



Burton Street Foundation



Location
Sheffield

Founded
1998 (originally the 'Langsett Foundation')

Legal structure
Community Benefit Society

Description of services
Community organisation working with adults and children with learning disabilities; also provides office and meeting space to a range of local organisations

Overview of the business

Burton Street aims to provide meaningful activities for adults and children with learning and physical disabilities. They operate from four buildings which provide space for local groups, businesses and charities, with additional facilities including a café, gym, conference and meeting rooms, function suite and bar. Over 90 different sessions run in the course of a week aiming to develop confidence and self-esteem: *'Art, drama, sport, discussion, independent living: all opportunities to get out and be part of the community. Not education work but focusing on self-esteem and confidence building... to encourage people to live independent and confident lives.'*

Employment opportunities are an important facet of Burton Street; it employs more than 100 staff, many of whom started out as volunteers with the organisation. In this way, they are able to create a route into work for a range of different people in the community: *'[people] can work here regardless of educational accomplishments: personality and*

creativity is paramount, and having a positive attitude. The vulnerability of clients means that the consistency of staffing is really important – that number of jobs for the local community is a really important aspect of the work. It's absolutely fantastic.'

The organisation was described as a business with profitability as a means to sustain its range of services with social value: *'we are a business with income from tenants; room hire; catering and events; we are also paid for our services for adults and children with learning disabilities and difficulties – through personal budgets.'*

Why is community accountability important?

The values, ethos and governance of the organisation were cited as being key to maintaining community accountability: *'It's written into the governance structure and how we work as a community business.'*



‘Everyone has a part to play’ is the organisation’s strapline and it was felt that it lives up to this value. This way of working is aimed at modelling the kind of inclusive society it would like to see: ‘It’s about creating a community/society that replicates what you want the wider society to be – happy, welcoming, living/integrating well – that’s what you want society to be.’

These values and ethos run throughout the organisation:

‘We demonstrate the ethos in all the things we provide on a daily basis. It’s important that we are not a closed off community for our clients with learning disabilities. It’s a proper community to them and the way we work, we’ve got a lot of activities in groups, mixing with other people [i.e. mixing with other local people and the clients/users of the organisations on site].’

What does accountability look like locally?

Here we use three categories to provide a snapshot of some of the mechanisms and methods that the business uses in community accountability. These categories are not hard and fast; there is some overlap between the areas outlined.

Structures

- **Managing Director – Board of Trustees relationship:** *‘personally I’m accountable to the Board of Trustees – the majority of whom are local residents, and their role is the governance of the organisation’*
- **Annual Away Day** and AGM bring together staff and trustees and reinforce responsibility/accountability for certain areas of work: *‘we will go through our business plan, objectives; looking at the business planning tree. Trustees have been looking at our governance document – updating, making sure it’s relevant/workable.’*

- **Membership:** currently anyone can become a member of Burton Street for £1, but the organisation is reviewing how this works and helps to consolidate accountability rather than creating a constituency that isn’t actively engaged with the organisation. In future: *‘those with membership will be future trustees, and others will be “stakeholders”’.*
- **Members are invited to the AGM and receive regular updates.**
- A **‘Shadow Board’** of five clients that use the Burton Street service: *‘It aims to genuinely involve people with learning disabilities, Burton Street was inundated when the opportunity was publicised.’*

Relationships

As well as relationships with volunteers, clients, staff, trustees and members, Burton Street also works to develop links with local agencies, businesses and residents. It was seen as being embedded in the local community business sector and an important part of the local area. In addition, the values-led model it uses enabled partner organisations and tenants in the building to feel supported and engaged in the work:

‘One of the things that has kept us here [as a tenant of Burton Street] is the fact that they are very supportive of our work. The work doesn’t necessarily cross over – sometimes we engage with the same young people, some may come to us and to Burton Street so it’s all in one place!’

‘We’re not worried to say we’re “not happy about that”, there’s not a worry on either side – so it’s an open, honest approach; quite a special relationship.’

Being a **responsible neighbour** as a sizeable enterprise in the area also informs and influences community accountability for Burton Street: *‘we ran a music festival on the site once, let all local people know, invited everyone, we didn’t get*

objections. Sometimes with issues we just need to be responsive.’

Finally, they recognise the importance of extending beyond those directly involved to be truly accountable to the community: *‘We’re always referred to as having its own sense of community but it’s also about taking it into the wider community.’*

Communications

- Communication and community events: community events are used to build relationships between the staff, volunteers and the public, as well as providing an opportunity to find out more about the centre: *‘Local events open the site up to people, and open communication channels. It’s always easy to find a manager, open to you communicating anything back to them.’*
- Burton Street uses a variety of communication approaches in relation to its local community: leafleting; social media; and using the local media – magazine/newspaper articles and local radio.
- Wider engagement events target those that engage less, for example, younger people for whom they have set up a parent and toddler group, and older people who participate in the friendship lunches that Burton Street runs.
- Clients are asked for feedback at twice-yearly forum weeks as well as during their contact with services and facilities.