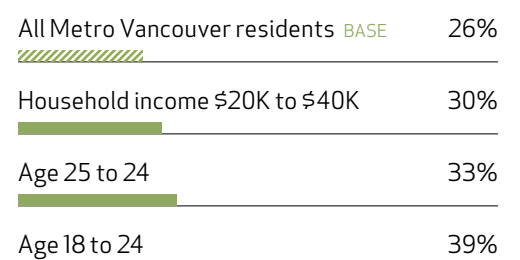
More personal time



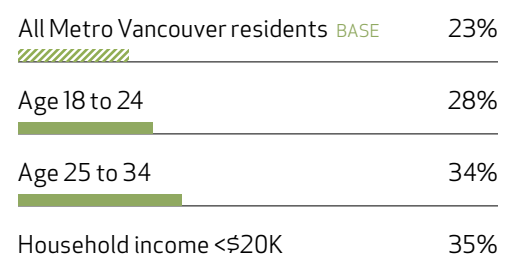
People being friendlier or more approachable



More community or common spaces to connect



More financial resources



QA3. What would make it easier for you to make new friends in your city or town?

Total respondents = 3,785

WHAT THIS MEANS

We believe that meaningful personal connections are the primary building blocks of healthy people and strong, resilient communities.

We're heartened to hear that fewer than one-in-five Metro Vancouver residents experience loneliness often. Indeed, most residents in Metro Vancouver report feeling lonely only occasionally, or never. We're also encouraged to find that the older residents we surveyed report the lowest levels of loneliness, are least likely to report spending too much time alone, and find it easier to make new friends.

However, too many people are still experiencing more time alone than they would like. We're concerned that younger people and those in lower income households seem to experience greater social isolation. Our survey doesn't tell us exactly why, but seems to suggest that work, school, and family obligations, transportation issues, financial constraints, and time pressures all play a role. Whatever the reason, we believe our communities are stronger when everyone is included.

Most of us are looking for people who share the same interests, for ways to create more personal time, for a friendly approachable face, for more shared community spaces to connect in, and need sufficient financial resources to join in. Our findings show that people who report the weakest connections – particularly young adults, and people in low-

income households – have clear ideas about how they would like to make new friends, and are open to expanding their circle.

People still prefer connecting in-person to interacting via technology. Our survey shows that residents of every demographic prefer

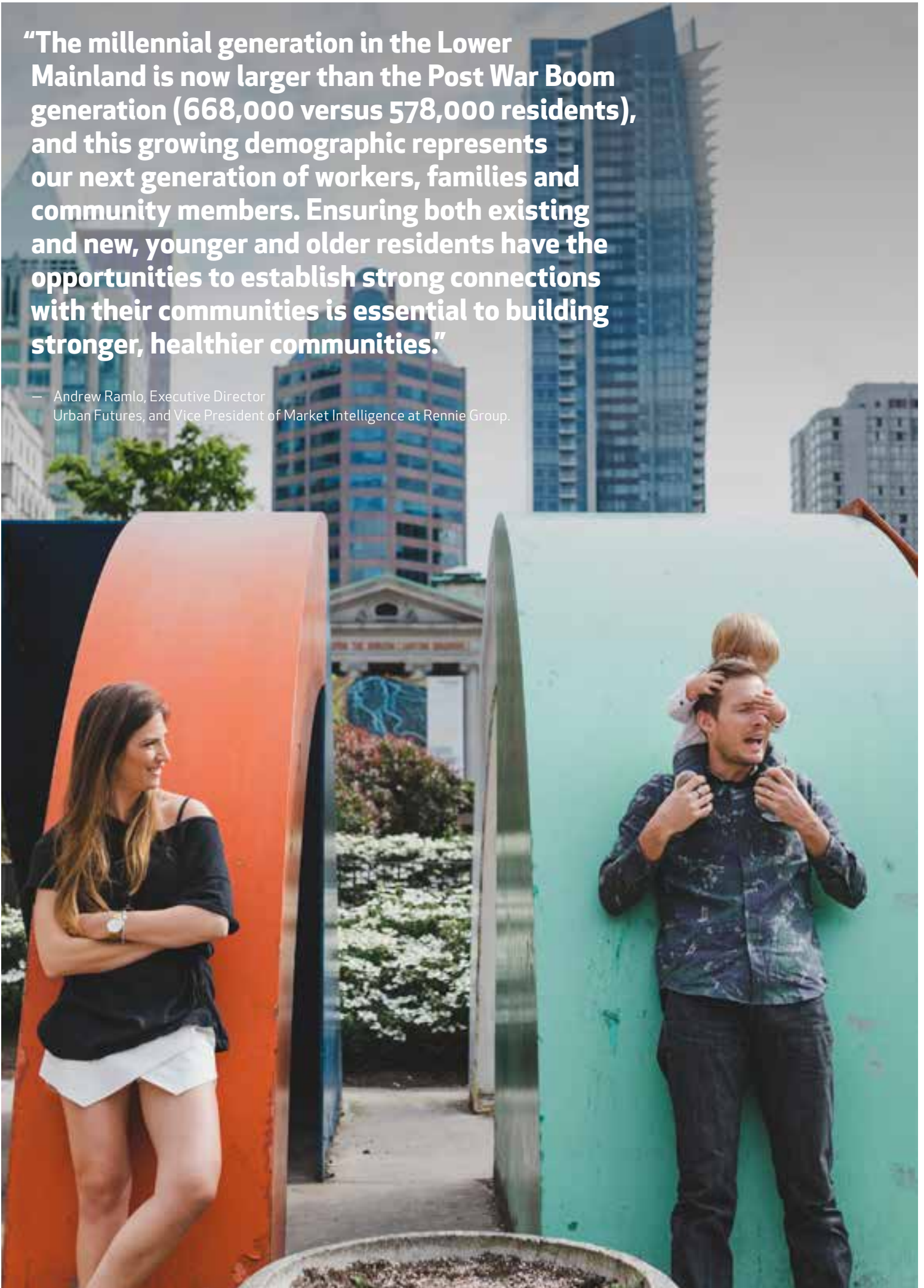
“I'm quite close to my neighbour on one side. I think she's 82 years old, and she's lived there forever. She's very active and she drags me out swimming all the time. She sits in the ocean every day, and if she goes in, I have to go in too.”

