

# BELONGING MATTERS CONVERSATIONS

## Why Belonging Matters (Session #1)

Roddan Lodge, Oasis – WESN  
Tuesday, March 11 2025

“Home is drumming, salad, and foo foo with cassava leaves—it’s where I can create new friends and learn cultures of others. When I feel I belong, I’m happy, not stressed, and I don’t have to go out for a beer just to be around people.”

Conversation Participants

“Home is attached to your self-worth—a feeling of safety within, no matter the circumstances.”

Conversation Participants

“Home is up north participating in a potlach”

Conversation Participants

“Home is socializing, hanging out, watching sports—it’s that repetition and familiarity.”

Conversation Participants

“Home is fiesta, parties, celebrations, knowing neighbors, and sharing meals—it’s where your heart is”

Conversation Participants

“Home is a place I long to go after a long, hard day—a place to relax where I feel happy, safe, and belong.”

Conversation Participants



What **home** means to me...

**Home is where ...**

- ✓ I feel connected to a familiar place
- ✓ I am with family
- ✓ I can rely on different people
- ✓ I go to after a long, hard day to relax
- ✓ I can be myself
- ✓ I enjoy familiar foods
- ✓ There is drumming

**For me, home is...**

- ✓ Comfort food
- ✓ When I feel safe
- ✓ Where I smell the ocean and eat seafood
- ✓ A place away from the judging and rushed outside world
- ✓ A positive atmosphere

**Food that creates a sense of home for us...**

- ✓ Homemade bread
- ✓ FooFoo with cassava leaves
- ✓ Salad & good coffee
- ✓ Sweet spaghetti
- ✓ Sunday roasts

**Values that create home..**

- ✓ Honesty
- ✓ Acceptance & understanding
- ✓ Safety & connection
- ✓ Trust of self & others
- ✓ Non-judgemental
- ✓ Human-created culture Vs. consumer culture

**Benefits of Belonging...**

- ✓ I can be myself
- ✓ Not alone & happier
- ✓ Can get help easily
- ✓ Trust in those around you
- ✓ No stress, relaxed- improves physical and mental health

What creates a sense of **home** and belonging to you

- ✓ Knowing neighbors and sharing meals with them
- ✓ Familiarity
- ✓ Freedom to speak up
- ✓ Sense of acceptance by others
- ✓ Positive atmosphere
- ✓ Connection
- ✓ Saying “no” instead of “yes” (autonomy in expression)
- ✓ Discernment

What erodes a sense of **home**?

- ✗ Not feeling safe entering my own home
- ✗ Swearing & negativity
- ✗ Not being able to pay rent/lacking finances
- ✗ Being far from home and unable to return due to costs
- ✗ When there is a false story created about me
- ✗ Closed-mindedness & stereotypes

**Costs of not belonging**

- ✗ Not feeling safe
- ✗ Makes you negative
- ✗ Fight or flight response from the body
- ✗ Anxiety/depression
- ✗ Withdraw, disengage from others
- ✗ You begin to not even want to go home
- ✗ Others around you develop a negative attitude
- ✗ Losing trust in others/strangers,

**OUR TOP PRIORITIES FOR BUILDING A SENSE BELONGING**

- 1. How to keep safe at the front door**
- 2. How to live and thrive in neighborhood adversity**
- 3. How to engage people in informal ways**
- 4. How to create safe spaces and supportive resources**
- 5. How to build positivity in the face of negativity**

# BELONGING MATTERS CONVERSATIONS

## Our Priority Challenge #1 > How to Keep Safe at the Front Door (Session #2)

Roddan Lodge, Oasis | WESN

Tuesday, March 18th 2025

### A Home's Front Door has the potential to be

- ✗ Like being on a boat, you always ask permission to enter
- ✗ No uninvited guests are allowed
- ✗ An inviting threshold between the inside of a home and the outside world
- ✗ A welcome mat to safety and relaxation

### I Feel Unsafe at Roddan Lodge's Front Door because...

- ✗ People pee and poo in the garbage can, by the door and on the grass
- ✗ A stranger followed me in the front door with blood streaming down his face.
- ✗ Assaulting me
- ✗ Witnessing fights with weapons
- ✗ Strangers begging me for food, cigarettes, lighter and drugs
- ✗ Strangers taking photos of me
- ✗ People using substances
- ✗ People lining up for the shelter, from 5am to 9pm crowding the entrance
- ✗ People shooting up outside
- ✗ People from shelter crowd under the rain-roof
- ✗ Cigarettes & garbage
- ✗ Strangers asking for food, smokes, lighter & money
- ✗ Someone pooped on the roof of my car and broke my car mirror

“For us Roddan Lodge’s front door is like the wild west. It seems like no one takes responsibility for our safety. Building managers say they are responsible for the inside of the building; community policing don’t seem to enforce loitering laws and the Evelayne Security team only takes responsibility for the inside of their part of the building.”

