

# Participation and **Production**



A Resource for Community Enterprise

John Hooper and Richard Warner



Nundah Community Enterprise Co-Operative

# TABLE OF CONTENTS:

**Dedication (ii)**

**Executive Summary (iii)**

**Introduction (iv)**

<b>Chapter 1:</b>	The Impacts of Being Excluded from Work (6)
<b>Chapter 2:</b>	The Meaning of Work (8)
<b>Chapter 3:</b>	From Ideas to Action: a brief history of NCEC (11)
<b>Chapter 4:</b>	The Objectives of NCEC: a statement of principle and practice (14)
<b>Chapter 5:</b>	Why a Cooperative? (17)
<b>Chapter 6:</b>	NCEC Structure (20)
<b>Chapter 7:</b>	Supporting People on the Job (22)
<b>Chapter 8:</b>	Creating Work: plugging the leaks (27)
<b>Chapter 9:</b>	NCEC Capacity Building Framework (31)
<b>Chapter 10:</b>	Conclusion (33)
<b>Chapter 11:</b>	Additional Resources (35)

**Publishing details:**

First Printed 2003, Reprinted 2005.  
Updated edition (i-book and PDF) 2013.  
© Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative 2013  
23 Nundah St Nundah Qld 4012

**Disclaimer:**

All care has been taken in the preparation of the information herein, but no responsibility can be accepted by the publisher or authors for any damages resulting from the misinterpretation of this work. Whilst the publication of this book has been supported by a Brisbane City Council *Access and Inclusion Partnership*, all views contained within are solely those of individual contributors and authors.



**Nundah Community Enterprise Co-Operative**

**N**undah Community Enterprises Cooperative Ltd (NCEC) has a core commitment to create meaningful work for people with learning difficulties. Our workers either have an intellectual disability, or an intellectual disability and mental health issue. Our workers however, refer to themselves as “people with learning difficulties” and this book will honour their wish and use this term throughout.

This e-book is distributed free of charge and was created by NCEC with generous support from Brisbane City Council (BCC). It is a part of our commitment to supporting the development of Community Enterprise.

#### **Contacting NCEC:**

- If you are interested in developing a community enterprise and would like to contact NCEC about the ideas in this book please email [enquiries@ncec.com.au](mailto:enquiries@ncec.com.au) and we will contact you.
- If you are interested in supporting NCEC as a customer please visit [www.ncec.com.au](http://www.ncec.com.au) or contact the NCEC coordinator on [enquiries@ncec.com.au](mailto:enquiries@ncec.com.au)
- If you are interested in supporting the work of NCEC by way of donation please visit [www.givenow.com.au/ncec](http://www.givenow.com.au/ncec)
- NCEC also offers training and consultancy services. Visit [www.ncec.com.au](http://www.ncec.com.au) for more information.

Proudly supported by Brisbane City Council's  
'Access and Inclusion Program'



*Dedicated to a better Brisbane*

# Executive Summary

*“Exclusion of people causes poverty, violence and exploitation. Inclusion is a means of achieving a full and equal life in the community and helps to create a better world for everyone.”*

Overcoming Exclusion, Inclusion International Issue 30 May 2003

**N**undah Community Enterprises Cooperative Ltd (NCEC), formed in October 1998, provides meaningful work for people with learning difficulties and mental health issues who have been excluded from employment.

This e-book is a revised and updated edition of a well utilised publication ‘*Participation and Production*’ which has been formative in the development of community enterprise in Queensland. The current update has been kindly supported through a Brisbane City Council “Access and Inclusion Partnership” and provides information on new developments within NCEC. It also takes advantage of modern technology to reach a wider audience and give our workers greater space to tell their stories. These stories of labor market exclusion raise significant challenges for our current society, which we believe can and must be addressed.

It is our experience that Community Enterprise\* can be a successful way of addressing the employment exclusion of people with learning difficulties and suggest the following key challenges for those who want to foster inclusion:

- Not for profit organisations need to recognise the significance and meaning of employment and to commit to enabling people with learning difficulties to have a meaningful work role.
- Funders must find a way to resource community enterprises such as NCEC in an ongoing and appropriate manner.
- Governments and Private Industry need to find better ways to provide contracts to community enterprise and to work with them to develop the capacity to take up these contract opportunities.
- Federal Government must face the challenge and acknowledge that employment services are not securing sufficient job opportunities for people with learning difficulties. Government must seek ways to support community enterprises, such as NCEC, who offer real work opportunities.
- The challenge for policy makers, economists and the global community is to deal with the reality that technological change, globalisation and competitive markets have accelerated the displacement of low skilled workers from jobs. People with learning difficulties are particularly vulnerable to this displacement and exclusion. Policy changes that promote inclusion are urgently required.

\* Community Enterprise is a type of Social Enterprise owned and operated by a community. For more information on social enterprise typology you can purchase a copy of David Langdon and Ingrid Burkett’s ‘*Defining Social Enterprise*’ from NCEC.

# Introduction

---

**F**ifteen years ago a group of people experiencing long term unemployment established the first workers cooperative for people with a disability in Australia. Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative Ltd (NCEC) formed in October 1998 to provide meaningful work opportunities for people with learning difficulties and mental health issues who had been excluded from employment.

NCEC currently provides a range of services to businesses, government and community members in the inner North Brisbane region. Services include:

- **Breakfast, lunch and catering**

[www.espressoTRAINcatering.com.au](http://www.espressoTRAINcatering.com.au)

- **Parks and Maintenance services**

[www.ncec.com.au](http://www.ncec.com.au)

In its first year of operation, NCEC generated a modest income of \$2000 and provided infrequent, casual work for five workers. In 2002, the time of the initial publication of '*Participation and Production*', NCEC had grown to generate an annual income of \$53,000 and provide regular weekly work for fifteen workers, previously excluded from the workforce.

Ten years on, at the time of writing, NCEC continues to thrive and has generated an income of \$412,000 from products and services; provided regular employment to twenty five workers previously excluded from the workforce and has created positions for three permanent supervisors, as well as a part time coordinator and administrator.

The book you are reading charts the trajectory of that success from 1998 to the present day. It builds on our initial publication; written by John Hooper; and brings it into modern age, with workers telling their stories in a digital format.

As you read this book you will find opportunities to click on a short movie or media presentation to hear from the people themselves.

## “Cafe society” ABC NEWS



Reproduced by permission of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (c) 2011 ABC. All rights reserved.

[Click here to watch video](#)

We hope you enjoy listening to these important stories and considering how you might translate what you learn from them into your own life and locality.

Through NCEC's development, successes and struggles, we have learned about key aspects of community enterprise.

The aspects highlighted in this manual are:

- The significance of employment and its critical importance in people's lives;
- Successful strategies to support people with learning difficulties, enabling them to re-enter and maintain employment;
- The importance of Governments and corporations within current resources and contracting systems to provide work opportunities for community enterprises like NCEC, through "social tendering";
- That a community enterprise needs a network of supportive organisations to maintain viability (just as our employees need a supportive network of people to maintain their employment);
- Government and private industry who want to support those previously excluded from employment, through the provision of contracts, must also be prepared to build the capacity of the community organisation to take up the opportunity.



From left: Craig, Felice, Pierre, Bernard, Chris, Nathan, Ian, Michael, John, Iain and Aaron.

# 1

## The Impacts of Being Excluded From Work

“Sitting at home all day you go mad!”

We can truly appreciate the importance of Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative Ltd (NCEC) when we hear how workers of NCEC had previously experienced employment and the destructive impacts of their unemployment.

