

**Building Communities:  
The Importance of Participatory  
Management in Non-Profit Housing**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction .....	1
2.0	Canadian Social Housing .....	3
3.0	Participatory Housing Management .....	8
4.0	Case Study: Resident Participation in Non-Profit Housing .....	12
5.0	Participatory Housing Management: Policy Implications .....	27
	Appendix A .....	31
	Bibliography .....	32

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**BUILDING COMMUNITIES:  
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IN NON-PROFIT HOUSING**

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Social housing in Canada is at a crossroads. The co-operative housing program has been canceled, the non-profit housing program severely cutback, and federal and provincial government focus is increasingly on deficit and debt reduction. It is unlikely the situation will improve in the near future. With fewer housing units being built, questions regarding type and quality of housing become more important. Is it enough to create "modest shelter" or should non-profit housing attempt to facilitate the creation of communities where people have choice and control? In the words of one resident who lives in non-profit housing in Vancouver:

A home is a community - people living, sharing, crying; people having choices, .  
.. it's the people that make a community; it's the people that make this a home,  
not the building. (Deby Prey, personal communications)

The impetus for this research comes from the writer's past work on the housing needs of female-led single parent families, where women voiced the opinion that the ability to make choices about the community in which they live allowed them to take greater control over their environment. They felt that housing needs are better met through tenant participation.

### 1.1 Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study examines the role, significance and consequences of participatory management styles in non-profit housing. A participatory housing management style includes resident involvement and, in some cases, control over decisions which affect their community and living environment. This research is based on the belief that participatory management contributes not only to the quality of life in the housing community, but also to its successful functioning.

When housing is considered as a "verb", it becomes a process by which people continually provide and manage their own housing (Turner 1976: 97). The ability to participate in the decision making about one's housing results in a greater sense of control over one's environment and life, serving as a base for work, leisure, self-actualization and family life. This

sense of control, in turn, can lead to feelings of ownership and responsibility toward that community.

Participatory housing management is of particular relevance in British Columbia at this time. Currently, various non-profit housing societies are implementing models of resident participation, and more residents are looking for more opportunities for involvement. Indeed, the 1992 *Report of the Provincial Commission on Housing Options* includes recommendations that the provincial government take a leadership role in encouraging tenant participation in property management (Audain and Duvall 1992: 63). However, research on participatory management related specifically to non-profit housing, particularly in B.C., is scarce and, consequently, the potentials are unclear.

## 1.2 Structure of the Report

First, an overview of Canadian social housing is provided. A review of participatory management follows, where the experiences with resident participation in non-profit housing management are documented. This section studies the methods, expectations and results of participatory management in order to ascertain what structures are needed to make resident participation viable, especially for women, whose housing needs are beginning to be recognized. The next section presents the research findings from the case study on resident participation. Two non-profit housing societies located in the Greater Vancouver Regional District, both of which have included residents in management and decision making, were chosen for the case study: Red Door Housing Society and Entre Nous Femmes Housing Society.

## 1.3 Research Methodology and Philosophy

A participatory or action research framework was used as the basis of the research for a number of reasons. First, participatory research is about creating change; it is the "systematic collection and analysis of information for the purpose of informing political action and social change" (Barusley and Ellis 1987: 4). Second, participatory research allows for the validation of different ways of knowing and for the acknowledgment of an individual's personal bias (Maguire 1987). Third, the research was carried out in a participatory manner as much as possible in order to be done "with" rather than "on" people (*ibid.*: 34). Conscious efforts were made to respect people's privacy and homes, and to ensure that the research fitted the societies and the communities.

Finally, a participatory framework was adopted because it facilitated an alternative analysis for housing issues as they relate to women. Traditional analysis on urban structure and housing has tended to ignore distinctions between the experiences of women and men in the name of "gender less humanity" (Andrew and Moore-Milroy 1988: 1). Participatory research, on the other hand, allows the values and personal choices, such as those affected by gender, to become explicit in the research process (Maguire 1987). The intention of this research is to acknowledge the "distinctive experience of women—that is, seeing women rather than just men at center stage, as both subject matter of and creators of knowledge" (McCarl Nielsen 1990: 20).

## 2.0 CANADIAN SOCIAL HOUSING

### 2.1 Canadian Housing Needs

The provision of housing in Canada continues to be primarily reliant on the market, which treats housing as a commodity. Within this structure, many are still unable to secure affordable, adequate housing appropriate to their needs. In 1991, one in eight households in Canada (1.16 million people) did not have the resources to obtain housing meeting current standards, and therefore were considered to be in "core need" (having an annual income insufficient to pay market rent for the adequate accommodation in a specific community) (CMHC 1993). While the national average of households in core need was 12.2 per cent, B.C., at the average of 14 per cent (164,000 households), had one of the highest core need rates in the country.

When these statistics are examined in sub-groups, it becomes apparent that housing need is directly related to poverty. In 1991, household income for families in core need was one quarter of that for those not in need (CMHC 1993). Of all core need households, 72.9 per cent are renters (CMHC 1993). Renters are five times more likely to face housing need than people who own their homes. Tenants make up 36 per cent of the households in B.C. and 58 per cent in the City of Vancouver, but their household incomes are only 61 per cent of those of homeowners (Statistics Canada, 1991 Census and The Tenants' Rights Action Coalition (TRAC) 1993: 3). In Vancouver, almost one in four tenant households pays more than 50 per cent of their income on rent (City of Vancouver 1993a 5: 2).

Further, because these statistics do not consider gender, they do not fully reveal the situation of women, especially single mother families and elderly women who live alone. For example, in 1991, two in five single parent families, almost all of them headed by women, lived in core housing need, and women outnumbered men three to one in senior's housing (Canadian Housing Coalition 1993:1).

## 2.2 The Development of Social Housing Schemes

In the 1960s, housing policy was shaped by an expansion of social and urban concerns. The first national housing conference (1968), convened by the Canadian Welfare Council, advocated the right of all people to housing (Wheeler 1969: 331). The conference recommendations emphasized factors such as "quality of life in the community, community consultation, and more choice in location, design and form of tenure" (Anderson 1992: 33). Two new housing assistance programs were introduced in 1973: Non-Profit Housing Assistance and Co-operative Assistance. These programs made loans available for local community and third sector (non-profit, non-governmental or co-operative groups) involvement in housing, and emphasized smaller scale housing developments.

## 2.3 The Federal 56.1 Non-Profit Housing Program

In 1979 amendments were made to the National Housing Act in order to consolidate low and moderate income housing into a single, simplified program. The resulting Federal 56.1 Non-Profit Housing Program and 56.1 Co-operative Housing Program extended the social status benefits of quasi-homeownership to two groups: first, to a moderate income group which probably could not afford to purchase a dwelling; second, to low-income residents who received further assistance reducing housing charges to a maximum of 30 per cent of adjusted family incomes (Wekerle 1988: 106). These programs were to create a social mix, rather than "ghettoize" low income people (Hulchanski 1988: 20).

