



Our Shared Values

ENVISION

COMMUNITY



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The majority of this research was conducted between March 11 and April 13.

- Understand the perspectives, needs, and desires of Envision's potential residents.
- Understand the perspective of housing experts in our community so that we can learn from their knowledge.
- Combine perspectives to craft shared values that will guide us in all aspects of Envision Community.

WE SPOKE WITH THREE TYPES OF PEOPLE

Potential residents experiencing housing instability (80)

- 3 SVOC meetings (12 people)
- 1 Site hike (12 people)
- 5 Group interviews at the public library (53 people)
- 1 Principles feedback session (3 people)



Potential residents who were stably housed (10)

- 3 One-on-one and interviews (3 people)
- 1 Co-op site visit & interviews (6 people)
- 1 MN tiny house site visit & interview (1 person)



Minnesota housing & shelter experts (11)

- 6 One-on-one interviews (6 people)
- 1 Group interview with Hopkins and St. Louis Park certified planners (5 people)



IN TOTAL WE SPOKE TO 101 INDIVIDUALS IN THIS PHASE OF RESEARCH!

TO CO-CREATE
SHARED VALUES

Shared values are high level guidelines that state the core values of Envision. They should guide decisions at all levels: financial, community, physical, etc. Shared values should be visible at multiple levels of the experience: physical objects, built environment, interactions, governance, etc.

Shared values are derived from **insights** we uncovered in our research. Insights are patterns visible across interviewees that provide a deeper understanding of the “why” behind observable behaviors or recounted narratives.



Envision's Values

Trust

Release

Learn

Share


Cultivate



TRUST

Consistency, transparency, and personal relationships are essential to build trust.

We build trust as individuals and as a community by holding ourselves to consistent well-known standards and rules, by clearly communicating our motives, and by considering the history of each individual in every interaction. Establishing trust is the foundation on which people build loyalty to one another, develop faith in worthy systemic structures, and build capacity to take up long-term plans and visions for the future. We must prove ourselves worthy of trust before expecting others to readily give it. As individuals and a community we respect the time it takes to build trust before a person is able to make long-term plans with our community and adopt the Envision principles into their daily lives.



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Support

“There need to be the same standards for all: responsibilities for your actions, cleanliness, respect, number of people in a house. What you’re paying for reflects what you’re getting.”
– MARCO, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“It needs to be clear that everyone living in this place got here the same way. Everyone has similar responsibilities.”
–DION, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“If I meet people where they at, I can’t treat everybody the same because some people have addiction. It’s about connecting with each individual and trying to find their needs, not because of what I want them to do.”
– FRED, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“You need a more flexible system for how people are housed currently. It needs to be fair and flexible at the same time. Currently there are no exceptions for people’s unique situations.”
– JAMES, HOUSING OUTREACH AT CATHOLIC CHARITIES


“Not everyone is going to be able to show up for everything. You need a few different ways for people to participate”
– KIM, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“Often people who are homeless have experienced a lot of trauma and injustice. They have come to learn everyone has a motive – and honestly we all do. When you lay that motive out for people, they are so much more willing to work with you and trust you. You should make the motives and intentions of this place very clear for residents.”
– TODD, PASTOR AT FIRST COVENANT CHURCH

“In shelters it seems like the rules change every hour every day. It’s frustrating.”
– KAYLA, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“To gain trust you need to open the door with a smile. How can we help you? How is your day? Do follow ups. I’m concerned. You coming back? I would love to see you again. This person is reaching out to you. They seem to care. Little by little you’re taking baby steps.”
– DIANE, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“People question your motive when there’s a lack of relationship.”
– TODD, PASTOR AT FIRST COVENANT CHURCH




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Value in Action

We provide **clear materials explaining our pricing for housing and services**. Residents can tell exactly what they (and their neighbors) are getting for their money, and what they would be able to get if they chose to pay more or less. This clarity requires a flat fee structure – everyone pays the same price for the same unit (services not included). This requires that the price be affordable enough that the residents can truly afford it with their income. Residents can choose to pay more than 30% of their income for a unit. However, we must make sure that our most basic unit is affordable so most people will be able to afford it with less than 30% of their income.

