



Social Enterprises and the Ontario Disability Support Program Case Study:

COIN Food Services (Peterborough)

As a non-profit organization, COIN is committed to improving the skills of individuals in the Peterborough community in order to overcome obstacles they may encounter in obtaining employment, including a developmental disability.

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 Community Opportunity Innovation Network Inc. (COIN) was developed in the early 1990s in response to poverty research conducted by the Peterborough Social Planning Council (PSPC) and the Peterborough and District United Way. Out of this research came the call for a community economic development initiative (CED) in the area.

History

COIN Food Services has two arms, World 2 Go Foods and Natural Blends Café. In 1996, World 2 Go Foods began training people in food preparation and filling custom catering orders; and more recently Natural Blends Café, operating out of the Peterborough Public Library, serves coffee, muffins, soup and sandwiches to

customers. A food cart arranged by the Café and provided to employees at Ontario Works extends the customer base and increases the Café's income. Both of these enterprises provide

food service training to developmentally disabled individuals, and by purchasing their goods and services customers are helping to sustain these programs (COIN, 2003-04).

“A social enterprise is a business like any other with customers, products and services, but as a non-profit it also has a social objective like helping the unemployed or protecting the environment”.

(COIN, n.d.: 4)

Businesses under COIN Food Services were built out of partnerships with other community groups. Natural Blends Café partnered with the Peterborough Public Library and Peterborough and District Association for Community Living, while World 2 Go Foods began through a partnership with the Trent Valley Literacy Association and Community Living Peterborough. However, World 2 Go Foods no longer maintains any affiliations.

Organizational Structure

COIN’s organizational structure encompasses a Board of Directors which meets once a month and is made up of 7 volunteers from the community. A general manager, administrative officer, enterprise managers, staff, clients and co-op students/volunteers also help to frame and support the organization. Decisions related to day to day operations are mainly made by the managers of the social enterprises, and larger decisions such as policy issues would be presented to the Board of Directors. Weekly staff meetings provide an opportunity to voice concerns and suggestions, but because COIN is a relatively small organization, open communication is maintained between employees and management.

Training revenues from the MCSS help support the social enterprises, and business revenues are reinvested to purchase products and pay the wages of employees. If one particular enterprise experiences a deficit, then the revenues from the remaining enterprises can be used to mitigate the loss. Funding opportunities are also identified by the Board of Directors as they are actively involved in the community, and business revenues are often augmented by other grants and donations.

Activities

COIN has developed several social enterprises which provide quality products and services to Peterborough, and builds confidence and empowers individuals through skills and readiness training.

TEKdesk, reBOOT and COIN Food Services are the social enterprises managed by COIN. Training programs that are provided depend on the nature of the social enterprise. For example, reBOOT is a computer business so its training focuses on technical and technological skills, whereas COIN Food Services offers training programs related to the food services sector, such as customer service and utilizing the cash register. Since COIN Food Services employs persons with developmental disabilities, it also offers work place skills, job coaching and follow up (COIN, n.d.). Although there are suggested timeframes for completing these training programs,



COIN is flexible in meeting the requirements of each individual. COIN (n.d.: 2) states “[by] helping people gain employability and job skills at a pace that suits individual needs, we support the opportunity for long term employment in the future”.

COIN Food Services is partnered with the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), as a service provider for the Employment Supports program of ODSP. Several methods are utilized for attracting clients, including referrals, word of mouth and announcements in the newspaper (Anonymous, 2007a; Grills, 2007). Service providers can offer clients assistance with developing goals and an employment plan, and obtaining and maintaining a job placement (Government of Ontario, 2006).

PSPC’s vision is “to be an organization that facilitates active, broad based citizen participation in shaping healthy communities in Peterborough city and County. It acts as a catalyst for positive, sustainable social change; and promotes the understanding that social justice is in everyone's interest”.

(PSPC, n.d.)

Factors Critical to Success

One slogan utilized by World 2 Go Foods is “Quality Foods at Affordable Prices” (COIN, 2003-04). This statement is crucial to business sustainability, and is also a common goal for the

for-profit sector. By offering excellent products at a reasonable cost, the businesses under COIN Food Services have become increasingly reputable over the years. Even though there are customers who may not be aware of the underlying social values of the businesses, there are those who purposefully support the social purpose. Customers of Natural Blends Café will be patient with the servers, for example, and allow them extra time to complete their assigned duties. In Peterborough other non-profit groups are aware of the social purpose of World 2 Go Foods and support it by utilizing their catering services for their own events. Having support from other non-profit groups and a captive market within the library adds to the success of these businesses.