The Federal 56.1 Non-Profit Housing Program was funded and administered exclusively by the federal government through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). Rather than receiving capital funding from CMHC, non-profit housing societies secured mortgages from private lending institutions which the federal government insured at a guaranteed interest rate write-down to 2 per cent for 35 years. This interest rate write-down allowed subsidies to be provided to residents so that they did not pay more than 30 per cent of their income towards housing (CMHC 1983: 13). CMHC also provided project start-up funds to assist

sponsoring groups from their initial incorporation through to project development (*ibid.*: 22). These funds gave non-profit housing groups control over their projects by allowing them to secure a site, hire an architect, and work through the preliminary stages of development without the financial support of a developer. Once the development was built, an Operating Agreement between CMHC and the non-profit housing society laid out the terms and conditions on how the community would be run.

In the City of Vancouver, under the Federal 56.1 Non-profit Housing Program, 45 communities, with a total of 2,387 units were built. One-third of the units were for families and the other two-thirds were for seniors and people with disabilities (City of Vancouver 1993b: v).

The Federal 56.1 Non-Profit and Co-operative Housing Programs were canceled in 1986 when the Conservative government altered the orientation of social housing policy. In a review initiated by the Minister responsible for housing, CMHC concluded that social housing problems were not being resolved adequately through these programs (BCHMC 1986: 323). The program which replaced the Federal 56.1 Non-Profit Program targeted only low-income households, in effect reintroducing the public housing program (Hulchanski 1988: 21).

#### 2.4 The Provincial Non-Profit Housing Program

The Provincial Non-Profit Housing Program, as it existed until the spring 1993 Federal Budget, was established in 1986 in order "to help needy households who cannot obtain suitable, adequate and affordable rental housing on the private market" (CMHC 1986: 1). Under the Global Social Housing Agreement, the program is jointly funded by the federal government through CMHC, which provides 67 per cent of the funding, and is administered by the provincial government through the British Columbia Housing Management Commission (BCHMC), which provides 33 per cent of the funding.

The Program assists public and private non-profit organizations to build or buy housing which they own and manage and make available to households which are in "core housing need" (CMHC 1986: 1). These groups, in their application for funding, must give details to BCHMC about previous experience in general management, community involvement and housing management, as well as factors involved in day-to-day property management, including whether tenant participation will be encouraged (BCHMC 1993a: 7). As with the Federal 56.1 Program, CMHC insures the mortgage which covers development costs (BCHMC 1992: 1-5). Operating costs, including maintenance and administration, are covered by rent contributions from tenants, supplemented by the federal and provincial rent subsidies to make up the break-even rent.



Once the project has begun, an Operating Agreement, which lays out all the terms and conditions of how the society manages the program, the building and the subsidy, is signed by both the non-profit society and BCHMC. The society must also provide a detailed Operating Plan and Operating Budget which is approved by BCHMC prior to the completion of the housing development.

Tenants are selected in keeping with the terms and conditions set out in the Operating Agreement. Typical target groups include: families, where there is at least one adult and one or more dependents; seniors, aged 55 or older; and people over 40 with specific housing needs. To be eligible for housing under the Non-Profit Housing Program, a household must have an income below the core need income threshold, and be paying more than 30 per cent of its gross household income for shelter, and/or be inadequately housed (BCHMC 1992: 3-4). After determining eligibility, the housing society evaluates the household's need for housing using a point system based on criteria in the areas of work, family, and finances.

The Non-Profit Housing Program has been used extensively in the Lower Mainland. Since 1986 a total of 12,359 units have been allocated in B.C. under the Provincial Non-Profit Housing Program. Of these 5,288 were for families, 4,820 for seniors and 2,251 for "special needs" (BCHMC 1993b). Of the 4,322 units of family housing that are currently under BCHMC administration, 1,116, or 34 per cent, are two parent families, and 3,206 or 66 per cent, are single parent families, the majority headed by women. Single parent families also make up the vast majority of families currently on the waiting list for social housing. Of the 5,068 active applicants (on the waiting list) from the Lower Mainland as of June 1993, 3,311 were families; 1,889, or 60 per cent, were single parents. Of these, 343, or approximately 20 per cent, were considered to be in the "high need category". In total, non-profit and co-operative housing developed between 1971 and 1991 accounts for 9 per cent of the total housing stock (18,000 units), and 15 per cent of the rental housing stock in the City of Vancouver (City of Vancouver 1993a: 3). However, despite the demonstrated need for non-profit housing, this kind of housing is still only a fraction of total housing in Canada.

## 2.5 The Direction of Current Housing Policy in Canada

The recurrent theme in housing policy over the last four decades has been that the production of housing units is the key to solving all housing problems. These production goals are based on the assumption that all Canadians will be decently housed if a sufficient number of units are built so that there is one adequate dwelling for every Canadian family (Dennis and Fish 1972: 17). However, being production oriented rather than distribution oriented leads to a

"quantitative operation qualitatively devoid of broad social objectives . . . economically inaccessible to many Canadians" (the Ontario Association of Housing Authorities, in Dennis and Fish 1972: 1). The realization of these production goals has been assigned to the private market through government incentives such as homeownership grants and tax subsidies, which largely benefit the highest income households (Hulchanski 1985).

During the years of Conservative government from 1984 to 1993 the federal government played a shrinking role in social housing policy development and provision. While CMHC spends about \$2.1 billion annually on operating grants for existing social housing units, the emphasis has been increasingly on who the government perceives to be "neediest of the needy". Examples include the elimination of income mixing in social housing in 1986, the cancellation of the co-operative housing program in 1992, and more recently the allocation of new housing units for 1994 going only to shelters for victims of family violence, housing for people with disabilities, and on-reserve native housing. There is no doubt that these groups have unique and extreme housing need. However, this trend is disturbing in the context of housing as a social right; currently, "the notion of public housing for general needs has been increasingly eclipsed by the view that only 'special' needs should require the direct attention of the state" (Clapham *et al* 1990: 55).

It is too soon to tell whether the recently elected Liberal government will reinstate social housing as a priority. With an increased emphasis on "cost savings" in government, all social programs in Canada, including social housing, are under review. In the Liberals' first budget (February 1994) the focus was on homeownership; for instance, the First-time Homeowners' Grant, which allows first-time home buyers to make a five per cent down payment, was extended. At the same time, the annual subsidy to cover two-thirds of the operating budgets of the 652,000 households (approximately 50,000 in BC) living in social housing was maintained. However, the only "new" funding for social housing was \$100 million for the reinstatement of the Homeowner and Disabled Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP), which provides loans to low income people and people with disabilities to bring their houses up to health and safety standards.

## 2.6 Housing as a Women's Issue

Women, particularly single mothers, are negatively affected by these changes in government housing policy and the resulting shortages in affordable housing (Audain and Duvall 1992: 51). The reality is that, as "family and household composition changes, more women become first order housing consumers" (McClain and Doyle 1984: 3). Single mother families,

along with elderly women living alone, are the largest group of female led households and primary housing consumers. In 1991, 13 per cent of all Canadian families (12 per cent in British Columbia) were led by single parents, of which 82 per cent were female-led. In B.C. this translates into 107,375 single parent families, 88,245 led by women (Statistics Canada, 1991 Census Report).

