

Leading Lights

experiences from the phoenix development fund



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Foreword

I am very pleased to be able to introduce this excellent account of the experiences of the Phoenix Development Fund projects.

I have followed the progress of the Phoenix Development Fund projects with great personal interest. This is not only because the Fund comes within my current ministerial responsibilities and I was the Champion Minister for the Policy Action Team 3 report in 1999 that led directly to the establishment of the Phoenix Fund. Even more importantly, I believe passionately that releasing the enterprise potential across society is crucial to the health of our economy. That goal is an integral part of the Government's action plan for small business that we published earlier this year.

The Phoenix Development Fund projects have contributed significantly to our aims by developing imaginative and innovative ways of delivering better business support in some of our more disadvantaged communities and for groups that are under-represented in terms of business ownership. As you read about their experiences, I hope that you too will be impressed by all they have achieved. I know that those achievements have been the result of an enormous amount of hard work and commitment on the part of the staff involved in running the projects. I thank them all for the contribution they have made. They have helped many, many people to realise their ambitions of running their own business and this has made a real difference not only for the individuals but also for their communities.

I am very pleased that the work of the Phoenix Development Fund is continuing. The lessons and good practice from these projects will be an important basis for that work. More than that, they will be a great resource to all those wanting to deliver the best possible business support for all the areas or groups that they serve.

I hope you find these Profiles interesting, useful and stimulating.



Patricia Hewitt
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and Minister for Women

Introduction

This publication celebrates the achievements of 93 innovative projects supported by the Phoenix Development Fund between 2001 and 2004. The profiles report the wide diversity of approaches, objectives and target communities all over England that have benefited from the drive to tackle disadvantage by helping those excluded from work to move into the world of business.

The range of initiatives is staggering – marketing social enterprises in Cornwall; introducing computer-aided design to traditional manufacturers in Middlesbrough; training football coaches in East London and people with learning disabilities in the East Midlands. They have resulted in thousands of new businesses and jobs in areas of severe disadvantage. And many existing businesses have received much-needed support and advice to help them grow.

The stories from this wealth of diversity also hold many lessons for other organisations seeking to lift people out of poverty by helping them into self-employment, small businesses or social enterprises. One recurring message is the need to match provision to the culture, expectations, interests and motivations of the target group, whether they be refugees, women with family responsibilities, the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities or excluded ethnic minorities.

The Phoenix Fund is part of the Government's strategy for using entrepreneurship to tackle social exclusion, announced by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in November 1999 and part of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal which was launched in January 2001. The approach is based on two important premises. First, no matter how great the exclusion communities suffer, they possess valuable skills which should not go to waste and which can help people into prosperity if they can be properly channelled. Second, business or enterprise can offer just as much opportunity for meaningful and sustainable work as more conventional "access to employment" approaches.

Many people in disadvantaged communities can set up and run businesses. The stories in these pages bear witness to that. But they do tend to face greater difficulties. There are several reasons for those difficulties – lack of confidence, inadequate skills or experience, an absence of appropriate support and advice. Many of these projects highlight the cultural barriers that deter some people from approaching formal support and advice service providers.

These projects set out to address those barriers, complementing existing services with imaginative new approaches. In many cases that involved going out into communities, to places of worship, mother and toddler groups and community centres to reach people who may never have thought of setting up a business, or who wouldn't know where to start if they had.

The projects were chosen for support specifically because they promised experimentation, the evaluation of new ideas and the identification and spread of best practice in an area where there is currently too little knowledge. Over 250 organisations bid for funding in the first round in 2000, and 50 projects were selected. The second funding round in 2001 produced more than 350 bids, out of which 46 projects were supported. (The total profiled here is only 93 because one project continued from round 1 to round 2 and two failed to get off the ground.) Awards to these projects totalled £29 million.

Bidders were asked to devise projects which would help people to:

- Explore the possibility of enterprise as a positive career choice
- Develop business ideas
- Consider the practicalities of setting up and running a business
- Start up new enterprises
- Grow existing businesses.

In many cases, the Phoenix Development Fund supported outreach workers to encourage business approaches in hard-to-reach communities. Other projects concentrated on building capacity in local community organisations, introducing them to the concept of social enterprise. Many provided professional training and development, some focusing especially on computer technology. Some had a sector focus, such as creative industries or retail, and some focused on a particular excluded group, especially ethnic minorities.

This publication coincides with the end of the second round of funding, but a third round – “Building on the Best” is already underway. It will support 26 of the projects profiled here until March 2006. They are identified in the index and on the relevant profile page.

How this publication is organised

The projects are profiled in alphabetical order. Each profile conveys the essence of what was accomplished and what can be learned from the project's experience, using the words of users wherever possible. Our aim has been to convey the excitement, the innovation and the achievements – often against daunting odds. We have not attempted to evaluate the projects' work in a formal sense – a full evaluation will be published in the Autumn.

The focus of each project is displayed in the coloured side panel using these symbols:

- | | |
|---|---|
|  Black and minority ethnic |  Social Enterprises |
|  Long term unemployed |  Disadvantaged communities |
|  Refugees |  Over 50's |
|  Sectoral |  Rural areas |
|  Women |  Ex-offenders |
|  People with disabilities |  Young people |

BB The symbol BB in the side panel indicates whether a project is in receipt of continuation funding from the Building on the Best programme.

The index on page 100 records the target groups for each project as well as the region.

The regions

The side panels on each page are colour coded according to the region in which each project operates. There is also a colour for projects operating nationwide.

East

South East

East Midlands

South West

London

West Midlands

North East

Yorkshire & Humberside

North West

National



highlights

Innovative approach to reaching hard-to-reach groups

Making use of existing local institutions

One-to-one workshops and group sessions held to offer support and advice

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

ABi Associates – Faith in business

Business advice isn't something you'd expect to find in church, but the Faith in Business project has found congregations are full of people looking to set up their own ventures.

Many people from African Caribbean communities wanting to run a business often don't have the same informal support network available in other communities. But many have strong personal or family links to a local church.

Faith in Business worked with local pastors to raise awareness of their business advice and training programmes, and ran workshops in churches and nearby community centres teaching basic business skills needed to start up a small enterprise.

The project also tried to establish networks within different congregations that could provide useful contacts for anyone needing a helping hand.

"It was interesting that most people were more comfortable about talking through their plans with people who shared their faith," says Ruth Djang, director at Abi Associates, the organisation behind the Faith In Business project.

Once word got round that someone was looking to set up a new business, the project found countless offers of help from people in the networks. Faith in Business found that congregations often had a wide range of skills and experience that could provide a starting point for anyone drawing up a business plan or promoting themselves in the community.

Very often the pastors didn't know much about business, so the group worked to demonstrate to church leaders how this kind of support was a good way to improve the lives of their congregation.

"People go to the pastor with problems in their life, but if it's a business problem there's little the pastor can do beyond prayer," explains Ms Djang. "But if he can recommend that they come and speak to us, or take part in one of our training sessions, then he's provided them with some kind of solution."

The project helped establish mentoring programmes in church communities and encouraged church members

who were more experienced in business to share their knowledge and support budding entrepreneurs.

"The church is a network, not just a spiritual network, but one that can provide all kinds of emotional and professional support as well," Ms Djang says.

Faith in Business also used workshops and training sessions to communicate how to be a good business leader and serve the community, with sessions on how to treat staff well and ways to give something back to the people in their local area.

People were also invited to attend one-to-one sessions with Faith in Business trainers who shared their Christian beliefs, and the project has now helped hundreds of people from the African Caribbean community take the first steps towards setting up their own enterprise.

"People go to the pastor with problems in their life, but if it's a business problem there's little the pastor can do beyond prayer."

ABi Associates – Fit to supply

It's not just new businesses that need a helping hand. ABi Associates found that many established businesses owned by people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities met barriers when facing the challenge of expansion.

One of the challenges these businesses faced was understanding and accessing tendering opportunities, both in the public and private sector. In fact, the under-representation of BME companies, and small and medium-sized enterprises generally, in procurement is considered a major barrier to the full realisation of sustainable local and regional economies.

The Fit to Supply programme aimed to prepare businesses from BME businesses to provide goods and services to a range of public and private sector organisations.

One Asian businesswoman, who had established a successful translation company with an annual turnover of £500,000, came to the project because she found that her work was beginning to stagnate. The majority of her business targeted the private sector.

Fit to Supply worked with her to develop a marketing strategy for expanding into the public sector. Through one-to-one consultations, and by taking part in group seminars, the businesswoman was able to identify potential public sector clients, and find ways of approaching them and pitching for tenders. The project also helped get the business on an approved suppliers list, accessed and used by a wide range of public sector organisations.

“Being able to grow is as important as starting up in the first place,” says Vijay Amin, ABi’s director, who developed Fit to Supply. “Businesses coming from minority ethnic communities have many challenges to overcome, but many face a real difficulty in identifying where to go next, which is where we found that we were able to fill a gap by looking at the tendering process.”

As well as training in how to tender, the Fit to Supply project helped medium sized businesses to develop their supply chains. They also worked with growing enterprises to strengthen their operations and strategies.

Through mentoring and advice sessions, the project created tailor-made programmes of support, and continued to work with businesses as they started expanding. It also provided networking opportunities with major purchasers and other growing businesses, to help share resources and knowledge.

“Fit to Supply helps minority ethnic communities to incubate, nurture and sustain business from these communities,” says Mr Amin. “We hope that in turn these successful businesses will put something back into their local communities.”

“We found that entrepreneurs sometimes didn’t have the necessary understanding to go for formal tendering opportunities.”



highlights

Helping BME businesses to grow

Fit To Supply helps firms to understand tendering

Developing supply chains, strengthening strategies and operations

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

Arch (North Staffordshire) – Community enterprise

Arch works with long-term homeless people in Stoke. But it stepped outside the conventional homeless care mindset and set out to help some of its clients to find independence through work.

Dave Thomas of Tipton Community Enterprise led the project. “There is a lot of untapped potential with this kind of client”, he says. “Nobody thinks of them as potential entrepreneurs. We tend to put people in little boxes and keep them there. In fact our expectations of the clients are often much lower than theirs. But we tried to get them to look at alternatives to long-term unemployment.”

His challenge was to break through the artificial walls which classify people as homeless, ex-offenders and substance abusers and reach that untapped potential. But it wasn't easy, because it turned out that the extent of disengagement was much greater than anybody had expected. “We found that the length of unemployment was quite extreme. The average was eight years and the longest was 24,” Mr Thomas explains.

They also found a high level of substance abuse among the clients – more than half were abusing drugs or alcohol. Many were also ex-offenders, or indeed still petty offenders to feed their habits.

Despite these odds the project achieved some successes. Dave has now been working for two years, running a food delivery service to old people and others who can't make it to the supermarket. “Being able to work and have control over my job is something I never thought could happen, but it has,” he says.

In some cases the project managed to break the vicious circle of “no training, no job” by placing clients in businesses with the promise that they would learn skills on the job. For example a handyman scheme is being developed where clients undertake a short basic training course and then go out with the handyman to carry out minor repairs on domestic properties.

The project also discovered, like many others, that there was a hunger for help beyond the immediate target group, like Paul and Adele, who are now earning money running a mobile catering van. “There is a vast untapped market of people who would never approach mainstream business advisers”, Mr Thomas says. “They see agencies like Business Links as being official; acting and dressing like mainstream business. These people are from a different background. To them it would be like going to see the bank manager. It scares them, and as a result they don't perform well if they do go.”

With the less formal advice and hand-holding from projects like this, such people can be helped into business. Like Nigel, who is dyslexic and doesn't make a very good first impression. But he knows what he's doing and he now employs more than a dozen people in his cleaning business.

Others will continue to get the chance of emulating Dave, Nigel, Paul and Adele, because the work of this project will be carried on by a new social enterprise agency for North Staffordshire.

“Being able to work and
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I never thought could happen,
but it has.”



highlights

Working with long-term unemployed and people with multiple disadvantage

A vast market of people who are scared of mainstream business advisers

A hunger for help beyond the immediate target group

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Association of Disabled Professionals – Disabled entrepreneurs network

Joe, a disabled person keen to set up a business in the north of England importing curios and specialist food goods from his native country, needed help to prepare a business plan and get his mind round the business start-up process.

He approached a local mainstream business support organisation but the help was delivered in an inaccessible format. Fortunately, the local entrepreneurs' club directed Joe to The Association of Disabled Professionals (ADP) operating the Disabled Entrepreneurs Network (DEN).

Joe was delighted to discover a business support group controlled and run by disabled members, because in his experience: "Most non-disabled people, although their intentions are very, very good, just don't seem to understand the quiet desperation of a disabled person."

Like other entrepreneurs, disabled people need information and sign-posting to support, finance and training. DEN was set up in 2001 to answer those needs. It provides networking opportunities as well as information for disabled people setting up or running their own businesses. DEN uses disabled people to listen and respond appropriately to the needs of other disabled people in ways they can understand.

To signpost relevant opportunities for accessible and appropriate training and development, DEN has developed links with agencies such as the Prince's Trust, some Regional Development Agencies and the Small Business Service. It has also begun to collate and share good practice on self-employment and small business management between disabled people, using cutting edge information technology to ensure total access and inclusion, regardless of impairment.

DEN has helped more than 125 clients directly to explore the possibility of enterprise as a positive career choice,

"The Disabled Entrepreneurs Network has changed and will continue to challenge the way mainstream bodies, business organisations and banks view disabled entrepreneurs and deliver information."

and to work through the practicalities of a business start-up. The confidence gained from the advice and information has meant around half of these people have set up their own business. For example, Ken was keen to make replica 1st century artefacts for museums and historic re-enactment enthusiasts. Having spent some time on market research, Ken was invited to the Hjemsted Oldtidspark museum in Denmark. DEN helped find some funding through a third party sufficient for Ken to make two informative visits.

He has since been able to place his work on display in European museums, is now running a successful artefacts business and has started writing a book on woodworking for historical re-enactors.

DEN relies on voluntary support as much as it does on paid consultants. Regional support networks were an important goal of the project – as a means to extend accessibility and participation. In practice these have taken longer to establish than was anticipated.

On a more positive note, DEN members can now develop collective views on strategic issues around disability, small business management and self-employment. DEN was launched into Scotland in November 2003 with the installation of business cards and a message board on the website. With funding from the London Development Agency it has also begun to develop a workbook on 'considering self employment'.

As co-ordinator Jane Hunt says: "The Disabled Entrepreneurs Network has changed and will continue to challenge the way mainstream bodies, business organisations and banks view disabled entrepreneurs and deliver information".



highlights

Like other entrepreneurs, disabled people need information and sign-posting to support, finance and training

DEN has helped more than 125 clients directly to explore the possibility of enterprise as a positive career choice

DEN uses cutting edge information technology to ensure total access and inclusion for all disabled people, regardless of impairment

Contact

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highlights

High street outlets

encourage people to get in touch

More than 24 people into employment or helped start their own business

Tackling welfare dependency

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Barnsley Development Agency – First services

Giving people the confidence to change their lives for the better often starts with breaking down barriers that exist in their own minds.

“We’ve found that coming at people with grand ideas of setting up businesses and using terms like “marketing” and “finance” can scare them off the whole idea of setting up on their own,” says Kevin Jebson, manager at Social Enterprise Barnsley, who set up the First Services project with Phoenix Enterprises in Rotherham to try and deal with the long-standing problem of unemployment in South Yorkshire.

Instead the First Services project lets people come to them. It encourages visits by offering simple services, such as photocopying or internet access through First Service branded shops and offices in some of the region’s most deprived areas.

“This means if you’re a plumber looking to set yourself up as a sole trader, or a window cleaner wanting to find new clients, we can do the simplest things such as printing fliers or advising on free directory services,” explains Mr Jebson.

First Services now runs three outlets in Doncaster, Rotherham and Barnsley, providing a full range of management and support services. Staff deal with customers on a one-to-one basis, helping to identify simple steps towards developing a business plan or expanding an existing company.

The project was set up in the middle of desperate unemployment problems in South Yorkshire, which is still reeling from the impact of the collapse of the mining industry in the 1980s.

The loss of the main source of employment in the region has sometimes led to three generations of the same

family suffering long-term unemployment and becoming dependent on welfare benefits. Many people feel that they don’t have the necessary written or administrative skills to start their own business.

“South Yorkshire traditionally had a very male-dominated work culture, and the loss of the main sources of employment meant many people felt they had no future prospect of work.” Mr Jebson says.

As the project progressed, First Services realised that it could also fill a gap by offering a programme of training that acted as a bridge to work for the long-term unemployed.

“People who haven’t worked for years, or who have never worked, need a lot of help before they even start to think about returning,” says Mr Jebson.

First Services started training programmes out of its shops and offices that looked at how to find vocational training, as well as providing people with management skills and skills assessment programmes. It has since helped dozens of people to get on the road to employment, and provided help to others looking to start their own businesses.

“Our experience shows how organisations can find a niche, but then expand within that area to help reach more people,” says Mr Jebson. “One of our major achievements is that we’re still here and still working to help crack the culture of state dependency that has crippled South Yorkshire for so long.”

“South Yorkshire traditionally had a very male-dominated work culture, and the loss of the main sources of employment meant many people felt they had no future prospect of work.”

Barton & Tredworth Developments – GLOBES

Gloucester’s Barton district was one of the most disadvantaged areas in the city, and Barton Street is what GLOBE’S business development officer describes as “the focus of the early regeneration effort in Gloucester”.

That made it a perfect location for the Globes premises (Gloucestershire Local Outreach Business and Enterprise Services). “It was ideal to make contact with the local ethnic communities and refugees”, explains Steve Hoare, business development officer. “It also enabled me to get to know the local area, with the help of my colleague, Martin Wallace, who grew up round here.”

Outreach was in the project title, so this was bound to be the priority. “We hit the ground running in August 2001 and initially we put a lot of effort into local outreach, meeting various groups and individuals in the local communities,” Mr Hoare says. But helping clients is not just a matter of going out to find them. It also requires you to be there when they want help, and this was another important aspect of the GLOBES project.

“We retained a fairly informal approach. We adopted an open-door policy so that if someone walked in we would see them so long as we weren’t tied up with another client.” The GLOBES team believe it’s important for people who may feel uncomfortable about ringing up to make an appointment, then going along a couple of weeks later to see an adviser in a formal setting. It meant that GLOBES built a reputation and attracted people who would have found a more formal approach somewhat daunting.

Many of them wanted to take skills they already had – for example, in the building trade – and transfer them from employment to self-employment. Others needed to raise money, so they needed help writing a business plan and meeting accountants or bankers. “We were just holding their hands”, Mr Hoare says. “We always underlined to them that it was their plan and their business – we were just there for moral support.”

A third group of clients needed training or official permits, so the project staff would direct them to appropriate courses where they could get a hygiene certificate or a licence for street trading. But many just needed the self-belief to set up on their own, Mr Hoare says.

“We’ve always taken the view that the biggest barrier people face is between their ears. People make assumptions about the mythical ‘they’ who won’t let them do anything. I have sometimes said to them: ‘Take me out and introduce me to “they”, and of course they can’t because there isn’t actually anybody.”

The project helped over 300 clients, and estimates that about two-thirds of them are now in business. People like Sol, who opened a shop catering to the local Filipino community and has since expanded to meet the needs of wider ethnic groups. And Gordon, who had long dreamed of becoming a cartoonist and achieved it with the help of GLOBES.

“We’ve always taken the view that the biggest barrier people face is between their ears.”



highlights

An open-door policy for people daunted by formality

Help for over 300 people, around 200 now in business

Taking existing skills from employment to self-employment

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highlights

The Black Business Association was set up to give businesses in the local BME community their own voice

BBA has more than 100 members and hopes to increase this figure to 250 over two years

Helping integrate black entrepreneurs into the mainstream business community

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Birmingham Chamber of Commerce – Black Business Association

The voice of a marginalized business community is often loudest when it comes from within. Despite every good intention, representative bodies ultimately fall short where they fail to gain the respect of the group they purport to serve.

Birmingham Chamber of Commerce recognised that the city's black businesses were largely disenfranchised from its range of business support. Following three years of consultation through events organised by the African Caribbean Business Forum with local African Caribbean entrepreneurs, the Birmingham Chamber discovered that there was a strong perception among black businesses that its services were not for them.

"We decided to put together a think tank," says Birmingham Chamber Project Manager, Paul Hanna. "I was initially sceptical about the level of interest, but about 350 local black businesses showed up at the very first meeting. The big message was that they wanted their own voice – their own entity."

Financed by the Phoenix Fund, the Black Business Association (BBA) was set up in November 2002. An independent, self-run company limited by guarantee, its aims include: facilitating the dissemination of best practice among black businesses, providing effective networking and inter-trading opportunities, lobbying for broader procurement opportunities, stimulating and supporting enterprise among young African Caribbeans, and developing business-to-business mentoring.

For example, a building firm, Bilacon UK, was able to secure a major refurbishment contract thanks to networking support from the BBA. Like many members, managing director Alex Nwokedi was initially unaware of the opportunity to bid, but through its strong networking links, BBA made sure that many of its members were

considered in the tender. As a result of its successful bid, Alex's building company was awarded the refurbishment contract for The Drum Arts Centre in Aston, Birmingham.

Mr Hanna sees the establishment of the BBA as a key step towards developing a solid business support framework behind local black business communities: As their own, independent organisation, the Black Business Association finds it much easier to provide information and support. This is a truly representative organisation. Although it has been hard work to get where they are now, the Association is continuing to grow and will have real impact in the long-term."

The BBA currently has more than 100 members. It hopes to increase this figure to 250 over two years, provide its members with 35 workshops and seminars, offer 30 IT training sessions, and enable on-going networking potential through regular monthly meetings.

In addition, with members of the BBA automatically qualifying for free membership of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, the increasing integration of black entrepreneurs into the Midlands' mainstream business community has brought extended benefits for all parties concerned: "It's certainly a mutually advantageous situation," says Mr Hanna. "Thanks to the BBA, black businesses now have a chance to tell us what support they need, and we can show them what we have to offer."

"The big message was
that they wanted their own voice –
their own entity."

Birmingham Chamber Training – PREP

Returning to work after childbirth can be a daunting experience for many mothers, especially older women who have been away from the workplace for several years.

In Birmingham, however, the Professional Returners Enterprise Partnership (PREP) has been set up to provide a dedicated support service to help professionally qualified women back to work. Established by Birmingham Chamber Training in 2001, its aim is to offer flexible, individual business advice to local women returners, particularly those from disadvantaged areas of the city.

When the project was set up the six-strong PREP staff went out to target specific groups of women.

“Initially we knocked on peoples’ doors and leafleted community organisations,” says Birmingham Chamber Training’s special project manager Des Ferguson. “There was a lot of legwork involved and we had more than 100 applications from local women.”

HB is a single mother with a difficult teenage daughter. She had dreamed of running her own dress-making business for several years, but had little experience of enterprise and poor experiences with the Inland Revenue. Through the PREP programme, she received bespoke business advice, which helped her to realise that running her own company was a viable proposition. Practical support, such as assistance with her accounts and ordering systems, came hand-in-hand with confidence-building sessions.

As a result, she successfully established a business selling dresses for weddings and special occasions. Subsequently, she has also set up a profitable greeting cards arm.

“Our work with women in the community began with an initial assessment, which involved feasibility studies,

“The crucial part of the programme was to meet the needs of the individual and not just provide a standard model.”

confidence building and helping them see if they were able to start their own business,” explains Mr Ferguson.

When the team decided that applicants were not yet strong enough to go through PREP, they referred the women to a new 12-week programme, another scheme created from the Phoenix Development Fund money. The objective was to see if they could move forward with some of their initial ideas, and learn more about the business elements of their entrepreneurial plans, in preparation for PREP.

“The crucial part of the programme was to meet the needs of the individual and not just provide a standard model,” says Mr Ferguson. “We had tailored support, including business advisors and a business consultant, which really helped to build the women’s confidence.”

As a result of the PREP programme, five qualified local women have returned to the work environment, 28 small businesses have been launched successfully and 48 jobs have been created.

“We have surpassed our expectations,” says Mr Ferguson. “The most rewarding aspect has been to see many of the women turn their lives around. They never realised they could run their own business, but they have taken on the challenge and many of them are now being very successful.”



highlights

Opening opportunities for women alienated from the workplace

Knocking on peoples’ doors to raise awareness of the programme

28 small businesses have been launched and 48 jobs have been created

Contact

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highlights

Breaking stereotypes

to boost entrepreneurs from BME communities

The Entrepreneur

Experiential Learning programme has helped 35 young people to develop leadership and entrepreneurial skills

Skilling For Business

programme has helped existing businesses develop the skills of their employees

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Black MBA Association (UK)

Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in Britain have traditionally lacked large numbers of inspirational, high profile role models in the workplace.

Without these visibly successful BME entrepreneurs, access to a dynamic business career can be as much about breaking stereotypes as individual achievement.

The Black MBA Association (BMBAA) was set up in July 2000 as a catalyst to facilitate development, inclusion and investment in overlooked pockets of communities in the UK and Europe.

“The Phoenix Development Fund has supported the BMBAA to develop and deliver a series of innovative development and business support programmes to enable black and minority ethnic entrepreneurs to realise their full potential,” says BMBAA’s executive director, Maureen Salmon.

“The most exciting intervention, however, has been the investment in the 35 young people (14 to 17 year olds) who participated in the Entrepreneur Experiential Learning programme, designed to develop their leadership and entrepreneurial skills,” she says.

The specific programmes implemented by the BMBAA include clinics, finance advisory workshops, scholarships, awards and ‘entrepreneur online’ – an online service aiming to promote entrepreneurship amongst the BME community. The BMBAA also provides tailored business support, coaching in-house and development workshops.

Over the last three years, the BMBAA has supported a wide range of BME entrepreneurs.

Dalgety Teas, for example, manufactures authentic flavoured herbal teas from the Caribbean. Founder and managing director Mark Dalgety set up the company in 1995 in response to the boom in the herbal tea market. Identifying an unexploited niche in Caribbean flavours, he began to pack loose Cerassie Tea in his spare room at home.

Following consultation and advice from the Black MBA Association (BMBAA), he gained the tools to implement a strategic approach to expanding his business. The company has since expanded and is based in its own factory units, produces a range of six flavours and is stocked in more than 2,000 independent ethnic grocers and health food shops, as well as selected high street supermarkets across the UK.

Mr Dalgety has also set up a small, but growing export market to the USA, West Africa and China.

Dalgety Caribbean Products has now also been formed to launch a new range of Caribbean produce, including plantain crisps, cassava crisps and extra hot sauce. As the company has grown and diversified, the BMBAA also helped Mr Dalgety to develop the skills of key members of staff through the Skilling For Business programme, jointly funded by PDF and the European Social Fund.

As a result, the company was awarded the Black Enterprise Upskilling Award in 2003. Mr Dalgety was also one of the five recipients of BMBAA 2003 Entrepreneur Scholarships.

“A series of innovative development and business support programmes to enable black and minority ethnic entrepreneurs to realise their full potential.”

Bolton Business Ventures – Women’s enterprise centre of excellence

One of the original aims of Bolton Business Ventures’ (BBV) project did not come to fruition, but it became an ill wind that blew some good.

As the project name suggests, the organisation’s plan was to establish a dedicated Women’s Enterprise Centre. BBV already offered fully equipped managed workspace, workshop and conference facilities, in-house advisers and consultants, networking opportunities and annual business awards.

But the need for a large capital budget to develop the new facilities, along with a lack of available premises, meant that BBV opted instead for a more flexible arrangement.

Operations executive Sylvia Philips explains: “If we had indeed decided on a centre in Bolton, it would have meant clients elsewhere, such as Wigan or Rochdale, would not have had easy access. We wanted to provide a service for women throughout North Manchester.”

BBV also realised it was not the workspace that was crucial, but the way in which the service was provided. They discovered that women are more likely to request and accept business support on a more personal level.

The provision of small sector networks, coaching, and one-to-one support, has helped many women gain the confidence to go on and attend larger events and workshops.

Claire, who is setting up a book-keeping business, agrees: “I’ve been out of employment for five years, bringing up my children,” she explains. “I feel I don’t know anything about the business world and often feel I don’t have enough confidence to sell myself, negotiate fees or deal with clients. The business mentoring really keeps me going.”

“Women need to have access to a responsive, flexible advisory service, with appropriate sources of finance and networking opportunities.”

An important aspect of the project has been the open-ended nature of the support. There are no limits on the time that can be given for advice. This has allowed advisers to develop a level of trust with clients, enabling them to work around difficulties women often face juggling the multiple demands of family and work.

Women have also been able to pick and mix the services they need from the range offered by BBV, which includes access to finance from its dedicated Women in Business loan fund. A website has also been set up to offer information and a forum for exchanging experience and knowledge.

