

Case study

“ProHelp”

Overview



Driver	Business in the Community (BITC)
Country	London, England, UK
Partners	Businesses, BITC (regional teams), Public administration, Community groups
Status	It has been running for over ten years now.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ In 2009 603 members of 27 ProHelp groups provided 10,000 hours of pro bono support worth of £1.4m and supported 2,243 community groups▪ Results in a case by case basis (see links to a range of case studies at the end of this document, Issue 7 and Annex)
Challenges	Funding and community partners' time.

Executive Summary

Business in the Community mobilises business for good. Its members commit to improve the way in which they manage their resources, be that their people or the planet. Its power is the unique platform this creates for collaborative action.

We work across four areas of expertise in the Workplace, Marketplace, Environment and Community. By sharing knowledge and experience, and developing innovative solutions, we are a catalyst for change and a demonstration of the positive impact business can have in society.

ProHelp is a national network of over 600 professional firms each of which has offered to provide professional advice and strategic support free of charge to community groups and voluntary organisations in their local area. Collectively, ProHelp is the largest provider of free professional support to local communities in the UK. In 2009, member firms provide £1.4m worth of free support each year which is delivered through 27 local groups.

“ProHelp is the largest provider of free professional support to local communities in the UK.”

1. Situation and societal issue

Community groups often spend resources (money and time) to pay for professional services. This takes away resources that could otherwise be used to achieve their charitable aims. To be part of ProHelp programme the beneficiary must be a community based, not-for-profit group working for the social and/or economic regeneration of its local area and should fit within the following criteria.

- Have a track record of working successfully with the local community
- Have no funding available for the specific project and no paid advisors retained to do the work
- If part of a national organisation, the branch must be locally constituted, and prove that neither the expertise nor the funding to pay for the work is available centrally
- The project must be realistic and viable
- The governing body must be willing to authorise the involvement of ProHelp

2. Partners

- **Businesses:** Often they are small businesses. Professional firm members cover many disciplines, including surveyors, architects, consulting engineers, accountants, solicitors, consultants (management, property and IT),
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a. Driver and Broker/ intermediary organisation

The organisation acting as broker and driver is BITC. Key tasks are:

- To assess applications for ProHelp support.
- To allocate successful requests to member firms. Firms see ProHelp as a chance to engage in their community and challenge themselves or their employees with a project that is outside of their day-to-day interactions. More junior staff can be given the chance to take on a project for training purposes, or to work with colleagues they would not typically get to be involved with.
- To provide support to community groups making applications and member firms taking projects on.
- To provide the appropriate administration to the above process.
- To monitor and record progress of projects.
- To collect qualitative and quantitative information on projects for BITC and appropriate funders.
- To co-ordinate, administer and lead quarterly ProHelp steering group meetings.
- To liaise with ProHelp Chair and other ProHelp managers re local priorities.
- To organise and help deliver professional advice workshops/celebration for voluntary groups.

b. Businesses

The professional firms (mostly small firms) undertake projects which include feasibility studies, structural surveys, marketing and business plans, legal and accountancy advice and property valuations.

The guiding principle of ProHelp is that members approach this sort of work in the same way as they would any other fee-paying clients. The only difference is that the community client is not charged for the work undertaken.

In some areas ProHelp also offers general advice surgeries and workshops on specific topics impacting on local community groups.

“The professional firms undertake one-off projects which can include feasibility studies, structural surveys, marketing and business plans, legal and accountancy advice and property valuations.”

Moreover, being part of a local ProHelp project benefits businesses in different ways:

- Provides firms with a source of quality pro bono opportunities
- Enables firms to prioritise which voluntary and community groups need support and target those with the greatest need
- Gives firms the opportunity of networking with other professional firms who are committed to social responsibility which creates a rich multi disciplinary environment
- Gives the less experienced staff members of firms the opportunity to sharpen their skills in a different environment
- Enhances firms' awareness of economic and social issues that impact on its firm

c. Community organisations

Nonprofit organisations and community groups are involved as recipients of the support and important local stakeholders.

d. Public administration and government

The programme is not linked to any national public program. Public administration is only involved through local and regional level funding in some areas.

