

WILLOW SPRINGS CREATIVE CENTRE

A Case Study

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Centre for
Sustainable
Food Systems



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Nourishing

Communities

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Sustainable
Food Systems

The Social Economy of Food:
Informal, under-recognized contributions to
Community prosperity and resilience

Introduction

“...It is easy to imagine the building serving as an historic community hub, once bustling with rural locals. Visitors and passers-by are greeted with a brightly coloured vintage auto in front of the building that was found on the property, and repurposed as an iconic landmark for those traveling to WSCC.”

Willow Springs Creative Centre (WSCC) is a Northwestern Ontario progressive social purpose enterprise with a mission to promote growth through creative expression and community development. To meet that goal, Willow Springs provides inclusive art, therapeutic gardening and food programs, services and training. They employ professional artists, people trained in horticultural therapy and gardening, skilled cooks and bakers, and other talented facilitators to deliver programs. To make such a small organization work they depend on the multiple partnerships they have with organizations, institutions and other

community service providers. Presently WSCC is partnering with over eighteen community service providers such as Options Northwest, CNIB, Lakehead University which houses Food Security Research Network (FSRN) and the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, Research and Engagement, Confederation College's Recreational Therapy and Community Integration through Cooperative Education (CICE) Programs, Regional Food Distribution Association (RFDA), and Autism Ontario (Social Enterprise Ontario, 2016).



Figure 1: WSCC's roadside icon

Willow Springs Creative Centre is based in the rural village of Lappe, located about 20 kilometres northwest of Thunder Bay. Pioneer settlers reported that the community



received its name in the following way: As they travelled north from the small community of Kivikoski they were called Laplanders (northerners) and the community they settled called "Lappi", the Finnish word for Lapland. When the community acquired postal service in the 1930s, a bureaucratic error distorted the spelling to the present "Lappe" (Kouhi, 1976). The community of Lappe currently has a population of 1,436 residents (Statistics Canada, 2016). WSCC is housed in the historical international Co-op built by local Finnish homesteaders in 1934. The facility transferred hands in 1945 when it was purchased by the Koski family. They ran the Koski's Store as a general store until 1983. Their son-in-law took over the ownership of the building at this time and rented it out as a personal residence until the year 2000 when the founders of Willow Springs Artisan Gift Store and Studio purchased it (Nelson, Stroink & Kerk, 2015).