We provide **choice in housing options** for residents to choose from that satisfy different needs, budgets, and hopes. This visual diversity is essential to support resident autonomy in being able to choose a home that resonates with them. It also visually distinguishes our community from institutional settings like a prison where some members of our community may have spent time.

We provide **flexible payment options and funding sources**. Our community members can choose from a variety of ways to pay for their residence depending on how long they plan to stay in our community, whether homeownership is an important goal for them, and how much of their income they want to put towards housing. This range of choices will allow us to attract a diverse population of residents.




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Value in Action

We provide options for potential residents to **try Envision before committing** to living here. We have a few trial houses where potential residents can experience living in the community for a few days in exchange for a small fee or for helping out around the community.

We allow residents to **bring their own tiny houses** into our community even if they are built at different price points than the houses we build ourselves. The most important similarity between our residents is the value system we all share, not the design of our homes. Anyone who shares our values has something to give and something to learn from us. By allowing outside-built tiny homes into the community, we foster the diversity that we are dedicated to learning from.




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Value in Action

Everyone in the community is required to participate in a variety of ways. Every resident must attend one **monthly community meeting held during a communal meal.** In this meeting, we make decisions about opportunities and issues that arise in the community, decide as a group what we want to try to learn and work on in the next month, and read from a box of gratitude notes that residents submit about each other.

We require each resident to **fulfill a certain number of community hours.** We provide many different ways to fulfill these community hours depending on the social inclination, trust, capacity, and skill set of the residents. Ex: planting flowers, advocating at a town meeting for envision, serving as security for an evening, etc.

The expectations for **participation in community are less at the beginning of residency,** as residents may not trust that this is a place worth investing themselves in. For example, community hours are not required of individuals until they have been at Envision for several weeks. As their trust grows we begin ask them for more participation such as hosting a skill share or a game night.



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Value in Action

We orchestrate **close coordination** between professionals offering health care, supportive housing services, property management, and select resident support committees to ensure that everyone understands a resident's past experiences and current struggles and progress. This allows us to make decisions about evictions, arguments, noise complaints, and more in the context of the resident's history, and provide flexibility for people who may have been through traumatic experiences. Integrated meetings help these different stakeholders come together to exchange information and align around care.


All groups running and profiting from Envision **make our motives for running the village explicit to residents** (financial, educational, and otherwise). We have a sign posted in a community area explaining who is involved in all parts of the model and what they are getting out of it. We ask that anyone volunteering or working with the village do the same so that residents can make informed choices about who they want to interact with.



RELEASE

Letting go of things we don't need focuses our lives on things we love.

Throughout our lives, we accumulate and carry things that don't support us becoming our best selves – possessions, traumas, habits, relationships, and internalizations of systemic oppression. It can be difficult to identify what one really needs to live a life rooted in meaning and purpose while sitting amongst the “clutter”. We provide a place where together we can learn to let go of unnecessary things to make room for purpose, meaning, and community in our lives.



Letting go of things we don't need focuses our lives on things we love.

Support

"That letting go of some of the things you carried around when you were homeless – bad behavior, bad habits, mental and physical. You need to have a place to have that safety and security and let go of that fear. If you have that house there, all that other fear is gone. you're sleeping with your shoes on, all that."

– FRED, HOUSING UNSTABLE

"People [experiencing housing instability] have a lot of trauma and pain they're dealing with. Having a way to process that and let go of it is really important for a lot of people to be able to move forward."

– JAMES, HOUSING OUTREACH AT CATHOLIC CHARITIES

"People need a support network so they don't go back to the habits, friends, and things they know. The community can be a bad force, depending on your surrounding. You can go back to your old ways. It was the community I fell prey to."

– MONA, HOUSING UNSTABLE

"Everything has a purpose when you live tiny. It's an internal challenge to oneself about shedding things the world has put on you and embracing harmony and oneness. It's more of a spiritual awakening. ."


– ALEX, RAINBOW GATHERING PARTICIPANT

"I have a different set of priorities [than someone living in a full-sized house]. My priority is to be able to do stuff, not to have stuff. My priority is to be able to spend time with my daughter rather than work 3 jobs just to pay the bills."

