

BEYOND THESE WALLS

Statement of Purpose: ENFHS Semi-Annual Newsletter is the outreach publication of Entre Nous Femmes Housing Society. Its purpose is to further ENFHS's goal (ENDS) of ensuring that economically disadvantaged families in the greatest number possible within the Metro Vancouver (GVRD) area have the opportunity for their lives to be enhanced by secure, safe, affordable, and appropriate homes to an extent that justifies the use of all available resources.

HAS THE NEED FOR LOW-INCOME HOUSING CHANGED?

I moved into Antkiw Court, the third of ENF's buildings, in the early 1990's.

Living in an ENF building allowed me the security and freedom to further educate myself, while giving my children a safe and warm home. I think the biggest difference that living in an ENF building made to my family and me was giving us a sense of community, of being part of something bigger. This sense of community was very welcomed. Although I was a single parent on a very limited budget I had support from other tenants as well as the Board and staff of ENF. There were childcare exchanges and work parties at our building. Tenants cared about their building because it was their home. They had pride in where they lived. The Board listened to building concerns and tenant issues and would work towards solutions.

After moving out of ENF and into private rentals, I stayed connected to ENF by becoming a Director on the Board and eventually becoming President of the Board.

In the early '90's the housing market looked promising for families, seniors and differently-abled people, because new social housing was being built with funding both from the federal and provincial governments. The need for low-income housing was slowly being filled because the economy at the time was good.

As we all know, in the mid-1990's the federal government decided to pull funding for new low-income housing and the pro-

vincial governments were not far behind in cutting their funding as well. It wasn't that there wasn't a need for low-income housing, a need which was actually growing, but developers could make more money building market housing. Although municipalities tried giving developers a tax break when developing new buildings if they committed a certain number of units to low-income housing, this program never really took off.

Now that I'm back as a tenant in low-income housing due to being differently-abled, the need for low-income housing is even greater for a variety of reasons: the bad economy, including job losses, and market rents out of control. But I notice there is a lack of community in buildings now—people don't talk about being involved in their community—I find more and more people just want to be 'left alone' rather than contribute to the 'greater good'.

There have been some very good, innovative projects developed to try to close the gap in housing needs. Some of the creative ideas have been creating housing above commercial spaces, private institutions partnering with housing societies and renovating old motels and department stores into housing units, but the problem is still the lack of funding and available land.

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ENFHS is a registered charity & gladly accepts donations to help offset operational costs. If you would like to donate, please forward a cheque to ENF's head office. A charity tax receipt will be issued for donations over \$20. Thank you.

And yes, of course, there is still plenty of NIMBY-ism to contend with.

Those of us on limited budgets who have been able to secure low-income housing are thankful indeed but the need for this type of housing certainly hasn't changed from when I first required it in the early '90's, rather it has grown by leaps and bounds. I encourage all tenants residing in low-income housing to do their part and become involved by advocating for more low-income housing because there is always 'strength in numbers'.

Written by Debi O'Connell—former resident of Antkiw Court, ENF's 3rd building completed in 1988 & former President of the Board of ENF; now the Communications Coordinator for Groots Canada

MONEY MATTERS



Families are expensive. Your child needs extra tutoring, lessons in something she's good at, or school project fees. Your parents need special care, your cousin is getting married. The monthly income barely covers basic costs and there is very little to save. You are not eligible for any more credit. Whether in India, Nepal or North America, does this sound familiar?

We hear of the women's savings and credit cooperatives in poor communities around the world. Women can save a few dollars a week, and with the profits from rotating loans, collectively start small businesses and upgrade the family situation.

What about here in North America? Can this kind of financial support group work here?

Remember banking and business investment clubs, those old boys' get-togethers, discussing pooling resources and making money?

In 2007, I joined a group called WINC, Women's Investment Cooperative, made up of 15 women ages 20-65, with different income levels. The purpose of WINC was to demystify the world of money—to save it, spend it and make it grow. We spent some time working out Basic Agreements as to how we would operate together—membership responsibilities, voting, fees, and procedures. For example, one vote per person, not per share;

membership is \$20, with a monthly savings contribution of \$20; meetings are held once a month, in person and through Skype.

By far, the most time was spent on how to decide on what investments to make, what information was required and what are WINC'S ethical standards—you may think you know yourself and your investment buddies, but try putting your money where your ethics are!

WINC Ethical Standards

- ⇒ Socially responsible
- ⇒ Fair employment practices\no or humane animal testing
- ⇒ Not contributing to violence or arms sales
- ⇒ Ethical investment policies
- ⇒ Does not support war
- ⇒ Benefits someone
- ⇒ Illustrates some political awareness

Research Criteria

- ⇒ Description of company & why it fits WINC's ethical standards
- ⇒ Price of stock over a 5 year period
- ⇒ Company profit/losses over a 5 year period
- ⇒ Analysis of company financial statement
- ⇒ Summary of one or two reviews from a financial magazine
- ⇒ Statement of projected future benefits

Each month, a recommendation was made of what shares to buy. This sounds easy. BUY GOOGLE! We needed to consider if Google met our ethical standards. But ONE Google share was \$447! We weren't going to get very far with our \$300. Over the next 2 years Google went down to \$300, up to \$700. We bought 2 shares at \$500; today, they're worth \$451.

