

**Evaluation of
Thames Valley
Social Enterprise
How2 Initiative -**

**Looking at Social Enterprise
in the Thames Valley**



A report to the Partnership Group

January 2006

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Real Time

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Definition of a Social Enterprise:

“A business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximize profit for shareholders and owners”

DTI, Social Enterprise Unit.

Executive Summary

This is the report of the final evaluation of the How2 project which ended in March 2006. The report was commissioned by OCDA (Oxfordshire Co-Operative Development Agency) from TwentyTwenty Solutions Ltd working in partnership with [Real Time](#).

CONCLUSIONS

How2 has done much really valuable work in the five target areas; Reading, Oxford, Oxfordshire, High Wycombe and Slough.

When questioned, 83% of those we interviewed thought that the How2 project had been an overall success.

The real successes of How2 have been that the scheme is trusted by disadvantaged communities, and there has been excellent delivery at grass roots level, providing a range of really useful social enterprise support appropriate for the needs of each community. These successes are better highlighted in the accompanying DVD.

However, amongst this general optimism, there were areas that could have performed better; these are highlighted in the findings.

An overall strategy for the geographic How2 project area has not yet been achieved. The main reasons are that there is great disparity between the areas, which range from very rural to urban, and their needs of the areas are very different. To construct one overall strategy for the How2 area was perhaps a little ambitious, although it could undoubtedly have been fed into SEEDA's Social Enterprise Strategy document.

The positives:

- The fantastic success of target 1C (No of People Trained obtaining Qualifications) was mainly due to OCVA and Wycombe performing extraordinarily well; the target was exceeded by 272%
- The success of target 1J (No. of young People benefiting from Personal & Social Development) was solely due to the success in Wycombe, who exceeded the target by 2300%
- The success of target 2D (number of Businesses advised) was due to the efforts of Wycombe, ORCC and OCVA – some credit must go to TBAC for their contribution to this target which was exceeded by 57%
- All the project managers are extremely proud of the achievements in their areas, and the fact that they speak so eloquently about social enterprise is testament to the fact that it is beginning to be really understood and has made a difference to those communities

- 11 out of 15 of the numeric targets for support to the business sector or the community were achieved. This represents 73% success rate

The learning points:

- The local social enterprise forums have not worked very well - most thought that they were either fairly helpful or not at all helpful and there did not seem to be any clear direction for them to capacity build within the sector.
- The Eye was universally criticised as having lack of strategic direction and for providing few useful outputs apart from the social enterprise training course (although it did hit 3 of its 9 targets; 1A, 1E and 8Ai)
- Only 25% of the project outputs for training and employment (Numbers 1A-1J) were met up to March 2005. There is an expectation that a further 2 targets will be met by the end of March 2006; this will be over 40% of targets 1A – 1J met
- It is disappointing that more of the learning targets were not met – but they were always going to be hard to achieve. The numbers of people trained who obtained jobs is a particularly difficult target, and the number of people entering self employment is a tricky one to count at any stage. It may well be that the people involved will move into self-employment in due course, but that time is not right now. However, the targets for 2005/6 still have to be counted before the project finishes, and there is an expectation that a few more targets will be achieved.
- The Partnership group was thought to have undertaken its responsibilities 'well enough' on the whole, but it was felt that there was a lack of clarity as to its role. This could perhaps have been better defined at the outset

This written report is only one part of the final evaluation, the other part being the aforementioned DVD which provides a real insight into the successes of social enterprise in the five areas.

It should be remembered that the purpose of this part of the final report was to elicit responses to some potentially 'difficult' topics and to provide a robust evaluation, 'warts and all'. The accompanying DVD is very supportive of the excellent work that the How2 project has achieved across the Thames Valley.

Structure of the Report

The written report consists of an Executive Summary and seven sections plus appendices.

The accompanying DVD consists of sections for each geographic area covered by the How2 initiative. If you are reading this report and do not have the accompanying DVD, please get in touch with OCDA who may be able to provide you with a copy.

Introduction

TwentyTwenty Solutions Ltd and Real Time have been jointly commissioned by the Oxfordshire Co-Operative Development Agency (OCDA) to undertake a final evaluation of the Thames Valley Social Enterprise How2 Initiative. The evaluation consists of this short written assessment of the programme and an accompanying DVD which shows what has been achieved in each of the geographic areas since the How2 programme started.