– STEPHANIE, MINNESOTAN TINY HOME OWNER

"One thing I tell people is that we're not just living here for cheap rent. It's not that I like the fact that I have to share a bathroom. If you really need personal space, you have to pay more. That's how I see the values of time and money shift with lifestyle ."

– AUSTIN, COOPERATIVE LIVING MEMBER/OWNER




**Letting go of things we
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Value in Action

We have **shared facilities** in our community as well as a housing layout and common spaces that promotes interaction. We see this not as something that we have lost (private facilities) but rather as something we have gained (strengthened social fabric).

We foster **integrated spaces** for hosting people from different backgrounds, languages, geographies, and ideologies. By bringing diverse people together, we form relationships based on understanding and belonging rather than on stereotypes. One-on-one relationships with real people begin to replace stereotypes. We ask old residents to invite new residents out for meals or walks so that both parties can make new connections and meet new people.



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Value in Action

The act of moving into a tiny home is celebrated by our community during the **housewarming celebration** as taking a step towards living a fulfilled and purposeful life. Prior to the housewarming celebration new residents are asked to identify a habit, perception, relationship, or even a physical object they feel is not adding positive value to their life. During the ceremony the resident will release symbolic ashes in honor of letting these things go.

We conduct **storytelling workshops** with residents to learn how we can tell different stories about ourselves. We know that the narratives we tell about ourselves and our past affect our future, and we learn how to craft these stories as a way to meditate on how we want the past to affect our future as well as to let go of the stories that may be holding us back.



LEARN

The foundation of a flourishing community is our deep desire to learn from one another.

The desire to learn from lived experience is universal, spanning people from different races, backgrounds, and experiences. This intrinsic curiosity we have about each other is essential to forming the bonds that hold a strong community together. We must intentionally create spaces and interactions that encourage residents to learn from each other's rich and varied lives. This requires a diverse community that shares the desire to learn.

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Support

“She has a gift and she can share that gift with me. I say, ‘Oh I can use that.’ In return, I might have a gift for gardening. We trading off these gifts with each other, and that’s community.”

– FRED, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“The point of community is to stimulate my mind and help me come up. ”

– RENEE, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“If you’re not learning, you’re staying at a certain point in life.”

– KA, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“The idea from any community is to learn and grow from everybody.” – Maria, Housing unstable

“When you stop learning you stop growing. When you stop growing you start dying.”

– HOUSTON, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“[Residents coming from resourced backgrounds] can’t have the idea that they are the expert and we are the clients. There can’t be an economic hierarchy like that. Nobody can show up like they are better than anybody else or invulnerable.

That’s true for all residents.”

– SHARON, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“You don’t want one group that is always receiving and never giving back. You want someone who is going to give just as much as they take.”

– XAO, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“The term diversity doesn’t go far enough in describing how people should value one another’s experience. It needs to go farther than just having a diverse resident population—there needs to be ways of facilitating that sharing.”

– BRENT , FORMER PEACE CORPS MEMBER

“The focus should be on understanding what people have to offer the community and what they want to learn from the community when applying to live in this place.”


– BRENT, FORMER PEACE CORPS MEMBER

“Everyone always has something to give. If you don’t let them do that it’s really diminishing to their spirit.”

– BRENT, FORMER PEACE CORPS MEMBER

“I joined because I wanted to share knowledge and be able to live with artists and people who aren’t always playing video games. We could share our different types of creativities. I want to absorb their knowledge and the people that come and go.

– KOTO, COOPERATIVE LIVING MEMBER/OWNER




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Value in Action

Part of the **application process** for joining Envision includes answering questions that don't appear on standard housing application. We see this process as an opportunity to help us tailor our programs and services to a resident, to learn which residents this person might be interested in learning from, and how this resident might give back to the community. These questions form the basis of the deep and ever evolving relationship Envision wants to build with all of its residents.

To make the process as easy and accessible as possible we pair the applicant with a partner who interviews them to comfortably ask questions and document their answers. Important questions are: I'm good at _____. I want to learn more about _____. I am excited about _____. My priority right now is _____. I'm struggling with _____.