The project has been able to help about 550 women over two and a half years. Sylvia Philips says they came because: “The help available to them wasn’t appropriate or relevant. Banks made them feel intimidated. Other business advice organisations didn’t offer a women-friendly service, with, for example, out-of-hours access.”

She adds: “I am most proud of the fact that we have been able to develop a comprehensive package of services that women can easily access. Women need to have access to responsive and flexible advisory services, appropriate sources of finance and networking opportunities.”



highlights

A focus on women wanting to set up or grow their own business

The project reached around 550 women

BBV’s Women in Business loan fund widens access to finance for beneficiaries

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highlights

In total 400 individuals have been assisted

More than 50 businesses have been established and a business network is up and running

Shaping services in response to changes in the wider economy

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Bootstrap Enterprises – Estate based enterprise support

Social enterprises, like their private sector counterparts, are never immune from the vagaries of the market, as Bootstrap Enterprises' project discovered to its cost.

When the project was dreamt up amid the turn of-Millennium dotcom frenzy, its goal - helping unemployed youngsters living on six of Hackney's most deprived estates to set up in business as IT entrepreneurs – must have sounded like a sure fire winner.

But the post-September 11 downturn in the City, together with the post-Millennium Bug retrenchment, soon combined to make the idea of setting up in business as a dotcom entrepreneur a far less appetising prospect.

"It was not working and we were not getting people through," says Bootstrap's community enterprise Manager, Mark Reedman. The company, which was providing services to tackle social inclusion and promote neighbourhood renewal long before they "became Whitehall buzzwords," realised that it had to tweak its services to adjust to changed economic circumstances.

Many aspects of the programme remain in place, including the provision of business start-up advice and support to micro and social enterprises in Hackney and surrounding London boroughs. And some of the micro-businesses still operate in IT, offering hardware set-up and software support services.

With Phoenix Fund backing, it has been able to take business support into hitherto uncharted territory on some of east London's toughest council estates. Many of the project's clients have been from ethnic minority backgrounds by default, Mr Reedman says, because they tend to be living in the most deprived areas.

"We tended to get lower skilled, more challenging clients who have an idea, but didn't have a bank account," he says. "They may have a fantastic idea but may not have written anything down." The lack of a bank account meant many were unable to get help from local single regeneration budget projects. Bootstrap has been able to help such clients progress to a stage where other agencies will then take them on and make further progress with them.

The Sarpong twins represent one of the project's success stories. Joseph and Patrick have set up the design2winz graphic design business.

Recently they were working flat out producing a full colour brochure and an international conference presentation for an important local charity.

Despite its slow start, the project has exceeded its targeted outcomes. Around 400 people have been assisted, 300 of those in the last 12 months of the programme. More than 50 businesses have been established and a business network is up and running.

Mr Reedman says Bootstrap's experience underlines the importance of flexibility. Instead of continuing with the original plan, Bootstrap was able to hold up its hands, admit that what it wanted to do was not working, and start afresh. "If we hadn't done that, we would still be flogging a dead horse, helping with IT," he says.

The flexible nature of the Phoenix Fund meant that it was possible to shift the focus of the programme, he adds. But he argues that there is an important lesson for too many projects that are scared to change tack because of restrictions imposed by the funding regimes within which they operate. He says: "If it's not achieving the results, then it's a waste of public money."

"We tended to get lower skilled, more challenging clients who had an idea but didn't have a bank account."

BACEN – Enterprising communities

People often don't realise they have the power to change their own lives. The Enterprising Communities project helped disadvantaged communities in Bristol to start and expand private and community-owned businesses.

The project began by inviting people to sessions that focussed on thinking through ideas for establishing and managing a community business, or entering self-employment. These sessions aimed to nurture and develop ideas into workable formats. Participants included people experiencing long-term unemployment, groups wanting to develop community or social enterprise, and potential business owners recently arrived in the UK.

Through workshops and one-to-one sessions, Enterprising Communities helped to build participants' confidence that their ideas could work. Potential social enterprises were helped not only to identify their own social and commercial objectives, but to "sell" the benefits of their enterprise within their community.

"Individuals or groups may have an idea, but not have the experience or confidence to make it work as a private business or social enterprise," says Steve Knapp, director of BACEN, the support agency that ran the Enterprising Communities project. "Through a series of tailored business development modules and one-to-one advice sessions they were able to make their ideas a reality"

Once someone had attended the first workshops and decided that they wanted to pursue their business idea, Enterprising Communities offered training to help build the detailed skills needed to set up a new venture, including organisational structures, market research and customer relations.

The project took training sessions to local communities, backed up by one-to-one business development support

"Individuals or groups may have an idea, but not have the experience or confidence to make it work as a private business or social enterprise."

from experienced advisors. By running informal social events that put people in touch with each other, it also encouraged the development of local networks of social enterprises and private businesses.

As it progressed, the project identified many people who would benefit from more focussed business training. Enterprising Communities developed sessions that looked at very specific issues, affecting different types of business. Subjects for these tailored workshops included training on raising finance, business planning, financial systems, monitoring and evaluation.

To ensure that enterprises survived beyond the start-up stage, the Enterprising Communities team regularly revisited enterprises to provide a detailed review and assessment of how the business was developing. The project would help to draw up an action plan, including future training opportunities and organisational milestones.

"It is rewarding to see social enterprises and businesses grow from ideas through to successful and flourishing enterprises," says Mr Knapp. "By staying with them every step of the way we were able to ensure that we offered them a full and comprehensive range of support services."

BRISTOL EVENING POST



highlights

The development of local networks of social and community enterprise across Bristol

Helping people to consider commercial viability of projects delivering social outcomes

Comprehensive range of support services

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highlights

Challenging negative stereotypes about the inner city as a bad place for business

More than 500 businesses and individuals have approached the Best programme for assistance

330 start ups or expansions as a result of the project

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

Bristol East Side Traders

Everybody loves a party, but Bristol East Side Traders (Best) used people's love of a good day out to help foster and encourage emerging businesses in some of Bristol's poorest areas.

By organising street festivals in St Marks Road and St Paul's Market, two of the city's busiest inner-city trading areas, the group helped create a sense of pride in the local community. The festivals enabled people to run stalls and try out their business ideas, and gave local traders the opportunity to get their products to customers. They also made closer links with other businesses operating in the two streets.

"The festivals got people out onto the streets talking to each other and exchanging ideas, while promoting the inner-city as a place to do business" said Helen Bone, project manager at Best. "Our aim is to share our experience, and demonstrate successful ways of supporting enterprise in the inner-city, which all helps us challenge negative stereotypes."

This face-to-face approach is central to how Best works with small social enterprises. It has since run seminars on the importance of festivals for encouraging business in deprived areas, and also uses one-to-one and group sessions to access hard-to-reach communities. Training is offered in aspects of business, including planning, finance and marketing.

The remit is simple: to take a grassroots approach to helping community businesses flourish. So far, over 500 businesses and individuals have approached Best for help.

"By knocking on doors and talking on a one-to-one basis with businesses, we can not only assess needs, encourage participation and build credibility, but can

ensure that all of our clients are aware of the opportunities available," Ms Bone says. "This could be including them in our inner-city business directory, inviting them to a marketing event, or inviting them to take part in networking opportunities."

The sheer scope of the services Best offers to local social enterprises also lets them provide individual businesses with long-term support.

When the local authority closed the Lower Ashley Road for repairs, a local businessman who owned a restaurant and oriental supermarket was threatened with ruin. Fearing a drop in trade, he turned to Best for advice.

The project helped him get the road re-opened, and to win compensation for lost earnings. They then went on to help him develop plans to move his business to a more profitable site.

Best also worked to improve the trading environment of the new premises, providing him and other small businesses in the area with advice on security, and how to work more closely with the police to tackle community safety issues.

The success of its work – over 330 individuals helped to start up or expand a small business in the Bristol area, safeguarding more than 100 jobs – has led to some of its projects being mainstreamed by local authority and enterprise support agencies.

"Hopefully this will let the project team use its time and resources to identify further gaps in local support services and develop projects to deal with these," Ms Bone says. "The funding we've already received gave us the flexibility actually to give some long-term business advice."

TERRY ROOK – GLANCE IMAGE

"The festivals got people out onto the streets talking to each other and exchanging ideas, while promoting the inner-city as a place to do business."

Business Enterprise Centre – Surviving into the mainstream

Surviving into the Mainstream tries to show aspiring business owners that the only limitations they face are the ones that they place on themselves.

So far the project has helped around 50 businesses run by women, and people from black and minority ethnic groups, to start small enterprises that have the potential to appeal to a mainstream market, reaching customers outside their own communities.

The message of the project's coaching programmes is that once you've got the business skills you need, the options are endless.

Surviving into the Mainstream found that a lot of people who approached them for help had started their businesses, but lacked the confidence or experience they needed to get them to grow. But through coaching, many learnt how to survive as small sustainable businesses serving their local community, before expanding in a more ambitious direction.

One man approached the project to help realise his dream of becoming a shirt designer. Through training and coaching sessions the project helped him move from being a sole trader selling clothing at a local market to a limited company.

Surviving into the Mainstream also found that taking people away from their normal work environment can open their eyes to a wider spectrum of business opportunities.

More than 30 businesses run by women and people from black and minority ethnic communities have gone through the project's residential business training programme, which also provides an environment that helps attendees build contacts with other small businesses in their local communities.

During the weekend, business owners attended seminars on everything from legal issues to business financing and

“We've tried to move away from traditional one-to-one sessions, to develop our training as a mentoring programme. Our coaches act as sounding boards rather than teachers.”

development plans. Personal development sessions encouraged the owners to talk about their concerns and share some of the problems they had already encountered.

Surviving into the Mainstream uses successful business owners to run training sessions – many of them are previous users of the project's services. They understand first-hand the challenges faced by women and people from BME backgrounds wanting to develop their businesses.

“This approach towards coaching also helps us develop a wide support network that new businesses can tap into for support and guidance,” says Cheryl Clarke, project manager at Surviving into the Mainstream. “We've tried to move away from traditional one-to-one sessions, to develop our training as a mentoring programme. Our coaches act as sounding boards rather than teachers.”

As well as the coaching, the Business Enterprise Centre runs one-day seminars, which focus on aspects of business including creative communications or customer relations, as well as longer courses looking at business skills in more detail.

“We've found we don't really need to tell people how to run their own business,” says Ms. Clarke. “But we provide a much-needed environment and support structure that enables it to happen.”



highlights

Supported 50 businesses run by women and BME groups

Promoting community cohesion

30 businesses participated in its weekend training programme

Contact

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highlights

Development of relationships with small, local trade associations to help them become more professional

A network of 30 business groups, bringing together more than 4,000 small businesses

Assistance with financial planning and advice on how to take their product or services to mainstream audiences

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Business Link Birmingham – Business support network

Sometimes it's better not to get rid of the middlemen, especially where they add value. The Business Support Network in Birmingham found that by helping develop local trade associations and community-based information services, it was able to help small businesses from deprived and ethnic minority communities gain the support that they needed.

"We found that trying to target some of the inner-city businesses directly just didn't work," says Paul Hanna, senior operations manager at Birmingham Business Link, the organisation that runs the Business Support Network. "They didn't know who we were, and couldn't see where we fitted in with their priorities. Trying to go in and preach marketing and business techniques was useless."

Instead, the team concentrated on developing relationships with local trade associations, which were often run by just one or two local business people. They were trying to provide a communal focus point for a group of traders or businesses in one particular community, where a trusting relationship existed and the issues were common, often in their own time and at their own cost.

The Network worked to put these associations on a more formal footing, helping them to become registered companies and to access funding for members of staff.

By doing so, the project was able to help them really get to grips with the issues facing small businesses.

"We found that a lot of inner-city enterprises needed help sorting out their problems with security or other environmental concerns such as rubbish collections or access for their customers and staff," says Mr Hanna. "At that point they simply weren't interested in talking to us. Yet once we helped the trade associations address their immediate concerns, this started to change."

The project organised meetings between associations and local businesses to build relationships that would help business owners voice their concerns and talk through any problems they might be facing.

"They could act as a bridge between service providers and inner city business owners."

By attending these meetings, the Business Support Network was also able to offer assistance with financial planning, and advice on how to take their product or services to mainstream audiences.

The project also started distributing a newsletter with details of available training opportunities and seminars on particular issues, such as finance, taxation or employment law.

By working in this way, a network of 30 business groups has been created, which has brought together over 4,000 small businesses and key service providers. This would have been impossible before the start of the scheme.

"Empowering the middle-person to develop a trusting and mutual relationship with local traders and enterprises meant that they could act as a bridge between service providers and inner city business owners," says Paul. "We were then able to respond to the particular issues facing these small businesses by reworking our programmes to meet their different demands, which would have been impossible before."

Business Link County Durham – Social and community enterprise task force

Learning from the experiences of others is key to the success of any business. The “Watch this – learn this” approach, taken by Business Link County Durham, has helped over 25 new businesses get up-and-running in the Durham area.

“It’s all about developing local networks that get people learning from each other without having to rely on outside support services,” explains Mike Berriman, team leader at Business Link County Durham. “By looking at how others have done it, small businesses have more chance of succeeding and of seeing themselves as part of a community.”

The Business Link’s Social and Community Enterprise Task Force take budding social entrepreneurs to visit existing social enterprises where they learn how to change a good idea into a practical business model.

“If we can help foster the attitude that businesses should work together in the same community, then the start-ups we’re helping now will be there to provide advice to other emerging companies in the years to come,” says Mr Berriman.

Equipped with experts in all aspects of business, including planning, marketing and finance, the Task Force provides individuals and emerging businesses with one-to-one help in everything from writing a business plan, to securing funding and launching a project.

The team also develops new ways to help provide different services to local areas.

Last year it helped a man from a small rural town near Durham to develop his idea of starting a community radio station. Using its own local network of contacts, the Task Force drew together a management committee, enlisting the help of local professionals including a newspaper journalist and local council member. Soon they were overseeing the implementation of an initial business plan.

“By looking to how others have done it, small businesses have more chance of succeeding and of seeing themselves as part of a community.”

Even after the project had secured funding, the Task Force continued working with the community radio team to provide legal advice and help build a website.

“The community radio station is now on-air, and I think everybody involved got a tremendous sense of achievement from the project,” says Mr Berriman. “In fact one of our team is now a volunteer presenter. That shows the extent to which we get involved with different projects springing up all over Durham.”

By illustrating how the work of social enterprises can benefit local people, Business Link County Durham is also working to raise support and awareness of emerging businesses in the Durham area. It recently highlighted to local schools how care programmes, developed by nearby social enterprises, could help them provide much-needed after-school care for pupils. The Task Force has also helped start-up businesses to design and launch community gyms.

“People still don’t really understand what a social enterprise is or why they exist, but local people are gaining real benefit from starting up a business and taking their work to the local community,” says Mr Berriman. “We provide help along the way and hope that they then do the rest.”



highlights

The taskforce is equipped with experts in all aspects of business, including planning, marketing and finance

Raising the profile of social enterprise to a wide audience, including schools, across Durham

Tailored teams pulled together to meet an emerging social enterprise’s business needs

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highlights

Personal development

can help clarify entrepreneurial goals

Joint working in schools with existing business programmes

Innovative work on lifestyle choices

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Business Link Derbyshire – NOMAD

Personal development is the foundation stone of innovative new business development in Derbyshire's coalfields and Peak District. It means you may start with an idea for a tropical fish shop but end up tendering for, and winning, a major telecoms contract.

It is this evolution of ideas which excites project manager Pauline Craddock about the impact of NOMAD (New Opportunities to Make a Difference in Derbyshire).

NOMAD is a business support project delivered by Derbyshire Chamber and Business Link. Over 30 months to December 2003, the project helped young people, women and ex-miners through personal development, counselling, networking, training and project management.

So far, 84 have set up new businesses and support has been given to 128 existing small businesses.

Ms Craddock has worked with 10 embryonic businesses in a 'business incubator' and has been involved in advising many women and social enterprises. But the most innovative work, she feels, has been in getting to the heart of lifestyle choices which potential entrepreneurs make.

"It is about applying personal development rules to people and getting them to think about what they really want to do," she says. "With the person who came to me with the idea of setting up a tropical fish shop, I explored where he wanted to be, as a person, in 30 years time. We then got into a very different area. He had massive management and sales experience and through a stroke of luck, a contract came up for his area in telecoms. He tendered for it and got it. He's now got his own business, can spend time on his hobby and has control over his life," she says.

While Ms Craddock deals with adults making lifestyle choices, Ron Shrimpton, another of NOMAD's project managers, concentrated on broadening the options for young people.

"It is about applying personal development rules to people and getting them to think about what they really want to do."

NOMAD put together a package of expertise including Business Link Derbyshire's IT advisors and other staff, plus the use of an IT centre. They took it into 14 schools to promote self-employment with pupils from year 10 upwards, and some in special education aged up to 27.

"We have had one group making wooden jigsaws and lavender oils and cards. They made a profit as well. In some schools we set up a dummy business and we have tried to link programmes to Young Enterprise and World of Work," says Mr Shrimpton.

He believes the difference NOMAD has made has been in its "account management" approach. Margaret Lindley of Special Occasions, Clowne, is one of the women NOMAD helped. She based her company on the favours, or bonboniers, she made for family and friends for weddings, birthdays, christenings and other celebrations.

NOMAD provided information about running a business, identifying suppliers of decorative materials and advising on employment law. "My business has now expanded and receives business from organisations staging corporate events, and national hotel groups. My daughter, Amie, is now the owner, taking it forward in its new development," says Ms Lindley.

Business Link Norfolk – Building entrepreneurial skills (BEST)

Social enterprises commonly drive growth in parts of the local economy, yet across the UK few enjoy the same level of business support offered to more conventional companies by mainstream advisory bodies.

At the same time, social enterprises are frequently overlooked by local public sector procurement managers as key suppliers of high quality goods or services.

Building Entrepreneurial Skills (BEST) was a three-year development programme to support social enterprises in Norfolk. It set out to create an identity for the social enterprise sector and to create access to appropriate business support for new and existing social enterprises. It aimed both to upgrade the entrepreneurial skills of managers and to develop a thriving practitioner network for cascading this learning.

BEST also sought to facilitate the development of localised supply chains and so-called 'inter-trading' between local social enterprises to help improve their income and long term sustainability.

"Nearbuyou" is the first website of its kind in the UK dedicated to support social enterprise trading. It's a lot more than a business directory. Members can have a web page but public and private sector organisations can also post tenders for social enterprises to bid for. To support local inter-trading the site also has a "community area" where users can create supply chain networks to maximise the business potential of the social economy. Linked to this, BEST held a regional social enterprise trade fair in October 2003 and hope to repeat this every two years.

Survey research showed that in 2001 over 250 social enterprises in Norfolk employed over 1,800 people and 4,600 volunteers to provide a wide range of goods

and services that contribute over £300 million to the local economy.

Yet until 2001, many of these organisations had received no formal business support at all and only limited help from other social businesses. "We knew that to succeed BEST needed to establish a strong network of social enterprises within which individuals and organisations could meet – for dialogue or training – to share the innovation and good practice which is their hallmark," says project manager Sally Kelly.

The project works partly to support social enterprise start-ups – working on the supply side. For example, Karen Flynn, a disabled, unemployed single parent of two, took a series of courses under the programme. She then produced a business plan for a furniture recycling scheme, to be set up with support from the New Deal for Communities in one of its project areas on the outskirts of Norwich. The project is now up and running with Ms Flynn fully employed as project director.

BEST also works with public sector procurement specialists to raise awareness of how social enterprises offer quality services – the demand side.

Mark Bishop, the economic development officer for South Norfolk District Council, attended a BEST programme called "Who Cuts Your Grass" to gain more insight into how he could better integrate local social and economic development processes through his work.

He soon went on to help a "recycle and reuse" group get started in South Norfolk, helped develop a number of local Food Groups and has made sure that every officer in the council with procurement responsibilities now has full details about of the "Nearbuyou" website.

"We knew that to succeed, BEST needed to establish a strong network of social enterprises within which individuals and organisations could meet."

SE

highlights

Building Entrepreneurial Skills (BEST) was a three-year development programme to support social enterprises in Norfolk that recruited over 80 client groups

Works with public sector procurement specialists to raise awareness of how social enterprises offer quality services

Created the 'Nearbuyou' website – the first in the UK dedicated to social enterprise trading opportunities

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING



highlights

BME users of Business Link Hertfordshire start-up services up from 7% to 11.5%

The Business Adviser for Minority Businesses for Minority Businesses has worked with over 300 businesses with 50 significant interventions

The project has trained 332 delegates at 7 skills events, a further 400 have attended 7 Business Networking events. membership of the Minority Business Network, has grown from 300 to 710 members

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

Business Link Hertfordshire – Breaking barriers

A stroll down a typical Hertfordshire high street shows that the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and kicking among the ethnic minority communities that make up six per cent of the county's population.

But many black and ethnic minority (BME) firms remain cut off from the business mainstream. This can inhibit their growth prospects.

The Breaking Barriers project was set up by Business Link Hertfordshire to ensure that BME firms could benefit from the advice and support that it offers. The key goal was to increase the take up of support services by individuals and businesses of ethnic minority origin. The approach was to create awareness, build confidence and improve access.

The project primarily provides outreach work with BME firms to show them how to access mainstream business support services. It also works with mainstream business service providers such as banks and accountancy firms to show how their services can be better tailored to ethnic minority clients' needs, resulting in a culture shift towards ethnic minority firms within organisations like the county's chambers of commerce and enterprise agencies.

A dedicated business adviser for minority businesses offers advice and support to help people take advantage of mainstream provision. He also works with ethnic minority firms to help draw up and implement business action plans.

One of Breaking Barriers' success stories is Islamic Talking Books, which was set up by Akhtar Hussein in his back room. He had the idea of creating talking books, with stories from the Koran, as a teaching aid for Muslim children. Mr Hussein used Breaking Barriers' specialist one-to-one support to help develop his series of audio talking books from a concept into a printed and published product that is now on sale.

According to Amrit Maan, the business adviser for minority businesses, one of the big lessons has been that services must be carefully tailored to the very different needs of the diverse ethnic minority communities. For example, he says that while African-Caribbean firms often need help with premises and finance, these problems tend to be far less pressing among South Asian businesses.

Contact with Chinese lifestyle businesses, which often operate during the evening, has been a significant gap in the project's activities. With its continuation funding from the Phoenix Development Fund, Breaking Barriers aims to remedy this shortfall by recruiting evening outreach workers, to promote Business Link services.

Breaking Barriers has run a series of high profile networking events that have featured BME business stars like the Cobra Beer and Coffee Republic founders Karan Bilimoria and Sahar Hashemi. Having such high-profile speakers has helped pull in up to 120 attendees.

But besides the glamour of rubbing shoulders with high-profile national entrepreneurs, there are hard-headed reasons to turn up too. "Many people see these network events as another route to their market," says Mr Maan. One example is the importer of Chinese marble and stone who found a new customer for her materials after meeting a builder at a Breaking Barriers event.

Such activities have helped spur an increase in the proportion of Business Link Hertfordshire's BME users from 7% to 11.5 % of the total within the past three years. Membership of the Minority Business Network has grown from 300 to 710 members in a space of 18 months.

"We have done a lot of work with start ups, with people who have never considered business before, but we now need to work with high growth businesses."

Business Link London – Mainstreaming social enterprise business support

London's social enterprises had little in the way of mainstream business support before the establishment three years ago of Business Link for London's (BL4L) initiative: 'Mainstreaming Social Enterprise Business Support in London'.

BL4L's Andy Griffiths, who ran the initiative, says the project taught the agency some important lessons. "We probably spent more time than we should have working with clients, such as start-ups with very intensive support needs which BL4L was not best qualified to help."

During its second year of operation, the project shifted focus to more established social enterprises to help them to develop. BL4L was able to provide help with the kind of issues that social enterprises particularly need to address, such as ethical procurement.

One of the success stories was a new centre for neighbourhood renewal on the Partmore estate, on the boundary between the south London boroughs of Lambeth and Wandsworth.

Following its take-over by a tenant co-operative, the estate's manager Yvonne Carr applied to BL4L for help with raising funds. "The project was at risk of losing the first tranche of funds because the target was to deliver IT services for which there was no available space," says BL4L's Gibril Faal, who became the project's mentor. He was able to help arrange alternative space for the delivery of the IT services, which secured this funding.

More importantly, he says the application of business planning techniques provided a strategic focus. The breakthrough, in terms of making the project stack up financially, was to widen the services on offer.

As well as offering youth club facilities, a café and child care, IT and life-long learning would be on the menu. A series of partnerships with local service providers like the further education college were crucial to achieving this wider range of services.

But perhaps more important, Mr Faal believes, was Ms Carr's success in winning high profile backing for the project. First of all, she persuaded Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stephens to become a patron, followed by Bishop of Southwark Tom Butler.

Sir John's involvement also sparked the interest of Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown, who identified it as a good example of his mission to inject enterprise values into the most forbidding of settings. Last November, the Chancellor opened the centre himself.

Tragically, Yvonne died from a heart attack, just over a month before the Chancellor visited the project that she had spent so much time getting off the ground. But her legacy lives on, following the decision to name the building the Yvonne Carr Centre in her honour.

Her work also carries on. Not only is the centre up and running, but a user panel is being set up to oversee the services that it provides and the establishment of a youth parliament is being explored.

And as the centre has created a secure foundation for neighbourhood renewal efforts in a deprived area of south London, the 'Mainstreaming' initiative has provided a solid platform for the development of social enterprise business support across the capital. Mr Griffiths says: "It has been the key that is unlocking huge potential in London."



highlights

Business support and advice to start-up and existing social enterprises across London

Helping organisations tackle issues such as ethical procurement

The creation of a solid platform for the development of social enterprise business support across the capital

Contact

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"It has been the key that is unlocking huge potential in London."



highlights

12 social enterprises set up and a further 44 provided with support

More than 500 clients engaged in the project including over 300 women who have been encouraged to consider self-employment

Inventiveness is needed to raise awareness and tackle apathy towards self-employment

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Business Link Staffordshire

Staffordshire has suffered from a long tradition of “jobs for life” in industries that either disappeared or are in serious decline, such as coal mining, steel and ceramics.

But Business Link Staffordshire, with partners Business Initiative, Business Enterprise Support and Be Together, set out to challenge the county’s culture and negative attitudes towards entrepreneurship and self employment. “We wanted to encourage individuals to view self employment as a positive and viable career option and increase the new business formation rate,” says business start-up manager Mark Tomblin.

One of the most important lessons from the project is that inventiveness is needed to address the apathy that exists in some of these areas. Through a series of community events the project has engaged with 4,000 clients, including women, young unemployed adults from socially deprived wards, and school children.

They are particularly proud of the “Big Ideas” workshops that seek to generate business ideas and ultimately business start-ups in deprived areas. “One such event had over 40 women in a room and through a series of fun exercises, games and activities, helped them to interact with people, raise their aspirations, confidence and self reliance,” Mr Tomblin reports.

Michelle Steadman, a single parent from Rugeley, is one of the success stories. She wanted to provide a secure future for herself and her 10-year old son, but needed help and guidance to set up her own business. “With the support, training and confidence I gained from the

Phoenix project I have been able to set up Keytel Telecommunications and it is now progressing very well” she says.

In addition, enterprise outreach workers have been put into smaller towns such as Biddulph to work with local people. Once a week there is someone at Biddulph Library to help people who wouldn’t feel comfortable going into a formal agency to enquire about the start-up support available.

Mr Tomblin says young people are now demonstrating a greater understanding of enterprise and entrepreneurship. That includes primary school ages, following a project for local school children aged 8 and 9.

“We got them together to think about having an idea in the way that an inventor does. We had real-life inventor, Trevor Bayliss, in a shed on the stage with smoke coming out of the chimney, taking the children on a fun journey of having an idea and then developing it. We also gave the children a competition to think of a start-up idea, develop it and present it to a panel. The children were soon talking about business concepts such as cash flows.” he reports.

Business Link Staffordshire is continuing this work, building new strategies into their core provision.

“We hope to get a full-time enterprise advocate into community groups and schools to promote entrepreneurship and our start-up service,” Mr Tomblin says.

“Starting my own business was a far riskier prospect than I had imagined but Phoenix gave me the confidence and support to make it happen.”

Business Services (East Lancashire) – Growing new businesses

Manufacturing and engineering employed nearly 70% of people in East Lancashire as recently as 1993 but after a jobs haemorrhage the figure fell to 38%.

This wide ranging project, jointly funded by Phoenix and the EU, set out to counter that employment loss by developing an enterprise culture in the area.

The initial target groups were women, ethnic minorities and men over the age of 45 with few formal qualifications. After some initial research, the criteria were widened to include young people, and virtually anyone living in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

Enterprise and Inclusion Manager Shufkat Razaq says: "We set out to engage with young people and women in a new way, to present self-employment as a viable career option to many who rarely think about this seriously. We don't promote enterprise directly – we work from within the community to reach people who don't have self-employed role models around them and lack the personal skills or confidence to pursue their business ideas."

