



people encouraging enterprise in rossendale

newsletter

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Facilitator's report

It has certainly been an interesting six months. OK, that's a bit of an understatement! The financial crisis and resulting economic slow-down have been causing tremendous worry to the vast majority of Rossendale businesses.

Difficult times

Some businesses are facing very difficult times and good businesses are being caught up in the troubles of others. At the same time many businesses are trading strongly. For these, the challenges are around cash flow, confidence and by implication, 'good' management.

Thinking it through

Many entrepreneurs are now spending more time thinking through the business planning process. They recognise that if they are going to have any chance of raising finance, then their financial arguments are going to have to be robust. This has meant that at the moment we are spending a lot more time guiding clients through the process, helping them make sure their business case stacks up.

Friends

On top of that, a lot of past clients have been contacting me wanting to talk through their problems. This is very true of 'one man' businesses where it can be a lonely time when it's not going well. In times like this, just having someone to talk to and bounce ideas off can be invaluable.

Neighbours

Another important development has been PEER's work in helping neighbouring communities to develop their own enterprise facilitation projects.

This involvement has been a chance for us to reflect on some of the principles that underpin the work that we do. I keep coming back to some real key words – like caring, competent, connected, accessible, trusted, reactive, personal.

Trust and connections

In short, enterprise facilitation is about working with someone who you can trust, is really well connected and who knows what they are talking about. They are available, without cost, for you to talk to when and where it suits you best, and because they care about you, they make sure any help you get is right for you.

The key thing is the 'connected' part, and that's where the PEER Support Board comes in. It's really the hard work of the board in supporting their Enterprise Facilitator that makes our support work so well.

PEER Support

To date we have worked with close to four hundred Rossendale people or groups wanting to start or grow businesses. At any one time we are working with about thirty businesses. We have been working with some clients, on and off, for over five years. We continue to work with a tremendous range of enterprises, from big projects to home-based start-up businesses. Our service is free, confidential and open ended. It is as much or as little help as you need to find a way forward for your dream.

PEER Support is always on the look out for new board members, people who care about Rossendale and who want to put something back. If you'd like to find out more, please check out the website or contact us directly.



Facilitator, Andy MacNae, at the Valley at Work exhibition

To find out more go to www.peer-support.co.uk To contact Andy, call him on 07971 190 827

Valley at Work

Valley at Work started from PEER Support. Our clients expressed a desire to meet and interact with other local business people.

'A lot of people who were starting out found that what was already out there was either too formal or too costly. There was a clear need for something that could bring people together' says Andy MacNae, 'several members of the PEER Support Board decided to do something about it.'

The No Pressure Network

The emphasis is on being a supportive and nurturing network. It's free to join. The regular monthly meetings are supported by a website and a members' newsletter.

Requests for help or contacts are answered. There are one hundred and seventy regular subscribers to the monthly newsletter, and meetings attract twenty to thirty people.

Some members' businesses have taken off purely because of the network and others have gained regular business from the connections made. For others, the benefit is simply that they get a chance to share their experiences with people who understand. People who are early in their start-up phase ask questions at meetings and have them answered by others who are six months further down the line.

We spoke to some regulars to discover what Valley at Work means to them.



Phil Tickle of Banana IT in discussion at the recent Valley at Work exhibition

Anna Bowen Bandidoot

Anna is a PEER Support Board member. She volunteered for the steering group that looked into setting up Valley at Work, and is now the Chair.

When we looked at what we wanted to achieve we aimed to cherry pick the best of other networking groups and leave out the bits we didn't like. So, now we have speakers who can talk about generic business-related topics like how to do a presentation. We focus on the things anyone running their own business needs to know. What we aim to create is a network with a friendly atmosphere. People are very open and honest. There is always someone who can help in the room - or someone who knows someone. That help often arrives away from the meeting.

Pete Berrisford Berrisford Advertising

I work on my own all day long, so for one thing, it is good to meet up with other people who are in a similar position and we can discuss things. It makes you realise that you are not on your own. I have made some really good contacts, had great feedback and picked up some work. Bottom line: I enjoy going.

Tracey Sunderland Sallywag

Three years ago, Tracey set up a quarterly magazine called Sallywag aimed at young families in Rossendale.

When I started Sallywag I felt there was a real vacuum when it came to business support in the area. Valley at Work became a real lifeline for people like me. It is fabulous. It's not simply about getting work but being able to find out useful information. It suits me because it is not overly formal. It is friendly, but at the same time very professional.

Phil Tickle Banana IT

Phil is a longstanding member of the PEER board and is a member of the Valley at Work Steering Group.

I have always been a keen advocate of networking so was happy to get involved. I felt that too many business networks were intimidating for people just starting out. I call them rooms 'full of suits.' Valley at Work always avoids that.

Valley at Work continued

Alyson Cadd Business Backup

Alyson made huge strides with her freelance administration and clerical company after Valley at Work put her in touch with several contacts. She is now in a position to take on more staff to help manage the growing firm.

