

Phase one report

QATHET INCLUSIVE MANUFACTURING PILOT PROJECT

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Acknowledgements

We acknowledge with respect and gratitude that this work takes place on the traditional and treaty territory of the Tla'amin people, who are a self-governing Nation.

The name qathet was gifted to the Regional District in 2018; the word qathet means “people working together” in ayajjuthum, the language of the Tla'amin people (and of its sister Nations). We are grateful for this word, as it aptly describes what we are hoping to achieve with the qathet Inclusive Manufacturing Pilot Project: a successful model of inclusion in employment in the manufacturing industry.

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Special thanks go to all the participants in this phase of the research project: employees, family members, supervisors, management, and Advisory Committee members who took time to share their experiences and perspectives in interviews, surveys, and/or journals. Some direct quotes from their contributions can be seen throughout the report. This work would be meaningless without their input and commitment to meaningful, inclusive employment in Powell River and throughout the Province of British Columbia. Thank you, sincerely.

A note about terminology: For the purposes of this report, the word ‘participant’ refers to all those mentioned in the paragraph above who participated in the research component of this project (employees, family members, supervisors, management, and Advisory Committee members). We acknowledge that this use of the word ‘participant’ is broader than that used by the PBLMT program that funds this initiative. For clarity, all those who work at OneLight as employees are in fact ‘participants’ in the PBLMT, and we are grateful for the opportunity this provides.

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Executive Summary

The qathet Inclusive Manufacturing (qIM) Pilot Project is an 18-month research process assessing the impact of an inclusive employment model adopted by OneLight: a social enterprise, manufacturing fire starters from reclaimed materials.

OneLight hires people with and without intellectual disabilities or other barriers to employment. By valuing diversity as a gift and recognizing that inclusive employment benefits the community and the economy, it sets itself apart from ‘sheltered workshops’ or other employment opportunities that are exclusive to people with disabilities. The research process that takes place at three 6-month intervals will enable OneLight to learn from the long-term experiences of employees and their families, as well as financial and productivity outcomes of the social enterprise. Documenting and sharing this learning broadly will benefit OneLight’s operations over time and also the employment landscape in the province of BC. **It is expected that the findings from this project will contribute to a reduction in longstanding barriers to meaningful participation in the workforce.**

“Where do I begin? Oh my god! This is the best job that I’ve ever had because their focus is on everybody doing well. They’re such great people. And I love the work.

I’ve been lonely for so long, and it’s just so amazing that this opportunity has come. It’s like ‘wow, finally, the universe is listening!’ Finally, there is something happening that is so necessary for the earth, and for people to see what is going on. It’s so cool.

The people - my work colleagues - are super interesting. I really enjoy the diversity of everybody. I think it’s a feeling of being with others and just being involved in a super amazing organization. Being innovative and using things – like the toilet paper rolls – that you would just toss out or recycle. I’m just so fascinated by it all.”

- *Katie, OneLight employee*

Through interviews, surveys, journals, and review of internal documents (including HR forms and productivity and financial data), **this first of three phases of qIM has assessed the operations of OneLight based on nine learning goals:**

- *Inclusive culture*
- *Natural supports*
- *Sufficient training*
- *Flexibility*
- *Equity*
- *Productivity*
- *Satisfaction*
- *Competencies*
- *Employee retention*

Strengths: Phase One learning (gathered at the three-month mark) indicates employee satisfaction is extremely high, largely due to the inclusive culture and natural supports that have been cultivated, and the flexibility around scheduling and tasks. Additionally, being part of something with environmental and social impact offers an important sense of purpose and belonging. Many people are seeing their capacities grow on the job and outside of work as a result of this experience – which is enhancing overall quality of life. Many participants attribute these successes to kind and attentive leadership, good training, and friendly coworkers. Being paid a fair wage (that doesn't come at the cost of their disability pension and related benefits) has led to many positive impacts for employees, including increased independence and ability to contribute to their families and community.

Areas for improvement: Being a start-up organization, OneLight can enhance structural supports by continuing to develop policies and procedures, and continuing to cultivate inclusion by providing ongoing team training and even social opportunities. Research participants also had important suggestions about how to make the training they experienced more accessible, relevant, and emotionally safe. Employee retention is high at this point, and most people expressed a desire to continue working at OneLight over the long term, in large part due to the sense of belonging they feel there. More supervision could help ensure the workplace is suited to more people.

Challenges: At present, the rates of production and sales are not adequate to sustain OneLight financially. Innovative solutions and strategic thinking at an organizational level are needed. Additionally, the current worksite is not fully accessible, nor is it adequate for all of OneLight's current (or potential) operational needs. Furthermore, there is no opportunity for upward mobility within the organization. Entrepreneurial training and leadership opportunities could help to address this gap. The COVID-19 pandemic and related protocols continue to be a challenge for the organization.

