

**SELF-HELP HOUSING WORKSHOP**  
**March 7 & 8, 1991**

**Prepared for:**

**Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation**

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Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Federal Government's housing agency is responsible for administering the National Housing Act.

This legislation is designed to aid in the improvement of housing and living in Canada. As a result, the Corporation has interests in all aspects of housing and rural and urban growth and development.

Under Part IX of this act, the Government of Canada provides funds to CMHC to conduct research into social, economic and technical aspects of housing and related fields, and to undertake the publishing and distribution of the results of this research. CMHC therefore has the statutory responsibility to make widely available, information which may be useful in the improvement of housing and living conditions.

This publication is one of many items of information published by CMHC with the assistance of federal funds.

## **DISCLAIMER**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On March 7 and 8 1991, individuals from across Canada involved in the self-help housing sector met in Ottawa. Participants were comprised of academics, researchers and those directly involved in the delivery and development of self-help housing.

The two-day workshop was the first time that individuals committed to self-help housing were able to congregate in one place and discuss their experiences and approaches to self-help housing. There is a strong interest in repeating this type of exchange in the near future.

Recommendations developed by the participants of the self-help housing workshop are presented in the following.

1. Educate CMHC Branches To Provide Same Level Of Assistance For Self-help Housing As Other Housing Sectors
2. Characterize And Quantify Self-Help Housing
3. Include Self-Help Housing Questions In CMHC Surveys
4. Develop Flexible Programs To Assist Self-Help Housing Sector
5. Apply Aspects Of Self-Help Housing To Research In Other Areas
6. Acknowledge That There Are Other Benefits To Self-Help Housing Besides The Fact That It Is Less Expensive Than Other Forms Of Housing
7. Work With Current Self-Help Advocates
8. Change The Perception That The Quality Of Self-Help Housing Does Not Meet Industry Standards
9. Organize A National Self-Help Housing Advocacy Organization

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## 1.0 INTROUCTION

This paper reports on a workshop which as held on March 7 & 8th, 1991 at the Skyline Hotel in Ottawa, Canada.

The purpose of the workshop was to procure views, experiences and information from those involved in self-help housing sector.

