

Chapter Six

Moving

2003

Starting the New Year-Workshops & Meetings for Partners-January 2, 2003

To start the New Year off right, the Partners and Staff from both businesses met at 40 Birch Ave. (the Foster Clubhouse). They had a morning of workshops that Sonja organized. "There was much laughter and learning," said Sonja. "The Partners are actively involved in the businesses, in wanting to make them better." There was a sense of pride in the way everyone was working together in this way. They were beginning to understand the nature of the Partnerships. They could see how the two businesses could interact positively together. It was marvelous to see them expressing themselves to one another. The Staff did an excellent job! There was a plan for another round of workshops on the next day but a big snowstorm forced us to cancel it.



SUSAN, CATHY, KIRK, JACK AND KAREENA AT THE WINTER WORKSHOP
AT THE FOSTER CLUBHOUSE

Signing on the Dotted Line

The snow melted in time for the Board meeting a week later. Lynn and Blair from the Surrey Place Coffee Shed met with the Board Members to sign their first Services Agreement contract with Common Ground Co-op.

Employment Supports Funding 2003

The Cookery Partners came to 20 Spadina for a special meeting that lasted all morning. There was a lot of positive discussion. They had a session on minimum wage. They agreed to use their current surplus from sales to boost their pay to minimum wage for the next three months. The four Staff met with me afterwards. They agreed that much good was happening.

The very next day, Sonja and I made a presentation to Kerry Ann Markle at Employment Supports Innovative Funding Programme, saying that we would be able to meet the requirement for minimum wage. Kerry Ann gave us a go-ahead! In early March, we learned that Common Ground would receive a grant from Employment Supports for the coming year! This grant meant we could go ahead with our plans to move the Cookery from Sibley House to the Jessie Manson building. Graham Baldwin was a manager at Community Living. He told the Common Ground Board that Community Living would support the Cookery's planned move to Jessie Manson.

Trillium Foundation Grant Application 2003

The Fundraising Committee had applied in 2002 for a grant from the Trillium Foundation. We needed it to pay for renovations to the kitchen at Jessie Manson. On June 16, 2003, Trillium Foundation approved Common Ground's grant application. We would have \$75 000 to renovate the kitchen at Jessie Manson so Lemon & Allspice Cookery could have a new home!

Moving Days for the Cookery!!

On August 25th I went to the Sibley House kitchen. There the Partners and Job Coaches were packing up to move to the newly renovated kitchen at Jessie Manson. This was my last visit to Sibley. I still cherish today lots of memories from our five years at Sibley House.

Three days later, I went to Jessie Manson Centre. I found the kitchen renovations almost complete and it looked wonderful! The last of the renovations and the move were soon completed and a phone was installed in the kitchen. Joan, Cathy and Kareena brought the last boxes of goods from Sibley to the new kitchen at Jessie Manson on Overlea Boulevard. On September 2, the Cookery Partners began work in their new location! The newly renovated kitchen provided the Cookery with much needed additional space, a walk-in fridge and freezer, a new oven, a

dishwasher and an industrial mixer. The kitchen space was available to the Cookery on evenings and weekends. These extended hours would allow the Cookery to accept orders it used to have to turn away.



KIRK AND ANGELA AT WORK IN OUR NEWLY RENOVATED KITCHEN AT MANSON

A New Office Assistant

Our new location at Jessie Manson provided more office space than was available at Sibley House. So, throughout the move, Sonja, Ray and I interviewed candidates for a permanent financial manager. We couldn't seem to find the right person until we met Shelina Akter. She was partway finished with a course in accounting and was very interested in the position. We decided to hire her. She settled in to the new office space at Jessie Manson.

More Grants, More Planning, More Work, More Business!

In April, we had learned that we would receive the Family Services grant again, plus grants from CEDTAP and from the Oullette Family Foundation! When the Fundraising Committee met, it was all about how the funding would be used instead of how to find funding. But we did not stop planning for the future.

When the Board of Directors met, all Members were present. We worked through a detailed agenda in two hours. Everyone was aware of how our success was

creating greater demands. But these Board Members were an amazingly committed group just like the Partners and the Job Coaches!

The Queen's Jubilee Medal

Good things kept happening. MPP Michael Prue presented to me the Queen's Medal for service to the community. The ceremony took place at Queen's Park. There were a number of other people from Michael Prue's riding who were receiving the Medals too. Lemon and Allspice catered the refreshments to over 100 people there! Five of the Cookery Partners, two Board Members, and our Coordinator attended. It was a wonderful evening. After I got home I was so excited that I couldn't sleep until 2:30am.



HERE WE ARE AT QUEEN'S PARK WITH MPP MICHAEL PRUE (ON THE LEFT). BOARD MEMBERS ANN ROWLAND AND JOHN RADFORD WERE THERE WITH PARTNERS SUSAN, JACK, KAREENA, ANGELA, KIRK AND COORDINATOR SONJA PERSRAM. MY HUSBAND JIM WAS THERE TOO,

Space for another New Coffee Shed!

The next Common Ground Board meeting was full of energy, concern and humour. Everyone was excited about the growth of the businesses and the Cookery's move to Jessie Manson Centre. But that was not the only good news. There was talk of starting up another Coffee Shed. Just a few days later, Dean Carl Amrhein at the

University of Toronto called us. He was a friend and colleague of my husband Jim and myself. He knew about the work we were doing in the Business Partnerships. He said he had spoken to the Principal of New College at the University of Toronto, David Clandfield. They talked about a space for a snack bar at New College. Within one week, we had a meeting with the Principal and the Dean and they invited Common Ground to set up a Coffee Shed in New College!! We felt overwhelmed!

By early April, we had put up a two-week trial table in Wetmore Hall at New College. It looked great! Blair and Bonnie worked there that first week. They and the other Partners at the Surrey Place Coffee Shed had agreed to take turns operating the two-week trial at New College. That was teamwork!

A Permanent Second Coffee Shed Gets a Green Light

At the end of May, Sonja, Larry and I met with the business manager at New College, Chris Sparks. We talked about whether we would be able to start a new Coffee Shed in the fall. Sonja made an excellent written and verbal presentation to Chris. She reviewed the two-week trial we did at Wetmore Hall in April. She explained the plans for the future. Chris said he was eager for us to go ahead with a new Coffee Shed at New College in the fall.

The Coffee Shed's Official Opening at New College

The Coffee Shed at New College began selling coffee, sweets and sandwiches in early October 2003. Three Partners from Surrey Place Coffee Shed had decided to move from Surrey Place to the new Shed: Lynn, Petra T, and Mimi. They ordered baked goods from the Cookery and sold them in Wetmore Hall five days a week.

More New Job Coaches

As Common Ground started new Coffee Sheds, we needed to hire new Staff. The Cookery Partners hired Tashana Wint to become a Job Coach in the Cookery. Gladys Bumanglag moved from the Cookery to be the Job Coach at the New College Coffee Shed. Leonard Ribeiro had finished his term as temporary Job Coach at Surrey Place Coffee Shed. Susan, Lynn and Blair interviewed two potential Job Coaches in early August. At their next Partnership meeting, they decided to hire Christine Womijolou as Job Coach for Surrey Place Coffee Shed.

More New Partners

Many, many people were becoming interested in joining our businesses. Agencies like Community Living, Employment Training Services, Youth 2 Work, Jewish Vocational Services, Family Services and Adult Protective Service Workers were referring people who wanted to work at one of our Business Partnerships. In the early years, people who were interested in joining one of our businesses would be interviewed and then invited by the Partners to join the Partnership on a trial basis. But with so many people interested, we decided to organize an Apprenticeship Programme.

Starting an Apprenticeship Programme

Common Ground was certainly ready to begin to look for new workers to become Apprentices. That's because of the opening of a second Coffee Shed and the growth of the other two businesses, Two Job Coaches, Joan Barnett and Gladys Bumanglag, organized a full day workshop for candidates who wanted to join our Partnerships. They invited the candidates' families, and their support workers. At the workshop, Board Members, Job Coaches, and family members of current Partners made presentations. A series of small group discussions gave the candidates a chance to hear from the Partners. They told about their experience of working in the businesses. They shared information about the businesses and how they operated. Staff conducted individual interviews with the candidates throughout the day.

After the workshop, those who were interested in working at one of the businesses were asked to fill out an application form. On this form, each applicant wrote down their first and second choice of where they wanted to work - in the Cookery or in one of the two Coffee Sheds. Most of the candidates made applications. Sixteen candidates were invited to become Apprentices: Larissa, Roland, David C., Mei Yee, Robin, Dan, Julie, Joseph, Kaveh, Wendy, Karen, Veronica, Stacey, Christina, Mark T. and Mimi. All of them accepted the offer. The applicants were contacted and a start date was set.

Each Apprentice began a three-month Apprenticeship at one of the businesses. During this Apprenticeship, they learned about the business, and the duties and the responsibilities of each Partner. The Job Coaches and the Partners taught the Apprentices the routines of working on the job. A Partner acted as a mentor to

each Apprentice, helping to teach the Apprentice the many tasks required of the Partners.

After three months, the Partners in each business met. They reviewed each Apprentice's work habits, skills and participation in the business. After a discussion, a vote was taken, with each Partner having one vote. The Partners agreed upon one of three things:

1. They would ask the Apprentice to join the Partnership.
2. They would suggest Apprentice be given an extra three months of training and be re-evaluated at the end of that period.
3. The Apprentice would not be invited to join the business.

All sixteen of these Apprentices eventually became Partners. Today, six years later, Mei Yee, Mimi and Karen are still working in the Coffee Sheds. The others have found other work and activities in the community.

Visiting Jewish Vocational Services (JVS)

On June 6th, I went to the Jewish Vocational Services¹ building with Partners Lynn and Bonnie from the Surrey Place Coffee Shed. Lynn's dad and Bonnie's mom also came with us. We spoke to a gathering of over 30 people. Chetan Bahri, a staff person at JVS, had brought them together to learn about Common Ground and the businesses. After our presentation, six people filled out application forms for interviews to become Apprentices!

Difficult Times - Stresses and Strains

So much was happening! There were many new Apprentices. There were new Coffee Shed locations. The Cookery and our offices had moved. All of that put a lot of strain on our Staff, and especially on our interim Coordinator, Sonja. She worked hard to keep up with the demands. The Board Members did what they could to help out. But there was stress on everyone.

Larry Sherman suggested outside mediation for a Board meeting. He found a person who could help. Everyone agreed except Ray who decided to resign on

¹ JVS is a broad-based community organization that helps people of diverse backgrounds to meet their educational and employment goals.