COIN’s programs could not be successful without trained employees who devote their time to maintaining the enterprise. Krisanne Grills, former Natural Blends Café employee, stated that “... the people are very motivated and very dedicated to the clients. They really have the best interest of the clients at heart and they really try and do their best to... train them well... There are a lot of very skilled people with a variety of talents”. For example, writing proposals and completing funding applications is one talent that currently exists at COIN (Anonymous, 2007a). In order to obtain funding, non-profit organizations have to adapt to changing government priorities and expectations: “[COIN has] had to adapt to ODSP [changes], as frustrating as their new programs are, you have to be able to do that if want to survive” (Grills 2007).



Outcomes

COIN is a unique and beneficial organization for the City of Peterborough (Grills, 2007) and particularly for persons with developmental disabilities in a number of ways. Individuals can receive certification in food handling if they are interested, however, “personalized instruction” has been identified by COIN (n.d.: 5) as the most beneficial aspect of the training services provided to clients. Strengths and weaknesses of clients vary by individual, and identifying them and creating an environment for them to succeed is very important (Grills, 2007). This can be shown by the way people learn. If a client excels in visual and verbal learning, then following a written recipe is not going to be as effective as guiding them through it several times (Anonymous, 2007b).

Individuals participate in these programs for various reasons, yet because of the ODSP deductions money was not considered a top priority. Instead “self-esteem”, “confidence”, “productive”, “purpose”, “contribute to society”, “reason to get up in the morning”, “social outlet”, “meeting people” and “fun” were terms and phrases that interviewees used to describe the outcomes (Anonymous, 2007a; Anonymous, 2007b; Anonymous, 2007c; Grills, 2007). COIN Food Services provides valuable skills related to cooking and food preparation, as well as nutrition education and a pleasurable experience (Anonymous, 2007b). A trainee from COIN



Food Services,(Anonymous (2007c) indicated that the experience of working with fruits and vegetables was helpful in addressing diabetes.

Participation in COIN Food Services not only provides training for individuals, but allows for community inclusion. COIN may “help society with learning that people with disabilities are just like anyone else and hopefully they see the person first and the disability second” (Anonymous, 2007b).

Changing the perception of individuals in the community is critical in reducing the fears and discrimination that developmentally disabled people face. ODSP recipients have a lot to offer and sometimes it may be difficult for employers in the community to recognize their potential (Anonymous, 2007a).

Barriers and Challenges

Interviewees highlighted a number of barriers related to ODSP process and procedures:

- Time Limits – next year the most recent ODSP Employment Supports model will be implemented which will require the client to obtain employment for 13 weeks in order for the service provider to receive their job placement target. If this employment target is not reached compensation is not received for the training, planning, and placement of ODSP recipients. However, this process does not take into account reasons for which a client

may not complete the 13 weeks, for example, the client may discover that s/he is not well suited to the food industry after starting his/her placement (Anonymous, 2007b)

- Administrative – employees are not compensated for the additional time it takes to complete the cumbersome amount of paperwork expected from ODSP (Grills, 2007). Communication barriers also exist, because financial deposits received from ODSP do not indicate which invoice it is paying (Anonymous, 2007a)
- Hiring COIN Clients – If a staff position opened up at COIN, a client who was trained there and would potentially be successful in the position could not be hired on without forfeiture of the job placement target money. In the past, World 2 Go Foods has employed an ODSP recipient who worked 8-12 hours a week and received minimum wage. However, if a position becomes vacant in the future, COIN management has been told by an employment support specialist that this is no longer possible
- Job Trials - Since being trained with COIN is a stepping stone to employment in the community, having employers who will hire ODSP recipients is crucial. However, if an individual is not ready for community employment and is unsuccessful in their job trial, the employer may not be willing to accept future clients
- Funding – lack of financial resources limits what a social enterprise can do. For example, without funding keeping staff members may be difficult and employees may be required to take on additional tasks (Anonymous, 2007b). It is also frustrating when ideas for development exist but there is limited funding to grow (Anonymous, 2007b). Underfunding can also hinder the development process because “if you are spread too thin then you can’t do anything well” (Anonymous, 2007b).

If at the end of the process the client is happy and successful, then COIN Food Services has accomplished its primary goal (Anonymous, 2007b) but as current enterprises are struggling to maintain their own employees, the likelihood of new developments and enterprises are unlikely. The sustainability of these projects is dependent on income, and to date, revenues generated by the businesses themselves are insufficient. Despite these challenges, however, “The organization has been around a long time and it’s gone through good and bad, and people are pretty motivated to see it continue” (Grills, 2007).

References

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