Alchemy Club 14:25 was formed specifically to grow a more entrepreneurial culture among people between the ages of 14 and 25. It began operating in October 2003, directed by a board made up of six 20-25 year olds that run their own businesses, two 14-16 year olds and two 17-19 year olds. The board also has four young employees from the Business Services (East Lancashire), the local Asian Business Federation and Burnley Enterprise Trust. The club runs workshops (run by successful entrepreneurs), small business visits and 'Question Time' sessions with entrepreneurs and selected celebrities.

Phoenix funding was also used for a 'Women into Business' project run by Burnley Enterprise Trust. Here a

"Many mainstream business support organisations need persuasion to adopt a more flexible approach to issues that commonly have a direct bearing on clients starting out from a position of marked disadvantage."

paid co-ordinator helps women in the most deprived parts of Burnley identify opportunities and develop the confidence to turn their hobbies and interests into a business. From 160 enquiries this project has yielded 40 business starts, many of them supported by an experienced female business adviser.

The same project also supports more conventional start-ups, such as Roadwise, a business set up in April 2003 by Shagufta Mahmood to offer driving instruction to young Asian women.

Ridge is another example – a catering company set up by Pam Eglin and Wendy Locke with support from Burnley Enterprise Trust. What began as a sandwich delivery business has evolved into a restaurant and function venue in Burnley, where one of the clients is the local Women's Business Network.

East Lancashire has also become the location for Europe's first Sirolli Enterprise Facilitation Project (named after Dr Ernesto Sirolli). Rossendale is following towns in Australia, Canada and the USA in adopting this pioneering approach, which recruits mainstream organisations and successful local business people to provide peer support and mentoring for new starts and for small businesses wanting to expand.

"Many mainstream business support organisations need persuasion to adopt a more flexible approach to issues that commonly have a direct bearing on clients starting out from a position of marked disadvantage," adds Mr Razaq.



highlights

The 'Women into Business' project run by Burnley Enterprise Trust has yielded 40 business start-ups from 160 enquiries

Alchemy Club 14:25 is a business club founded for and run by young people

Working within the community to reach people who don't have self-employed role models

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highlights

Taking the computing message to people in traditional businesses and deprived communities

A softly softly approach is needed to build up managers' confidence

40 businesses helped with design and broader computer skills

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The CADCAM Centre – Enigma project

Computers are so ubiquitous these days that it is easy to forget there are still plenty of people who have never touched a keyboard. That can not only damage the prospects for business success, but the confidence barrier makes it difficult to overcome this kind of exclusion.

“People in the Establishment tend to think of a PC as an extra pair of hands, and assume everybody else is the same. But there are a lot of people in hard-to-reach communities who need the confidence to go and use them”, explains Elizabeth Keenan of The CADCAM Centre.

The centre’s original mission was to provide shared computing power for design and manufacturing when it was less affordable. Now it has used Phoenix funding to take the message to people in traditional businesses and deprived communities that have been excluded from the computing revolution.

Companies like Hardy Non-ferrous Metals, a foundry business in one of the oldest industrial parts of Middlesbrough. Like many small businesses, it had simply been carrying on as it always had – but needed to change to react to the decline of the steel industry.

“It had been untouched by any other support organisation”, says Keith Dunn, the Enigma Project Manager. That was partly because of a distrust of the “suits” who might have been able to provide advice. “I purposely don’t wear a suit, because I want to align myself with them”, Mr Dunn says.

He believes businesses like these need a softly softly approach to build up managers’ confidence slowly. “It’s no good walking in full of IT buzzwords. That can be the ultimate put-off, especially for people who are over 45. You have to go back again and again. It takes several months.”

The intervention can be crucial, though. For example, Mr Dunn says one company was trading in difficult conditions but thanks to the introduction of technology, has weathered the storm. Westgate Structural Engineers had valuable draughting skills used in drawing details for structural steel supports, but this was all done on traditional boards rather than computers. With its traditional, local client base shrinking, prospects were grim.

“I introduced them to computer-aided design and now they have clients across the UK, who wouldn’t talk to

them before because they had no email,” Mr Dunn says. Instead of going bust, they have now taken on extra staff.

The project has helped about 40 businesses in similar ways, out of more than 400 which have been contacted. Mr Dunn says the biggest lesson is the amount of hand-holding needed by small traditional businesses like these.

Helping the business can also be a way into helping the people in them and in the local communities. Working with Riverside College, The CADCAM Centre developed a series of bite-sized modules which it takes into companies whose confidence it has won. Small groups of employees work in short sessions, depending on the needs of the business, and these computer familiarisation “courses” count towards an NVQ.

“If you speak in their language you can get them to realise what they can achieve”, Ms Keenan says. “So what started as business support has broadened into people support.”

“It’s no good walking in full of IT buzzwords. That can be the ultimate put-off, especially for people who are over 45.”

Community Action Network – Linking social entrepreneurs across England

The presence of firms like McDonald's in places as diverse as Basingstoke and Beijing demonstrate that the franchising business model is in rude health.

Community Action Network (CAN) has been running a Phoenix Fund project to explore how this concept can be applied to promote the development of social enterprises.

The project, called “Linking social entrepreneurs across England” has also looked into creating the conditions for clusters of not for profit businesses on the lines of CAN's own successful Mezzanine floor development next to Waterloo station in central London.

The project's stated goal is to promote and explore ways of replicating social enterprises via franchising. CAN's director of finance and development, Donald Findley, says that franchising offers a way of encouraging social enterprise development in the most run down areas.

“It's very hard to set up a business if there's no business culture,” Mr Findley says. “The record of social enterprises in new deal for communities areas is not good.” He believes that funders are more willing to support a start up if it is associated with an organisation with a proven track record.

An organisation that has benefited from CAN's input is the London based recycling business Greenworks. In the early days of the Phoenix project CAN provided Greenworks – then a start-up – with subsidised workspace in the Mezzanine. CAN also provided Greenworks founder Colin Crooks with business mentoring, in-depth assessment and feedback which enabled him to change the company's costing structure and the way it operated.

CAN also introduced Crooks to other recycling social enterprises including STRIDE in Leicester . Greenworks started trading with STRIDE in March 2003 and it is

examining a potential collaborative venture in Africa. Greenworks is now working with CAN on plans for franchising in other parts of the UK.

A lot of social enterprises are interested in franchising, but few have the track record to put it into practice. Greenworks is one of the handful of “top end” organisations, cited by Mr Findley, able to replicate themselves. Many social enterprise clients are “not ready” for franchising, he says, because they are not making any profit. “We've found the going hard,” he says. Another problem has been the lack of management support.

As a result, rather than encouraging the development of franchising arrangements, CAN has had to put more effort than expected into getting businesses into a position where they can contemplate franchising. Now, Mr Findley has set a goal for a number of businesses to replicate themselves within the next two years. “It's put up or shut up time,” he says.

The project's linked goal of establishing clusters of co-located social enterprises has been arguably more successful. The purported benefit of co-location is that it helps promote information exchange and trade between social enterprises. The company is planning to set up a new cluster arrangement at London Bridge – in the summer of 2004.

“It's very hard to set up a business if there's no business culture.”



highlights

Helping social enterprises to develop franchise models

The creation of co-working clusters for social sector organisations

Building trading links between organisations

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING



highlights

Self-sustaining project generating 60% of its own income

Introduces government, business and the voluntary sector to the concept of social enterprise

Organising learning trips in UK, the USA and South Africa

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The Cat's Pyjamas

Co-ordinator Ann-Marie Grimes is very emphatic that nobody should get the wrong idea about the nature of The Cat's Pyjamas. "We're more than a project, we're a business," she says.

The Cat's Pyjamas is a partnership between Liverpool based Urban Strategy associates and FRC Group, which was a social enterprise long before the term was in common parlance. The aim is to use some of the practical experience that FRC and other social businesses have picked up, to aid other would-be social entrepreneurs.

The Cat's Pyjamas offers best practice and information about social enterprise to anybody thinking about establishing one, or to private sector businesses wanting to address their social objectives. The main mechanism for doing this is through a programme of seminars and master classes run by successful social entrepreneurs.

The events are aimed at social entrepreneurs from disadvantaged communities. But others are welcome. Government officials and big businesses have been spotted at the Cat's Pyjamas. And the business has organised a trip to the USA to see how social enterprise works on the other side of the Atlantic, as well as a visit to South Africa in March 2004.

Alongside the events, and a lively website, the Cat's Pyjamas has published a book "There's no business like social business," an accessible collection of practical insights, top tips and real life case studies based on the practical experience of social enterprises in the UK.

The aim of both the events and the literature is to offer aspiring social business leaders advice and insight rooted

in the reality of actual social enterprises, exploring issues such as how social and private businesses differ, whether grant-funded organisations should take the leap into the social enterprise sector, and how they can balance profit and social purpose.

The Phoenix funding paid for some of the Cat's Pyjamas staffing costs during its first few years of operation, and allowed the company to experiment with high risk ventures such as Top Cat, the USA event. 'It also gave us the ability to offer free places on the programmes to people who would otherwise not have the funds themselves,' says Mrs Grimes.

One beneficiary was David Cooper, who secured a month's secondment through the Cat's Pyjamas at a social enterprise called CREATE Liverpool. There he spent a month looking at new opportunities for the company and helping its leadership team develop the business.

The project now works on a more business-like footing, which it can afford to do because demand for places outstrips supply. The Cat's Pyjamas earned 60 per cent of its income during the term of the PDF. From 1 April 2004, the company will survive purely on sales income.

"Other social enterprises could profitably take a leaf out of the Cat's Pyjamas book," says Ms Grimes. But she says one of the Cat's Pyjamas most important achievements has been the hundreds of people who have been inspired by what is possible:- "We have been able to push the boundaries about what a social enterprise can do," she says.

"We have been able to push the boundaries about what a social enterprise can do."

CDA South East Hampshire & Isle of Wight – Island initiative

It was by chance that two separate groups wanting help to set up a community café attended the same business advice session organised by the Island Initiative project.

Now they have formed a co-operative and are running a successful café in one of the Isle of Wight's most deprived areas.

As well as providing a focus for the local community, the café provides free internet access and information from other social enterprises, to help build networks between local people.

The Island Initiative was established to tackle social exclusion on the Isle of Wight by supporting community businesses, and fostering an environment where local co-operatives could work on setting up small social enterprises.

Instead of offering a range of outreach services, or generic skills training, the Island Initiative believed it could best help local communities by acting as business mentors. It advertised services throughout the Isle of Wight and ran weekly advice sessions in libraries and job centres, where people could seek help on how to make a business idea come to life.

"People on the Isle of Wight know more about what's needed in the local community than we do," says Mike Tiller, business development manager at CDA South East Hants & Wight, which runs the Island Initiative. "We set this project up to respond to people's needs, not go in and tell them what to do. Our aim was to be available to all across the island and as flexible as possible."

The idea behind the project was to empower people to make their own decisions. After listening to people's ideas for community initiatives, the project helped them with some of the practical elements, such as filling out forms or drawing up a business plan.

"At first we thought the project would mainly be run through our website, which offers a full online business training programme," says Mr Tiller. "But we found that people preferred to talk through business development ideas face-to-face and that many appreciated an external view on their ideas."

As well as offering one-to-one and group advice sessions, the Island Initiative also provided a bridge to help local entrepreneurs link up; the project's weekly sessions provide an opportunity for people to network and find out what other community groups are up to.

So far the project has helped over 75 individuals or groups set up as small businesses or social enterprises. The Island Initiative thinks that they are already helping to turn the Isle of Wight into an environment where community ventures can flourish.

"People on the Isle of Wight have a very clear idea of what is needed to make things better for local communities, it's just a question of giving them confidence and improving access to resources and information," Mr Tiller says.

"We set this project up to respond to people's needs, not to go in and tell them what to do. Our aim was to be available to all across the island and as flexible as possible."



highlights

75 individuals or groups helped to set up as small businesses or social enterprises

Taking business support and advice to local communities

Encouragement of networking between businesses and social enterprises

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highlights

10 community groups delivering basic business training

65 business mentor relationships

Participants gain enough knowledge to put together a basic business plan

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

Centre for Enterprise – Ideaspark

How do you encourage people to start a new business if you can't lure them into places where the skills they need are on offer?

You create a training package which can travel – to community centres and groups where people already meet – and you make it flexible enough to be delivered in different languages or at a different pace, so it helps to build confidence and self-esteem.

IdeaSpark is such a programme, aimed at disadvantaged communities in Leicester – people on benefits, refugees and those from different ethnic groups who are in one way or another excluded from more conventional business training.

Project co-ordinator Kate Cowan explains: “People from disadvantaged communities may not be confident enough for traditional training or can't afford it. We showed that by going out to communities and using the local skills and knowledge of the community you can encourage people who would not normally participate and reach people where they feel most comfortable.”

The basis of IdeaSpark is a business skills course of up to 20 hours, covering five different areas: a basic introduction to business, finance, marketing, market research and legal issues. By the end of the programme, participants have enough knowledge to put together a basic business plan and be referred on to others who can help them develop it further.

While IdeaSpark is a general business introduction, Ms Cowan says clients often want to use their existing skills and spot the gaps in their area for services such as catering, sewing and dressmaking, care and childminding. And IdeaSpark certainly does seem to have sparked activity. The programme has trained 160 people, identified

“By going out to communities and using the local skills and knowledge of the community you can encourage people who would not normally participate.”

12 business mentors and generated 65 business mentoring relationships. Ten organisations have been trained to deliver the IdeaSpark programme and 18 individuals have started a business as a result.

But the project doesn't end there. April 2004 is the start of IdeaSpark II – a programme aimed at developing the concept further by offering business coaches, providing a Business Resource Centre including the use of photocopier and internet, and help with business plans. It's also launching two social enterprises as testing grounds “for would-be entrepreneurs to gain hands-on experience.”

What difference has it made? Ms Cowan says other organisations are now aware of the benefits of working within the community and building new links, but also that much more support is needed in the first three years of a new business than is often acknowledged. “We've built a momentum in the city and within communities.” she adds. The individuals who benefited from IdeaSpark are the proof of how it can change lives.

Mary, for example, is an African-Caribbean with two young children. She has been on benefits for a long-time. She was introduced to IdeaSpark in May 2001, with an idea of starting a West Indian Bakery/Caribbean Restaurant. After the IdeaSpark training she went on to Basic Skills and Computer Literacy at a local college and has now started test trading.

Ian and William had been working together for a local firm which made them redundant. They attended an IdeaSpark Course, received support with a business plan and used the redundancy money to set up a business called Guttersnipe, cleaning gutters and dealing with household waste.

Chamber Business Enterprises – Supporting social inclusion

Starting up in business can be challenging enough for an able-bodied individual, let alone for somebody who is disabled. But self-employment may offer a route to independence for people who often find getting a job difficult.

Chamber Business Enterprise decided it would try and foster disabled social enterprise through its “Supporting Social Inclusion” initiative, which was supported jointly by the Phoenix and European Regional Development funds.

The project supported pre-start, start-up and micro businesses for people with disabilities as well as ethnic minority owned businesses, and businesses in the childcare sector.

Marie, who has been visually impaired for 35 years and was unemployed, has been one of Chamber’s success stories. She wanted to set up a company to show those who can see the problems that visually impaired people face, and provide training in how to help.

She initially went to charities for the blind but found they couldn’t offer business advice, after which she approached CBE for help. With their help she has set up and marketed the business and is now successfully delivering training courses for a living.

Working with ethnic minorities has been another key objective of the programme. Manchester has a long

tradition of ethnic enterprise – just under one in nine start-ups across the conurbation is BME owned. But there are few links between those businesses and mainstream enterprise services which could help them to expand.

The project has visited ethnic businesses in the five local authorities that make up Greater Manchester to offer business support to clients who would not normally use the Chamber’s services. This has enabled the Chamber to forge links, both on a detailed and strategic level, with groups they would not normally engage with.

Dorothy Freeman, the team leader, says : “The project has allowed us to reach communities that we would not normally have worked with.” The initiative proved sufficiently successful that the Chamber is making outreach work with the ethnic business sector a permanent element of its mainstream business activity.

The project has also worked on fostering the development of child care micro-enterprises in the Greater Manchester area. Business advisers have worked with would-be child care providers putting together applications for the New Opportunities Fund that will supply the seedcorn funding needed before the new businesses can stand on their own two feet.

“It has helped us to reach communities that we would not normally have worked with.”



highlights

The project helped create 37 businesses owned by disabled people

The Chamber has forged links with groups it has historically not engaged with

New groups are now part of the Chamber’s mainstream support services

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highlights

Four pilots set-up to test a fresh approach to business support in very different communities

In 16 months, 384 clients were supported, 70 were already in business, 117 have started their own businesses

Eight new BizFizz projects started activities in April 2004

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

Civic Trust & New Economics Foundation – BizFizz

Many business advisers lack an intimate knowledge of the local areas they are expected to cover. Many also believe it is not their place to help with personal issues facing people wanting to set up a business.

But this project puts a premium on both these aspects of support. BizFizz, a joint venture between the Civic Trust and the New Economics Foundation, has designed a one-stop-shop service for start-ups, micro and small enterprises in disadvantaged areas that provides an innovative two-pronged approach.

First, a business coach offers one-to-one support based on the needs of the individual. Second, a panel made up of a diverse group of stakeholders use their local knowledge, specialist expertise and contacts to help solve specific practical problems for BizFizz clients.

Four pilot projects have tested this support model in a market town, a rural location, a coastal town and an inner city area. In 16 months 117 start-ups and 70 existing businesses have been helped, and 70 cases have been discussed by the local panels.

“The key is knowledge and networks,” explains national co-ordinator, Paul Squires. “We know that as a sole trader, it’s very difficult for one individual to have all the knowledge to run a business. So we can create temporary teams for that individual.”

The pilots helped a broad mix of people. Some clients wanted to turn a hobby into a business, some had been made redundant. Clients may have had fairly developed plans, but also personal fears or problems, such as a reluctance to risk redundancy money, or pressure from family members who did not support their business ambitions.

“What’s crucial is the coach’s relationship with the client,” says Mr Squires. “Traditional agencies often say, “you need a business plan, here’s a model”. We don’t work like that. It’s more about what the person wants, not what’s expected of them. It’s more important that the individual understands their business, a question of good business planning rather than focusing on a business plan”

Mr Squires recalls one person who wanted to drive a taxi – but he was known to be a heavy drinker. This is a delicate personal issue that would fundamentally affect the success of his new business in a very small community which was very aware of his drinking habits.

The coach helped the client work through how others in the community would perceive his business idea and himself. The client then took the decision to change his drinking habits, and now is running a two-car taxi venture in partnership with his wife.

The programme is expanding under the latest stage of Phoenix funding, with eight more projects about to be set up, targeting more inner-city areas with a diverse ethnic mix.

“BizFizz is different –
it has no rules, no set systems,
no boundaries.”

Co-active – Business excellence in the social economy

If you're going to provide advice to would-be social entrepreneurs, then it ought to be good quality advice.

That's why Co-active, a Plymouth-based not-for-profit organisation that encourages entrepreneurship in Devon and Cornwall, set about a two year project to upgrade and improve every aspect of the service it has offered since 1986.

That included a major revamp of the website, the production of a CD-Rom, and the development of an assessment framework that allows Co-active to measure how well the businesses it helps are actually doing.

"Effectively what the Phoenix money allowed us to do was to improve the quality of the tools we use to provide our services," says research and development services manager Dave Kilroy. "To use an analogy, it means we've now got bigger hammers and sharper chisels, and as a result the quality and speed of our service has improved. In turn that has meant that the services provided by the social entrepreneurs we advise should also improve."

The newly-developed assessment framework, christened the Business Research Information Analysis Navigator – or BRIAN for short – helps Co-active measure and monitor both the business and social capital of an enterprise. A "before and after" study of 34 businesses advised by Co-active has already shown measurable improvements in their performance over a 12-month period.

The website is now packed with new information on issues such as how to deal with VAT payments, national insurance and statutory sick pay, and has links to other social entrepreneurs, plus news stories on the subject area. By the end of the project the number of people using the improved site had risen to 1,100, a five fold increase.

"We've now got bigger hammers and sharper chisels, and as a result the quality and speed of our service has improved."

The project also allowed the development of an electronic newsletter, plus a CD explaining what Co-active has achieved through the project, lessons learnt and a showcase of some of the projects it supports. This has been sent to potential funders and other interested parties. And in a bold move, it has even led to the production of a specially tailored 13-week NVQ Level 3 course in social entrepreneurship, called Enterprise for Everyone, which has proved popular in the two counties.

Putting together all these innovations was a challenge to Co-active's nine staff, who often had to learn fast in areas that were new to them, while also providing their normal day to day advice and support. "Many of these things involved a huge learning curve, and they stretched the capacity of the staff to the full – it was really hard work," says Mr Kilroy. "But they have improved the reach and the quality of what we do. That helps us to move social entrepreneurs away from being just voluntary or community projects to being run in a more businesslike manner."



highlights

By the end of the project there had been a fivefold increase in the number of people using Co-active's website

The project has led to the production of a 13-week NVQ course in social entrepreneurship

BRIAN is an assessment framework that measures business and social capital

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING



highlights

Encouraging community-led renewal through enterprise support

15 registered companies set up and 40 new jobs created

A centre of excellence for social enterprise in the north-east to be created

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Comecon – New access to enterprise in the community

This project truly worked from the grassroots up. Linda Rutter, one of the three directors at Comecon, which has run New Access to Enterprise in the Community, says that it uses local community-based organisations to deliver enterprise support.

The target is disadvantaged parts of Tyneside suffering from market failure and lack of local services. Together with local communities, the project identifies gaps in local service provision and helps individuals to create social market solutions.

An example of a project that presses both buttons in this way is the Community Catering Initiative, based at the Thomas Gaughan Centre in the inner city neighbourhood of Walker.

This is a social enterprise run by two local women, Laura and Pam, one of whom was working only 12 hours per week and the other who was on benefits. They have secured a £21,500 per annum contract to run a community café, which will open between 8 am and 1.30 pm, offering a choice of hot, nutritious meals at an affordable price to local people.

In addition, the café will encourage people to use the centre so that it can become more of a focal point for the local community. They also hope to provide buffet facilities for local events. Residents will be encouraged to participate in the way the café is run.

Such successes were replicated elsewhere, so that the project can boast the establishment of 15 registered companies and 40 new jobs. “The projects are sustainable and all the jobs are still there,” says Ms Rutter.

She adds that, unlike other sources, the Phoenix funding comes with relatively few strings attached. “We were able to work across Tyneside regardless of post code and we

were allowed to look at enterprises regardless of where they were. It’s very innovative and flexible but not output driven. To have that pressure taken off allows you to be free and creative.”

Phoenix funding has enabled the project to develop at a faster pace than it would have done. Comecon is now developing a centre of excellence for social enterprise in the north east, which will be called The Mission.

Housed in a converted Mission building above the North Shields quayside, it will offer a far better base for the organisation’s activities than the tiny offices that it has been operating from since its foundation just over ten years ago. “That definitely would not have happened without the Phoenix,” says Linda. The new centre has meeting rooms, a resource centre and a café.

Linda says one of the key lessons from the Phoenix experience has been the importance of keeping running costs lean. It took on other full-time staff to run New Access to Enterprise in the Community. In future, she says, Comecon will employ a core team and buy in outside expertise as and when it proves necessary.

But she is confident that Comecon has a sustainable future. “We will still be here in 10 years time when social enterprises won’t be considered a new thing anymore,” she says.

“We will still be here
in 10 years time when social
enterprises won’t be considered a
new thing anymore.”

Co-operative Community Action

Nottingham's Co-Operative Community Action (CCA) should know a thing or two about social enterprises. After all, it is one.

Two years ago, the voluntary co-op sought funding to develop various community projects. Today, it's not only generating income from its own activities, it's also helping its own clients to start their own businesses.

CCA has two main revenue streams. The first is "floating support"; a scheme which provides council tenants with advice on education, health and safety, legal rights, benefits and so on. It is funded by the local authority. The second source of income is "interpretive services". Here, CCA retains a number of translators on a contract basis to work with the police, NHS, law firms and other agencies. The money earned from these activities has set CCA well on its way to being self-funding.

Going from a voluntary co-op to an income generating social enterprise has given CCA many insights which it is now passing on to its visitors and clients. Steven Caswell, enterprise development manager of CCA, believes it is the right environment to help people from ethnic minorities. "We serve a diverse community, and many people – especially if they come from a different culture and don't speak English well – are slow to integrate into the community. But it's important that they do. Here, they can start that process."

CCA offers help at all levels, from simple filing to compiling a business plan. It also calls on the help of initiatives such as Business Start. It has helped to set up around 10 social enterprises and two individual business start-ups. The enterprises vary from a Somali group that bought a mini-bus and organises a school-run to a Gambian student group that works together to help

"People from a different culture who don't speak English well can be slow to integrate into the community. Here, they can start that process."

people "back home"; to a Punjabi women's group that wanted help reviving its "Fabric" skills-sharing organisation.

Many people have been encouraged to make the most of their skills and achieve fresh independence. One young man, a cleaner for 10 years, came into contact with CCA through his work, wanted to know more and was soon encouraged to consider self-employment. Despite having learning difficulties that slowed his progress, he is now working on his business plan.

Another client joined CCA as a volunteer and, with the support of the director, began to consider how to use his knowledge of four African languages to help refugees and asylum seekers. Eventually he became team leader of the community support group Heri Kwetu. It is now well known in Nottingham, and many statutory and voluntary organisations recognise its services.

A Somali volunteer was similarly galvanised. He set up the Somali Community Nottingham and called in CCA to provide training for his members. The body launched with local authority grants but plans to use its enterprise training to become self-funding by charging for valuable services to the Somali community.



highlights

A truly multinational project helping people from Somalia, Angola, Central Africa, Caribbean, Pakistan, Gambia, Punjab and elsewhere

10 social enterprises launched as a result of the project's work

13 volunteers gained work experience, six moved to higher education, eight found employment, 11 came off benefits

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highlights

72 people attended
DRIVE workshops,
representing 180 people in
local social enterprises

Seven new community
enterprises created and 43
existing enterprises
supported

29 new jobs created

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Coventry & Warwickshire CDA – DRIVE

As businesses, social enterprises need entrepreneurial skills. And staff at the Coventry and Warwickshire Co-operative Development Agency (CWCD) realised that providing these skills was vital for a viable local social enterprise sector.

It was convinced that, with targeted, holistic help, these enterprises could improve their chance of survival and sustainability. Nick Wilson, the project leader at CWCD, says: "It was really a question of widening their ideas of what they could achieve and showing them how to sustain a business in the long term."

The CDA put together a package designed to introduce social enterprises to concepts such as public relations, marketing, advertising, project planning, interfacing with other agencies, staff contracts and legal issues. It also tackled the issue of team building. "We found that there is often a big divide between the management and the people who actually work on the "shop floor". Sometimes they barely knew each other, so we worked to bring them together, sharing skills and experiences," says Mr Wilson.

The Entrepreneurial Skills Development Programme was run across four days of workshops – with 72 people attending in 18 months.

They included Trevor and Valerie Worwood who launched a community enterprise called 2T Fruity to supply fresh fruit and vegetables to estates in Coventry. The founders completed the DRIVE workshops and then developed a business plan which helped secure £8,800 from Global Grants. Mr Wilson says: "With help from DRIVE, 2T Fruity has progressed from being an idea of several residents living in one of the most deprived areas of Coventry to being a thriving social enterprise."

For others, the task was to show how existing services can be financially adept. Allesley Park Community

*"It was tempting to write
business plans for organisations
yourself – certainly quicker.
But that's not the point."*

Association had been registered as a charity for nearly 40 years, only ever breaking even each year. DRIVE gave the association a clearer vision of its commercial potential – charging for room hire, selling community research findings to the statutory bodies, broadening the use of its facilities to include weddings etc – and passed on the skills to make a plan and pursue it.

Similarly, Aspire To Be, a community enterprise set up to help excluded young adults, learned how to compile reports and offer consultation services that could be of value to local authority and educational agencies.

Mr Wilson explains: "It was tempting to write business plans for organisations yourself – certainly quicker. But that's not the point, DRIVE is about working with groups, enhancing and developing their abilities to identify opportunities and be self sustaining. And in the end it's worth it. I've worked in the commercial sector. This is infinitely more rewarding."

Dingle Opportunities – Innovations factory

Are social entrepreneurs born or can they be made? One experiment in Liverpool set out to discover the answer, helping local unemployed people to take the initiative along the way.

The project, called Innovations Factory, included an Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) programme open to people unemployed for at least 12 months. It offered trainees a minimum wage while helping them develop their skills, and business advice on setting up social enterprises or finding a job.

