

INSIDE »

P2 The Importance of Home Ownership

P3 Benefits and challenges of Owning a Home

P4 Ten Tips on Renting

P5 The Feel of Home

P7 The Making of a Sanctuary

P6 Vancity's Springboard Home Ownership Program

P8 One Family's Journey to Home

WINTER 07 | ISSUE 01



HOME OWNERSHIP:

A Place of Our Own



Home Ownership: A Place of Our Own is the first in a series of bulletins for PLAN Members and Associates. We have been producing PLANfacts for years to keep you informed about our "PLAN Community" and to provide future planning tips. Many of you have told us that you keep your PLANfacts for years because they are so valuable.

Home

By Ted Kuntz, Member, Past Chair of PLAN

A home is a sanctuary. A home is a place where someone knows they belong. A home is a place where comfort and preferences are honoured. Where one's uniqueness is supported and celebrated. A home is also more than the four walls and roof. A home is a part of a neighbourhood. You know a home is working when the individuals who reside there are known and welcome members of their community. Where people greet them by their first names. Where more than paid staff come to visit.

When a home is working well those individuals who reside in the home feel that they are full and participating citizens. They are engaged and contribute to the life of the community. It is these invisible qualities, these threads of connection that determine whether one is actually "home."

This year we are replacing two of our regular newsletters with three new bulletins. We are taking what people have told us they like about our newsletter—current information, planning tips and inspirational stories—and concentrating them in one publication: like boiling the sap from maple trees to make into maple syrup, and what better place to start with something new than Home.

We hope that you like this edition and that you will tell your friends about it. If they are interested in receiving our bulletins on a regular basis and getting lots of additional benefits, all they have to do is become a PLAN Associate. There are more details at the back of this bulletin.

The Importance of Home Ownership

Nevertheless, owning a home is a real and achievable option for many people with disabilities. More and more families are looking to new alternatives to help their loved ones find a place of their own. With interesting new opportunities and resources families are beginning to realize that their family member's dream of owning a place of their own is possible. With careful planning, there is plenty of potential for people with disabilities to realize their hopes and dreams of owning a place of their own.

Buying a home is a luxury that many of us take for granted. It is a dream that many people share, an aspiration entrenched in our social values and norms. It is an opportunity that most of us simply assume will occur, not realizing that for many individuals this may not be a reality. For people with disabilities, owning a home is often difficult to achieve. The barriers and challenges are numerous, sometimes seemingly insurmountable, and often limit the options available.

For someone with a disability, owning a home is about ensuring a higher quality of life, making choices, and creating a space that is uniquely their own. It is about understanding that they have contributions to make to their community, and that contributing benefits themselves as well as everyone else. Most importantly, it is about taking a step towards securing a happy and healthy future.

HOME OWNERSHIP MEANS

- Control over where you live
- Stability of tenure
- The opportunity to build up equity
- Financial and emotional investment
- Hedge against inflation
- Privacy
- A sense of place
- Choice
- Contemplation
- Hospitality
- A haven
- Security
- Safety, comfort
- Sanctuary

The Feel of Home

By Kristi Fairholm Mader, Director of Social Enterprise

The founders of PLAN were careful in their choice of language. They identified “home” as one of the key components of a good life rather than a “house”. You might wonder the difference.

Many years ago I was a college instructor for a program that trains Classroom and Community Support Workers—those individuals who support our sons and daughters. As part of my responsibilities I supervised students on their field placements. These were placements in the community where students could experience the reality of their chosen profession—

classrooms, group homes, supported employment, and community support. As a result I visited many group homes in the lower mainland operated by a variety of agencies and providers. The contrast between a “home” and a “house” became evident during these visits.

Some residences were beautiful. They were attractively furnished, bright, clean, and orderly. And yet they lacked the feel of a home. It was hard to imagine that people actually lived there. Nothing was out of place. The floors and bathrooms smelled of cleaner and disinfectant. The beds were all nicely made. Yet something was missing. Other residences lacked the high standards of cleanliness and yet felt more comfortable. The walls and fireplace mantels held pictures of family and friends. Drawings and notes were stuck on the refrigerator door. Evidence of last night’s card game or movie night were still there. What was obvious is that someone lived here. These homes smacked of personality and character. These were clearly the homes of the individuals who resided there and not the workplaces of the workers.

