

Spotlight

Social Enterprise

Featuring:

**Bike4Health, North East Counselling Services and
Active Families North East**

Pages 4, 8 and 16

Also in this issue

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Business planning tips

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How to set up and run a successful social enterprise

Cover photo: A large group of children cycling near Cobalt Business Park with Bike4Health

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About this magazine

Connected Voice is published four times a year. We aim to make sure all information is correct and up to date but we do not accept liability for any mistakes that may inadvertently appear. Views and opinions in this magazine are not necessarily those of Connected Voice.

Images: as part of our commitment to accessibility, we describe images for those using screen readers.

If you have any queries about this magazine email connect@connectedvoice.org.uk

Issue 15: Social Enterprise

Our Summer 2023 issue of Connected Voice focuses on social enterprises. We hear from three successful and very different social enterprises about how they have set up and what difference they have made to their local communities here in the North East.

Our new trustee, Peter Deans, shares his extensive experience in social enterprise to offer helpful tips on developing an effective business strategy.

We also hear from our Support and Development team about choosing the right legal structure and accessing grant funding when setting up a new social enterprise.

Our Business Services team has undergone a lot of change in the past six months so we take an opportunity to connect with the team members and find out how they can support you with your organisation's finances.

Our membership offer has also had a refresh and our new Membership Officer, Mark Shilcock, talks us through the benefits and how you can join as a voluntary, community or social enterprise organisation ●

Social Enterprise

Lisa Goodwin
Chief Executive



Social enterprise... what exactly is it? Is it a noun or a verb? For many years now we have included 'social enterprise' as part of the wider sector we support – the terminology has shifted from VCS (Voluntary and Community Sector) to VCSE Sector (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector).

There are many potential forms of social enterprise – from Community Interest Companies and Co-operatives, to registered charities with trading arms. Some of them generate most of their income from trading and re-invest this in the social/ community purpose of their work. But a far greater number of organisations have an element of traded income which supplements their main income sources – such as grants and contracts.

“ I think most VCS organisations fall into the bracket of 'social enterprise' for at least some of their work, though many wouldn't necessarily describe themselves in that way

I think most VCS organisations fall into the bracket of 'social enterprise' for at least some of their work, though many wouldn't necessarily describe themselves in that way.

At Connected Voice we generate around 17% of our income from trading, and this is something we have made a conscious effort to increase over the past few years. Trading income gives us some freedom about how we spend our money. It allows us to develop new projects and ideas without always having to rely on finding external funding. Sometimes it helps us to do those things which are necessary but not always funded – such as additional cost of living salary increases for our staff team.

In recognition of the fact Newcastle was recently awarded Social Enterprise Place status (Gateshead has already been a Social Enterprise Place for some years), and in light of the focus in our local authorities on community wealth building, we felt it was the right time to have a magazine themed on social enterprise.

I hope you enjoy reading about some of the great examples of social enterprise that we have locally, all from organisations making a difference in our communities and keeping money in the local area. As more and more of the companies we come across in our daily life are global, it's good to see that the number of social enterprises in the North East is growing. Whether it's a thing you are or a thing you do, social enterprise is here to stay, and we look forward to supporting more social enterprises in our daily work here at Connected Voice ●

Spotlight: Bike4Health CIC

David Buchan
Director

David is Director at Bike4Health - a local Community Interest Company (CIC) that supports more people to cycle.

www.bike4health.org

Photo: New bike hire at Kielder. A man stands in front of an old stone building with an orange bike



What does your organisation do?

Since our foundation in 2014, we have worked to establish our model and broaden our reach across the North East.

Our work is focused on harnessing the power of cycling to improve how we move around our region, whether for utility (commuting, going to the shops or appointments), sport, leisure, or fun.

Whilst over the years we have offered different blends of services, our focus remains true to our core; enabling cycling through providing unique and inspiring cycling experiences that leave the participants with increased skills, knowledge and confidence to go about cycling for themselves.

In 2018 we established our first physical workshop location. The

foundation of the Bike4Health Workshop allowed us to facilitate more work with larger groups, but also help keep members of the public on two wheels with general bike repairs. Most importantly, it allowed us to establish our self-funding model which means we don't rely on grant funding.

“The Bike4Health Workshop allowed us to establish our self-funding model”

In 2020, we moved to our new and larger North Tyneside location. Being closer to most of our school and business partners allowed us to deepen our existing connections and forge new relationships. We also increased the portfolio of brands we work with so we can offer high quality cycling equipment to our customers and clients.

