

Southwell Care Project

Main theme: Perceptions of stakeholders / Mission related trading

Southwell Care Project is a charity that supports adults with learning disabilities to achieve and sustain the best quality of life possible. The charity was founded in 1999 and has relied on grants and donations to survive. Three years ago Steve Shatwell became the new Project Manager of Southwell Care. Since joining the charity Steve has developed several income generating activities including taking on contracts and room hire. Steve explains how the trading activities have developed and shares his long-term vision to develop the charity into a social enterprise...

“Southwell Care Project was set up because we live in a rural area and there was no statutory provision to support adults with learning disabilities. We offer a range of services including academic classes and recreational activities. We also organise weekly social events and twice yearly holidays. We encourage our clients, where practical, to come along on their own because we exist to support them towards independence.

We, like most charities, have for many years relied on gifts and donations from trust funds. These funding streams are drying up as funders expect us to move towards a financially sustainable model. Just to run a small head office as we do in Southwell can cost £60,000 a year so we see trading and social enterprise as a way of contributing towards those costs. We want our organisation to be here for the long term. There is no point creating independent living opportunities for a young person unless you can be there to support them for the rest of their lives.

However, I don't think we will ever move towards a social enterprise just for additional

income. We would never develop an activity that had no connection with our clients. We would always want our social enterprise to be integral to our overall objectives to create opportunities for, and to raise the self-esteem of, our clients.”

Since his arrival at the charity Steve has developed several trading activities for Southwell Care...

“Three years ago our turnover was £54,000. Since then we have developed a number of different income streams and we have opened a second base in Newark. We have developed a charity bike ride that brought in £12,000 this year and we have also started two small enterprises.

A local care provider occasionally used our office for meetings paying us £10 a time. As it became more regular we suggested they extended their use to include training, team meetings and a drop in for staff. We formalised the arrangement and agreed they would pay us £100 a month on an on-going basis. We now also rent our rooms to Social Services for £25 a time for person centred reviews. As we are a rural community there aren't many places people can do that.

We have also taken on some printing contracts for a couple of organisations. We found that even with standard office printers we could create a fairly professional job for smaller organisations. The actual printing and folding can be done by our clients who work on a voluntary basis and really enjoy being part of the office team.

A retired person's organisation called the University of the Third Age (U3A) heard about our work and now we have a contract to produce the monthly newsletter which is distributed to their members. Once we had learnt from working with them we gained confidence and approached an event



Southwell Care Project

organisation for whom we print thousands of entry forms each year.

We've always done some basic office training here with our clients but there is a massive need with our clients for what we call 'meaningful activity' which in the long-term reduces the incidence of mental health issues from isolation.

It's not a great profit maker and, if we had to charge for the wages of our clients, then we wouldn't make a profit at all but that's one of the advantages a voluntary organisation holds. For most of our clients, a salary is a very low priority and could even cause problems by affecting the benefits they receive. The self esteem they gain from being productive and being treated like everyone else is the main thing."

In the long-term, Steve has a vision to develop other larger enterprises for Southwell Care...

"We see the creation of more formally structured and larger social enterprises as the next stage of our development. We are on the point of acquiring a piece of land to build accommodation for our clients. Southwell suffers from a kind of reverse deprivation, because it is an affluent area property prices are high and commercial providers of supported housing won't provide a service here. We want to provide accommodation so that our clients don't have to move out of the area. As well as that we plan to move to providing care services for our clients and become a support provider.

We are also about to start 'Pod Recycling', an organisation staffed by clients that will collect used print cartridges and old mobile phones for recycling."

Steve offers his advice for other organisations that are developing trading activities...

"I think it is imperative to have someone with specific experience of running a small business. An entrepreneurial attitude is so important if the philosophy of the voluntary sector is going to change and take advantage of the recent developments in the UK economy. Be prepared to think 'outside of the box' and take calculated risks to create new income streams and new activities for service users."

Key lessons:

- Developing trading activities could contribute towards the cost of running an enterprise
- Spare space or rooms in a premises can be used as an income stream
- Consider trading activities in which service users can be included. The availability of potentially free resources will create the competitive advantage
- When seeking business expertise through mentors or staff, try to find individuals with experience of running small enterprises

Legal structure: Charity and company limited by guarantee
Main activity: Printing contracts and room hire
Number of employees: 8
Turnover: £131,000
Location: Southwell and Newark, Nottinghamshire
Date formed: April 1999
Percentage of generated income: 8.5%
Date written: July 2010
Website: www.southwellcare.org

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.