

Evaluating a Social Enterprise Catering Plus: People over Profit

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Executive Summary

This report was written by two fourth year Trent students for the International Development Studies course Assessment of Development Projects, through the Trent Centre for Community Based Education for the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA).

The methods for this report included a literature review of the theory of social enterprise and the role of work in recovery from mental illness, as well as semi-structured interviews with Catering Plus staff and regular meetings with Catering Plus management.

The report includes a literature review, which discusses social enterprise, recovery, work and mental illness. This section found that social enterprises occupy a unique space within the market, require funding and are an important source of employment for individuals with lived mental health experience who often face barriers to employment. Recovery from mental illness is defined as a complex and multifaceted process and the link between recovery and work is highlighted. The role of work in providing a basis for personal identity, a structure and purpose to daily life, a social network, independence and financial security is also discussed.

This is followed by a section that presents the structure of Catering Plus, and describes its history and connection to CMHA, its funding, revenue, staff, shifts, business meetings and decision-making, conflict resolution and performance appraisals, termination policy and customers. It was found that Catering Plus is structured as a social enterprise, simultaneously pursuing social and economic objectives. The staff's perceptions of Catering Plus identify important factors of employment at Catering Plus which include: accommodation and support, people, routine, building improvements, a sense of place and purpose, learning, financial support, responsibility, perceptions of self, pride, opportunity and recovery.

Advertising was found to be a particular challenge for Catering Plus and it was found that an emphasis on the organization's social aspect alone is not a strong marketing strategy. Rather, advertising should focus on the product and service being provided, as well as mentioning the social aspects of the organization. It was found that the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) continues to provide support for people with lived mental health experience while they are employed. However, this policy is not always completely understood by staff and a culture of fear of losing payments and benefits may prevent them from working, or extending their hours. The ODSP policy takes an individualized approach to disability which can perpetuate negative stereotypes about the capacities of individuals with lived mental health experience and prevent them from seeking employment, or may force them into poor jobs. By providing a supportive and accommodating work environment, Catering Plus addresses this issue.

It was found that Catering Plus provides important social and economic benefits for the individuals that it employs. These include an opportunity to access employment, a sense of purpose, place and accomplishment, a supportive social network, a chance to develop confidence and a sense of usefulness and a degree of financial security. These benefits are made possible through the creation of a unique employment environment that emphasizes participation, flexibility and support and accommodation of individual needs and circumstances. Catering Plus also plays an important symbolic role in challenging the values and structure of the mainstream profit-driven business model and perceptions of the capabilities of individuals with lived mental health experience.

Based on the findings and the subsequent discussion, the following are recommendations for the ways in which Catering Plus can continue to improve in meeting the needs of its staff and the needs of the organization.

- ^ Catering Plus should expect to continue to rely on external annualized funding, but should also continue to generate profit.
- ^ The division of shifts between caterers should continue to be flexible and accommodate the needs and particular situation of individuals.
- ^ The importance of the current Lead Caterer and Small Business Assistant in creating the positive environment of Catering Plus should be recognized and taken in to consideration for future hiring.
- ^ The importance of the caterers' shared background of lived mental health experience should not be overlooked.
- ^ When funds permit, implement improvements to the Catering Plus building and equipment or invest in a new, larger and better equipped space.
- ^ Catering Plus should continue to take advantage of any opportunity to promote the skill development of its staff.
- ^ Catering Plus should continue with activities that facilitate staff involvement and pride of ownership.
- ^ It should be recognized that the majority of the caterers perceive employment at Catering Plus not as a transitional stage in their integration into the workforce but as long-term employment.
- ^ From an economic perspective, advertising should continue to emphasize the quality of the product and service Catering Plus provides.
- ^ Catering Plus staff would benefit from ongoing information sessions on receiving ODSP support while being employed.
- ^ Potential areas of future research include:
 - The economic aspect of Catering Plus. .
 - The link between recovery from mental illness and employment with Catering Plus.

Introduction

This report was written by two fourth year Trent students for the International Development Studies course Assessment of Development Projects and through the Trent Centre for Community Based Education for the Canadian Mental Health Association. It explores the social and economic benefits that Catering Plus, a social enterprise catering company that employs individuals with lived mental health experience in Peterborough Ontario, provides to its staff. This report includes a literature review of social enterprise, recovery and work as well as a presentation of findings, based on interviews with CMHA and Catering Plus staff. The complexities of advertising and ODSP, which present particular challenges to the organization, are also explored. Finally the report concludes by presenting an assessment of the social and economic benefits of Catering Plus, as well as its symbolic importance. The purpose of the report is to identify the social benefits of Catering Plus as a social enterprise which hires individuals with lived mental health experience. This information will hopefully be used to inform decisions about Catering Plus and contribute to a future business plan.

Keywords

social enterprise, mental illness, work, recovery, Catering Plus, Canadian Mental Health Association, consumer initiative, alternative business

Methodology

Personal Motivations and Biases

This report is written as part of the fourth year international development studies course Assessment of Development Projects taught by Professor Chris Beyers at Trent University. The researchers are fourth year students and their studies, which focus on a critical analysis of global inequality in the field of development, inform the way in which we approached the project. Due to a lack of experience and knowledge in the field of business, we decided not to focus on the viability of Catering Plus from the perspective of mainstream enterprise. Instead we focused on how Catering Plus fits into the broader capitalist system as a social enterprise and the social and economic benefits that it provides to its staff.

As International Development students we are bombarded with examples of how the capitalist system fails to meet many people's needs and is responsible for many of the problems in the world today. A major motivation for involvement in this project was the chance to gain an understanding of one way in which the capitalist system can potentially be used for good, through social enterprise. The hope that there is a way to harness capitalism and use it to promote social good is a bias that influences the way in which we interpreted our experiences at Catering Plus. We brought to our research the biased perspective that people are more important than profit.

Literature Review

In order to understand the broader theoretical context in which Catering Plus is situated we conducted a review of relevant literature. Our literature review focused primarily on social enterprise theory and the relationship between employment and

recovery from mental illness. Articles were accessed through CMHA and other mental health websites, alternative business websites, as well as through online databases. This information was used in this report to provide background information on social enterprise and recovery as a lens through which to understand Catering Plus.

Meetings and Visits

Meetings with our host supervisor, the Catering Plus Program Manager and the Small Business Assistant were a very important part of our methodology. We met with these individuals at the CMHA office five times between November and April and many of these meetings lasted for well over an hour. Each meeting would have a specific purpose, whether it was reviewing our schedule of interview questions or making changes to the project agreement. There was usually also time to discuss other aspects of the project as well, and to ask questions about Catering Plus. Through these meetings we were able to ensure that our progress with the project was in line with our host's expectations and receive their feedback on methodological decisions and our initial findings. It was also through these meetings that we were able to learn about the general structure and organization of Catering Plus and CMHA, its history, its place in the Peterborough catering market and to gain insight into social enterprise theory in the context of Catering Plus. These meetings were also a valuable chance to learn about the management perspective on the successes and challenges facing the enterprise and their perceptions of its social and economic value.

In late January we visited Catering Plus for the first time. This visit was meant to be a chance for us to learn about the enterprise through participant observation. This is a methodological technique that involves the researcher entering a situation with the dual purposes of engaging in the activities related to the situation and observing these activities, the people involved, and the physical aspects of the situation (Spradley 1980). However, because of our lack of safe food handling certification and the organization's internal philosophy that the caterers should do the work of the caterings,

we were unable to actively participate in any actual work. This visit was, however, extremely valuable as it allowed us to get a sense of the environment of Catering Plus and meet and informally interact with some of the caterers and the Lead Caterer. This interaction provided us with somewhat of a basis on which to create our interview questions and conduct our interviews.

Semi-structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview is an interview that is conducted with the use of a structured schedule of questions but that can be supplemented with further questions based on the interviewees' responses (Berg 70). We conducted semi-structured interviews with seven of the Catering Plus caterers, the Lead Caterer, the Small Business Assistant and the Program Manager. We chose this form of interview because, as Berg suggests, we felt that this method would be appropriate for understanding the possibly diverse range of opinions and experiences of the respondents and address the subjective nature of our research (70).

Due to our limited time to interact with Catering Plus staff and scheduling issues, we did not have the opportunity to conduct a pilot interview. We did however, present our interview schedule for the interviews with the caterers in a meeting with our host supervisor and the program manager, prior to conducting the interviews. We also sent this interview schedule to the Small Business Assistant by email. This was a valuable step in the interview process as it allowed us to verify that we were approaching the interviews in a way deemed appropriate by our hosts. It also allowed us to incorporate our hosts' feedback into the wording of questions, in order to maximize the comfort level of the interviewees.

All of the interviews were conducted with both researchers present, however a key interviewer, responsible for asking all questions, was designated for each interview.

The other researcher took notes. The majority of the interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. One interviewee was uncomfortable with being tape recorded and we respected their wishes and took detailed notes of the interview. All interviewees were made aware of the purpose of the research and the interview, given the option of skipping any question or halting the interview at any time and asked to sign a consent form for the release of their information. Please refer to the appendix for a copy of the schedule of interview questions and the consent form.

The interviews with the caterers were conducted at Catering Plus. Caterers temporarily left the work that they were doing for a catering in order to be interviewed. It is important to note that these interviews were conducted within earshot of the small business assistant and several other caterers. While this was not brought up as an issue by any of the interviewees, the answers given by the caterers may have been influenced by the particular context of the interview. The environment was also a bit busy and loud which may have been a source of stress for some of the caterers and may have impacted their responses in the interview. This report is thus limited in its ability to fully determine whether or not Catering Plus is fully achieving its social objective by the context in which information was gathered. The overwhelmingly positive findings may have been influenced by this context as well as the Lead Caterer's, Small Business Assistant's and Program Manager's desire to present the organization as successful, as well as the caterers' desire to maintain their employment.

In order not to compromise the comfort of the caterers we chose not to ask personal questions about mental illness, recovery from mental illness or ODSP during the interviews. As a result, we have not directly discussed these topics in relation to the experiences of the Catering Plus caterers in this report. These topics are, however, discussed in the context of the literature review and the Small Business Assistant and Program Managers perceptions' of how they impact Catering Plus. We also made this decision because of our inability, as researchers, to measure the level of recovery of the staff and attribute this recovery to employment with Catering Plus. This was mostly

because of our lack of training and expertise in the area of mental health and mental health research.

Through these interviews we were able to gain an understanding of the caterers' experiences and feelings about Catering Plus. Their answers gave us a sense of how employment at Catering Plus impacts the caterers' lives and the benefits and challenges that they attribute to working at Catering Plus. We were then able to identify the factors in the literature which contribute to recovery from mental illness that are also present in the Catering Plus environment.

The interviews with the Small Business Assistant and the Lead Caterer were also conducted at Catering Plus. These interviews gave us a different perspective on the role that employment at Catering Plus plays in the lives of the caterers. It also provided us with insight into the Small Business Assistant and Lead Caterers' personal experiences with the organization.

The interview with the Program Manager was conducted in his office in the CMHA REACH centre. This interview focused less on the interviewee's personal experience and involvement in Catering Plus, and more on the structural aspects of the organization. The goal of this interview was to gain information that could enhance our understanding of how the organization functions and its role in the broader context of CMHA, in which to situate our other findings and analysis.