Ultimately, we all need to use active travel more for our collective mental and physical health, and for reducing our CO₂e emissions. Our work focusses on driving cultural change and getting more people on bikes, today and for the future.

Tell us about your key projects?

Our core focus in 2023 is creating cultural change and getting more kids on bikes by providing inspiring cycling coaching embedded in our region's primary schools. Our Bikeability programmes go beyond the national guidelines and take

Photo left: Children from Wingrove Primary Fenham wearing hi viz and standing in a line with their bikes on a ferry on their way to Holland



Photo right: children on a group ride in Bellingham stand in front of an old building



children off site to explore their local area. Long term, embedded cycle coaching gives children the skillset to move around and reach independence on two wheels. This is particularly empowering in historic and current low-income areas, where individual physical mobility and social mobility are intrinsically linked.

Bike4Health continues to support businesses who are trying to reduce their commuter related carbon emissions, by offering active travel support, training, fleet management and mechanic support for organisations.

How has Connected Voice supported you?

Connected voice was instrumental in the foundation of Bike4Health CIC. They provided all the 'nuts and bolts' to get started with this project. This included everything from 1:1 support with marketing and branding experts (who we still have a great working relationship with to this day) to legal and payroll advice and support.

The support from Connected Voice allowed us to focus on what was important to us in the early

days, getting out there, engaging our community and establishing relationships with schools and organisations. The support allowed us to focus on making the business work in the first instance, rather than spending too much time worrying about details.

What do people say about your organisation?

We're pleased the Bike4Health Workshop is rated as one of the highest quality bike repair shops in the North East, with over 150 5* reviews in 2022 and a 4.9 average. Members of the public rate us on our professionalism and communication.

Our school partners often report increases in cycling to school among children who are participating in our cycling programmes, which continues with the children as they progress through school.

We recently produced a film all about our various projects with different partners, '[We are Bike4Health](#)', which can be seen on our YouTube channel and features feedback from some of our key partners ●

Business Planning for Social Enterprises

Peter Deans
Connected Voice Trustee



Peter has extensive experience working with charities and social enterprises, most recently as a consultant, and before that, in senior positions at the Social Investment Business and National Lottery Community Fund. He is currently on the Investment Committee for the North East Social Investment Fund.

How is the social enterprise going to make money?

It's the obvious question. Unlike other not for profit organisations, social enterprises are more likely to be trading, so specifically who is going to pay you for what and why will they choose you, instead of using an alternative? What are your costs and how are you going to manage them? What does your cashflow look like and will you need finance to get going or grow, or provide necessary investment? You need to be able to satisfy yourselves that you have got credible answers to these very basic questions.

“**Business planning is not the same as strategy, though they are connected, they often get confused**”

Business planning is not the same as strategy, though they are connected, they often get confused. Indeed, most business plans start with strategic statements such as mission and vision, so it can feel like you are covering strategy. But stating strategy is not the same as analysing it. And by analysing strategy, I mean considering which field you wish to work in and the position you wish to occupy in that

A few reflections on business planning for social enterprises, having done lots and made lots of mistakes.

field, in comparison with the other players in it. Planning is more the practical *how*, than the strategic *what and where*.

There is a good YouTube video about the difference between strategy and planning, featuring Roger Martin for Harvard Business Review: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuYIGRnC7J8>. Even if the references in it don't relate to you - large organisations in competitive US markets - the principles are helpful. It lasts less than ten minutes.

What is specific to social enterprise business plans?

In short, not much. There is plenty of advice online about what to cover in a business plan and to a large extent they cover the same elements whether you are a charity, a social enterprise, statutory body or a for profit organisation. The more important distinctions are about your size, stage of development, complexity and about the characteristics of the field you are working in. However, there are some things that a social enterprise may have to consider in more carefully:

- First, what is the relationship with customers? Are they partly motivated to purchase from you because you are a social

enterprise? To what extent? It might help the first purchase, but it is quality and value that will sustain you. How might being a social enterprise affect your branding, if at all?

- Second, are there trade-offs between your social purpose and profit? If so, how are you going to negotiate this, especially at the front line? For example, say you run a counselling service and you can subsidise some work for people who cannot afford full price, or can raise subsidy to do so. How does that effect the way you explain your pricing and how staff manage this?
- Third, depending on your structure, how will you raise finance and reward investors? There is a healthy social investment market that you could explore. It is unlikely that you can offer any equity in your social enterprise in a way that is attractive to investors, so you are almost certainly looking at loans or grants. The process of explaining your plans to someone who is expecting their money back is helpful, even if you don't take out a loan in the end.

