

CHAS – Co-operative Housing Association of Saskatchewan

Following is a brief history of the Co-operative Housing Association of Saskatchewan and our current status.

The Co-operative Housing Association of Saskatchewan was incorporated more than 25 years ago on July 21, 1981 and was the engine in the development and building most of the co-operative housing projects in Saskatchewan. They were instrumental in the planning, organizing and developing the plans for the construction of most of the Housing Co-ops that were built in Saskatoon (4), Moose Jaw (4), Prince Albert (1), Moosomin (1) and Regina (7). There is a mix of Family and Senior projects in Saskatoon, Moose Jaw and Regina, while the Moosomin project is for Seniors and I am not sure about the Prince Albert housing co-op but I think it is a family oriented housing co-op.

These housing co-ops were all constructed during the 80's and early 90's. Since then no new co-operative housing projects have been started, which is really too bad, because for as long as I have been associated with co-op housing there has always been more demand than availability. Today there seems to be a larger file of applicants than ever.

As I read through some of the minutes of our Co-op and listen to the stories from those that were involved in the beginning, I cannot help but feel proud to be part of this association.

The association set up meetings with potential co-op housing members. People like Judy Gayton and Judy Cavanagh were very instrumental in getting all the paperwork done and there seemed to be a lot. It appears that there were road blocks and red tape at every turn. It seems it was often difficult to meet deadlines, but CHAS with the different boards of directors plowed through these difficulties

and made it happen. They were always there Intervening for the board of directors with all levels of government and giving vital direction and training in the early stages of the projects. I find when I talk with some of the originals that the Co-operative Housing Association of Saskatchewan was very involved in giving direction and training for new boards of directors. Likely using CHF Canada materials, as well as what they developed themselves. So the current housing co-ops owe a lot to those early members of CHAS, who worked so tirelessly to bring about our successful housing co-ops.

But as the housing co-ops became self reliant and more independent the association found itself less and less relevant. I take my hat off to the few that kept CHAS going over the lean years, I suspect it must have been very discouraging for the members to see so little interest, yet they kept it going and sent out information they thought would be of interest to the various housing co-ops, who often did not respond to this information or invitations to the AGM's.

It has been a struggle for us to try and revive this valuable association.

Those of us on the board of directors saw the potential and are excited about our future relevance to co-op housing, but we were unsure as to how to proceed. Realizing that we were in need of some help, we turned to CHF Canada and they responded with offering to help us define our goals. Together we established 7 important goals and their order of priority.

1. Communications: Our first goal, appears to be the hardest to achieve. We are working on it and making progress. One of the communication tools is the quarterly newsletter, which is well done and well received. This Website will help us reach more on a timely basis and there will be other means of communicating between CHAS and the housing co-ops.

2. Partnerships: Developing links with other co-ops in Saskatchewan, such as Saskatchewan Co-operative Association (SCA), from which we have already received some valuable assistance.
3. CHAS Identity: Our “Logo” and “Mission Statement” are part of it but it also includes, who we are, what we stand for, what we hope to achieve and much more.
4. Research: Although we have already done some of this and passed some of our findings along to the interested housing co-ops, our plan is to look into various ways that our housing co-ops can collectively and separately save money and achieve efficiencies in their maintenance and operation.
5. Education: When our housing co-ops where first started, CHAS was very much involved in the education process, teaching board members the ins and outs of co-operative living, operation and maintenance of the facilities. As we can see now twenty some years later, this was a very valuable experience for the original members. Although some of that type of education is not relevant today, there is a real need for re-establishing the co-operative model in our housing co-ops.
6. Membership: We are still working on the criteria for membership. Currently, all Saskatchewan Housing Co-ops are members by virtue of their initial fees paid when their co-op was established.
7. Advocacy: It is well known that it is much more difficult for one to win than it is for many standing together. We hope to advocate collectively for all the housing co-ops in situations where there is a need to intercede with the different levels of government.

I would like to say that all the members on the board are great people to work with and I know that as we work together we will achieve our goal. We have made great strides forward,

accomplished a number of things we planned to do, but there are still other items that need to be done. All in all, I think we can be proud of the results of the hard work the board has put into CHAS and I am confident that within the next short period of time we will see ourselves a relevant source for our housing co-ops.

We know that some housing co-ops will be struggling (perhaps are struggling already) and we want to be there with collective advice, help and support. There are many areas that we have already discovered amongst ourselves as a board that we can offer one another's housing co-op. Ideas on how we either successfully or not so successfully experienced solutions. We can then offer these ideas and models to other housing co-ops.

This is what the co-operative model is all about. Working together to find better and more efficient ways to do things.

We extend an invitation to housing co-ops that at present do not have a representative on the board of directors of the Co-operative Housing Association of Saskatchewan (CHAS) to please consider sending 1 or 2 representatives to one of our quarterly and annual general meetings. We know that each housing co-op has something to contribute and we would very much like for as many housing co-ops as possible to be represented on the board. Please consider it and recommend it to your board.

Thank you

Henry Schellenberg, President