Definitions

Social Enterprise

As the term suggests, there are two main components of a social enterprise; the social and the enterprise. The 'social' aspect of social enterprise indicates a social goal or aim of an organization, often responding to the needs of a disadvantaged community. The 'enterprise' aspect indicates that this social objective is addressed through a community economic development initiative, specifically a business, which produces or sells goods or services within the market and provides employment and economic benefit to its participants (Defourney and Nyssens 4, Elson, Gouldsbrough and Jones 5, Enterprising non-profits 7, Ontario Coalition of Alternative Businesses). Though each organization is unique, most social enterprises share the following common characteristics:

- ⤴ The objective of serving members of the community rather than generating profit (though profit may be generated, this is not the main motivation)
- ⤴ Promoting a sense of social responsibility at a local level
- ⤴ A democratic decision making process which is not based on capital ownership (one member, one vote)
- ⤴ Prioritizing people and labour over capital in the distribution of income and the avoidance of a profit maximizing behaviour
- ⤴ The production of goods and/or selling of services as one of the main reasons for existence
- ⤴ Representation and participation of persons affected by the activity, in decision-making (Defourney 6, 16-18)

Alternative Business

An alternative business is a type of social enterprise that “has been created through a community economic development process and is operated entirely by consumer/survivor employees” (Ontario Coalition of Alternative Businesses). Alternative businesses are specifically characterized by:

- ⤴ Operating on business principles while offering support to staff and

recognizing “the struggles that consumer/survivors face, particularly in accessing and maintaining employment”

- ▲ Flexible work schedules for employees and accommodations to sustain their employment
- ▲ Providing permanent jobs (not placements or “sheltered workshop” programs)
- ▲ Salaries at market rate
- ▲ An emphasis on training, mentoring, skills development, and peer support
- ▲ Employee participation in decisions that affect the business.
- ▲ Words that are used in describing an Alternative Business include “comfort, ownership, pride, teamwork, safety, responsibility and respect”. (Ontario Coalition of Alternative Businesses)

Consumer Initiative

A consumer initiative is a program run for, and by, individuals with lived mental health experience. All consumer initiatives are founded on the values of autonomy, independence and empowerment (Program Manager Pers. Comm. 29 Mar. 2012).

Lived Mental Health Experience

An individual with lived mental health experience is considered to be someone who has been institutionalized by the psychiatric system or treated by mental health staff in the community—a consumer of services or a survivor of the medical/mental health system. Some of these individuals continue to use the mental health system while others seek alternatives to the traditional medical model (Ontario Coalition of Alternative Businesses). An individual who has had a close relationship with, and taken care of, someone with a mental illness is also considered to be someone with lived mental health experience (Program Manager Pers. Comm. 29 Mar. 2012).

Recovery

Recovery from mental illness is a process that is defined by the individual, which may include improvements in the clinical, existential, functional, physical and social aspects of an individual's life. The complexities of this concept will be further discussed in the literature review.

Literature Review: Social Enterprise

The Market

The current economic and political climate of neoliberalism places the utmost importance on for-profit private enterprises operating within free markets. Among other things, this environment values flexibility, rapidity and efficiency (Defourney 1). Naturally, the non-profit sector does not fit within this framework, and the qualities mentioned above are not commonly associated with non-profit organizations, which often rely on the support of government or private donors for funding. Though they operate in a separate sector, these non-profit organizations are not immune to the capitalist and neoliberal values that permeate society. As such, many are facing increasing funding constraints as they struggle to be recognized and operate within the capitalist system (Enterprising Non-profits 4). As Dart writes, “the language of the marketplace has put management at the centre of our organizations, corporate business at the centre of society and defined government and non-profit organizations as non-productive and burdensome” (419).

As opposed to purely non-profit organizations, social enterprises in the current economic environment are viewed as legitimate because of their pro-business approach to social issues, as well as their general support of the dominant market ideology (Dart 419). This allows them to be widely accepted and receive funding, but it also raises concerns that social enterprises, which have adopted useful aspects of a market-based approach, may also adopt its more harmful aspects to the neglect of social rights (Defourney 1). Social enterprises are at risk of shifting their focus towards the market and revenue and away from innovation and social objectives (Dart 420).

Funding

Social enterprise has presented itself as an alternative to the dichotomy of for-

profit and non-profit organizations. Defourney and Nyssens describe it as “an innovative response to the funding problems of non-profit organizations” (4). Dart explains that,

...government or others funders might find social enterprise activities pragmatically legitimate because such activities could reduce social-purpose organizations' need for these groups' funding,...also nonprofit organizations could find the social-enterprise form pragmatically legitimate to the extent that it provides access to new targeted public sector funding in a variety of different political jurisdictions (417).

Though they operate within the context of the market, where the for-profit sector dominates, social enterprises are not necessarily self-sufficient. As the Canadian Social Enterprise Guide explains, “often, due to the social costs associated with supporting a disadvantaged population, these kinds of enterprises rely on some grants and donations to support their activities” (Enterprising non-profits 17). This can make it difficult for social enterprises to be seen as legitimate by the for-profit sector (Broad and Saunders 21). However, “social enterprises which offer services for occupational integration or try to create jobs often receive such types of state support because it is felt that they are doing more than, or acting differently from, a private agency which might perhaps restrict itself to picking out the easiest tasks and persons” (Evers 300).

As well as funding, social enterprises require a variety of non-economic resources to function effectively. Evers explains that,

...the success of a social enterprise for social and occupational integration and job creation depends on many non-governmental and non-market resources....it needs good informal contacts with the political and the business community; it builds on a unique level of trust achieved over time; it will have the best chance of success if it is solidly rooted and embedded in the local community; in order to be able to reinsert people, building up partnerships and projects with various economic and social partners will be a key issue (300).

This need for funding and the use of other non-economic resources, sets social enterprises apart from mainstream businesses. Though it may be perceived as a weakness, funding is necessary to achieve the important social contribution of social enterprises.

Employment

The current economic system of market capitalism, which operates within a framework of neoliberalism, is not a viable environment for many members of society. Capitalism prioritizes maximum profit above all else and, as stated by Cohen, “does not deal with its social consequences” (1). Further, in neoliberal states “competition between individuals or groups within the market is seen as a natural and effective mechanism to drive creativity and innovation” (Gewurtz 30). The system maintains that equal opportunity exists for everyone on a supposed even playing field and assumes that all humans were created equal and have similar capacity and power. This however is untrue. The world is characterized by a diverse range of people, with diverse backgrounds and diverse skills and capabilities. This is not recognized within the capitalist system where individuals are seen as labourers, meant to work as quickly and as efficiently as possible. It is not a system in which everyone can survive, much less benefit from equal opportunity.

Broad and Saunders point out that the “survival-of-the-fittest approach to public policy...bodes ill for any vulnerable population, particularly persons with disabilities, youth, women and other groups with disadvantages in the workplace (9). They explain that research shows that persons with disabilities often find obtaining employment in the 'competitive' workplace challenging. This is due in part to a lack of knowledge and a basic unwillingness on the part of employers to hire people with disabilities. In some cases persons with disabilities are only able to work limited hours due to the nature of their disability and the limitations it may impose; others, such as those with intellectual disabilities, may require ongoing support and coaching in the workplace, making employment within the 'competitive' marketplace challenging, due to its emphasis on profit-making (Broad and Saunders 10).

Social enterprise has the capacity to address this shortcoming and meet the needs

that the market cannot (Enterprising Non-profits 4). It can offer 'innovative solutions to social problems' (Dart 417). Particularly, social enterprise can offer stable jobs to persons excluded from the labour market due to their perceived 'weaknesses' (Defourney 20). Providing jobs for 'excluded' members of society is crucial because, in the current neoliberal climate, employment is the primary means through which to gain social inclusion (Broad and Saunders 8). This encourages the perception of those who are unemployed and receiving social assistance as 'cheaters and 'defrauders of the system' (Broad and Saunders 9). Society values those who work, while those who are deemed unable to work are seen as a burden to the system. Social enterprises are therefore responding to “an important need for supportive employment opportunities for people with disabilities” (Broad and Saunders 13). Ideally, social enterprises combine “their extensive knowledge of the disability, its impact and its required accommodation, with business knowledge to effectively provide supportive employment opportunities” (Broad and Saunders 10).

Benefits

There are many social and economic benefits of social enterprise, both for the individuals involved, and for society as a whole. These include “reduced healthcare costs, improved quality of life for people with disabilities, and a reduced reliance on income support” (Broad and Saunders 11). Workers are motivated not only by the financial benefits but by the role they play in “shaping and sharing the organization's goals and mission” (Bacchiega and Borzaga 274). As well, social enterprises and social entrepreneurs play a role of agents of change in the social sector by:

- Adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value),
- Recognizing and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission,
- Engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning,
- Acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand, and
- Exhibiting a heightened sense of accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created. (Dart 414)

With this in mind, it could be argued that social enterprise is a model for all businesses

that strive for ethical operations, particularly where the treatment of workers and social innovation is concerned.

Literature Review: Work, Recovery and Mental Illness

Recovery

Recovery from mental illness is generally seen as the goal of mental health services. It is also a notion that is very present in the consumer-survivor community and mental health movement (Whitley and Drake 1248). It is however, conceptualized and defined in many different ways by the variety of actors within the mental health community. Provencher et al define recovery as the “process of transcending symptoms, psychiatric disabilities and social handicaps”, focusing on re-discovering meaning and purpose in life and carrying out significant social roles (133). This definition centers on the ability of an individual to participate in society, as a measure of recovery. Other definitions focus on the aspect of improved physical health and put stress on factors such as weight loss and healthy eating habits (Whitley and Drake 1248). Health practitioners often base their definition of recovery on the medical model, emphasizing the reduction of symptoms and the return to a baseline level of functioning. Other actors, such as those involved in the consumer-survivor movement, concentrate more on nonclinical factors such as empowerment, self-esteem, autonomy and overcoming marginalization.

Whitley and Drake argue that recovery should be conceptualized as a multi-dimensional process (1249). They see recovery as being composed of the five dimensions of clinical, existential, functional, physical and social aspects. In their model the clinical dimension focuses on the reduction and control of the symptoms of a mental illness, usually through medication and therapy. The existential dimension relates to the factors that can lead to a sense of control in one's life, such as hope, value and meaning, self-direction and responsibility. It also encompasses aspects such as spirituality and religion that can often play a large role in an individual's recovery. The functional dimension

focuses on the ability of the individual to participate successfully in aspects of society and everyday life. This dimension relates to factors such as employment, education and housing (1250). The physical dimension of recovery refers to improvements in physical health and wellbeing while the social dimension involves the ability to maintain and establish rewarding relationships with family, friends, peers and significant others.

In this report, we have used Whitley and Drake's model as basis for understanding some of our findings. We have, however, chosen to focus on the specific benefits of employment at Catering Plus, as defined by the staff themselves. We have highlighted those benefits that in the literature are linked to recovery; however, we were not in a position to make the direct link between these benefits and the recovery of the staff at Catering Plus. For reasons mentioned previously in the methodology section, we did not feel that it was appropriate to specifically ask about the topic of the caterers' personal recovery. Based on our review of the literature and experiences working with CMHA and Catering Plus we also came to the understanding that, as Whitley et al explain, "recovery must be defined primarily by the individual consumer." As a result, the concept of recovery and how it relates to the goals and functioning of Catering Plus, is not directly addressed in this report.

The Role of Work

"Work is at the very core of contemporary life" (WHO 5). For most people employment provides not only a means of achieving financial security but also plays a major role in personal identity and provides an avenue for meaningful contribution to the community (WHO 5). Employment is extremely valued in today's society and provides individuals with an important social position, which impacts other aspects of their lives. Employment provides the structure to most people's lives, is often the basis upon which social relationships are formed, and is seen as a requirement for independence in contemporary society (Scheid and Anderson 164).

