

Adrenaline Alley



Main theme: Mission Related Trading

Adrenaline Alley is one of Europe's biggest and most famous urban sports centres. It was founded as 'Corby Wheels Project' by Mandy Young in 2002 as she wanted to create a safe place for local young people after her son was the victim of an unprovoked attack. A 'The Alley' young people come to learn and practice urban sports including skateboarding, in-line skating and BMX.

The project began life as a charity but Mandy soon began to explore trading as a means of growth and development. Today 90% of the Alley's £500,000 turnover is self-generated, mostly from gate fees. The team are committed to their mission of serving the young people of Corby who have a strong voice in the development of the Alley. Mandy Young is now the Alley's Operations Director and explains how she began to explain trading as a means of developing the project.

"When we started I worked as a volunteer for a year and a half researching and learning about the urban sports industry. Initially I had no idea what social enterprise was but with guidance from Social Enterprise East Midlands (SEEM) I started to understand how it could broaden our social impact. I could either keep applying for funds to engage young people in Corby or I could put a nominal charge on things and actually cover the costs of doing a project. It was at that point that I started to realise the project could be much bigger than a half-pipe on an estate somewhere."

Even as the Alley has grown into a large social enterprise they have remained committed to serving the young people of Corby. Mandy believes a close relationship

with their most important stakeholders is the key to the Alley's success...

"Everything we do, we do in consultation with the young people – we listen to what they want. It's not guided consultation, it's not informal consultation, it's what do you want? We do it online through social media, we do it through face to face meetings, we interview young people on video at our events and there are our young volunteers. The young people are very involved in terms of what they want and how they're going to be involved in getting it. I think that whole process is what captures them – it's not just about making money, it's about the social impact it has on them, it's their facility and they have ownership. If they're going to respect that ownership they need to take responsibility for it."

"But it has been challenging to keep the nucleus of young people from the local area who run the project. The group of young people that started the project have grown up and the new generation can be complacent. They work hard but they know that the Alley will be here whether they give 100% or only 50% - but they're crucial to the project because most of the money we receive is for the young people of Corby – they are our mission. For that reason we employ our events and participation manager Kim who engages with young people through schools, youth clubs and community organisations."

However trying to give the young people what they want has sometimes come into conflict with the Alley's social values...

"Setting up a music rehearsal room for the young people didn't work and it's been quite a valuable lesson. We used to be located outdoors and we had a stage that

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bands could practice on and we did outdoor gigs. When we moved indoors we built a professional music room but it's too clean! We have a zero tolerance policy on drugs, alcohol and smoking, and that doesn't fit in with rock n' roll. We do hire out the room to bands that are too young to get into that stuff and professional groups but the young people who are our target market aren't interested."

Mandy also shares some of the lessons she has learned over the last seven years...

"One of the most important things you can do is build statistics. The quicker you can start evidencing your outcomes, the better chance you've got of attracting funding or identifying the actual needs you should focus on. Whether it's just getting people to understand your project or actually getting them to join you as a partner I think that statistics and evidence are a big part of being able to attract the right people and funds."

"You've got to believe in the mission because it's never a 9-5 job and you never get paid for all the hours you work. You've got to have a passion and dedication but sometimes my passion has been perceived as arrogance and even rudeness. You've got to become a lot more aware of the larger environment and not just the space around you."

Key lessons:

- Trading can enhance the opportunities to fulfil your social mission
- Collaboration with stakeholders ensures development is in line with your social mission
- Building up statistics and other evidence of positive outcomes will support your development
- Your mission must be worth the effort and commitment it will take to see it

through

Legal structure: Charitable company limited by guarantee
 Main activity: Gate money from sports park
 Number of employees: 7
 Turnover: £500,000
 Location: Corby, Northamptonshire
 Date formed: 2002
 Percentage of generated income: 90%
 Date written: February 2010
 Website:

www.adrenalinealley.co.uk

This case study is one of a series produced by the Capacity Builders funded 'Stepping Up To Enterprise' project in the East Midlands.

The case studies tell the stories of voluntary or community organisations and how they moved to developing trading. The case studies are available on the website

www.oneeastmidlands.org.uk/sute.