**“You’re not who we want for the job, we’ll have to let you go.”**

For most NCEC workers, school was a place where they had to survive regular bullying and harassment. Life after school however, was even harder. The first few years post schooling were often characterised by a series of short job stints, generally lasting a couple of days and ending in a sudden and mystifying dismissal. One man recalls ten different jobs ending this way in the two years after school.



*“I was always excited and hopeful at the start of each job and then shattered, angry and feeling lousy and useless at the end.” (Craig)*

Another talks about the challenges in finding work after school:

*“It was a pain [looking for work], people wouldn’t take me because I have disability.” (Paul)*



These jobs were generally laboring or factory work where workers were put under pressure to work fast and efficiently, with little tolerance for mistakes.



*“They put you on a stop watch to see how quick you work.” (Danny)*



*“I never got to know the names of the people I worked with.” (John B)*

All the workers talk about the stress and pressure of previous work and how their employers didn’t realise how anxious that pressure made them, leading to mistakes and the ultimate loss of their job.



*“Previously I was pushing trolleys and I was getting stressed and not doing well with my mental health.” (Michael)*

Workers felt their employers didn’t understand them and, therefore, they didn’t get the best work out of them.

*“If they’d understood my learning difficulty, they’d know I didn’t make mistakes on purpose. I just got confused.” (Michael)*

For the majority of NCEC workers there were a number of such job opportunities provided through open or disability employment services in the few years after school, but these all ended in dismissal. Training courses provided a temporary sense of purpose and promise, but the hopes they raised were commonly dashed. A number of workers then chose to work in sheltered employment at a rate of pay that covers transport and lunch costs, while others just had no employment at all.

Workers talk of how destructive these long periods of inactivity were for their confidence and physical and mental health.

***“[I was] Pretty bored. You just don’t do anything. You just sleep all day and that’s bad for you. (Paul)”***

**Paul: NCEC Parks Crew**



Paul discusses what it was like looking for work.

[Click here to watch video](#)

People with learning difficulties live with high levels of anxiety and stress and forced inactivity only heightens mental health problems.

**Kylie: Espresso Train**



Kylie speaks about the importance of work...

[Click here to watch video](#)

*“It used to take me hours to get to sleep. I’d sleep in till one p.m. then stay up all night – then you’d waste the day. Get depressed at night because you’re doing nothing with your time. Wasting your life away by sleeping all day.” (John B)*

After many years of rejection and inactivity, workers found it impossible to re-enter work even with the help of employment agency support.

These are the stories which prompted the Community Living Program (CLP)\* to approach interested constituents about coming together with other interested community organisations and pooling resources to see if a mutual approach to employment generation could work.

1) The Community Living Program established in 1989 (managed by Community Living Association Inc.) is a Queensland Government funded community organisation in Nundah which supports people with learning difficulties. As well as providing individual support to its constituents with learning difficulties, it has been involved in a range of community development projects, including those focused on employment and working to strengthen community capacity to better include its constituents in the community.

# 2

## The Meaning of Work

“Our communities rarely have the mechanisms to offer people with learning difficulties opportunities to contribute”.



Espresso Train Crew Circa 2011  
From left: Pierre, Joseph, Michael, Nathan and Ian.

**T**he success of a community enterprise must be judged by the difference it makes to its workers. In interviews for this book, workers at Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative Ltd and their supporters have named the following benefits of gaining and maintaining a job with NCEC:

### **A sense of contribution to the community.**

A number of NCEC workers speak of a sense of pride that their labour and the products created by their labour, are valued and needed by the community.

*“You feel proud of yourself working, as you are giving something back to the community.” (Danny)*

Previously, many workers saw themselves and were seen by the community, as service recipients, with no contribution to make. Our communities rarely have the mechanisms to offer people with learning difficulties opportunities to contribute.

Working in their local community has given NCEC workers a sense of ownership of their locality, as well as a sense of relating to others as an equal contributor.

---

***“I’m proud to have a job. I know people who don’t have a job and do nothing all day. I can tell my brothers and sisters now that I’ve got a really good job ” (John).***

#### **Examples:**

- NCEC Parks and Maintenance workers have a sense of ownership in the 26 local parks they are now responsible for.
- When workers are out and about they now have a whole new set of people to say hello to through their relationships with customers, one of whom nominated NCEC for ‘Brisbane's Spotless Suburb' award which it went on to win.
- Espresso Train workers see the food they’ve prepared being consumed by an eager public, many of whom are not even aware they are purchasing from a Community Enterprise.

#### **The confidence and motivation that work brings to other areas of their lives**

The new found self-esteem and confidence that work and an active lifestyle brings has bolstered workers efforts to change other areas of their lives,

outside of work. Workers talk about the skills and abilities they pick up:

*“I have learnt to cook better, if I want to cook at home now I can.” (John M).*

*“For someone who finds it hard to connect into and is regularly rejected from places - now that he has work he can relate to people - he has a role” (CLA Inc Social Worker).*

#### **The extra relationships that work generates.**

Employment has become a bridge to a connected and active life, for a group of people who are often excluded. NCEC workers can now engage with people as contributing equals, where previously they saw themselves as recipients.

*“I get to be with friends. Those that I've met here, these are some of my closest friends” (Shannon).*

*“My best mate, I see him just about every day. I met him at work, about 8 years ago. I don’t have a lot of friends, but the few that I do have are really good. I've been able to make these friends here” (John).*

#### **The physical and mental health benefits of regular work and having a routine.**

The change of routine which work brings is one of the most difficult barriers for workers to cross. However, once established, the daily routines and improved sleeping patterns have helped workers manage their lives and health issues better than in the past.

*“The job has helped me recover... the best thing about it, is getting me out of bed and doing something different each day” (John).*

Work doesn't prevent people becoming unwell, but it does provide a sense of purpose and pride that can be drawn upon when life is difficult. If a person has a mental illness, these successes bolster people's efforts to deal with their illness.

---

***“Work stops you being bored and cooped up, which feels terrible” (Danny).***

**Danny: NCEC Parks Crew**



Danny discusses the meaning of work...

[Click here to watch video](#)

**The importance of regular extra income and the difference it makes to people's sense of security.**

Before joining NCEC, running out of money in the “off” pension week was an almost insurmountable problem for many workers. Running out of money could lead to selling off, or “hocking” of important things, with the cycle of debt becoming deeper and more debilitating each fortnight. Having goals, even simple goals, that income won't cover is frustrating.

*“Sometimes I was so short on cash I had to go to cash converters to sell DVD's. It was a pretty vicious cycle – I didn't like it. I was pretty glad when this came up. Beforehand I used to rely on my parents a lot. In the last four or five years I haven't borrowed a single cent: I've been pretty self-sufficient. That's important to me” (Craig).*

Workers say it isn't just about the extra income, it's also about being busy and active. Having work means experiencing less boredom and frustration, which is when spending can be a “feel good” fix.

---

***“I've been able to start saving. I can now buy presents for family - like bowls shoes for dad” (John)***

The following story demonstrates the meaning and value of a workplace like NCEC:

**Sue's Story:**

Addictions and declining mental health were interfering with Sue's capacity to work. She was missing an increasing number of shifts and her NCEC supervisor had noticed her job concentration deteriorating. The NCEC supervisor raised this with Sue who shared the story of how she'd become frightened to go home and had started spending most of her evenings playing pokies and drinking at the local club. The supervisor suggested a joint meeting with Sue's Social Worker who had not been aware of the seriousness of her current problems, but could now assist her to develop a plan to confront them. NCEC was able to be flexible and allow time for the plan to take effect before Sue returned to her usual shifts. Sue commented that it was the motivation of wanting to keep her job that enabled her to take on her addictions.

