



Pan-Canadian Community Development Learning Network Profile of Effective Practice:



Affirmative Industries

Context

In Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, in the late 1980s, on a Psychiatric ward of the Nova Scotia Hospital, a young Psychologist working with 20 patients was using traditional methods of behavioral interventions to help patients re-integrate into the community. Results were poor, with very few – if any – of the patients developing the skills necessary to live outside the institution. Dr. Norman Greenberg was challenged by this and decided to try something different. He imagined

This Profile of Effective Practice is one of fifteen stories examining how innovative, community-based initiatives are using comprehensive approaches to improve social and economic conditions on a local level.

The profiles were prepared as part of a 2.5-year project of the Canadian CED Network looking at the links between social inclusion and community economic development.

For other profiles, more information on the project and additional resources on social inclusion and CED, see the notes at the end of this document.

that if the hospital provided a work setting with appropriate supports, there could be an opportunity for new skills to be developed in non-institutional settings. The theory was that if the environment was new and individuals liked the environment, they would respond with willingness and excitement towards this learning opportunity. Based on the philosophy that everyone could contribute if provided the right opportunity and supports, a journey began that uses work, business and skills building to help people integrate into society.

History

After reading the book *Affirmative Industry* by Lance Du Rand and hearing the Minnesota author speak in Nova Scotia, Dr. Greenberg launched the first employment training business for mental health patients at the NS

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Hospital in 1988. The first business was craft oriented, producing clay heritage model houses. Since then, businesses have also packaged gravel for a local gravel company and created cat furniture, which was sold in the US. This last enterprise led to packaging pet supplies which then morphed into “Pet Stuff On the Go”. This company/enterprise continues to package, retail and deliver pet supplies in the Halifax region.

In 1992, The Affirmative Industry Association of Nova Scotia was incorporated and recruited a board of directors from the NS Hospital. In 1998, a strategic planning session was undertaken and the vision of the organization was broadened to help individuals with disabilities enhance their economic independence. The mission became “facilitating economic independence of persons with disabilities through getting a job, starting a business or owning their own home.” As part of that mission, the board recruited diverse members from the community, including four individuals with disabilities.

Halifax, Nova Scotia

History – Originally a Mi’maq settlement, Halifax was founded by the British to counter the French power of Acadia. Originally a fortress town and naval base, it prospered during war time and became a destination of American British Loyalists, which led to a strong African Nova Scotian population, and Pier 21 became famous for the landing of thousands of immigrants from the great wars. It grew as the province’s seat of government and as a service centre.

Economy – Halifax is the largest city in Atlantic Canada with a diversified economy, boasting many colleges and universities, a naval base, an oil and gas servicing industry, vibrant cultural industry, and is the government and service centre for Nova Scotia.

Social Need – The challenge for people with disabilities to be full citizens in Canadian society is daunting both for those with disabilities and for groups supporting them. As an example, people with disabilities have unemployment statistics way beyond the reported numbers about the unemployed in Canada. There are significant access and affordability issues for Mental Health consumers in housing and for entrepreneurs with disabilities to obtain financial support for their businesses.

Claim to Fame – In 1917, the collision of a munitions ship in the harbour created the biggest human-caused explosion before the nuclear age, flattening much of the city and killing close to 2,000 people.

At the same time, Affirmative Industries helped form and became a leading partner in the Teamwork Cooperative. This new organization opened the door for all agencies working with people with disabilities to create innovative solutions towards employment and break down barriers between people and agencies.

Continuing with their strategic plan, in 2002 Affirmative Industries took ownership of the Dollar Store on Novalea Drive in Halifax. In 2004, the Andrew Peacock Fund was created to provide business loans and equity to individuals with disabilities starting their own business.

In 2004, Affirmative Industries began developing “Building for Independence”, an affordable housing and equity savings model for mental health consumers. To date they have raised \$500,000 for a \$1.2 million project and are hoping to complete the project by 2006.

Activities

Affirmative Industries operates three lines of business:

Employment Training Platform – Pet Stuff On the Go and the Neighbourhood Dollar Store are businesses owned by Affirmative Industries which employ a mixture of people with disabilities and those without. A supported work coordinator oversees the two businesses through job coaches who work with clients’

Affirmative Industries

business site.. Participants go through employment orientation then go on to one of the businesses which provide three-month supported work opportunities for people with disabilities to help them develop skills, adjust to a work environment and re-integrate into society. Ultimately, the goal is for them to secure employment in the free market. The program trains 50 people per year and generates approximately \$300,000 in sales. Businesses aim to break even but the project has government support for the coordinator and job developer positions, who help participants secure work when they graduate from the business training.

The Andrew Peacock Fund – Established with support from the federal government's Office for Disability Issues, the Andrew Peacock Fund provides business loans and equity to individuals with disabilities across Nova Scotia who want to start their own business. It currently operates in partnership with the Nova Scotia Cooperative Council which administers the Fund, and the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, which provides funding for a business developer who reviews and advises on the development of business plans, and acts as a mentor for applicants.