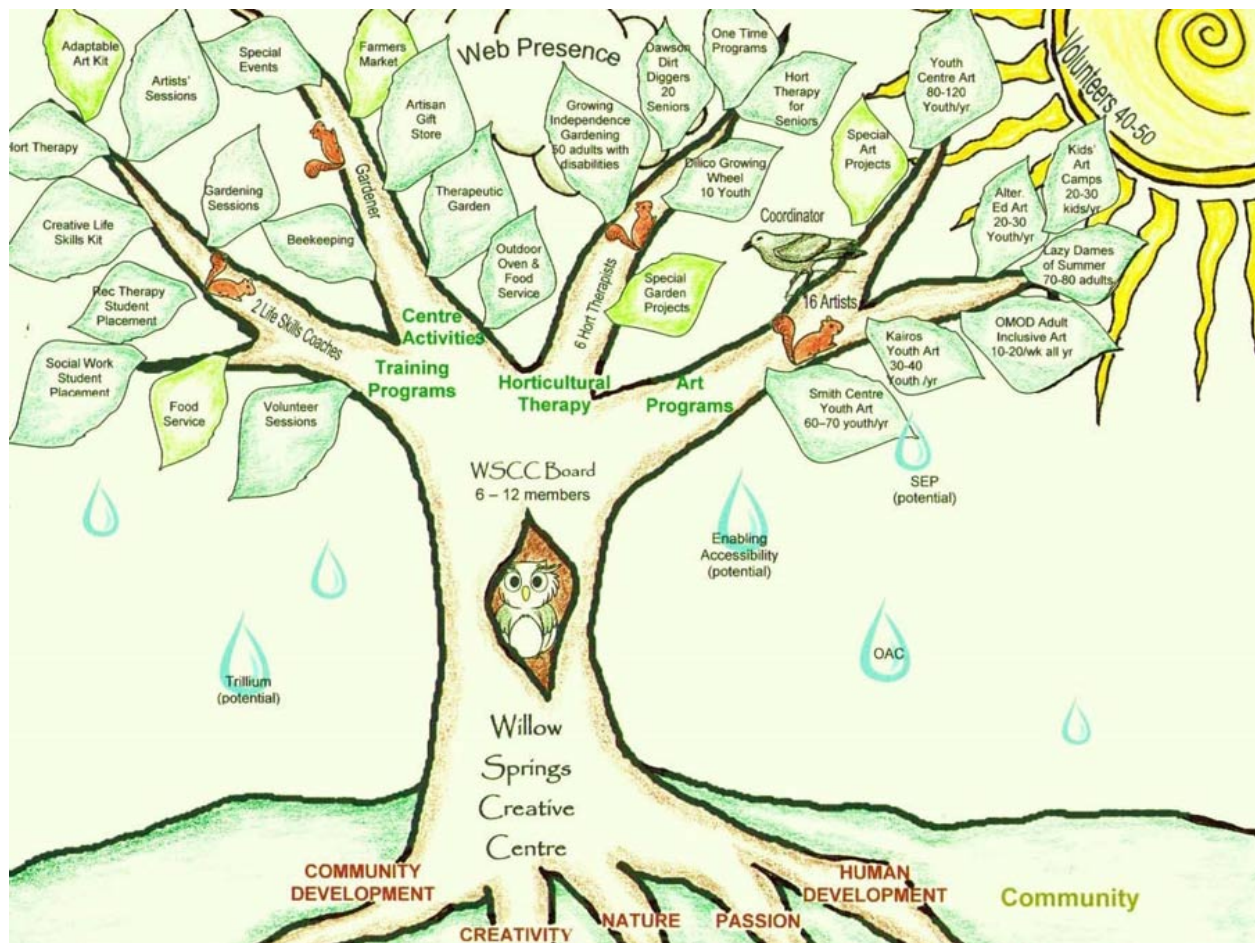


Figure 2: WSCC's organizational tree

During their first two years in operation, the founding women realized that their work involved more than teaching art classes. In making artistic, creative, and nature-based activities available to a community that did not typically have access to these types of programs, they were contributing to personal discovery, healing, spiritual exploration, and in turn, community development (Willow Springs Creative Centre, 2014). They re-worked their objectives accordingly, and began to transform Willow Springs from a studio and gift store into the Willow Springs Creative Centre. (Ferguson, Frecha & Herzog, 2015).

WSCC operated as a small, for-profit business for six years. The owners began to recognize the community development opportunities that Willow Springs could provide in their rural location. In June 2006, Willow Springs Creative Centre was incorporated as a not-for-profit with the mission to promote growth through creative expression and community development (Nelson, Stroink & Kerk, 2015).



Figure 3: WSCC mission and vision



Willow Springs currently employs four staff and is governed by a volunteer board of directors (Willow Springs, 2016). Much of the work done at Willow Springs Creative Centre also is dependent on a large number of volunteers as well as student placements from a variety of programs from both Confederation College and Lakehead University. Human capital is a vital element that is embedded into the daily activities at WSCC. The knowledge, personalities and creativity exemplified within the agency creates an exceptional and innovative way that this organization operates (See Figure 2).

Willow Springs is an agency that offers unique programs, tucked away off the beaten path, nestled within the rural community of Lappe in Northwestern Ontario. The black asphalt road seamlessly gives way to a windy dirt road. There are little more than two signs along the highway that advise residents and travellers of the location of Willow Springs. Upon arrival, one sees the property that has the image of an old general store.

It is easy to imagine the building serving as a historic community hub, once bustling with rural locals. Visitors and passers-by are greeted with a brightly coloured vintage automobile in front of the building that was found on the property and repurposed as an iconic landmark for those traveling to WSCC (See Figure 1). No longer operable, the 1949 Vanguard Standard has been reused as a garden as well as a canvas for artistic expression.

The smell of a wood fire hangs in the air, resonating from Willow Springs' signature artisan outdoor oven (Figure 3). The exterior of the oven is adorned with mosaic style decoration; a showcase of the creative talent of the Willow Springs Staff. The main repurposed store appears weathered by time, but has no shortage of character. Once inside, the atmosphere is rustic and welcoming. The main area has a storefront feel. There are shelves built on the walls; some filled with local items for sale on consignment including art, jewellery, preserves and pottery while others hold historical relics that bring the building's past to life such as an old store scale, a lantern, a metal lunch box and a large sign reading *Koski Store* – the original signage from the old store. There is a window that gives visitors a sneak peek into the bustling activities taking place in the commercial kitchen in the back. Painted above the window is Willow Springs' mission statement: "*To promote growth through creative expression and community development.*" (See Figure 3).

Project Overview

Willow Springs Creative Centre conducts several food related programs that provide both intrinsic and external benefits to the rural community of Lappe, as well as the broader community of Thunder Bay and area. These initiatives will be the focus of this case study research project.

Through this case study, three key food related initiatives at Willow Springs Creative Center are highlighted: *Horticultural Therapy*, *Willow Springs Country Market*, and *Soup and Bread Extravaganza*. Through exploration of each initiative, the following research questions are answered: whether and how a social economy of food can/does 1)

increase prosperity for marginalized groups; 2) build adaptive capacity to increase community resilience; 3) bridge divides between elite consumers of alternative food products and more marginalized groups; 4) increase social capital; and, 5) foster social innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic diversification. Ethics approval for this research was granted through Lakehead University.