“What I have seen is a huge rise in his cognitive development. He’s remembering a lot more, problem-solving a lot more. Also, it fills his day with something constructive that he can build on. He finds pleasure in working. Now he gets home and is tired. People that go to bed exhausted from work aren’t depressed – you put in a good day, right? So, I like to see that too.

It’s good that he tried other things before OneLight and as a family we tried different things. The fact that this is successful shows that it’s being done right. It’s a really big forward movement and I hope they can expand it and give more people purpose.”

- Jenny, parent of OneLight employee

The Phase One report elaborates on the learning to date as related to each of the nine goals, and is intended primarily (but not exclusively) for internal use. OneLight will integrate findings into its operations moving forward. In six months, Phase Two will begin, at which time learning from the first year of activity at OneLight will be reviewed and shared publicly to widen this important conversation. Phase three will occur six months after that, culminating the qIM Pilot Project.

Introduction and methods

qathet Inclusive Manufacturing (qIM) is an **18-month pilot project** funded by the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. The community-engaged research project is testing an inclusive model of employment in the manufacture and sale of fire starters made from recycled materials at a new social enterprise called OneLight. The research is assessing the factors that lead to productive and meaningful participation in the labour force by people with and without disabilities. In order to track learning over time, the research is taking place in three phases (at six-month intervals). This reports shares learning from **Phase One** of this process.

With the hope of learning from various perspectives, all employees, supervisors, and advisory committee members were invited to participate in the research in any (or all) of three ways:¹

- Keeping a **journal** -A total of 6 participants chose this option: 1 manager and 5 employees.
- Completing a **survey** - A total of 14 participants chose this option: 1 manager, 1 supervisor, 1 family/community member of an employee, 3 advisory committee members, and 8 employees.
- Having a **conversation** with the researcher - A total of 16 participants chose this option: 1 manager and 15 employees.²

Additional information was gathered through the review of **internal documents**, including productivity and financial outputs, 27 individual employee HR data forms, and 1 exit interview.³

Phase One participant engagement and data collection took place from **January 4 to 29, 2021** – which is only three months into the project. This provides important baseline information from which the organization can move forward. All information gathered was then analyzed based on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges as they relate to:

- 1) **five learning goals of the qIM Pilot Project:**
 - inclusive culture
 - natural supports
 - sufficient access to on-the-job training to perform diverse tasks
 - flexible schedule and task modification
 - equitable duties and compensation

- 2) and the **additional learning goals of OneLight** (the social enterprise itself):

¹ All those who completed journals also opted to have a conversation with the researcher. Given the survey was anonymous, it is not clear how much overlap there was between survey respondents and those who chose to participate in other ways. However – since survey respondents identified their roles in relation to the project, we do know that some people chose to complete the survey who did not participate in other ways. This is important information, as it indicates the anonymous nature of surveys may be more comfortable for some people, including those not directly involved, such as Advisory Committee members.

² Conversations took an average of 30 minutes. Participants could choose either in person (with COVID-19 protocols in place) or over zoom. Nobody chose the zoom option. Participants could choose to contact the researcher directly (two people selected this option) or sign up on a schedule, with time slots corresponding with the start and end times of shifts at OneLight. When a conversation was scheduled, the researcher would meet the participant outside the worksite (to remove the barrier of transportation), and they would select a place together to sit for their conversation.

³ Minor updates to research protocols were made and tracked, based on learning from this first phase of research.

- productivity
- satisfaction (of employees, managers, and supervisors)
- competencies (gained and enhanced)
- employee retention

The remainder of this report is a more detailed breakdown of the lessons learned as related to each learning goal. A summary of this learning can be found under **Appendix A**.

At such an early stage in the process, this Phase One report is intended primarily (but not solely) for *internal* use, to help qIM and OneLight make decisions and adjustments moving forward.

Inclusive culture

A common message throughout interviews, journals, and surveys is that the culture at OneLight is especially inclusive - and more inclusive than other workplaces experienced by employees. The vast majority of research participants who are employees at OneLight said they feel **accepted and respected, and enjoy a sense of belonging**. Many were quite enthusiastic when talking about this aspect of the workplace. When asked to provide detail about what contributed to the inclusive culture at OneLight, there were two key themes:

Leadership

Many participants pointed out the big and small things the supervisors and manager do to foster inclusion. They are described as **considerate, attentive, approachable, patient, well-organized, and good communicators**. They respond quickly when they observe or are told about an adjustment that can improve someone's experience. Importantly, they also create space for people to be independent and solve their own problems or support each other. There is a nice balance between autonomy and support in the workplace.

"I've had a lot of different jobs over my life - because I'm not 20 years old anymore - and this is the most accommodating job I've ever taken on. People have been quite supportive in the past, but not like here."