## 2.0 ATTENDEES

**BIRTLES, Mr. Mike,**  
CMHC  
Sydney, Nova Scotia

**GRANT, Ms. Colette, President**  
Colette Grant Enterprises  
Sudbury, Ontario

**BISHOP, Ms. Mary**  
Dept. of Municipal & Provincial Affairs  
St. John's, Newfoundland

**GREENHAM, Mr. Don**  
Habitat for Humanity Toronto  
Toronto, Ontario

**CARTER, Mr. Tom**  
University of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg, Ontario

**HARRIS, Dr. Richard**  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario

**CATTO, Mr. Charles**  
Frontiers Foundation  
Toronto, Ontario

**IRVING, Mr. Don**  
Frontier Foundation  
Surrey, B.C.

**CORBETT, Mr. Ron**  
Mount Allison University  
Sackville, New Brunswick

**JOHNSTON, Mr. Don**  
CMHC  
Ottawa, Ontario

**DICKSON, Ms. Linda**  
Bain Apartments Cooperative Inc.  
Toronto, Ontario

**KING, Mr. Eric**  
United Church of Canada  
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

**DUNCAN, Mr. Rob**  
CMHC  
Ottawa, Ontario

**KRAHN, Mr. John**  
Habitat for Humanity Canada  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

**EYTCHESON, Ted**  
CMHC  
Saskatchewan

**LEVITAN, Mr. Eric**  
Centre for Community Econ. Dev.  
Sydney, Nova Scotia

**FOSTER, Ms. Jennifer**  
Interchurch Housing Society  
Kentville, Nova Scotia

**MALTMAN, Ms. Christine**  
The Starr Group  
Toronto, Ontario

## 2.0 ATTENDEES (Continued)

**MARTIN**, Reverend Wilmer  
Habitat for Humanity Canada  
Waterloo, Ontario

**MATTHEWS**, Ms. Sharon  
CMHC  
Ottawa, Ontario

**MCDONALD**, Mr. John  
Cape Breton Labourers Development  
Sydney, Nova Scotia

**McLAIN**, Ms. Janet  
University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario

**McLELLAN**, Mr. Gary  
Northwest Territories Housing  
Yellowknife, NWT

**MICHON**, Mr. Alfred  
1850 Treaty Council  
Thunder Bay, Ontario

**PACINI**, Ms. Christine  
The Starr Group  
Ottawa, Ontario

**PATTERSON**, Mr. Wayne  
League Savings and Mortgage  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

**ROWE**, Mr. Andy  
Consulting Economist  
St. John's, Newfoundland

**SINCLAIR**, Mr. Leonard  
Ministry of Municipal Affairs  
Slave Lake, Alberta

**SKEETE**, Mr. Lem  
Whitney Pier Non-Profit  
Sydney, Nova Scotia

**SOLOWY**, Mr. Joe  
Northwest Territories Housing Corp.  
Yellowknife, NWT

**STARR**, Mr. Edward  
The Starr Group  
Toronto, Ontario

**STASCHIK**, Mr. Udo  
Frontiers Foundation  
Kenora, Ontario

**THOMPSON**, Mr. Bob  
Habitat For Humanity Canada  
Toronto, Ontario

**VAN ADEL**, Ms. Linda  
CMHC  
Ottawa, Ontario

**WILCOXEN**, Ms. Marilyn  
Bain Apartments Cooperative Inc.  
Toronto, Ontario

**2.0 ATTENDEES (Continued)****REGRETS**

**FERENCE, Mr. Don**  
Don Ference & Associates  
Vancouver, B.C.

**GLADUE, Mr. Lawrence**  
CMHC  
Ottawa, Ontario

**KOECK, Mr. Norbert**  
CMHC  
Ottawa, Ontario

**HANLEY, Ms. Lynn**  
Communitas Group  
Calgary, Alberta

**LARONDE, Mr. Tom**  
CMHC  
Calgary, Alberta

**ROMANZAK, Ms. Sandy**  
Yukon Housing Corp.  
Yellowknife, Yukon

**SLOAT, Mr. Bob**  
Canadian Home Builders Assoc.  
Ottawa, Ontario

**TOEG, Mr. Jalla**  
Northwest Territories Housing  
Yellowknife, NWT

**VAN DYKE, Mr. Nick**  
Can. Housing & Renewal Assoc.  
Ottawa, Ontario

**ZIMMER, Mr. Allan**  
East Beaver Lumber  
Gloucester, Ontario

### 3.0 PROCEEDINGS

More detailed information about the various self-help housing programs and organizations is available in the **Self-Help Housing Publication** and the **Self-Help Housing Video** both available from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. In addition, the specific organizations may be contacted directly for further information.

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Mr. Don Johnston, Project Implementation Division  
Canada Mortgage And Housing Corporation

Mr. Johnston welcomed the participants to the workshop. CMHC's role in the self-help housing sector was briefly described, in particular, the Rural and Native Housing Demonstration Project.

CMHC's objective for the workshop was to bring forth participant's views, experiences and approaches relating to self-help housing. It is anticipated that this information will assist CMHC in presenting the experiences of the self-help sector in Canada for the benefit of others who are considering this approach.

#### 3.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF SELF-HELP HOUSING

Dr. Richard Harris, Department of Geography,  
McMaster University

Owner-building has a long history in Canada. Today, we think of owner-building as predominantly a rural image, concentrated in the Atlantic provinces. Harris's research demonstrates that even in urban cities, owner-building has been a major sector of housing in Canada.

Harris's research in self-help housing has concentrated on southern Ontario cities in the period 1900 to 1950; however, he believes he has a sense of the national picture.

##### Extent of Owner Building

Harris's research on Toronto indicates that owner-building accounted for at least one third (and probably about two-fifths) of all housing starts in the period 1901-1913. In the 1920's, Harris estimates that one-fifth of homes were owner-built. There was very little construction of any kind of housing in the 1930's; however, by the 1940's owner-building became popular again, accounting for ten percent of all housing starts in Toronto.

Harris's research suggests that owner-building was more common to the west of Ontario, notably Winnipeg and Vancouver. It was less common in Quebec, particularly in Montreal.

### Who Was Involved In Owner-Building?

The people who built their own homes were mostly blue-collar workers, many of them immigrants. Approximately 85% of all owner-built homes in Toronto constructed prior to World War I were first occupied by blue-collar workers. A number of these workers were in construction trades but many were not. It is clear that many people who lacked relevant skills built their own homes. They learned through trial and error and also used advice from friends, family, neighbours and co-workers.

### The Building Process

#### (a) Building and Finance

The building process was typically extended over several years, and in some case decades. In many incidences, owner-building merged into renovation. Many owner-builders began by constructing a one- or two-room dwelling, and extended this as time and money permitted. Sometimes the owner-builder replaced the original building with something more substantial.

Owner-building was a process not an event. Homes were constructed slowly because usually the owner did not have the money to pay for its construction all at once. It was customary for owners to buy materials for the construction of their homes on a weekly basis. Land contracts were common, and some owners obtained short-term credit from building suppliers.

In general, most homes were not mortgaged. Where mortgages were used, the funds came from private rather than institutional sources.

#### (b) Role of Government

The role of government with regard to owner-building in the first half of the century was minimal. Owner-building occurred because it was not prevented by local government rather than because it was encouraged. Most owner-building took place in the suburbs where building regulations did not exist (pre-WWI) or were laxly enforced (1920's). Thus there is a strong relationship between owner-building and the absence of building regulations.

In the earlier years, the suburbs had no services of any kind. This is another indication of the government's lack of support of the owner-builder.

### Consequences Of This Type of Development

#### (a) Short Term: 1900-1920

In the short run, owner-building was clearly beneficial. If people had not built their own homes they would have been homeless, living in tents or overcrowded in the existing housing stock. Owner-building was the best choice for many people in the early 1920's.

#### (b) Medium Term: 1920-1930

Owner-builders and districts of owner-building ran into problems in the 1930's. Municipal servicing costs rose drastically between 1920 and 1930 due to the scattered nature of development. By 1930, owners could not pay their taxes and some municipalities went bankrupt.

#### (c) Long Term: Present

In general, owner-built units have continued to provide relatively inexpensive housing to those in need. Today, affordable areas are those which were built up during the 1920's.

### Lessons Learned

- (1) Owner-building has a long and significant tradition in Canada, even in the larger urban areas. Owner-building is not uniquely Canadian; however it is at least as important in Canada as anywhere else and possibly more important than in Europe.
- (2) This tradition is a good one, in that owner-building has made it possible for very low-income households to make modest, but decent, homes for themselves. This has been positive not only for the households concerned, but also for the wider community.
- (3) The problems associated with owner-building, most obviously in the 1930's, were largely due to the specific form that owner-building took (i.e. scattered development). The Canadian tradition of owner-building, in contrast, for example, to the Swedish, has been individualistic. In Sweden, owner-builders were given technical assistance and direction by the government.