— Indigenous Focus Group Participant

to connect with each other in-person. Less than one-in-five feel they spend too much time with technology, and more than half use technology to connect with people and friends in the community. We're curious about the relationship between technology use and connections, and encourage others to continue to examine its influence in more detail.

“The millennial generation in the Lower Mainland is now larger than the Post War Boom generation (668,000 versus 578,000 residents), and this growing demographic represents our next generation of workers, families and community members. Ensuring both existing and new, younger and older residents have the opportunities to establish strong connections with their communities is essential to building stronger, healthier communities.”

— Andrew Ramlo, Executive Director
Urban Futures, and Vice President of Market Intelligence at Rennie Group.





NEIGHBOURHOOD CONNECTIONS

Our neighbourhoods can be welcoming places and we're open to deeper connections. Now it's time to extend the invitation to everyone.

WHAT WE ASKED

There is something unique about our relationship with the people who live on our block, in our building, or down the street. We believe in the value of knowing you can knock on someone's door to borrow kitchen ingredients, garden tools, or just to ask advice, and we wanted to understand how to strengthen this feeling for everyone.

In 2012, we asked people if they feel welcome and a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood. We asked this again in 2017, but we also wanted to dig deeper into the strength of our connections with neighbours. We asked how

well people know their neighbours, and if they can rely on them for help.

We were also keen to find out if people want to know their neighbours better, and if so, what kinds of things they would like to do together. We hoped this might inspire us – and others – to come up with new ideas to help neighbours form stronger bonds.

Finally, we asked people why they moved into their neighbourhood, if they are satisfied with where they live or if they are planning to move away – and why. We were also curious to know if people trust their neighbours, and how this compares to how much they trust strangers.

WHAT WE HEARD

Many people feel welcome in their neighbourhood and have a strong sense of belonging, particularly residents age 55 and over. Overall, approximately two-thirds (64%) of Metro Vancouver residents report feeling welcome in their neighbourhood and a sense of belonging. Compared to our 2012 survey result of 68%, this proportion has dipped slightly.

Older residents report a stronger sense of feeling welcome and belonging compared to

the average, rising to a high of 84% among residents age 75 and over.

Those less likely to feel welcome or a sense of belonging include those who have lived in Canada for 10 years or less (46%), people age 18 to 24 (46%) and 25 to 34 (50%), people from households with income less than \$20K, or those living in a suite in a house (51%) and people not employed (54%).

CAN WE COUNT ON OUR NEIGHBOURS?

88%

know at least one neighbour
by name

79%

know at least one neighbour well
enough to ask for help

47%

know three or more neighbours well
enough to ask for help

63%

believe a wallet or purse containing
\$100 would be returned by a
neighbour with the money inside

1/5

people do not know any neighbours
well enough to ask for help

2/3

of people who have lived in Canada
for 10 years or less want to get to
know their neighbours better

QB2. Approximately how many neighbours do you
know the names of?

QB9. About how many people in your neighbourhood
do you know well enough to ask for help if you
needed it?

QB4. If you lost your wallet or purse containing \$100
dollars. How likely do you think it would be returned to
you, with the money inside?