September 10th. We still remember him as a key founding member of our organization who made a generous contribution of his time and talent for nearly four years.

Larry, Chris, Ann and I decided to set up a mediation session with Sonja and that happened the following week. The Board met with Sonja. With the help of the mediator, we sorted out our differences and clarified our plans. By the end, we all felt revitalized and rededicated. We had lots of hard work to do but everyone was ready for it. We learned that disagreements can be healthy. We need to see them as a way to develop and deepen our relationships.

Then Came the Good News! - Volunteers!

What really helped too was having Shelina on Staff. Then suddenly we had two chartered accountants who wanted to volunteer to help us with Common Ground's finances: Allan Smythe and Gordon Kushner. We met with each of them on the same morning and both agreed to give a gift of their time and wisdom to our Coop. Gordon helped Shelina to establish our books on computer. He contributed shelves for the Partners' personal belongings. Allan served our Board as treasurer for a year or two. Their contributions of time and expertise were a great boost for everyone!

Then along came our friend, Rashmi Nathwani again! He offered to help design and build a packaging area at the new Cookery kitchen. That packaging area was there for many years. Brightly coloured rolls of ribbons hung there, ready for tying up the bags of cookies we made and sold. The ribbons added a cheerful note to our kitchen and dining area.

Goodbye to Sonja and Paula's Return

At the end of October, the Partners had a gathering to say goodbye to Sonya. As a farewell gift, Susan, a Partner at the Cookery, presented a dancing pizza man to Sonja as a farewell gift, and we all ate cake. Paula returned from her maternity leave. Partners and Staff were pleased to see her and she was happy to be back.

The Cookery's Fifth Open House and The Third Annual General Meeting of CGC

Right away Paula was involved in the planning for the Cookery's 5th Annual Open House and the 3rd Annual General Meeting of Common Ground Co-op. For the first

time we held the meeting at Jessie Manson Centre AND for the first time we combined the Open House with the AGM. Both events took place on November 6th.

What a magnificent day! The Open House was a huge success and so was the AGM. Representatives from most of our funders were at the Open House. Many of our Business Partners came too. Michael Prue, MPP came and people from Surrey Place and Community Living Toronto. Joan, Tashana and the Cookery Partners served a wonderful supper to forty people! At the AGM, the Co-op Members elected a Board of eight people. And the roster of committees was completely filled with names of Members. Rob Duff from the Staff at Surrey Place made a CD and a videotape of the Open House. This event was a way to celebrate the significant growth that the Co-op and businesses had made over the 2002-3 year.

Listening Committees

At the time the new Business Partnership opened at the Coffee Shed at Surrey Place Centre, John Flannery had become the Chief Executive Officer of the organization. He was very supportive of the Shed. He always bought his coffee and snacks there. He encouraged his staff to become regular customers of the Coffee Shed. So the Partners realized how important it would be to get to know the 200 or more people who worked for Surrey Place. They were the Shed's main customers. It seemed a good time to begin meeting with his staff.

A Listening Committee was formed that included nine people: five staff from Surrey Place, two Partners - Blair and Veronica, Job Coach Christine and Common Ground's Coordinator - Paula. The purpose was to have better communication and share ideas and information. That would help the Shed to best serve the people who worked at the Centre. Listening Committees with the host staff later became a regular part of each Shed's meeting schedule.

Partnership Meetings in Full Swing

As December 2003 began, the Partners at the Coffee Shed at New College had their first Partnership meeting. A week later, the ten Partners at Lemon & Allspice had their regular monthly meeting with Paula and two of the Job Coaches. Partner Stacey chaired the meeting. It was wonderful to see how those Partners who had been with us for a while spoke up with their ideas. The new Partners listened and learned. This kind of meeting was at the heart of what Common Ground was all

about and what it might become! The Job Coaches were having their own meetings together and showing great talent, commitment and promise.

Holiday Event at CBC Radio

Word about the Cookery was getting around! The CBC Radio Metro Morning show called us one December morning. They asked us to be on their show with Andy Barrie the next day. Partner Susan from the Cookery volunteered to go with me. Susan and I met with Andy for a taped interview. It was broadcast at 6:15 the following morning. Of course, Susan took some Lemon & Allspice Christmas cookies to Andy to sample! The interview was all about those wonderful cookies and the Partners who baked them!

The "Extra Mile" Staff Team at Common Ground

On the last day of December, during the holidays, I dropped in to Jessie Manson to find Paula and all the Job Coaches working together on various projects. There was a good feeling shared among them: Alice Bikeeva, Joan Barnett, Gladys Bumanglag, Christine Womilojou, and Tashana Wint. These coaches were preparing for teaching skills and providing support to the Partners in all tasks of the businesses: food prep, taking and filling catering orders, working at cash registers and making bank deposits.

This Staff team was enthusiastic and compassionate. They worked very hard at making the Business Partnerships successful. They also worked to support the needs of the Partners. Paula described her Staff as "always willing to go the extra mile" and help out when things had to be done." Shelina, our office assistant, was there too and she made a curried lunch for everyone.

Chapter Seven
Making New Friends
2004

The New Year and Talk of Another New Shed!

The people at JVS were very interested in the idea of opening a Shed in their headquarters. Chetan Bahri, Kim Coulter, Chris Tolley, Paula Murphy and I met with Karen Goldenberg, ED at JVS, to discuss ways to support a Coffee Shed there. The JVS staff showed us a space in the headquarters building where the Shed could be located. We thought it might work well. Not long after that, Common Ground Board of Directors approved the plan.

Opening a New Coffee Shed at JVS

No sooner had the 2004 fall season begun than Common Ground opened the new Coffee Shed at JVS. Many people came to the opening ceremonies at JVS on September 8th. Partners were there from all the businesses, plus families, Board Members, JVS staff, our Job Coaches and Paula. We had a ribbon cutting and our fourth business was launched! Tashana Wint left the Cookery to become the first JVS Job Coach. Tashana said, "Everyone helped us to settle in nicely and feel comfortable. There has been lots of praise for the Partners." Sales in the early weeks were better than we expected!



LISA AND KAREN OPERATE THEIR NEW CASH REGISTER AT JVS COFFEE SHED

And there we were with FOUR Business Partnerships - the Cookery and three Sheds!

Meeting our new MPP

Early in the year, I attended a gathering at Community Living Toronto at 20 Spadina Road. David Pitt had arranged for Kathleen Wynne to be there. She was the MPP for the riding of Don Valley West. Kathleen listened to people's stories about finding jobs and places to live for their adult children with disabilities. That was my first contact with MPP Wynne. I learned that Common Ground and Lemon & Allspice Cookery are in her riding. I invited her to come to Jessie Manson to see the Cookery and meet the partners there.

An Important Visitor!

In the summer, Kathleen Wynne came to visit the Cookery. It turned out that her office was just around the corner from Jessie Manson. She came to visit because she was very interested in our Business Partnership at the Cookery. By the time she left, she was impressed by what she saw at the Cookery. She wanted to tell other people about our good work. Kathleen Wynne, like Michael Prue in earlier years, was to become a very good friend to all of us.

Partners Take Charge

I always liked to visit Partner meetings at the Sheds and at the Cookery. It was wonderful to see how the Partners were taking responsibility for their Businesses by meeting and discussing things together. One day, just before Angela went to chair a meeting of the Cookery Partners, she told me with great pride, "My parents chair meetings a lot, and now I'm doing it too!"

A Very Special Workshop

On a Sunday in February, we had a six-hour workshop at the Cookery kitchen and dining area. Fifty people came to talk together about the businesses and how they could become even better. The Partners spoke and people listened. Many family members came. They were full of praise and questions. New people came and joined the Co-op. The Partners and all the people there realized we were building something wonderful! We wanted to let others know about us.

Making Plans to Keep Common Ground Growing

On the morning of February 2nd a meeting took place that I had wished for over many months. Who was there? - Kerry Ann Markle from the Ontario government; Bev Bowman and Nancy Green from the Canadian government; three people from JVS (Karen Goldenberg, Chetan Bahri, and Kim Coulter) and two people from CGC (Larry Sherman and myself). The meeting was about Common Ground. We wanted to co-operate to find funding so that we could keep Common Ground going. We wanted Common Ground and the Business Partnerships to be around for a long time. Those who came supported what Common Ground was doing. Kerry Ann and Bev agreed that Common Ground was building something wonderful. They wanted to work together to find the help that we needed from governments.

Kerry Ann Markle Comes Through Again!

We found out that the Canadian government would not be able to grant us funding this year. But, wonder of wonders, Kerry Ann Markle found a way, once again, for the Ontario government to help us meet our budget. She and the Ministry came through!! On March 25th, Kerry Ann agreed to the Common Ground budget for 2004/5.

Finding the Way to Charitable Status

The next step was to begin the application for charitable status for Common Ground. Having charitable status meant that we would be able to ask foundations for funding we would not just rely on governments. Common Ground was receiving a good amount of money from the Ontario government, but we needed more than what the government could give. In order to apply for money from other organizations, Common Ground would need to apply to the government of Canada to become a charity. A charity would give receipts to people who gave money to us. Then people could use the receipts to pay fewer taxes to the government.

On April 2nd, the Finance Committee (Chris Bovaird, Gordon Kushner, Allan Smythe, Jim Lemon and myself) met with Brian Iler in his office to discuss charitable status and how Common Ground would go about getting it - a powerful meeting!

Common Ground Board of Directors decided to ask the government of Canada to give us the papers we needed to become a charity. We began to put together our incorporation papers. We gathered other information that the government would need in order to decide if we could become a charity. Then we went back to Iler,

Campbell law firm with our papers. We spoke there with Kim Holas who would take our application forward to the government. It would take over a year to receive our charitable status.

Marching for a Good Cause

A March of Dignity took place in Ontario that April. It began with some people who have disabilities who live in Sarnia, Ontario. They knew that the ODSP benefits they received from the government were not enough money for them to live on. They wanted to get the attention of the Ontario government to ask for more help. They took several days to march 150 miles to Toronto! They invited many other people with disabilities to join them in front of Queen's Park for a rally on April 29th.

Almost all of our Partners receive ODSP benefits. I told the Partners at the Coffee Sheds at Surrey Place and at New College about the rally. Five Partners walked over to the rally with me: Blair, Roland, Christina, Mei Yee and Petra T. Two of the Partners' moms came too - Ursula Sherman and Marg Symons.

