



Social Enterprises and the Ontario Disability Support Program Case Study:

Charles Printing (Prescott-Russell)

Charles Printing is a self-described 'affirmative business' which provides printing services to customers in Hawkesbury. Such services include colour printing and copying, and tasks related to print finishing such as collating materials. Answering the telephone, photocopying, laminating, and filing are just a few examples of duties Lucie Jenevieve Roch, a Charles Printing Employee of more

In 2006 Algoma University, with funding provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation through the Canadian CED Network (CCEDNet), undertook a research initiative designed to identify areas for policy improvement related to social enterprises which employ persons in receipt of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). This is one of four case studies developed as an outcome of this initiative. To view the final report and policy recommendations developed from the case studies visit: http://ccednet-rcdec.ca/files/social_enterprises_and_ODSP.pdf

than two years, performs during her shifts. Roch was introduced to Groupe CONVEX by her mother and began working with Hawkesbury Packaging before moving into her current position with Charles Printing.

Context

The Services to Children and Adults of Prescott-Russell (SCAPR) offers a variety of supports to vulnerable individuals (SCAPR, 2007). Although SCAPR's clients already were experiencing some social exclusion related to their disability, trying to enter the workforce created additional challenges to their participation (Arcand, 2007). The development of competitive employment opportunities for vulnerable individuals faces particular challenges in rural areas such as the county of Prescott-Russell due to high levels of unemployment and the lack of public transportation (Arcand, 2007). To address these challenges and to move away from the client based model,

affirmative enterprises were created (Groupe CONVEX, n.d.a). Groupe CONVEX focuses on the expansion of innovative businesses and the creation of conditions in the workplace that positively impact employees (Groupe CONVEX, n.d.a).

History

Charles Printing was originally operated as a mainstream small business but as the owner



approached retirement, he was unable to find a successor. Discussions with the Groupe occurred over a couple of years (in part because the Groupe was somewhat reluctant to open a print shop in Hawkesbury) before the deal was finally closed. Several services were added such as laminating and binding, in an effort to increase employment opportunities (Jedynack, 2007). Since it was purchased, the business has grown and now provides employment for a business manager, two pressmen, and 5 employees. Due to the highly specialized skills required of the manager and pressmen positions, these positions are recruited from the general public rather than from target employees. Employees offer their ideas regarding various issues, including their workspace. For example, employees requested a lunchroom and this suggestion is now being realized (Jedyna, 2007)

Organizational Structure

Groupe CONVEX was created with the primary purpose of expanding employment and training opportunities for individuals with a developmental disability (Groupe CONVEX, n.d.a). Together the Groupe CONVEX network generates approximately \$1,000,000 in revenue a year (Ontario Co-operative Association, 2007) and employs 145 individuals of whom approximately 85% are in receipt of benefits provided through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) (Arcand, 2007). Nine enterprises are currently in operation through Groupe CONVEX providing a wide range of products and services to the Prescott-Russell region. Enterprises include Hawkesbury Antiques, Casselman Packaging, Hawkesbury Packaging, Express Net, Gold & Spices, Librairie du Coin, Menuiserie Casselman, The Harvesters, and Charles Printing. Being a network of enterprises, they have the ability to utilize each other's services. For example, Menuiserie Casselman sends its products to Casselman Packaging to be packaged (Anonymous, 2007).

The Board of Directors is composed of 6 individuals from the Prescott-Russell area, each with differing areas of expertise, who meet monthly and make strategic and policy decisions, as well decisions regarding larger purchases such as equipment. Each of the 9 enterprises has a manager in charge of making decisions related to the day to day operations of the business, recruiting, hiring and supervising the employees. All of the business managers meet 4 times a year and report to the Executive Director who is responsible for the overall development of strategies and businesses, administration, financial aspects, and the human resources of Groupe CONVEX. An Administrative Assistant is also employed at the organization's head office to assist with items such as invoicing and collections. Advertisements and recruitment are completed through local employment and social service organizations who inform ODSP recipients of the Groupe's employment and training opportunities.

Funding is received from SCAPR, grants and revenues derived from the businesses. Profits, as well as deficits generated by all of Groupe's businesses are combined and reinvested into the overall budget of Groupe CONVEX. Recently the organization was granted \$130,000 from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to assist with public awareness with other businesses and organizations who want to learn more about developing social enterprises, and to produce resources such as a CD and

DVD. With the increasing demand for information about social enterprises and their social and economic benefits, these materials will provide guidance to those newly entering the sector.

Groupe CONVEX enterprises are designed to operate similar to mainstream businesses, and the community and customers respond to them that way. Some customers do not identify the social purpose until after they enter the store (Jedynack, 2007). The process for hiring employees is comparable to other businesses where individuals hand in their resume, an interview is conducted, and after a successful probationary period they are hired. In order to help the employees enter the workforce an employee handbook was developed, which outlines the responsibilities and rights of the workers. In the handbook it states “we consider our workers to be our biggest asset” (Groupe CONVEX, n.d.b).

Accommodations are tailored to the needs of each of the employees. Carole Jedynack, Manager of Charles Printing, explained, “for example, one employee has an individual work station to address the nervousness and pressure he experiences from working in close quarters with other employees”. This type of accommodation assists in eliminating inconsistencies in the work and improving the quality of the finished product, as well as ensuring a viable workplace for its employees.