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Value in Action

We keep a **community board** in a common area with a photo of each resident and a list of the things they self-identify as good at. It also lists the things that they want to learn more about so that other residents know who to approach and what to exchange when they have a need.

Residents are encouraged to start their own **clubs or groups** to further pursue a passion with others, teach other people skills they are good at, or practice a new skill together. These clubs could include things like veggie-based cooking, fixing and tinkering, or even things like filling out complex forms or tax documents.

We maintain a **time bank** that residents can put hours into and trade with other residents for goods and services. This allows us to step out of our money-based economy and fully embrace and honor the abilities others bring to the table. It requires us to interact with other residents, and encourages a mindset of self-worth and abundance.



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Value in Action


In a community held together by the desire to learn, **transience is seen as an asset**, bringing in new people, ideas, and experiences for us to learn from. We welcome people committed to learning from each other into our community, regardless of their temporal commitment. While we maintain a base of long-term residents to create consistency, we also welcome less permanent residents like members of the Peace Corps, students, and more. We celebrate the time we have to learn from them. This commitment is supported by the different payment options we provide.



SHARE

Sharing our experiences creates meaningful impact in the world.

The natural extension of our desire to learn is our desire to share what we learn with others. The act of sharing makes meaning out of struggle and transforms hardship into purposeful growth that others can benefit from. By creating spaces and interactions for residents to share what they've learned with the outside world, we foster transformation within ourselves and the larger ecosystem. Sharing our stories outside of our community allows us to contribute to the important work of positive social change in housing instability.



**Sharing our experiences
creates meaningful impact
for everyone.**

Support

“Some of the best people have been through the fire and made it. That’s real life in a way many people can benefit from.”

– DION, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“People who have experienced homelessness are the most resourceful people out there. This is one of the many gifts they can give back to society. They can teach us how to live with less and be more efficient.

–SAM, RAINBOW GATHERING PARTICIPANT

“It’s wonderful for people to share their experiences so others don’t go down the same path.”

– WAYNE, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“Everyone’s strategies and abilities need to be brought out.”


– FLORA, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“To give back and build community. People want to do passion-driven work and projects that they define and build.”

– TODD, PASTOR AT FIRST COVENANT CHURCH

“The more we tell our stories the more we become them. They start to make us who we are. If you’ve told yourself you’re a failure over and over it’s hard to think about yourself in a different light.

– JAMES, HOUSING OUTREACH AT CATHOLIC CHARITIES




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Value in Action

We host **supper clubs once a month** where residents and surrounding community members are invited to enjoy a meal together. Before the meal residents and surrounding neighbors are encouraged to **prepare items on the menu together** and get to know one another. We encourage surrounding neighbors to bring a new friend with them each time they return to Envision for supper club as a way to invite as many non-residents into the community as possible. A special welcome for new guests is made before the meal. We know that one of the scariest things about a new place is whether or not you can trust the people, so supper clubs provide opportunities to meet the other residents and share a free meal.

During the meal, people are welcome to **share a story** they've prepared about their lived experience based around a monthly theme. We offer story training workshops to help people prepare for this event. We record the stories, include them in a podcast, and publish a **yearbook** each year documenting the stories our residents and non-residents shared with each other.



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Value in Action

Our **residents host and teach** urban survival workshops, reuse & resourcefulness trainings, and untapped spaces exploration hikes. We invite the surrounding community into Envision to learn from the valuable skills our residents have acquired over their lifetimes.


We also invite the **housed community** in to **host** skills workshops. We keep a running list of what residents are interested in learning about so that anyone who wants to volunteer can tailor their work to the residents' interests.



CULTIVATE

Dignity is fostered by cultivating something you love.

We can communicate the value we see in each person by entrusting each other with treasured things. Too often, some people are only given only what others discard. We believe that no one is “less than.” Living this belief means integrating people from all walks of life in a community that is worthy of love. In doing so, we seek to foster a mindset of dignity within each resident and to engage them in caring for themselves and their community. This also signals to the surrounding neighborhoods that Envision Community is a well-loved asset.