The DVD provides a useful promotional tool which may be used to further encourage people wanting to explore the social enterprise concept throughout the Thames Valley area, and beyond.

NB a Mid-term report was prepared in March 2004 by consultants [CSC](#)

Purpose of this final Evaluation

The evaluation started in October 2005. The objectives for the evaluation are, as stated in the brief,

- To demonstrate the impact of the programme in the Thames Valley over the last 6 years, firstly at the local scale, and secondly at the regional scale
- To produce a SWOT analysis of the SRB scheme so that lessons can be learnt from the scheme that will contribute to further social enterprise development
- To draw together common threads, but also to acknowledge differences in each area. The evaluation should be forward looking with an emphasis on recommending how activities be sustained in the future

The report was presented to the Partnership Group meeting on 18th January 2006.

Background

The How2 scheme was supported by SEEDA (South East England Development Agency) with funds from SRB Round 6. The objective for the project was to establish and sustain social enterprise as a tool for community capacity building and local economic development in the Thames Valley, and for establishing a model for sectoral development across the south east region.

Governmental changes immediately prior to the launch of the SRB programme meant that the latter objective was harder to achieve as support for community enterprise was handed to Business Links, all of whom operated independently and differently across the region. Chances of developing strategic objectives across the sub-region were therefore diminished.

The programme developed a series of programmes across the 5 areas: Reading, Slough, Wycombe, Oxfordshire and Oxford City. It additionally sought to network events and share best practice through the Eye, an ICT based project.

Methodology

The methodology was developed to meet the twin objectives of the need for a short written report, and a “multi-media approach utilizing CD / Video technology”, whilst incorporating the above factors.

We therefore devised a 2-fold approach;

- telephone interviews in the form of questionnaires addressing each of the relevant aspects of the evaluation
- a series of video filming days that took us around the region to visit the 5 areas involved in the How2 Initiative

The telephone interview was pre-booked and was conducted with each of the individual project leaders in Oxfordshire, Oxford City, Reading, Slough and Wycombe. In addition, the telephone interview was carried out with a representative from SEEDA. The results of the questionnaire were then evaluated and formed the basis of the SWOT analysis.

During the video filming days we met with the project leaders and asked them further questions about social enterprise, both generally and specifically. Each area had the opportunity to take us to a social enterprise of their choice. We filmed what went on there and interviewed the managers, workers and beneficiaries (where appropriate¹), providing a snapshot of life in a social enterprise.

The objective of this part of the filming was to elicit some of the ‘softer’ outcomes of the projects that are difficult to quantify on paper. Sometimes other people involved in the project were speaking to camera – e.g. the Chair of the Trustees in one example and a Trainer in another instance.¹This was not possible where we had no permission to identify minors e.g. when we were at a project for young people.

Programme Overview

The original objectives for the project were

- to establish and sustain social enterprise as a tool for community capacity building and local economic development in the Thames Valley - effectively the development of delivery channels for social enterprises that are trusted by disadvantaged communities and to establish and sustain social enterprise sectors within localities in the Thames Valley
- to establish a model for sectoral development across the south east region – effectively the development of a centre of expertise to support and sustain social enterprise across the Thames Valley and wider region

As was noted in the ‘Background’ section and in the mid-term report, the latter objective was effectively taken out of the Partnership’s hands with the policy responsibility for supporting social enterprise being given to the Business Link network.

The individual objectives for each of the 5 geographic areas, plus the ‘Eye’ project (originally the Hub project) were, for 2005/6 as follows:

Project	Activity
Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC)	Development of Social Enterprise solutions for disadvantaged groups in Rural areas, focusing on retail services.
OCVA 2	To establish, market and link with mainstream advice, a gateway and support network within Oxfordshire for Social Enterprises.
Slough	To promote and develop Social Enterprise within the Ethnic Minority community, building upon previous SRB activities.
Reading	To establish a targeted advice and support service for Social Enterprise, linked to the mainstream activities of other agencies.
Wycombe	Building upon previous SRB activity, focusing on outreach, promotion, training & development of new Social Enterprises
Eye Project	To develop a focal point of information, providing case studies, research, best practice, training solutions & partnership development activities.

