

Farewell to Catering PLUS



Since 2005, the Canadian Mental Health Association Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge (C.M.H.A. H.K.P.R.) has been providing individuals in our community who have a mental health concern with employment and training through the social enterprise, Catering PLUS (People Learning Useful Skills).

Over the years, Catering PLUS grew to become an established catering company for the Peterborough community and a go-to option for many businesses in the community hosting corporate meetings and functions. The team also catered special events and tradeshows.

At its peak, Catering PLUS employed over 17 individuals, with both full-time and relief positions. The program provided these individuals with the transferable skills and training to go on and acquire gainful employment in the community. Three staff also obtained their G1 Driver's License through the program.



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Funded by the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), the program was successful in improving the mental health and stability of employees as well as helping them gain skills and training in the food services industry. Catering PLUS was part of a formal quality improvement initiative and in the past year, a new marketing plan was created and implemented to help drive business. Unfortunately, the evolving situation surrounding COVID-19 has posed many challenges to the program and the catering industry as a whole.

C.M.H.A. H.K.P.R. is concerned with the long term effects that the pandemic will have on business functions and special events, with many businesses now working remotely and with large special events postponed indefinitely.

"C.M.H.A. H.K.P.R. has made the difficult decision to close the doors of Catering PLUS and shift the focus of our Social Enterprise program to a more sustainable endeavor, which staff will be hearing more about in the coming months," says Manager of Safety and Social Enterprises, Patrick Lindsay.

"I would like to thank all who have been involved in the evolution of Catering PLUS over the years, particularly our catering staff and managers who have guided the program, as well as all of the businesses and individuals who supported us. As a social enterprise, this program has been successful in improving the mental health and stability of our catering staff and we wish them all the best as they use the transferable skills they learned through their time with the program and go off to pursue new endeavors," says Chief Executive Officer, Mark Graham.



Ben Anderson, who has been the Head Chef with Catering PLUS for the past seven years, says that his time working for Catering PLUS has been incredibly rewarding. "I initially was interested in the position because it had to do with supporting others and teaching them new skills. I was especially interested in teaching people how to cook," says Ben.

Through the program, Ben was able to gain his Red Seal Chef Certification as well as learn to manage and train a diverse range of people, all with different needs. "I learned that everyone has different ways of learning and how to apply different teaching methods," says Ben. The highlight for Ben, however, has been watching individuals come into the program and have it change their lives.

"Catering PLUS provided the community with a place for individuals with a mental concern to hone their skills and improve their lives. From learning how to apply themselves and learning how to be accountable, to taking better care of themselves and giving them a sense of purpose and the confidence," says Ben.

"Food can have a very positive impact on an individual, if you learn how to cook healthy foods, you are taking that skill home, and by eating better, along with the monetary gains and the other life skills individuals learned through the program, this really improved their mental health and their lives," says Ben.

Many of the individuals who were trained through Catering PLUS are now interested in pursuing a career in the food services industry. C.M.H.A. H.K.P.R. wishes them all the best in their future endeavors!