

History of Common Ground

Common Ground's story began in 1998 when Jim and Carolyn Lemon secured a **government grant** to hire a job coach and provide legal counsel for their daughter Cathy to start up a bakery and catering business. Community Living Toronto offered them **free use** of a commercial kitchen in one of their group homes on Toronto's east side and Lemon & Allspice Cookery was born. Cathy and two other partners with developmental disabilities began by baking and selling cookies to order and using the TTC to make the deliveries.

As the business grew, eight people with developmental disabilities signed papers to become a **registered business partnership**. With an increasing need for staff who could oversee the business' finances and administration, the next step was to organise a non-profit co-operative, which could qualify for additional grants. A group of five volunteers began meeting in September 1999 and became the **first Board of Directors** of Common Ground Cooperative, Inc. in April 2000. They brought together expertise from the community organisations and institutions to which they belonged – only one board member was a relative of a person with a disability. The Co-operative and the Cookery then signed a fee-for-service agreement outlining the services that Common Ground would provide.

The Board of Directors applied to the Ontario Disability Support Programme (ODSP) for a grant to pay salaries, administrative expenses and start-up costs for a second business. The grant was approved and they hired a full-time Coordinator in January 2001. A job coach was hired for the second business, a retail snack bar called The Coffee Shed, in December 2001. Six new people joined this partnership at **Surrey Place Centre**, the headquarters for over 250 professional staff people who provide therapeutic services to people with developmental disabilities. In September 2003, a second Coffee Shed was set up at the New College, University of Toronto. Nine people joined this partnership. In September 2004, a third Coffee Shed was established with five partners at Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) Toronto. In 2006, Common Ground officially became a **charitable organisation**.

Today, most of the snacks sold by the Coffee Sheds sell are still supplied by the Cookery. The **full-time staff** of Common Ground Co-operative includes an Executive Director, Financial Administrator, Training Coordinator, Kitchen Coordinator and six job coaches. Customers of the Cookery number over 300 community organisations, businesses, government institutions, law firms and individuals. In 2008, Carolyn Lemon was inducted into the Ontario Co-operative Association's **Spirit Recognition Awards** Hall of Fame, while in 2009 Common Ground was the recipient of a **Vital Idea** award by the Toronto Community Foundation.