

## Why

00;00;00;00 - 00;00;27;05

Karen Brown

Welcome to Real Life Renos : The Podcast. I'm your host, Karen Brown and if we haven't met before, I'm an Aging in place and accessibility strategist, as well as an educator in all things leading to a life that is independent, safe and dignified. Today, I want to talk about why the cause? The reason? The purpose so many of us don't understand.

00;00;27;07 - 00;00;53;21

Karen Brown

The reason and the purpose behind the need to live in a certain way. To think about things differently. So let's dig into a few of these, and I think you'll catch on. So many people don't understand why it's important to live in a house that's safe. You didn't ever think about that, did you? We just assume that we're safe in our homes.

00;00;53;23 - 00;01;04;10

Karen Brown

Well guess what? About 78% of all preventable injury related deaths in Canada occur in our homes.

00;01;04;17 - 00;01;33;17

Karen Brown

52% of falls happen inside our homes. But guess what? Homes haven't changed in terms of how their built in well over 50 years. What's wrong with that? You know, if it works, why change it? Well, it's not working. When all of these injuries are happening inside of our homes, sharp angles, doorways that aren't wide enough and stairs. Oh my gosh.

00;01;33;19 - 00;01;47;14

Karen Brown

I've talked about stairs so many times on this podcast. Nobody likes stairs. And yet there are stairs everywhere. Electrical outlets are placed too low.

00;01;47;14 - 00;02;05;10

Karen Brown

What's the reason they're located there, you might ask? Have you ever thought about why electrical outlets are placed where they are? Well, there's really not much of a reason at all. I learned several years ago from a colleague that electrical outlets,

00;02;05;13 - 00;02;31;15

Karen Brown

you're not going to believe this, are placed where they are, because back in the day, electricians would come along, they'd have their hammer and they'd put their hammer vertically on the floor, and they would place the electrical outlet at the top of where that hammer was, and they would just go around the room and place every electrical outlet in the same way.

00;02;31;16 - 00;02;33;24

Karen Brown

That way, they were all the same height.

00;02;33;24 - 00;02;39;21

Karen Brown

So your outlets are place dependent on the height of a hammer.

00;02;39;21 - 00;02;55;16

Karen Brown

Now, if you want to get real about it, electrical outlets need to be placed much higher. We'll dig into that a little bit later. Houses are being built on very narrow lots these days, which means that there are stairs everywhere.

00;02;55;19 - 00;03;23;12

Karen Brown

The people responsible for your house and mine don't understand how we live in our houses therefore, they have no idea why they should be built differently. I hear from builders all the time that if people expressed a desire for homes to be built differently, well by golly, they would do it. I agree that consumers need to do their part in asking for changes, but frankly, builders aren't responsive to population needs either.

00;03;23;19 - 00;03;50;19

Karen Brown

I mean, anybody can read statistics. The data is clear, and anyone can understand that people don't want to go to long term care and that therefore changes are needed. There have been many, many surveys done with people, especially during and since the pandemic, and the data has shown quite clearly that people, if they had their way, would not go to long term care.

00;03;50;19 - 00;04;03;19

Karen Brown

Now, there is certainly also data to show that the last year or maybe two of a person's life, when they need greater care, going into nursing care is appropriate.

00;04;03;19 - 00;04;10;25

Karen Brown

What we find in general, though, is that people go to long term care way earlier than they really need to.

00;04;10;25 - 00;04;15;19

Karen Brown

If they could stay in their homes with proper supports.

00;04;15;22 - 00;04;17;17

Karen Brown

They wouldn't need to do that.

00;04;17;17 - 00;04;36;16

Karen Brown

I bought a house about a year and a half ago and I asked for changes, but I was denied because they don't want to do things differently. And this was a builder who swore up and down that they have someone on staff who works with accessibility needs, and that they understand the needs of an aging population.

00;04;36;19 - 00;04;53;20

Karen Brown

I did ask that question and that's what I was told. So what did I ask for? Electrical outlets to be placed higher, and I gave them the measurement. Light switches to be placed lower. I gave them that measurement too and a roll in shower.