Further, women, who earn, on average, 70 per cent of what men earn, are less likely than men to own their own homes. Women-led households represent 38.6 per cent of renter households and make up two-thirds of the residents in non-profit housing. The majority of people living in family housing are single mothers, and single parent households constitute 34.7 per cent of households in core housing need (Doyle 1992: 9).

Despite these facts, the literature reveals that the housing needs of women, especially single mother families and elderly women who live alone, have not been explicitly acknowledged nor dealt with in government housing policy and programs. Prior to a 1984 study by McClain and Doyle, for instance, statistics were not broken down along gender lines; households were simply categorized as "family" or "non-family" or by number of persons (Stern 1991: 6). Other specific housing concerns for women in our society include safety and primary responsibility for children. Housing is not a gender neutral issue; "both economic and social factors combine to create a situation in Canada in which many more women than men have housing needs that are not met" (Doyle and Melliship 1992: 8).

### 3.0 PARTICIPATORY HOUSING MANAGEMENT

Traditionally, market rental housing management has provided a model for non-profit housing, partly because many of the management tasks and responsibilities are similar. In both market rental and non-profit housing, the manager is responsible for maintenance; rent collection; tenant selection; upholding occupancy agreements and other aspects related to the property; and is responsible for maintaining good relations with the tenants by responding to their legitimate requests.

#### 3.1 Role of Stakeholders in Management of Non-Profit Housing

However, market housing focuses on property management, and the landlord-tenant relationship is basically a business relationship. Non-profit housing, on the other hand, has social objectives, which can be encouraged or discouraged through management. The four stakeholders

in non-profit housing—government, non-profit housing societies, property management staff, and the residents—all have different impacts on management.

Federal and provincial governments set the direction of management through their housing policy, and through any regulations they choose create, such as the *Residential Tenancy Act* or the *Societies Act*. Government housing agencies, such as the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and the British Columbia Housing Management Commission (BCHMC), interpret government policies and programs, set management standards and provide annual operating grants to non-profit housing societies. BCHMC and CMHC monitor financial aspects of the tenants and the societies, as well as the eligibility of tenants. BCHMC and CMHC are also the places disgruntled tenants sometimes go to complain about the non-profit housing society which runs their housing.

The non-profit housing society, although given the power of direct management by government, is accountable to BCHMC and CMHC through the *Operating Agreement*, which outlines the terms for efficient management and satisfactory maintenance. A Board of Directors, made up of members of the non-profit housing society, is responsible for society business and is legally liable for the housing. Societies have the power to set their own goals, objectives and philosophy. Societies also set policy on community issues such as whether or not pets are permitted, and whether residents are hired to do work around the building.

Non-profit housing societies, like all non-profit societies operating in B.C., must be incorporated under the *Societies Act* which requires them to remain in good standing with and report annually to the Registrar of Companies (BCHMC 1992). As with market rental housing, the relationship between the society and residents is a balance between rights and responsibilities governed by *The Residential Tenancy Act (ibid.)*.

In non-profit housing, it is usually the *property management staff* who are responsible for ensuring "good management" on a day to day basis. This involves aspects of maintenance and repair, and financial management. It also involves tenant relations, including recruiting new tenants; informing tenants of their rights and obligations, as well as the community rules; and representing the board and enforcing its decisions.

Residents of non-profit housing are affected by the decisions made by all of the above stakeholder groups. As with all rental housing, residents have responsibilities as described in the *Residential Tenancy Act* and the tenancy agreement. In non-profit housing, rules which are specific to the community may also exist. Whether residents are involved in the management of their housing depends on the philosophy of the society, staff and government agency. It also

depends on the residents themselves—whether or not they want, or are able, to get involved. Residents may be involved in a wide range of activities, including maintenance and tenant relations, and they may serve on the board of the society which runs their housing.

### 3.2 Resident Participation in Non-Profit Housing

Resident participation, where adopted as a strategy of management, can realize the following goals: encourage community development; facilitate better housing management; give more power and choice to tenants; increase resident satisfaction with their housing; and help members make decisions which respect the needs of the community (Institute of Housing Tenant Participation Advisory Service 1989: xii).

Where these goals are implemented, there is a potential to replace the principle of "tenant as client" with "resident as active partner" in the decision making and smooth functioning of not only the building but also the community (Power 1991: 5). The opportunity exists for people to use their own skills to improve their quality of life.

However, increased control and involvement on the part of residents does not mean the rights and responsibilities of conventional management are eliminated. The landlord assumes the fundamental responsibilities for maintenance and repair, while the tenant must also, by law, act in a responsible way toward the property, neighbours, and landlord. Indeed, the opportunity for residents to take some control over their housing brings them added responsibilities.

In whatever form resident participation takes, be it resident groups working in partnership with the landlord or residents sitting on Boards, benefits are derived for residents and housing societies. Specific benefits include long-term cost savings, increased occupancy rates, reductions in delinquent rents, increased maintenance productivity, job creation for tenants, reduced vandalism and other crime, reassertion of social control, increased resident self-determination and self-respect and general community development (Prairie Research Associates 1991: 2).

### 3.3 Models of Resident Participation

One model of participation will not fit every community or situation. Every community is unique and will have to develop its own process. Examples of how residents participate in decision making about their living environments are found all over the world. In many less technologically developed countries, for instance, it has been found that the success of housing

and environmental improvements is directly related to the degree of resident participation in planning and implementation (Skinner *et al.* 1987: 23). In the United States and Britain, resident participation in public housing originated in response to deteriorating maintenance (Peterman 1988, Power 1991). Different models of resident participation were developed, such as community development corporation ownership and management, mutual housing associations, and increased participation in tenant councils (Peterman 1987, 1988; Edwards 1986; Seviour 1993).

In Canada, as in the United States and Great Britain, there was much interest in resident participation in the 1970s. During this time, the Canadian Welfare Council Housing Committee endorsed "tenant participation in housing management as a desirable objective which should be fostered by public programs" (Canadian Council on Social Development 1970: 1). In the same year, the Minister of Housing spoke in the House of Commons of encouraging tenant organization and involvement through CMHC (*ibid.*: 2).

However, the interest in resident participation of the seventies declined in the eighties (CMHC 1982), with the exception of co-operative housing, which has facilitated and fostered strong communities run by residents (see Appendix A for a brief history on Co-operative Housing in Canada). Co-operative housing, by its very nature, addresses the larger social needs of a community, while at the same time providing affordable housing. While this form of housing requires residents to take on responsibility, it also provides them with control over their housing. Co-operative housing offers many advantages to women, especially single mothers, including affordability, security of tenure, and a supportive community (Wekerle and Novac 1989: 225).

