

Homes, Not Housing

A Vision from the Our Home, Inclusive Community Collaborative, LLC

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Founding Neighbor, Our Home, ICC

“People crave comfort, people crave connection, and people crave community.” — Marianne Williamson

Envision a neighborhood where neighbors know and care about each other; are willing to lend a hand, an ear, or a soup pot; and where families and singles of multiple generations, income levels, and abilities are living in homes they own, located in an open space where neighbors gather and children play. Imagine a small neighborhood of beautifully designed and well-built, efficient, innovative, market-rate homes, some of which are subsidized to meet individuals' and families' income needs, and are kept affordable for generations.

Sit with that for a minute...then ask the questions that we have been asking ourselves: Where do you want to live? How do you want to live? Who do you want to live with? Do you want to purchase your own home? What is your home and neighborhood dream? If you experience disability, are aging or make below the median income for your area, do you feel like you have the opportunity to live your dream? Do you feel like you have a choice? In your mind, is your dream living situation based an assessment of your needs for support services, your income, or your age? Probably not. Do you want to live in a monoculture community built around what others perceive as your challenges? Do you want others to decide where you live? Probably not. Do you want to decide where to live and who to live with primarily based on support services being delivered efficiently? Probably not. Is there a choice? We hope so. We hope that we are building another option.

There Are Challenges

We have some challenges. We've moved away from hometowns and extended family. We've moved our families from our city centers to the suburbs. We leave our neighbors on the outside by going from garage to house, eschewing the front porch. We've moved our elders, our people with income challenges, and those with disabilities into developments, facilities and group homes, segregating and grouping based on needs and deficits.

Removing people from the natural vigilance and support of family, friends, and community increases the risk of their isolation, abuse, and neglect. This removal from community incurs costs not just for our at-risk populations, but for the health and well-being of our society as a whole. Equity is lost when we deny diversity in our neighborhoods. The premise that a high-quality life for at-risk people equals removal from an extended and diverse community needs to be re-evaluated.

How we build neighborhoods that embrace the diversity of our elders, our community members with disabilities, and those with lower income, and how we thrive together in these neighborhoods are questions that need to be addressed by every society. Until recently, the models of housing and care in this country took their inspiration from the mechanization of industry and agriculture: efficiency of production resulting from economies of scale. It was believed by grouping those with similar needs and deficits together, services could be provided more efficiently and at a lower cost. As the families and founders of Our Home, Inclusive Community Collaborative, we base our vision on the understanding that this type of grouping, based on deficit and need, has unforeseen costs both financially and societally. When vulnerable populations are removed from the community at large, the result is too often permanent isolation, neglect, and abuse. Medical and other support costs rise as individuals become increasingly dependent upon institutionalized supports. Ironically, when the natural supports available from family, neighbors, friends, community organizations, and local businesses are in place, these costs drop, quality of life improves and outcomes are more positive. The wisdom of the 'group, isolate, and exclude' housing model is being increasingly challenged.

For those of us who experience disability personally or in our families, we have seen some positive changes over time. We can now find more inclusive schools, opportunities in the community, less segregation, more employment opportunities than in the past. Individuals who experience intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their families, have a new, more inclusive way of thinking, but the future of housing and community membership has not caught up with their desire to continue down this path.

Articles from our Contributors

Homes, Not Housing: A Vision from the Our Home, Inclusive Community Collaborative, LLC

So We've Decided to Build Something Different

Our goal is to create a diverse pocket neighborhood community consisting of 15-18 singles and families who will own their own homes and will include individuals often seen as “at-risk” (elders, people who experience disability, and people below median income). This community will be based on strengths, interests, and shared values – not deficits and needs.

It Started with a Family

As the founding members of Our Home, ICC, we are members of a three-generation family who experience the complex support needs of disability and aging. Jane, who is both social and private by nature, is the matriarch of the family. In her 70's, she has spent eleven years caring for her aging parents and is looking forward to sharing her laughter and insights. Neva, a delightful young woman who brings a fresh perspective to everything she experiences, has complex support needs due to disability. Soon to be a young adult, she deserves the opportunity for independence outside of her family home while receiving the supports that she needs for everyday life. Alicia, daughter and mom, is the “meat” of this Sandwich Generation. Together, we look forward to the relationships that proximity and shared values can bring to a larger community. We all recognize the value of our community around us for life's inspiration as well as natural supports. We will be the cornerstones of this community, gathering people around us that share values and goals. We believe that coming together as neighbors, intentionally, will provide the stability that all of our families need to work, live, age, and thrive in a community of our choice. This community will be home for all of us: Our Home.

And a Non-Profit Organization

Founded in 1989, Community Vision Inc. provides an array of supports to individuals with disabilities and their families in Oregon, assisting them to live, work, and thrive in the community of their choice.

In 1999, Community Vision recognizing the value of the stability home ownership created a fully functioning mortgage support program for individuals and families with disabilities and buyers that make 80% or below of the area median income standards. In recent years, Community Vision has expanded its reach by acquiring and developing properties under the name of Portland Community Asset Builders, LLC.