Two year-long courses were developed, helping a total of 22 people who learned about business planning, regeneration, and different funding streams. They also heard speakers from organisations including the Charities Commission and the Inland Revenue. Trainees had access to Open University courses, courses on internet design, and work placements.

Success stories include Terry and Stephen, who have set up a social enterprise working with young people. They offer keep-fit, first aid, and health and safety training out of a local youth centre.

Other past trainees have also found work, for example Barth, an asylum seeker with poor English, who had previously been employed as a business tutor in the Congo. He was accepted on to a Master's degree course in translation and now works for the United Nations Children's Fund in Somalia. Another ex-trainee, Mark, works at Liverpool Council's regeneration department, specialising in helping social enterprises.

The project has also developed a Social Enterprise Action website offering a comprehensive information portal for social enterprises in Merseyside initially and then throughout the UK.

It also developed research with a practical end, including a project to assess the impact of the opening of a superstore. Senior manager Roberta Peak explains: "Asda opened in a poor part of Liverpool, which has many derelict shops, a transient population, and high unemployment. We carried out research and then staff at Dingle Opportunities Ltd helped the company with its interviews and application process. Now 95% of staff are

from the local area".

A third course is now being prepared, which will specialise in helping people into self-employment as translators. The organisation is applying to become an accredited centre for a translation diploma. "We want to make it into a small social enterprise for translation. The idea is that those who pass the course can then become course assessors," Ms Peak explains.

But has the project answered the original question? "If you asked if you can be trained as an entrepreneur, I'm still on the fence about it," she admits. "You have to have that push to be an entrepreneur. You do battle. But I think being a trainee, you are able to learn by a lot of mistakes. We have opened people's minds to enterprising cultures."

And she adds: "My advice is not to give up. All my staff laugh at me when I say, here's another obstacle. But it's a gift. Obstacles are gifts."

"If you asked if you can be trained as an entrepreneur, I'm still on the fence about it."



highlights

Developed an ILM project to train social entrepreneurs and offer business advice

Helped 22 people through two year-long courses

Created a website as an information portal for the area

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highlights

60 prisoners have already set up their own businesses on release from jail

Lee was released on a day licence to visit the bank to secure a loan to set up a drystonewalling business

The project has been so successful that it will now roll out nationwide

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

Dukeries Training Agency – Business in prisons

Though all prisoners look forward to their release date, their problems often begin again when they walk out of the jail gates to face the prospect of months and even years of unemployment.

Which is why Phoenix has funded the Business in Prisons project in the East Midlands. Run by the Dukeries Training Agency, the project has offered prisoners in 11 of the East Midlands' 19 jails the chance to think about setting up their own business on release.

The project has been so successful that it will now roll out nationwide, with plans to expand its staff complement of six to more than double that in the near future.

In the two years it's been operating in jails such as Sudbury, Ashwell, North Sea Camp and Ranby, Business in Prisons has reached around 1000 prisoners, of whom 360 are planning to set up in business on their release. A further 60 have already done so, and with encouraging results.

Prisoners are told about the initiative more or less as soon as they are received into prison – so that if they are interested in setting up a business this can be included in their sentence planning. "It's important to start early so that the potential for self employment is actively pursued at the outset rather than brought up just before they are about to leave, which is too late," says the project's managing director, Denise Colton.

If a prisoner shows interest, then they will be given a half-day training session on the bare bones of what is involved in setting up a business, and from there they work on a one-to-one basis with project advisers on issues such as drawing up a business plan, carrying out market research, and financial planning.

"If you think about it, most criminals are risk takers, and to be successful in business you do need to take risks," says Mrs Colton. "So it's about channelling that energy into a positive approach that will bring them a sustained income in a legal way."

Although the project has exceeded all expectations – the initial hope was for 40 prisoners to set up in business – the main difficulty has been maintaining meaningful contact when clients are released.

"Most criminals are risk takers, and to be successful in business you do need to take risks."

"If they live in, say, Exeter that presents problems, because on release we have to maintain contact via the telephone or letter, rather than in person," says Mrs Colton. "That has meant we have to establish a good network of contact agencies down there, so the client has support in their home area."

Lee is one of those who have benefited from the project. He received some training as a stonemason before getting into trouble with the law, and was able to set up a successful dry stonewalling business on his release from prison. As well as giving Lee help on producing a business plan and linking him up with the Prince's Trust, which gave him further help, the project arranged for him to be released on a day licence to visit the bank to secure a loan – and helped him gain access to a start-up grant.

East End Microcredit Consortium – Economic outreach in East London

When financial analysts look to Asian economies for inspiration, their gaze rarely alights on Bangladesh.

But some make an exception with the world's first micro-credit institution, the Grameen Bank, which offers loans through a peer lending methodology to those who cannot access conventional sources of finance.

The East End Microcredit (EEMC) scheme is based on the same principles as the Grameen. Operating in the deprived East End boroughs of Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets, it attacks a root cause of financial exclusion by issuing small loans to those who stand no chance of securing finance through regular channels, and by creating mutual self help groups to support borrowers.

The EEMC is made up of four agencies – The Environment Trust, which co-ordinates the Consortium and manages the loan portfolio; and Streetcred, Account3 and Homeless Families Campaign, which deliver the peer lending support.

Loans are made through the Microcredit Loan Fund, which is supported through the Phoenix Challenge Fund for Community Development Finance Institutions and managed by The Environment Trust. The first loan is up to £500, the second £1,000 and the third £2,000, with administration charges taking between six and ten per cent.

The Consortium members work through a series of lending circles, which are each made up of between four and six women. Individuals have to get agreement from the group before a loan is issued. The group also vets each individual's business plan. If one person fails to repay the loan the whole group is penalised. As is the case with all microcredit systems, this "moral collateral" forms the backbone of the Consortium. And it works: 98 per cent of loans are repaid.

But reaching those who may rarely leave their homes, let alone the estates they live on, can be hard. "There was a lot of provision for people to access business advice if they were white, male and motivated, but we wanted to make provision for the people who had not thought about it or were not even interested in starting a business– we

were after real social change at the margins," says Faisal Rahman Co-ordinator of the East End Micro-Credit Consortium.

This is where the "Economic Outreach in East London" project, part funded by the Phoenix Development Fund for the past three years, stepped in. This helped to pay for three outreach workers to work with the lending circles. It targets women who had become most removed from the working world and promotes self employment as a route out of poverty. Each outreach worker manages around ten peer groups.

Mr Rahman says the project has had plenty success. There are now 55 peer lending groups up and running, which equate to over 300 women. The project has issued over 250 loans. At the last count, more than 50 women had taken out second loans and a handful of tertiary loans, proof that their businesses are developing.

The project's success cannot be measured simply by the number of loans issued. For many women the success story has just been having the chance to get out of their homes, giving them a chance to consider their options. By working on the margins of society its work has had real impact into people's lives.

"There was a lot of provision for people to access business advice if they were white, male and motivated, but we wanted to make provision for the people who had not thought about it or were not even interested in starting a business."



highlights

Loans to micro enterprises through a system known as "peer group lending"

55 peer lending groups up and running in east London

By February 2004, the project had issued 250 loans

More than 50 women had taken out second loans and a handful of tertiary loans, proof that their businesses were developing

Contact

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faisal@envirotrust.org



highlights

Subsidised, start-up office space in east London

Training, finance and business support offered in 15 “incubator” units

Links with private sector being used to boost supply of office space elsewhere in London

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East London Small Business Centre – Incubator support

It’s one thing offering business support and advice to budding entrepreneurs, quite another to be able to translate this into another level of practical support. By providing office space to start-up businesses, the East London Small Business Centre believes it has hit on a winning formula, and one it hopes to replicate across areas of east London.

“We were an enterprise agency frustrated by the lack of facilities,” explains chief executive Tim Heath. “There’s a lack of start-up and incubator units in the area. We needed to move out of our offices at the time and found good space in an old clothing factory. When we moved in, we discovered that further space in the building was available and the landlord was willing, so we went to get funding to take these over.”

The centre helps ethnic minorities and people setting up in creative, mainly fashion-oriented, industries. It provides training, business support and, where necessary, finance, as well as fifteen incubator units.

The Phoenix Fund allowed the centre to offer initial rent subsidies. “The fund was a launch pad to prove the concept, and the demand for it. It allowed us to understand the issues involved and work out how to manage the resource,” Mr Heath says.

The majority of tenants have succeeded, he adds. For example, Sandra has started a childcare support consultancy and has managed to gain work in the area. Aki is developing a range of his own shoe designs, and has made use of the centre’s grant programme to allow him to exhibit his wares. He has already found markets in top-end fashion stores.

Once established, and having outgrown their incubators, people like Sandra and Aki are then helped to find office space. “Sooner or later these businesses have to measure up to what the private sector is offering,” Mr Heath explains.

The organisation aims to scale up its activities, and has already opened new incubator units in Newham. Mr Heath says he was lucky enough to be able to use existing strong relationships with some private sector companies, managing to get “no strings attached” sponsorship from some big companies.

Plans for setting up more units in other parts of the organisation’s catchment area, which includes parts of the Thames Gateway, are also underway.

“We’ve been around 25 years and we’ll go wherever the opportunity is,” Mr Heath says. “I’m proud of bringing a resource into being which has confirmed my market research. We brought the project in bang on budget.”

But he advisers others interested in working in a similar way to plan the project very carefully. The key, he says, is to be your own project manager. This means doing everything yourself, including designing how you want the units to look.

“Don’t employ anyone else,” he says. “You’ll be cutting costs in a number of ways, and not paying for the work of someone who doesn’t understand the project requirements as much as you do.”

“Sooner or later
these businesses have to measure
up to what the private
sector is offering.”

East Riding of Yorkshire Council – Communities of enterprise network

The flat, rural countryside of Southern Holderness to the east of Hull is far enough off the beaten track to create problems of isolation for businesses attempting to operate there.

The Communities of Enterprise Network, a three-year scheme run by East Riding of Yorkshire Council, has been trying to reduce that isolation by helping to improve access to information technology in the area. It hopes that by improving access to, and understanding of, IT, it will not only have improved the competitiveness of the Southern Holderness economy, but have made it easier for entrepreneurs to set up there too.

Using local expertise wherever possible to deliver training and advice to IT novices, the scheme has also tried to tackle infrastructure problems, not least through its Shire-Web project, which has helped to bring a broadband internet service to the area.

“The Shire-Web project was necessary due to the failure of existing telecommunications providers to offer a terrestrial broadband service,” says Phillip Cleary, business community and ICT development worker at Communities of Enterprise.

“The area is very low-lying, with few tall buildings – and that, along with the relatively thin demand, caused a problem in providing broadband. What we did was use wireless microwave to beam the signal between various businesses, who have taken up the service enthusiastically.”

Education and training, based on the use of four school-based IT learning and training centres, has been a cornerstone of the scheme. Another project, called IT

Matters, has delivered seminars throughout the area that present the business benefits and advantages of using information technology.

The hope is that would-be entrepreneurs, newly hooked-up and enthused, will incorporate their new learning into business ideas, widening their horizons beyond the limited marketplace provided by their local area. The Wyvern project, also set up by Communities of Enterprise, has tried to encourage just such an approach with a group of local artists who want to find new places to sell their work. With support from the project, they are now aiming to promote themselves in the worldwide market place via a pooled website.

Mr Cleary, who was one of two full-time East Riding staff devoted to the project, says it's still too early to quantify exactly how much difference the project has made, but believes it has, at the very least, laid solid foundations for improvements to come and has made the local community far more IT literate.

“In many ways this area has all the typical problems of an isolated rural region, and the infrastructure difficulties are as much about IT as anything else,” says Mr Cleary. “So I would say the scheme has helped in its own way to reduce the social exclusion that goes hand in hand with that isolation.”

“In many ways this area has all the typical problems of an isolated rural region, and the infrastructure difficulties are as much about IT as anything else.”



highlights

The scheme has helped bring a broadband internet service to an isolated area

Education and training has been a cornerstone of the scheme

The hope is that would-be entrepreneurs, newly hooked-up and enthused, will incorporate their new learning into business ideas

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highlights

Attempt to understand needs of women entrepreneurs in rural areas.

The key message from these women was the need for networks to support them in what tend to be lonely enterprises

An informal network would provide the knowledge and experience to support women moving into self-employment, but also the support for those already running their own businesses

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East Shropshire Regeneration Partnership

Britain's market towns have suffered from the steady decline in agricultural employment and changes in food distributions networks. The result is that these historic, picturesque towns have lost the central place they had held in their localities for centuries.

They are wonderful places to live for those with jobs in the city, but can struggle to support others with the employment and services they need.

But many people still rely on the towns for vital services, especially people such as the elderly who are less able to travel. And there are often large pools of potential entrepreneurs, especially women, who might be able to provide local services if they had the right support to move into self-employment.

The East Shropshire Partnership used Phoenix funding to investigate the kind of support such women need, based on the situation in Newport, Albrighton, Shifnal and Wellington. The four towns, with a total population of almost 40,000 have been in economic decline in the past few years, partly due to the expansion of nearby Telford.

Many women in such areas are more interested in self-employment than formal employment because it provides the flexibility they need to deal with other responsibilities such as childcare. Many lack confidence, however, and sometimes basic business skills. Even when they do create businesses, they often feel isolated.

A team from the Countryside Development Unit at Harper Adams University College in Newport sought to

understand rural women entrepreneurs' needs through several focus groups which brought together women already in business, followed up with telephone research.

The key message from these women was the need for networks to support them in what tend to be lonely enterprises. Most worked alone, usually from home, and consequently suffered the isolation which can hit self-confidence. They felt an informal network would provide the knowledge and experience to support women moving into self-employment, but also the support for those already running their own businesses. Existing business support is seen as lacking the necessary understanding of women in micro-businesses.

As the project report says: "Group members would act as mentors, boosting each other when confidence was low, and providing much-needed support. Many of the participants felt that empathy was a quality that many of the business advisers they had been to had lacked."

"Group members would act as mentors, boosting each other when confidence was low, and providing much-needed support."

Enterprise Connection – Women into business – ICT

One of the most common reasons that small businesses fail to take off is that they lack high quality Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and access to related business advice, information and training.

Women often tend to underrate their potential to successfully set up and run any business successfully, never mind one where substantial ICT investment means the difference between success and failure.

Between 2001 and 2003 the Women into Business ICT project sought to provide innovative support to women in rural Dorset who wished to develop entrepreneurial activity through business start-up and micro-SME operations. It targeted those for whom ICT was a key factor in their personal and business development.

One aim of the project was to improve general perceptions of entrepreneurship among women in Dorset. Another was to recruit and profile the progress of a selected group of 24 local ICT-enabled women. A third aim was to develop a “working model of best practice” to support excluded and disadvantaged groups in accessing business start-up, ICT skills and knowledge resources. This last facet of the programme focused particularly on the delivery of flexible training that integrated efforts to gain qualifications with business development and e-business implementation.

To these ends, successful applicants (twelve each over two successive years) received free specialised support. The learning programme led to the Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative - Business Start-up NVQ 3, while other elements provided support in personal development, selection and recruitment as well as the ICT content.

One of the project’s successes was Sue Blagburn’s marketing, communications, design and print consultancy, Blagburn Wessex Association Marketing by Design.

“Before joining the Phoenix Project all the IT training I received was totally based on client demand.”

With a goal to more than double her turnover and staff, Sue realised she needed to invest in the latest IT technology, software and training. She admits: “Before joining the Phoenix Project all the IT training I received was totally based on client demand rather than directed in a

strategic way linked to my business and personal development.” This project gave Sue access to various courses by which she could update her IT skills, upgrade her reprographics technology and modernise her project and print management systems.

Going digital duly transformed her business, winning her awards and removing any handicap imposed by her rural location in the heart of the Blackmore Vale.

Anna Seal is another person who transformed her fortunes via her participation in this project. Her husband has been making willow baskets in West Dorset since 1993. Anna got involved in administration of the business when she left full-time primary school teaching to have a baby in 2000.

She joined the Enterprise Connection project to enhance her self-taught computer skills so she could make better use of new technology. Keen to raise the profile of her husband’s work, she soon began to develop a business model for running and developing the business. Ms Seal’s success speaks for itself: expansion has led to new premises and her husband needs to take on an assistant if he is to keep up with demand.



highlights

Providing innovative support to women in rural Dorset to develop entrepreneurial activity

One of the most common reasons that small businesses fail to take off is that they lack high quality ICT and access to related business advice, information and training

Between 2001 and 2003 the Women into Business ICT recruited and profiled the progress of a selected group of 24 local ICT-enabled/oriented women

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highlights

Sew East used specialist databases to contact more than 500 local businesses

Fashion designers have been helped to form new creative partnerships with local fabric suppliers, clothing manufacturers and retailers

Design partnership Sexy Buddha won business from Japan and the US

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8B CONTINUATION FUNDING

Ethnic Minority Enterprise Project – Sew East

Proximity doesn't automatically breed collaboration. After all, how many small businesses clustered in an area and operating in the same industrial sector get to know each other well – let alone collaborate on a routine basis?

Recognising this among clothing manufacturers and designers in London's east end, the Ethnic Minority Enterprise Project (EMEP) put together Sew East under the Phoenix initiative with matched European funding.

EMEP knew from long experience that local firms face two enduring barriers to growth and development – a lack of capital for pursuing innovation and a shortage of (affordable) premises into which to expand. So, in the words of programme manager Jennifer Williams Baffoe "Sew East set out to build stronger, quality-driven collaboration between local companies to help place the whole clothing sector in Tower Hamlets on a much more viable, sustainable footing."

Around three quarters of an estimated 800 local businesses engaged in some aspect of the fashion trade were thought to be capable of benefiting from better access to business training and development finance, one-to-one specialist advice, grants for exhibitions or showcases, and marketing or PR support. Sew East used a specialist database to cold-call around 500 businesses over the first two years. They included fashion & accessories designers, Cut, Make & Trim (CMT) manufacturers, fabric suppliers or retailers and leather garment or ancillary trade suppliers.

Positive responses were followed up with a great deal of face-to-face discussion and a steady stream of topical information supplied by email.

Jennifer Williams Baffoe admits: "This process did prove much more difficult initially than had been expected, so building a clientele for the project took much longer than anticipated. "Gradually the project's reputation began to grow so that by April 2003 (the end of the second year) it had recruited around 200 clients and built a large network of clothing designers."

Sexy Buddha, a local design partnership between Leigh Odimah and Stephanie McLaren started out at EMEP on a

"Sew East set out to build stronger, quality-driven collaboration between local companies to help place the whole clothing sector in Tower Hamlets on a much more viable, sustainable footing."

basic business course in 2002. Sew East directed these women towards a specialist fashion industry course at Portobello Business Centre to help them target and market their small accessories portfolio. Later the same year the project helped Sexy Buddha market their products at Annex, one of the UK's main accessories trade shows. In 2003 they went on to exhibit at Necessary Accessory, a London Fashion Forum event where they won interest from Japanese and US clients and secured what has grown into a large account with House of Fraser.

Sew East also works with more established companies wanting to expand or to pursue a new idea. For example, the project helped a small men's luxury accessory business and a local luxury womenswear designer promote a new retail shop they opened together in April 2003. The two companies then went back to Sew East for more support to develop and implement a joint sales campaign.

Having won further Phoenix funding under Building on the Best, Sew East will now continue until March 2006.

Fair Shares – Time for childcare

The phrase “time is money” is just a meaningless cliché to most people. But the concept of time banks makes it real: people provide services to other members and earn time credits instead of money; then they can spend those credits when they want something done.

This innovative idea has been spreading across the country, and the Fair Shares project applied it to childcare in two contrasting locations – rural Gloucestershire and inner-city Leicester. The aim was to liberate women who couldn’t afford to pay for the childcare they needed if they were to take training or educational courses. Instead of paying with money they didn’t have, they could pay in time. For example, Lyn, who wanted to set up a dance school, used members’ time contributions to make costumes.

In a novel twist, Fair Shares also “paid” time credits to people on training courses, so Lyn repaid some of the members’ time she used by taking management courses and practical courses in needlework and lighting. Members also earn credits by providing services, which can include giving somebody a lift, gardening or housework. One of the great things about it is that services can be available at all hours all through the week.

“We reward things that we want to see happening”, explains Martin Simon, director of Fair Shares. “So we reward people for the time they put in, because it’s of value to themselves and to the community.”

Members were recruited individually through local publicity, but the projects also linked with other local organisations. In some cases those organisations benefited because the time bank provided emergency cover when staff were sick.

Originally the project aimed to help lone mothers transform their informal childcare activities into businesses, but it soon became obvious that women were interested in other kinds of entrepreneurial activity. Ali wanted to use her music skills and after completing several courses she is now employed by Gloucester Music working with parents and toddlers.

“The support of what amounts to a huge extended family gives these women the confidence to take bigger steps

forward, secure that they have around them a social support network they can trust”, Mr Simon says. “They see that they are needed and valued by others and that they can change and grow from dependency to interdependency.”

It also meant that these women stayed the course more than usual when they took up training, because they knew somebody would be collecting their children from nursery and they didn’t need to worry about the cost. The higher retention rate of participants helped local training providers, who were then more prepared to listen to demands for more or different courses. Training providers also began to encourage participants to join the time bank because of the valuable support it provides.

More than 80 people in the two locations are now offering child care through the time banks, providing thousands of hours of invaluable support to other women in these communities. The model is also influencing other time banks around the country and even internationally.

“We reward people
for the time they put in, because
it’s of value to themselves
and to the community.”



highlights

People earn time credits instead of money and are paid in time credits for attending training courses

Women were interested in a variety of entrepreneurial activity, not just childcare

Time banks provide the equivalent of a huge extended family – mothers knew somebody would be collecting their children and they didn’t need to worry about the cost

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highlights

Accessible support for people with ideas for a business who don't know where to start

One person a month has been helped into self-employment, and between 70 and 80 per cent were still trading after 12 months

Businesses set up have included builders' merchants, child minders, plumbers, hair and beauty services.

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The Five Lamps Organisation

Unemployed people who have dreamt up an idea for a business but don't know where to start, often feel too intimidated to contact traditional business associations for help.

This is where more approachable local groups like The Five Lamps Organisation can help. Staff at Five Lamps discovered that local residents didn't know that help was available to them to start a business. So they set up the Venture Capital project to provide one-to-one support for developing a business plan, carrying out market research, and eventually taking the leap into self-employment.

The project targeted unemployed people in the town of Thornaby, near Middlesbrough, including ex-offenders and people with addictions. The project also helped to develop awareness of enterprise in young people by targeting schools.

One strength of the project was its ability to weed out people at the initial interview who were not motivated, and those who just came along because "They presumed we would give them a cheque there and then," as business development officer Bill Erskine puts it. "But some people are very keen from the start, and have already done some market research. You can get a feel for who will succeed."

These people, he adds, have a combination of the right personal qualities and a robust business idea to make self-employment work. "You have to be very careful," he adds. "You can't make people into entrepreneurs. And you can't have six joiners in the same area wanting to be self-employed, all targeting the same market."

Over the three-year lifetime of the project, an average of one person a month has been helped into self-employment, and, at the last count, between 70 and 80 per cent were still trading after 12 months.

Businesses set up have included builders' merchants, child minders, plumbers, and hair and beauty services.

Originally, one aspect of the project was also geared to help people working in the informal economy to legalise their businesses. But this proved to be challenging, not least because of a lack of referrals from local benefits agencies.

Nonetheless, the project did score one notable success. John had been running an unofficial carpet fitting business for some years. Although not claiming benefits for himself, his wife had been working and also receiving Working Families Tax Credit.

They both felt uncomfortable about the situation, and were keen to legalise the business and put it on a sound footing. Venture Capital advisors were able to help develop a business plan and raise funds for him. John's "official" business was launched in Spring 2002. His wife now supports the business, and he has also taken on an employee.

Phoenix funding ended in December 2003, but new funding has allowed it to continue, ensuring that self-employment will continue to be an option for people who come to Five Lamps looking for help to find work.

"You can't make people into entrepreneurs, and you can't have six joiners in the same area wanting to be self-employed, all targeting the same market"

The Food and Drink Forum – Enterprise in food

All you need is an idea... the catchphrase of Nottingham's innovative Enterprise in Food (EIF) project makes it sound simple.

And it has kept that simplicity at the core of what it offers, promising and delivering "a single path" to starting a food business through a unique training programme and support network. The single path was achieved by pulling in partners such as Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Bassetlaw Food Technology Centre, Nottingham Trent University and community based organisations like New Deal for Communities and The Prince's Trust.

"Everyone has an involvement, interest and knowledge of food. Food crosses cultures and knows no boundaries, so EIF has been successful in capturing, harnessing and nurturing entrepreneurship," says Shona Munro Andrews, project manager.

Enterprise in Food set out to use food as a way of tackling social exclusion, stimulating learning and entrepreneurship, underpinned by the concepts: "welcoming", "non-threatening", "crossing cultures".

"We deliver support and advice in an informal, non-judgmental, professional and passionate way so it is readily accessible," says Ms Munro Andrews.

The project guides individuals with a business idea through a journey from "taster" session to assessment, training in food-specific business skills, kitchen-based training, and one-to-one advice on product development. It also provides business buddies and a range of support for fledgling businesses, including promotion and website creation.

The approach has delivered: 42 individuals starting up their own business, 84 undertaking accredited training, a further 151 thinking of starting a business and 15 businesses expanding as a result of the programme.

Franklin Porath developed a recipe he first tried out at home into a product which will be seen nationwide in a leading retailer's deli. He had a business background but little idea about food regulations, so EIF and its parent organisation the Food and Drink Forum linked him with a food manufacturer in Nottinghamshire who agreed to mass produce his product. The next stage is transferring the product into packs for retail, giving him even wider commercial potential.

Lloyd Morgan wanted to set up a Caribbean take-away. EIF supported him from idea to business start-up. He plans to branch out into corporate catering and introduce a delivery service. "In our second phase we will continue to support him to find staff and will work closely with New Deal for Communities" says Ms Munro Andrews.

The next phase of EIF from April 04 to March 06 also being supported by PDF, will add new elements such as a food business start-up check list, access to training materials on-line, food labelling seminars, and a food library. It also plans to strengthen its partnership with Business in Prisons (see page 40), an initiative which helps reintegrate offenders into the labour market. They plan to offer "awareness sessions" in eight prisons across the East Midlands.

"Everyone has an involvement, interest and knowledge of food. Food crosses cultures and knows no boundaries."



highlights

Enterprise in Food awareness training to be offered in eight prisons

Nationwide retail distribution for one successful entrepreneur

A 'single path' into food business start-up

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING



highlights

21 incubator units with a 6-month rent-free period

Rural Rides provides a service to people who want to get into business but not into town

Over 300 people helped with business advice

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Goole Development Trust – Relaunch

The Relaunch project set out to help budding entrepreneurs in three ways, but just as entrepreneurs have to be nimble to catch customers, it quickly had to adjust its own original ideas for the project.

The one leg which stayed intact was the provision of “incubator units”. Roger Millar, general manager of the Goole Development Trust in South Yorkshire, managed to persuade the port operator ABP to provide a disused building at a peppercorn rent for 10 years, and the Phoenix Fund paid for its refurbishment. The building used to be associated with ship launches, hence the project title.

The three-storey building provides 9,000 sq ft of space in 21 units, plus a conference room. Tenants get six months rent-free, although there are service charges during that time. It is not in the centre of town, which may have made things more difficult, but the location in the most deprived ward was important. “It’s the kind of area you can get a mid-terrace house for about £20,000,” Mr Millar explains. “I wanted it to be there to provide an opportunity for new-start and recent-start businesses in that area.”

The project worked closely with Business Link, which became one of four anchor tenants when the Phoenix Business Centre opened in February 2002 but has since had to pull out. Dean Murphy was another early tenant. He is an electrician who previously worked in a shed but realised he needed proper premises to grow his business, and now employs eight staff.

Dean says: “We moved from home into a small unit and the six-month rent free period was a real help to us. The

business grew rapidly and we moved into a much larger unit eight months later.”

The centre’s business has been up and down, building to 15 tenants at one point, then falling back. They have included an artist, a telephone sales operation and an employment bureau.

The other two legs of Relaunch were a “practice office” concept, and what Mr Millar dubbed Rural Rides, after William Cobbett’s famous travels on horseback through the rural south of England in the 1820s.

The “practice office” turned out to be a bright idea without a market. There was, Mr Millar recalls ruefully, “zilch response” to the offer of college-based office experience and advice on basic administration practices. “People didn’t want that from a college environment. They wanted one-to-one with a counsellor.”

That is pretty much what Rural Rides delivers, for people wanting to get into business but not into town. It began as a series of meetings in village and church halls, then became a travelling advice service. “We thought “we’ll come to you” if that’s what people want,” Mr Millar says.