# 3

## From Ideas to Action: A brief history of NCEC

“We have always chosen to grow at a pace which matches the gifts and needs of our workers”.



First park mowed for BCC 12/7/2001

From left: Catherine, Danny, Richard, Tony, Michael, Morrie, Dave, John.

**N**undah Community Enterprises Cooperative Ltd (NCEC) began with minimal resources, a few hundred dollars in membership, administrative support from Community Living Association (CLA) and a couple of borrowed lawn mowers.

Late in 1998, a small government grant enabled NCEC to purchase much needed tools and equipment and to install an essential phone line.

Initially, Dave Langdon, a social work student and Dave & Jo-Ann Greene, two local residents, acted as supervisors, supporting workers with occasional

jobs that came from NCEC's membership network. Jobs included: removing graffiti from a wall, washing a couple of cars and mulching a garden bed. All of these were one off jobs and equipment was purchased as needed. NCEC had a ledger book, a receipt book and an invoice book – that was the extent of our administration.

In the year 2000, Community Living Association who saw value in NCEC, committed to financing a coordinators position for one year. From this point, NCEC gathered momentum. One key development around this time was the innovative decision by Brisbane City Council (B.C.C.), to offer NCEC responsibility to maintain three small public parks (See Chapter Eight). Through the hard work of the NCEC parks crew and the ongoing support of council, this contract gradually grew to its current size of 26 local parks as well as maintenance of Nundah Village streetscape. Danny Vanderwalle, the senior parks Coordinator for BCC comments:

*“The complaints for Nundah sites are reduced. They seem to have a greater pride, rather than being motivated purely by the money. They feel some sort of ownership, and they've got passion. If something's going wrong outside of their scope of work, they'll try and do something, or feed the information back to US”* (quotation from Social Ventures Australia SROI analysis 2012)

The success of this pioneering social tendering arrangement led to additional mowing contracts being gained with the Department of Transport and Main Roads Queensland (TMR). As of the time of writing these combined contracts create enough

work to employ a full time supervisor and ten part time workers with a learning difficulty.

The second major development for NCEC occurred when Community Living Association constituents, unable to work in Parks and Maintenance, approached NCEC for work. Listening to these workers interests and abilities led NCEC to embark on a new business arm: 'Espresso Train Café and Catering'.

Espresso Train began humbly, with small catering jobs for local community organisations as well as running a veggie box delivery to local customers.

Work expanded in 2003 when NCEC was given the opportunity to take over a former pizza shop owned by Community Living Association in their new office building in Nundah. CLA generously offered this space to NCEC.

Through the support of CLA and a substantial grant from the Paul Newman Foundation, NCEC was able to establish a commercial kitchen and shop front from which to operate a business. Today 'Espresso Train' employs a full time manager and

chef, a number of casuals and 10 part time staff with learning difficulties. It offers breakfast and lunch to local customers and regularly caters events, from small meetings to large conferences (for more information visit:

[www.espressotrainscatering.com.au](http://www.espressotrainscatering.com.au)).

Through the efforts of supervisors, workers, allied organisations and customers, NCEC has survived the squeeze on finances, if only just at times, and managed to grow. We have learned that, in community enterprise, it's okay to slow down when



resources or energies are tight and start up again when you've learned how to create or shuffle resources differently.

We have also learnt the importance of building relationships with key community, business and government allies and to deliver on our commitments to them. We believe our success is based upon these learnings as well as the fact that we have always chosen to grow at a pace which matches the gifts and needs of our workers.



Ian and Pierre  
with produce from Espresso Train

***“NCEC has been a trail blazer and has mentored many other community groups starting out on the social enterprise journey: providing both business advice and advice on human resource strategies for engaging the most marginalised of workers”.***

(Susan Black, Social Ventures Australia)

# 4

*“Most workplaces expect the worker to adapt to the job, whereas at NCEC we also adapt the job to suit the worker”.*

## The Objectives of NCEC: A statement of principle and practice

---

**N**undah Community Enterprises Cooperative Ltd (NCEC) was not the first attempt to generate employment for people with learning difficulties in North East Brisbane. Morrie O’Connor, Coordinator at the Community Living Association (CLA), in conjunction with workers from CLA and other local community organisations such as Nundah Neighbourhood Centre and Foresters Community Finance, had supported a number of local employment projects over the previous decade. The learning from the success and failures of these enterprises and the shared wisdom of community enterprise internationally, assisted us to conceptualise the foundational principles of NCEC.

These principles and related practice examples are as follows:

### 1. A Supportive workplace

The concept has always been to work in small teams of one supervisor to one or two workers. In operation, this has proved to be the most supportive for workers and the most productive way to get jobs done. It provides training, direction and encouragement from a skilled supervisor as well as support and connection with a peer. We aim to match people with differing abilities, experiences and skills in these small supportive work teams. We

envisioned one or two people with a learning difficulty, working with a person without a learning difficulty and this team format has proven to be effective.

### 2. A Flexible workplace

It’s about part time work, NOT full time work. The aim of NCEC has never been to provide workers with full time work. To create a safe, unpressured work environment where people can rediscover their capacities and confidence requires short work days. Previous experiences of moving from no work to being thrust into full time work have taxed people beyond their limits. None of the NCEC workers has expressed a desire to work full time at the Cooperative.

*“It’s different. You get days off, then you can recover and be fresh for the days you do work.” (Michael)*

Our aim is to provide workers with an average of 6 – 15 hours per week, which fits people’s needs and capacities and also ensures the available work is shared out amongst all workers. The number of hours and the money earned, while important to workers, are not the key achievements, rather it is the meaning and sense of contribution that work brings which is having the largest impact on people’s lives.

Not only is the principle of flexibility for workers ‘time’ based but it is also ‘role’ based. Most workplaces unquestionably expect the worker to adapt to the requirements of a role whereas at NCEC we will also adapt the role to suit the needs of the worker. One example of this is a man who had lost numerous jobs over a period of ten years due to his inability to take direction. NCEC recognised the need of this man and looked for opportunities to carve off existing work as well as to find new opportunities where he could work with minimal direction. The end result is that he has an individually crafted role and operates a range of successful community businesses including graffiti removal, lawn mowing and biscuit making.

### **3. “Plugging the leaks”: a local economy perspective**

NCEC seeks to slow the drain of resources from the local economy, by matching existing local needs with underutilised local resources. We knew there were locally available jobs that could be done by local people looking for work, even though this wasn’t occurring. Local residents and organisations were purchasing services and products externally that local labour was able to supply but had no opportunity to do so. Nundah suffers from typical multiple leaks of energy and money. People come in and earn money, but, because they don’t live or spend in Nundah the wealth and opportunities it provides leaks away.

NCEC has “plugged some of these leaks” by matching underutilised resources (the NCEC workers) to provide the needed services.

### **4. Starting small and thinking big**

It has been important that NCEC develop regular work in the local area: firstly to provide workers with

regular hours and confidence in knowing the job; and secondly to enable NCEC to establish plans based on a regular source of income. One off jobs, are generally costly to NCEC. However, our aim has always been to use one-off jobs as an entry point and then develop those into regular job contracts.

---

***“NCEC seeks to ‘Plug the leaks’ in the local economy by matching existing local needs with underutilised local resources”.***

### **5. Embedding NCEC within a network of support**

NCEC has sought funds from government and philanthropic sources to establish itself in the community. When finances became desperate, we have also called on workers and supporters to donate unneeded goods and held a Trash and Treasure sale.

Our results speak for themselves. Past grants assisted us to establish the foundations. “If you fund us, we will be able to do this.”