The importance placed on employment makes the exclusion of individuals with a mental illness from the working world particularly serious. Difficulty maintaining employment is viewed as a defining feature of chronic mental illness (Scheid and Anderson 164). People with a mental illness experience significantly higher rates of unemployment than the general population and even people with other types of disabilities and health conditions (CMHA 2). This problem is intensified in situations, like the present, of economic downturn, where unemployment rates within the general population are particularly high. These situations lead to a decreased likelihood that employers will hire an individual with a mental illness when there are many individuals without a mental illness to choose from (CMHA i). This is a major concern as unemployment is linked with an increased risk of depressive symptoms and mental illness relapse (WHO 9).

Other barriers to employment for people with a mental illness include poverty, being ‘derailed’ early in life and an inability to complete certain levels of education due to illness, poor self-esteem and a lack of assertiveness, an inability to pay for employment related costs such as clothing, transportation and childcare, and a lack of job seeking and job retention skills (Hildebrand 2009). One of the greatest barriers to employment is stigma. Gewurtz writes that employment-related stigma often, “presents itself in the form of beliefs that people living with mental illness are incapable, incompetent, unreliable and unpredictable as employees” (17). People with lived mental health experience may internalize these negative stereotypes, causing them to become further marginalized from the workforce (Gewurtz 18). As well, the cyclic and episodic nature of mental illness can also limit an individual’s ability to maintain consistent employment (Gewurtz 16).

The role of work in recovery from mental illness is an area that has recently received a lot of attention. Employment is seen as having the potential to play a deeply generative and re-integrative role in a person’s life (Hildebrand 2012). A variety of

models and programs, such as supported employment, alternative and affirmative businesses and vocational training programs, that aim to incorporate people with a mental illness into the workforce, have been explored and established (CMHA 7). Studies have shown that employment can play a major role in facilitating an individual's recovery (Provencher et al 133, Scheid and Anderson 164).

While the role of employment in an individual's recovery is very context dependent, there are several major aspects of employment that have been linked to the facilitation of recovery from mental illness. These include the provision of a time structure and regular activity around which to organize daily life. The lack of such a structure can be a psychosocial burden and is linked to relapses in people with a mental illness (WHO 5). This structure is at times seen as so valuable that people with a mental illness will pursue employment even when it does not necessarily make financial sense. Employment also provides social contact (WHO 5) and co-workers can act as a social support network and be positive role models (Provencher et al 133). The collective effort and purpose provided by employment can also play an important role in mental wellbeing (WHO 5). Work provides a social identity (WHO 5) and is seen as a way of developing a sense of self-empowerment and positive self-image. This contributes to an individual's willingness to take on new challenges and take advantage of a learning environment. (Provencher et al 133). Besides providing a degree of financial security, work is seen as a means by which people with a mental illness can gain a sense of independence, further their self-development and improve their quality of life.

The social benefits that employment can provide for people with a mental illness, and the mental wellbeing of the individual are, however, quite dependent on the environment in which the individual is employed (WHO 5). An environment in which there is "acceptance, support and understanding from supervisors and colleagues...was found to be critical for job performance, job maintenance and job satisfaction" (Gewurtz 18). As well, "many participants found it helpful to have contact with other people living with mental illness who have successful careers and are living full and satisfying lives"

(Gewurtz 18).

Additionally, an environment in which an individual has the opportunity to participate in the planning of activities in the workplace can have a positive impact on an individual's psychosocial wellbeing (WHO 5). This aspect of involvement is a criterion that is also stressed in recovery models and programs that argue that individuals should have a "right to full partnership in all aspects of their recovery, including partnership in the designing, planning, implementing and evaluation of the service that supports their recovery" (Hildebrand 2012). In the case of employment models designed to support individuals with lived mental health experience, this service would be their place of work. The degree to which the work environment encourages skill development can also have an impact on an employee's mental wellbeing (WHO 5). In a mental illness recovery context, skill development is seen as a way for an individual to work towards being able to function as independently as they wish (Hildebrand 2012).

Social exclusion is often one of the biggest challenges faced by people with a mental illness (WHO 3). A work environment that fosters the development of relationships with one's peer group, and facilitates a sense of belonging and connection, can make a significant contribution to a person's growth and development (Hildebrand 2012). In most recovery programs the "genuine concern with the wellbeing of survivors and belief that they are capable of progress must be of paramount importance to staff" (Hildebrand 2012). In these recovery programs staff must focus on "the individual first and foremost as an individual with strengths, talents, interests as well as limitations, rather than focusing on the person as a case, exhibiting indicators of disease" (Hildebrand 2012). To be successful, an employment based recovery model must take these factors into account.

Findings: Catering Plus as a social enterprise

Catering Plus is a consumer initiative that operates under the model of an alternative business and can be placed within the category of social enterprise, because it displays many of the unique qualities attributed to these types of organizations. Most notable is the ability of social enterprises to pursue both social and economic goals. The Program Manager explains that “...it's not about necessarily the fiscal or monetary profit. It's about the human profit for sure and I think a good social enterprise strikes the balance between the two”. The Small Business Assistant at Catering Plus views it as a “combination of both the healthcare environment and a business environment”. The organization's mission statement, values and vision, posted on the wall of Catering Plus, reads as follows,

FOOD SERVICES

MISSION STATEMENT

Food excellence through dedication and responsibility for the wellness and betterment of others.

VALUES

People, ethics, self-sufficiency, courtesy, integrity, honesty, friendship, good work, and life.

VISION

We hope to bring in new business by becoming self-sufficient and by desire, train ourselves to work towards increasing sales.

This statement indicates Catering Plus' status as a social enterprise, striving to balance its social and economic objectives. The following sections outline the unique structure of the organization and the particular aspects, which contribute to these social and economic objectives.

History and CMHA Connection

Originally operating as 'Crazy Cooks' under the Ontario Council of Alternative Businesses, the organization was re-named Catering Plus when it was taken over by the Canadian Mental Health Association in October 2008. The 'Plus' of Catering Plus stands

for 'People Learning Useful Skills' (Deeth 2008). A director and program manager, who oversee the organization, both work from the CMHA office a couple of blocks away. The Program Manager visits the organization weekly to supervise the staff and has daily communication with the Small Business Assistant (Program Manager).

Funding

Catering Plus receives over \$100,000 in annualized funding from the Central East Local Integrated Health Network through the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (Program Manager). As outlined above, most social enterprises do require funding. One of the reasons for this is that they do not enjoy the same access to loans provided by financial institutions, as the Program Manager explains,

Think of it this way, if you're a small business owner you don't necessarily get a grant from the government but you can go to a credit union or a small business start-up or whatever it is that's loaning money and get the same idea. Without that start-up capital, without that ongoing investment, places don't flourish.

Both the Program Manager and the Small Business Assistant identified funding as 'paramount' and essential to the survival of the organization (Program Manager, Small Business Assistant). Since Catering Plus does not operate solely on the basis of profit, but also has the social goal of providing employment for individuals with lived mental health experience, it may make compromises in terms of its operation, prioritizing social concerns over economic ones. This annualized funding provides security to the organization, as the Small Business Assistant explains, “we have that infusion of cash, so we still are able to, even if we have a bad month, we can still make sure that everything gets paid, like our bills and the food that we buy. A lot of restaurants close because they don't have that ability. So we're lucky, very lucky to have that funding”.

Revenue

2011 was the first year that Catering Plus generated a profit (Program Manager).

According to the Program Manager this was a 'huge achievement' because food start-ups are very financially challenging. He attributes this success to the following,

I think we got the right mix. I think we were on top of portion control, I think we were on top of labour costs and I think we were on top of being really really razor sharp with our production. I think a lot also changed too was our branding, I think our brand is becoming more and more noticeable in the community and I think that that's an important piece. ... And if you can carve out a little niche like we did. Like we're exceptionally good with the business lunches and we've developed a reputation of being able to turn around and get people the catering at the last minute. I mean I'll give you an example, City of Peterborough, City Hall, they'll call us sometimes and they'll be you know, 'ah we forgot to order for 50 people, can you help us out?' right 'no problem'. We've developed a bit of a reputation like that. You have to find a small bit of a niche or a reputation, cause without it you're just another caterer.

As this quote demonstrates, receiving annualized funding does not mean that Catering Plus does not operate, in many respects, in the same way as a mainstream business. As was made clear in the vision of the organization, Catering Plus is concerned with increasing sales and striving for self-sufficiency.

The revenue that Catering Plus generates is re-invested back into the business (Program Manager). The same is also done with tips,

...if we get tips or something we don't break that up amongst the staff it goes into the account and everybody's ok with that because, you know, this is a non-profit organization and just the fact that they have a work initiative like this is a fabulous thing. So everyone's ok with, oh yeah you know it's going to a good cause. It's going to be distributed amongst the other programs or put back in here (Small Business Assistant).

Staff

As of March 2012, there was 10 staff working at Catering Plus. This included 8 caterers, a Lead Caterer and a Small Business Assistant. The caterers start at minimum wage, \$10.25 and can earn 'incremental merit based increases' (Program Manager). Caterers work part-time and have no set hours. They do not receive benefits, but some

receive benefits through ODSP. The Lead Caterer and the Small Business Assistant work full-time and receive full benefits (Program Manager).

The hiring process is the same as is used for the rest of CMHA with a posting in the newspaper or online, advertising the position. Resumes are then submitted and suitable candidates are selected for interviews (Program Manager). The Program Manager outlines the hiring criteria for caterers,

Well one of the criteria we look at by and large is does somebody have lived experience...Secondly do they have any sort of food service experience that might translate into transferable skills. And probably thirdly is the ability to work on a team...somebody who's at a point in their recovery that they're able to get back to work and somebody who's interested in the sort of relief nature of what we do, that they're not necessarily look for full or part time regular employment.

As well as for the Lead Caterer and Small Business Assistant,

For Lead Caterer we definitely want to have some culinary experience, want some experience with organization and leadership, not management, there's a difference between management and leadership, definitely some leadership ability and we want somebody who's going to you know be a self-starter, take initiative, be able to train the caterers. For small business assistant we need people with sales and marketing experience bottom-line. We want someone who is able to get out there and develop those sales contacts that are going to benefit the company.

Since the program is a consumer-led initiative for people with lived mental health experience, one of the main criteria for hiring caterers, as mentioned above, is “personal experience navigating the mental health system” (Draft job description).

This presents a unique challenge for the organization, as the Program Manager explains,

...certainly we want to attract people who might have barriers to employment, We want to make it accessible so people have a place to start but we also have to think about the fit on the team, and the fit for the company itself...I think it would be about a 50/50 weighting on that.

Reasons that individuals may not be hired include having a criminal record or not being

at a place in their own recovery where they are able to work (Program Manager).

When staff are hired at Catering Plus, they receive training in Safe Food Handling, as well as knife safety, back care and WHMIS. As well there is a great deal of on the job training (Program Manager).

Shifts

The caterers do not have a regular work schedule because the amount of work available depends on the caterings that the organization is hired to do. Normally the Lead Caterer will call the caterers based on their availability. The Program Manager explains that, “if someone's been with the company a long time certainly and they've demonstrated that they're available they might probably get one of the earlier calls, but we don't preclude anybody”. The Small Business Assistant echoed this, saying that they “try to make sure everybody has a shift”.

Catering Plus tries to be as accommodating as possible, as demonstrated by the following remarks made by the Small Business Assistant such as, “we make sure, like when we ask 'are you sure you want to do this?...are you ok, because you're working until six tonight and here we're asking you to come in at six tomorrow. Is that a good enough turn around for you?” Further, shifts are divided up based on “...how comfortable they are, like if somebody's having problems with their legs then we know not to call them in very often, we'll still call them but if its like, 'oh well my legs are really sore', than it's like it's like, 'oh well that's ok', and we'll call somebody else” (Small Business Assistant). At times it is simply a matter of personal choice, “...people have things going on in their personal lives, private lives, that they're like, 'well I don't really want to work today' and we're like 'ok well that's your choice' and we understand what's going on so we just mark them non-available (Small Business Assistant).

