

A step-change in awareness



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An employee of Brumcan - a social enterprise based in Birmingham

With funding from ChangeUp, Birmingham & Solihull Social Economy Consortium (BSSEC) has launched a new campaign to increase awareness and understanding of the social enterprise sector. The group explains why the social enterprise business model has become so prevalent.

Social enterprises trade to deliver a social or environmental objective. Unlike conventional businesses - where revenues can quickly leave the local economy as they are paid out to owners or sometimes distant shareholders - social enterprises use their profits ('surpluses') to reinvest in the business, the local community, and to achieve their social objectives.

From ChangeUp through to Capacitybuilders, and across wider policy regarding voluntary sector sustainability, public service delivery and public purchasing, it's evident that the social enterprise business model has become firmly established as part of the government's agenda. However there is still a need to increase awareness and understanding -

especially at the local level - of what makes the sector unique, the kind of developmental support it requires, and of how best to utilise social enterprise. Indeed, many voluntary organisations that have adopted social enterprise business models for service delivery, contracting, income generation and income diversification, don't necessarily regard themselves as social enterprises.

BSSEC believes that the language and definitions of social enterprise are secondary to a sound grasp of the social and economic principles involved, and to widespread availability of the kind of help and expertise that can assist organisations that are growing their trading activities or moving into trading and income-generation for the first time.

"We want 2006 to mark a step-change in understanding of social enterprise," says Steve Walker, co-chair of BSSEC and chief executive of ART - a thriving social enterprise and specialist loan provider for both commercial and social enterprises.

"There are massive opportunities for

the sector, but we also need to get the social enterprise message across at all levels - especially in the public sector and among policy-makers and fund-holders at the more local level. The materials we will be producing as part of this campaign will help significantly in this."

BSSEC is the only social enterprise network in the region to have won ChangeUp resources and is currently using these not just to raise the profile of the sector but also to examine its support provision and needs.

BSSEC secretariat Alun Severn says: "We have specialist researchers examining both the supply of business development services to the sector and how the need for these services might be changing as voluntary sector business models become more complex and more challenging. This work will directly inform the Birmingham ChangeUp investment plan. We want to ensure that social enterprise is a very clear dimension in how the 'third sector' in its widest sense is supported and invested in in the future."

As part of the campaign, a series of case studies of inspirational social enterprises operating in Birmingham and Solihull have been developed. The studies, which are featured on the campaign's website, include profiles of:

- Future Health & Social Care Association - a social enterprise that manages a range of health and social care services and projects. It also supports people into education, training and employment in health and social care.
- Jericho Community Business - an enterprise that provides training and paid work placement opportunities to



A trainee of social enterprise Jericho Community Business

people that are disadvantaged in the employment market.

- Birmingham Community Sports (BCS) - an enterprise that provides sports facilities at subsidised rates to local groups. It also aims to redevelop sporting centres in Birmingham and make them available for use to both community and commercial groups.
- Waterloo Woodwork - a business established by the Colebridge Trust that manufactures timber products for outdoor use - including chairs, benches and shelters - while also providing vocational training for adults with learning difficulties.

Other elements of the campaign include BSSEC Bulletin - a regular news update about the sector, an on-site social enterprise visit, press releases, and an event to launch a social enterprise purchasing guide developed by BSSEC.

Full social enterprise case studies and further resources are available via the campaign's website at www.bssec.org.uk

For further information contact Alun Severn, BSSEC Secretariat, on 0121 233 0278 or email alun@thirdsectorservices.co.uk

About BSSEC

BSSEC is a strategic alliance of service providers who support the social economy. It has come together to maximise resources, improve service provision, influence policy and create opportunities for growth in the social enterprise sector. BSSEC's members provide a comprehensive package of support and expertise customised for the social economy including market and feasibility research, business advice, development and practical help, training and access to finance. BSSEC's current members are:

Aston School for Social Entrepreneurs
 Aston Reinvestment Trust
 Birmingham City Council EDD
 Birmingham Credit Union
 Development Agency
 Birmingham Voluntary Service Council
 Brumcan Recycling Ltd
 Business Link Birmingham & Solihull BVSC
 Brumcan
 Business in the Community
 Co-Enterprise Birmingham
 The Colebridge Trust
 Development Trust Association WM
 The Digbeth Trust
 Diocese of Birmingham
 Groundwork Birmingham
 Initiative for Social Entrepreneurs
 Jericho Community Business Ltd
 Kajans Productions
 Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council UnLtd