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Over the last 2 years, we've learned new vocabulary, prioritized, consulted tarot cards, thrown dice, argued, reasoned, guessed, but mostly we've demystified. Doing it together helped. Today, WINC's investment information for members is online (E-trade) and we can watch our investments daily. We have stocks in Apple, Google (information tech); American Eagle Outfitters; Amex; Visa (credit) Baldwin Technologies and Pax World Environment (environmental); Proctor and Gamble is doing well (everyone—please keep on cleaning!)

In 2 years WINC has lost \$900, which at 20%, is average for this latest market tumble. This means WINC understood the market well enough to make informed decisions and did as well as experienced groups. As the market fell, WINC held tight and didn't invest more. Then one of the members asked for a short term loan as she could not qualify at the bank—back to the original purpose of savings and credit. She has proved to be our best investment.

We take this seriously and make this enjoyable. With WINC, heads are out of the sand, a little is saved, and a lot is learned—no longer the hapless, hopeless, helpless. Look out Warren, here we come!

—*Written by Marnie Tamaki, ENF Member*

Before the holiday madness begins, how about starting a money club? If you have had an experience with a savings and investment club, and would like to share your story, please call the ENF Newsletter editor, Tracy McCullough, at (604) 451-4412 or e-mail your story to: enf@telus.net for inclusion in an upcoming Newsletter.

Lumanti Savings & Credit Co-op, Nepal



AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN EUROPE— A LESSON FOR CANADA

At the recent BCNHPA Conference, Eva Wadolna had the opportunity to lead a panel discussion on the continuum of affordable housing in the European Union. The following is her research on the subject.

Extensive research indicates that for years Germany, the Netherlands, France, and the UK, as well as the Scandinavian countries, have treated housing as a government priority. These countries have not left the provision of affordable housing to market forces only.

There are Ministries of Housing, along with National Housing Policies and/or Strategies, with a variety of programs stimulating the creation of housing. There have also been many partnerships with large developers, some of whom specialize in affordable housing. These governments use various taxation tools to stimulate development of rental housing thereby increasing the supply of units, making them more affordable. Other taxation instruments limit flipping of real estate properties. There are numerous co-op housing programs as well as universal subsidies in the form of vouchers which a family can use in many rental, and even in some ownership, situations. In Europe, renting is considered a fully viable housing option for many people, except the most wealthy; many well-to-do people rent their home their entire life. They may even pass their rental unit on to their children.

An important aspect of the European housing system is that most housing is built to last for a minimum of 50 years and is more sustainable from the point of view of energy. It is also built with low on-going maintenance costs in mind. This is a priority when designing or constructing a new project.

Also, tenants tend to be more responsible with the units. They treat them as a stable home not as transient accommodation until something better comes along. A sense of community and a sense of joint responsibility is stronger in Europe than in North America and many improvements to the property are initiated by tenants. In a number of these countries the law protects tenants but also deals promptly with any repeated unacceptable behaviour by tenants.

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Also, it is worthwhile to note that units are generally smaller than those in Canada but they are well-designed and more functional with proper storage. The newer ones are also energy efficient. Multi-level family housing is the norm. There are generations of children who grow up in apartment buildings or row houses, which offers them the opportunity to learn to behave in a respectful manner towards others' in a multi-family environment.

One major issue that underlies the affordability of housing in the European Union is the fact that the societies in charge of affordable housing complexes are huge in comparison to Canadian housing societies. Managing in excess of 10,000 units is normal with professional management. This offers a better choice of units and enhanced mobility for tenants—although people tend to move much less frequently in Europe as compared to North America.

From a housing society perspective, there is economy of scale allowing for faster renovations, leveraging assets and negotiating better financial deals with financial institutions and/or developers, putting them in a better position to expand their housing stock. Societies of that size are more powerful and can negotiate with governments in the legislative process, functioning as a well-run, cohesive and socially responsible housing lobby.

In general, the design of social housing is very similar to the design of market units which helps diminish Nimby-ism'—opposition to the development of affordable housing which is so prevalent in Canada. Buildings fit into the surrounding neighbourhood and the tenants make an effort to fit in with the existing community, creating diverse and strong places to live.

—written by *Eva Wadolna, ENF Director*

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that millions of boys and girls are sexually abused and exploited—countless numbers of them in the global sex trade. This year ENF staff has decided to help in the World Vision campaign to deliver vulnerable children from this terrible fate and bring healing by supporting trauma centres and providing things like safe shelter, medical care, counselling, vocational training, and when possible, reintegration into safe and loving homes. A gift as small as \$75 will help get this job done! As Christmas fast approaches, our staff offers the challenge to you and your staff to beat our donation to help these traumatized children! E-mail us and let us know what you do and we'll report on it in the next issue!

ENF BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR 2009/10

SHAWN PREUS EVA WADOLNA
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: TRACY McCULLOUGH

**If you are interested in becoming a member of ENF, please submit a letter of interest to:
ENF Board of Directors, #21, 3550 S.W. Marine Drive, Vancouver, B.C. V5S 4R3
or fax to: (604) 451-4415 or e-mail: enf@telus.net
Ph: (604) 451-4412 website: www.enfhs.org**