Business Meetings and Decision-making

Once every quarter the entire staff of Catering Plus has a business meeting. These meetings are mandatory for all staff and their purpose is for staff to update each other and discuss health and safety and sales and marketing issues (Program Manager). When asked about the level of staff participation in the meetings the Program Manager responded,

Oh it's 100%....the staff are expected to participate. I mean it's not me coming down and...giving the word on high. It's definitely a collaborative approach. That's why we call them business meetings, cause everybody, see this is one of the core, fundamental beliefs of Catering Plus, is that everybody has a stake in the success or failure of the business...

The same approach is taken for decision-making; all staff are included to the fullest possible extent,

... we go to the staff...for example, if its new capital expenditure we ask them for a wish list, 'what would you like to see?' If it's a really big change that we have no control over like location we try to give as much information as possible but also help people to realize that you know we need to go in a certain direction. Might not be a whole lot of choice. But we're certainly open to input. So, we try to be as collaborative as possible when it comes to change...(Program Manager).

The Small Business Assistant also stated that, “The staff have input on pretty much everything that gets changed around here”. She gave the example of a couple of staff members who “redid the kitchen order form so now it's a two-sided form rather than before we had everything squished on the front page so it was a little harder to write things”.

As outlined in the above definition, this level of participation by those who are directly affected by the activities of the organization is a key aspect of a social enterprise, and alternative businesses more specifically. As the Program Manager explained, this involvement in decision-making is crucial to ensuring that all staff are meaningfully included in the organization. This feeling of involvement is likely a contributing factor to staff dedication,

We call people in the morning, 'what are you doing this afternoon, can you come in?' They're fabulous that way. They will come and stay as long, like you can see they're tired, we've been here all day, and we've got multiple caterings, and it's like, 'are we done yet?', but nobody will complain, nobody says... 'I'm going home, you guys are on your own', nope they'll stay until the bitter end... (Small Business Assistant).

Conflict Resolution

Conflict does not arise often, but when it does the Program Manager explains that he believes in peers solving it themselves if possible. If his participation is required in conflict resolution he uses a restorative justice approach which,

...looks at what happens when things go wrong first and foremost and if someone's been hurt by that process and I don't mean physically hurt I mean emotionally hurt, by any particular process or wrongdoing. And it really emphasizes what happened, what were you thinking about at the time? What have you thought about since? Who's been affected by what you've done? In what way? What do you think you need to do to make things right? So it's really about the person owning the issue and then coming up with the solutions in order to solve it (Program Manager).

He explains that this approach is used "so that everybody can have a full understanding of what the conflict was about, what are the different perspectives and how do we proceed together. Keeping in mind that it's the needs of the programs that are really paramount to other things". This method of conflict resolution indicates a concern for individuals that is characteristic of social enterprises and in particular consumer initiatives; the needs of the organization are important, but so are the needs of the individuals that allow the organization to function.

Performance Appraisals

The approach to performance appraisals is similar to that of conflict resolution; the performance of the caterers is evaluated but the Program Manager recognizes that

“sometimes performance appraisals, I mean even if you do have a really great grasp on what you're doing and you're used to working in that sort of thing, a performance appraisal can be a very stressful time no matter what”. For this reason he builds the performance appraisals with the employees and seeks feedback from the Lead Caterer, the Small Business Assistant and the other caterers (Program Manager). He takes into consideration how the caterers “view their performance compared to the requirements of their job” (Program Manager). Again, this demonstrates the organization’s willingness to accommodate and involve its staff.

Termination

The termination of Catering Plus' staff is undertaken in much the same as in the rest of CMHA,

In terms of termination if there was something very serious, like criminally related that might be termination with cause. Very rarely would we go termination without cause. If there's performance issues that can't be resolved then we go to the progressive discipline process which is a verbal warning, a written warning, usually a suspension in there and then termination (Program Manager).

Customers

Catering Plus serves a wide variety of individuals and organizations within the community. For example, a sample of their customers from December 2011 to January 2012 is as follows,

Canadian Mental Health Association (OCAN training, Board of Directors) individuals (take-away dinners) Community Living Weddings Canadian Automobile Association Downtown Business Association Peterborough Collegiate and Vocational School City of Peterborough	Centre for Autism Chamber of Commerce Children's Aid Society Kawartha Endodontics Catholic School Board City Hall DM Mills Associates Green-up Village Innovation Per Diem offices
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Westwood Condos
TD Bank

Based on Catering Plus feedback forms, customer satisfaction with the service and the food were very good overall, with a few exceptions of dissatisfaction with food timing, temperature and quality. Generally customer feedback forms had comments such as the following,

“Everyone loved the food and raved about the taste/quality and variety”

“Thank you for providing excellent service and quality products for my order”

“Everyone was satisfied with the food”

This feedback is communicated to the staff, as explained by the Small Business Assistant,

I always try to let them know what it is people are saying about us...if it is good, which 90% of the time it is, but if it's not then we can make some changes and they're always very helpful with making suggestions because you know they're the ones that actually do the work, you know 99.9% of the time. So their input on systems and how things work and what works best is really invaluable and they should set up the way things work because, they do it.

This quote demonstrates the organization's commitment to improving its services, and the way in which the caterers are participants in this process.

Conclusion

This section has outlined the unique organizational structure of Catering Plus, which is characteristic of social enterprises and alternative businesses. Evident throughout is the way in which the processes of the organization seek to balance its social and economic objectives. All activities, from hiring to performance appraisals, must take into account the dual focus of Catering Plus; they are a catering business, but they also have a “dedication and responsibility for the wellness and betterment of others” as outlined in their Mission Statement. The next section will present findings on the way in which this structure affects the staff, based on their own perceptions.

Findings: Staff Perceptions of Benefits and Challenges of Employment

Accommodation and Support

One of the important aspects of the Catering Plus working environment is the accommodation and support provided to the caterers. As the Small Business Assistant explained:

You know things don't get done in record breaking time here, like in a traditional business setting you have deadlines and if you don't meet those deadlines you have some explaining to do and here it's a little bit different. Sometimes you may have to explain something a couple of times before it actually sticks, you know before they can actually perform the task...sometimes you need to, they just need a little more encouragement, just to suit up and work with them and they're fine (Small Business Assistant).

Several of the caterers expressed their appreciation for this support from the Small Business Assistant and Lead Caterer. One caterer explained that, "that's another good thing about Catering Plus is that they will allow for mistakes and everyone's different abilities" (Caterer 5). One caterer expressed that the leadership at Catering Plus was different than what they had experienced in other jobs because they are,

...more considerate...like ok for example. One time I was doing a sandwich tray and I don't know if its cause of my illness or what I don't know. But I was doing the sandwich tray wrong and so she came over and tried to explain it to me, and it took her three or four times to get it into my head...I'm like ok I understand now...But it takes me like that three or four times to get it in there...like, there's a wall there, or something. I don't know why, it must be cause of my illness (Caterer 4).

Another caterer explained that:

I get nervous when I get to a spot where I don't know what to do next on what I've got. And like I say I'm looking for the answers and somebody's got to be there. (laughs)...I'll, I kind of fret a little bit. But I know that in a couple minutes it will all be over. That somebody will be there (Caterer 2).

As well as the support provided to the caterers during the physical work of the catering, support may also extend to accommodating their emotional, physical and mental needs. This is apparent in the way in which the caterers are asked to do shifts, as mentioned previously and one caterer also explained how this support is manifested at work.

I worked about three hours and I was hyped up the whole time. Course they could see that right. And I don't know they said you, you finish working now and come sit down and come talk with us...both bosses were there, the chef boss and the manager. And my chef boss was trying to make me laugh. I said what are you doing, she said I'm just trying to make you laugh...but the tears went flowing down my face, because, I think a lot was my male friend and it hurt to let it go, talk to two people that I really care for a lot. And it just helped me release it and I felt a lot better after...they said, quit working come over here and talk to us. It was nice to let it out to someone (Caterer 4).

The accommodation also extends to the schedule of the time spent at Catering Plus. One caterer explained,

If we want a cigarette to go out for a break and we have a break and there's time and we can go out for a cigarette. See at Tim Hortons you couldn't do that at all, you were on your feet for 5 hours, say your shift was 8 hours and then you would get a half hour break...it was hard at Tim Hortons (Caterer 5).

There is also support for caterers who have other jobs, or other commitments. One caterer, is finishing their high school diploma while working at Catering Plus and explained that, "they'll probably let me off to go to school, cause it's to benefit my job" (Caterer 6).

These types of accommodation, typical of social enterprises, are important because they are often not found in mainstream business and their absence can be a barrier to employment. As one caterer expressed about their job at Tim Hortons,

...it's a very pressured job you have to be very quick, very busy...after three weeks they let me go, they said we don't think you can handle the stress of the job, working alone in the future. And I'm sorry we'll have to let you go but we'll give you a letter of reference. And I was very disappointed, because I was getting the hours and I did try hard and I didn't think I was slow, I screwed up a few things in training, but so that was a big disappointment to me (Caterer 5).

For some of the caterers the accommodation in terms of the flexibility of the hours and work at Catering Plus was seen as an asset. One caterer explained that, "I also like the flexibility because like we could work 3 days a week, 2 days the next week. So it's very flexible. Like number one it gives you time off, we don't have to work a five day week" (Caterer 7). Another caterer appreciated the flexibility because it allowed them to also have other employment, "A lot of these jobs out there are just part time and I can fit Catering Plus into it" (Caterer 5).

The Program Manager explains the importance of the flexible nature of Catering Plus, linking it to the caterers' recovery process,

...I think our flexibility is one of the keys to our success. As long as we realize that recovery is not a linear thing, like you don't just get up and do a and b, and c and d. It doesn't follow that. Recovery is a twisting winding road as a metaphor. And if you're flexible enough as a group, or a company or an organization, you'll help people find their level. You'll help them find where they need to be.

In terms of accommodation he explains the following approach,

I mean you've got to take it case by case...whatever comes in has to be treated as on an individualized basis. And if you don't, if you're too rigid in...your process with that approach, you're going to have situations where you might actually even lose good people. But the accommodating factor, we try to bend as much as we can without breaking, bottom line. But we also help people to realize what is really important, not only to their own health, their own mental health, physical health, etc, but also to the business itself. I mean we can't do it without people. So I mean helping them realize the balance as well, and what their own personal

stake in all this is. Like yeah we all have a responsibility, no matter what our jobs, to the success or failure of the business. It's keeping along that message that's important.

The Program Manager's statements emphasize the crucial importance of flexibility and accommodation to support caterers as well as to ensure the success of the organization.

People

The people involved in the organization seem to play an important role in the employment experience of the Catering Plus staff. Many of the staff expressed really enjoying the people that they work with. As one caterer stated, "the best thing about working here is the people I work with, the team" (Caterer 5). For some, the people were seen as an important social network, and many talked about the fun and humour that is shared while at work (Caterer 7,6,4,3,1). Others took this even farther and mentioned how comforting it was to work with people who shared a similar history of lived mental health experience. One caterer stated that, "It's very relaxing to know that there's others, you know in the same...that have maybe problems in that area" (Caterer 1). Another caterer expressed that "It's enjoyable to come to work to a workplace where people will have similar problems to me"(Caterer 4).

One caterer also explained that they see working with other people with lived mental health experience as an opportunity to make a positive contribution. They explained that, "I work, not necessarily all for money. I work with other people, people who've been somewhere I've been before. And...I find that I can help somebody else along the way. And that's a large part of why I work within CMHA" (Caterer 2).

While some caterers felt that working with other individuals with lived mental health experience was a positive aspect of working for Catering Plus this was also seen as

a challenge by one of the caterers because not all of the caterers have the same abilities. They expressed, “I do have an issue here...it has to do with the people working here and their abilities...sometimes you have to work with someone who’s not a very good worker and it’s not much fun” (Caterer 5).

