

Bakery is no ordinary business

By Meri Perra

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When Gordon Brown starts his shift at [St. John's Bakery](#) at 5:30 each morning, most of Broadview Avenue is still quiet. The few people who are up are often looking to score crack, or turn a trick, close-by at the corner of Broadview and Queen.

“(Working at the bakery) is the exact opposite of crack addiction,” Brown said, and he would know what he’s talking about. Just over four years ago, when Brown started working at the bakery, he was still on drugs.

Now a lead baker at St. John’s, and responsible for finding new clients for the bakery, Brown is enjoying clean living after a long, 25-year addiction. Open about his past, Brown says he was originally fired from his job after six months because of his drug use. “It’s pretty hard to get the boot from The Mission,” Brown joked.

The bakery, known for its high-end, organic artisan bread, is operated by [St. John the Compassionate Mission](#), and is no ordinary business.

The bakery is a social-purpose enterprise, meaning its bottom line is to stay in business and provide supportive training and employment opportunities to people who need them. St John’s Bakery is able to meet its double bottom line with support from the [Toronto Enterprise Fund](#).

“What’s most unique is about social purpose enterprises is that they’re employing people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness,” Susannah Cameron, coordinator of the Fund said.

With job losses being reported nearly every day because of the economic downturn, social purpose enterprises may be a source of good news to people who are the most economically disadvantaged in the city.

Hilda Tzavaras, the store manager at St John’s, says their wages are competitive. “We pay market rate,” Tzavaras said. “We’ve worked hard to do so.” She also says the economic downtown has not yet had an impact on the bakery.

Cameron says the businesses the fund supports send in reports twice a year. So far the downturn hasn’t had an impact on any of the enterprises.

“We haven’t seen a decline in sales yet,” Cameron said. “Some of the businesses are smaller and have very niche markets,” Cameron said.

Cameron says the fund has recently supported [Interpreter Services Toronto](#), which pays workers between \$25 and \$30 an hour. It’s some job creation, with decent wages, which are both badly needed. It’s also some good news to hear when an economy is sinking.



Gordon Brown pulls the early morning shift at St. John's Bakery.