The service has helped over 300 people, ranging from a woman designing greeting cards to somebody advising small businesses on health and safety. One of the great bonuses of these schemes is that the Trust also receives Phoenix funding as a Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI), which has provided over 30 loans, and helps to link what people want to do with the financial means of getting started.

“We thought
“we’ll come to you” if that’s
what people want.”

Granby Toxteth Development Trust – Business awareness training modules

This project offered a series of training modules for entrepreneurs, designed to complement a community finance initiative offering loans to business start-ups in the Toxteth area of Liverpool.

The matched funding became available too late, so the plan had to be adapted.

Project manager Chris Starkey explains: “We had hoped to have a really good comprehensive training package to run alongside the loan fund. In the end, we had a fairly low-key package, more to do with mentoring on a one-to-one basis and filling in gaps left elsewhere. But some people preferred this approach, and it has gone down well.”

After 12 months of waiting for matched funding, Mr Starkey decided to carry on regardless, and set up a pilot business course.

“People arrived with applications in different states,” he says. “We have a degree of in-house expertise, and if someone had a specific need or a particular puzzle over an aspect of the business plan, we would either sit down with them or we would bring in specialists.”

A group of a dozen ex-dockers turned up, asking for help. They had come together with a view to setting up a social co-op together, and were pleased to take part. “They had been on the brink of setting it up but didn’t know how to go about it,” Chris recalls. “The course was the missing link for them.”

The business is now going strong: it combines a social enterprise specialising in learning-based projects, with a profit-making bar bistro business.

“We have been able to do something positive for people taking part in the project, particularly by linking in with other agencies.”

Mr Starkey believes his organisation, which already offers a range of learning service, is well placed to offer training because it is “Rooted in the community and regarded as a trusted local organisation, a friendly place on the main street in with all the shops.” He adds: “Local people are intimidated about going to a mainstream college because it’s an institution, and access to business support is still difficult. They very often don’t have the experience of how to get into a network.”

Mr Starkey estimates that between 40 and 60 people have been helped by the project. The organisation also developed a mutually beneficial relationship with business advisors at another local PDF project, Innovations Factory, who took referrals (see page 39).

“We’d send them people needing a business plan, and they, in turn, contacted us with people needing a loan. It worked very well.” Mr Starkey explains. “Despite the lack of funding, we have been able to do something positive for people taking part in the project, particularly by linking in with other agencies.”



highlights

Filling the gaps of advice needed in developing business plans

The project complemented a community finance initiative

Helped 40 to 60 long-term unemployed people to start up businesses

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highlights

Local SMEs improved environmental performance

Two old Industrial Estates being transformed into environmentally friendly Business Parks

Up to 20 people in employment as a result of 'Roots and Shoots'

Young people integrating better with society after participation in community project

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Groundwork West Cumbria – Cumbria environmental business support

Small businesses tend to be very focused. They have to be to survive and grow. So they tend to be more interested in saving money than saving the world through environmental action.

Cumbria Environmental Business Support has helped these businesses to acknowledge that everything they do affects the environment, but environmental impacts can also be financial impacts. "Through market research we started to understand the needs of SMEs and identify ways of gaining their interest. We showed them that by reducing their impact on the environment they can also save their organisations money," says Shirley Newman, environmental business services manager.

Training seminars promoted sustainability by showing how it can increase profitability and safeguard jobs at the same time. "Many of the businesses weren't aware of the environmental legislation that is applicable to them, so we've helped them look at how they are performing, made them more efficient, and helped them to avoid getting into trouble with the Environment Agency," she says.

The project runs an Intermediate Labour Market. Roots and Shoots, helps to get disadvantaged people back into employment, providing them with training and horticultural skills.

"There have been many job losses in the historical industries such as chemical, mining, engineering and steel works, and Roots and Shoots has enabled 15-20 people from highly deprived areas to successfully gain employment" says Mrs Newman.

Groundwork are also proud of their work on the Green Business Park, two old industrial estates which are being transformed into environmentally friendly ones by advising the existing companies on environmental legislation, saving money, and developing an on-site waste

minimisation programme. "It was challenging to cross the cultural barriers of industries such as scrap metal merchants, scaffolders and haulage companies who don't consider the environment important, but through a series of fact sheets, newsletters, seminars and helping service workers – especially women and ethnic minorities – we succeeded in getting the businesses to realise that if they improve how their business looks to the outside world it will create more work for them" says Ms Newman.

Paul Agnew from Brookside Products says co-operation with Groundwork has allowed his company to convey quality aspirations in the working environment: "New signage is both informative and stylish while landscaping work has softened the harsh industrial look of our premises, making it much more inviting to customers and staff," he says.

Phoenix funding has also contributed to cultural development through involvement in a youth community project to make a Hounds Trailing video. Hounds Trailing is a very popular local hunting sport using dogs to trail a scent of aniseed and paraffin across the Fells. "After learning that the Hounds Trailing Association membership was falling we got young people involved in producing a video with a technical college in Carlisle," says Ms Newman. The video is now being used within schools and as a tourism resource and has boosted the sport's popularity.

With other secured funding, "Roots and Shoots," the Green Business Park transformation and the Environmental Business Services work will continue.

"We have helped many small businesses realise cost savings through improved environmental performance."

Haringey Council – Tottenham Green Enterprise Centre

People tend to take sides about the efficiencies gained by “hot-desking”, which involves people sharing the use of work space, equipment and administrative support.

But it is a key element of provision at Tottenham Green Enterprise Centre (TGEC), which helps support local people setting up businesses in Haringey.

A group of empty buildings, including an old fire station and firemen’s cottages, had been going to waste for years, explains centre director Malcolm Gorman. A plan was hatched to renovate the 11,000sq ft of space into offices for start-up businesses.

“Without the Phoenix Fund, the centre would never have got off the ground,” Mr Gorman says. “The ownership is split evenly between the local college and the council. Having their assistance has helped us immensely.”

The centre is able to offer arrangements suitable for each stage of an entrepreneur’s progress towards a stand-alone business. Initially, people are offered individual business advice and are then filtered through to a “pre-start” phase, which offers desk space for people to write their business plans, and test out their markets while benefiting from on-hand business advice.

Next comes the hot-desking stage, which allows individuals free use of a desk shared with two others, with a maximum use of three hours at any one time.

Each person is given their own telephone number, and the centre will take messages if they are not in, as well as offer some administrative backup. Michael, one of the current hot-deskers, is an agent for young performers. He is only 17 years old, and is the Daily Telegraph’s Young Businessman of the Year. He received the award in front of more than 1000 business VIPs at a glitzy ceremony in Hyde Park Lane’s Grosvenor House Hotel in November.

“The place is choc-a-bloc full.

We have assisted thousands of people in their quest to start up their own businesses. And we’ve done it without an overdraft or much in the way of working capital.”

Lola is another hot-desker. She had been hoping to set up a business with somebody else but her intended business partner decided to pull out of the project. The centre has spent time with Lola, helped to develop her confidence, and to gain a £3000 grant. She is now making a go of it on her own.

After outgrowing the hot-desking facilities, businesses move to small incubator units – and then, if required, to larger space. The centre charges rent for these, with subsidies diminishing incrementally over a few years. During their stay, all businesses receive constant advice and enjoy the benefits of peer networking with other tenants.

Some of the centre’s clients do not use the hot-desking option, such as Carol, who worked as an aromatherapist at a hospital. The centre helped her develop a business plan and gain funding to start her own social enterprise delivering aromatherapy to people with disabilities and limited life expectancy.

The centre is now hoping to develop more local capacity: there is constant pressure for more incubator units, but it is so popular existing tenants are unwilling to move on.

“I’m really proud of the centre. From absolutely nothing TGEC employ over 20 staff and have more than 140 working from its premises” says Mr Gorman. “The place is choc-a-bloc full. We have assisted thousands of people in their quest to start up their own businesses. And we’ve done it without an overdraft or much in the way of working capital.”



highlights

Renovated an old fire station and firemen’s cottages and built a small office block into 11,000 sq ft of space for start-up businesses

Project employs over 20 of its own staff and has more than 140 working from its premises

All pre-starts and start-ups receive constant advice and enjoy the benefits of peer networking with other tenants

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highlights

There are people with the skills to provide community services

Three arches under a road viaduct, previously used as the county council's lighting depot, are ready for conversion

Providing incubators is the big chance to bring the necessary resources together

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Hastings Trust – Up Start incubator workshops

Many mainstream small businesses start out in serviced offices or workshops, sometimes known as “Enterprise Hubs”: That gives them a place in a community which shares common interests as well as services, and acts as an important network to help fuel growth.

If that works for them, then it should also work for social enterprises, argues Christine Goldschmidt, director of the Hastings Trust: “We set out to provide incubators to offer exactly the same sort of support as an Enterprise Hub provides – accountancy, secretarial, training and IT services, but we are also looking at creating an informal trading network through which people can help each other.”

There is no shortage of demand for social enterprises in an area which figures high on most measures of deprivation, with a significant refugee and asylum-seeker population. “In a place like Hastings, job opportunities are few and far between. It’s really an inner-city area by the seaside,” Ms Goldschmidt says. “It’s hard to choose an employment path that isn’t plucking chickens or a similar kind of low-skilled work.”

But there is a need for community services, whether that is providing ethnic foods, community websites, embroidery or IT services. And there are people with the skills to provide those services. The missing links are money (to get enterprises started) and somewhere to operate from.

“There is a whole raft of different communities that don’t want mainstream provision, but our job is to ensure that everybody gets the same kind of opportunity and support. Providing incubators is our one big chance to bring the necessary resources together,” Ms Goldschmidt says.

“It’s really an inner-city area by the seaside. It’s hard to choose an employment path that isn’t plucking chickens or a similar kind of low-skilled work.”

Unfortunately, the project’s efforts to convert this theory into reality were hit by the death of a key worker and problems with the site originally earmarked for the premises. But it now stands poised to progress, subject to funding. A new site is ready for conversion – three arches under a road viaduct, which was previously used as the county council’s lighting depot. The plans envisage that social enterprises will pay rent according to their income, then as the business grows, so will the project’s income – until it’s time for the successful venture to move on when it can pay market rates (hopefully after 12-18 months).

One of the arches has already been converted into training space for arts and crafts. The other two will provide 20 units, plus reception and training space – enough to be self-sustaining, Ms Goldschmidt believes.

Harrow in Business – Rejuvenating retailers

Although the days of the corner shop being the hub of the community may be long gone in many areas, the small independent retailer still has an important role to play in delivering services on residential estates.

But the economic and social blight that has affected so many urban estates has seen these, often family-based, businesses suffer hard times. A project pioneered by Harrow in Business attempted to breathe new life back into such shops in a suburb of London.

Rejuvenating Retailers was set up as an enterprise promotion and development programme working with isolated, family-based independent retailers facing economic difficulty and closure.

The project had two broad aims: improving the position of these independent retailers by providing appropriate business support, training and advice; and using the entrepreneurial skills of these businesses to encourage enterprise and self-help in the disadvantaged residential areas around them.

Its objectives were to enhance the quality of life of the people who work in these businesses by developing long-term strategies to improve their competitiveness, or help them move into other enterprises.

Importantly, the project intended to create a tailored programme that recognised the particular needs of women in independent retailers, improving their skills and their contribution to family businesses.

Project co-ordinator Alan Pluck admits the original framework had to be tweaked to allow the scheme to address the problems it found. He says: "The original bid was for a pan-London project, but with hindsight this was probably too ambitious."

The project concentrated on providing one-to-one advice, guidance and consultancy to identify the key challenges faced by retailers, pinpoint opportunities and envisage the future roles local retailers and pharmacists should play in the delivery of community services.

"This has gone from investigating their business support needs to working with the family members to look at issues such as racial abuse, handling stress and health," he says.

The project reached out to 400 independent retailers, over 80% of these being from black and ethnic minorities and half of them being women. More than 150 of these retailers became full clients of the project.

Mr Pluck says: "We have mainly helped in assisting businesses to grow, but there is also the issue of helping them gain confidence and looking at how they can strengthen their markets."

"We have mainly helped in assisting businesses to grow, but there is also the issue of helping them gain confidence."



highlights

The objective was to enhance the quality of life of independent retailers

Work ranged from investigating business support needs to working with the family members to look at issues such as racial abuse, handling stress and health

The project reached out to 400 independent retailers, over 80% of these being from black and ethnic minorities and half of them being women

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING



highlights

Research into the impact of self-employment training for prisoners

Highly positive responses after completing the course

Nearly 200 prisoners involved; seven ex-offenders known to be in self-employment

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HM Prison The Mount – Moving on

Getting work is notoriously difficult for ex-offenders, and being without a job makes it doubly difficult to go straight. One solution is self-employment, which avoids the problem of persuading an employer to take on someone with a compromised background.

In some ways, self-employment can also be suited to the entrepreneurial spirit and individuality of many ex-offenders.

Prisoners are therefore often offered self-employment courses while they are inside, and this project set out to discover the value of such training. It focused on a course called Firmstart, which is delivered by the education department at The Mount. It is a full-time course which lasts 12 weeks and consists of eight modules which build up to producing a detailed business plan and achieving a qualification accredited by the Open College Network. The course is supported by a group of volunteer mentors who help prisoners with research and planning and give advice based on their own business experience.

The first part of this project aimed to discover prisoners' views of the course and the extent to which they felt it had helped them prepare for self-employment. This elicited responses such as:

"It gave me an overall look at business and what it takes to run a business."

"I never realised before that running my own business was realistic and in my power."

"Valued the qualification – first and only."

Of course, not everyone was completely satisfied, although the general tone of responses reflects the popularity of the course, which usually results in a waiting list. One disillusioned student responded to a question

asking whether it had made a lasting difference:

"Without money it is a waste of time."

Others were much more positive, however:

"I am very pleased with my business plan and looking forward to the future."

"I believe I am more confident in my ability to actually do this."

"It has made me aware of being self-employed and given me ambitions."

Discovering whether such ambitions were achieved proved highly problematic, however. It is natural for ex-offenders to prefer not to have contact with the prison where they served their time. In many cases there is no known address following release – a difficulty exacerbated by the fact that the discharge grant is higher if the prisoner claims "no fixed abode".

Attempts to discover the extent of self-employment therefore met with little response. But several graduates of the course did confirm that they had become self-employed – seven in all. And the lessons from this research have been incorporated in other prison work, such as that at the Dukeries (page 40).

"I never realised before
that running my own business was
realistic and in my power."

Houghall Enterprises – Encouraging rural entrepreneurs

The death rattle of the coal and steel industries left County Durham reeling and dazed. For the communities left on the ropes by this severe blow, the foot and mouth disaster that followed could well have been the knockout punch.

But this initiative showed that, with the right approach, people could be encouraged to fight back. The essential aim behind this project was to raise awareness of the possibilities offered by self-employment as a career option, to encourage and help people to explore their own business ideas.

It has proved successful, through the simple strategy of talking to people on their own terms, gaining their trust in informal sessions, while at the same time giving them confidence to look afresh at what they could achieve.

As Karen Williams, project co-ordinator, says: “We learned that in order to gain credibility with our target audience it was absolutely necessary to approach them at a grass roots, one-to-one level.

“We did this through informal awareness sessions which produced much better results than newspaper advertisements. We learned that an informal approach was far more likely to gain people’s confidence than a formal, structured delivery.”

Around half of the project’s current 50-plus clients are women. One of these is Sheila Hannant who has been with the project for over a year. Sheila’s is among thirteen businesses which have taken off.

She went into business as a counsellor and is already looking to diversify. She says of the initiative: “A lifeline to every kind of business support. The project doesn’t forget that we, as individuals, are our business. Regular

“We learned that an informal approach was far more likely to gain people’s confidence than a formal, structured delivery.”

meetings with other entrepreneurs have been invaluable. I couldn’t have done without the support, hope and encouragement.”

Another client is Gillian Barrass, who wanted to start bed and breakfast accommodation to capitalise on the growing tourist industry in County Durham. “The scheme is the best thing since sliced bread because the support offered is excellent,” she says. “It has kept me motivated with good honest and upfront advice, backed up with knowledge.”

The ‘honest and upfront’ advice is what those involved with the project believe has made the initiative a success.

Ms Williams says: “Phoenix funding has allowed us to start working with the rural community of County Durham in a way that was not possible before. Our use of an interactive website and the formation of self-help groups for clients are new approaches. But our one-to-one client input is the really important part of the project.”



highlights

Raising awareness of the possibilities offered by self-employment as a career option

Honest and upfront advice the key to success

More than 50 clients are women, 13 businesses have taken off as a result of the programme

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING



highlights

Supporting refugees

with skills to help set up businesses

Support must be sensitive to a refugee's religious and cultural background and tackle a legacy of depression and disappointment

15% of all beneficiaries went on to establish a new small business

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8B CONTINUATION FUNDING

IMRC – Enterprise support for the disadvantaged

“In our experience, refugees are often serious, dedicated and capable people who have a survival instinct, a strong character and are eager to learn,” says Dr. Matin Kahn, founder of International Management and Recruitment Consultants (IMRC).

IMRC ran this project in two parts of north London to help refugees from disadvantaged ethnic minorities start a new business. “Refugees need special help developed over time and can't be treated like any other small business. They may have come from highly educated backgrounds or held senior positions but they have lots of troubles on their mind and have often gone through hell.”

Support must be sensitive to a refugee's religious and cultural background and tackle a legacy of depression and disappointment by enhancing soft skills such as confidence and self-belief. “That means we have to learn to listen, to be there for them and to understand their real problems,” Dr Khan says. This project therefore worked specifically to develop and deliver a service built upon flexible, patient bespoke advice and moral support designed to build rapport and lasting relationships.

Business awareness seminars were widely advertised and made open to any refugee keen to explore how they might develop a business idea. Over 1000 people attended more than sixty such events that selected those who were clearly serious, committed and capable.

In total, 139 men and 234 women, 86% of them from ethnic minorities, won a place on a programme of Business English lessons designed to deliver vocabulary, technical content and cultural protocol sufficient to break through into a legal, financial and social system that can seem impregnable for many refugees. Each person also received a needs analysis, supported by personalised, one-to-one life and business coaching.

This approach succeeded, to the extent that nearly 15% of trainees went on to start up a new business (29 men, 27 women). The approach was labour intensive but the results show just how far a small amount of soft inputs will go towards reaping a significant long term dividend.

Take for example Seevagan, a Sri Lankan journalist who fled with his wife and family to the UK in August 2000 after death threats from the government. As skilled reporters, he and his wife hated living on social security but could not fund a full time college course to retrain, and lacked enough English language to get a good job. Seevagan joined classes at IMRC and began meeting regularly with an adviser to discuss ideas to set up his own video production company. Access to funding enabled Seevagan to start Arangam Vision Makers, training 7 people from his own community in video production and buying his first equipment. Now Seevagan combines freelance production work in Tamil for the Sri Lankan market with a UK bi-monthly Tamil video magazine. He also works part time for the BBC's Tamil service.

“Refugees need special help developed over time and can't be treated like any other small business.”

Isle of Wight Business Lottery Investment Fund

The Isle of Wight Lottery is the first in England to be developed specifically to create employment opportunities. It was set up with the help of Phoenix funding by The Isle of Wight Opportunity Society in 2000.

The first draw took place in April 2001, and the Lottery now attracts over 5,300 regular participants.

Emulating a similar lottery that has been operating in Pembrokeshire since 1993, the IoW scheme is run on a strictly non-profit basis with all proceeds – income less allowable expenses and prizes – directed into a Loan Fund offering interest free finance to local business start-ups or expansion. Proceeds into the Loan Fund must be at least 20% of the total Lottery income to comply with legislation.

The Lottery's objective is to create new, long term sustainable local jobs, across all sectors of the community and encompassing a broad spread of age and ability. It recognises in particular a need to provide young people with job opportunities (or access to capital) to pursue the option of a career on the Island.

Jane Aslett, the lottery manager, emphasises that customers are investing in their own communities. "Every £1 entry into the Lottery plays a vital part in generating real employment opportunities"

In an efficient cashless operation, all £1 weekly entries are paid either by standing order or by payroll deduction (over 20 employers offer this facility). Either way, no-one has to remember to buy a ticket every week and each entrant has a unique personal number entered in the weekly computer-generated draw for which there is a guaranteed cash prize of £2,000.

The loan fund can be accessed by Island entrepreneurs to finance business start-up activity or expansion of an existing small business. All projects must be commercially viable or have the potential to become so, regardless of whether proposals are made by groups which are disadvantaged or under-represented in terms of business ownership. All loans are granted on an interest-free basis, to be repaid over a maximum three years.

The Loan Fund is rarely the primary source of finance, but seeks to syndicate with other providers, with a particular emphasis on bridging funding gaps (up to 50% of total project costs, subject to a maximum of £25,000).

Applications are assessed and approved by an independent investment panel, whose members are local professionals and business people serving on a voluntary basis.

Phoenix funding came to an end in April 2003 but the Lottery has continued to thrive, with 7.5% of the economically active adult population on the island taking part, and considerable interest from local businesses. By April 2004 a total of 32 loans had been granted and the Lottery was able to increase the number of prizes available every week To coincide with the 3rd birthday there will be additional 2nd and 3rd prizes of £350 and £150.

"Every £1 entry into the Lottery plays a vital part in generating real employment opportunities for our local community."



highlights

The Isle of Wight Lottery is the first in England to be developed specifically to create employment opportunities

Aims to help create new, long term sustainable jobs on the Island

Has supported over 30 companies with interest-free loans worth in total over £150,000, creating over 70 jobs

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highlights

Helping women in Birmingham to gain business skills

Recruiting through traditional networks such as nurseries or mother and toddler groups

Many women left with valuable training and qualifications

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Just for Starters – Catalyst for change

The flexibility of self-employment can make it ideal for women who have family demands which may have kept them out of the job market. But while many women have skills which could earn them a living, many lack the confidence or know-how to set the ball rolling.

The Catalyst For Change (C4C) project run by Just for Starters targeted women like that in Birmingham, helping some to learn business skills and pursue their dream, others already in business to take a step up. Colette Nubie, for example, set up Infinity Studio: “I have been playing around with the idea of starting up my own business for some time, but it wasn’t until I came to Just For Starters that I could put all my ideas into some sort of timetable to achieve. I have changed since starting the C4C programme. I have become a lot more determined and concentrated.”

Sharon Colphon, who was the Enterprise Development Officer, says women were recruited through their traditional networks. “You have to go where the market is, where it’s easy for them to get to, where they go every week and it’s easy so they don’t have to make an appointment – nurseries, mother and toddler groups.”

The C4C programme offered help with childcare and travel to make it easier for women to participate. It then took the recruits step-by-step through a course over the next two or three months which helped them understand their training needs, work on their business plan and learn about specific areas such as marketing and finance. “Marketing was the biggest thing. They all wanted to know about marketing,” Ms Colphon says. And that included women who were already trading, such as the proprietor of the Uni7 hair salon, who had a successful six months behind her but wanted to develop through a proper business plan and some marketing expertise.

“I have changed since starting the C4C programme. I have become a lot more determined and concentrated.”

A little later she would have been able to turn to one of C4C’s graduates, who set up M J Marketing precisely to help such businesses – people who knew they needed marketing and wanted to buy in a marketing service.

While several businesses did emerge from C4C, many women did not find the courage or resources to put their business plans into action. “They did the business plan but then families or other responsibilities started to interfere, or they hit a funding obstacle,” Ms Colphon says.

Even so, many of these women left with valuable training, including NVQ Level 3, RSA qualifications and health and safety certificates. As Silvia Owusu-Nepaul put it:

“It was an opportunity for me to plan my business for the future, by pulling together all my thoughts and goals towards the business, to build a business plan and gain additional qualifications which will support my potential success in business.”

4Children – (formerly known as Kids' Clubs Network)

It is easy to overwhelm people with business jargon, even when it is aimed at a fairly low level. That is one of the main lessons from this project, which set out to discover how best to help women in disadvantaged areas to create childcare businesses.

The organisation now known as 4Children wanted to find out how to inspire women from black and ethnic minorities to capitalise on childcare opportunities at the start and finish of the school day. Two pilots ran in Lambeth, south London and Bradford.

But the women who were recruited were not ready to be plunged into business learning. The team realised they needed to mind their language. They had adopted a business approach, but found that the language of business and social enterprise was not readily understood or accessible for women who were more likely to be motivated by the opportunity to provide childcare rather than the drive to set up a business.

"We were starting at a much more intensive level than they wanted to start at," explains 4Children's head of social enterprise, Steve Keable. "There are important implications for access – you need a more gentle introduction to entrepreneurship."

Responding to these findings, the programme was tailored specifically to overcome initial barriers and to address the early-stage needs of the target groups. A specific access course was designed for those women re-entering a learning environment.

"The language and approach used needs to resonate with the key stakeholders. Bridges also still need to be built between the childcare field and business support sector," says Helen Wilkinson, who was development director of Kids' Clubs Network.

Training required a more intensive, personal approach than had originally been planned, with face-to-face coaching and support, and developing interpersonal skills. That gave clients the confidence to move on, Ms Wilkinson says: "The most important outcome has been the way in which this project has changed attitudes among the key client groups, many of whom did not consider themselves able to start a business,"

Having overcome this business barrier, the project went on to support 48 women through the training necessary to understand and develop a business plan and acquire the skills necessary to run their own business. As a result, 13 businesses have been set up – four in Bradford and nine in Lambeth.

As clients themselves commented: "This has given me practical ideas to improve how we do our work through planning and delegation and how to tackle issues such as marketing and funding". And: "The training gave me a clear sense of purpose, a grasp of the roles and responsibilities of my voluntary management committee, and confidence to approach issues and solve problems."

The project proved that there is a need for access courses that explain the concepts of business and social enterprise, as they are not fully understood by potential childcare providers. It has also helped 4Children to develop business support materials for childcare providers, including a business planning toolkit and voluntary management toolkit.

"We have developed materials tailored to that market, with a very, very gentle approach to business support," Mr Keable says.

"Bridges need to be built between the childcare field and business support sector."



highlights

Helping women in disadvantaged areas to create childcare businesses

The language of business and social enterprise was not readily understood or accessible

The most important outcome has been the way in which this project changed attitudes among the key client groups

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highlights

Business training

tailored specifically to creative people

People completing the business course received a free computer to help run their business

10 start-ups known to have come out of the project

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Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council – Creative industries business skills programme

Knowsley had a vision of creating a cluster of creative businesses in the borough, bringing them together in a managed workspace which would act as a vibrant centre for creativity in the area.

The Lancashire Watch Factory provides the physical space, but it was also clear that people who might have the necessary creative skills would also need to learn about turning them into a business. The Phoenix Fund provided the support to deliver that essential business learning.

The project set out to provide specialist training which was appropriate to creative people wanting to become self-employed. This consisted of an NVQ small business course, seminars and one-to-one support. It was designed to ensure that the presentation and content was tailored to the sector rather than being a standard course which could be delivered to any group wanting to learn about business. Informality was also encouraged so that participants could benefit from networking with people in a similar position to themselves.

Every effort was made to make the training as informal and flexible as possible, but some participants nevertheless seemed to be put off by the feeling of going to college. “We have found it difficult to get people to sign up and attend consistently,” explained a spokesperson. “One factor is that most people taking part are on a low income. If the opportunity comes along to earn some money then they usually have to take it.”

From May 2001 to March 2002 a total of 60 people, mostly from Kirkby and Huyton, benefited from the training programme. Most of them were unemployed,

with only two in full-time employment. But some worked part-time, often at short notice, which made it difficult to make the sessions. For example, a qualified jewellery maker was working at IKEA to earn money while she took the self-employment course. When her shift pattern changed it became difficult to complete the course.

Those who did complete the business course achieved an NVQ Level 3 qualification. They also left not only with a well-developed business plan but also a free, reconditioned computer to help run their business. Ten business start-ups are known to have come out of the project.

It confirmed that there is demand for creative business training, but as the organiser observed: “Many people in Knowsley have good creative ideas but may lack the confidence, knowledge, self-esteem and capacity to take them to the next stage.”

“Most people taking part are on a low income. If the opportunity comes along to earn some money then they usually have to take it.”

LA Raiders Soccer Academy – Community coaching network

Football is seen by many young people as a way to climb the ladder of success and achieve financial security. But for the handful of mega-rich soccer stars there are thousands who never achieve their dream.

That is now changing as a result of the LA Raiders Soccer Academy in Leyton, east London. Its community coaching network is producing qualified football coaches who have also developed business skills.

The aim of the project was to provide an exit strategy for qualified football coaches to move into self employment. The target was the ethnic minorities who, although keen on football, had relatively little in the way of formal schooling and, as a consequence, had little structure to support their aspirations off the field.

Noel Morris is one of the project co-ordinators. He says: “The idea grew from the members of a local football team who had achieved some NVQs and sports coaching qualifications, but lacked the support to take their careers that step further.