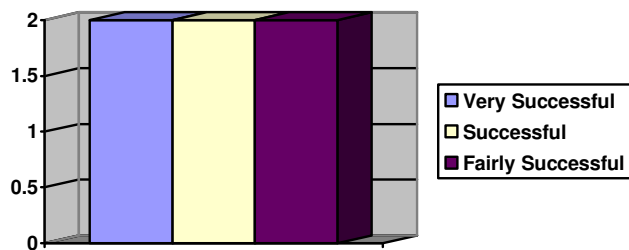
These targets are shown here to demonstrate the variety of activities each area was undertaking in one year. It helps us to understand the variety of needs within the region, and helps to explain why a model for sectoral development would be difficult to achieve even with a co-ordinated approach from Business Link.

Findings

In this section we draw together our findings from the various sources under a series of thematic headings. Responses were obtained from all five project leaders, plus a representative from SEEDA. Where questions related specifically to the 5 geographic areas, the SEEDA response has been omitted from the results as it did not apply, but where the questions were more general, the SEEDA response has been included.

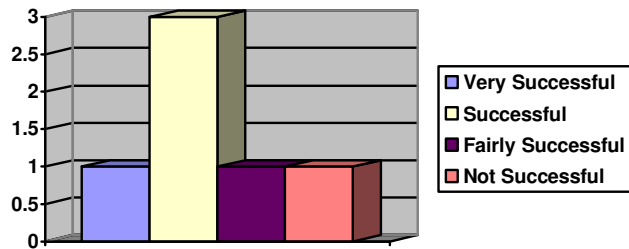
Question 1

We started by asking “How successful has How2 been in establishing Social Enterprise as a tool for community / local development in the Thames Valley?”



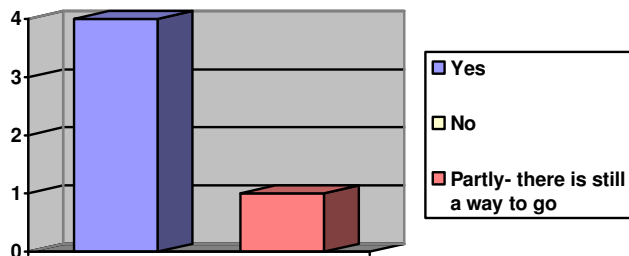
Question 2

“How successful has How2 been in sustaining social enterprise as a tool for community / local economic development in the Thames Valley?”



Question 3

Is the How2 scheme in your area trusted by disadvantaged communities?



About setting up Social Enterprises

Question 4

This question looked at the shortest time it had taken a social enterprise to set up, from the initial idea. The answers ranged from less than a month to more than a year.

Question 5

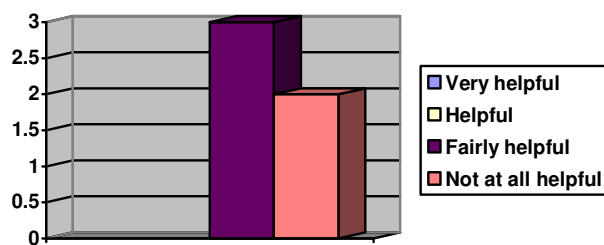
This question looked at the longest time it took to set up a social enterprise. Most of these were over 18 months, with the additional comment that they were often difficult groups with which to engage, and some groups had no hope of ever setting up.

Question 6

Most respondents thought it was taking far longer than they had originally estimated to establish social enterprises – a lot of time had been invested, and the failure rate was also high in some areas.

About the local Social Enterprise Forum

Question 7 – How helpful has the local Social enterprise forum been in assisting you with the achievement of your objectives?



Question 8. Is there anything that the local social enterprise forum could have done better?

...The membership is quite fluid which limits progress. New social enterprises join and the forum process starts again. We could have an induction process?

It's a problem innate to these structures...It's often a bit of a talking shop for support agencies, but not well used by social enterprises. There could have been better clarity about what it was for...