Current and future grants enable us to build on our achievements. “We are doing this and if you fund us we’ll be able to do much more!” We have a track record of creating meaningful work and can demonstrate that people benefit from it. The community is supportive as they know us, trust us and value the quality of our goods and services as well as our contribution to an inclusive community.

Our stories don’t just gain the attention of funders. Most of our jobs have come from an NCEC member or customer talking to an acquaintance about NCEC and that person then offering us some work. This has led on average to 70%-80% of our annual

income being derived from trade. That is why, for any community enterprise like ours, “Your membership is your market”.

## 6. Treading lightly

We are conscious that our work also has to add ecological value to the community. Examples are:

- Carbon savings via the fact that the bulk of our business is within 10 Km of Nundah.
- All edible waste from the cafe is given to the local neighbourhood centre vegetable patch, who return the favour by way of local organic produce delivered to the cafe.
- NCEC has invested in photovoltaic solar systems on our premises, halving our carbon footprint and reducing our electricity costs to nil.



NCEC Solar System

## 7. Value adding

“Value adding” is a key part of community enterprise. Every work opportunity must also be explored to see what other benefits can be generated, particularly the opportunities for social connections. The commerce of community enterprise is only as good as the relationships and connections it builds with and between, the local community.

NCEC seeks to “value-add” to our jobs. For example, not only do we maintain the Nundah Streetscape for Brisbane City Council, but the Local Chamber of Commerce, made up of local business owners whose street frontages we maintain, employ our workers at the annual Nundah Village Festival:

*“On behalf of the President and members of the Nundah District Development Association I wish to extend my thanks and appreciation to you and your staff for help in making the Nundah Festival a huge success” (Anne Reid Hon. Secretary).*



NCEC Parks crew win spotless suburb award 2011  
From left: Liam, Stephen, Danny, Iain and John

# 5

## Why a Cooperative?

---

**N**undah Community Enterprises is a Non Trading Cooperative Without Share Capital registered under the Cooperatives Act 1997 (Qld) and monitored by the Department of Fair Trading Queensland.

A cooperative, by its nature, is a structure through which a group of people combine their resources, talents and commitment to benefit themselves and each other. People work collectively to provide what individually they cannot. Cooperatives are focused on servicing the needs of their members. In a world economy that frequently excludes rather than includes people and focuses primarily on the needs of a few wealthy shareholders, cooperatives are a viable local community economic alternative. They have a local focus both in terms of their membership and their operation. They offer workers a chance to control their own work place, customers to know the local people who benefit from their purchases and communities the opportunity to use their own resources to make it possible for all to make a contribution.

***“Co-operatives are a reminder to the international community that it is possible to pursue both economic viability and social responsibility”.***

- Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General

In 1998 a group of Nundah citizens with learning difficulties found themselves disadvantaged by the current economic system that offered them no opportunity to make a contribution. Another group of citizens who purchased products and services were disheartened that their economic power was not benefiting their locality. A cooperative seemed a logical way to match this need and resource together.

The Community Living Program (CLP) invited interested constituents, community members and community organisations in the Nundah region to a meeting to determine interest in forming a ‘workers cooperative’ where constituents of CLP excluded from the workforce could engage in paid activities in a supportive community environment. A well-attended formation meeting was held at the Nundah Community Centre and the Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative Ltd was registered in October 1998. We had an initial membership of sixteen individuals and five community organisation members.

The membership of Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative (NCEC) elects a board from its membership annually. The board must meet a minimum of six times a year and consists of, at the very least, a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. Any member is welcome to participate in discussion at board meetings.

Under the Cooperatives Act (1997) there are two types of cooperatives:

1. Trading cooperatives whose rules allow it to give returns or distribution of surplus or share capital.
2. Non-trading cooperatives whose rules prohibit it from giving returns or distribution on surplus or share capital other than the nominal value of the shares (if any). They may or may not have a share capital.

Extract from Department of Fair Trading Website ([www.fairtrading.qld.gov.au](http://www.fairtrading.qld.gov.au))

We chose to form a Non-Trading Cooperative without share capital, as we were not interested in generating large profits for our members. We wanted to create a small local economy that would reimburse membership for their labour, providing meaningful forms of part time employment. We have found NCEC not only benefits workers by reimbursing them in terms of pay, but also provides job security, training, the opportunity to access equipment and receive discounts on NCEC services and the opportunity for social activities.

The following table (overleaf) was developed to make clear the differences between a Private Business and a Workers Cooperative.

**Craig: NCEC Parks Crew**



Craig shares the secret of the Co-op's success...

[Click here to watch video](#)

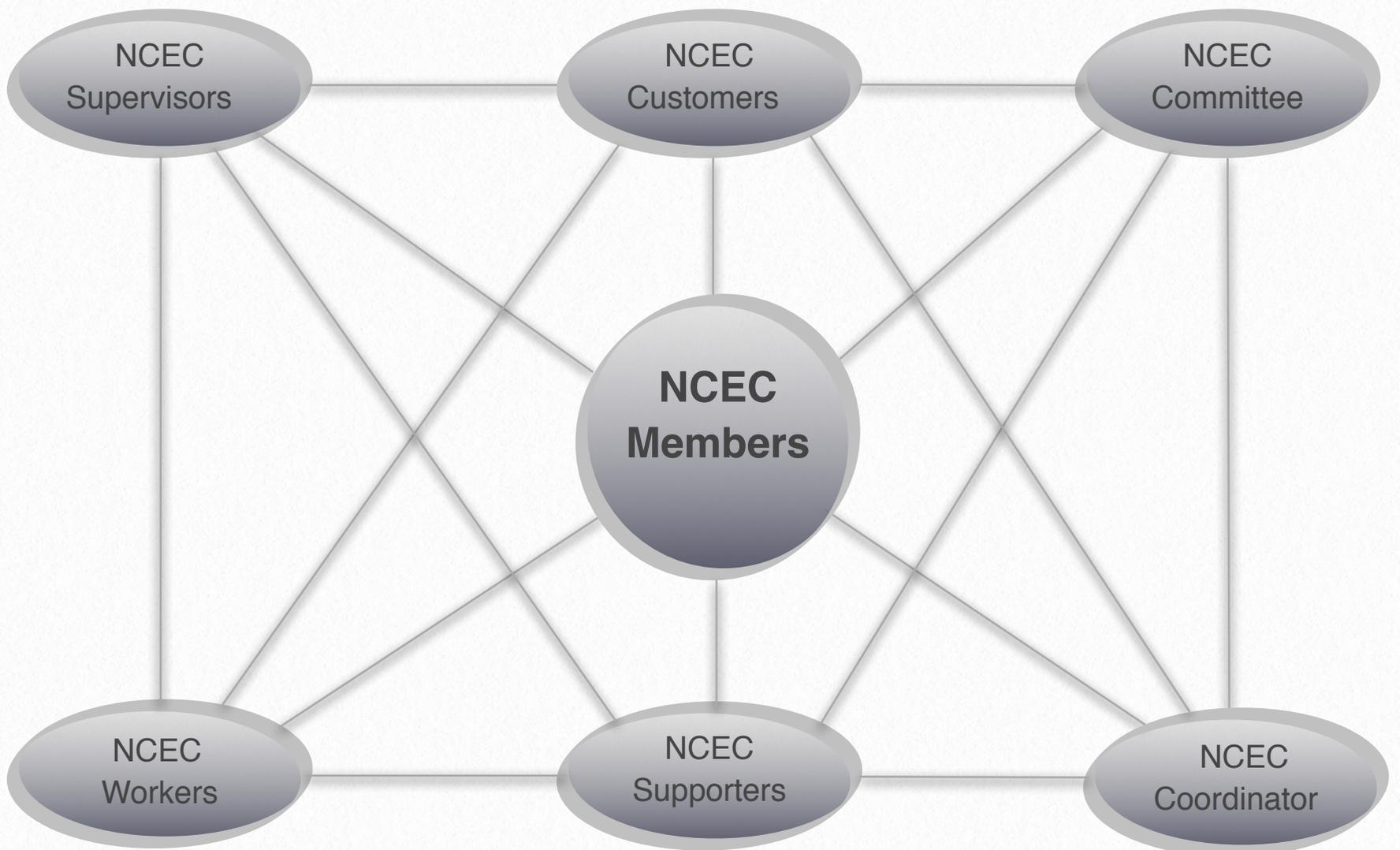
## Differences between a Private Business and a Workers Co-operative

