

WISH kept

SOUTH AFRICA REPORT
Linda Leaks

On July 10, 1992, I travelled to Johannesburg, South Africa and spent a month working with tenants of the Seven Building Project.

The seven Building Project is an endeavor by tenants living in seven inner-city apartment buildings to collectively purchase the buildings and convert them into cooperative housing. The tenants of the seven inner-city buildings were given the opportunity to buy after a two year struggle with their landlord for secure tenure and an end to illegal rent increases among other demands.

Washington Innercity Self Help(W.I.S.H.), because of it's successes in assisting low income people in developing and operating housing cooperatives, was invited by several members of the Seven Buildings Project Development Team to provide technical assistance to the team and to the tenants.

The purpose of my participation in the Project, was to provide the tenants with an introduction and orientation to owning, operating and living in a housing cooperative. Additionally, my task was to provide observations and suggestions on the tenants' leadership efforts to organize and strengthen their organization.

My assignment was carried out under the auspices Co-operative Planning and Education (COPE), a member of the development team and a non-governmental development organization. COPE assists groups in setting up and operating economic co-operatives and other community enterprises.

In addition to providing it's client groups with skills and training, COPE promotes a high level of community involvement and control over decision-making and resources.

Specifically my responsibilities to the project as developed by WISH and COPE, were:

- + To provide tenants with a more complete picture of cooperative ownership
- + To assist in developing an effective cooperative training program for tenants
- + To assist with organizational development strategies
- + To assist with development of communication strategies
- + To interact with players of the project and make observations and recommendations
- + To provide support work in organizing and training
- + To attend Working Group Meetings; make observations and recommendations
- + To share, reciprocally, organizing and training skills
- + To assist in lobbying city council, Urban foundation

and other groups with potential resources
+ To provide a prototype of the day to day working of
a housing cooperative

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In working with tenant leadership and COPE staff, we designed a series of educational and skills building workshops. They were held both in a convenient central location and on site at six of the seven buildings.

The centrally located workshops were held on Sundays in my hotel room. They were designed to develop, build and/or strengthen tenants leadership's organizing and organizational skills and knowledge. On average these workshops were well attended and participation was good. See attached workshop outlines.

The on site workshops were held in a flat of one of the tenants. The purpose of these sessions was to introduce to as many tenants as possible a more complete picture of cooperative ownership and management. These meetings were divided into two sessions per building so as to allow for a maximum participation of tenants.

The on site gatherings were always fully attended with tenants standing and sitting in every available space. The discussions were designed to take tenants through all of the stages of cooperative development. The discussions led tenants from negotiation for purchase to finding sources of financing, through renovations to management. Tenants were engaged in role playing of possible problems and suggested solutions. Tenants interaction and participation indicated a high level of absorption and comprehension of ideas and concepts discussed. All sessions were interpreted into the tenants language by a tenant leader.

I met regularly, almost nightly, with tenant leadership to discuss strategies and tactics for getting more tenants involved in the organizing process, thereby strengthening the Seven Buildings Project organizationally. We concluded that, first, the basic organizational structure, the floor committees, were weak and needed rejuvenating and strengthening. Secondly, we all agreed that tenants needed an intensive education and skill building program and thirdly, tenants needed an efficient internal communication system.

Our nightly discussions and weekend sessions also included strategy development for solving present and future problems identified.

Some time was spent meeting separately with some of the key players on the development team as well as lobbying some potential financial backers. We, Martha Davis, the other WISH staff delegate, met with Actstop, a civic organization, Planact, a

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