



Employees showcase the variety of items stocked at Neechi Commons, a community business complex at 865 Main St. in Winnipeg fostering aboriginal and neighbourhood employment, co-operative business development, and healthy and accessible foods and products. “Neechi” means “friend”, “sister” or “brother” in Cree and Ojibwa.

## Winnipeg’s Neechi Commons Enlivens Hope and Possibility for Community

By Lisa Bailey

The “raised poor” of Neechi Commons grew up in impoverished and socially challenged circumstances, but they’ve found a sense of pride, purpose and ownership as the workers and artisans of the community business complex in Winnipeg’s north end.

Hazel Corcoran has heard these transformative stories at Neechi Commons first-hand and, as chair of the Neechi Support Committee, is joining many others to further enliven the potential of what she calls “an important beacon of hope” for the aboriginal

community and the community at large.

“(Neechi Commons) is important for what it represents as a possibility and what it’s actually doing,” Hazel says.

“It is saying, ‘Here’s a hopeful example of what we could do together.’”

Neechi Commons is a 25,000-square-foot building that is home to various food-related entities and an art store/gallery with an aboriginal and local/regional focus.

Opened in 2013, the commons expands the vision of Neechi Foods Co-operative

See ‘Co-op Creates’ page 15

## Successful Catering Social Enterprise Evolves From Community Dinner Passion

By Michelle Strutzenberger

It was a love of hosting gigantic community dinners that jumpstarted a Saint John, N.B. non-profit’s foray into social enterprise.

The Saint John Learning Exchange is a literacy education organization that connects with more than 500 adults

See ‘Stone Soup’ page 18

## Impact Junk Solutions Creates Meaningful Work

By Jennifer Neutel

After being gainfully employed as a large food manufacturer manager, Steve fell ill with a mental illness and lost his job, his family contacts and became homeless.

At his interview with Impact Junk Solutions, a London, Ont.-based social enterprise, he openly shared that he

See ‘Employee’s Life’ page 8

## Model Halifax Social Enterprise Links Thriving to Emphasis on Community Relations

By Michelle Strutzenberger

When Sarina Piercy first began working with Hope Blooms in north Halifax, the social enterprise had already been running four years and the first thing that struck her was the incredible amount of trust, openness and care that everyone had for one another.

See ‘Our Successes’ page 6

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*Note: These stories have been condensed for the purposes of this piece. To read them in full, visit [www.SocialEnterpriseCanada.ca/newsroom](http://www.SocialEnterpriseCanada.ca/newsroom)*



eVa's initiatives

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## ABOUT ENP CANADA

Enterprising Non-Profits, enp, is a unique collaborative program that promotes and supports social enterprise development and growth as a means to build strong non-profit organizations and healthier communities. The first enp site was established in British Columbia in 1997 and today sites exist in communities all across Canada including British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Toronto and Nova Scotia. The sites work together on social enterprise issues at national level, share resources and participate in research. Each site offers a variety of support for social enterprise development including coaching and grants.

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## EDITORIAL

# Social Enterprises Becoming Social-change Rallying Points in Local Communities

From Farm in the Dell in the heart of the Saskatchewan prairie to Hope Blooms in Halifax's north end to Emma's Acres in B.C.'s Fraser Valley, social enterprises across the country are catching the hearts and imaginations of their local communities. Many are becoming social-change rallying points in ways that are exciting to see.

Community members are opening their arms to these enterprises and sharing the gifts of their time, funding, training, wisdom and even land in order to support their flourishing. (You can read some inspiring examples throughout the pages of this storybook.)

Many community members clearly feel a sense of ownership over the success of these enterprises, even if they're not formally a part of the organization. They recognize that the success of the social enterprise is bound together with the success of themselves and that of their community.

As Sarina Piercy of Hope Blooms puts it so beautifully, "The more investment — social, financial and otherwise — we have in projects like Hope Blooms, which strengthens our social fabric, the greater our collective ability becomes in building diverse, resilient and beautiful environments as individuals and as a society."

All that said, community relations must be nurtured.

As Canadian entrepreneur and author Al Etmanski points out, collaboration can be painful, especially with strangers and those with whom we disagree.

... social enterprises across the country are catching the hearts and imaginations of their local communities.

He extends this invitation in response: "Imagine if we focus on the goodness of our adversaries; imagine if we stop blaming the other and took responsibility for our own behaviour, our addictive nature, our consumerism, our carbon expenditure, and approached each other with the splendour of our gifts and, yes, our imperfections."

The implication is in that wide generosity and humility of spirit the difficulty of co-operation will be overcome to yield the kinds of gifts that cannot be birthed any other way.

Co-operation, though not always easy, is the greater social enterprise promise.

We'd love to hear your social enterprise's story of engaging with your local community and the possibilities this has created, including how you've overcome the accompanying challenges of collaboration. Please contact the newsroom at [assignment@axiomnews.com](mailto:assignment@axiomnews.com). ■

## ENP CANADA AND AXIOM NEWS IN PARTNERSHIP

The Axiom News team of Generative Journalists has joined with ENP Canada to provide frequent, ongoing news about the emerging social enterprise ecosystem in Canada and beyond. Visit [www.SocialEnterpriseCanada.ca](http://www.SocialEnterpriseCanada.ca) to read new stories published Tuesdays and Thursdays.







## New Calgary Social Enterprise has Big IT Dreams for People with Autism

By Michelle Strutzenberger

Garth Johnson hopes his new Calgary business will help create a new kind of society where it's just common for people like his son, who have varying forms of disability, to find meaningful employment that allows them to use and hone their talents while earning a living wage.

Garth and two colleagues, Michael D'Souza and Joy Hewitt, are launching Meticulon, a social enterprise which will hire out IT consultants to perform an array of highly specialized tasks such as software quality assurance processes, data management and scanning services.

What makes Meticulon different from other consulting companies is that its employees will all have autism and exceptional abilities allowing them to perform these specialized tasks with a high degree of effectiveness.

In the summer of 2013 Meticulon

conducted a market needs assessment of Calgary organizations to identify potential customers for its services. The goal was to understand organizations' "pain points" and offer a solid business proposition in response. "Businesses are not going to employ (our consultants) because they're people with autism; they're going to employ our people because they're very good at what they do," Garth says.

Meticulon is inspired by and modelling itself after Passwerk, a Belgian company which has been successful both financially and in creating meaningful, long-term employment for people who have autism through a similar IT services provision model.

About three months ahead of schedule, thanks in large part to Passwerk's generous sharing of its assessment and training process, Meticulon reviewed applications

from its first round of prospective consultants in the fall of 2013.

Selected applicants undergo a rigorous three-week assessment process to determine if the work is a match with their skill-sets and interests. Garth says people best suited for this line of work include those who are interested and passionate about it and also demonstrate such qualities as exceptional attention to detail, diligence and an ability to understand what's required of them within the larger context.

Candidates who are determined to have a strong fit receive several weeks of training from Meticulon and the company places them in job positions identified in conjunction with its industry partners.

Meticulon continues to provide support as both the consultants and employers require.

"A lot of (the consultants) have all the gifts and abilities to do the actual task, but all the other pieces that surround the work life environment, they can struggle with," says Garth, who has experience both in



*Pictured on previous page: Meticulon job coaches. Above: Meticulon's second annual open house. Right: Meticulon representatives attending the National Autism Summit in October 2014.*



non-profit management and running a private business. “They don’t need to have their hand held, so much as they need mentoring through the process, and so we provide that as part of our service to them as our employees and facilitate that integration into the workplace.”

Meticulon also provides orientation and facilitation support and training for employers, though very little accommodation is usually required, Garth says.

The company aims to place 44 consultants by Year 5 of its current five-year plan.

As a business, Meticulon’s goal is to be self-sustaining and profit-generating, which it anticipates will be possible by about Year 5. Consultants will be hired out under contract to client organizations. In addition to paying their wages, Meticulon will fund its core staff, operating costs and also the necessary training and job facilitation support. Given this latter cost, earnings before interest and taxes will be smaller, but “that’s fine and we view that as an investment back in the business anyway,” says Garth, noting any profits will be

directed to expanding the programs and opening up new branch locations.

In addition to job creation in Calgary, Meticulon envisions replicating itself at least twice elsewhere in Canada within five years.

It’s also aiming to speak to a minimum of 1,000 businesses to encourage them to find ways to employ people who have autism and other disabilities inside their own corporate environments.

This is in line with the company’s larger aspiration to contribute to shifting society’s perception on the employability of people who have a disability.

“My ultimate hope is that we (as employers of people who have a disability) can be a functioning, enabling part of the mainstream industry,” says Garth.

“I think there is nothing worse than somebody who is capable of a lot and is trapped with no opportunity, so I’m really hoping that five years from now we’ve got a tremendous success story and we’re able to replicate it and inspire others to do something similar in their own fields in different ways.” ■

## Manitoba Releases Social Enterprise Strategy

Manitoba community groups and government have demonstrated leadership with the release of a co-developed Manitoba Social Enterprise Strategy this spring. The strategy’s 38 recommendations offer a roadmap for developing the sector through the engagement of both government and the community.

## Success Themes in Supportive Employment

Last fall, Enterprising Non-profits released the findings of year-long research into the success factors of employment social enterprises. The report, which identifies 11 practices or success themes, includes a toolkit to help enterprises put these findings into practice. See infographic on page 11.

