

Community Food Forum - Key Discussion and Outcomes

Tuesday 2nd February 2016, Crisis Café, 66 Commercial Street, London

An evening hosted by Made in Hackney and Crisis Café brought together over 80 people for a night of fine food, networking and peer to peer skill sharing. Attendees were founders of community food enterprises - kitchens, cafes, businesses and food growing projects, or those just in the early planning stages. With thanks to UnLtd, The Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs for financially supporting the event via a Spark Award given to Nynke Brett, Project Manager of Made in Hackney.

This document captures the key discussion points and outcomes from each of the 5 discussion groups on:

1. **Enterprise**
2. **Impact**
3. **Support**
4. **Outreach**
5. **Social vs Profit**

With grateful thanks to the note takers: Carolina Stupino, Lily Chong, Cecilia Lundqvist, Yasmin Ahmed, Radhika Bhagat and Felix Litzkow.

1. Enterprise

The purpose of this discussion group was to share experiences of how to create **income generating activities** for your project. Sarah Bentley founder of Made in Hackney (MIH), facilitated the session and began with giving examples of enterprise activities they are running. She pointed out that they came in response to an overall drop in funding from community grants. MIH is now generating 40% of its income through enterprise activities.

Sarah explained that Made in Hackney is offering **Team Building Cookery Events** for staff from medium to large organisations as part of their 'employer programme'. Clients come from the corporate and charity sector, and they've had some success with repeat bookings. The group then discussed the following points:

- The importance to invest in enterprise development and set aside time and budget for this.
- Need to package up the experience to ensure full cost recovery.
- Important to identify clients with aligned values, and who's interests and needs you can meet.
- Requires considerable work and promoting.
- The importance for a small organisation to continually assess the impact of its efforts.
- Need to constantly redefine services and look for new ideas. The importance of having an elastic mind, to quickly reassess strategies if they don't work. Need to have a structure in place to change and adapt services.
- To make a decision on whether or not to charge for services.

MIH has made the decision to always charge partners and the general public who attend their cookery courses and masterclasses. This is to add value to the service being offered and to ensure commitment and a reasonable number of attendees. This 'booking fee' can be minimal however, especially in the case of grass root community organisations. It is important to distinguish between the organisation a service is being offered to (eg. a charity or housing group) and the service users to whom the service should be offered. It's important to ensure that this cost is not being passed on to the service users.

The group also discussed **Corporate Volunteer Placements** as an enterprise activity. Some members in the group pointed out that originally corporates paid for volunteering placements but then stopped. Some important themes arose:

- Need to evaluate the volunteers experiences and benefits to employers and repackage the offering to highlight these.
- Need more research around nature of volunteering activities and price them accordingly, based on other successful models.
- Corporate volunteering is popular and in demand so need to position your organisation and volunteering opportunities in a compelling and rewarding way.

Enterprise activities can be resource intensive and take time to produce and promote. Sarah also mentioned some of the other enterprise activities that Made in Hackney has pursued or considered which include:

- **Selling products** eg. aprons and bags
- **Hiring the kitchen space** to external clients
- **Catering**
- **Super Clubs**
- **Cookery Book**

The group acknowledged that ideally there should be a dedicated staff member, an Enterprise Manager, responsible for enterprise development, but how can a small organisation without the budget for such an investment overcome this challenge? Suggestions around the table included:

- Spread these duties across all staff members' role descriptions.
- Pass on this enterprise role to the community by inviting service users to get involved with fundraising and promotion campaigns. Send out a survey, start a competition. Make it fun, have prize draws, discount offers for new enterprising ideas.
- Look at resources you already have, consider bringing together beneficiaries, suppliers and other stakeholders (who mutually benefit from the success of the organisation) to spend time together and assess ways to help each other grow. Encourage feedback, 'lead generation' ideas from everyone.
- Include enterprise in the budget, need to invest money in order to grow. eg. paying for professional design work for flyers and website is worth doing and can save time of relying on a volunteer.
- Allocate enough time for enterprise planning, this can have a big impact on the project.
- Opportunities are everywhere. Don't be afraid to ask. How can you improve the experience, who else may benefit? What would they like to see done differently?
- Strike a balance between how your organisation generates income and your core values. Decide how far you can allow yourself to compromise on your values to secure funding. Continue to assess your principles, know your boundaries. Made in Hackney for instance will not rent out its kitchen to organisations who are part of the animal food industry and it has a strict plant based policy for all its clients.
- Find ways to collaborate with others in a way that helps them overcome their challenges.
- Experiential learning is valued, so ensure this is recognised by setting the right price.
- Don't let self-sabotaging thoughts stop you before you've even begun. If you have an idea, talk and get market feedback rather making an assumption that it's been done already or you have no experience.
- Ask your clients to speak for you, ask for referrals, testimonials and in return help tell their story.

