



# CABOOLTURE WORKERS CO-OPERATIVE

## Locals Supporting Locals

Caboolture Workers Cooperative (CCWC) is a grassroots social enterprise started as an initiative of Homelife (a disability support agency) and registered as a Non-Trading Cooperative in July 2006.

The cooperative's **social purpose** is much like its sister organisation Nundah Community Enterprise Co-op, which is to provide long-term employment for people living with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues in the Moreton Bay Region.

As such, the corresponding **trading activity** of the cooperative was initially in the fields of car-detailing and mowing.

Today, the Caboolture co-operative runs Logan Creek Cafe, a Coffee Shop in Morayfield/Health Hub and continues to operate its mowing enterprise in the Caboolture and Morayfield area. The inclusive and cooperative spirit allows people working there to attain socially-valued roles making them feel happier and healthier. As one worker says, 'It makes me feel important and (that) I am worthwhile'.

## FINANCE

In 2009, the co-op secured a grant to set-up Lagoon Creek Café (LCC) taking inspiration from the Espresso Train café, Nundah. This start-up grant along with income from the business has provided a sustainable business model, albeit the cooperative has established itself as a registered charity which enables philanthropic donations. As such, a key lesson of the cooperative is to ensure a good mix of income streams – trading, grants

and philanthropy, government funding, sponsorship, partnerships.

## PARTNERSHIPS AND HORIZONTAL LEARNING

Crucial to the early days have been key partnerships with the disability support non-profits Better Together and Homelife. These partnerships have supported the café's development and functioning with investment in employing a manager for the café and the support workers (known as lifestyle coaches).

In 2014, Better Together became incorporated with the purpose to develop valued roles for people with disabilities (drawing on Social Role Valorization theory (SRV)). Having similar visions, Better Together and the Cooperative worked jointly and independently from Homelife thereafter. Better Together provided some resources, especially financial aid to support the Cooperative.

Significantly Nundah Community Enterprise Cooperative (NCEC) provides advisory support to the Caboolture Workers Cooperative – specifically the LCC was based on NCEC's Espresso Train Café model. Within community development this is often known as horizontal learning whereby an organization in a place learns from the model developed in another place. Unlike a franchise model, the original model is not replicated in the second location but is adapted to 'fit-into' the local conditions, while also avoiding making the same mistakes from the first model.

## KEY ANIMATORS

While uncomfortable foregrounding particular people – after all, many of these efforts and effective social

enterprises require the energy, skills and commitment of many people – it would also be inaccurate to pretend that key animators aren't crucial. The SEED story in SANDBAG needed Steve Williams; NCEC needed Dave Langdon and subsequently Richard Warner (to be involved for many years). The Hervey Bay story needed Tanya Stevenson. In the same way, Caboolture Workers Cooperative has needed Deb Griesheimer. Through curating these case studies and listening to the stories, such people cannot be made invisible. They're people who have 'skin in the game' as one person put it, alongside significant vision, tenacity and willingness to step into uncomfortable spaces of business – when otherwise used to working in non-profit community organisations.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS

Caboolture Co-operative has faced several challenges and learnt some lessons since its inception more than 15 years ago. Some key challenges and lessons relating to the co-operative have been listed below.

### Navigating partnerships over time

Small businesses are fragile and are often reliant on partner organization for various supports. When a key partner withdraws its supports, it is crucial to have other adequate supports in place to fill in the vacuum. After Better Together withdrew its support, the Caboolture Co-op had to 'dig deep' to achieve social sustainability. As such, a key lesson to be learned is – like any business really – look for diversity; in this case diverse partners.

### Financial independence

One of the advantages of thinking about development through the lens of social enterprise is to be able to move away from dependence on government funding (which is the traditional model of neighbourhood and community centre's). Another challenge being faced by the cooperative is to have financial independence and constant flow of capital. There are several costs attached with running a business, such as marketing, rent and

wages. Apart from business income, there are other ways of generating capital for social enterprises, like securing grants from government or obtaining a charity status. Different methods of generating cash inflow should be considered while running a small enterprise because income from business/sales (or just one source) may not be always reliable.

### Matching market opportunities with worker aspiration

It's clear to any business model that a market gap must be discovered. That gap could be about something new or an undersupply that can be met by the business (for example, not enough people are providing pet grooming services in an area so a new business identifies the gap). However, the gaps must meet the potential and interest of the people working in the enterprise. For example - cleaning may be a profitable business and a gap might have been identified, but not everyone might want to do cleaning for a living.

### 'Location, location, location'

'Location, location, location' Is a mantra of any business. It's not a secondary consideration, but primary. LCC is situated near Lagoon Creek in a bush-setting. If LCC was located in a busy area it would attract more customers decreasing marketing costs and increasing profit. But that could put extra pressure on the staff, making work more stressful for them. So, different considerations need to be taken into account when making decisions.

### Business thinking and planning

Deb highlighted the important role of managers in planning the day-to-day functioning of the café. It is almost impossible to run an enterprise without a manager who has a business skillset. Thus, comprehensive analysis/planning is required at all times to operate sustainable businesses.

## MORE INFORMATION

**Caboolture Workers Co-operative**  
[cabooltureworkerscoop.org.au](http://cabooltureworkerscoop.org.au)

## PROJECT SUMMARY







▲ Lagoon Creek Café opened 2012 – supporting people with disabilities to build skills and knowledge, and achieve their employment goals



The Hub Coffee Shop from 2022. Everyone is healthier and happier when they have a valued role.

This Social Enterprise Sector Development Grant project is proudly supported and funded by the Queensland Government.

This case study was developed by Community Praxis Co-Op and Nundah Community Enterprise Co-Op and has been endorsed by CCWC in March 2023.



The Caboolture Mowing Co-op since 2006. Approximately 95% of the Co-op worker/members are local people with diagnosed disabilities who have experienced discrimination in mainstream employment because of their disability.