00;04;53;20 - 00;05;05;10

Karen Brown

Yet I was denied. They just simply don't want to do anything differently. It would cost them extra time and it would cost them extra money.

00;05;05;12 - 00;05;17;24

Karen Brown

Well, that may be true if they did just one house that way or 4 or 5 houses that way. But guess what? If they did them all that way, it wouldn't cost them anything extra.

00;05;17;24 - 00;05;27;24

Karen Brown

Every house has to have electrical outlets and light switches. So if you just put them all in a better place, it wouldn't cost anything different.

00;05;27;24 - 00;05;28;17

Karen Brown

Now

00;05;28;17 - 00;05;52;22

Karen Brown

bathrooms. Let's talk about bathrooms for a minute. Having certain elements of a bathroom placed in the correct position seems to be incredibly difficult. In a private bathroom, in our homes, and in a public bathroom. Grab bars are essential tools, whether it's private or public, but they need to suit the user needs so they can't just be whacked up anywhere.

00;05;52;25 - 00;06;14;25

Karen Brown

Every bathroom in a home needs to be built with proper backing, so that when the time comes that grab bars need to be installed

and, by the way, this should be proactive, not reactive, they can be put wherever they are needed with certainty that they won't be pulled off the wall when somebody actually needs them.

00;06;14;25 - 00;06;17;22

Karen Brown

In schools I was in a school

00;06;17;22 - 00;06;26;23

Karen Brown

just last week, and the alarm button placement was in the oddest place.

00;06;26;26 - 00;06;45;13

Karen Brown

It was placed. Let me see how I can describe this to you. If you were sitting on a toilet and you had an L shaped grab bar, so remember that the L shaped grab bar is actually, the reverse. So mirror image it is beside the toilet.

00;06;45;13 - 00;06;53;16

Karen Brown

If you were hanging onto that grab bar and you raised your elbow about four inches, that's where the alarm button was.

00;06;53;18 - 00;07;02;20

Karen Brown

Now, what is the why behind alarm buttons? Why do we need an alarm button? Well, it's in case somebody needs help.

00;07;02;20 - 00;07;11;11

Karen Brown

I was talking to a group of grade fives, and when I asked them why somebody in this bathroom might need help.

00;07;11;11 - 00;07;16;12

Karen Brown

They knew it. They knew that somebody would need help if somebody fell off the toilet.

00;07;16;15 - 00;07;25;16

Karen Brown

And I asked them if you fell off the toilet and were on the ground, could you reach this alarm button? And they all just kind of laughed and said, well, no.

00;07;25;16 - 00;07;40;07

Karen Brown

The alarm button needs to be placed somewhere that it can be reached. If somebody is seated on a toilet or has fallen on the floor. But whoever installed it didn't understand the why.

00;07;40;07 - 00;07;46;02

Karen Brown

Whoever designs public bathrooms doesn't understand how they're used.

00;07;46;02 - 00;07;55;02

Karen Brown

They don't understand it because they don't involve people with disabilities in their process. I know that they don't because I see the results.

00;07;55;02 - 00;08;02;13

Karen Brown

They don't understand why something needs to go here instead of there. Now, this was a brand new school.

00;08;02;13 - 00;08;08;07

Karen Brown

This was their first year of operating, so it's still under warranty, if you will.

00;08;08;13 - 00;08;25;09

Karen Brown

So I went to the principal and I had a couple other things to talk with the principal about. But I did mention this alarm button placement and she said they're not going to change that. And I said, but it's in the wrong place. I mean, number one,

00;08;25;09 - 00;08;33;03

Karen Brown

it doesn't work in that location for people who actually fall on the floor and need to hit the alarm button.

00;08;33;06 - 00;08;41;03

Karen Brown

And secondly, people who are using the grab bar could so easily hit the alarm button when they don't actually need help.

00;08;41;03 - 00;08;49;10

Karen Brown

So why it's there is a mystery to me. And she said, yeah, I know they're not going to fix it.

00;08;49;10 - 00;09;04;20

Karen Brown

Now, another one of the points I brought to her attention was the fact that the universal washroom on the upper level of the school didn't even have an alarm button, so it wasn't that it was in the wrong place.

