

**Worker Owned Home Care Cooperatives**  
**Wisconsin Caregiver Conversations Summary, 2007**

Twenty-two caregivers from two worker-owned cooperatives participated in three facilitated discussions regarding places they go, activities in which they participate, and the people to whom they talk. These conversations yielded the following details about caregivers in an urban/rural county and a rural county in Wisconsin.

<b>Urban/Rural Wisconsin</b>	<b>Rural Wisconsin</b>
<b>Places Caregivers go regularly in a one to three month period:</b>	<b>Places Caregivers go regularly in a one to three month period:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Grocery Stores with 11 votes (plus, caregivers read the bulletin boards)</li> <li>○ Parks with 7 votes</li> <li>○ Gas Stations and bars were tied with 6 votes each</li> <li>○ Library, restaurants and Wal-Mart were tied with 5 votes each</li> <li>○ The “mall” and the doctor each had 3 votes</li> <li>○ Other places with 2 votes each include bank, beautician, coffee shop, farmers markets, and post office.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Retail stores received 13 votes. Four of these votes were for Family Dollar and Dollar General discount stores.</li> <li>○ Grocery Stores: 8 votes</li> <li>○ Banks and gas stations: 7 votes each.</li> <li>○ Restaurants, church, doctors/hospitals tied with 6 votes each.</li> <li>○ Post office and the library: 5 votes each.</li> <li>○ Other mentions with 3 votes each were: school, and the beauty salon.</li> </ul> <p>Places receiving 2 votes each were: city hall, car wash, and the dentist.</p>
<b>Community Activities in which caregivers participate.</b>	<b>Community Activities in which caregivers participate.</b>
<p>The top vote getter was <b>farmers markets</b> with 3 votes. Others with 2 votes each were: church picnics, county fairs, festivals, and parades.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Volunteer roles and fund raisers for charitable organizations received 7 votes.</li> <li>○ Church activities received 4 votes.</li> <li>○ And tied with 2 votes were community festivals and high school sports.</li> </ul>
<b>Favorite Activities and Events:</b>	<b>Favorite Activities and Events:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Community festivals with 6 votes</li> <li>○ 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks, art fairs, and flea markets, and parades each with 2 votes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This is a physically active group where individuals bike, swim, walk, and attend aerobics classes and picnics. These activities received 10 votes all together.</li> <li>○ Family activities are prized with this group and received 8 votes.</li> <li>○ Shopping: 5 votes.</li> </ul> <p>Parent Teacher Organization activities, church picnics, and thrifts shopping all received 2 votes each.</p>
<b>People with whom caregivers interact:</b>	<b>People with whom caregivers interact:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Clients with 7 votes</li> <li>○ Significant other with 6 votes</li> <li>○ Kids and Neighbors each with 5 votes</li> </ul> <p>Church groups, family, and parents each received 3 votes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Family members: 14 votes</li> <li>○ Clerks at the grocery and other stores: 10</li> <li>○ Co-Workers: 9 votes</li> <li>○ Friends: 7 votes</li> <li>○ Clients and spouse tied with 5 votes each</li> <li>○ People at Church: 4 votes</li> </ul> <p>School staff, neighbors, and community organization members: 2 votes each.</p>

## Best Places for Caregivers to get Information from About Starting a Cooperative

Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute (PHI) offers a list of suggested locations where caregivers are likely to get information about a cooperative (see Workforce Tools, Vol. 1 No. 1, Fall, 2002). We used that list with caregivers in Wisconsin and asked them to rank that list in order for themselves. Where would you most likely to get information about starting a cooperative. According to 22 caregivers in Wisconsin the best place to get information for them is:

Urban/Rural Wisconsin	Rural Wisconsin
1. Human Services Organizations	1. Human Services Organizations
2. Senior Centers	2. Community Based Organizations
3. Community Based Organizations	3. Senior Centers
4. Churches and Places of Worship	4. Supermarkets and Shopping Centers
5. Public Housing Authorities	5. Churches
6. GED and other Educational Programs	
7. Local Colleges	
8. Supermarkets	

Laundromats were ranked last. Essentially the message was “don’t bother” with that location.

Other information sources discussed were local cable television channel and radio. Local cable channels can run “bulletin board” type of listings and/or public service announcements. In rural Wisconsin, the rodeo and car shows are popular spots to distribute information.

