

Perspectives

Set up a social care charity? You'd have to be bloody nuts,
says Richard Shrubbs

Over the past couple of years I have set up community groups that have at their core the purpose of supporting the people who live in the area. The state is receding at such a pace that unless people step into the vacuum there will be a humanitarian disaster with disabled, starving beggars in the streets. This is already happening but it will get worse in the coming years.

Each time I have looked at starting a charity. And each time I have baulked at the prospect – paperwork by the truckload and enough administration to occupy a full-time paid post to achieve what? To meet the requirements of the Charities Commission and the funders who support you? Give me a break!

Deanne Clark, chief executive of Bedfordshire-based mental health charity Impact Mental Health, sums up my belief about setting up a charity in very few words: “You’d have to be bloody nuts to set up a charity at the moment!” she laughs.

Impact runs a peer support programme across Bedfordshire. Originally they went the traditional way – get funding from a local authority or government pot and then run the programme, getting participants to fill in feedback and monitoring forms at the beginning and end to justify their work.

Though the feedback forms are necessary in showing how good you are and essential in running any such operation, funders make stipulations that drive charities crazy. Clark points out: “funders trim away at the core ethos of the charity,” adding that “if you don’t follow the core ethos of your charity you should give up!”

Getting funding to do what you want to do can be difficult. I was involved in the Forest of Dean Community Radio project when it closed a few years ago. It closed due to lack of funding that could support what they wanted to do – run a community-focused radio station. Funding bids asked for 10% to cover administration costs (generally refused) and a little to fund radio shows while doing what the funding was meant to do such as community projects and working into schools. Needless to say, funders went pale at the thought of funding a radio station in order for the radio station to do what they were funded by the funders to do! Despite the last fanatics putting their hearts and

souls into the organisation, it closed as it couldn’t afford to exist.

Clark has refused funding before for similar reasons. “I have refused to jump through unnecessary hoops to achieve small funding opportunities,” she says. “You have to flex your muscle to achieve what you want to do!”

I wrote about the community group I founded, The Firebox, in the July/August 2013 issue, which I have since left when I moved to Luton. With The Firebox, we wrestled with the way it should be constituted in order to have a bank account, pay for things like public liability insurance and to attract funding. We concluded that for a nine-strong organisation we should become a ‘constituted community group’. We didn’t want to be bound by funding so at the point I left we were heading in the direction of becoming a profit-making company that does good things. Call it a ‘community interest company’ (CIC) but a business is a business – you get bad CICs as you get bad charities or good companies limited by guarantee. As long as you observe good practice and have a sound set of core beliefs that you won’t depart from as part of your constitution, you can be anything. You don’t need to be a charity!

Impact has set up a limited company to escape the bonds of funders. Clark says: “Our business’s fundamental purpose is to get investment to pay for peer support.” Impact has just started training police cadets, and in turn the business is generating a profit to fund its peer support programmes.

But equally, Impact is in control of its own destiny. You self-fund? You can do as you choose – not what some bureaucrat demands you do in order to achieve your aims, which are generally peripheral to what they want to give you the cash for.

With the welfare state dying on its backside and most charitable funders paying out for basics such as food banks for people forced into starvation by the Conservatives, there isn’t much funding to be had from traditional sources in any case. The only option is to go it alone if you want to do good for the community. In a state hellbent on pure capitalism then you must play the capitalists at their own game in order to deal with the misery wrought by the worst of them. How? Run a business with a heart and soul, and don’t use the begging bowl!



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Perspectives alternates with the Network column from the National Survivor User Network. It provides an individual service user view of the world.