



**The Transition Network's
Caring Collaborative
2011**

CREATING A VERTICAL VILLAGE IN A HIGH-RISE BUILDING

The Transition Network Vertical Villages™

Supported by a grant from the New York State Health Foundation

Copyright © 2011, The Transition Network's Caring Collaborative. All rights reserved.

FORWARD

The Transition Network (TTN) is a national non-profit organization that helps women over 50 explore their next steps by using the TTN community to support each other as they move forward. It is a groundbreaking organization for these women as they face new challenges in health, finances, family and friendship bonds, and second careers. Living and aging in community is a priority of TTN. See our website at www.thetransitionnetwork.org.

In 2009, TTN launched the Caring Collaborative, a reciprocal care-giving program that benefits its members, especially, those who do not have a family network. It reflects the fact that many TTN members are beginning to wrestle with health and care coordination concerns brought about by age-related illness and disability. The project is relevant to a wide range of community organizations whether they be churches, alumni associations, book clubs, or, in this case, high-rise buildings.

Creating a Vertical Village in a High-Rise Building is one component of the Caring Collaborative. In addition to this manual, TTN offers two other manuals: *Creating a Caring Collaborative in Your Community*, for community organizations and their members, and *What You Need To Know When You Go To The Hospital*, for understanding and influencing emergency room and hospital discharge practices. The Caring Collaborative is managed by a dedicated team of TTN members who are professionals in medicine, law, government, business, social work and journalism, and who have put together these manuals.

Our goal in distributing this manual is to share this model with high-rise buildings throughout New York City and other municipalities, and to suburban areas with a concentration of high-rise buildings. The manual suggests ways residents can turn their high-rise buildings into communities, leveraging the convenience of proximity and enabling staff, management, and residents to assist those in need.

All of these manuals are available free of charge to organizations interested in offering a version of this program suited to their needs. The manuals are written in Word and use Word's standard Table of Contents. As such, they can be modified and customized to community needs. We do ask that if you use these manuals, you respect our copyright and credit The Transition Network by keeping the copyright statement in the document. And, please let us know at www.thetransitionnetwork.org/ContactUs how use of these materials helped improve life for your community.

This manual is dedicated to Jane Young whose work on this manual was essential and profoundly rich. Jane died in 2009 after a valiant struggle against cancer.

Table of Contents

WHAT IS A VERTICAL VILLAGE?	4
A CASE STUDY	5
GETTING STARTED	7
SET YOUR GOAL AND CHOOSE YOUR STRATEGIES	7
NAME THE ORGANIZATION.....	7
ASSEMBLE YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM	8
IDENTIFY AND ENGAGE YOUR BUILDING’S STAKEHOLDERS EARLY	9
EXPANDING NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR PARTICIPATION	10
WINNING STRATEGIES	11
PLAN FOR EMERGENCIES	11
STAFF TRAINING FOR EMERGENCIES	11
EMERGENCY GO BAGS	11
CREATING AN INFORMATION SYSTEM WITH EMERGENCY CONTACTS.....	12
BUILD A BUDDY SYSTEM.....	12
THE BOOK EXCHANGE.....	13
BUILD A NEIGHBORS-HELPING-NEIGHBORS PROGRAM.....	13
OTHER VILLAGE PROJECTS	14
OVERCOMING BARRIERS/SOLVING PROBLEMS.....	16
COMMUNICATIONS	16
LIABILITY CONCERNS.....	17
BALANCING COMMUNITY AND PRIVACY	17
INCREASING THE MEMBERSHIP OF YOUNGER RESIDENTS	18
APPENDIX A: NEWSLETTER ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PROGRAM.....	19
APPENDIX B: SAMPLE LETTERS TO ANNOUNCE THE NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR PROGRAM.....	20
ANNOUNCING THE PROGRAM AND SEEKING PARTICIPATION FROM RESIDENTS	20
SAMPLE LETTER ASKING IF A RESIDENT IS AVAILABLE TO HELP	21
LETTER FOR CREATING A NEIGHBOR-TO-NEIGHBOR ASSISTANCE PROGRAM	22
LETTER DESCRIBING THE PROGRAM.....	23
APPENDIX C: EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION FORM.....	24
APPENDIX D: NEIGHBOR SELF-HELP CONTACTS AND INFORMATION SPREADSHEETS	25
CONTACT NAMES AND PHONE/APARTMENT/E-MAIL ADDRESSES	25
QUESTIONNAIRE:.....	26
A SUMMARY OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE:	27
APPENDIX E: SAMPLE MEMO FOR BUDDY PROGRAM.....	28

What Is A Vertical Village?

Living cheek-by-jowl in a high-rise building doesn't automatically turn residents into a community – often, quite the opposite. Our lives are busy and our schedules hectic. The last thing most city residents want to do when they're at home is to socialize with their neighbors. Yet when they need help, the first person they turn to is often a neighbor. People are hard-wired for community. Multi-unit apartment buildings have enormous potential for becoming vibrant communities....Vertical Villages.... where old-fashion values of neighborly assistance and support can prevail.