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Support

“It needs to be integrated to be dignified.”

– GLORIA, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“Closing you off from the world around you or fencing you in. Putting you way out somewhere that no one wants to be, this just adds to the idea that society doesn’t want you.”

– SHARAE, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“I think putting a fence around it would divide people even more—the rich and the poor. If you put it in the Mississippi even more so.”

– MALIK, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“If you put all the black and homeless people together you just create the same problem society created to get people to the point of homelessness. You create a ghetto.”

– SHARRON, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“If you love something you’re going to want to take care of it.”

– MONAE, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“It needs to have a homey feel. Little designs cut out of the wall where you can see from one room to another. Not just a box. Colors. Not just a cell.”

– SHARRON, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“Ownership over something gives people hope and ability to progress.”

– DAN, ST. STEPHENS

“The perception of undesirability will kill this thing. Funders need this word [homelessness] to justify the financing. No one else does. Don’t talk about homeless, don’t talk about health. Stigma around these things is huge and becomes an identity which is problematic.”

– TODD, PASTOR AT FIRST COVENANT CHURCH

“People think homeless people have really fucked up, they are losers. No-one wants to help a loser.”

– ERIC, HOUSING UNSTABLE


“If you put homeless on a sign out front, people driving by are going to think that those are just a bunch of homeless people, even if they see the houses.”

– DAN, HOUSING UNSTABLE

“We don’t go around saying to people, ‘Oh the resident in unit 102 used to be homeless. We make it clear that x% of the building is for section 8.” – LISA, COMMON BOND

“Don’t use the word heal. It makes it sound like the brokenness or wrongness is situated in the individual rather than the system. If it has anything to do with health, people are going to think that disturbed or sickly people live in there.”–

ABSHIR, HOUSING UNSTABLE



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Support

“The homeless people who move into your housing have options too and if it is seen as less than or not as good they won’t want it and won’t come.”


– ELLEN AND JENNIFER, HOUSING CONSULTANTS

“This thing needs to be the exact opposite of any institutionalized space created thus far. They never ask for anyone’s input or design anything that feels welcoming.”

– MICHAEL, SHELTER PROGRAM MANAGER
AT ST. STEPHEN’S

“The difference between a trailer park and what tiny house dwellers envision when they say a tiny house village... is a sense of pride, of homeownership.”

– STEPHANIE, MINNESOTAN TINY HOUSE OWNER




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Value in Action

We create **homes that are beautiful** inside and out, we provide **healthy food** for residents, and we locate our village on **land that is accessible and enjoyable** to be on. This ensures that our residents feel valued and that the outside community will want to come in and interact with Envision. Desirability is the foundation of integration.

“Homeless” is a derogatory term, branding the individual it is applied to with a sense of worthlessness and individual responsibility for a systemic problem. Individuals experiencing housing instability and their housed counterparts alike do not want to associate with this word. By **branding our community as a group dedicated to intentional living and learning rather than a homeless village**, we emphasize our asset of shared lived values rather than deficit or forced labeling. We also reflect the truth that no-one is homeless once they are housed.




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Value in Action

We incorporate residents into the hard work of advocating for this community and provide residents with multiple avenues for participation depending on individual capacity. Before Envision existed, future residents shaped the vision, took action to push its establishment forward, and co-created to build this beautiful, unique place. Resident leadership is essential, and the community strives to continually design new ways to amplify resident voices in decision-making and advocacy.

For example, different **democratically elected resident boards** review and inform decision making processes. Some boards deal with legal, financial, and/or political issues, while others help navigate and steer decision making concerning activities and events (like welcoming residents and surrounding neighbors) or settling resident disputes.



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Value in Action

Meaningful work is an essential part of dignity; people want and need to feel they are contributing to the world in a meaningful way and supporting their community. Meaning comes from an alignment between our internal values and our actions. We provide opportunities for meaningful work in our community by listening to what residents are interested in and creating ways to volunteer or generate income based on that. Examples of this may include gardening, maintaining the grounds of the community, creating art, and advocating for social change. We also provide flexibility in how this work is conducted and managed so that we can be support individuals who have gone through traumatic experiences.

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