If owner-building in Canada had been regulated, and more actively supported by government, for example through the provision of technical assistance, then many problems could have been alleviated, if not prevented.

## Participant Discussion

- o It was noted that many people today may not be prepared to tolerate as much as earlier Canadians did. For example, many people may not be willing to start off in small dwellings and gradually expand the house as the funds become available.

In the past people had no real expectations so that owning a one room dwelling was an accomplishment. Today, people are forced to lower their expectations and accept something less; especially in urban centres where the lack of land means the household must accept something less than their expectations.

- o There was some discussion as to whether the regulatory environment today is too complex for people to self-build. Harris noted that during the period of time he has researched, most regulations have prohibited owner-building, especially where one is permitted to build.

On the other hand, there were no fire and safety inspections during the early twentieth century. Consequently, there were many fires in owner-build housing, prompting the community to seek assistance from local government.

- o Canadian frame and wood construction facilitates self-building.

### 3.3 CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUAL SELF-HELP HOUSING

Mr. Andy Rowe, Consulting Economist

Mr. Rowe's discussion focused on individual self-help. Figures and tables referred to in this summary can be found in Appendix B.

#### Definition

There are two forms of self-help housing: self-build and self promotion. Refer to Figure 1, "Place of Self-Help Provisioning in Housing Production". The definition is deliberately consistent with definitions in other countries. A percentage of labour is not included in the definition.

Self-promote identifies those households that assume responsibility for the planning and financing stages of the project, but that usually act as general contractor and hire a builder to construct the dwelling.

Self-build refers to households that undertake responsibility for all major phases of the project including planning, financing and construction.

### Level of Activity

The level of self-help activity varies by province. Approximately 50% of total housing starts in the Atlantic Provinces were undertaken by self-helpers, the majority of which were self-build as opposed to self-promote. Refer to Table 2.1.

Self-help is not necessarily a cultural predisposition in Atlantic Canada. Self-help accounts for 14% of all new housing put in place throughout Canada. Refer to Table 2.3. Self-help activity is high in the Atlantic Provinces, medium in B.C. and Quebec and low in Ontario, Alberta and Manitoba (Rowe's data is preliminary, however still valid). The data suggests that as one moves closer to the urban core, there is a decline in self-help activity.

Self-help activity in Norway, Greece, France and Sweden is in the 25% range; while Britain has a low range of self-help activity, in the 5% range. There is an opportunity to learn important policy lessons by looking at self-help activity in other countries.

The research Rowe has conducted to date demonstrates that we have a long way to go in our understanding of self-help housing. According to Rowe, it is essential to start putting more resources into understanding self-help housing before policy initiatives can be undertaken.

Self-help activity comprised 41% of the renovation sector according to Statistics Canada data. This figure may be higher since it is commonly accepted that under reporting of renovation activity takes place.

Table 2.4 illustrates that self-help account for a significant portion of the work carried out by sub-contractors.

### Characteristics

The statistics found in Table 3.1 reveal that self-help by senior citizens in Canada is not uncommon. While self-help households tend to have lower income, there is self-help activity by higher income households and professionals. Unemployment rates among self-help providers are found to be much lower than the national average. (Refer to Table 3.2)

However, it appears that spontaneous self-help is not reaching those in greatest need; consequently there may be a need for more supportive government assistance. Self-help housing is cheaper to construct (refer to Table 3.3) and it may reduce future social assistance requirements if facilitated by policy initiatives which help people who cannot meet their own housing needs.

### Self-Help Versus Industry Built

People involved in self-help are building housing similar to those built by the industry: dwellings look the same, they are the same size and meet most industry standards. There are no statistical differences between the need for repairs of self-help and industry built dwellings.

The housing industry may be more efficient in building a house but the industry may also cut corners because it is concerned with profits (Refer to Table 3.4). Even though self-built dwellings may take longer to build, the homeowner gets a good quality house.

In comparing self-help and industry financing, it is clear that the individual self-help sector is less likely to use debt financing. To the extent that the self-help sector does use mortgage financing, it is at a lower percentage than those purchasing an industry built home. This is mostly due to the fact that sweat equity reduces cash requirements. In addition, self-help building tends to be a process whereby people save over a period of time. Consequently, during economic crisis self-helpers are less likely to lose their homes or encumber large portions of their house.

According to Rowe's research, everyone self-builds. No previous skills or experience are necessary. Self-builders do not need to take time from their jobs; it is possible to build their homes during the weekends and in the evenings.

### Policy Issues

Rowe believes that small changes can go a long way to encourage self-help housing in Canada. There is a need to understand the different needs of the self-help housing sector and respond to these needs. CMHC could play an important role in promoting the idea and initiating policy ventures.

### Recommendations:

#### (1) Provide Self-Builders With Support

Technical support in the form of on-site inspectors and informational support is the type of assistance self-helpers need.

#### (2) Create Financial Incentives

Financial assistance to increase access to housing by those with social housing needs is required.

#### (3) Develop Community Support

Local support of the self-help initiative is required to assist self-builders with local

regulations.