A) If it was found by one of your neighbours?

Total respondents = 3,785

QB10. Would you like to get to know your
neighbours better?

n=133



Photo by Avi Prasad



Most residents talk to their neighbours regularly, and know between three and four neighbours well enough to ask for help. Most people in Metro Vancouver have conversations with their neighbours at least monthly (69%), and know at least one neighbour by name (88%). When it comes to having neighbours they can count on, 79% know at least one neighbour well enough to ask for help, while 47% have three or more neighbours they can turn to if needed.

But one-in-five don't have a neighbour they can call on for help. Our survey indicates that 21% of residents do not know any neighbours well enough to call on them for help. This percentage rises to 33% for renters, 34% for people age 25 to 34, 36% for people age 18 to 24, and 38% among students.

Many residents are open to forging deeper relationships with their neighbours – even more so among those who have lived here for shorter periods of time. Our survey indicates that over half of residents (53%) would like to get to know their neighbours better. People who were even more likely to want to get to know their neighbours better include those who have lived in Canada for 10 years or

less (66%), or those who have lived in the neighbourhood for 5 years or less (61%).

Among residents who do not want to get to know each other better, 32% report preferring their privacy, while 18% already spend a lot of time with their neighbours, 14% feel they already have enough friends, and 13% feel they do not have enough time.

Social gatherings, community events or festivals, and participating in a community project are the most popular ways for neighbours to get to know each other. Other common ways that neighbours enjoy meeting and forming relationships include attending a neighbourhood or community meeting, volunteering, and inviting neighbours into their home.

Among people age 18 to 24, preferred ways to meet neighbours include neighbourhood social gatherings (39%), and social gatherings in a local park or green space (30%). Those who have lived in Canada for less than 10 years are more likely than most residents to attend a community event or festival (37%), and participate in a neighbourhood or community project (33%).

About half of all residents expect to stay in their neighbourhood long-term, while the

CASE STUDY

The Grove

In the Newton area of Surrey, neighbours have reclaimed a beautiful cedar grove under threat and transformed the area into a community meeting space. The trees now host community artwork, poetry, chess, and more importantly, a sense of community among residents.

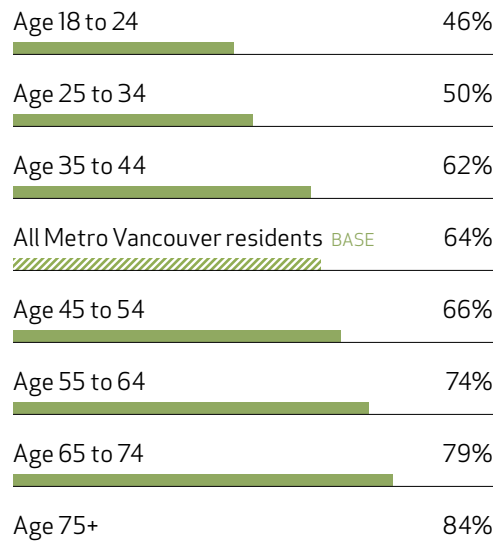


CASE STUDY

Kudoz

Kudoz creates meaningful connections for adults living with cognitive disabilities. It matches people with developmental disabilities to volunteers who share their skills and knowledge, creating novel learning experiences, and widening participants' sense of possibility and place in their neighbourhood.

How do different age groups experience a feeling of welcome and belonging?



QB3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements: 33 A) I feel welcome in my neighbourhood and feel like I belong here.

Total respondents = 3,785

How do we prefer to get to know our neighbours?



QB12. If you wanted to get to know your neighbours better, or spend more time together, which of the following would you likely do?

Total respondents = 3,785

other half is either expecting to move in the next five years, or is simply unsure. Our survey finds 49% of Metro Vancouver residents expect to live in the same neighbourhood five years from now, while 26% believe they won't live in the same neighbourhood, and 24% do not know.



Photo by Leon Wang

The top five reasons for expecting to move away are because they can no longer afford to stay (42%), want more space or a larger home (28%), wish to downsize to a smaller home

(18%), because the roads are becoming more congested (17%), and to be closer to friends and family (15%). Approximately one-third (38%) report that a close friend or family member has moved out of their community due to affordability and/or housing reasons.

Unsurprisingly, the proportion of people that expect to move is highest for people age 18 to 24 – among whom 50% do not expect to live in the same neighbourhood in five years time – followed by renters (46%), students (46%), and those who have lived in Canada for 10 years or less (44%).

Most people like where they live and express trust in their neighbours. Our survey finds that 74% of Metro Vancouver residents report living where they want to live. For those living in a high-rise, the rate is even higher at 79%.