Some business plan pitfalls to avoid. These can apply to any business planning, for any organisation:

- **Who is the plan for?** Primarily it must be for the organisation, to help it make future decisions efficiently. Too often plans get written for an external body and get tilted towards what you think they need to hear. Of course, plans contain speculation, but make it a realistic reflection of your reasoned honest belief. Note whether the people doing the planning are naturally optimists or pessimists. Talk about this. Laugh about it. Keep it in mind.

- **So big no one reads it, so long to produce it's out of date.**

Keep it as manageable as you can. Think of it as a document and process that ensures the various plans you need anyway (for finance, people, service delivery, governance, technology, marketing, EDI, stakeholder management, risk, safeguarding etc) are coherent with each other and with your strategy.

- **Out of touch.** Make it grounded in the front line of your organisation. Would it make sense there? How does the planning process engage with who it needs to? There is a lot of sense in Agile Project Planning, about which there is plenty online.

- **Unmanageable wish list.** These come from avoiding choices, for fear of not meeting everyone's needs. You can't do everything, you must choose. Often these plans don't identify what the main problems and opportunities are, and what practically you are going to do about them. See Richard Rumelt: 'Good Strategy Bad Strategy.'

- **Too fixed.** Once you've finished it, you need to be able to tweak it as new information arrives. Have a process for this which keeps the coherence across the organisation's different plans, without a rewrite.

- **Communicating the plan.** Be canny about the audience and what they need. It must help decision makers. A summary version is sometimes helpful for wider circulation.

- **Don't get stuck in the past.** If you are an established organisation, it's easy to think 'we've always done it this way.' A culture of evolution is important. Business planning is forward looking ●

Looking for support?

Connected Voice's Support and Development team can assist in a number of aspects of your organisation's strategy. Visit our website www.ConnectedVoice.org.uk to learn more or get in touch on 0191 232 7445

Spotlight: North East Counselling Services

Marjorie Hunter
Chief Executive Officer

Marjorie shares North East Counselling Services journey to success over the last 17 years.

necounselling.org.uk



Tyneside. We have worked to help with a variety of challenges including depression, anxiety and stress related disorders. Clients have included carers, ex-service personnel and other 'hard-to-reach' groups such as children and young people (through our outreach work in schools). We have a team of 80 counsellors made up of employees, freelancers, volunteers and placement counsellors.

Tell us about your key projects?

We have now completed work in 172 schools within Newcastle and Gateshead and see clients across 22 GP surgeries within Gateshead. These are clients who are in 'hard-to-reach' areas of the community, with a main barrier for them being cost. We have directly helped 1,521 clients since January this year through counselling sessions.

What does your organisation do?

North East Counselling Services was founded in July 2006 by carers as a result of personal experience. Incorporated as a Community Interest Company (CIC), we work for the benefit of the community and not for private advantage. We have a built-in asset lock which ensures that any profits are passed back into the community and not taken as dividends.

Since its foundation, North East Counselling Services has provided counselling and therapy to over 20,000 clients in and around Gateshead and South

“It was amazing to be referred through Gateshead Carers, to receive 12 funded sessions and to receive another 6 sessions after that from another funding provider. It was invaluable to be able to talk about some very traumatic experiences with a safe person in a safe space

Client feedback

What one piece of advice would you give to someone looking to set up a social enterprise?

To set up a social enterprise that you have a passion for. That you are motivated to develop a social enterprise that identifies and meets people's needs. That does not duplicate what others are doing. And recognising the importance of involving people with the right skills, knowledge and experience to develop and grow the social enterprise.

How has Connected Voice supported you?

Connected Voice carried out a Governance Review for NECS which provided a clear Executive Summary highlighting our main priorities for the next two years. The review provided a detailed report, the key points of which were distilled into the Executive Summary which gave clarity of focus.

Every contact with Connected Voice demonstrated a clear level of empathy with our business and the challenges we face in a turbulent trading environment. We share a vision that we can build upon and take forward together. It feels like a transformational rather than transactional relationship.

What do people say about your organisation?

- “ I feel like I learnt a lot from my counsellor and have some tools to deal with anxiety which I never had before.
- “ Having an appointment once a week gave me the opportunity to process my feelings and put in place ways to cope with my challenges.
- “ It was very quick to speak to someone. I could have also continued the sessions if needed which was a good support.
- “ My councillor helped but thinks into perspective and taught me how to cope in different situations.

