

COMMON EQUITY NSW

# Newsletter

SUMMER EDITION // FEBRUARY 2024



## In this issue

---

03 Cooperation among co-operatives

---

04 Starting the year with a bang

---

08 Collaborating and finding solutions

---



**COMMON EQUITY**  
CO-OPERATIVE  
HOUSING

# Contents

- 01 Message from the CEO
- 02 Building community harmony through co-operative living
- 03 Cooperation among co-operatives
- 04 Research project update
- 04 Starting the year with a bang
- 05 Miriams story
- 06 International Social Housing Festival
- 07 Ningana Co-op
- 08 Collaborating and finding solutions

Front cover photo: Getting busy at the CCA Forum Nov 2023  
 Photo credit: Victoria Chen



*Let the sector know what your Co-op has been doing!*

Contact [nicole@commonequity.com.au](mailto:nicole@commonequity.com.au) or call 02 9356 9223.

**Acknowledgement of Country**  
 We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land throughout Australia and pay our respects to them, their culture and their Elders, past and present. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.



## A message from the CEO

Welcome to 2024 and the summer edition of our Newsletter.

These bi-annual newsletters look to highlight and provide information on activities relevant to our vibrant sector of Co-op Housing.

2024 promises to be another jam-packed year for Common Equity and the Co-op sector. Together we are embarking on a new and exciting process of engagement and consultation in the review of our Company Co-operative Agreement (CCA). Working closely with nominated representatives of most of the Co-ops we will be holding a number of sessions over the next 6 months which will define and determine the look and feel of our new CCA. In this issue you can read about the outcomes of our last consultation session in November 2023 which sets the platform for this process.

Our new property developments are in full swing with the first stage of our new Co-op property development at Lasa St for the Vietnamese seniors community now complete. This is something to

celebrate not only in terms of design and process but also marks the completion of a long standing contractual agreement with DCJ that commenced many years ago with the closure of The Compound at Millers Point.

Other articles in this edition highlight Co-op Housing perspectives overseas, cooperation amongst co-ops and an update on the important Co-operative Housing research project.

We always look for your input for future articles. Please contact Nicole or other members of our editorial board with your ideas and contributions.

Yours in co-operation,

Nick Sabel, CEO

ALPHA HOUSE CO-OPERATIVE

# Building Community Harmony through Co-operative Living

by Magdalena Tausch, Alpha House

In an era where individualism often takes centre stage, co-operative living stands as a testament to the power of community. Co-operative living spaces, characterised by shared responsibilities and resources, bring a unique value to both residents and the communities they inhabit.

With this in mind, a panel discussion was organised by Alpha House Artists Co-operative Gallery and took place in November 2023. The event was organised by YEmpower, Creative Spirit and Alpha House member Magdalena Tausch.

Organisers of the event brought together diverse minds to delve into the interconnected topics of sustainability, mental health, and co-operative living. The event aimed to shed light on how these elements intertwine and shape our society.

As the discussion unfolded, it became evident that the intersection of these topics is not just theoretical; it's a practical approach to building



a resilient and harmonious society and that these areas are nurtured and encouraged in co-operative living environments. The panellists encouraged the audience to consider how their daily choices impact the environment, mental

health, and community bonds.

The collective call to action was clear let's strive for a world where our choices contribute to a sustainable future, nurture our mental well-being, and strengthen the bonds that weave our society together.



TARA MORELOS, CHAIR ALFALFA HOUSE & EXTENDED FAMILY HOUSING CO-OP

## Cooperation among Co-operatives

Alfalfa House Community Food Co-operative in Sydney's Inner West, once the vanguard of Australia's wholefood revolution, closed its retail business in April 2023 after 40 years of solid community service.

While the vegan and chemical-free product space was booming, Alfalfa House had had 5 years of consistently declining sales and a hefty rent increase mid Covid. Our membership was decimated. Previously loyal members had either relocated, become disenchanted, or were crisis fatigued with many newer members having no interest in co-operative principles – we'd become just another shop.

