Homelessness Hub
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SOCIAL SCIENCES

# Social Isolation in SROs

## How SROs Mediate Isolation for Vulnerable Groups

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## Executive Summary

Single-room occupancy hotels, or SROs, are some of the most affordable options within the private housing markets of American cities. The lower rents found in SROs reflect the smaller size of SRO apartments and the conditions of the buildings. A typical SRO unit is only 150-400 square feet in size. Many SRO buildings are older and offer shared amenities, including bathrooms and kitchen spaces. Due to their affordability, many vulnerable groups rely on SROs for their housing, including seniors, persons with disabilities, low-income workers, and people emerging from homelessness.

Given their demographic characteristics, SRO residents are more likely to be both economically vulnerable and socially isolated. Social isolation not only makes it difficult for persons to turn to family and friends for economic support when needed,[1] but isolation has been linked to declines in physical and mental health.[2] Given that physical and mental health impact housing stability,[3] and that many SRO residents face housing insecurity despite the low cost of their units, understanding how SRO buildings mediate social isolation is an important endeavor.

From 2021 through 2023 we studied social isolation among SRO residents living in San Diego, California by interviewing 55 residents and inviting 10 tenants to take photographs of their units and buildings that illustrated how they feel about their housing, specifically how they feel their housing impacts their sense of social isolation.

[1] Wellman, B. & Wortley, S. (1990) Different strokes from different folks: Community ties and social support, *American Journal of Sociology,* 96(3).
[2] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2023) *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation.*
[3] Padgett, D. K. (2020) Homelessness, housing instability and mental health: Making the connections, *BJ Psych Bull,* 44(5), pp. 197-201.

## Key Findings

- **SRO residents enter their buildings with few social relationships** - SRO residents come into their buildings already experiencing high rates of social isolation. Oftentimes, this isolation contributed to previous experiences of homelessness.
- **Property managers and landlords make a difference** - the approachability of property managers and landlords varies greatly. When a property manager or landlord is friendly and helpful they support beneficial social relationships between residents and management and with other tenants. By contrast, when a property manager or landlord is perceived as rude or remote, residents view them as unreliable. In cases, where tenants feel that aloof managers and landlords hold stigmatizing beliefs about SRO residents, they internalize these ideas by avoiding other tenants.
- **Building policies impact social isolation** - property managers and landlords enact building policies that can hinder or support SRO residents' abilities to have guests over, which in turn can make forging and maintaining relationships with friends, family, and other tenants difficult.
- **Common gathering spaces and social events decrease isolation** - common spaces where people can socialize — such as patios or lounges — within SROs vary in their quantity, quality, and accessibility. While some SROs have a variety of well-maintained common areas for their residents to use, others have limited options. When inviting common spaces are available, SRO residents make use of them and are more likely to meet their neighbors. This is even more true when common areas are used to host social events, highlighting the importance of thoughtful building management.

## Key Recommendations

- **SROs need well-managed and maintained common spaces** - SROs need inviting common spaces where tenants can meet and engage with their neighbors. In addition to providing these spaces, SRO management teams should support social events within lounges, patios, and TV rooms that would further facilitate social tie formation among residents. Given San Diego's focus on building new SRO options, construction should include patios, lounges, and lobbies where tenants can gather and socialize. Nonprofits that place clients into existing SRO buildings can work together with the San Diego Housing Commission to generate funds for the revitalization of common spaces when they do exist within buildings.
- **SROs need to revise policies that exacerbate isolation** - SROs should revise their policies to promote the creation and maintenance of social relationships for residents while maintaining a sense of safety within buildings. Policies that specifically require individuals to pay for their guests should be eradicated as they make it difficult for low-income individuals to stop by and visit loved ones.

- **SRO residents need advocacy networks** - SROs can become friendlier spaces for residents if case managers have more of an on-site presence in buildings. Many residents enter SROs from homelessness programs with very little follow-up from case management. Increasing site visits would ensure that residents have an advocate should they need one. Beyond service provider involvement, residents themselves should organize tenant advocacy groups that can liaise with building management to ask for improved management relations and building policies. Nonprofit organizations and community-based organizations assisting SRO residents or low-income tenants in general could support these efforts.
- **The local community can get involved** - There are many ways in which the greater community can be involved in reducing isolation among SRO residents, including local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and neighbors. Restaurants, through support from nonprofits serving those transitioning out of homelessness, can open their doors for resident happy hours and service organizations can create "friendship programs" that would pair volunteers with SRO tenants.