If you'd like to know more about how we can support your organisation with a Governance Review [visit www.ConnectedVoice.org.uk](http://www.ConnectedVoice.org.uk) or call

0191 232 7445



Newcastle Gains Social Enterprise Status

Giovanni Spatuzzi
Deputy Chief Executive,
Connected Voice



What does this mean for social enterprises across the city and the communities they support? Giovanni talks us through the new Places Action Plan

Last year, Connected Voice worked collaboratively with fellow social enterprise support organisations: Junction Point and PNE, to apply and gain **Social Enterprise Place** status from Enterprise UK. This recognises the city as a hotspot of social enterprise activity.

Social Enterprise Places are areas of the country where social enterprises and key local stakeholders have come together to form thriving areas of social enterprise activity. Newcastle joins Gateshead, Sunderland and Durham as the next city in the North East to gain this status.

Newcastle is home to a dynamic social enterprise community with 323 social enterprises operating across the area, including youth services, business support bodies, arts and culture organisations, and community health and wellbeing services. Social enterprises come in all sizes, from businesses turning over millions to small community-focused organisations. Social enterprises are also starting up in Newcastle at a rapid rate, with the number of registered Community Interest Companies (CICs) growing by over a half between 2019 and 2022.

Connected Voice, Junction Point and PNE worked with Newcastle City Council and local social enterprise organisations to produce a **Places Action Plan**, which strives to create the best environment for social enterprises to thrive in the city. The plan is focused on achieving

three aims: (1) to improve connectivity within the social enterprise community, (2) to improve external understanding and positive interaction with the social enterprise community, and (3) to improve the capacity building support offers available to social enterprises. The plan has resulted in the creation of the **Newcastle Social Enterprise Network**, which will be driving these aims forward over 2023/24.

Commenting on Newcastle becoming a Social Enterprise Place, Peter Holbrook, Chief Executive at Social Enterprise UK, said:

"Newcastle is home to a vibrant, growing social enterprise community and we congratulate the city on gaining Social Enterprise Place status. We also recognise the incredible efforts of the social enterprises behind the bid to come together and set out a plan to further grow the impact of social enterprises in the city."

"As the cost of living crisis continues to bite and inequalities become ever more apparent, the role of social enterprise has never been more important. It is vital that these businesses, which are so often on the frontline of supporting communities through the crisis, are supported and invested in."

"Through becoming a registered Social Enterprise Place this fantastic city has committed to placing social enterprise at the heart of regional economic development." ●

Your Business Services Team

Meet our finance experts who are here to look after your social enterprise or charity's accounts, payroll and pension

Following a number of staffing changes within our Connected Voice Business Services team, we'd like to take the opportunity to introduce you to everyone.

We have a fantastic team of finance professionals providing;

- Payroll and pension processing
- Year end accounts, including Independent Examination
- Bookkeeping and accountancy, including preparation of management accounts
- Specialist training on cloud-based accounting solutions

Blanché Phillips joined us as our new Head of Business Services in March 2023. Blanché will be leading on Connected Voice Business Services'



new strategic priorities, including a focus on outstanding service delivery, building our capacity and investing in new technologies.

We have several new members of staff in our **bookkeeping and accountancy** team. **Lanchana Sivanathan**, Finance Officer, is supporting a number of local organisations with their bookkeeping and accounts. **Saad Bashir**, Management Accountant and **QuickBooks Trainer**, is providing management accounts along with being our in-house QuickBooks



ProAdvisor, working with local charities and social enterprises to move them on to cloud-based accountancy software. **Richard Maxwell** recently joined us as Management Accountant, supporting both our own charity and organisations in the North East.



We've grown our **Independent Examinations** team, with **Lilian Hetherington** joining **Douglas Maltman** to provide year end statutory accounts and examinations for charities, Community Interest Companies and Cooperative Societies.



Many people in the North East who have worked for charities and social enterprises will be familiar with the name **Moira Mart**. Moira has worked in our **payroll** team for over 30 years now, and is the name everyone wants to see pop up in their inbox, as she sends out your monthly payslip.



Jaz Nagra is another longstanding member of our payroll team, supporting organisations with payroll and pension processing.



We're extremely grateful to **Philippa Gardiner**, who worked with us as Interim Finance Director for ten months. Philippa worked with our Business Services team and



Board to build a strategy to ensure not only sustainability, but growth within our service.

If you'd like to find out more about our financial services, contact Sally Adams, our Commercial Development Executive, at sally.adams@connectedvoice.org.uk

How to Set Up and Run an Effective Social Enterprise

Beth Reeves
Support and Development
Officer



Beth talks us through the different legal structures and what they mean

What is a social enterprise?

