

Hamilton is becoming an age friendly city. An age friendly city has policies, services and structures that are conducive to optimal aging. During community consultations to develop Hamilton's Age Friendly Plan, seniors in private market rental buildings asked for opportunities to socialize with other tenants. With this in mind, the Hamilton Council on Aging and the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton piloted a project to bring seniors social clubs into 2 rental buildings. The projects were a success - with immediate interest expressed by tenants, and attendance at social activities occurring from the moment of launch.

Business Case

There is a definite business case to be made for offering social opportunities to tenants in rental properties. As many landlords know, older tenants are sometimes socially isolated and lonely. Creating opportunities for social networks to develop, generates possibilities for social support. When you create an environment of support for tenants, they are more likely to want to remain in your building. Demonstrating a caring relationship between property managers and tenants builds longevity in your tenancy. It's all about retention.

We received numerous expressions of interest from landlords who understood the value of creating a social club for seniors in their building and invited us in. This dispels the myth that landlords fear that when tenants congregate, identification of building concerns will follow. When tenants are confident that property managers and superintendents are contributing to an enjoyable housing experience for them – senior social clubs become a win-win situation for both tenant and landlord.

With regard to the two rental properties involved with the project: one is continuing to offer a weekly scheduled drop-in tea-time in the common room; and in the other property, the senior social club has evolved into a core group of tenants who are meeting regularly to plan seasonal events for all tenants in the building. Tenants are excited and enjoying their new relationships with fellow tenants. Property managers and superintendents are pleased as well, and supporting these efforts. Initiating social events for seniors in your building is feasible for landlords to get underway!

Tips for Landlords

- Identify a communal space for tenants to congregate. This can be a common room, the lobby, space next to the laundry, or other. Comfortable seating is necessary and a few tables are ideal. Do not arrange a social club in a tenant's apartment, as this has the potential to generate problems with access and control by the unit owner.
- A positive attitude towards tenant social participation is a key to success. Property managers should join their tenants in social situations, as time allows. Tenants love when they have the attention of building management. It shows that you care about them, and their building.

- Property managers need to be assured that their superintendents are committed to assisting tenants offer their social club in communal building space.
- Residents should be made aware that the events they are participating in are supported by the building ownership, but they are taking part at their own risk.
- If possible, chat with tenants in advance and inquire about their interest in social activities in the building. With some kernel of interest, arrange the first social event. Invite tenants by putting up notices in the elevator, bulletin board, in the laundry room or leave under tenant doors. Late morning or early afternoon are usually good times for seniors to attend. Involve long-term tenants in getting the word out. They usually are knowledgeable about who lives in the building and can be good connectors.
- Expect the social club to grow over time as word gets around. Don't be discouraged if it starts off small.
- While events can be advertised as senior or older adult focused, we encourage you to be flexible and inclusive, if other tenants show up wanting to attend. This never became an issue in the two buildings.
- Seniors tend to like meet-and-greet teas, bingo and cards. Women sometimes like to knit together. When starting out, organize activities that support conversation among tenants to get to know one another. There may also be interest in activities that can beautify the property, such as choosing plants together or setting up a community garden.
- A natural leader or team may develop from within the group, who are interested to assume planning for social activities. Your role as a landlord/property manager can then evolve to enable these activities to take place.
- Refreshments are an important element to bring people together. Tea and cookies are just fine. Please contribute by purchasing paper plates, cups and refreshments. These costs are minimal. Often residents are excited to bring baked goods they have prepared themselves to social events.

Connecting Tenants with Community Resources

Tenants are often not familiar with programs and services in their neighbourhood that can also connect them with the greater community. To respond to this need, our project also created a "What's Nearby Guide" of community resources for each property.

Hamilton's *Neighbourhood Action Strategy* involves community developers, who work with residents to foster healthy communities in eleven priority neighbourhoods. Landlords with properties in these areas who would like to speak with a community developer to learn more about community resources, and social participation opportunities for their tenants, please contact Renee Wetselaar at rwetselaar@sprc.hamilton.on.ca

For more information about this project, please contact Shelagh Kiely at the Hamilton Council on Aging, kielys@hhsc.ca

This project was supported by a grant from the Ontario Seniors Secretariat.