

## Success Story # 1 – Sarcee Meadows Co-op

Sarcee Meadows Housing Co-operative in Calgary, Alberta is one of Canada's largest and oldest housing co-op communities.

Established in 1968, the co-op today is reflective of much of Canada: diverse, urban, and with a wide range of ages and families who call Sarcee Meadows home.



And like the rest of Canada, the co-op is not immune to issues of racism and discrimination. Three years ago, six women in the co-op took one small, but very significant step towards building bridges in their community.

They sat down to share and learn about each other's cultures. Something very special formed over a meal of butter chicken and chai tea: the Sarcee Meadows Women's Circle. This is their story:



## Success Story # 2 – Tamil Co-op

Tamil Co-operative Homes in Toronto was built in 1984 to provide housing for Tamil refugees. Over the years, the co-op has opened its doors to newly arrived immigrants from a number of countries, most recently from Burma. Today, the largest ethnic groups represented at the co-op include members of Tamil, Burmese, Vietnamese, Filipino and Ethiopian heritage.

The co-op continues the long tradition of building strong communities inside and outside of the co-op, incorporating social justice and the seventh Co-operative Principle- Concern for Community- into its very social fabric.

The co-op places an importance on engaging its youth and seniors. A sports committee, run with the assistance of youth in the co-op, helps to run the co-op's gym and an annual car wash is held to fundraise for new gym equipment.



Ten students from the co-op have received CHFT Diversity Scholarships, a telling sign of the importance education has within the co-op. Tamil children are offered Tamil language and music classes. In addition, a daycare on site provides affordable childcare to members' children and children in the neighbourhood.

Seniors are kept active physically through activities in the gym and mentally through indoor games such as rummy, quiz nights, and the South Indian billiards game, Carom.

The co-op encourages cross-learning of members' cultures through regular potlucks. Ongoing education for members occurs through guest speakers presenting on health issues. An emphasis is placed on serving members in their first language, with materials provided in Tamil, Burmese and English. A real sense of friendship and kinship exists at Tamil, with members assisting each other to doctor's appointments, immigration hearings, and helping those members with physical challenges with their cooking and groceries.

Tamil members are actively involved in activities outside their co-op as well. Many members volunteer with local resource centers, schools and women's centers. The co-op also provides spaces for several community programs. This mutually beneficial relationship sees programs provided a space at an affordable rate, and members getting to participate in programming such as yoga classes, worship services and senior's fitness classes.

In September 2013, the co-op celebrated 25 years of providing safe, affordable housing to residents of Toronto. In 2015, they were awarded CHF Canada's Award for Co-operative Achievement for serving a vibrant and diverse membership, engaging youth and seniors through a variety of programs, and serving the community in partnership with area programs.

### **Success Story # 3 – Corktown Co-op**

Over the years, the members of Corktown Co-op have worked to change the culture of participation within their co-op. Realizing that forced participation was causing more harm than good in their co-op, the members held discussions about what it is they wanted their co-op to be, rather than focusing on what was wrong. This change in thinking worked wonders and has led to a vibrant, engaged membership that is both active within their co-op and their local community.

The results of this shift are clear:

- There have been quorums at all General Membership Meetings for the past 12 years.
- There have been contested elections for all Directors for the past 12 years.
- The board of directors reflects the diverse membership of the co-op.

In addition to a more active engagement in the governance of the co-op, social activities within Corktown have flourished. The co-op's social calendar is jam-packed with events throughout the year and a community development worker works with members to carry out their ideas.

The members show their support for the wider co-op community by contributing annually to Rooftops Canada and the Golden Horseshoe Diversity Scholarship. The co-op also collects items for their local food bank and is committed to reducing its impact on the environment. The co-op applied for a grant to install solar panels and has built garden boxes for members to plant veggies, herbs and flowers.

Corktown Co-op supports the youth in their co-op. They offer a free afterschool tutoring club to the co-op's youth, and currently have a youth member serving as a director on their board.

Their emphasis on nurturing a caring community and a maintaining a well-governed co-op has led to a lengthy waiting list and many long-time members calling the co-op home. Corktown Co-op is an outstanding example of a community that has changed their mindset about participation and has realized the benefits.