Broadly speaking, a social enterprise is defined as a business which trades for social or environmental purposes. A social enterprise is not a legal structure itself, but an umbrella term used to describe organisations that operate for social good.

- They are independent and controlled in the interests of the social or environmental mission
- They are transparent in their reporting of the social impact and how they operate
- They reinvest profits and surpluses to further the social or environmental mission, so are not for profit

“A social enterprise is not a legal structure in itself”

For those wanting to get involved in the world of social enterprise, it can be confusing to navigate the wealth of information and jargon on the topic. This article will break down: the key characteristics of social enterprises, how to choose an appropriate legal structure for the organisation, and how to run an effective social enterprise.

Key Characteristics

- They have a social mission included in their governing documents
- They should earn at least 50% of their income from trading (income from sales of goods/services and contracts)

Choosing a legal structure for your social enterprise

A legal structure is the legal business structure that your organisation takes, which determines how the organisation runs. Whilst Community Interest Companies (CICs) are often perceived as the most common legal structure for social enterprises, a [2021 report](#) revealed that 37% of social enterprises in the North East are Companies Limited by Guarantee, equalling those that are CICs.

“37% of social enterprises in the North East are Companies Limited by Guarantee”

There has also been a rise in organisations gaining a B Corp certification, which demonstrates

their commitment to high social and environmental performance. Whilst this is not a legal structure in itself, B Corps share many of the characteristics of social enterprises.

What are the most common legal structures for social enterprises?

Community Interest Companies/ CICs

- CICs register with Companies House as a company limited by guarantee or a company limited by shares (it cannot be a charity). It is also important to note that CICs are liable to pay Corporation Tax
- Community Interest Test - to be registered as a CIC they need to satisfy a test that verifies that the organisations' proposed activities are carried out for the benefit of the community
- CIC Regulator - As a CIC, you need to submit accounts and an annual return to Companies House and annual CIC report to prove the community benefit
- Asset Lock - the governing document will include an Asset Lock, designed to ensure that the assets of the CIC are used for the purposes for which the CIC was formed
- Some grant funders will award funding to CICs, particularly towards set-up or scaling-up costs

“Some grant funders will award funding to CICs

[Find out more about CICs](#)

Company Limited by Guarantee

- Owned by guarantors that agree to pay a nominal amount towards company debts (usually £1)
- This is usually adopted by not for profit organisations wanting the protection of limited liability – they are easy to set up

- They need to submit accounts and an annual return to Companies House
- There are limited opportunities for grant funding with this structure

Company Limited by Shares

- Set up by shareholders who are protected by limited liability (their liability is limited to the share capital they originally invested)
- Need to submit accounts and an annual return to Companies House
- This is a less common form for social enterprises to take and is usually used for private businesses

Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

- This a structure designed specifically for charities and is regulated by the Charity Commission only
- Whilst charities are not always perceived to be social enterprises, CIOs can trade and generate income to fulfil their charitable purpose
- They can undertake primary purpose trading – trading that is part of the charity's primary purpose (e.g. a theatre selling tickets to advance the arts) or ancillary trading that is not carrying out the primary purpose but contributes to the organisation (e.g. a café run by the theatre which reinvests profits into the charity)
- You benefit from Corporation Tax relief as a CIO
- This is recommended for organisations that intend to have a mixed-income model (for example grants, trading and contracts)

Charitable Companies

- Charitable companies are registered with both the Charity Commission and Companies House

- In 2013, the CIO legal structure was introduced as a way of making reporting more straightforward. For this reason we recommend that you set up a CIO instead of a Charitable Company.

As you can see, there are a lot of different legal structures to choose from! We recommend that you spend some time thinking about which is the best option for you so that you can grow a successful social enterprise.

How to run an effective social enterprise

Good governance is the backbone of a successful social enterprise. CICs and Limited Companies are run by a Board of Directors, whose primary duty is to ensure that the organisation is achieving the social purpose that it was established for.

CICs and Limited Companies need at least one director, but it is recommended to have at least three to help with decision-making. The board needs to function with full transparency, have clear roles and responsibilities, and have policies and procedures in place to run effectively.