“Home has nothing to do with rewards and punishments. It has nothing to do with wood, nails, bricks, and mortar. Rather, it is about sweat and laughter, bruises and tears, rug stains and cobwebs, flowers and slammed doors, failures and promises, kisses and fingerprints. Home is where we become, where we are authentic.”

—Etmanski, Al. “A Good Life”. Orville Cove and Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network: Vancouver. 2004. Pg. 110

Benefits of Owning a Home

- **Positive Living Environment:** Purchasing a home allows people to choose where they live, increasing the likelihood of being close to friends, family members, amenities, their interests and a safe community.
- **Stability:** Home ownership often creates sense of permanence and stability, which goes a long way towards ensuring that people belong in their community and develop meaningful relationships.
- **Financial security:** Investing money that would normally be put into rent can enable people to accumulate an asset, even if they have a lower income.
- **Inflation:** The persistent and substantial rise in prices for accommodation results in a significant loss money for other things. Investing in a home is a great strategy for combating inflation.
- **Privacy:** Home ownership provides a measure of privacy that often cannot be found in group homes or other service arrangements.
- **Choice:** Buying a home secures the ability to make many life decisions, such as where one lives and who one lives with.
- **Nurturing one's Network:** Having a home of one's own enables people to invite friends and family over, strengthening old relationships and creating new ones within the community.
- **Security:** Owning a home means being able to choose a safe neighbourhood and be surrounded with trusted people.
- **Sanctuary:** A home is a sanctuary: a place of rest and respite, where we can grow and feel comfortable.

Challenges of Home Ownership

- **Vulnerability:** Many of our relatives are vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous people. A home is a valuable asset and you may wish to structure the ownership so that unprincipled people will not be able to access this asset.
- **Disability Benefits:** We are often concerned about how our planning and actions will affect our relative's disability benefits. How will home ownership or rental income affect benefits?
- **Support Services:** Your relative may need support services to live in the residence. You may need to negotiate with the appropriate government funding bodies or service providers to secure these services.
- **Monitoring:** Who will monitor to see that the services required are actually being delivered appropriately? Who will monitor the home and make sure that repairs and maintenance are attended to?
- **Competency:** Your relative may or may not be considered legally competent to buy or sell real estate or to make a will, etc. This can complicate the purchase, sale and management of a residence.
- **Financing:** Most of us are unable to purchase a home outright. This raises the question: "How is the residence to be financed?"
- **Taxes:** As with any investment, taxes are a consideration. We need to think about capital gains tax and tax on income that is earned from the residence (e.g. renting out a basement suite). You will want to minimize taxes.

The Making of a Sanctuary

By Vickie Cammack, Executive Director PLAN Institute

For one glorious summer in the 70's an old, tamarisk tree with wide branches sweeping down to the sand of a Greek beach, was my home. Its branches opened like welcoming arms to form my front door. When friends came to call they knew I was home if they saw my sandals carefully set to one side. Inside there was a special crook in one branch that held my cup and toothbrush and plenty of twigs to drape my scarves on. My tree gentled the sun's rays by day and let the stars peek through at night.



I felt safe and sheltered by this kind tree. My tree space felt lived in, by me, by others before me and of course by various wildlife who shared it with me. It was definitely the place that felt the most like home during that sun kissed summer. On the other hand, one of our treasured family stories is the account of my mother, who upon reading a letter containing my starry eyed account of my life in Greece, burst into tears and wailed, “She’s living in a tree. A tree!” For her, my breezy home was not and never would be a home.

