



Social Enterprises and the Ontario Disability Support Program Case Study:

Out of This World Café (Toronto)

The mission of Out of this World Café is to assist the community by employing current in-patients and out-patients of the psychiatric community, increasing their communal integration by providing real-world experience to those faced with mental illness. At the same time Out of This World Café provides the surrounding community with great food at great prices.

In 2006 Algoma University, with funding provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation through the Canadian CED Network (CCEDNet), undertook a research initiative designed to identify areas for policy improvement related to social enterprises which employ persons in receipt of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). This is one of four case studies developed as an outcome of this initiative. To view the final report and policy recommendations developed from the case studies visit: http://ccednet-rcdec.ca/files/social_enterprises_and_ODSP.pdf

Context

The Ontario Council for Alternative Businesses (OCAB) was developed in 1993, out of the growing need for employment opportunities requested by the psychiatric Consumer/Survivor community. The Council's formation was a result of the work being done at Fresh Start Cleaning and Maintenance, a Consumer/Survivor operated janitorial business within the City of Toronto. OCAB's mandate is to develop and support social enterprises that provide empowerment, employment, training and skills to Consumer/Survivors, and bring attention to the growing need for these opportunities. OCAB's mandate allows them to be a member of the Ontario Peer Development Initiative (OPDI), which supports and strengthens provincial Consumer/Survivor groups, and is also considered a Consumer Survivor Initiative (OPDI, 2006a).

The social enterprises belonging to OCAB employ approximately 80 part-time employees with annual revenues of \$450,000 (Brown, 2007). Currently the Raging Spoon, Parkdale Green Thumb Enterprises and Out of This World Café (OTW) are the social enterprises run by OCAB. Attention will focus on OTW as it has been identified as having the largest number of employees of the three businesses with annual revenues of approximately \$220,000 (Brown, 2007).

History

From 1994 until 2002, OTW operations were run by the Vocational Resource Centre (VRC) of CAMH to provide Consumer/Survivors with a new skill set and an employment opportunity. Brown (2003) outlined that OTW was run more like a business than a training program, and it extended outside the mandate of CAMH. After much discussion with a CAMH hired consultant, the clients decided to divest OTW to OCAB. Divestment resulted in a shift towards meeting industry standards, but also conducting business in a way that meets the needs of Consumer/Survivors. There were several challenges that came with divestment including: patient information was no longer provided to VRC employees; training was required for “non-profit business practices, funding requirements, how to develop a business plan and how to fine tune day to day operations”; and employees were let down when the business manager was not hired internally (Brown, 2003: 7).

Even today OTW is evolving. Donovan Gopaul, Business Manager, “wants to raise the bar higher, raise the standards, quality of food and service, get things more creative, more interesting, build more pride for employees, and build a better reputation for the company”. He wants to prepare for the future changes for OTW.

In the next 3-4 years OTW will experience significant changes with the redevelopment of CAMH. Several CAMH buildings are scheduled for demolition, to be replaced with new buildings and new streets. The redevelopment will result in disrupted service for the espresso bar, which will have to be relocated along with its 8 employees. The move however will result in several positive impacts. The redevelopment will encourage a greater integration of CAMH with the community, including a community garden and ground floor store fronts (Capponi, 2007). OTW will go from being partially hidden from the public in its current location, to a fully accessible street level shop on a main corner; and will require additional customer service training to address an increased and different customer base (Capponi, 2007).

Organizational Structure

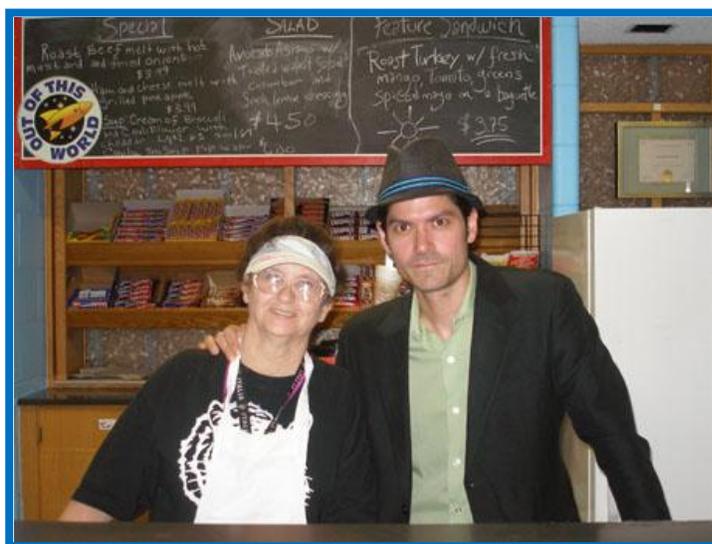
OTW is an alternative business located in downtown Toronto within the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). OTW is unique in that it is the first Consumer/Survivor run organization to