Social enterprises should have a business plan – it is recommended to include information on:

- Vision, mission and values – needs a clear central purpose of the social enterprise
- Strategy – it is key that everyone involved is clear on the direction that the organisation wants to move in and that this is monitored regularly
- Products, activities and services – think about how you will generate income through trading
- Market research – understand why your service is needed and the wider environment you are operating in
- Social impact – what impact do you intend to have?
- Operations – staffing plans and systems to ensure effective day-to-day functioning
- Finance – current position and forecast/budget for the year ahead

Contact us for support with choosing a legal structure, setting up an organisation and governance. Email connect@connectedvoice.org.uk ●

“ Good governance is the backbone of a successful social enterprise

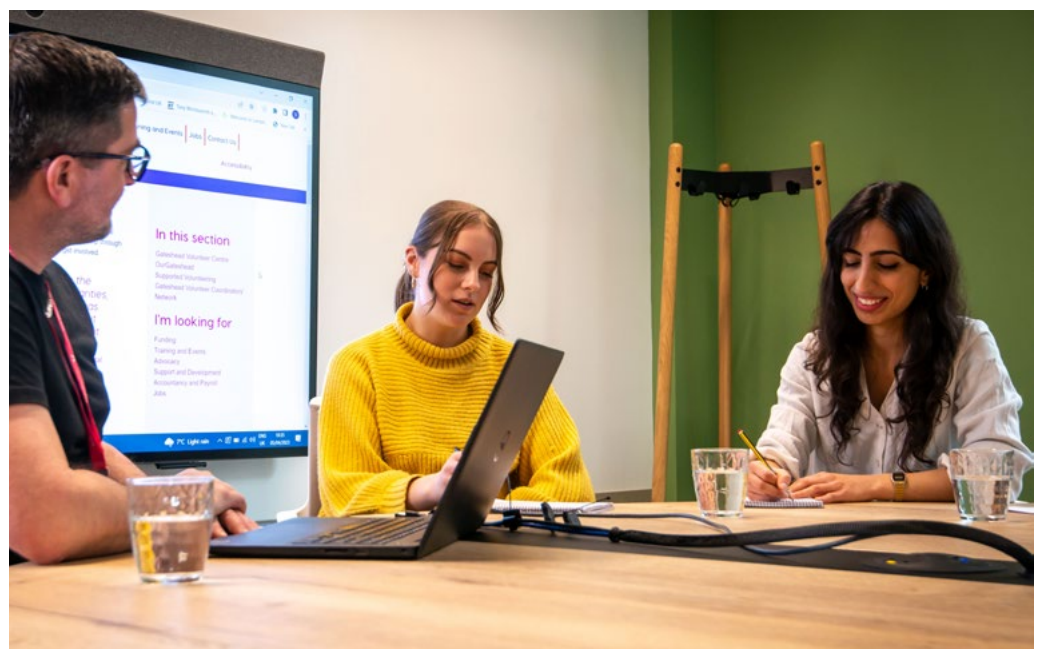


Photo right: Beth and Scirin from the Support and Development team sit at a table talking and taking notes with a colleague

Kickstart Your CIC with Grant Funding

Francesca Crosby
Support and Development
Officer



Francesca shares her tips for funding Community Interest Companies accessing funding

Securing grant funding can be a challenging process at times, and you may find that this can be the case if you are a Community Interest Company (CIC). As a CIC, you will be expected to generate the majority of your daily running costs through earned income. However, if you are early on in your journey and looking for a cash injection for start-up, are planning to run a specific project, or scaling up your organisation, there is funding available. But how are we able to do this successfully?

Planning will be the first and most vital step in your funding journey. Before you begin searching for grants, it is worthwhile to ask the following questions:

Are you 'Funding Ready'?

Make sure you have a bank account, a clear understanding of your priorities and the activities you want to deliver, that there are appropriate policies and procedures in place, and more. [Use this handy checklist to ensure you are ready.](#)

Do you have a Business Plan?

Regardless of what type of organisation you are, it is beneficial to spend time identifying the need for your organisation/ project and doing your market research in the form of a business plan. This is especially important for a CIC, as you will be looking to sell goods or services. Grant funders will likely request this from you,

so be sure to create one and keep it updated. Read our trustee Peter's tips on putting together a business strategy on page 6.

Have you researched your funder?

Make sure that the time you spend writing bids is not wasted on a funding opportunity which is not aligned with the grant-maker's, or your organisation's, priorities. Spend time viewing their website, getting in touch, and tailoring your application. **Not all funders will fund CICs**, so do read the criteria carefully.