3. Programme Description

a. Initiation

ProHelp was born with the aim of improving the situation of a community through professional support while at the same time adding value to the businesses involved in the project. The practical advice and support offered through ProHelp is something necessary and invaluable in helping community organisations achieve their goals and sustain them on a long term basis. One of its remarkable characteristics is that it can help with capacity building and strategic development of community groups. A little support given when and where it is needed most can make a real difference.

b. Process

ProHelp was set up more than ten years ago. Since then different groups have been running in up to 40 communities. The objective of the programme has remained the same: improve the situation of a community through professional support whereas at the same time adding value to the businesses involved in the project.

The aim of ProHelp is to continue deliver mutual benefit to the community through partnerships between businesses and community groups.

c. Resources

The programme is currently funded through contributions from member firms and local/regional public sector funding.

d. Activities

Professional firms undertake projects which include feasibility studies, structural surveys, marketing and business plans, legal and accountancy advice, property valuations, project plans, planning applications, website design, etc. The guiding principle is that ProHelp members give their firm's time, and assignments should be treated no differently than an instruction from a commercial client. For examples of the activities please see the links to a range of case studies at the end of this document (issue 6).

4. Programme Evaluation

The impact of ProHelp is mainly evaluated on a case by case basis. Therefore the following data regarding the impact of the programme is based on a specific case. For further information go to <http://www.bitc.org.uk/document.rm?id=9543>

5. Impact

In the last full year there were 603 members of 27 ProHelp groups across the country. They delivered over 10,000 hours of pro bono support in the community with a total value of £1,408,649 and supported 2,243 community groups.

This is an example of one project brokered by the ProHelp team in the South West of England:

a. Benefits to the local/ regional community

A £1 million building has been transferred from Bristol Council to the centre in a local asset transfer agreement.

b. Benefits of the community organisations

The needs of 180 organisations and 12,000 residents will be addressed.

c. Further Impact

The centre staff gained extensive experience in consulting, designing, planning, fundraising and executing complex projects that will prove invaluable in future endeavours.

Moreover it will maximise revenue with improved building energy efficiency and additional space that will provide substantial self-generated income.

6. Challenges

ProHelp has two major challenges to overcome:

- The first challenge is focused on the funding. As already mentioned small businesses constitute the largest number among companies who support community projects through ProHelp. This leads to barriers such as the lack of funding and difficulty communicating the importance of financial contributions as well as those they are already making in time. Moreover, the fact that the funding coming from the public administration is not given at a national level constitutes a problem. Not all regions or local administrations support funding; therefore, some communities do not get so much support.
- The second main challenge is the difficulty some community organizations encounter investing time on the project. The partner will need to spend time working with BITC and the business which means time out from their own work.

7. Contact & Further Information

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www.bitc.org.uk/community/employee_volunteering/prohelp/index.html

www.bitc.org.uk/resources/case_studies/prohelp_members.html

www.bitc.org.uk/document.rm?id=9543

www.bitc.org.uk/resources/case_studies/community_impact.html

www.bitc.org.uk/resources/case_studies/simons_design.html

www.bitc.org.uk/resources/case_studies/the_power_of_prohelp.html

Annex

ProHelp Case Study: “Far Cotton REC Centre finally opens its doors!”



It has taken nearly ten years, but now the hopes and dreams of a small community in Northampton have finally come to fruition.

In 1998, Far Cotton was devastated by massive floods and has struggled to recover ever since. People have long felt the area is a forgotten outpost of Northampton with very few community facilities.

The Southern Quarter Development Group (SQDG) was formed between three local residents associations and after much consultation with people living in area, the demand for much needed facilities and services became apparent.

After much consultation, it was decided that the Far Cotton recreation ground would be the most suitable site and work began!