## Who Lives in SROs?

Historically SRO residents were thought to be a transient population, one that moves from city to city without any long-term tenure. Contrary to popular belief, SRO residents tend to reside in their units for prolonged periods. Many SRO residents come from vulnerable groups that experience higher rates of economic precarity including low-wage workers, seniors, persons with disabilities, and persons who have previously experienced homelessness.[4] Long-term tenure in SROs is often used as an alternative to experiencing homelessness as SRO residents live on extremely limited, fixed incomes within a context of limited affordable housing within private housing markets and a lack of subsidized options.

SRO residents tend to belong to groups that not only exhibit higher rates of economic precarity and housing insecurity but also greater social isolation. Social isolation is typically defined as a lack of contact or a lack of emotional closeness with family and friends, a lack of connectedness to social organizations, and a lack of social activity.[5] Although not everyone who is socially

[4] Berger, J. (2016) The many lives of a New York SRO, *The New York Times*; Texas Epidemic Public Health Institute. (n.d.) *Vulnerable Populations* https://tephi.texas.gov/docs/tephi-who-are-vulnerable-populations.pdf?language_id=1 (accessed December 20, 2024).

[5] Taylor, H. O., Tsuchiya, K., Nguyen, A. W., & Taylor, R.J. (2024) The impact of subjective, interpersonal, and structural social isolation on the mental health of African Americans and Black Caribbeans, *Social Work in Mental Health,* 22(4), pp. 527-545.

isolated experiences loneliness — the distressing feeling of being alone — many people face both issues in a way that negatively impacts health.[6] Seniors experience higher rates of isolation as they are more likely to experience the death of a loved one, worsening health, retirement, and changes in income.[7] Persons with disabilities experience higher rates of isolation and loneliness as they tend to have fewer friends and less social support than nondisabled individuals.[8] People who have transitioned out of homelessness experience high rates of isolation as they often see their social relationships diminish due to the stigmatization of homelessness.[9]

## The Study: How Do SROs Mediate Social Isolation?

Isolation matters for a variety of reasons. First, being connected to family, friends, and neighbors is an important source of tangible assistance as people often rely on their social relationships for financial help when it is needed. Second, supportive social relationships promote mental health as they provide individuals with emotional support. Thus, when a population experiences high rates of social isolation, it is bad for both their material and mental well-being.[10] By contrast, social support has been shown to improve mental health and promote housing stability: factors that are important for vulnerable groups.[11]

Because SRO residents tend to come from groups that experience higher rates of isolation, we set out to answer the following question: do SRO buildings support the construction and maintenance of social relationships for residents or do they exacerbate social isolation?

Studies have demonstrated that some SRO residents living in buildings they perceive to be dangerous adopt self-isolating strategies to remain safe.[12] This is especially true for

[6] National Institute on Aging. (2024) *Loneliness and Social Isolation - Tips for Staying Connected* https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/loneliness-and-social-isolation/loneliness-and-social-isolation-tips-staying-connected#:~:text=Loneliness%20is%20the%20distressing%20feeling,while%20being%20with%20other%20people (accessed November 2, 2024).

[7] Serving Seniors (2021) *Senior Homelessness: A Needs Assessment*; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2020) *Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults: Opportunities for the Health Care System.* National Academies Press; Washington, DC.

[8] Emerson, E., Fortune, N., Llewellyn, G., & Stancliffe, R. (2021) Loneliness, social support, social isolation and wellbeing among working age adults with and without disability: Cross-sectional study, *Disability and Health Journal,* 14(1), pp. 100965.

[9] Institute of Global Homelessness. (2017) *Understanding Homelessness: Stigma and Social Isolation.* https://ighhub.org/understanding-homelessness/causes-intersections/stigma-social-isolation (accessed December 14, 2024).

[10] Umberson, D., & Montez, J. K. (2010) Social relationships and health: A flashpoint for health policy, *Journal of Health and Social Behavior,* 51, pp. S54-S66. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022146510383501

[11] Gabrielian, S., Young, A. S., Greenberg, J. M., & Bromley, E. (2016) Social support and housing transitions among homeless adults with serious mental illness and substance use disorders, *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal,* 41(3), pp. 208-215.

