



Hugh Nelson, Director
Executive Director, Y's Owl Maclure Co-operative

1. Tell us a bit about yourself (i.e., your background (where you grew up, education, children, which co-operative you work for, your position, etc.)

I was born in Ottawa in 1951, attended Algonquin College and began my career working with people with disabilities in 1970. I met my life partner in 1974 and we spent 45 years together (until his death in August 2019). In 2004, I was asked to become the Executive Director at Y's Owl Maclure Co-operative Centre – a co-op whose members have developmental challenges including Autism. The co-operative provides employment supports, recreation and leisure, youth transition, Supported Independent Living, and has several social enterprises including a café, a children's store, and a store that specializes in products for special needs populations – all of these providing employment opportunities for our members. In wanting to recognize excellence, I have had the privilege of giving out an annual award to the "Best All Round Developmental Service Worker Graduate" at Algonquin College for the past 16 years.

2. How long have you been involved in the co-operative movement, and what do you love most about it?

Although aware of the co-operative movement, I became deeply interested in it as I took on my present position 15 years ago. The fact that the model gave a voice to people with disabilities was very affirmative to me, and I actively sought to find out more about the culture of co-operatives.

3. If there is one thing you would want people to know about co-ops, what would it be?

That they work for the members directly and have an impact on member's lives much greater than any other business model.

4. Why is your co-operative a member of OCA?

We joined OCA as we wanted to be part of the voice that makes change in Ontario. We are a small co-operative, but as a member of OCA, it allows us to have a larger impact and bring the needs of the population with disabilities to the attention of fellow members and the government.

5. What do you think are some of the benefits of being a member of OCA?

Directly for me, the chance to learn the depth and breadth of the co-op movement in Ontario, and to make contacts and build relationships with the many faces of our co-operative community.

6. Why did you decide to join the OCA board as a Director?

In deciding to join the Board of OCA, I considered what I had learned over the last 15 years, the knowledge that I had about the co-operative sector, but also bringing my knowledge of the disability sector to the table.

7. How has your past experience helped you in this role?

My experience with the local Ottawa Co-op Network, our own co-operative Y's Owl Maclure, and the links with Co-operatives and Mutuels Canada through the Health Care Co-operatives Federation of Canada, provided me with contacts and a greater understanding of the political process both municipally, provincially and federally.

8. What do you think are some of the opportunities and challenges facing OCA in the next 3 - 5 years?

The Board of OCA is challenged by the scope of opportunities that are opening up for the co-operative sector across the province. People are thinking of co-ops differently and want to build unique models that will require OCA to expand our education and government relations efforts

to new populations, which will be looking for alternatives for new business opportunities and ways of building communities.

9. What is your vision for OCA?

My vision for OCA is that we will become the leader in the development of co-operative growth in Ontario through our advocacy, partnerships, education and hands on involvement in the building of future co-operative initiatives throughout the province.

10. Share a fun/silly thing that not many people know about you!

One of the things that I love about the Board and staff at OCA is that they have a great capacity to laugh with each other no matter what the situation. I will go out of my way to bring humour into people's lives which brings me great joy - and I gave up roller blading at the age of 65!!!

Probably a little late.