

birmingham campaign aims for step-change in awareness

Birmingham & Solihull Social Economy Consortium (BSSEC) has launched a new campaign to raise the profile of the social enterprise sector in its area.

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 believes 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 its local level - of what makes the sector unique, the kind of developmental support it requires, and of how best to utilise social enterprise.

The campaign aims to increase awareness of the social, economic, and environmental benefits that social enterprises offer and encourage public sector purchasing. It also aims to demonstrate how the social enterprise model can be used by voluntary and community organisations to generate sustainable income.

"We want 2006 to mark a step-change in understanding of social enterprise," says Steve Walker, co-chair of BSSEC and himself the chief executive of a thriving social enterprise, ART, the 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 amongst policy-makers and fund-holders at the more local level."

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 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 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.

The campaign, which will run until the end of 2006, has been funded by ChangeUP - a government supported programme of capacity building for the infrastructure of the voluntary and community sector, developed in partnership with the sector. BSSEC is the only social enterprise network in its region to have won ChangeUP resources and is using these not just to raise the profile of the sector but also to examine its support provision and needs.

"We are managing a significant programme of ChangeUP-funded work currently," says Alun Severn, who supports BSSEC and provides its secretariat service. "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 the future." www.bssec.org.uk



Work placement at Jericho Community Business

more awards

A few days after the presentation of the Edge Upstarts awards (see page 8) applications were being invited for the Enterprising Solutions Awards (run by the Social Enterprise Coalition on behalf of the Small Business Service, RBS and NatWest, in association with defra, the Home Office, Social Enterprise Magazine and The Observer).

Applications are welcome from social enterprises from any sector, of any size and of any legal structure. This year the Coalition has introduced a 'New Social Enterprise' category for new and emerging organisations. The overall winner will receive a cash prize of £10,000. Three other finalists and the winner of the New Social Enterprise award will receive £5,000.

The closing date for applications is 7 July 2006. The awards will take place on 25 October 2006. www.enterprisingolutions.org