- Barb, OneLight employee

Coworkers

The inclusive culture is not only fostered by leadership, but also among coworkers. Most participants talked about their coworkers as **friendly, super interesting, and respectful of each other**. Participants also described the ways they try to show up as good colleagues for each other too. Some people shared stories about things they contribute, and others about ways they strive to manage their own responses in order to create a respectful and inclusive culture. Several participants identified the team training as really beneficial in fostering this sense of shared responsibility.

"I'm in a very comforting environment, very safe. We've all been told to respect each other's abilities and disabilities, and that doesn't always happen in places, right?"

- Justin, OneLight employee

Room to grow

For the most part, HR forms suggested workers have collegial relationships with their coworkers – sometimes working together, and sometimes socializing on or off the job. In only a few cases was on-

the-job socializing indicated as potentially distracting from work. There are six people for whom **no peer-to-peer interaction** was specifically noted in HR forms. This may be preference but may not be, and could be worth attending to.

Interviews and surveys revealed there are people who do not feel much rapport with others yet and some who feel actively excluded (this is elaborated later in the report). It was recommended that more supervision could help to cultivate a workspace that is respectful to all. While **COVID-19 protocols** were recognized as potential barriers to relationship building, some participants shared a desire for coordinated opportunities to gain a level of comfort with their coworkers (such as **social events or staff meetings**). The survey indicated 'celebrating successes and having fun' is a key area for improvement towards an inclusive culture at OneLight. That said, it is also important to note that not everyone wants a highly social experience at the workplace and some workers really appreciate the opportunity to show up, work independently, and go home.



Natural supports

The inclusive culture noted above is also fostered by natural supports in the work environment. Some of these are relational, some are practical, and others are structural. In each of these areas there are many reported successes, as well as room to grow.

Relational supports

People (coworkers and supervisors/manager) help each other throughout the shifts. Asking questions, observing, and offering tips are all creating a naturally supportive workplace. Even when conflict arises, much of the time people are able to work it out together – either without management or with support from management. Open lines of communication between workers (and their families) and OneLight was identified as a great natural support. It creates opportunities for gaps to be addressed quickly and to alleviate the stress of the unknown. Natural supports are also built over time with the active engagement of family members and other community supports who educate OneLight supervisors/management so that everyone is on the same page – providing consistency between work and home life for employees.

Over this initial period, many employees have found relational roles for themselves in the workplace – one person described herself as a ‘den mother’ and another as the ‘music man.’ Others noted the strong sense of purpose (working on a product that is so valuable) as a motivational factor for doing a good job. In all of these ways, employees are built up and experience the workplace as a strength-based place.

“If there’s a question somebody has, staff will help, but sometimes the other people there will just be like: hey you can do this. And you try it and be like: oh wow, this really works!”

- Chris T., OneLight employee

It is expected that as people become increasingly comfortable with their work-related duties and each other, these forms of natural support will continue to grow. One challenge identified was uncertainty about potentially ‘overstepping’. That is, if a concern for a coworker is not strictly work-related, should people speak up, and if so – to whom? Some ways relational supports can be actively strengthened include:

- lining up team training cohorts with shifts, so the relationship building that takes place during training carries forward into the workplace.
- Supervisors becoming trained in the particular areas in which employees might need support, which can alleviate the need for dedicated support workers during shifts. Having this supervisory training *in advance* of employment can ease the transition for employees who are new to the workplace.
- Clarifying communications and reporting structures, as well as complaint/concern or incident reporting processes.

Practical supports

Other natural supports exist in **the physical space itself** – big and small things that contribute to an inclusive workplace in which everyone can do well. For instance, clearly marked workstations, an easy-to-navigate worksite, adjustable chairs, and good natural lighting for those who need it *all* make a big difference. Being on a **bus route** was noted as important by several people. That said, a more accessible workspace would be an improvement.

There are also some ways individual employees have made **adjustments** in order to improve their work experience: Some people find the workplace quiet and bring in music, while someone who prefers quiet wears noise cancelling headphones. Having a clock at one’s workstation helps to anticipate breaks or time progress. Some **areas for growth** include: having enough adjustable chairs that all who need one get one, adjustable tables that allow for ergonomic comfort and avoid injury over time, gloves that are both flexible and protect against splinters, and (down the road) a larger facility that has a proper loading bay, and floors that are not tile so a palette lift can be used.

Structural supports

Structural supports can be defined as aspects of the environment (institutional, financial, systemic, or other) that provide foundational supports for the work taking place at OneLight.

The social enterprise is a start-up, which means few structures were in place before operations began. Fortunately, there has been consistent support from inclusion Powell River’s (iPR) CEO since the beginning. However, OneLight has not been integrated into iPR’s operations strategically just yet. This

is changing, with increased engagement from a board level and a strategic planning meeting on the horizon. OneLight is now working towards the **continued development of clear policies and procedures**. Importantly, the survey indicated **Advisory Committee** members would value the opportunity to be more engaged in the project (such as visiting and even taking part in the worksite and providing input and feedback). This suggests that while there is a need for increased structural supports, there is a strong appetite for cultivation of them at all levels.

