CultureHouse

We create pop-up community spaces
culturehouse.cc

Impacts

At CultureHouse Kendall, a group of mothers with young children started a group that met weekly at the pop-up. The fact no purchase was necessary to enter, along with the comfortable environment, gave the group easy access and allowed it to grow. At CultureHouse Kendall, these mothers were able to form relationships, swap tips, and broaden their community network.

CultureHouse builds crisis resilience

CultureHouse creates environments that spur the necessary networks for communities to be resilient in times of crisis. Sociologist Eric Klinenberg has shown that the existence of social infrastructure—spaces for gathering—is the most significant determiner of neighborhood resilience to a crisis. Klinenberg found that during the 1995 Chicago heat wave, communities with better access to social infrastructure saw a lower mortality rate because the connections created in these spaces increased the likelihood of people checking in on neighbors in need.[1] Recent research has found similar impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic.[2]

As we see an increasing number of intersecting crises due to climate change and other global challenges, community resiliency is critical to neighborhood survival. By reducing barriers to entry, CultureHouse creates equitable access to social infrastructure—in turn generating connections that result in increased resiliency.

CultureHouse creates more livable communities

CultureHouse infuses play and social interaction into the fabric of public life to create 21st century cities that are happier, healthier, and more livable. Right now, over 60% of people living in the United States report that they are lonely.[3] Social isolation is increasingly common across the globe and is strongly correlated with poor mental health outcomes. A recent study found that psychotic disorders, including schizophrenia, are most common in neighborhoods with the thinnest social networks.[4] CultureHouse projects provide free-to-enter meeting and hangout space—a necessary resource for people experiencing social isolation. By incorporating unexpected elements like swings, trampolines, and ping pong tables into public spaces, CultureHouse also introduces play into everyday situations. Play builds social connections and boosts mood by increasing excitement and joy, leading to long-term benefits.[5]

By transforming unused spaces into vibrant centers for public life, CultureHouse creates reasons to come and stay in an area—a phenomenon we call "stickiness." Inactivity and vacancy in the urban environment discourages gathering, lingering, and creates a cycle of disinvestment. Using engaging designs and creative programming, CultureHouse pop-ups encourage people to stop and stay—generating a positive feedback loop of liveability, vibrancy, and economic growth.

CultureHouse spurs equitable community development
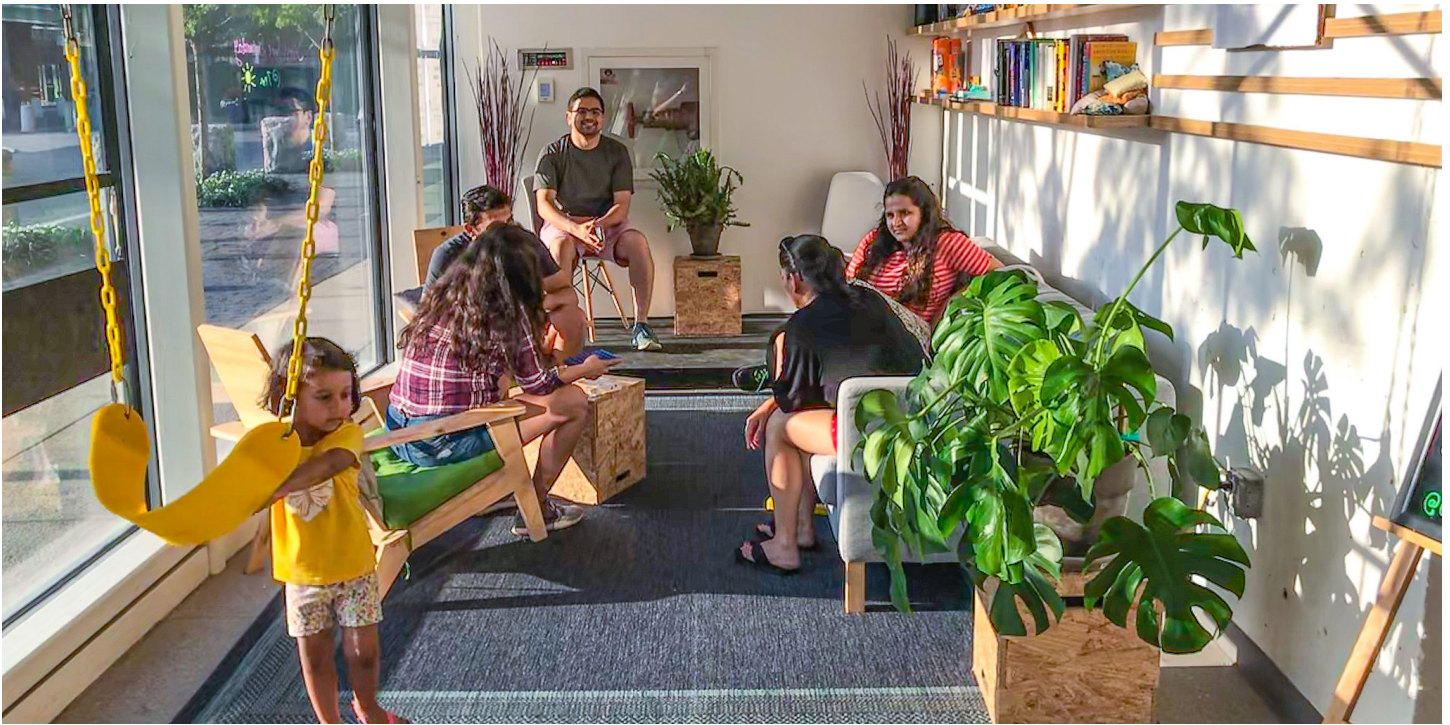
CultureHouse helped us to start thinking differently about what we might be able to do. We're seeing that if we just start something that's what helps to start new trends and shifts in what people do downtown."

—Pasquale Minichillo, Community Leader

Using participatory placemaking methodology, CultureHouse brings communities together to self-determine the future of their neighborhoods. In traditional development, community members are left out of the planning and design process or, at best, consulted only as a way to improve PR. Without understanding the underlying economic context and actual needs of communities, neighborhood development can cause displacement—whether financial or cultural—harming the most vulnerable populations.[6]

CultureHouse spaces take a different approach by bringing community members—especially those who are untapped or unheard—together to actively participate in the process of creating new public space in their neighborhood. The resulting pop-ups become forums where members of the community can have both formal and informal conversations about their neighborhood. The CultureHouse process shows stakeholders what is possible, building capacity and passion to address in new ways other issues affecting their community.

1   Klinenberg, E. (2018). Palaces for the People. Crown Publishing Group.

2   Kelseu, T., & Kenny, M. (2021). The Value of Social Infrastructure (Vol. 7, Ser. Policy Report Series). University of Cambridge.

3   Renken, E. (2020). Most Americans Are Lonely, And Our Workplace Culture May Not Be Helping. NPR.

4   Montgomery, C. (2014). Happy City. Doubleday Canada.

5   Yenigun, S. (2014). Play Doesn't End With Childhood: Why Adults Need Recess Too. All Things Considered. NPR.

6   Cornelis, S., & Kenat, S. (2021). Using Engagement to Find Untapped Expertise in Equitable Development. Urban Land.