In addition, people express a significant degree of trust among neighbours. Residents were asked, "If you lost a wallet or purse containing \$100 dollars, how likely do you think it would be returned to you, with the money inside?" Overall, 63% believe a neighbour would return a wallet or purse – a higher proportion than in 2012 (58%). In comparison, only 11% believe a stranger would return it – the same as in 2012.

DO WE FEEL AT HOME?

53%

would like to get to know their neighbours better

74%

are living in the city or neighbourhood where they want to live



“People are often just waiting to be asked or invited to take part in something – they have the skills, assets and desire, they just aren’t sure what to do.”

– Joe Erpenbeck, Faculty Member of the Asset Based Community Development Institute

64%

feel welcome in their neighbourhood and feel like they belong

QB5. Are you currently living in the city or neighbourhood where you would like to live?

QB3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements: A) I feel welcome in my neighbourhood and feel like I belong here.

QB10. Would you like to get to know your neighbours better?

Total respondents = 3,785

WHAT THIS MEANS

We believe that where we live plays an important role in forming deeper relationships with each other, and that better connections lead to stronger neighbourhoods.

Older residents tend to feel more welcome and a stronger sense of belonging to their neighbourhood. Despite rapid changes to our communities, our older residents still feel a strong sense of belonging – higher in fact than any other group. Because people who have lived here for less than 10 years have not yet developed the same bonds, we believe it's everyone's responsibility to extend a warm welcome.

While most people have neighbours they can count on, one-in-five is far too many that don't. Overall, 79% know at least one neighbour well enough to ask for help, while 47% know three or more. But we are concerned that one-in-five people don't know any neighbours well enough to ask for help. This rises to around a

third of people age 18 to 35, and nearly 40% among students. Our survey tells us who is feeling this way, but it does not tell us exactly why. We welcome further research by others to help inform ideas on how to address this issue.

Neighbours want to get to know each other better, particularly those that have lived here for shorter periods of time. Our survey shows that over half of all residents want to spend more time with their neighbours. This number rises among those who have lived in Canada for 10 years or less or have lived in the neighbourhood for five years or less. Clearly the desire to know neighbours is there, but how might this be turned into action?

Now that we know more about how people would like to connect, it's time to work on the invitation. Our survey provides greater insights into how people would like to connect. Those experiencing weaker connections, in particular, have clear ideas about how to make new friends. We believe our list of top 10 neighbourhood activities provides a starting point for something important – an invitation. This is something we can all work on, from individuals to community-based organizations to cultural institutions, to policy makers, and many others.

It's sometimes nice to imagine neighbourhoods as fixed or stable, but the reality is they never are. Our survey shows that while housing affordability is on many people's minds as they contemplate a move, there are other lifestyle factors such as upsizing or downsizing our homes, transportation needs, and being closer to friends and family that influence our decisions. But is this anything new? Our neighbourhoods have always been changing, so let's forge connections wherever we live.

Most people like where they live and express trust in their neighbours. Our survey shows 74% of people live where they want to, and 63% trust their neighbours to return a wallet or purse. These numbers give us hope about the neighbourhoods we are building for tomorrow.

“I feel like there's almost a longing and a craving for community that you see from people...there's just some way you have to bridge the gap of everybody longing for it, but not doing it.”

— Youth Focus Group Participant



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Metro Vancouver's green spaces provide a great venue for building healthy communities. Our greatest obstacle is finding the time to participate.

WHAT WE ASKED

Metro Vancouver is defined by a unique mixture of diverse cultures, urban and suburban communities, natural beauty, public spaces, and transport connections. We believe the strength of our communities can be improved by understanding the way that social, physical and natural systems interact with each other to support the people who live here.

Building community occurs when we take part in something together. We asked people what community activities they participate

in, and about the obstacles to getting more involved. We also asked about the shared spaces they prefer, and who has enough room to create their own community-building activities.

Lastly, we asked if people feel a sense of belonging to their town or city, and if they feel a sense of connection among the people or places in their community. We wanted to know more about how they get around for local errands, and how long it takes them to reach one of Metro Vancouver's green spaces.

WHAT WE HEARD

Residents are less involved in community-related activities than five years ago, apart from volunteering. Across almost every measure in our survey, people in Metro Vancouver are taking part less in community-related activities. However, volunteering has remained relatively stable. In 2017, 45% of Metro Vancouver residents report participating in volunteer work, compared to 48% in 2012. Both women and older residents were more likely to report participating in community activities than other residents.

Most people take part in at least one activity to make their community a better place to live. Many residents report actively maintaining a clean, safe, and friendly neighbourhood. Three-quarters have done one or more activities in the past year to help neighbours or to maintain common spaces to enhance the collective good. The top five neighbourly activities include picking up litter (39%), shovelling snow from a common area (38%), lending or giving an item to a neighbour (33%), feeding a pet, collecting mail or watering

HOW ARE WE PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNITY LIFE?