That’s the thing about a home. It is a very personal feeling. Not so much a place as a space. It is a space that breathes and nourishes us. A space becomes a home when it opens to us as we are, and when we, in turn, get worn into it. Creating this kind of ‘home space’ when a person is vulnerable or isolated is complex. As families we are often caught in the paradoxical challenge of finding spaces that both open doors and secure locks. This is why cultivating and consulting caring connections beyond us is so important for our relative. Standing together, we can peek out, open the curtains of our own comfort zones and imagine the living, breathing spaces our loved ones can grow their way into. And out of. Just as no tree lives for forever, no home, no matter how well planned, financed and built, is ever permanent. True durability lies in the long arms of others who will care for our relative beyond our lifetime. It is embrace that will nourish and honour our loved one’s spirit wherever they may live.

H.O.M.E. Home Ownership Means Equity!!



By Susan Whittaker

Quite a number of years ago my husband Ron and I attended a workshop entitled 'Home Ownership Means Equity'. That workshop left an indelible impression.

On the Saturday, family members spoke about the creative living solutions they had developed for their children with disabilities. It was impressive to hear these solutions—they were all different and each family felt they had found the one that best met the needs of their children. There was one that spoke the loudest to Ron and I.

This model has been the inspiration for us over the years. Although we had a kernel of an idea, we weren't sure how it would look and if it was achievable. **We knew that one family had achieved it and that it worked.** Arthur Mudry spoke that weekend of what he and his wife had done for their daughter, Lynne. It has been at the back of our minds for many years now and we are actively pursuing something similar to what Arthur has achieved.

Our daughter, Stephanie, lived at Woodlands (BC's largest institution) as a young child. We worked hard to get her out in the community. Twenty-five years ago group homes were the ideal solution. They were new, they were smaller and more personal and an alternative to institutional life.

What we have learned over the years though, is that group homes are not always able to meet the needs of the individual. As the years have gone by, families have started to pursue other avenues to give their children a better life. One more step in the evolution of community living! We felt that it was time to take that next step and once again we are working to change her living situation.

Our other two daughters attended university and lived in a variety of situations—dorms, shared apartments, shared houses, living on their own. They chose where they would live and with whom. They had a choice and made the choices which they felt would work for them. When things didn't work or it was time for a change, they moved on.

It was Stephanie's PLAN Network that helped us refine our vision to best meet her needs.

Stephanie has lived in a group home for over twenty-five years. She has never been given that same choice as to where she lives, with whom or who the staff will be. She has lived in four different houses in two communities. Neither she nor the family had a part in the decision as to where that house was located. We have seen many room mates come and go and numerous staff—too numerous to count. We are also aware of the toll it takes on Stephanie to live in a house where there are often seven or eight people (roommates and staff).

We know that there is a cycle in group home life. We have seen it take place too often. Things can work well when staff are dedicated and caring. We have also seen how staff can change in a very short period of time, with no explanation to families. You go in one day and they are just gone—these are often people your child cared about, was close to, and were a part of their life. These are often individuals that were trusted and well liked by the family.

These changes can create chaos and grief for our daughter which flows over to our whole family. We have seen how this has affected Stephanie and how difficult she has found it. It is during these times that the H.O.M.E weekend has inspired us to put thoughts into action.

We have always gone back to trying to find the ideal solution for our daughter. It was Stephanie's PLAN network that helped us refine our vision to best meet her needs. The network has made suggestions that Ron and I would not have thought. Together, we have begun to put something in place that we feel will give Stephanie a good life.

Her family and network see Stephanie in a home of her own. A home that is hers, that has all the things important to her. We have taken the step of purchasing a house that matches her network's vision for a good life for Stephanie. It is in a safe neighbourhood, close to public transportation, shopping, movie theaters, community center and her family. It has a fenced backyard perfect for the dog that we know she is desperate to have. Walking down the street on any given day, we meet families out for a walk, dogs out for their daily constitutional, and children on their way to school or the community center.

We are of two minds—a compatible room mate or no room mate? To optimize costs, we need to consider a room mate. The people that know Stephanie best, her network, will be fully involved in making decisions for choosing her room mate. We know it is one of the most critical pieces for her future and for that of her room mate.

Stephanie requires 24 hour care. We will be fully involved in who shares her home with her. We have been leaning toward someone to life share with Stephanie and her room mate but are also looking at other options. If someone were to life share, it would be their home as well and they need their own space and privacy.

