

PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OFFENDERS

GROWING SUSTAINABLE WORK INTEGRATION SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

A CASE STUDIES SERIES



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The views expressed in these case studies are those of the respective organisations and the publication of the case studies should not be viewed as an endorsement of these organisations and their work by the Home Office and Ministry of Justice. The data and statistics presented within the case studies have been locally collected and cannot be verified by the Home Office, Clinks and Social Firms UK.

Background

Low qualifications and lack of employment are recognised within the Government's strategy for *Transforming Rehabilitation* as key social issues related to re-offending.*

Some local areas have already developed social enterprises as one way to overcome barriers around the employability of ex-offenders. However at the time of writing there is currently very little that brings together learning or examples of effective practice to assist others in doing this.

Recognising this gap, the Home Office commissioned a short term programme of work undertaken in February and March 2013 by Clinks and Social Firms UK.

The programme set out to explore and assess the role of social enterprises in enabling both adult and young offenders to access training and employment opportunities. The results provide a body of work that will significantly contribute to cross-Government thinking about how to embed and support social enterprises working with offenders. The programme included two elements:

- The development and publication of this series of twenty Case Studies. The social enterprises featured in the case study series were invited, following a competitive application process, to write about their own experiences and insights into the opportunities and barriers confronting their development and sustainability.
- A Summary Report which brings together the key learning about developing and sustaining social enterprises offering employment and employability training to offenders.

Together they provide a valuable resource for newly established social enterprises, for those planning to establish social enterprises, for police, prisons and probation providers, for Police and Crime Commissioners, for local Integrated Offender Management (IOM) partnerships, and for policy makers.

These resources also complement previous work undertaken in partnership between Clinks and the Home Office aimed at increasing the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector's involvement in local IOM arrangements.

* Ministry of Justice. May 2013. *Transforming Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Reform*: www.justice.gov.uk/transforming-rehabilitation

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Ubique Partnerships Ltd

A Social Enterprise Case Study

Ian Henshaw

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Introduction

This case study presents the experience of Ubiqum Partnerships Ltd, a social enterprise that was established by the former staff of Warwickshire Probation Trust's Partnerships Unit in March 2012. Ubiqum Partnerships was set up with the primary aim of continuing and developing the provision of employment and skills provision to offenders across the West Midlands. In addition to work undertaken with offenders, the company also works to support ex-service men and women and their families.

This case study highlights our experience of establishing the business and considers some of the key issues we have addressed in our first year of trading.

Background

We have often been asked what the name means and why are we called Ubiqum? The word comes from the motto of the Royal Marines: 'Ubiqum quo fas et gloria ducunt' (everywhere right and glory leads us), as one of our directors is an army veteran. The directors share a fundamental belief that we must work in partnership with other organisations if we are to be successful in supporting some of the most disadvantaged in our society.

The majority of our clients are current offenders, ex-offenders and those at risk from offending and we have bespoke projects to work with women offenders and veterans.

A Best Value review of Warwickshire Probation Trust's education, training and employment (ETE) services in 2011, recommended that they could be delivered on the Trust's behalf by other providers. Discussions with potential external providers did not result in any interest being expressed and the internal Partnership's Unit remained the main provider of offender focused ETE and related services, funded mostly by the European Social Fund (ESF). A number of contracts were coming to an end and the indication from the new Prime Contractor for National Offender Management Service European Social Fund co-financing was that they did not want to sub-contract the programme to Probation Trusts but preferred to consider other supply chain options including a greater use of social enterprises.

The Probation Trust recognised that its status as a public sector provider was a disadvantage as it is not as flexible or responsive as the private or Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sectors can be when it comes to competing for or attracting funding. There were also elements of the Partnership Unit's work that were more relevant to the emerging agenda on social enterprise, co-operatives and mutualisation which would allow for the development of a social enterprise to deliver these services. The Trust therefore gave permission to the staff to develop a feasibility study and business case for the creation of a social enterprise. It soon became clear that the Partnership Unit's manager and established staff would lead the development of the enterprise and would eventually become the company's first members and directors.

Our experience: Ubiqum Partnerships

Between April 2011 and March 2012 the staff of the Partnerships Unit undertook extensive work to develop a business model and plan, whilst continuing to deliver its contracts and services. Progress reports were routinely submitted to the Trust Board and discussed. The Trust undertook

due diligence on the proposed business plans and the company's viability and eventually the Board took the decision that they would support the new social enterprise and facilitate a transfer of staff, contracts, resources and TUPE liabilities to the new entity with effect from 31 March 2012.

The Trust also agreed to provide a small, but very important, contract for the delivery of ETE service for the first two years. Whilst our core and casual staff were pleased to be given this opportunity, the process had taken a considerable period of time to work through, which resulted in several staff moving on before the point of transfer.

Our main contract over many years has been the delivery of information and advice services under Next Step and the National Careers Service, and in order to maintain this contract the new company had to achieve the MATRIX quality standard within three months. We also had to develop a full range of policies including health and safety, diversity and equal opportunities, whistle blowing and sustainability, etc.