Our cooperative venture was on the rocks, without participation there can be no cooperation.

Enter STUCCO Housing Co-operative!

Yes, we closed our lovely shop front but heartened by our Co-op peers from STUCCO and their generous offer of secure basement storage for our shop fridges and fittings, we've had a little breathing space to contemplate our future.

Alfalfa House Co-operative continues rebuilding its community on land provided by Transport for NSW as managers of Newtown Station Kitchen Garden – a productive green patch with plenty of cooperative soul. In winding up our shop, we gave bags of dried goods to Stucco and have since been able to deliver a steady supply of leafy greens and other vegetables.

Stucco saved our vegan bacon, demonstrating real cooperation among Co-operatives and a genuine concern for the wellbeing of our shared Community.

## RESEARCH PROJECT UPDATE

## Articulating Value in Housing Co-operatives

The Project Team and Steering Committee would like to take this opportunity to warmly thank all members who contributed to the Articulating Value in Housing Co-operatives research for sharing their knowledge, expertise and insights over the past two years. We know that the project would not have been possible without this input and the generosity of members in taking part. This

is the country's first analysis of what works in Affordable Rental Housing Co-operatives (ARHC's) and why. Together, our project has generated the first data on the sector at a national level and created the evidence base of the work and benefits of Australia's ARHC's. Lead researcher, Professor Louise Crabtree-Hayes and Dr Sidsel Grimstad have been presenting the preliminary

findings and results at various forums, including the Federal Parliamentary Friends of Co-ops and Mutuals Roundtable. These presentations have generated a huge amount of interest and discussion about the model and the benefits of living in co-operative housing. The final project report will be launched on 15 March 2024 in Liverpool, NSW.

**More details here:**

[www.housingcoopresearch.org.au](http://www.housingcoopresearch.org.au)

*We hope this research makes a positive difference for the sector. We want to spread the word about co-operatives, the benefits, and what helps them to function well!*



*What a great way to start the year – housing more people and growing the sector!*

It was such a pleasure to attend the handover of the Lasa St properties on 22 January this year. Co-op members and prospective tenants had a chance to have a look around the building which is now ready to be tenanted!

The 13 new units are finally completed at the site. This new Co-op development will be an extension of the Lac Viet Co-op. The development comprises 4x2 bedroom, 2x1 bedroom and 7 x studio units.

A beautiful result, designed in collaboration with the Co-op and the build expertly managed by Nasr Group.

BY ZULEMA, ALMA CO-OPERATIVE

## Miriam's Story...

*Alma Co-operative was formed in 1998 and received houses in 2000. They are a group of friends who have strong beliefs about community, justice, equality and respect.*

Miriam Marquez was born in Fray Bentos, Uruguay. She was interested in politics and workers' rights since she was a young girl. She left her hometown for Montevideo when she was very young to pursue university studies.

Times were hard in Uruguay as the armed forces began kidnappings citizens who opposed the military government, the dictatorship cracked down on the opposition with an iron fist.

Miriam was 19 when she was arrested. For three years she endured torture and humiliations at the hands of the military. She was eventually granted conditional release.

She returned to her hometown and had to attend the town's military headquarters every Monday for five years. At times waiting for hours until able to return home, other times she was subjected to torture by the guards.

When democracy returned to Uruguay in 1984 Miriam travelled to Sydney (where her sister was living) without speaking a word of English but with the values she held at home intact.



Photo: Miriam at a recent CENSW Forum

She started working at a factory while learning English. She completed years 11 and 12 at TAFE and started a job at a refuge for women fleeing domestic violence. Here she was able to put into practice the values instilled in her by her father.

Miriam then started a job at a NSW Health drug and alcohol facility supporting people often regarded as the refuse of society.

She then joined a NSW Corrective Services facility and worked helping women who were about to be transition to life outside of prison.

