

## Who Is Calling The Shots?

00;00;00;00 - 00;00;31;06

Karen Brown

Hello and welcome to another episode of Real Life Renos : The Podcast. I'm your host, Karen Brown. I'm an Aging in Place and Accessibility Strategist, which means I work with people who want to stay in the home of their choice for as long as possible. Most houses are full of barriers, so they need modifications to make them safe for independent living.

00;00;31;08 - 00;00;57;14

Karen Brown

Sometimes my clients are forward thinking people who are beginning to have aches and pains and realize that something needs to change before they develop a chronic injury. Other times, my clients are people with progressive diseases or people who have experienced an injury and they can't go home until the modifications have been made to their home. I also work with companies, retail stores and governments to make their spaces more accessible for their customers and staff.

00;00;57;17 - 00;01;22;22

Karen Brown

I've been producing videos for several years and podcasts for the last couple of years and it struck me that I haven't done a specific video or podcast on the very basic question of the why behind the need for all of us to think about our future in terms of access within our own homes. I'm going to talk about that today, and then I'm going to talk about the most basic action starting where do we start and how do we start?

00;01;22;24 - 00;01;47;06

Karen Brown

Why is it important to do something, make decisions? The short answer is because if you don't, someone else will. If you want other people deciding what your quality of life will be, it's simple. Do nothing. If, on the other hand, you want as much control as possible over your life and your independence, then you need to stop being paralyzed with fear over what to do.

00;01;47;08 - 00;02;13;12

Karen Brown

You need to face your life and make some decisions. Make a plan. Let's dig into it. Why? Why does it matter? Don't all houses kind of look the same? Picture this. I'm in my thirties, so why should I care about something that won't affect me until I'm old? I'm in my forties, so it's important to me that this kitchen reno is beautiful and on trend.

00;02;13;14 - 00;02;38;06

Karen Brown

I'm in my fifties and I just need my bathroom renovated so it looks more modern. Sound familiar? Allow me to point out that aches and pains are not always age related. People are born with a variety of disabilities, or they develop them as they grow up. Catastrophic accidents happen. Sports injuries have lingering effects. Diseases develop and cause a multitude of issues.

00;02;38;08 - 00;03;09;24

Karen Brown

Age is not in and of itself a disability. However, as we age our bodies change and range of motion or other movement challenges creep into our lives. Though steep knee bends hit differently than they did when we were teenagers. Now, does any of this sound familiar? The data bears this out. The latest stats can 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability tells us that youth aged 15 to 24 are reporting a 7% increase in disability over 2017 when the last survey was conducted.

00;03;09;27 - 00;03;42;04

Karen Brown

7% may not sound like much, but in 2017 the percentage was 13.1 and in 2022 that percent had jumped to 20.1. So a full one fifth of our youth population is reporting having a disability. That does not bode well for our health care system in the future if it continues to work as it does today. Working aged adults jumped from 20 to 24.1% and seniors 65 and older moved up from 37.8 to 40.4%.

00;03;42;06 - 00;04;06;14

Karen Brown

Overall, 27% of our citizens report having a disability of some sort. What kind of disabilities are most common? Pain related disabilities top the list, followed by flexibility and mobility. As I said a moment ago, the houses we live in are full of barriers. Let's just start with stairs. They benefit nobody. They are a barrier to entry and exit.

00;04;06;14 - 00;04;25;09

Karen Brown

That can be impossible for some. Painful and very difficult for others. Stairs up to the front door are a thing in construction for a couple of reasons. When it was discovered that the living space of a house could be doubled by putting a full basement underneath a house, there was also the need to bring natural light to that extra space.

00;04;25;12 - 00;04;48;23

Karen Brown

Raising the main floor up a bit allowed windows to be installed in the basement to achieve this. Another big reason for stairs is that a barrier free entrance would require sewer inverts to be placed lower than they currently are, or for developments to have areas designated for barrier free entry that are sculpted such that the houses are higher in those areas to accommodate the positioning of the sewer invert.

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Karen Brown

Developers see this as an unnecessary expense. We can also look at floor joists which are typically placed on top of the foundation. However, if they were buried inside of the foundation, a barrier free entrance is potentially available. It's a different building method, so the easy answer is always no, that's not how we do it. Or some will say it's not allowed according to code.

00;05;11;22 - 00;05;33;20

Karen Brown

Don't buy it. It is allowed. And no, that isn't how we do it but we could if the builder knew how. Don't let the chatter of extra costs

derail the conversation either. If you're only doing a few houses with barrier free entry. Sure, there's an increased cost, but the more that are built, the less added cost there is until it levels out.

00;05;33;22 - 00;05;58;26

Karen Brown

If an entire subdivision was built that way inside of many houses, we also have stairs to contend with. And I will point out that a two storey house is not a barrier to accessibility. I did a podcast last year on Vertical Access with architect Ron Wickman who went over several ways to mitigate movement inside of a house. You can find that late last fall if you look back on our podcast archive.