Affirmative Industries

Year Incorporated – 1992

Activities

- Employment Training Platform – Pet Stuff on the Go and a Dollar Store
- Andrew Peacock Fund – business loans
- Future Project - Housing for Independence

Annual Impact

- Number of trainees: 50
- Gross sales: \$300,000
- Value of equity investments: \$28,000

Repayable Equity investments are offered to clients who provide a completed business plan. Approval is based on evaluating officer's analysis of the client's business plan and skills. Applicants must also agree to management skills training and mentoring. The fund provides a minimum investment of \$10,000 to a maximum of \$50,000, with a term of 5-7 years. To date, equity investments totaling \$28,000 have been issued, with an additional \$40,000 currently pending.

Building for Independence – The housing envisioned for this project is as the title suggests, a way for mental health consumers to address both their housing and equity needs. This model will enable those who are stable in their illness and who

are already at work or school to gain access to affordable, adequate housing which also provides a way for them to save money to purchase a home or for other meaningful targets. There will be ten units designed, including two 2-bedroom units, eight 1-bedroom units and a common room for tenant meetings. Partners include The Halifax Regional Municipality, Community Services Housing, The Federal Governments Affordable Housing Program, Central Mortgage and Housing and the Community Economic Development Technical Assistance Program at Carleton University.

Comprehensive Analysis

The idea of a work environment that endeavored to include those excluded from work was the beginning of a new analysis. The level of comprehensiveness, that is, the merging of social and economic goals, and the use of a community economic development perspective progressively grew, and was more fully stated in the 1998 strategic plan. It was also reflected

Comprehensive Analysis

The first model used was supported employment. It grew to include a broader community economic development model that recognized the interconnectedness of housing, transportation, employment, income and accessibility.



Affirmative Industries provides three-month supported work opportunities for people with disabilities, like Jonathan Muloloni, helping them develop skills, adjust to a work environment and re-integrate into society.

in the subsequent vision statement – to facilitate the economic independence of people with disabilities in Nova Scotia. The first model used was supported employment, but it grew to include a broader community economic development model that recognized the interconnectedness of housing, transportation, employment, income and accessibility. It recognized the need to partner to be comprehensive. This was the principle in the formation of the Teamwork Cooperative to build capacity in the community and across various organizations. This in turn has led to a successful partnership with community and government departments to provide a school to work transition year program for graduated students with disabilities.

Policy and Support

During the start-up phase of the businesses and Affirmative Industries, HRDC was very supportive and had the flexibility to support job coaches, coordinators, and job developers. More recently it has become increasingly difficult to innovate with government partners, or to even get the same level of funding for key pieces of the programs. These are programs that in the past were recognized as being a

proven part of the mix to help people stay out of hospitals and integrate more in society. Dr. Norman Greenberg explains, “Policies are so tied to Ottawa that regional and local program officers no longer have the flexibility to work with communities or their innovative initiatives.”

Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Affirmative Industries has succeeded in growing and developing innovative options for people living with disabilities first and foremost thanks to the leadership and entrepreneurial attitude of Dr. Norman Greenberg. As a key person in a key position, he has played a critical role in pushing the boundaries of what is expected and accepted of people with disabilities. A second staff person, the Supported Work Coordinator, with her passion and commitment was definitely a prime ingredient in the success of the early days and she continues to be an important factor in the current success of the organization. Another key factor was and remains the Nova Scotia Hospital’s support of the idea, through provision of staff and a location. Early in the program development, the flexibility and support from government partners like HRDC and Community Services was also an important factor in establishing the programs and acquiring businesses.

Success Factors

- Leadership and commitment by key staff and the hospital, which served as an umbrella organization.
- Government flexibility to allow for innovative programs.

Along the way, Dr. Greenberg has learned that we must be patient to let initiatives grow, we must work with government as partners, and we must continue to meet challenges head on.

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One unexpected challenge has been the desire by different disability identities or communities to remain more separate than integrated. This is partly due to the funding streams available to community organizations which only fund projects, rather than community capacity.

Outcomes and Evaluation

The incorporation of Affirmative Industries, and recognition by the community and partner agencies, that the “employment training platform” is a community partner, are major outcomes. This is demonstrated by partnerships with the Department of Education, Nova Scotia Community College, and Independent Living Resource Centre. “When we began, 100% of our participants were institutionalized. Today almost 95% reside in the community. We are part of the partnership that enables this major outcome.” The creation of the Andrew Peacock Fund in support of business owners with disabilities is also a significant achievement for Affirmative Industries.

Affirmative Industries has been evaluated internally or externally in 2002, 2003 and 2004. The strategic planning process of 1998 remains the baseline from which evaluations are carried out. The Board of Affirmative Industries has recognized that another planning session for the next five years is required over the next year.

Seth Asimakos

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For more information on the Affirmative Industries, visit their website at <http://www.affirmativeindustries.ca/>

More Profiles of Effective Practice and other resources on social inclusion are available at: <http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/pages/learningnetwork.asp>

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Resources

Du Rand, Lance. (1978). *The Affirmative Industry*. St. Paul: Minnesota Diversified Industries.

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