Private Business	Co-operative
The owner of the business is the boss – who makes the rules. The workers can't replace the owner.	The co-operative is a democratic organisation. It's members control the organisation – elect the Board annually and through the Board set the rules. The membership can vote out the Board.
In a private business workers only responsibility is a fair days work for a fair days pay.	In a co-operative workers not only are responsible for a fair days work for a fair days pay, they also have responsibilities to keep the co-op running successfully and to do what it was set up to do – provide work for its members – on occasions that may mean doing things for the co-op that aren't paid – or where the membership agrees paying a subscription to keep some part of the co-op operating.
A private business owner doesn't have to have a concern for the community unless they want to.	The rules and spirit of the co-operative include a concern for the community.
A private business owner doesn't have to co-operate with any other businesses.	A co-operative should co-operate with other co-operatives.
A private business owner doesn't have to provide education/training to his workers on how they can contribute to his business.	The co-operative has a duty to provide education/training to members on how they can contribute to the co-op.
The owner of a private business is responsible for all the investment into capital (equipment, premises) and controls what happens to it.	In a co-operative all members contribute to the investment into capital (equipment etc) and control decisions about what happens to it.
A private business exists to provide profit (money) to its owner(s).	The co-op exists to provide employment for its owners (the members).

# 6

## NCEC Structure

“Each role has responsibilities and skill requirements”



The above diagram illustrates the many roles and relationships that comprise NCEC.

Each of these roles has key responsibilities and skill requirements and as a cooperative, we have

developed the following brief role descriptions. This resources NCEC members to make informed decisions about which role they are interested in, whether this is the best use of their current skills and what training they may require to take a different role.

# ***NCEC Role Requirements***

## **Workers:**

- ⇒Willingness to work
- ⇒Ability to take direction
- ⇒Respect for fellow workers and ability to work as a team member
- ⇒Ability to be flexible in multiple tasks
- ⇒Ability to acquire skills in cooking and/or mowing and/or cleaning and/or carpentry etc.

## **Supervisor:**

- ⇒Supervisory skills
- ⇒Respect for workers
- ⇒Demonstrated job skills
- ⇒Appropriate leadership
- ⇒Ability to relate to customers
- ⇒Team management ability

## **Cooperative Co-ordinator:**

- ⇒Financial skills
- ⇒Admin skills
- ⇒Planning skills
- ⇒On the job skills
- ⇒Job creation skills
- ⇒Leadership
- ⇒Ability to support staff

## **Administration Worker:**

- ⇒Bookkeeping skills
- ⇒Preparation of reports for auditor
- ⇒Provide monthly financial reports
- ⇒Invoicing and receipting

## **Board Member:**

- ⇒Read and understand minutes
- ⇒Read and understand the Constitution
- ⇒Read and understand correspondence
- ⇒Support the co-ordinator/supervisor and workers of NCEC

## **President:**

- ⇒Ability to chair meeting
- ⇒Supervise co-ordinator
- ⇒Negotiate with government

## **Treasurer:**

- ⇒Prepare budget
- ⇒Prepare for audit
- ⇒Set up financial systems

## **Secretary:**

- ⇒Take minutes
- ⇒Read correspondence
- ⇒Send correspondence

# 7

“Supervising is about empowering workers to do the job themselves and take responsibility for it”

## Supporting People on the Job

We appreciate the courage it takes for people with learning difficulties to try and forget the many past disappointments of work and approach us for a job (Chapters One and Two). We have, through the experiences of the last fifteen years, developed processes to assist members to: rebuild their self-confidence in their working ability; develop the necessary trust in their workmates, with and without a learning difficulty; and to re-establish work routines in their life.

When new members join Nundah Community Enterprise Cooperative (NCEC), they meet with the co-ordinator to talk about their past work experience, discuss the areas of work they are interested in and learn about the Cooperative and what we offer. They are then offered work when odd jobs come up, for example, jobs where a tree needs removing, a single car needs washing, a wall needs painting etc. With the support of a Cooperative supervisor, a member works out how to do the job and then they do the job together.

We create a work environment that is not “pace” pressured but allows people, as much as is practical to work at a pace they feel comfortable with. Our supervisors draw on people’s positive perceptions of themselves by talking over the completed job and encouraging people to see what



Iain, John and Danny

they’ve achieved together and what their strengths were on that job. This builds people’s confidence both in their work and in the fact that their contribution is valued. Supervisors aren’t only supporters, or only co-workers: they are supportive co-workers.

The co-ordinator meets with the person after they have done a few odd jobs to discuss how they feel they are going and to encourage them in their work. Once a regular and suitable job opportunity becomes available, they become part of a regular work team with the support of a supervisor. The regular jobs often grow out of their initial odd jobs.

The NCEC supervisors, with their belief in the workers, their skill in many work areas and their understanding and compassion are the foundation stones of our Cooperative. Past and present supervisors have, from their experience and learning, developed Nine Key Principles to guide their 'on the job' support of workers with learning difficulties. These Nine Key Principles were developed out of the fire of experience and will be useful to any community enterprise wanting to support people, previously excluded from the workforce, to re-enter and maintain employment.

## NINE KEY PRINCIPLES IN SUPPORTING WORKERS

### 1. Creating the space and the time workers need to grow into work and jobs.

A common issue workers face is the anxiety and stress that is a part of their everyday life. Their anxiety translates, supervisors have found, to an overwhelming fear of making mistakes in their workplace. At NCEC, supervisors address this in a number of ways.

The supervisors strive to find aspects of jobs that give people time to 'go slow' and, in fact, this needs to be encouraged actively. People's anxiety makes them 'race', causing the very mistakes they fear. Or people "freeze", fearing any step or decision will lead to error and "the sack". Reassurance about people's ability and expressing their belief in the workers is important, as is affirming and celebrating the 'forward steps' they take, even if small ones.

We emphasise people's job security and stress that it is okay to make mistakes because it means

workers have had a go. It has been so important to create a culture of positive learning from mistakes.

We select jobs carefully and don't accept a job which will place undue pressure on the supervisors to "get it done". Anxieties about outcomes can destabilise the trust and confidence that workers have developed.

*"As a supervisor I've learned to let go – if I go with the flow we get there in the end" (Maree).*

### 2. Involving workers in planning and decision making.

*"As a Chef you pass on knowledge to apprentices, they become happy and excited, it's a good feeling" (Pierre) .*



Supervisors actively avoid the control that workers try to pass to them on a job: "I can't do it, you do it", "I don't know what to do". Many NCEC workers have had people take over in the past and they have lost confidence in themselves. In the past if they did things their own way they were usually told they were wrong.

*"Do something right and no-one remembers, do something wrong and no-one forgets" (Craig).*

At NCEC we give our workers the message they can do it and that we're there to back them up, not take over. It's been great over time to see people respond to this and grow confident in themselves.