## Did You Know?

Surveys of the social enterprise sector have been conducted in B.C., Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and the Territories. The Canadian Social Enterprise Sector Survey Project is lead by researchers Peter R. Elson, Institute for Community Prosperity, Mount Royal University and Peter Hall, Urban Studies, Simon Fraser University and gives us a profile of the social enterprise landscape in Canada. Thank you to everyone who participated. These surveys were made possible with the support of the Trico Charitable Foundation, Mount Royal University and Simon Fraser University. As part of the enp Canada pilot, this project is funded in part by the Government of Canada’s Employment and Social Development Canada. Please visit our website for more information: [www.SESS.ca](http://www.SESS.ca).





## 'Our Successes are Bound Together:' Hope Blooms Founder to Community

*Continued from page 1.*

"It was immediately apparent to me that, from its beginning, priority had been given to developing relationships as a major part of its foundation," says Sarina, who joined as a co-ordinator.

"Whether six or 60 years old, first- or fifth-generation Canadian, single parents, large families, new farmers who had never dug in the soil, or veteran farmers with the seasons etched into their hands, everyone felt they owned and were a part of something that their hard work had created — something to be proud of."

A youth-led grassroots project, Hope

Blooms includes 27 garden plots with more than 40 youth involved. It has its own greenhouse and a commercial kitchen where the youth make salad dressings that are sold to community.

The social enterprise has received numerous awards and cross-country media coverage.

Hope Blooms was created with the intention of addressing unequal access to nutritious food, engaging at-risk youth, building a small social enterprise and offering the opportunity for anyone to help make the local community more beautiful. But the strong foundation of relationships on which the enterprise

has been built has led to much more, Sarina notes.

Social support networks have been strengthened; opportunities for people to develop employable skills have been created and youth leadership in the community encouraged.

"Every year more youth join, the food production site expands, and more bottles of our fresh herb dressing are made and sold, contributing thousands of dollars into our scholarship fund for these youth to attend post-secondary in the future," says Sarina.

Financially, the project has very little secure long-term funding, yet the hard work, determination and many long nights of grant writing by founder Jessie Jollymore has ensured that year after year there is money for the program to operate. Many local



businesses, foundations, government branches and individuals with whom the story of Hope Blooms has resonated, have also been integral to the program flourishing, says Sarina. These organizations have not only provided support in the form of grants, donations, and spreading the word, but many have partnered with Hope Blooms, offered ingredients at cost and offered to market its dressings.

“Likewise, the incredible amount of volunteer and work hours put in by parents, seniors and other community members have kept it community-run and thriving,” Sarina says.

But if anyone has been integral to the vitality of the enterprise, it is the local youth.

“The youth are the drivers of this project, and if it were not for the incredible enthusiasm, courage, determination, intelligence, creativity, and hard work of these youth, this project wouldn’t be,” Sarina says.

“They come in after school and on weekends to make dressings, complete orders, tend to our urban farm, process food, and serve the community while still balancing homework, caring for siblings and being a kid.”

Sarina says she has learned more from these youth about integrity, courage, authenticity, resilience, and leadership than she ever thought possible. “They truly embody the essence of ‘richness being a state of mind’, and it is thanks to the collective contributions of everyone involved that this community is very rich.”

As for encouraging more of the wider community to become involved in social enterprise and other efforts similar to Hope Blooms, an integral piece is demonstrating to people that “our successes are bound together,” Sarina says.

Hope Blooms is not operated as, or considered a charity. “Rather, we approach issues such as childhood development, food security, health,



*Previous page: A dedicated Hopes Blooms youth. Above: The youth engaged with Hope Blooms have taught her more than she ever thought possible, Sarina says.*

social entrepreneurship, and leadership development as social investments that have real benefits for the wider community.

“We see these engagement pieces as part of a social weave that connects us all — whether you are a business leader, a not-for-profit, or a community member at large.

“The more investment, social, financial and otherwise, we have in projects like Hope Blooms that strengthen our social fabric, the greater our collective ability becomes in building diverse, resilient, and beautiful environments as individuals and as a society.” ■

“The youth are the drivers of this project, and if it were not for the incredible enthusiasm, courage, determination, intelligence, creativity, and hard work of these youth, this project wouldn’t be.”

— Sarina Piercy, co-ordinator, Hope Blooms



## Employee's Life Changed, Thanks to Social Enterprise

*Continued from page 1.*  
couldn't read or write.

Impact Junk Solutions is a social enterprise launched by WOTCH Community Mental Health Services that is committed to supporting people who face multiple barriers.

Kevin Dickins, WOTCH community programs manager and one of Impact's founders, says he and Impact's operations lead Nick Soave looked at each other during Steve's interview and shared a moment where they considered the assets Steve would bring to the workplace. They hired him.

Since working with Impact, Steve's life has changed. He's reconnected with his son who now lives with him, he buys food at a grocery store instead of lining up at a food bank, and he pays for his son's music lessons.

"He's a father again, he is a contributing member to the local economy, he's a taxpaying citizen," says Kevin. "He's

really achieved that status again of doing something he enjoys and giving back to other people."

Living in a housing complex with other individuals who may be struggling, Steve has become the person other tenants go to when they need a household item. The junk removal enterprise keeps good items in its warehouse, and Steve is able to help people access the items.

"He has done that for countless families," says Nick, noting as a result of his struggles and recovery he is a better humanitarian.

Kevin says Steve, and others like him at the 16-person operation, are the reason for doing the work they do.

"Our whole crew is made up of people with exciting and different stories just like Steve," says Kevin.

Impact was launched in May 2012, after a year of planning which Kevin describes as a "weird roller-coaster ride" as they hoped to finish the business plan and have clients interested in the services.

The idea for a junk removal business came out of WOTCH Community Mental Health Services' partnerships in the community with different housing providers. The agency was already hired to do some light janitorial work, and Impact looked to leverage those clients into new customers.

"The moment when we got the first call to go and do this kind of thing it was just pure excitement and it turned to nervous excitement and then things started taking on a life of its own," Kevin says.

Impact's first job was done with a staff member's borrowed pickup truck and a garden trailer, a makeshift test run to determine if they could do junk removal, how to price it and whether it would work.

Now Impact Junk Solutions has a truck with 400 cubic feet of space and has recently moved into a new warehouse space that is shared with another social enterprise. ■



# Young Woman Nurtures Dream to Create Livelihood 'I Can Feel Good About'

Some friends and people she grew up with have undergone troubling changes, Bonnie Heilman has observed, since they took on lucrative careers in Western Canada's oil and mining industry.

"It's heartbreaking. Sure they have a job that pays really well, and it's boosting the economy, but beyond that, how good is it really for people and the planet?" says the Saskatoon resident.

"There just have to be other healthier ways for us to exist."

Bonnie is on what she calls a personal mission to figure out how she can earn a living "that contributes to the world constructively."

She's looking to social enterprise as a model that will enable herself and hopefully a few others she works with to do just that — "to find livelihoods that we can feel really good about it."

A growing number of people, including those in the oil and mining industries, seem to be reassessing their definitions of success and what it takes to create a meaningful life, Bonnie adds. "People are utterly yearning for other options."

Recognizing the potential in business versus non-profit work alone to act as agent of social change has been a journey in itself for Bonnie, who spent the last 12 years working with a nonprofit youth support agency. It was her experience of the global financial crisis and also participating in Occupy Saskatoon that convinced her of the importance of business within the fabric of the larger community and the possibility it holds to be generate so much more than shareholder returns, she says.

As one of the first steps on her new path, she signed up for an entrepreneurship course with a Saskatoon institute, the

Praxis School of Entrepreneurship this fall. She is one of a very few exploring the social enterprise model, she says.

Her aspiration is to create a social enterprise with a mission to build the capacity of local communities to support young people to find their sense of place and purpose in the community.

She fully anticipates the measure of her enterprise's financial success will be different than those of the typical for-profit model, not necessarily "wild profitability" but

that she's able to enable livelihoods for herself and a few people, as an example.

It gives her chills to hear about the burgeoning social enterprise movement worldwide as manifested in the Oct. 2-4 Social Enterprise World Forum in Calgary, Bonnie adds. The uptake of the model by others heightens her own sense of the possibilities in social enterprise for herself and the future of society.

"I'm just trying to figure out where do I fit, what can I do that's going to be most useful, that's going to play to my strengths and contribute strategically."

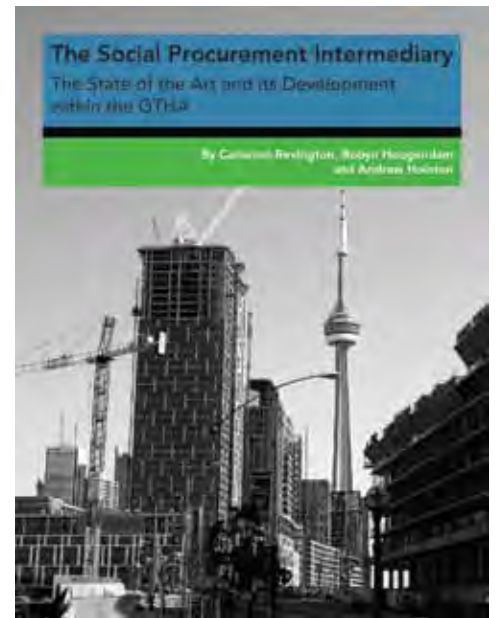
A recent message circulating Twitterverse proposed that social enterprise is when "going to work is your good deed of the day."