The co-operative gives Miriam the opportunity to keep fighting for a just cause; accessible and decent housing for those in need. She continues to uphold the concept of cooperativism she brought from home. She has always been motivated by altruistic feelings towards those in need. She never sits on the fence as a passive observer, as the saying goes, "she walks the talk".

The Uruguayan government recently recognised Miriam and her comrades struggle, and erected a monolith with their names outside its Parliament.

# ISHF INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL HOUSING FESTIVAL

This was the 4th International Social Housing Festival (ISHF), it has been held in Europe every two years. Its tagline: celebrate, protest, a movement. The ISHF is not just a celebration of housing models that deliver, a protest to house our society in dignity but also a movement with increasingly committed social and affordable housing providers, policymakers, urbanists, architects, activists and researchers.

This year's focus was on lessons learnt from mature as well as emerging housing systems vis-à-vis emerging social and economic challenges across the world. Although Europe based, participants from all over the world attended the event: 2,100 participants from 82 countries. The festival also included visits to public and co-operative housing.

CENSW Board Member Liz Mackdacy had the opportunity to attend the Festival in Barcelona in June 2023. Below is some of what she learned about housing challenges and solutions.

All countries in Europe are struggling with homelessness,

trying to provide sufficient affordable housing supply and the huge increases in the cost of construction and renovation since COVID.

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) are essential to the growth of the affordable housing sector everywhere. Barcelona City Council has 2 private sector partners and their aim is to build 13,000 units of accommodation per year.

Public authorities including public housing authorities must never sell their land. It is their greatest asset and is irreplaceable. Where PPPs are involved in construction land can be leased to the developer with strict conditions about social housing outcomes. The building and land remain in public hands.

There is a similar strong view about not selling social housing on the private market. Sales of public housing in Europe have decimated housing supply since the 1970s and 1980s and the costs of restoring adequate levels are obviously immense.

The right to housing must be enshrined in law as has been done in Basque, Spain.

Many housing authorities in Europe have a net zero goal for environmental sustainability. Financing includes using public private partnerships to retrofit properties.

Ageing in place and investment in affordable housing are essential policy focus areas, particularly for women. Each type of space needs to be adapted and adaptable to suit all life stages. One model presented defined the spheres of place around co-ops – public space, community space and personal space all of which need to be safe and appropriate for all ages. Some initiatives introduced include encouraging intergenerational families in co-ops and on-site management of the care needs of tenants. The cost of these on-site managers can be shared between co-ops.

Research from two housing associations in the Netherlands (Staedion in the Hague) and UK (Alms Housing) demonstrated the increased longevity and well-being of residents who live in co-ops.

Details about the conference can be found here: [socialhousingfestival.eu](http://socialhousingfestival.eu)

## Ningana

Ningana is a Housing Co-operative in Annandale, Sydney and provides affordable housing in a community living situation. It is managed through Common Equity NSW.

Ningana is a block of 53 flats and was built in the 1970's. There are currently some available bedsits/studios. The units are small, around 25-30 sqm, but functional, private and affordable. Each studio has its own bathroom, balcony and there is a small kitchen space. There are 3 larger kitchens for tenants to use, one on each floor.

The residents self-manage the complex. As a resident you are expected to take an active role in the management of the building, attend meetings, be a member of one of the working groups.

Ningana has a policy of having equal number of genders, as such they are currently looking for female tenants.

### Rosie's\* story at Ningana:

Rosie has been living at Ningana for almost 10 years. In that time, they have found it to be a secure and peaceful place to live.



Although Ningana is a three-storey building with 53 flats, it is a relatively quiet place to live, located in the heart of leafy Annandale. It is close to public transport. There are many common areas where tenants are able to socialise, do laundry and cook. There is a large garden as well as some off-street parking which are an added bonus.

It is a wonderful model of low-cost housing in a time where people are struggling to afford housing in the inner City of Sydney. The idea is that all tenants participate with the upkeep of the building instead of employing

professionals to come in to do the work.

Ningana has given many people a reprieve from difficulty to help them manage their lives, stay on track, and even thrive.

