



Peer

The official newsletter of the PEER Group
People Encouraging Enterprise in Rossendale



Mike's CD is as easy as ABC

A PIONEERING small Stacksteads company has been flying the flag for Great Britain at an international trade fair in Switzerland.

The Spell People is a range of interactive CDs to help very young children develop their basic skills and they were on display recently at one of Europe's largest education exhibitions in Basel.

The company is the brainchild of former textile designer Mike Sacks and his work has already been given an official seal of approval by standards agency BECTA.

The Spell People are cartoon characters and each one represents a different letter of the alphabet. On the CDs the

Spell People, who can talk and sing, feature in a series of magical games.

"The idea of The Spell People is to help pre-school children develop basic skills on the computer, simple spelling and the alphabet all in a fun way that combines colours, shapes and numbers," explains Mike, who officially launched the company earlier this year. The project came about, quite literally, by accident. Mike slipped on snow on his garden path, broke his leg and, while he was recuperating, started work on the idea. That was seven years ago.

"It has taken time and a lot of imagination to develop the concept and the characters. I eventually

managed to produce a prototype and took it out to local schools, friends and family and, from their feedback, was able to put together a polished final product."

The Top of the Valley team at Futures Park put Mike in touch with PEER in 2003.

"In fact, after I had first told the PEER chairman Ronnie Barker about the business he came to see the work in progress. He was so impressed with the product he said he would like to buy a CD for his granddaughter as soon as he could. True to his word, he came round to my house the following Sunday. He was my very first customer!"

The cash from that first sale has been framed and is proudly displayed on Mike's living room wall. The work goes on for Mike, who has already had the product bought by Sure Start in Bacup. He has produced three CDs and has another in development.

For more information about The Spell People there's a web site www.thespellpeople.co.uk or you can call 01706 873795.



Andy's update



Welcome to the first issue of the PEER newsletter. PEER is a unique project. Led and managed by the Rossendale community it's about working with passionate people to bring business ideas to life. And it's also about working with other bodies, throughout the borough, to help create the conditions for these businesses to be successful. Over the past year we've worked with over 80 individuals and projects. We've helped businesses to start and to expand. That's created jobs and incomes. But it has also created inspiration for others to have a go themselves. PEER is there to help them make it happen.

In each issue of PEER News we will describe a couple of the people and business ideas that we have worked with, and who have started down the road to a successful business. In later issues we'll also talk in more general terms about what PEER is doing. We hope to give readers a clear idea of how PEER works and what great businesses are taking shape in the valley. We hope you find it interesting. Please get in touch with me if you would like to know more.

Andy



Joanne finds new friends and business

Issue 01



WHEN Joanne O'Donoghue separated from her husband she moved back to Lancashire from Yorkshire. With her self-confidence shaken and few friends close by, the 55-year-old soon found her social life was non-existent. Her efforts to find a club that catered for over 40s who, like Joanne, were in need of a bit of adult company were all frustrated. She even drew a blank when she tried the internet.

Despairing she decided to do something radical about her situation...she set up her own club!

Six months later Joanne's 40 Plus Friends has taken off throughout the area and, as well as whole new circle of friends, Joanne has the makings of a thriving business.

"It was only when I found myself on my own that I realised that there was such a grave shortage of clubs which offer support and friendship. There are plenty of dating agencies but they aim primarily at younger singles and that wasn't what I was looking for.

"I tried the internet, dining and dating clubs but that was too stilted. I wanted something

much more informal, where there was someone on hand to help break the ice. When I couldn't find it I decided to set one up myself and see if there was any interest."

So in June, and with the help of her son Graham Kirk, Joanne produced and distributed around 200 flyers door-to-door in Helmshore, Haslingden and Edenfield where she now lives.

"The response was unbelievable. We got about 40 calls from people who were interested in coming on the night out. It was immediately obvious we had tapped into a need."

In just six months Joanne has built on the momentum. 40 Plus Friends currently has 200 members and they put on events every two weeks.

"We have found that the most popular format involves informal dining and disco along with live entertainment. Basically people want somewhere to be able to chat, eat, dance and feel comfortable without pressure of match-making"

What quickly became clear to Graham and Joanne was that

there was a market for the kind of organised events for 40 Plus Friends way beyond Rossendale. Although the company is still in its infancy there are already plans to expand the horizons across the country and they even hope to organise a 40 Plus Friends holiday. Graham has also developed the club's web site.

The pair have been given support from PEER the community-based business support initiative which aims to help people in Rossendale make a success of their business ideas.

"I have a great deal of experience in sales/customer service and in hair and beauty, while Graham's background is in property and we have never done anything like this, so it has been really useful to be able to speak to someone to help make the business dream a reality, which is what PEER has done," says Joanne.

For more information about 40PlusFriends there's a web site www.40plusfriends.com or you can call 01706 828395. Picture shows

Joanne and Graham of 40 Plus Friends



To find out how PEER can help you, contact

Andy McNae
07971 190827

We hope you enjoyed PEER news

