

Sustainable Funding Project CASE STUDY

■ High Peak CVS



Organisation

High Peak CVS

Key themes

- Developing resources tailored to local need
- Developing user-centred services which generate income
- Trading to develop a sustainable funding base
- Sustainability and growth beyond money

Summary

Established in 2000, High Peak CVS has quickly grown to become a valuable resource for voluntary and community organisations working in the North West of Derbyshire. A key strand of their work has been tailoring generic resources to suit its local, rural-based client group and developing a trading arm to diversify its income base.

Date

This case study is based on printed and web material provided by High Peak CVS with further input from High Peak CVS Funding Advisor, Esther Jones, during June 2007.

About High Peak CVS

High Peak CVS is based in the High Peak borough of North West Derbyshire. The area is predominantly rural: with Greater Manchester to its north west, it includes the market towns of Glossop and Buxton and stretches into the Peak District national park towards Sheffield. The CVS aims to promote community and voluntary sector activity and development within the borough. This involves supporting and facilitating the development of voluntary and community organisations through the provision of advice, practical services and resources, information, training, facilities and identifying funding.

High Peak CVS was first conceived in 1997, when a number of voluntary organisations recognised the requirement for a local CVS. After a number of meetings involving community groups and voluntary agencies, a feasibility study was commissioned and published, based on in-depth research into the support needs of voluntary groups in the High Peak and Derbyshire Dales. From here, voluntary and community groups across the district decided to form a CVS to cover the High Peak borough, and it was officially launched in May 2000.

By early 2002, funding was in place to employ a small staff team and, in September 2002, High Peak CVS moved into premises in Whaley Bridge. The building was purchased in 2003, giving the organisation a permanent base to work from.

In just a few years, the organisation has grown with the addition of new projects and staff. Many of High Peak's services are free, but to promote sustainability the CVS charges for some of the support it provides (typically on a sliding scale dependent on organisational size) and has developed additional income streams through taking on commissioned work on behalf of local authorities or developed through regional infrastructure consortia working. 20% of High Peak's income now comes from trading activity.

High Peak CVS currently has 300 local voluntary and community groups in membership – testament to the value and service that the CVS provides within the area.

Supporting local VCS sustainability by developing user-centered resources

A key strand of High Peak's activity is to support the sustainability and development of local VCOs. To deliver this aim, High Peak set up its 'Sustain Project' in 2004 to provide advice and support to VCS groups to develop economically and environmentally sustainable ways of working. Groups are encouraged to grow whilst reducing their environmental impact, and to develop social enterprises and enterprising behaviour to diversify their income and become less grant-dependent. Funding for the project initially came from the Sustainable Development Fund via the Peak District National Park Authority with match funding from Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership.

Two events quickly put the project on the map locally. NCVO's Sustainable Funding team provided a one-day session on 'Bright Ideas for Sustainable Funding'. This explored the range of funding options including the benefits of earned income, and other ingredients to financial sustainability, such as mission-focus, strategic planning and financial management. The second was 'Buildings, Buildings, Buildings'. High Peak developed this event themselves in response to the large number of organisations asking for support to improve their community buildings. It consisted of a day of workshops lead by local and regional experts on aspects of building refurbishment and re-development. Topics included 'greening your building', business planning, fundraising, working with professionals, and addressing access issues. In the first three months these events brought the CVS into contact with 40-50 of the larger organisations in the High Peak. Further training courses have followed, including 'Ready, Steady, Go!' aimed at those thinking of starting a social enterprise or trading activity.

The Sustain Project has also developed supporting information resources, including 'How? Guides' on social enterprise, sustainable funding, asset development and environmental sustainability (see www.highpeakcvs.org/how). High Peak has also developed a 10 hour course accredited at OCN level 2 based on NCVO's 'Bright Ideas for Sustainable Funding' course. This has attracted participants including some just starting out on potentially sizable enterprises, and others which are very small and will possibly never have any paid staff.

Last year the project managed two county-wide Change Up projects on Social Enterprise and Asset Development. The Social Enterprise project had four strands:

- a web-based information centre for social enterprises (see www.sedd.org.uk),
- accredited training for a number of advisors,
- mapping existing support across the county and assessing present and future need
- modelling long-term sustainable support across the county

The Asset Development project explored opportunities and barriers to asset transfer locally, collecting the views of local authorities and other statutory organisations on the issue. This had an information strand, and produced five fact sheets on various aspects of asset development and asset transfer.