We listened to people make speeches. They spoke about how difficult it is for people with disabilities to earn enough money to be able to buy food and pay rent. Everyone shouted, sang and clapped hands so the Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) inside Queen's Park would hear them. Some of those MPPs did come out in front of the Queen's Park building to speak to the crowd. Our good friend, Michael Prue, was one of them. Everyone cheered when those MPPs said they would work hard to make life better for people with disabilities.

Another Apprenticeship Workshop

At the end of May, Common Ground Co-op held another workshop for people who wanted to become Apprentices. Twenty people came and were interviewed. The successful Apprentices were: Agnes, Katy, Paul W., Aldene, Nazia and Rachel B. (All but Agnes were still Partners with us at the time this book was written.)

Summer Fun

Paula and her parents put on another pool and BBQ party for Partners, Staff and the Board Members. The weather was sunny and cool and everyone enjoyed a swim, or dancing to music from Partner Jack's boom box. What a marvelous thing that all of us helped to bring people together who liked one another's company

Changes at Surrey Place

In 2001, when the New Group took over the Coffee Shed, they had a sales table on the third floor in the staff lunchroom at Surrey Place Centre. It was a cozy place but there were not a lot of sales. In 2004, Surrey Place moved our Shed to a much better location. It was on the first floor near the front doors... But that was only a temporary move. Surrey Place Centre was planning to renovate the entire first floor. As part of the renovation, they would build a kiosk just for the Coffee Shed! The renovations would take one year. But that wasn't the only change for the Partners at Surrey Place Coffee Shed. Job Coach Christine, had decided to accept a new job in London, England. The Partners chose Peter Ackie to become the new Job Coach in September 2004.

Cathy Lang Helps With Fundraising

About this time, Cathy Lang became interested in our project. She knew a lot about co-ops. She volunteered to help Common Ground Co-op with fundraising. She assisted us to write applications for CEDTAP, Trillium Foundation and Cooperators. She was a valuable member of our Fundraising Committee and of CGC for several years.

A Very Special Guest for our Annual General Meeting!

We learned that the Minister of Community and Social Services, Sandra Pupatello, had accepted our invitation to speak at our Annual General Meeting!!! Larry phoned the news to me at the Cookery kitchen. Doreen Cluett, Partner Jack and I were just putting together the Membership package to mail out for the AGM. It was almost too good to be true! Right away, I delivered a package of information about Common Ground to Minister Pupatello's office in Queen's Park. Later, someone in the Minister's office called me to find out more about Common Ground's AGM for the Minister.

Partners Plan to Participate in the AGM

It was time to get the Partners involved in the planning for the AGM with its wonderful speaker. I met with five of the Partners - Susan, Veronica, Karen, Blair and Joanna, and with David Pitt and Paula. We had a very good discussion about what to say to the Minister Pupatello when she attended our Annual Meeting. The

Partners decided Susan would speak for them. David stayed after with Susan to help her write out her speech.

The Fourth Annual General Meeting

Back in 2001, a dozen people attended Common Ground's first AGM. I called that "a small miracle". I described this fourth AGM as one of the happiest events of my life. There must have been 60 or 70 people, including many Partners, attending both the Open House and the AGM. Even my two-month old grandson was there. I was the happy grandmother, pushing Oliver in his stroller as he laughed and enjoyed all the attention. Cathy was pleased to show off her nephew to all her friends.

Then the Minister, Sandra Pupatello, came with Kathleen Wynne. Susan read her welcome speech very well and introduced Kathleen. She and the Minister spoke very highly of our work. The Minister took my hand and led me to the front and said many kind things about me. All around me were the Partners, their families, my family and many friends I had met over the past six years. It was wonderful! After the Minister spoke, Cathy Lang, Ana Vicente, David Pitt and Larry Sherman met in the kitchen with the Minister to talk about next steps for Common Ground. I chaired the first part of the AGM in the meeting room. Then Larry took over and Common Ground Members elected seven Board Members. Few of us could believe our good fortune in being recognized by the Minister.

At this AGM, I stepped down from the Board of Directors, along with Ann Rowland and John Radford. I trusted that the new Board would carry on the work of the Co-op successfully. But I continued to be active in the organization, especially with fundraising.

A New Place for the Holiday Party

The annual Common Ground Holiday Party took place at the Harry Foster Centre at 40 Birch Ave. on December 17th. There were too many people by then to host it in my home. Partners, Apprentices and their family members came, along with all the Staff and some of the Board Members. I had been working for over a year on a special gift to the organization. It was a knitted afghan with 56 large squares. Each square had a partner name embroidered with the initials of the Business Partnership name and the date s/he had joined. I presented it at the Christmas

party to a big round of applause and many wonderful comments afterward. The next day, Paula hung the afghan on the wall in the office area of Common Ground at the Jessie Manson building.



COORDINATOR PAULA MURPHY HANGS THE AFGHAN

A New Friend and Supporter - Meeting our MP

On December 21st Larry Sherman, Partners Cathy and Stacey and myself met with John Godfrey. He was the Member of Canadian Parliament for Don Valley West where our Cookery is located. Cathy and Stacey took some of their shortbread Christmas cookies to the Minister. We asked him to help us with our application for charitable status and with finding federal funding. We established a good relationship with him. He said he would visit the Cookery soon. We had found another good ally like Kathleen Wynne.

Chapter Eight

Changing Our Lives

2005

Paula Wins a Special Grant for Common Ground

Paula had been attending meetings of Toronto Region Developmental Services in the Ministry of Community and Social Services. This year, the Ministry offered a special grant to organizations in this group. Paula and eight other agencies had applied for this special grant. The applications were "blind" and that meant they had no names on them. Only three were chosen. Paula's application on behalf of Common Ground was one of the three! It meant Common Ground would receive \$95 000 in the coming year! This money was for a special project called the Foundations Programme. If Common Ground did a good job, we would receive this funding every year in the future.

This was a big breakthrough for Common Ground. Before that, others in the group and in the Ministry hardly knew anything about us. Now we had taken a first step toward getting longer-term funding.

Paula's Second Maternity Leave

Paula had told us in mid-January that she would be taking another maternity leave! She was expecting her second child. This time she would take off just six months. Before Paula left, Joan Barnett invited Partners and Staff to her house for a baby shower.

David Pitt and Gladys Bumanglag Take on New Positions

David Pitt became Interim Coordinator in Paula's place in March 2005. David asked Gladys Bumanglag to head up the new Foundations Programme for Common Ground. That Programme became a special course that Gladys taught every year for five years. The Programme was for young people who had finished secondary school and were starting to look for work. Each year, several young people took classes every weekday with Gladys for four months. Then they were placed in our businesses for another four or five months. Classes with Gladys continued one day a week during that time. It is an excellent programme!

Finding Government Money for the Coming Year

Once again, much time was spent on our application to Employment Supports. We would need money again for the next fiscal year starting April 1, 2005. Cathy Lang, Board Member Chetan Bahri, and I worked during January and February to prepare a proposal. Our treasurer, Allan Smythe, helped us with the budget. At the end of February, I took the application for Employment Supports to Kerry Ann Markle's office. This was the fifth year we had applied. The funding was supposed to have ended after three years. We waited anxiously to see if Common Ground would receive this grant in addition to the Foundations Programme money. Everyone was worried.

The Funding Comes!

In April, the Fundraising Committee met for a three-hour blockbuster meeting about where we were and where we would go. Many good ideas were flowing, but we were still waiting to hear from Employment Supports about the funding for this year. And then, the very next day, Employment Supports announced Common Ground would receive a grant. It was enough money to continue our work for another year with all four businesses. What a relief!

Visits from New Friends

Cathy Lang had arranged for John Godfrey, our Member of Parliament (MP) for Don Valley West to come to the Cookery for a visit on March 2nd. She also invited people from the United Way, the City of Toronto and some funding organizations. This site visit was wonderful! The Partners and Staff at the Cookery prepared and served lunch. MP John Godfrey announced that we would hear about charitable status for Common Ground very soon! Mr. Godfrey and the other visitors told us they were committed to seeing our work continue.

Living on ODSP

Members of Common Ground believe it is not enough just to give help to those in need. We must also work for political change. Common Ground is trying to do both. Common Ground is helping people with disabilities to find long-term employment. This is the helping part. It is difficult for them to get jobs that pay enough to meet the costs of rent, food and clothing. This is especially true for those who want to live on their own.

Here is the political part. Our Partners receive benefits of about \$1000 per month. Of course, that is not enough to live on in downtown Toronto. So our Partners try to earn a little extra money by working in their businesses. But the government has set rules that seem unfair to our Business Partners. The rules of ODSP say that half of any money a person earns from a job must be given back to the government. No one understands why the government takes back hard-earned money from people who don't have enough to live on.

Partner Susan said, "I have been on ODSP for as long as I can remember. The money I get from ODSP just pays for my rent and my bills. The money that is left over is for me to live on until the end of the month and that is not enough money." Partner Blair said, "Getting the amount that I get from ODSP does not help because I have to pay rent. It is not enough, because when I pay my rent, I hardly have enough money to pay for my Metropass and food." One month, Partner Blair missed the deadline for submitting his earnings report to ODSP. "I got a letter from ODSP saying that they will suspend my cheque. If I do not pay for my rent, I will get evicted from my apartment. I need more money to keep my apartment."

Working for Change

Some people who have received ODSP benefits have gone for help. They go to free legal clinics and to agencies to try to find out how to change this situation. In 2002, a few people in the legal clinics and in the agencies decided to form a group called the ODSP Action Coalition. Many people with disabilities and their families and workers and other citizens have joined this group. They speak to the people in government about this question: Why do you take back our money? They ask a lot of other questions about ODSP. The government has to listen because there are a lot of people in this group,

The government finally made some small changes. Our Business Partners still have to give back to ODSP half of everything they earn working at the Cookery and in the Coffee Sheds. But the government now gives them \$100 a month as a bonus for working. The big change of keeping all their earnings did NOT happen. Lots more people have learned about the problem, though. Many of them agree that the "claw back" is unfair. All of this is what we call "working for political change". Although many people are working hard for that change, the situation has changed very little.

Katy is a Partner in the Cookery. Before she got married, she saved her paycheques from the Cookery "to put for a new place when I get married". She receives ODSP, but "My parents help me with my money to pay for rent, and to buy food we can eat." Katy is typical of most of our Partners. They cannot get by without help from families, even though they have regular earnings in addition to ODSP. Nancy, a partner who began work at JVS Coffee Shed in 2005, says this: "Working at the Coffee Shed is not like other jobs. I wonder why we can't have a regular wage." This is a very good question.