While Bonnie says she can hear the critical voices of those pointing out that "somebody has to do the dirty work," and she can totally understand that belief, she allows herself to dream just a moment.

"Wouldn't it be nice if we could all feel like the work we were doing was a good deed," she says. "Imagine how that would change the way people feel about themselves and their community." — MS ■



Bonnie Heilman



## Report Highlights Value of Social Procurement Intermediary

A report released earlier this year identifies that social procurement is taking hold in Canada functionally and conceptually, but requires further action. The report proposes that an intermediary operating in this space can and will play a defining role, both in envisioning the work and setting the bar for what can be achieved.

## Enterprising Non-profits Canada: The Watercooler

Enterprising Non-profits Canada is intended to be a gathering spot for the social enterprise ecosystem — a place to find support and share your story for the purpose of building your enterprise. Check out [www.socialenterpriseCanada.ca](http://www.socialenterpriseCanada.ca)! We include a Marketplace (a place for social enterprises to promote themselves), Resource Library and Newsroom (which is always open to receiving news tips).

# Aberdeen Opens Arms to Social Enterprise

In the heart of the Prairies the people of Aberdeen, Sask. have opened their arms and hearts to a unique effort launched by two young women, Lynette Zacharias and Krista Neufeld.

That welcome has been key to the effort's success.

Lynette and Krista opened a home called Farm in the Dell for 10 adults who have an intellectual disability on a sprawling rural property two years ago.

Their aspiration is to enable people who have an intellectual disability to experience a safe home, meaningful work and independent living — in a rural setting.

People who live on the property help care for farm animals and tend to a large garden each summer. They also create products that are sold in the community, as well as complete other types of contract work.

Local residents can relate to this lifestyle of farming, gardening and working with one's hands, which is why Krista believes the community has been so receptive.

Krista and Lynette made a presentation to the town council in the initial phase of the effort, which helped spark interest.

They continue to join community events as much as possible, raising awareness and creating new connections.

Having that receptivity from the community is important for psychological well-being. While not all of the people on the farm are from the area, all feel very much at home there now, Krista says.

Farm in the Dell also relies on the community to support its efforts to provide meaningful work opportunities for the people it works with. Residents make picnic tables and flower boxes to sell. They plant and care for flowers in Aberdeen, and they have work contracts with other businesses.



*Animals are a great source of companionship and can support therapeutic growth, Farm in the Dell founders say.*

The organization has also been able to recruit a board of “very dedicated” directors, without whom this effort couldn't survive, the women say.

“The majority of our residents moved from the family home and it's been really neat to see them, just like their siblings and parents, move on to the adult part of their life, where they contribute to their household and go to work every day.”

— Krista Neufeld, co-founder, Farm in the Dell

Enterprising Non-Profits defines social enterprise as a business operated by a non-profit entity. As a business, a social enterprise has a product or service it

sells to customers; it also has a defined social, cultural or environmental value.

While Krista and Lynette say they don't typically refer to their organization as a social enterprise, they agree that, according to such a definition, that's what it is in part.

Seeing the organization's impact on the residents themselves is most rewarding, they add.

“The majority of our residents moved from the family home and it's been really neat to see them, just like their siblings and parents, move on to the adult part of their life, where they contribute to their household and go to work every day,” Krista says.

“It's really neat to see their sense of pride in that.”

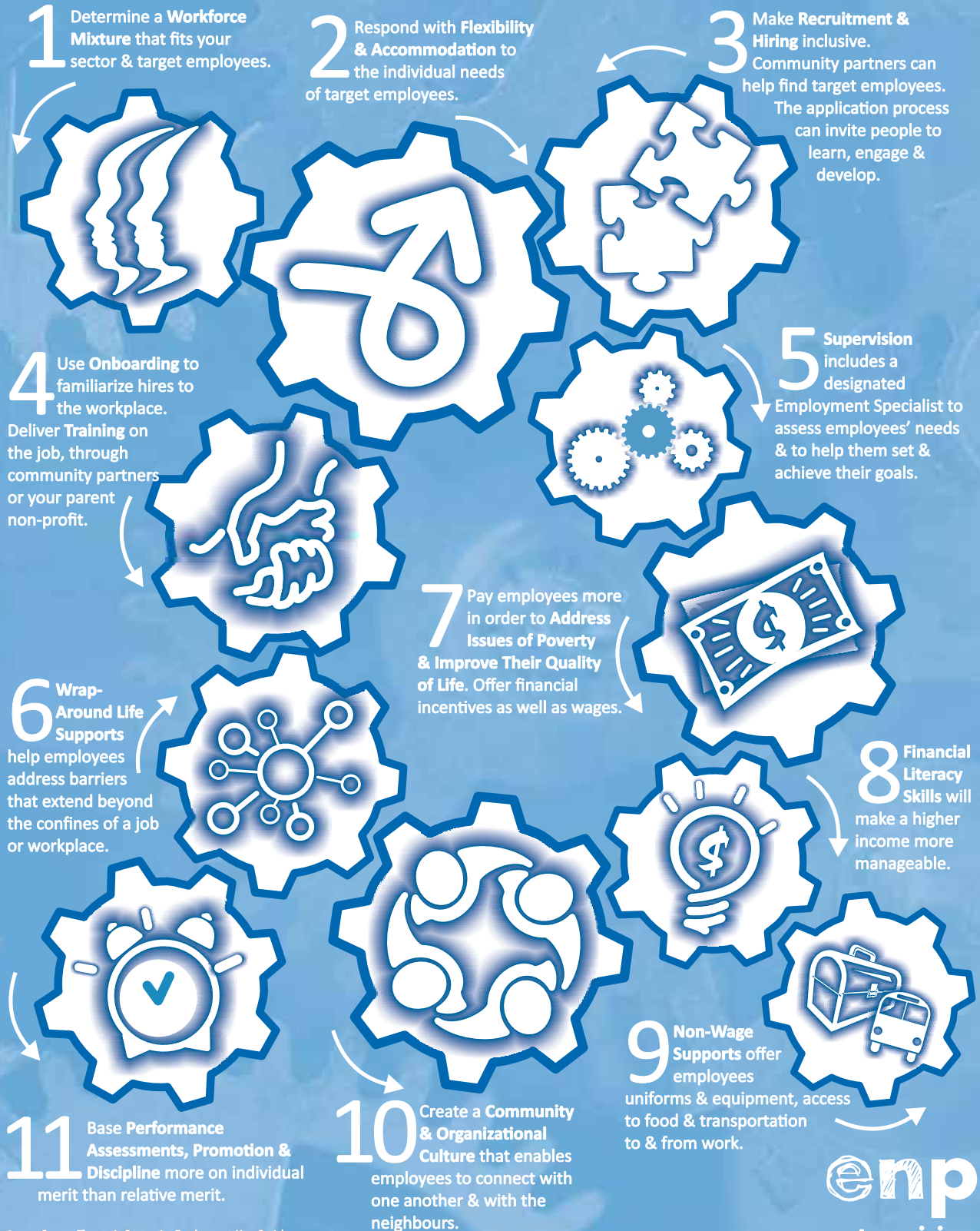
There is a significant need for residential and employment support services for adults who have an intellectual disability in Saskatchewan.

“Present services are great, but are full to capacity,” a Farm in the Dell write-up states. ■ — MS



# 11 Success Themes in Supportive Employment

Social enterprise has a transformative impact on the lives of people who face multiple barriers to employment. Recent research shows that 11 practices are critical to that success.



Source: Success Themes In Supportive Employment: How Social Enterprise Connects People with Jobs & Jobs with People (2014), published by Enterprising Non-Profits, URL [www.enpbc.ca](http://www.enpbc.ca)

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The DreamRider program “in action” in the classroom. Next page: DreamRider co-founders and performers, Ian Gschwind and Sara Holt.

# Vancouver Social Enterprise Trains Kids to be Environmental Superheroes

By Michelle Strutzenberger

After a decades-long journey that started with watching a parking lot replace a rainforest in her backyard, Vanessa LeBourdais’ deep passion to restore the earth has led to a solution she believes holds some of the greatest promise for creating real change.

That solution centres on tapping the imagination and energy of children.

For the last 17 years, Vanessa has been working with her team mates at the social enterprise they founded, DreamRider Productions, to create, produce and deliver live theatre productions to students in Greater Vancouver.

The intent is to inspire students to do their part to conserve water and energy and to reduce, reuse and recycle waste.

The program has worked far beyond

what its originators dreamed as students have gone home and made significant changes in their and their families’ lives.

Just recently, Vanessa joined a class in an Abbotsford school where a Grade 4 student shared how she’s convinced

her mother, who travels 67 kilometres to Vancouver to work each day, to give up her car for transit.

“Kids just get it. This is the air we breathe, this is the water we drink, we have to take care of it. It’s very simple,” says Vanessa, whose power for writing songs “that stick in your head” is a key gift that has sparked this inspiration in students.