“We developed community coaches. They had already gained some coaching qualifications but we helped them to become better qualified, while at the same time helping them to develop a work ethic.”

The retention rate has been good. This, says Mr Morris, is down to an informal delivery of the service the project is providing. “We’re very user friendly and open to everyone. It has to be like that when some of the people have been school drop-outs and they are coming into an environment that is more structured than they’re used to. We’ve had people walk away but they soon come back.”

“The community coaching network has enabled me to remain in football and without the project I would not be able to proceed with coaching or develop my career.”

Twenty-seven self-employed football coaches have been produced by the scheme, going off to work in the world of soccer at professional level or with local authorities.

One of them is Sertac Yousef, one of the original students at the academy, who was involved in the development of the network. Sertac (24) has also used his time to gain further qualifications. He is currently studying for his level three coaching badge and his skills as a coach are in demand by local schools.

He says: “The community coaching network has enabled me to remain in football and without the project I would not be able to proceed with coaching or develop my career.”

Mr Morris adds: “The Phoenix funding has allowed the organisation the time to plan ahead to develop sustainability and has enabled our newly qualified football coaches a route into the world of work.

For the future, the community coaching network is in negotiation with a local authority to take over the management of 30 acres of land with 20 football pitches – a long way from the days when members of a local football team decided they wanted something more.



highlights

27 self employed football coaches, mostly from BME groups, have been produced as a result of the project

Retention rate has been good, which is put down to the service’s ‘informal delivery’

The community coaching network is in negotiation with a local authority to take over the management of 30 acres of land with 20 football pitches

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highlights

Focus on boosting enterprise in the music industry

Development of a virtual business incubation scheme that has helped 58 businesses and 11 start-ups

Will lead to the creation of ARK, a centre for creative enterprise and entrepreneurship in Liverpool

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts – MusicBias

The psychologist Carl Jung famously said Liverpool was the pool of life. Indeed, it seems innovation and imagination are a prerequisite for growing up there and the city has done it again with a groundbreaking idea that Phoenix funding helped bring to fruition.

Mainstream business support providers have had great difficulty reaching and helping creative industry enterprises in their early stages, particularly those operating in the niche markets favoured by many entrepreneurs from black and ethnic minority groups. New, flexible, and specialist support systems were required to meet this need.

To address the problem, the project piloted a range of services for a 2-tier special focus 'without-walls' business incubation programme, targeting early-stage ventures in the music business and related industries. It focused on ventures with owner-managers from ethnic minorities, young people from areas of social and economic deprivation, women, and unemployed people.

Nikki Hayden is one of them. At 23 she is the black lone parent of two children, but for the past 12 months she has kick-started a career in music promotion.

She says: "I've got an office, help with fund raising and all the other tasks that can seem daunting to someone like me wanting to start a career. The whole project has been a breath of fresh air in Liverpool. This is something every city should have."

The findings from the project may have put down markers for other initiatives in the future. Project co-ordinator Pete Fulwell explains: "In the course of carrying out the pilot project we have developed an effective new model for virtual business incubation that to date has significantly helped 58 businesses, and led to 11 new enterprises successfully starting to trade."

He also says the project has delivered data for mapping client needs: "It has enabled the production of a dynamic picture of client needs across several business development market segments as they proceed through the programme."

One business that has been helped is Liverpool's arts and entertainment magazine, 'Live'. Mike Clarke, for the

magazine, says: "We were helped with advice on setting up, and now we regularly meet with financial advisers linked to the project. Plus, there are so many connections to the project that we are able to network with a whole cross-section of people."

One of the main spin-offs for the future is the establishment of ARK, a new Centre for Creative Enterprise and Entrepreneurship in Liverpool. The incubation model has also been adopted by Liverpool John Moores University and the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts for supporting graduate start-ups in Fashion & Textiles, Fine Art and Design, Acting and Dance.

*"I've got an office,
help with fund raising and all the other tasks
that can seem daunting to someone like
me wanting to start a career."*

Local Investment Fund – Finance Corporation

Access to traditional forms of financing can often be fraught with difficulties where social as well as financial objectives are at the heart of an organisation’s business strategy.

With many high street banks still failing to understand this ‘double bottom line’, a raft of Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs) have emerged in recent years, which are prepared to look beyond an organisation’s balance sheet to assess the true strength of its business model and loan potential.

The Local Investment Fund (LIF) is one such loan provider. Since its establishment in 1995, with backing from the Government, it has offered 98 loans totalling nearly £7 million. This has leveraged almost £40 million into community regeneration, and created or maintained more than 2000 jobs.

When it came to the Phoenix Development Fund, however, the LIF’s successful application was not built on future loan provisions, but on a feasibility study to look at reshaping the very nature of CDFIs in Britain.

Roger Brocklehurst, LIF’s Director, wanted to improve the day-to-day operation of the community financing sector: “Some of the banks were finding it hard to deal with individual CDFIs knocking on their door asking for money. Equally, this process was frequently a long hard slog for many smaller CDFIs.”

LIF’s suggested solution was an intermediary organisation which would raise new wholesale finance for CDFIs working in regeneration areas. Based on research from the New Economics Foundation and a previously successful model created for the housing finance community, the aim was to simplify borrowing and lending for both parties, while also maximising the benefit from the Community Investment Tax Credit.

“Some of the banks were finding it hard to deal with individual CDFIs knocking on their door asking for money.”

“A dedicated wholesale fund makes it much easier for CDFIs to raise money,” says Roger. “The LIF study also showed that this intermediary organisation would be able to act as a broker in connection with the Community Investment Tax Credit scheme, which would bring added advantages to the CDFIs concerned through lowering the cost of funds.”

The report’s recommendations were taken up by one of the UK’s most successful social businesses, The Big Issue. The Big Issue Fund, which has since been renamed BIGinvest, is a £10 million loan fund designed to spearhead social investment in deprived areas.

Following the findings of LIF’s initial feasibility study, BIGinvest was launched in April 2003 with initial funding provided by the Bank of Scotland. It provides loans from £100,000 upwards to CDFIs across the UK in order to help them grow and develop through access to large-scale, low-cost loan finance.

Mr Brocklehurst is optimistic about the further and wider implications of LIF’s study: “This is a great way of establishing a performance benchmark for the CDFI sector,” he says. “By creating an intermediary that really understands the sector, we can, over time, improve performance across the board.”



highlights

Feasibility study to examine the case for an organisation to raise finance from banks to invest in community development finance institutions

Finance would be invested in regeneration areas and marginalised communities

The Big Issue launch of BIGinvest, which is making loans of up to £100,000 to CDFIs across the UK

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SE

highlights

Raising the profile of social enterprises

The project has led to the building of a 60-place nursery that has created 20 jobs in the local area

Gazebo has been involved in the creation of 14 new businesses

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Longbridge Advice and Resource Centre – Gazebo project

At least 60 Birmingham children will have cause to thank the Gazebo Project this summer, because the nursery they are to attend would not have opened without it.

The £1.2million Grendon and Billesley Nursery and Family Centre had its roots in a casual conversation between Gazebo operations manager Steve Conlon and a local councillor. Mr Conlon had been to a meeting in Billesley at which he had informed local people of the Gazebo Project's mission to support and set up social enterprises in the south west of Birmingham.

'When I was leaving the meeting, the local councillor got hold of me and said: "Wouldn't it be nice if we could get a nursery here? We've tried twice before and failed. Would you consider it?" That was music to my ears.'

Gazebo's four staff set to work advising a group of local residents how to set up a limited company to run the nursery, how to put together a business plan and to make funding bids. 'There was a fresh crisis every week, but we were on hand from the beginning and it only took about 19 months to get the thing built,' says Tracey Newman, Gazebo's development officer.

"99 out of 100 people
won't have heard of a social enterprise,
and the other one wouldn't be
too sure about it."

The result is a state of the art building that will employ 20 local people and offer much needed affordable child care places.

While the nursery is something of a jewel in the crown for Gazebo, the two and a half year project has had many other success stories, including the creation of a company that provides payroll services for more than a dozen small Birmingham organisations that were struggling to do their own books.

Run under the wing of the charitable Longbridge Advice and Resource Centre, Gazebo has been involved in the creation of 14 new businesses, creating dozens of jobs in the local economy and increasing the profile of social entrepreneurship as a result.

"Our main problem has been that there's a lack of understanding of what social enterprise is," says Miranda McCarthy, also a development officer. "99 out of 100 people won't have heard of a social enterprise, and the other one wouldn't be too sure about it.

Aside from being a support organisation for new businesses, Gazebo has also worked at an individual level, supporting unemployed and disadvantaged people to find work experience and opportunities or to set up their own social enterprises. John is one such person, who, thanks to Gazebo, now works for a company designing web sites – and has set up his own business pressing CDs.

Phoenix money also paid for three temporary Gazebo development workers, two of whom have themselves gone on to work for a social enterprise, Ipress Design, that helps voluntary groups put together community newspapers. The other, who had been out of work for many years, has helped set up the Birmingham Music Network, supporting the music industry in the city.

"Essentially we've been a catalyst, working to support whatever activity there is out there, but also trying to get things going ourselves," says Mr Conlon.

Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre – Devices

For many people, the arrival of teleworking is a gift from heaven. At last, a chance to flex entrepreneurial muscles without paying for office space or making the dreaded daily commute. But there's a downside. Teleworking can be lonely.

The need for human interaction was recognised by the Luton And Dunstable Innovation Centre, an organisation that provides shared office facilities for aspiring new companies across four sites. The organisation has helped many local companies over the years but as teleworking became more commonplace it realised some businesses were beyond its reach.

Project leader Mike Anstey says: "We became aware of a group of people who wanted to work with us, but could not come in to the office. Often they were full-time carers, disabled or older workers who had begun working from home. They wanted our help, but not in the way it was being offered. We decided to do something"

In 2002, the team won financial support from the Phoenix Development Fund to create "Devices"; a collection of support materials and services designed to give local teleworkers a leg-up in business and, crucially, a sense of community. (The name stems from "designing effective visual interaction")

"Workers who had begun working from home wanted our help. But not in the way it was being offered."

Devices gives home-based companies all the community benefits available to existing Innovation Centre members, without the need to locate in one of its offices. Mr Anstey and the team developed a support pack comprising:

- membership of the Innovation Centre
- webcam and microphone
- membership of the Teleworkers' Association
- home working software
- USB key (plugs in to a PC to allow access to the Devices web site and authorising online payments)

Participating businesses will be able to take their place in an online community. They will have access to each other, to the central "hub"; to the 46 businesses already supported by the Innovation Centre and to organisations such as Business Link and UK Online.

But the Devices team will go further in its quest for community. It will arrange online group conferences and encourage structured interaction and networking between members. These encounters could be via voice, instant messaging or even the web cam.

The Innovation Centre even plans to interrupt people, albeit in a creative way. Mr Anstey explains: "People get interrupted at work all the time. Yes, it can be an annoyance. But it can also liven up the day, give you new ideas and make work more human. We're going to replicate this by contacting members unannounced."

Devices will begin sharing its proposals with other business support organisations after it is formally launched in May 2004. "We want the pack to be widely available, without proprietary restrictions. Other organisations should be free to add their own materials and ideas to suit their own circumstances," says Mr Anstey.



highlights

Home workers often crave the human interaction that sparks new ideas

The "Devices" project will recreate community among teleworkers using voice, instant messaging or video conferencing

The Innovation Centre plans to interrupt people – in a creative way

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING



highlights

A specially tailored programme to promote and support designer-makers

60% of people who come to Mazorca are women, and 20% are from ethnic minority groups

A franchising scheme is currently being piloted and plans are afoot to roll this out further

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

Mazorca Projects – Hidden Art one-stop shop

Furniture-maker Beatriz came to London from Madrid and was attracted to the creative reputation of the east end of London. As a newcomer to the scene, she needed a way of making contacts and getting the right advice to develop her business.

This is where Mazorca Projects was able to help. The organisation is the first of its kind to create a specially tailored programme to support designer-makers, and there is growing worldwide interest in its work.

The support offered is comprehensive and is based on detailed research of the sector's needs. It includes a mix of networking events, workshops, links to manufacturers, events to help showcase work, and a website offering online support.

"The marketing work is linked to a support programme which means the support is able to have a practical outcome," explains chief executive Dieneke Ferguson. "The support and help we offer is very flexible and based on people's needs. The Phoenix Fund enabled us to pilot a flexible, cost-effective support package built upon lessons we have learned over the years."

In total, about 60 per cent of people who come to Mazorca are women, and 20 per cent are from ethnic minority groups.

In Beatriz's case, it has meant being able to take part in an 'open studio' event and an art fair, which "enabled me to exhibit with little effort, as everything was organised and the space looked good," she explains.

Through the project, she has also hired younger designers on a freelance basis to help with new commissions, which now include large projects for public clients. This year she will take a new design for an outdoor seating bench to an important show in Milan.

The project helped focus the organisation on the question of long-term sustainability. A membership scheme has been developed, as well as a shop and a franchising package. Which will be tested initially with two franchisees.

"We're very proud of the number of people we've supported. We've been able to make a difference because we support people over a long period of time," Ms Ferguson says.

She adds: "People can come back, email for advice, or go to events, collaborate with others, and find new markets. This has materialised into sales. There's a large pool of people we can draw on as our structure is very network oriented. It's about access to information for people engaged in what tends to be very isolating work"

"We're very proud of
the number of people we've supported.
We've been able to make a difference
because we support people over a long
period of time."

The National Federation of SubPostmasters

Despite waves of closures, 3,000 more post offices from inner-city London to outlying rural areas are still under threat. But many previously under-performing post offices could have a bright and prosperous future.

This project, run by the National Federation of SubPostmasters (NFSP) provide professional retail advice on best practice to sub-postmasters in deprived rural and urban locations. It also enables them to help sub-postmasters put together applications to the Government's Deprived Urban Post Office Fund.

Making outlets more profitable would not only secure post office services in deprived areas, but the continued provision of financial services would also help stem social exclusion.

Like any business, post offices need to know their market if they are to prosper. They may need to diversify. Because of the advice given by the project's officers, post offices have been able to capitalise on empty shop space and find profitable gaps in local markets.

Thomas Higgins wanted to fully utilise the 300 square feet of space in his post office in a deprived area of Greater Manchester. He already had greetings cards and stationery on display, but there was still spare space.

He began stocking baby clothes and accessories because the area had a high concentration of young families. But what he didn't hit on was the buying culture of many families in deprived areas. The standard way to buy and pay for clothes in his neighbourhood was through a

catalogue. It costs more overall, but the payments are staggered, putting less of a burden on the weekly budget. The sub-postmaster was soon left with stock on his hands.

But with help from one of the project's officers, a marketing survey was carried out which showed a great demand for household products and toiletries – products not normally bought through a catalogue and for which there is a continual market.

As Mr Higgins says: "It was an experiment with the baby clothes that didn't pay off, but following the project's marketing exercise we are confident the new line in toiletries and household goods will. We wouldn't have known there was a demand for these without the project's help."

One of the problems has been evaluating the project's success. Ken Boosey, project leader, says: "In simple number terms it can be measured on the numbers of sub-postmasters accessing the advisors. But the benefits derived from the advice will be impossible to measure, due to the fact that members of the NFSP are not required to share sales information."

Nevertheless he hopes members who have benefited will volunteer sales information to demonstrate the effect the project has had in helping maintain the nation's post office network.

"We wouldn't have known there was a demand for these without the project's help."



highlights

Tackling financial exclusion by helping post offices to become viable operations

Sustaining financial services and other amenities in areas of deprivation

Bringing marketing skills to bear on sales problems

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highlights

The Programme has tried and tested a robust model of intervention with ethnic minority micro-businesses that could be replicated elsewhere

For Asian entrepreneurs, culturally sensitive, multilingual business and e-commerce advice has been a thoroughly rare commodity

More than 180 Asian micro-businesses have benefited

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Nazir Associates – Asian business support programme

For Asian entrepreneurs, culturally sensitive, multilingual business and e-commerce advice has been a thoroughly rare commodity – especially something that is both non-prescriptive and responsive to their specific ‘micro-business’ needs.

With funding from the Phoenix Fund, the Asian business consultancy Nazir Associates set out to change that in and around Birmingham and Sandwell in communities such as Saltley Heath.

The Programme had three facets. The central part was a package of local, ethnically sensitive business analysis and advice for existing small Asian businesses suffering from social exclusion. This started with 5 days of jargon-free ‘needs analysis & business review’. Then there were up to 5 days of more specialist professional inputs to meet the identified needs. Under this programme element, project staff also trained and accredited five new Asian small business consultants.

The second part of the programme set out to support local Asians keen to patent and market innovative ideas. It also worked to good effect with new start-ups that did not happen to have a patentable idea.

The third segment was an ICT and E-commerce support project. The computer hardware component stopped after the first year (because it was found impossible to source a supply of reconditioned computer equipment) but the focus continued with most clients receiving e-commerce solutions.

“Conventional marketing won few participants for the project. Instead, our project staff resorted to ‘outreach walks’, visiting hundreds of Asian businesses.” says

“Conventional marketing won few participants for the project. Instead, our project staff resorted to ‘outreach walks’, visiting hundreds of Asian businesses.”

Mohammed Nazir, managing director of Nazir Associates. “We estimate that one firm signed up from every two or three visited, and that over 75% of the 180 clients recruited to the project came through this route.”

Most clients (70%) came from the retail sector. Many were Pakistani (though Kashmiri, Indian and Bangladeshi groups were also represented) and most employed between 1 and 4 employees. Nazir Associates believes that sourcing trustworthy outside help is often the core constraint to growth for micro businesses like this.

“Business, to most Asian entrepreneurs, is a private matter, so those outside the family are rarely invited to get involved. Consultants therefore need to understand their culture, their first language and the specialist markets they serve.”

Marketing proved to be the most serious constraint for most clients. Many wanted to know how to reach a much wider audience and build a stronger brand. Demand was high for advice on ways to improve stationery, catalogues, brochures, tele-marketing, direct mail and websites.

NewLink

The charity NewLink had been working with disabled people for 15 years, introducing them to the power of computing, through courses and workshops. But there was a nagging concern that very few of its graduates were moving into mainstream employment.

That was not through any failings in the training programmes, or the students, demonstrated by the fact that many of them ended up working for the charity as tutors. Indeed more than half of NewLink's employees are disabled people.

Bringing in a coach to help people get jobs wasn't the answer. There is an understandable concern that somebody who is actively seeking work could lose incapacity benefits, which makes people reluctant to enter a process they feel they have no control over.

Social enterprise seemed to offer more hope – disabled people working together in self-sustaining firms, but where the main purpose was to generate jobs, not profits. "It seemed much more interesting than sheltered work, or trying to shoe-horn people into mainstream jobs," says Simon Probert, who was the NewLink project worker.

At the time, the East Midlands was the one region without a social firms network. But Phoenix funding allowed a NewLink group of six volunteers to investigate social firms elsewhere – as far afield as North Wales and Cornwall. These investigations led to NewLink providing the secretariat for the Social Firms East Midlands network, and Mr Probert became the regional co-ordinator.

The next step, working with Leicester & County Co-operative Development Agency and Derbyshire County Council, was to offer business support to organisations with the potential to generate more income. Swadlincote's

Newhall Garden Centre, which has now become a co-operative called Blooming Marvels, is one example.

The garden centre was attached to a day centre for people with learning disabilities, and made a little bit of money selling its products. But that money had to be paid to Social Services, which obviously made it impossible to construct a business plan. It took six months of negotiations to leap that hurdle. Opening a bank account was another logistical nightmare, since the former service users who are now the co-op directors did not have the necessary documentation, such as passports, driving licences or utility bills.

These difficulties were eventually overcome and the 20 users became staff members, joining the two existing paid staff to open as Blooming Marvels in April 2003. The venture has generated a surplus, some of which will be paid to the members as dividends, with the ultimate goal of creating paid jobs. They have been highly motivated by their control of the enterprise and by learning business skills such as book-keeping and marketing.

Pam Monk, Deputy Manager of the Day Centre, stresses that the transformation from service users to members is very real: "The project is now quite self-contained. These people are in charge now and they just get on with it."

Several other horticulture projects have been helped in similar ways, as well as others including two recycling enterprises.

"The project is now quite self-contained. These people are in charge now and they just get on with it."



highlights

Social enterprise offered the prospect of disabled people working together in self-sustaining firms, but where the main purpose was to generate jobs, not profits

Opening a bank account was a logistical nightmare, since the former service users who are now the co-op directors did not have the necessary documentation

The venture has generated a surplus, some of which will be paid to the members as dividends

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highlights

Cultural development programme targeting severe exclusion

Planned creation of an events production workforce to organise functions for local enterprises

After the training NonStop offers business support which includes expert advice, trade opportunities and work experience

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

The NonStop Foundation – Creative access

There are three groups of people who regularly feel socially excluded: young people from ethnic minority groups, unemployed people and ex-offenders. If you are all three then there is little wonder that the odds are stacked against you.

You certainly wouldn't expect to be performing at the Don Valley Grass Bowl in Sheffield in front of over 8,000 people within a year. But that is exactly what will happen to clients of The NonStop Foundation in Sheffield.

NonStop runs a 'cultural development programme' targeting people who feel socially excluded. They also stage the 3dom Festival, a multi-cultural event which takes place every year in Sheffield. It is the Foundation's shop window and, more relevantly, a chance for the young people on the programme to be involved, in a variety of capacities, in staging a substantial event.

Chief Executive, Dee Warburton, says: "It is a great way for our people to get involved in running an event of this size. They take part in all aspects of the event, either as performers or as stewards, event staff, staging and so on. Some of those that already have businesses set up stalls and pick up business as well."

The NonStop Foundation has been helping people since 1993 to turn their dreams into reality in cultural industries such as music, dance, arts and design. At its inception, the focus was largely on the music industry but it has since widened to take in all cultural activities.

The programme works by offering innovative training covering business planning, web design, marketing, bookkeeping and graphic design. After the training NonStop offers support which includes expert advice, trade opportunities and work experience.

NonStop is a trusted organisation in the socially excluded circles it moves in and gains many clients through word of mouth. But it also markets itself at club and dance events, reaching out in the places where people who might be interested in its programmes can be found.

And it works. Twelve months ago John Tuxman was unemployed and recovering from a road accident. A year later, he has just launched his own multimedia creation company "Teknobug" and is also forging a career as a club DJ and music producer.

John says: "I already knew the sort of direction I wanted my career to take, but I lacked confidence and knowledge. Going on the courses that the cultural development programme provides helped me overcome this by putting me in touch with the people and the skills I needed. The programme NonStop have put together really works for people like me."

With 37,550 people unemployed locally and eight percent of those from ethnic minority groups, the Foundation's work is urgently needed. NonStop is looking to build on the success of 3dom, aiming to establish it as the largest multi-cultural event in the north of England, with an audience of over 15,000 providing plenty of opportunities.

"I already knew the sort of direction I wanted my career to take, but I lacked confidence and knowledge."

North Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire Coalfield Alliance

– Drivers for Change

When a region loses its major employers, the impact goes beyond those who worked for them. It also affects local companies that rely on these employers to fill their order books.

In North Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire the rationalisation of the coal industry hit hard throughout the '80s and '90s. But during 2000 and 2001 there were also significant job losses in the clothing and textiles sectors.

Concerned at the potential effect on the region, Bassetlaw District Council, on behalf of the North Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire Strategic Sub-Regional Partnership, launched a project to help local employers cultivate new business leads. With cash from the Phoenix Development Fund it launched Drivers for Change. The aim? "To maintain and grow order books, stimulate innovation and business planning, which will in turn lead to job safeguarding and creation, increased salary levels and training." The method? To fund four "enterprise champions" who would go out and work directly with 44 targeted organisations.

Drivers For Change was launched in April 2002. Andy Priscott, enterprise champion for engineering, describes the situation they found: "Most of the companies were just taking the work they were offered without thinking too much about their overall strategy and profile. What we tried to do was to help them widen their scope and think about their unique skills."

The project was met with almost universal enthusiasm. Mr Priscott says: "We found that if the director was set on change – and virtually all targeted by us were – then change would happen."

The champions' approach was usually to do a review of the business and then take decision-makers to a neutral venue to brainstorm, hammer out ideas and devise strategy. The remit included: analysing sales history and operations, database research, contacting existing customers and contracting new customers, coaching clients and colleagues on how to sell.

Two companies to benefit were SEM Technologies, which opened up a steady stream of work with Californian connector manufacturer Glenair, and Lindhurst Engineering, which signed lucrative "framework agreements" with water utilities.

While filling order books was a satisfying conclusion to the work carried out by Drivers For Change, the project also worked to increase long term prospects. A key strategy here was to create "clusters" within certain manufacturing sectors in which the participants could offer complementary skills to potential clients. In one instance a cluster comprising engineers, civil engineers, electrical engineers and remote sensing specialists collaborated on a bid to provide asset management for local utilities.

Overall, Drivers For Change has made a real difference to the region. Gross sales of the 44 companies assisted have increased by £2.45 million while 34 new full-time jobs have been created.

"We helped them to widen their scope and think about their unique skills."



highlights

Boosting continuing businesses to counter the impact of closures elsewhere

Seven firms said they probably would have ceased trading had the Drivers For Change Enterprise Champions not been engaged

The project was responsible for an estimated £2.45million gross sales increase, and helped to create 34 new full time jobs

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highlights

Returns and youth
courses a rich source of clients

Social enterprise
attracted huge interest from community groups wanting to move from grant dependency

“We set about creating
what the clients need rather than what we assumed they wanted”

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

North Hertfordshire District Council and Stevenage Borough Council – Enterprising communities

“We completely underestimated the potential,” says Sue Lawton, the Project Manager. “We started out signposting people to existing provision. But after the first 150 or so clients it was obvious they weren’t going to Business Links or Enterprise Agencies. It may have been self-exclusion but they felt uncomfortable with that kind of organisation.”

Clients were women and young people, especially Asian women. For example Lisa, who had built up professional millinery skills and wanted to start a business in original hat designs. Lisa didn’t know anything about setting up a business, and although she had visited Business Link she had not felt it offered the personal development she needed “The personal journey I have travelled since starting the course has been invaluable,” she says. “I am becoming more assertive, more confident and feel like I am finally in control of my own destiny.”

With help from the Enterprising Communities team and the In Credit programme she has now made the leap and is working with clients from London and beyond. Two dozen other businesses are also trading thanks to the stimulus and support from this project.

Patricia and Debbie have also benefitted from the programme, aiming to establish a personal style advisory business. They said: “We think that Enterprising Communities have helped us to visualise our full potential and made us realise that we can do it. It has helped us to build our confidence so we feel that we can fulfil our dream”.

The project found plenty such potential entrepreneurs. They went out into the communities of Stevenage, Hitchin

and Letchworth, including places of worship and education. Returners and Youth courses at places such as North Herts College were a rich source of women and young people wanting to be their own bosses.

Social enterprise also attracted huge interest from community groups looking at business development so they could move from grant dependency to generating their own income.

It became clear that the project needed to satisfy a demand for personal development as well as helping to develop ideas and possibilities, and explaining the practicalities. “We set about creating what the clients need rather than what we assumed they wanted”, Ms Lawton explains. “They want the technical support in a community environment, a cultural and physical setting they are comfortable with.” So now the project provides courses, often in partnership with a community centre and Business Links, and also offers access to micro-finance.

The main self-employment course is called In Credit, and that will become the name of the new independent organisation that will continue and expand this work from April 2004, with further Phoenix funding. A Stevenage office (the first permanent base) will be a launch-pad for the eastern region, fuelled by extra staff and partnerships with the Equal Project for Social Enterprise and the Prince’s Trust.

“Enterprising Communities
have helped us to visualise our full
potential and made us realise
that we can do it.”

Paces Development Limited – Venture

In October 2001, with the help of the Phoenix Development Fund, Paces found a way to extend support for disabled children to those aged over 18. The aim was to ease these “graduates” into independent employment in social enterprises.

Nick Palfreyman, project manager, explains: “The centre was clearly doing great work with children, but very little for adults with motor dysfunction. So we sought funding to change that. Now, Paces has become an ‘incubation unit’ with a support framework to help people develop the skills and confidence to seek work.”

Conductive education teachers now work alongside organisations such as Business In The Community and the South Yorkshire Social Enterprise Network to spread IT awareness, develop keyboard skills, draw up business plans and so on.

Of course, it hasn’t been plain sailing. Progress was slow as the project found its own pace. Mr Palfreyman says: “People with motor dysfunction have to be helped by teachers with experience. They can’t be hurried. And transport is a problem so it’s not easy to make and meet appointments.”

Finance was another potential problem: bank managers are predictably wary of lending money to disabled entrepreneurs.

