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money there that they could give us to help get the shop ready and help get us off our feet.

But then after a fair bit of time spent with First Port we realised they could only give us money and help if we weren't as organised and as ready to go as we were. Because we already had a business plan and a marketing strategy in place and a group of customers in place ready to come with us they couldn't

“I felt the biggest problem we had was because we were at a stage - we were so ready to go, we had the customers, we had everything ready – we were sort of in between the areas for help.”

help us, they could only help someone who didn't have any of that and they would help you put them in place, so it wasn't any help.

Business Gateway wasn't any help either – again all they could tell us was “yeah, your business plan looks great, your marketing strategy looks great, do you want to go on any of these free courses we run to write business plans?” Well, what's the point in that? We've already got a business plan and there's no point in going on a course to write something we've already got. So they weren't much help either.

The Social Enterprise Fund was eventually very beneficial and eventually we did get the help and support from them we needed but there was a lot of hoops that we had to go through because we weren't as down the

line as we should have been for them to help us.

So I felt the biggest problem we had was because we were at a stage - we were so ready to go, we had the customers, we had everything ready – we were sort of in between the areas for help.

There was areas of help for folk who were completely starting up from scratch with nothing and there was help for people who'd been going for two or three years. There was nothing for folk who had a good business model, a good business plan and were ready to go and just needed help getting off the ground. There seemed to be very limited help there.

Thankfully with the help we got from RCVS we got over that, we cleared the last hurdle and things are gonna get a lot easier. If it wasn't for that it wouldn't have happened and we'd have been really struggling.

What about the positives of becoming a SE? What are the highlights so far?

There's been a few good moments: getting the shop ready and getting opened on time was a good moment for us.

When the customers we had from our previous company were happy to sign up and come with us that gave us a good feeling as well because we had customers that been with RCVS/CXS for a long time and they were very happy to come with us – obviously it shows they had great faith in us and our ability to deliver.

Another good high was winning the contract to take over support for Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire. It's our second biggest contract and it was getting done by

someone who was hugely overcharging them and they made it exceptionally difficult for us to take over the contract.

Every hurdle they could throw at us they did throw at us just because they could and for no other reason.

But clearing all that was a pretty much a big high for me as well.

In part two of this Q&A Eddie will talk about the future of NCS, the social enterprise sector in Renfrewshire and the possibility of SEs becoming the business model of the future.



SE Connections

Social Enterprise Connections



Issue 4
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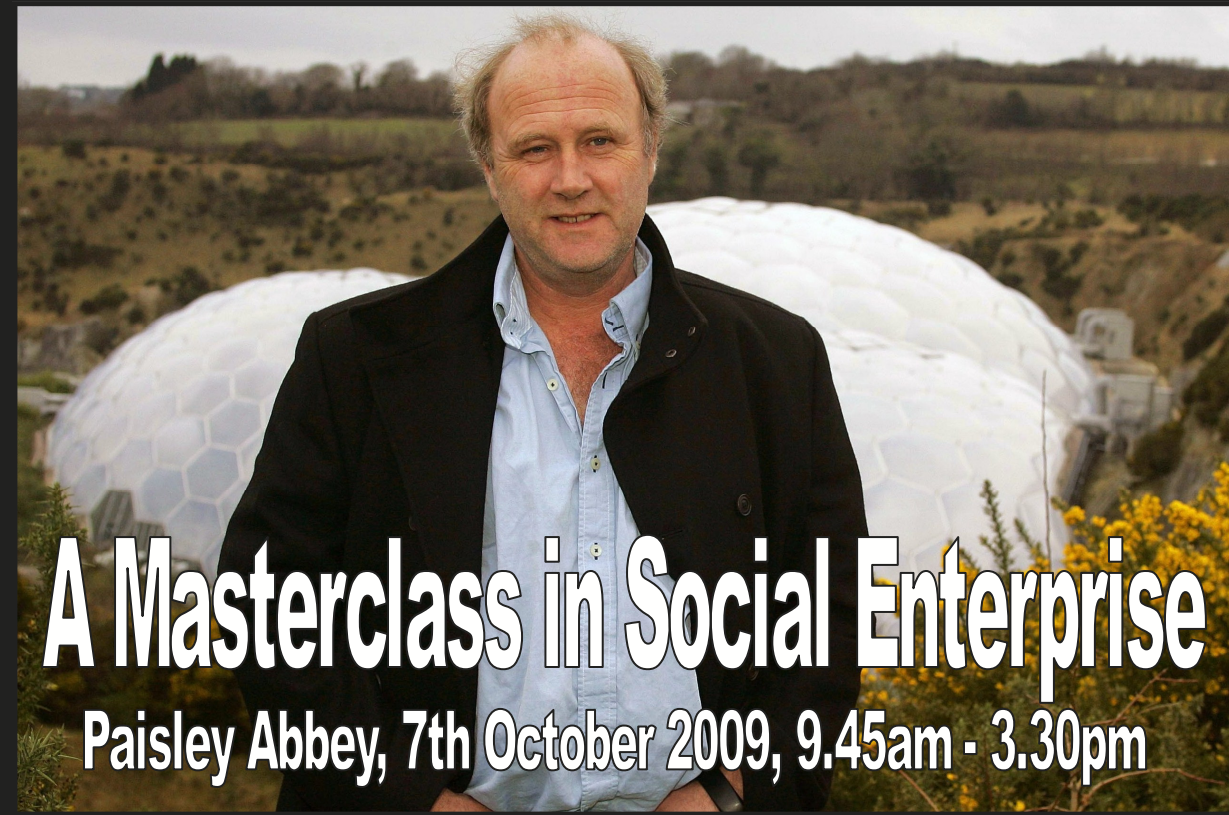
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A Masterclass in Social Enterprise