A Shared Vision

To eliminate segregation, isolation, and helplessness. To support reciprocity, purpose and fun. To provide beauty, nature, and community.

Shared Values

Innovation, integrity, community, empowerment, and passion. We want to create – within our community and support in the larger community – an inclusive and civil society by welcoming members of diverse class backgrounds, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, ages, family status, and disability.

And Shared Principles:

- ◆ **Diversity** – people together based on individual values, strengths and interests versus deficits, needs, diagnosis, income, or age, preventing segregation.
- ◆ **Community** – people who care about each other versus those paid to care for each other, preventing social isolation and dependency on the system.
- ◆ **Proximity** – creating an environment where proximity builds familiarity and companionship prevents loneliness and segregation.
- ◆ **Natural and supported interactions** – easy access to spontaneous and casual interactions, as well as on-going intentional activities designed to support collaboration and community in which unexpected and unpredictable exchanges and happenings can take place.
- ◆ **Reciprocity** – a strength-based community creates an opportunity to give as well as receive.
- ◆ **Purpose** – the opportunity to do things we find meaningful is essential to human health and gives us purpose.
- ◆ **Beauty** – creating an aesthetically pleasing, well-maintained, energy-efficient, and ecologically sensitive environment where life revolves around close and continuing contact with neighbors, plants, animals, and children. These relationships provide a pathway to a life worth living.
- ◆ **Growth and flexibility** – creating an intentional community is a never-ending process. We are all life-long learners.

We Need a Solution

We plan to provide an alternative solution to four pressing challenges in Portland, Oregon:

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1. Housing options (especially home-ownership) are extremely limited in Portland for people with disabilities, and are based on deficit and need (negative outcomes include dependence on system, burden on the family, separation from the community, lack of individualization, and “real life” opportunities).
2. People below median income (often people who experience disability or our aging population) are increasingly being priced out of the residential home-ownership market in Portland.
3. Housing options for the aging population in Portland lack the opportunity for older individuals to give back and have a sense of purpose by being an integral part of an age-diverse and familiar community where they know their neighbors as well as receive the supports that are needed to age in place for as long as possible.
4. Currently, Portland is lacking communities that intentionally bring together diverse populations of people (including, but not limited to, those who experience disability, aging, families, first-time homebuyers, mixed income) based on shared values and interests that promote natural supports (see below) and individualized choice as a premise for the community.

Note: Natural Supports are defined, for the purposes of this article, as intentional and continued awareness of each other and a willingness to lend a hand, an ear, or a soup pot. Individual primary supports will be the responsibility of each community member to organize for themselves as they are needed and will be enhanced by having close neighbors that have taken the time and effort to know each other; a small village within the larger Portland metropolitan area. For those members who require more extensive supports, they may choose to have space in their dwelling for someone to live in or purchase another dwelling or connected dwelling for caregivers to live.

Together, Here Is Our Plan

The Our Home community will consist of homeownership opportunities for diverse structures (singles, couples, and families), age, ability, socioeconomic, and interests (what they bring to the community table) built to be architecturally modern, urban, lasting, and looking to the future. To help promote affordability, our dwellings will range in size from approximately 700 to 1,700 square feet, with most dwellings having the potential for two to three bedrooms each.

We envision a cluster of new and/or rehabilitated buildings surrounded by gardens and accessible outdoor spaces that are a neighborhood asset. Our Home will provide the hub of home to ground from and extend out for work, school and the larger community where our children, our adults, and our seniors can build relationships and community.

In combination with existing state, federal, private and community programs, our community will help provide natural supports to assist those who live there with what is needed to age in place and live full and inclusive lives. Parameters will be set up for community longevity, flexibility, and affordability. The basic tenants will remain consistent with the original intent and be managed by the Our Home Board consisting of dwelling members who have an ongoing interest in the viability of the community.

Through private and community partnerships, Our Home, in conjunction with Community Vision, will make available a percentage of homes at below market prices or will assist with supports and subsidies to encourage affordability for individuals or families at 80% or below of median income.

Ongoing Challenges

In an upturned economy and hot real-estate market, finding larger sections of land that meet our transportation and proximity requirements has been difficult, but we have just secured half an acre in a close-in Portland neighborhood. There are still challenges ahead. Paying market rate for the land makes building homes that meet our design standards and future neighbor's needs more difficult, but we are currently interviewing architecture and construction firms and preparing to dive in. We are continuing to look at creative ways to provide zero interest, second mortgages – perhaps through the local land trust or through city government. And we continue to reach out to the local community to build partnerships with neighborhood associations and concerned citizens who believe that building a vibrant community works for everyone.

Our Dream

Our dream is that by building this pocket neighborhood and by continuing to support a strong, connected community we can increase the quality of lives of our families and neighbors and through the natural supports that friendships, collaboration, and proximity bring, help curb future systems dependency by nurturing truly inclusive communities. Conversations have started around scaling and replicating this model in other locations in Portland and beyond. It all starts with asking the questions of what we truly want and need, letting ourselves dream and taking a leap into a new way of living that can provide another choice in what we call home. Our Home.

Follow us on Facebook at the Inclusive Community Collaborative page, or check out our website at www.inclusivecommunitycollaborative.org.