Q8 (Cont'd)

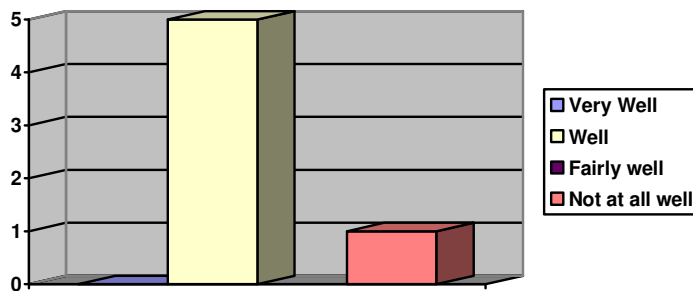
We should have had a monthly networking meeting / skills development meeting with a business agenda rather than a steering group meeting. It could have been more fun!

Given their limited resources, I don't think there was anything they could have done better.

About OCDA as the accountable body

Question 9

How well do you think OCDA has performed as the accountable body during the course of the How2 Initiative?



There were some issues which were not perfectbut all we really wanted was the cash.

Certain elements very good, but I wouldn't rave about it. Monitoring etc was done well.

It performed well if you separate it from the Eye project...

Question 10.

Is there anything that OCDA could have done better?

Partly networking with other social entrepreneurs...they could have addressed much better where there was a personality clash between a staff member and other partners.

..Created a How2 identity of belonging to the project and joint activities, and consistency of training materials across the patch.

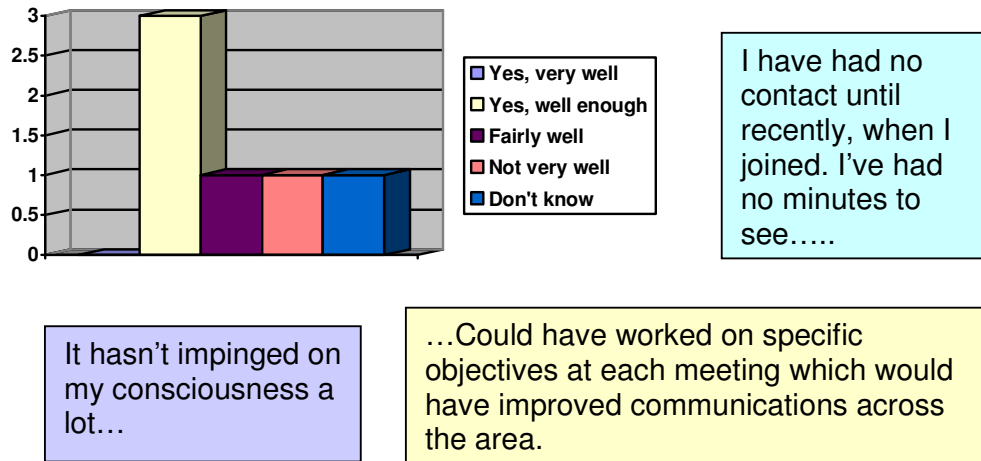
Sharing and collaboration has been variable.. Opportunities for networking were lost, but some networking took place in spite of, not because of xxxxx.

About the Partnership Group¹

¹Partnership Group consists of 2 members of each of the SE Forums, 2 representatives from OCDA (the accountable body) and co-opted representatives from the relevant sector, and local government bodies.

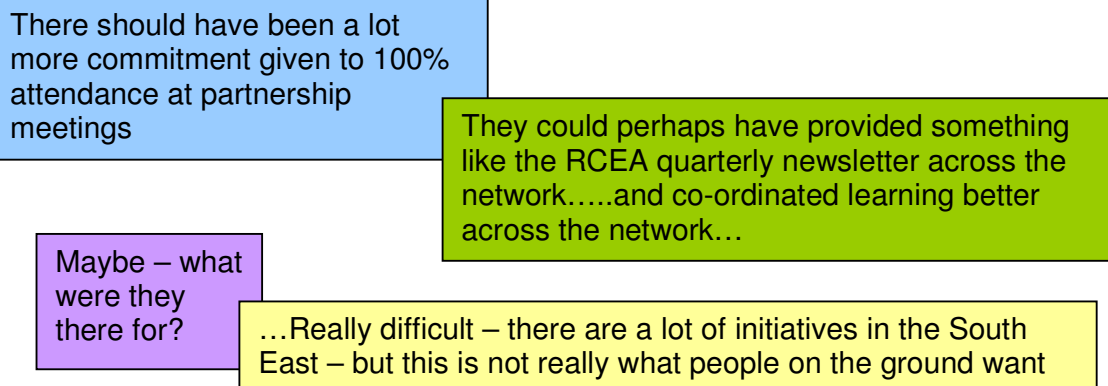
Question 11

Has the partnership group undertaken its responsibilities well?