The fact that employees have joined the fold before all structural supports were developed has led to a few challenges. For instance, some have experienced difficulties with regard to PWD pensions, as not everyone at the Ministry is informed about this Pilot Project, which leaves employees in the uncomfortable position of educating Ministry workers and stressing about potential pension losses. Additionally, the survey indicated that some employees benefit from more structure in their workplace, particularly if self-regulation is a challenge. Parents and others have provided valuable input (and even created resources such as contingency maps, info sheets, and videos) that have bolstered structural supports for employees. Supervisors and management have been very receptive to this additional support and are quite responsive. This is not only a challenge, however: employees and their families value the opportunity for their input to be considered and implemented at these early stages. It helps to cultivate a sense of shared ownership and responsibility – and in turn, pride.

An interesting surprise has been the way OneLight has provided structural support for some employees **outside of the workplace** as well. In particular, in partnership with School District 47, employment at OneLight is enabling some people to complete their high school diploma.

Sufficient training

Employees at OneLight received two kinds of training: on-the-job training, and team training.

On-the-job training

Across the board, on-the-job training was described in overwhelmingly positive terms. Employees appreciated that it was **hands-on**, that they had things shown to them, and that they had opportunities to try out various roles. Through the process, people were able to discover where their interests and talents lie, and also got to experience challenges and improvements over time. Adjustments to how the fire starters are made were developed in a trial-and-error way, which also gave employees opportunities to experiment and make suggested improvements to operations. Additionally, the fact that **ongoing supervision** at the worksite is very engaged, on-the-job training continues to occur naturally.

“We’re all doing every job: the splitting, assembling, wicking, waxing, and boxing. It makes for a more relaxed environment because there isn’t a big surprise coming around the corner.”

- Michelle, OneLight employee

Team training

For the most part, team training was also described in positive terms. Many participants attribute the inclusive culture at OneLight to the learning and **relationship development** that took place during team training. Having someone from outside the workplace facilitate the training – so that supervisors, management, and employees could learn together – was identified as an important contributor to the comfort employees now feel in the workplace. Holding the team training at the Jean Pike Center also felt good for some participants, as it is a familiar place for them to go. Additionally, learning how to

respect differences, become aware of their own tendencies, and manage conflict were described by some as crucial for fostering the sense of comradery, belonging, and shared responsibility they feel at OneLight. Many of them shared stories of carrying this learning into their personal lives as well.

“It should be standard – I think everybody should go through that before they go to work, before they start a new job.”

- Justin, OneLight employee

Despite the positive experience many people had of the team training, there was important feedback to take into consideration prior to a next delivery. For several people who learn in an experiential way, the amount of listening and sitting was a barrier. For people with visual impairments, **visual exercises** are exclusive to participation. Additionally, the language used was quite abstract, and this **limited comprehension** and ability to engage for some. For example, it was recommended to use the word ‘group’ instead of ‘cohort’, or use concrete examples of ‘how to get along with coworkers’ or ‘work through disagreement’ rather than talking about ‘conflict resolution’. Ensuring the slides and workbook are made accessible to all learners by using plain language is recommended. And printing an optional workbook without graphics (just black font on white background) will enable those who use the support of software to read it.

Learning about the history of institutionalization in BC was met with mixed response. For some, it was vital learning and the impact was motivating. For others, the content was upsetting and it did not feel empowering or uplifting to be receiving it during job training. It may be important to explore **alternative approaches** to teaching the relevant content in ways that better align with the goal of workplace readiness in an inclusive and supportive setting. It is recommended to ensure **emotional safety and choice** are prioritized throughout.

“It was too much. After watching a documentary, I couldn’t watch any more of it. It was too hard to take. I just couldn’t bear to watch any more if it.”

- Roberta, OneLight employee

For many people, team training is a new experience, so having a clear understanding of **what they might expect** before they showed up would have helped them prepare for – and thus be more engaged with – the process. While the learning and relationships developed there were important for fostering an inclusive workplace, several participants had a difficult time recalling what they learned. OneLight might also consider opportunities for **ongoing team-building efforts** (via professional development opportunities, team meetings, or webinars) in order to sustain some of the good work that was done during team training.

“The way they started the program off with the team training was huge. It let us all relax, all get to know each other on a personal level, and feel more like equals – not that it’s ‘the boss’ you’re talking to.”

- Barb, OneLight employee

Flexibility

Flexibility is a commitment at OneLight, and for the most part it is something that is very appreciated by employees and their families. Not only does flexibility ensure people are included, but it also contributes to increased efficiencies at the social enterprise, because each person can work to their optimal capacity.