Our Offices Get Crowded

Common Ground's two offices in the back of the Jessie Manson building were beginning to feel crowded. There was no room for a desk for Gladys. She needed one now that she was heading up the Foundations Programme. One of the first things David Pitt did when he became the Interim Coordinator of Common Ground in March 2005 was to look for more office space. He spoke with the landlord of the Jessie Manson building. The landlord had his office in a separate building just behind Jessie Manson. The landlord agreed to build two more offices between his office and Common Ground's offices. He would ask Common Ground to pay a reasonable rent. Within three months, the new offices were built and Common Ground had four offices instead of two. Staff had much more room!

A Birth and a Death

On March 27th, we heard some very good news, that Paula had a healthy baby girl. Then on the very next day, we heard some very sad news - Kareena, a Partner at Lemon & Allspice, had died suddenly of heart failure. She was 34 years old.

On April 8th, most of the Partners and Staff attended Kareena's funeral and burial. We gathered for lunch at the funeral home after making the trip to the cemetery. We met Kareena's family and told them that Kareena had been a friend to all of us. We loved her smile and her dedication to the Cookery.

Applying for More Funding

In April and May we worked on applications for funding to send to the Catherine Donnelly and Trillium Foundations. We asked for money for two projects:

1) Classes for Partners to increase their learning about Common Ground and the wider community; 2) a business manager to help all the Partnerships to increase sales and improve marketing. We had a spirited and useful discussion at a joint

meeting of the Fundraising and the Business Development Committees. David Pitt, Cathy Lang, Linda Burnside, Chris Tolley, Julie Schwartz and John Symons met together at 20 Spadina Road. The purpose was to discuss the new Trillium grant proposal but we talked about the whole future of Common Ground.

Another Coffee Shed??

During this time, a meeting was held with Marg Whelan, ED of Geneva Centre for Autism.² She decided to survey her Staff to see if they would be interested in having a Coffee Shed at the entrance of Geneva Centre headquarters. This looked like it could be a promising experiment. If Geneva decided to have a Coffee Shed, Common Ground would need to train 4-5 Partners who would be willing and able to start up in a new Business Partnership. There was not enough money to hire another Job Coach.

Funding for Start-up of a New Coffee Shed at Geneva

September 15th was an amazing day! Peter Ackie and Julie Schwartz made a presentation to Anne Jamieson and other funders at the United Way's Toronto Enterprise Fund (TEF). They asked for start-up funding for the Coffee Shed at the Geneva Centre. Chris Tolley attended on behalf of the Board. He reported they did an excellent job. It resulted in \$15 000 awarded to Common Ground. In November, Kathryn Gill was hired as Job Coach. She helped the Partners start up the Geneva Centre Coffee Shed. The original Partners were Joanna, Kirk, Aldene, Blair and Petra T.

Time for Summer Fun

Here is the story of the barbecue picnic the Partners and Staff had in the summer of 2005, as written afterwards by Petra T.

One day we had a BBQ. I went first to the Cookery. Then I was talking to Ve (one of our Job Coaches). After that I got a ride by Cathy to Seton Park where we had the BBQ. We had fun. They (the Job Coaches) were having a great day for us. We saw many friends whom we had known there. All the food made me hungry. Then we got kidding around with lots of laughter. We were playing tricks and jokes and being silly. I talked to my friends Irene, Jack, Mimi, Lynn,

² Geneva Centre for Autism provides services, training and support to families affected by autism. The goal is to empower individuals with autism and other related disorders, and their families, to fully participate in the community.

Rachel, Stacey, Katy, Frank, Karen, Nazia, Petra S., Mei Yee. I talked to our Job Coaches like Ve, Kathy, Peter, Tashana, Tara, Joan, Gladys, Alice. Paula Murphy came to the BBQ with her two cute ones. I was talking to them and playing around with them. One of the ones is her new baby girl. Paula promised that she will come back in the month of October. There was lots of food, drinks and desserts. First I had a hotdog with BBQ sauce, mustard, and some water too. Then I had one burger with a slice of tomato, lettuce and some mayo and potato salad, cabbage salad. My friends and I also had some corn with some very sweet desserts like lemon squares, date squares, lemon cookies, chocolate cookies and oatmeal cookies. There was also watermelon - it was so juicy and very watery. When the meal was done, we were playing games with Gladys. Best of all, there was a water fight with Ve and some other Partners too. Then we played Frisbee and caught water balloons too. It was very bright that day. Ve got so soaked, he didn't know what to do. It was very hot and smoggy too. The BBQ was great and bright and good. This has always been a tradition in our company that we always meet each other in mid-summer. I love this tradition very much. I will always love the breeze there. I will never forget it.



BUSINESS PARTNERS MIKE, JACK AND CORY AT THE PICNIC



JOB COACH VE DUONG WITH PARTNERS SEAN AND SARAH AT THE PICNIC

A Brand New Kiosk for Surrey Place Coffee Shed

Good things were happening at Surrey Place Coffee Shed. After nearly five years of selling our coffee and cookies in the staff room on the third floor, Surrey Place Centre had finished building a kiosk for us. It was on the main floor near the front entrance to the building. Job Coach Peter Ackie said it made a big difference to the Business Partners. It looked and felt like a real coffee bar business! The Partners were happy to move to the new kiosk downstairs. John Flannery, Director of Surrey Place Centre, watched them move. He was very pleased about the new kiosk too.



MEI YEE AT THE CASH REGISTER AT SURREY PLACE

What a long way we had come since the early days at Surrey Place! The Partners loved it - and still do! Here is how four of the Partners describe their work at the Surrey Place Coffee Shed today:

Aldene: "I work in the coffee shop at Surrey Place Centre beside Women's College Hospital on Elizabeth St. It's like Tim Hortons, but we sell organic coffee. We get the coffee from Alternative Grounds. As a Business Partnership, it's important to work as a team."

Rachel G.: "I serve coffee at the Coffee Shed. Four years I have been there in a building called Surrey Place Centre, just across the street from Women's College Hospital. I work on the cash register, serve customers, serve tea, coffee dessert and snacks. Being in a Partnership means we learn to understand each other."

Alison: "I work at the Coffee Shed and I like to take the food and beverage cart to all the offices, visiting all five floors. I have been there five years. I know what I'm doing and I know the Partners I work with."

Andrew: "Working in this business is like family. Other places you feel trapped in a box. But here it is a team, a family. We know one another. We know when one of us is having a hard day. Then we can help each other when we need it. It is ok to make mistakes, learn from our mistakes and each other. The best part is owning my own business. No one else in my family can say they do this."

New Partners Join JVS Coffee Shed

As JVS Coffee Shed began to grow, new Partners were invited to join. Looking back five years later, the Partners who joined in 2005 shared their memories of their first week on the job.

Maryam remembered, "I was nervous. I didn't know how to do the work. In five years, I have progressed. I learned to get along, to speak up. I stayed on the job even though it was very hard for me at times. I stayed because I knew I would lose everything I had learned if I left." Miranda recalled, "The Coffee Shed looked interesting when I first saw it. I liked it and wanted to be part of it. I didn't know what I was doing at first. It took a while to get used to it. But it was a friendly environment. Nancy said, "I found it confusing until I got the hang of it."

Teresa came to JVS Coffee Shed from the Foundations Programme. She reflected on her first days there. "At first, I didn't know anything. Someone introduced me to the work too fast, but I stuck with it. This is the longest I stayed at something. When our Job Coach Peter left, he persuaded me to stay and I'm glad I did."

It's True - Being a Partner Changes Our Lives

Mary Ferguson, from Sustainable Livelihoods, spent several months with our Staff and Partners, helping us to understand the effects of working in the Business Partnerships. She asked the Partners many questions like these. "How do you like working in the businesses?" "How has it changed your life?" At the end of her time with us, Mary concluded that "Working in Common Ground's businesses has had "a profound positive effect on the Partners' lives." It has changed their lives for the better. Mary praised our Job Coaches and our other Staff for helping this to happen.



PARTNER CHRISTINA AND JOB COACH PETER ACKIE WITH MARY FERGUSON

Preparing the Way for Permanent Funding From the Government

We had funding for the year 2005-6. But we could not just sit down and relax. Next year would come soon and we would need money again to keep Common Ground and the Business Partnerships going. So, in the middle of July, David Pitt, Cathy Lang, Larry Sherman and I invited Ellen Waxman to meet with us at Surrey Place. There she saw our new kiosk. Ellen had been a strong supporter of Common Ground for several years. She worked in the Ministry of Community and Social Services and many people respected her. The meeting we had with Ellen that hot day in July was very positive!

That was a good thing for the future. People like Ellen could help us explain to people in the Ministry how social enterprise and social services together could improve employment for people with disabilities! It might mean that Common Ground one day would be able to receive permanent core funding! When the Ontario government saw we were doing an excellent job, they would want us to continue. That would mean that money for Job Coaches and other Staff would come to Common Ground every year without our having to ask for it.

Another Queen's Park Rally - September 29, 2005

Once again, Partners and Staff walked to Queen's Park for a rally for dignity for people on welfare and benefits. About a dozen of our Partners were there - some

from Surrey Place, New College and the Cookery as well. There was lunch, speeches, the Raging Grannies and others. Once again, people were asking the government to make changes in the ODSP.



SEAN, SUSAN, MEI YEE, KENNY, PAUL, AMANDA AND VERONICA
AT QUEEN'S PARK RALLY

Queen's Park MPPs Hear about Common Ground

Our MPP, Kathleen Wynne, stood up in the Ontario Legislature at Queen's Park on November 2nd to talk about Common Ground Co-op! Sandra Pupatello, MPP and Minister of Community and Social Services at that time spoke up too. She said, "That's a good programme". (She knew this because she had visited us at our AGM.) Amazing! Would the Minister act to help us? All the words spoken about Common Ground by Ms. Wynne and Ms. Pupatello were written down in Hansard. Hansard is the name of the book of records where all the happenings in the Legislature are written down. (A copy of the speech MPP Wynne made is in the Appendix at the back of this book on page 155.)

Staff Changes

Our Job Coach, Tashana, was leaving after two years with us as a Job Coach.

She worked at both Lemon & Allspice and at JVS. She had great praise for Mike, a Partner at JVS, who she said had benefited from the course in Financial Management. We wished Tashana well. Partners and Staff welcomed Paula back on October 11th as her maternity leave was over. We thanked David Pitt for the work he did while Paula was away.