Question 12.

Is there anything the partnership group could have done better?



SWOT Analysis

Question 13

What, in your opinion has been the over-riding strength of the How2 Initiative?

Question 14

What, in your opinion has been the over-riding weakness of the How2 Initiative?

Question 16

What opportunities do you wish you could have made better use of?

Question 17

What threats have hampered you in your work?

Strengths of How2

- Very different areas working together leading to cross fertilization of ideas
- It has led to me working more effectively....
- Effectively focused local delivery
- A whole range of training opportunities that have helped the local area in a tangible way
- The funding availability in response to local needs
- Capital funding to enable us to support investment in equipment
- Revenue funding to produce a handbook and fact-sheets that are available countrywide
- Support for the principle and practice of using social enterprise as one possible answer to addressing local needs
- Reaching individuals and groups who would otherwise not have been reached, and bringing their ideas to fruition
- The excellent on the ground delivery

Weaknesses of How2

- Consistent communication about progress of the project
- The Eye (originally The Hub)
- Having over-optimistic targets to start with, especially for businesses and jobs created – difficult when dealing with some disadvantaged groups
- The Partnership Group – especially in relation to strategic overview, e.g. we could have had a joint response to SEEDA on the strategy on Social Enterprise
- Lack of networking in between quarterly meetings. Didn't always seem 'part' of How2

Opportunities we wish we could have made better use of...

- Joint training materials, joint fact-sheets
- A Conference to highlight concerns about social enterprise to a wider community
- Start-up office / development space was lost which we cannot now use
- The courses that didn't quite work out, and we didn't get the outputs
- SEEDA was reasonably slow to bring the social agenda to the fore... the county-wide networks are only just evolving now

Threats which have hampered us in our work

- Lack of awareness about social enterprise and potential ignorance especially on the part of Business Links. Better cross-referral could have helped
- Lack of funding for projects, particularly those not benefiting from Leader+ funding
- Difficulty of finding premises in some areas
- Instability of funding
- Being tied to hard economic outputs when we are best at social / community development
- The relationship between social enterprise opportunities and Business Links

Question 15

With the benefit of hindsight, what would you have done differently that would have achieved better results for the How2 project in your area?

I would have visited other projects more and taken on some of their ideas in more depth

It's difficult... an issue has been the uncertainty of the timescale. We started with 3 years then had the opportunity to bid for another year, then another year. This has hampered our long-term planning. How2 could have been set up differently....

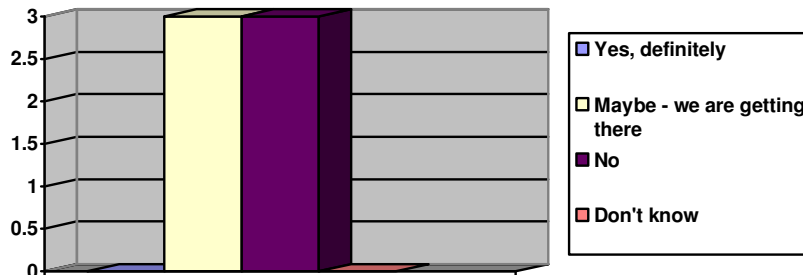
I would have liked How2 to share more across the areas. I would have preferred the Eye to be less IT focused and I would have liked better relationships between The Eye and the rest of the teams

I would not have had devolved management from OCDA initially. It may have worked better if it was managed locally....

Overall Strategy

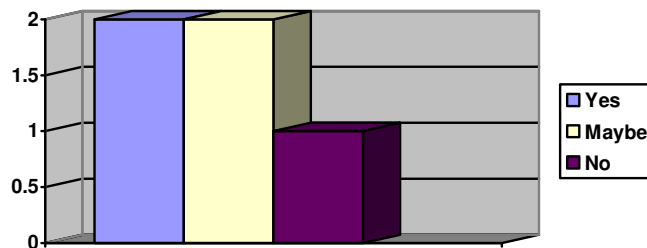
Question 18

Do you think there is now a cohesive social enterprise strategy for the whole of the How2 project area?