Currently, there are a variety of ways in which residents in Canadian non-profit housing participate in management. Although uncommon in non-profit housing, residents may be members of the housing society, and sit on the Board and committees. The most common way that residents participate, both in non-profit and public housing, is through a tenant association, which can influence Board decisions, as well as provide services that are beyond the mandate or budget of the society. Another common form of involvement is a tenant/management committee through which residents, Board and staff representatives form an advisory group which can make recommendations to the Board. Yet another approach involves residents through facilitative management, in order to give a voice to those most affected by decisions about the housing, to build community, and to encourage individual responsibility. The most direct way residents can be involved in management decisions is through representation on the Board of Directors of the non-profit housing society; this can be combined with any of the above approaches. (Examples for each of these models may be found in the 1993 ONPHA *Tenant Participation Handbook.*)

The following chapter presents case studies of two Vancouver non-profit housing societies, both of which have attempted to involve residents in management. The two societies have attempted to pursue some of the models outlined above. Their experiences provide useful information on the successes and challenges of participatory management.

#### **4.0 CASE STUDY: RESIDENT PARTICIPATION IN NON-PROFIT HOUSING**

##### **4.1 Research Approach**

Two Vancouver non-profit housing societies were chosen as case studies because of their experience in resident participation in housing management: Entre Nous Femmes Housing Society (ENF) and Red Door Housing Society (Red Door), both of which were established in the 1980s to develop housing under the Federal 56.1 Non-Profit Housing Program (administered by CMHC) and, later, the Provincial Non-Profit Housing Program.

Qualitative research was carried out through open-ended interviews and focus groups with residents, staff and Board members of Red Door and ENF, in order to discover experiences and beliefs regarding resident involvement in non-profit housing management. People working in both non-profit and market housing, as well as in government, were also interviewed in order to broaden the findings. Literature on housing management, non-profit housing, and women in housing provided secondary research material. Documents such as housing society by-laws and constitutions, government regulations and guides were also consulted.

After the research was completed, the findings from the interviews and focus group were used to discover lessons and implications, and to develop policy recommendations. Copies of the completed research were sent to Red Door Housing Society and Entre Nous Femmes Housing Society. Copies of the research abstract were sent to all participants, and the research was made available to anyone who wanted to make a copy of it. To facilitate participation in the research, especially by single parents, reimbursement for any monies spent by participants on childcare or transportation was made available. The confidentiality and the anonymity of participants has been maintained.

## 4.2 Background of Interviews

Four housing communities run by ENF and Red Door were chosen on the advice of both societies and with concern for comparability. Two of the buildings were built under the Federal 56.1 Non-Profit Housing Program, and two under the Provincial Non-Profit Housing Program; two are located in Vancouver and the other two in Surrey; three of the communities are large with more than 40 units, while one is smaller with approximately 20 units. The goal was to interview the property or site manager and five residents, who had varying degrees of involvement, at each building, as well as three board members and senior staff from ENF and Red Door. However, in only one community was it possible to interview five residents, while in other communities it was only possible to interview two to four people. The lack of response seemed to be due to lack of time or interest.

People interviewed were chosen on the basis of recommendations from within the community, as well as for a concern for a balanced cross section representation from the non-profit housing sector, government and market rental housing. They were contacted by phone or through direct conversation. Of the residents, ten of the fourteen interviewed were single mothers. Three of the people interviewed at ENF were both a Director of the Board and a resident. While both ENF and Red Door focus on the needs of single parent families, the preponderance of women interviewed is attributable to the fact that the majority of people living in non-profit family housing are single mothers and their children, and the majority of board and staff members of both ENF and Red Door are women.

## 4.3 Background on Housing Societies

### 4.3.1 Entre Nous Femmes Housing Society

Entre Nous Femmes Housing Society (ENF) was established in 1984 by a group of women, all single parents, with the primary intent of providing and managing safe and affordable housing communities for female led single parent families (*ENF Mission Statement*). These women realized that "safe, secure and affordable housing was a necessary first step to stability and forward movement in life" (Geary 1992: 1). In the words of one of the founding members: "We came to it with the idea we could do it; we came from a positive place, moving to make life better for us and others like us" (Mia Stewart, as quoted in *ibid.*: 3). The purposes of the society include the acquisition and operation of non-profit housing accommodations; the improvement of quality of life for single parents and their children; networking and resource sharing among single



parent families and the community; and encouraging greater participation by single parent families in the community (*Entre Nous Femmes Constitution*).

ENF developed its first building in 1986 under the Federal 56.1 program, and since then has completed an additional seven communities through the BCHMC program with a total of 255 units throughout the Lower Mainland. Approximately 60 to 70 per cent of the units are occupied by single parents (with 5 per cent single fathers); the balance by two parent families, singles, couples and seniors (*ENF Information Booklet*).

ENF's Board of Directors is fairly unique within the non-profit housing sector. The Board includes people from the community-at-large elected by the members of the Society, as well as one Tenant Director from every building elected by the residents. The Tenant Directors act as a liaison to management and representatives to the ENF Board. While the Board functions in non-hierarchical ways, the members elect the standard hierarchical executive of a President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary, which is required by the Societies Act. The Board also carries out functions through committees and modules which have board, tenant and staff representatives.

In addition to the Tenant Director, each community elects a Tenant Representative who acts as a liaison between the community and the Property Manager and coordinates resident involvement. Each community determines its own internal structure and sets up its own committees on issues such as membership, maintenance, social activities, gardening and mediation. Within each community a Property Manager is hired by the Society in consultation with the tenant representatives and other management staff. All ENF positions are advertised within the communities to encourage residents to apply. In addition to the Property Manager, the Society has a Society Coordinator, an Office Administrator and a part-time Accountant on staff. The staff works within a non-hierarchical model, with the coordinator acting in a facilitative role.

At times over the past few years, ENF has implemented crisis management strategies in order to cope with a fast rate of growth. This growth has resulted in several reviews of the Society's structure. For instance, at their 1993 Retreat, the Board decided to focus on the Society's own organizational structure, rather than on further development. Also, ENF has recently embarked on a reassessment of resident involvement. While ENF has a high level of resident involvement, especially when compared to most housing societies, there are communities where some residents do not feel really part of the decision making process. Despite challenges, ENF remains an organization committed to participatory management.

#### 4.3.2 Red Door Housing Society

Red Door Housing Society (Red Door) was founded in 1984 by members of the Red Door Rental Aid Society (RDRAS). RDRAS provided assistance to people in search of affordable rental housing, similar to the YWCA Housing Registry which presently operates in Vancouver. As a rental aid service, RDRAS realized the extreme need for housing that many renters face, and the difficulties and stigmas they encounter in the private rental market. Therefore, when funding for RDRAS ran out, they pursued the idea of building and managing non-profit housing themselves. Like ENF, Red Door began with the recognition that housing is a basic right, and that housing is more than simply four walls or a roof over people's heads (Red Door Housing Society *Basis of Unity* 1988).

With the assistance of Terra Housing Consultants, a non-profit housing resource group which guides sponsor organizations through the allocation and development phases of the Non-Profit Housing Program, Red Door completed its first housing community in 1986, the same year as ENF. As with ENF, this housing was built under the Federal 56.1 Non-Profit Housing Program. Since then, Red Door has completed an additional seven communities through the Provincial Non-Profit Housing program and has a total of 330 housing units throughout the Lower Mainland.