### Conversation Participants

### Ways feeling unsafe at front door impacts me

- ✗ It triggers my past traumas
- ✗ I have had to increase medications to feel more at ease
- ✗ I feel unsettled & scared
- ✗ I don’t attend gatherings in the evening because I don’t want to walk through front door alone
- ✗ It’s disgusting: to see people use the sidewalk as a bathroom
- ✗ I’m feeling restricted and limited in what time I can leave the building
- ✗ It makes me carry self-defence weapons to feel safe
- ✗ I’m always looking around me paranoid of strangers following me in the slow moving handicap door
- ✗ I have had to increase my medications to make me feel more at ease
- ✗ I feel uneasy and scared

“I feel relief once I get inside and no one is behind me.”

### Conversation Participants



### What are some root causes of the front door being unsafe?

- ✗ Poor building design and unsanitary conditions around the entrance
- ✗ Presence of homelessness, mental health crises, and substance use nearby
- ✗ Lack of consistent enforcement of loitering and safety policies
- ✗ Insufficient security presence (police, enforcement, staff check-ins)
- ✗ Infrequent cleaning and maintenance around the front door area
- ✗ Building design; front door 3 feet from a shelter front door

### What makes me vulnerable/ at risk?

- ✗ Being a woman or an older adult
- ✗ Past traumas & being alone
- ✗ A slow closing door
- ✗ The demographics of this neighborhood

### OUR TIPS & STRATEGIES TO FEEL MORE SAFE AT THE FRONT DOOR

#### As a Roddan Lodge tenant, I can...

- ✓ Know the safe and dangerous spots in the neighborhood
- ✓ Be aware of surroundings; stay present, avoid looking at my phone
- ✓ Scan the area, be observant
- ✓ Have my keys ready before approaching the door
- ✓ Trust my gut and ask for help
- ✓ Use self-protection techniques if needed
- ✓ Know safer times to be outside (e.g., cheque week)
- ✓ Avoid using the automatic door button if not necessary
- ✓ Ask for help or be with someone I trust
- ✓ Call the office if needed
- ✓ Connect with safe neighbours and support each other
- ✓ Have a safe contact to call before approaching the door
- ✓ After using the door button, wait until the door closes fully

#### Some things we can do as a community of tenants to make the front door more safe...

- ✓ Organize volunteer walking buddies or walking groups
- ✓ Build stronger connections—knowing neighbours increases the feeling of safety
- ✓ Call each other when we need have someone meet us at the door to feel safe
- ✓ Use 211 to get referred to free services such as legal advice, counselling, and supports
- ✓ Create regular, tenant-led community activities such as monthly group to get groceries and outings

### Tips and Strategies for Building Managers

- ✓ Ensure strong communication & collaboration between city staff, shelter security, community policing and tenants
- ✓ Find creative solutions with tenants when a safety concern is out of scope for city staff
- ✓ Ensure accessibility measures such as emergency button at front door for tenants who feel unsafe and do not own a phone
- ✓ Consider best practices from similar buildings like Caregie who have a security position or concierge at the front door to ensure any loitering is assisted to move along
- ✓ Advocate with City Planners to include tenant voices in the planning, design, implementation and review process of any change to a building

### Tips and Strategies For Building & City Planners

- ✓ Include tenants in your building design planning & review process
- ✓ Ensure accessibility of safety measure for tenants that don’t own a phone
- ✓ Do not put shelters and services that attract substance use and violence in a building with vulnerable populations
- ✓ Redesign accessible entrance to provide more space (more than 3 feet) and better alignment with the main entrance.
- ✓ Install a ramp over the stairs on Alexander to create an alternative accessible route.
- ✓ Relocate line-ups and loitering away from the Dunlevy entrance to reduce safety concerns.
- ✓ Address loitering as a key issue affecting daily tenant safety, quality of life and emergency evacuations.
- ✓ Install a security/emergency button outside the door for those without a phone.
- ✓ Have volunteers distribute resource info (e.g., where to find free food, services, safe injection site) to people from the shelter outside our door as a way to redirect them
- ✓ Ask Carneighe about their practices: they have a security person moving people away from entrance all day long