00;05;58;28 - 00;06;22;25

Karen Brown

Moving on. Main floor bathrooms are seldom visitable, much less accessible. For those who haven't heard this podcast before, pull your lens back and picture yourself as a 30, 40 or 50 something homeowner and your parents or grandparents came to visit. If they used mobility devices, could they independently use that little powder room on the main floor? Probably not.

00;06;22;28 - 00;06;42;06

Karen Brown

Visitable means that basic access is available. I can't tell you how often I hear stories of people who can't navigate the bathroom and have to have a cup brought to them to pee into and then hand it off to someone who can get inside the bathroom to dispose of it. To say that this is undignified is an understatement.

00;06;42;08 - 00;07;14;21

Karen Brown

Honestly, if there's no bathroom that they can use independently, most people just don't go to visit. That is incredibly sad. The lack of a main floor accessible bathroom may well have an impact on how you can use your home if you need to live on one floor. We can also talk about counters in the kitchens and bathrooms. Microwaves that tend to be installed way above the stove tops too high for most adults in a standing position to even see what's

going on in there. Floor transitions from room to room or from floor to carpet, door and cabinets.

00;07;14;24 - 00;07;43;19

Karen Brown

Hardware. Showers and bathtubs. Outdoor spaces. The list goes on and on. Back to the why. Why should accessibility be a consideration in the homes you purchase? Build or renovate? Because if you don't already have a disability related to pain, flexibility, mobility, sight hearing, dexterity, learning or developmental, you and those you live with may be one of the 27% of Canadians who will develop one of these disabilities.

00;07;43;21 - 00;08;13;25

Karen Brown

If you cannot manage life in your home. You can't stay there if you don't do something about modifying your home in the earliest stages of any of those disabilities, you risk further injury. If you have an accident that results in a disability that prohibits you from entering your home using the bathroom to toilet and clean yourself, you may not be allowed to go home until modifications are made and you find a more suitable place or a spot opens up in a long term or assisted living facility.

00;08;13;27 - 00;08;43;03

Karen Brown

This doesn't even touch those of us who break a leg, have sciatica, undergo surgeries like a hip or knee replacement, or have some other short term challenge that makes living in our homes independently difficult, if not impossible. Most of this can be mitigated by pulling back and taking a more global view of your life, your home, your loved ones, your community, and making thoughtful decisions about home purchases or renovations early on in the process.

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Karen Brown

Hopefully you are understanding the why, why it's important for you to take a good hard look at your home and understand the areas that are working for you. As we noted in earlier podcasts, for

most people, it's the entrance, the bathroom and vertical movement within a home. After that, you need to look at how wide hallways are, what's on the floor, what kind of transitions do you have from one living space to another?

00;09;07;29 - 00;09;29;25

Karen Brown

How do you take care of your daily tasks like cooking, cleaning, dressing and so on? Next, you need to take a good, hard look at your limitations. For a lot of us, aging in and of itself brings challenges with range of motion and mobility. For the 27% who have a disability, you need to understand the progression of your disease or condition.

00;09;29;28 - 00;09;55;27

Karen Brown

That means you need to have an honest discussion with your health care team and understand the worst case scenario for your disability. Five years from now, ten years from now, 20 years from now. Do not be a denier about any of this. Understand what your life will be like, what your limitations will be along the way, what medications there are currently that can help, but also understand the side effects of those medications.

00;09;55;29 - 00;10;17;06

Karen Brown

What about the way you live your life now is causing further damage or preventing you from doing the things that would give you the opportunity to increase the good or better years? Here's a for instance. You may be causing further damage because you have carpeted flooring and maneuvering that with your walker sucks energy from you that you could use for other activities.

00;10;17;08 - 00;10;35;13

Karen Brown

You may not be able to reach the second shelf of your kitchen cabinets, so you either overreach or use a stool, which puts you at risk. The front steps may be icy in the winter and you're afraid of them, so you hibernate most of the winter, spending your time in front of the TV and really not moving around that much.

00;10;35;15 - 00;10;59;08

Karen Brown

Your muscles get weaker from not being used, putting you at greater risk for falls. Your bedroom is on the second floor, but the stairs are getting harder and harder. Your children want you to move, but you don't want to so you lie to them about the challenges you're facing. You need to sit yourself down and have a good, hard look at how you function in the home. How you use the bathroom.

00;10;59;12 - 00;11;23;09

Karen Brown

I know sometimes those are uncomfortable conversations to have even with ourselves, but you need to understand how you use the bathroom and what challenges there are now and in the future. How you use the kitchen and what the challenges are now and in the future might be. How do you access and do your laundry and what are the challenges now and in the future?

