



WELLSPRING COOPERATIVE

Summer Newsletter 2022

A Time for Growth:

Our Co-ops, Our Community, and Our
Common Future

Wellspring Cooperative has been growing! This year we have welcomed Catalyst Cooperative Healing [see page 2], Northeast Biodiesel, and Natural Living Landscapes to our network. We now have nine cooperatives in our network!

It is an exciting time to work in cooperative development as interest and resources in the co-op movement are on the rise. As illustrated in the recent articles shared in the concluding resources section [see page 14], there is a lot of conversation around worker-owned co-ops as a solution to issues such as food deserts, racial inequality, burnout, exploitation, employee retention and more. Furthermore, Massachusetts has the third most worker-owned cooperatives of any state, with nearly 1/3 formed in the past 5 years. Wellspring felt this energy when we helped organize the Massachusetts Solidarity Economy Festival & Gathering this June [see page 11] that brought together cooperators across the state to celebrate our accomplishments and brainstorm how we want to grow.

This spring and summer Wellspring Cooperative facilitated multiple events that strengthen our community in Springfield [see page 9 for highlights]. This is in part due to Wellspring’s heightened effort to host community-building efforts to reestablish and expand relationships following the isolating effects of the pandemic. The increased number of events is also reflective of Wellspring’s overall growth as an organization and our focus on engagement and movement-building in our strategic plan.

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Catalyst Cooperative Healing:

Finding Ways to Care and Be Cared for

Catalyst is a mental health co-op that facilitates healing spaces that draw on liberatory abolitionist traditions with the belief that an essential piece of supporting individuals, families and communities on their healing journey is identifying the oppressive systemic components of what has previously been understood as an individual and biological “mental health problem.” This includes the effects of systemic racism, poverty, patriarchal violence on people’s material, physical, and mental wellbeing. To this end, their providers offer affordable, LGBTQIA and culturally affirming services, as well as somatic practices, mindfulness coaching, organizational consulting, and facilitated workshops. Catalyst is currently composed of three dedicated worker-owners, Alex, Marina, and Brittany. Alex manages the administrative responsibilities of running the practice while Marina and Brittany are licensed mental health providers. They are bringing their perspectives and backgrounds together to envision and organize a new way of approaching mental health care.

In traditional workspaces, the conditions for mental health workers are very exploitative such as performing unpaid administrative work, being overloaded with cases, and being underpaid. Like many co-ops, Catalyst Cooperative Healing was formed by a group of people that were disillusioned with the status quo and felt their needs were not being met. After witnessing and experiencing some of this burnout and exploitation, Brittany concludes “It’s just ridiculous that we go into the [mental health care] system trying to help people, and the system destroys us.” At Catalyst she is able to be “in a space here where I’m able to make relationships that have meaning to me and be able to work collaboratively to figure out how we can accommodate everyone and make people’s lives better which feels like very valuable work to me”. This approach allows care workers to take care of themselves, so they have a greater capacity to be present with their clients.



Worker Owners left to right: Marina, Brittany, and Alex

Similarly for Marina, "It just got to the point where I went years and years with having meetings with supervisors saying this doesn't make sense, this needs to be changed, and them saying well that's not gonna happen." The lack of agency and respect in the workplace prompted her to seek out a cooperative model. Through the co-op model and culture, they are moving away from the idea of expertise and hierarchy and are instead seeing everyone, both practitioner and client, as bringing valuable insight and knowledge to the space and thus empowering everyone to do so. At Catalyst the worker-owners are cultivating a mental health practice that reflects what they want to see in the mental health profession and world at large like cooperation and collective decision-making, a more empowering and community-centered relation to money, and conditions where our wellbeing is prioritized over productivity and profit.

Catalyst Cooperative Healing has identified itself as the third mental health cooperative in the country thus far. As such, they hope that the work they are doing to collectively understand how they want to relate to money, accessibility, decision-making, and other aspects of the cooperative model helps to support other people interested in pursuing this path by demonstrating success and sharing resources. They hope to share their experiences and resources as they grow to help lower the barriers for other people to start mental health co-ops. The potential growth of mental health co-ops is a motivating force behind the work Alex does, "It's part of what keeps me excited about this work, is being someone who can support the replication of these kinds of models in other places because I know there are a lot of people who want to do it but feel overwhelmed by the idea of it because it's a big shift and it's complicated and there are a lot of different dynamics involved." Catalyst is demonstrating that people over profit, collective knowledge over individual expertise, and sharing profit is a viable model for mental health practices.