“A Consumer/Survivor is self-defined: someone who has been institutionalized by the psychiatric system or treated by mental health staff in the community – a Consumer of services and/or a Survivor of the medical/mental health system”.
(Brown 2003: 2)

“Consumer/Survivor Initiatives are run for and by people with mental health problems and/or those who have received mental health services”.
(CMHA Ontario et al. 2005: 2)

“An Alternative Business is one that is operated by Consumer/Survivor employees and one that has been created through a Community Economic Development (CED) approach ... While operating on business principles, Alternative Businesses offer support to staff and recognize the struggles that Consumer/Survivors face in society and with respect to employment”.
(Brown 2003:2)

operate out of a hospital. With an espresso bar, canteen, catering service and a coffee cart, OTW offers various employment opportunities for Consumer/Survivors. Two-thirds of the OCAB Board of Directors, the business manager, two lead hands and up to 40 part-time permanent employees of OTW are Consumer/Survivors, and most are in receipt of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Having Consumer/Survivor representation on the Board of Directors can “create ownership” (Church, 2007: 7). Furthermore, Jamieson (2007) expressed how “by only employing people with experience in the mental health system, it provides a very comfortable environment for everybody, because everybody understands what it’s like to live with a mental illness”.



All the employees of OTW participate in the decision making process through regular staff meetings and day to day communications. For example, feedback is received from front-line employees around customer purchases. The business manager can then make changes to the menu and marketing materials. At the monthly Board of Directors meeting, the manager will receive input from board members and communicate employee comments and concerns. Employees are also part of CAMH committees, such as the Patient’s Advocacy Council and CAMH’s Client Employment Initiative Committee.

CAMH provides support to OTW by renting the space at a minimal cost, sending emails and memos encouraging staff to purchase and use its services, and producing some printed materials for promotional use. However, OTW also receives financial support from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Toronto Enterprise Fund. The Toronto Enterprise Fund provides funding to businesses with a “double bottom-line” that includes maintaining a sustainable business while fulfilling a social mandate (Toronto Enterprise Fund, n.d.). Partnerships, support and funding are all important for the success of a social enterprise, but there are several others.

Activities

OTW being a social enterprise is a strength in itself (Gopaul, 2007) because consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits accruing to society from the ‘double bottom-line’ approach and wish to spend their dollars in ways which support social justice. Community response to OTW has generally been positive. For example, organizations like the United Way conduct tours of the business, and OTW has also been highlighted in a workshop at the 2007 Canadian Conference on Social Enterprise in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Most employees receive certification in food handling, first aid and workplace safety as part of their employment training. Training for their day to day responsibilities, such as customer service, is usually provided by the manager and experienced staff and they are trained at jobs that suit their abilities and respond to their needs. For example, if an employee does not feel confident in managing money or giving change, then that employee would not be assigned to the cash register. However, if

at a later date, that same employee felt more able to be in charge of the cash, accommodation and training will then be provided, so employees are not restricted to only one position in the company. Brown (2003: 2) utilizes the words “comfort, ownership, pride, teamwork, safety, responsibility and respect” to describe Alternative Businesses, like OTW. People from CAMH, OCAB and OTW definitely feel a sense of pride, and employees experience improved self-esteem and confidence from working there. “The staff opportunity to work in a real business environment, to earn an income and to be part of a really caring community has had a huge impact on them” (Jamieson, 2007). The enterprise’s legitimacy as an employer is furthered by having staff identification cards, uniforms and providing a steady income to its employees (Brown, 2003).

Outcomes

Social enterprises are seen as a way to address the discrimination Consumer/Survivors face in the workforce and from society as a whole (Capponi, 2007). OTW staff presence throughout the hospital reduces the perception that Consumer/Survivors are not capable of participating in the workforce, and can be encouraging to current patients (Capponi, 2007). Purchasers of the goods and services provided by OTW are supporting the social mandate of the organization even though they may not be aware of it. A professional approach also shows that OTW can produce high quality goods and services while providing a valuable experience to the Consumer/Survivor community. With an increasingly successful business the benefits could reach a greater number of Consumer/Survivors. Diana Capponi (2007) from CAMH stated that social enterprises “[use] the economy to build the community”. This method of community development is also supported by Church (1997) who highlights the process, impacts, and challenges social enterprises may experience. Employment with OTW has also allowed workers to reconnect with friends and family, build a network and socialize with co-workers, and have some structure in their lives (Jamieson, 2007). Working at OTW also results in medical benefits, such as fewer doctors’ appointments and hospital visits, and less frequent use of medication (Jamieson, 2007; Capponi, 2007). This finding is supported by other research (CMHA Ontario et al., 2005) which demonstrates how participating in a project organized and operated by Consumer/Survivors can decrease the amount of treatment and hospitalization individuals receive.