[12] Knight, K. R., Lopez, A.M., Comfort, M., Shumway, M., Cohen, J., & Riley, E.D. (2014) Single room

women, who find SROs to be dangerous spaces when there are residents living with mental health or substance use issues without adequate support. Yet research on the ways in which SRO buildings affect isolation remains scant.

To better understand the connections between SROs and isolation, we interviewed SRO residents who reside in downtown San Diego. San Diego is a unique American city in that it has preserved a good deal of its SRO housing despite losses that began in the 1970s and continue to this day. In 2023, the San Diego Housing Commission counted 4,557 SRO units in the city.[13] With its preservation of SRO stock, San Diego was a good site to conduct our investigation into the experiences of SRO residents.

From 2021 through 2023, we conducted interviews with 55 SRO residents. We additionally had 10 SRO residents take photos of their units and buildings to capture how they feel about their housing, specifically how they feel their housing impacts their social isolation. Most of the residents we interviewed were older adults (median age of participants was 58). Almost half of all residents we talked with were receiving SSI or SSDI. Most of our participants (37) were men.

**54.2%**

**of respondents receive SSI or SSDI**

## Study Findings

### SRO Residents Have Few Social Relationships Prior To Entering Their Buildings

Many of the residents we interviewed noted that they had very few social relationships that they could rely on prior to entering their buildings. Almost every resident we interviewed (apart from four) were single. Many recounted stories of a deceased spouse or a past divorce. While some participants were estranged from their children (due to histories of substance abuse or painful divorces), parents more frequently described positive relationships with their kids but noted that they lived far away. Although some residents mentioned that their children have invited them to live with them, many were hesitant to leave the area because they have lived in San Diego for decades and enjoy the healthcare they receive in the city. Others do not want to move in with their children out of a desire to "not be a burden."

occupancy (SRO) hotels as mental health risk environments among impoverished women: The intersection of policy, drug use, trauma, and urban space, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 25(3), pp. 556-561.

[13] San Diego Housing Commission. (2023) *Known SSRO Inventory List* https://sdhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/SDHC-Current-SRO-Inventory-List.pdf (accessed November 5, 2024).

Although most SRO residents we talked with expressed having limited social relationships, this was especially true for men. While many of the women residents we interviewed had relationships outside of their buildings — with family or friends — most of the men we interviewed revealed that they lacked similar connections. This finding converges with larger patterns of isolation by gender identity.[14]

**While 33% of women expressed isolation, 81% of men did**

As Kelley, a 69-year-old resident of Hotel Churchill who identified as Black told us,

> "I don't make friends no more because I have friends back [where I'm from] that just stabbed me in the back including my own family. So, I'm not on the premise of getting a whole lot of people I hang with… When you're a nice person like me and you try to use me, I tell them 'Look I was born at night but it wasn't last night.' I could see why you want to be my friend because I got a car, and I could drive you places or whatever."

As is clear from Kelley's story, he had relationships end poorly in his past that made him hesitant to make any new friends. From his perspective, people use him for his resources. Indeed, many of the men we interviewed portrayed themselves as loners and exhibited high levels of social isolation and distrust of other people. Some men shared that divorcing their spouses had contributed to their isolation, while others highlighted that their homelessness had reduced their social ties as they were either embarrassed to tell people or had friends abandon them. Interestingly, men and women in our sample experienced homelessness at similar rates (81% and 83% respectively). Thus, men did not exhibit more isolation in our sample than women on account of higher rates of homelessness.[15]

[14] Umbersom, D., Zhiyong, L., & Cha, H. (2022) Gender and social isolation across the life course, *J Health Soc Behav*, 63(3), pp. 319-335. doi: 10.1177/00221465221109634

[15] Unhoused men, like men in general, tend to have fewer social ties than unhoused women. Lagory, M., Ritchey, F., & Sells, T. (1997) Gender differences in social support: Mental health consequences among the homeless, *Sociological Focus,* 30(3), pp. 209-225.

This finding points to the possibility that men are more likely than women to lose social relationships and develop distrust after a negative social experience.[16]

### Isolation Contributed to Residents' Housing Insecurity

In addition to the high rates of social isolation witnessed among SRO residents, many stories from this research highlighted the fact that a lack of social relationships contributed to residents' prior experiences of homelessness.