Two environmental projects are also in progress. One will provide an on-line directory of environmental resources available locally (see www.greenyourworld.org.uk). The other project is developing an Environmental Quality Mark for voluntary organisations which take steps to reduce their environmental impact.

Sustain clients have included a community café that closed down and was courageously re-started by a new organisation, a recycling project that has substantially increased its income from trading, and a young community association that is about to take on the management of a local-authority owned community centre. Such is the success of Sustain that it now also offers advice, consultancy and training to a limited number of organisations outside of High Peak.



Diversifying income through social enterprise

High Peak CVS likes to practice what it preaches. Under the brand name of 'Digital Umbrella' it has developed a successful trading arm to help sustain the organisation economically. For the last three years, under Services Programme Manager Tony Okotie's direction, High Peak CVS has led the delivery of various IT projects and IT services across Derbyshire, designed to help voluntary and community sector organisations make the most of IT in delivering their mission. This was formalised under the Digital Umbrella brand in 2006.

Digital Umbrella offers a range of IT services for voluntary and community sector organisations and private businesses. These are grouped into 4 main categories: web services, IT training, Championing ICT, and technical support. Digital umbrella aims to encourage and develop the use of information technology for the benefit of voluntary and community organisations, individuals, businesses and communities. By providing services as a social enterprise, it aims to add to the financial sustainability of the parent organisation, High Peak CVS, in addition to providing otherwise unavailable additional resources for the local community, organisations and businesses. Digital Umbrella are proud of their 'Robin Hood' charging philosophy ensuring the smallest voluntary sector organisations in the High Peak receive services at a discounted rate.

Digital Umbrella also provides multimedia and video services. A further recent income generating initiative is Digital Umbrella's 'Logosagogo'. This is a new, creative design service for the creation or redesigning of logos for local organisations, businesses and projects. The service offers three levels of service depending on the number of initial designs required and the complexity of the work, with levels costing from £175 for a basic package to £535 for bespoke work.

Digital Umbrella is proving very successful. In addition to ongoing income from selling its services, it has recently been appointed as the 'Regional IT Champion' for the East Midlands, which has provided further funding from the ICT Hub until March 2008. A key to the success of Digital Umbrella is in its clearly identified brand.

Managing increasing financial complexity

High Peak's trading activity, primarily in web design, has made a significant contribution to turnover. In 2005/06 trading income represented 20% of total income for the CVS, an increase of 50% over the previous year. The Board plan to invest a proportion of the surplus from this income to enhance and strengthen the support the CVS offers to the local VCS, as well as to meet their reserves policy target (currently a minimum of six months running costs). Surpluses generated by trading also help High Peak to reduce the gaps in projects where existing funding streams have come to an end.

Improved income diversification and growth in trading has, however, brought increased complexity to High Peak's financial management. Because of the increase in trading income High Peak recently registered for VAT. The CVS is currently assessing the impact of this and updating its accounting processes. One positive outcome is that VAT registration will enable High Peak to reclaim some of the VAT it currently pays out to suppliers. On the other hand, having to charge VAT for all the organisation's services means at times they can't be as competitive as they would like and it can be unwieldy.

Success and sustainability beyond the money...

High Peak's experience in tailoring generic resources to suit its local, rural-based client group is a good example of how CVS can adapt national resources to suit their respective audiences. So impressed was NCVO's Sustainable Funding Project at how High Peak built on its training materials and information resources that it invited the Sustain project manager to both speak at its 2006 Annual Gathering conference and act as an adviser to resources NCVO recently developed for the Finance Hub and ongoing.

This has brought in a small additional fee, but the bigger gain from this work has been its contribution to High Peak's external profile and the developmental benefit for staff. Project Manager Esther Jones cites the experience as '*one of the things she is most proud of in 2005/06*'.

Links

High Peak CVS www.highpeakcvs.org.uk

Digital Umbrella www.digitalumbrella.co.uk

Learn more about sustainability and download resources you can adapt for your own locality from the Sustainable Funding Project website at www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sfp

See and use the resources on funding and finance High Peak helped the Sustainable Funding Project develop at www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sfp/Introductory-Pack



Supported by



The Sustainable Funding Project is an NCVO initiative working in partnership with the Big Lottery Fund and Charity Bank.

The Sustainable Funding Project encourages and enables voluntary and community organisations to explore and exploit a full range of funding and financing options to develop a sustainable funding mix.

The Sustainable Funding Project
funding in the round

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