### **Participant Discussion**

- o It was noted that the Saskatchewan Home Builders have felt threatened by the self-help sector, where self-help activity is in the 30-40% range (in Saskatoon). They have lobbied the government to curb this activity.
- o A beneficial aspect of self-help housing is that there is a positive relationship between income and housing affordability.

### **HABITAT FOR HUMANITY: Video Presentation**

This video presented an international perspective of community self-help. Former U.S. president Jimmy Carter was a participant of the Tiajuana work camp shown in this video.

## **3.4 CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY SELF-HELP HOUSING**

Mr. John McDonald,  
Cape Breton Labourers Development Company Ltd.

A video detailing the CBLDC's community self-help plan was presented. Details of the plan are provided in an information package which can be found in the Appendix.

The Cape Breton Labourers Development Company Ltd. has been in operation for three years and has completed the construction of twelve self-help dwellings. Three units were funded through the Rural and Native Housing Demonstration Program. The remaining units were constructed using funds from member payroll deductions.

Trade union representatives determined that working people in Cape Breton (low to medium income) were house poor. A survey administered by the union found that 51% of its current membership needed affordable housing and 19% were living in poor conditions. Consequently, a group of local trade union representatives developed a community self-help housing plan.

Members of a union or other group may join CBLDC's community self-help plan by contributing \$ .25/hour worked through a payroll deduction. Monies collected are deposited into a benevolent fund operated by CBLDC. An equal or larger amount is returned to the contributor upon retirement. Money from the fund is transferred interest-free to a housing construction fund.

The revolving housing construction fund is used to finance the construction of new homes for members of the union. Members receiving financing are chosen based on needs criteria

established by CBLDC. Under the CBLDC program, the cost to the new home owner is the real cost of building the home, plus a flat administration fee. The cost of the administrative fee results in an annual interest charge of around 4%. Homebuyers' payments are then returned to the fund to finance other construction and the payment of benefit awards to contributors as the need arises.

McDonald is confident that this innovative idea could be replicated anywhere in Canada.

### **Participant Discussion**

Participants asked John McDonald a number of questions pertaining to the CBLDC plan, including the following:

- o The the homes built through the plan are of good quality because there is a link between the homeowner and the contractor who are both part of the CBLDC organization.
- o CBLDC does not build its homes without skilled construction supervision. In addition, professionals are hired for trades such as plumbing and electrical. CBLDC has a good reputation with the local planning commission.

The CBLDC plan encourages voluntary labour, but it is difficult to secure an abundance of voluntary labour during the spring and summer months because most unemployed people try to find work during that time so that they will be eligible for U.I.C. during the winter months.

- o CBLDC's goal is to become an employer on the Island.
- o The CBLDC plan stipulates that homeowners cannot sell their homes for at least five years. If the homeowner does sell their home prior to the five year stipulation, they will receive no further support from the company. The CBLDC also has first option to buy back the home.

### **General Discussion Re: Site Acquisition and Design**

#### Hearth Homes

##### **(a) Site Acquisition**

Jennifer Foster of Hearth Homes provided calculations which demonstrated the cost-savings of the self-help community approach to housing as compared to other government programs. The Nova Scotia provincial government no longer provides funds to community groups such as Hearth Homes to cover the administrative costs of their program, including land costs. Consequently, Hearth Homes has not been able to build any more homes for its clients.

## (b) Design

Hearth Homes are not elaborate dwellings, averaging approximately 570 square feet for a two bedroom unit and 970 square feet for a three bedroom unit. Hearth Homes centre around the living room/kitchen area (hearth) because this is where people tend to congregate.

Habitat For Humanity (Winnipeg)

## (a) Site Acquisition

Habitat for Humanity received funding for the land required to build its community homes from the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation and the City of Winnipeg. Habitat representatives believe that the role of government is to set the stage for community non-profit groups to help themselves. In order to support self-help housing in Canada, the government should develop policies and programs which help groups acquire sites and pay for the servicing required. Once site is in place, community groups such as Habitat for Humanity can construct the homes.

## (b) Design

In the past, Habitat for Humanity was overbuilding homes for its clients because the volunteers who initiated the program were middle class people who were use to large well-built homes. Habitat is now looking at ways to build an equal amount of house for less money. For example, a bi-level house saves on foundation work and materials.

Whitney Pier Non-Profit Housing

## (a) Site Acquisition

Ten families had originally owned housing on a site which was demolished due to a Neighbourhood Improvement Program. The land had remained vacant for years. A number of family members of the original ten families saw an opportunity to move back into their old neighbourhood. This former residents, along with interested local people, began meeting as a group to discuss how to proceed with the idea. The group was able to secure the land, at no cost, from the City.

## (b) Design

CMHC provided the organization with the services of a Construction manager to provide homeowners with some technical assistance.

### Bain Apartments

#### (a) Site Acquisition

The Bain Apartments Co-operative owns a 75-year old complex which required major renovations. Site acquisition was not an issue.

#### (b) Design

The co-op consists of a general membership of 500 to 600 people. A Steering Committee was established to oversee the renovation of the Bain Apartments and the renovation work was carried out with the assistance of a project management company. Tenants approved all rehabilitation work which was carried out.

### General Discussion On Site Acquisition

Most participants believe that site acquisition is the largest stumbling block for individual and community self-help groups to overcome. This is especially true in the large urban centres.

### General Discussion Regarding Design

Rowe indicated that individual self-help housing runs into most problems with access to professional trade information. Individual self-helpers need advice otherwise they may make mistakes which will result in increased costs.