After working yearly with more than 70,000 students of all ages in more than 200 Greater Vancouver schools, DreamRider wanted to reach even more students — without necessarily travelling.

First attempts included producing a TV show, but it didn’t yield the response the creators sought, as students essentially “sat and stared at the screen,” Vanessa says.

“We were like, ‘Oh, that’s not going to do anything in the real world’,” she says.

That failure led to explorations around how interactive media could create real-world change.

Following experiments in classrooms and a prototype last year, DreamRider is now launching the Planet Protector Academy. It’s an interactive, curriculum-linked program for Grade 3-6.

“One of the things we really stress is that it’s a training ground for superheroes,” Vanessa notes. “We say, ‘Welcome to the Planet Protector Academy, you’re all apprentices,’ and they really are. We go through how to train a kid to take action in the world and so that’s what they end up doing, they end up feeling like planet protectors, 83 per cent of them, according to a survey last year.”

Vanessa says she believes it’s the kids



Vanessa LeBourdais



who take on that identity who are going to last as changemakers.

Another key differentiator to the program is that it includes regular instruction for classes to do activities together — from filling out their planet protector ID cards to writing raps to inspire others to recycle.

As planet protectors, students also have a mission to involve their families in making changes at home that will help restore the environment. They then have to report back.

“The whole plan of this was that we want to measure what we’re doing but in a fun way, because measurement isn’t very fun. So we made it a game with teams and points and it’s very exciting,” Vanessa says.

“The really exciting part of it now, is that we’re getting really amazing feedback . . . families are changing massively,” she adds.

Interest is rising from across North America, not only in the program but the root cause of DreamRider’s success as other organizations consider applying the same approach to other social issues.

“The potential is huge; we feel like we’re on the verge of immense growth and possibilities,” Vanessa says. ■

“We go through how to train a kid to take action in the world and so that’s what they end up doing, they end up feeling like planet protectors, 83 per cent of them, according to a survey last year.”

— Vanessa LeBourdais, co-founder, DreamRider Productions



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# 'I Didn't Want P.E.I. to be Left Behind in this Social Enterprise/Finance Movement'

It was while researching for her MBA that Georgina Bassett first came across the concept of social enterprise and found herself hurtled into a sphere she's become almost obsessive about, she says with a chuckle.

"I started reading about social capital, social innovation, social finance and was really intrigued by the notion that a company doesn't have to exist to just make money for themselves and profit just for themselves but what they do could be beneficial to society," says the P.E.I. resident.



*Georgina Bassett*

"I thought to myself, 'We need to have that kind of model here on P.E.I.'"

When the Canadian government put out a call for concepts for social finance last year, Georgina says she was the only P.E.I. resident to make a submission.

"I didn't want P.E.I. to be left behind in this movement," she says.

About a year later, Georgina has launched her own social enterprise, BID Inc. (Bid. Invest. Develop.), which she describes as P.E.I.'s first social enterprise for entrepreneurship.

Her aspiration is to support the building, investing and developing of social innovation and entrepreneurship in her province.

She's been meeting with local government officials, business leaders and non-profit representatives to provide information and discuss the potential in social enterprise.

She is also hoping to find others who are interested in social enterprise and would like to work with her in developing a forum to build knowledge, awareness and support around the model.

"You can't do it alone. You really need a group of likeminded individuals to say we'll do this as a group," she says. — *MS* ■

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## Saint John Social Enterprise Supports Adult Learners

With a goal of going to college and becoming a personal support worker, Barbara Gillet is working on completing her Grade 12 through a Saint John, N.B. adult learning organization. And while she does, she's working and earning a living wage through a new social enterprise the organization has launched.

"This helps a lot with providing for my children," Barbara says, noting she doesn't expect she'd be working otherwise, given she doesn't have her high-school diploma. It also doesn't help that finding work is difficult in Saint John these days.

About nine months ago the Saint John Learning Exchange, which supports about 500 adult learners each year, opened the doors of its eco-friendly cleaning social enterprise.

The idea for the enterprise was sparked by a local businessman and Learning Exchange investor, who thought

residential cleaning would have a strong local market, says Learning Exchange executive director Christina Fowler.

Offering a chance for adult learners who are going through the Learning Exchange programming to also make a living wage aligns with the Learning Exchange's mission, says Christina.

In addition to wages, learners can refine and demonstrate workplace skills, which can be transferred to other jobs they might take in the future.

The social enterprise, called Voila!, has been set up as a for-profit "stand alone" business with the Learning Exchange operating as the parent company.

Currently, the business employs one Learning Exchange staff member as a business development manager and a team of two cleaners.

The social enterprise's development journey to date has had its ups and downs, Christina admits. "It's like any

other business," she says. "It's hard to get customers and manage the bottom line."

Christina describes managing both a non-profit and for-profit as "exciting and a little scary," particularly because the language and subject areas are sharply contrasting between the two. "(Thinking about) customers and sales and marketing is very different from funding and contracts and learner recruitment."

A strong team is integral to managing this dichotomy, she adds.

The goal for Voila! is to make a profit, which will be returned to the Learning Exchange, increasing the non-profit's autonomy to fund and deliver programming.

As for Barbara, in addition to earning a living, she says she appreciates the learning opportunity her employment with Voila! provides. She is grooming her knowledge of eco-friendly cleaning products and polishing up her customer service expertise. ■ — *MS*



# Co-op Creates 50 New Jobs for Aboriginal Youth, Others

*Continued from page 1.*

Ltd., which began 25 years ago and operated a grocery store previously. It's one of the few aboriginal-led worker co-ops in Canada, elevating personal and social healing through economic empowerment. The co-op's member workers gain skills and knowledge with training and employment while generating economic opportunities for local producers of goods and services as well as community enrichment.

*"It brings hope of a different way to organizing economic life that seems to work better in many cases in the aboriginal community."*

— Hazel Corcoran, executive director, Canadian Worker Co-operative Federation

Neechi Commons also strives to revitalize commerce in the economically-challenged Winnipeg neighbourhood in which it chose to locate.

Neechi is the largest commercial employer of Aboriginal Peoples in Winnipeg, which is home to the largest urban aboriginal population in Canada, or about 75,000 people. The co-op has created upwards of 50 new employment opportunities for aboriginal youth and other residents of the neighbourhood. A job fair for the commons generated a huge response, Hazel says.

Its work is based on a number of principles, from creating and purchasing locally-sourced and produced goods and local reinvestment of surpluses to community-oriented business ownership and creating healthy, sustainable communities.

"It brings hope of a different way to organizing economic life that seems

to work better in many cases in the aboriginal community," says Hazel, executive director of the Canadian Worker Co-operative Federation of which the Neechi co-op is an original member.

Hazel notes that the co-operative system's general principles of solidarity and mutual support are also found in many aboriginal communities, especially in the Far North where co-ops are the second largest employer.

"It's a sharing culture," she says. "And what they found in Winnipeg is a way of living a more traditional life in the modern space."

Neechi's transition to the larger, more diversified Neechi Commons from its former smaller space has raised the spectre of balancing management of operations and finances with inadequate resources available. Challenges during the construction phase of the new space left the co-op carrying excessive debt and lacking the working capital needed to hire the anticipated staff and to fully develop the business according to plan.

This has led the Canadian Worker Co-operative Federation to create the Neechi Support Committee, which is helping to source new capital including grant funding for social enterprises, and to implement plans.

Hazel says the federation seeks to provide assistance to members facing challenges, especially in cases like Neechi where a significant number of people are employed.

Neechi hopes to launch an investment share offering (ISO) soon, coupled with a tax credit to Manitobans who invest — it's "an excellent program" Hazel says she'd love to see implemented in other provinces to support co-operatives.

If approved, this would be the second ISO offered by Neechi Foods Co-op; the first supported the commons initiative.

This time, Hazel says, investors would



*Visitors to Neechi Commons can learn about the making and significance of creations like this Northern Star blanket.*

help to sustain "an important space for hope in the aboriginal community." Neechi facilitates learning of hard skills as well as traditional artisan skills, and is both a showcase and source for local and aboriginal goods and services.

"There are all sorts of learning opportunities. They are very focused on education," Hazel says.

A crowd-sourcing campaign may also be in the offing that would stand as another avenue for investment.

There's another very easy way for Winnipeggers and visitors to show support — by shopping at Neechi Commons.

Hazel says consumers can park right on site and will embark on a unique shopping experience, with an array of local-, regional- and aboriginal-sourced foods and products at competitive prices.

"It's a wonderful place to go," Hazel says. "There's a great community spirit and it has really awesome products."

Hazel's highest hope is that Winnipeggers will learn the story of Neechi Commons and be inspired by its principled work to engage with their shopping and investment dollars, and attendance at community events.

"Neechi Commons is very strategically important," Hazel says.

"This is something unique that is making a difference in a place where difference is needed and in a positive way." ■



# Land-based Atlantic Salmon Farm's First Harvest Marks a Milestone

By Lisa Bailey

Working with SOS Marine Conservation Foundation and Tides Canada, the 'Namgis First Nation of Northern Vancouver Island launched Canada's first land-based, closed containment Atlantic salmon farm in March 2013. The goal was to prove the economies of growing Atlantic salmon sustainably, on land, separated from the marine environment.

A year later, on April 22, 2014, the farm's first harvested salmon became available at Safeway stores in Alberta and B.C. under the Kuterra brand name, which combines the 'Namgis terms for salmon and land.