We achieved our Matrix Accreditation in June 2012 which enabled us to deliver the National Careers Service contract and we have gone on to secure new business. This new work enabled us to recruit more staff and volunteers including the former service users. To date, over half of those who have been employed in the company have been reformed offenders, service veterans or former service users. This is one of the achievements of which we are most proud. We have found them to be reliable, hard-working and most of all committed to the jobs they do. They have made a real difference in our ability to engage and support current offenders who feel more confident and comfortable in working with their peers. One of these is K:

K was keen to provide help and support to others who are engaged in offending behaviour. Her partner is an ex-serviceman and he and K were initially supported through the Veterans Contact Point in Nuneaton where Ubiq Partnerships provides information and advice services. K progressed to providing volunteer support and was recently recruited by Ubiq Partnerships Ltd as a casual employee, providing peer support to women and PPOs (Prolific and other Priority Offenders) on the New Leaf Project. Through our contract to deliver the National Careers Service we have been able to offer K an apprenticeship which she started in March. She has already completed a certificate in employability services and will progress to a fully accredited award during her apprenticeship.

The scale and scope of the business have increased significantly since April 2012, enabling more offenders to benefit from the services that we offer. Overall we have worked with just over 900 offenders in 2012/13 from across the West Midlands, undertaking over 2,400 face to face interviews.

We offer services to offenders through a number of routes including key stakeholders (prisons and probation) and other partners within the VCSE sector. Our services include:

- Information and advice services
- Case management
- Peer support
- Disclosure advice.

We currently deliver the following projects:

- **New Leaf – Step Up** (funded by National Offender Management Service European Social Fund co-financing), an employability programme that supports women offenders and Prolific and other Priority Offenders (PPOs) in Warwickshire

- **New Leaf – Veterans** (funded by NOMS ESF co-financing), an employment and support service for ex-services offenders across the West Midlands
- **National Careers Service** – providing offenders in Warwickshire and West Mercia with access to the National Careers Service
- **ESF AIM Partnership** – delivering innovation in peer support approaches working with offenders.

Key learning

There have been a number of key learning points for the company and particularly the directors during the first year of trading. The first and foremost is that it is easy to underestimate the amount of work involved in running a business. We recommend getting professional help and support wherever possible. Although the new business had been a year in the planning, the first months of trading were very difficult in terms of balancing the need to maintain service delivery, acquire and initiate new business and undertake all the activities associated with running a business e.g. payroll, bookkeeping, invoicing, recruitment, compliance etc. We recognise now that we had paid insufficient attention to some of these details because, in a public sector organisation, we do not see or value the business functions that are remote from the service delivery.

The financial management of the company, including HMRC and VAT returns, has been led by our executive director and the resilience of our business model has been soundly tested in the first twelve months of trading. It has been important to maintain and manage cash flow, especially in the early months.

The directors' transition from being managers to becoming employers has been an issue. The directors have experience of managing staff and budgets but there has been an identifiable change in the relationship between directors and some staff which, if we had not spotted it, could have led to problems.

There is a high expectation on the part of Offender Managers within the Probation Trust, that the service they now receive should be the same as the one delivered when ETE staff were part of the Probation Service. Ubiq provides only services that are funded or have potential to generate income, whereas previously when advisory staff experienced low numbers of referrals and high rates of attrition they were paid regardless! We are now income dependent and have to deliver services and contracts as specified. In addition the proposed changes that will result from the Transforming Rehabilitation strategy have raised concerns amongst probation staff about partnership work with organisations that may be positioning themselves to compete for probation services in the future.

Being a social enterprise can also be a disadvantage – not everyone understands what a social enterprise is and we have experienced some misconceptions over who we are and what we seek to do. We have been turned down by a potential funder on the basis that they did not think social enterprises were businesses and we have also received negative feedback from a local membership organisation that believes that we must only be interested in working with veterans in order to make a profit from them!

From our experiences we recommend accessing the support available for new social enterprises that are created by those currently working in the public sector.

We received significant support from a range of organisations and each provided a critical piece in the jigsaw that has enabled us to develop into a sustainable business in such a relatively short period. The key organisations were: our former employers, Warwickshire Probation Trust; NOMS ESF co-financing through its Technical Assistance programme for supporting social enterprise development; the ESF AIM partnership, which provided invaluable support, firstly through commissioning a feasibility study for the social enterprise, and secondly as a source of funding for innovative projects with women offenders and veterans. CSWP, the Prime Contractor for the National Careers Service, also provided excellent support by helping us to achieve the MATRIX standard and facilitating the transfer of the NCS contract from Warwickshire Probation Trust to Ubiqum Partnerships Ltd. We also received business advice from Business Enterprise Support Ltd, a local enterprise agency.

We suggest that anyone leading the development of a new enterprise identifies a number of people with appropriate experiences who are willing to provide advice and support and become your critical friends.