### Tips & Strategies for Shelter staff

- ✓ Use the Rolle UP barrier every day on Alexandra street as this will create a barrier
- ✓ Ask your security team to ensure no one loiters on Dunlevy street
- ✓ Create a front door safe program
- ✓ to help people get through the front door
- ✓ Use Alexander street for entrance only
- ✓ Ensure no line up or access to shelter via Dunlevy entrance
- ✓ Create a communication channel for tenants for suggestions, complaints and feedback

### Tips for Community Police

- ✓ Increase parole and physically move people along

“I no longer go pray at the mosque because I’m afraid of coming back home through the front entrance at night.”

### Conversation Participants

# BELONGING MATTERS CONVERSATIONS

## Our Priority Challenge #2 > How To Thrive In Neighborhood Adversity (Session #3)

Roddan Lodge, Oasis | WESN

Tuesday, March 25th 2025



“Here, everyone’s exposed to more violence, more stuff than most neighborhoods in Vancouver.”

Conversation Participant

Adversity We Are Exposed To:

- X Drug use & overdose deaths
- X Random violence
- X Yelling & volatile people
- X Garbage & germs
- X Homelessness & people that look like they might be dead or injured

“Thriving in our neighbourhood amidst adversity means learning to focus on what is in our control”

Our Neighbourhood consists of:

- ✓ Our apartments & me
- ✓ Roddan Lodge Building & tenants
- ✓ The DTES & community members

Ways I can create conditions to thrive in my apartment:

- ✓ Clean, declutter, and get rid of things I don’t need
- ✓ Read a book
- ✓ Do things I like such as baking or cooking
- ✓ Deep breathing exercises
- ✓ Listen to music
- ✓ Call a friend or relative
- ✓ Pick up a hobby
- ✓ Take a shower or bath
- ✓ Have a nap
- ✓ Set an ambiance (fake candles, decorate)
- ✓ Use my treadmill
- ✓ Maintain a long-term mindset: “we will get better eventually”
- ✓ Be aware of signs I may need to reach out for help.

TIPS & STRATEGIES TO THRIVE IN OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

Explore and engage with the community

- ✓ Get to know the neighborhood better
- ✓ Make connections with organizations outside of RL
- ✓ Learn about available resources
- ✓ Participate in events like “Hope & Shadows” (disposable camera event)
- ✓ Consider there may be others trying to thrive in the neighbourhood and be open to new friendships
- ✓ Connect with cultural organizations important to you in the neighbourhood

Go to safe and uplifting places:

- ✓ Waterfront
- ✓ Library
- ✓ A show
- ✓ A coffee shop
- ✓ Dog park
- ✓ Railtown & beach
- ✓ Gastown
- ✓ Commercial Drive

Helping others brings joy to ourselves & others:

- ✓ Volunteer work → find ways to contribute
- ✓ Practice “giving flow” → the joy of bringing others joy

Thriving In Our Neighbourhood Means Taking a Break:

- ✓ Learn to compartmentalize
- ✓ Leave and get out of the neighbourhood for a change of scenery by going to other places in the city
- ✓ Have a coffee in a different neighbourhood (eg. Commercial Drive, gastown)
- ✓ Go to nature and feed birds
- ✓ Things I want to do like CD shopping, going to the library, take the bus or skytrain anywhere
- ✓ Think positive thoughts
- ✓ Don’t engage with the trauma & adversity in the neighbourhood

“You almost get anesthetized to the lifestyles of homelessness, drugs. You’re desensitized; you don’t care as much, you keep walking past people that are almost dying.”

Signs I need to reach out for help:

- X Prolonged anxiety or depression
- X I haven’t gone out in a while
- X Self-neglect (not sleeping, eating, etc..)
- X Negative thoughts just loop around in my head

Ways to deal with anxiety:

- ✓ Find a distraction (movie, music, tv)
- ✓ Meditate
- ✓ Exercise & move my body
- ✓ Talk to a friend

Cultivating a positive mindset is key to surviving / thriving in adversity:

- ✓ Confident self-talk: “I can do this”
- ✓ Trust your gut and listen to your body
- ✓ Pray to God
- ✓ Remember everyone deserves respect

Build a network of trusted professionals that work for me:

- ✓ Massage therapist
- ✓ Meditation, yoga
- ✓ Doctor

“I think positive so that I don’t let my fear take me away or stop me.”