2. Impact

The purpose of this discussion group was to share experiences of developing an **'impact-led' strategy** for growth at an early stage in your project.

Ben Pearce from CAN, led the discussion and explained that organisations often think impact is something they will do 'when they have time', but that time rarely makes itself available. The best approach is to measure some impact right at the start, and develop that as you grow. This helps organisations to have a clear growth strategy focused on impact.

Some comments from the group included:

- Measuring social impact is useful for showing the big picture to funders and stakeholders.
- The concept of 'Theory of Change' is a useful framework when designing impact measurement by mapping the changes over time.
- There can be multiple impacts – so which ones need to be measured? (Not all impact is measurable.)
- When considering measurement, think about the aims and objectives of your project first.
- Funders ask for constant monitoring and evaluation. They provide tedious forms for measuring impact, sometimes tens of forms to fill out which makes the process harder to manage.
- Survey monkey is one method to elicit responses from multiple participants and stakeholders. This can be followed up by more in-depth 1:1 interviews with fewer respondents.
- It's better to have neutral statements in the feedback survey.
- Frequency of how often you fill in survey depends on your project.
- A response rate of 50% is usually acceptable, unless otherwise specified by the funder.
- How do you make social impact more about people and less about ticking boxes?
- If time consuming or resource heavy projects are not producing impact, they are not worth doing.
- If organisations are not transparent about their activities and impact, they could be 'over-claiming' their impact.
- Better to have two (or more) sources of rating impact rather than one.
- Ensure a subjective view from the individual going through the intervention which should be validated by a second person connected to them to get a more holistic perspective.

A handout of Ben's presentation is available on the Made in Hackney website.

3. Support

The purpose of this discussion group was to share experiences on how to attract the right people and resources to **support your project**. In particular how to recruit staff and volunteers and gain financial, structural and logistical support.

Nynke Brett, Project Manager of Made in Hackney, led the discussion and began with sharing ideas for **how to source volunteers**. She gave particular emphasis on making volunteer posts appealing and rewarding to candidates, for example by offering them a chance to gain skills for future employment. She pointed out the importance of explaining to applicants what they will gain from their volunteer work and what will be expected of them in return. She recommended using resources from the NCVO website for help with designing attractive role descriptions for volunteers. <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/volunteering>

She explained that volunteers have different motivations, and for those wanting to get back into work after a period of absence or to change career, volunteering could be a valuable experience for gaining skills.

Nynke then spoke of some of the platforms for volunteer recruitment, starting with the social network **Project Dirt**, <http://www.projectdirt.com/> a network of environmental and social projects around the UK which has helped Made In Hackney meet its volunteer recruitment needs. Other routes include Universities (students often look for work placements), Charity Job website and Permablitz who offer volunteers to transform gardens. Social Media is also effective - Twitter and Instagram in particular.

The group discussed a few issues:

- Fairshare finds it hard to offer skills development when the duties of the volunteer role require people already with specific skills.
- Capital Growth posts volunteer ads on Environment Jobs and for a recent paid staff vacancy they received 400 applications!
- Olio (food waste organisation) had over 600 people applying to volunteer with them since expanding to a UK wide service and are struggling to know how to involve them all.
- Crop Drop, an organic box scheme in Haringey have recruited most of their 12 volunteers through local media platforms such as Haringey online and Tottenham Life. Plus the **London Food Link** network. <http://www.sustainweb.org/londonfoodlink/membership/>

Nynke mentioned to the group there are numerous sources of **free professional support** available to community organisations. For example The Media Trust, a charity linking charities with journalists and PR experts who provide free media advice and support.

Streetbank and Streetlife are useful platforms for sharing resources amongst neighbours and to borrow or give away free resources such as gardening and cooking equipment. Others include Freecycle and Gumtree and there's a free Compost Pick up service from outside Alara Wholefoods in Camden. She also recommended Big Lunch Extras for free advice on community projects, while the UnLtd website offers free templates for employment contracts and other legal documents.

Paige Murphy, Grants Manager at East End Community Foundation outlined the work her foundation does by offering **grants and funding** to community organisations operating in Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham. Made in Hackney was awarded a grant from them for their apprenticeship programme. Paige explained the 5 criteria they look for when deciding whether to offer financial support:

- 1) Eligibility – need good governance and policies in place (eg. child protection, vulnerable adults, equal opportunities, etc); and a bank account or a parent company that has one.
- 2) Need – the existence of a new project plan or growth of an existing project to justify the need for funding.
- 3) Project plan – Very important. This needs to be as detailed as possible in outlining the plan for the project, what the resources are needed, why the objectives are feasible and realistic, who would be doing what etc.
- 4) Structure of the organisation – staff structure, insurance policy, experience of the applicant organisation in their field or, in case the organisation is new, experience of staff members.
- 5) Evaluation and monitoring procedures – evidence of how the applicant intends to evaluate whether the key performance indicators have been achieved. Monitoring of changes occurred, skills gained, attendance level of beneficiaries etc.

