



Seeds of hope

Start-up cooperatives are the seedlings of the cooperative world, sometimes with little more than a vision, a bit of money and a few members. Cooperative developer Jen Heneberry of Ontario says she sees a marked trend to create social cooperatives with strong community benefits, and more are combining cooperative models to create their ventures. ACE UpDate takes a look at three co-operatives that have recently started or transformed themselves and mentored change of their own enterprise and is interesting to note that leaders in two say board and management education is beyond their resources

WORKER COOPERATIVE LEADS TO HEALTHIER OUTLOOK

An income is most often the goal of worker cooperatives, it's not usually work itself. However, it is for 25 members and many clients of social cooperative pioneer Team Werks of Northwestern Ontario. The cooperative, started in 2000 and just joined with a like-minded Superior Werks, provides a key to wellbeing. Under the guidance of Doug Dowhos — Supervisor Employment Options — and St. Joseph's Care Group of Thunder Bay, survivors of mental illness and addiction gain supported employment in several business ventures ranging from the Good Times Cafe to Paper Werks shredding services. Members have part-time positions, and are provided work accommodation and support when and where required. Through the cooperative, many members are able to maintain their social benefits in addition to earning modest wages, patronage returns and quarterly bonuses, depending on the financial position of the cooperative. The skills, experience and confidence members and clients gain helps them to move to new employment later, if they choose. Dowhos says, "the worker cooperative is a good fit because it encourages a team approach to running the enterprise." Team Werks provides the added benefit of giving members control of their own enterprise and employment goals. He notes that self direction is known as a best practice in psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery.