The Transition Network (TTN), using its experience of building and strengthening communities, has developed an innovative model for transforming multi-generational, high-rise residential buildings into Vertical Villages. It's a simple, low-cost way to organize and mobilize residents, staff, and building management to become a powerful network of support when help is needed. By organizing and mobilizing neighbors, Vertical Villages build a safety net of helping hands that has all sorts of outcomes – less isolation and loneliness; relief from the stress of wondering who will help in an emergency or acute health incident; better health outcomes through shared support and information; and the opportunity for a better quality of life for everyone.

The Vertical Village starts with the building's existing organization, which will vary building to building, but has common to all buildings, essential networks of human connections. The creative use of the existing organizational structure to help others costs a pittance. The challenge is to make it easy for residents to commit to developing community and to reward that commitment with help when needed. The model of the vertical community presented here is intergenerational, informal and reliant on volunteers. It makes no demand on building management for funding. It does not require dues from the residents and requires no paid staff. It's built on human and social capital that characterizes all types of communities.

These Vertical Village networks can benefit young and old alike, since the network is based on reciprocity and the belief that everyone has something to contribute. For example, a working adult can bring an evening meal to an older neighbor who, in return, can be the point person to wait for the cable repairman or such appointments that typically require time away from work. It is a way to join forces to create strong connections and a social environment that serves all residents.

This "How To" manual offers the tools and resources for creating caring community networks within any high-rise building. The model was tested in three multigenerational buildings where the population ranged from young parents and their children, to those in their 90's, who still live on their own. The Vertical

Village described here is based on the experiences in these three buildings, using TTN member-residents as a point of entry.

The manual identifies strategies to mobilize residents, building owners, managers and staff to agree upon and work together for common cause. It suggests opportunities where residents can participate in social activities to bind them together as a community where trust and support are prevailing values.

We recognize that there are often barriers when changing an existing culture. The manual addresses these barriers and ways to overcome them, such as liability issues, how to use technology, and strategies for communication with the stakeholders.

A Case Study

The experience in a midtown 8-story building on the Upper West Side is the basis of our manual. Two other Vertical Villages were started as small, single-focus projects using the neighbor-to-neighbor self-help model.

In the lead building, it was clear that projects focused around handling emergencies would be particularly useful. Specifically, there was a need for: 1) a database to be maintained by management with contact information for each resident in case of an emergency; 2) a plan for responding to city-wide and building-wide emergencies; and, 3) a buddy system to help residents in need.

The first step was getting approval from the board. Then, the project was described in the co-ops quarterly newsletter and announced at the annual meeting. The announcement also can be made with explanatory letters slipped under residents' doors or posted on the mailroom bulletin board. Building management distributed a form to all residents asking for emergency contacts and any special needs in case the building must be evacuated. Further, it asked if residents would participate in planning a neighbor-to-neighbor program. Residents in 51 of the 173 units completed the questionnaires, and 22 offered to help with the program.

Subsequently, five residents met to initiate the planning effort. This initial group developed a survey that asked what assistances residents would be willing to give when a neighbor had a temporary illness or disability, with such items listed as grocery shopping, picking up a resident after a medical procedure. The survey also asked how a resident might help others if there was a building-wide emergency, such as the blackout a few years ago.

The leadership group developed guidelines for the building staff and residents on how to handle emergencies and provided information on emergency kits (Go Bags) that might be purchased by each resident. Management trained staff on what is needed to operate a safe and secure building. Future projects include

mapping of neighborhood resources that can help in the event of a personal or building-wide emergency. Especially noteworthy is the positive response that came from the building's managing agent.

Getting Started

Building a Vertical Village is a process. There is no lock-step sequence of activities. Some buildings may choose to start with the building, some with the residents. Others may start with a formal plan, others with only an idea. Our manual describes the basic components of a Vertical Village. The way it is designed and rolled out will reflect the needs of residents in the individual buildings.

Set Your Goal and Choose Your Strategies

The broad goal of a Vertical Village is to introduce the values of neighborliness, care and communication into the operations of a multigenerational high-rise building; to foster the recognition of shared needs and shared interests; and to initiate activities to better connect the residents and enrich their building so it's sound and safe, financially secure, and where civility, respect, concern and consideration prevail among management, staff, and residents alike.

For the Vertical Village to achieve its goals, it's wise to start slowly, rolling out parts that are achievable in the shortest amount of time. The program can grow over time with a more robust set of activities. For ultimate success, aim to be inclusive; involve young, old, families and singles. The more extensive the buy-in, the better are the prospects for a rich program. Also, start where your initial leadership takes you. It may be that there is more interest, and therefore, more leadership, in a neighbor-to-neighbor program focusing on senior residents who worry about their growing vulnerability. But, no initiative should be discouraged if it brings the residents together.

Generally, pitch the program as having something for everyone and characterize it as community building. Let the program develop organically, over a period of time, consulting all segments of the population to assess their interests in order to embrace the larger more diverse tenancy.

Don't assume you have all the answers to what is needed. Engage all residents regarding what they want from the community - baby-sitting assistance, planting a garden, or a once a month potluck dinner or book club.

Keep it simple. Build an infrastructure that can be self-sustaining. For example, if a book club is started, it should develop its own leadership and structure and not rely on a coordinator from the broader project.

