

West Chelsea Workspace Aims to Unite 'Social Good' Organizations



By **Mathew Katz** on March 18, 2014 8:56am

[@MathewKatz](#)



Centre for Social Innovation in West Chelsea

CHELSEA — A shared workspace in West Chelsea is connecting companies and people who want to change the world for the better.

The **Centre for Social Innovation**, a 24,000-square-foot co-working space in Chelsea's Starrett-Lehigh Building, looks like a tech startup's fantasy office, with a shared kitchen made out of furnishings from a former apothecary and tables made out of the industrial building's old freight elevator doors.

But unlike other shared work spaces that focus on minting millionaires, the Centre for Social Innovation hosts about 150 organizations — both for-profit and non-profit — that aim to make the world a better place.

"Our goal is to create a home and a vibrant culture for social entrepreneurs," said Eli Malinsky, CS executive director. "They're here to be part of a bigger community."

The organization was founded in Toronto in 2004 and now hosts 600 organizations in three different spaces there.

The Chelsea space in the historic building at 601 W. 26th St. opened in May 2013 and quickly drew

tenants.

In one corner of the former manufacturing floor, a group of entrepreneurs recently worked on **Dri Change**, a food truck company that hires formerly jailed youth. In another is **Cool Culture**, a nonprofit that gives poor families access to the city's cultural institutions.

A wooden canoe hangs in the center's library as a nod to its Canadian roots, and the walls have chalkboards covered in tips, platitudes from members and even Scrabble pieces.

Any potential members have to apply for the space, and prove that they serve a social purpose. CSI offers several different options for workers, nonprofits and companies, with workspace ranging from \$125 a month for a spot at a shared desk to \$1,200 a month for a private, enclosed office for five seats. There are meeting and event spaces as well.

The CSI operates as a nonprofit in Canada, and is currently applying for nonprofit status with the IRS.

Malinsky said that the most important aspect of the space is a "connective tissue" that links organizations that work towards a social good. Members host events, teach workshops, share content and even help one another get through bureaucratic red tape.

"There are tons of places around New York with office space, but we want to achieve something together," Malinsky said. "It's the best possible value for our members, that they can help one another."

For Domitilla Enders, there couldn't be a bigger difference from her company's previous home at the Varick Street Incubator, where tech startups pursued the holy grail of venture capital. Enders' for-profit company, **Open Assembly**, develops open-source initiatives to help educators use resources from MIT's free OpenCourseWare.

"In New York, it's hard to succeed with something that doesn't just want to make a big pile of money," Enders said. "This is a powerful experiment in how you nurture great ideas, organized on a scale and in a way that you can really do good."