We knew we needed a duplex or a basement suite to help with income for mortgage, taxes and maintenance.

We are open to all considerations of staffing and life sharing, but we are adamant that her home reflect who she is and be as close to what we would want for ourselves as possible. Ron and I recently attended a "Residential Options" presentation by Community Living BC and saw a model that may work well for Stephanie. We will be giving it a great deal of consideration and will be discussing it with her network to get their input.

Stephanie's house has a basement suite. We knew we needed a duplex or a basement suite to help with income for mortgage, taxes and maintenance.

With everything around our children with disabilities, funding is a key issue. It is key to achieving our dream and to giving Stephanie a good life. This is one more piece we have been working on for years.

Leaving the Nest for a Home of One's Own



By Arthur Mudry

“Home” is the source of life itself. We all seek a good life, which includes relationships with families, friends (old and new), neighbours and new-found acquaintances, the sharing of seasonal celebrations, achievements, joy, opportunities, and mutual challenges and tribulations. Indeed home is the “garden” where our dreams, strengths and relationships evolve, grow and flower in our journey of life within our community. Good times or bad, there is no place like home.

Leaving a family home to establish a home of one's own marks a unique and important experience in our life. Similar to a bird's first attempts to leave its nest, we take a leap of faith into the unknown, driven by our desire to make it on our own and discover our own world. It is often difficult and challenging to let go of a place so dear to us. Yet, the transition from a family “nest” to a “nest” of one's own is an important step for both parents and their loved one.

Home ownership implies a sense of citizenship, responsibility and control of one's own personal environment. One's own home marks our unique and familiar “place” in the community where we learn to grow ourselves and are seen by others in our neighbourhood as a unique and valued citizen.

For most of us “home” (i.e. principal residence) is also our single largest and most valuable asset; providing shelter, security and happiness while maintaining value through the years. It is a place we always come back too, a place representative of our own distinct character.

It often takes a big leap of faith to leave the “nest”. It takes faith in the people who love you, your family and friends. But most of all, it takes faith in yourself. Faith that you will be challenged at every step, but that in the end, you will learn to fly.

One Family's Journey to Home



Pat Tesan, Family Support Coordinator

When my family first joined PLAN a number of years ago, one of the first people we heard speak was Arthur Mudry. I can still remember how excited I was to hear his story about buying a home for his daughter Lynn. It was wonderful to hear that there were other possibilities for the future that we had not yet considered. We had just always thought that Erin would always live at home with us. All these years Arthur has been as inspiration for us and we have held onto the dream of one day buying our daughter a home of her own.

Erin is now 29 years old. While she is not yet ready to move into her own home we have taken a huge step forward. We had the good fortune of hearing about **The Family Independence Fund** [www.givinginaction.ca or phone: 1.866.523.3157 (toll free) and 604.683.3157 (local)] administered through the Vancouver Foundation. We learned that

because we “were supporting a relative with a developmental disability in our own home”, we could apply for a one-time grant to help with a home renovation. We felt very sure that building a suite in our home for Erin would help her to gain some new independence.

We applied for funding and were approved! We hired a contractor and within two months Erin's suite was finished. What fun it was for both the two of us to shop and pick out her paint colours and a few pieces of new furniture.

She has become more independent and takes great pride in her new surroundings.

Erin is now happily ensconced in her “new apartment”. She loves her new bedroom and having her own fridge and stove in her own kitchen. While she still has dinner with us and spends the evenings upstairs with us (if she is not out with her friends), when she is tired she happily heads downstairs to put on her music and get ready for bed. She has become more independent and takes great pride in her new surroundings. She loves to enter and leave home by “her” door.

While our dream is still for her to one day own her own home, we are extremely happy with her suite and just how easily and quickly she has adapted to this new adventure.



Home Ownership: Some Income Tax Issues

By Eric W.H. Feilden, CA, HLB Cinnamon, Jang Willoughby & Company, Chartered Accountants

Have you considered home ownership as being one of the strategies in securing a good life for your relative with a disability? Home ownership should combine the increasing value of a home with the forced savings that results from paying down a mortgage. When potential income tax savings flowing from the principal residence exemption is added to the mix, it becomes a powerful combination to build wealth and financial security.