Name the Organization

It's important to name your Vertical Village community early in the process and stick to it so the initiative has a distinct, unique identity that is easily recognized by residents. The naming process can be as simple as using the name of the building in the title like – The Concord Network; the Concord Vertical Village; or

the Concord Community. Or, it can be something with more pizzazz. For example, a program in Portland, Oregon calls its community program, “Once in Awhile,” so residents can view the program as voluntary and even fun, and that suggests commitments need not be onerous. One of our buildings named its program KIT (Keep in Touch). Don’t spend too much time agreeing on a name. It can slow your progress. Creative minds put to the task are sure to come up with too many choices. One of our programs is simply called Neighbor-to-Neighbor.

Assemble your Leadership Team

It doesn’t take vast resources to start a Vertical Village, but it does take an organizing team – just a few residents – who can lead the effort and engage other residents. The team will build over time.

Volunteer leadership needs nurturing and continuity. If your team weakens, figure out how to strengthen it by identifying and courting residents in the building who have an interest in improving the quality of life where you live. Do not get discouraged – creating an organization takes time and persistence, but the rewards are tremendous when a full team begins to function as you hoped it would.

In finding your participants, do not make involvement seem burdensome. Keep things informal and fun. Invite potential members for tea or drinks. Build teams around residential floors and/or interests. You need not choose officers (in fact, it is not recommended, at least, not in the beginning), but coordinators should be chosen, and they should be encouraged, if they demur, to find a co-coordinator. A steering committee may be desirable depending on the number of projects underway. If formed, it should be under 10 people. It should be informal. Always remember that volunteers should be nurtured and rewarded.

A variety of strategies can be employed to elicit interest in starting a program. Perhaps, you’ll want to start with your own floor, leaving neighbors a small gift such as a valentine, a thank you for being my neighbor card, then, invite them to meet and greet each other at your apartment, or bring folding chairs and meet in the hallway. If you have a newsletter, put in a paragraph asking people who are interested in the “human side” of your building’s operation to express their interest in working on a committee.

Start a conversation with those you meet in the elevator on what features they might be interested in. One vertical village program started with a resident who polled others on what they most wanted for their building. Many residents, who worked long hours and did not cook, wanted to organize a program around take-out or order-in catering services. A resident committee was formed to find a caterer who designed a reasonably priced menu specifically for the building. That simple need was the start of their Vertical Village.

Maintain the momentum to keep interest and enthusiasm going. Continuity and follow up are important. It is a good idea to meet monthly with an agenda circulated before the meeting and a meeting recap and assignments to follow. Once you have identified your projects, you can solicit both volunteers and participants more widely. (See Appendix B for sample invitations sent by our pilots to residents in their buildings to join the programs as participants and/or volunteers.) There were 22 volunteers who responded to the first solicitation in our primary project and 14 to 18 respectively in the other two. This is a good response and a very good starting point.

A comment after one of the initial meetings:

“Thank you for the attachment of wonderful ideas. I definitely think there is a need and interest to implement such measures for a safer and kinder community. Please keep me involved. “

Identify and Engage Your Building’s Stakeholders Early

The major stakeholders all have distinct and occasionally conflicting roles and responsibilities. The first real challenge in introducing a Vertical Village to the various players is to make sure that roles and responsibilities are respected, boundaries understood, and any barriers and conflicts identified and addressed early.

Efforts to start a Vertical Village should always be sanctioned by building owners - in a rental, the owning corporation; in a cooperative or condominium, the governing board. They, in turn, will convey their support to the managing agent and building staff. Your major argument to all stakeholders for supporting Vertical Village activities is the importance for the health, safety and well-being of building residents. For condo and coop owners, Vertical Village activities are amenities that increase market value.

The owner’s primary responsibility is to set policy for the building and to make sure it is structurally sound, financially solvent, safe and secure. Some owners may resist giving support to neighborly efforts to help each other because of liability concerns. (See Chapter 4 for a discussion). Or, they are concerned that Vertical Village activities may divert them from a focus on their core management mission. However, in every instance in our pilots, the owners were approached and support was given.

Building owners generally contract with managing agents to staff and service their buildings. Under the owner’s direction, standards are set for cleanliness, safety, security, ambiance, heat, and more. Since managing agents handle many buildings, they can be a great resource for strategies that other buildings have used to create a climate of friendliness and camaraderie. They also set the standards for staff performance and should ensure that service is courteous, responsive and appropriate. Staff, particularly those who stand at the entrance

doors, are often the first point of contact in an emergency. Staff usually know what is happening in the building and may be invaluable in offering suggestions to enhance a building-wide community program. Managing agents usually define what staff can and cannot do in relation to residents, and everyone has a stake in how the roles are defined.

Residents are responsible for complying with house rules. They are under no obligation to help each other. However, anecdotal information indicates they will rise to the occasion if their neighbor needs help. This social capital is the mark of a village and if harnessed in a high-rise building, is a resource that is priceless. The bones of the program are in place. We can now look at winning strategies for creating a creating a lively and friendly village.

Expanding Neighbor-to-Neighbor Participation

Do I have enough residents? In our pilot high-rise buildings, the initial survey of interest was sent to all residents. The response ranged from 12 to 22 people. This is not a disappointing number. It is, in fact, the right number for getting started – not too big, not too small. The challenge is to continue to build membership over time, which will happen as planning shifts to the launch of new programs and activities. New programs should be announced with fanfare. The genesis of new activities should be linked to your organization so you get credit and establish credibility.

