

CASE FOR SUPPORT



OPPORTUNITY WORKS

“About one in four adults — suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year” – National Institute of Mental Health

Mental health consumers have trouble finding and keeping employment because of the cyclical nature of mental illness.

“Over 70 percent of people with a mental illness are unemployed, under-employed or in jeopardy of losing employment.” - Mood Disorders Society of Canada in Quick Facts: Mental Illness and Addiction in Canada

Self-employment is a real option that enables mental health consumers to improve their standard of living and be engaged in the Calgary community.

Participants start businesses and take control of their own mental health. By learning the skills to become self employed, and to manage their mental illness, people can improve their economic well-being and mental health. We help people become involved in their communities and develop business, wellness, interpersonal, computer, time management and financial skills in a positive environment of respect and understanding.

Community Impact

Opportunity Works’ participants often have nowhere else to turn. Some participants have never been employed and many have experienced mental health issues in a way that has kept them from being employed for long periods of time. Opportunity Works’ participants deal with a variety of debilitating issues including ongoing mental health concerns, unemployment, subsistence living, isolation, despair and shattered self-confidence and self-esteem.

Opportunity Works offers the only self-employment program tailored to mental health consumers in Western Canada.

Through our program, participants develop an alternative and sustainable source of income, allowing them to enhance their quality of life. Often, this is as simple as selling a painting and being able to afford a night out at the movies, but the process is a continual one and Opportunity Works provides ongoing support.

Participant Success Story

It has been a long and difficult journey to get to where I am today. In 2001, I was happily employed performing advanced system and network troubleshooting when a car accident brought all that to an end. I lost memories and most reasoning skills, and with that, my job.

Without my income our family lost our home and disintegrated. It was a very dark time. In spite of these losses, I kept trying. In 2003, I took a course in starting my own business. Unfortunately, I couldn’t manage the day to day tasks of setting up and running a small business and the business floundered.

I buried myself in horses, rescuing a terribly abused mare named Barbie and her foal, Mystic. I made a few horse blankets and things for Barbie and the new baby.

People saw these and asked if I would offer horse blanket washing and repair services. I jumped at the chance. It was an extremely difficult challenge. With memory problems I had difficulty maintaining accurate timelines, remembering whose blanket was whose and what needed to be done to each.

During this struggle, I found Opportunity Works. It has been a godsend. Working directly with my coach weekly for more than a year, I have learned how to prioritize my work, not to bite off too much and to build strategies for my memory problems.

After finding Opportunity Works, my income doubled over the previous year.

Participant Success Story

I heard about Opportunity Works from a doctor I saw some months ago. She said Opportunity Works could help someone like me start a business. I was unsure about Opportunity Works because I don't like discussing that have a disability. I called Opportunity Works and made some appointments to meet with my current business coach.

It took me a while to warm up to the idea of using Opportunity Works to help me start my business. With regular appointments at Opportunity Works I was able to make my business plan, my website to advertise my business, brochures and business cards. They've helped me to understand how complicated it is to start a business.

I felt stupid at certain times when I looked at spreadsheets and accounting books that told me how to start a business. The staff helped me take little steps towards my goal.

Aside from learning how to run/start a business, they've helped me figure out what I need to do for myself to keep my stress level at a minimum.

I like the great interaction with other people who help me feel less overwhelmed and I feel like persevering.

It's great to talk with someone face to face, instead of just passing e-mails back and forth and never knowing whom you're talking to. The guidance from Opportunity Works assists me in planning for my business and taking care of myself.

My vision is to make an animation studio that provides entertainment with fantastic classical animation and beautiful story telling.
www.bbanimation.ca/

Opportunity Works' participants develop a strong sense of community, often for the first time in their lives, in a safe and accepting environment. We also work to expose participants to resources available in the larger community. With renewed confidence and an improved sense of financial well-being, Opportunity Works' participants contribute to this community, whether it is financially or through involvement in community events and volunteering.

Our Program

Opportunity Works' participants are people who identify as mental health consumers and want to start their own business. We provide intensive, flexible, ongoing business and mental health support to over 100 participants each year, serving as many as 60 people at any one time.

Process

Participants go through a six to eight week orientation, completing a number of self-assessment tools to determine interests and skills. Participants work through comprehensive exercises developed by Opportunity Works including a Recovery Action Plan, Business Plan Workbook and Sustainable Economic Security Plan, as well as tools from outside sources, such as Alberta Learning Information Service.

Participants meet with their coaches on a regular basis. The Opportunity Works approach is self-directed. Participants determine the speed of their progress and their level of involvement based on their capacity.

Once a business idea is identified, participants begin work on a business plan.

As the business plan takes shape, participants attend weekly business and mental health workshops. They may also set up one-on-one training sessions with a computer coach, learning or improving skills such as e-mail, Word or Excel, and progressing to web and graphic design. Participants create business cards and brochures to promote their business and eventually build their own websites.

Workshops

Opportunity Works offers business and mental health management workshops including Business Planning, Marketing Strategies, Business Finance, Interpersonal Skills and Effective Listening.

Every month, we host a Peering into Business event and invite local entrepreneurs and community agencies to discuss business and mental health strategies with participants.

Resources

The Opportunity Works technology lab includes seven computer stations, a high-resolution scanner and printer as well as an accessible workstation with a 24 inch monitor, large key print keyboard, zoom text and adjustable table, chair and monitor arm.

The Opportunity Works library lends out books, videos, and interactive learning tools that provide information on business and mental health issues.