It is important to note that none of our interview questions specifically asked about what the caterers thought about the people they work with. It says a lot about the work environment and the importance of the type and attitudes of the people involved in creating this environment that all of the caterers mentioned at some point in their interview the importance of the people that they work with.

The relationship between the caterers and the Small Business Assistant and Lead Caterer was also mentioned by the caterers as a positive aspect of working at Catering Plus. In some cases this was related to their understanding of the caterers lived mental health experience. One caterer expressed that “it’s nice to have bosses that understand” (Caterer 4). For the Lead Caterer and the Small Business Assistant the people that they work with are also an important part of their experience working with Catering Plus. The Small Business Assistant expressed this by saying, “I really like working with the people here, they’re fabulous”.

These statements demonstrate that, while it can present its own form of challenges, the fact that all of the caterers at Catering Plus have lived mental health experience is generally seen as a positive aspect of the work environment. This is a unique aspect of the Catering Plus environment, and one that suggests that in other work environments there would be less of a mutual understanding between employees. The caterers’ comments about the importance of the people that they work with reflect what the literature suggests about the role that employment can play in providing a social network. As the Small Business Assistant described it,

Some people come for the social aspect, it gets them out of the house and they like the group, the camaraderie a lot of them have worked together for years and years and years, I think to have that stable connection with somebody that's moving forward, doing positive things is an asset in anybody's life. They've developed friendships, some of them see each other out on social times.

Routine

Some caterers found the inconsistency in timing and number of shifts week by week to be an issue. One caterer explained how they need to budget to make sure that they have enough money to pay the bills when the catering business is slow (Caterer 2). Another caterer expressed how being called in to work on a catering last minute can be quite stressful, "like that one day when I was called in like. Can you come in right now or can you come in at one o'clock or like that day. That's hard for me mentally" (Caterer 4). This suggests that because the Catering Plus work schedule is inconsistent the caterers are not getting the benefits that the literature suggests are provided by daily routine.

Building Improvements

When asked about the ways in which Catering Plus could be improved, all of the caterers, the Small Business Assistant and Lead Caterer spoke about the need for a bigger and better equipped kitchen and working space. Based on the fact that very few other aspects of the Catering Plus working environment or structure were mentioned, it can be interpreted that the physical working environment is in such need of improvements that it overshadows the other issues. Alternatively, it may be an indication that the staff are genuinely quite happy with the way in which the organization is run and for them an improvement in the equipment and physical space of the organization is the only obvious improvement. Based on the overall positive way in which the staff spoke of their experiences working at Catering Plus it seems more likely that it is the latter.

Sense of Place and Purpose

The caterers expressed the importance of the sense of purpose and place provided by employment at Catering Plus. As one caterer explained: “I have somewhere to go to, to get out of the house and meet people. That way it’s really good. To know you can do something besides just sitting at home” (Caterer 1). Another caterer explained how being employed keeps them occupied:

So you know it really is beneficial and I like it 'cause number one it keeps me busy, it keeps my mind going and prevents my mind from thinking of other things. So basically its like as soon as I walk through that door I'm on work. It time to work. And that's it (Caterer 7).

Another caterer commented, “It’s like I’ve got my place to live, but this is another place that I can work and earn money and be with people, be busy, be out of the apartment. You know I don’t work a lot. But what I do work is good” (Caterer 4).

The Small Business Assistant saw the fact that Catering Plus can give individuals something to do with their time as a benefit that more people should be able to have access to. She expressed a desire to get “more people in here so we can start helping other people have the chance for a lifestyle change or modification, you know if they’re just staying at home and wanting to do something this is the perfect thing for that”. The above quotes emphasize the importance of a sense of purpose, as highlighted in the literature.

Learning

As suggested in the name of the organization ‘People Learning Useful Skills’, many of the Catering Plus staff conceptualized their work as a learning experience. In the

interviews, the caterers discussed how they have learned cooking and baking skills and how they sometimes bring recipes home from work (Caterer 3, 4, 5, 6). They described how they have learned organizational skills (Caterer 5) and the basic skills necessary to work in the catering business such as arranging trays and timing deliveries (Caterer 7). One caterer explained that, “this is new to me, cooking in a kitchen...I've never had a job working in the kitchen before preparing food, and I love it and it's really a lot of fun...I've learned to cook things...I've learnt a lot cooking here.” (Caterer 5)

Beyond the tangible skills acquired through employment with Catering Plus, the caterers also described learning other types of skills. One caterer stated that working at Catering Plus has helped them think and cope a lot better (Caterer 7). Another caterer explained how working has helped with their social skills, “being able to talk to people more. Cause I'm a pretty shy person. Don't like to be around a lot of people. And this has helped” (Caterer 6). One of the caterers explained how their work taught them to listen better (Caterer 4).

For the Small Business Assistant, the learning aspect of her job was described as a chance to better understand the “many shades of grey in this world” and to recognize that everything is not as “black and white [or]...cut and dry” as was portrayed in her earlier employment in mainstream businesses. She perceived the learning of the caterers to be centered on their increased time management skills.

The Lead Caterer explained how working at Catering Plus has taught her a lot about mental illness and described her job as a “learning experience”. She perceived that, for the caterers, employment at Catering Plus “Teaches them discipline and...they've learned to laugh”.

These points reflect how the Catering Plus work environment facilitates learning and skill development, which is emphasized in the literature both as an important aspect of

social enterprise and as a benefit of employment.

Financial

The fact that Catering Plus is a job that provides a certain degree of financial security was mentioned as an important benefit of employment by many of the staff. The Small Business Assistant explained that she believes that for the caterers “there’s the monetary advantage of working as well, that helps supplement their ODSP...I think it helps give them a better quality of life, as far as being able to buy better food...and knowing how to prepare it”. One of the caterers expressed that, “it’s the only job I have right now...number one you don’t want to be unemployed” (Caterer 7). Another caterer said that it helps, “supplement my income, yeah. Extra 400\$ a month or so which helps” (Caterer 3) and one caterer explained that the role that employment at Catering Plus plays in their life is “mostly a monetary role” (Caterer 2).

Responsibility

The responsibility and independence that is associated with employment at Catering Plus was seen as important by both the caterers and the Small Business Assistant. While there are certain accommodations made within the organization that would not necessarily exist in a more mainstream business, the same sense of responsibility for the quality of work exists. As the Small Business Assistant explained: “if something goes awry amuck or askew it’s fixed and...a solution is provided, it’s not just like oh well what do you expect, we can’t do [it]. There’s none of that, because everybody takes responsibility for what they do and they’re happy to do that”. The Small Business Assistant also alluded to the fact that the staff feel a responsibility to each other as a team, saying that in some cases,

we've been here all day, and we've got multiple caterings, and it's like, 'ah are we done yet', but nobody will complain, nobody says 'that's it I'm going home, you guys are on your own', nope they'll stay until the bitter end and when they're done... They don't want to let anybody down.

According to the Small Business Assistant the caterers are trained in a way that allows them to take responsibility for their work,

The Lead Caterer makes sure that things get done properly and you know on time and she also encourages them to do the same as well. So that they're learning and they're also taking responsibility for what they do...I think they have a clear vision of what we're hoping to attain and everyone's working toward that. It's great.

The caterers also expressed that their tasks require a certain amount of responsibility. In comparing Catering Plus to their previous job, one caterer explained that, "I worked in the cafeteria... Just wiping off the tables and that. This you actually, do stuff. The other, you just wash tables" (Caterer 6). Another caterer expressed this by saying, "I've got more responsible jobs here than I did before. I got specific jobs to do" (Caterer 3).

Perceptions of Self

An important theme that emerged throughout the interviews was the impact of employment at Catering Plus on the staff's perception of themselves and their abilities. One caterer stated, "I didn't realize that I could do a job like that until I was actually doing and it and I went, this is great...I have learned a tremendous self esteem, sense of accomplishment and that's really important to me that I do when I leave for the day I feel I've accomplished something" (Caterer 7).

In many of the interviews there was a specific focus on the theme of gaining

confidence and having a purpose. In contemplating the changes she has noticed in the caterers since they started working at Catering Plus the Small Business Assistant said,

Everybody's comfort level has grown. Their confidence has grown definitely, not just here but in their personal lives, for some of them as well...And they're taking a more independent role along with that. Like if they see something needs to be done, they'll go ahead and take care of that without being asked to do it. So yeah...their self confidence I think that's probably the biggest change I've seen.

When asked about whether they have changed since working at Catering Plus, one caterer explained that they feel "More confident...mainly feeling useful. Yeah, like needed, needed." (Caterer 4).

Some of the caterers linked employment at Catering Plus to emotional and mental changes as well. When asked if and how they had changed since working at Catering Plus, one caterer said that they had changed in "every way, attitude, not so depressed, just everything" (Caterer 6). Another caterer explained that,

...when I first started here my anxieties were worse. But now I realize that I stayed longer than I did at first. You know how your anxieties just get going and I wanted to go home about an hour and a half after I got here, but now we're getting better with it...[now I work] maybe four or five hours, even more maybe (Caterer 1).

Another caterer stated that their job with Catering Plus "kind of...grounds me...it like makes kind of my life" (Caterer 4). This is one of the ways in which Catering Plus achieves the social aspect of its mission statement, which emphasizes 'dedication and responsibility for the wellness and betterment of others'.

Pride and Ownership

Many of the Catering Plus staff expressed a great deal of pride in the work that they do, stating, “It’s a very busy catering company. We’re very popular...we do have a lot of clients and we’re right there at the top of the board you know with our catering...I feel proud to be a part of it. I feel good, it’s an honour to be part of Catering Plus” (Caterer 7). “We have done a lot of big caterings in this little place. Like over 200 people, 250” (Caterer 6). For one caterer the pride that they felt in working for Catering Plus was related to how their family felt about her employment, “My family knows that I’m doing a good job and they’re so proud of me because I’ve come through a lot” (Caterer 7).

From the Small Business Assistant’s perspective, “Nobody ever complains about doing any of that they’re just like ok let’s do it, and they’re really very proud of that. They take like a pride of ownership in what they do”. In reference to the successful completion of a very large catering, the Small Business Assistant said that, “they had a big group whoopoo, so I mean that was good that they were that excited about it. And it was a fabulous thing because that really pushed our boundaries”. She also explained how she feels that this pride of ownership is what makes the caterers want to come to work even when they are tired or have worked long hours the day before. As explained above in the business meetings and decision-making section, participation in the organization plays a role in the creation of this sense of pride.

Opportunity

As opposed to the mainstream business environment, in which there are so many barriers to employment for individuals with lived mental health experience, employment at Catering Plus can provide an opportunity for individuals to change their own perceptions of themselves and create change in other aspects of their lives. This was mentioned as being important by the Small Business Assistant and several of the caterers.

As the Small Business Assistant explained:

The staff have some of them, you know they've come back from being derailed in their lives and to working on schedules, sometimes that alone can be daunting for some people to show up at a certain time and do a certain task but a lot of them have done that, some have even gone on to moving into their own homes, being totally self supported... I've seen some staff be discharged from caseworkers, so I find that really inspiring... We've got a couple people talking about going back to school. You know ones working on getting her high school, and that's phenomenal. I don't know if they would have necessarily wanted to do that if things had been, you know, if they had been sitting at home or not but you sort of give them, this workplace gives them the chance to show themselves, I mean they've always had it in them, they've always had this ability, this quality, and sometimes you can just sometimes forget what you're capable of doing until you're put into a situation and then its like, oh yeah I can do this, and I can not only do this but I'm even thinking of doing that. And they'll succeed at it, that's one of the amazing, the good things about this. Nobody's ever backslid on anything, you know, they continue to grow and...I find that inspiring.