Activities

Training comprises a large component of the enterprise, as the skills, abilities, and ways of learning vary substantially from one employee to another. The manager and the two pressmen provide the training to workers on the various tasks providing repetitive opportunities for skills development (Jedynack, 2007). Some projects are specifically utilized as training tools to assist new employees in their skill development. During the training period, trainees receive compensation based on the job and output, but if the individual is hired on full time after their training period is completed they are paid a competitive wage (Jedynack, 2007) and currently 45% of ODSP recipients have moved from trainees to employees (Arcand, 2007).

“I love my job. It’s quite simple. I love my job”.

Carole Jedynack
Charles Printing

Over time the employees become more and more independent in their tasks and roles within the organization. For example, one of the former trainees who is now an employee has become independent in greeting customers in person and over the phone, as well as receiving and completing copy orders. One of the challenges faced by the organization is the lack of anyone solely dedicated to training. Currently, the pressmen face conflicting priorities between completing jobs to deadlines, while providing training to employees on the press (Jedynack, 2007).

Outcomes

Even the organization’s title, CONVEX, is a metaphor for the continuous growth of an individual’s skills, abilities and self-esteem (Groupe CONVEX, n.d.a). Groupe CONVEX was described as providing employees with “self-esteem”, “valorization”, “social inclusion”, “community integration”, and “pride of working” (Anonymous, 2007; Arcand, 2007; Jedynack, 2007). For example, one of the disabled employees at Charles Printing lives independently, works 30 hours a week, earns a competitive wage, and has become friends with other employees. Lucie Jenevieve Roch, an employee at Charles Printing, explained that she goes bicycling and walking with another

employee outside of work. Working for Charles Printing also gave her the opportunity to visit France for a social enterprise conference where she was able to interact with various individuals from diverse backgrounds, as well as having a lot of fun. Other taken-for-granted activities such as buying Christmas presents for family members, are special events for individuals who have for many years been unable to access waged work.

Groupe CONVEX is not involved in the administration of ODSP for employees, because it is trying to maintain a business environment rather than a social service (Arcand, 2007). Carole Jedynack of Charles Printing stated that “we give them real jobs, real responsibility and real work. I find it fascinating to see how they love what they do...”



Groupe CONVEX is always seeking innovative ideas for enterprises, and they often begin from within the community. Recently, for example, the Casselman Chamber of Commerce contacted Groupe

CONVEX about the community’s need for an LCBO and Beer Store Deposit Centre. Currently community members have to travel outside of the village for this particular service, resulting in economic leakage through the purchase goods in other communities. By introducing this service into the community, the Groupe will not only provide additional employment opportunities for people in receipt of ODSP, they will also be plugging some of the holes in the region’s economic leakage (Arcand, 2007).

Factors Critical to Success

Like all of the Groupe’s 9 enterprises, Charles Printing belongs to its local Chamber of Commerce, which assists in its promotion, and the Groupe’s enterprises are also able to support and promote each other through referrals. Charles Printing has benefited from the partnerships developed with the other print shops in Hawkesbury, sometimes doing finishing work for which the other shops do not have the capacity. Likewise, printing projects that cannot be completed in house at Charles Printing, will be sent to other local businesses (Jedynack, 2007).

“The important thing is to never lower [your] price”.

Caroline Arcand
Groupe CONVEX

The business sometimes generates as much as \$20,000 in a good month (Arcand, 2007). Caroline Arcand, Executive Director of Groupe CONVEX, provides a piece of advice to others interested in the social enterprise sector, “the important thing is to never lower [your] price” and to ensure high standards for both the products and for the people who make them. Product quality was identified as an important element to the print shop’s success (Anonymous, 2007; Jedynack, 2007).

Management is one of the greatest strengths for Groupe CONVEX (Arcand, 2007; Jedyneck, 2007). Many of the people involved in the organization are not there just as a means of employment, but because they really believe in what the organization is trying to achieve. “I can make a difference in somebody’s life, it’s really valuable for me...” (Anonymous, 2007). As Carole Jedyneck, the Manager of Charles Printing stated “I love my job. It’s quite simple. I love my job”.

Like other member enterprises operating under the Groupe CONVEX umbrella, Charles Printing benefits from the support of the larger organization. Specifically:

- The enterprise shares in the revenues (and losses) of all 9 enterprises, making it more likely to be viable
- The Group is highly experienced in workplace accommodation and providing training for persons with disabilities
- Referrals from its ‘sister’ businesses.

Barriers and Challenges

Employees of social enterprises “don’t always understand the importance of quality, and the importance of the tools they’re using” (Jedyneck, 2007). For example, one employee damaged a piece of equipment by attempting to cut a paper clip with a tool utilized for trimming laminations (Jedyneck, 2007). This resulted in substantial costs for repairs and delays in other jobs.

One barrier that was identified specifically related to ODSP was the fear that employees and their families experience when reporting their income, and the subsequent deductions to their ODSP pension. Parents fear the increased income because they want to ensure their children’s finances for the future (Arcand, 2007). However, one change to the ODSP structure (Ontario regulations, 2006) that was identified as an incentive to work was the ability to maintain health benefits (Arcand, 2007). Maintaining health benefits contributes to reducing the fear about and creating more incentives for individuals entering the workforce.

Charles Printing still has a lot of potential for growth. Purchasing an additional printer and press would create more employment and training opportunities. These purchases would also be responding to the move towards digital printing that currently exists in the marketplace. Employees may be able to learn more easily on the printer than the press (Jedyneck, 2007). This is important because developmentally disabled individuals’ productivity is on average less than that of an employee without a disability (Arcand, 2007).

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