Paige recommended to anyone making a funding application to always try and have a conversation with the funders first and make themselves known to them before completing the application.

Nynke recommended the Directory of Social Change as a useful resource to find out what funders an organisation would be eligible to receive support from.

A handout of Nynke's presentation with contact details of useful networks and organisations offering free services and professional expertise is available on the Made in Hackney website.

4. Outreach

The purpose of this discussion group was to share experiences on **how projects can reach their beneficiaries and customers** and the challenges of outreach to diverse communities.

Caroline Rognon, Project Manager of Made in Hackney (MIH) led the discussion, and provided a handout explaining all the outreach methods used by MIH for its community and enterprise activities. (Available on the MIH website.)

Some key issues shared among the group included:

- In the public sector a key resource is a 'Community Food Worker' who can act as a 'community expert', who knows the local area and can build links with relevant stakeholders.
- Challenge of defining what is meant by 'hard to reach'?
- How to engage and work with the hard to reach groups? Need to collect feedback on quality of services e.g. evaluations, and then customise style of communication according to each target group.
- GP surgeries are a good way to access service users.
- Do you really need to cast out a wide net for outreach purposes?
- Important to focus efforts on building a strong organisational identity and USP. This will help with outreach.
- How to reach out to schools? Teachers are busy, so need to make it very easy for them. Don't expect Local Councils to dictate to schools. Schools have autonomy to decide which organisations they allow into their school.
- Public commissioning – need to prove value for money for hard to reach groups. If you can 'solve a problem' for them this will increase your chance of funding.
- How to ensure volunteer retention – provide training, offer perks (eg free veg bag)
- MIH faces challenges in unpredictability of its many outreach methods – never know which one will work best so have to keep using all of them, all the time.

5. Social Vs Profit

The purpose of this discussion group was to share experiences on how to **balance the conflicting need to make a profit with your social mission**, when operating in a competitive market.

Alana Cookman, Head of Cafes at Crisis led the discussion. She explained that Crisis Café's train 40 people each year who are referred by the Crisis employment service and the charity Switchback, who they help into employment. The training costs are too high to cover from their current trading income, so they rely on subsidies from the parent charity Crisis.

She pointed out that Crisis Café is a public facing and commercially run café which pays approx. £7,000 per trainee that it helps into employment on top of its cafe operating costs. At present café trade has been stagnant while training outcomes have only increased slightly. They want to ensure that their training remains cost effective in an increasingly competitive and changing landscape.

Some of the big questions presented by Alana included:

- Are there any financially self-sustaining food enterprises that pay the living wage and also generate a social impact?
- What are the realistic expectations on cost of training? And how can that figure be determined?
- How can Crisis Cafe align its social impact more with income generation needs?
- Why is there a pressure to increase one or the other? If operational and training costs are separated could more specific benchmarking be achieved?

The group then posed some answers, ideas, and suggestions:

- Food Organisations that could serve as an example of a financially self-sustaining social enterprise:
 - London Cooking Project
 - Liberty Catering by Changing Paths
 - hiSbe
 - Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency (GCDA)
 - Media Trust (reference for training programme)
 - Determine a realistic / acceptable cost per training programme:
 - What would the government pay a trainee for similar services?
 - What do other employment ready training services cost within and outside of Crisis?
 - Media Trust also pays several thousand pounds for training per person
 - How can training be shared, so that other partners deliver certain aspects of the programme?
 - Increase profit without compromising on social mission
 - Fund a 'corporate sales person' on a commission basis
 - Secure long-term corporate catering contracts
 - Secure more venue hires and at higher value
 - Secure corporate event bookings (away-days, corporate dinners, etc.)
 - Re-evaluate café pricing (below market average at the moment)
 - Do more advertising in direct community (eg. Spitalfields Market)
 - Increase social impact without compromising on profit
 - Open training services to more partners
 - Extend services (e.g. accredited training) and offer to more partners
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All **handouts** from the event are available on the Made in Hackney website here:

<http://madeinhackney.org/news/latest-news/43>

To Keep in touch with the network you can join **London Food Link** – for regular networking events, check out <http://www.sustainweb.org/londonfoodlink/membership/> for more details.