Paisley Abbey, 7th October 2009, 9.45am - 3.30pm

World famous social entrepreneur Tim Smit CBE (pictured) will be leading this unique event that simply cannot be missed by anyone involved in social enterprise.

The day-long event will allow delegates to immerse themselves in the reasons why the world needs social enterprises and detail how the sector is now a growing business movement estimated to contribute around £2 billion to the Scottish economy every year.

Learn From the Best

Chief Executive and Co-founder of the ground-breaking Eden Project, Tim has been praised as an “inspirational and unconventional business leader”.

At the Masterclass he will share how the Eden Project created jobs, community

renewal and prosperity – an environmental “world first” that has contributed over £900million to the local economy.

Using his extensive experience he'll share his ideas on 21st century business, charity and why the world needs social enterprise in this period of economic downturn.

The Power to Change

Tim said: “Social Enterprise is often described as business for the hard of thinking. The great challenge is for us not to patronise ourselves by thinking that social enterprise cannot be genuinely transformative on a large scale.

It is, in my view, a form of 'corporate structure or organisation' that has the potential to change the very fabric of society and business itself. If you want to go muesli

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RIERSEP is a partnership of support agencies and social enterprises across Renfrewshire, Inverclyde and East Renfrewshire.

It was set up to help the social economy sector grow and develop.

Merged from three separate local social economy partnerships, RIERSEP believe working together achieves more for the local social economy sector.

www.riersep.org.uk

Understanding Social Enterprise Glasgow
14th & 15th October
10am – 4pm

This programme will allow you to develop a broad view of the concept of social enterprise, the challenges established enterprises currently face, and what the future holds for SEs.

Further information:

0131 243 2670
learn@theacademy-ssea.org

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weaving, wear open toed sandals and get in touch with yourself, go somewhere else, I'm not interested, because it won't change the world."

Years of Experience

Tim will be joined by Graham Bell, Chief Executive of the award-winning and world renowned Kibble, an education and care centre and one of Scotland's oldest social enterprises. Graham will draw lessons from his own experiences of the need for social enterprise in Scotland.

Graham stated: "We are delighted that Tim Smit is coming to Renfrewshire to lead this social enterprise Masterclass. We will share with delegates how social enterprise approaches can be adapted to a range of social issues and how problems can be turned into opportunities. It promises to be a lively day!"

