

Chair's Report - Social Firms Scotland AGM

Tuesday 9th December 2008, Brodies LLP, 15 Atholl Crescent, Edinburgh, EH3 8HA

Chief Executive's Welcome

Pauline Graham, Social Firms Scotland (SFS) Chief Executive welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending. She extended thanks to Brodies and Isobel D'Inverno for hosting the event and covered basic housekeeping. She then introduced David Lyon SFS's Chair.

Chair's Introduction

David Lyon introduced himself as Business Manger for Red & Black Innovations, recently rebranded from AskClyde and launched officially as a CIC on 17th November 2008. Red & Black are an emerging Social Firm delivering market research and consultancy services to public, private and voluntary sector organizations. He echoed Pauline in thanking delegates for attending.

Development of Social Firms Scotland

David stated the mission of SFS is to grow the Social Firm sector in order to increase employment opportunities for severely disadvantaged people. A framework has been developed outlining the main strategic areas that SFS has identified as the means of achieving its purpose; these are

- **INFORMATION** - To establish understanding and awareness of Social Firms
- **MEMBERSHIP** - To provide a high quality service that engages and benefits our members
- **INFLUENCE** - To ensure that Social Firms are recognised as a solution to employability issues for severely disadvantaged people
- **SECTOR GROWTH** - To lead and inspire initiatives to create an enabling environment that supports the growth of the Social Firm sector
- **INTERNAL** - To create a supportive working environment within a robust organisation

David stressed that SFS's work to date is based on the assertion that Social Firms offer a real and sustainable solution to creating employment for people furthest from the labour market. As an employment and business model, he said, Social Firms work, however he also recognised that SFS need to continue to strengthen our membership, our key messages and the number of Social Firms in Scotland. David described our vision for the sector for:

- Social Firms to be widely recognised as an innovative business model that combines enterprise, employment and empowerment.
- Social Firms to support large numbers of severely disadvantaged people excluded from the open labour market into work in sustainable businesses.

David told the meeting that SFS continues to represent Members at various strategic forums and levels including the SSEC Board and HISEZ board. In addition, SFS is also a member of the Aspire to Enterprise Consortium which provides business support to social enterprises in Lowland Scotland and our CEO is a member of the Public Procurement Advisory Group.

SFS continues to build strategic alliances with other agencies to promote Social Firms and our key messages and of course work closely with Sally and her team at Social Firms UK around consultations and campaigning on issues such as Welfare Reform and the benefits system.

Projects Delivered

David then went on to detail the projects SFS have delivered. The 2 year **Employment Support Programme** finished at the end of March 2008. The project produced 2 important publications; *the way to work* aimed at severely disadvantaged people wanting to make the journey into work and *Creating the Magic* aimed at Social Firm managers, offering guidance on how to create a supportive, inclusive and empowering work environment. A series of case studies on full and emerging Social Firms in Scotland has also been produced and can be downloaded from our website.

The European EQUAL programme with support from Third Sector Division at Scottish Government provided funding to develop a **guide on business acquisition** as a means of starting up/growing Social Firms drawing on international experiences. The Equal programme also provided funding for the development of a **guide to community benefit clauses** in Housing Association tenders and highlighted the positive experience of one of our members, Solstice - in responding to community benefits in procurement. This guide was produced in partnership with Grampian Housing Association and was published in 2008.

The Small Research Projects Initiative funded a report investigating a methodology for calculating the **impact that working in Social Firms has on people's mental health**. SFS will continue to build an evidence base to prove that Social Firms offer an important and valuable solution to job creation for people who experience significant barriers in the labour market.

Hard copies of all reports are available from SFS or you can download from our website.

Internal Developments

David covered the main internal development for SFS in 2007, Leona McDermid our Chief Executive, went on maternity leave towards the end of the year. Pauline Graham was initially appointed to provide cover but has since been permanently employed in the role and Leona has moved on to be Commercial Director for Foyer Enterprise in Aberdeen. David took the opportunity to thank Leona from everyone at SFS for all her work for SFS and wished her every success in her new role. He believed she would still be an active member and supporter of SFS.

Funders

The Chair then thanked SFS's funders in 2007 - Big Lottery Fund, Communities Scotland, the European Equal Programme, Scottish Government through the Small Research Projects Initiative and through the Third Sector Division.

In the current financial year SFS have been grateful to receive additional funding from the Equal Programme, the Third Sector Division at Scottish Government and the Big Lottery Fund.

The Chair ended by thanking the Directors and staff for their commitment, contribution and support throughout 2007.