Scheduling

Participants identified many big and small ways supervisors and management help employees find a **schedule that works for them** – accommodating their other commitments and responsibilities, working with bus schedules, and finding times in the day that they have the most energy in order to maximize productivity. For some people who do not have much prior work experience, scheduling has required some trial and error in order to find the optimal number and timing of shifts. This has been negotiated through surveys, conversations, and forms in which employees identify their preferences. Being able to select a schedule that works for employees alleviates a lot of stress that could interfere with a **productive and harmonious workplace**. That said, one participant expressed concern that scheduling should work for the business first, and was unsure if that is the case with so much flexibility. The new punch card systems at the start and end of each shift creates some **clarity** that workers like. For the most part, scheduling has been going well and employees are settling into regular shifts.

“The shifts being only 4 hours for me is really helpful. I’m only good for about that long. But then the fellow I worked beside today works two longer days a week. It’s all really flexible.”

- Michelle, OneLight employee



Task modification

Participants also expressed appreciation for flexibility as it relates to tasks. They described a work environment that is calming, doesn't have tension, and is **stress-free** in large part due to this. This began at the interview stage when employees were invited to rank their preferences of work stations. It continues with regular attention to detail from supervisors, and opportunities to make adjustments or **changes along the way**. For instance, participants described: a job share position that draws on different employee's strengths, being able to work at one's own pace, having roles that don't require multi-tasking so focus is not divided, moving away from roles that are not well-suited to their abilities, and being able to try out different stations.

“And they made it really clear right from the beginning: we want to make sure that everything’s working for you. So, if it’s not, talk to us about it and we’ll find a way to make it work. All of them have been very good about that.”

- Barb, OneLight employee

However, in one case it was noted that a preference was stated but not accommodated, so there was some concern about that.

Interestingly, the HR data forms indicate that few task modifications have been made for specific employees. On the other hand, some general task modifications have been developed at the initiative of employees and supervisors who – while working – have found **creative ways to make the job more efficient or manageable**. In this way, the flexibility around tasks and the meaningful engagement of all workers does not only benefit individuals, but the social enterprise as a whole.

Equity

At OneLight, all employees earn the same rate of pay, which (after their initial training period) is the provincial minimum wage.⁴ This means people’s earnings depend on the number of hours they work, not on how productive they are or what role they play. Exceptions to this rule are supervisors and managers, who have more responsibility.

Compensation

For the most part, people who engaged in the research process were satisfied – or more than satisfied – with the rate of pay. Some described it as fair given the nature and pace of the work being done. Others found it to be a highly significant opportunity that contributes to a **sense of purpose, independence, and ability to contribute** to their families and community. Being a pilot project in which earnings do not interfere with disability pension makes a big difference in the lives of some employees. Additionally, earning money comes with valuable learning opportunities – from which independence grows – including going to the bank, learning about worker’s rights, making financial decisions, and supporting oneself and others. Given that many work experience opportunities do not offer equitable (or any) pay, this is recognized as a significant success to date for OneLight.

“I didn’t think I’d be a contributing member of society any more, and now I am. I feel proud that I’m working. The money helps too – I’ve been able to help my daughter out a few times. It’s great.”

- Justin, OneLight employee

While many employees really value the fact that everyone earns the same wage, one survey respondent indicated dissatisfaction with the rate of pay. Also, there were questions raised by one participant about the possibility of providing higher rates of pay for people who produce more. At present, there is no clear **incentive to work efficiently**, which is a concern for some. Other concerns raised were not directed at OneLight itself: Past experiences - including high levels of government scrutiny - contribute to a **lack of trust in the government**, and fear that disability pensions will be clawed back. There is also exhaustion that comes when employees find themselves educating Ministry workers when reporting on their income. This is a systemic issue, and not a complaint about the workplace itself.

⁴ Minimum wage in BC is currently \$14.60/hour and set to increase to \$15.20/hour on June 1, 2021.

Duties

As noted above, employees feel tasks are equitably distributed among workers in the manufacturing of fire starters. For the most part, there is considerable workplace satisfaction in this regard. As sales training begins and workers are also learning about the possibility of developing new products down the road, there is room for greater involvement of employees in **leadership and decision-making positions**. Expansion in this way could create space for new roles to be developed based on the skills and interests of employees. This could also create opportunities for **upward mobility** in the organization which currently do not exist. The upcoming strategic planning session is a chance to explore this further.

“So that’s really exciting. They have the facility, so there’s lots of things we could be making and expanding. I can’t wait for that.”

- *Carola, OneLight employee*

Productivity

Productivity is often interpreted as ‘profitability’, but these are in fact not synonymous. Productivity refers to the state or quality of producing something – and in industry is most often measured in terms of the rate of input as compared to the rate of output. While profit is one potential output, it is not the only one – and **measuring only profit when assessing productivity is unnecessarily limiting** (and thus potentially misleading). Other outputs can include social and environmental goods. Additionally, there are economic goods of social enterprises *beyond* the rate of profit alone – such as:

- the money that is earned continuing to circulate within the community (thus supporting other businesses),
- job retention that leads to financial wellbeing for individual employees over time,
- increased access to community supports (through employer) that enhance financial wellbeing of individual employees over time,
- reduced reliance on costly services,
- reduced need for formal supports (through the cultivation of natural supports),
- reduced reliance on employment insurance and other benefits,
- reduced need for supports for physical or mental health challenges,
- diverting materials from the waste stream (and related costs),
- and so forth.