Depending on whether you are fundraising for set up and capital costs (buildings, vehicles, assets) or project costs, the following funders may be of interest:

- [National Lottery Awards for All](#) - good for starting up with a rolling programme of grants up to £10,000 and rising to £20,000 later this year
- [Sir James Knott Trust](#) - up to £15,000 for capital, project or core costs
- [Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland](#) - up to £10,000 for capital costs and scaling up

If you would like any guidance around funding for CICs, or would like support in applying for a grant, be sure to reach out to the Support and Development team directly on 0191 235 7021 and we will be happy to help ●

Active Families: Driving the North East to Improve its Well Bean

From three company Directors to a team of 19 members of staff, winning national accolades, tapping into innovative research grants and driving positive healthy change to over 50,000 individuals. We spoke to Kelly Brougham, Director at Active Families North East to hear about their journey so far.

activefamiliesne.co.uk

Established in 2017, three fitness company Directors joined forces with the shared commitment to make positive health changes to local communities. In particular, those that had fallen on harder times in recent years.

The first port of call was their own stomping ground in Sunderland, where they first collaborated with Sunderland Council on their Active Forever Project. This provided seated exercises for older people to encourage healthy activity and help with social isolation. The project was originally funded for 16 weeks and was then extended following its popularity.

Kelly said: "We were watching communities and friendships being built around our classes and it made us determined to provide more to these communities.

"Back then, we were doing everything we could. We were putting on classes, going door-to-

door to engage residents, looking for funding and putting together applications. On top of this, we were also working hard to build awareness of what we were doing and were constantly networking."

"The team's determination paid off and we soon had additional funding from Sport England at the same time as we were rapidly expanding into other areas across Sunderland."

Kelly added: "We were having all of these funding successes, however, the real success for us was in seeing the impact we were making to people's lives. Carol, who now volunteers for us, originally started coming to classes after her husband died, as she felt like if she didn't keep coming she might never leave the house."

"It feels like every day now a member of our team comes back to us with a story like Carol's or a conversation they've had

Photo: Kelly and Amy sit on chairs outside a red and white lighthouse waving red pom poms



“**The pandemic also brought about our innovative side**”

with someone in class about the difference it's made to their life.”

Active Families continued upon its successful growth trajectory, however when 2020 hit, Covid-19 brought along with it an even more vital need for the team's service.

Kelly said: “We knew it was vital to ramp up our activity, particularly to support our older participants.

“We moved classes online, delivered food hampers and sent out weekly newsletters with how-to guides to help people get online and join our Zoom programs and classes.

“Of course, we had the usual Zoom mishaps with people putting phones to their ears and having the camera turned off. We even did a zoom bingo session, however we have to admit it was absolute mayhem as everyone was shouting out numbers all the time!

“The feedback we got was fantastic and one service we provided which really stood out during the pandemic was our weekly calls with socially isolated individuals. We would work off a list every week and catch people on the phone for a good hour to 45 minutes. It was important to us to sustain contact so that when everything opened back up these individuals were still motivated to come back to classes.”

The importance of the team's work was recognised when they won a national community impact award for the support and services provided during the Covid-19 pandemic and most recently at the Sunderland Business Awards winning the accolade of Best Business in the Community.

Kelly said: “The pandemic also brought about our innovative side. We obviously couldn't meet indoors and needed to be two metres apart, so we wanted to create something

we could travel about in and provide social activities and exercise on people's doorsteps. Hence the start of the Well Bean Machine.

“It allowed us to travel around knocking on people's doors and having conversations, spending hours chatting, creating those communities again and then inviting people to take part in our group activities.”

“We couldn't believe the impact it made and the ease of having everything in the van and being able to travel around. We knew at this point we could roll out further.”

Recently, Active Families North East won further funding to expand the Well Bean Machine into Gateshead and South Shields. The team were awarded £363,307 from the UK Research and Innovation's Healthy Aging Challenge to reach 20,000 residents across their key target areas. The CIC was the only program to receive funding in the North East and as this issue goes to print, the team have picked up two new electric vans to help the company expand.

However, that's not all. The team already has a number of new initiatives they're working on.

Kelly said: “We're already having talks about a partnership to provide a community kitchen for both adults and children and also taking the Well Bean Machine digital with its own app.

“It's been an amazing five years and when I look at the opportunities available to us and the doors of national organisations that keep opening for us, there's a lot of pinch me moments. However, it's all down to the team's hard work and drive to help our communities age healthily. We can't wait to see what the next five years hold, so make sure to watch this space!”

“**We're already having talks about a partnership to provide a community kitchen... And taking the Well Bean Machine digital**”

A New Membership Offer

Mark Shilcock
OurGateshead and Connected
Voice Membership Officer



Connected Voice membership is free and there's never been a better time to join!