Discussion revolved around providing self-helpers with technical assistance in the form of a construction manager and supplying tools homeowner may not be able to purchase. In essence these are the two factors crucial to the RNH Demonstration Project.

### **WHITNEY PIER NON-PROFIT HOUSING: Video Presentation**

This video featured the non-profit group's community self-help project.

## **3.5 FINANCING SELF-HELP HOUSING**

Mr. Wayne Patterson,  
League Savings and Mortgage

Wayne Patterson's organization has been involved with self-help housing since 1969. From a lender's perspective, Patterson presents guidelines for self-help housing providers seeking financing.

- (1) Make Sure It Makes Sense
- (2) Always Involve Government But Maybe Not At The Front End

Government involvement does not necessarily have to be in a financial sense; it could provide guarantees or technical support. The government could mean CMHC, provincial governments or local governments willing to support the self-help housing initiative.

- (3) Consider Service Clubs As Sponsors

Since 1985 League Savings and Mortgage has provided funding for Hearth Homes in Nova Scotia, a community sponsored non-profit organization.

- (4) Make Sure The Lenders' Representative Is On Side And Has Some Authority

It is important that the lender understand and support the self-help housing concept.

- (5) Find Out What Projects The Lender Has Financed

- (6) The Lender And The Government Agency Must Have Each Other's Respect

- (7) Just Because It Has Never Been Done Doesn't Mean It Can't Be Done

There was a brief discussion of the history of Canadian government sponsored housing programs.

### **Participant Discussion**

- o The major weakness which Patterson finds of most self-help groups is balancing sufficient technical support with information overload.
- o Approximately 40-50% of League Savings and Mortgage's new loans are for individual self-builders. Of these new loans, very few require mortgage insurance because of the sweat equity value. In addition, the lending institution has experienced a very low default rate for owner-builders.

### **3.6 MANAGEMENT OF SELF-HELP HOUSING**

Ms. Linda Dickson, Rehabilitation Administrator,  
Bain Apartments Co-operative Inc.

Linda Dickson outlined the history of the Bain Apartments and their current rehabilitation initiative. Slides were presented illustrating the various stages of renovation.

In the early 1980's, the Bain Apartments Co-operative approached CMHC with a refinancing scheme to cover the costs of required rehabilitation. By 1986, a financing program was finalized and work began in 1988.

All renovation work is approved by the total tenant membership. A voluntary Steering Committee oversees and co-ordinates all aspects of the rehabilitation process. A Rehabilitation Committee deals with member concerns and a project management company handles the work itself.

Close to four years of planning was involved in this rehabilitation process and it is expected to continue for the next 10-15 years. To date, the process has necessitated 76 temporary move-outs in nine months and a vacancy loss of 6%. Units have been updated and repaired in consultation with members and the residents believe this has been a most worthwhile process. While members have not actually undertaken the reconstruction work themselves, they have participated in the planning, landscaping and most importantly, the decision-making stages.

### **Participant Discussion**

- o Some of the advantages and disadvantages of self-management were discussed.

Self-management teaches you skills you do not learn in school. Tenants such as Marilyn Wilcoxon are finding self-management an "incredible learning experience", especially the management of the rehabilitation initiative.

Self-management promotes the whole idea of positive reinforcement of the person. Tenants are given the opportunity to use their innate skills while participating in a community setting, attending meetings, making decisions, compromising, etc.

Tenant participation ensures that they get what they expect since they are involved in virtually all aspects of decision making.

Tenants in self-managed dwellings have responsibilities which at times may be time consuming. In addition, tenants must take responsibility for their decisions.

- o The change to self-management was not easy. It is a process for both the individual tenants and the organization. At any given time, different tenants are at different stages of the process.

### 3.7 **ADVANTAGES AND POTENTIAL SHORTFALLS OF THE SELF-HELP HOUSING APPROACH**

Mr. Charles Catto, Frontiers Foundation

Charles Catto described the work carried out the Frontiers Foundation. A film, entitled "Helping Hands" was shown to the participants.

Frontiers Foundation, a non-profit organization incorporated in 1968, relies on voluntary service from people from Canada and around the world. Volunteers work with host communities in Canada on community-based development projects, such as building or renovating homes. A contractual arrangement is worked out between the host community and Frontiers Foundation as to each group's responsibilities. Individuals, community groups, churches, corporations and government bodies offer financial support for the program.

Since 1964, more than 2,250 volunteers from over 50 countries have participated in more than 300 projects in Canada. They have assisted in the renovation and construction of 1,400 homes and a number of community facilities.

#### **General Discussion on Shortfall of Self-Help Housing**

- o Income verification was identified as a problem at times. It is difficult to make sure that community self-help houses are built for those most in need. Organizations such as Habitat for Humanity rely on the community to determine which households are in most need because it is difficult for such organizations to tackle the "community barter" system that is not officially reported on income tax forms.
- o It was stated that it is important that those involved in community self-help ensure that the people are going to help themselves otherwise we are defeating the whole purpose of self-help. It is absolutely essential that the community and individual residents be involved in the self-help initiative. There needs to be a feeling of ownership and belonging.
- o Community self-help creates enthusiasm in the community when volunteers come from all over to help them, not to preach to them or to do the work but to help them.

#### **FRONTIERS FOUNDATION: Video Presentation**

A segment of the CBC Journal program featuring the Frontiers Foundation was shown.