What are the income tax consequences associated with home ownership? Except where the home is used to earn business or rental income, the costs of maintaining a home are not deductible for income tax purposes.

On the other hand, income taxes otherwise payable on the home's increase in value (capital gain) when the home is sold may be partially or completely eliminated because of the *principal residence exemption*. In concept, the *principal residence exemption* is straightforward—a gain realized on the disposition of a principal residence is not subject to income tax. However, as with most income tax rules, the devil is in the details.

A *principal residence* includes a:

- housing unit (a house, an apartment or unit in a duplex, apartment building or condominium, a cottage, a mobile home, a trailer or a houseboat)
- leasehold interest in a housing unit, or
- share of the capital stock of a co-operative housing corporation if such share was acquired for the sole purpose of obtaining the right to inhabit a housing unit owned by that corporation.

Where the home is owned by a personal trust, the trust may also claim the principal residence exemption.

Generally speaking, up to one half a hectare of land (approximately 1.2 acres) on a which a housing unit is situated also qualifies for the principal residence exemption, and in some cases, land in excess of one half hectare also might qualify.

In order to qualify as a principal residence, a housing unit generally must be *ordinarily inhabited* during the year by the taxpayer, or by his or her spouse or common-law partner or child. The term *ordinarily inhabited* is not defined, and whether or not a housing unit is ordinarily inhabited in the year must be resolved on the basis of the facts in each particular case. However, a housing unit can be *ordinarily inhabited* even if only occupied for a short period during the year, such as where a housing unit is acquired late in a year or disposed of early in a year.

One of the limiting factors in claiming a principal residence exemption is that a *family unit* may designate only one property as its principal residence for a taxation year. A taxpayer's family unit generally includes the taxpayer's spouse or common-law partner and unmarried minor children.

A housing unit must be owned by a taxpayer or jointly owned by the taxpayer and some other person in order to qualify as a principal residence. Where a housing unit is jointly owned by a taxpayer and some other person, the taxpayer will be able to designate only the portion of the housing unit that he or she owns as his or her principal residence.

Where the home is owned by a personal trust, the trust may also claim the *principal residence exemption* to reduce or eliminate a capital gain that results when the property is sold. However, the rules in this situation

are complex, especially if the trust has more than one beneficiary. Alternatively, the trust may be able to transfer the housing unit to a beneficiary without incurring income taxes, and the beneficiary may be able to claim the *principal residence exemption* for the years that the trust owned the housing unit.

Home ownership, either directly or indirectly, by your relative with a disability may assist in securing a good life for your relative.

It may be possible for to earn some rental income without impairing the taxpayer's ability to claim the principal residence

exemption. Where a taxpayer has completely or partially changed the use the home produce income, there are rules which might result in the realization of a capital gain or capital loss. Any capital gain might be reduced or eliminated by the *principal residence exemption*. Any capital loss on a personal use property is deemed to be nil. The Canada Revenue Agency usually will not apply these change of use rules where the income-producing use is ancillary to the main use of the property as a residence, and certain other conditions are met.

Home ownership, either directly or indirectly, by your relative with a disability may assist in securing a good life for your relative. The potential for income tax free appreciation in the value of real property can yield high returns. However, the income tax rules pertaining to the principal residence exemption are complex, and professional advice should be sought.

Home Ownership: Accumulating Assets

Home Ownership is a significant factor in the accumulation assets. Statistics demonstrate a huge discrepancy in accumulated net worth between those who rent versus those who own. For example, the average Canadian renter between the ages of 55 and 64 years a net work of \$19,900. The average homeowner in the same age bracket has a net worth of \$418,700 (see table for details).

Principal Residence Status	Under 35	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Rent	\$5,000	\$14,500	\$20,500	\$19,900	\$40,300
Own	\$92,500	\$160,400	\$279,000	\$418,700	\$303,800

Thus beyond all of the day-to-day benefits of living in one's own home, buying a home is an important way in which people can invest and save their money. As the table demonstrates, people who invest in a home are much more likely to accumulate assets over the long term.

