Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Housing Futures: Designing an Equitable Path for Successful Aging In Place

• Author(s) Name:
Michelle Wyndham-West, PhD and James Dunn, PhD

• University or Company Affiliation:
Health, Aging and Society Department, McMaster University

• Abstract (300 words):
How are older adults navigating the relationship between place identity and successful aging when facing housing instability in rapidly and continually changing urban markets? How are older adults negotiating place-based security and safety when faced with involuntary or incentivized housing displacement, ‘health discounting’ due to high/rising shelter costs, inappropriate (given physical/cognitive functioning) housing, or involuntary housing immobility (unable to move to more appropriate accommodation)? In order to answer these questions, this paper will explore the lived housing experiences of low-income older adults in Hamilton, Ontario (Canada). These experiences are being collected using digital media and ethnographic techniques in order to provide contextualized accounts of the effects of a rapidly changing urban housing environment on low-income older adults’ health and well-being. Participants have been given iPads with applications geared towards visual and textual data collection, including photo-voice, whereby participants take photographs of objects, settings or events to highlight housing experience “touch points” (Bate and Robert 2007: 137). This approach allows
older adults to take control of what they record and when in the research process, providing an avenue for participants to frame their representation in research processes and not have representation shaped by researchers alone. This approach attempts to even out the unequal power relations between the researcher and those they research and will bring participatory research findings to the design of affordable housing options and everyday housing environments. These designs will aim to mitigate age-related loss of function, as well as provide pathways for movement into such housing that has the potential to reduce the negative health effects of inadequate/improper housing. In so doing, findings will inform implementation of program and physical designs that meet such needs and have the potential to provide for the successful aging in place of low-income older adults.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Michelle Wyndham-West, PhD, is a postdoctoral Fellow at the Health, Aging and Society Department in the Faculty of Social Sciences at McMaster University. Dr. Wyndham-West is a critically applied medical anthropologist specializing in aging, health, emerging technologies and public policy. Dr. Wyndham-West is currently deploying design anthropology, and specifically co-design methodologies, to develop, with Dr. Dunn, a digital qualitative tool for capturing emergent lived experiences of housing and mobility among low-income older adults. This research project aims to provide an avenue through which participatory older adult housing related data can be captured and analyzed in real-time and in an iterative fashion, thereby providing policymakers with topical and timely data to create equitable older-adult focused housing policies. Prior to attending graduate school, Dr. Wyndham-West worked in the technology sector for start-ups, including a medical device company that developed an artificial heart.

James R. Dunn, Ph.D., is Professor and Chair of the Department of Health, Aging and Society at McMaster University and a Scientist at the Centre for Urban Health Solutions at St. Michael’s Hospital in Toronto. He was recently named Senator William McMaster Chair in Urban Health Equity at McMaster University. He is the Director of the McMaster Institute for Healthier Environments and in 2011-12 he was the William Lyon Mackenzie King Visiting Chair in Canadian Studies at Harvard University. Trained in urban health geography and social epidemiology, he has published widely in geography, public health, urban planning and epidemiology journals over his career, and co-edited Rethinking Social Epidemiology: Towards a Science of Change (Springer) with Patricia O’Campo in 2012. Since 2011, he has been the Co-Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, and also sits on the Editorial Board of Housing, Theory & Society. Specifically, his work includes projects on the health and social impacts of public housing redevelopment, the impact of neighbourhood redevelopment initiatives on health and child development, and the development of cross-sectoral (between public health and urban planning) policy implementation solutions for urban health problems.