Word of mouth was discussed as the absolute best way to get the message out to caregivers. One person said that she talked to family and friends to get their input and then worked backwards investigating their suggestions. As a result of these efforts, it was noted that grocery stores were listed at the top the list of places that caregivers in the urban/rural area go and at the bottom of the list of best places for caregivers to get information.

## **Review of Timeline and Development Process in Wisconsin Home Care Cooperatives**

We talked with two of the board members in the urban/rural region about the development process of their business and six caregivers in the rural region who participated in their cooperative development process.

### **What Activities Were the Most Important Use of Your Time?**

From the perspective of the original steering committee member, now on the board of directors, “it was important to my time to know more of this stuff to invest more time.” The biggest question that she had going in was “is my money going to change?” When she left factory work making \$15/\$16 per hour, her family really needed to know how much that dollar sign is really going to change. The wage offered has to fit with what a

family needs to sustain itself. The patronage refund is like a bonus, it's a reward and a nice retirement package.

In the urban/rural area, so many of the timeline items we reviewed were "most important for the use of her time" because these activities really brought caregivers into the process in-depth. One in particular, needed that feeling to continue with the substantial commitment she, and her family, made to the process. Another caregiver felt the most important use of her time came in later in the process when the steering committee voted to organize as an independent cooperative, the name of the cooperative was chosen, and the by-laws begun. These events were noted as a significant turning point in the process. Another expressed that "I think the process (of organizing the cooperative) really weeded out the ones who didn't want to do this."

In the rural region, looking for a building and viewing videos about cooperatives and forming a business were stated as the most important. "It was scary" one caregiver said, and the others agreed. Over the course of the project, trust developed in the cooperative developers. They were honest from the start stating that they didn't have all the answers. This level of personal honesty helped the caregivers to trust them and develop an on-going relationship with them with the ultimate goal of starting the business.

### **Are there Activities that You Went Through that you Think Would Best be Handled by Staff and Not Caregivers?**

We shared with caregivers in the urban/rural region about doing more of the business plan upfront in order to streamline the time commitment of caregivers. These upfront activities could include reviewing the local market, completing a competitors analysis, and putting the numbers to the page while reviewing changes to operations for changes in variables. We think that by doing that work first, it can then be presented to caregivers in the very early stages of the process. They would know from the start what wages the market will bear and can decide for themselves whether they want to pursue the development of a cooperative or not.

The caregivers agreed that staff should do the financial projections, business plan development, and office space review while the caregivers themselves, once they agree to move forward, can begin learning about cooperatives and work on vision statements.

In the rural region, caregivers simply stated that developing the business plan was all "out of our league". They agreed that cooperative developers should handle putting the business plan together.

A major caution was noted when one caregiver said that if the completed business plan was presented up front, "it would have seemed like this was your business, not ours". While cooperative developers should work up as much of the details as possible ahead of time, sharing with caregivers and getting their feedback and input should happen in stages.

## **What Activities Should Have Been Presented Later in the Process?**

One caregiver noted that much meeting time was taken reviewing what had happened at previous meetings. This may have been true, as we saw meeting attendance fluctuate with different people coming periodically. In an effort to keep everyone up to date, there was repetition of information and constant updating so that those attending were current, which people attending a majority of meetings, did not need. On the other hand, the repetition over time was seen as is a “necessary evil” for the process to continue. To be respectful of good use of the caregivers time, organizers should not spend more than 5-10 minutes of meeting time reviewing previous meetings. The value in the review and repeating of information is it helps to build buy-in and ownership among the caregivers. The more that those who will own the company can talk with others, including other caregivers, about what it is, the more they are able to take an ownership view of the business.

From the rural view, the contract date with the county should have been later. There was too much of a push to get everything done by June 1. It was too traumatic to be pushed so hard to get to the contract start date. Hiring an executive director started in May and the contract started on June 1.

## **Are There Activities that You Think the Caregivers Should Not Have Participated in at All?**

One caregiver in the rural area discussion shared this summary statement, “Our experience since then has been that caregivers should be more involved and not less.”

## **In What Activities Do You Think the Caregivers Should Have Had More Involvement?**

In the rural area, the caregivers felt that they didn’t actually know what the board’s and officer’s jobs were when they were elected. “The officer roles were totally new to us and we just didn’t have any idea about what we were supposed to do in those roles” said one caregiver.

In closing, caregivers in the rural area were asked what advice they would like to offer for other cooperatives now forming and those forming in the future. The full group consensus on this was to utilize other cooperatives that are in place as resources in the start-up phase. They stressed that each business is unique and that they learned from an urban cooperative and they had to refine what they learned to fit their rural location.