

News

Local organization receives national award

SEED Winnipeg recognized for work with co-ops

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Cindy Coker, SEED's executive director, believes co-ops "allow working people to have much more control of their workplace."
Photo: Mark Reimer

Without the help of a local organization, Supporting Employment & Economic Development (SEED) Winnipeg, Stephen Kirk would have never been able to co-own a business.

"They're making small businesses more accessible to people" who otherwise might not have a chance at it, he said.

Kirk is a member of the Organic Planet Worker Co-op, an organic market that got its start in 2002.

It was made possible with the help of SEED, a non-profit organization that provides business training, consultation and help with business models and plans to groups interested in starting their own businesses.

SEED's contribution has now been recognized with the Worker Co-op Merit Award, a national award given annually to an organization or person making outstanding gains in worker co-operation.

SEED was awarded for supporting local worker co-ops in an effort to fight poverty and revitalize Winnipeg's inner city.

"I think the most important thing [about a co-op] is that it values labour rather than capital," said Kirk. "To me it's ... more equitable, it's more fair,"

In a worker co-op, each member is an equal owner and profits are divided among members based on hours worked instead of being absorbed by

management to be re-distributed.

The award was presented as part of the Canadian Worker Co-op Federation's (CWCF) annual conference in Winnipeg. The city reportedly stands out for its co-op activity.

"We realized there's a lot of new worker co-ops coming up in Winnipeg," said Hazel Corcoran, executive director of the CWCF.

SEED has worked with eight new co-ops in the past six years, said Cindy Coker, SEED's executive director.

"In some ways what we're doing is just trying to remove some of the barriers and give people the confidence they need to go ahead," Coker said.

Corcoran feels co-ops "allow working people to have much more control of their workplace."

Other benefits include democratic decision-making processes, stable jobs and increased worker satisfaction, she said.

SEED's Coker feels the co-op atmosphere leads to an important sense of connection for workers toward their jobs.

"This is their home—you're bringing your life to... your business decisions," she said.

Co-ops also give back to the local area.

"It helps people build the skills to be more participatory in their communities," Coker said.

The Canadian Worker Co-op Federation is a national network of support for co-ops. Their annual conference took place Nov. 13-15 in Winnipeg.