58%

visited their local library,
community centre or recreation
centre (83% in 2012)

63%

voted in the last municipal election
(67% in 2012)

41%

attended another type of
community event or festival

35%

signed a petition (47% in 2012)

22%

attended religious services
(40% in 2012)

20%

Attended a cultural or ethnic event
put on by a cultural or ethnic group
different from their own (43% in 2012)

17%

attended a neighbourhood or
community meeting (26% in 2012)

11%

attended a political rally or political
meeting (11% in 2012)

9%

participated in a neighbourhood or
community project (23% in 2012)

7%

attended a city council or school
board meeting (12% in 2012)

QC5. Our next question is about different things
people may or may not do during the year, thinking
about the past 12 months, please tell me if you have
done any of the following?

Total respondents = 3,785

WHAT PREVENTS US FROM GETTING INVOLVED?

51%

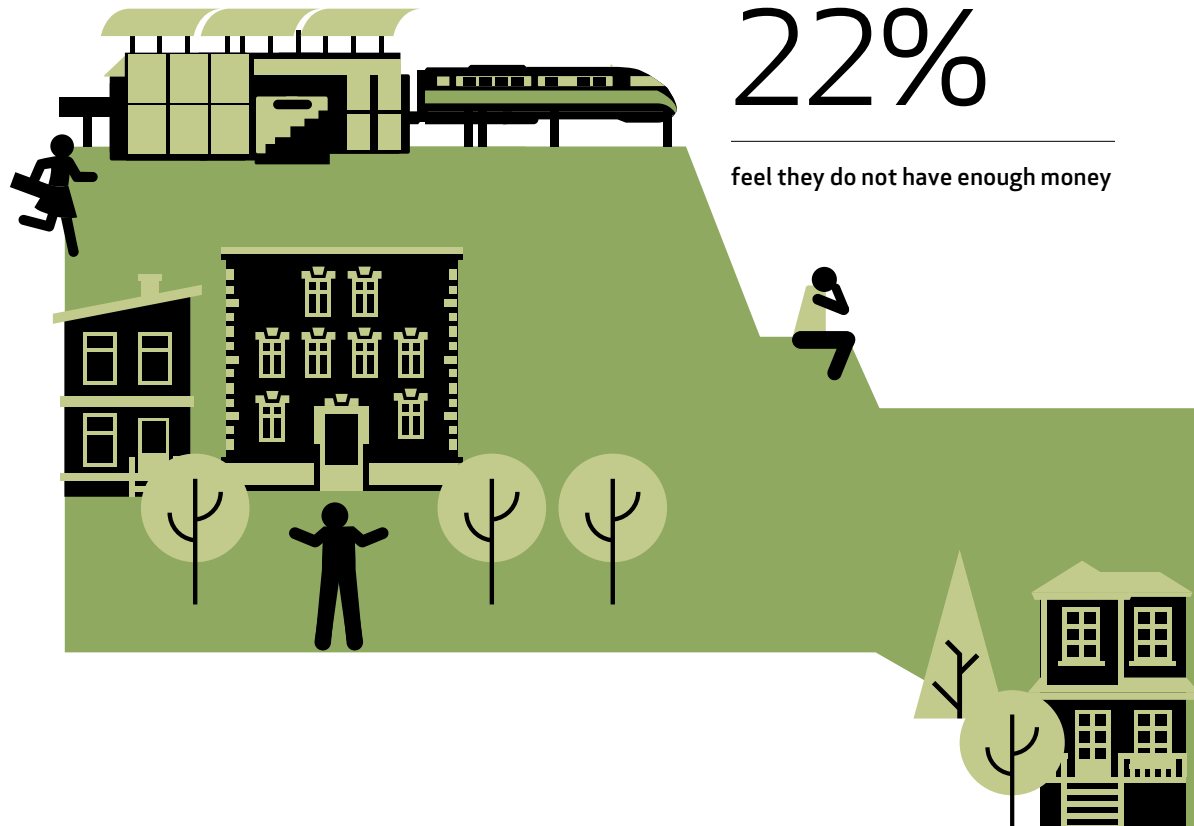
feel they do not have enough time

32%

say they are not aware of opportunities or activities

22%

feel they do not have enough money



QC7. Many obstacles keep people from becoming as involved with their community as they would like. Thinking about your own life, please identify if any of the following are obstacles to your participation in activities that could make your neighbourhood a better place to live.

Total respondents = 3,785

plants (23%) and reporting something of concern in the neighbourhood (22%).