Red Door Housing Society was incorporated in July 1985. The purposes of the Society include the acquisition and operation of low cost, non-profit, housing for persons in need; the education of its members and the public about the housing needs of low income persons and families; the education of the members and tenants about self-management and tenant control; and participation in other housing related issues (*Red Door Housing Society Constitution*).

Red Door Housing Society's organizational structure is fairly conventional. The members of the Society elect a Board which can have no fewer than five Directors, who manage and administer the affairs of the Society (Red Door Housing Society *Bylaws*). Although there is no clause in the Bylaws excluding tenants from being members or sitting on the Board, these positions have always been held by people from the larger community. Staff at Red Door include the Executive Director, an Accountant, two part-time maintenance staff and six part-time Site Managers. In the past, there were Tenant Councils which organized community events, developed community rules and published newsletters. Tenants were also expected to contribute to the community by doing some maintenance.

Red Door has undergone restructuring over the last few years in response to a crisis in the maintenance and repair of their buildings, as well as in response to recent fast growth

(receiving three project allocations within two years). The problems associated with fast growth, compounded by the lack of money for maintenance and support for running the buildings, resulted in BCHMC demanding changes in the property management style. The job description of housing community manager, who was responsible for rent collection, tenant relations and community organization (Red Door Housing Society *Housing Community Manager Job Description*), was changed to site manager, with more of a focus on financial, administrative and maintenance tasks. *Decision making structures have also changed; Red Door no longer organizes Tenant Councils.* While the tenants may organize them if they wish; in only one community, where community development took place, is a Tenant Council functioning. Despite the problems and changes Red Door has faced, the philosophy of the Society is still pro-resident involvement.

#### 4.4 Principal Research Findings

The interviews conducted at ENF and Red Door are summarized here in order to give a picture of the issues, concerns, and suggestions regarding *participatory management*. The discussions are organized around 1) management issues, including and comparing the details of non-profit and for-profit housing and property management; 2) resident participation, including definitions of resident participation in management, the importance of resident participation, issues of power and control, and barriers to resident participation; 3) suggestions for effective participatory management.

##### 4.4.1 Management Issues

###### *Non-Profit Housing Management*

The board members and staff of both Red Door and ENF identified the following tasks as part of management: finance and administration (rent collection, inspections, reporting to CMHC or BCHMC); maintenance (janitorial work and day to day upkeep); and tenant relations (filling vacant units, maintaining a good relationship with the residents). It is interesting to note that tenant relations was almost always listed last by these respondents.

Residents, when asked what they considered important aspects of management, also talked of maintenance, administration and finances. However, there was more emphasis on issues of tenant relations (responding quickly to resident's requests; maintaining ongoing contact and good relations with residents; helping to create and maintain a positive relationship between residents;

being available and accessible; and enforcing rules). One issue referred to continuously was the importance of management taking resident concerns seriously.

The interviews conducted made it clear that management style depends on the priorities, goals and organizational structure of the individual housing society. The largest difference between ENF and Red Door's management style is ENF's structure for resident participation. The financial and administrative aspects of management for both societies are dealt with exclusively by staff members and the board. However, residents sit on the board of directors of ENF so they are involved in financial and administrative decision making. In some of ENF's communities, tenant committees may be involved in tenant selection and the development of community rules such as courtyard curfews. Although Red Door communities residents also have the power to set community rules, they are not involved in tenant selection. Currently, resident involvement for both societies is more likely to occur under the Maintenance or Tenant Relations categories of management. Some of this may be paid employment, such as cleaning a unit after a move-out or being hired on contract to do the grounds keeping.

Property managers face difficulties in enacting ENF's philosophy of resident participation due to the structure of the organization. As noted by one staff member, the priority of BCHMC, as funders, is to look after the buildings, and ENF's priority is to care about the people who live there. These priorities can be in conflict and when this happens, staff members tend to find themselves in the middle of that conflict. ENF also faces difficulties in realizing its philosophy of resident participation; while there is participation in some communities, in others there is a lack of volunteers for tenant directors, tenant representatives or committees.

While Red Door's staff has facilitated some resident participation through community development in the past, it has not done so since it was advised by BCHMC to restrict its focus to the maintenance, financial and administrative aspects of management. From interviews with tenants of the Red Door communities it became clear this aspect of management and the opportunity to participate in decision making was missed.

#### *Concerns of Non-Profit Housing / Property Managers*

Property managers face a complex and demanding job. Both Red Door and ENF tend to hire them for their "people skills" as well as some previous contact with community development, while it is expected that management skills can be learned on the job. However, some of the property or site managers interviewed thought it would be helpful for them to have some training around property management and maintenance, although BCHMC does not currently provide funding for this. The current funding limits also means that staff must focus on

the property management and maintenance aspects of their jobs, and rarely have time to do community development activities. Property managers must also deal with rule enforcement and problems stemming from social issues specific to non-profit housing.

#### *Non-Profit Compared with Market Rental Housing Management*

The biggest difference between these two types of housing identified by those interviewed was the not-for-profit aspect. Housing is organized, not from the property ownership paradigm, but from a community paradigm, based on principles of give and take. Effective management must recognize and be flexible enough to deal with the needs of these communities. As one board member explained, "in non-profit housing there are extenuating social issues which cannot be ignored." For example, for those residents on income assistance and who tend to be at home a lot, the housing community can become their world. They may have very different needs and perceptions of the community than a resident who is rarely at home.

For the residents, one of the most important differences between non-profit and market rental housing was the opportunity to participate in management. For some, on the other hand, participation may become an unwelcome burden. Resident participation issues—definitions, value, power, and barriers—are discussed in detail in the following section.

#### **4.4.2 Resident Participation Issues**

##### *Definitions of Resident Participation in Management*

The spectrum of definitions of resident participation yielded by the interviews ranged from residents organizing social events for the community, to participating in the maintenance of the building, to having complete control over decisions affecting their communities. Maintenance, as a form of resident participation, can include aspects of community relations, since it involves organizing activities for the community, such as gardening parties, sharing childcare. However, maintenance cannot be stipulated as a term of tenancy, under the *Residential Tenancy Act*. Where residents participate through decision making roles, they may be involved in developing community rules, developing design or policy, or sitting on the Board or forming committees. Both of these above forms of resident participation imply organization and facilitation by the non-profit housing societies.

Activities included in the first form of resident participation (maintenance) are probably easier to envision and implement than those of the second form (actual decision making roles), especially if they are considered within the framework and parameters of the current non-profit

program. ENF and Red Door may be two exceptions to the general lack of visioning around resident participation within the non-profit sector. Meanwhile, however, resident participation is considered by many as a radical concept. This has meant that ENF and Red Door have had to struggle to implement their visions and philosophies.

### *The Value of Resident Participation*

Everyone interviewed agreed resident participation in non-profit housing management is important, not only for the residents and the community, but also for the housing society and staff. The benefits mentioned most by those interviewed fall into three main categories: 1) better decision making; 2) increased control for residents; and 3) heightened quality of life.

