

Iqaluit Social Enterprise Discovering Abundance in Scarcity

Image



Inclusion Café thrives on strong community partnerships

An Iqaluit, Nunavut social enterprise is demonstrating what's possible through seeking abundance in the midst of apparent scarcity — both in its community and in the people it exists to support.

As a northern Canada entity, the Inclusion Café faces the same pressing lack of resources and supports that organizations in the North all face.

But rather than a problem, organizers of the café have decided to consider this an opportunity.

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— *Carolyn Curtis*

“We’ve turned it into an opportunity by looking to the community for support and building community relationships,” volunteer co-ordinator Carolyn Curtis says.

“I think that’s really what surviving and thriving in the North is all about,” she adds.

Operated by the non-profit [Nunavummi Disabilities Makinnasuaqtiit Society](#), the café is currently able to achieve what it does through a series of community partnerships. For instance, the Iqaluit Food Centre, which houses the local food bank, allows the café to prepare its food in the centre’s large commercial kitchen free of charge.

“We do what we can to help them and to keep the place running and clean, but they’ve offered this to us for free. That’s one of the ways that we’re able to make this (enterprise) happen,” Carolyn says. “At this point we couldn’t afford to pay for a commercial space to cook and bake.”

A partnership with Association Francophone Du Nunavut provides the enterprise a space free of charge to serve lunch every other week to about 60 people. The lunch

consists of a three-course meal made of the café's signature homemade foods. Payment for the meals allows the café to pay its employees who have a disability. All of the enterprise's support staff are currently volunteers.

"We do everything at cost, so our only real concern is to be able keep paying our employees," Carolyn says. "So we give the non-profits a very good rate and they keep coming back to us, so in that way we see them as our partners."

In addition to discovering the abundance that exists in the community, the Inclusion Café seeks to make visible the gifts of people who have a disability.

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Photo courtesy of Inclusion Café.

"My whole life I have been searching for a culturally transformative idea or approach to community living and, for me, community inclusion is that fundamental, most important thing that has to exist in our society in order for people to flourish," Carolyn says.

Work like that which the Inclusion Café is committed to allows for that inclusion to happen as people who have a disability live into opportunities to discover who they are and what they have to offer.

Sometimes, even the individuals who have a disability are surprised at what they learn about themselves.

"People (who have a disability) haven't always had the opportunity to find out who they are, so when you see people feel included and feel like they're valued within a community of people, it's such a powerful thing," Carolyn says.

Seeing people who have been working with the café now exploring other job opportunities energizes Carolyn most. With the supportive environment offered

through the café, employees have built up the confidence and skills that makes them eager to test the waters elsewhere.

Others are equally enthused to stay with the social enterprise long-term.

One of the big hopes is that the Inclusion Café can eventually be housed in its own space in the community and operate fulltime.

For a fantastic story on the history of the café, click [here](#).

A version of this article was originally written for the [Enterprising Non-profits Canada news service](#). This repost, for which we received permission, follows the style guidelines of the original post.