Figure 4: Historical storefront view

Each WSCC initiative has a snowball effect and creates momentum for subsequent initiatives. All have evolved organically and self-organized into what they are today. For example, work within the community combined with networks through other agencies that serve individuals with disabilities led to the realization that there was a real demand for employment-related skills training. This population includes many people who want to work. WSCC created the link between enhancing availability of local food and training for this population. The well-subscribed soup and bread program was initiated. This has led to other programs that provide training such as *Spring Salad and Artisan Pizza* and *Local Seasonal Berry Pies*. There is strong community support that benefits community local food consumers and simultaneously addresses a gap for individuals facing barriers to employment due to their disabilities. WSCC places a strong emphasis on connections through partnerships. All needs and activities are used as opportunities for programming for example, a mistake in the kitchen resulting in a lost batch of scones was utilized as a programming opportunity for children to exercise their creativity, creating bird feeders and learning about nature and the outdoors (See Figure 9).



Horticultural Therapy

The four cofounders of WSCC were all gardeners and artists by trade. Most of their work was inspired or created from natural materials growing on and around the property. The group began to incorporate gardening related activities into the existing art program. For example, if a cedar and willow planter was being made they would include planning herbs inside of the planter as part of the activity. Participants involved in the programs responded positively to the combination of art and gardening. The group quickly recognized the therapeutic nature and value of gardening within the programs. This realization combined with encouragement from the community to re-establish the overgrown gardens on the two-acre site propelled WSCC into their endeavor with Horticultural Therapy (See Figure 5).

Horticulture Therapy (HT) can be defined as the treatment modality that uses plants and plant products to improve the social, cognitive, physical, psychological, and general health and well-being of its participants (Simson & Straus, 1998). Davis (1994) further describes HT as not just the act of gardening but a process through which plants, gardening activities and the innate closeness we feel toward nature are used as vehicles in professionally conducted programs of therapy and rehabilitation

Through a two-year Trillium Foundation grant in 2008, WSCC was able to become an accessible destination with therapeutic gardens and a nature path as well as provide introductory training in Horticultural Therapy to over 30 participants in the Thunder Bay area. Mitchell Hewson, a Master Horticultural Therapist from Homewood Health Centre in Guelph, ON delivered the training at WSCC. WSCC now provides therapeutic gardening programs in long term care facilities, treatment centres and schools, as well as with different

community organizations such as Autism Ontario and with the Food Security Research



Figure 5: Accessible garden plots

Network (FSRN) Campus Community Garden. WSCC is also currently working in partnership with FSRN at Lakehead University to develop a four-course certification program in Horticultural Therapy. Because HT focuses on the process of growing plants, food production is becoming a natural by-product. Therefore, creating healthy, nutritious food became another element that was incorporated into WSCC's programming. Naturally, as the gardening programs grew, so did the amount of food that was being produced. Thus, the idea of revitalizing and re-establishing WSCC as a community hub and the creation of a small rural market emerged.

WSCC Market

In 2011, WSCC received a grant from the Northern Ontario Heritage Foundation Corporation which provided them with the financial means to hire a full-time Food Service Intern to launch the Willow Springs Market. The establishment of a market held the potential for a social purpose enterprise that would help to sustain WSCC as well as provide economic opportunities and development for the area. The Market runs on Friday evenings from late June to late September, taking full advantage of the exodus of city residents flowing to their summer camp locations. The Market is a bustling, jovial hub that incorporates food, celebrations, art activities, and music with a wide variety of goods sold by local vendors. Goods include local meat, cheese, produce,



Figure 6: Fresh artisan breads ready for sale

preserves, premade foods and local artisans' work as well as Willow Springs signature artisan bread (See Figure 6) and wood fired oven pizza. The Willow Springs Farmer's Market provides a starting point for small, local area producers wanting to sell their goods (See Figure 7). One vendor at the market shared that the sales made during the summer months at the market provide an important source of revenue, sometimes as much as \$200.00 per week. Other vendor shared memories of humble beginnings at the Willow Springs Market, emphasising that the support provided from WSCC assisted them to become vendors in larger markets or even continue in their own home-based business ventures. Most of the vendors are women interested in



running a small business from home. Willow Springs Market provides them with a supportive place to begin as well as assistance with kitchen certification, advertising, and developing customer service skills. An essential element of the market is training. This summer marks the Farmers Market's fifth anniversary with gross sales at approximately \$15,000.00 and growing. WSCC places less emphasis on profitability and more on providing opportunities for local food vendors and sustainability.



