

Produced by



Crocus Co-operative

As part of Saskatchewan Co-operative Association's ongoing series of co-operative profiles, we interviewed Robin Mitchell, Director of Operations of Crocus Co-op, a place described by one member as "a clean, bright, and always benevolent place where I can find friendship and support when almost no other place is available to me."

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What is Crocus Co-op? Where is the co-operative located?

Crocus Co-op is a private, non-profit support member driven cooperative for people with mental health disabilities. It's a dynamic place where members can find companionship, understanding and support; it's a place to learn, work and heal. Crocus Co-op works towards the social re-integration of people suffering with mental health or emotional problems. For this reason, Crocus is vital for its members – and it's beneficial for society, too. Crocus helps to reduce the number of relapses and the severity of relapse and time spent in hospital. This results in a reduced strain on the health care system. It helps to strengthen the community by helping people to cope - and thrive – within it. We, the members of Crocus, are proud of our achievements and would like to describe Crocus and its unique role in providing mental health services within our community.

When was it established? Is there a story behind the name?

Crocus Co-operative was incorporated under the Saskatchewan Co-operatives Act in 1983. Our name breaks down to illustrate our vision for Crocus. The Crocus is the first thing to come up in spring – it is the promise of new spring growth after the dark season of winter - it could also be compared to the journey of mental illness and the recovery after the dark season of illness/ breakdown . . .

- C – Caring
- R – Respect
- O – Opportunities
- C – Challenges
- U – Understanding
- S – Support

Why did Crocus Co-op choose to use the co-operative model?

It fits for Crocus . . . Crocus is informal, loosely organized, cost-effective and community oriented. We provide an environment that is secure, non-judgmental, and supportive, as well as a place where members can express themselves openly. Our governing board is member driven with 51% of the board being members.

Members feel welcome, needed and important at Crocus – the way everyone in our community should feel. Imagine how frightening it would be to feel isolated and anxious because of a mental illness or emotional difficulty that, through no fault of your own, left you on the fringes of society. At Crocus, members take a self-help approach to healing and re-integrating within a helpful, non-threatening support structure.

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How does Crocus Co-op address community needs?

Originally modeled after Fountain House of New York State, Crocus incorporates two concepts of proven value. One is that a close partnership of consumers and interested non-consumers is far more productive than mental health consumers

working by themselves. The other idea is that providing suitable work for mental health consumers solves a lot of problems. Thus Crocus features a built in bridge to the community. Mental health professionals recognize Crocus Co-op as a valuable partner in mental health rehabilitation. We encourage our people to participate in meaningful roles, such as casual employment and volunteer activities.

At Crocus, people develop necessary skills for functioning in their homes and the community. Programs include those that focus on basic living skills, work adjustment skills, vocational training, socialization skills, recreational skills, etc. There are also Crocus Can-Do Crews, which is a self-employment program that can help you with a variety of home projects and chores. If you can't do the heavy work, or just feel like taking a break, call the Crocus office and ask for a Crew; they'll take on summer yard work, winter snow removal, janitorial work, moving, hauling and other jobs.

How many members does your co-operative have? How do they participate in the co-operative?

There are currently around 1,800 life-time members of Crocus.

A member of the Crocus Co-op community, wishing to remain anonymous, submitted the following:

“Crocus Co-op, to me, is a clean, bright, and always benevolent place where I can find friendship and support when almost no other place is available to me. When you are a person suffering from mental and emotional problems, the reaction

and attitude from the general public, as well as from friends and relatives, is seemingly almost always one of negativity and ignorance. Crocus Co-op is just about the only place where I can be honest and open about my mental illness and know that I will not be condemned or ridiculed for it. The people at Crocus Co-op have been the best friends and acquaintances that I have had in years. I had gotten more compliments and encouragement here than just about anywhere else in my life. Because of this, I now have the strength and courage to go back out into the world and get the education and social skills to live in it again. There were many times in the past when I was afraid that this would never be possible. On a day-to-day basis, I can feel useful by looking after the kitchen and canteen, or relax watching the television or a movie. I take part in the members' meetings to do my part to ensure that Crocus Co-op continues to be the great organization it is. There are also dances and dinners on special occasions to brighten up my and other members' lives. I can definitely say in conclusion that Crocus Co-op is the most important public organization that I've joined in my life. I'm very confident that it is the same for the rest of the people here."

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Crocus Co-op has been going through some big changes in the last 3 years; can you outline some of the exciting things that are happening? What do you envision for the next 5 years?

Due to new construction on the property adjacent to Crocus, we have had to reconstruct a large portion of our building. This has created a financial predicament whereby we borrowed money and used up a large percentage of our reserves. With the help of grants and donations

we have been successful in raising enough money to replace the portion of Crocus that needed to be demolished. In the next five years Crocus hopes to move beyond what needed to be done and expand our Transitional Employment program to allow more members the opportunity to heal through work.

What are some of the greatest successes of Crocus Co-op? What about challenges?

Crocus is successful in helping many individuals living with a mental illness the chance at recovery. Through work and social exchanges, members learn to cope with, and overcome their illness to return to a normal way of life. Our main challenge is that it remains a struggle to provide sufficient support given the limited resources we work with.

How can people find out more about the co-operative?

You can find us online at: www.crocuscooperative.org, or reach us by telephone at 306-655-4970