



Unlimited Potential



Location

Salford, Greater Manchester

Founded

2002

Legal structure

Community Benefit Society

Description of activity

Developing innovative solutions to health, wellbeing, and wider social and economic problems, for a variety of different clients including the NHS, local authority, charitable foundations and Trusts.

Key assets

Membership, networks and local workforce.

Employees

13 full-time equivalent

Volunteers

Four

Biggest obstacle to success

Balancing income generation with maintaining its core values and finding relevant contracts.

Overview of Unlimited Potential

In 1999, Charlestown and Lower Kersal, an area of Salford in Greater Manchester was designated as a New Deal for Communities regeneration area. One of the issues reported by local people within the neighbourhood was the lack of health care provision. In addition to having limited access to GP surgeries, death rates in this specific part of Salford was two and a half times the national average. As such, six local residents who wanted to address the area’s health issues came together to form a community group, which was later supported by a community development worker. This small community business was incorporated in 2002, and was dependent on grant funding for its first four years. The original aim of the community business was to create a healthy living centre, which would be run by the local community.

In 2005, Chris Dabbs joined the business. Examining the group’s strengths, he could see that they were good at community engagement, but did not have the necessary skillset to run a health centre. As such, Chris changed the focus of the business to delivering smaller health and wellbeing projects, working with people from the community that larger, more established health and wellbeing agencies were unable to reach.

In 2009, the community business changed its name to Unlimited Potential (UP), and its legal status to a community benefit society. At the same time, UP became the first social enterprise in the North of England to receive the Social Enterprise Mark. The aim of UP was to develop innovative solutions to health and wellbeing problems for a variety of different clients including the NHS, local authority, charitable foundations and trusts. For example, UP has recently developed the ‘Breath Stars’ project which aimed to test whether singing improves the breathing of children with asthma. This project is funded by The Big Lottery, Salford Clinical Commissioning Group, and Salford CVS and is solely focused on children in Salford.

UP is based in rented offices at the Innovation Forum in Salford, which is owned by the council but managed by Manchester Science Partnerships who operate a series of science parks. Their main beneficiaries are disadvantaged local people in the community, including people with dementia, teenagers, the long-term unemployed, and homeless people.

Unlimited Potential's journey to success

This section summarises the key factors that Unlimited Potential attributes to the success of the business and the challenges it has faced along the way.

Developing relationships with funders and community

Fundamentally, one of the most important skillsets that UP attributes to the success of the business is its ability to create lasting relationships with both funders and the community. UP initially worked across two wards in Salford, however it has since expanded its reach to Greater Manchester and as such has developed relationships with various local authorities as well as the NHS. Despite the Salford area remaining the focal point for UP's expertise, through engagement with the community and relationships with local organisations as a result of devolution in Greater Manchester, UP has been able to establish good links with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership, who have majority control over public health budgets. As such, these relationships have helped UP to spread their services into locations beyond Salford. For example, one of the projects UP is currently working on is to increase the uptake of healthy living services in Rochdale borough by families with young children who are overweight or obese. Working alongside both statutory and social enterprise organisations, such as the Pennine Care NHS Trust, Rochdale Council, Link4Life and the Big Life group, this project is using community insight to produce a different approach to the National Child Measurement Programme.

Relationships with the larger public bodies such as the NHS are not always created with a view to securing direct funding for UP projects. They are also developed in order to influence decision-makers. For example, Chris Dabbs, CEO of UP, sits on the Salford Health and Wellbeing Board as a Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce representative. Building relationships here enables the business to identify future opportunities, be in a position to influence their development, and raise awareness of UP. UP also highlights how being a community benefit society provides funders and health commissioners with the assurance that the innovative solutions that UP develops are driven by social values and not for profit, which can lead to further opportunities.

UP underlines the importance of being willing to take risks and make mistakes as a key enabler of success. Taking this approach can offer valuable learning experiences, which in turn can contribute to the success of projects and enhance relationships with funders. In addition, a common lack of understanding as to how social innovation works, i.e. the process of developing and deploying effective solutions to challenging and often systemic social and environmental issues, especially in comparison to technical or pharmaceutical innovation, means that UP is constantly having to refine its approach, and subsequently make mistakes. However, UP actively shares its failures with funders to build trust and ensure transparency.

In terms of building future relationships, UP is planning to invest in additional marketing to promote the business' services and ethos, in particular via social media campaigns. As despite recognising it has good networking skills, it also acknowledges that it needs to develop an increased online profile to extend its reach to both local beneficiaries and funders.