00;11;23;11 - 00;11;52;19

Karen Brown

How do you maintain your home? Cut grass, shovel snow, clean gutters, access the electric panel, or the water turn offs? How do you like to use your outdoor space? Are you a gardener or do you have a workshop maybe that you like to use? All of these things matter in terms of how you maintain your life in a space that may becoming less and less friendly to whatever challenges you have. Merely existing in a space that you can't modify or refuse to leave

00;11;52;21 - 00;12;17;02

Karen Brown

isn't leading a life that brings you satisfaction and joy. And that's what we want for you. Hard decisions. I know. Next, look at the activities in your life. How far away are the grocery store, the pharmacy, your church, your friends homes, your hairdresser? How do you get there? If you can walk to all of them, you're living a dream that most of us just can't.

00;12;17;04 - 00;12;38;15

Karen Brown

If you drive there, consider how you would do your life without a car. Yeah, I said it without your car. You have to get very real here once again. Most of us at some point have to stop driving. I would prefer that each of us makes a plan to do that on our own and gradually ease up until we can do without that car.

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Karen Brown

This is definitely an issue where it's typical for others to make the final decision. Your doctor signs off on removing your license. You fail your test, or maybe your kids hide the keys or the battery to the car when they don't feel like you can drive safely any longer. Suddenly you're left high and dry with no alternate plan in place.

00;12;58;12 - 00;13;22;00

Karen Brown

Make the plan. I understand that it's often the last bit of independence for us, but independence isn't about a car sitting in your driveway. It's about doing the things you want to do when you want to do them without having to rely on others to do them for you or fit you into their schedule. Okay, so you've looked at your home, your health and your activities.

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Karen Brown

Now it's time to fit them all together. Can your home be modified or renovated to accommodate the worst case scenario of your life? Always worst case because you don't want to go halfway, only to encounter another renovation somewhere down the road. Add to that that there are fewer and fewer people available in the trades. A few podcasts back, John Kupchenko told us that four in ten tradespeople are retiring over the next ten years and those four are being replaced by only one.

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Karen Brown

Are modifications available that would allow you to stay in your home and in your neighborhood for a period of time that would be acceptable? There are certain conditions and diseases that



ultimately will mean a transfer to long term care or assisted living. Many people can live through most of their lives in the home of their choice, or perhaps spend only the last year or two of their lives in a different location.

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Karen Brown

So be realistic here. What can be done to your home that will prolong your health, lessen issues with pain, flexibility, mobility, or whatever the primary and secondary issues are that your health care team has identified and allow you to be not only independent but safe and live in a dignified manner. If your home cannot be modified or renovated or you can't afford to make the changes, you have two choices Stay and let life have its way.

00;14;44;27 - 00;15;06;06

Karen Brown

Or consider a move to a home that better accommodates your need to live independently, safely and with dignity. The solution may be downsizing, moving to a condo or apartment. Finding a tenant who can maybe be another warm body in your house, but can lend a hand with chores for a reduced rent. Or maybe you will be the tenant.

00;15;06;08 - 00;15;32;12

Karen Brown

There are lots of alternative living arrangements popping up these days, including colleges and universities, matching students with homeowners or agencies that divide executive homes into multiple private bedrooms and bathrooms, where the tenants share kitchens, living rooms and outdoor space. Multigenerational living is becoming more popular, and while municipalities try to find ways to build more homes, granny suites, both attached and detached, are springing up everywhere.

00;15;32;14 - 00;15;57;16

Karen Brown

How you choose to move forward is your decision to make. Understand this. Not making a decision is making a decision. Eventually, a decision will be made. If not by you, then by someone

else. The time for you to have a voice will eventually pass. Let's say your home can be modified. Now you want to look at how you do life outside of the home.

00;15;57;19 - 00;16;20;16

Karen Brown

Loneliness is as bad for you as smoking and can lead to dementia, heart disease, stroke, and perhaps even premature death. You need to get out and socialize, even if it's a conversation with the person at the grocery store who checks out your groceries or a neighbor you meet along your walk. You may still have a car for now, but down the road can you access public transit?

00;16;20;18 - 00;16;40;01

Karen Brown

Does your budget allow taxis or some other form of car service? Can you carpool with friends or neighbors to activities? Perhaps your adult children or grandchildren can help out, but I caution you against relying on them for everything. They have lives of their own and while I'm sure that they would love to help out nobody with a job,

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Karen Brown

children to raise, community activities, a social life and a family to maintain has the kind of time you need them to devote to you without them giving up part of their life. That's a whole other podcast, which I should do at some point. But independence is not about refusing to live the life you haven't prepared for, while demanding subliminally or overtly that someone else gives up a part of their life to look after you.

00;17;07;18 - 00;17;32;20

Karen Brown

That's not fair, and it can lead to resentments. I've seen that time and time again. The title of this podcast is Who is Calling the Shots? I will always advocate in the strongest of terms that you should call your own shots. Be informed even when it's hard. Know your options. Understand the possibilities. Do not bury your head in the sand.

00;17;32;23 - 00;18;15;03

Karen Brown

Know where you want to go. And then one foot in front of the other make decisions that will take you there. We may only die once, but we live every day. So let's plan to make that every day the best it can be. Independence. Safety and dignity. Join us again for the next episode of Real Life Renos : The Podcast.