Ultimately, the Paces Venture project has succeeded where it matters, helping over 90 disabled people. They include Kirstin, who is attending a part-time fashion course at Doncaster College despite significant physical disabilities and being unable to communicate by speech.

Kirstin’s ‘Gemini’ laptop doubles as a design tool – and the University of Nottingham is helping design a computer-based measuring and design facility. She now works in a Young Enterprise Scheme, buying in the stock for a gift shop open on the Paces site.

Through the example of people like Kirstin, this project has changed the expectations of some carers and professionals who previously believed their relatives or clients would never be skilled to work standards. Their success has also demonstrated that the social firm model is a sound base for enterprise involving disabled people. The project has also helped other disadvantaged groups such as refugees, drug users and people with mental health problems or learning disabilities.

This project recently received more Phoenix funding and will continue its work for another two years, hoping to extend support to refugees and people with substance abuse problems.

“Amazing work is carried out every day to help youngsters with motor dysfunction to take some control of their movements and improve the quality of their lives.”



highlights

A unique project, offering enterprise skills to people with motor dysfunction

Over 90 people helped and 10 enterprises launched

Continuing with the aim of extending support to asylum seekers and people with substance abuse problems

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING



highlights

Providing free business services to 19 Cornish social firms

100 local people in the Acorn "target group"

Two full-time members of staff taking a marketing support package to local companies

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Pentreath Industries – Acorn development

"Is it care or is it business?" That was the question that kept coming up whenever Pentreath Industries, a charity providing work experience, training and employment for people in Cornwall, examined the status of social firms.

In 2001, having concluded that the overwhelming desire of the people working in those firms was to create viable businesses, not just subsidised jobs, it approached the Phoenix Development Fund for a grant. The plan was to set up a new company that would help these enterprises with real business services – PR, advertising, branding and marketing.

The result was Acorn Developments. It opened for business, as a social firm itself, in July 2001. Louise Knox, acting chief executive of Pentreath Industries, describes the difference it made: "The social firms clearly needed some help if they were to be successful. Phoenix funding enabled us to offer this as a free service."

The primary expertise of the Acorn staff is in marketing, but it also provides support with IT, web services, health and safety issues, personnel, management services, staff training and financial planning. After it became clear that many social firm managers found it difficult to get away from work for support sessions, Acorn developed a range of support materials and sent its team on site visits.

They had an immediate impact on some of the 19 social enterprises in the area. With Cornish World, a magazine devoted to local life, Acorn helped re-design the cover to

make it more saleable, as well as chasing more advertising revenue. As a result the magazine moved to break-even. The Heaven Scent plant nursery was given advice on signage to improve customer orientation and enhance the brand image of the business. Pedals, a social firm running a bike hire shop, received marketing advice which helped day-to-day operations and raised the company's profile.

Of course, this business support also improved the skills of the people working in social firms. According to Knox, there are around 100 people in the target group. One employee of Cornish World, previously with clinical depression, was helped with IT skills and soon mastered the subscriber database to the point where she managed distribution to 27 countries. Her confidence buoyed, she left after two years for a salaried position as administrator at The Cinnamon Trust charity.

William Hitchins started work at Pentreath Industries in 1998, having suffered with manic depression. With help from Acorn, he has now started full-time at Pedals and hopes soon to be placed in charge of the project.

Finally, there is Rod Stephens, who went through depression, bereavement, homelessness and despair before finding his balance again as marketing manager of Acorn itself. He says: "My GP has been amazed at my rapid recovery. All of this would not have been achieved without my work with the social firms. The desire had to be there to succeed but they gave me the opportunity in a supported environment."

"The overwhelming desire was to create viable businesses, not just subsidized jobs."

Portobello Business Centre – Enterprise for all

The Portobello Business Centre (PBC) set up its Enterprise For All project to target business support at excluded, deprived and under-represented communities, which includes existing and former offenders, ethnic minorities and other minority communities.

The project provides tailored business support to reach and attract the target communities. Key methods of delivery included community outreach officers developing relationships within the community, raising awareness of the project and bringing the products and services to the beneficiaries rather than waiting for them to come to PBC.

The centre also developed support for specific sectors, such as catering, music, fashion, and IT training. The courses formed an integral part of the project and of the PBC's overall success in engaging with excluded and minority communities.

“For the last three years PBC has been running successful fashion, music and IT help desks for small businesses” says Virginie Ramond, project manager at the centre. “The helpdesks provide one-stop generic and sector-specific advice for small businesses in the creative sector.”

Through flexible business support services, tailored to the target communities, the project has encouraged businesses to succeed. It offers mentoring, training, financial and emotional support to those hoping to set up new enterprises.

“We’ve helped clients to overcome the barriers they face in starting or running a small business. The project actively tackles barriers faced through discrimination and cultural differences, and bridges the gaps not met by current support,” says Mrs Ramond.

A core part of the project has been to develop strong partnerships with a range of different agencies, to enable PBC to reach a wider and ‘hidden’ audience. It has developed strong links with private organisations, including banks and professional services; job centres and community organisations; prisons and charities.

The project’s staff have also attended a number of events aimed at helping organisations to develop social enterprises, leading to a programme of support within the organisation for those hoping to pursue a social business

model, rather than one strictly for-profit.

“Our outreach workers have been targeting hard-to-reach clients in circumstances that have previously been largely ignored by traditional business support agencies, such as existing and ex-offenders,” said Mrs Ramond.

“We are also working on estates where existing businesses are being run from home, often in the ‘grey’ economy. Through a customer-centred approach, based on trust and confidence, we have been able to develop services and measures to assist these businesses to reform and join the mainstream business community.”

Through the Enterprise for All scheme, the Portobello Business Centre was able to meet over 400 pre-start and existing businesses to provide outreach support. As a result, 78 new businesses are now trading, safeguarding 285 local jobs and creating 114.

One young woman said of her experiences on the project: “It was wonderful to have the opportunity to meet so many experienced and dynamic professionals. I left each day feeling inspired and encouraged, knowing there is such an amazing support team at PBC.”

“I left each day feeling inspired and encouraged, knowing there is such an amazing support team.”



highlights

Business support for BME groups working in the fashion, music and IT sectors

400 pre-start and existing businesses to provide outreach support, 78 new businesses now trading, safeguarding 285 local jobs and creating 114

Partnerships with a range of different agencies to reach a wider, hidden audience

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highlights

Increase in the number of women supported into business from 33 per cent at the start of the project to 39 per cent

The number of women mentors increased from 19 per cent to 28 per cent

Young women were often prevented from starting businesses, or even accessing the training and support to try

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The Prince's Trust – Yes you can

Starting a business is hard enough for anyone, but the young people targeted by The Prince's Trust faced double the barriers to making self-employment a success – they were in disadvantaged areas, and they were women.

The Trust provides funding and business support, especially mentoring, to people from disadvantaged backgrounds aged 18 to 30. The Yes You Can scheme aimed specifically at getting more young women from deprived backgrounds to think about self-employment, and to make setting up their own businesses a reality.

"We've never run any gender-specific programmes nationwide before this," says Mei Shui, head of enterprise at the Trust. "We'd treated all young clients as one, rather than considering that women might have a different set of needs and problems. The Phoenix Fund allowed us to look at women as a different group, at what their needs were, and to try different ways of working with them."

Yes You Can aimed to change the way the Trust's 45 offices in England work. The project established 18 'Regional Champions' working to discover what the particular needs of young women were, to improve business support for them, and to recruit women mentors.

They found that confidence was a big problem – young women just didn't think they could set up a business. But worse than that, they were often prevented from starting businesses, or even accessing the training and support to try, because of the multiple barriers they faced. Many had childcare needs. They were also less likely than their male counterparts to have access to money.

The Champions' role was to find ways to tackle these issues. For example, to help the local offices link with childcare organisations, or provide information about

childcare benefits. Champions also developed local networks and relationships with support organisations for women, so that a larger pool of women mentors could be created. "Women said they would feel more confident with a woman mentor to whom they could explain their business ideas more fully," says Ms Shui.

One woman, who had established her own marketing company in Salford, was recommended as a mentor through a local network. She had been through the rigours of starting her own business, and had missed out on the support of someone like her during rough patches. She was keen to share her relevant experiences with other young women wanting to succeed.

The project increased the proportion of young women supported into business from 33 per cent at the start to 39 per cent. The number of women mentors increased from 19 per cent to 28 per cent.

"We've learned a lot from the project," Ms Shui says. "It has allowed us to develop a different approach to how we work with women. It enabled us to set up a good network with partner organisations and raised awareness among the disadvantaged young women about what's possible, and within our regional offices about how they can better target the young women we're trying to reach."

"We'd treated all young clients as one, rather than considering that women might have a different set of needs and problems."

Priority Estates Project – Resident services organisations

Generating local solutions to local problems is one of those propositions few could argue with. Such projects give communities control of their own destiny, are self-sustaining and more likely to endure than solutions imposed from above. But local people usually need help to turn their good idea into a business.

Such was the thinking of Priority Estates Project in successfully seeking Phoenix funding to employ project development managers for a number of developing Resident Services Organisations (RSOs).

PEP is a national, not-for-profit company that works with community groups to develop local solutions to local problems. Among these solutions are RSOs, in which a board of residents sets up and manages an RSO to employ local people to provide neighbourhood services. They provide employment for people who have been out of the labour market for some time, train them in new skills, and help them to develop careers. At the same time they provide services focused on the needs of the neighbourhood, such as gardening, cleaning, plumbing and office work.

Two particularly exciting RSOs have emerged recently, Leathermarket in the London Borough of Southwark and Heartlands in Birmingham. But they needed help to make the leap from subsidised bodies to self-sustaining social enterprises. So in 2002 PEP put in professionals to run them. Now both projects are better placed to pitch for and win contracts to carry out local services.

The results have been impressive. Heartlands RSO, for example, was launched in February 2003 and has expanded to employ seven new members of staff, all of

whom were previously unemployed. Its project manager, Andy Elder, expects the RSO to turn over around £250,000 in its first two years. Of course, it hasn't been easy. Mr Elder says: "A social enterprise simply has to make money. And that means taking action fast.

Unfortunately a lot of the agencies we have to deal with are not used to working at speed. That's been frustrating."

Mr Elder is confident Heartlands RSO will soon be wholly self-funding. It will achieve that thanks to a burgeoning repertoire of services that make money and benefit the community. One such early contract was low-rise block cleaning on the Bloomsbury Estate, Nechells. Heartlands RSO has also been quick to exploit the demand from Birmingham Council for local service delivery at ward level. The Anti Graffiti Service is expanding rapidly, as is the Nechells Community Gardening Service.

It will be hard work – especially when the managerial subsidy runs out. "The Heartlands RSO board is full of very competent people," says Mr Elder. "But they have been fortunate to have had the services of a full-time manager subsidised whilst the organisation was being developed. It will need to turn over at least £1 million to break even. But I've absolutely no doubt that it will."

"A social enterprise
simply has to make money. And that
means taking action fast."



highlights

Developing Resident Service Organisations to improve neighbourhoods and provide employment

Heartlands, one of the three RSOs in the project, will turn over £250,000 in its first two years

It has created seven new jobs, and all vacancies were filled by previously unemployed people

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highlights

Taking business advice to where it is welcomed, sometimes in peoples' homes

Advice and support given to more than 100 clients and more intensive support to over 50

27 new enterprises created

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Project North East – STEPS

When someone has a bright idea for an innovative new business, often their biggest fear is not being taken seriously. Project North East, an enterprise agency in Tyne and Wear, recognised that a lack of confidence can often stop people from turning their ideas into something more – especially in deprived areas.

They found mainstream business support was often not geared up to deal with people with bright ideas, unless they already had lots of confidence to see them through. "If people go into mainstream business support agencies, they're often told what they need to do and then go off and do it," says Tracy Gee, consultant at PNE. "But if the person lacks confidence, they're not likely to be able to act on the advice."

PNE set up the STEPS project (Support Targeted Enterprise Project Start-ups) to tackle just that problem. It provides intensive business support that goes beyond regular advice, to socially excluded people, including minority ethnic communities and people with disabilities. It also serves people and organisations wanting to establish social enterprises and not-for-profit businesses, recognising again that mainstream support services are often not equipped to deal with the social business model.

"For some, even getting them to come to an office is asking more than they can do at the beginning," explains Ms Gee. "We assign them a business support counsellor who will go and see them in their homes, if that works best for them."

As well as all the regular business support, such as training, marketing help and advice about book keeping, the STEPS project has a number of additional tools to make its service more effective.

One is a visiting scheme, where potential business start-ups are supported to visit other businesses doing similar things.

"If there's someone else already doing the business successfully, then we encourage the client to spend time with them and talk to the people behind the business, to learn from them about how they did it, and what systems they have in place," says Ms Gee.

By working one-to-one with clients or organisations, the project has helped businesses get off the ground that might not otherwise have started. One woman who volunteers at her local community centre cooking for the lunch club has been helped to set up a café in the newly refurbished community building, serving the local community. Another is on his way to establishing a football development academy to serve local junior footballers.

It has provided basic advice and support to over 100 clients and more intensive support to over 50. It has helped to create 27 new enterprises with more in a position to start up over the coming months.

"It's great that we've been able to help people who've not been able to access any support elsewhere to set up innovative and interesting businesses," says Ms Gee. "They've been passed from pillar to post, but when they come here, they say we seem to understand what they're talking about."

"If the person lacks confidence, they're not likely to be able to act on the advice."

Prowess

For Prowess, the women's enterprise advocacy organisation, influence works both ways. To its director, Erika Watson, it was clear the organisation has as much to offer to Government policy makers as it does to local organisations delivering business support.

The organisation was established, with a grant from the Phoenix Development Fund, to encourage more women to start up businesses, with a long-term vision of an equal number of men and women starting and growing businesses in the UK.

"We were able to carry out a very broad consultation among our member organisations, and our networks, to determine what was needed on the ground," said Ms Watson. "One of the key things we've achieved is that the Government has now taken the comments on board and committed itself to some very tough targets."

Partly thanks to Prowess' influence, the Government has set a target that by 2006 women-owned businesses should make up a fifth of the total, compared with just over the current one-in-ten ratio. It also aims for 40 per cent of people accessing government-funded business support to be women by 2006.

"One of the key things we've achieved is that the Government has now taken the comments on board and committed itself to some very tough targets."

But it's not all schmoozing in the corridors of power.

Prowess has a programme of conferences, seminars and networks to encourage support services to do more to encourage women entrepreneurs.

"We discovered there's lots of business support services that have never segmented or targeted their services according to gender, or ethnicity," said Ms Watson. "Many have no idea how many women or people from minority communities they've supported."

For Prowess, business support needs to be sensitive to the different needs of women entrepreneurs. It works closely with business support services to raise awareness and deliver training so they can meet the needs of women-led start-ups. Initially targeting 100 organisations, Prowess now has more than 130 members committed to improving their services for women.

Working with Prowess, business support organisations can achieve an accredited 'Flagship' award for best practice in women's enterprise development. Nearly 80 organisations have been assessed and the first eight awards have been made.

Phoenix seed funding has enabled Prowess to establish itself as a new organisation, with an impressive degree of financial sustainability. Its first annual conference, an ambitious multi-stranded two-day event aimed at business support professionals, was a sell-out. Its training and development products and services have clearly found a market niche.

"We've become a hub for new knowledge, and provided the ability for members to share and learn from each other, and carry that activity to Government," says Ms Watson. "We're pleased to be working in partnership with all the key players in this field. There's a real feeling that a movement in women's enterprise is emerging, and we're pleased to be playing a leadership role."



highlights

Creation of an umbrella organisation representing women's enterprise advocacy agencies

Exceeded its 100-member target by 30

Conferences and training seminars have helped Prowess to achieve its goal of becoming financially sustainable

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highlights

Training for Asian women and asylum seekers

The Learning Surgery has had 716 enrolments to date

100% pass rate on a recent food hygiene course

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Oldbury
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Sandwell Community Alliance – Asian women into enterprise

Working with the community is part of the remit of Halesowen College and in 1999 it was approached by Sandwell Community Alliance, a local voluntary organisation, about working with the large Asian community. Together they converted a disused doctor's surgery into a resource centre for Asian women, calling it The Learning Surgery and offering training facilities to help the women get into education and consider starting up a business.

“When Mohammed Sakhi from Sandwell proposed the idea we knew that the college could put the courses on, but also that we would need someone to be the anchor person, to market the idea, talk to community groups and then run with them. The Phoenix Fund provided the salary for a manager at the Learning Surgery,” explains Lyndon Legg, one of the college’s curriculum development managers.

They realised that to get Asian women interested they needed to start with fun subjects that seemed more like recreation rather than education. “We ran courses such as henna art, and slowly introduced them to essential business skills” Mr Legg says.

They found that links with community organisations from different cultural groups, and word of mouth, tended to be the most rewarding methods of reaching clients. As well as Asian women, they made contact with many refugees. As a result the Surgery is now also open to men, but that has to be managed diplomatically, taking care to respect the differing roles of male and female groups from different communities.

They are very proud to have reached people who wouldn’t ordinarily have had access to further learning. “Many Asian women return home before they have a chance to go to college here, then they marry without an adequate grasp of English. This has been addressed through the ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) courses,” says Mr Legg.

Vinodballa Soni used to teach English to small children in India. When she moved to England and found out about the Learning Surgery she decided to volunteer, using her

skills to help other Asian women who don’t speak English to get on to courses. This has increased her own work prospects: “I am now applying for paid work as a class-room assistant at the Surgery,” she says.

When Baljinder Kaur came to the Centre in September

2002 she was lacking in confidence. She took a course in Manicure and over time has developed this skill into a business, helping with the many local Asian weddings.

Jo Griffiths, the Learning Surgery’s manager, reports a 100% pass rate on their recent food hygiene course. They currently have 20 courses running in subjects from ESOL, IT and office skills to Henna art, food hygiene and counselling. The centre is continuing with further funding to cover the manager’s salary and they now also have funding for a creche.

“After working as a volunteer for the Learning Surgery my confidence has improved and I have applied to become a class-room assistant.”

Social Firms UK

Mentally and physically disabled people form a marginalised group in the British workplace, but there are now several hundred organisations nationwide which offer preferential employment.

These 'social firms', a type of social enterprise whose specific social purpose consists of creating employment for disabled people, frequently require bespoke business support. Social Firms UK, a national support group promoting such enterprises across nine English regions, is a one-stop shop which provides support to budding social firms. "We promote and disseminate best practice to increase employment options for disabled people," explains Sally Reynolds, CEO of Social Firms UK.

In West London, for example, Nigel Dixon was hoping to expand his housing and community care enterprise, Ealing Consortium, by setting up a door-to-door minicab service tailored towards vulnerable people who might otherwise struggle to get out. His plans included employing people both with learning disabilities and mental health needs to accompany customers.

Mr Dixon applied directly to his local network, Social Firms South East. They provided business planning, start-up and market research advice, as well as a feasibility study. As a result, Ealing Consortium's board is preparing to pilot the minicab project.

Ealing Consortium is one of 129 business support interventions which Social Firms UK has made via its regional networks thanks to the support it has received from the Phoenix Development Fund.

"Social Firms UK is the only national support agency in the social enterprise sector that has initiated a programme of hands-on support to its members across the English regions," explains Ms Reynolds. "The approach has resulted in a higher number of social firms being created and higher numbers of disabled people being employed."

Ms Reynolds counts at least 55 new jobs created for people with disabilities across England specifically as a result of this project. That is likely to be the tip of the iceberg, however, since Social Firms UK's business support programme gives each of its members the tools and confidence to grow their own enterprises and create additional employment.

With at least 50 requests a year to help members develop their operations, Ms Reynolds recognises how important the success of her own enterprise has been to social firms nationwide. "If we hadn't been successful, there would be no regional network support, so the practical element would be lacking completely. As it is, we at least have a basis on which to serve members at a regional level to face the future challenges of promoting and developing the social firm sector within its bigger family of social enterprises."

"The approach has resulted in a higher number of social firms being created and higher numbers of disabled people being employed."



highlights

A programme of hands-on support to social firms across all the English regions

129 business support interventions made by Social Firms UK via its regional networks

55 jobs created for people with disabilities across England

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING



highlights

Helping single parents prepare for self-employment

Over 450 people – almost one in six single parents in the area – undertook training

Innovative approaches to target hard-to-reach groups

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South East Hampshire Enterprise Agency

– Hampshire enterprise for lone parents

Apart from being the opening line to one of the most memorable pop songs ever written, the phrase ‘Help, I need somebody’ is absolutely relevant to single parents. It can be lonely and financially challenging, particularly if you live in a deprived area.

The HELP Project, which covers 6,000 registered single parents in Portsmouth, Gosport and the surrounding areas, sought to provide that helping hand to as many single parents as it could find. It aimed to help them with the difficult task of preparing themselves for setting up their own businesses.

But the first problem was finding them and persuading them to attend the courses. The project found that traditional advertising in newspapers and through leaflets did not reach its target groups. This was partly because target groups did not read newspapers or did not receive literature sent home from school. Just as often, pressure from friends and family persuaded them that they were wasting their time.

"We literally had to go out and walk the streets and knock on doors," explains project co-ordinator, Maggie Ace.

HELP's persistence paid off and eventually over 450 people – almost one in six single parents in the area – passed through the training programmes.

The two and a half year programme aimed to take single parents to the launch stage of running their own business. Training involved 'homework' exercises in relation to the business they wished to set up; all aspects of the knowledge required for starting a business and making it a

success; and workshops involving experts from the tax and VAT offices, the Prince's Trust and so on.

An innovative approach was found to the overarching issue of childcare, after finding that making payment to parents for childcare was not working. HELP employed a company which sent childminders to the training sessions and looked after children in an adjacent room. This had the additional benefit of a happier atmosphere for parents and their children, while also proving cost-effective.

The main issue for most clients on the scheme was inevitably finance, with the start-up costs of a business proving daunting for people who often did not have a bank account. But some help was received from The Prince's Trust and the Fredericks Foundation.

There are many success stories to celebrate as the programme comes to an end. Mandy Gunner is a single mother and has her own interior design company. She originally started her company in her daughter's bedroom but is now looking for premises. The HELP programme gave Mandy a better understanding of business and helped her confidence. She has many large contracts now and is looking to take on outworkers.

Ms Ace says it would be great if a resource centre was set up – run by the parents for other parents – to help grow the seed that has been planted.

"We literally had to go out and walk the streets and knock on doors."

South East Northumberland Enterprise Trust (SENET)

– Making your IT work for you

The Trust's bid to the Phoenix Fund was to create an ICT (Information Communication Technology) resource centre with an IT trainer and outreach manager. It targeted small local businesses who were using Microsoft software but weren't engaging with the web.

But after six months there was little take-up of IT and the project seemed to be failing. "We contacted 40 companies with the goal to connect them to e-business but only 11 moved forward to gain IT skills. We assumed they weren't using the internet due to lack of training when the reality was that the web isn't appropriate for many of their businesses", explains project manager Alan Bell. "You make plans but they don't always work out how you envisage – but we stuck with the original concept and allowed it to flex" concedes Mr Bell.

So he changed the original concept, extending it to the unemployed, providing them with the opportunity to acquire IT skills that these small businesses needed. This proved highly successful.

"The uniqueness of the drop-in facility and learning flexibility where trainees can tailor their own learning format made the project especially popular," feels Mr Bell. Eventually 236 people registered for training, coming mostly through word of mouth referrals and consisting of the young unemployed, mostly women, and the 50-plus group who were looking for re-training opportunities.

The success of the project can be measured by the following figures: at the end of February 2004 the total number of registered trainees was 235; 98 of these took qualification modules, and 95 passed with an accredited qualification. The success is also represented in the

"My confidence, IT and management skills have improved and I am now setting up an additional business with an expected turnover of £200,000 plus"

increase of employment in the community. "We are very proud that six people found jobs after gaining IT training and qualifications and 58 new businesses have been assisted and are now using the internet. There are high levels of unemployment in the area and we are proud to have helped these people gain new skills" adds Mr Bell.

Angela Crawford, who operates a beauty salon providing services to care homes, has benefited immensely. Ms Crawford has undertaken the spreadsheet module and will progress to website design and basic bookkeeping next year. Susan Ann Bell of Stakeford has been self-employed for ten years as a cake decorator and was helped with desktop publishing training and self assessment. She is now taking a basic IT course which has resulted in her feeling more confident about managing her business.

SENET is currently in its 20th year. Its core activity is small business start-ups, business skills training and managed work space. As a direct result of the Phoenix fund project, SENET has increased its core skills while creating a user-friendly training platform for the socially disadvantaged. Although the project finished at the end of March 2004, the ICT training centre will continue with additional funding from its partner company Northumbria Enterprise Ltd.



highlights

IT training for businesses and the unemployed

IT now encompasses fifty per cent of SENET's core business activity

Six people gained full time employment and 58 new businesses now using the internet

Contact

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South Yorkshire Social Enterprise Network

Where community groups and social enterprises have emerged to meet specific local needs, they are often small, diversely run organisations. Despite their operational differences and wide range of social and business objectives, however, there are several best practices which can be applied to the social enterprise sector as a whole.

The key lies in providing an overarching sub-regional framework of business support services, and this is the challenge that South Yorkshire Social Enterprise Network (SYSEN) has taken up. SYSEN's chief aim is to identify funding opportunities and roll out strategic business support for the voluntary and community sector across the sub-region of South Yorkshire.

The Middlewood Winners are a group of residents from the Winn Gardens Estate in North Sheffield. The estate is within the Owlerton ward, which is among the 10 per cent most deprived wards in the country. Led by a six-strong, all-female board, the Middlewood Winners has grown from an informal voluntary community group into a company with charitable status. Since 2000, it has raised more than £35,000 to employ a development worker, and has redeveloped the estate pavillion to provide a neighbourhood nursery, health room, youth service, IT training room and kitchen.

SYSEN has been a critical partner throughout, assisting the Middlewood Winners over the last six years through hands-on business and funding support, setting up finance and completing a successful £275,000 lottery bid.

SYSEN manager Dave Thornett recognises the huge impact of the Phoenix Development Fund on the scope of his enterprise's operations: "The fund money has put us in a position to help more than 500 organisations in Sheffield alone," he says.

In preparation for South Yorkshire being classified as an Objective 1 area, SYSEN employed three staff members to develop a targeted business strategy and provide a common financial plan for social enterprises across South Yorkshire. "Phoenix funding enabled us to bring everyone round the table," says Mr Thornett. "It gave our staff the time to do research and put together tenders. As a result, we have helped social enterprises successfully raise money through Objective 1 and the regional development agency Yorkshire Forward. Across the sub-region, this has probably brought in £3 million."

The project also brought together a hugely disparate group of organisations. Sheffield's large BME communities – especially Somali – as well as women's and environmental groups in the sub-region have all benefited from the creation of a comprehensive business support framework, as have organisations in former mining villages through Barnsley Development Agency, one of SYSEN's partners in the Objective 1 contract.



highlights

Helped more than 500 organisations in Sheffield alone

Developing a social enterprise network

Brought together a hugely disparate group of organisations

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"We are able to deliver the services we do now largely thanks to this funding. It has also had a massive knock-on effect in the community."

St Helen's Chamber – Enterprising St Helens

The dream of going it alone and starting their own business is something many employees share. But what about those who have never worked at all? Those born in communities where unemployment is simply a fact of life? For these individuals, "going it alone" is simply not on the radar.

Exercised by this tragic waste, and the belief that there were talented, imaginative entrepreneurs trapped in such communities, the Enterprising St Helens team at the St Helens Chamber set out to stimulate development in eight socially deprived areas, known as Pathways Areas.

The Chamber had, through its Pathways Development team, already established good partnerships with local people, but was struck by their lack of entrepreneurial awareness. Ann Holcroft, Business Start Manager at St Helens Chamber, says: The fact is, these are former mining communities with as many as three generations unemployed. They have certain perceptions of what they can and can't do."

The Enterprising St Helens project launched in April 2002. Initiatives targeted local schools, social enterprises and start-ups.

The Business Into Schools Initiative was launched in September 2002, involving Year 10 pupils. It covered an introduction to all aspects of business with workshops and seminars, culminating in a 'Trips to Industry Day', when the pupils were taken to meet businesses – both small and large companies- to illustrate to them the similarities and the differences. The results of this initiative were extraordinary, with an 86 per cent drop in disciplinary referrals among Year 11 children.

Guidance and support was offered to social enterprises. The project backed start-ups and gave assistance to

existing firms to the benefit of local communities. And St Helens Chamber's business development programmes were tailored to people in Pathways areas.

At every stage, the Chamber made the most of its relationships with these communities to demystify the idea of self-employment. Ann Holcroft says: "It was very important to work with people in their comfort zone. We couldn't expect them to walk into one of our buildings – we had to go to them. And we already had a level of trust through the Pathways team that gave us a head start."