### 3.8 SELF-HELP HOUSING PROGRAMS

Mr. Rob Duncan, Project Implementation Division  
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

#### Rural Home Assistance Program (RHAP)

Leonard Sinclair commenced the discussion on government self-help housing programs. Sinclair delivers the Rural Home Assistance Program in Northern Alberta.

RHAP was established in 1977 as a result of the lending institutions unresponsiveness to community requests for financing. Since that time RHAP has assisted 25 native communities and a total of 1250 families. The program recently announced a budget for the construction of 40 new homes and repairs to community water and sewage facilities.

The program is delivered by community non-profit groups. These community groups receive block grants and are responsible for project administration, organization of voluntary and paid labour, purchase of materials, and accounting for projects. Loans are provided to self-build clients, and they become fully forgivable after five years.

Construction advisors assist the residents with technical aspects of the construction and if necessary, hire professional trades people. Homeowners provide "sweat equity". Unemployed residents must provide a minimum of 120 hours of sweat equity; the employed must provide 80 hours of sweat equity; and the disabled must provide 40 hours of sweat equity. Tasks such as providing coffee, keeping the fire going and cleaning the construction area are considered sweat equity.

The two key factors to the success of RHAP are the community non-profit associations and the sweat equity required by each resident.

#### **RURAL HOME ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: Video Presentation**

A video was presented on the Alberta Rural Home Assistance Program.

#### Rural and Native Housing Demonstration Program

Rob Duncan provided an overview of the RNH five-year demonstration project, initiated in 1986. Tom Eytcheson from CMHC in Saskatoon showed slides from a number of demonstration projects.

The Demonstration Program's principal objective is to develop and test the capacity of its clients to build their own houses in a wide variety of rural and remote locations with a high level of advisory, training, material and financial support. In addition, the RNH Demonstration

Program is being used to research and develop new designs, techniques and building kits to make self-build simpler and less burdensome for clients.

The program funds 100 individual self-help housing initiatives per year. The RNH Demonstration Project, which ends this year, has been a good experience for CMHC from a management perspective and a refreshing experience for field crew.

### Northwest Territories Housing Corporation

Gary McLellan summarized key features of the Home Assistance Program (HAP) administered by the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation. HAP delivers about 200 houses each year.

Small Settlement Home Assistance Program is the predecessor to the Home Assistance Program (HAP). HAP is now available throughout the entire North West Territories except for Yellowknife proper. In 1986 a global agreement was signed between NWT Housing Corporation and CMHC. The agreement stipulated a 50/50 cost-sharing for HAP. In 1984, the block funding concept was introduced in response to requests by communities for more control over housing. This concept enabled communities to have greater control over design and the purchase of materials.

HAP provides clients with a complete package including selection of housing designs, site development, supply of building materials for a timber frame house, and on-site support and training from a construction manager. HAP also provides the self-builder with an innovative method of financing: a forgivable mortgage, provided the client resides in and adequately maintains the house for a period of five years.

Bill Solowy outlined areas in which the NWT Housing Corporation tries to simplify things for the self-builder.

- (1) Supply clients with isometric three dimensional drawings. These to-scale drawings help to reduce communication barriers which may exist due to the nine official languages of the area.
- (2) Supply clients with a construction manual and construction drawings. These references provide such detailed information as nailing patterns.
- (3) Supply clients with a "how to" video which demonstrates how to construct a home from start to finish.
- (4) Provide clients with assistance from HAP supervisors. These skilled tradespeople assist the clients in building their homes by ensuring they are meeting required building codes and that the houses are being built according to plan.
- (5) Provide support by other staff, namely a project officer and program officer. The project officer is also the compliance inspector and he/she assists the client with planning

and site preparation. The program officer introduces the program to the community.

- (6) Supply clients with the HAP Catalogue which outlines the various design options available.

### 3.9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Mr. Rob Duncan, Program Implementation Division  
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

Rob Duncan briefly summarized the various topics presented during the two-day workshop. In addition to developing recommendations, participants developed a definition for self-help housing and identified key barriers to the self-help approach.

#### 3.9.1 Definition of Self-Help Housing

Andy Rowe led the discussion in which participants developed a definition for self-help housing that would encompass the various levels of participation.

To begin with, self-help housing could be undertaken on an individual basis (**individual self-help**) or on a community or collective basis (**community self-help**). Individual self-help is carried out by Canadians of virtually every income level and occupation. Community self-help involves groups that organize to help themselves and/or others to build or promote housing. Frontiers Foundation, Habitat For Humanity, Whitney Pier Non-Profit Housing, and Hearth Homes are examples of community self-help initiatives.

The two self-help options **self-build** and **self-promote** are also components of the self-help definition. Self-build refers to households that undertake responsibility for all major phases of the project including planning, financing and construction. Self-promote identifies those households that only assume responsibility for the planning and financing stages of the project.

It was also noted that the definition of self-help housing does not just entail housing built for those with affordability problems. There is a much broader range of self-help housing than just those in need.

Whether building or promoting self-help housing, the key factor to the self-help approach is to involve those who will actually live in the housing.

#### 3.9.2 Key Barriers Prohibiting Self-Help Housing

Participants felt it was useful to identify key barriers that inhibit or prohibit self-help housing. The barriers have not been prioritized as different circumstances dictate the degree of constraint.