The main obstacles people identify to becoming involved in community activities are not enough time, not enough awareness of opportunities or activities, and not enough money. Other barriers include a feeling of not having much to offer, and feeling unwelcome. In 2012, many residents said they felt they do “not have much to offer”, while in 2017 fewer identified this as an obstacle.

People age 18 to 24 were more likely to report not being aware of opportunities or activities (44%), not feeling like they have much to offer (33%), and not having enough money (22%). People who have lived in Canada for less than 10 years do not identify language ability as a top concern (14%), but are slightly more likely than average to experience the barriers of time, awareness, and money.

Residents of apartments, condos, and suites in houses would benefit from more shared spaces to socialize with neighbours, but most live within a short walk of a green space. Our survey reveals that 33% of residents in Metro Vancouver do not have a yard or common area where they can easily socialize with neighbours. This figure rises to 44% for people

living in a suite-in-house, and 50% for those living in an apartment or condo. The kind of common areas residents would like to enjoy include a community garden (28%), green space or pocket park (22%), BBQ area (18%) and games room (14%). The vast majority of Metro Vancouver residents – 84% – report having a green space within 10 minutes walking distance.

We feel a sense of belonging to our towns and cities through both people and places. Residents of Metro Vancouver feel the strongest sense of belonging among friends (56%), family (56%), nature (30%), work (25%), in their neighbourhood (22%), and among groups, e.g. those that focus on sports or hobbies (16%).

Our interactions with strangers reveal us to be friendly, but reserved. People in Metro Vancouver report interacting with each other in public community spaces by smiling (73%) and saying hello (66%). But fewer than half are willing to respond to a question from a stranger (48%), and only 23% will ask a question or initiate a conversation.

CASE STUDY

The Sanala Solution

The Sanala Solution studies how cultural continuity and language revitalization can inform Namgis health and social policy / programming to effect community-driven change. By weaving cultural activities into the everyday experiences of Namgis youth and elders, both groups report a greater sense of wellness, balance and connection to the community.

CASE STUDY

On the Table

The Chicago Community Trust’s ‘On The Table’ event is an annual opportunity for people across the region to come together to talk about their community needs. These conversations can inspire new ways for people to work together to make communities stronger, safer and more dynamic.



WHAT ARE OUR FAVOURITE SHARED SPACES?

28%

want a community garden

21%

would like access to a gym

18%

report interest in a BBQ area

50%

of people living in an apartment or condo do not have a common area to socialize with neighbours

22%

want a green space or pocket park

84%

of Metro Vancouver residents have a green space within 10 minutes walking distance



QB13. Does your home have a yard or common area (indoor or outdoor) where you can easily socialize with neighbours?

QB15. If you would be interested in sharing space or activities with your neighbours, which of the following would you like to have in your neighbourhood?

QB16. How much time does it take you to walk to the nearest green space?

Total respondents = 3,785

WHAT THIS MEANS

We believe that understanding the interactions between people, places, and our social or environmental spaces can help us build more inclusive and cohesive communities.

We're surprised to hear that people in Metro Vancouver are less likely to be involved in community activities than they were five years ago. We will explore this further through community conversations, but we also encourage others to examine this issue in more detail. As we seek to understand what inspires people to participate more, we hope to discover more about how the relationship between social and physical factors contributes to participation in our communities.

Since 2012, the main obstacle people identify to participating has shifted from 'not having anything to offer', to 'not having enough time'. Has life speeded up in the last five years? Why aren't we more aware of opportunities to connect? Our survey doesn't tell us. But with the explosion of connected devices and social media, we're sure it has never been easier to find out more about activities in your area. We wonder if people know where to look, but are finding other more conventional barriers – like time and money – prevent them from participating.