The overall results – nearly 50 new start-ups by the end of the project – were impressive. But the human impact was even more marked. Take Zoe Fairhurst, a young woman who thought her dreams of a childcare qualification were over when she had children. Enterprising St Helens helped her to realise that she could become a registered childminder working from home, and gave her the support needed to remove multiple barriers.

Or how about Adrian White, who turned his gardening hobby into a business despite being disabled, over 50 and believing his working days were over? And the Fingerpost Tenants and Residents Association, which wanted to turn its drop-in centre into a Learning Centre to support the local community. It couldn't do so without extensive managerial training. But with the help of Enterprising St Helens, the association members got their training and the centre was opened by the mayor in January 2004.

"These are former mining communities with as many as three generations unemployed. They have certain perceptions of what they can and can't do."



highlights

Exceeded the target of 400 residents to have received guidance, advice, support or training

Nearly 50 new businesses started

50 residents working towards a recognised qualification by the end of the project

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highlights

Business and training support to the declining steelworks community

Being strongly rooted in the community, STEP didn't need to advertise

More than 100 businesses established – 70 more than the original target – and over 300 people assisted

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Stocksbridge Training and Enterprise Partnership

– Stocksbridge business incubation crucible

In Britain's industrial heartland, community is king. So where the winding down of once-strong industries like coal and steel have led to heavy job losses, a community-led regeneration programme can succeed.

The Stocksbridge Training Enterprise Partnership (STEP) in Sheffield was established to provide a range of business and training support to the declining steelworks community.

"The steelworks here once employed 8,000 local workers," explains Sylvia Constantine, business adviser at STEP. "Now it employs just 800. When workers are made redundant, they are affected but so are their families, local shops and businesses. By being part of the community, we can provide something special for those with long-term unemployment and long-term inactivity."

The organisation was established because mainstream services supporting those hoping to set up businesses were often centralised, based far away and were not specialist enough.

STEP provides advice and training to anyone from the community about starting their own business, including aspects of writing a business plan, handling taxes, marketing and expansion. A local accountant provides services to business start-ups for free. STEP links those for whom self-employment is not quite right into further training or education.

Instead of hosting cold seminars and passing out acres of paper, STEP's workers go to meet people in their own homes to explore their options. People are then referred to the specialist training most suited to them.

"We try to make ourselves as accessible and approachable as possible," says Ms Constantine. "People really appreciate that we've taken the time to go and see them."

Because STEP is so strongly rooted in the community, it doesn't really need to advertise. Once people hear the good things the project has helped people to achieve, they soon get in touch."

STEP aimed to help 30 business start-ups in its first two years, but the programme has been so popular that more than 100 businesses have been established – from textile manufacture and metal work to aromatherapy and puppet theatre. Not one has failed. More than 300 people have been assisted and many have gone into training, further education or employment.

One participant says: "It helped me personally to proceed, and will provide an excellent back-up service for the future. It gave me real confidence in my idea."

Key to the project's success, says Mrs Constantine, was that the business mentoring was designed at the client's pace, rather than expecting the client to fit into rigid structures.

"The project has adopted a policy of being supportive, rather than coercive, to show empathy rather than sympathy, and to facilitate a solution rather than tell somebody what to do," she says. "The needs of the client are paramount. We try to provide a flexible, wrap-around service that suits them."

"When workers are made redundant, they are affected but so are their families, local shops and businesses."



Tower Hamlets CDA – Bangladeshi women’s co-operatives

Finding long-term employment in London can be a tough challenge even for those people whose first language is English. When it’s a second, or even third tongue, the task can seem insurmountable. Tower Hamlets Co-operative Development Agency (CDA) set out to help Bangladeshi women living on the area’s council estates.

The CDA’s Bangladeshi Women’s Co-operative Social Enterprises project aims to help local women find jobs or set up in business in the community. It provides classes on marketable employment skills, literacy and numeracy, general business advice and guidance, as well as CV writing and interview techniques.

The co-operative’s support and advice is typically very hands on: project staff are estate-based and work from local community centres, where one-to-one advice is available five days a week without an appointment.

Fast Forward Women’s Group, a Tower Hamlets-based co-operative of seven Bangladeshi women, approached the CDA for help with its idea for an enterprise. Fast Forward’s Director Shaheeda Khanom wanted to implement a programme to help develop local women’s confidence, as well as increase access to health services and encourage the development of sustainable activities for young women in the community.

“The project supported Fast Forward through registration and training,” explains Shanaz Rashid, Bangladeshi Business Development Advisor at the Tower Hamlets CDA. “From being entirely voluntary, Fast Forward now has three part-time staff, has raised finance and expanded its services from one day to four days.”

Besides established women’s groups, the project also specifically targets local women who rarely leave their homes, speak little or no English and have never previously worked.

“The outreach programme aims to encourage these

“From being entirely voluntary, Fast Forward now has three part-time staff, has raised the necessary finance and expanded its services from one day to four days.”

women by inviting them to local community centres where they are supported through a programme to improve their self confidence, literacy and numeracy skills,” explains Ms Rashid. “They are then introduced to the concept of setting up businesses.”

As a direct result of Phoenix fund support, 205 local women are now attending training courses, seven new start-up businesses have been created and 16 women have found employment.

One unexpected outcome was the interest generated among non-Bangladeshi BME women’s communities: “We found that women from other communities were also seeking services from our project,” says Ms Rashid. “We therefore extended support to them.”

The Phoenix funding has transformed the Bangladeshi Women’s Co-operative Social Enterprises project. Previously, it was operating on a pilot basis in a concentrated area of the community. The strengthened financial position has allowed it to employ additional staff, provide assistance for groups outside its Bangladeshi core and work further afield to help greater numbers of marginalised women find employment.



highlights

The project targets local women who don’t usually come out of the house, speak little or no English and have never previously worked

205 local women are now attending training courses, seven new start-up businesses have been created and 16 women have found employment

Interest in the project has spread into other communities in east London

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TRAIN 2000 – POWER

There is a myth that disadvantaged areas, such as deprived parts of Liverpool where this scheme is based, are unlikely to be home to entrepreneurs. Perhaps that's why banks have beaten a retreat, leaving people cut off from the support and expertise most other people take for granted.

Of course, among those living in disadvantaged areas, there is also a pecking order of advantage, with certain groups – women and members of ethnic minorities for instance – faring even less well than others. What they lack, essentially, is power. And this is what the POWER programme (Promoting Opportunities for Women in Enterprise and Regeneration) takes as its starting point.

Run within the TRAIN 2000 organisation, POWER is a suite of programmes aimed at women from Merseyside who want to start a business but need assistance. POWER trains the women in the arts of business – writing a business plan, for instance.

Sometimes women find that after starting an enterprise course they may not be suited to being their own boss, but still want to enter the jobs market or get more education. POWER can cater for this and will support women to realise their personal employment or training goals.

TRAIN 2000 recruits through making its presence felt “wherever women gather.” This might range from the swimming club to the pub – but it is the only way of reaching some potential clients. “The vast majority of women do not react to the single gateway telephone number,” says policy co-ordinator, Tricia Dinan. “They think it's for someone else.”

Once through the door, POWER aims to meet all the women's challenges head on. The programme takes off

with an Enterprise Gateway course and if the women so choose, they can undertake a personal development programme. They are also able to complete an accredited business training programme which gives them a business qualification – in some cases the first qualification they have ever gained.

If they decide that business may be for them, they are able to access Bridging the Benefits Gap, where advice workers explain the complicated transition from benefits to paid work.

“There's a huge amount of misinformation about what's available,” says Ms Dinan. “This programme allows women to make an informed decision about the future.” Success stories abound. One is Jayne Williams, a lone parent with no previous qualifications. She turned a dream into reality when she took over a derelict launderette and, almost single-handedly, renovated it and the accommodation upstairs. As well as the launderette becoming a focal point for the community, she has recently gained a commercial mortgage on the property and owns her business and her home.

Jayne's considerable personal achievements were recognised when she won the £1,000 first prize in the POWER Women in Business Achievement Awards.

As Ms Dinan says about Jayne: “Two years ago she didn't have a bank account. Now she has a commercial mortgage.”

“There's a huge amount of misinformation about what's available out there. This programme allows women to make an informed decision about the future.”



highlights

Innovative approach to taking business advice to wherever women gather

Helping women through the transition from benefits to business

Widening access to educational and training opportunities

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

Ujima Housing Association – First base

Everyone needs a role model, especially when starting a new business. But among the black and ethnic minority communities of west London, not only are there few successful business role models, the odds are stacked against new start-ups making it work.

“In the UK, because BME communities have only been here relatively short term, many have not been able to establish themselves as successful business leaders. In London especially, unemployment rates are disproportionate for BME communities. We aimed to change all that,” says Patrick Williams, enterprise development officer at Ujima First Base, a business support service aimed mainly at BME start-ups.

Ujima Housing Association is the biggest provider of social housing for the UK’s minority communities, managing close to 4,000 properties. The Government has called on housing associations to provide more than just a roof over-head.

Ujima takes that responsibility very seriously. In June 2002 it set up First Base to tackle the lack of business support targeted at minority communities in the west London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. It was able to target those most in need of support through the housing association’s existing networks.

“First Base was set up to help young people realise their dream of setting up and running their own business, by providing training, support and affordable business space,” says Mr Williams.

Filling gaps left by mainstream business support providers was core to the programme’s strategy. That meant bringing in business role models from minority communities to inspire, inform and educate young hopefuls. Speakers have included winners of black business enterprise awards, including Robert Bell, who

was the young black business entrepreneur of the year. “The idea is to provide role models who can share their ideas and inspiration, but also link the young entrepreneurs into their networks,” Mr Williams says.

First Base’s support is also practical. Linking with local business colleges, it provides a range of free courses for young-start ups, including book-keeping, marketing and business development. The project has designed computer software to help turn fledgling business ideas into concrete business plans that go on to succeed.

First Base has helped over 100 people set up small businesses, access training or employment opportunities in the two years it has existed, and more than 200 people have accessed IT support, training information or referrals through the project.

One woman who worked with the programme says that before she joined she couldn’t get banks to take her idea for a soft furnishing business seriously. First Base helped her to construct a detailed and credible business plan. “I feel more confident to present my plan to the bank now,” she says. Another young man, who has set up a record label, says: “The bank would never help me but since signing up to First Base I feel confident that my business will succeed.”

Those who’ve completed the business training are also eligible to rent subsidised office space at First Base, benefiting from a vital first step on the ladder.

“The idea is to provide role models who can share their ideas and inspiration, but also link the young entrepreneurs into their networks.”



highlights

Provision of role models for young black people looking to set up in business

More than 100 people have set up small businesses, accessed training and employment opportunities

More than 200 people have accessed IT support and training information

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Voluntary Action Cumbria – Enterprising communities

Running a social enterprise within a rural community can be a rewarding but isolating experience without a strong business support network. In small, isolated areas, the impact of social projects is often immediately visible, but a social enterprise can still struggle to succeed without support.

Enterprising Communities, Cumbria's specialist rural social enterprise support agency, was set up in April 2002 for just this reason. The project was developed by Voluntary Action Cumbria, which is part of a national network of rural community councils across England, in collaboration with the Cumbria Local Enterprise Agency Network.

The Enterprising Communities team consists of nine social enterprise sector professionals. They include five 'area officers', who work within each of Cumbria's rural districts to help new and existing social enterprises to develop through appropriate business advice. The business support provided by the area officers includes group development work, strategic and business planning, advice on funding, legal structures and governance, access to specialist training programmes, and links to other social enterprises.

"We encourage social enterprises to be self-sustaining in the long term," explains Enterprising Communities programme manager, Viv Lewis. "This means we combine community capacity building tools that nurture social capital and increase inclusiveness and community cohesion, with good and appropriate business advice."

For example, Home Appliances (Flimby Ltd) is a not-for-profit community business that recycles white goods donated by the borough council from their doorstep collection. It currently employs four people and on average

11 trainees at any one time. Many machines that it collects are only good for spare parts, while the rest are sold to people referred from Social Services and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Home Appliances plans to become fully self-sustaining in the future and Enterprising Communities has helped them secure funding to develop a business plan. It is also supporting them to examine how new environmental legislation can provide opportunities to expand.

Over the last two years Enterprising Communities has worked with more than 120 rural social enterprises and 16 new enterprises have opened their doors. They have helped community groups bring in more than £1.3 million pounds through support with funding applications, creating or maintaining over 50 full and part-time jobs. Many of these social enterprises are delivering essential services to rural people that otherwise would be lost.

Viv Lewis says that Phoenix Fund money has made a profound impact on the success of the project: "Without this money, rural social enterprises in Cumbria would not have received any dedicated support and we believe that the sector would not have grown as fast as it has. These social enterprises are often responding to gaps in service provision and market failure due to the remoteness of many Cumbrian rural communities."

"Without this money we believe that the social enterprise sector would not have grown as fast as it has."



highlights

Work within isolated rural communities in Cumbria to encourage start-up and expansion of social enterprises

More than 120 rural social enterprises assisted and 16 new companies set up, creating over 50 new jobs.

Supporting social enterprises delivering essential rural services

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

WEETU – Full circle project

The idea of women forming groups to help each other might not be new. But one project in Norfolk is proving how successful it can be when applied to the world of small business start-ups.

Full Circle is a micro-credit programme for women, based on the recognition that some women need continuing help to develop their ideas. It offers a package that includes long-term support, training, access to finance, and help with childcare and travel costs.

The training process allows the women to test out their ideas, gain confidence and business skills as they launch their business. There are nine courses every year, taking eleven weeks each.

As the name suggests, the project centres on the idea of 'lending circles', or small groups of women in a similar situation who meet each other through the training process and form groups of four to six. These lending circles then meet regularly – most meet for at least two years and many go on for three or four years. The circles offer mutual support for their members – practical, emotional and business support – and this long-term peer support is a key reason for people joining a circle.

If a member wants to apply for a loan the group decides whether their individual business plan holds enough potential for success. Although the application will go to a loan committee, this is only to check the circle has looked at it properly. Only the lending circle can refuse a loan.

The project has proved so popular there is often a clamour for places, Full Circle manager Jan Hicks says. "Women are an underprivileged sector and have had a great deal of difficulty accessing money, especially those who are returning to work or who have no credit history," she

"Women are an underprivileged sector and have had a great deal of problems accessing money, including those who are returning to work or who have no credit history."

explains. "They gain confidence not only from the advice we give them, but from the other circle members."

A typical story is that of single mother Angela. Her experience of health problems had given her the idea to set up an environmentally friendly cleaning service. But when she first came to Full Circle, her confidence was low and her only income was maintenance from her former husband.

Angela successfully completed a circle, took out a loan for £1,000 to launch the business, and now owns two vans and employs four people. She is also expanding the company to offer her own range of green cleaning products.

The project has received two further years of funding under the Phoenix Fund's 'Building on the Best' scheme, but is looking at ways of becoming more self-sustaining in the long-term. It has already sold several licences for a project tool kit, which includes a full manual and training.

"Because of the research we've done, the project is tried and tested. It's a short cut for people who don't want to reinvent the wheel," Ms Hicks says.



highlights

The package includes long-term support, training, access to finance, and help with childcare and travel costs

The circles offer mutual support for their members – practical, emotional and business support – and this long-term peer support is a key reason for people joining

Only the lending circle can refuse a loan

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING



highlights

Aiming to help break the cycle of benefit dependency

Research into support for people moving off benefit

All clients who are candidates for Income Bridge schemes should automatically be referred to a Business Link Startup Counsellor

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WM Enterprise – Income Bridge Evaluation

Moving from benefits to self-employment requires claimants to negotiate a well-known Catch-22. Someone who has been unemployed will have no savings to tide them over until their new business starts generating cash. So they can't afford to come off benefit until they are generating an income. But they can't get the business going until they come off benefit.

Governments have recognised this vicious circle and developed solutions known as “income bridges” because they bridge the gap between benefits and earnings. They give people the chance to try out their business proposition without worrying too much about money during what is sometimes known as “test trading”.

But these schemes also need to provide the business support which people new to self-employment are likely to need, and that has been patchy, bedevilled by poor liaison between different government departments and agencies which handle business support on the one hand and income support on the other. Too often, one hand doesn't seem to know what the other is up to.

The income bridge research carried out by this project was designed to investigate such liaison (or lack of it) and how it affects people trying to cross the divide between unemployment and self-employment.

It found several holes in the support network. The employment service, JobCentrePlus sometimes works closely with the companies which provide training, but does not have a systematic approach to the income bridge or a proactive stance about helping people who have started businesses. That is the job of organisations such as Business Link, but they often do not get out into communities to work with self-employed people from these backgrounds. In any case there is often little liaison

“People need more regular input, but these are commercial organisations – the incentives to keep in touch just aren't there.”

between the agencies, and the research identified this as the key issue to be addressed to improve the service to Income Bridge clients.

“I would say the contracts with training providers allow them to offer a less-than-perfect service,” says Rob Weaver, head of business

services at WM Enterprises. “It can mean just giving people a business card. People need regular input, but these are commercial organisations – the incentives to keep in touch just aren't there.”

The research came up with several recommendations for improvement so that unemployed people moving to self-employment automatically get access to the whole range of official support:

- All clients who are candidates for Income Bridge schemes should automatically be referred to a Business Link Startup Counsellor
- support should be given to businesses emerging from Income Bridge programmes
- Business Link activity such as one-to-one counselling or mentoring should be available to the Income Bridge clients in the later stages of the training programme.

Mr Weaver says “The issue is still being discussed and there is evidence that Business Link and JobCentrePlus are talking to each other more. The Treasury and the Social Exclusion Unit are also interested in the discussions.”

West Yorkshire Enterprise Agency – Business links for communities

The Business Links for Communities partnership in West Yorkshire was formed with a view to providing business support to the communities and individuals suffering from the multiple effects of social exclusion, and particularly exclusion from mainstream business support.

The project targeted the most excluded groups in West Yorkshire. Many of these areas have been hit hard by the de-industrialisation that has taken place over the last 25 years. The programme provided outreach business support, based within the most excluded groups, including unemployed people, ethnic minorities, women, older people and ex-offenders. Advisers were based in community centres, family centres, schools and well-known meeting places within the communities.

The project was developed to meet the needs of these groups, such as access to finance, mainstream provision, appropriate training and advice, continuing support after start-up.

Dawn Whiteley, a spokesperson from The West Yorkshire Enterprise Agency said, "The Phoenix Development Fund financed a dedicated resource in Calderdale, Kirklees and Wakefield to encourage, motivate and develop individuals on a one-to-one basis. This included concentration on soft skills, confidence building and fostering entrepreneurial skills to encourage both start ups and the development of existing firms."

David Giraud is one of the project's success stories. This former soldier and security guard now runs his own business, D G Garden Furniture. After two years out of work following a traumatic incident, he enrolled on a woodwork course at Bright Sparks, a North Halifax Partnership funded programme, and began to produce garden furniture and planters.

"You have to be there
for the long term; you have to prove
you are there."

Following business advice from the Business and Community Adviser, Linda Widdop, David set up in business, securing a number of bulk orders for garden furniture and planters to individuals and organisations in the local area, with further orders in the pipeline.

The success of the project stems from the commitment and empathy of the advisers, who adapted so successfully to their roles in the local communities.

"You have to be there for the long term, you have to prove you are there," Ms Whiteley says, adding that the project was lucky that it was able to recruit advisors who were prepared to go the extra mile by going to see clients when needed, even at evenings or weekends.

Around 500 individuals have been helped, which is 66 per cent more than the original target. It has created 170 new jobs, which is more than twice its target. In addition, it has assisted 154 existing businesses.

In addition, West Yorkshire Enterprise Agency has created 20 social enterprises, 155 new businesses, safeguarded 40 jobs, and helped 50 unemployed people into self employment, thus playing a valuable role. But while these measures are welcome, Ms Whiteley says the most important lesson from the project is that "people are more important than outputs."



highlights

Business support for communities suffering multiple exclusion

500 individuals helped, 170 new jobs and 154 existing businesses given support

Creation of 20 social enterprises and safeguarding of 40 jobs

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highlights

Few women living on benefits or working in dead-end jobs tend to view self-employment as a positive life choice

WEP addresses the emotional and motivational problems that often blight the ambitions of socially excluded women keen to start a business

Nearly 400 women attend a WEP course, 40% of them from ethnic minorities

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BB CONTINUATION FUNDING

Women's Business Development Agency – Empowerment programme

“Socially excluded women in dull, low paid work or unemployment rarely see themselves as budding entrepreneurs,” says Marla Nelson, assistant director of Coventry-based business advice organisation WBDA. “Many, however, will come to events billed to improve their self-confidence and personal prospects,” she adds.

That insight lies behind WBDA's Women's Empowerment Programme – a specially written four-day or six-evening modular course designed to raise the profile of entrepreneurship among socially excluded women in three areas of the UK.

WBDA starts from the premise that emotional and motivational issues commonly present more of a barrier to many women than other business start-up problems. WEP can be tailored to suit the needs of a particular group, such as African-Caribbean women, and is also routinely offered to all regardless of 'impediments' such as marital strife, children with drug problems, sick parents, dyslexia, disability or depression.

Taking an innovative 'grass roots' approach to recruitment, WBDA works closely with any willing local partner (such as a play group, a library, Sure Start or a GP practice) in order to meet clients in their community. “Before we can start to provide relevant training for our clients we try to get under the skin of their lives,” says Ms Nelson.

In a similar vein, WBDA's follow-on three-day Business Start Up Skills workshop is delivered by female trainers in a deliberately inclusive, female-sensitive, culturally aware manner. “Personal problems get the attention they need to make way for other progress. We're proud to signpost our clients to advice on issues like welfare rights if they need this,” adds Ms Nelson.

WEP has run successfully since December 2001 in Coventry & Warwickshire, Birmingham & Solihull and

Cornwall & Devon with matched funding from each local Business Link. By January 2004 some 440 women had attended a WEP course – 40% of them from ethnic minorities. More than 200 of these women opted for further education or training, and 75 confirmed that they would come off benefits. In Coventry, 78 out of 191 WEP participants (40%) went on to take business start-up advice and training and seven of these launched successful businesses.

Bal Dhanjal worked as an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) tutor in Coventry – a city boasting at least 10,000 refugees. She saw a market for translating services among local organisations struggling with the language barrier, but lacked the confidence to build the business. In April 2003 Bal attended a WEP course. Six months later she launched 'Your Voice Interpreting Services'. Today her company has a database of more than 40 translators employed on contract by many local agencies in their work with refugees.

In November 2003 WBDA won a “Flagship” award from PROWESS (see page 81), the national women's enterprise support trade association, for Best Practice in Women's Enterprise Development.

As Ms Nelson suggests, “If mainstream business advisory services want to help women from disadvantaged communities effectively, they all need to recognise the barriers they face and provide this kind of support.”

“If mainstream business advisory services want to help women from disadvantaged communities, they need to recognise the barriers they face and provide this kind of support.”

Women's Business Network North West

Women set up less than a quarter of all the UK's new businesses. But helpful networks such as the Chamber of Commerce remain a forbidding and unwelcoming prospect for many businesswomen.

"Many business networks are still dominated by men," says Ruth Livesey, co-ordinator of the Women's Business Network (WBN) in the North West. Some of the women-only networks that exist are made up of successful women in management and those from the professions – an intimidating prospect for the less confident or inexperienced businesswoman.

WBN was designed to remedy this shortfall in networking potential for women in business. Since its establishment three years ago, it has acted as an umbrella body, enabling networks throughout the north west to flourish.

WBN's key role is providing support for the co-ordinators who run the host of individual networks that have sprung up across the region since the project started. Although some of these co-ordinators are paid, many give their time on a purely voluntary basis, because they recognise the strength and value of peer group support.

The majority of the networks are organised geographically, focussed on an estate, a town or village. A few are sector specific, such as one targeted at women entrepreneurs engaged in the arts and media.

Ms Livesey says that the networks play an invaluable role in supporting business women who are taking their first steps in business, many of whom are working from home:

"A lot of businesswomen are sole traders and quite a high proportion work from home and often feel isolated. Being in a network helps them to combat this isolation."

She cites the experience of one network member. "On joining, she was ready to give up her business. She felt isolated and the business was reaping little reward. Now she is still trading and the business has grown to the extent that she has taken on a member of staff. She attributes this turnaround to the support and confidence-building she received from her peers."

WBN has contributed to the dramatic expansion in women's business networks across the region. There are now 37. Ruth says: "There are networks that would not be here without our support."

In addition, through partnerships in two European initiatives, supported by the European Social Fund's Equal and Leonardo da Vinci II, networks have been able to link up with Continental counterparts through overseas exchange visits. WBN also organises an annual international conference.

WBN promotes partnership working and encourages its members to engage with the mainstream business sector. This regional network of networks has helped to build relationships between different members: networks of different sizes, with different objectives. Creating these links is helping to build a continuum of support. Where appropriate, women are encouraged to try and test a larger network meeting, as their businesses grow and their networking needs change.

"A lot of business women are sole traders and quite a high proportion work from home and often feel isolated."



highlights

Developing the strength of peer group support

UK and European exchanges as well as an international conference

37 member networks

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highlights

Business advice, training, technology, incubator offices, small-loan finance and conference space offered to local businesswomen.

The project has resulted in the creation of 17 new jobs in the first year of operation and will have created workspace for 85 fledgling entrepreneurs by 2005.

More than 3,000 people provided with access to basic Information Communications and Technology (ICT) taster sessions.

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Women's Education in Building – Building etc

Finding the right office space is often a tricky first step for any new business. For disadvantaged, minority groups looking to start up in economically deprived areas, locating the right workspace can be critical to their future success.

In Stratford, East London, a brand new managed workspace project, building etc, gives local entrepreneurs a solid foundation for their operations. Targeted at women, minority ethnic groups and ex-offenders, its office spaces and integrated business advice centre provide support to local businesswomen.

Opened by The Princess Royal in March 2003, the building etc project was developed by Women's Education in Building (WEB), a pioneering support and training organisation designed to help women access employment in the traditionally male-dominated construction industry. When it came to creating the framework of building etc, WEB decided to broaden its remit to include women entrepreneurs from every sector.

Chief executive Miranda Seymour-Smith says Phoenix funding has had a dramatic impact: "The project simply couldn't have happened without it," she explains. "It has been fantastic to have the resources to support local, women-led small enterprises."

Besides providing workspace to local businesswomen, building etc is also designed to build confidence and encourage skills and achievement by providing a range of support measures, including business advice, training, technology, incubator offices, small-loan finance and conference space.

Carol Stevens is a young R&B and garage artist living in Stratford. With some experience of the industry behind

her, she wanted to find premises to set up her own video production, promotions and training company. She approached building etc and has since moved into one of its managed offices, from where she now produces videos for companies and promotes events for young people in East London.

Beyond the tailored business support available to her enterprise, Carol says she is glad to have moved into the building etc office because Stratford is an up-and-coming area, the centre is newly refurbished, and this gives her company the right image it needs to operate within a highly image-conscious industry.

building etc has seen the creation of 17 new jobs in the first year of operation. In addition to building a capacity workspace of 85 fledgling entrepreneurs by 2005, it has provided more than 3,000 people with access to basic Information Communications and Technology (ICT) taster sessions, and ensured that 720 people are provided with longer-term ICT training. The Phoenix Fund money has also financed the creation of a small loan service, which aims to give business start-up support to local tradeswomen.

Ms Seymour-Smith says that the success of building etc has exceeded expectations: "It has had a huge impact on people," she says. "We know that the first three years are often critical for women-run businesses, and we've seen many pass the three year mark already. It's great knowing we have helped successful small businesses who might otherwise not have managed to find accommodation or loan finance."

"It's great knowing we have helped small businesses who might otherwise not have managed to find accommodation or loan finance."

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| 74 | North Herts & Stevenage | East | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
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| 76 | Pentreath Industries | S West | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | |
| 77 | Portobello Business Centre | London | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 78 | The Prince's Trust | national | | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| 79 | Priority Estates Project | London & W Midlands | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 80 | Project North East | N East | | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 81 | Prowess | national | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 82 | Sandwell Community Alliance | W Midlands | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | |
| 83 | Social Firms UK | national | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 84 | South East Hampshire Enterprise Agency | S East | | | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 85 | South East Northumberland Enterprise Trust | N East | | | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 86 | South Yorkshire Social Enterprise Network | Yorks & Humber | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | | | | | |
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| 88 | Stocksbridge Training and Enterprise | Yorks & Humber | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
| 89 | Tower Hamlets CDA | London | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 90 | TRAIN 2000 Limited | N West | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 91 | Ujima Housing Association | London | | | | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | | |
| 92 | Voluntary Action Cumbria | N West | ✓ | | | | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ | |
| 93 | WEETU | East | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| 94 | WM Enterprise | national | | | ✓ | | | | | | | | | | |
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