



Ask Lauren

A pilot project creating vertical communities in apartment buildings to inspire a friendlier city.



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CITYSTUDIO
FALL 2014 COHORT #9


CITY OF
VANCOUVER


THE APARTMENT INNOVATORS


GORDON
Neighbourhood House

westbank



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WHAT IS A COMMUNITY CONCIERGE?

A Community Concierge is a volunteer role who welcomes apartment dwellers home, while having a vast knowledge of the local neighbourhood. They encourage and support the creation of a vertical community within their apartment building.



Ask Lauren, the pilot project, launched in November of 2014 with the help of CityStudio Vancouver, The Gordon Neighbourhood House, and Westbank Corporation.

As a pilot project, the community concierge is an experiment in simple, everyday, face-to-face connections. This experiment aims to help residents get to know the neighbourhood, each other, create a welcoming and friendly atmosphere in apartment buildings. Residents have a choice for how much interaction they have with the concierges as they can stop and chat for half an hour, or simply smile as they walk by.

The Community Concierge is a simple, yet effective mechanism for creating vertical communities in Vancouver. Any building looking to establish their own Community Concierge can use this toolkit to help establish a concierge within their building. Toolkits can be found at your local neighbourhood house, or their websites.

STARTING YOUR OWN CONCIERGE, A HOW-TO GUIDE:

STEP ONE

Understand your building and its management style. This step varies depending on which type of development you live in. We piloted our project in a new, rental-only building, and spoke directly with the developers. But, this step changes drastically depending on whether or not you live in a co-op, strata, rental-only, or other.

STEP TWO

You can also contact The Apartment Innovators at apartmentinnovators@gordonhouse.org and we can arrange a phone call or meeting to help create a plan. Your neighbourhood house should also be able to offer you support.

STEP THREE

The key step is to get in contact with whatever management is currently in place, and convincing them that a community concierge is a simple, and cheap mechanism to create a vertical community. We recommend telling them that our pilot project had a 96% approval rating, and was able to connect residents with each other.

STEP FOUR

Start your concierge! Set up a table or chair in your lobby, and start meeting people. We strongly recommend finding another person to concierge with you as well, you will likely feel more comfortable starting this project with an extra person.



TIPS AND TRICKS



SAYING HELLO

Our number one tip, is to learn people's names. Introduce yourself, and ask if they've heard about the concierge project. People respond to people, so keep it low key and light.

If you can gather donations such as tea, coffee, or cookies, it helps get the attention of residents as they come home.

CALENDAR

Know upcoming events in your area. We recommend reading the Georgia Straight as they usually have a good grasp on events happening in the city, as well as free events.

Your local neighbourhood house has a lot of various programming, and are usually offered at a low cost - they are more than willing to give you more information about this.

RESOURCES

There are multiple grants within Vancouver that are able to help you with your endeavour of establishing a vertical community.

**Greenest City Grants,
Vancouver Foundation small
Neighbourhood Grant.**

Keeping in contact with your neighbourhood house and building management. They will be able to share any information you may need.



TIPS AND TRICKS

MAP IT OUT

Having a good understanding of your geography is key. For people who are new to the building, you serve as a strong point of knowledge, and can help them feel situated in a new environment. Being able to point them in the direction of the best produce, closest movie theatre, or dog park is key.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Know what times have a steady traffic flow. We found that between 8am-10am people are usually on their way out for work, but are willing to stop for coffee. Around noon there is a slower flow of traffic, but people are willing to have longer conversations. After work hours (4pm-6pm) are a mix - people are happy to be home, but tired.



IDENTIFICATION

Find a way to distinguish the concierge from normal residents. We used a bold red button, that read, "Ask Lauren," and wore blazers. This step could be as simple as wearing a white button down and a name tag.

BUSINESS CARDS

It is important that your fellow residents have some way of contacting you. We printed business cards, and set up an email so that residents could email us at their own will.