The most frequently cited benefit of resident participation was better decision making due to the opportunity for residents to communicate their perspective to management. It was acknowledged that residents, through their experience of living in the housing, possess information and knowledge which are not only valid, but also extremely valuable. This kind of involvement helps decision makers understand the needs of residents, and make decisions which better meet the needs of the community.

The second most frequently cited benefit of resident participation was the increased control residents gain over their living environment. In non-profit housing this control may be even more important than in private market rental housing. One person interviewed commented that since many people (living in non-profit housing) are forced to live in the community, involvement is fundamental. However, it was emphasized that resident participation must be supported with structures which facilitate people's involvement. For instance, in non-profit housing, densities are often high, there are often lots of children (if it is family housing), and amenities and space must be shared. Therefore, it is necessary to develop community rules and encourage ways for residents to live together in a supportive community.

The third benefit identified relates to an increased quality of life, both for the community in general and for individual residents in particular. Resident participation was seen as critical to keeping the community a pleasant place to live. It also helps the flow of communication, leading to better relations between all involved. For individuals, resident participation is a way to learn skills, to increase choices and options for movement. These experiences, in turn, can lead to a heightened feeling of commitment to the community.

Other, specific benefits mentioned include decreased maintenance, workloads and costs; greater satisfaction for the management staff; continual learning opportunities for the housing

society; increased safety and security; personal satisfaction for directors and tenants; housing developments which are not "social housing" but are an integrated part of the community; children functioning better together; spaces and amenities being used to a greater degree; personal growth and advancement by all people involved; and if not a greater level of health, a greater ability to deal with "dishealth".

### *Issues of power and control*

While it is relatively easy to agree that residents should have power and control over their living environments, the key question is "how much power and about what issues?". Pertinent to this question are issues of training and community development, issues of clarity about decision making, and the realities imposed by the Program and other pieces of legislation such as the *Residential Tenancy Act*.

There was broad consensus that residents should be involved in management and development tasks. Specific areas of involvement mentioned in the interviews included: tenant selection; the hiring of staff; design and development of the housing complex and units; developing community decisions and guidelines; maintenance and gardening; organizing social gatherings and maintaining community security; conflict resolution within the community; organizing training programs.

Tenant selection was one of the most frequently cited areas where residents should be involved. Most people felt there should also be Board and staff representation on the selection committee. There are, however, certain restrictions that any tenant selection committee must follow. Regulations and pieces of legislation such as the *Human Rights Act* set out clear criteria for selection and prohibit discrimination. Further, 25 per cent of all Provincial built non-profit housing units are housed directly by BCHMC, and while the housing society can make suggestions as to community needs, neither they, nor the tenants, have control over these selections.

For most, the idea of residents having total control was not necessarily desirable nor realistic. For some, this feeling was based on the need to keep the perspective of the board broad and diverse. For others, it was based on the concern that residents may not have the necessary skills or interest to manage their own housing. There was the acknowledgment that people are at different levels of personal development when they move into non-profit housing. However, rather than using these concerns as reasons for not involving residents in any of the decision making, most people thought they could be resolved through the society's commitment to resident involvement, and through access to the necessary training and information.

All respondents emphasized that with power comes responsibility. If the housing society is going to ask residents for their opinions, they must listen and take those opinions into account when making decisions. On the other hand, residents must be made aware of the responsibilities which are part of making decisions. There was some agreement that the degree of responsibility residents should be expected to take on be at par with the amount of control they have.

Another important area of power dynamics exists between the property or site manager and the residents. The property management staff has very intimate knowledge of residents' lives and has the ability to evict people. This power can result in imbalances, and the perception of division between "us" and "them", even if the property or site manager tries not to use it in this way. Therefore, the power that the property management staff has must be kept in constant focus.

Concerns were also expressed about the potential for small groups of active residents to take control and make decisions for and affecting the whole housing community. These residents may not be representative, or their interests might be to seek affordable and secure housing, rather than to participate in management, or these residents may experience burn-out since they are doing so much work.

### *Barriers to Resident Participation*

The greatest barrier to resident participation for most housing societies in B.C. is the lack of opportunity to be involved. In the case studies of ENF and Red Door, specific barriers were posed by the lack of access to process, including the possibility of disempowerment, and by the structure of institutions involved. Lack of access to process includes lack of necessary skills, knowledge, information, confidence, and time. In addition, organizational structures meant to facilitate participation may actually disenfranchise people. Ineffective communications (such as those written only in English and delivered anonymously), and the degree of accessibility of meetings (established, through, for instance, the type of language used, the availability of daycare) may actually eliminate some residents from participation.

Institutional barriers include liability, responsibility and legality. An obvious solution is for the property manager to take total control over decisions affecting the building; of course these decisions affect the community as well, and may deter resident participation. The degree of support for resident participation in management is also influenced by the funding bodies, such as BCHMC and CMHC. Another institutional barrier to resident management is the lack of clarity of the *Societies Act*, *Operating Agreement* and *Residential Tenancy Act* on the matter. While acts do not place any actual restrictions on resident involvement, they prescribe fairly hierarchical and



conventional methods of organization, and can act as barriers depending on the way they are read and interpreted.

#### 4.4.3 Effective Participatory Management

One of the most important messages to emerge from the interviews was the need to create a diversity of ways of participating. This allows residents to choose how they will participate, and to become involved in things in which they are interested. Areas identified that would make resident participation effective and feasible included: education and training; resources for community development; the need to question assumptions and develop structures of accountability; institutional changes; design; benefits for residents; ensuring resident participation is part of the residents' agenda; ensuring that residents have real decision making power.

##### 1. Education and Skill Development

Education and skill development were identified by almost all of those interviewed as being a crucial part of making resident participation effective. It was suggested that ideally resident involvement would occur on its own, but in reality there needed to be encouragement through skill development and education. Educational workshops and guidelines about decision making, how to run a meeting, or use consensus, were considered important for resident involvement in an informed decision making process. At the same time it is crucial to acknowledge and respect the skill and expertise which already exist within the communities and the housing societies.

There was agreement that this training was also needed for board and staff members. Board members not only make decisions which affect people's lives, they are also liable for their decisions, and must be informed about their rights and responsibilities. Both Red Door and ENF have held orientation workshops in the past for new board members. A "buddy system", where an experienced board member acts as a mentor for a new board member, was suggested. Support and training are also needed for Property Managers. Strategies for communication include clear guidelines, regulations, and regular staff meetings.

##### 2. Access to Information and Clear Lines of Decision Making

The interviews stressed tenant access to information on the philosophy and expectations of the housing society about resident participation. For instance, problems occur when residents are told they have a wide range of power, but then are told they have to revise their plans for various

reasons. Information is also needed to recognize and deal with "power imbalances" in order to address the invisible tensions which arise as a result of societal bias in relation to class, poverty and race. Freely available information leads to an informed tenant voice, realistic decisions and a sense of ownership.