One of the caterers explained that employment at Catering Plus has made them feel more confident about finding other types of employment, "So for me to even hand out a resume somewhere like Druxy's or somewhere where I could say 'look I've had catering experience, I've had deli experience'. It makes me feel like hey there's another part of my career that I can tackle" (Caterer 7). Another caterer stated that they now "want to go back to school to a culinary course I want to take" (Caterer 6). The importance of the opportunity for employment was expressed by one caterer,

...like when you're working one day and then the next you're unemployed you go from up here to down here (motions from high to low with hands). And it's such a big difference you know you're working, you're making, you know, you're doing a job, you're meeting people, you're out in the open (Caterer 7).

Another caterer conceptualized the opportunity aspect of Catering Plus in a different way, explaining that they are "glad [the customers] give us a chance to do our job. I'm glad they do, that they do call us. It's nice to know that they do give us a chance, to see what the food and all that is like, which is real good" (Caterer 1).

Duration of Employment

Most of the caterers expressed a desire to continue working at Catering Plus as long as they were able to do so. When asked if there would be a time when they would stop working at Catering Plus caterers responded, "...no I wouldn't like that, I wouldn't like that at all" (Caterer 7), "...no...because a lot of this work in Peterborough is seasonal...at lot of these jobs out there are just part time and I can fit catering Plus into it (Caterer 5), "No, unless I can't physically handle it. Or mentally handle it" (Caterer 4), "I'll work as long as I can" (Caterer 3) and "I guess I'll work here as long as I can. As long as I'm healthy enough to work. Yeah I think as long as I can work I will" (Caterer 1). The Lead Caterer and the Small Business Assistant share this view, stating respectively, "Not 'til I keel over. I'll work 'til I'm able" and "Well, I guess I'm going to have to sooner or later...so eventually I will but I'm hoping to stay as long as I can." This indicates that the majority of staff view Catering Plus as long-term employment and do not consider it as a short-term or transitional job situation.

Link to Recovery

The benefits and challenges of employment at Catering Plus presented above came directly from the interviews with the caterers, Small Business Assistant and Head Caterer themselves. While the Catering Plus staff were never asked directly about how they perceive these benefits to be linked to recovery from mental illness, the benefits of employment that were identified in the interviews are ones which in the literature are believed to contribute to recovery from mental illness.

Challenges

The following are a couple of challenges which reflect some of the complexities faced by social enterprises employing people with lived mental health experience. Many challenges exist, however these particular issues were identified as important by the Program Manager. This section explores the way in which Catering Plus is responding to these challenges.

Advertising Catering Plus

One of the challenges in finding a niche market for Catering Plus involves the decision of whether or not to advertise the business as a social enterprise. When advertising social enterprises there is a need to balance between focusing on appealing to potential customers' values and promoting a product that competes in the marketplace (Lougheed and Donkervoort 3). Catering Plus could be marketed as a business that provides employment and numerous social benefits to individuals with lived mental health experience, as well as a catering service. This approach has the potential to highlight its uniqueness and help the business carve out its own niche in the competitive catering market. Advertising as a social enterprise could allow Catering Plus to capitalize on the social benefits that it provides to its employees and attract a customer base that is interested in community involvement and social inclusion. In this type of situation, Catering Plus would be providing its customers not only with catered meals but also with the opportunity to advertise themselves as socially conscious businesses or organizations because of their support of people with lived mental health experience through contracting Catering Plus. This concept takes advantage of the current popular idea that a consumer exercises considerable power through their purchasing choices (LePage 1). The idea is that the purchasing decisions of consumers, specifically larger consumers such as governments, corporations and NGOs, have the power to impact large issues such as global warming, poverty and, in the case of Catering Plus, the social exclusion of people with lived mental health experience (LePage 1).

On the other hand, advertising the fact that Catering Plus employs individuals with lived mental health experience might deter certain customers from hiring Catering Plus because of the influence of negative stereotypes of individuals with a mental illness. As the Small Business Assistant explained “some people don’t like the idea of people with a mental illness serving food” (Small Business Assistant Pers. Comm. 16 Jan. 2012). This avoidance of Catering Plus due to negative stereotypes is a trend that the Small Business Assistant feels would be apparent in the area of wedding caterings, an area in which Catering Plus is currently trying to expand its customer base (Small Business Assistant Pers. Comm. 16 Jan. 2012).

The decision of whether or not to advertise the social aspect of a social enterprise seems to depend largely on the type of social enterprise, the market in which it works and the targeted clientele. For example, Inner City Renovations, a social enterprise construction company in Winnipeg that employs low-income residents of inner-city neighbourhoods, found that their potential clients were more concerned with the quality, reliability and price of the construction/renovation services than with the social impact of the enterprise. In some cases the fact that the employees were low-income was seen by potential customers as a factor associated with poor quality work. This is a good example of the misleading negative stereotypes that social enterprises face. In this case, advertising for Inner City Renovations was most effective when it focused on the successes, in terms of quality, of their completed projects and on testimonials of happy and satisfied past customers (Lougheed and Donkervoort 2).

Potluck Catering, a social enterprise café and catering organization in Downtown Eastside Vancouver that provides employment to individuals facing employment barriers, provides another example of the intricacies involved in advertising a social enterprise. Potluck Catering originally tried to focus their marketing on appealing to the values of their potential customers by promoting their product as a way for customers to

give back to the community. This strategy however, failed quite dramatically and their sales stagnated and even declined. It was suggested that this was because this strategy did not mention anything about the quality of the product itself and because they emphasized the fact that it was a 'nonprofit', a term that, it was learned through later discussions with customers, is associated with a substandard product. Potluck Catering found that their social message only attracted a limited group of individuals who were already predisposed to social responsibility. For the majority of customers the social aspect of the enterprise was considered as added value to the Potluck Catering product. However, considered alone, the social aspect was not a strong enough draw to ensure their business. For these customers the most important aspect of the decision amongst catering companies was choosing a company that was able to provide a service and a product that would make them, as a host, look good (Lougheed and Donkervoort 3). When Potluck Catering took this into account and started focusing their advertising on the quality of product and service they provided as well as on the social aspect of their enterprise, they had much greater success (Lougheed and Donkervoort 4).

One of the challenges of advertising social enterprises involves the ethics of advertising the specific characteristics of the employees. This was an issue raised by the Catering Plus Program Manager, who stated that, "I have never capitalized on the aspect of us being an alternative business, because I have never been able to really reconcile that as a marketing aspect...I just don't know how to use it ethically". In the case of Catering Plus, the Program Manager felt that advertising as a social enterprise could benefit the business and dispel stigma related to mental illness in the Peterborough community. He explained that by increasing the profile of the social aspect of Catering Plus the organization could show people,

...what the impact of the human capital is... really relating it to the recovery. I think these are all things that the community at large could really benefit from. I mean not only would it dispel stigma around mental health issues, but I think it would raise the profile of the company right. I just want to be really clear with people that we're doing it for the right reasons, you know not necessarily to

increase profit but to really display and show off and celebrate the hard work of these folks (Program Manager).

In the case of Catering Plus, the advertising, while not ignoring the social aspect of the organization, focuses on the product and service that they provide. As the Small Business Assistant explains,

We try to do business for what we can do, not necessarily for who we are...we present ourselves as a business, that's what we are first and foremost. A consumer initiative business is still a business. We have the information printed on our menu, it talks about who we are and what we do. Its not a secret, I think when people find, out, especially if they've used our service or were part of a meeting that we catered for and they find out that we're part of the Canadian Mental Health Association sometimes it's met with, wow that's really great, and other times they're a little surprised about that. But it, you know, it never seems to be a negative thing. I think that we're a very competitive business and this just helps us, you know if somebody wants to support a social enterprise like us than that probably will get us the sale over someone else, so I think that we're happy, certainly better than a European trained chef I think. Because our hook is us.

Even though it is not the focus of Catering Plus advertising, the Small Business Assistant still believes there are customers who are aware of the social aspect of Catering Plus and who are quite supportive of it, "overall they're definitely behind us and they see what we're trying to accomplish and they give CMHA kudos for that for having...this type of operation, where people can start back in to work and you know see how far they want to take it".

While this seems to be a fairly successful advertising strategy for Catering Plus at the moment, in the competitive Peterborough catering market the Small Business Assistant and the Program Manager continue to search for a way to carve out a niche and gain an edge on their competitors. As expressed by the Program Manager, this edge may or may not be achieved through advertising the social aspect of the business.

I wonder sometimes if I could have it both ways. I mean can I have it so that people know its a social enterprise and still want to hire us, or could I have it so that people are just looking for a really awesome caterer. 'Cause that's all I want, I

mean you know if I could wave my magic wand I would make them the number one catering choice in Peterborough...I mean but if it gives us a competitive edge, why not? (Program Manager)

The question of whether or not to highlight the social aspect in the advertising for a social enterprise is a question that is still under consideration at Catering Plus. It is a question that strongly reflects the unique role played by social enterprise within the capitalist market.

Social Assistance

Often the employees of social enterprises are supported by social assistance prior to, and during, employment. At Catering Plus, the Small Business Assistant believes that the majority of the caterers receive Ontario Disability Support Program payments. Currently, the Ontario Disability Support Program appears to be encouraging its recipients to seek employment, with campaigns such as 'Don't Waste Talent' which is dedicated to

...helping people with disabilities across Ontario:

- ▲ discover the skills you have to offer in the workplace
- ▲ learn what job help is available to you
- ▲ connect with people who can get you started on the path to employment. (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services).

This encouragement of employment is also reflected in the current ODSP policy as outlined in a booklet titled *Work While Receiving ODSP Income Support*:

You are allowed to work while receiving ODSP Income Support. Having a paid job will increase your total income.

For each month you are employed and reporting earnings:

- ▲ For each \$1.00 in net earnings you make, the ODSP will deduct 50% from your income support cheque. For example, if your net monthly earnings are \$600, the ODSP will deduct \$300 from your ODSP Income Support cheque.
- ▲ You can claim the following work expenses without reducing the total amount of Income Support you receive:
 - The full cost of licensed child care or up to \$600 each month for

each child with unlicensed care

-Up to \$300 per month for disability-related items you may need to help you in your job such as specialized equipment, sign language interpreting services, or attendant care services.

- ▲ Plus, you can receive a \$100 Work-Related Benefit to help you with costs such as transportation or work clothing.

Between your earnings, your ODSP Income Support and the Work-Related Benefit, you will have more money when you are working than from your income support alone (Ontario Disability Support Program).

Additional supports exist, such as an “Employment and Training Start Up Benefit of up to \$500 in any 12-month period to help pay for things like work uniforms, equipment and professional fees”. As well, if recipients reach the point where they can leave ODSP Income Support entirely, “the ODSP can provide health benefits and continued employment supports to help keep your job and advance your career”(Ontario Disability Support Program). The Small Business Assistant highlighted the importance of this, explaining the situation of one staff who was barely receiving ODSP but, “...ODSP still continued to cover their benefits. Which is huge for medications, like there’s no way that, I mean anybody could afford meds without some sort of support. So I think ODSP is good that way.”

Social enterprise organizations can often reduce employees' dependence on social assistance through the provision of employment and in this regard the current ODSP policy and its focus on employment support is useful. However, it can be a challenging experience for those accustomed to receiving it to have their income support reduced. As Broad and Saunders explain, the difficulty and the complexity of obtaining Ontario Disability Support Program assistance results in a “culture of fear where the ODSP recipient quite legitimately experiences anxiety when undertaking any activity which could possibly jeopardize his/her eligibility for benefits” (Broad and Saunders 7). This has been an issue at Catering Plus, as the Program Manager recounts, “for example, one worker wanted to quit because he had no money for rent cause he worked too much. I

told him he could pay his rent with his earnings. He had spent 15 years on ODSP and couldn't make the connection between work and pay”.