At Connected Voice we have reviewed our membership offer. We want not only to encourage more organisations to join us, but to also ensure that we engage more regularly with our long standing members.

Our Support and Development team will offer to visit new members so that we can see first-hand the amazing work that they are doing. We hope that this will be the start of a constructive relationship and allow us to keep tailoring our support to members' needs and priorities.

In May of this year, we introduced a new member's brunch networking session, inviting our latest members to meet the Connected Voice team and learn about our services. These meetings allow us to find out more about our new members and explain how we can support them with their priorities. The brunches are also an opportunity for groups to meet other new members, learn about what they're doing and potentially develop new partnerships.

But it's not just about our new members: we will also be offering to visit organisations on their 5th anniversary of membership. This will ensure we are familiar with their current projects, better able to support them to meet their priorities, and in a position to speak up about the issues they're facing. This is a really important part of our work: we have many meetings with key decision

Photo left: Tables set for a new members brunch with colourful pop up banners behind in the vibrant new Innovation Hub at One Strawberry Lane

Photo right: A spread of pastries and colourful fruit for brunch



makers and want to continue to share with them the most up-to-date information about what's happening in the VCSE sector. Of course, our regular networking events also provide us with great opportunities to learn from and feedback to the organisations we support, but visiting more of our members more regularly will help us to do this even better.

Your new Membership Officer

I'm delighted to have taken on the role of OurGateshead and Connected Voice Membership Officer, meaning I am the first point of contact for all our membership enquiries. I have around 30 years' experience working in the voluntary sector, initially as a youth worker in West Gateshead, and then in various community projects. This has allowed me to gain a deep understanding of the issues and challenges that face organisations.

“ I'm enjoying the opportunity of working more directly with our members

I have been an active management committee member, held the position of treasurer, and have first-hand knowledge of developing a community project to the point of converting to a CIO. For the past 13 years I've been supporting organisations across the region and have also managed the OurGateshead.org community website from its initial inception - something I'm pleased to continue in my new role.

I'm enjoying the opportunity of working more directly with our members, getting to know them and introducing them to other Connected Voice teams to

help them fulfil their potential.

Join today!

Connected Voice membership is free and is open to any voluntary, community and social enterprise organisation with a written governing document and operating in the North East of England. In addition to the great benefits of our membership, we are also funded by Newcastle and Gateshead Councils to offer free support to organisations working in these local authority areas. 93% of our members would recommend joining.

What are the benefits?

- Stay connected through our networking events, email bulletins and quarterly Connected Voice magazine.
- Opportunities to work collectively and help us to amplify voices and influence on the issues that matter to us all.
- Opportunities to influence our governance and inspire change by voting at our Annual General Meeting, or standing for election to our Board of Trustees.
- Benefit from a 10% discount on policy writing and tailored training.
- Receive a 30% discount on advertising job vacancies through our website, bulletins and social media.

Download and complete a membership pack from our website

If you have any questions about membership email

mark.shilcock@connectedvoice.org.uk

“ It's a huge benefit for a small independent charity to have some back-up

Member feedback

Contact us

Connected Voice

Support and
Development

Expert support services that enable voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to set up, be sustainable and informed, achieve their objectives and come together.

connect@connectedvoice.org.uk
0191 235 7021

Connected Voice

Advocacy

Free professional support to individuals to help them be aware of their rights and choices, make informed decisions, advocate for themselves and facilitate their voices being heard.

advocacy@connectedvoice.org.uk
0191 235 7013

Connected Voice

Business
Services

Quality and cost-effective financial support services that meet the growing needs of charities, community organisations and social enterprises.

cbsteam@connectedvoice.org.uk
0191 235 7020

Connected Voice

Haref

Working with communities and organisations throughout Newcastle and Gateshead to reduce health inequalities linked to ethnicity and culture.

haref@connectedvoice.org.uk
0191 235 7022

Connected Voice

Health Equity

Connecting charities and community organisations to health services to improve digital inclusion, mental health support and social prescribing.

0191 235 7022

www.ConnectedVoice.org.uk

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 @ConnectedVoiceCharity

 @Connected Voice

Connected Voice

Volunteering

Supporting volunteering across Newcastle and Gateshead through employee volunteering (Sector Connector), promoting volunteering opportunities and offering advice.

volunteering@connectedvoice.org.uk
0191 235 7038 (Gateshead Volunteer Centre)
0191 235 7039 (Sector Connector Newcastle)