Three-year Grant from Trillium for Business Development

In early November, we got word that we had been successful in our application for another Trillium grant! Our Fundraising Committee met for three hours that morning. We talked about how this money would be used for developing the businesses.

The Fifth Annual General Meeting

We held another successful Annual General Meeting on November 8, 2005. We had lots of good news to share about the funding grants we had received. Sixty people attended the CGC Open House and AGM, in addition to many Partners and Staff. Partners gave speeches at both events. Many people attended both events. David Pretlove was there on behalf of our MP John Godfrey. Kathleen Wynne came too. The Members approved the changes in the Articles of Incorporation so that Common Ground could get a charitable number.

Becoming a Charity

In the month of July, the government of Canada decided to help us by approving our application for charitable status. They told Common Ground that we had met all the requirements. We would have final approval in September! That approval came on September 23rd.

Partners Learning

In 2005, Common Ground received government funding to offer Advanced Training courses for the first time to Partners who were interested. Each course was given weekly over eight weeks. I volunteered to do the planning and teaching. I asked various Board and Staff people to assist me for each lesson. This was the beginning of a growing emphasis by Common Ground on continuing adult education together with working in the Business Partnerships. Educational programmes became a big part of what we do!

These are the courses:

June - August, 2005: Financial Management: Robin C., Mike, Diana, Rachel G., Aldene, Cathy, Christina. The Partners learned about the history of money. Aldene described the course this way: "In the financial management course, I learned where money is made; the difference between wholesale and retail; how to use tools like a calculator and how to balance out a cash register; retail operations like inventory, ordering, pricing, deposit, payments, etc. We took a trip to our Credit Union." The final meeting was held at Alterna Credit Union on July 12th... We learned more about banking from the Credit Union staff. They joined our Business Partners for a visit to Surrey Place Coffee Shed. It is just around the corner from the Bay branch of the Credit Union.

August - September: Public Speaking and Communications. Petra T., Joanna, Susan, Nancy and Rachel B. - a very enthusiastic group! They wrote articles for the Common Ground Newsletter, did role plays, learned the proper way to make introductions and gave short speeches on various topics. David Pitt helped with this course. Each Partner received a certificate for course completion.

October - November: Democratic Processes. At the first session, Board Member Allan Smythe came. He answered questions about Common Ground and what the difference is between a co-op, a corporation and a small business. Job Coach Joan Barnett came to the second meeting to talk about ways to conduct Partnership Meetings. We discussed how Partners could participate in Common Ground's Annual General Meeting. Some Partners offered to speak at the AGM in November. I gave them copies of the agenda for the upcoming AGM so they would understand what would be happening. After the AGM, we talked about it.

The Partners also learned how to put together a puzzle on the bulletin board. It showed a model of our organization. The Partners began to see their individual histories in the overall history. Job Coach Ve Duong helped as we played a new vocabulary game. At one session, we had three guests: Board Members Larry Sherman and Chris Bovaird, and Job Coach Peter Ackie. The course included a good discussion about the Services Agreement that Partners sign with Common Ground. I explained the fees the Partnerships pay to Common Ground for the services they give the Partners. The final class session was a trip to Karma Coop on December 1st. We saw how a co-op food business operates. We chose to visit Karma Co-op because it was (and still is) a long-time buyer of Cookery baked goods.

February - April 2006: Marketing & Promotion;

Partners learned about 1) different ways to promote their businesses, and; 2) about pricing their goods competitively. The final class on April 21st was a trip to the local Tim Horton's. There we observed the many ways Tim Horton's promotes itself to customers. We enjoyed a snack too!

Veronica Receives Award from Toronto's Mayor

Every year in the first week of December, there was an International Day of Disability. Mayor David Miller declared the Day for the City of Toronto. The ceremony was held in 2005 at the rotunda in Metro Hall. Mayor Miller presented an award to our very own Veronica, Partner at the Surrey Place Coffee Shed. The award was for her work with Common Ground and with other organizations in the community. Five of our Staff were there: Paula, Shelina, Gladys, Kathy Young, Peter, and myself. Veronica's parents and other family members were there too. It was wonderful to see one of our Partners honoured by the Mayor!

Holiday Party

The Partners' Holiday Party took place for the first time at Jessie Manson dining room. Gladys and the Job Coaches organized it. Our new kitchen manager, Tara MacDonald, made salad and pizzas. Santa Claus came. (Some people thought Santa looked a lot like Bob, the Cookery's delivery driver.) The Partners had their pictures taken with him. There were lots of gifts. And the sense of happiness and fun was great. Many brought family and guests. There was music and dancing. We all just reveled in being part of what this little cookie project had become!



Chapter Nine Overcoming Obstacles 2006

Starting the New Year on the Right Foot

Our MPP Kathleen Wynne met with Larry Sherman, David Pitt, Allan Smythe, Paula Murphy and myself at her office in January. She told us she would help us to source government funding. She would wait with us for the outcome of Common Ground's meeting with the people in Developmental Services on January 24th. It seemed that staff in the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Karen Meighan, Colleen Hua and Kerry Ann Markle were considering ways to bring our Co-op and its Business Partnerships into their policy discussions.

Permanent Core Funding!

On January 26th, the Ontario Government made an offer of permanent core funding to Common Ground Co-op! This was a big deal!! The Ministry of Community and Social Services, through their Developmental Services, was offering us each year up to \$200 000 plus the \$95 000 we already had for the Foundations Programme. These would become one grant we could use for our programmes and our Staff salaries. It was a big step forward!

But there was a "catch". They were willing to fund us, but we had to agree to cut our budget drastically. Common Ground had to cut Staff salaries and show a reduced budget in order to get this core funding.

The Board Response to the Government

The Board of Directors of Common Ground met all day on Sunday, January 29th. The meeting was about ways to reduce the CGC budget in order to receive the government funding.

They decided how Common Ground would balance its budget: 1) our full-time Coordinator position (Paula's position) would be replaced by a new position of part-time Director. This meant Paula would be let go. 2) We would find more volunteers. 3) We would apply for and receive more non-government grants. 4) We would have Partners operate a Coffee Shed without a Job Coach.

1 David Pitt Becomes Interim Director

The Board asked David to take over as a part-time Interim Director. Changing the full-time Coordinator position to a part-time Director position would save money in our budget.

2 Plan to Increase Volunteers

The second action to reduce spending was to find more volunteers to help Partners in the businesses. Karen Goldenberg and I made a visit to the Service Canada (formerly HRDC) office. We talked about a plan for Common Ground to hire a Volunteer Coordinator. Bev Bowman and Ralph Altobello told us Service Canada could give Common Ground most of the money to hire someone who did not have a job and was currently receiving Employment Insurance (EI). We did find Sabina Krumins to be our Volunteer Coordinator for one year on this plan.

3 More Fundraising

The Fundraising Committee Members, Chris Tolley, Cathy Lang, David Pitt and myself, decided to continue making grant applications. We submitted a large number of them. Over the next few months, several applications were successful, including grants from Cooperators, Toronto Enterprise Fund (TEF) Trillium Foundation and Carrot Cache. We also received our first corporate grant from Scotiabank. My neighbour, Gillian Amber, works at head office for Scotiabank. She visited our kitchen and took our application forward for us. These grants helped make it possible to keep most of our Job Coaches.

4 Geneva Centre Coffee Shed

The TEF grant allowed us to hire Kathryn Gill as a Job Coach at Geneva Coffee Shed from November '05 to April '06. Tamara Dachuk replaced her as the Geneva Coffee Shed Job Coach for six-months, from April to November '06. But the money would run out in November. Tamara was asked to train the Partners at Geneva to run the Coffee Shed independently without a Job Coach after she left.

Partners Take Leadership in the Community in Six Ways

Even though we had to cut back the budget, the Business Partnerships and Common Ground continued to grow. This growth continued, in part, because the Partners and Job Coaches improved their businesses in six ways.

1) Two Partners represented their Business Partnerships at a Conference in Vancouver. A Community Economic Development Conference took place in Vancouver March 15 -18. Peter Ackie and Cathy Lang wrote a proposal for Common Ground's participation and it was accepted! Peter and two Partners were chosen to attend to speak about their own Partnerships as social enterprises. Several Partners applied. Joanna and Petra T. were selected. They set off by plane to Vancouver with Peter on March 14th. (A private donation paid for this trip.) They participated in a "cracker barrel" session where CGC and other social entrepreneurs had set up tables. Joanna talked about her work in the Cookery and Petra T. described the Coffee Sheds. Petra called it a "cool" experience where many people came by their table, asked questions, and exchanged business cards. Throughout the three days, our three CGC reps were shown a lot of respect for being part of four successful business enterprises.

2) Six Partners catered food to nurses on a weekend in August: Kirk, Petra T. Aldene, Blair, Rachel G. and Rachel B., accompanied by Job Coaches, Alice, Kathy and Peter. They catered meals to the 250 nurses attending the International Aids Conference in Toronto. The nurses described the Partners as "a great team".

3) Three Partners educated medical students about Developmental Disabilities. Veronica, Rachel G. and Andrew, with Job Coaches Kathy Young, and Peter Ackie, met with medical students. The students attended a three-day workshop at Surrey Place Centre in September. The medical students were in training to become doctors. The three Partners shared their experiences about working at their Coffee Shed. They described their day-to-day experiences. They patiently answered the medical students' questions. The students were impressed by the courage, confidence, openness and honesty shown by the Partners. They found listening to the Partners refreshing and educational. Some said they learned more than they did listening to lectures. For many of the students, our Business Partners were the highlight of the three-day conference!

4) One Partner spoke on work and ODSP benefits. Natalie explained her work as a Business Partner at JVS Coffee Shed to a Common Ground special meeting held for JVS staff on September 28th.

5) Two Partners helped train 14 post-secondary interns who were learning about Cooperatives. Training Coordinator, Gladys Bumanglag, and Job Coach,

Tamara Dachuk, accompanied Partners Kirk and Aldene to Guelph on October 25th. They told the interns about their businesses and how Common Ground Co-operative helped them to succeed. The interns were very interested in our Business Partnership model. They saw, through Kirk and Aldene's eyes, the importance of being a Business Partner and how their lives had changed since joining the Partnerships.