Among those recognizing this stepping-stone was Enterprising Non-profits (ENP) which provided a \$10,000 grant in 2010 for the 'Namgis to conduct a project execution plan.

"ENP continues to be one of the only sources for early stage planning funds and support, while the need continues to grow," ENP program manager Kim Buksa says. "We are always happy and proud to see these funds leveraged or grow into something important and substantial for the community."

Jackie Hilderling, communications director with the SOS Marine Conservation Foundation, a project partner, says the inaugural harvest is an important milestone in the farm's progression, especially since this first group of fish "had everything thrown at them," including some initial production-associated challenges.

But the anticipated advantages of farming Atlantic salmon in closed containment were realized, including growing out the fish within a year using

less feed and in optimal and controlled animal husbandry conditions, which means no use of pesticides or antibiotics. Feedback on the look and taste of the fish has been highly positive, Jackie adds.

The business is 100-per-cent owned by the 'Namgis First Nation, heightening its social value and relevance for achieving a greater good as a potential model for socio-economic success among First Nations. The 'Namgis aim to demonstrate that land-raised, closed containment Atlantic salmon is a sustainable alternative to the open-net ocean operations farming this domesticated fish, which are sparking concerns over possible negative impacts on wild salmon stocks and the marine environment.

Jackie says many eyes are on the land-based farm as it strives to make the economies of a proven salmon farming method work.

"We realize how important this project is and how it's being scrutinized," she says.

One of the elements being debated is the large capital cost of the modular, state-of-the-art facility to create the





optimal environment for the Atlantic salmon. Building the first module cost \$10.7 million, but Jackie says some important lessons have been learned on how to reduce these expenses.

“As we build out to other modules, we have the lessons learned but we also have the economy of scale as we expand,” Jackie says.

Moving forward, the short-term goal is to make the farm an economic success for the 'Namgis First Nation while the ultimate, bigger-picture objective is to catalyze change in the salmon farming industry with a high-quality, sustainable and traceable land-raised product that is affordable.

The Kuterra project's plan is to expand to commercial scale (1,000 to 2,500 metric tonnes), initially with one more module, but there is room for another four. The feasibility of establishing a hatchery is also being looked at, and an ultimate plan would be to develop aquaponics, a potential value-added product which utilizes the fish's liquid waste to grow plants.

Jackie says they have to “prove that

we can keep this high-quality product going as a weekly harvest and to continue spreading the word and technology so that others might come on board.”

On the latter front, project partner Tides Canada is holding aquaculture innovation workshops twice a year to share expertise amongst international and other parties that are utilizing recirculation aquaculture systems. Tides Canada is also ensuring that an independent environmental monitor is in place to make sure the 'Namgis farm is held to the highest standard.

“All kinds of performance metrics” are also in place as part of the required reporting to Tides Canada, Jackie says. She adds that the organization aims to shape the catalyzing force for change in the salmon farming industry, by proving land-based, closed containment is economically and environmentally sustainable.

For more on the Kuterra salmon, visit [www.kuterra.com](http://www.kuterra.com) and for more on the SOS Marine Conservation Foundation, visit [www.saveoursalmon.ca](http://www.saveoursalmon.ca). ■

*Previous page: Senior administrator for the 'Namgis First Nation, George Speck, and 'Namgis Chief Bill Cranmer. (Photo: JR Rardon). Above: The first harvest of Kuterra land-raised Atlantic salmon.*

“As we build out to other modules, we have the lessons learned but we also have the economy of scale as we expand”

— Jackie Hildering, communications director, SOS Marine Conservation Foundation

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# Thriving Nova Scotia Social Enterprise Offering Hands-up

*By Deron Hamel*

In the 1980s, Nova Scotia Hospital psychologist Dr. Norman Greenberg was working with patients with mental-health conditions when he had a unique idea: combine the patient recovery process with business.

It proved to be a win-win idea: meet consumer needs while providing people who have disabilities with job skills needed to achieve greater economic independence.

In 1992, a social enterprise was born with this concept in mind. Today, Affirmative Ventures, originally called Affirmative Industries, helps up to 88 people with disabilities annually gain the skills they need to thrive independently.

Through Affirmative Ventures' three

Halifax-area businesses — Pet Stuff On the Go and Common Values Emporium, both pet supply shops, and Mort's Convenience — the organization's clients get on-the-job training for 12 weeks.

Once people complete their training they collaborate with a job coach and a job developer who help them obtain the skills needed to find employment and flourish independently. Affirmative Ventures even offers a financial literacy training program called Skills to Pay the Bills to help people better budget their money.

"We had a belief that people with disabilities have a right to work just like anybody else, but that people needed a vehicle and a tool to get training before

they moved on to their own jobs," explains director of operations Lori Edgar.

"And that's what our businesses are; a vehicle and a tool that we use to (provide) employment training."

Affirmative Ventures also has a 10-unit apartment building called Affirmative House. Lack of affordable housing is an issue many people with mental-health conditions face, Lori says.

To continue to soften the impact of the affordable housing shortage, Affirmative Ventures is in the process of building a 42-unit block, says Lori, adding the organization is also planning to launch another business in the near future.

Visit [www.affirmativeindustries.ca](http://www.affirmativeindustries.ca) to learn more about Affirmative Ventures. ■

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## Stone Soup Catering Serves Up Soft Skills

*Continued from page 1.*

learners each year. Between 80 and 100 learners participate daily in the organization's programs, including literacy, GED preparation, essential skills training and transition-to-work programs.

Several years ago the non-profit was one of five chosen from across Canada to participate in an initiative exploring how to better train adults on essential workplace skills. The initiative emphasized "real-world" projects as an effective way to learn.

As a result of that experience the Learning Exchange began focusing on cooking as a venue to learn and demonstrate soft skills, such as teamwork and responding to feedback, as well as creating a budget and following through on planning.

Needing mouths to enjoy what learners were preparing, the non-profit began inviting partner organizations, government officials and community members for community dinners.

Seeing how well the dinners were received, and enjoying the experience themselves, the Learning Exchange team began entertaining the notion of taking things to another level.

There was added reason to do so as a staff member was passionate about holistic, healthy food, and a learner revealed a knack for cooking and interest in developing a catering business.

So the dabbling continued — hosting community dinners for free or finding sponsors, as well as cooking for learners and the Learning Exchange's board of directors.

This evolved into some paid gigs, and then some more.

Today, another learner, who happens to be a talented chef, and a staff member run what has been developed into a social enterprise.

There is a significant local market for what the social enterprise offers, says executive director Christina Fowler.

"A lot of our non-profit partners and

city council and government partners call and ask us to cater for them often, and we get a lot of really good feedback on all the healthy food we have," she says, adding there is also interest in expanding the enterprise to provide training for more learners.

Stone Soup Catering, as the enterprise has come to be called, currently employs one learner about 20-25 hours a week. A Learning Exchange staff member oversees and manages the enterprise. Profits are returned to the non-profit to support its mission around providing healthy food and nutrition options and programming for learners.

Christina says she's most excited about the opportunity through this social enterprise, and another the Exchange has recently launched, to provide additional revenue streams for the non-profit.

She's also thrilled about supporting learners in their transition to work, especially for the chance to have them learn and demonstrate soft skills on the job. ■



# Winnipeg Mental Health Social Enterprise Shares Elements of Success

Marv Thiessen is out shovelling snow with his work crew in Winnipeg when he agrees to a brief call with the Enterprising Non-profits Canada (ENP-CA) news service to talk about how his social enterprise is able to act as a compassionate employer while delivering quality service.

Marv is a team leader with SSCOPE Inc., a registered charitable non-profit that provides mostly casual and part-time employment opportunities to people with mental health issues. SSCOPE owns and operates enterprises providing services in lawn and yard care, moving and deliveries and property maintenance.

The organization currently averages

“The strength (of the team leaders) has to be in understanding business, understanding customers, working well with customers, being efficient on the job.”

— Bob Rempel, executive director, SSCOPE

50-60 employees per bimonthly payroll.

Like all social enterprises, SSCOPE has both social and business goals. It aims to recognize, respect and support its employees, but it also seeks to deliver quality service to customers. So what has it found are keys to success in achieving this two-pronged intention?

In large part, it comes down to exactly what he's doing at that moment,

Marv tells the ENP-CA news service — working as a team leader right alongside the crew — all of whom are living with a mental health issue.

SSCOPE executive director Bob Rempel agrees.

“The strength (of the team leaders) has to be in understanding business, understanding customers, working well with customers, being efficient on the job,” Bob says.

Given the range of physical capabilities the SSCOPE teams includes, patience and understanding are key qualities to live out each day, Bob and Marv add.

Team leaders have to buy into the notion that the work experience is going to be beneficial to the mental health of those on the team.

“We have to be accepting that the work won't always quite match the robustness we'd like to see (right away) so sometimes it will simply take us longer to achieve the quality that we think needs to happen,” Marv says, adding this could sometimes mean the team leader pitches in a little extra to enhance a service. He notes that in some cases, there is a need to pass on a request for patience from customers too.

To also help ensure success, SSCOPE aims to bid on jobs that it knows its team can do.