At this early stage, it is impossible to assess how well OneLight will ultimately do in terms of productivity just yet. Phase Two and Three reports will have more indicators to help clarify this. While this uncertainty does contribute to potential concerns about the sustainability of OneLight, widening the scope of what is considered when measuring productivity is helpful. Some important learning has already taken place:

Increasing efficiencies

Many participants shared stories about shifts that have been made along the way that have dramatically increased production (that is, led to less input required for greater output). One such change initiated by a supervisor - which was to assemble without wicks and then remove one stick to insert a wick – doubled the rate of production. Other **adaptations** have come with experience by employees and most participants noted their own rates of production are increasing as they get comfortable with the job.

Additional suggestions made during interviews include: 1) putting a guide on the slicer (against which the block can rest) which would decrease time taking lining it up; and, 2) a ridge to support the collar during assembly (which would hold it in place and rely less on hand-eye coordination).

Additionally, supervisors have helped by observing **individual workers’ strengths** and finding stations for them in which they excel. Several employees expressed that this job is a good fit for them because it doesn’t require multi-tasking or dealing with people. Participants noted that there is no pressure coming from supervisors to be more productive, but many have **inherent desires to do their best** and continue to improved. That said, some workers still feel they would like to be producing more than they are, and continue to see plenty of room for improvement for themselves.

“For myself I keep track of how I am at the job. I’d like to actually do good in a job that I’m doing, so I try and do better and better.”

- Joanne, OneLight employee



Financial sustainability

To be clear: as a social enterprise the relationship to profit is *not* primarily oriented to growth, but sustainability. Sustainability means expenses match revenue, and revenue includes but is not limited to profit. Most businesses take time to generate adequate revenue, due in large part to start-up costs. OneLight has been fortunate to receive grant funding that alleviates some of this precarity. While the current **rates of production (and profit) are lower than initial expectations** - based on the European estimates that were provided - there is nothing to say that profit needs to be the only source of financial sustainability for OneLight into the future. While complete financial data are unavailable at the time of reporting, below is a table of estimates, which provides a partial baseline from which to work in Phases Two and Three of this research project:

Month	Units produced	Revenue	Expenses	Balance
Dec, 2020*	n/a	Sales: \$1,837 Grants: n/a Other: n/a	Employee wages: \$34,500 Manager/supervisors wages: \$16,748 Overhead: n/a	n/a
Jan, 2021	4434	Sales: \$1,488 Grants: n/a	Employee wages: \$16,162** Manager/supervisors wages: \$21,318	n/a

		Other: n/a	Overhead: n/a	
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**Full production at OneLight did not begin until January 2021.*

***Employee wages went from flat rate to minimum wage based on hours worked in January*

This brings with it some challenges when it comes to **balancing the social, environmental, and economic inputs and outputs and ensuring the sustainability of the social enterprise**. Fortunately, being a pilot project there is time to experiment. Possibilities currently being considered include: 1) introducing minimum expected outputs (which will be employee-specific), 2) introducing a spiff (which is a production bonus), 3) potentially subsidizing fire starter production with other business ventures under the banner of inclusion Powell River, 4) increasing hours and/or staff, and 5) continuing to advocate for base provincial funding. These and other ideas will be explored during the upcoming **strategic planning** in the hopes of landing on a sustainable model before the pilot project (and related funding) ends.

“It can’t sustain itself, at this point, with the rate of production and the rate of sales. Even if we’re looking out a year. It would take many years.”

- Leni, OneLight Program Manager

Satisfaction

Among participants for whom this was a first job as well as those with a great deal of work experience, workplace satisfaction was described in positive terms at this point in the project. This is due to a sense of purpose related to manufacturing a product they believe in, the sense of belonging cultivated at OneLight, and the enjoyable environment and tasks.

“Where do I begin? Oh my god! This is the best job that I’ve ever had because their focus is on everybody doing well and being able to help them any way they can.”

- Katie, OneLight employee

Purpose

Given that OneLight is ‘starting from scratch’, there is a sense of **building something important** together from the ground up. This increases a commitment to success, and a belief that everyone has a role in contributing to that. Additionally, several participants remarked about the value of making a **product that is made from recycled materials** – diverting waste from landfills – as well as the social impacts of the organizations. Being involved in something that contributes to social, environmental, and economic outcomes provides a powerful sense of purpose that contributes to satisfaction. The most common survey response to the question “what is the best part about being involved in the social enterprise?” was: “participating in something that feels meaningful.”