Winning Strategies

A Vertical Village can start with a survey to determine community interest. Or, it can start small, with one or two projects selected by the organizers, as a strategic beginning. Using our main pilot as a case study, we started small but with projects that would appeal to a broad range of people. The initial projects included planning for emergencies, creating a buddy system, and starting a book exchange program. The two smaller pilots created a building self-help program to support each other when needed.

Plan for Emergencies

Urban infrastructure is aging. 9/11 was an act of terrorism of epic proportion. Experts warn us to expect more in the future. Blackouts are not just a mere inconvenience - living by candlelight can be dangerous. A stalled elevator can put a resident's life in peril, especially for an older or disabled person. Incidents happen -- a sudden fall, a heart attack, a disabling bout with the flu, or a ski accident. Safety planning may mitigate the suffering following any of these events; it can result in faster healing, reduced anxiety, and lives saved.

The lead Vertical Village pilot identified three small projects focused on emergency planning – affecting residents of all ages. They dealt with staff training for city-wide or building-wide emergencies; gathering and communicating information on emergency Go Bags for single households; and finally, creating a data base of emergency contacts and special needs information for each resident. These projects were assigned by the board of directors to management for implementation.

Staff Training for Emergencies

Management sent staff to a training program offered by the Building Service Workers Union, called Safe and Secure. This program addresses observation skills, communication, access control, and the role of staff at the scene of an emergency. This early project was announced in the newsletter paired with the neighbor-to-neighbor effort, an important linking of the two programs.

Emergency Go Bags

Most urban dwellers are not prepared for an emergency. A study by the Center for Catastrophe Preparedness and Response in Greater New York showed that most New Yorkers would not have enough food or water in their homes to last three days. Moreover, these items will quickly sell out within hours of the emergency. A publication, *All Together Now, Neighbors Helping Neighbors Create a Resilient New York City*, prepared by the Empowerment Institute in partnership with the New York City Office of Emergency Management, is a training document to help emergency preparedness leaders handle building-wide and city-wide emergencies. A chapter in this publication focuses on how to prepare for energy disruption, national disaster or terrorist incident. It can be

found on the internet under, <http://www.empowermentinstitute.net> (key word: ready-set-go bag). If you have to leave home in a hurry, it is critical to have your most essential needs planned for in advance. Go Bags should contain copies of important documents, a first aid kit, non-perishable food, bottled water, flashlight, and more.

The neighbor-to-neighbor team presented a sample kit at a board meeting of the co-op and discussed it in the context of the neighbor-to-neighbor program. A newsletter advised residents of the importance of preparedness and identified certain websites for more information on Go Bags. Resident solidarity could be enhanced if a few residents gathered to create their own Go Bags as a group activity.

Creating an Information System with Emergency Contacts

In our pilot, we discovered that the building staff kept hand-written emergency contact information in a notebook at the front desk. Information was lacking for many residents, and much of the information was out of date. Knowing that residents could fall and break a leg, or be stricken by an illness that required hospitalization, or that a building emergency might require evacuation, we believed that a roster of emergency contacts and special needs was a high priority. Forms were circulated to all residents asking for this information, and two thirds responded – a very high response rate according to professional survey experts. Moreover, the board voted to require that an emergency contact form be filled out as a prerequisite of board approval for each new resident occupant or sublet renter. (See Appendix C for a sample of the Emergency Contact Form.)

The information can be kept by management under lock and key or entered into a database with password protection. It should be accessible to management but remain confidential unless needed to handle emergencies.

On more than one occasion, the information was used to notify family or friends that a resident had been hospitalized and of his location. One involved a 92-year-old man, another, a considerably younger man who was hit by a car on a dark, rainy night.

Build a Buddy System

Many New Yorkers live alone. Some, not all, are friendly with others in the building, but might be reluctant to reach out to them in an emergency. By creating a buddy system, permission is granted to help each other; relationships shift somewhat, from arm's length to a little more care and concern. The buddy system in the lead pilot program started with five floors representing 46 apartments. Sixteen residents responded, either identifying a buddy they wanted to be paired with or asking for help in finding a buddy. We consider this an outstanding success given urban dweller's propensity to distance themselves from close involvement with their neighbors. Questionnaires asking if the resident

wished to participate in this program and describing what the buddy program might consist of were circulated. (See Appendix E for the memo that announced the buddy system.)

Listed below are some of the features that can be included in a buddy system:

- Exchanging keys
- Exchanging email addresses, telephone numbers
- Exchanging emergency contacts, names and addresses
- Exchanging lists of medications and health providers
- Discussing what you can or cannot help with
- Agreement to inform your buddy when you go on vacation and, perhaps, give permission to enter your apartment if, for instance, you forgot to suspend newspaper delivery;
- Agree on an exchange of services -- such as shopping, a shared meal, taking care of pets, picking you up from medical appointments -- if either of you is incapacitated.
- Some people have several buddies in the building. It doesn't hurt to have others looking out for your welfare or sharing your willingness to help other neighbors. Remember, having a buddy is a two-way street -- you are helping each other.

Resident Comments:

"I am a very old woman — 97. Even though I go out ALONE every day, you have made me feel very secure."

