

Inter-generational Living Comes to Canada

Happipad launches iGen project in Okanagan

New Intergenerational Living Project Aims to Rethink Housing

Happipad's iGen project (<https://happipad.com/blog/apply>), which pairs students in need of housing with seniors seeking companionship, strives to import a popular European housing model to Canada.

Canada is facing a nationwide rental shortage. Data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation indicates that the average rental vacancy rate is just 3% nationwide, with rising rental costs putting pressure on students and low-income earners. Rental housing supply isn't keeping up with demand, leading to long wait times, high rents, and renters accepting substandard living conditions just to find a place to live.

Meanwhile, senior citizens in Canada are feeling more and more isolated – so much so that care facilities and non-profit organizations like the Canadian Red Cross, the Sinai Health System, and the Saint Elizabeth Foundation are setting up companionship programs to provide seniors with social contact.

What if there were some way to solve both of these problems using just one system – a system that other countries have already proven as viable? That's the question that iGen by Happipad strives to answer.



(<https://happipad.com/blog/apply>).

Companionship an Unmet Need for Local Seniors

It's a well-documented fact that having a strong social circle has a vast array of benefits for both physical and mental health, and that these effects are particularly pronounced in seniors.

A 2010 study at the University of Michigan found that people who had a 10-minute conversation performed much better on memory tests than people who didn't. And in 2009, researchers at the University of Chicago found that seniors who lead rich social lives tend to be in much better physical and mental health than seniors who live in isolation. Other studies have found that regular social contact slows the rate of cognitive decline in seniors.

The problem, though, is that as we age, it becomes harder and harder to stay socially active. According to Statistics Canada, a full 20% of seniors don't participate in regular social events, and can often go over 4 weeks without socializing with others.

Senior isolation is becoming more and more of a challenge for Canada's senior care system, and we're not the only ones who think so. A 2013 community development report by Better at Home states that Okanagan seniors feel social isolation is a growing mental health problem that requires a concrete strategy in order to prevent future mental health issues.

Easing Kelowna's Rental Crunch for Students

At the same time, university-age students are struggling to find affordable housing in and around Kelowna. With a rental vacancy rate of just 0.2 percent – the lowest vacancy rate in the country – and rent prices rising at an annual average of over 8 percent, finding affordable rental housing is an

increasingly difficult challenge for the 9,000 students attending UBC Okanagan and the 8,500 students taking classes at one of Okanagan College's four campuses.

Those who are lucky enough to find rental units are often paying rental rates well above what their peers in other cities pay, with an average rent of over \$1,000 per month. The CMHC reports that as of October 2017, there were effectively no primary rental units available for below \$933 per month.



(<https://happipad.com/blog/apply>).

Proving the Viability of Intergenerational Living Through Quality Control

Students need affordable housing. Seniors need companionship. So why not have seniors rent out rooms in their homes to students at below-market rates, with the students providing companionship in exchange?

Intergenerational living is not a new concept, but it is new to Canada. Countries like the Netherlands, Finland, Spain, and Germany have already implemented university-sponsored retirement communities as a means of increasing the stock of housing for students and providing seniors with companionship, and these communities have existed for several years.

However, a made-in-Canada solution will need to look slightly different.

Intergenerational housing, while a proven model in many parts of the world, hasn't been popular in Canada, where housing revolves around the nuclear family. As multi-generational housing has been in decline in Canada, the idea of seniors and students living together may seem risky. A made-in-Canada solution will need to involve a series of quality control measures to ensure that the living situation is a good fit for both parties.



(<https://happipad.com/blog/apply>).

With iGen, Happipad plans to introduce a robust quality control system to ensure students and seniors who are placed together can successfully share a living space. Happipad staff will be conducting regular home visits to ensure the program's success and to maintain transparency. A detailed set of conflict resolution guides and

procedures will help participants to work through any problems that may arise, and if a placement becomes untenable, Happipad will relocate students to more suitable placements.

With a growing population of seniors in need of more social contact, and a housing crunch pricing students out of the standard rental market, Canada is going to need a series of innovative solutions to address both challenges. While initiatives like elder outreach and modular housing can help to alleviate these problems separately, intergenerational living addresses both at the same time, allowing intergenerational living projects to make a bigger social impact for a lower cost.

iGen is set to start in May 2018 with applications currently being accepted. Happipad is looking for 20 seniors and 20 students in Kelowna, as well as 20 seniors and 20 students in Kamloops, who want to be part of a groundbreaking new pilot project that will test the viability of intergenerational living in Canada.

[You can find the application and more details about the program here.](https://happipad.com/blog/apply)

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POSTED DATE: January 26, 2018 11:37 am

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