



Zest



Location
Sheffield

Founded
1997

Legal structure
Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee

Description of activity
Zest delivers a range of services to the local community covering health, employment, training, social and physical activities to adults and children and the hiring of office space.

Key assets
The Zest Centre houses a multi accessible heated swimming pool, two gyms, a library, café, meeting rooms and offices.

Employees
60 part-time and seasonal

Volunteers
50

Biggest obstacle to success
Limited resources to develop new partnerships and lack of funding opportunities.

Overview of Zest

Zest was born as the result of a successful community campaign during the regeneration of a residential area of Sheffield in the late 1990s. Members of the community came together to ensure they were consulted on the housing changes the local government was intending to implement at the time. As a result of this organised community response, local residents subsequently formed a community association that went on to identify the primary needs of the community and eventually developed into what is Zest today.

Zest is a community business serving different communities across Sheffield, with a particular focus on the neighbourhoods of Netherthorpe, Upperthorpe and Langsett. Zest delivers a range of services covering health, employment, training, and social and physical activities for adults and children. Zest operates from its own centre that houses a public swimming pool, two gyms, a library, a café, in addition to meeting rooms for hire and office space available to rent.

Zest is a registered charity with an experienced Board of Trustees who are drawn from the local area and who are committed and accountable to the community. Therefore, Zest ensures it works closely with the communities it supports and that Trustees are supportive of innovative ideas to generate income and increase the number of beneficiaries.

In addition to the services offered at the centre, Zest works in partnership with the city council and local organisations delivering health programmes to communities across Sheffield. Because of Zest's experience of working with diverse groups, they have been leading two community health partnerships commissioned by the local authority. These programmes target specific health needs and key target groups e.g. women, the elderly and black and minority ethnic communities across Sheffield.

Zest's journey to success

Zest identifies success as delivering high quality services which are responsive to community needs; being financially self-sustainable; ensuring they can hire and retain suitable qualified staff, and fostering greater community engagement to develop and sustain strong partnerships.



Supporting the needs of the community

A particular focus for Zest is delivering health and wellbeing services identified by local communities as priority needs. For example, the business offers women only swimming lessons and gym sessions, which was identified as a specific need by low income Muslim women within the community. By responding to this local need, Zest has been successful in engaging Muslim women in physical activity that they would otherwise find difficult to access. Moreover, these women-only sessions have had impact beyond the local community as they attract Muslim women from across Sheffield.

Despite offering targeted community services, Zest recognises the difficulty of measuring and quantifying the wider social impact of these services. Zest recognises the challenge of maintaining a balance between generating income from trading through providing a diverse range of services and maintaining services in line with its health and well-being objectives. This challenge in maintaining a balance has been compounded by the expansion of its networks, and an increase in the delivery of a variety of health-related services for various partners with their own diverse aims. Nevertheless, the business has seen this challenge as an opportunity to increase its familiarity with new communities and their needs. Subsequently, this increasingly wide exposure has helped to inform its business strategy to create new and innovative services and find new users for its core services. Zest has also found that working with a diverse range of partners benefits its users, as they can access holistic support under one roof. This in turn has led Zest to develop additional signposting capacity, which has become an important aspect of businesses success.

Financially self-sustainable and having suitably qualified staff

A fundamental factor to the success of any business is the capacity to be financially self-sustainable. In a typical year, Zest generates one-third of its income from grants, one-third from contract delivery and one-third from other trading activities. However, based on current austerity measures, proposed reductions in grant income and increasingly tight margins on service delivery contracts, Zest is expecting to need to shift the balance towards increased self-generated income.

In preparation for this financial challenge, Zest is considering several strategies to mitigate the effect of these anticipated changes in income streams. First, being aware of the high levels of competition and the length of time needed to prepare funding applications, the board of trustees invested in a business development manager role, who is tasked with working across the organisations to develop new areas of work/enterprise. At other levels, Zest is re-examining its programme delivery across the organisation and reviewing its internal procedures to allow for stronger community input into their decision-making processes. A recent success has

been the development of a local parents forum, who are able to influence and support the development of family services and activities.