"I am so happy with my buddies (both of them) who helped me through back surgery with good home cooking, walking with me down the hall, and for organizing my shelves so I could reach dishes and groceries. I will help them in a heartbeat if they ever need me."

The Book Exchange

This was a small but important icebreaker. Bookshelves were built in the laundry rooms and residents were encouraged to leave books they otherwise would have discarded and to take books they wanted to read. Shelves are stocked with mysteries and other good reads. Books fly off the shelves and are replaced just as quickly.

Build a Neighbors-Helping-Neighbors Program

Building a helping neighbors program in your building is not complicated. It basically involves distributing a form asking residents if they want to participate

and, if so, what tasks they would be willing to perform. For instance, exchanged services have included plant watering while a resident is on vacation and picking up a neighbor from cataract surgery. (See Appendix D for sample questionnaires and spreadsheets that list what neighbors are willing to do for each other)

Comment from a satisfied neighbor:

“I returned from traveling last week feeling very ill and had nothing in the house that I needed. I called xxx from the Neighbor-to-Neighbor list and she was a tremendous help. I originally joined with the idea that I would be helping others but when my need arose, this was absolutely terrific.”

Other Village Projects

- **Events around Food.** Food as pleasure and food as necessity is a great organizing vehicle. Get a group together for a potluck dinner so the burden of cooking an entire meal every night can occasionally be shared with others. Identify your building’s food gurus – perhaps, they can teach a group on how to cook or find someone who has a good knowledge of nutrition who can address menu planning and food shopping. We have previously mentioned organizing a catered take-out or order-in service from a restaurant near your building.
- **Interest Groups.** Do you have space for a garden? Organize a garden committee. Start a book club as an outgrowth of the bookshelf book exchange. How about a poker or bridge club, or a walking group? You can have a movie club – sharing DVD’s from NetFlix, or a night on the town, and you can have an Academy Award party where all bring part of the dinner.
- **Welcome New Residents/Find Common Ground.** Organize a welcome committee for newcomers. Get a neighborhood map and a list of nearby resources such as pharmacies, dry cleaners and laundries, take-out restaurants, child-care facilities. Add previous newsletters to the package so the newcomer experiences the benefits of the community you are trying to build.
- **Spanning the Generations.** Find out whether any of the more senior residents want to benefit from the skill sets of younger residents – like computer use. Can that service be exchanged for tutoring in English vocabulary? Look at baby-sitting services exchanged for shopping or other kinds of errands in a kind of barter arrangement.
- **Doing Good for Fellow Residents.** Work with the door attendant to find out who is not feeling well and send a card, a little gift, and your best wishes. Organize a service group to escort people who need help to medical appointments, or run neighborhood errands. Find out the good news – a new baby, a retirement, a marriage, a new job – and send a congratulation card. Plan building events – a Christmas party; Halloween celebrations for children.

Resident Comment:

“I broke my foot and am experiencing neighbor-to-neighbor help in the building. People I know have wished me a speedy recovery while others (many of whom I only know to say hello to in the elevator) have offered help.”

- *Doing good for Outside Organizations.* Find out what nearby institutions need volunteers, like a school or a hospital, and organize a volunteer team. Start a building drive to provide coats for the less fortunate, especially, as winter approaches. Look for opportunities to beautify the block.
- *Join Neighborhood Activities.* If there is a block association, join it. If there is none, talk to your Board about starting one.

Overcoming Barriers/Solving Problems

Sailing may not be smooth. Problems occur. Barriers might be constructed. Questions will be raised. Inertia will set in. Not all residents will participate. And one or two who do could be disruptive. Persistence is important. Here are some of the barriers or problems we encountered and how to overcome them. An important element is having a communications strategy that underscores the participatory aspects of the project.

Communications

A healthy organization requires easy ways to communicate. Its members need to know meeting dates and agendas, have meeting notes and a summary of decisions made and next steps. They need to know what programs are available and how to access them. They need to know how they can ask for help and how to offer it. In a small village, it's a walk down the path to talk to your neighbor. In a large urban apartment building, it's usually the push of phone or computer keys. Urban residents prefer phone calls and email.

Email communication is quick, but rarely can all residents be reached this way. If residents do not have email, a hard copy letter or memo can be slid under the door. If the communication relates to a building-wide matter, staff might make the distribution. If it is part of a volunteer project, residents must step up to the plate. Newsletters are a good way to convey information, but they are issued only periodically and cannot be used for late-breaking news. Bulletin boards and elevator postings are also an option, although many buildings will not allow them. (See Appendix B for a sample of communications by letter and newsletter.)

The larger your program, the more groups you will have. Each group (the garden committee, the events committee, the book club) should be responsible for its own communication using email lists to set meetings and exchange information, slipping notes under the doors of those without computers.

More robust and larger group communication lists can be set up using free services offered by YahooGroups.com or Googlegroups.com. Both programs are easy to use although they require a couple of residents to be the owners/managers to enter the information required to run the group. It's likely that there are plenty of youngsters (and a few oldsters) who live in the building who can set them up. Communication programs might be used for any group with shared interests, such as, all the residents who signed up for the buddy system, or the helping hand services. To start a group, access the Google or Yahoo websites, enter the name of your organization, its email address, its purpose. You also must enter the names of the group members, and decide whether access to the group list will be, 1) public, that is, anyone can join and post messages, 2) announcements only, meaning anyone can join, but only managers can post messages and view the membership list or, 3) restricted,

where people must be invited to join the group. The last option is preferred given the sensitive nature of the information to be exchanged. Once members, they can send messages, read the archives, and view the members list.

