

Real Support from PIA Enterprises CIC and Connect in the North

People in Action (Leeds) and Connect in the North are at the cutting edge of developments for people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Work of national significance includes setting up People's Place, Leeds – Communities Stronger Together, a multicultural centre for people with learning disabilities; supporting African Caribbean trainers (Rooots Ltd) since 2003; and Connect in the North becoming a Centre for Inclusive Living led by people with learning difficulties. **Our Improving Reach proposal is also of wide significance and the budget includes promoting this approach through our regional and national networks and a national conference.**

Why social firm infrastructure for people with learning difficulties/disabilities is a priority area for development

National and local strategy is based on Valuing People Now (December 2007) – supporting people with learning difficulties/disabilities into chosen paid work, while closing segregated day centres. A number of legislative changes over recent years have told authorities spending public money to ensure that minorities are actively included in all services, for example through Disability Impact Assessments and the Race Relations Amendment Act. It is vital that Change Up supports this government agenda.

Numbers of people 9 large day centres used by almost 1000 people in Leeds are due to close. Consultations have shown that many other people who do not use day centres, or are attending colleges, are also interested in paid employment. We will target people who are motivated to work together in empowering ways. Out of this pool of people **Real Support** will give intensive infrastructure support to around 100 people (15 groups) for the lifetime of the project. We anticipate that at least 20% of people will be from minority ethnic communities.

Areas of work of frontline groups are likely to be

- Training and consultancy from an African Caribbean perspective
- Training and consultancy from an Asian perspective
- Recruitment of personal assistants
- Mystery shopping, checking on impact assessments of public authorities
- Making information accessible, advising on community networks
- Running a dating and friendship agency
- Selling surplus items over the internet (while reducing landfill); refurbishing furniture
- Local community services such as gardening, catering, running discos

The challenge A typical frontline group would be 6 people with learning disabilities/difficulties supported by one or two enthusiastic day centre or voluntary organisation staff. Their finances will typically rely on a combination of trading income and grants.

To develop a business they need to

- learn to work as a team and develop leadership
- develop and deliver a service or other product
- write and carry out a business plan, budget, and market their work
- write funding applications
- agree and adopt a legal structure

Simultaneously development of this range of skills with people with intellectual impairments (and sometimes rather limited life experiences) is possible, but it needs **intensive and sustained infrastructure support** each month over a number of years. Specialist infrastructure support to each group will cost around £5000 per group per year (£75,000 a year). This means **providing information and support about social firms in accessible ways**, including talking things through with people. We will also encourage frontline organisations to meet up occasionally for mutual support.

Capacity building

We will increase our capacity by using some of the Improving Reach budget to develop additional information in accessible formats. People in Action is part of Leeds Infrastructure Network and we will spend some time with other infrastructure organisations such as Business Link to make their work more accessible. We will engage with the local Leeds social enterprise infrastructure (Leeds is a successful bidder for LEGI money) to make commissioners and providers aware of the need to include the fullest range of marginalised groups and individuals. In 2010 we will write an accessible report, and put on a national conference about our experience targeted at Change-Up consortia. We have applied for an additional allocation each year of £14,000 to capacity building, networking, promotion and management of **Real Support** during the 3 years for which it is funded.