

International Day of Co-operatives 2011



Happy kids, well looked-after for the Day... Yaaa!

International Day of Co-operatives 2011 was another wonderful gathering provided by FOHCOL for the wide community of housing co-ops and all others to come together celebrating a global event.

The agenda spanned setup (FOHCOL management committee and members of Pinakarri coming early to put up bunting (thank for that to Shani Graham from Living Smarties), and the FOHCOL banner, along with getting chairs and spaces ready, beautifying with the 2009 conference FOHCOL houses, and then...waiting for everyone to turn up.

And the attendance was ideal – exactly the number of bottoms for chairs as usual, including the Mayor of Cockburn, Logan Howlett and his wife Pat, and many co-op people, along with David Bunce from Adelaide gleaning information for his PhD. Others in the crowd were from co-ops and communities, as well as the Dept of Commerce (their special Co-operatives Unit), and many other backgrounds and organisations.

Speakers were welcomed and introduced by wonderful Alisha Ryans-Taylor (FOHCOL Convenor) and presented with a small fairtrade tokens of thanks .

Lynn MacLaren MLC for the South Metro region (representing the Greens housing portfolio among others) kicked off the presentations by congratulating FOHCOL for creating history for the housing co-ops by holding these events, gathering passion and commitment as do the Greens. “To build a better world, a positive future, is not easy – I commend you for all the work you do in your part of the world.”

Lynn outlined achievements in community housing (including the new Affordable Housing Strategy launched recently), and the big benefit for having 15% affordable housing integral

to new developments in WA, though the Greens are pushing for 20%. July 2 was the first day of the new configuration of 10 elected Greens in parliament, including a Greens housing minister in Tasmania.

Responding to questions from the floor, Lynn offered to follow up on mental health issues relating to behavioural policies being tightened up, and what is happening with the social behavioural issues team.

Olwyn Maddock then gave an excellent overview of where Co-operation Housing (Homes for Sustainable Communities) has come from and is heading to. From its inception in 2008, when it was part of FOHCOL as a 'steering committee', to 2009 when it was named and began, to 2010 when it was registered as a company (not for profit) limited by guarantee. Along with the theme of this year's International Day of Co-operatives being 'Youth' she described Co-operation Housing as a 'toddler'. It's current stage of development involves regulation and compliance under Department of Housing (to then be eligible to access State and Federal funding), which is a big vision as they are learning to walk. When they get to StageTwo there will be consolidation, then in Stage Three they will be growing the sector, always including their mission to support and serve existing co-ops. Olwyn's described her own journey in supported housing as "expanding her life".

With excellent staff, along with 5 Board members drawn from the co-ops and 2 technical directors, she described it as "moving into Board Land" while still connected with the grassroots. What they are doing at present is working on policies and procedures (with consultant Christina Kadmos), asset audits of the member co-op houses, and applying for grants as they are totally self-funded, with no current external financial support. The Co-operation Housing timeline for all these developments is optimistically 2012 as they 'dance thoughtfully, as individual co-ops merge into one large provider'.

Michelle Hovane, from the emergent co-op SHAK (Sustainable Housing for Artists and Creatives) gave a colourful description of the history and evolution of her group, of what has been years of trying to find a home for them all, how integral the 'artists and creatives' were to Fremantle historically, and how available spaces for them were shrinking and disappearing.

FOHCOL's coordinator Elizabeth PO' then spoke about getting involved in the International Year of Co-operatives in 2012; about FOHCOL's changing focus alongside the development of Co-operation Housing; how FOHCOL is becoming a training and education provider to existing and emerging co-ops as well as any who wish to live together with effective management systems in community settings (e.g. strata title developments).

Our final speaker was the wonderful Lynne Tinley describing the FOHCOL Art Project which will incorporate all the available photographs from co-ops past and future to be gathered and artistically incorporated into a mandala-like artwork. Everyone was invited to contribute. (Contact the FOHCOL office for further details.)

For the last part of the morning session, before lunch, small groups blossomed into conversations about one of four different topics of interest. There was the group looking into the 2012 International Year of Co-operatives and what might bring benefit there, then another focusing on women's empowerment in co-operatives; another about youth engagement and how co-ops can encourage more youth involvement; and the fourth was all bubbling with interest about community land trusts (gathering around Ivy Penny and Carol Clark from Medina).