Figure 7: WSCC vendor selling a variety of fresh produce

An essential element of the market is training. During the inaugural year, Willow Springs took on a trainee; a young man, funded through March of Dimes, who faced barriers to accessing training and employment. This individual assisted with activities such as gardening and food production however, took especially to artisan bread making. From this point forward, Willow Springs has continued to involve young adults with disabilities into their activities within the Farmer's Market. Following with this idea, and again snowballing past successes, the now well-established Soup and Bread Extravaganza came to fruition.

Soup and Bread Extravaganza

The Soup and Bread Extravaganza initiative, which first began in 2014, operates on a Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) model (See Figure 8). Following this model, 40-60 customers pre-pay for a weekly share, which they receive over a period of six weeks. Customers can purchase a full or half share. A full share includes two litres of homemade soup and a large loaf of artisan bread, and a half share includes one litre of soup and a smaller loaf of bread. Locally sourced ingredients are utilized as much as possible including vegetable and herbs that have been grown in the Willow Spring gardening programs.



Figure 8: Soup assembly line





Figure 9: Making scones that would later become bird feeders

Shares are prepared by Willow Springs Trainees, fondly referred to as ‘Souper Heroes’. Building from experiences in the Farmer’s Market, WSCC recruits young adults facing barriers to employment, specifically those with disabilities and mental health issues, to work as part of the Souper Hero team. Willow Springs provides a rich, nurturing environment where trainees, paired with a mentor for added support, go through detailed culinary and life skills training for the duration of the six-week program. Mentorship for trainees is often provided by placement students in the field of social work, recreational therapy or inclusive outdoor recreation from both Lakehead University and Confederation College. This environment enables many of the trainees to have the opportunity to learn valuable kitchen-related skills that can be applied in day to day living as well as possible future employment. Trainees complete the program, usually within one or two cycles, with new skills such as proper knife handling, safe food handling, and working as part of a team. Trainees

also have the opportunity to develop skills in using industrial kitchen tools in a large commercial kitchen (See Figure 9) due to a partnership with the Thunder Bay Regional Food Distribution Association (RFDA).

Many of the trainees are hired and continue in the program as paid employees after completion of their training. For many of the trainees, this is their first experience receiving a paycheck. For one trainee, the income generated from the soup and bread program provides her with the ability to purchase equipment she requires to participate in sports at the Special Olympics. For others, it provides money to buy basic needs such as food and toiletries. Due to the success of Soup and Bread Extravaganza and the increasing demands from individuals wishing to take food service training, there was a realization that food training could be provided year-round. Over the past year, Willow Springs has begun to incorporate the soup and bread model into nearly all of their food related activities. As an expansion of the Soup and Bread Extravaganza, Willow Springs has initiated a Pizza and Salad program following the same CSA type model. In addition to this, Willow Springs also, for the last two years has introduced Pie Spectacular and Harvest/Holiday Baskets. These new initiatives will allow Willow Springs to provide food service training all year as well as offering a variety for customers.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used when evaluating the activities at WSCC is that of a complex adaptive system. A complex system can be described as a collection of individual agents, who have the freedom to act in unpredictable ways, and whose actions are interconnected such that one agent's actions changes the context for other agents (Nelson, 2017). Complex adaptive systems (CAS) are difficult to define, but can be characterized by some key traits: Nonlinearity, emergence, adaptiveness, simple rules and self-organization (Pumpuni-Lenss et al., 2016). Panarchy in the adaptive cycle identifies four stages of complex systems; exploitation, conservation, release and reorganization. (Fraser, 2003; Nelson, 2017). In examining WSCC through a CAS model, the exploitation stage would involve a time of rapid expansion, which is demonstrated through the Soup and Bread Extravaganza and the Willow Springs Market where WSCC discovered opportunities rich with potential. In conservation stage, they are beginning to reach the maximum capacity and stabilizing for a period of time. This can be seen especially in the Soup and Bread Extravaganza, where the maximum number of consumers are being served and thus the status quo is being maintained. If WSCC choose to expand this program, they would need to release resources from the conservation stage. Moreover, the release phase may result in changes or alterations to programs due to changing needs of the system. In the reorganization phase, resilience becomes key. As mentioned previously, the ability to plan ahead may result in