Other low cost programs available online that may be useful include, SurveyMonkey, which costs about \$20 per month. It is an easy way to poll members about interest in creating a Vertical Village and about what types of features/services interest them.

Liability Concerns

We are a litigious society, and liability questions are often raised. Coop and condo buildings have liability insurance. The board of our primary pilot building consulted with its insurance broker as to whether the emergency preparedness program was covered by the building's insurance and whether or not it would increase premiums. After fully understanding the program, including soliciting and maintaining emergency contact information on building residents, the broker concluded that the risk of proceeding was minimal and would not impact the building's insurance rate. When Vertical Village planning gets tangled in issues of liability, do not give up. Insist on a meeting with the relevant insurance brokers.

We were also advised that the volunteer part of the program, the buddy system, the book clubs, the neighbor- to-neighbor helping hands groups, should not be under the aegis of the board. Since these are informal programs with loose affiliations of individuals, they may not require liability insurance. Members of such groups are only acting in an individual capacity as a member/volunteer, who wants to help or interact with her/his fellow residents.

Balancing Community and Privacy

New relationships must be nurtured, and issues may arise during the process. Helping a fellow resident will usually be a once-in-a-while event, and most volunteers and recipients of help understand boundaries. Neither the volunteer nor the recipient, unless the relationship really clicks, will be a new best friend. On occasion, the relationship may become more imbalanced than either party wants. Volunteers in a neighbor-to-neighbor program must set boundaries to protect their time and space, and get pleasure in helping others. They must learn how to be considerate yet firm if pressed to offer more than they can. Recipients of services need to appreciate the generosity of volunteers and their good intentions and not seek more than is offered. For example, a volunteer bringing a home-cooked meal might have no time to chat, and the recipient must respect the limited interaction. Similarly, volunteers should not exceed their level of competence and experience. For example, they should not assist with any medical procedures, like changing a bandage, for which they are not qualified. Volunteers should also be reimbursed for costs they incur for helping someone, like the money fronted to buy groceries.

Volunteers participating in a vertical village have access to information about one another. This includes personal demographic information (phone number, emergency contacts) as well as certain things that may be noticed during the course of a service exchange. While most people would not intentionally divulge confidential information obtained during a health exchange, sometimes, it happens by accident. At all times, care must be exercised.

Finally, to make sure that “worst fears” are not realized, volunteer neighbors must be trained to let go of a recipient who is abusive, manipulative or disruptive and, if possible, refer her or him to a social service agency. An informal training program could be mounted to cover these principles so the neighbor-to-neighbor program is not undermined but maintains its strength and remains satisfying.

Increasing the Membership of Younger Residents

The building residents who saw the value of the program first were over age 50. In part, this tilt to greater interest on the part of older residents was a result of pitching the first solicitation to reciprocal help exchanges based on accidents or episodes of temporary disability. A broader list of ideas to include activities of interest to young families or working singles might result in a response that better reflects the building’s demographics. But it is also true that younger residents are so busy earning a living and/or taking care of their families, that they have little interest in the program – or any program. You should continue to reach out to younger residents, but remember that you still have the beginnings of a great program even if most of your participants are over 50.

TTN’S Caring Collaborative hopes this manual encourages residents of high-rise buildings to forge a program that mirrors the humanity and cooperation found in small villages. For more information about the TTN Caring Collaborative, visit www.thetransitionnetwork.org website and click on the Caring Collaborative.

Appendix A: Newsletter Announcement of the Program

If your building has a newsletter, it is a good way to announce your Vertical Village Program and to update its progress. A newsletter is great for communication, but you also need email or letters slipped under the door for getting residents to volunteer.

Emergency Preparedness and Neighbors-Helping-Neighbors

The XXX Building has always been a wonderful place to live – there is a sense of community characterized by warmth and concern for each other. This feeling of neighborhood has never compromised the respect we have for privacy and for the courtesy required, given the close quarters in which we live.

We now want to formalize this neighborhood ambiance and add another component – making sure that we are equipped to handle citywide, building, and individual emergencies. The components of this program include:

- A plan to be developed to protect our residents in the event of a citywide, building, or individual emergency.
- The plan would be inclusive, involving all residents young and old, those living alone, or living with partners or family.
- The plan will cover the roles of the governing board, the managing agent, staff, and residents as they choose to be involved (resident participation is voluntary).
- The plan will address guidelines on how residents can help each other should an emergency arise – e.g., pitching in with shopping, babysitting, and pet walking
- There will be guidelines and training for staff on what to do in the event of individual and building-wide emergencies and problems

We intend to start with a building survey to make sure we have emergency contacts for everyone in case we need to reach out to a non-resident family member or friend. We will also request residents to give us email and telephone numbers so we can contact them if needed.

If you are interested in helping us plan for this XXX program, please contact:

Name: _____

Apartment: _____ Telephone No. _____ Email: _____

Appendix B: Sample Letters to Announce the Neighbor-to-Neighbor Program

Announcing the Program and Seeking Participation from Residents

(This letter was slipped under the door of each apartment.)