6) One Partner brought a new recipe to the Cookery. Diana met a woman called "Sugar" who had her own TV show. Sugar told Diana about how she had been interested in cooking since she was a child. She gave out free copies of a recipe she had developed for cookies. Diana brought the recipe to Lemon & Allspice. The Job Coaches helped her to convert the recipe into bulk baking and a new product for the Cookery - oatmeal molasses cookies.

Spring Gatherings - Getting to Know Everyone Better

In mid-March 2006, I sent out invitations to Partners, Staff, Board and Co-op Members and others who were making a difference to our organization. My husband Jim and I hosted four small gatherings at our home for people in our Common Ground community - one in each of the months March, April, May and June.

On March 31, Jim and I hosted the first of the four gatherings. Eight Partners and Apprentices came, along with Brian Iler, Linda Burnside, Marg Murray, Chris and Viki Tolley and Graham Baldwin. David, Shelina and Gladys were the Staff people who came. I acknowledged and thanked them for all they were doing to help Common Ground grow. I gave each of the special visitors a Coffee Shed tshirt. Brian, Graham and I had a conversation about Community Living's commitment to continue to provide a kitchen for the Cookery, even if Community Living decided to move away from Jessie Manson.

At the second gathering on April 22, five Partners and one Staff person came from the Cookery, plus Kathleen Wynne, Kerry Ann Markle, Anne Jamieson, Cathy Lang, Julie Schwartz, Jim and Marion Kirkwood and Helen Stratigos Williams. It was exciting to watch Kathleen and Kerry Ann discussing together the future of social enterprise! The Partners who came wanted to come again.

More Gatherings

Toward the end of May, another gathering took place at our house. This time, we welcomed our good friends, Executive Director of Surrey Place, John Flannery, and Karen Goldenberg, Executive Director of JVS and chair of the CGC Board. We were also pleased to see other past and present Board and Committee Members Allan Smythe, Chetan Bahri, Marty Williams, Ursula Sherman, Doreen Cluett and Ann Rowland. Nancy Vanderplaats came too from the ODSP Action Coalition.

On June 17, 2006, the fourth and last gathering took place in our garden. We had David Clandfield, principal of New College, and his wife Sandra, Colleen Hua from Developmental Services, Board Secretary Cathy Gareau, Paul Van Del Laar from Geneva Centre, five Partners and three Job Coaches - Joan, Tamara and Alice. Alice and her husband Vladimir came with a guitar. They sang "Blowing in the Wind" for me and gave me a gift. David Chivers, the first Job Coach at the Cookery, came too. Altogether, 24 Partners came to the four gatherings and 40 present and past Staff and Board, government officials, and community partners. It was great fun and a big boost to bring our many friends together!

David Pitt Becomes Executive Director for Common Ground Co-op

David Pitt's job was interim, or temporary, so the Board of Directors had to find someone for a permanent part-time position as Executive Director (ED). The Board placed an ad for an ED. Forty-one people sent in applications, including David. He decided he would like the new position with Common Ground. Members of the Board met after they read all the applications and decided to interview five people. After the interviews on May 18th the Board approved David Pitt as our new Executive Director. The position was to be part-time from June 1, 2006 to March 31, 2008. We all knew David well, so we were happy to have him continue with us.

CGC Board Meets Families, Partners and Staff

This Board accomplished a lot in 2005-6 - charitable status, permanent core funding, a balanced budget, and a major Staff change. Five of these Board Members came to an open meeting of the Co-op on a hot night in July at Jessie Manson. Partners and Staff came too and they spoke up about their ideas and concerns. Families from Mississauga were there who wanted to start their own Coffee Shed. Several other parents and a few Co-op Members came too. Good

ideas emerged for making things better for everyone who worked for CGC and the Business Partnerships.

The Government Forum

The provincial government Forum on Social Enterprise took place on October 11, 2006 at the Holiday Inn on King Street. About one hundred people attended. Many friends were there - Cathy Lang, Toby Goldberg, Denyse Guy and Kerry Ann Markle. David Pitt, Peter Ackie and Partner Aldene came from Common Ground. Anne Jamieson from United Way and I spoke on a panel about social enterprise. I highlighted our Business Partnerships as good examples.

The Ministry saw Common Ground as one of the leaders in the social enterprise movement. They saw that we were offering a unique alternative to employment for people with intellectual challenges. Other people were asking about our model. They wanted to start enterprises themselves. We had active groups in Ottawa and in Mississauga who wanted to form Co-ops and use our model to start a business enterprise.

Anti-Poverty Rally at Queen's Park

I went with four Partners to a Queen's Park anti-poverty rally in pouring rain that lasted all day. Holding on to our umbrellas, we marched with the crowd along College Street to the Steelworkers Hall. The questions in our minds were these: Why should people with disabilities have to live with so little money? Why should our Business Partners have to give half of their earnings back to the government?"

We believe that Queen's Park should raise the monthly amount that our Partners receive from ODSP. And they should let the Partners keep all of their earnings from the Business Partnerships. Some of our Partners want to be involved in marches like this to stick up for their own rights.

Sixth Annual General Meeting - Kathleen Wynne

There was heavy rain on the AGM night on November 7th but many people came. Kathleen Wynne, our MPP, gave a good speech about wanting empty schools to meet community needs - like providing a new kitchen for the Cookery. The Members of Common Ground voted yes to a by-law to change the number of Common Ground Board Members from nine to eleven. I was one of the eleven people elected to the

Board at that meeting. I had been off the Board for two years, but I was eager to join again. The Board was growing bigger, just like the Business Partnerships.

Business Development

Trillium Foundation finalized our three-year grant for business development. At the beginning of September 2006, the Board offered two new half-time positions to Peter Ackie: Business Developer and JVS Job Coach. Peter left his job coach position at Surrey Place to take on these two jobs. Katherine Facini shared the Job Coaching at JVS with Peter.

Finding a New Job Coach for the Surrey Place Coffee Shed

The Surrey Place Partners chose Deanna Djos to be their new Job Coach. On November 10th, I went to lunch at Surrey Place to meet Deanna. We joined Partners Paul and Mei Yee for soup and a sandwich from the Coffee Shed. Deanna had worked before as an Operations Analyst. The Partners liked her a lot so she was just the person Common Ground needed for Surrey Place Coffee Shed!

The Board Makes Two Decisions

The news from the Board meeting on December 9th was both good and sad. The Board gave their consent to set up a Joint Advisory Committee with two Board Members, two Staff and four Partners, one from each business. Michel Klamph and I agreed to serve as the two Board reps.

On the sad side, the Board voted to close Geneva Coffee Shed on a recommendation of the Business Development Committee. The Partners had attempted to operate this Shed on their own after Job Coach Tamara left. The Business Development Committee had consulted with the Partners at Geneva Coffee Shed before making this recommendation. Frank Pickersgill, chair of the committee, said that he was very impressed by the Partners' participation in the decision on whether to close the Geneva Coffee Shed. Here is one candid comment from a Partner: "We have to look like a business. We are not respected by people in the Geneva Centre building because we don't look like a business."

The Holiday Party

On December 19th, I once again took my grandson, Oliver, to the Partner/Staff Christmas party at Jessie Manson. There were fifty or so people there. Oliver played his toy guitar and danced to great applause. Santa came and everyone had a picture taken with him. It was a good time!



COFFEE SHED PARTNERS POSE AT THE HOLIDAY PARTY
BACK: ROLAND, CHRISTINA, BLAIR, KAREN M., and JULIE
FRONT: KAREN N., PAUL, PETRA S., CORY

Spirit of Giving

On the last day of 2006, after the church service at Trinity St. Paul's United Church, nine people purchased \$500 worth of bag lunches from Lemon & Allspice for the Out of the Cold programme in January and February. It was amazing how the congregation had kept making these purchases in the winter months every year since 1999! It was the Christmas spirit of giving operating all winter.

Chapter Ten
Partners Raise Their Voices and are heard!
2007

Setting Up the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) Questions at the Board Meeting
about a Joint Advisory Committee

At its December meeting, the Board had accepted a proposal for setting up a Joint Advisory Committee. It would have representatives from Partners, Staff and Board. But some of the Board Members had thought of some questions over the holidays. They wanted to talk some more about the JAC at the January Board meeting.

Some Board Members thought that the plan to have Partners meet in a committee with Staff and Board people should be considered very carefully. One Board member said that it's important to have competent people to make decisions about our organization. The question was whether our Partners were able to make decisions about their businesses. Board Members raised another question about whether our Partners were competent to sign the Business Partnership Agreements and Services Agreements that we had established.

Several people thought it might not be wise to bring Partners onto a Joint Advisory Committee. The Staff and Board reps for the Committee should meet first, without the Partners, to decide how much influence the Partners would be given. Another member of the Board stated that the Partners were too easily influenced by Staff and could not always speak their own minds.

But there were two sides to this discussion. Another Board member disagreed with the idea of Staff and Board meeting first without the Partners. She said the Board and Staff should only meet if the Partners were present. The Partners should be there! I explained that Staff and volunteers at Common Ground had been presenting courses to the Partners over the past two years. These courses had helped the Partners to learn more about the democratic process. They had learned a lot about managing their Business Partnerships. They had learned about Common Ground Co-op. They were being encouraged to think

for themselves and to express their own ideas. So they should be able to serve on the Joint Advisory Committee.

Someone suggested that the Board invite one of the Staff people to a Board meeting. This person could describe the courses being taught to the Partners. Some thought this was a good idea. There was a need for education of the Board, in addition to the education we had been giving the Partners. There was a need to communicate better with Board Members about the competencies of the Partners.

This discussion indicated that perhaps some Board Members should have been given more opportunities to get to know the Business Partners. Better explanation of our mission and accomplishments should have been given. Board Members would then understand how the Business Partners had become meaningfully employed and engaged in the community. This was the most exciting part of our work as Board Members. Board Members would come to a better understanding of the rewards of being part of Common Ground Co-op.

Giving Partners a Voice

March 6, 2007 was an important day. It was the first meeting of our Joint Advisory Committee. Although the Board Members had questions about setting up this committee, they had not said no to the committee. So those who liked the idea decided to go ahead with it. The founding members of the committee were Aaron from the Cookery, Mike from the JVS Coffee Shed, Veronica from the Surrey Place Coffee Shed and Nazia from the New College Coffee Shed. They had been elected by their Partnerships to represent their businesses on this new committee. The two people representing the Staff were Joan Barnett and Peter Ackie. Michel Klamph and I were there to represent Common Ground Board of Directors.

Each member of the JAC explained why they were there.