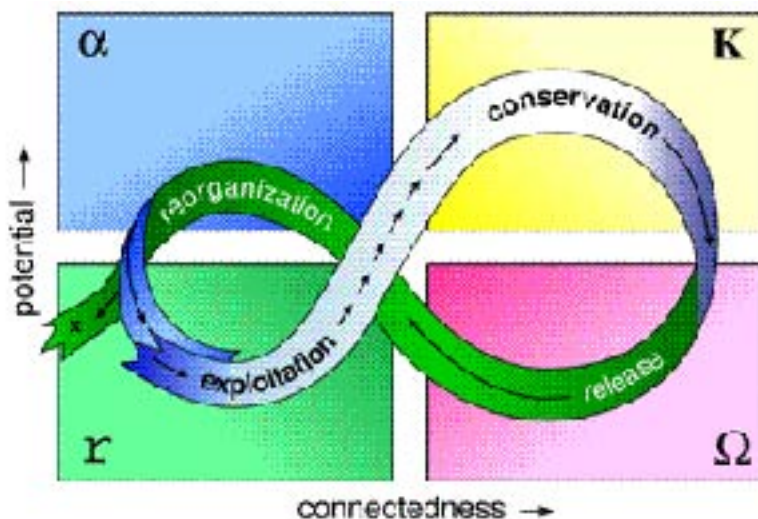


Figure 10: Complex adaptive cycle

increased levels of resilience and may greatly impact the reorganization phase. There may be a period where resources need to replenish or be replaced and goals and objectives re-evaluated. In viewing the Complex Adaptive System model (Nelson & Stroink, 2012; Stroink & Nelson, 2013; Nelson & Stroink, 2015; Randle, Stroink & Nelson, 2014), it may be evident that WSCC is currently in the phase of conservation (See Figure 10).

The food related activities at Willow Springs Creative Centre share several common themes of a complex adaptive system (See Figure 10). Complex systems actively adapt to their environment and learn from experience through feedback loops. Willow Spring represents a complex system with tight feedback loops, enabling the organization to be



highly responsive to its environment and positive feedback loops help the system avoid falling into a rigidity trap. The main programs at Willow Springs (i.e., farmers market, soup and bread) are themselves complex systems nested within the larger system. These nested systems represent different levels within a panarchy. Events at one level affect systems at higher and lower levels. Complex Systems are highly adaptive and resilient, making it easy for Willow Springs to adjust or make changes to the programs depending on available resources and demands. Willow Springs operates on the assumption that all participants are unique and therefore customization of approaches is necessary. As with any complex adaptive system, the parts cannot be separated from the whole. Finally, all of the programs at Willow Springs demonstrate organic emergence in that they arose from unexpected structure within the self-organizing system (Choi et al, 2001).

Findings

The following are the results of data collected from Willow Springs Market Customer Insight Survey, Market Vendor interviews, Soup and Bread Extravaganza Customer Survey, and Soup and Bread trainee discussion/observations.

Willow Spring Market Customer Insight Survey

The Farmer's Market Customer Insight Survey was conducted September 2017 to collect data to better understand customer demographics as well as what motivates customers to attend and purchase goods at the farmer's market. The total number of completed surveys returned was 72. Demographic questions revealed that most consumers who completed the surveys were 50+ years old (68%) followed by 41-50 years old (13%). Further, 47% of respondents identified as being retired and 32% identified that they are employed on a full-time basis. Places of residence were primarily in Thunder Bay (56%), followed by Lappe (22%). The most common response for how much money customers spend per visit was \$20-\$40 (46%).

In addition, the surveys asked what local foods were market attractors. Fresh produce was ranked highest (75%) for items that draw individuals to the market, followed by baked goods (65%), pizza (54%), pre-made food (49%), preserves (32%), local meat (24%) and blueberries (19%).

Social capital and social purpose are important aspects of the market and may be the underlying reason people attend and purchase goods in the market. Surveys indicated that 26% of respondents attended the market with a child and 10% with a grandchild. About 44% of respondents answered this question with none of the above however, several responses added alternate answers such as husband or a parent.

Consumers highlighted the importance of this data with the following comments: "Wonderful atmosphere and purpose; delightful; great supporter of local food", "The

Willow Springs Market adds so much social capital to Lappe, Kam and TBay. Keep it up!”, “Thank you for all the hard work and investment in our community of Lappe”.

An interesting trend emerging from the market surveys was the significance between how many times the individual visited Willow Springs and with whom they attended the market. On average, those who attended the market with a grandchild or child visited more than someone who did not. Individuals that attended with a grandchild attended 7.83 times, followed by those with children (4.29 times). This would suggest that there is an intergenerational component which influences how many times people come. It also implies that grandparents, who attend with their grandchildren, visit the market more often. As one vendor pointed out, “the market provides an opportunity for kids to play together that otherwise would not.” This statement suggests that children also enjoy the atmosphere and the social aspect and may influence whether their parents or grandparents attend the market. This idea is further supported by some of the qualitative responses to the question “what would make the market better?” Responses included: “More kids’ activities”; “perhaps sports to involve the local children”; “my grandchildren really enjoyed the crafts—and the young people who presented and helped them the last two summers”; “my kids love the wilderness forest”; “face painting for the kids”; and “more [kids] crafts” (three responses). This indicates that attending the market is a social experience. Comments such as “It is nice here”, “I enjoyed my visit, nice people”, “A very nice place to enjoy great food” indicate that many people enjoy the atmosphere and the ability to socialize and eat some of their goods on site, rather than just leaving after their purchase.