Catalyst continuously holds space for their business to evolve as they learn more as worker-owners, as the field of psychology evolves, and as new worker-owners join their co-op. They are expecting a second Spanish-speaking practitioner to join Catalyst in the near future, allowing them to expand their existing Spanish/bilingual sessions offered out of their Holyoke-based practice. They are also hoping to establish an office in the area soon. To stay updated on their offerings and news, visit the Catalyst Cooperative Healing website at <https://catalystch.com/>.

" If we could do-away with a lot of structural issues, we would do away with a lot of mental health problems. And this co-op feels like one way to create a structure for things to be different."

- Marina Kantarovich Rodríguez



2022 Co-op Boot Camp

Wellspring's annual co-op academy, Co-op Boot Camp, was held virtually again in 2022. While Covid still poses a challenge, it has also prompted us to find new ways to maintain our connections to one another. So while we were unable to meet in person or do our usual tour of local cooperatives, the virtual classroom opened doors to students across the country. We had students from Vermont, Virginia, Illinois, Mississippi, and across Massachusetts.

One participant, Erin, works at Springfield College. She worked with our co-director and Co-op Boot Camp facilitator, Emily Kawano, to connect her students to Wellspring Harvest and the cooperative world. Erin says cooperatives and the robust work around cooperatives in the area is a source of hope. "It's important to teach young people that there are alternatives to capitalism out there"...as well as offering "different ways of looking at work and labor" as students imagine what is possible for our collective future.

This year's Co-op Boot Camp had about 15 participants between the two courses. This included participants at all stages of the co-op process: imagining, planning, starting up, working in a new co-op, and running an established co-op. This course offers something for everyone and the popular education model creates space for discussions, role plays, small group work, and presentations to cater to participants' varying needs and interests. We are looking forward to seeing what all the 2022 Co-op Boot Camp participants go on to accomplish!



A few of this year's CBC graduates with their certificates at our community cookout and CBC graduation celebration this June.



This year's Co-op Boot Camp Graduation and Community Cookout in Springfield's beautiful Forest Park





See what some of this year's CBC students are saying!

"I REALLY APPRECIATE WELLSRING RUNNING THIS COURSE. IT WAS REALLY EASY TO DIGEST AND SUPER EDUCATIONAL. I HAVE BEEN IN AND OUT OF A FEW OTHER COURSES OVER THE PAST YEAR OR SO AND HAVE FOUND THEM PRETTY INTIMIDATING FOR NEWCOMERS LIKE MYSELF. THIS WAS NOT THE CASE IN WELLSRING'S COURSE—MAYBE BECAUSE OF THE FOCUS ON THE POPULAR EDUCATION MODEL AND YOUR INSTRUCTION".

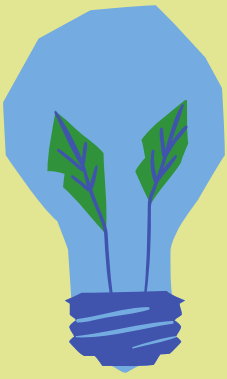
**- AVANI
MARSHFIELD VILLAGE STORE COOPERATIVE (VT)**

"I THINK ONE OF THE GREATEST TAKEAWAYS WAS HONESTLY THE REMINDER OF HOW MUCH I LOVE POPULAR EDUCATION. I REALLY LOVE LEARNING IN SPACE TOGETHER AND HEARING FROM OTHER PEOPLE. I THINK EMILY DID A REALLY GREAT JOB WITH THE CASE STUDIES AND THE BREAKOUT GROUPS. I APPRECIATED HOW ENGAGING IT ALL WAS."

**- ERIN
SPRINGFIELD MA**

"AS A WORKER-OWNER IN A FAIRLY NEW CO-OP, THIS COURSE WAS VERY HELPFUL AND WE WERE ABLE TO TALK THROUGH AND APPLY A LOT OF THE CONTENT AND TOOLS LEARNED IN CLASS INCLUDING MANAGING FINANCES".

**- HUNTER
THE HARVEST COLLECTIVE (VA)**



Wellspring's Invisible Work:

A Case Study of a Construction Co-op

Over the years, Wellspring has explored many ideas for co-ops, and we have learned that there are any number of ways and reasons that they don't come to fruition. For example, we partnered with Baystate Franklin Medical Center in Greenfield to conduct a feasibility study for a laundry co-op; we got a grant from the state to do a feasibility study for a community kitchen in Springfield, and we took a serious look at building an anaerobic digester to provide power for Wellspring Harvest. In all of these cases, our conclusion was, for various reasons, that it didn't make sense to move forward.