Recent changes related to ODSP medical coverage have also been beneficial for recipients who become employed. OCAB (2002) identified that some individuals who were capable of increasing their work hours did not prior to amendments to the legislation because they would lose their benefits. Recent amendments to the Act now allow these individuals to maintain their benefits until their employer provides them with a similar plan (ODSP Revisions, 2006). This increases their security and promotes the opportunity for employment. Employees’ fears around reporting income have been reduced with the 2006 ODSP policy changes; however, with the new 50% income deductions, employees feel that they are working for \$4.00 an hour rather than \$8.00 an hour



(Jamieson, 2007). Further changes in the 50% income deduction would allow more Consumer/Survivors to climb out of poverty. For example the ODSP Action Coalition, an organization campaigning to improve income and employment supports, is suggesting that recipients be allowed to keep \$430 per month before the 50% deduction is applied (Brown, 2007). The additional income ODSP recipients currently receive is beneficial for Toronto residents where the cost of living is generally higher (Jamieson, 2007). It also creates greater choices with regards to housing, recreation and nutrition (Brown, 2007). Although the 2006 changes to ODSP policy have been generally positive for OTW employees, there are still some challenges and barriers being faced in this program.

Factors Critical to Success

Various factors critical for maintaining OTW as a successful and sustainable business were identified. Most are not unlike those in the for-profit sector, including:

- Customer needs – identifying and meeting the customers’ needs and wants
- Product – being able to offer high quality products and services at a reasonable cost
- Captive Market – having a clientele including staff, patients, and visitors to the hospital that are encouraged to support OTW by CAMH
- Adaptability – making adjustments to items such as the menu, products, and prices that reflect variations in the marketplace and respond to competition
- Staff – ensuring that employees feel a sense of community and support is essential. It is also important to have a knowledgeable and experienced manager to facilitate day to day operations and training, and to provide accommodations to the employees.

However, one factor critical to fulfilling the social mandate of OTW is Flexibility and Accommodation. Many Consumer/Survivors require a certain level of accommodation in the workplace. For example, scheduling must account for time off needed for tests, doctor’s appointments, or for reasons related to their illness. Scheduling must also reflect the times most suitable for employees to work. Job security is provided for employees who may not feel up to working. However, alternate staff and resources are required to cover those shifts, which results in a large number of part-time staff employed with OTW. Also, many individuals who are in receipt of ODSP are only able to work part-time due to physical or mental health conditions.

Barriers and Challenges

Due to the episodic nature of their illness, some employees of OTW may require a leave of absence from work. OCAB (2002) outlined that there is limited flexibility with the ODSP process if paperwork related to such an absence is not sent in on time; and business managers often have to mediate situations related to ODSP procedure and requirements. Another barrier is that if a Regional ODSP office does not identify the Consumer/Survivor Initiative as a required medical service then recipients may not be able to acquire financial assistance for transportation (CMHA Ontario et al., 2005).

Although OTW is marginally profitable, it still faces some significant challenges in its viability and is forced to rely on some funding from outside sources. For example, OTW initially received financial support through the Employment Innovations Fund supported by ODSP Employment Supports. This funding provides support for a maximum of three years “to develop innovative ways to create and expand job opportunities for people on social assistance, including people with

disabilities” (Government of Ontario, 2005). The Employment Innovations Fund is beneficial to get programs started, but if financial assistance is still required after the first three years, finding alternative funding sources can be time consuming and difficult, particularly for small organizations. Consumer/Survivor Initiatives have not been given any significant funding intended for development in more than 10 years (CMHA Ontario et al., 2005). Provincial government contributions were made by the New Democratic Party in 1991 and the Progressive Conservatives in 1996 (OPDI, 2006b). CMHA Ontario et al. (2005) outlines that there is a lack of funding for developing alternative businesses, and the ones that currently exist have people waiting to be employed. This is the case for OTW. People are not forced to leave, staff turnover is infrequent, and “OCAB doesn’t have the resources to put towards business development” (Capponi, 2007). Without funding for development of new enterprises, only a limited number of people will be able to access the benefits alternative businesses have to offer.



Social enterprises in the Toronto area are fortunate in that they can apply for funding through the Toronto Enterprise Fund (a fund administered by the United Way), and can receive partial funding from the provincial government. However, receiving outside sources of funding can create a perception on the part of the for-profit sector that social enterprises are not legitimate because they do not encounter as much risk (Capponi, 2007).

OTW also has internal challenges. For example, the business manager is a challenging position to fill, requiring an individual who combines a background in mental health or addictions with a specific skill set, including culinary knowledge and business management experience. The business manager must be able to “continuously balance the needs of the workers versus the needs of the business” (Capponi, 2007). For example, the manager must schedule experienced staff with less experienced staff, and there may be times when two employees might be needed even if the job usually only requires one. There is also a need for an official system for evaluating employee performance, which would allow for raises (Gopaul, 2007). Creating an evaluation process that reflects the nature of the business and is sensitive to employees’ needs is complex.

Even with all of these challenges and barriers OTW is a success. There is an obvious need for new businesses like OTW, and attention should be given to their development. Without the existence of this social enterprise, consumer/survivors are missing out on a valuable experience.

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