- Aaron: "I want us to talk about how to improve the Sheds and the Cookery." •
- Veronica: "I want to communicate about the issues, and the changes, and how they may affect the Partners."
- Mike: "I want to talk about financial issues, like why the pay cheques are so low at JVS, and why Surrey Place's are so high."
- Nazia: "I want to discuss all these important things."
- Joan would like to find creative ways to solve problems together.

- Peter wanted to have the committee be a place where we all talked together. He wanted the committee to provide a voice for the Partners. He hoped that each member of the committee, especially the Partners, would go back, and discuss at their Partnership meetings, what the committee was all about.
- I wanted to know what the Partners were thinking about their work in the businesses.
- Michel wanted to make sure, that the Partners' issues would be heard at the Board level.

The answers given by the Partners showed a high level of maturity. The Partners themselves were about to launch some major changes at Common Ground Co-op - not all by themselves, but in cooperation with the Board and the Staff.

That was the beginning of growing communication among the many people who were part of the whole Common Ground project. I said to the Partners, "In the early days when the Cookery had just started up, there were no Coffee Sheds yet and no Board of Directors. It was easy to communicate among the eight or nine Partners and one or two Job Coaches who were at Sibley House then. Now there are so many more of us. This Joint Advisory Committee will help us to communicate more easily now the way we did back then."

Organizing the JAC Committee; Charging Fees to Businesses

The Board voted to charge fees to the Business Partnerships. The Services Agreement already stated that Common Ground could charge fees to the Partnerships. But, up until this time, Common Ground had not done that. Because the fees were not collected in the early years, the Business Partners should have been consulted about this change, but that did not happen. We had a Joint Advisory Committee meeting in early April to talk about this. The Partners at the meeting struggled to understand why the Board wanted to take their money. I explained that, like all businesses, the Partnerships needed certain services. It was a normal practice for any business to pay for those services. Some of the services Common Ground offered to the Partnerships were these: keeping track of business finances, writing the Partners' paycheques, purchasing equipment, and paying Job Coaches.

Setting up the JAC committee was a very positive move for our organization. It had been needed for a long time. It helped to close a gap in understanding among

some Members of the Board. Perhaps the Board Members did not realize that the Partners would know what was happening with the fees and wonder why they had not been consulted. But the people on the Joint Advisory Committee did learn about the new fees and heard the explanation for them. The reps from each Business then explained about the change and the reasons for it at their Business Partnership meetings.

Changing the Services Agreement

At the June meeting of the Joint Advisory Committee, we chose officers: Veronica was made chair of the committee, I was vice chair and Joan became the "minute taker". The topic for discussion was the Services Agreements that the Business Partners had signed with Common Ground a few years ago in 2001 and 2003. Joan, Peter and I reminded the Partners what the Services Agreements were about. We went over Schedule A of the Services Agreement. It listed the services CGC offers the enterprises.

I told the committee about Brian Iler: that he was the lawyer who had helped us to set up the **Business Partnerships** and the **Co-op** in 1999 and 2000. He had helped us to write the first Partnership Agreements and Services Agreements that were signed by the Partners earlier. Peter and I said we were planning to meet with Brian in August to discuss some changes that needed to be made in the Services Agreement. And we wanted to re-write the Agreement in language that was easier for everyone to understand. Then our Joint Advisory Committee would discuss those changes with one another and with the Partnerships, Staff and the Board. The Partners would decide whether or not they wanted to accept the changes. Representatives of the Partners who were working in the businesses at that time would then sign copies of the new Services Agreement.

Peter Ackie and I met with Brian Iler on July 27th to revise the Services Agreement. Brian simplified the words in the Agreement, to make them easier to understand. But he made sure that the changes would not affect the Partners' control over their own Businesses. I said to Brian that I believed the original agreement had it right. We changed some words and the format but did not change the meaning!

A Good Productive Meeting of JAC - August 27, 2007

Our Joint Advisory Committee met again at Surrey Place at the end of August: Veronica, Mike, Aaron and Nazia were there with Peter, Joan and myself. Our four partner reps talked through the importance of regular monthly partner meetings at each of the businesses. We talked about how to organize them better. We read through the new version of the Services Agreement. The Partners liked the new format. They began to understand how much authority they have to make decisions.

Partners Show Their Strength

Being a Partner in a business was a big responsibility and that included having to make some difficult decisions. But the Partners showed themselves to be capable of doing this and doing it in a responsible way.

On October 1, the Partner Reps reported to the JAC meeting that they were pleased with their accomplishments. They were ready to keep moving forward. Mike reported that JVS Coffee Shed was going to get more space because there would be some renovations at their business site. Veronica told the group that Surrey Place Coffee Shed was starting a composting programme for everyone in their building. Nazia reported that New College Coffee Shed had started selling used books and New College had given them an office. Aaron announced that he had signed up 13 new Members for Common Ground Co-op! Hearing all this good news from the Partner Reps gave the Staff and Board reps a real lift. Despite all the difficulties, the Partners were carrying on. The Partners were keeping the whole project going with their enthusiasm!

Fundraising Help Needed for Fundraising

Meanwhile, the members of the Fundraising Committee were trying to keep the organization afloat by finding large amounts of funding, at least \$100 000 or more each year. Cathy Lang had recently left the Fundraising Committee. I wasn't sure if the Committee would be capable of raising that money without Cathy Lang's help. No one else on the current Board had offered to assist with fundraising. Fortunately, Frances Frisken joined the Committee soon after, taking on the position of secretary and helping with research on foundations.

John Flannery Invites CGC to Join Get-in-Line Fundraising Event

I paid a visit to John Flannery, head of Surrey Place Centre. I asked him about how Common Ground could raise more funds. John told me about Surrey Place's Get-in-Line roller blade and walking event, held the previous summer. Staff and families of Surrey Place had raised a good deal of money through sponsorships. Some of the Partners from the Coffee Shed at Surrey Place had helped out as volunteers. John invited Common Ground as an organization to participate the next summer. The Partners, Staff and Members of Common Ground could organize a team for the skating and walking fundraiser. I said yes because I could see how much good it might do for Common Ground.

Cooperators Comes Through With Three-year Grant!

In April, Cooperators came through again - only big time -\$20 000 each year for three years!! It was a great relief! Cooperators had already funded Common Ground for three years, but we had to apply each year. This three-year grant (totally unexpected) would make a huge difference to our bottom line. Several messages of congratulations came from the Board Members, regarding this grant.

A Partner Raises \$6 000!

And there was more good news - we received \$6 000 from the Tippet Foundation! It was NOT a Staff member or a committee member or a Board member who got that grant for us. It was Joanna, a Business Partner in the Cookery!! Here is how it happened. David Pitt invited Joanna to go to the Tippet Foundation with him on May 31st. He asked her to speak to the people there about her work in the Cookery. When they arrived at the office, they spoke to the receptionist. Walter Thompson, the head of Tippet Foundation, could hear the conversation from his nearby office. He invited David and Joanna to come into his office. David sat very quietly while Joanna had a long conversation with Mr. Thompson.



PARTNER JOANNA WORKING IN THE LEMON & ALLSPICE KITCHEN

Joanna told Mr. Thompson all about her work and about the other Business Partnerships and how they needed money for their Job Coaches. At the end of the conversation, Mr. Thompson said that he would give \$6 000 to Common Ground to help the businesses! When the cheque arrived in the mail, it included a note from Mr. Thompson, saying, "A special thank you to Joanna - she is a terrific representative for your organization." Joanna sent him some lemon and date squares along with a note, saying, "Dear Mr. Thompson, we the Partners and Staff at Common Ground Cooperative are extremely happy with your generous \$6 000. This is a huge benefit for CGC. The money will help the Staff to help us Partners run the businesses." It was true that our Business Partners were Our best ambassadors!

Get-in-Line at Woodbine Beach!

Many of us went to Woodbine Park for the big fundraising Get-in-Line event with Surrey Place Centre. Our Partners and their families and friends, along with Staff and Board Members had formed Team Common Ground and had raised money by finding many sponsors. This was the day to walk on the Boardwalk or skate along Ashbridges Bay. We were hoping to raise \$5 000.



STAFF AND PARTNERS WALK THE BOARDWALK IN THE ANNUAL GET-IN-LINE FUNDRAISING EVENT

It was a glorious day, especially because Common Ground came in first by raising pledges of \$9900! We had surpassed our original goal! With the tremendous organizational support of Deanna and Gladys, Team Common Ground proved that persons with intellectual challenges are more than capable and able to fundraise for their own cause. We were able to keep about \$7000 when all was accounted for. Some of Common Ground's earnings went to Surrey Place to help pay for organizing the event. John Flannery and I were both happy with the results in this new venue at the Beaches. John invited Deanna and Gladys to join the Surrey Place committee to help plan the *Get-in-Line* event for the next year.

Summer Events Summer Picnic at Woodbine Beach

We didn't get enough of the beach at the *Get-in-Line* event. So on August 10th, we had our Partner and Staff annual summer gathering at Woodbine Beach Park. Gladys and Tara did a lot of work to prepare food for the picnic. Cathy and I and some of the other Partners had a great swim in the Olympic pool on a lovely sunny day. We all munched on lunch and enjoyed the beach.

A Good Productive Board Meeting - August 20, 2007

Soon after the Woodbine Beach events, CGC had a Board meeting. Ten of the eleven Board Members were there. The meeting lasted three hours as people finally came face to face with the radical nature of what we were doing. When they first came on to the Board, they had based their understanding of our organization on what was familiar to them. But now they realized that Common Ground had been taking a new and different approach to employment for people with disabilities. Our treasurer, Christine Pearce, presented full financial statements to the Board, one for each business. That helped Board Members to be more aware of just how busy the business's sales had become. I presented the newly formatted Services Agreement that the Joint Advisory Committee had accepted. At this meeting, we made an effort to understand one another better. And all went away feeling we had a very productive meeting!!

Publicity Common Ground Co-op Newsletters

In 2007-8, several beautiful full-colour eight-page issues of the Common Ground News were published. They were designed and edited by a dedicated team of volunteers on the Communications Committee: Yone Simidzu (editor), Michael Swan, Helen Williams, Robert Boardman, Angela Chan, and Dylis Chow. They were assisted by Sabina Krumins (staff volunteer coordinator). The Newsletter featured articles and stories by and about the Partners and Staff, and included Membership and Board activities. Partners enjoyed reading them and seeing themselves in print. Many Common Ground Members, activists and followers received copies to share with friends. Intern Natalie Roach edited the final newsletter in this series, published in June 2008. Since then, newsletters have appeared regularly on the CGC website and are produced by Staff.