(The Vanier Institute of the Family, *Transitions: Money and the Canadian Family*. Winter 2002-2003 Edition. Pg. 5)

The Pros and Cons of Owning a Home in Trust

Halldor K. Bjarnason, Barrister & Solicitor

A trust is a relationship where one person (called the “Trustee”) holds property for the benefit of another person (called the “Beneficiary”). While the Trustee legally owns the property and makes all of the decisions with respect to it, he or she can only use the property for the benefit of the Beneficiary. Likewise, the Beneficiary can enjoy the trust property, but he or she is not permitted to make any decisions with respect to how the property is handled.

There are a few ways that a trust can be helpful:

- If the Beneficiary does not have the mental or physical capacity to sign a purchase or sale agreement, a trust gives some else the legal ability to handle the property.
- If the Beneficiary is subject to undue influence, and could potentially be persuaded to “give their house away”, a trust could prevent this from happening.
- If the Beneficiary has full capacity, but enters into a marriage or common law relationship, a properly designed trust may prevent successful family property claims being made against the house by their spouse or former spouse.
- While a person receiving provincial Disability Assistance can legally own their own home and still qualify for Assistance, the rent received from tenants or roommates constitutes income, and can affect their eligibility for Assistance. A trust which owns the home can shelter such income, ensuring it does not affect the Beneficiary.



However, there are also some downsides to having the home owned by a trust:

- When the person receiving benefits is fully capable of managing their own affairs, they have a disadvantage of having no control over their own home.
- A home held by a trust can typically not receive the Home Owner’s Grant to offset municipal property taxes.
- The costs of having a trustee manage the house could be quite high, particularly if a professional trustee is used.
- There may be capital gains tax issues if there are a number of residents of the house besides the beneficiary.



The above is an over simplification of the issues. With proper legal advice, there may be ways to use a trust as part of the homeownership plan that will be perfect for your individual circumstances. The use of a trust can resolve a lot of potential problems of home ownership for your disabled son or daughter.

Home Ownership and Disability Benefits

By Jack Styan, Executive Director of PLAN

There are many advantages in owning a home but whenever families plan for loved ones with a disabilities, they must consider the impact on provincial disability benefits (BC Disability Benefits, Assured Income the Severely Handicapped in Alberta, Ontario Disability Support Program).

Most families do not have the means to provide for their relative's financial security on their own, especially when the cost of health benefits is considered. As a result, provincial benefits are the foundation for financial security for roughly 450,000 Canadians with disabilities. Thus when considering home ownership as part of a future plan, families often ask the following question: "How does home ownership affect our relative's disability benefits?"

Your primary residence is an exempt asset

In every province and territory a person's primary residence is considered an exempt asset. That means when they tally up a person's assets to determine their eligibility for disability benefits, they don't count a person's home. Unfortunately, that does not include a home that you don't live in, that isn't your primary residence.

Income from a boarder or a tenant

As we know, planning a home is not a simple task. In many instances, people will have room-mates or may rent a suite in their home to help cover the costs of their home. How is this income treated?

In BC, the income that a person gets from providing room and board or renting a suite in their principal residence is considered "earned income" (Note: This does not apply to income received from renting a residence that the person does not live in.). Up to \$500 of earned income is exempt in BC.

In addition, the cost of providing room and board can be deducted from the income received from a boarder and 25% of rent payments received can be deducted from a boarder.

Unfortunately, the regulations for disability benefits are different in each province and territory. Check our website (www.plan.ca) for a summary of how room and board and rental income is treated in other jurisdictions.

BC Example:

Jack receives BC Disability Benefits. He owns his own house, provides room and board to a roommate for \$500 per month and rents out a basement suite for \$500 per month.

He calculates that it actually costs about \$300 a month to provide room and board (food and household supplies, additional utilities costs, etc). He can deduct the \$300 from the \$500 he receives for room and board. Thus only \$200 counts as earned income.