Dear Neighbor,

We need your help! A group of us in the XXX Building are launching an important pilot program that could affect every resident in the building. It concerns *the welfare of each and every one of us in the building in case of an emergency*. It means knowing how to reach you in a building emergency, and whom to contact in case something happens to you personally.

The second and separate part of our pilot program involves our neighbor-to-neighbor program where we help each other out when help is needed. For example, you are laid up and need assistance with grocery shopping, a letter mailed or a dog walked? We want to make sure there is someone in the building you can call upon.

We have attached a questionnaire to this note, which asks if you would like to volunteer to join our “Neighbor-to-Neighbor” program. This program does not involve regular “duty” – it’s just a “standby” position, if you are free, for a resident who needs help at a given time.

And, we would like to have you join our committee to help us plan the program. If you have any questions, please contact one of us by e-mail or phone, or slip a note under our door.

Let us know your thoughts. We hope you will be as enthusiastic about this program as we are!

Sincerely,

Name: _____ Apt: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Sample Letter Asking if a Resident is Available to Help

Dear Neighbor,

When neighbors need help of any kind, the first person they often turn to is another neighbor. We, at the (Building name and committee name) want to make sure that when help is needed, we, as neighbors, are there.. When we speak of help, we are addressing both building-wide and personal emergencies and issues. We would like to get your interest in helping as follows:

Neighbor-to-Neighbor: If a neighbor is disabled or in need, would you help out with such tasks as food shopping, a telephone call, accompanying someone to a medical appointment, feeding a pet, walking a dog, emergency babysitting?
(Check one below).

Sure, if I am available _____

I can help with some of these tasks, depending on the situation _____

I cannot help at the present time; try me later _____

Building Emergency: If there is a building emergency requiring evacuation, and you are home, would you help anyone needing help (people with disabilities, small children, and/or pets)?

Yes _____ No _____

Building Buddies: Many of you, especially those who are living alone, have neighbors who are your helping buddies. In order to provide this information to the doormen, in case of emergencies, or if you have not been seen around, and we want to make sure you are okay, would you tell us who your building buddy or buddies are ---- the information will be confidential.

Person(s) name: _____ and Apt. number _____.

If you have no buddy, is there anyone you can ask and then let us know who?

Yes _____ No _____

Would you like us to try to link you up with someone?

Yes _____ No _____

Finally, you may not have filled out the attached form (Emergency Contact Form in Appendix C), which is essential so we can get hold of you or your emergency contact and/or buddy in case we need to. The information will be kept confidential. Please, to protect yourselves and the building, complete the form and give it to XXX

Finally, would you like to help us plan this program?

Yes _____ No _____

Thank you so much.

Name: _____

Apartment: _____

Telephone No. _____

Email: _____

RETURN TO: Name _____ Apartment _____

Letter for Creating a Neighbor-To-Neighbor Assistance Program

To: All Residents of xxxx
From: _____
Date: _____
Re: Would you like to be part of a Voluntary Neighbor-to-Neighbor Assistance Program here in the building?

This letter is intended to interest you in participating in a new program within our multi-generational building. It is a network we'll create to help each other when short-term problems and challenges arise.

We can be here for each other---if you break a leg and need help with the groceries, or need to be picked up from a medical procedure. Would you like to be a part of this new voluntary system here in the building where neighbors are able to help each other now and then? Other buildings in the City are trying this concept, so we are not alone, and we can learn from each other.

When each of you became shareholders at xxxxx, you filled out an Emergency Contact Information form used (*by unnamed building*) so the managing agent and superintendent know whom to contact on your behalf. That is part of the solution.

We can have a more immediate backup system than family, who may not be close by or are very busy. We'd like to create a Neighbor-to-Neighbor Self Help system right here. No cost, no obligation. Here are some of the things that might be done on a short-term basis: water the plants, feed/walk an animal, help out in a health emergency until family members or other professionals arrive, baby-sit. We will create a directory for those who want to participate.

It is purely voluntary. It has nothing to do with the board of directors and the running of the building. It is just a way for neighbors to help neighbors. Please leave this flyer in a sealed envelope with the doorman addressed to me, and I will contact you. Include name, apartment, telephone, and email.

Name: _____

Apartment: _____

Telephone No. _____

Email: _____

Letter Describing the Program

Dear Neighbor,

A medical crisis - at any age – can end independence in the blink of an eye. Even if we have a partner, there may be a time when we need to reach out for help to someone else – even though we may not want to “bother” a relative, a friend, or a neighbor.

Who will shop for food if we can't get out? Who will check on us by phone, or email or a knock at the door? Whom do we call after a fall? Who will replace the light bulb in the kitchen or bathroom? Pull a book from the top shelf, retrieve the earring that rolled under the bed, crack open the olive jar?

We need to arrange for help *before* we need it. For the older among us, mutual help can mean the difference between remaining in our homes as we age, or having to go to an assisted living facility, or live with family.

Our goal in this building is to build a community where we will help one another, so that no one feels alone. We can limit the scope of aid to lending a hand with an occasional household task or shopping trip. Or we can expand it to reaching out to a resident who is feeling overwhelmed by his/her situation and offering additional assistance.