For Zest, developing the resource capacity to assess risks and identify solutions are essential factors in their strategy to enable the business to be financially self-sustainable and remain community focused. In that sense, Zest considers that not being risk adverse is an attitude that has helped the business to be innovative and supportive of community needs whilst remaining financially viable. For example, the board of trustees made a decision to operate a deficit budget for a period of time to ensure the continuation of health and wellbeing services for children, families and young people in the area. The decision was risky as reserves were used to deliver much needed services that used to be covered by grant funding. In this case, Zest stresses the importance of taking considered risks as financial reserves are also needed for other unexpected expenses.

Strong community engagement

Zest strongly believes that support from the local community has been fundamental in enabling its success. For example, initially, community members were referred to Zest by local general practitioners to address issues of health and wellbeing. As part of this referral, beneficiaries attend different health and wellbeing sessions at the centre. Zest reports that as beneficiaries get active and familiar with the centre and their services, the majority of those being referred stay beyond the prescribed six weeks of the programme and become long-term users of their services. Furthermore, community members engage regularly in volunteering activities that support the delivery of services.

Historically, Zest has benefited from strong community engagement and believes that some of its users make deliberate ethical decisions to support the business due to its community focus. These type of users tend to be supportive and understanding of the business model and perceive Zest as a friendly and inclusive place with a focus on supporting the local community. An example of this is the on-site café policy, which uses a 'pay as you feel' model. The café does not have set prices and is run by volunteers, overseen by a paid professional chef. Although the income from the café's trading is small, the café is popular element of the centre and makes healthy food affordable for many members.



Strong partnerships

Zest considers working in partnerships with diverse organisations a core value of the business that has been fundamental to its success. Despite the challenges involved in working with different partners, e.g. longer coordination time to deliver services, the positive aspects outnumber the challenges. Zest finds that by working in collaboration with others instead of competing with them, they are able to combine skills and resources to reach more people. For instance, as a result of working with diverse and larger agencies and developing trust, Zest has been able to secure larger contracts that in turn increases the business income.

Another tangible effect of working in partnership is that Zest has been able to negotiate mutually beneficial partnerships that maximise the best use of the centre. For Zest, having open, transparent and strong relationships with diverse organisations has been vital to their success. It has allowed the business to assess the extent of their capacity and clarify their role within each partnership, which in turn contributes to the business reputation of being reliable and transparent. However, at the same time, Zest recognises that building and sustaining strong partnerships takes time and effort and that partners also have to deal with the challenging commissioning processes. It feels that by working collectively with other businesses that face similar challenges they can jointly influence the way health and wellbeing services are commissioned. Zest is hopeful that this collective action could ultimately influence how some local health agencies commission their services.

Future direction

Although Zest has faced a considerable number of challenges since its formation, i.e. low staffing levels, available funding and maintenance issues, the business has found innovative ways to manage those challenges and maintain the focus on the needs of the community. Since Zest benefits from a history of strong community engagement and support, a committed and knowledgeable board of trustees and stable leadership, the business is considering crowdfunding as a viable income stream to fund much needed capital investment in the near future. The business is confident in its long-term success based on the high demand for services from the local communities they serve and the impact their current services are having on the local community and across Sheffield.

Financial information

The following table provides an overview of Netherthorpe and Upperthorpe Community Alliance income, expenditure and assets for the period 01/04/2016 to 31/03/2017.

Income	£1,182,837¹
Expenditure	£1,289,035
Difference between income and expenditure	£106,198
Surplus/deficit on ordinary activities before taxation	£106,198
Annual income from grant or subsidy	£1,960
Fixed assets	£609,544
Current assets	Stocks: £370 Debtors: £111,123 Cash at bank and in hand: £344,285
Total	£455,778
Net assets	£824,606

Source: Zest (Netherthorpe and Upperthorpe Community Alliance) Annual Accounts 2016/17, Companies House

¹Annual income source detail (2016/17):

Grants and donations	£1,960
Charitable activities	£1,116,735
Other trading activities	£25,301
Investments	£38,841
Total income	£1,182,837