He is able to deduct 25% of the \$500 rent that his tenant pays, therefore only \$375 of the rent he receives counts as earned income.

Thus his total earned income from the boarder and his tenant is \$575. Because up to \$500 is exempt, only \$75 is deducted from his BC benefits.

Calculation of Effect on Disability Benefits

Income from room-mate and tenant	\$1000
Qualified deductions (\$300 + \$125)	\$425
Total Earned Income from Boarder and Tenant	\$575
Exemption Allowed on Earned Income for Persons with Disability	\$500
Total Income Deducted from BC Benefits	\$75

Financing: Vancity's Springboard Home Ownership Program

By Kristi Fairholm Mader, Director of Social Enterprise

For many families and people with disabilities, the high cost of housing can act as a barrier, especially in real estate markets that have seen a huge increase over the past few years. As the cost rises, the amount of down payment needed to make monthly mortgage payments affordable can be significant. However, Vancity Credit Union has been working towards finding ways to assist aspiring home owners by providing financing that increases affordability.

Relatives with a disability who live in non-profit housing can take advantage of the **Springboard Home Ownership Program**. This program provides qualified participants with 100 per cent of the money needed to buy a home, including the down payment. It consists of two parts:

- 20% down payment loan (interest-free) payable over 10 years
- 80% 10 year fixed mortgage; interest payments-only mortgage is payable over 25 years

The total of both loan and mortgage cannot exceed \$300,000.00

The following qualifications must be met in order to take part in the program. Participants must:

- be living in non-profit housing,
- have verifiable employment/pension income,
- have 2 years unblemished rent payment record to the housing provider,
- have completed the "Home Readiness" financial literacy course

Already, this program is having an impact, and 11 people since 2006 are now proud home owners; "It feels like winning the lottery, just better", says Donna Kientz of Abbotsford, the first Springboard participant and proud owner of her first home. And while home ownership has great benefits, it also comes with certain responsibilities. The 'Home Readiness' course is 6-hours delivered over 2-3 sessions and is designed to provide a practical approach to buying and owning a home. The course will address such topics as: Pros and Cons of Home Ownership, Financial Help for Home Ownership, Finding the Right Home for You, and many more.

The Springboard homeownership program is only one tool families and people with disabilities can use to make homeownership more affordable. The Mixer mortgage encourages people to pool funds in a shared living/ownership arrangement, and Vancity Enterprises has led the way in developing homes that carry restrictions on price. For more information, check out Vancity's website at www.vancity.com

"That's the thing about a home. It is a very personal feeling. Not so much a place as a space. It is a space that breathes and nourishes us. A space becomes a home when it opens to us as we are, and when we, in turn, get worn into it."

—Vickie Cammack, Executive Director, PLAN Institute

Renting: 10 Tips for Finding the Right Home

By Kristi Fairholm Mader, Director of Social Enterprise

Renting can provide many of the same benefits of homeownership. While renting does not build assets, it relieves you of responsibility for home maintenance and property taxes. If you are not ready for home ownership or if you find the financial risk of purchasing a home daunting, then renting provides a way to explore housing, establish a home, organize your supports, and test independent living.

Finding the right home is key, and negotiating the rental market can be both fun and discouraging (as you see the wide variety of repair and disrepair). Over the past 15 years, I have rented and lived in 10 different rental homes. I may not be an expert, but have picked up a few tips that might make your search a little easier.

1. Finding the right place

Browsing online (e.g. craigslist.com) and searching the classified ads generates a lot of options, but sometime you will face line-ups outside of apartment buildings.

Walking through potential neighborhoods looking for 'for-rent' signs offers a ground-level feel of the neighborhood and a first look at potential homes. If you see a place that seems suitable, buzz the manager's suite and ask if they have anything available. One friend did this and saw two places before they were even advertised.

2. Price and quality housing are not always related

I have walked into some places charging a premium and wondered how landlords can show the place, while lower priced suites have been fabulous. One reason a landlord gave for asking low rent on a beautiful main floor of a house was that they wanted to choose the right tenant and encourage them to stay a long time.