A Sector Champion

The Masterclass will be chaired by award-winning business journalist Antonia Swinson, Chief Executive of the SSEC and long-standing champion of social enterprise. The Coalition is the national collective voice for Scotland's social enterprise movement.



Antonia Swinson

Antonia said: "Social enterprise is setting the agenda for real change in Scotland and it is very exciting to welcome a world class social entrepreneur such as Tim Smit to Paisley, to share wisdom on how to grow this dynamic area of the Scottish economy.

Whether you are in business, working for a charity, or a member of the general public keen to find out more about social enterprise from leading figures in this sector, this is a must attend event."

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Come Together

This one-off event will bring together third sector organisations, local authorities, chambers of commerce and



Graham Bell

representatives from the public and private sector and is aimed at anyone interested in social enterprise, business and community life, and in the future of Scottish business.

Twenty social enterprises will also be exhibiting at the Masterclass, drawn from across Scotland, including five from the Highlands and Islands area, and interactive case studies from the Social Enterprise Academy.

Partnership

RCVS will be hosting this event in partnership with the Scottish Government, Renfrewshire Council, Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce, The Kibble Centre, Scottish Social Enterprise Coalition and Voluntary Action Scotland.

Janis McDonald, CEO of Renfrewshire CVS: "Renfrewshire CVS welcomes the calibre of the speakers and anticipates this will be a major local event this year. We are grateful to the partners for their support in bringing such a quality event to the area."

Tickets are now on sale for this special Masterclass, including discounts for OAPs, organisations with income of less than £25k per annum, group bookings and the unemployed. They can be ordered online at:

www.renfrewshirechamber.com/MasterclassinSocialEnterprise.asp

Alternatively, please contact:

Anne Keir
0141 587 2487
anne.keir@rcvsweb.co.uk

Q&A: Network Computer Services Ltd with Eddie Hart, Manager

Tell us about NCS?

Eddie: The company is called Network Computer Services Limited. We offer IT support and maintenance, break/fix maintenance and support to companies, network support for servers and work stations as well as for home users – they can bring their computers and if they need a health check or something fixed we can do it in the shop.

The majority of the work is the networks that we support for different companies. We've also still got the wireless network which covers the Ferguslie Park area. There's not many customers that still get their internet through it but Ferguslie, being the most deprived area in Scotland, some of the people there who just couldn't get internet access through anywhere else get it through the wireless network.

Why did you decide to become a social enterprise?

The timing was perfect for it. There was a number of things we wanted to be able to do – to continually be able to offer things like the wireless network in Ferguslie Park and to look at other wireless networks

we'd been asked to do in Neilston and other rural and deprived areas.

Doing it as a private company, there was too many constraints: we would need to get them to pay all the money up front which would mean they'd need to go and get grants. It would've just made it a very time laborious operation.

Also as a private company you've got share holders and board members who are wanting paid, so there's a lot more demands on you. Because we came from the charity background – we came from RCVS to breaking away – we wanted to keep our prices as low and the focus



customers we've already got. So it just seemed the logical choice.

What sort of difficulties have you encountered with becoming a SE?

In all honesty most of the problems we've had was bad timing and how far down the line we already were. By the time the decision had been made to set up ourselves we already had a business plan, we already had a set of customers, so there's a limited

"We saw social enterprise as a better business model, that better suited the environment we're working in."

on helping charities and voluntary organisations rather than the focus be on making money.

So we saw social enterprise as a better business model, that better suited the environment we're working in and particularly the

number of places you can actually go for help in that situation.

We spoke to First Port. When we first spoke to them they seemed very, very good and they would be able to help us from start to finish and there was



The Social Enterprise Awards are searching for Britain's most successful and inspiring social enterprises to win the following categories: Best Social Enterprise (turnover of £1 million plus), Best Social Enterprise (turnover of less than £1 million) and Best New Social Enterprise.

Winners can receive up to £5,000 as well as business support packages and a national media platform to promote themselves.

The Social Enterprise Coalition is running the awards in partnership with the Scottish Social Enterprise Coalition, the Social Economy Network in Northern Ireland and the Wales Co-operative Centre.

Deadline: 28/09/09

Further information:

www.socialenterpriseawards.org.uk

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