*"We train workers as best we can in all the different jobs required by the team. Some of the guys are now doing things they never thought they could do" (Iain).*

It is an important principle at NCEC that worker's contribution is valued and that he or she can feel free to make suggestions about how to do a job. Workers will often be so anxious they may know what to do in a job but just don't trust themselves and fear mistakes. It's important that supervisors encourage people to rely on their own experience. It helps to ask workers "How did you do it last time?".

Over time, as people see their decisions about a job leading to a good finished product, their confidence and motivation for work increases. Support agencies and families have noted that self-esteem gained from work has led to many positive moves in other areas of the worker's life. When life outside work becomes difficult for workers, they will still may take a few backward steps. However, they recover more quickly than in the past because they have successes to draw upon.

### **3. The sense of making a real contribution is a big motivation.**

As people previously excluded from employment and community life, workers have stressed the satisfaction they have experienced in having their labour and skill valued. Their contribution has led to a good finished product that members of the community have used and enjoyed. Workers have moved from a passive consumer role to a valued role as a contributing and productive community member. The relationship between customer and worker is important for supervisors to nourish. That workers meet and are thanked by the people who employ them is also important. These factors, combined with other processes that involve the workers in controlling and developing their job, builds confidence and a sense of contribution to their community.

### **Michael: Espresso Train**



Michael shares his dream to make the perfect coffee...

[Click here to watch video](#)

### **4. Cross subsidising skills and capacities.**

In NCEC there is a constant balancing of participation and production. This struggle is to offer workers the time and space they need to work to their capacity, while at the same time NCEC needs to make enough money from the work to survive, to provide jobs and also to produce a quality product. One strategy is to put workers with differing skills and capacities together on the same job with a supervisor. The inexperienced worker sees their colleague doing the job well and more autonomously. This then gives them a sense of the possibilities for themselves, as well as a peer mentor on the job. The mentoring role acknowledges the other worker's skills and gives them a sense of their own achievements in reaching that level of skill and focus. The need for profit is met because the skill and efficiency of the skilled worker fills the gaps that the developing worker may create. The supervisor also works on the job, while encouraging each to work at the pace that suits them.

This matching of need and resource is a core strategy of NCEC. It provides a space where people with learning difficulties and people without learning difficulties can join to get the job done. Together in this space those workers who need a hand up can get it from their co-workers.

Sometimes the co-ordinator and the supervisors allocate high profit (and often high stress) jobs to the more confident and experienced NCEC workers, allowing the developing workers to take on lower profit jobs where there will be less pressure and allow time for them to develop.

### **5. Using repeatable process in jobs.**

People can develop confidence in themselves and their ability to get the job done when the process they use for a job is virtually the same each time. Repeatable process isn't about mundane repetition, but about a standard process people can confidently draw on to complete a task. Repeatable processes not only help people to learn concretely and retain the process and skills developed, but also ensures consistent quality of product. It helps participation and production.

In the catering kitchen for example, repeatable process means using standard recipes and also following a product process stepped out clearly in a flow chart.

### **6. Getting people used to work culture.**

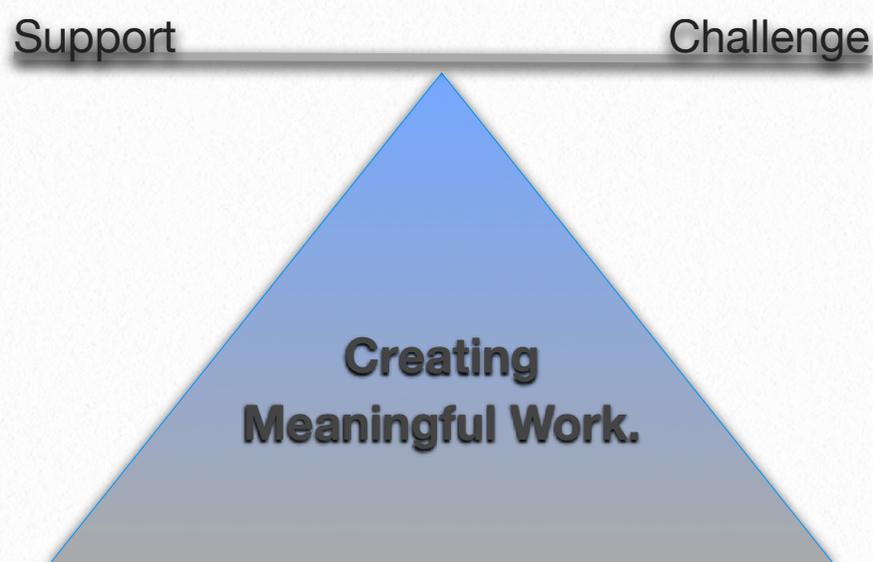
When people have been excluded from work for long periods, re-entering the workforce requires a massive shift of life habits and changes in coping strategies. NCEC workers have commented that they initially found turning up ready to work as difficult, if not more difficult, than the work itself.

In previous employment situations, workers have not had the workplace support to overcome these hurdles. NCEC understands this and actively assists people to make changes. If a worker is struggling to get to work on time, if at all, the supervisor explores with the worker what is making it hard to get to work. The supervisor may share strategies that work in their own lives and will celebrate and affirm the small steps workers take.

Another aspect of establishing a culture of work is the creation of a community of work. For example, processes where workers can share their successes with one another and invite their key supporters to assist them to get back into work. Emphasising the pay and social opportunities of work is motivating.

Creating realistic goals for work is important. Workers often set unattainable goals for themselves, some expect full time work right from the start. When they realise they're having trouble getting to work once a week, they lose confidence in themselves. NCEC emphasises that two to three half days of work is the absolute goal for most workers. We encourage workers to adopt realistic goals and in achieving them they build confidence again.

### **7. Balancing support and challenge.**



Supervisors need to be very clear about their expectations of workers and the quality of work needed on jobs. It is difficult for supervisors to “challenge” when they know all the issues workers are struggling with, even just to get to work, but we have found workers respond to the honesty when they are told that jobs haven’t been done well. Workers are asked to take responsibility for their work because a bad job means less money for them, less money for NCEC and ultimately fewer jobs for everyone.

Like the key tension of 'participation and production' balancing 'support and challenge' for our workers is crucial. This can be conceptualised as like a see-saw. Tip too far on the 'support' side and people have no opportunity to develop and grow, tip too far to the 'challenge' side and you are setting people up to fail. Getting the balance right however as a supervisor creates the optimum outcome for the worker, the customer and for NCEC.

## 8. Flexibility.

A key principle of NCEC has always been flexibility or, as one supervisor put it, “Where we finish may be very different from the plan when we started”. Being flexible enough to change the day’s goals, depending on how a worker is going that day, allows people the freedom to say if they’re struggling with a particular issue outside work which will affect their work that day, for example, a mental health issue.

Trying out workers in a variety of jobs allows them and us to discover where they best fit and what best suits their capabilities. The flexibility to create work opportunities that fit people’s capacities and the flexibility to adapt jobs ‘on the go’ and over time are strengths of NCEC.

## 9. Seeking the cause.

When workers efforts have been considered unsatisfactory in previous work places, they have been labelled as 'lazy', 'slow' or 'attention seeking'.

Supervisors at NCEC are encouraged to go beyond these simplistic explanations and “seek the cause” of the behaviour. For example, one young man would often stop mid task because of all the negative thoughts going round in his head, the “demons” overwhelming him. Berating him for being ‘lazy’ was not only cruel, it was counter productive. A quiet touch on the shoulder and a reminder about the task at hand was all that was needed for him to get himself moving again.

---

**“Balancing support and challenge is crucial”**

### Teresa- Espresso Train Cafe



Teresa shares what she likes about the job

[Click here to watch video](#)

# 8

## Creating Work: Plugging the leaks

“Our membership is our market  
and our advantage”



NCEC Cafe Crew (Circa 2011).  
From Left: Joseph, Pixie, Chris, Richard, Pierre, Ian and Kylie.