Both ENF and Red Door have attempted to provide information to tenants through newsletters, posting the minutes of board meetings and any other information which is pertinent to the communities. In addition, the property or site managers have regular office hours. However, the interviews with residents indicated that there is a need to provide more information about such matters as major changes and the rationale of rules in order to avoid misinformation and resentment. One resident suggested that BCHMC should have clear guidelines regarding the housing society's management responsibilities and obligations to the residents.

### 3. Community Development

The interviews revealed that community development and the resources needed to support it were considered vital to creating healthy communities and encouraging resident participation in non-profit housing. By community development, most of the respondents seemed to be referring to activities which create communities where people have choices and feel they have a stake--places where people want to live. As well, education, training and even access to information within non-profit housing can be seen as part of a larger community development goals.

Community development staff can work as facilitators within the housing community, bringing the residents and other "stakeholders" together to help them vision about they want, and to provide support until self-functioning occurs. The community development staff person who worked at one of Red Door's communities, for example, helped tenants to run committees and meetings, to discover and develop their skills, and provided motivation.

Broad consensus emerged from the interviews that the roles of the property or site manager and community development worker need to be separated. Often the property management staff do not have time to facilitate resident involvement. As well, the roles of the property or site manager can be hard to reconcile with community development. The role that the property manager plays in terms of eviction is powerful and difficult to reconcile with community development. The community development worker could work closely with the residents, housing society and property manager to create a consultative processes within the community.

Currently, operating budgets do not provide a line item for community development. It was agreed by the respondents that, in order to make resident participation effective, funding and support is needed for community development—it should be considered an investment in society and the future. *Community development activities should be valued and paid for, not be dependent on volunteers, especially single mothers and those least able to volunteer.* Further, it was suggested that community development should start before the community is built in order to allow the people who will be living there time to discuss how they will live together. ENF was actually able to do this with their first project because the Federal 56.1 Program provided start up funds, something the Provincial Program does not provide. Funding is also required to support resident activities and community needs such as conflict resolution, mediation, childcare and translation for meetings. Presently, there is a small amount in the BCHMC budget to support such activities. One idea mentioned in the interviews was to have a program, run by a committee of housing societies and regulated by government, where a certain number of community development workers for housing communities would be made available throughout the Lower Mainland.

#### 4. Assumptions about Non-profit Housing

Funding for some of the above activities is an important part of making resident participation feasible and effective. However, equally fundamental to its success is the need for a *change in attitudes and the creation of structures which will provide ongoing support.* Resident participation schemes demand questioning of the current assumptions about non-profit housing and how it is run. The definition of efficiency, for example, needs to be examined because participatory processes take both a lot of time and energy. The conventional idea of housing as service provision, as "us" knowing what is best for "them", needs to be challenged.

#### 5. Design for Non-profit Communities

Design was also identified as an important element in terms of encouraging resident participation, and the assumptions made in this field must also be questioned. Design impacts on the morale and pride of a community, which in turn effects whether or not people want to be involved in that community. The most often mentioned concern regarding design was that it reflect the realities of the residents, such as space for children, consideration of safety issues, impacts of high density. Both Red Door and ENF have consulted residents on what does and does not work in the design of their communities.

#### **6. Institutional Changes in Government Funding Bodies**

Institutional changes to government funding bodies, and in particular BCHMC, are also required in order to make resident participation effective. The attitude of government, at least in B.C., has recently become much more conducive to resident participation and empowerment. However, a change in government direction toward supporting and valuing initiatives such as community development is still needed. A real belief and commitment to the principle that "housing is a right" is required not only by politicians, but also bureaucrats. This belief, or lack of it, will impact on programs and whether or not they encourage or facilitate measures such as resident involvement.

#### **7. Grassroots Commitment by Residents**

Many of the respondents, particularly those with ENF, stressed the need to ensure that the desire for participation comes from the residents, not solely from the philosophical beliefs of the housing society. Ways of assessing whether or not residents want to be involved, such as door to door surveys, may be useful to ensure there is grassroots commitment to participatory management.

#### **8. Real Benefits to Residents for Participation**

Resident involvement must be worthwhile, or residents will not participate. Resident participation has to be a pleasant and positive experience and must result in benefits. Opportunities for skill development, increased self-esteem and a better living environment are potential benefits of involvement.

#### **9. Structures of Accountability**

Structures of accountability are required if resident participation is to be effective. For instance, if residents take on responsibility for defining policy in their communities, they must also take on responsibility of following through with those policies. Also, structures which recognize the realities of their lives must be introduced in order to allow this responsibility to be carried out.

## 10. Real Decision Making Power

Residents must have real, not token, decision making power in order to be part of creating proactive solutions to community issues. For this to occur, residents must feel sincere commitment from management, and know their input is really wanted and respected. The ability to participate in community decisions builds a sense of ownership, a process which takes time and trust.

One of the issues which arose frequently during the interviews was the problem of getting people involved, even when the opportunity exists. As one staff person observed, "non-participation does not equal lack of interest." Both ENF and Red Door work on systems of voluntary involvement, unlike co-operatives where participation is mandatory. In the model of non-profit housing, it is the responsibility of the society to provide the opportunity for people to participate, not to force them to be involved. Voluntary involvement recognizes people's need to have some control, as well as personal space. It is also part of the responsibility of the society to ask residents who are not involved why they are not, and what would help them participate.

### 4.5 Women and Participatory Housing Management

As with co-operative housing, non-profit housing offers women, especially single parents in family housing, advantages not available in the private market. Non-profit housing for mature women have also been established (such as the Brambles Co-operative and Women In Search of Housing (WISHES)). These advantages include safety, security of tenure, affordability and decent standards. Equally important to women is the opportunity to be part of a supportive community as well as to take a pro-active position in their living environment. Resident participation is a vital component of this, and while the findings from the interviews clearly indicate that participatory housing management is valid for everyone, it has particular benefits for women.

One benefit of resident participation for women is an increased sense of community and a decreased sense of isolation. The opportunity for participation also offers an alternative to society's norm of the nuclear family. Other benefits gained by women from participating in their housing communities include skill development and an increased control of their lives.

Both Red Door and ENF are fairly unique in their focus on women; they are both essentially "organizations run by, for and with women". One woman who is a tenant in one of ENF's communities and who has been on the Board as a Tenant Director and President, says her involvement with ENF has changed her life:

It has affected my housing, my employment, it has provided me a place for my son to grow up with friends...it has changed my whole personality...I am much more assertive, much more willing to stand up for my rights, and I am much more willing to vocalize how I feel about something. I have found it very empowering.

(Geary 1992: 90).

## 5.0 PARTICIPATORY HOUSING MANAGEMENT: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### 5.1 Research Summary

This research explored participatory management in non-profit housing. A historical survey of Canadian social housing policy showed that management issues have not been the subject of much attention. Rather the focus has been on the supply and production of housing units, with the belief that the private market can and should provide most housing. Formulation of housing policy has rarely existed as a goal in and of itself, but has more often been linked to macro-economic stimulus. Further, the process of policy and program development has, for the most part, not included the residents of non-profit housing, non-profit housing societies or staff. Women's needs have often been overlooked. Recently, the emphasis on housing provision only for those the government deems most needy and the continuous cutbacks in social housing spending by the federal government have become entrenched aspects of housing policy. These cutbacks are disturbing in the context of housing as a social right, and contribute to the deteriorating quality of life in social housing (la Haye 1992: 31).