Program Objectives and Outcomes

As participants work through the stages of Assessment, Skill Development, and Entrepreneurial Support, they set goals based on four core objectives:



OW has given me hope ... given me a sense of community. OW has been someone to help me not get overwhelmed and sink.
-Opportunity Works Participant

Economic Well Being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate, assess, and develop a business idea • Research and understand the business markets • Develop marketing, operational, financial and contingency plans for the business • Implement plans including business start-up • Access on-going support towards the maintenance and further development of the business
Sustainable Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure connectivity to personal, professional and organizational supports • Develop self-advocacy skills to ensure positive, constructive interactions with mental health professionals, supports, and customers/clients • Develop strategies to maintain and improve long-term mental health
Skill Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access group learning activities to transfer knowledge and allow for social interaction and peer support • Receive ongoing follow-up and positive reinforcement from Self-Employment Coaches to ensure that learning opportunities are accessed, skills are being developed and used, and participants have opportunities to develop self-confidence and self-esteem
Community Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become connected and involved with agencies and resources in the community • Represent the mental health community in a positive manner • Engage in mentorship and networking opportunities

Opportunity Works follows a continuous improvement model - expanding and tailoring the program to meet participant needs. Coaches compile on-going information about participant progress based on the following criteria:

- Completion of business planning workbooks and service plans
- Implementation of steps toward development of business plan and self-employment skills
- Implementation of steps necessary to improved wellness
- Accomplishment of self-determined goals
- Self-reported income

Peer Coaching

Opportunity Works operates from a peer perspective. All of Opportunity Works' business coaches are mental health consumers who operated small businesses prior to joining Opportunity Works. All experienced major employment setbacks as a result of mental health issues, thus bringing their lived experience and an empathetic approach to working with participants.

*“Opportunity Works has given me the encouragement to dream of a better future...with the help of Opportunity Works, I will succeed in finding the necessary tools to re-equip myself to the point of being able to operate once more”
-OW Participant*

All of our business coaches have training in PsychoSocial Rehabilitation and three are Certified Peer Specialists (CPS), having taken formal training and certification at the Georgia Peer Support Institute. The foundation of the CPS model is self-determination, a value shared by Opportunity Works as we empower participants to reach their potential.

Board and Volunteers

The Opportunity Works' Board of Directors includes professionals from a variety of backgrounds and industries. Many have previous experience with mental health and are passionate advocates of self-employment as a viable option for our participants.

Volunteers play a key role in the organization, contributing in a broad range of areas including office administration, fund development, special events and financial planning.

A History of Supporting Mental Health Consumers

Opportunity Works started in 1998 as a pilot site of a nation-wide project sponsored by the National Network for Mental Health and funded by the Opportunities Fund of Human Resources Development Canada.

Over the years, Opportunity Works has developed funding relationships with the United Way of Calgary, The Calgary Foundation, Wild Rose Foundation, Alberta Gaming & Liquor Commission, the Government of Canada, an anonymous donor and a number of private donors.

“Opportunity Works is helping me to learn how to market my artwork...providing me with the support I greatly need to move forward”

-Opportunity Works Participant

Opportunity Works has a wide base of support from the mental health, business development, supported employment and local economic development communities. The Opportunity Works model is currently in a position to be expanded to include employment support and volunteerism.

Participant Success

Since Opportunity Works’ founding in 1998, Opportunity Works has provided business and mental health support to over 500 mental health consumers in Calgary. Opportunity Works’ participants come from a wide range of educational and employment backgrounds and include artists, sculptors, writers, massage therapists, photographers, business consultants and accountants.

Funding and the Future

Opportunity Works’ annual operating budget planned for 2010/2011 is \$460,000, with an additional \$4,000 anticipated for capital needs. Opportunity Works’ programs are enabled through the valued support of the United Way of Calgary, the Government of Canada (Opportunities Fund), The Calgary Foundation, the Wild Rose Foundation (now the Quarterly Grants Program), QV Investors, an anonymous donor and individual donations.

We invite you to partner with our current funders through donations or volunteering.

Our Mission: Opportunity Works provides unique peer coaching and education to aspiring entrepreneurs who live with mental illness.

Our Vision: Individuals facing mental health challenges are healthy, successful, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

*“Opportunity Works turned my life around”
-Opportunity Works Participant*

*In the big picture, my achievements in life are directly because of OW
-Opportunity Works Participant*

www.opportunityworks.ca

Charitable Registration #: 89390 4912 RR0001



Yes, I want to help participants connect to the local community

Name: _____

Company Name (if applicable): _____

Address: _____ City: _____

Province: _____ Postal Code: _____ Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

I wish to make a monthly donation of: \$ _____


Enclosed are 12 post-dated cheques

OR

I wish to make the following donation:

\$500 \$250 \$100 \$50 \$25 Other: _____

Enclosed is my cheque made payable to **Opportunity Works**. Charitable receipts will be issued for ALL gifts.

To Donate Online: Go to www.opportunityworks.ca and click on the  button.

I would like to opt-out of receiving future correspondence from Opportunity Works (newsletters, special event updates, donation requests, etc.). Please remove me from the OW mailing list.

Opportunity Works Calgary, Inc. is committed to protecting your privacy and respecting your anonymity. We will not share, sell, or distribute your information to any third party without your explicit authorization, unless we are required by law.

Charitable Registration # 89390 4912 RR0001

Anything you can do at any given time is enough...giving us time to do these things at our own pace is so wonderful.

-Opportunity Works Participant

Cover Art Left Panel
“Inglewood Bird Sanctuary 1”
Watercolour by OW participant
Brian Pawlak.
www.brianpawlakmfa.com

Cover Art Right Panel
“Gate in Millarville”
Watercolour by OW participant
Sandra Milne
www.sandramilne.com