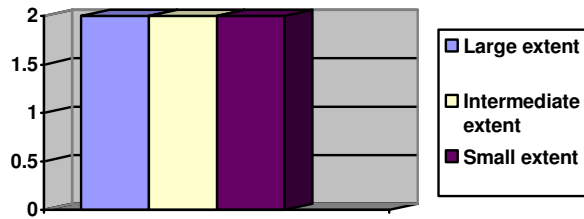
Question 19

Will social enterprise be well supported in your area after the end of the How2 project?



Question 20

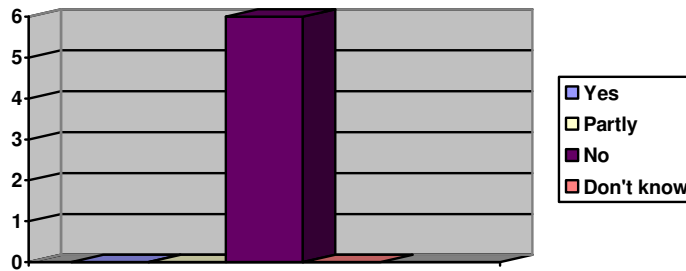
To what extent has the How2 Initiative been a catalyst for developing social enterprise in your area?



About the Eye Project (formerly the Hub)

Question 21

Thinking about The Eye project – do you think this was a success?



Question 22

What do you think The Eye could have done better?

Three colored boxes containing feedback:

- Light pink box:** The website had potential, but it was not effective
- Light yellow box:** We are afraid we never looked at it..
- Light blue box:** The Eye could have publicized itself

Question 23

What was the best thing The Eye achieved?

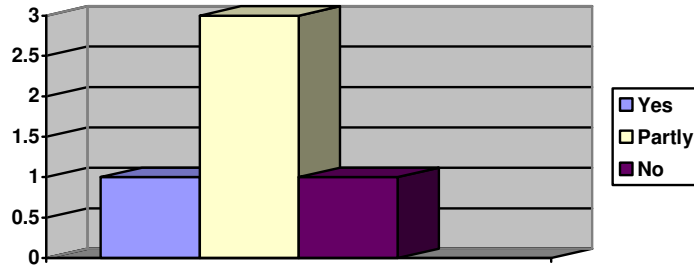
The training programme for social enterprise advisers was very good and very well delivered by the trainers. But this was despite the Eye project, not because of it.

(The training programme was part of the original Hub project, providing SFEDI qualified social enterprise advisers for the region. It went on to accredit individual modules. Most people focussed on the technology side of the Eye project when thinking about their answers).

About mutual support networks

Question 24

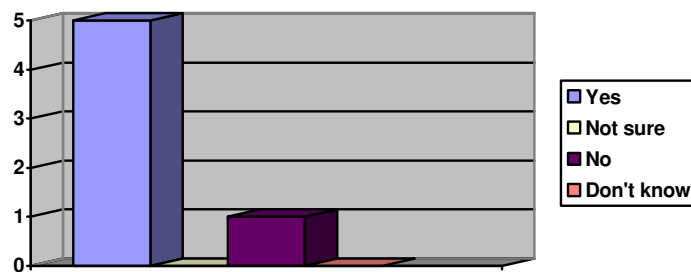
Do you consider that mutual support networks have been effectively established in the How2 area?



Overall impression

Question 25

Do you think that overall the How2 project has been a success?



Proudest Achievement

Question 26

What achievement are you most proud of since the How2 project started in your area?

Having one of the greatest number of community owned village shops in the country – the results of having a dedicated worker

Creating a professional, locally focused and effective service, especially looking at the people we work with at a local level

The added value leading to a greater impact in what we are offering

It's all around the support we provide to groups, and the greater confidence they have gained through the project

Our funding workshops are a major success..and a major conference on the developments in the voluntary and community sectors was held in May 2005.

We ran a social entrepreneurs course over 6 days and those people have done very successful things. Community leaders emerged from this

Other comments

Question 27

Do you have any other comments you would like to add to the final How2 Evaluation?

