



ICA Housing

ARTICLE 1

The Housing Co-operative L'Accueil: a housing co-operative that responds to the changing needs of its members.

Senior citizens getting together in a housing co-operative to save the demolition of a small hospital and give themselves quality housing, that's the beginning of the story of the housing co-operative *L'Accueil* (Quebec, Canada). Supported by the Resource Group *Habitation Populaire de la Côte-du-Sud*, specialised in housing co-operative and non-profit housing development, a group of citizens set up the co-operative in 1980, accessed federal subsidies and transformed the hospital in 19 units for senior people.

Located in the centre of a small village of 3,000 people, adjacent to a municipal park which offers summer concerts and a nice resting area, the housing co-operative *L'Accueil* has become a big success. The members moved in at the end of November 1982, after three years of hard work achieving their dream. More than 150 people came to celebrate the vision of the founders at the official opening; a vision that has not been lost by the co-operative's succeeding leaders.

Many projects in mind

Such success cannot stop there. In 1984, the co-operative acquired a neighbouring building to develop four new units with the financial assistance of a provincial program. This second project was named *Le Hameau*.

As with many senior housing co-operatives, *L'Accueil* is confronted by a major issue: give the possibility to its members to stay in the housing co-operative recognising their new needs associated without a loss in their autonomy. The leaders got back to work and developed, with the help of their Resource Group, a project of small units offering meals, laundry and housekeeping services. In 2003, the co-operative inaugurated its third building of 21 units, the Residence *L'Oasis*.

And that's not all. The co-operative is now working on developing a fourth project that will be linked to the Residence *L'Oasis* in order to increase its provision of units with services. Political representations are presently done and technical aspects are being elaborated. It looks that the fourth project of the co-operative will become reality before the end of 2009.

A management structure adapted and involved members

Managed by a seven member board of directors, the co-operative can count on management services from its Resource Group. As acknowledged by the president of the board, the manager is seen as their 'grandmother', someone that can guide them in fulfilling their responsibilities, an interesting comment from people that are themselves grandparents and much more. Many committees are in place to assist in executing several tasks, such as caretaking and minor repairs.

It's certainly not the age that stops the members being active participants in the democratic functioning of the co-operative. With a level of participation close to 100% at the general assembly of members, the manager of the co-operative had this comment: "The members of the Co-operative are at their business, they are involved and interested. It is their living place and they are proud of it." Even the oldest member of 96 years old sets an example by attending all of the members meetings.

A secure and interesting living place

Recreational activities, community gardening and an attracting and secure environment make the co-operative a coveted place to live. To prove it, more than 130 people are on the waiting list of the co-operative, for which close to 50 hope for a unit with services.



Conditions for success

To the question: “How is such success been possible?” the members of the board of directors name without hesitation the following essential conditions:

- **Participation and self-help:** The costs of rents are affordable and stay affordable because members are involved and assist each other. The place is seen as a model in the neighbourhood, and this is possible because of the solidarity that exists.
- **The unfailing support of the Resource Group:** during development as well as in the operations management their professional support is carried out respecting the needs and expertise of its members.
- **A community of co-operators:** the community supports the co-operative in different ways, by ceding the hospital at 1\$ and by contributing C\$170,000 in the third project of the co-operative. The co-operative is established in a community that believes in the co-operative form.
- **Financial help from the government:** the co-operative received access to financial assistance from different levels of governments, an essential aid for affordable housing projects. The provincial government has also implanted a specific housing program recognising the importance to support projects that allow people to stay in their home for as long as possible.

With quality housing units located in an attractive environment, services adapted to the needs of the members, affordable rents, a democratic organisation controlled by the people living there, the housing co-operative *L'Accueil* is certainly a model to follow.

Technical Data

Number of members: 52 – 43 women and 9 men

Number of units: 44 in 3 buildings (11 with 2 bedrooms, 32 with 1 bedroom, and 1 studio)

Cost of rent in 2009 with electricity and heat (depending of the type of units and the building):
between 325\$ and 510\$CAN monthly

Financing: Financial programs from the federal and provincial governments

From the community: 171,000\$CAN

Investment from the Co-operative: 80,000\$CAN

Building costs:

2, 5 millions CAN – in actual numbers when developed (1982, 1984, and 2003)

Annual budget:

355,000\$ including the services offered in the members living in the Residence L'Oasis

Management structure:

Board of Directors – 7 people

Committees – member selection, employee selection, maintenance (caretaking and small repairs), landscaping, community gardening and recreational activities

Management contract