Another co-op idea that we have explored a few times is a construction co-op. We have talked for a long time about partnering with the Springfield Community Land Trust to re-hab or build affordable housing where the work is done by a construction co-op. The explorations have involved research, feasibility assessment, relationship-building, and collaboration with prospective co-op members. Most recently, in 2021 we worked with a group of 10-12 people interested in starting up a green construction co-op; some folks brought specific expertise and were interested in playing a support role while others were interested in becoming worker-owners. It was challenging in that people brought different visions and priorities and we eventually had to narrow the meetings to just include the prospective worker-owners in order to first center their vision. Folks in a support role were on standby to continue to provide their expertise and connections when the time was right. The other major challenges were that none of the core of prospective worker owners had construction experience, and none of them had a Construction Supervisors License (CSL) which is necessary for most construction jobs. Furthermore, there remained, even among this smaller group, a divergence of visions.

We considered various solutions and ways forward, but in the end, these challenges proved to be too difficult to overcome. We wish everyone involved good fortune in their future endeavors and hope that our pathways will meet up again in the future. At the same time, we've learned a lot and continue to work on connecting up with the right group of people, with the right combination of skills and interest in co-ops.



Wellspring Harvest Anniversary

With Four Years Behind Us, We're Looking to the Future

On May 27th, Wellspring Harvest and Wellspring Cooperative hosted a celebration for the greenhouse's 4th year anniversary! Supporters gathered at the greenhouse to mingle with the Wellspring community, listen to a series of great speakers, and tour the greenhouse.

City Councilor and previous Wellspring board co-chair, Zaida Govan, recalled her longtime vision for a greenhouse in her community and her excitement that Wellspring Harvest has transformed a formerly blighted lot into a thriving urban agricultural site. Worker-owners at the greenhouse Do-Han Allen, Liam Malone, and Clive Ndlovu shared sentiments about their experiences working in the cooperative and excitement for plans ahead. Wellspring Harvest is fundraising to build a second greenhouse, as set out in its original business plan, to reach the scale of production needed to operate profitably in the increasingly competitive hydroponics industry.

The greenhouse has grown more than

**340,000
HEADS OF
LETTUCE**

that have been sold to local hospitals, colleges, grocery stores and residents



Wellspring Cooperative's co-director Fred Rose recounted the greenhouse's history and transformation from empty lot to full-scale greenhouse business. Important milestones include formation of a dedicated team of workers, technological upgrades to better control the greenhouse environment, cultivation of a loyal group of customers, and improved production methods.



Following the speakers, Liam Malone, the greenhouse's production manager, led a tour of the greenhouse with an introduction to hydroponic growing. As he explained, leaving the head of lettuce connected to the roots helps the greens stay fresh and crisp in your fridge long after you buy it.



"I'm bringing fresh produce and also creating opportunity for the local residents to get jobs and train skilled jobs in this greenhouse."

- Clive Ndlovu, operations manager and worker-owner at Wellspring Harvest



Go Fresh Mobile Market Update

The Go Fresh Mobile Market significantly expanded its summer deliveries of fresh produce to food insecure families in Springfield, with the help of an earmark of ARPA funds secured by State Representative Orlando Ramos. Summer deliveries increased from twelve to twenty sites including low income and senior apartments, senior meal sites, medical facilities and community organizations. State funding supported expansion to two sites in Indian Orchard and one in East Springfield, among other locations.

Recent Event Highlights

Springfield Earth Day Celebration

This spring Wellspring and its board decided to organize an event around Earth Day as part of our commitment in our 2021-23 strategic plan to have at least one community engagement event each season.

The overarching premise of the Springfield Earth Day Celebration was to illuminate the connection between sustainability and a cooperative ecosystem: how people and groups in Springfield are sowing the seeds for a just, sustainable, and democratic economy and community. Wellspring brought together seven energetic Springfield organizations that put on the event: Springfield Neighbor to Neighbor, Gardening the Community, Northeast Organic Farming Association, Springfield Climate Justice Coalition, Live Well Springfield, People Aligning to Create Harmony (PATCH), and Massachusetts Jobs with Justice. The event was held at the site where a budding organization run by Springfield residents, People Aligning to Create Harmony (PATCH), is installing a restorative garden that will be used to teach community members about permaculture and cooperatives. PATCH is a group of community members coming together to utilize each other's strengths and resources for community and social development. With a commitment to sustainability and a holistic approach, PATCH seeks to create businesses, workshops, and co-ops to improve the personal and collective wellbeing of the Springfield community.

The event brought together a wide variety of community members, businesses, and organizations in a lively celebration of Springfield, community, sustainability, and a brighter future. Festivities included music with DJ XX, the local food truck Crave, a photo booth, a mushroom propagation workshop, working in a regenerative garden, and eco-friendly crafts such as painting flower pots and making bird feeders out of recycled materials.