**Three in four respondents have experienced homelessness**

Jennifer, a 67-year-old resident of Trolley Court who identifies as white described how, after her divorce, she was living with her mother. When her mother died, she lost her housing. Estranged from her brothers on account of her history of exotic dancing and struggles with mental health issues, Jennifer found herself with no one to turn to and not enough income to stay housed.

Dominic, a 47-year-old former resident of Golden West who identifies as Asian, shared a similar story. After Dominic's dad died, he was his mother's caregiver. When his mother passed away, he was unable to maintain her housing expenses on his own with his part-time job working as a dishwasher. Dominic was too ashamed to tell his extended family in Thailand that he was experiencing homelessness before moving into his SRO. While he has a few friends from his church, they were not able to stop him from falling into homelessness although they do give him leads on jobs whenever they can.

As is evident from these findings, many SRO residents who have experienced homelessness either had no one to turn to for assistance or the social relationships they do have are not able, or are unwilling, to help them when they are in need.

### SRO Buildings Mediate Social Isolation

In addition to finding that most SRO residents entered their buildings with limited social relationships, we discovered that SRO buildings themselves can mediate social isolation in three interrelated ways: through the quality of management relationships, through building policies, and through the availability of well-maintained and managed common spaces.

### 1. Relations with Management

One way SROs mediate social isolation is through the quality of the relationship tenants have with their property managers or landlords. Relationships with property managers and landlords are important as management teams can become helpful social relationships or a disruptive force. An

[16] Haselhuhn, M. l. P., Kennedy, J. A., Kray, L. J., Van Zant, A. B., & Schweitzer, M. E. (2015) Gender differences in trust dynamics: Women trust more than men following a trust violation, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology,* 56, pp. 104-109.

example of the latter comes from Ivon, a 49-year-old Latina resident of Hotel Churchill. As Ivon shared of her previous manager:

> "One day, the manager asked me if I was cooking methamphetamine in my room and that he wanted to go up there because they're usually supposed to give you a 24-hour notice, but he wanted to go directly up there and go and check my room. I know that I did not have that going on in my room, but I also had my boyfriend at the time, who was asleep in my room (so I asked him to wait for me to wake up my boyfriend)…He said, "Oh, that sounds kind of weird. Kind of, like you're going to put something away or something." I'm like, "No, that's not what's happening." I'm like, "I know my rights. You can't just go up in the room..." He goes, "Well, do you want me to wait for [her case manager]" I'm like, "You don't have to bring them into this." I'm like, "I'll take you up to my room." I took him, and I was so shaky and mad."

This quote illustrates how a negative relationship with a property manager can significantly impact a tenant. As Ivon recounted, her property manager's lack of trust and disrespect for her privacy blocked the possibility that she could in turn trust him, as did the fact that he undermined his own building rule (and California law) which requires management to give 24-hour's notice before inspecting a room. The manager's unfounded accusations of illicit activity and his threat to inform Ivon's case manager that she was noncompliant with his wishes further exacerbated the situation, causing emotional distress for Ivon as she realized that her property manager not only holds stereotypical views of SRO residents (i.e. that they are drug addicts) but is willing to tell her case manager on her when she stands up for herself. Not only does this approach to SRO management negatively impact Ivon's mental health, but it blocks the possibility that Ivon would ask this person for help in the future, exacerbating feelings of isolation as Ivon does not feel that she has property management in her corner. Indeed, many residents recounted similar stories, highlighting that these encounters with property managers and landlords have prevented them from seeking out assistance when it is needed and have further exacerbated their sense of isolation.

Some tenants noted that their SRO managers and landlords treat them with respect. Jeff, a 74-year-old resident of the Sara Frances who identifies as white shared a more positive story:

> [My manager] wasn't someone who stayed in his office. He was proactive as far as dealing with problems or as I say, he didn't just sit in his office and hold court, so to speak. He was willing to help out and do the necessary things, so that was good. His door was always open, which is good because if there was a problem, you could go and discuss it with him and try to work out a solution as needed.

