



Rainbow Housing Co-operative

As part of Saskatchewan Co-operative Association's ongoing series of co-operative profiles, we interviewed James Gilliard, President of the Co-operative Housing Association of Saskatchewan (CHAS). With the help of CHF Canada, CHAS is in the process of revitalizing itself to assist all housing co-ops in the province. James became involved in the co-op housing sector to ensure that a Saskatchewan voice was heard at the national level. He brings this national board experience back for the benefit of all housing co-ops in the province. His interest with CHAS now is to address the core housing need in the province.

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What is the Rainbow Housing Co-operative?

Rainbow Housing Co-operative is a complex of affordable housing for any person(s) wanting a safe environment for themselves or their family. We are located on the south side of 115th Avenue in Saskatoon. It was built in late 1984 and early 1985.

What community need does the Rainbow Housing Co-operative address?

Rainbow provides safe affordable housing for mixed income families, seniors, people with disabilities, and youth.

Who are the members of the Rainbow Housing Co-operative? How do they participate in the co-operative?

Members are any person who lives at Rainbow and is 18 years or older. There are 116 members ranging in age from 18 to 90 years of age. All members participate in the co-op by attending the AGM and general membership meetings. Also, members are expected to join one of nine committees. The most important form of participation from each member is to pay their housing charge (rent) on time each and every month because this ensures that the business of Rainbow is viable and secure for future generations.

How does one apply to become a resident at the Rainbow Housing Co-operative?

There is an application process that everyone goes through. Rainbow has a member selection committee that interviews people for possible membership, in this process the committee makes recommendations to the Board of Directors, who approve or deny membership requests.

What makes Rainbow Housing Co-operative different from non-co-operative housing complexes in terms of how people interact and relate with each other?

At Rainbow, each member is a member-owner so they have a say in how Rainbow Housing is run as a business. At other non-profits, tenants are not members, therefore their say in how things are run is limited. The members of Rainbow make informed decisions from information supplied to them by the Board of Directors and staff. The decisions that the membership makes ensures that Rainbow as a business will succeed and be viable for future generations. This brings the community closer. It feels like when Rainbow succeeds the membership succeeds.



“ We have members here that have been here since Rainbow opened its doors, and also some that stay for only a few years while they save enough money to buy their first home. ”

How long do people often stay as a resident? What are the benefits of living in a housing co-operative? What are the challenges?

We have members here that have been here since Rainbow opened its doors, and also some that stay for only a few years while they save enough money to buy their first home. Some of the benefits of living here include: a community within a community, everyone knows most of their neighbors, a sense of belonging to something that in time makes most of us better people, a great place to raise kids, and a great place for seniors; seniors are a wealth of knowledge, and from them some newer members learn. The challenge of being a member of Rainbow is that everyone has an opinion and wants their voice heard, some get frustrated but for the most part we all have one common goal and that is to ensure Rainbow is around for many more years.

In your opinion, what is the most interesting part of living in a co-operative?

For me, the most interesting part of living in a co-operative is that no matter what age you are, or how much money you make, you have a right and an obligation to get involved in your co-op. Sometimes people get involved just by helping their neighbor by cutting their grass or joining a committee or running for the Board of Directors. This gives everyone a sense of belonging to something bigger than oneself. Once one gets involved, it can become addictive. For me, I went from one committee to the Board of Directors, to being regional director for the national Board. I found that every meeting is a learning session, and one always learns new ways on how to help your own Co-op or other co-ops in the province.

Can you tell us a little about the current challenges housing co-operatives are facing in Saskatchewan?

As our buildings become older they cost more money to maintain. Right now, Rainbow receives funding from Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, which is passed on from the Federal government, but when this mortgage ends, so does all funding from all levels of government. This will happen in the next few years with most of the housing co-operatives across the province and so each will need to be financially independent.

Also as our membership gets older, housing co-ops need to be able to supply services to help seniors maintain their membership within the co-op. The creation of home care co-operatives is a viable idea that is long overdue. Because seniors' homes have long waiting lists and some seniors can maintain their home with minimal assistance, a homecare co-operative is an option that all levels of government should investigate. In Saskatchewan, 12 of the 17 housing co-ops are seniors' co-ops. Seniors enjoy living in their communities and the provincial government should be open to assist with ideas that could maintain their membership and contribution to the community in which they live.

Who have been the key co-operatives/organizations working with your co-operative and how were they involved?

CHAS (Co-operative Housing Association of Saskatchewan) was the main organization that helped Rainbow develop. Since then, CHF Canada (Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada), in which Rainbow is a member, has helped out in many ways. SHC (Saskatchewan Housing Corporation) also provides a great amount of assistance and advice to Rainbow.

The members of Rainbow have helped out the most though. Without the dedication and strength of the members, Rainbow would be struggling in all aspects of being a housing co-op. A strong membership gives you a strong organization. Recently the SCA published an article about multi-stakeholder co-ops; this is something that we in the sector should consider to be the most innovative means to meet an end. We can ensure members are able to stay in their homes with some assistance, whether it is medical or any other type of service. This would give some much needed relief on the provincial services.

What do you envision for the Rainbow Housing Co-operative, and housing co-operatives in general in Saskatchewan, in the next five years?

My vision for Rainbow is the same for all housing co-ops. As part of the co-op sector, I would like to maintain what we offer to the community at large, and provide an option for people to become more involved in their community. I would like to see all 17 housing co-ops come together as one voice and convince the provincial Government that housing co-operatives are a financial option for them to consider. It is well known that housing co-ops cost the province much less to run than any other non-profit in Saskatchewan.

How can people find out more about your co-operative?

Rainbow Housing Co-operative is on Berini Drive, just south of 115th Avenue. Our office is located at 72-302 Berini Drive, in Saskatoon. We can be reached by phone at 306-242-0604, or visit our website at www.rainbowhousing.ca