All members are encouraged to “think like owners” in the enterprise, which can benefit both themselves and the organization, Bob says. This can increase self-esteem, for instance, as customers indicate their satisfaction, and help ensure employment for the future.

Currently, SSCOPE is able to fund about 85 per cent of its activities



through its business revenues, with grants and donations covering the rest.

Bob is a strong advocate of non-profits such as SSCOPE working hard to experience success through their social-enterprise activities, if they have them.

“If you want to live on your own and you're getting close to that and getting closer all the time, that would make the people in the community want to give you more work, want to give you donations, or anything you possibly need,” he says.

SSCOPE is committed to directing its earnings to the competitive wages it pays its employees, as opposed to becoming “top heavy” in administrative costs.

As is the case with other social enterprises working with people who have a disability, most of SSCOPE's employees work part time, looking to not only gain employment experience or join a positive work environment but also to top up their provincial social assistance.

The SSCOPE model is inspiring other organizations. Bob is in conversations with people from Kenora, Ont. and Steinbach, Man. about potentially launching a similar service in those areas.

To learn more about SSCOPE, visit [www.sscope.org](http://www.sscope.org). ■ — MS



# Common Thread Sews Up Success as Social Enterprise

*By Michelle Strutzenberger*

In early 2014, Melanie Conn celebrated the closure of another significant deal for her social enterprise, Common Thread, which sources street banners and other fabric to convert into durable products such as tote bags.

In the four years since its launch, Common Thread has had many successes, says Melanie, co-founder and marketing manager of the Vancouver-based enterprise.

For instance, in 2012, the International Year of Co-ops (IYC), Common Thread aggressively marketed a tote bag with the IYC label to credit unions and co-ops across Canada. It sold thousands of bags and its producers demonstrated how much they had learned by meeting the demand even when they received orders with very short notice, Melanie says.

In 2013, Common Thread had its first large contract of items for resale in a retail setting. Drawstring bags for Vancouver Whitecaps Football Club using their signage were sold at the games and online in the team's e-store. Melanie notes the enterprise has since leveraged that experience and the fantastic video the Whitecaps made to close sales with several other organizations.

Melanie has been involved in working with women on social and economic development since the early 1970s in Vancouver, participating in many multi-bottom line projects in many different ways.

She found herself involved in Common Thread's start-up while working as both a consultant in the development of new co-ops and a teacher at Simon Fraser University's Centre for Sustainable Community Development.





In 2008, Melanie researched the opportunity for some kind of intermediary to help women's sewing enterprises and program get more sales. "Before I knew it I had partnered with Jenette MacArthur who worked at the Kettle Society's employment program to establish Common Thread."

At first, the plan was to get contracts and divvy them up among a few groups the two new business partners were acquainted with. But then they realized they needed to become much more hands-on, for instance, providing production co-ordination and training.

In the summer of 2009, Common Thread landed its first contract, up-cycling the City of Vancouver's pre-Olympic banners into 1,400 drawstring backpacks. "We were a little nervous, but excited too," Melanie says.

The enterprise convened a network of producers who pulled off a fantastic job on the packs, she adds, noting that after that "we were thrilled and confident about moving forward to get more contracts."

Today, Common Thread is a non-profit co-operative of seven organizational and

individual members operating sewing programs or supporting the enterprise's work in other ways.

Common Thread's main social purpose is creating employment. It provides sewing, training and production coaching for newcomers to Canada, people living with mental illness and others who face barriers to mainstream employment.

There are very few opportunities for women who are newcomers to Canada or living with mental illness or other barriers to employment to learn skills and get paid work, Melanie notes. "Our goal is to provide a flexible and supportive learning and earning environment."

Common Thread's secondary purpose is environmental as it reclaims street banner material that would otherwise go to the landfill.

The enterprise has industrial equipment set up in two locations, including The Flag Shop, "our amazing for-profit partner," says Melanie. "For the last three years we have been doing production on their premises rent-free."

Common Thread also accommodates sewers who prefer to work at home. ■



# Alberta Social-purpose Business, Localize, Finds Answers to a Challenging Question

By Michelle Strutzenberger

Is it possible to integrate and live out a business' social purpose consistently and authentically — while also achieving financial sustainability? That's the question Meghan Dear kept asking herself several years ago as she developed her social-purpose business, Localize.

To be part of the Localize programs, retailers pay a small monthly subscription fee. Food producers access the benefits of the program for free, committing to transparency about their supplies and how they create their products.

"Seeing progress in multiple directions is what energizes me the most," Meghan

Consulting Group confirmed that in Localize's grocery store partners, customers are able to buy more local products when they can find them; food producers also sell more and can get listed by retailers more easily because they're local — a trait sought by retailers and from which they benefit.

The study, which reviewed Localize products sales at Calgary Co-op stores, found sales grew to more than \$26 million in 12 months — a category sales increase of over 9.6 per cent and gross profit increase of 14.7 per cent.

"This confirmed shoppers' appreciation for local food options and knowing the stories and people behind it," a press release states.

Localize also recently achieved B-Corp certification, a designation for companies that meet high quality and independent standards of social and environmental performance.

This achievement is especially meaningful to Meghan, she says, given the tension she's felt in running a for-profit business that is also a social business.

"In a lot of ways, our B-Corp certification reconciles that (tension) because they've gone behind the scenes to really look at what we're doing and where we're going."

Localize is the first Edmonton business to receive the B-Corp designation.

And in all of this, what's possible now that wasn't possible before?

"We're proving that a little piece of paper in a grocery store can help be part of creating a more sustainable food system," Meghan says.

"And we've tested and found ways to engage conventional retailers into this in a scalable and sustainable way." ■



Today, the Alberta resident can say with confidence that the answer is yes.

Launched in 2011, Localize is an Edmonton-based social-purpose business that helps to tell the stories behind local and regional foods through its smartphone-enabled shelf tags in grocery stores.

Each product with a Localize tag has a score that's been created by the Localize team based on the location of the product company's ownership, location of production or processing, origin of the ingredients, and its overall sustainability.

By scanning the Localize label with one's smartphone, a consumer can instantly learn even more about what they're feeding themselves and their families through Localize's online database — essentially a Wikipedia of local food that shares a wealth of additional information about the product.

says. "We've built a business that's proving to have a sustainable in-demand model, but then on the other side of that, there is a question of whether we're creating the impact that we wanted to create and we're getting really great numbers and validation on that as well."

Localize labels first appeared on the shelves of 24 Co-op stores throughout Calgary, Strathmore, Airdrie and High River in February 2013, highlighting more than 400 products hailing from Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Today, there are close to 10,000 registered Localize products, and more than 250 grocery stores throughout western Canada subscribing to the program. An Eastern Canada satellite office is also now open, and preliminary expansion into the U.S. is also underway.

A study by third-party Serecon



# Women Nonviolence Organization Leads Canada's First Shipping Container Housing Project

By Patricia Marcoccia

Atira Women's Resource Society — a not-for-profit organization committed to ending violence against women — stumbled into the property management business a decade ago; today, Atira OProperty Management Inc. is partnering to lead a cutting edge housing project for Canada — the nation's first recycled shipping container social housing project.

Twelve shipping containers have been repurposed into 320-square-foot self-contained residential units for women in the Vancouver Downtown Eastside.

“At the end of the day, a non-profit is . . . just a business that's designed to break even.”

— Janice Abbott, CEO, Atira

The project launched in August 2013, after two years of development inspired by BC Hydro's “House of the Future” — a recycled-shipping-container home that was demonstrated on BC Hydro's front lawn during the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. BC Hydro donated the House of the Future to Atira in the summer of 2010.

“For me (the shipping container housing development) is a really good example of what you can achieve when you're willing to take some risks and you've got folks who are willing to take risks with you,” says Atira CEO Janice Abbott.

The evolution for the not-for-profit organization to include its subsidiary social business occurred both intentionally and fortuitously. Janice began attending

social enterprise workshops in 1998, when the idea started to become a conversation in the non-profit world — though her interest in using the social enterprise approach to sustainably fund the organization came years before.

“One of the things I learned from a speaker in the States is to stick to something you know — look at your core services and that's the business you should go into,” she says. “We're a women nonviolence organization. That's our expertise. It was a bit offensive to think about how to make money off it. That was challenging.”

Since Atira provides housing, advocacy and support to any woman who identifies as someone who meets their organizational mandate, the organization consequently owns buildings and manages properties. They began doing this without specialized skills in property management, but they developed this skillset as it became central to their core mandate of providing safe environments for women. The social enterprise in property management launched in 2002 with the sole purpose of making money to donate back to the women's society.

“At the end of the day, a non-profit is a business; it's just a business that's designed to break even,” Janice says. “It's not that non-profits don't know how to run businesses.”

A few years after its incorporation, Atira developed a mandate to provide meaningful work for women facing barriers to employment. Today, this encompasses 93 per cent of Atira's employees — about 280 people aged 19-67, together speaking more than 24 languages. ■

*Pictured right: Exterior and interior views of the shipping container housing.*



# Halifax Circus 'Shuffles the Deck' for Youth in Difficulty

By Michelle Strutzenberger

When a Halifax youth first stepped into the yawning Halifax Circus gymnasium four years ago she was in rough shape.

Battling a drug addiction, she was drawn to what she saw in this large space with its vivid circus equipment and trained professionals warmly greeting her.