Land	Time Requirements
Organization	Staff/Administrative Costs
Finance - Risk	Development Costs
Construction - Risk	Information
Clients/Program Matching	Technical Support

#### 4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations developed by the participants of the self-help housing workshop are presented in the following.

1. Educate CMHC Branches To Provide Same Level Of Assistance For Self-help Housing As Other Housing Sectors

Branch Offices need more information regarding the seriousness and significance of this sector. Some of the CMHC technical support staff need retraining in order to develop a more positive view of self-help housing. In this way, CMHC and local agencies would be able to encourage self-help housing in their communities.

2. Characterize And Quantify Self-Help Housing

For a sector that produces between 20% to 30% of housing, there is little research available. There is a need for funds from government to undertake that research. There is also a need to expand our knowledge about urban self-help housing.

3. Include Self-Help Housing Questions In CMHC Surveys

Considering self-help housing is such a significant portion of the housing sector, CMHC should ensure that self-help questions are included in national surveys carried out by the agency.

4. Develop Flexible Programs To Assist Self-Help Housing Sector

Another issue which was raised is the need for flexible programming and financing to meet the needs of the wide range of self-help activities. There is a need for government assistance to foster and sustain self-reliance and community development but the assistance must be flexible.

5. Apply Aspects Of Self-Help Housing To Research In Other Areas

Because the self-help sector is so broad, it can be researched similar to the manner in which other housing sectors have been researched (i.e. elderly, special needs,

etc.). In addition, there is an opportunity for Canada to become a leader in research in self-help housing.

6. Acknowledge That There Are Other Benefits To Self-Help Housing Besides The Fact That It Is Less Expensive Than Other Forms Of Housing

Self-help housing is more than just cost-effective. There are many benefits and positive spin offs to self-help housing. For example, community development, community stability, and education/health/employment are all positive spin-offs of self-help housing.

7. Work With Current Self-Help Advocates

Those in the self-help housing field need to work with CMHC staff who are patrons of self-help housing.

8. Change The Perception That The Quality Of Self-Help Housing Does Not Meet Industry Standards

It was noted that there is a concern by many that the quality of housing being built by the self-help sector may not meet industry standards. In fact, the workshop presentations and discussions have demonstrated that the quality of work in self-help housing is equal to or better than industry built. There is a need to get this message across to government agencies and the building industry.

9. Organize A National Self-Help Housing Advocacy Organization

There is a need for a national organization which would act as an advocate for self-help and appeal nationally for skilled trades and other volunteers. Also, because each group is approaching self-help from a different perspective, there is a need for an organization which would be able to assist groups or individuals through the bureaucracy. In addition, because information is scarce, a national self-help group could facilitate the dissemination of new findings.

## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

**SELF-HELP HOUSING WORKSHOP**  
Sponsored by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation  
March 7-8, 1991  
Skyline Hotel, Ottawa

***AGENDA***

**WEDNESDAY MARCH 6, 1991**

Evening

Registration Package available at Front Desk, Skyline Hotel.

**THURSDAY MARCH 7, 1991**

8:00-9:00  
Ballroom A (LL Level)

Breakfast

9:00-9:45  
Joliet (CL Level)

**INTRODUCTION**

Mr. Don Johnston, CMHC

The purpose of the workshop will be briefly explained. Participants will then introduce themselves and briefly describe the organization they represent and their involvement with self-help housing.

9:45-10:15

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF SELF-HELP HOUSING**

Dr. Richard Harris, Department of Geography  
McMaster University

Dr. Harris will provide a brief presentation of the history of self-help housing in Canada. He has undertaken a great deal of interesting and original research in this area.

10:15-10:30

Break

## **THURSDAY MARCH 7, 1991 (continued)**

10:30-12:00

### **CONSTRUCTION & RENOVATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUAL SELF-HELP HOUSING**

**Mr. Andy Rowe, Consulting Economist**

Mr. Rowe has undertaken extensive research in this area. Through a presentation of his experience, he will begin the discussion of construction and renovation as self-help housing activities.

Participants will have an opportunity to share their experience and ideas regarding site acquisition, construction planning and management, design, advantages and disadvantages of the use of certain materials, construction techniques, etc. Determinants of activity in self-help housing will also be explored.

12:00-1:30  
Ballroom A (LL Level)

Lunch

1:30-3:00  
Joliet (CL Level)

### **CONSTRUCTION & RENOVATION (cont'd)**

**Mr. John McDowell, Cape Breton Labourers Development Company Ltd.**

Mr. McDowell will begin the workshop with a presentation of his agency's work in self-help housing. A continued discussion of construction and renovation will take place.

*This may also be the opportunity for other participants to make their individual presentations.*

3:00-3:15

Break

3:15-4:45

### **FINANCING SELF-HELP HOUSING**

**Mr. Wayne Patterson, League Savings & Mortgage**

Mr. Patterson will use his agency's experience to begin the discussion of financing mechanisms for self-help housing.

Participants will have the opportunity to share their experience in financing their self-help housing projects. What if any government programs were utilized? What are the shortfalls (if any)? Consideration of financing mechanisms in other countries. Experience with private financing.

7:00

Dinner: Courtyard Restaurant

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**FRIDAY MARCH 8, 1991**

8:00-9:00  
Chaudiere (CL Level)

Breakfast

9:00-10:15  
Joliet

**MANAGEMENT OF SELF-HELP HOUSING**

**Ms. Linda Dickson, Rehabilitation Administrator, Bain Apartments Cooperative Inc.**

Ms. Dickson will begin this discussion with a presentation of how and why Bain Apartments in Toronto became a tenant-managed housing project.