The project is worth doing – and it has been done elsewhere. But it will take time to build, and we will need volunteers (committed and casual) to help implement it. The more volunteers we have, the more successful we will be. As a potential volunteer, consider what you can offer now – and think how much more comfortable you will be asking for help, should you need it later.

The Buddy System is the easiest program to get up and running. It also requires the least management. With a tenant leader(s) who will set up a chart to keep track, neighbors agree to pair off to help one another. Additionally, one neighbor may be assigned to several pairs as an on-call volunteer when one of the two buddies is not at home. A time bank might be set up in which all volunteers bank hours of service for use if they have need in the future.

If you are interested, please let me know. I will then set up a meeting in my apartment.

Thank you.

Name: _____

Apartment: _____ Telephone No. _____ Email: _____

Appendix C: Emergency Contact Information Form

Please complete the following questionnaire and return it to [Name] by [date]

Name of Shareholder or Tenant _____

Apartment number _____

Names of all people occupying the apartment: _____

Resident's Phone: _____

Business Phone: _____

Cell: _____

Weekend Phone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Are you interested in attending the planning meeting in apt xx, date to be determined?

_____ Yes _____ No

The information you provide will be confidential and held by building management.

Do you also want your name and contact information to be included in a directory for all residents? _____ Yes _____ No

Special Needs: _____ Hearing Impaired _____ Sight impaired

_____ Wheelchair bound _____ Oxygen in use _____ Pets _____ Life Alert

In case of emergency, please list next of kin, friend or attorney:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Questionnaire:

WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO FOR YOUR NEIGHBORS?					
Name(s)	Apt.#	Home Phone	Work Phone	Cell Phone	Email address
			Comment		
Plants					
Errands					
Go to doctor appointment					
Midnight call					
Visit someone who's ill					
Light food shop					
Baby sit					
Feed animal					
Walk animal					
Bring in newspaper					
Calls after midnight					

Is there something special we should know about you? (Purely voluntary)

Thank you for responding and coming to this meeting. I will send you a list of all the people who are interested in being a helping neighbor and what they are willing to do. Please contact each other directly for services. If you give me feedback, we will know if this project is working. We'd like this group to grow! Thanks for your interest. Invite your neighbors to join us!

Name: _____

Apartment: _____

Telephone No. _____

Email: _____

A Summary Of Individual Responses From The Questionnaire:

Survey Of What Group Members Will Do For Others

Name / Apt #	Plants	Errands	Go to Doctor app't	Visit someone who's ill	Light food shop	Baby sit	Feed animal	Walk animal	Bring in newspaper	Calls after midnight
Jones, apt 21	x	x		x	x		x		x	

Examples of comments returned with the questionnaire:

"Might be available to help out on a weekend as I work during the week."

"Away from December thru April. Have problem walking. Hope to be corrected shortly."

"Until a sitter arrives or in an emergency until parents return home."

"Can help with heavy lifting, moving furniture, etc. if the porters are unavailable."

"Have a cat."

Appendix E: Sample Memo for Buddy Program

Dear Neighbor:

Thank you for participating in our pilot study on how neighbors can help each other. You have indicated that you have a buddy, or would like a buddy, so you can help each other if needed. This is such a good idea, especially, if you live alone. You are building a kind of informal insurance policy based on connection to your neighbor. The program is voluntary, spearheaded by a small committee of residents at the xxxxxx. Although the Board has given us permission to build this informal committee, it is not a Board project.

Now, here are some ideas on how to make your buddy relationship match your needs ... some, none, or all might work. Or, you can think of ideas which we have not listed (and we would like to hear about them).

1. Exchange keys, making sure you put them where you can find them easily. Identify them by initials or first name, but not an apartment number, so they are safe.
2. Exchange email address, telephone numbers (day, night, weekend, and cell).
3. Exchange emergency contacts, names, address, numbers in case of need.
4. Exchange a list of medications taken and health providers (at least find out where this information is kept). Periodically get an update.
5. Agree to an exchange of services if either of you becomes incapacitated, like shopping, a shared meal, taking care of any pets, picking you up from medical appointments.
6. Discuss what you can or cannot help with. Set boundaries if you need to.
7. Make sure you know when your buddy will be on vacation, and make sure newspaper subscriptions are temporarily suspended. If your buddy forgot to get the subscriptions suspended, advise the doorman or agree that you can use the key to put the newspapers in your buddy's apartment.
8. Some people have several buddies in the building --- it doesn't hurt to have others looking out for your welfare or sharing your willingness to help other neighbors.
9. Remember, having a buddy is a two-way street --- you are helping each other.

Basically, you are engaging in a neighbor-to-neighbor agreement.

Finally, we are so pleased that so many have elected to work with a buddy. Will you help us spread the word to others? (We only surveyed 5 floors on the north side of the building and need to do all floors at the xxxxx). We will give you the survey forms and assign you a floor to put them under the doors.

Yes, I will help _____ No, I can't _____ Tell me more _____

Please return them to me with your name, apartment number, telephone and email.

Name: _____

Apartment: _____

Telephone No. _____

Email: _____

This Guide was published by The Transition Network (TTN) through a grant from the New York State Health Foundation. For more information, contact The Transition Network @ info@thetransitionnetwork.org or 212-803-6121.