Over twenty local vendors, co-ops, and organizations tabled at the events selling food and wares and uplifting their work. We heard from an amazing group of speakers on topics including the connection between our environment and personal health, a sustainable economy, food as medicine, and the importance of teaching and involving youth in creating a sustainable community. Every step of the way from planning to execution, Wellspring saw a beautiful convergence of passion, resources, and networking that made this event what it was.

Attendees and participants left feeling hopeful and excited to do this again next year—bigger and better. Wellspring strengthened existing relations and made new connections through this event, and we look forward to the collaborations that will follow.



The local Greenfield co-op PV Squared helped sponsor eco-friendly crafts for kids led by Wellspring members



The Wellspring Co-ops tabled at the event, selling their products and promoting their businesses. Seth of Chronic Trips [the middle photo pictured above] spoke during the program to highlight the importance of access to nature for all and a collective stewardship for the land. Marina and Brittany of Catalyst Cooperative Healing [pictured above on the right] also spoke, drawing attention to the benefits of nature for our mental health.



Springfield Climate Justice Coalition [pictured above] educated attendees about ways to get involved in local climate justice work.

Ezra of From the Source Fungi, a 2022 Co-op Boot Camp participant, led a mushroom cultivation workshop [pictured above] and participants got to take home fresh oyster mushrooms to start their at-home growing!



Neighbor to Neighbor Springfield [left] set up a pot-painting table and Gardening the Community [right] brought starters that local youth helped grow.



Solidarity Economy Festival and Gathering

Wellspring Cooperative is a member of the US Solidarity Economy Network and a co-founder of the statewide Massachusetts Solidarity Economy Network (MASEN). Both our worker co-op development and collective community initiatives are examples of solidarity economy practices which center values of solidarity/cooperation, equity, democracy, sustainability and pluralism (not a one size fits all model) as opposed to the capitalist drive for profit maximization and blind growth. Wellspring seeks to connect worker co-ops not only to other co-ops, but also other solidarity economy practices such as participatory budgeting, community land trusts, mutual aid and time-banking.

In early June, MASEN organized a two-day gathering to celebrate, learn, strategize and build together. Day One was a Solidarity Economy Festival with performances, tabling, and workshops that illuminated the solidarity economy's relational nature and celebration of community and interdependence. A number of Wellspring Co-op Network members attended and tabled for their co-ops during the festival. It's great to see our member co-ops engage with the larger cooperative ecosystem, going far beyond completing the daily tasks of the job! We heard lots of enthusiastic feedback about our work and the work of our co-ops.

Day Two delved deeper into workshops and breakout sessions spanning topics such as The Culture of Solidarity Economy, Public Banking, Coalition for Worker Ownership & Power, and worker co-ops. Wellspring staff members Emily Kawano and Nellie Marshall-Torres led a few presentations and discussions over the course of the weekend and represented Wellspring Cooperative at the event. Attendance included a mixture of people who are interested in the solidarity economy and those who have worked within the movement for many years. The festival cultivated a space for lively discussions, knowledge and resource sharing, and strategizing ways in which the Massachusetts solidarity economy can grow. This was a great event for everyone to strengthen and expand relationships with others across the state involved in co-ops and creating a cooperative economy! You can read more about the event and the main takeaways in this article written by Wellspring's board member, Boone Shear, and a couple of his students who attended the event.

What is the Solidarity Economy?

The Solidarity economy (SE) is:

- a dynamic global movement
- a framework that connects
- SE practices that align with
- SE Values of Solidarity, Equity, Democracy, Sustainability and Pluralism to articulate and advance a post-capitalist economy, society and world.

To learn more, you can read [this article](#) written by Wellspring's co-director, Emily Kawano.



J and Clive representing Wellspring co-ops at the festival



A group photo of Day One attendees

Co-op Resources & News

Mapping & Taking Inventory of Massachusetts Cooperative Ecosystems

This report and accompanying ecosystem inventory database of the worker cooperative ecosystem in Massachusetts were created in Spring 2022 by students of Boone Shear, a Wellspring board member, at UMass Amherst. The report is "a static snapshot of a movement in the making." The report endeavors to track worker cooperative happenings, and regularly update and expand the inventory so we can have open access resources for conversations, cooperative development, organizing, and power building.

[The Report is Linked Here](#) and [The Inventory is Linked Here](#)

Beyond Capitalism: Owning Our Economy, Owning Our Future

by Steve Dubbs and Emily Kawano

This [article](#) co-authored by Wellspring's co-director Emily Kawano questions the meaning of ownership and how it can be structured to design a more democratic economy.



Co-ops in the News

[Sustaining the Rising Tide of Black Co-ops: An Ecosystem Approach](#)

[How the Cooperative Food Movement is Evolving](#)

[How a Worker-Owned Business Model in Spain Is Keeping Inequality in Check](#)

[How We Converted to a Cooperative—and How You Can, Too](#)

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