00;09;04;22 - 00;09;06;27

Karen Brown

It just simply didn't exist.

00;09;06;27 - 00;09;08;09

Karen Brown

Very strange.

00;09;08;09 - 00;09;15;03

Karen Brown

But not strange once you understand that builders really don't understand why.

00;09;15;03 - 00;09;42;11

Karen Brown

It's important to understand your own life progression, your own health history, and what that means. That will guide your personal why. It will guide you in terms of why you buy a particular house,

why you make specific reno decisions. It informs how long you can stay in any given house.

00;09;42;13 - 00;10;10;07

Karen Brown

It informs the choices you make around diet and exercise. We each need to understand our own why. And if you don't, please sit down and think about this. Why you use things the way you do, why you live in your home the way that you do. My guess is that a lot of why you use your own home the way you do is because your home doesn't give you any choice.

00;10;10;11 - 00;10;22;26

Karen Brown

So you are acquiescing to the design of the home. It's your home. It needs to be what you need it to be. To answer your own why.

00;10;22;26 - 00;10;39;02

Karen Brown

Now here's another why for you. Why do we need more accessible homes built in a subdivision? Any subdivision. Well, the population is aging and as I mentioned earlier, nobody wants to go into long term care.

00;10;39;10 - 00;10;51;21

Karen Brown

Aging in place in the home of your choice is preferred, but it has to be safe. Builders just want to whack up cookie cutter homes quickly and not changing the style to accommodate the need

00;10;51;21 - 00;10;59;22

Karen Brown

of the people who will live in it. Their goal is not to accommodate us. It's to make money.

00;10;59;22 - 00;11;04;15

Karen Brown

Now, I will temper that by saying something I've said before.

00;11;04;15 - 00;11;29;01



Karen Brown

If you've listened to this podcast, you've heard me say it before architects, designers and pick a trade because all of them are not taught anything about accessibility in school. So they may hear in the wind that there are different ways of doing things, but they were never taught that if they want to learn it, they have to work with people who have learned it before them.

00;11;29;01 - 00;11;33;03

Karen Brown

And how did they learn it? Well, they took extra curricular courses.

00;11;33;03 - 00;11;39;14

Karen Brown

There are courses available. The Canadian Home Builders Association has a course called Adaptiv.

00;11;39;14 - 00;11;51;15

Karen Brown

If you're working in a commercial or a public space, then the Rick Hansen Foundation has a course. I took a course from the University of Southern California, as well as the two that I've just mentioned.

00;11;51;17 - 00;12;00;14

Karen Brown

The University of Southern California's gerontology division has a really, really good program on accessible housing.

00;12;00;14 - 00;12;07;25

Karen Brown

All of these people, the architects, the designers, the trades don't really know how a house is used.

00;12;07;25 - 00;12;12;20

Karen Brown

Therefore, they don't know why it should and could be built differently.

00;12;12;20 - 00;12;13;23

Karen Brown  
No idea.

00;12;13;23 - 00;12;19;22

Karen Brown

They want to build something that's pretty. They want to build something that's functional, certainly, but functional for who?

00;12;19;22 - 00;12;21;03

Karen Brown

That's the why.

00;12;21;03 - 00;12;27;04

Karen Brown

They need to understand the why of their end users and stop with the cookie cutter nonsense.

00;12;27;04 - 00;12;40;06

Karen Brown

Let's talk about code and why we need to do better with code. There's a federal building code. And then most, but not all provinces and territories have their own codes.

00;12;40;06 - 00;12;58;16

Karen Brown

And in any given province, the builder needs to build in accordance with the higher standard. So in some cases, Ontario, for instance, has a higher code requirement than the federal code.

00;12;58;23 - 00;13;05;00

Karen Brown

So the builders in Ontario, which is the province I live in, are required to build to that higher standard.

00;13;05;00 - 00;13;06;00

Karen Brown

But code

00;13;06;00 - 00;13;17;17

Karen Brown

should be thought of as a negotiated settlement. It is the very least that anyone has to do to avoid being sued or to get that occupancy permit.

00;13;17;17 - 00;13;24;07

Karen Brown

We have the knowledge, the ability and the tools to do so much better in terms of code.