**A** community enterprise needs work to do. An initial fear was that encouraging local people and organisations to give Nundah Community Enterprises Cooperative Ltd (NCEC) work would be very difficult. The opposite however has been our experience.

## Our membership is our market and our advantage

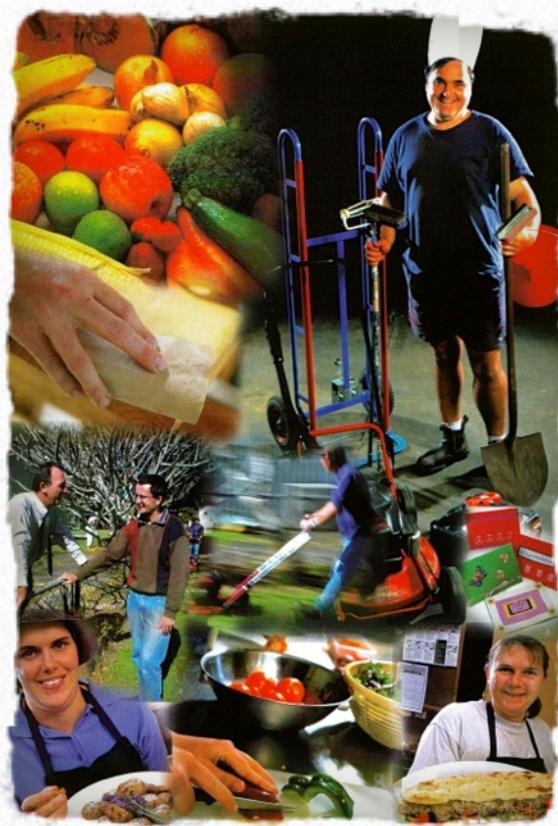
Generating regular work at NCEC has been the result of tapping into our membership and their connections in the community. Almost all our customers have come through word of mouth. We have found tremendous goodwill (and purchasing power) in the community that we use to generate employment. Our customers have expressed their satisfaction that, by engaging NCEC, they know who their purchases are benefiting. The NCEC workers then tend to spend their income in the Nundah area. “Plugging the Leaks” means that money doesn’t leak out of the community, but circulates within it, to benefit all.

Many work opportunities come to NCEC as one-off jobs. The Cooperative takes on one-off jobs if there is the potential for these to develop into a regular work opportunity. Once the jobs become regular, those individual workers in the Cooperative who have shown particular interest or aptitude for them are trained and supported to regularly undertake them. A prime example has been the development of our catering business from its “Nundah Munch” beginnings.

## Nundah Munch - from little things big things grow

In 1999 Foresters Community Finance decided to organise a monthly community get-together to build stronger community relationships. At the same time

workers at NCEC were completing the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations (DETIR) funded catering training modules and were ready for an opportunity to use their skills. Foresters ANA became aware of his and asked if NCEC could cater for the get-together. The catering training modules were held in a meeting space with kitchen facilities provided by Community Living Program (CLP). On the morning of the first Nundah Munch, the catering workers put their new skills to work and produced lunch for this get-together. This was the first official catering job for NCEC.



NCEC Collage (Circa 2003)  
From left: Sapsford park neighbour,  
Susan, Jacob, John, Craig and Anna.

The Nundah Munches, which NCEC catered for each month, drew in a wide membership of community organisations who, when they saw the quality of NCEC’s catering and the benefits to Cooperative members, began to employ NCEC to cater for their AGM’s and other meetings. It was obvious from discussions with people at the Nundah Munches that a very limited range of healthy eating options were available in the area. Nundah has a large number of human service organisations and most of their staff members often drove out of the suburb to a huge suburban shopping mall to purchase healthy lunches.

NCEC began making healthy sandwiches for local organisation workers two days a week. From these humble beginnings ‘Espresso Train Café and Catering’ ([www.espressotrainscatering.com.au](http://www.espressotrainscatering.com.au)) was born. Espresso Train now operates six days a week. It continues to provide paid work for up to 10 people with learning difficulties and two full time supervisors. In the last calendar year it attracted almost a quarter of a million dollars in sales.



Opening soon... Nundah Coop's Paul Ryall and David Langdon at the site of the Coop's new fresh coffee and fruit juice venture

Northside Chronicle 2003

## Brisbane City Council - Parks Project

### ***“Bureaucratic Champions of Social Tendering”***

A crucial aspect of NCEC's survival thus far has been gaining a regular work contract from Brisbane City Council (BCC) to maintain some local parks. The contract, which we call a “social tender”, was the result of a ground breaking partnership between NCEC and BCC, due to the efforts of our bureaucratic champions.

In early 2000, BCC managers participated in a leadership exercise, part of which was working with a community organisation to advance a significant issue in the community using existing BCC resources. The leadership team, after discussions with CLA and NCEC coordinators, negotiated contracts for the maintenance of three local parks. The Local Asset Services manager was able to adapt an existing contract mechanism in BCC and apply it to a formalised partnership arrangement between the Council and NCEC, in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding.

*“It was a new concept for council and it took effort by Shane McLeod in Council to create the mechanism to contract. However he was able to work from the existing contracting arrangements to create the Memorandum of Understanding that ensured quality for council, but was a more flexible contracting arrangement for NCEC.”*

*(Peter Simpson - BCC Local Asset Services).*

The BCC had the will to offer the work to NCEC, but had to establish a mechanism to hand the work over. By means of a Memorandum of Understanding the BCC found a way to tender the work at a competitive rate with a significant social return.

The income NCEC receives from maintaining the parks project is small compared to the millions of dollars paid to major contractors, but it is of great importance to NCEC. With a reliable source of income, NCEC has been able to budget and plan work for a number of work teams. (O'Connor & Patchell: 2001)

Twelve years on, BCC has expanded its social tender with NCEC to take in 26 local parks as well as the Nundah Village Street Scape. Previously this work was done by a multi-national company, now it is done by local people, paid by the local council to maintain a local park.

Thanks to our Bureaucratic Champions at BCC we have also gained work with Department of Transport and Main Roads Queensland. These combined contracts create over 3,500 hours of paid work a year for people with learning difficulties and enable us to employ a full-time supervisor to support a team of workers.

The establishment and expansion of the Parks contract between BCC and NCEC is a great

example of a government creating an opportunity for disadvantaged people from within its existing resources.

Early in the history of NCEC, Dave Langdon, founding co-ordinator and Ingrid Burkett termed this process “social tendering”. This concept is now commonly accepted and has been developed further by groups such as Social Ventures Australia (SVA) and Queensland Social Enterprise Council (QSEC) [www.qsec.org.au](http://www.qsec.org.au) of which NCEC is a founding member.

We believe the work BCC has done in tendering out the parks contract to a community enterprise, as well as the official mechanism they have developed for this, is a significant innovation. Such a view has been confirmed by the expansion of Social Tendering within BCC to other Social Enterprises, as well as the regular enquiries we have from other Local Government jurisdictions around Australia wanting to learn from the NCEC-BCC experience. BCC’s willingness to work outside the square and offer an initial small contract to NCEC has created a wealth of good beyond the design of the original participants.

---

***"The story of Nundah's success has helped to develop the concept of social enterprises. When speaking to other councils, it inspires others. It's a great example"***

Raf Bassily, Brisbane City Council

(quotation from Social Ventures Australia SROI analysis 2012).

