

# 2004 AGM

THURSDAY 23 SEPTEMBER

# Social Firms Scotland

## ROBERT T BROADWAY – 21ST CENTURY HOMESTEAD

Robert Broadway, Founder and Executive Director of 21st Century Homestead, one of the most innovative social enterprises in the United States. 21st Century builds safe, decent, affordable housing for low/very-low income persons, particularly for people with disabilities, through several innovative programs that Robert has developed. For instance, 21st Century builds specially designed 1 bed homes for people with disabilities and subsidises the rent to only 30% of their total income. Through a further programme, on-staff and vocational construction instructors, teach young, nonviolent, first time, felony offenders (male and female) residential construction trades. It essentially offers an apprenticeship to those who would otherwise have no opportunity to learn or enter the skilled trades - it has produced over 1500 apprentices.

Another ground breaking self-help housing project enables low and very low income families to help each other as a team build their own homes. With the help of 21st Century Homestead, participants qualify for construction loans (no money down, low interest) and provide most of the labour associated with the construction of the homes.

Robert's organisation is a perfect example of a social enterprise whose business model has made it self-sustaining without the need for foundation or government support. This has been achieved in the last six years

Robert compared our tax and benefits system with the American system. The Inland Revenue in North American does not tax non-profit corporations, who are free to engage in most business and make as much profit as they like if they have a social purpose. Previously in the US an individual could stay on public entitlement their entire life, however this has changed and individuals now have grant entitlement for a total of 3 years. Robert administered this Welfare to Work grant in East Kansas under a system whereby a case manager would be assigned to an individual and would, to all extents, look after that person. The person would also have a trainer responsible for ensuring they receive the necessary training (which could be incredibly wide-ranging) to get them back into employment. Finally, a Business & Industry Co-ordinator, almost acting as the individual's agent, would liaise with people in corporate organisations, to access employment for the individual whilst offering to subsidise the salary for 6 months.

Robert had the following to say on influence

### 1. Find out how everything works

Go to the council, go to the Government and ask as many questions as you need until you understand how the system works. Once you understand the environment in which you operate and how to get from A to Z, you will see the entire picture and recognise how to get things done.

### 2. Build partnerships

Once you understand the system, you will realise that what you want to achieve can be best done by building relationships and working in partnership. As part of the programme to train young offenders, 21st Century Homestead first had to train their carpenters to become instructors.

### 3. Promotion, promotion, promotion

Getting people to understand who you are and what you do is an enormous task. You need to make yourself relevant to as many people as possible and you need to publicise what you do to the nth degree. Make sure you meet the people who influence the people who make the decisions, get them to champion your idea and in a political sense make them understand how it can win votes.

## MARTY SCUTT & KAREN SMITH – SOLSTICE & GRAMPIAN HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Solstice is a user led, up and coming social firm working in partnership with Grampian Housing Association. The main aim of Solstice is to provide supported employment and training for people recovering from severe and enduring mental illness. It provides varying levels of individual support to enable people to progress to open employment. Solstice provide an in-house gardening service to Grampian Housing Association (contract work for open space maintenance, assisted garden maintenance for less able tenants) whilst retaining their own customers (a private gardening service for the public). They also intend to open a wholesale nursery in order to grow specialist plants

Marty stressed the benefits of the actual employment in this emerging social firm – having a real and valid qualification and the increased confidence that comes from employment and being able to answer the “what do you do?” question. He paid tribute to Leona (McDermid, Social Firms Scotland’s Development Co-ordinator in Aberdeen) for all her support through Solstice’s development.

Karen stated that whilst Solstice were an emerging social firm, the quality and level of service they provide must be market competitive and that she is proud to be involved with an organisation that actually works! She highlighted that one member of the team had left to train as a nurse, however still return as they appreciate the supportive environment. Karen also said that she believes that it is the individuals who are the most important within an organisation and as such said thank you to Leona. She gave an example of the help Leona had given with a funding application and the level of detail that Leona had gone into. Karen also felt that one of the secrets behind Solstice’s success was the confidence generated by the experience and structure behind Social Firms Scotland. She also pointed out the recognition and promotion Social Firms Scotland can provide act as a real spur.

## DAVID LYON – SOCIAL FIRMS SCOTLAND

David is Social Firms Scotland’s Development Co-ordinator based in Glasgow. Having been employed since April 2003, David works closely with a portfolio of organisations providing them with a wide range of support and expertise to assist in their work to establish social firms.