Very frustrated that the last year we have had to work on the sustainability agenda and SEEDA hasn't really engaged with us on that. SEEDA is already looking at new projects. More strategic input from SEEDA would have been appreciated

Our project is different to other areas in that it is focused on promoting and supporting one quite specific field of social enterprise....We do not see ourselves as promoters of social enterprise but as supporting community needs assessments and assisting with appropriate solutions to identified needs – including social enterprise solutions

Overall it has been a kick-start for social enterprise development, for a whole range of projects. The funding would never have come in if the initial funding hadn't been done

Despite initial problems, it has provided a solid base for social enterprise, and has created a groundswell of interest. The future's bright!

Conclusions & Recommendations

CONCLUSIONS

How2 has done much really valuable work in the five target areas; Reading, Oxford, Oxfordshire, High Wycombe and Slough.

When questioned, 83% of those we interviewed thought that the How2 project had been an overall success.

The real successes of How2 have been that the scheme is trusted by disadvantaged communities, and there has been excellent delivery at grass roots level, providing a range of really useful social enterprise support appropriate for the needs of each community. These successes are better highlighted in the accompanying DVD.

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The positives:

- The fantastic success of target 1C (No of People Trained obtaining Qualifications) was mainly due to OCVA and Wycombe performing extraordinarily well; the target was exceeded by 272%
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- 11 out of 15 of the numeric targets for support to the business sector or the community were achieved. This represents 73% success rate

The learning points:

- The local social enterprise forums have not worked very well - most thought that they were either fairly helpful or not at all helpful and there did not seem to be any clear direction for them to capacity build within the sector
- The Partnership group was thought to have undertaken its responsibilities 'well enough' on the whole, but it was felt that there was a lack of clarity as to its role. This could perhaps have been better defined at the outset
- The Eye was universally criticised as having lack of strategic direction and for providing few useful outputs apart from the social enterprise training course (although it did hit 3 of its 9 targets; 1A, 1E and 8Ai)
- Only 25% of the project outputs for training and employment (Numbers 1A-1J) were met up to March 2005. There is an expectation that a further 2 targets will be met by the end of March 2006; this will be over 40% of targets 1A – 1J met
- It is disappointing that more of the learning targets were not met – but they were always going to be hard to achieve. The numbers of people trained who obtained jobs is a particularly difficult target, and the number of people entering self employment is a tricky one to count at any stage. It may well be that the people involved will move into self-employment in due course, but that time is not right now. However, the targets for 2005/6 still have to be counted before the project finishes, and there is an expectation that a few more targets will be achieved
- Delays in recruiting staff to undertake project activities has been almost universally difficult, which has resulted in some project targets not being met. This was often due to a paucity of suitably qualified applicants for posts, not necessarily in delays to the actual recruitment process

Recommendations

- That the targets for any project are clearly defined at the start of the project, as is the length of the project. Whilst it is appreciated why the programme was extended by one year, had this been anticipated at the outset, different approaches may have been employed. However it is clear that the project could not have foreseen that several of the strategic objectives would be quickly superseded
- That links are made both within and outside the SEEDA region to other people working in the social enterprise arena, and a contacts database is established of suitably qualified people to step into vacant positions as they arise

- That the Thames Valley be recognised for what it is – a hugely diverse area with towns displaying very different characteristics. They vary from the largely rural communities to very urban, and include predominantly white in some areas along with high levels of BME communities in others. Just because it happens to fit within one RDA does not necessarily mean that there should be ONE cohesive social enterprise strategy that will suit everyone
 - That the Partnership Group objectives are better defined – and to ensure that group objectives are useful to those working on the ground
 - Consistent communication about successes and failures within the project would have helped the towns feel part of something bigger – even though they were working to their own distinct targets
 - That there is a better understanding about the length of time (and effort) it takes to get a social enterprise off the ground. Much effort may be expended only for the emerging business to realise that social enterprise is not for them. This should NOT be seen as a failure. Indeed, it is a positive step for someone to realise that their ideas may not in fact be robust enough to endure, or that the initial flush of enthusiasm has waned, and they will not have the stamina for the business in the long term. HOWEVER it is very important that adequate support mechanisms exist for the project managers to share their inevitable frustrations, and these should be supported and encouraged
-