00;13;24;08 - 00;13;58;12

Karen Brown

So how is code arrived at? Well, over a period of time, a bunch of people come together in a room and, you know, I don't know if this is really true, that some sit on one side of the table and some sit on another. But you can think of builders and the people who educate builders and the people who create policy around building sit on one side of the room, and on the other side of the room are people who are advocating for greater accessibility,

00;13;58;12 - 00;14;04;18

Karen Brown

and they talk about the various pieces of code, and there are lots of pieces.

00;14;04;20 - 00;14;07;25

Karen Brown

I mean, these code books are very thick.

00;14;07;25 - 00;14;22;24

Karen Brown

They talk about these various pieces. And the people who are wanting greater accessibility try to negotiate a piece of code so that it includes a greater percentage of people who need that accessible

00;14;22;24 - 00;14;30;13

Karen Brown

piece to be increased. And the people on the other side of the table, the builders and so on,

00;14;30;15 - 00;14;51;12

Karen Brown

they try to negotiate the code to stay exactly where it is, or to change very little, because any change in code means they have to be reeducated. It means they have to build perhaps differently in some cases. It means that inspectors have to learn more about how a building needs to be inspected.

00;14;51;15 - 00;15;02;23

Karen Brown

So everybody negotiates all of this. And as a as a colleague of mine says, a good negotiation is when everybody leaves the table a little bit unhappy.

00;15;02;23 - 00;15;04;05

Karen Brown

In this case,

00;15;04;05 - 00;15;12;29

Karen Brown

I think it's really necessary for the building side to leave the table very unhappy, because

00;15;12;29 - 00;15;25;23

Karen Brown

the building code that is in place now doesn't go far enough to satisfy the needs of people who need to live in homes longer and be more safe while they're doing it.

00;15;25;25 - 00;15;27;13

Karen Brown

So that is code.

00;15;27;13 - 00;15;31;03

Karen Brown

We need to understand how a given space is used,

00;15;31;03 - 00;15;33;12

Karen Brown

and then build code requirements

00;15;33;12 - 00;15;37;25

Karen Brown

so that it satisfies the needs. Longer term.

00;15;37;25 - 00;15;41;19

Karen Brown

Why do we need renovations that consider not just five years out,

00;15;41;19 - 00;15;45;19

Karen Brown

but ten, 15, 20 years or more

00;15;45;19 - 00;15;49;13

Karen Brown

when houses and buildings are being built?

00;15;49;17 - 00;16;16;18

Karen Brown

We tend to pay a lot of attention to trends, especially when we renovate our own spaces in our own homes. What's the trendy kitchen thing? What color or material do cabinets need to be made out of in order to be trendy? What does the entrance need to look like so that it's trendy? We need to pay more attention to our own functional needs and how we use the home.

00;16;16;20 - 00;16;47;28

Karen Brown

If we have family or friends who are elderly or perhaps have disabilities, we need to see them. And I mean really see them. Can we invite them into our homes? Can they actually get into our homes? Can they use the bathroom? Does our home welcome them or not? Now, those of you who've listened to this podcast for a while know that I've done lots of podcasts with an architect named Ron Wickman.

00;16;48;04 - 00;17;00;05

Karen Brown

He has told on previous podcasts the story of his father, who was in a wheelchair and was unable to get into a lot of homes and even have a coffee

00;17;00;05 - 00;17;12;18

Karen Brown

with whoever lived there, because having a coffee meant that eventually he'd have to use the washroom, but he couldn't use the washroom because he couldn't get his wheelchair into the washroom.

00;17;12;20 - 00;17;47;09

Karen Brown

And so on several occasions. How undignified is this? But on several occasions he would have to ask for some sort of a vessel to pee into, and then the homeowner or whoever was with him would have to dispose of the pee because he wasn't able to get into a bathroom. That is not very welcoming. That's not dignified. So we need to really see people and understand how they use the space.