3. Look for units in established, designated rental buildings.

There is a difference between speculative real estate and long term rental stock. Speculative real estate is not a good source for long-term housing for vulnerable tenants. As the market rises, investors tend to sell.

The same can be said about basement suites—owners sometimes choose to sell, renovate or take their suite off the rental market.

4. Research the community

Check the city/community website for an overview of services nearby, crime rates, transportation and future community planning.

5. Appearances are important

The outside of the building indicates the landlord's approach to building care. A poorly maintained exterior often signals deeper problems. Beware!

6. Use tenants as a resource

Ask how long the last tenant stayed—a long time indicates a good place and landlord.

If the current tenants are in the home, having two people is handy. One of you can distract the landlord so someone can quickly get a 'thumbs-up-or-down' from the tenants. I have been saved from two places this way—one that was infested by rats, and the other that had a very noisy neighbor.

Talk to neighboring tenants. Find out if the landlord maintains the residence, respects tenants and responds to requests quickly.

7. Check security

Is the building secure? Ground floor apartments can offer a garden and outside access, but may also be more susceptible to crime. Landlords are required to change locks with each new tenant upon request.

8. Cleaning and maintenance

Has the unit been cleaned or will it be cleaned before moving in? (including shampooing carpets and re-painting walls)

Is the landlord willing to provide paint for you to paint according to your relative's wishes?

Are the carpets clean and in a reasonable state of repair?

9. Estimating costs

Call utilities companies for electricity and heating records; this will provide a clear picture of how much monthly utilities will cost.

10. Know your rights

Get to know the Residential Tenancy Act in your province/state. It dictates the relationship between tenant and landlord, and outlines your rights as a tenant.

For example, in BC landlords are allowed to charge a 4% annual rent increase.

Rental house hunting is the combination of art and science, and can be a draining couple of days (the first two days of the month must be blocked off!). However, it can give a real appreciation of a neighborhood,

Want More Information? Future Resources

Home is Where the Heart Is

May 24th, 2008 from 10am to 4pm

(location to be determined)

Weaving family experiences together with the expertise of professionals to inspire you to create the right home for your loved one while avoiding the pitfalls.

Home Options—Telelearning

February 27th, 2008 from Noon to 1pm

or 4 to 5pm (Pacific Time)

A one-hour telephone seminar (available anywhere) that tells how families have matched their unique situations with options for ownership, funding and support.

A Good Life (Book) or

Peace of Mind (CD Rom)

A step by step guide for securing a good life for our relatives with disabilities by Al Etmanski.

Want to Stay Informed? Become an Associate of Plan

Support PLAN's public policy work and receive:

- PLANfacts (PLAN's newsletter)
- Specially-produced Bulletins on planning for a Good Life. 2007 Bulletins include:
 - Home Ownership: A Place of Our Own
 - Navigating your Tax Return
 - The Registered Disability Savings Plan: Fitting it into your estate planning
- Subscription to Abilities Magazine (Canada's leading disability lifestyle magazine)
- ActionPLAN (PLAN's public policy ezine)
- 25% discount on all PLAN workshops and seminars

For more information, to order, register or become an Associate of PLAN

Call: 604.439.9566

Email: inquiries@plan.ca

Website: www.plan.ca

I'D LIKE TO BECOME A PLAN ASSOCIATE!

Enclosed is my cheque/money order for \$29.95 (\$35.95 outside Canada)

Please charge \$ _____ to my (check one) Visa Mastercard

I would like to donate an additional _____ to my payment. (tax receipts issued)

Cardholder name: _____ Authorized signature: _____

Card number: _____ Expiry date: _____

Learn how you can be an Associate of PLAN for free if you are a Member of Vancity—Call 604.439.9566

Please return to PLAN #260 – 3665 Kingsway, Vancouver, BC V5R 5W2 Phone 604.439.9566 Fax 604.439.7001 www.plan.ca



LOOK FOR OUR NEXT BULLETIN IN JANUARY, 2008:

Navigating Your Tax Return: What you need to know if you have a relative with a disability.