The manager's open-door policy at the Sara Frances and his willingness to engage with tenants allowed Jeff to perceive his manager as a positive social relationship in his life: one that would help him out with building issues. Most tenants at Hotel Churchill additionally shared that their new property management team is kind and attentive, making tenants feel at home in their building. Many even highlighted that the property manager specifically goes above and beyond her job description to help residents with various needs including accessing food at the end of the month when their CalFresh is depleted and filling out benefits forms. In this sense, SRO managers and landlords who are perceived to be respectful and available become important social relationships for tenants by helping them with building issues, food acquisition, and benefits navigation.

Importantly, relations with SRO management predicted with a great deal of accuracy how SRO tenants would treat one another. Residents in buildings where management teams were perceived to be rude, disengaged, and harboring tenant stereotypes were more likely to view others in their buildings through a stereotypical lens that kept them from engaging with their neighbors. By contrast, residents in buildings where management teams were available and friendly were far less likely to harbor stereotypical views of other residents, thus paving the way for the possibility of neighbor interaction.

**2. The Impact of SRO Policies**

Many tenants highlighted the social outcomes of various SRO policies that exist across buildings. These policies often included quiet hours, rules around pets, and rules around smoking or doing drugs in the units. For Jack, a resident of Hotel Churchill who identifies as Black with a history of homelessness, the policies were what created good neighborly relations in his building. As Jack told us, "The rules are set down here so there is no friction. Everyone knows what they are, what will happen if they don't follow them, and they follow them." In other words, building rules that promoted being quiet at night, picking up after your pets, and not smoking or using drugs in the units reduced the possibility of conflict, setting the stage for the creation of social relationships with fellow residents.

While tenants felt that many SRO policies help to create the conditions for friendly interactions with neighbors, other policies were noted to be a source of stress. These policies often make it hard for individuals to maintain social relationships outside of their

buildings. Many SROs have policies around guests that make it difficult for residents to have friends and family over. Some prohibit overnight guests after a resident has had a certain number over within a specific time period. Others have visitor fees that make it difficult for residents' family and friends to come and visit. As Sean, a 60-year-old resident of the Sara Frances who identifies as Black recounted:

> "My building has a strict rule where guests must pay $10 for the visits in the afternoon from 10:00am to 5:00pm and from 5:00pm to 10:00am the next morning it's $25. At my old building you would be allowed to have guests [without the fee]. You don't get any guests here. You build a big wall around yourself here."

For low-income individuals, a $10 or a $25 charge makes it difficult to afford visiting a loved one in their SRO. Additionally, many buildings require that guests leave a form of ID at the door, a rule that many residents found frustrating. Ivon highlighted that she finds this rule difficult for her guests to follow because many of them are still experiencing homelessness and have no form of ID handy.

Oftentimes management would use informants to determine who was violating policies around building guests. Many residents noted that their property managers would use informants in the building to spy on others, helping management catch tenants in the act of violating building rules. The use of informants in certain buildings eroded tenants' trust in their neighbors as they never knew who would tell on them. This finding harks back to our previous point on the importance of management relationships for tenants.

### 3. Common Gathering Spaces Are Few and Limited and Common Bathrooms Generate Problems

Given the fact that SRO units are small in size, having access to common gathering spaces can facilitate tenants' abilities to socialize with friends, family, or neighbors. However, many SROs lack gathering spaces despite having the physical space to accommodate them. For example, the Golden West has a large lobby but no gathering space for residents. The Sara Francis likewise has a back patio as well as a lobby but they are not currently being used by residents (the back patio, it was told to us, is off limits to tenants with no explanation).

Even when common areas are present, they have limitations on their use. The lack of consistent common areas not only makes it difficult for SRO residents to entertain friends and family from outside of their building, but it hinders tenants' abilities to get to know one another. As Kelley said:

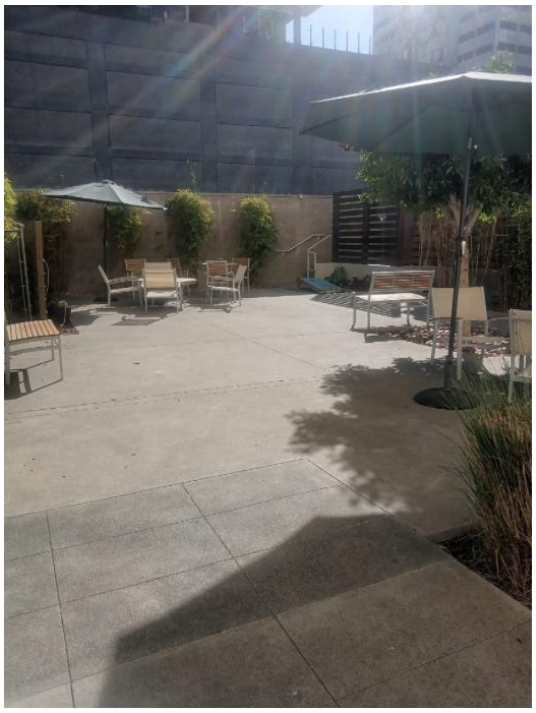
> Everybody doesn't have a television or Wi-Fi, so we can come down there [to the lounge] and watch TV. I asked her [the property manager] to raise the hours. They want us out of there by ten o'clock, and I'm like, "We're not kids. You can give us at least till twelve o'clock."

In Kelley's building, the Hotel Churchill, the lounge allows tenants without their own television to watch and socialize with each other. However, the fact that the room closes at 10 limits residents' opportunities to meet one another and feels infantilizing.

**Image 1. Lounge at Hotel Churchill**

Importantly, Hotel Churchill was one of the only SROs within this study's sample to have shared gathering spaces. These included the lounge mentioned above as well as a conference room, a lobby with seating, and a back patio. Residents of Hotel Churchill consistently shared that they appreciated these shared spaces. More than one resident highlighted to us that the new management team advocated for them to get the new TV lounge. Jesus, a 70-year-old resident of Hotel Churchill who identifies as Latino said he was thankful that he could hang out on the back patio with other residents and catch some much-needed sun. While many tenants in this building expressed gratitude for these common areas, residents in other buildings held perspectives similar to Kelley's. Sean, a 60-year-old Black resident of the Sara Frances, highlighted that, while there is a back patio at his building, it is essentially off limits to tenants most of the time. While Sean could not tell us why this was the case, he did mention that being unable to access common areas in his building was a contributing factor to his social isolation.

**Image 2. Back Patio at Hotel Churchill**



While common gathering spaces can support the creation and maintenance of social relationships, other common spaces — particularly shared bathrooms — breed discontent. When residents live in buildings where management teams are rude and aloof, they are more likely to experience inferior building conditions including cleanliness of bathrooms. Although tenants blame management for not caring enough to keep up with building maintenance, poor bathroom conditions cause residents to stereotype their neighbors, calling them unclean, lazy, and too drug-addled to clean up after themselves. When SRO residents stereotype their neighbors, they are less likely to engage with them.

**Image 3. SRO Bathroom**

Based on our findings, we provide policy recommendations at two different levels of implementation: the building level and the community level.

## Building Level Recommendations

1. **SROs should have common spaces with planned events** - While social isolation erodes mental health, social relationships boost mental health. As mental health supports housing stability, it is imperative that SROs, as housing options for those at risk of experiencing homelessness, have well-maintained common spaces. Well-maintained common spaces are used by residents. When this happens, SRO tenants are more likely to get to know one another. Knowing that the City of San Diego is interested in both preserving and constructing new SROs to help solve

the city's housing crisis,[17] attention should be paid to the revitalization and creation of common areas. While new SRO construction should always include common spaces, revitalization funds available through San Diego Housing Commission should be better advertised to landlords. Nonprofits who place clients into SROs can also advertise these funds as well as work together to generate more funding for common area development and revitalization. At the Hotel Churchill, an SRO building that has been revitalized with the help of the San Diego Housing Commission, the current property manager created a lounge where residents can watch TV and use the computer. The creation of this space led to regular meetings for veterans in the building led by a well-loved chaplain. Given these findings, it is not enough to just have common areas in SROs; it is additionally helpful to host events in common spaces to promote socialization among tenants. These events could not only serve to help residents socialize with each other but could also provide opportunities for the property manager to participate and strengthen their relationships with residents.