Further, there is an inherent contradiction in receiving ODSP and being employed simultaneously because to qualify for income support, recipients must demonstrate that their capacity to work is limited (Gewurtz 134). As Gewurtz quotes Estroff et al. “disability income is both nurturing and confining; it may relieve survival stresses and strains but may also spawn despair” (19). Often individuals with lived mental health experience have been told they are unable to work and that they must receive ODSP. This puts them in a difficult situation,

...they've had non stop income support, from usually from the time they were very relatively young, 19 years old. You've been receiving income support, everything's been paid for, why would you work? So these folks who are working in food services right now are taking a massive leap, they really are (Program Manager).

As the Program Manager explains, working while on ODSP can be a frightening and challenging experience, because recipients are not accustomed to working and because they fear the loss of social assistance payments. Though it seems that ODSP policy is largely responding to the needs of working recipients, the “problem is again the level of understanding. I don't think there's a very clear understanding from a client's perspective how the ODSP system can work for them” (Program Manager). The Small Business Assistant had a similar perspective, but felt that caterers were beginning to understand,

I think initially some were afraid of working past a certain amount of time because they thought that their ODSP would be in jeopardy, like they didn't want to lose it, obviously, that's something, nobody wants to lose that, and we certainly don't want to put anybody in a position. But I think gradually they're coming to understand that it doesn't necessarily matter how many hours you work... (Small Business Assistant)

The Ontario Disability Support Program exists within a the neoliberal context, in which “market principles are conceived as the most efficient way to organize human life

and thought to contain the solution to nearly every political or social problem” (Gewurtz 30). As Gewurtz explains, this context has influenced the restructuring of social assistance, which has come to rely heavily on the market and which also emphasizes 'self-sufficiency and individual responsibility' (30). This is apparent on the 'Don't Waste Talent' website which urges clients to,

REDEFINE YOUR DISABILITY

Be the person, not the disability.

During a job interview, it's up to you to help employers focus on you as a person, and not on your disability. Employers want to know you can do the job. So you need to be prepared to tell them what you have to offer.

(Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services)

This individualized approach “tends to blame marginalized individuals for their circumstances rather than acknowledge the contribution of deeply-rooted social and structural inequalities” (Gewurtz 195-6). This furthers the stigma towards people on social assistance with mental health issues, by viewing them individually as an the issue, and ignoring the external challenges they face (Gewurtz 198). Catering Plus, however, works to counter this individualized responsibility by employing people with lived mental health experience in meaningful work in a supportive environment. This transfers the blame from the individual to the discriminatory employment environment in mainstream businesses.

An additional concern with ODSP policy is its narrow focus on employment which may force clients into 'low paying, dead-end jobs' despite their skill level and interest (Gewurtz 151). There may also be a preference among employers to hire individuals ready to go directly into a job above individuals who require more support (Gewurtz 160). Within a market-based model, individuals who require more support can be perceived as burdensome and detrimental to the profit-making capacity and competitiveness of the hiring organization (Gewurtz 192). This a concern which Catering Plus, as a social enterprise, is able to respond to. Due to the dual focus of Catering Plus,

both on social and economic objectives, they are able to offer supportive and rewarding work to individuals with lived mental health experience, seeking to reduce their dependence on ODSP. They can employ individuals who may require more support because profit-making and competitiveness are not their sole objectives.

Discussion

Based on these findings, it is clear that the unique and innovative structure of Catering Plus as a social enterprise creates an inclusive environment which provides important social benefits to employees. First and foremost, the mere existence of Catering Plus provides an important opportunity for individuals with lived mental health experience to access the social benefits of employment. In the mainstream business environment, which focuses on efficiency and profit, this opportunity is often not provided due to misleading negative stereotypes relating to the capacity of individuals with lived mental health experience. These limiting negative stereotypes can be internalized by individuals with lived mental health experience and become a barrier to employment. Catering Plus is an environment in which individuals are “appreciated for what they can do instead of recognized for what they can’t” (Small Business Assistant Pers. Comm. 16 Jan. 2012).

By hiring individuals with similar experiences, Catering Plus provides a secure and understanding environment in which staff can develop strong social networks and experience a sense of place. The Small Business Assistant and Lead Caterer contribute to this environment by providing support for the development of catering skills, as well as playing a role in facilitating the personal growth of the caterers.

Accommodation of staff, through flexibility in work schedules and response to the specific needs of individuals, is a structural aspect of Catering Plus which staff greatly appreciate. It allows them to work when they are able, but acknowledges that in some situations staff may be unable or unwilling to work. In these situations they may decide to refuse shifts without compromising the security of their employment at Catering Plus. This flexibility also provides space for staff to pursue other employment or educational opportunities.

The participatory nature of business meetings and decision making at Catering Plus allows for the development of a sense of ownership among the staff. By being involved beyond the catering work of the organization, staff are able to feel a stronger connection to its successes or failures and to take pride in their role in its achievements. This sense of accomplishment can lead to a greater understanding of their own capabilities and provide caterers with a strong sense of purpose.

The method of resolving conflict through restorative justice, and of building performance appraisals with staff further demonstrates the importance of staff participation in the organization. When given the space to participate, staff can develop a sense of responsibility for the organization and a sense of personal accountability for the role they play within it. As the Small Business Assistant explains, “you always want to do better if you are a vested part of something” (Small Business Assistant Pers. Comm. 16 Jan. 2012).

The Catering Plus environment and the social benefits that it provides, can contribute to changes in the way that staff view themselves and their capabilities. This is apparent in the development of greater self confidence and sense of personal value and usefulness expressed by several of the caterers. Beyond the social aspects of Catering Plus, as an enterprise it also provides financial benefit to its employees. This contributes to their independence and sense of responsibility.

As a social enterprise providing employment to individuals with lived mental health experience Catering Plus plays an important role in the lives of its staff. It is important to note that many of the benefits of employment with Catering Plus that were expressed by the caterers were similar to those benefits of employment that are linked to recovery from mental illness in the literature.

The economic aspect of Catering Plus also plays an important role in the organization. Catering Plus has recently begun to generate profit, which the Program Manager describes as a huge achievement. The organization currently requires annualized funding to operate, a fact that, from a business perspective, may lead to it not being perceived as a business. However, it is completely understandable that Catering Plus requires financial support considering that its pursuit of social goals as well as economic ones means that it cannot operate solely on the basis of maximizing profit and efficiency.

The success of the organization cannot be measured on an economic basis alone, as this neglects the social importance of Catering Plus. Neither can it be evaluated solely based on its social contribution. The economic aspect of the organization provides an opportunity for participation in a productive environment. As emphasized in the literature, paid work is extremely valued in society, for social as well as economic reasons. Catering Plus provides its staff with access to the benefits associated specifically with paid employment. Further, the economic focus facilitates the creation of the unique structure of Catering Plus as a social enterprise which allows the organization to pursue both social and economic objectives. Without an economic objective around which to organize, Catering Plus would not be able to provide the same social benefits to its staff.

Catering Plus plays an important symbolic role by challenging the dominant perceptions of the abilities of individuals with lived mental health experience and re-conceptualizing the traditional profit-driven model of business. Catering Plus re-conceptualizes this mainstream model of business by choosing to prioritize people over profit instead of profit over people. It operates within the market, but it addresses the shortcomings of capitalism by providing accommodation and support for its workers. Catering Plus also challenges the barriers set up by society for people with lived mental health experience by successfully employing individuals deemed unemployable by mainstream standards. By challenging these barriers Catering Plus is creating a space for society to change its perceptions of individuals with lived mental health experience.

Dart makes the point that social enterprises are “organizational solutions for structural problems” (15 Feb 2012). This means that social enterprises can only address structural problems on an organizational level, from which they cannot be fully solved. In the case of Catering Plus this means that it can play a role in changing perceptions, but it cannot fully address the structure within which these perceptions exist. This is evident in the section on the challenges faced by Catering Plus and its staff in the areas of advertising and ODSP. To have Catering Plus advertised as a social enterprise and fully accepted as one, requires a shift in the perceptions of mainstream society towards a greater understanding of people with lived mental health experience and a recognition and appreciation of their abilities. While some progress has been made to overcome negative perceptions, this is still an ongoing process. In the case of ODSP, a shift is taking place among the staff themselves, who are recognizing their ability to decrease their dependence on social assistance and to find meaningful work. Though they face many structural barriers, Catering Plus provides a space in which these barriers are less significant. Catering Plus is striving to be innovative, however, it exists within a dominant society which is still working towards an understanding and appreciation for individuals with lived mental health experience, and this may limit its capacity to completely change perceptions.

Nevertheless, through changing perceptions of mental illness and employment, and reconceptualizing mainstream profit-driven business, Catering Plus is playing an important symbolic role. As Dart writes, social enterprises “reflect and embody important social ideas as much as they deliberately perform certain tasks” (416). These important social ideas involve addressing the discrimination that 'excluded persons' face, in the labour market and in society more generally, and changing their perceptions of themselves and society's perception of them (Broad and Saunders 20). The Ontario Council of Alternative Businesses website explains the situation, “many consumer/survivors have been institutionalized, spending years in and out of hospital, talking to professionals who are paid to speak to them about their mental health status. As a result, they may lose hope for an independent future” (Ontario Coalition of Alternative

Businesses). By providing an employment opportunity to individuals with lived mental health experience Catering Plus is addressing this barrier. The Program Manager expressed it best,

You want to know what the main barrier is, for people with mental health issues? In my opinion, hope. I mean if people have a sense of hope I think they're entirely successful. I think that they really have an opportunity to grow beyond what they ever thought possible. It's the same barriers for anybody else. I think a sense of hope is entirely important. I mean being employed is hard, retaining employment is hard. Finding employment is exceedingly hard. ...You know, that's scary stuff. But I think that people finding a place to start, to start making those dreams a reality is the place to go. And sometimes it takes a long time and sometimes its a hard road, but if they maintain that sense of hope I think that it gets them through. Without it they're not successful, its a barrier.

Conclusion

Based primarily on the social focus of this report, it seems that Catering Plus is successful in achieving its social objective of meaningfully employing individuals with lived mental health experience. This is done through creating an environment which is supportive and accommodating and provides the opportunity for the personal and professional growth of employees. Catering Plus challenges the values of for-profit business and mainstream perceptions of the capabilities of individuals with lived mental health experience.

This report does not address the economic viability of the organization, nor the direct link between employment with Catering Plus and recovery from mental illness. An examination of these aspects would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the success of Catering Plus.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the literature review, the interviews with Catering Plus staff and the subsequent discussion, the following recommendations are ways in which Catering Plus can continue to improve in meeting the needs of its staff and the needs of the organization. These recommendations may be used to inform a future business plan.

♣ **Catering Plus should expect to continue to rely on external annualized funding but should also continue to generate profit.**

Most social enterprises do require funding, as the pursuit of social objectives (in this case providing work for individuals with lived mental health experience) make it difficult to operate on the same principles of efficiency and rapidity as a mainstream business. Attempting to become self-sufficient, and no longer depend on funding, may compromise the social objectives of Catering Plus. At the same time Catering Plus should continue to work towards generating profit, because this is a source of pride and motivation for the staff. However, too much focus on generating profit could potentially detract from the social benefits of employment (by seeking only the most capable staff for example, or creating additional stress and pressure within the workplace).

♣ **The division of shifts between caterers should continue to be flexible and accommodate the needs and particular situation of individuals.**

In addition, the transparency related to the decisions about division of shifts should continue to be increased, as this allows caterers to understand why they may or may not be receiving a certain amount of hours and reduces the likelihood of conflict between staff related to shifts. It should be recognized that the caterers have individual needs and that some require more warning to prepare for their shift, mentally and otherwise.