Conversation Participant

Tenant Led Programs, we want to start:

- ✓ Walking program
- ✓ Party / fiesta/ karaoke nights / drumming
- ✓ Games night
- ✓ Y at Home exercise /wellness programs
- ✓ Host more community meals

Ways I resolve conflict within Roddan Lodge, I:

- ✓ Try to be aware of my trigger and that of others
- ✓ Learn to self soothe when triggered (take a deep breath, self-talk, pray, meditate, listen to music, cook)
- ✓ See the problem as a misunderstanding and seek to understand
- ✓ Apologize, explain my reasoning/ experience
- ✓ Smile
- ✓ Don’t hold grudges & don’t take what’s said personally
- ✓ Remind myself that we can’t solve other people’s problems
- ✓ Don’t judge
- ✓ Don’t assume or try to interpret what others experiences are
- ✓ Respect everyone’s journey, personalities and past traumas as their experiences

Ways we, as a community can create a thriving Roddan Lodge Community:

- ✓ Have community meals (waffle party, socials, karaoke, coffee socials)
- ✓ Make alliances and friendships with neighbors
- ✓ Invite community organizations to make presentations with what services and programs we can access in our neighbourhood

“Try to remember everyone here wants a better community, we aren’t here to fight and clash; we are here to help each other”

Conversations Participant

Tips & Strategies on how to be a good neighbour at RL:

- ✓ Be kind to others through noticing what people like and making small gestures
- ✓ Ask, “how are you,” “are you okay?” “Is there anything I can do?”
- ✓ Show respect to others
- ✓ Bring soup to a neighbour that is sick
- ✓ Give food
- ✓ Respect others

# BELONGING MATTERS CONVERSATIONS

## How To Initiate & Lead Volunteer Programs & Activities at Oasis Roddan Lodge (Session #5)

Roddan Lodge, Oasis | WESN Tuesday, April 8th 2025

**“Oasis”** (noun): A fertile spot in a desert where water is found; something that provides refuge, relief, or a pleasant contrast.

*“The part you don’t see on the news is when the folks down here in the Downtown Eastside pull together... It’s really touching to see people that have very little to give so much. It warms my heart to experience such generosity and kindness.”*

Karl Hartlen, Roddan Lodge Resident & Poet

### In what ways is Roddan Lodge an Oasis to you?

- ✓ “Feeling open, welcomed to share feelings and knowing action will be taken.”
- ✓ “Giving people opportunities to do stuff—you’re not obligated, but it’s there if you want it.”
- ✓ “Socializing, eating together, sharing ideas, doing what we can do to help.”

### Creating an Oasis at RL looks like...

- ✓ Making people feel safe and calm
- ✓ Respecting and learning from different cultures
- ✓ Offering activities with no pressure but open invitation
- ✓ Taking action based on feedback
- ✓ Building connections, reducing isolation, and creating room for healing



*“Grateful we got some action plans. We’re taking off now—and it’s only the beginning.”*

*“When I thought I would die here, I found this program and now I feel a drive to explore.”*

*“It’s easy to be cynical and think nothing will work, but we’re giving this a fair shot.”*

— Residents & Belonging Matters Conversations Participants

### What are some Benefits of Volunteering here?

- ✓ “It gets you out of your headspace.”
- ✓ “You learn more, get to know others, and understand their roots and thinking.”
- ✓ “It keeps your brain active—more present, less dwelling.”
- ✓ “Helps heal your past by feeling valued and giving back.”
- ✓ “You’re part of something bigger. It brings purpose and meaning.” – Miriam

### WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF VOLUNTEERING? WHAT HELPS?

#### Barriers

- ✗ Conflicting schedules or life commitments
- ✗ Lack of resources (money, space, supplies)
- ✗ Sharing space can bring tension
- ✗ Different mindsets or expectations

#### Supports

- ✓ Flexibility and clear expectations
- ✓ Respect policy or shared guidelines
- ✓ Feeling needed and valued
- ✓ Training and orientation
- ✓ Ongoing support from coordinators (like Miriam, Caleb, Melissa)