“What really got me hyped about OneLight is that it was all recycled. I love this.”

- Carola, OneLight employee

Belonging

Due to a range of social factors - as well as the COVID-19 pandemic - many participants described experiences of isolation, loneliness, and lack of community *prior to* their employment at OneLight.

Additionally, some people have experienced previous workplaces in ways that make them feel anxious, stressed, or pressured. OneLight was described in different terms: The collegial environment, genuine care of supervisors and management, sense of **purpose**, and friendly coworkers have led to not only increased satisfaction in the workplace, but in **quality of life** in general for many people. Many participants also talked about making new friends and feeling a **sense of community** at OneLight. One survey respondent indicated knowing more about the supervisors/management would be nice.

“Joining this was probably the single best decision I have made in my life.”

- *Anonymous survey response*

Enjoyment

The job itself – making fire starters – was also a source of satisfaction for participants. People describe it as: **fun, relaxing, calming, and interesting**. Some people like the fact that the roles at each station are distinct and clear – with the need to focus on only one thing at a time - which makes the job straightforward and predictable. At the same time, knowing that everyone plays a part in the creation of a quality Firestarter takes some of the pressure off. In this way there is a **balance between autonomy and collaboration** that many people appreciate. Gratitude to leadership was expressed in the surveys.

“I always feel trapped at jobs and I don’t feel like that here. I can’t find fault with anything. Work used to be a real source of stress to me, and it’s not anymore. It’s a real relief.”

- *Michelle, OneLight employee*



Competencies

As a social enterprise, one of the goals of OneLight is for employees to have opportunities to enhance existing competencies and gain new ones. This is often an unacknowledged benefit of being employed – a job will often provide the opportunity to develop skills that can be applied in the workplace or transferred elsewhere (consider the cumulative process of CV development, for instance). By tracking the development of competencies, OneLight makes this aspect of employment visible.

Workplace competencies

With on-the-job training and active supervision, employees have remarked that their task-related skills are developing over time. **Encouragement as well as internal motivation** are the driving factors (rather than performance pressure). Some workers are now working **longer shifts** than they thought they would be able to manage at the beginning. Those with formal and informal supports are already seeing increased independence and competence on the job. This has given some people a **sense of mastery** already as well as ambition to continue to learn – either within this workplace or elsewhere. Some people noted they have certain strengths and weaknesses on the job, and some tasks are not well-suited to them. They have felt supported by supervisors to both find roles for which they have some aptitude and challenge themselves to continue increasing their skills.

Supervisors are supporting employees to do goal-setting through **Work Plans**, which will be reviewed at 6-month intervals. The sales training has been recognized by some participants as a new and challenging opportunity to develop workplace skills. At present, there is no entrepreneurial or leadership training, but this may be integrated in future.

“It’s going to be great looking for places to sell OneLight. I really look forward to seeing OneLight all over the world! Maybe I’ll become a traveling representative.”

- Michelle, OneLight employee

Life skills

The opportunity to work in a supportive environment has also provided many employees with learning that is transferrable to other aspects of life. **Managing time, managing money, problem solving**, feeling the satisfied exhaustion that comes after a full day of work, and learning to work with others have all been noted as new or enhanced competencies by participants. Some have stated that being relied upon and challenged cognitively has increased their capacity to work hard and be productive. Earning money has increased people’s capacities to engage in other aspects of life and sustain other responsibilities (by buying a cell phone, for instance). And the **conflict resolution** training has been described as useful in personal relationships as well.

“So, this is really good to teach him about employment, about your rights and what you’re allotted. I don’t think anyone’s ever said that to him.”

- Kim, family member of OneLight employee

Employee retention

When Phase One data collection ended (end of January 2021) there was **zero attrition**, which means everyone who started working at OneLight was still there. This is a remarkable achievement for a new organization or business. In the week that followed, **two employees left** the workplace.

Project start date	1 November, 2020	26 employees/ 1 trained remained on call
End of Phase One	29 January, 2021	26 employees/1 trained remained on call
New developments	5 February, 2021	25 employees/ 2 resigned/ 0 on call

As a social enterprise, OneLight's goal is not to be a training opportunity for people with disabilities, but rather a sustainable, fair-paying, quality job for those who want one over the long-term. Interviews, journals, and surveys indicated there are many employees who are interested in a **long-term opportunity**. Some expressed a strong desire that after 18 months there will still be a place for them at OneLight. Other described possible new roles they envision for themselves as the organization continues to evolve. Nobody stated that they see this as a stop-gap or short-term commitment. For many, the **inclusive culture** was described as a central factor in their interest in working at OneLight and not somewhere else. However, **experiences of exclusion** as well as physical pain and discomfort experienced over time while doing the job were contributing factors to attrition that took place in early February, 2021.

"If it wasn't for people being super friendly and pretty tolerant of people like me, then I would have probably moved on already and went somewhere else and looked for a job."