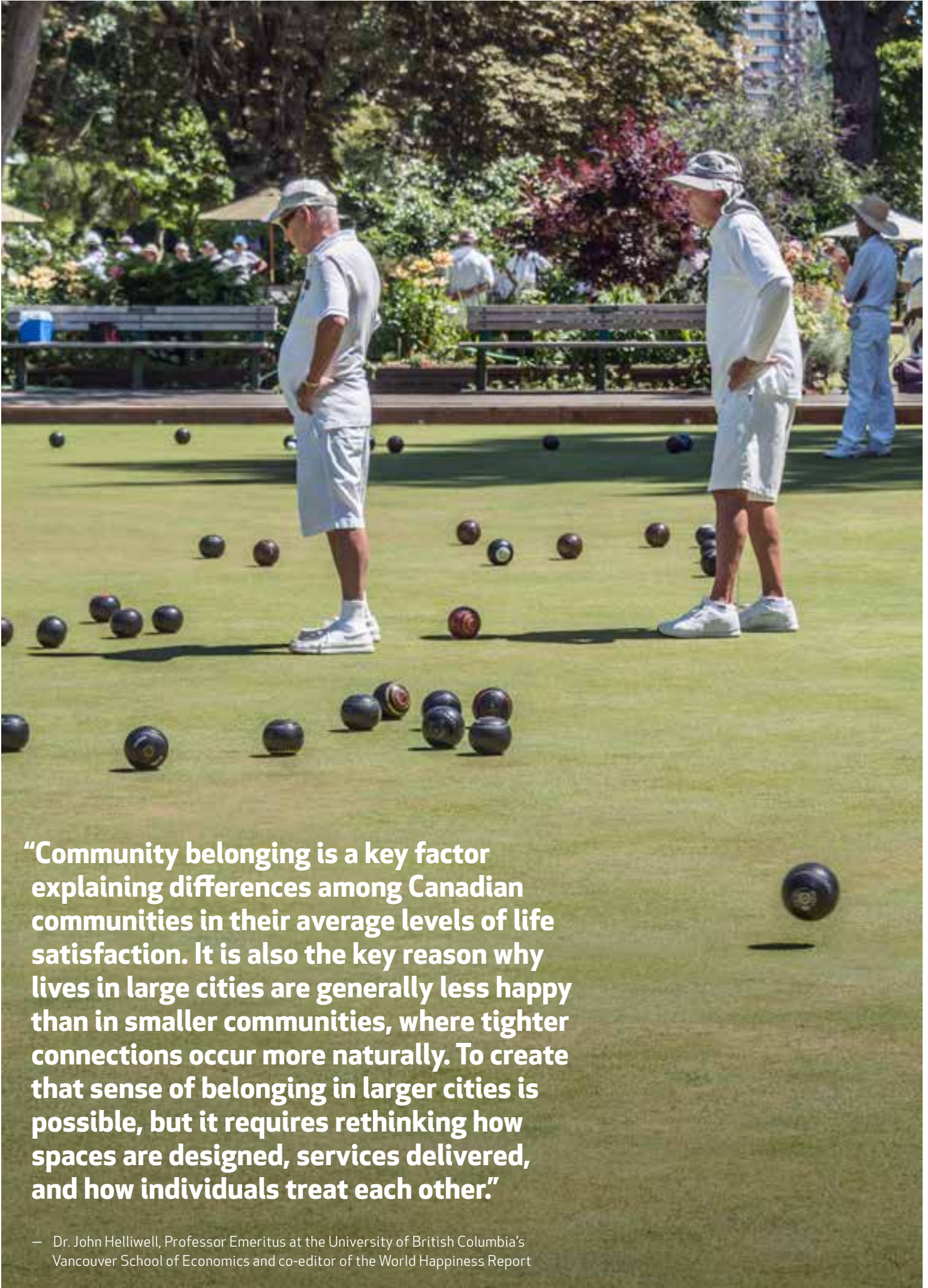
It's no surprise that people feel the highest sense of belonging among friends and family. But many also get this feeling from spending time in nature and in our neighbourhoods.

This is a great place to start thinking about how communities – and the interactions between our physical, social, and environmental spaces – can enhance our sense of belonging.

“[What makes community?]... to kind of feel safe, to feel connected, to not be judged by what you are wearing, the colour of your skin, or stuff like that. That's very important for the community to be connected. Once people accept you the way you are, then I guess this is how a strong community starts.”

– New Arrival Focus Group Participant

Metro Vancouver's green spaces provide a great venue for building healthy communities. A third of residents in Metro Vancouver do not have a yard or common area where they can socialize with neighbours. Our survey shows what kinds of spaces people would like to share, with community gardens and green spaces at the top of the list. Organizations with outdoor spaces to share could make a valuable contribution by encouraging community access.



“Community belonging is a key factor explaining differences among Canadian communities in their average levels of life satisfaction. It is also the key reason why lives in large cities are generally less happy than in smaller communities, where tighter connections occur more naturally. To create that sense of belonging in larger cities is possible, but it requires rethinking how spaces are designed, services delivered, and how individuals treat each other.”

— Dr. John Helliwell, Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia’s Vancouver School of Economics and co-editor of the World Happiness Report



CONCLUSION

We believe in addressing the root causes of issues in our communities, and promoting ways to work together.

When we started work on a follow up to our 2012 Connections and Engagement report, we began by asking ourselves if anything had changed. But we soon realized that building on our previous findings, digging deeper, and looking for opportunities would be even more valuable.

Our findings show that in many ways people feel the same about the strength of their connections as they did five years ago. Most still report a sense of trust among neighbours, feel welcome, and experience a sense of belonging. However, many still find it difficult to make friends, approximately one-in-four continue to find themselves alone more often than they would like, and one-in-five don't have a neighbour to ask for help. This weakens the resilience of our communities. We believe this is something that is possible to improve, and that we can work together in order to do so.