Ningana is a community with a wide variety of types of people, ages and interests. We pride ourselves on diversity and tolerance and on the whole, we all get along well.

*If you are interested, please email [Ningana.selection@gmail.com](mailto:Ningana.selection@gmail.com)*

Ningana Housing Collective

\*Name has been changed to protect privacy

# Collaborating and finding better solutions together...

The Company Co-operative Agreement (CCA) is the main document that sets out the responsibilities of CENSW and Co-ops. The CCA is reviewed on a regular basis and we are now in the middle of the most recent review process.



The second CCA broad consultation session was held on Saturday 4th November 2023 in Sydney. These events are really important for CENSW and the sector to get together and 'nut' things out. This session gave us the chance to work together and share stories of our experiences both good and bad.

All the information gathered on the day will be provided to the CCA Working Group which has been set up with members selected by Co-ops. The Group is tasked with handing down a recommendations report to CENSW.

There was a great attendance rate and definitely a buzz of energy throughout the day!

45 Co-op members (and CENSW staff) participated in the workshop "at the Mercure Sydney. The aim of the day was to better understand everyone's experience of the Co-op / CENSW relationship until now and to develop a future vision that will guide work on the CCA.

Objectives for the day included:

- Gathering wider Co-op member input into the CCA Working Group process
- Defining a vision for their Co-ops and the sector
- Exploring challenges and strengths for both CENSW & Co-ops
- Start defining how Co-ops and CENSW can work together.

The day was facilitated by Scott from Gauge Consulting who, again did a great job, keeping people to point,

keeping comments pertinent to the issue being discussed and making sure the day ran smoothly, encouraging everyone to have a say. CEO Nick Sabel provided a brief history of the landscape before CENSW, why CENSW was formed and what this meant in terms of roles and responsibilities as well as the changes for Co-ops. Nick went on to explain the heavily regulated housing industry that we now work under.

Throughout the day attendees were encouraged to comment and ask questions. Issues and areas explored throughout the event included: members experiences with CENSW, then and now, their concerns and appreciations; attendees vision for Co-ops, the sector and CENSW. The information gathered throughout the day is extremely valuable and has assisted greatly with defining the focus for the CCA Working Group.

Some comments about the day:

"Let's continue to work out ways we can work better together."

"Changed my outlook almost 180 degrees. Very effective meeting. Timing was perfect. This had to happen and now it has."

"Informative session and looking forward to having more in the future."

Co-op member Liz, who attended the session had the following reflections on the day:

"Attending the CAA meeting in November 2023 was an opportunity to learn about the formation and history of CENSW; and from those who

have been part of the co-operative sector for many years, and who were all very generous with their knowledge and experience. Hearing from people who were at the forefront in the creation of several NSW co-ops was both informative and inspiring.

The day was one of critical reflection and review of past experience, and a facilitated session looking for input from all of us on the way forward – to support existing co-ops in a sustainable way and expand the sector in the long term; and also, to address some of the mistakes and difficulties of recent years.

There was a strong call for a re-centring of the 7 principles of cooperatives across all aspects of how the sector functions; and a call for the co-operatives and CENSW relationships to reflect these principles.

The facilitated group discussions articulated the many benefits of co-operative living, clarified some of the difficulties faced by co-ops especially around funding, management and maintenance of properties, access to and timeliness of support, regulation, compliance and reporting, and the division of responsibilities.

And highlighted a need for more robust communication between CENSW and co-operative members. We hope this magazine will be a venue for addressing this need in particular."



**COMMON EQUITY**  
CO-OPERATIVE  
HOUSING

11.01, 46 Market St, Sydney, NSW 2000  
PO BOX Q1323 Sydney, NSW 1230  
T +61 (02) 9356 9200 **Toll Free** 1800 066 834  
[enquiries@commonequity.com.au](mailto:enquiries@commonequity.com.au)

[commonequity.com.au](http://commonequity.com.au)