The advantages and disadvantages of the self-management approach will be explored. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss: how they initiated self-management; techniques for effective self-management; differences between self-management in self-built and non-self-built housing.

10:15-10:30

Break

10:30-12:00

**ADVANTAGES & POTENTIAL SHORTFALLS OF THE SELF-HELP HOUSING APPROACH**

**Mr. Charles Catto, Frontiers Foundation**

Mr. Catto will facilitate the discussion of the advantages and potential constraints of the self-help housing approach.

Participants will be invited to comment on the advantages and shortfalls and suggest others, based on their experience.

12:00-1:00  
Chaudiere (CL Level)

Lunch

1:00-1:45  
Joliet

**SELF-HELP HOUSING PROGRAMS**

**Mr. Norbert Koeck, CMHC**

Mr. Koeck is a former Project Manager of the RNH Program. He will begin the workshop which will focus on both public and private self-help housing programs. Participants representing government and private agencies are encouraged to present their experience with self-help housing programs.

This workshop may also explore criteria for client selection. Areas examined may include technical and administrative experience of clients, level of involvement of clients in the construction phase and other related topics.

**FRIDAY MARCH 8, 1991 (continued)**

1:45-2:30  
Joliet

**GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN SELF-HELP HOUSING**

**Mr. Rob Duncan, CMHC**  
**Project Implementation Division**

To date, the government has provided funding for research initiatives regarding self-help housing. For instance, the purpose of this workshop is to obtain information from those involved with self-help housing in Canada. In addition, CMHC also makes available various statistical data.

The purpose of this discussion is to identify gaps in CMHC's activities regarding self-help housing. What additional assistance should be provided to understand and encourage the self-help housing sector? What else can CMHC do for self-helpers and those agencies and others working in this sector?

2:30-2:45

Break

2:45-3:00

**SELF-HELP HOUSING PUBLICATION & VIDEO**

**Mr. Edward Starr, President**  
**The Starr Group**

Following from the previous discussion, one activity funded by CMHC is the production of a summary publication on self-help housing. The Starr Group has been commissioned to complete this study. Mr. Starr will briefly discuss the progress of the publication, currently in draft format.

In addition, The Starr Group is coordinating the production of a self-help housing video. Mr. Starr will outline what the video will capture and timeframe for completion.

3:00-4:00

**WRAP-UP, INSIGHTS, RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Mr. Rob Duncan, CMHC**  
**Mr. Edward Starr, The Starr Group**

Mr. Duncan will join Mr. Starr to begin the wrap-up. They will draw together the key components of workshop discussions.

Discussion will proceed among participants to identify other issues, concerns and insights regarding the self-help housing approach.

Reflection on workshop discussions and how comments might become recommendations. Participants will be asked to provide suggestions for the final version of Self-Help Housing Publication.

*The Starr Group*

## **APPENDIX B**

## THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF SELF-HELP HOUSING IN CANADA

Richard Harris  
Department of Geography  
McMaster University  
March 1991

My research on self-help housing has concentrated on southern Ontario cities in the period 1900-1950, but I do have a sense of the national picture.

My research on Toronto indicates that owner-building accounted for at least one third (and probably about two-fifths) of all housing starts in the period 1901-1913, and perhaps a quarter of starts in the 1920s. Even in the late 1940s the proportion might easily have been 10%. Evidence suggests that owner-building was more common to the west of Ontario, notable examples being Winnipeg and Vancouver, but less common in Quebec, and notably Montreal.

The people who built their own homes were mostly blue-collar workers, many of them immigrants. About 85% of all owner-built homes in Toronto, 1901-1913, were first occupied by blue-collar workers. A number, of course, were in the construction trades but many were not. It is clear that many people who lacked relevant skills built their own homes. They learned through trial and error and also used advice from friends, family, neighbours and co-workers.

The building process was typically extended over several years, and in some case decades, so that owner-building merged into renovation. Many began with a one- or two-room shack, and extended this (as time and money permitted) or replaced the original building with something more substantial. Land contracts were common, and some obtained short-term credit from building suppliers. In general most homes were not mortgaged and where mortgages were used the funds came from private rather than institutional sources.

Owner-building occurred because it was not prevented by local government rather than because it was encouraged. Most self-building took place in suburbs where building regulations did not exist (pre-WWI), or were laxly enforced (the 1920s). These suburbs had no services of any kind at first.

In the short run owner-building was clearly beneficial. If people had not built their own homes they would have been homeless, living in tents, or crowded into the existing, inadequate, housing stock. Owner-builders, and districts of owner-building, ran into problems in the 1930s. Owners could not pay their taxes and municipalities went bankrupt. In general, owner-built units have continued to provide relatively inexpensive housing to those in need.

The historical record of the early twentieth century underlines three lessons. First: owner-building has a long and significant tradition in Canada, even in the larger urban areas. Second: this tradition is a good one, in that owner-building has made it possible for very low-income households to make modest, but decent, homes for themselves. This has been positive not only for the households concerned, but also for the wider community. Third: the problems associated with owner-building, most obviously in the 1930s, were largely due to the specific form that owner-building took. The Canadian tradition of owner-building, in contrast, for example, to the Swedish, has been individualistic. If owner-building had been regulated, and more actively supported by government (for example through the provision of technical assistance), then many problems could have been alleviated, if not prevented.