Improving the financial outlook

Over the past ten years, UP's sources of income have fluctuated. Originally funded solely by grants, the business moved to a predominantly contract based model where around 80-90% of income was derived from trading activities. Currently, approximately 60% of UP's income comes from trading activities, with the remaining income from grant funding. Trading income historically came from public health funders such as the NHS and local authority. Although the business still delivers NHS funded contracts, there has been a shift away from public sector funding to contracts with organisations such as NESTA, the Design Council and Young Foundation. This is in part due to the impact of austerity measures, but also because the business has changed its focus from delivering mainstream health care services to social innovation services.

Although grant funding was initially essential for the business to establish itself, increasing income from trading activities is currently considered very important in order to generate a surplus and maintain financial sustainability. When sufficient income for three months of running costs have been secured, any surplus generated above this reserve is reinvested into business activities which provide additional social benefit to the local community. However, UP views a lack of health commissioning opportunities as one of the key barriers to its success and subsequently one of the biggest challenges for UP is balancing income generation with maintaining its core values. Making a profit that can be reinvested into the business is vital for UP's sustainability, however the main focus will always be to provide services that create social benefit. To achieve this balance UP is looking to grow the business in other areas to improve its financial sustainability, including diversifying its services into social innovation areas other than health, such as criminal justice and employment. It is also seeking to expand the geographical reach of its services beyond Salford. Finally, it is planning to shift away from a dependence on public sector income, and look more towards the higher education and private sectors for future funding streams.

Over the last two years, the number of staff and volunteers at UP has decreased due to cuts in the local authority budget which resulted in UP contracts ending. In response to this drop in income, UP decided to reduce in size so that the business was less exposed to overhead costs, enabling it to remain viable for the longer-term.

Achieving its aims for beneficiaries

One of the key factors of success for UP is achieving its aims



for its beneficiaries. In order to measure this, UP has adopted impact measures recommended by health commissioners, but it has also developed its own methods of measuring impact that are meaningful to beneficiaries, rather than just funders. UP also examines the impact of its own business, not just that of the projects it delivers. For example, socio-economic and environmental impacts of the business are measured, such as the amount of carbon dioxide the business produces, and the proportion of staff living within five miles of their main work base, as they are considered less likely to drive.

Another aspect of ensuring they are meeting the aims they set out to achieve for their beneficiaries, UP recruit staff and volunteers from the communities they work with. This approach provides UP with valuable insight into the communities needs and their effectiveness. In turn this also helps UP engage with the community on a deeper level, developing innovative solutions from ideas and knowledge they would not have been able to tap into otherwise.

Engaging with the local community is important to UP in enabling local people to have a genuine influence over what UP does as an organisation. Accountability is therefore vital aspect of the business. UP’s members, which are members of the local community, elect the board of non-executive directors, and also play a part as an advisory council. Members therefore hold the management team and board to account, making sure they focus on improving society for local people. Members also ensure that the board is diverse in terms of it composition, not only with regards to gender, age, ethnicity and disability, but also in terms of mind-set and background. For example, professional expertise is essential for the business to operate in a commercially competitive sector, but social expertise from lived experience is also required to provide an understanding of the challenges UP deals with. In having a diverse range of board members, the board more closely resembles the communities UP works with, which enables them to develop solutions that better relate to the issues of those specific communities.

Future direction

In terms of further support for the business, UP sees benefit in moving the social enterprise focus from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, to the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy, in order to encourage potential customers to view social enterprises and community businesses as an alternative way of doing business. Moreover, UP highlights how it often needs to shift its language of governance when talking to funding commissioners between state, private and third sectors, as it fits into all of them at different times. Having funding commissioners recognise that they are part of all of these sectors would allow greater flexibility for future funding.

Looking to the future, UP maintains that there are relevant contracts available, but the challenge is to find sufficient numbers in a limited space of time. The business has some reserves, but these will diminish eventually, therefore, for

the time being it will need to continue sourcing some income from grants for the foreseeable future. Having said that, UP believes there has been a shift in Greater Manchester’s priorities for social enterprises. Chris Dabbs is Chair of the Greater Manchester Social Enterprise Network, and has worked together with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to get social enterprise recognised as a legitimate business form. As such, recently, the GMCA put forward its new Greater Manchester strategy, which for the first time included social enterprise, indicating a change in perceptions.

Financial information

The following table provides an overview of Unlimited Potential’s income, expenditure and assets for the period 01/04/16 to 31/03/17

Income	£539,668
Expenditure	£585,288
Difference between income and expenditure	-£45,620
Surplus/deficit on ordinary activities before taxation	-£44,445
Annual income from grant or subsidy	£0
Fixed assets	No data available
Current assets	Stocks: No data available Debtors: £30,622 Cash at bank and in hand: £374,089
Total	£404,711
Net assets	£231,538

Source: Unlimited Potential Annual Accounts 2016/17, FCA Mutuals Register