



2019-2020 OCA CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS' REPORT

OCA is in its third year of our strategic plan in 2019/20 with our three overarching goals to be:

1. The **voice** of co-operatives in Ontario;
2. The **promoter** of the co-operative principles; and
3. The **facilitator** of co-operative solutions.

As the voice of co-operatives, our organization is prioritizing two areas: advocacy and public relations. In 2019-20, our advocacy goals were to complete a review and modernization of the 44-year-old *Co-operative Corporations Act*.

In January 2019, the government conducted a consultation with all co-operatives in Ontario, and the work to modernize the CCA resulted in Bill 138 in November 2019. Changes included the movement of CCA oversight to the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services in April 2020, elimination of the 50% Rule and an update to co-operative audit requirements.

In June 2019, the co-operative Offering Statement process was moved from the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) to the Financial Services Regulatory Authority. OCA and our members were instrumental in ensuring regulation did not move to the Ontario Securities Commission – a fate that would have cost co-operatives in Ontario millions of dollars in administrative and legal expenses.

When working with government and in public relations, it is clear that what differentiates co-operatives from our corporate competitors is our commitment to the international co-operative principles. These principles align perfectly with the social consciousness of today's consumers and communities, and help our

businesses deliver more than just a product or service, but a promise to achieve something better for Ontarians. For this reason, OCA believes it is imperative that co-operative businesses live and promote the co-operative principles, so this is our second over-arching goal.

As the promoter of the co-operative principles, our organization is advocating within the co-operative sector for a full commitment to the principles. We are working to grow our membership and increase the engagement of our members in order to support continuous and increasingly better dedication to the principles. Much of this effort is through our educational resources that support board governance, employee education and member and youth development.

A new employee onboarding educational tool is in development for launch in 2020. Additionally, OCA will be working on a benchmarking study that will address each co-operative's commitment to the principles and help identify ways we can assist co-operatives to continuously achieve alignment with the principles, as the business environment changes.

Our communications efforts included distributing a series of articles that were shared with the Ontario media about ways our co-operatives are innovating to improve communities and the economy co-operatively. We also highlighted a successful business conversion to a co-operative, as Arise Architects transitioned from a 41 year old sole proprietorship to Canada's first architectural worker co-operative. We also worked hard to increase our social media presence, and supported the national co-operative association's campaigns to promote co-operatives across Canada.

Longtime supporters of our Co-operative Young Leaders program and our CYL Director worked tirelessly to update the program's curriculum in preparation for the 2019 summer. The new program incorporated the amenities of our new location at the Co-operative Education Centre, in partnership with Gay Lea Foods Co-operative. As a result of COVID-19, we began adapting the curriculum to a virtual camp format for the summer 2020 program, but the new programming will be in place along with a strong alumni network for summer 2021.

Our final goal is to facilitate co-operative solutions. This encompasses co-operative business development and Principle Six: Co-operation among Co-

operatives. A key theme in co-operative development this year has been succession planning. OCA has been working with businesses in transition from one generation to the next to offer an innovative approach to succession through the creation of a co-operative. This allows for shared employee or community ownership and a more accessible financial transition. Libro Credit Union supported this new initiative in 2019-20 through a Prosperity Fund grant for the succession of businesses in the London region. Together, we are embarking on a pilot project in 2020 to assist businesses through the transition to a co-operative business structure with a team of local experts.

In addition to business conversion to co-operatives, we are developing comprehensive online resources for co-operative entrepreneurs, partnering with community-based business developers and incubators to incorporate co-operative development into their repertoire, and working with financial partners to find new creative ways to finance co-operative opportunities. We are also working with community-based social networks to apply co-operative business solutions to community-identified needs.

To connect co-operatives, we have a new project with our agricultural businesses to assist with labour attraction, training and retention that began in March 2020 and will continue in 2021. OCA is also working with our members and the sector at large to make connections that will financially benefit co-operatives and their members in 2020 and beyond.

This year ended with significant change for our members, our Directors and our staff at OCA, with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. OCA is committed to working with the co-operative sector - both to assist with issues as they arise, and also to position the co-operative model as a new, more inclusive and equitable way forward for Ontario. We hope everyone is able to remain safe and find their footing as our province continues to adapt and rebuild. Please reach out if there is anything you need – we want to help in any way we can.

Thank you to the members, the board and the staff of OCA for your continued commitment to co-operation. **Tomorrow needs us.**

In co-operation,

Maureen Gillespie, Board Chair and Erin Morgan, Executive Director