Market Vendor Interviews

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“Wonderful atmosphere and purpose; delightful; great supporter of local food.”

“The Willow Springs Market adds so much social capital to Lappe, Kam and TBay. Keep it up!”

“Thank you for all the hard work and investment in our community of Lappe.”

Willow Spring Farmer’s Market is a dynamic group of artisans, bakers, cooks and gardeners coming together to sell a diverse array of items. Eager customers drive from town to pick up fresh artisan bread, unique items such as beer jelly, or preserves made from local wild fruit, salsa, locally raised meat, pre-made foods (i.e.; meat pies), baked goods (fruit crumble/crisp, fruit pies, banana bread, cupcakes), ice cream, wood fired oven pizza and a wide variety of seasonal produce including cucumber, lettuce, onions, garlic, carrots, peas, beans and potatoes, to name a few. The market runs weekly,



on Friday evenings, from late June until late September. Individual interviews were conducted with six vendors from the Willow Springs farmer's market. From the data collected from the interviews, a number of common themes emerged.



“[the food] is right here in our own community. You don't need to drive into town to get healthy food or go to a special store. You can see exactly where it's coming from too. You can ask the producers questions. You can't do that at Superstore and I think that's good for people.”

The reason for becoming a vendor at Willow Springs market included supporting a local initiative, a location that is close to home, personal connections with staff and for a source of income. One vendor discussed the supportive environment for new vendors that are just starting out. She further explained that Willow Springs helped her through the process of having her home kitchen certified. This type of support and assistance has enabled some vendors to branch out and expand to selling at larger markets and even work towards

independent home-based businesses. For a few vendors, the income received from sales is a big motivator as well as an important financial resource. However, profit does vary from season to season. Most of the vendors agree that that the market may help address issues of food insecurity within the Lappe community through providing a source of income as well as making fresh, nutritious food more accessible. One vendor commented

[the food] is right here in our own community. You don't need to drive into town to get healthy food or go to a special store. You can see exactly where it's coming from too. You can ask the producers' questions. You can't do that at Superstore and I think that's good for people.

Many vendors also expressed that they felt that involvement in the market provide additional benefits to the Lappe community through strengthening community connections. Vendors felt that some friendships have been formed as a result of being at the market. However, due to the focus being on selling at the market, the vendors expressed that there was little opportunity to network or share skills. In addition, one vendor speculated that this may be due to the diversity of items being sold. There is not much similarity in the items being sold, so this may make it difficult to share knowledge or expertise. “We all sell very different things; there is not a lot of overlap as far as products. I guess we share tips and things like that.” Despite this, most of the vendors agree that the market provides an opportunity for them to socialize and interact with one another. One vendor states “Everyone knows each other and everyone

is really friendly to one another. Sometimes you'll notice vendors walking around to talk to one another when it's quieter."

Vendors noted some challenges to participating in the farmer's market including the unpredictability of the weather, preparation of goods (especially pre-made foods) and kitchen certification requirements. Kitchen certification can become a barrier for those wishing to participate in the market. For example, Singing Poplars ice cream encountered issues with the use of dairy products. This resulted in Singing Poplars being unable to make dairy-based ice cream unless it was created on the premises.

Soup and Bread Extravaganza Customer Survey

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"Thanks so much for all that you do to facilitate positive programs for our community. Your ability to empower, educate and facilitate in a strength-based way is a fantastic asset to our community."

The following are the results of the data analyzed from the Soup and Bread Extravaganza Customer Surveys. Customers were presented with a paper survey during the pick-up of weekly shares. Distribution of surveys took place over two rounds of the soup and bread program in the fall and winter between October 2016 and March 2017.

The first round of surveys resulted in 19 completed returned surveys

and the second round resulted in 28 completed surveys. A total of 47 surveys were analyzed. The surveys asked what the participants liked best about the soup and bread program and they could check all that apply. A large number of responses (79-84%) indicated that the food and local ingredients were important however, 100% of surveys answered employment and volunteer training. Customers further highlighted the importance of this through some of their comments: "...A feel-good program for the workers [and] using local products", "Excellent program and makes one feel good that you are supporting the community", "Thanks so much for all that you do to facilitate positive programs for our community. Your ability to empower, educate and facilitate in a strength-based way is a fantastic asset to our community", "We appreciate that the Soup and Bread program has a dual purpose...to provide training opportunities that provide strengths and integrations AND to provide us with a delicious locally sourced meal each week." Reasons for the customers use the soup and bread program were good food (58-85%), fair price (42-64%), supporting something meaningful (84-92%), to help support the trainees (79-82%) and to support the mission and vision of Willow Springs (37-71%).