## **New developments - finding a niche for the most disadvantaged**

NCEC and CLA have had a long term concern for workers with a learning difficulty, who even NCEC have found it difficult to employ. We have sometimes referred to these individuals as ‘*the most disadvantaged workers*’. Challenges faced by the most disadvantaged workers include:

- 1) The need for a level of job flexibility beyond the capacity of NCEC, or any other employer, to provide.
- 2) Inability to work in a team environment
- 3) Heightened social or family disadvantage and/or cognitive and psychiatric disability impeding their ability to work

We have sat down with a number of such workers and assisted them to develop their own ‘niche’ voluntary role or small business. Some of these workers have gone on to develop their own micro-enterprise catering to a need in the local community, some have replaced a supplier previously used by NCEC, others who have not been interested or able to gain paid employment have secured a valuable voluntary role.

Stories of success and a framework for developing individual businesses and niche volunteer roles can be found at [www.communitycrewhub.com](http://www.communitycrewhub.com). This publication was produced by Community Living Association with assistance from NCEC and generous support from Brisbane City Council.

# 9

## NCEC Capacity Building Framework

---

The quest to build a sustainable organisation at NCEC has occurred across four key capacity areas, the axis on which NCEC's viability will be proven. Central to these four areas is a *core commitment* to creating meaningful work opportunities for people with learning difficulties.

### The Core Commitment:

*'To create meaningful work opportunities for people with learning difficulties'.*

### New People

We have built capacity by:

- Bringing people with a learning difficulty who wanted employment, together with workers without a learning difficulty.
- Bringing together a range of supporters, such as NCEC workers, family and friends of workers, customers, support workers and contractors.
- Forming a strong partnership with the Brisbane City Council and Transport and Main Roads Queensland.

### New Knowledge

We have built capacity by:

- Providing supervisors with training and opportunities to reflect on how they can best support workers with learning difficulties.
- Working with industry and business mentors to improve our business skill and acumen.
- Engaging in external review.

### New Decision Making

We have built capacity:

- Through decision making structures in NCEC, such as worker team meetings, supervisor's meetings, board meetings and NCEC review days.
- By setting up processes to deal with worker's issues which allow workers to involve the important people in their lives to help them sort the issues affecting them.
- By including a range of members with different perspectives, abilities and skills on our Cooperative board.

## New Resources

Capacity has been built through:

- Successfully engaging the individual talents of workers while developing a stable customer base.
- Partnerships with Brisbane City Council (BCC) and Queensland Transport and Main Roads (TMR) through “social tenders”, i.e. the Parks contracts.
- We have been successful in submissions for ‘one off’ grant funding which have been crucial in developing capacity particularly in regard to purchasing of capital equipment.
- “Value adding” to work opportunities. For example, NCEC doesn’t just maintain the Nundah Village it has developed a relationship with the local chamber of commerce.



NCEC Capacity Building Framework.  
(with acknowledgement to Concetta Benn, Ingrid Burkett and Tony Kelly)

# 10

## Conclusion

**“NCEC has seen workers take back control of their lives as they have grasped the opportunities offered to them.”**

**N**undah Community Enterprises Cooperative Ltd (NCEC) has seen worker members take back control of their lives as they have grasped the opportunities offered to them. It has been a fifteen year collaboration and struggle - for them, their supporters, supervisors, co-ordinator, administrator, contractors and customers to hold on to the opportunities and for the organisation to survive and grow.

The struggle continues...

The key challenges for all people, organisations and government who want to foster community enterprise are:

- The challenge for people with learning difficulties is to once again draw from the well of their courage and confront past disappointments and take hold of new opportunities like the Cooperative (We salute your courage).
- The challenge for families and supporters of people with learning difficulties is to encourage and believe in the person's ability.
- The challenge to supervisors and work mates without learning difficulties is to always go to the least blaming explanation, to seek to

understand how to include rather than exclude.

- The challenge for community organisations and not for profits is to realise the significance of employment and to commit to enabling people with learning difficulties to have a meaningful work role in the community.
- The challenge to potential customers is to consider which of their purchases could provide regular work opportunities for community enterprise and to be understanding about the amount of time a community enterprise requires to support workers on the new job.
- The challenge to funders is to find a way to resource community enterprises such as NCEC in an ongoing manner.
- The challenges for Local and State Governments and Private Industry are (a) to provide contracts to community enterprise and (b) to work with groups to help them have the capacity to take up contract opportunities.
- The challenge for the Federal Government is to acknowledge that the current job support system is not offering sufficient opportunities for people with learning difficulties and it must

seek ways to support community enterprises, such as NCEC, who can offer real opportunity.

- The challenge for policy makers, economists and the global community is to deal with the reality that technological change, globalisation and competitive markets have accelerated the displacement of low skill workers from jobs. People with learning difficulties are particularly vulnerable to this displacement and exclusion. Policy changes that promote inclusion are urgently required.

In summary, we would encourage local communities who are looking to establish a community enterprise for people excluded from employment, to trust that there are potential customers out there. Any locality has resources that are under-utilised. It might be a space, a group of people or purchases being made. NCEC began by talking with the five organisations who were at the formation meeting and seeing where they were purchasing products and services. The opportunities were there - we just had to prepare and resource NCEC to be ready to take them on.

It's important to highlight that NCEC has grown at the pace that suits its workers. In hindsight, we see the quite limited progress we made over the first two years as a benefit. It enabled us to work out how we supported workers and it gave the workers a chance to prepare themselves for more regular work without too much pressure.

A work enterprise needs to develop from its membership, not develop its membership to suit the customers. In this way, we have avoided "creaming", that is, choosing to work only with people who are able to be immediately productive and profitable. This is a common issue with the structure of the existing employment network.

Finally, all people exist and are sustained through relationship. At NCEC this becomes more obvious each day, as workers flourish through the connections they make at work and the confidence and esteem they bring to existing relationships. We are very aware of how difficult life is for those NCEC workers who remain isolated in our community and as a result they are unable to sustain their involvement in work. NCEC and indeed all of us, need to explore how we can assist isolated members to build supportive relationships in their life.

Finally, we say to other interested communities –

***"Don't wait, just give it a go."***

People want work, the community wants to offer work – match the community's need with the people's resource and see what happens.



Workers and Supervisors (Circa 2006)  
From left: Michael, John, Danny, Greg, Craig and Kylie.

# 11

## Acknowledgments and Resources

---

### Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the following individuals as contributing to this book: Concetta Benn, Ingrid Burkett, John Dick (Pi Productions Photography), Anthony Kelly, Dave Langdon, Sarah McDonald, Morrie O'Connor, Sandra Sewell and all staff and constituents of NCEC and Community Living Association, both past and present.

### Key Resources

We suggest the following resources and web-links for those interested in reading more about community enterprise:

- *Defining Social Enterprise: Enterprising Ways to Address Long Term Unemployment*. Dave Langdon and Ingrid Burkett with the New Mutualism Group (2004).
- *Social Enterprise and Social Tendering: A Guide for Government Departments, Large Social Welfare Organisations and Corporations*. Dave Langdon and Ingrid Burkett with the New Mutualism Group (2005).
- *Social Return on Investment Report in to NCEC*. Two page summary by Social Ventures Australia Consulting (2011). Available by clicking the following link: [sroi-ncec](http://sroi-ncec.org.au)

[www.communitycrewhub.com](http://www.communitycrewhub.com)

[www.communityliving.org.au](http://www.communityliving.org.au)

[www.qsec.org.au](http://www.qsec.org.au)

[www.socialventures.com.au](http://www.socialventures.com.au)

[www.socialtraders.com.au](http://www.socialtraders.com.au)

We would like to sincerely thank Brisbane City Council's 'Access and Inclusion Partnership Program' for assistance in producing this book.