Rogers TV Interviews Angela and Me

Angela, a partner in the Cookery, went with me to be interviewed at the Rogers TV studio. Angela loved doing this, especially having her face made up before the interview. She spoke very well in answer to the questions the interviewer asked her about the Cookery. I had trouble answering one of the questions. Angela and I appeared on TV the next evening. It was clear who the star of the performance was - it was Angela! The Job Coaches at Common Ground were not surprised to see how well Angela did. They knew that the Partners were the best people to speak up about their Business Partnerships. They knew that the Partners

understood their work and were well able to talk about it! They hoped the Board Members had seen Angela's performance.



More Good Publicity - Angela & Cathy

Meanwhile, another film shoot was going to take place at the kitchen. This film was a project of the Ontario government. Our good friend, Toby Goldberg, had arranged for two of our Cookery Partners to be filmed. The topic was about what shopping was like for people who have a disability. The title was "Talk to Me!" The film included several people with different kinds of disabilities. It would be shown to clerks who work in stores and banks. They would become confident about speaking with shoppers who have a disability. Cathy and Angela were filmed and a few months later, we received a copy of the film. Cathy and Angela did very well! We hoped the film would help clerks and others to relate well to all of our Business Partners when they were out shopping and banking.

Forging Ahead!

Feeling Good

With these events, we began to feel even more positive and optimistic. It seemed that when sometimes the future looked bleak, good things would happen to give us the courage to go on. The Partners were showing more and more determination too - with great results.

For example, Lemon & Allspice Cookery was busy in the days leading up to the Easter holidays. Easter cookies were the order of the day! The Partners prepared, baked and decorated shortbread cookies in Easter shapes. In all, they made and sold 100 dozen Easter cookies! That was something to shout about!

Many Good Friends

It helped us to know that Common Ground, the Cookery and the Sheds had found many friends in the community. We had very good relations with the Ministry, with the Ontario Co-op Association, with Trinity St. Paul's United Church, Surrey Place Centre, the University of Toronto, JVS Toronto and Community Living. We had good relations with the Members and the Staff of Common Ground Co-op. These people had seen the capabilities of our Partners. They understood our mission and were already amazed by the accomplishments of our Partners.

More Hard Decisions Changes in the Coffee Shed Partnerships

Partners at the Surrey Place Coffee Shed decided to ask some of their Partners to leave. The reason the Partners gave for asking these Partners to leave was this: they were not working to promote the business. They did not do the jobs they were expected to do and that meant the other Partners had to work harder.

Before they asked them to leave, they followed the rules in the Partnership Agreement they had signed. The Partnership Agreement stated that the Partners could remove a Partner from the Partnership by a majority vote. But they must first arrange a meeting with the Partner and a family member or worker to discuss why they were being asked to leave the business.

At the meetings, the Business Partners explained the reasons why they were asking the Partner to leave. After the Partner had a chance to speak and to ask questions, then the other Partners voted. The Surrey Place Partners had met with each one of the Partners who were being asked to leave. They had given them several chances to change their work habits. But there was not enough improvement. So, after the Partnership meetings, those Partners were asked to leave. The Job Coach at Surrey Place helped these Partners to find other placements where they were much happier.

Persuading People to Join the Board

The CGC Board Members invited new people to consider becoming candidates for election to the Board. The Board Members did this every year in October. This year, four Partners were invited to meet with the Board candidates to explain to them the work they do. Nazia, Aaron, Rachel G. and Rachel B. spoke to the candidates at a special meeting held in the Cookery dining area. The candidates

were impressed with how well they spoke. The Partners made it easier for interested people to decide they would like to serve on the Board.

New Projects, Travel and Work for Partners a Compost Box Full of Red Wrigglers

The Surrey Place Partners and their Job Coach, Deanna, invited a number of people to gather at their new compost box at the edge of the parking lot behind the Surrey Place Centre building. This wonderful project was called "vermiculture"! The Partners collected organic matter and paper from the Shed and from the offices on all five floors of the Centre. They gathered it together every day and took it outside to put in the compost box. They stirred the organic matter into the materials in the box. They also put red wriggler worms into the box and closed the cover tightly. The worms ate the organic matter. Once each year, the Partners emptied the box of all the lovely clean soil that the worms made by eating the organic matter. Then they sold the compost to gardeners or made small balls of it to put in egg cartons and sell to people who could use it to fertilize houseplants. The money they raised helped to pay for the large vermi-composting boxes. It has been a great project. Deanna and the Partners were doing good things to reduce waste and improve the environment!



PARTNER ALDENE AND JOB COACH DEANNA DJOS TEND TO THE COMPOSTING -
AN ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECT OF THE SURREY PLACE COFFEE SHED



PARTNERS CATHY, FRANK AND ALDENE WITH JOB COACH DEANNA AFTER FEEDING WORMS

The Book Sale Project

Nazia wrote about the Book Sale Project in the fall 2007 Common Ground Newsletter: Last summer our business at New College expanded by selling used books for \$1 each. Some of the books are interesting enough for me to read. I really like this book-selling idea. It should help bring more customers to the Coffee Shed.

A Trip to Ottawa by Train

Partners Aaron and Veronica with Job Coach Joan Barnett and I took the train to Ottawa on October 21st. We had been invited to present a workshop there about the Business Partnerships. Our friends, Marge McCabe and her husband, Rick, picked us up in their van at the station and took us to the Canadian Parliament Buildings. We walked around Parliament Hill on a beautiful warm sunny afternoon. Veronica especially enjoyed watching a colony of stray cats we discovered on the Hill. McCabe's took us on a drive up along the Rideau Canal. We saw the Ottawa River, Quebec, and the bridges crossing over from Ontario to Quebec. We had dinner together at the Heart and Crown pub in the market. Joan and I stayed with friends that night. Veronica and Aaron stayed with Marge and Rick.

The next morning, we got together again at the Hintonberg Community Centre for a meeting about Social Enterprise. Don Palmer gave a presentation about Krackers Katering in Ottawa. It's a catering company a lot like Lemon & Allspice Cookery. After that, the four of us made our presentation about the Cookery and the Coffee Sheds in Toronto. After lunch and another presentation in the afternoon, Marge drove us back to the train station where we waited for the train that whisked us back to Toronto. It was a good trip!

Working at the Cookery

The Cookery Partners often speak for themselves about their businesses and the variety of work they do there. Here is how some Partners describe the jobs they perform. Joanna says, "I help in a catering business with people with disabilities. I sign the cheques and make deposits." Sean, Diana and Alex describe themselves as bakers. Cathy says, "I do sandwiches as well as baking. It's a catering business that delivers food around the city. We are all bosses". Katy describes herself as a baker, but she adds, "I do deliveries. I do some dishes and help the Job Coaches get food trays ready. I sweep and wash the floor." Doug says, "I make deliveries and I operate the cash register." Aaron says, "I wash dishes and set up the kitchen. And I also bring in new Members to the Co-op, do public speaking and promote the businesses." They interact with the catering customers too. Joanna likes to make deliveries to the National Film Board of Canada downtown. "They asked me to lunch once", she says. "They were nice." Aaron likes to make deliveries to the several law firms that order food from the Cookery. Sean enjoys delivering orders to JVS Coffee Shed, because of the friendly Staff there.

A Waiting List

Members of Common Ground Co-op were beginning to ask about the waiting list of people who wanted to become Partners in the businesses. Some were people who had finished the Foundations course with Gladys. They had done some work in the businesses as part of their training. They wanted to stay. Other people heard about our businesses and asked to be put on the waiting list. There were 53 people working in the four businesses. Many of them had been Business Partners for several years. They liked their work and didn't want to leave. There was a limit to how many Partners there could be in each business too. So people on the waiting list sometimes had to wait a very long time to start an Apprenticeship. After a few months, some would find another programme or job and take their names off the list.

This raised a big question. How could more people become Business Partners? Should Common Ground open more snack bars? That was a hard question to answer. It cost a lot of money to open a new business. CGC had barely enough money to help the four Business Partnerships we had. We had tried to open a business at Geneva Centre but we had to close it because we couldn't pay another Job Coach. The Partners there had been doing a good job, but it was difficult to run a business successfully on their own. We needed to think of new ways to help more people to join or start new businesses. It would take almost two years for us to find those new ways. (See pages 123-4 in Chapter 12.)

Shelina Moves On

Shelina Akter had been working for Common Ground and the Partnerships as our Financial Manager ever since September 2003 - four years! Everyone knew and liked Shelina. But she was offered another job in July and decided to accept it. We were very sorry to see her leave us. Fortunately, the Board approved the hiring of Shelina's brother, Nazrul Islam.

The Seventh Annual General Meeting

The Open House and AGM took place once again at the Jessie Manson building in November. Many Partners, Staff and Co-op Members attended. It was well organized. Peter Frampton, from the Toronto Learning Enrichment Foundation, was our special guest that year. He spoke to the crowd about Common Ground's important place in Canada's social economy.

International Day for Disabled Persons

I gave a short speech to Health Canada folks on Queen Street West. Alice, Deanna and three Partners attended. Rachel B. and I stayed for the Lemon & Allspice lunch. We made some good contacts. A copy of my speech is in the Appendix at the back of this book, page 156.

Community Living Plans to Move from Jessie Manson

One day, the people at Community Living told Common Ground that they were planning to move. They wanted to move out of the Jessie Manson building at 4 Overlea Blvd. to another building. They hadn't found the building they wanted yet, but they let us know so we could be prepared. This meant that our Cookery kitchen

might have to move too, because Common Ground was sub-leasing the kitchen from Community Living,

So Members of the Common Ground Board of Directors set up a Property Search Committee. We began looking for a kitchen - Tara, Larry, David and myself. We went to Neill Wycik Housing Co-op on the campus of Ryerson University to meet Melissa Wilkes. She gave us a tour of their vacant kitchen and we discussed all the angles. It seemed like a good possibility and Neill Wycik might not charge a lot of rent. We discovered no serious drawbacks. It was a good meeting but no decision was made. We would wait to see if Community Living gave official notice that they would move.

And the Holiday Party

The Partners, Staff and many family members came to the Holiday party that took place at the Mandarin Restaurant this year, on December 3rd. Eighty people were there. Aaron said, "It was packed like sardines. Everyone came!" We learned that night that the Cookery did \$8 000 worth of business just over the weekend. Who could have imagined we would ever bring in so much money in such a short time?