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Michelle Foster, The Basement Recovery

Business Link helps drug project thrive as an enterprise

A project which helps drug users kick the habit and make a fresh start has embarked on a new life of its own since becoming a social enterprise.

The Basement Recovery in Halifax began as a user support group which ran its own breakfast club. Today it provides specialist detox and recovery programmes, helping scores of people on the road to a brighter future.

Project manager Michelle Foster says Business Link Yorkshire was influential in the decision to turn The Basement Recovery into a company in April 2008. “Business Link have been talking to us since summer 2007. They said if you want to go forward, if you want to fulfil your vision, you need to become a proper business and the social enterprise model was the best option.

With Business Link’s guidance Michelle realised that The Basement Recovery had the potential to play a significant

role in the provision of services to substance abusers.

“Business Link has made us see ourselves as a business, and others see us as a professional organisation. We’ve found that our more business-like approach means that we are able to be competitive when we are trying to win new business. People are willing to listen to us.”

“Their support is ongoing. They have helped me to identify suitable finance and to find a consultant who is assisting with business strategy and also a mentor.”

In fact, one of these external consultants advised Michelle that creating a successful, profit-making business would have the most benefit and impact on her clients: “He told me, ‘bring in a million, you can help more people’.”

The Basement Recovery may not be at a million yet, but is already proving to be a success. Its £48,000 turnover in 2008

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is expected to more than double to £100,000 in 2009 and in its first six months The Basement Recovery registered 560 clients.

It runs a four-week pre-recovery and detox programme to ensure clients are drug-free before they embark on the more challenging 12-week programme. This covers everything from staying sober to learning to cook.

Michelle is the only worker and running the business can be demanding. "Because I'm quite isolated here, if I am stressed I can ring my Business Link adviser and she will offer support," she says.

The Basement Recovery programmes are run with the help of mentors who have been through the recovery process themselves. At present courses are restricted to office hours but Michelle would like to open a "sobriety house" which would offer access to support round the clock "almost like residential rehabilitation".

"I am confident about the future now Business Link has helped us reinvent The Basement Recovery as a thriving enterprise."

NB: A social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are reinvested for that purpose rather than being driven by the need to deliver profit to shareholders or owners. (DTI, Social Enterprise Strategy 2002)

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