Left: Georgie Atkinson (SQDG Vice Chair) and David Babister (ProHelp Architect) at the official opening

ProHelp member firm Hewitsons helped form a company limited by guarantee and register the charity, which allowed SQDG to be a formal entity from which to receive funding. The management team worked hard to raise the money required, a cool £2.8m, which came as a mix from emda, Northants Partnerships, local authority and the remainder raised by SQDG themselves. This would include making improvements to the local school building to provide educational classes in arts and drama. GSS Architecture, another ProHelp firm, worked along side SQDG for a number of years to complete a scheme that met the requirements, involving both sites.

A joint effort from ProHelp’s Underwoods and, once again, Hewitsons solicitors helped SQDG negotiate lease terms when, on completion, the new building was to be handed over to the community.

On Saturday 5th May 2007 the REC centre officially opened its doors for a ceremony attended by local dignitaries and a fantastic display of local heritage. The new community centre will eventually provide full services including a library with a computer suite, sports facilities, medical services and a community café. Bookings are already being taken!

Georgie Atkinson, local school teacher and Vice Chair of SQDG, says “I am confident that both facilities will be heavily used by local people. They deliver the services people wanted. We hope to engage young people with the aim of reducing vandalism and anti-social behaviour in the area. This is a project driven by the people, for the people, addressing local issues.”

And of her ProHelp colleagues, Georgie comments:

“We are so grateful to ProHelp. In the initial stages, we had no funds and no expertise with which to tackle such a huge project. We could never have achieved this without the professional help and guidance we received”.

David Babister, ProHelp architect, comments:

“Projects such as these are great to get involved in. It’s been a pleasure to work with such inspirational, focussed and determined people. It’s been a delight to attend the official opening and see the people involved at the start, still here, making it all happen.



“The ethos of GSS and other ProHelp firms involved is to assist with the regeneration of the area and build links with the voluntary sector. ProHelp is a great vehicle for helping local firms do this and to develop networks with other like minded professionals”.

INCLUDE – Pathways to Community Investment

The European project INCLUDE provides local intermediaries like civil society organisations, economic development agencies, chambers of commerce and public authorities with support that will help them to engage businesses in innovative cross-sectoral partnerships. INCLUDE identifies on a worldwide scale good examples of collaborative business initiatives as well as business engagement in cross-sectoral partnerships, which contribute towards skills development and employability of disadvantaged groups, towards social inclusion and innovation in addressing societal challenges and communicates them.

INCLUDE builds upon the results of the CSR-Laboratory “Skills for Employability enhanced through Employee Engagement” which was carried out as part of the European Alliance for CSR and is run jointly by UPJ and the ENGAGE initiative coordinated by Business in the Community (BITC). Partners of the project are the German Federal Department of Labour and Social Affairs, Citi-Group, Asociata pentru Relatii Comunitare (Romania), Önkéntes Központ Alapítvány (Hungary), SMartKolektiv (Serbia), Pontis Foundation (Slovakia) and Özel Sektör Gönüllüler Derneği (Turkey).

The project is supported by the European Commission (Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities).

Further information about the project is available at www.bitc.org.uk/global/include.html (in English) www.upj.de/include (in German)

UPJ

UPJ is the German national network of engaged businesses and local non-profit intermediary organizations. Its projects and programmes create new connections between businesses, civil society organizations and public authorities thus contributing to solve societal challenges and to shape sustainable communities. UPJ, a registered charity under German law, provides organizations from the business, community and public sectors with information and consultancy to improve their Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Social Responsibility activities. www.upj.de



ENGAGE

ENGAGE is an international programme that brings together businesses and community organisations around the globe to increase the quality and amount of employee community engagement in their local communities. Its mission is twofold: To inspire, mobilise and support companies to develop sustainable community investment programmes, and to provide community organisations with a network, tools and support that will help them work more effectively with business partners. www.engageyouremployees.org



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