



REVOLVING LOAN PROGRAM CREATES MODEL FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITY

Representatives from First Nations communities across Canada frequently visit the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte to learn about building sustainable and affordable housing. Well-maintained and functional, most of the 800 homes in this 2,200-person community 100 miles east of Toronto were constructed under the Band's revolving loan program.

"The program is set up to help responsible families build houses," says Chris Maracle, Director of Housing, Parks, and Band Property Maintenance. "We've gotten away from giving community members the subsidy that we receive from the federal government, and we put that money into a revolving loan program."

Under the program, the Band has awarded hundreds of mortgages over the years and developed a model community of energy-efficient, durable homes. Residents can own a house for as little as \$400 a month, making home ownership possible for virtually anyone—singles, young couples, elders, people with disabilities, even those on social assistance. And tenants can also rent three-bedroom houses for less than \$500 a month.

Generating the capacity to offer about 12 new mortgages annually, the program often attracts as many as 50 applicants a year. To select people most in need, the Band awards points based on a variety of criteria. Do applicants have a steady job? Do they have children? Is their existing housing inadequate? Those with the most points get the mortgages. "The point system helps take subjectivity out of the mortgage-awarding process," says Mr. Maracle. "It rewards people who are responsible."

Anyone in the community can apply for a mortgage, but people have to own the land they intend to build on. Those who get mortgages typically construct 1,200 to 1,300 square-foot raised ranch bungalows, a design that lends itself to brighter, more livable basements. "Most of our houses are modest," says Mr. Maracle. "We do have some high-end ones, but people by and large take a practical approach."

To save money, people often act as their own project managers and get friends and family to help with construction, but the greatest—and most important—support, however, comes from the top: the Band Chief and Council. "I've worked with a lot of First Nations, housing people across Canada, and they

have great intentions, but without the support of their chiefs and councils, they're not going anywhere. We have that political support, and it's crucial."

The revolving loan program has helped inspire the community to seek new ways to build even more economical and functional housing. "There's a lot of support for the program," says Mr. Maracle, "because people know that they're building up a pot of money that their children and grandchildren will be able to use to build houses. Every household in the community has made the program the success that it is."

The revolving loan program has also created a renovation loan program allowing community members the opportunity to borrow money to maintain their homes or add additions as their families grow.

Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte is a finalist in the Finance and Tenure category of the 2002 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Housing Awards Program, **Affordable Housing Innovations**. The Housing Awards recognize individuals, companies and organizations that have made significant contributions to improving housing affordability in Canada.

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