Everyone was well engaged in the chat, and so conversations spilled over into lunch – some had brought food to share, and there was Lynne creation of a huge pot of exquisite soup, and once the fuel was topped up it was time for the Pinakarri tour by Ginny Webb, a busy resident member. This inspiring tour encompassed the raised vege gardens, the solar panels and energy efficient design of the houses, the common house and its facilities, and other features.

Lynne and Ken then took the lead for the tour of three of the local housing co-ops. Those who visited First Fremantle, then Freo Fringe, and finally Inanna's House were treated to a rare glimpse into the beauty, privacy and peace these places exemplify.

So the rain held off, the sun came out, we hope you enjoy the pictures that show some of the Day's colours and configurations.

Again FOHCOL's was the sole celebration of this wonderful Day. Next will be a year-long celebration across the whole of 2012... we have some ideas for that celebration and what it may look like. If you are intrigued and interested in what might be going on stay in touch...



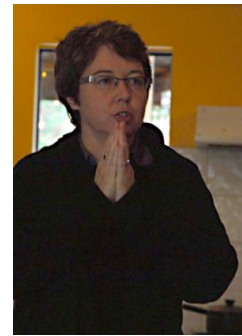
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Kay Howlett and Michelle Hovane



FOHCOL 'houses' at Pinakarri



Alisha Ryans-Taylor thanking Lynn MacLaren MLC for her presentation... and Lynn's talk.



Ivy Penny describing Medina's plan.



Lunchtime snap.



Olwyn's delightful presentation about Co-operation Housing.



James, Olwyn, Michelle and Ivy.



Ginny leading the sustainability tour.



A happy audience after a quick stretch.



Pinakarra composting area and garden.



Into the beautiful gardens...



More engaged participants during the small-group session.



Alisha, Chris, Maud and Heidi.



The tour of Freo Fringe housing co-op.



Ken and Lynne before the big tour.



The beautiful decorated entrance.



David, Paul and Chris contemplate.



Sunny welcoming entrance to the Common Room.

Outcomes from the four discussion groups :-

Youth Engagement Group – (following from the International Day of Co-operative’s theme this year of Youth) – suggestions arose of using resources and equity from existing co-ops to get rental houses close to the co-ops, to act as part of those co-ops so young people can access subsidised housing and engage in community (as part of the obligations of co-op membership), being mentored and co-operatised (or “brainwashed”) by long-term members. This easily achievable housing mix can be an answer to those with difficulties related to housing arising from mental health issues, or those students unable to support themselves in isolation from supportive others. (Youth chaplains were also included as potential beneficiaries of this scheme).It doesn’t bring a lot of burden to existing co-ops, drawing only on members’ duties as adults and mentors.

International Year of Co-operatives 2012 Group – inspired by the expanse of possibilities thrown up by the United Nations Year of Co-ops happening next year, this group supported the ideas of a year-long connection with the local, national and international co-op community around intentional communities and housing co-ops, using Skype, photos, experienced members, the national conference planned for Melbourne (encouraging a WA co-op presence and presentation there). There was conversation around the world-wide historical perspectives (Findhorn, Dru Yoga group, Welsh co-op, Mongragon, etc), and declaration that co-ops are an empowering movement with a great vision of society.

Community Land Trust Group – this group was energetic and covered a lot of ground about the Medina Residents’ Group plan to use local investment to create and maintain affordable housing in their area, and does this translate to creating capital for the creation of new housing co-ops... FOHCOL is supporting this group; stay tuned for details.

Women’s Empowerment Group – this included Alisha’s personal story from Inanna’s House (Hilton women members housing collective), which covered the importance of security of tenure to women, the female membership of such a housing group, and the importance of consensus-based decision making,

*** Thanks to City of Cockburn for helping with printing and their Mayor coming to the Day’s celebrations. Thanks to Pinakarri for their welcoming, and the children’s care. Thanks to extra photographers Tahlia and David. Thanks especially to all the FOHCOL Management Committee for their solid help. (Elizabeth PO’, Coordinator) July, 2011**