♣ **The importance of the current Lead Caterer, Small Business Assistant and**

Program Manager in creating the positive environment of Catering Plus should be recognized.

In hiring new leadership, particularly a new Lead Caterer or Small Business assistant, it would be important to consider the impact that this individual would have on the Catering Plus environment. As well, hiring decisions should consider the ability of the individual to facilitate a supportive environment as currently exists. Many of the caterers expressed the importance of their relationships with the Small Business Assistant and Lead Caterer and it must be recognized that these relationships of trust take time to develop. This demonstrates the importance of long-term contracts and commitments from the leadership of Catering Plus.

^ **The importance of the caterers' shared background of lived mental health experience should not be overlooked.**

It should be recognized that this shared background is a fundamental aspect of the current positive and supporting environment of Catering Plus because of its role in creating a safe space and trusting relationships amongst the staff. This should be taken into account when making decisions about future staff as well as introducing new positions, such as a professional chef.

^ **When funds permit, implement improvements to the Catering Plus building and equipment or invest in a new, larger and better equipped space.**

This was an issue raised by the majority of the caterers as well as the Small Business Assistant and Lead Caterer. Improvements recommended by the Catering Plus staff included a larger kitchen space, larger and more professional ovens and stoves, industrial grade kitchen appliances, specifically an industrial blender, increased lighting and heating in the back room, more counter space and increased freezer and refrigeration space.

^ **Catering Plus should continue to take advantage of any opportunity to promote the skill development of its staff.**

This should include providing staff with the opportunity to learn new skills even when another staff member may be able to complete the task more efficiently.

▲ **Catering Plus should continue with activities that facilitate staff involvement and pride of ownership.**

The participatory business meetings and performance evaluations are processes that likely enforce this. The fact that caterers are expected to be responsible and accountable for the work that they do, and the way in which the Small Business Assistant and the Lead Caterer facilitate this, is also important to the development of a sense of pride of ownership and positive perceptions of self among the caterers.

▲ **It should be recognized that the majority of the caterers do not perceive employment at Catering Plus as a transitional stage in their integration into the workforce.**

If Catering Plus was to emphasize this type of transition, the importance of providing a larger number of individuals with the opportunity to be exposed to the benefits of employment at Catering Plus would need to be balanced with the impact that this type of change would have on its long-term employees. It would also need to be recognized that this shift of focus would greatly impact the Catering Plus environment. By decreasing the duration of employment of staff, there would be less of an opportunity to create the trusting and positive relationships that currently exist within the organization. Additionally, it needs to be acknowledged that the current accommodations and support provided to Catering Plus staff, while extremely important to the social success of the organization do not reflect or prepare staff for the type of situation that they would face in a mainstream business environment. Therefore additional training would be required to integrate into the mainstream workforce.

^ **From an economic perspective, advertising should continue to emphasize the quality of the product and service Catering Plus provides.**

While the social aspect of Catering Plus should not be excluded from the way in which it is marketed, case studies of other social enterprises suggest that this should not be the only aspect of the business advertised. However, if Catering Plus is to play a role in dispelling the myths and negative stereotypes associated with individuals with lived mental health experience, the social aspect of Catering Plus should be made more prominent in its market strategies than it currently is. This would serve the purpose of educating customers on the capabilities of individuals with lived mental health experience. One way to address this challenge is to emphasize the different aspects of Catering Plus depending on who the advertising is targeting.

^ **Catering Plus staff would benefit from ongoing information sessions on receiving ODSP support while being employed.**

ODSP was not an issue raised by many of the caterers, and the Small Business Assistant believes that many of the caterers are becoming comfortable with the process. However, providing an information session for new and current staff to familiarize them with the policy and the way in which employment will affect their ODSP payments might help individuals become more comfortable with the idea of working while on ODSP and decrease their fear of losing ODSP benefits.

^ **Potential areas of future research include:**

- **The economic aspect of Catering Plus.** Research could highlight the way in which funding could be used most efficiently and identify successful marketing strategies for the organization.

- **The link between recovery from mental illness and employment with Catering Plus.** Research could analyze the way in which the specific environment and opportunities provided by Catering Plus contribute to the caterers' recovery from mental illness.

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The author of this article, Raymond Dart, is an assistant professor in the business administration program at Trent University, Peterborough, Canada. His areas of expertise include organizational analysis, nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations, entrepreneurship, community development. We did not have the chance to contact him, but we heard him speak about a case study of a social enterprise in Toronto.

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This article explores the role of work in the recovery of people with psychiatric disabilities who are both employed and unemployed. Interviews were conducted with 14 individuals who had been referred by Community Mental Health Centers. Based on these interviews the authors developed three profiles for the experience of recovery in persons with psychiatric disabilities. These profiles outline how an individual's vocational status, sense of self, sense of empowerment, connections to others, the meaning they give to work, their view of their vocational future and the meaning they give to recovery, interact to determine their experience of recovery.

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This article investigates the role that employment plays in the lives of people living with severe, persistent mental illness and the work environments that lead these people to have positive employment experiences. The authors found that all consumers interviewed felt that work was important, not only for the extra money but also for the regular activity, sense of belonging, structure and the status and identity that comes along with having a job. They found that consumers were quite pessimistic about their future employment prospects, fearing a relapse that would lead to unemployment. The authors found that

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Appendix 1: Consent Form

Consent Form

Evaluating a Social Enterprise (CBE Project #4226)

Part A

The Project: This is a research project conducted by Jaya Bastedo and Emily Balderston through the Trent Center for Community Based Education. It is part of a fourth year International Development course (IDST 4220: Assessment of Development Projects) taught by Prof. Chris Beyers.

Purpose of the project: to evaluate the alternative food service social enterprise operated by CMHA-Peterborough, Catering Plus. The project will focus specifically on Catering Plus' capacity to facilitate participants' recovery from mental illness and on the factors necessary for ensuring the long-term viability of the social enterprise.

Risks and Benefits: During our interviews we may be asking respondents questions about their lived mental health experiences, which have the potential to elicit strong emotional responses. However, the objective of our research is to provide CMHA with recommendations and information to improve the program and its ability to respond to the needs of CMHA clients. Information will be gathered with the purpose of directly benefiting respondents, future Catering Plus staff and the organization as a whole.

If you agree to give consent to our use of the information, you are guaranteed the following rights:

- You may withdraw your participation at any time, or choose not to answer certain questions
- You have the right to confidentiality of personal information. Unless you wish otherwise, your name will not be used in our final report.
- You do not have to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering.
- There is no deception, or risk to yourself or other participants involved in this exercise.

The information will be gathered in written form and tape-recorded. These notes and recordings will be stored in a secure place.

If you have any further questions or concerns please feel free to contact us:
705-930-2557 or 705-743-3746, jayabastedo@trentu.ca or emilybalderst@trentu.ca

Part B

I have read the above description of the research in which I have been asked to participate and understand the possible risks and benefits involved. I have also been told that I may withdraw from this project at any time and that the information I provide will remain confidential unless I have also signed Part C.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this project.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Part C

I further agree that information I provide may be cited without my name attached in the researcher's/researchers' essay or other class work.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Interview Questions with Caterers

1. How long have you been working at Catering Plus? (What changed for you when Crazy Cooks became Catering Plus?)
2. How did you get involved in Catering Plus?
3. Have you had other jobs? Is Catering Plus different than other jobs you have had?
4. Do you feel that you have changed since you started working at Catering Plus? And how?
5. What have you learned working at Catering Plus?
6. What role does working at Catering Plus play in your life?
7. Do you think there will come a time that you will stop working at Catering Plus? When or why do you think that would be?
8. What do you feel is good about working at Catering Plus?
9. Does anything make it hard for you to work at Catering Plus?
10. What do you think Catering Plus is doing well?
11. What do you think Catering Plus could do better?
12. How do you think the people you cater for feel about Catering Plus?

Interview Questions with Small Business Assistant

1. How long have you been working at Catering Plus?
2. How did you get involved in Catering Plus?
3. Have you had other jobs? Is Catering Plus different than other jobs you have had?
4. Do you feel that you have changed since you started working at Catering Plus? And how?
5. Do you feel that the caterers have changed since you started working at Catering Plus?
6. What have you learned working at Catering Plus?
7. What do you feel that the caterers have learned working at Catering Plus?
8. What role does working at Catering Plus play in your life?
9. What role do you feel Catering Plus plays in the lives of the caterers?
10. Do you think there will come a time that you will stop working at Catering Plus? When or why do you think that would be?
11. What do you feel is good about working at Catering Plus?
12. What do you feel is good for the caterers about working at Catering Plus?
13. Does anything make it hard for you to work at Catering Plus?
14. Do you feel that anything makes it hard for the caterers to work at Catering Plus?
15. What do you think Catering Plus is doing well?
16. What do you think Catering Plus could do better?
17. How do you think the people you cater for feel about Catering Plus?

Interview Questions with Lead Caterer

1. How long have you been working at Catering Plus?
2. What changed for you when Crazy Cooks became Catering Plus?
3. How did you get involved in Catering Plus?
4. Have you had other jobs? Is Catering Plus different than other jobs you have had?
5. Do you feel that you have changed since you started working at Catering Plus? And how?
6. Do you feel that the other caterers have changed since you started working at Catering Plus?
7. What have you learned working at Catering Plus?
8. What do you feel that the other caterers have learned working at Catering Plus?
9. What role does working at Catering Plus play in your life?
10. What role do you feel Catering Plus plays in the lives of the other caterers?
11. Do you think there will come a time that you will stop working at Catering Plus? When or why do you think that would be?
12. What do you feel is good about working at Catering Plus?
13. What do you feel is good for the other caterers about working at Catering Plus?
14. Does anything make it hard for you to work at Catering Plus?
15. Do you feel that anything makes it hard for the other caterers to work at Catering Plus?
16. What do you think Catering Plus is doing well?
17. What do you think Catering Plus could do better?
18. How do you think the people you cater for feel about Catering Plus?

Interview Questions with Program Manager

How many staff? How many hours work?

What positions, job descriptions?

How does hiring process for Catering Plus staff work? What are the criteria for hiring? Pick someone who can benefit the most or someone who will work out and work well with team? Are there specific reasons why someone wouldn't be hired?

Does Catering Plus have the capacity to work with someone who is really struggling? When would someone be asked to leave Catering Plus?

How do they decide who gets what shifts?

What training do staff receive? Who decides?

How do they do performance appraisals for JoAnne, Carol, Dennis and the caterers? How often?

Funding? How much? Where? How is it received?
How much are staff paid? How much revenue does Catering Plus generate?
What are Catering Plus expenses? Rent? Advertising? Equipment?
History? Dates switched over?
What is the connection between CMHA and Catering Plus?
How often is CMHA directly involved in Catering Plus business?
How do team meetings work?
How is conflict resolved?
How is change decided? - bagel bar, new stoves/ what is the decision making process?
Is Catering Plus meant to be transitional? Of the staff that have left Catering Plus what have they been doing since?
Are there other organizations that hire people with a mental illness?
Where would he like to see it go? His vision?
What do you perceive to be the employment barriers to mental health survivors?
How long have you been working at CMHA?
What changed when Crazy Cooks became Catering Plus?
How did you get involved in Catering Plus?
Do you feel that the staff have changed since working at Catering Plus?
What have you learned working with Catering Plus?
What do you feel that the staff have learned working at Catering Plus?
What role do you feel Catering Plus plays in the lives of the staff?
What do you feel is good about working at Catering Plus for the staff?
Do you feel that anything makes it hard for the staff to work at Catering Plus?
What do you think Catering Plus is doing well?
What do you think Catering Plus could do better?
How do you think the catering customers feel about Catering Plus?