

Case Study

Social Enterprise Network of Central Ontario (SENCO)

The Social Enterprise Network of Central Ontario (SENCO), is an initiative of Georgian College's Centre for Changemaking and Social Innovation (CCSI). SENCO works with social enterprises, social entrepreneurs, organizations, intermediaries, and community leaders to support innovative economic approaches to strengthen the community. The network aims to bridge knowledge, resources and support for business practices to achieve financial growth and sustainability through social enterprise by connecting and equipping those looking to engage in social enterprise to face cultural, environmental and social challenges in Central Ontario.

The collaboration with S4ES originated from SENCO's identified need to develop strategic partnerships to create a flourishing regional social enterprise ecosystem in Central Ontario. Through learning events facilitated by S4ES, SENCO Program Manager, Elly Green, established professional relations with the project partners. Learning about the potential mutual benefits of a collaboration with S4ES, SENCO was confident that the project would respond to SENCO's need through expert knowledge, resources and material necessary to achieve the network's strategic partnership objectives and support the Georgian College students, the faculty and the community.

SENCO connected with S4ES by hosting the Social Enterprise Institute's (SEI) viewing of The Social Shift. Seen by 1,300 individuals, this documentary shares the stories of Canadian citizens adding social value to their business model. Since 2018, Georgian College students and community members have access to SEI's Steps to Start Up, a course available on the institute online learning platform.



Increased Awareness



Change in Mindset



Improved knowledge / skills



Behavioural Change



Increased Collaborations

S4ES also supported SENCO through the delivery of Buy Social Canada's (BSC) sessions on social procurement to 40 individuals. SENCO is a member of two S4ES knowledge sharing and networking platforms: the community of practice on the social value marketplace facilitated by BSC and the community of practice on social impact measurement, co-facilitated by the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet). Through this partnership, S4ES contributed to the positive impact SENCO is bringing about to Georgian College's students, faculty members and the community.



IMPACT ON STUDENTS

A total of 800 students attended the viewing of *The Social Shift*. Before this, most students had no or very little knowledge of the social enterprise sector. When asked for their feedback, the students' most cited take-away was raised awareness on the importance of social enterprises. There was a clear change in perception, especially from business students, that an enterprise can be successful and profitable while doing social good, and that one doesn't have to settle for one or the other. After watching the documentary, most students interviewed stated their motivation to work for or start a social enterprise.

Since September 2018, Georgian College students have had access to SEI's online learning course *Steps to Startup*. The course teaches how to plan, build and launch a successful social enterprise. The course has become a popular option for students and enrollments have increased significantly from the fall session of 2018 (3) to the winter of 2019 (13). Beyond the positive outcomes of awareness raising, SEI's material contributed to behavioral changes among students. For example, as a result of watching the *Social Shift*, April Vanarragon, a Business Management and Leadership Program student reported more mindful consumption habits, ensuring that what she buys did not cause social or environmental harm. Additionally, Kelly Duggan, a professor in Business and Management at Georgian College, mentioned that students are increasingly asking to complete their internships with purpose-driven organizations as a result of their enrollment to the learning platform.

IMPACT ON THE FACULTY AND STAFF

A total of 73 faculty staff attended the viewing of *The Social Shift* and were inspired for change. At the request of SENCO, Buy Social Canada delivered an introductory session on social procurement to 25 individuals in the fall of 2018. Most of the participants were faculty members and staff, although community members were also present. In July 2019, BSC facilitated a second session and introduced the *Guide to Social Procurement*, reaching out to 15 additional staff and faculty members. The implementation of a Social Procurement Policy aligns with SENCO's objective to support the faculty achieving its strategy as an ASHOKA member changemaker institution and to increase the college's capacity in promoting social innovation as part of



their curriculum. For most of the faculty and staff, the BSC sessions constituted a first exposition to social procurement. Despite the little knowledge on the matter, the participants showed a high level of interest and were eager to learn how the college could operationalize the transition to social procurement. Following their collaboration with BSC, the college started working toward a social procurement policy draft, referring to the guide. According to Elly Green, program manager SENCO, the guide is a useful resource informing and supporting the college's work toward the establishment of their first social procurement strategy to be launched in 2020.

The College's Henry Bernick Entrepreneurship Centre (HBEC), considers SENCO as the extension of that work by strengthening these connections from both an economic and social perspective. SENCO is considered an effective networking platform to connect students and the community to build capacity in the community and local businesses. Capacity building is a core element of the College's strategy as the students want to join organizations that share their values and where they can apply the knowledge and skills gained throughout their studies. SENCO also works on raising the awareness of the "traditional" business community in the impactful work of the social enterprise sector, contributing to legitimizing social entrepreneurs. The Entrepreneurship Centre has witnessed an increase in awareness and knowledge of the social enterprise sector, a result attributed to SENCO's capacity to develop relevant partnerships helping the Centre meeting its objectives. According to HBEC Mentor, Lindsay Telfer, the partnership with S4ES and the quality and relevance of the tools, resources and material made available to the College through SENCO contributed to this positive perception of the social enterprise sector over the past two years and the connection to the community.

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

In 2018, SENCO hosted a screening of *The Social Shift* as part of its community engagement strategy. The event gathered 430 individuals across Central Ontario, including local businesses, BCorps and social enterprises. Here too, S4ES contributed to increasing awareness of the importance of social enterprises, but also engaging the community. As stated by Amanda Kelly, senior business innovation & entrepreneurship officer at the City of Barrie, a major strength of SENCO resides in its convening capacity to partner with relevant organizations such as S4ES in providing adequate tools and resources allowing SENCO to work effectively with the community.

SENCO is working with various municipalities across Central Ontario and is involved with the Creative Economy Department of the City of Barrie. The overarching goal of this department is to create a strong and resilient local economy, and the City sees social enterprises as key players in achieving this goal. Given the alignment between SENCO and the City of Barrie's objectives, the partnership was inevitable. SENCO, with the support of S4ES, contributes to achieving the City's objectives by laying the groundwork and convening people as a means to integrate services and programs at the city level. SENCO's work triggers changes in practices among enterprises that reflect the needs, the wants, and inspirations of employees, contributing to filling the employment gap in Barrie by attracting new passionate individuals sensitized to the benefits of the social enterprises.

GOING FORWARD

Going forward, SENCO is aiming to strengthen its collaboration with S4ES as a means to achieve its objective of increasing partnerships, accelerating more social enterprises and engaging additional community members as part of its theory of change objectives. S4ES will be alongside SENCO in its effort to convene social enterprise development, sector development and network collaborations and helping SENCO support Georgian College's students, faculty and the community.

Elly Green

Program Manager, SENCO

“Partnering with S4ES, as a regional intermediary, has allowed us to engage our region with relevant resources and tools being developed and tested across the county, specifically for social enterprises. With the right resources, supports and connections we know a thriving social enterprise ecosystem will continue to emerge and flourish in our region.”



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