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Introduction

Green Tracks Environmental Services (GTES) is an emerging Social Firm operating in the commercial market of Landscaping, Maintenance and Conservation work. They have been trading since 2004 and currently generate 50%+ of their own income through commercial sales with management, staff and trainees being totally committed to providing a top quality service and range of products to their ever increasing customer base combining the provision of employment and training opportunities for everyone involved.

Issues addressed:

- Starting out
- Establishing a solid foundation
- Supporting and developing the business
- Creating a supportive working environment
- Opportunities created
- Partnership working

Social Firms seek to create good quality jobs for severely disadvantaged people within supportive and successful enterprises

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Evidence of success

- Establishment of dedicated premises and workshop training facilities
- Increased customer base and income generation
- Creation of specific employment roles for people recovering from mental health problems
- Partnership working established that further enhances client experience and learning opportunities
- Participants involvement throughout the business and decision making process
- Increased well-being of participants
- 2006/07 saw GTES generate over 50% of their income through sales income

The approach taken

• Setting out

Originating in 1998, a small project of the Alford Centre in Aberdeen, GTES has evolved into a Social Firm, through the desire and determination of clients who had a strong desire to work, but had difficulty in coping in today's labour market. Under guidance from the parent organisation, Mental Health Aberdeen and with support from external sponsors, a business opportunity has been developed providing a range of employment, training and work-placement opportunities to a range of people who wish to make the journey back into employment.

• Establishing a solid foundation

Since securing dedicated premises in March 2006, with the aid of funding secured through the Increase Programme, GTES now provides a professional service to customers, concentrating on their two main social purposes of supporting people with mental health

problems to reclaim their lives through work and to ensure that the environment is improved and conserved.

A clear purpose & mission - 'Improving lives and landscapes'

Values - 'Valuing the strengths of individuals and conserving the environment'

Vision for the future - 'Green Tracks will be a sustainable conservation and landscaping Social Firm working in partnership to create a range of employment and training opportunities'.

• Supporting and developing the business

GTES has recently established a Steering Group with a specific remit to further support the establishment of a fully fledged Social Firm and to work towards developing a more secure footing within the industry sector.

GTES engage with various external support organisations and field experts that compliment their own expertise and knowledge, within the field of landscaping, maintenance and conservation.

In particular the needs of the individuals and the demands of the business are matched to ensure that a quality service is provided and standards met fully to create 'a family business environment' from which everyone can benefit.

Key Learning Points

- Prioritising workloads
- Refining products and service
- Meeting employment law and minimum wage requirements

Top tips

- Be committed and believe in your aims
- Work hard to achieve your goals
- Don't over-commit yourself
- Network, network and network
- Where possible develop partnerships
- Preparation and presentation are key
- Don't grow complacent

• Creating a supportive working environment

The culture and ethos within GTES offers and lends itself to a fully integrated and supportive working environment that values the efforts and contributions of all their employees and volunteers.

There is no differentiation made between management, staff, and trainees within the organisation. The emphasis is placed on valuing everyone's contribution and encouraging people to build their confidence and learn new skills within a working environment.

Methods of support include: regular supervision and appraisal, person development plans, regular team meetings, and training and development days.

• Opportunities created

GTES currently provide and support the following opportunities within their business activities:

- 3 Training Placements
- 2 Volunteer Placements
- 2 Full Time staff positions
- 1 Part Time position via New Deal for the Disabled
- 4 Part Time positions via Workstep programme, Administration, Finance and Field Workers

It is the aim of the organisation, supported by the Manager and Full Time Field Support Worker to further increase the number of opportunities available in line with business growth and future developments.

• Partnership working

GTES has developed a programme in partnership with Aberdeen Foyer that will further enable the organisation to offer basic skills training in various areas such as; woodworking, bricklaying, horticulture etc. The course is designed to run over a 9 month period and link in with Progress to Work and the Build and Train courses facilitated by The Foyer.



Next Steps