- Chris T., OneLight employee

Conclusion

Phase One of the qIM Pilot Project is now complete. Through interviews, surveys, journals, HR data forms, and other internal documents OneLight has learned that employees are largely satisfied with their experience, feel a growing sense of competency, and enjoy an inclusive culture with many natural supports. Having a product and organization with social and environmental impact are important factors that contribute to employee satisfaction and retention. Flexible schedules and tasks, responsive and caring leadership, and fair wages all lead to this being a **stand-out work experience** already for many of the people working at OneLight.

Phase One participant feedback also points to areas for continued improvement over time. There were important suggestions made about how to ensure the team training is accessible and has ongoing, positive impacts for team members. Productivity is an area in which **continued innovation** may be needed. And finding creative ways to engage the Advisory Committee and others in the community can bolster support for this initiative over time.

By undergoing two more phases of feedback from participants and analysis of internal documents and other sources, OneLight aspires to not only continue improving its own operations and the experiences of everyone involved, but also to share this learning with other businesses, organizations, and the provincial government in order to **raise the bar for inclusive employment opportunities for all**.

The current report is intended primarily for internal use at OneLight and its parent organization: inclusion Powell River. In six months, OneLight will be seeking engagement in Phase Two, which will be intended for a wider audience with the hope of **impacting policy and decision-making** beyond our community as well. OneLight welcomes all employees, supervisors, Advisory Committee members, and managers to participate: Every voice matters.

"He tried other things before OneLight and as a family we tried different things, and the fact that this is successful shows that it's being done right. It's just awesome. It's a really big forward movement and I hope they can expand it and give more people purpose."

- Jenny, parent of OneLight employee



Appendix A: Learning snapshot

Goal	Successes	Challenges
Inclusive culture	Caring and attentive leadership	COVID-19 protocols
	Open lines of communication	
	Collaborative environment	Some people do not feel actively included
	Training that actively fostered inclusion	Not enough oversight to address exclusive behaviours
	Friendly coworkers	No team meetings or social activities so far
	No judgement	
Natural supports	Relational supports (open communication, quick response time, observant leadership, helpful coworkers)	Not all policies and procedures are developed yet (including no clear reporting structures for complaints/concerns)
	Practical supports (natural light, clearly set out workspaces, near bus stop, adjustable chairs, music, clock)	Supervisors not receiving training specific to particular employees needs in advance of employment
	Structural supports (actively engaged CEO, resources provided by families to support employees, upcoming strategic planning).	Team training cohorts did not correspond with shifts (to support relationship building)
		Not fully accessible workspace
Sufficient training	On-the-job training was hands-on: practical and clear	Language and visuals used in team training were not accessible to all participants
	Workers continue to get ongoing supervision and support on-the-job during their shifts	Documentary used in team training was upsetting for some people; emotional safety and choice were not centered
	Team training was fun and supported the development of inclusive culture and natural supports at OneLight	Participants were not fully informed about content and purpose of team training in advance of attending
Flexibility	Scheduling (works with bus schedule, energy levels, other commitments, and preferences)	One concern that a scheduling preference was stated but not yet implemented
	Task modification (works with employees' capacities and preferences, opportunities to adjust along the way, input from workers for general operations)	

Equity	Minimum wage feels fair for the jobs being done for most people	No room for upward mobility or for leadership opportunities
	Earning money has led to increased independence and learning opportunities	
	Most workers appreciate that everyone earns the same	Those who produce more earn the same as everyone else – no incentive for productivity
	Plenty of opportunities to try new tasks and learn new skills	
Productivity	Adapting operations to increase efficiencies, with input from workers and supervisors	The rate of production and sales alone is not enough to sustain the business
	Assigning tasks based on employees' strengths	
	People are getting more comfortable and faster at the job	Social goals of OneLight can feel in competition with financial goals of business sometimes
	Employees are setting production goals for themselves	
Satisfaction	Sense of purpose and pride in a) making a recycled and quality product, and b) the social impact	None noted
	Feeling of belonging and community felt at OneLight leads to improved quality of life overall (even outside of work)	
	The tasks and the atmosphere are enjoyable, fun, and interesting.	
	Balance between autonomy and collaboration in the workplace	
Competencies	Increased competency in job-related skills (through encouragement and internal motivation – not pressure)	Some tasks are more challenging for some people than others (finding a balance between comfort and continued growth)
	Increased ability to work longer shifts over time	
	Improvement in life skills outside of the workplace (conflict resolution, time management, money management, problem solving)	No opportunities to gain entrepreneurial or leadership skills yet
Retention	At the three-month mark, there was zero attrition	Two people left during first week of February
	Several participants indicated keen interest in long term employment with OneLight	Not enough supervision to ensure respectful workplace for all
	Inclusive culture key to retention	Some physical pain due to desk and chair set-up

