

## **Cooperatives for Human Services**

***A person with a disability selects her personal care attendant from the cooperative registry in Sweden. The Spanish-speaking parents of an adult with mental retardation in Arizona join with other parents to purchase and manage a bankrupt service provider agency. A mother schedules her required two hours of weekly office coverage for her son's cooperative child-care center so the co-op can afford to pay the teachers well. Parents of teenagers with autism establish a housing cooperative to buy and manage condominiums for their children to move into after high school graduation. A cooperative credit union member votes for the new President of the bank.***

### ***What is a cooperative?***

A cooperative is a type of business that is owned and governed by its members - the only people who use its services. Co-ops are different from for-profit businesses, which are owned by one or more investors whose intent is to make a profit by selling services to other businesses and individuals. Co-ops are distinct from non-profit organizations, which are intended to provide educational, charitable and other services, and must reinvest any profits they make into their own operations or donate them to other non-profits or to government agencies. Co-ops are different from other types of organizations as they abide by three main rules: members are treated fairly and respectfully, members work together towards solving mutual problems, and products and services are provided exclusively to meet member's needs rather than solely for the purpose of making money.

### ***A long history –***

Starting in the 1800s, a variety of different co-ops developed around the world: agricultural, consumer food, housing, banking and credit unions, fishery, workers, and health and social care. In California there are currently about 800 operating cooperatives.

### ***A hopeful future -***

Human Service Cooperatives (HSCs) are a new variety of cooperative that provide services in the developmental disability industry in the United States. The first HSCs are currently developing in Arizona under a Center for Medicaid Services grant with the expertise of Bohling Inc., an advisement firm that conceived and initiated the Human Service Cooperative model. The *Federated Human Service Cooperative Support and Development Center* assists HSCs in development and ongoing organizational needs.

The service possibilities of cooperatives are endless, but could include the following: hourly support service, personal/occupational support, quality assurance, transportation, case management, fiscal management, companion living and micro-enterprise development supports.

### ***For more information about starting Human Service Cooperatives in California call:***

Sherry Beamer, Sherry Beamer and Associates, Inc. (818) 841-1088

Dale Dutton, D<sup>3</sup> Associates (415) 461-7218

Holly and Gale Bohling, Bohling, Inc. (602) 404-7334, or online at:

The Federated Human Service Cooperative Center [www.humanservicecoop.com](http://www.humanservicecoop.com)