APPENDIX 1

Project Outputs		Original bid targets ¹	Project targets ²	Actuals to March 2005	2005-06 Targets	Actuals in total	Target met ✓ / not met x (and variance) X (-1)
1A	Number of Jobs Created/Safeguarded	14(2)	83(1)	82(9)	4		X (-1)
1C (i)	No of People Trained obtaining Qualifications	350(35)	376(8)	1400(348)	5(1)		✓ (+1024)
1C (ii)	Number of People Trained without accreditation	370(37)	372(9)	326(50)	70(8)		x (-46)
1C(iii)	No. of people trained as part of in-service/employment	280(30)	60	16	0		x (-44)
1D	No of Residents Accessing Employment through Training	384(38)	110(8)	35(4)	15		x (-75)
1E	Number of Training Weeks		49	85	10		✓ (+36)
1F (i)	Number of People Trained Obtaining Jobs	80(8)	60(2)	39(8)	2		x (-21)
1F (ii)	No of People Trained Obtaining Jobs (Previously Unemployed)	16(2)	23(1)	13(1)	3(1)		x (-10)
1G (i)	Number of People Entering Self Employment	160(16)	40	21(7)	8		x (-19)
1G (ii)	No. of people entering self employment (previously Unemployed)	10(1)	4	0	0	0	x (-4)
1I	No. of disadvantaged groups who obtained a job	10	20(5)	16	0	16	x (-4)
1J	No. of young People benefiting from Personal & Social Development	90(9)	15	360(131)	0	360(131)	✓ (+345)

* (Numbers in brackets are ethnic figures)

¹ These targets were revised following appraisal, and the projects then worked to the new Project Targets shown above in ²

² New Project Targets, the original bid targets having been revised

Project Outputs		Original bid targets ¹	Project targets ²	Actuals to March 2005	2005-06 Targets	Actuals in total	Target met ✓ / not met x (& variance)
2A	Number of New Business Start-Ups	96	29	45(1)	0	45(1)	✓ (+25)
2C	Number of new businesses supported	96	22	41(3)	9		✓ (+19)
2C	Survival rate of new businesses (52 weeks)	72	9	7	14		x (-2)
	Survival rate of new businesses (78 weeks)					not measured	x
2C(ii)	Number of Businesses Advised	62	3	0	0		✓
2D	Number of Voluntary Organizations Supported	320	362	570(63)	32		(+208)
8A (i)	Number of Community Groups Supported	4	95	275(32)	5(1)		✓ (+180)
8A (ii)	Number of Individuals Involved in Voluntary Work	80	104	112(5)	5(1)		✓ (+8)
8C	Number of Community Enterprise Start-Ups	248(25)	448(5)	449(53)	31(3)		✓ (+1)
8E	Value of SRB Funding (include Revenue, Capital & Admin)	72	47	19(3)	7(1)		x (-28)
9A (i)	Total Other Public Spend	1,770,000	1,770,000	1,505,407	264,537	1,770,000	
9A (ii)	Total Private Sector Leverage	1,249,000	690,897	672,064	0		
9A (iii)	Promotion of Community Shop Concept (ORCC)	1,167,000	170,892	172,502	11,760		✓ (+3)
X1	Community Shop Newsletter (ORCC)		22	25	4		✓ (+6)
X2	Information/Training Seminars (ORCC)		8	14	4		✓ (+8)
X3	Information Sheets (ORCC)		4	12	2		x (-1)
X4 (i)	Manual (ORCC)		8	7	2		✓ (+1)
X4 (ii)	Additional Support Visits (ORCC)		2	3	1		✓ (+87)
X5			75	162(4)	20		

* (Numbers in brackets are ethnic figures)

¹ These targets were revised following appraisal, and the projects then worked to the new Project Targets shown above in ²

² New Project Targets, the original bid targets having been revised

		Original bid targets¹	Project targets²	Actuals to March 2005	2005- 06 Targets	Actuals in total
Tier Three Outputs from 2003						
C1A	New jobs created			138(16)	17(1)	
C3A	No. of learning opportunities 3-30hrs			1714(408)	75(9)	
C4A	New businesses created/attracted			57	7	
C4B	New business sustained for 12 months			9	18	
S2	No. of businesses receiving specialist advice			935(88)	62(2)	
S4	Adults receiving basic level skills training			168(67)		
S6	Adults receiving high level skills training			608(143)		

* (Numbers in brackets are ethnic figures)

¹ These targets were revised following appraisal, and the projects then worked to the new Project Targets shown above in ²

² New Project Targets, the original bid targets having been revised