

Innovative Services

Community Catalysts

Community Catalysts is a Community Interest Company launched in January 2010. Community Catalysts works through local partners to support the development of sustainable local enterprises delivering services that people can buy to live their lives. The aim is to enable individuals and communities to use their gifts, skills and imagination to provide real choice of small scale, local, personalised and high quality services (for local people who need care and support).

Policy context

Consecutive governments have put strategies in place to give people more choice and control over their own lives, the support they need and the services they use. Personal budgets are a key part of this, giving people control over the public money that funds their care and allowing them to choose how it is spent.

By themselves personal budgets will not make all these changes happen. Evidence shows that once people understand how much money is available; they use that money flexibly and with imagination, choosing services that they want and need. Their choices are limited by what is locally available and so if social care is to really change, attention needs to be paid to supporting the development of many different types of support and services that people will want to buy with their personal budget. People who do not receive a personal budget may fund their own care and support and they also require local services offering a broad range of services.

Micro -providers

Micro-providers are local people providing support and services for other local people by running a micro-enterprise. They work on a very small scale (a 'micro-enterprise' has five or fewer workers – paid or unpaid).

The business models used by micro-providers are on a continuum from fully commercial at one end to fully voluntary at the other. From our work we know that 30-40% of micro-enterprises are delivered on a voluntary/semi voluntary basis. Only some of the providers are delivering a formal health or social care service that requires regulation by the government regulator.

Older and disabled people play a variety of roles in the design and delivery of micro-enterprise. In nearly all cases people are involved in co-designing their services. In addition older and disabled people are often involved in the management and delivery of services.

Case studies of micro- enterprises

People buy support and services to help them to live their lives and so many micro-enterprises deliver services that fall outside health and social care. Leisure and arts, well being, friendship, holidays, transport and food are important to all of us.

Tony runs a micro-enterprise offering supported lodgings. He rents a number of quality 2 or 3 bedroom houses to people with a learning disability or those who have mental ill health. He provides the support that each person needs and this is usually funded through personal budgets. Tony works closely with the local Shared Lives scheme that may also support the people who use his service. He is providing an essential resource that enables people to move on from Shared Lives arrangements once they have acquired the necessary skills to live more independently.

Space Inclusive was set up by Richard and David, two teachers, with a background in special education. Seeing former pupils struggle to access post-19 provision, they set up their own micro-enterprise and now deliver services to young adults with learning disabilities, with particular experience of supporting people on the autistic spectrum. Customers are supported in a totally individual way to develop their individual skills with the long term aim of gaining independence and employment.

Lesley and Shagufta run a micro-enterprise aimed at women with a learning disability and in particular women of South East Asian origin. They encourage women to come together in their local community to learn new skills around IT, cookery and sewing whilst increasing friendships and independence. They have received positive feedback from the families of the women, due to the excellent communication between all parties and the flexible service that is provided.

Mr and Mrs Hunt retired from their respective professions within social care. They wanted to use their knowledge and experience to provide low level support to older people in their own homes in their community helping to reduce isolation and encourage independence. They have also set up a local club for older people to get out and make new friends.

The mother of a young man who is on the autistic spectrum has recently established a timebank in her local area in partnership with a local housing association. The main aim of the timebank is to encourage people with a learning disability and the people that support them to identify the individual's assets and skills and to connect them into their local community to enable them use those skills for the benefit of others. Some people may need support to contribute to the timebank. The person with the disability earns credits for their time, and their involvement in the bank often leads to new forms of support and friendships

Jessie and her mum Jill are co-directors of a small social enterprise called Pulp Friction. Jessie is a young woman who has a learning disability who left school keen to work like her friends. When this proved difficult she and her Mum came up with an enterprising alternative. Pulp Friction run cycle powered smoothie bars at community events and festivals and provide opportunities for young adults with and without a learning disability to develop their social, independence and work readiness skills.

Micro-enterprise:

- Provides an important route into work, especially for disabled and older people and creates local jobs:

- Is a practical vehicle for local authority employees interested in taking over and delivering their service on a co-operative basis or setting up a social enterprise
- Helps local money stay local: public money spent on local micro-services remains in the local economy for longer than money spent with big national providers
- Provides an accessible route to enterprise for local people. The traditional approach to economic regeneration focuses on attracting established businesses into an area or 'growing' locally established enterprises. Most local people are daunted by the size and complexity of these businesses. Micro-enterprise on the other hand is within many more people's reach and one success will encourage others to try their hand.
- Offers real choice so that people can buy the support and services which best enable them to live their lives and meet their health and support needs. People make their money go further via services delivered on a voluntary/semi voluntary as well as a more commercial basis.
- Builds social capital: Services tend to be very local (within a couple of houses or a couple of streets); micro entrepreneurs involve friends, family and neighbours in the service formally and informally; people build social networks at work which spill over into life outside work (as with us all); people use community facilities, are supported to join community associations and are out and about in the community.
- Bring real and tangible assets into the market for community benefit (eg: workshop space, vehicles)
- Provide healthy competition and help to drive quality and innovation in local provision, positively disrupting the status quo.

The initiative

Community Catalysts directly or through a partner sets up a local support agency, employing a local person with the right skill set, connections and attitudes (a support co-ordinator). The co-ordinator has an early focus on uncovering and engaging with any micro entrepreneurs currently operating in the area, alongside their major task of stimulating and supporting new enterprise. They:

- Provide a single contact point for local people with good ideas who want to set up services as well as for people with established enterprises that need help
- Help people understand customer requirements and link customers and potential providers
- Make best use of existing advice and support agencies by sign posting
- Give people help to overcome barriers
- Set up an association which offers membership to current and emerging micro-providers. The association provides a range of support services and facilitates the peer-to-peer mentoring essential to maintaining the momentum and success of established micro-provision.

For more information contact CEO Sian Lockwood sian.lockwood@communitycatalysts.co.uk or visit the Community Catalysts website <http://www.communitycatalysts.co.uk>