Leaving her troubles at the door, she set about to master one of the most difficult of the circus acts — riding the unicycle — despite advice that she might want to start with something a little easier. But she forged on, eventually accomplishing her goal, to much acclaim

from fellow program participants and instructors. There, in that gym, her feat became part of her identity and she even began to teach others.

About a year later, she overdosed and had to be hospitalized. She said later that when her doctor told her she likely would have been dead 20 minutes later, one of her first thoughts was, “if I die, I can’t do circus work anymore.”

Galvanized by both the near-death experience and her circus performance accomplishments, she entered rehab to gain control of her addiction. She is now in her second year of a university social-work program. Her dream is to support others struggling through a journey like hers.

Director of the Halifax Circus Mike Hirschbach shares this youth’s story to illustrate the achievements and possibilities of the social outreach program he’s been running in downtown Halifax for eight straight years, two times a week, whatever the weather and regardless of available funding.

A professional circus performer for more than 30 years, Mike was struck by the potential for circus work to help youth change their lives while working with the Cirque du Soleil from 2001 to 2003. In Los Angeles, touring troupe members were invited to join the circus company’s social outreach program, Cirque du Monde, and show local youth in difficulty some of the circus ropes.

Sensing he had found his calling, Mike worked for several more years with Cirque du Monde, which has chapters in more than 100 locations worldwide, before starting his own version of the program in Halifax in 2005.





Provided free of charge to youth in difficulty — from those battling addictions and homelessness to others struggling with career decisions — the Halifax Circus Circle program emphasizes safety — which includes teaching circus skills in the safest manner possible. It also encompasses focusing on the activity, as opposed to the troubles that bring the youth there in the first place, Mike says.

“The kids know when they walk in that this is a place where whatever difficulties led them there, they can set those aside for little while.”

In that creative, artistic, fascinating setting, supported by experienced circus performers, youth learn much more than circus tricks, though that’s certainly the hook for them. They learn and practice everything from setting clear and practical goals to how to cope with frustration in healthy ways to how to communicate with others and then eventually teach others what they have mastered.

The Circus Circle program also operates as a guidepost for youth in that those who eventually build up enough trust with the instructors will sometimes share their larger difficulties. Circus Circle instructors and volunteers direct them to support services in the city for additional help.

The program has also been a springboard for some of the most avid and talented youth, who can go on to work in the Halifax Circus’ school for the general public or in its performing troupe. These latter two entities were added to the social outreach program five years after its inception given the public interest in both the training and performances. They help fund the outreach program, Mike says, though the artist-run collective hopes to achieve charitable status for the outreach program, to boost donation opportunities.

Five years ago, the Halifax Circus launched another Circle program in

“I consider it a real privilege to work with these kids. . . They’re just amazing, creative kids who have been given a poor hand of cards in life.”

— Mike Hirschbach, director, Halifax Circus

Dartmouth and a third opened in Preston two years ago, supported by the United Way.

Looking ahead, Mike hopes to extend the Circus Circle program to at least three more locations, which would then cover the main geographic areas of the city. Given the demographic of youth he’s trying to reach, he wants to make the program as accessible as possible for them.

“I consider it a real privilege to work with these kids,” Mike says.

“They’re just amazing, creative kids who have been given a poor hand of cards in life.

“What we get to do is we get to shuffle the deck a little bit.” ■



# Klink Coffee Patrons Give Ex-offenders a Second Chance

Coffee lovers everywhere: Why not choose a brand from a business whose core mission is to enable a meaningful difference in people's lives?

That's the question Sonya Spencer likes to ask.

to sell coffee. Profits from coffee sales support the first goal.

About 75 per cent of the people St. Leonard's works with through its non-residential program struggle with chronic unemployment, putting them

and Reunion Island Coffee.

Incarcerated for 16 years, she had been searching for work to no avail. She was becoming increasingly discouraged. Then she learned of the opportunity Klink offers and decided to give it a try. After three weeks of training, she was offered a job with Reunion Island Coffee.

In an article published by St. Leonard's, Lisa Marie shares her reaction. "When they (Reunion Island Coffee) told me that they were going to hire me full time, I cried," she says.

"I was so happy. Words can't express how I felt that day. I was on Cloud 9 because someone actually gave me a chance to prove myself, a second chance to be able to work and earn a living and move on in my life, because that's very important is to move on. My past is my past, that doesn't define who I am today."

It's these kinds of stories that Sonya finds most energizing about Klink.

"You can't put a dollar figure on the impact it has on somebody's life who never thought they'd work again," she says.

The enterprise has had about 40 people go through its door since launching in January 2013. Many of them are now gainfully employed.

Fundraising for correctional services charitable programs can be difficult. Government funding for pre-employment and employment training options is on the decline. The coffee sales are critical to ensuring Klink can keep doing what it does.

"We know that drinking coffee is something many people do every day and they're purchasing coffee regardless," Sonya says.

"We're not asking people to change behaviours or make different kinds of purchases; we're just asking them to purchase Klink over another coffee brand so that there can be that social return." ■ — MS



*Joanne Amos and Sheerah Daly selling Klink products.*



Sonya is executive director of St. Leonard's Society of Toronto, a non-profit that helps former offenders reintegrate into the community following a period of incarceration.

To help actualize its mission, St. Leonard's has opened Klink Social Enterprise. Its goals are to find sustainable jobs for ex-offenders, and

a risk for homelessness. Mental-health issues are a common challenge.

Klink offers a supportive environment for ex-offenders to gain pre-employment and employment training, as well as the possibility of a job. The name Klink is intended to connote both the slang term for a jail cell and glasses clinked in celebration.

Klink partners with a private business, Reunion Island Coffee in Oakville, Ont., which operates as a training site for Klink employees as well as roasts and distributes the private label Klink Coffee.

Some Klink clients have gone on to become full-time employees of Reunion Island Coffee.

Lisa-Marie is one person who has experienced a positive life change through her connection with Klink



# Emma's Acres Social Enterprise a Rallying Point for Community Engagement

By Michelle Strutzenberger

Whether it's the nuns next door praying a blessing on their work or a growing collection of community agencies contributing gifts of funding, training, wisdom or land, a new social enterprise in Mission, B.C. is on its way to becoming a rallying point for meaningful community engagement.

Emma's Acres was launched in 2013 as an agricultural social enterprise by L.I.N.C. (Long-term Inmates Now in the Community) Society.

It has four main goals:

- Supply naturally grown, non-spray produce year round in Mission, B.C.
- Support L.I.N.C.'s work with survivors of serious crime through selling its produce
- Offer offenders on conditional release the opportunity to learn to garden and grow their own food while gaining first-hand experience managing a garden, from seed to sale
- Create an inclusive community green space

Through the heartfelt advocacy of founders Glen Flett and his wife, Sherry Edmunds-Flett, the social enterprise has caught the imagination and hearts of community agencies such as Communities in Bloom in Mission, Vancity Community Foundation, Enterprising Non-profits B.C. and others, some of which have provided various forms of support since L.I.N.C. opened its doors 23 years ago.

Sherry paints a picture of people from all walks of life — former offenders, prison staff, survivors of serious crime and the many different people coming from these community agencies — coming together to make new things possible.

And what is being made possible?

Sherry shares one story that is especially dear to her heart — Ray

King, Emma's Acres first hire, who came to the social enterprise as a survivor of serious crime; his son had been murdered. He speaks earnestly about how he's discovering a new and more promising outlook on life through his connection with Emma's Acres.

"Gardening is about everything being reborn; . . . it's about life," Ray says in a video about Emma's Acres. "I've been dealing with death for so long. It's a nice change; it's a good change."

Then there are those who have been offenders who now have a chance to work in the community and learn a range of skills. The majority have been



*Top: Abbotsford-Mission MLA Simon Gibson visited Emma's Acres. In the photo, left to right, Glen Flett, Simon Gibson and Ray King. Middle: Glen planting peas. Bottom: The Emma's Acres greenhouse in Mission, B.C.*

incarcerated for more than 10 years and face many barriers to successful reintegration, including mental health and substance abuse challenges, lack of community supports and work experience.

"(Emma's Acres) gives them a chance to do something proactively and, also, in the interaction with Ray and others,

(the work) has some meaning," says Glen, who himself once served time in prison. "It's not like a half-hour job in the institution where they're cleaning, (for example)."

Everyone involved also has the satisfaction of knowing they're contributing to local food security.

Emma's Acres produces and sells vegetables, herbs and fruits grown naturally without the use of chemical pesticides. Some of the produce is also donated to local non profits in the District of Mission including the food banks and the community kitchen. ■



# Calgary Building Supplies Social Enterprise Hits \$1.7M in Sales

By Michelle Strutzenberger

Heidi Lambie, her husband and teenage daughter flew from Alberta to Costa Rica one Easter break for what Heidi describes as a “life-changing experience” — working with Habitat for Humanity to build a home for a struggling family.

Heidi is a manager of two social enterprises in southern Alberta that support Habitat for Humanity, and there was reason for her to feel an extra sense of pride in helping build the home.

In 2012 her Calgary store hit \$1.7 million in sales, the highest of all Canadian Habitat for Humanity social enterprises, called ReStores, for the year.