The data gathered from the surveys was consistent with that of the data gathered from the Farmer's Market customer surveys for demographics, but also with the underlying value. In other words, more important than the quality or ingredients used to prepare the food is the underlying social purpose goals and the desire to contribute to something they feel is meaningful. Many surveys also had additional comments that made further reference to the underlying social purpose that is embedded within the programs: "Awesome program, please keep doing it!", "I think this program is wonderful, trying new food and providing new skills in employment", "Excellent, meaningful program...", "Great food! Great cause!", "I love this program! The food is great but the program and the vision are fantastic. Being involved in this program is an absolute honour for me. I even love the jar shaming!!", "We love this program and its community involvement."

Soup and Bread Extravaganza Trainee Discussion/Observation



Awesome program, please keep doing it!!"

"I think this program is wonderful, trying new food and providing new skills in employment", "Excellent, meaningful program..."

"Great food! Great cause!"

"I love this program! The food is great but the program and the vision are fantastic. Being involved in this program is an absolute honour for me. I even love the jar shaming!!"

"We love this program and its community involvement."

The following is information gathered as a result of a group discussion with Soup and Bread Trainees as well as direct observations. The group discussion took place on February 2, 2017 at the Regional Food Distribution Association (RFDA) during regular training. Three of the trainees as well as two key staff members were present. Trainees shared some stories about how they first became involved with Willow Springs. One trainee had forgotten how she became involved, and stated that she had been involved with the market as well as soup and bread since it first began. Another trainee remembered first attending for a student placement. The trainees shared some of what they enjoy most about being involved in the program: the staff, being able to cook, conversation, being social and learning new skills. Among the favorite tasks are using the grill, measuring ingredients and making dough. One trainee shared about her

favorite equipment to use. She described the 'Robo-coop', a machine that slices vegetables. Another trainee shared how he loved to use the grill. "They call me the grill master" he smirked, jokingly. The last trainee shared how she liked to sing, especially while washing dishes. A partnership with the RFDA has made it possible for trainees to use large kitchen appliances and equipment and further develop their skills in this area.

All of the trainees agreed that they enjoyed having the opportunity to learn not only from the staff, but from one another. They share specific skills that they have learned since being part of the program: safe food handling, kitchen safety and how to learn and adapt from mistakes. They also talked about the relationships they had formed. Strong friendships and an environment where they are comfortable and feel able to express themselves. The girls identify goals of developing more skills in customer service, overcoming shyness and working better as a group. When asked if there is a new skill they've learned that they can use other places they responded with better knife/cutting skills, safety, focusing on tasks, how to put things away, leadership and teaching skills. The group identified some challenges such as shyness, thoroughly cleaning bowls and interpersonal conflicts within the group. Some of the responses from trainees when asked how they felt being part of the program were as follows: "I feel good when I leave here", "It feels good to do something", "I am always excited to come to work", "I love my job", "This group is like my family." Not only did the trainees have a deep connection with other members of the group, but they also had a deep sense of pride in regard to having a job.

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"I feel good when I leave here";

"It feels good to do something"

An important part of the program is the income from the program. Only one of the trainees in the group had gainful employment somewhere other than Willow Springs. She shared how it was difficult to find work due to her disability. Despite having the desire to work on a more full-time basis, she had difficulty getting more than two hours of work per week. She stated further that the income she received from Willow Springs was crucial for

her to buy sports equipment and supplies.

Additional observations were conducted through full participation in the soup and bread program and informal conversations with trainees and staff. The ability to adapt the environment to meet the needs of trainees was a large part of the program. For example, one morning a trainee was having difficulty remember the measurements while making bread. Staff was able to apply an innovative solution by using a dry erase marker to mark the weight on the scale. This was done in a way that did not undermine the trainee's ability. Developing innovative way to assist trainees when they experience barriers during their training is an inaugural part of the program.



Discussion of Findings

This report began by outlining five questions to be answered: whether and how a social economy of food can/does 1) increase prosperity for marginalized groups; 2) build adaptive capacity to increase community resilience; 3) bridge divides between elite consumers of alternative food products and more marginalized groups; 4) increase social capital; and, 5) foster social innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic diversification. These questions were addressed through surveys, interviews, observations and research and are further outlined as follows.