00;17;47;11 - 00;18;22;07

Karen Brown

Guess what? How they use the space is potentially how we will need to use our space down the road. And when you think of it from that point of view, the why becomes really clear. Let me pull back and look at some solutions, because I don't want to always just come with complaints. I do come with solutions. Number one, housing accessibility needs to be mandated from the provincial level. As it is right now

00;18;22;08 - 00;19;00;14

Karen Brown

municipalities all across this country have the ability to make policies that include making 10 or 15 or 20% of a development accessible or visible. Now, what happens when a developer comes knocking on the door of that municipality? Well, when they talk about that particular policy, the developers say, yeah, no, we don't want to do that. And if you don't agree to take that policy away from being applied to our development, we're just going to

go down the road to the next municipality where they will not impose that policy on us.

00;19;00;16 - 00;19;27;06

Karen Brown

And of course, the municipalities want the tax base increase so they acquiesce and the development is built without one single home that is accessible or visible. Therefore, it has to be the province that imposes these rules so that municipalities don't have the option to ignore the policy or remove it from any given developer.

00;19;27;09 - 00;19;52;20

Karen Brown

Have I asked the province to do this? Yes I have. We'll see what comes of it. Number two, consumers need to understand what they need, when they need it and how to get it. Well, how do you know what you need? You can listen to this podcast for starters. I've developed a home assessment course so that you can independently assess your own home.

00;19;52;22 - 00;20;01;21

Karen Brown

You need to understand your own health journey. You could do a lot of reading on the internet. I mean, the information is all out there,

00;20;01;21 - 00;20;15;07

Karen Brown

but you need to understand it and you need to understand how to apply it to your own life. Number three architects, designers and tradespeople need to demand that accessibility be taught in schools.

00;20;15;07 - 00;20;17;10

Karen Brown

Anybody can look around

00;20;17;10 - 00;20;19;19

Karen Brown

and see the need for it.

00;20;19;22 - 00;20;23;20

Karen Brown

Our population is aging. We said that at the top of the program.

00;20;23;20 - 00;20;29;08

Karen Brown

You need to understand that when you build for accessibility needs, everyone benefits.

00;20;29;08 - 00;20;35;29

Karen Brown

Stairs need to go away. Doorways need to be wider. Disease progression needs to be understood.

00;20;36;01 - 00;20;45;09

Karen Brown

Community growth and longevity with more forever homes can be a more stable thing, but we need to understand it.

00;20;45;09 - 00;21;15;06

Karen Brown

Number four, all of the buildings and public spaces that have been grandfathered in accessibility legislation. In other words, when the new legislation was built in, they said, okay, you guys, you've been here for a while. You don't have to do this, but all the new stuff does all the new buildings or when a major renovation is done, then you need to come up to the level of current accessibility code that needs to go away.

00;21;15;13 - 00;21;57;28

Karen Brown

Anybody who has been grandfathered needs to be required to bring accessibility into their spaces within a reasonable time, and there needs to be government money attached to this because it's a very expensive proposition, especially for really, really old buildings. Think of rural environments. Think of main streets in rural environments. Now, I used to live in a rural environment where the main street say, let's maybe three blocks of it were



really, really old buildings that are being used for retail now in behind our alleyways where deliveries take place.

00;21;58;00 - 00;22;15;11

Karen Brown

These alleyways could be made better use of and could be modified to accept both the delivery function and accessibility needs and get more people into these businesses who have accessibility needs.

00;22;15;11 - 00;22;29;10

Karen Brown

As I say though, there does need to be government money attached to this. It's really expensive to do, and we can't really expect building owners and business owners to come up with the money quickly and make this happen.

00;22;29;12 - 00;22;55;21

Karen Brown

So that needs to take place. My fifth and final solution is that there needs to be more government money attached to home renovations for accessibility. There is absolutely a return on investment to the health care system when people don't need to go into long term care early, but can remain in the home of their choice in the community of their choosing, and do it safely.

00;22;55;21 - 00;22;58;13

Karen Brown

With proper supports in place.

00;22;58;13 - 00;23;02;11

Karen Brown

That is our why podcast

00;23;02;11 - 00;23;18;07

Karen Brown

Thank you for joining us. If you found it thought provoking, please hit the like icon and share this episode with someone who needs to hear the message. I am going to look forward to seeing all of you on the next episode of Real Life Renos : The Podcast.

00;23;18;07 - 00;23;26;27  
Unknown