Established in 1991, the Habitat for

Humanity ReStores sell new and used building supplies, home furnishing, appliances, and décor donated by corporations or citizens. There are 77 Canadian stores. Profits are directed to the non-profit, Habitat for Humanity Canada, to support the building of more homes for families who are struggling. Over the past 25 years, Habitat for Humanity Canada has contributed to the successful completion of more than 2,200 homes for low-income Canadian families. Internationally, it has helped build thousands of homes.

ReStores are open to the general public and draw a broad diversity of customers. For instance, an architect who was building his home designed it according

to the windows he could find at his local ReStore. He saved \$50,000 as a result.

Heidi, who has been the business development and operations manager for the two southern Alberta stores for about a year, attributes the Calgary store’s phenomenal 2012 success in part to rigorous documentation of incoming inventory as well as clearly and constantly articulating the purpose of the enterprise.

The southern Alberta stores are unique amongst the Canadian ReStores and possibly other retail social enterprises in terms of their commitment to disciplined inventory tracking using the computer program, called Retail Management Systems, Heidi says.





*Pictured above and on previous page are groups of employees from two different companies who volunteered at the Habitat for Humanity ReStore, both as a way to give back to the community and a team-building exercise.*



*Heidi Lambie*

The temptation can be to focus only on sales going out and managing incoming inventory, all of which is donated, in an “off-the-cuff” kind of way. For instance, “putting something out on the floor with one price tag and then saying, ‘Oh, that’s too much’ and changing it on a dime.”

But efficiencies and accountability are increased with the documentation, which leads to enhanced output, Heidi says.

The Alberta stores’ teams are also dedicated to sharing the story of why the ReStores exist with donors and customers — especially those bent only on a bargain and unaware of how their business benefits low-income families.

The goal for the southern Alberta

stores was \$3 million in sales in 2014. The hope was that moving the location of the Medicine Hat store, currently in a tiny facility with no storefront, would help boost awareness and sales, Heidi says. The new site is seven times the current size, right off the highway and does have a storefront.

The greatest possibilities Heidi says she sees in the ReStores is that they continue to shrink the public’s environmental footprint by reducing and reusing building supplies and home and office items.

The social enterprises also help build awareness of the work of Habitat for Humanity, and ultimately, shatter the cycle of poverty. ■

Over the past 25 years, Habitat for Humanity Canada has contributed to the successful completion of more than 2,200 homes for low-income Canadian families. Internationally, it has helped build thousands of homes.

# London Cleaning Social Enterprise Shining Brighter, Thanks to Excellent Service, Cost Competitiveness

How do you grow a commercial cleaning social enterprise, energized by a social mission, to provide jobs for people facing employment barriers?

that when organizations hire a cleaning service they're expecting results. This is not a charitable exercise for them.

Strong leadership engagement

a meaningful difference in the downtown core's cleanliness. It did, even earning some local press for its excellent results.

Clean Works has been a visible presence in the downtown since that time during the summer months of each year. Its new contract means it will be working to keep the downtown sparkling at all times.

Looking ahead, Paul's hopes for Clean Works include more opportunities in the social enterprise's commercial cleaning division. Working outside can be difficult, especially in the winter months, he points out. Clean Works offers graffiti removal, commercial cleaning and outdoor sidewalk cleaning.

Clean Works is a division of Pathways Skill Development & Placement Centre, a London-based non-profit organization that assists individuals to overcome multiple challenges to meaningful employment.

Through employment and training with the social enterprise, Clean Works employees are able to make positive steps forward in their lives.

Paul will be presenting on competing as a social enterprise in the mainstream marketplace at the 2015 Canadian Conference on Social Enterprise.

Drawing on his experiences with Clean Works, which operates without government subsidy and regularly competes with private, for-profit businesses, Paul will share insights on what it takes to land and maintain contracts.

An attendee of the first Canadian Conference on Social Enterprise in 2004, Paul has witnessed a remarkable growth in understanding and skill level across Canada's social enterprise sector since that time.

"There is increasing sophistication in the sector across Canada," he says. ■ — MS



*Above: A Clean Works team. Left: Power washing at Masonville Mall. Photos courtesy of Clean Works.*

ensures London, Ont.-based Clean Works is able to provide consistent quality service. "We spend more time and energy supervising and working with our employees. That's just an important part of what we do."

As a result, Clean Works is experiencing growing opportunities to provide employment and training for people facing employment barriers.

As one example of an achievement, Clean Works is expanding a contract with the London Downtown Business Improvement Area (DBIA) this spring. Clean Works first began working with the DBIA when the city hosted the World Figure Skating Championships in 2013.

A pilot program at the time, the intent was to see if the team could make

Clean Works president Paul Hubert chalks it up largely to a focus on cost competitiveness and excellent service.

The social enterprise's social mission is not emphasized, Paul says.

"Our differentiator is that we're just good at what we do," he says, pointing out



# From Despair to a 'Second Chance': Former Housing Manager Launches Employment Social Enterprise

By Michelle Strutzenberger

Vivian Keels admits she was in anguish when her unemployment insurance ran out and she still had no job.

The Toronto resident had enjoyed a 25-year career as a manager of residential settings for people who have a developmental disability — until March 2013, when she found herself unemployed.

For 16 months she tried to find a position in middle management, but to no avail.

Then she learned of the Ontario Self Employment Benefit program while browsing the internet. She signed up and was accepted to the August 2014 session.

Knowing from her previous work experience that many people who have a developmental disability are eager to work, she began entertaining the thought of opening a business that would provide employment and volunteer opportunities for people who face barriers to employment.

“My journey of unemployment helped me empathize with the individuals I used to work with,” Vivian says. “I knew there were many individuals who did not hold the degree and diploma that I have but are eager and willing to be employed.

“I decided to create a job not only for myself but for others who are willing and able to be gainfully employed.”

A person of faith, Vivian describes what’s happened since as a “God-venture.” Not knowing where all the required funding would come from, she began working towards launching the business. Somehow the money “came as it was needed,” she says.

Karibu Thrift Store Inc: A Second Chance Place is now open for business on St. Clair Avenue East in Toronto.



Karibu Thrift Store operates as a for-profit social enterprise by employing people who face barriers to employment and offering them training and employment experience in a used merchandise retail environment.

*“I decided to create a job not only for myself but for others who are willing and able to be gainfully employed.”*

— Vivian Keels, owner, Karibu Thrift Store

To accomplish its mission, the store has partnered with Corbrook: Awakening Abilities, an organization that works with people who have a disability to achieve their goals. In the arrangement with Karibu Thrift Store, Corbrook acts as an employment recruiter and has currently supplied two part-time employees and another person who is completing a four-week work experience session.

“Karibu Thrift Store’s vision is to grow as a social enterprise and bridge the gap of overlooked and underemployed

people by offering job training and work experience in a used merchandise retail environment,” Vivian says.

Currently, the store offers a range of items, from clothing for women, men and children to accessories — purses, belts, hats — shoes, housewares and media items.

Vivian envisions eventually expanding to include donated furniture which would provide more opportunities for people to learn about upholstery work and refinishing of furniture.

Four weeks from its opening, the store had a waiting list of people also interested in volunteering.

Looking back, despite the challenges, Vivian calls her transition from housing manager to entrepreneur a “fantastic journey.” She hopes others will be inspired to also step out and create employment opportunities not only for themselves, but others, especially those who face barriers to jobs because of disability, mental health issues, language abilities and more.

“There are a lot of people out there who just want to work,” she says.

To learn more about Karibu Thrift Store, visit [www.kaributhriftstore.ca](http://www.kaributhriftstore.ca). ■



*Above: Artist Jerry Whitehead working on one of the three art installations he created with the hotel designers. Below: Artist Eric Parnell at work on a 20-foot Skwachàys Lodge table that is his design. Photo credit: Craig Minielly / Aura Photographics.*

# Aboriginal Art Social Enterprises Support Affordable Housing in Vancouver

Who knew art could do so much? Not just enable spiritual thriving but physical, too. That's what two social enterprises centred on aboriginal art are now doing in downtown Vancouver. While visitors nourish their spirits and rest their bodies at the Skwachàys Lodge and Residence — a combination of an aboriginal art gallery and art-themed hotel — they're boosting access to affordable housing for Aboriginal Peoples at risk of homelessness.

Revenues generated by both the hotel and gallery are helping sustain an affordable housing project of the Vancouver Native Housing Society. The project consists of 24 apartments for Aboriginal Peoples at risk of homelessness. Occupants pay what's called a "shelter rate" for the apartments, about \$350 per month. The additional cost to maintain the apartments is subsidized.

In the past, that subsidy was paid for by the federal government. Increasingly, however, it must be covered through other means — or not at all — as the Canadian government has been gradually reducing its support for affordable housing. Today, that funding sits at about \$1.25 billion, down from about \$9 billion in 1993. In the next decade or so, that support will be completely gone.

To date, the Skwachàys Lodge and Urban Aboriginal Art Gallery revenues have been able to sustain the society's affordable housing project. Eventually, the hope is that they can not only sustain it, but pay for other housing projects undertaken by the society.

The goal is to have the lodge and gallery become a "socially responsible" destination of choice in Vancouver. With its proximity to the Vancouver Skytrain, Canada Place and many

great restaurants, it is expected to attract visitors seeking a transformative art experience even while their dollars enable social impact. ■ — MS

