

Best Practices: Aging in Place

2006 Resolution Remaining in our homes

As a result of a 2006 Resolution on *Remaining in our homes*, CHF Canada is identifying and promoting best practices which housing co-ops and other housing providers use to support residents in order to age in place.

This article about *The Solidarité Co-op Seigneurie de Vaudreuil: an inspired place to call home*, is an excellent example of a best practice on aging in place. If you have an innovative project in your community that supports aging in place or aging in community, let us know about it. CHF Canada would like to share these best practices with co-op members across Canada.

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The Solidarité Co-op Seigneurie de Vaudreuil:

An inspired place to call home

In this day and age, where we talk about large-scale mass production, the Solidarité Co-op Seigneurie de Vaudreuil was created with specific users in mind.

The people who have run the co-op since it opened in June 2007 have indeed shaped its operation on their own needs and wishes.

“When this project was designed, we based all our choices on five common criteria,” explained Edgar Marcoux, President of the Board and founder of this seniors’ co-op. “We had to offer housing that was both very attractive while staying affordable. We also wanted to have easy access to healthcare, impeccable security, high-quality food services on-site; and a recreational activity program so that people are healthy and in good spirits,” he summed up.

Taking It up a Notch

The dream has come true... an L-shaped building with 73 full apartments, each 800 square feet, built with the SHQ

(Quebec Housing Corporation) as part of Quebec’s Affordable Housing Program.

“We did not reinvent the wheel in terms of area or layout, since the SHQ offers a standard unit design for us to use,” recalls Edgar Marcoux. But the co-op enhanced features like flooring and paint, to improve the attractiveness of the units. In addition, the co-op reinforced the ceilings of all apartments on the main floor so that, if necessary, the co-op could install a lift to transport the occupant between the bedroom and the bathroom; and connecting doors between these two rooms were included in the original designs.

Easy Access to Care

This attractive environment had to attract a specific clientele - seniors with reduced mobility. In fact, the co-op has 96 members with an average age of 75 years old. These members have a need for a certain amount of medical care and other services.

“The CSSS (Health and Social Service Centres) provides home care to people with reduced mobility,” specified Edgar Marcoux. “We thought that there would be savings of scale and improved quality of life for the members if we did everything we could to have a CLSC (local community service centre) office on-site.”

The co-op benefits from a program of the Ministry of Health, which provides for home services to people who need more than four hours of care a day. Instead of having to offer services to citizens spread throughout the region, the co-op provides the office space and internal/external communications systems free of charge, and the CSSS provides an annual budget of \$350,000 for the CLSC to operate on-site. This arrangement is significantly less costly in terms of travel for CLSC personnel.

The 11-member care team includes a nurse who checks that medication is taken, and assistants who help with personal care, meals and cleaning. The CLSC services bring together 17 clients with reduced mobility under one roof. “For members, the atmosphere is not the same as a seniors’ home,” underlined Edgar Marcoux. “Their entire day is different. Instead of being confined to

a room, they can move throughout the complex. Everything is more lively and fulfilling!” This type of arrangement also prevents the often very painful separation from spouses, and helps relieve the pressure on seniors’ home care.

In short, the La Solidarité Seigneurie de Vaudreuil solidarity co-op is not a medical institution with living quarters, but rather living quarters that have medical services!

Peace of Mind

The project then focused on security. All the apartments are equipped with sprinklers connected to a central alarm with a state-of-the-art coding system. The system allows emergency services to identify the apartments that are occupied by people who are particularly vulnerable. The main entry is locked at all times and has a camera to view visitors before letting them through the electric door.

The co-op created a security committee, made up of 12 people, who received training so that they could co-ordinate an evacuation in the event of a fire. The City of Vaudreuil even helped with walkie-talkies, flashlights and headsets for the committee.

Dinner is served!

The co-op had to make sure the quality of the food stood out, because the member occupancy agreements require that members eat at least one meal a day in the dining room. “Our dining room is open every day and serves very good food, designed and prepared by graduates of the ITHQ,” explained Edgar Marcoux, “We know the seniors do not always eat well or sometimes not at all, especially if they are alone or sick. This has the added advantage of getting the members to socialize.”

Members do not have assigned tables—but those with reduced mobility can enter the room 15 minutes early. It’s all in the spirit of our family approach, which does not put people into categories!” points out Edgar Marcoux.

Since the members often like to make their own meals, breakfast is eaten in the apartments and the cooking team offers frozen meals at affordable prices (three generous dishes for \$10). This allows members to eat well, even when they want to have a meal in the privacy of their own apartment.

Action!

The co-op wanted to make physical

and mental activities integrated into their community. “When the first residents arrived, we gave them a chance to unpack and get used to the place,” recounts Mr. Marcoux. Now, every month the co-op plans a special evening with guests or celebrations. Activities are up and running: the walking club with 30 members, bingo, cards and billiards, the newspaper club now has about dozen pages prepared, the relaxed cocktail party on Friday evening is very popular, and computer courses are in the process of being set up...

The Future

When the project was merely an idea on paper, more than 250 interested people signed up to be contacted once the units were ready. Not everyone replied quickly enough when the project was on the home stretch. With so much demand, many had to resign themselves to the waiting list - thinking, “I should have acted earlier”.

As a result, the co-op has already launched its Phase 2, with an additional investment of \$10 million, and an overall investment of \$20 million. Once construction is underway later in 2008, the project will have 155 units in all. “We will then have another 82

apartments, which will be connected to the initial block through a passageway,” said Edgar Marcoux. “In all, more than 225 people will live here.”

Mission accomplished

It goes without saying that this type of project requires juggling financial programs from various levels of government—a puzzle that is not possible for everyone. “I did not want to live in a soulless place where you hardly know your next-door neighbour,” explained founder Edgar Marcoux when asked why he did it. “I studied co-operative associations in the 1950s, and was director of a bank for 25 years, so I combined both and created a place where I would want to live after I myself retired.”

As for success, the co-op can definitely say “mission accomplished”, as is evident from a comment from the president: “What surprised me the most is that no one talks about illness here. Everyone has so much to do that the topic never comes up in conversation.”