

**Social Firms UK Annual Conference**  
**Shaping The Future: Supportive Employment, Successful Businesses**  
**27 June 2006**

**WORKSHOP 5: Highlighting Positive Experiences In Social Firms**

**Facilitated by John Jones (Touchwood), Jenny Bassett (Daisies Café) & John Bennet (Pack-IT)**

Notes by: Richard Snow

**Background:**

*We have much to learn from Social Firms that are economically viable, sustainable businesses providing good supportive employment to disabled and non-disabled employees. Three Social Firms share their experiences.*

**Key Points:**

**Daisies Café,** Jenny Bassett and Derek McLure

Despite being situated on NHS property. Daisies worked right from the start to be an independent business. Favoured loans over grants and paid off a £19,000 loan on time. Managers have catering backgrounds and are able to deliver a surplus, ie. Run a profitable business. They are able to do this partly because they appear to have invested in extensive planning and research – going to Social Firms in three countries ie. ‘learning from others’.

The other part of the success story is that Daisies seems to enjoy a great group dynamic. The teamwork together and sometimes play together. Customers are also regarded as an extended family. Staff and trainees are upwardly mobile within the company, reinforcing the supportive nature of this Social Firm.

**Summary:**

- Independence
- Learning from others
- Generous support
- Family atmosphere
- Career path

**Pack-IT** John Bennett

‘The secret of ours being a successful Social Firm is that we have passion for what we do.’ Again, the manager, John, had a solid commercial background. He made sure that the right people were on board. Experience has shown that wanting a job and believing they can work are the best predictors of success. Once employed, people flourish through the empowerment of

wages (filters through to family members too) and through job satisfaction, reinforced by NVQ training and accreditation/certification. Pack-IT seems/aspires to be flexible in its job descriptions to work with employees abilities. Replication is a good way for Pack-IT to capitalise on its award-winning achievements and it brings extra remote warehousing too.

**Touchwood Recycling** John Jones

Again, solid commercial background. Again, recognised people's abilities as opportunities rather than disadvantages. John's big tip for success is to get your admin system/person in place very early on. Like Daisies, Touchwood avoided crippling start-up costs. Creative thinking enabled an unpromising feedstock (waste pallet wood) to be turned into marketable products relevant to the community (of Skye).

**In Summary**

All presenters emphasised the importance of team building, flexible approach, business focus and the empowering effect of employment and training. Very inspiring!