We used our 2017 survey to create a more complete picture of our social connections, and to explore in more depth the barriers and opportunities to enhancing them. By doing so we learned that despite the findings above, few people in Metro Vancouver experience loneliness often, and that the overwhelming majority have someone to depend on.

We also discovered that those who are more likely to experience weaker connections – particularly younger people and those living in low-income households – have clear ideas on how they would like to make new friends, and are open to expanding their circle. This is important, because it highlights the common ground on which – once again – we can all work together to forge stronger connections.

According to our results, residents are less active in community life today compared to five years ago. Participation in almost every community related activity has dropped since 2012. But people still prefer connecting in-person, and less than one-in-five feel they spend too much time with technology. So are we still asking the right questions? Or are there new ways of participating that our survey doesn't capture? What 'community life' looks like is constantly shifting, and we will continue to update our ideas as society changes.

Our survey provides insight into the kinds of activities and places that connect people. We've shown that events such as social gatherings, community festivals, and participating in community projects are the most popular ways for neighbours to get to know each other. So what now? We believe

that focusing on the invitation, being even more inclusive, and forging connections wherever we live, are all important next steps.

Vancouver Foundation supports people and projects that touch almost every aspect of community life across British Columbia. We believe in addressing the root causes of issues in our communities, and promoting ways to work together. Through this approach we've learned that often the best ideas come from the ground up, created by residents working together to address the issues that they identify as important to them.

Our 2017 report reveals a desire for stronger connections that gives us hope. We also know that we are not alone in our endeavours to build stronger communities. We are encouraged by the inspiring efforts of others in this space, and welcome policy makers, community organizations, private companies, business organizations, faith-based groups, and individuals to put our findings into action.

We hope this includes you.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

We intend to support projects, initiatives, organizations, and research that lead to higher levels of civic engagement.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS FOR VANCOUVER FOUNDATION?

We hope our report will spark curiosity, conversations, and action.

Vancouver Foundation will use this research to inform our work as a grantor, convener and partner. We intend to support projects, initiatives, organizations, and research that lead to higher levels of civic engagement. This includes funding the work of non-profits, as well as contributing to dialogue about systems

change and policy shifts that enable inclusion and participation for all residents.

Specifically, we will strengthen our own Neighbourhood Small Grants program by creating a new model that allows us to work with communities throughout BC, offering local residents the opportunity to become involved in grassroots community building. In 2018, the 75th anniversary year of Vancouver

Foundation, we plan to go one step further, with a new initiative that invites people from all walks of life to share a meal and talk about what really matters in their community.

Finally, we intend to keep on listening. So please let us know how you would like us to help Metro Vancouver become more connected and engaged.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Each and every one of us can contribute to a feeling of welcome and belonging in our communities. Simple things like greeting our neighbours, engaging in conversation,

“We can’t solve problems if we don’t care about each other. We learn to care when we know each other, our joys and challenges. From this place we can work together to solve our most pressing local problems.”

— Youth Focus Group Participant

asking questions and listening carefully, are all steps towards a more connected and engaged community.

There are also many organizations and initiatives that people can connect with to become more involved in their neighbourhood or community. Neighbourhood Houses, community centres, libraries, youth groups, community foundations, universities, colleges, faith-based groups, and local governments are great places to find out more.

But beyond our individual actions, there is even more we can do together. By joining forces with each other we can become active in shaping the social, physical, and natural

systems we interact with every day. With your voices to inform them, policy-makers, media, educators, governments, businesses and funders, can all play a part building the strength and resilience of our communities.

So no matter how small you start, you are starting something that matters.

We've developed the following tools and resources to help you use our report. Whether you are involved in policy-making, community-building programs, research, journalism, or grassroots activities in your neighbourhood, we have something for you.

Community Organization Checklist

Take some simple actions in your organization to put connections and engagement at the heart of your programs.

Speaking / Workshop Opportunities

Ask Vancouver Foundation to support presentations and workshops at your organization that put the findings of our report into action.

Open License and Open Data

Download all the content and data associated with our 2017 Connect and Engage report and build on our findings.

Media Toolkit

Get the background, key facts, interviews, data, and visualizations to support your story of connections and engagement.

To download any of these tools or resources, or to get in touch, please visit:
vancouverfoundation.ca/connectandengage



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Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We connect the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas and time of people in the community to create healthy, vibrant and livable communities across BC. Since 1943, our donors have created 1,800 endowment funds and together we have distributed more than \$1 billion to charities. From arts and culture to the environment, health and social development, education, medical research and more, we exist to make meaningful and lasting improvements to communities in BC.

vancouverfoundation.ca/connectandengage

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