The findings from the case studies of ENF and Red Door show that resident participation in management is a positive way of improving the quality of life in social housing communities, creating benefits for individuals, housing communities and non-profit housing societies. There are a number of diverse ways residents can participate in the management of their housing; no one way is universally applicable. Perhaps the most important factor in involving residents in management is the existence of an organizational culture which emphasizes inclusion and empowerment.

Finally, the case studies highlighted the need for women to be part of all aspects of housing, from the creation of policy and programs, to development, to management. Current changes at the administration level are encouraging. For instance, in the past there were no women on the Board of Directors at BCHMC; now there are six women (one of whom is an

aboriginal woman), and five men. At present, the top policy making positions in the provincial Ministry of Housing (Minister, Deputy Minister, Assistant Deputy Minister and Director of Policy) are held by women.

## 5.2 Implications

In addition to highlighting the successes and challenges Red Door and ENF have faced with resident participation, the research suggests a number of implications for policy and program development. Recent initiatives are encouraging, such as the Public Housing Tenant Advisory Committee and Provincial Housing Advisory Committee which advise BCHMC and the B.C. Minister of Housing.

### Implication 1: Recognize and Encourage Resident Participation

There is a need to recognize the value of participatory housing management, especially in non-profit housing. Opportunities for resident participation should be made available, but at each community residents, together with the housing society, should define how they will participate. Flexibility is needed to respond to the changing needs and realities of residents and non-profit housing societies.

### Implication 2: Increase Government Support (Policies and Funding)

In order to support participatory management in social housing, active support from governments and their agencies, such as CMHC and BCHMC, is needed. This entails a change in the civic and organizational cultures of these institutions, and the building of trust with the non-profit sector and residents. The Provincial government appears to be moving in the direction of encouraging participatory management, due, in part, to the recommendations of the *Provincial Commission on Housing Options*.

### Implication 3: Introduce Legislative Changes

The *Residential Tenancy Act* (RTA) should be amended to remove the ambiguity surrounding residents as members of non-profit housing societies. The RTA and any related information booklets and forms should also be rewritten in gender neutral and plain language, and, if not already done, be translated into minority languages. The *Societies Act* should be examined to see if it creates any barriers to resident participation.

**Implication 4: Recognize Need for Community Development**

Community development is a housing issue; it requires both policy and financial support. Funding for community development is necessary, both before and after the housing is built. Tangible support in the form of access to training, educational workshops and information is needed. Residents, non-profit housing societies and staff should be consulted about what community development means and how it could be implemented.

**Implication 5: Increase Participatory Housing Research and Education**

Resident participation is seen by some in the non-profit housing sector as radical. In order to demystify the idea and facilitate its acceptance, research on the successes, challenges and benefits of participatory management needs to be done. This could take the form of a guide book, similar to *The ONPHA Tenant Participation Handbook*. This handbook could include the examples of resident participation at Red Door and ENF, as well as other housing societies in B. C. which have tried different approaches.

**Implication 6: Change Attitudes Toward Social Housing**

Attitudes surrounding social housing, and social programs in general, need to change so that residents are viewed as social housing's most valuable asset. There needs to be an awareness of issues regarding exploitation, such as demanding participation in maintenance as a term of residency. At the same time, changes need to be made in the language associated with social housing. For instance, a term such as housing "project" conveys negative images reminiscent of large scale American public housing. In contrast the word "community" implies common interest and mutual support.

**Implication 7: Reinstate Funding for Social Housing**

The research demonstrated the value of social housing, especially for women and their children. Safe, secure and affordable housing is a basic human right. Rather than retreating from their responsibility, governments should view housing as a priority in terms of funding. Not only will this lead to cost savings in the future, but also will result in healthier communities now. Innovative forms of housing, such as equity co-operatives and co-housing should also be supported.



#### **Implication 8: Encourage Gender Sensitive Policy Development**

This research showed that the needs of women have not been addressed in social housing policy and program development. *The Provincial Commission on Housing Options* recommended that housing programs should be designed on the basis that 80 per cent of future residents will be women. Women need to be involved in this process--not just experts, but women who live in publicly funded housing.

#### **Implication 9: Practice Participatory Policy Development and Planning**

If effective and equitable social housing policies are to be developed, the processes by which these policies are made must also be effective, equitable and participatory, involving the people whose lives they affect most. Participatory planning seeks to include people in the decisions which impact on their lives, as well as informing them of the diverse interests and issues at stake.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Participatory management recognizes that the most valuable assets of non-profit housing are not the buildings, but the people who live in those buildings, the residents. It is a way in which social policy can "enable individuals and communities to attain their own ends in their own ways" (Cayley 1994: 16). By recognizing and valuing the knowledge of residents, and providing them with the opportunity to be involved in decision making, participatory management attempts to reach the full potential of non-profit housing.

## APPENDIX A

**Co-operative Housing in Canada**

Housing co-operatives are incorporated, non-profit businesses organized by people who have joined together to provide their own housing through joint ownership (Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada 1990: 2). Co-ops in Canada are termed 'non-profit' because members do not individually own their own housing, and are not entitled to sell their membership for profit (CMHC 1990:4). The federal government first started funding co-operative housing in 1973 under its non-profit program, and in 1979 introduced a program specifically designed for co-ops. Between 1979 and 1985, this program funded the creation of more than 35,000 co-operative units, and from 1973 to 1985 housed over 125,000 individuals (CMHC 1986: 1). The Conservative government eliminated the Co-operative Housing Program in the 1992 budget.

Benefits from co-ops include opportunities for personal growth and development which come from the "fundamental premise that members work together to help themselves and solve mutual problems" (Selby and Wilson 1988: 24). In order to ensure that participation is effective and informed, co-ops receive continuing education and support from co-op federations, resource groups and co-operative management companies (Co-operative Housing Alliance 1992: 13).

Canadian co-operatives have endeavored to build a strong mixed-income communities by using government funding to subsidize low income members so that they do not pay more than 30 per cent of their income on housing (Selby and Wilson 1988: 14). Approximately 15 per cent of co-op units house rent supplement recipients (CMHC 1990: 6). Co-operative housing provides homes to those on social assistance, the working poor and those of moderate and middle income who can not afford to buy their own home. Women in Canada have also benefited greatly from co-operative housing programs. Canada has a larger number of women's housing developments than any other industrialized country (Wekerle, in *Rooftops Canada* 1988: 4).

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#### *Handbooks on Resident Participation*

Two useful handbooks (recently published in Britain) are: 1) *Housing Management: A Guide to Quality and Creativity* by Anne Power (published by Longham, 1991), and 2) *Tenant Participation In Housing Management* (published by the Institute of Housing in conjunction with TPAS, 1989). These handbooks cover the broad range of ways participation can occur, as well as describe legal requirements, roles of participants, and performance standards.