She says:

Valley at Work has been great, primarily because it has the right people behind it. It is purely altruistic – no individual or company is making a profit from it. I was in the early stages of setting up my business but needed help further developing it. After attending one of the monthly Valley at Work meetings, I followed the advice to promote my business to other members. This resulted in three positive responses and the work has continued to grow from there.

I have recently received a referral from a Valley at Work member who manages a small network of agents and wanted to take on help. The company put me in touch with other contacts, and now I am at the stage where I could be managing fifty to sixty agents by the end of the month – with the potential to double that figure by the end of the year. This success is all thanks to registering with a free local business group and attending a few sociable, useful monthly meetings.

Gavin Smith Pioneer Gym

Gavin set up Pioneer Gym over 8 years ago.

Valley at Work is a fantastic way of encouraging local businesses to share their experiences – no other initiative in the area offers this. It has enabled me to make some great contacts, and I've been able to help others out as well.

Esther Ferry-Kennington, Horse and Bamboo Theatre

Esther joined the network to make links with other local businesses and get a feel for what other businesses are in the area.

It has given me a real opportunity not just to get to know people and businesses in the area. I feel more a part of the valley, and that helps me to navigate the company within it.

Ronnie Barker Chair of Peer Support

When PEER won the 2007 North West Capital of Enterprise Award it gave us a little finance to make the network happen. Because Valley at Work has come from our clients it is very inclusive. I hear a lot of positive feedback.

Val Carder Valley at Work

Val makes sure Valley at Work works. She organises the meetings, keeps the newsletter and website up to date and is a vital point of contact between the members.

In short, it's about being the information hub for members. They know who to contact if they need to make a general announcement or request for information between meetings. What makes the whole thing work? It's a network for people who don't like networking. It's friendly and there is no pressure.



Pioneer Gym owners look ahead, at the Valley at Work business exhibition

For more information visit: www.valleyatwork.co.uk



Meet Andy Hunter

Hyndburn's Enterprise Facilitator



'Hyndburn is full of talented people and a strong work ethic. If we can help harness that, and get things moving, everyone wins.'

Who are you and what's your background?

I'm a Lancashire boy, who has been lucky enough and worked hard enough to have enjoyed seeing quite a lot of the world. I graduated in Law and worked in the engineering and construction business. I then studied for an MBA at Cranfield. In 1990 I formed a software company – we ended up developing some successful software that's used in many well-known organisations.

Why become an Enterprise Facilitator?

I didn't know that I DID want to be one! My girlfriend, Louise, saw the advert, and said 'You could do that.' When I started to understand what the Sirolli model was about, and saw examples of what PEER had been doing, I got hooked on the idea. I was very honoured to be offered the position.

What's HyBOSS and where?

Hyndburn Business Opportunities Skills Support. We modelled ourselves on the success that PEER Support has had. I work with people and businesses in Accrington, Baxenden, Rishton, Oswaldtwistle, Clayton-le-Moors, Church and Great Harwood.

How do you find clients?

We have a fantastic, really diverse group of people who act as our Enterprise Board. They are introducing me to all sorts of people – from the leader of the Council, to a mate down the pub, from their grandma to the local doctor – anyone and everyone, and the more the merrier. The model works.

By being introduced to these people, they know about HyBOSS, and they tell people

they know. So if someone wants, for example, to talk through an idea for a new business all they have to do is call me. I'll meet them wherever they feel most comfortable, and we'll have a confidential chat. Then I can check with our Board whether there's anyone or thing that can add any value... Simple!

Hyndburn is full of talented people and a strong work ethic. If we can help harness that, and get things moving, everyone wins.

Contact Andy Hunter on 07736 486707 if you would like help to explore your business or project ideas for Hyndburn.

Business exhibition

The inaugural Valley at Work business exhibition was given the 'thumbs up' by both exhibitors and visitors.

The exhibition, which took place over May 12th and 13th at Bacup Leisure Hall, had over two hundred visitors to the thirty trade stands. Exhibition organiser, Iain Wight, of Ask Rossendale, said 'We have had really positive feedback since the exhibition.'

Many past and present PEER Support clients had stands at the event, as did PEER Support. Andy MacNae was usually seen surrounded by clients in Do-dah's café. The visitors commended both the layout of the exhibition and the variety of businesses exhibiting. The exhibitors commented on the good levels of interest from the visitors, with many reporting a number of good 'leads' to follow up.

Hazel Harding, former Leader of Lancashire County Council, said 'There are so many brilliant businesses working in Rossendale and delivering for customers far and wide. This exhibition gives us all the chance to meet them and see the quality of Rossendale.'

The Valley at Work steering group is now considering making the business exhibition an annual event, adapting it to reflect the comments of both visitors and exhibitors.

'There are so many brilliant businesses working in Rossendale and delivering for customers far and wide.'

Hazel Harding, former Leader, Lancashire County Council



Finding out about Ask Rossendale, right, while above, a visitor inspects the Essentially Natural stand