2. **SROs should revise guest policies** - Given the myriad health benefits of social relationships, SROs should revise guest policies to make it easier for tenants to host guests. Getting rid of fees for guests will help low-income individuals visit family and friends. While removing the ID requirements will help those still experiencing homelessness access their acquaintances, SROS must remain safe spaces for tenants. As such, checks must be put in place that prevent anyone from roaming the halls, a happening that many tenants reported. If SROs wish to waive ID requirements, we recommend that guests without ID should only be allowed in well-managed common areas, where cameras and security guards are present. Having consistent security in SROs — especially in the form of security guards — would make tenants feel safer even as policies are laxed to allow more guests into buildings. Many residents we spoke with identified the fact that they had no security guards on site, a reality that made them feel unsafe. However, while we advocate for constant security, security guards must be trauma-informed and anti-racist. One Black interviewee reported that the security guard in their building exhibited racial bias against him, which eroded his sense of safety. To ensure that security guards are trauma-informed, they could be directly recruited from SRO buildings. Targeted recruitment of this nature would additionally create

[17] City of San Diego. (2023) *Housing Action Package 2.0.* https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/2023_hap_fact_sheet.pdf (accessed October 4, 2024).

financial opportunities for SRO residents.

3. **Case managers should be more present in buildings** - recognizing that SRO residents experience high rates of social isolation, case managers who place clients into SROs should have a more consistent on-site presence. Not only would this ensure that clients have one consistent social relationship, but it would also be an additional resource for SRO landlords and managers. Landlords and managers could benefit from conversations with case managers, where they could learn about the connections between homelessness and trauma and improve their relationships with tenants.
4. **Tenants should organize peer services** - whether these be peer-support programs (where residents have a peer they are responsible for checking in on) or the form of tenant organizations, where tenants can elect resident representatives to share their concerns with building management, SRO tenants should be encouraged to build their neighbor networks. Such networks could bolster holistic health and well-being (as peer check-in programs can ensure individuals are getting outside, getting to medical appointments, and paying their bills on time) and help tenants to advocate for building changes they want to see, including those around guest policies and communal spaces. Nonprofit organizations dedicated to assisting low-income individuals, persons emerging from homelessness, and renters could assist SRO tenants in such organizing efforts including Serving Seniors, Residents United Network, and the Housing Justice Collaborative.

## Community Level Recommendations

1. **Community Connections for SRO residents** - Not all SROs have common spaces. Recognizing the importance of communal spaces for the creation and maintenance of social relationships for SRO residents, it is recommended that SRO management teams collaborate with local businesses to have the latter open their doors to SRO tenants for hosted social gatherings. These events could be for specific buildings or for an entire network of SRO tenants. This idea has been employed in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco where local farmer's markets have been tapped to bring mini-markets to SRO buildings: places where residents can both socialize and have their nutritional needs met.[18]

[18] Minkler, M. (1986) Building support networks from social isolation, *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Ageing,* 10(4), pp. 46-49.

2. **"Friendship programs"** - San Diegans in general can get involved in minimizing social isolation for SRO residents. Local programs could be created that pair interested parties with SRO tenants. Such programs could be modeled on Bridge of Hope, a faith-based example of volunteers connecting with their unhoused neighbors.[19] Bridge of Hope volunteers undergo training and then offer themselves as a supportive social tie to a family that is experiencing homelessness. Using Bridge of Hope as our model, nonprofit organizations can be encouraged to facilitate these friendship programs as part of their larger commitment to serving the community. Friendship programs could also be modeled after volunteer opportunities offered within assisted living facilities, where volunteers can come and engage in or create activities for residents.[20]

[19] Bridge of Hope offers a faith-based model of connecting volunteers with their unhoused neighbors. Volunteers undergo training and then offer tangible and emotional support and encouragement as they engage with families who have exited homelessness: https://bridgeofhopeinc.org/our-model/.

[20] Such programs specifically exist in San Diego, including those found at St. Paul's. https://www.stpaulseniors.org/volunteer-opportunities/

## Author Bios

Magda Gomez is a College Corps Fellow and a Research Assistant at UC San Diego's Homelessness Hub. She is double majoring in Sociology (with a concentration in Economy and Society) and International Studies (focusing on Political Science). Through these majors, Magda aims to understand how society functions and to discover the most effective ways to support positive change in our communities. Her work with the Homelessness Hub has allowed her to develop and apply her research skills and her ability to collaborate within a team. She looks forward to carrying these essential skills into her future career.

Stacey Livingstone is a postdoctoral researcher at the Homelessness Hub at UC San Diego. As a community-engaged scholar, Stacey studies services and housing solutions for people experiencing homelessness in collaboration with local nonprofits and advocacy groups.