The initiatives mentioned at Willow Springs demonstrate local food initiatives that build an enhanced sense of community purpose, identity and connectedness. Consumers of both the Willow Springs Market and the Soup and Bread Extravaganza programs indicate that they have a sense of contributing to something meaningful. This can create a feeling of connectedness, even with people who are not directly involved in the programs. The idea of “economy” within this context is highly complex. Relationships and growth through enhancing accessibility are the essence of the initiatives at Willow Springs. Within this complex system, sustainability rather than profitability is the driving force. This type of systems thinking challenges the traditional notions of profit driven economies. Enhanced sense of purpose and community connections is central foci; money is simply a means of survival for Willow Springs but not the end goal. The programs are based on principles that are concerned with people’s needs such as recognizing gaps for persons with disabilities, and employment and pre-employment skills. Success is judged on benefits the projects have for the individuals involved as well as beneficial impact on community well-being.

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“This group is like my family.”

Direct interviews with market vendors and modified interviews with Soup and Bread Extravaganza trainees provided clear insight into how these initiatives provide increased prosperity for marginalized groups.

Interviews with market vendors indicated that income generation was key incentive to participating in the market. This was also a common theme among responses from Soup and Bread trainees. For many trainees, this was their first experience receiving a paycheck. Both of these programs have the potential to provide participants with economic resources and therefore, increase prosperity.

Within the context of Willow Springs Creative Centre social capital is the complex web of social relationships that enable the system to work effectively. Through interviews with vendors and direct observations it was discovered that increased social capacity is a direct result of these initiatives through building identity and a sense of community. There is also opportunity to continue to develop these skills through the supportive community. Trainees and market vendors gain a sense of accomplishment

and purpose, therefore creating positive feedback loops, reinforcing individual trainee's behaviour and the interactive relationships with both staff and other trainees.

Through observation and participation in the programs the initiatives at WSCC embody the concept of social innovation. As a social purpose enterprise, WSCC makes substantial contributions to the social economy through running effective programs with the aim to become sustainable and reduce social issues in the populations they serve by providing economic resources, training and development opportunities (Chamberlain et al, 2001). Through offering and providing employment related training and opportunities for young adults with disabilities, they have developed a novel solution to an identified social dilemma. Young adults with disabilities face physical, systemic and social barriers to participate in the work force. Being a highly adaptive system, Willow Springs is able to adjust according to the changing needs of individuals in new and innovative ways. Willow Springs supports community members and provides support to encourage entrepreneurship. Willow Springs is also working toward creating economic diversification through new partnerships with other groups such as Cloverbelt Local Food Coop (CLFC).

Direct observations and qualitative responses from customer surveys and interview with vendors and trainees indicated some of the ways the food related programs build adaptive capacity and thus, community resilience. Willow Springs works with a fluid structure that invites change to respond to community needs and desires. Willow Springs operates on a model of inclusion and accessibility in all aspects of programming. They strive to ensure the accessibility in all areas including the facility and grounds, fully accessible gardens and programs, choosing accessible product pick up sites and offering adaptable training. Recently, they have added a wheelchair accessible treehouse for the kids. Willow Springs also models inclusion within the market and throughout other programs to show how everyone can be a part of the social economy. The market, soup and bread and horticultural therapy program have multiple purposes including individual development, skill building and social benefits. Access to the market for the Lappe community allows income generation for Willow Springs, vendors and trainees. Willow Springs assists trainees and small, local vendors and as a result, creates increased community resilience.

Observations of interactions between consumers and producers in both the market setting as well the surveys revealed how these activities bridge divides between consumers and the producers. Producers and trainees both represent marginalized groups, and involvement in these programs offers them the unique opportunity to interact with consumers. Observations also revealed the role of embodiment within both the Soup and Bread Extravaganza and farmer's market. Embodiment is the result of customers engaging on a deeper level with the food they are purchasing (Starr, 2010). Customers are able to make a more meaningful connection with the sources of their food and also observe the greater benefits their support has to the producers, WSCC



and the community of Lappe. Vendors also have the added benefit of being able to explain their products to potential customers. This is further supported by qualitative responses to customer surveys and interviews with vendors and trainees.

In conclusion, the food related programs at WSCC operate within the social economy. Through the farmer's market and the soup and bread extravaganza, participants from marginalized groups (individuals with disabilities and small-scale rural producers) are provided with opportunities to increase prosperity for themselves as well as the wider communities of Lappe and Thunder Bay through income generation and skills training. WSCC is a complex system and is highly adaptive to change. From a CAS model, high adaptivity can create increased levels of community resilience. The farmer's market as well as the Soup and Bread Extravaganza provide an opportunity to bridge the divide between elite consumers and marginalized groups by providing an opportunity for interaction through embodiment. The divide is also bridge between these groups through the shared sense of being part of something meaningful, which is a common theme found in the responses of surveys and interviews. These activities assist to increase social capital through the establishment of relationships and partnerships with consumers, volunteers and community partners. And finally, social innovation, entrepreneurship and economic diversification are the direct result of job skills training, adjusting to the changing needs of the populations served and creating new partnerships to provide vendors with new economic opportunities.

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