EVENT PLANNING



When we worked with Westbank, they had a budget set aside for community initiatives, but needed ideas. With their help, we were able to throw the residents a party at the end of our experiment. You can also use community grants to help fund some sort of party.

It helps to have something to offer residents, we used beer, wine, pop, and appetizers. Once you get them into the space, then you can work on connecting people.



At our event, we had the help of a group called **Why I Love My Hood**, they asked residents what they love about their neighbourhood, and what they would improve.

Other aspects of our event involved:

- having a DJ,
- a chalk board for residents to write what they love about their building,
- a children's play table (markers and drawing paper),
- a survey/raffle to collect feedback on how the building feels towards the concierge,
- name tags that asked people to fill out some thing they know a lot about, rather than their name.



THE APARTMENT INNOVATORS

BRENDAN BAILEY

UBC SOCIOLOGY AND FAMILY STUDIES

"The most rewarding part of being a Community Concierge, was the moment when someone came up to me, knowing I was the Community Concierge, and asked if I could introduce them to someone because they didn't know anyone from their building yet."



NICOLE DOUCETTE

SFU POLITICAL SCIENCE

"Getting to see the residents at the party at the end of the week was truly special. People were comfortable to get to know one another and started conversations with people they'd never talked to before. It was amazing."

MERCEDES MORK

SFU HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

"Community concierging is a great opportunity to get to know people and see their excitement when getting to know other residents. We were a great excuse for residents to interact with each other and knowing that gave me happiness. I found when I finished concierging I was friendlier on the streets and had a new sense of what it's like to live in an apartment building outside of my own experiences."



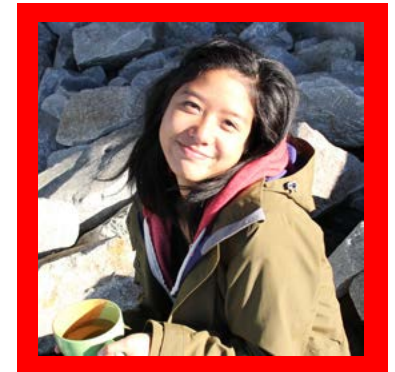
The Apartment Innovators formed during a semester at CityStudio Vancouver, an innovation hub for students within the City of Vancouver.



NATRADEE QUEK

UBC VISUAL ARTS AND ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY

"I've learned that friendliness can spread easily, it just needs a spark to start. When we concierged, we were an excuse for people to interact with someone new. I loved it when people who had previously rushed by us in the lobby would come back to us and chat. I found myself very eager to say "hi" and talk to people after leaving a concierging shift at The Lauren and am left wondering why everyone doesn't just say "hi" in the city."



SARAH BARNES

UBC HUMAN GEOGRAPHY, FOCUS IN URBAN STUDIES

"My favourite memories from our project are the stories that the residents shared with me over the week - I got to know them, their kids, wives, husbands, dogs, and experiences. Being somebody who residents were comfortable spending a conversation was so rewarding, and made the experience for me."



REFERENCES

Chia, E. (2014). Building Neighbourhood Social Resilience. ().UBC Sustainability Group.

This reference provided valuable insight into what is already being done, and what is suggested to create more connected neighbourhoods.

City of Vancouver. (2013). West End Community Plan. ().City of Vancouver.

This helped guide the demographics and key principles we were working with.

City of Vancouver. (2014). Vancouver's Healthy City Strategy. (). Vancouver: City of Vancouver.

This reference, in particular goal area seven cultivating connections, helped guide the deep need we were addressing in the city.

Engaged City Task Force. (2014). Vancouver Mayor's Engaged City Task Force Final Report. ().City of Vancouver.

This report helped us to create ideas to connect residents.

InWithForward. (2014). The Idea Press. ().InWithForward.

This article discussed Nok Nok, a version of a community concierge which we then piloted in The Lauren.

Vancouver Foundation. (2012). Connections and Engagement: A Survey of Metro Vancouver. ().Vancouver Foundation.

This report guided us in who we wanted to target through this project.