David spoke of the lessons which he had learned over the past year, which were grouped under the three headings of ‘Providing an Opportunity’ – where the people who have been involved in social firm development have shown that by simply providing an opportunity to get involved with the development of a social firm, there is a substantial wealth of untapped experience and enthusiasm which can be harnessed to undertake the sometimes long and difficult journey of establishing a social firm.

The second aspect was ‘Commitment’ where people involved had been working on their own time and in addition to their own jobs and the final aspect of ‘principles’ David spoke of the ethos behind the organisations drive to establish a viable business opportunity. It is these three aspects which have had the greatest influence on David over the past year.

## AGNES GROUT – SUPPORT WORKER & SOCIAL FIRMS SCOTLAND DIRECTOR

Agnes is a director of Social Firms Scotland. She has been employed in the Care Sector for the past twelve years, has been a user of services for twenty-two years and is currently a Support Worker for Adults with Learning Disabilities.

Agnes is a fervent advocate of social firms as a fine example of how to empower people and give people the opportunity to change their lives for the better. Having experienced mental health problems herself, she believes that being able to work can be life saving – however she also pointed out that the return to work is not often enough. An unsupportive work environment can be so detrimental to recovery with people feeling like they are treated as objects. She stressed it is important to have the right environment where there is no stigma or discrimination.

She said Social Firms Scotland believe in empowering people, as shown in the structure of the board which is comprised of a certain proportion of people who have experienced mental health illness. She said she felt supported on the Board and also had had the opportunity to attend conferences and various training courses whilst, most importantly, feeling that she contributes to the strategic development of the organisation. She believes that social firms are a better way forward for an inclusive society.

## NEIL GRAY - STUDENT

Neil is in his 3rd year at Edinburgh University, studying Business Studies and Law. Hailing from Orkney, Neil came to Social Firms Scotland through the STEP programme to undertake a project to review and analyse Social Firms Scotland's current information system and produce a report to capture all stakeholder requirements.

Neil realised the importance of his task to Social Firms Scotland which required a systematic methodology to consider the needs of all stakeholders. He produced recommendations on a new system that was not only realistic but on budget! Neil found it extremely hard to believe that the social economy had been overlooked for so long from an education perspective. He stated that the work and existence of the sector goes largely unrecognised and untaught and that none of his peers knew what a social firm was. He strongly believes that this needs to change if the sector is to continue to grow.

## JOHN THOMSON – NHS GLASGOW

John has been with NHS Greater Glasgow Health Promotion Department since 1997 in a variety of roles within the geographic teams and is currently Health Promotion Officer (Acting). Working predominately within the Social Inclusion Partnership and Community Planning structures in East and West Dunbartonshire he has a keen interest in health inequalities.

John declared that social firms create meaningful and rewarding employment for people and help tackle health inequalities. From an economic point of view, increased employment also means a parallel decrease in reliance on the NHS and benefits.

Whilst he acknowledged that the time period for social firm development can be daunting, he believes that they are part of the answer in allowing people to access employment. He also echoed the importance of having a dedicated Development Co-ordinator working alongside them, seeing this as a huge asset. He finished by saying he was greatly encouraged by the current position of Social Firms Scotland (not least the headway made in the last 12 months through the new Chief Executive) and that he believes Social Firms Scotland have a great future ahead!

## JOHN HARPER – CAMPSIE CATERING (EDAMH)

EDAMH (core purpose "To promote the rights and seek to enhance the lifestyle of those affected by mental ill health in East Dunbartonshire through the provision of easily accessible community based services) have recently established an emerging social firm Campsie Catering which started trading on August 29th. John is Campsie Catering's Business Manager and is responsible for the management and development of EDAMH's first social firm.

John further acknowledged the work of the Development Co-ordinators who build close relationships with their clients and become part of the team. He recognised David's input in enabling EDAMH to source and access funding and his experience of business planning and infrastructure. Campsie Catering has been a long time in planning and the initial market research conducted by David showed that the original idea did not quite stack up, however John stressed how invaluable David's business background has been and they had reached the launch stage eventually. John said he found the statistics relating to emerging social firms encouraging as they are an integral way to build confidence in individuals in an environment the individual's need where there team work is actively encourages and where there is a balance between social inclusion and profit.