



“As we get bigger, Business Link will be able to help us further. It’s an invaluable source of knowledge and contacts. They can put you in touch with all the right people, which is vital for our growth.”

Caroline Wherritt, Re-Work

Recycling furniture creates jobs for disadvantaged

A Yorkshire entrepreneur has built a thriving small business by recycling furniture that big business throws out.

Caroline Wherritt worked for a blue chip company and noted how wasteful it was, discarding perfectly good office furniture when new stock arrived. When she moved into the voluntary sector she saw how many charities had to manage with a mish-mash of poor quality fittings.

Social enterprise Re-Work was born from these observations. Re-Work collects used office furniture from large companies and sells it at a competitive price to charities and small businesses. It can refit complete premises and creates bespoke desks and storage from recycled materials. In doing so, this social enterprise has already saved more than 10 tonnes of furniture going to landfill.

“Business Link has been with me all the way since before I wrote my first business plan,” said Caroline.

She had never run a business before. So the January 2008 launch of Re-Work Office Furniture from Hunslet Trading Estate in Leeds was a “huge learning curve”.

As well as helping Caroline secure initial finance, Business Link Yorkshire offered indispensable advice on subjects including cash flow projections, legal issues and managing staff. “My Business Link adviser Louanne Roberts sits down and listens to what I have to say, brings her expertise to bear and put things into perspective.”

Caroline has also attended several Business Link Yorkshire events, such as Excellent Customer Service. “I find them doubly useful. You learn a lot and it’s an easy way to meet people and network.”

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Re-Work has achieved a great deal already, creating three new jobs for people from disadvantaged backgrounds and achieving a first year turnover of £90,000. But Caroline has ambitious plans.

The business is still in its first phase, securing a lot of its stock from environmental charity Green Works. Phase two will involve a marketing campaign to raise awareness of the company so it can acquire further supplies from Yorkshire businesses.

Then it will be time for phase three. "The ultimate vision is for us to create a full-scale recycling facility. This would allow us to take anything and everything that comes out of the office. We would continue to sell on good quality

equipment but also recycle anything in poor condition by breaking it down into its component parts."

The social enterprise model ensures that all surplus profit can be ploughed into growing the company. "The more we grow, the more we can stop furniture going into landfill and create more employment," says Caroline.

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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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