



Aspire Ryde



Location
Ryde, Isle of Wight

Founded
2014

Legal structure
Charitable Incorporated Organisation

Description of activity
Numerous music and creative arts groups, with a number of sessions dedicated to improving wellbeing; room hire; café and pop up restaurant; selling paint donated by manufacturers to other community groups or local members of the community; and selling refurbished furniture and bicycles.

Key assets
Aspire Church, previously owned by the Church of England, currently undergoing asset transfer.

Employees
Three full-time equivalent staff (One full-time, four part-time)

Volunteers
120

Biggest obstacle to success
Capacity to deliver and the ability to delegate.

Overview of Aspire Ryde

In 2014, entrepreneur Heath Monaghan (now CEO of Aspire Ryde) and his family moved to the Isle of Wight. One of the first things he noticed was how Ryde, the largest town on the Isle of Wight, with the largest population, did not have a community centre or somewhere central for the community to come together. Heath subsequently identified that voluntary sector and social enterprise work in the area was particularly fragmented, and as such, there was an opportunity for a community hub.

Originally built in 1840, Holy Trinity Church closed in January 2014 as it only had 12 regular attendees. Subsequently, Heath approached the Church of England (CoE) and asked if they would consider giving the building over to the community so that it could be transformed into a community hub, to which they agreed. Consequently, Heath, together with a local community group, took ownership of the church in February 2014 and developed Aspire Ryde; a social hub for the local community, gain a feeling of belonging, regardless of gender, age, mental health or employment status. Aspire Ryde achieve this through delivering numerous music and creative arts groups, with a number of sessions dedicated to improving wellbeing a 'Men in Sheds' and 'Women in Sheds' group which encourage men and women to be useful with their hands. For example, through the refurbishment of donated bicycles, they build up friendships and provide peer support, which helps to reduce social isolation. Aspire Ryde also hires out areas within the hub for client meetings, parties and events, in addition to running a café and pop up restaurant; selling paint donated by manufacturers to other community groups or local members of the community; and selling donated furniture and bicycles refurbished by the Men in Sheds group.

The business now sees around 2500 people utilising its services every week and turnover increased from around £20,000 in the first year to over £100,000 in 2016.



Aspire Ryde's journey to success

This section summarises the key factors that Aspire Ryde attribute to the success of the business and the challenges it has faced along the way.

Legal status

Originally, Aspire Ryde was established as a Community Interest Company (CIC), with the directors providing an initial investment of £1000 into the business without knowing whether it would be successful. However, it was soon realised how successful the hub was becoming and what its potential could be. The directors subsequently set up a steering group of local residents, which provided them with the means to act more inclusively with the local community. However, as support from the local community increased over time, it was recognised that there would be a clear benefit for the hub to become a registered charity, offering greater transparency and accountability to the local community. The business therefore registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in 2016 and the original CIC gifted all of its goodwill and assets to the newly reformed charity.

Effective strategy

Success for the hub is best described using its strategy and business model which focuses on three facets; people, place, and projects. The business aims to empower people to improve their lives and help them realise their potential. They have numerous examples of individuals who have transformed their lives through accessing the services they deliver. For example, the business considers the Men in Sheds group a great success, not only in tackling social isolation, but also in generating income at the same time. In terms of 'place', the hub has seen a huge increase in footfall, which is attributed to the physical transformation of what was once a redundant building, into something that is fit for purpose for local community needs. Finally, Aspire Ryde base their success on the scale of the projects they deliver. For example, in 2017, they directly assisted 22 homeless people into accommodation, gave a mailbox address to 31, and provided 29 tents and sleeping bags. Furthermore, the Men in Sheds and Women in Sheds projects attract around 100 participants a week.

The business has also developed its own social impact calculator, which considers these impact themes. This shows that for every pound of income they have received through trading or grants in 2016, they can attribute an 800% increase in the value added by their activities. The business considers this tremendous value for money in addition to being a useful tool to demonstrate to funders how their investment will add value to the local community.

Financial self-sustainability

Aspire Ryde's business model is based on maintaining financial self-sustainability, which it considers essential given the recent austerity and the lack of grant funding currently available. Although the business does receive a proportion of grant funding, it is not reliant on cyclical grant based funding, which is typically available for relatively short periods. Over the past four years income generated through trading activities has increased and has been achieved through a range of means, i.e. letting rooms and other spaces within the hub, selling food and beverages in the café and pop up restaurant and selling paint and refurbished furniture and bicycles. The CEO is aware of a number of charitable organisations which have been solely reliant on grants and has witnessed the issues created when grant funding ends, i.e. not only do customers suffer because the business can no longer deliver its service, but staff are also negatively affected when they are made redundant. The business highlights that because the local community own and run the hub, they feel they are getting something in return and so are willing to invest in it, whether that means contributions in time or money. Simply relying on donations is considered a dangerous model because in times of austerity as they are the first thing to get cut from personal budgets.

In the move towards becoming financially self-sustaining, one of the most innovative ways of generating income developed by the hub is the selling of paint no longer required by manufacturers. After researching the excessive cost for manufacturers to send unwanted paint to landfill, the hub directly approached suppliers and offered an alternative solution of donating the paint to the hub for a small fee. This represents a significant saving to the manufacturers, with the hub then being able to either sell the paint on, or redistribute it to other churches or charities. This model provides a 100% profit margin for Aspire Ryde and represents a regular income source in comparison to sporadic fundraising. In addition, although the 'Men in Sheds' group was initially set up to reduce social isolation in men, it also generates income through the sale of the furniture and bicycles the group refurbishes, which also provides a 100% profit margin as the furniture and bicycles are donated to the hub.

The asset transfer of the church to Aspire Ryde also increases the financial sustainability of the business. The official transfer is not yet complete, however the hub appreciates that this is a time consuming process. The business acknowledges that without this building it would not be the success it is today, as the sheer size and nature of the premises allows for the wide variety of services and group activities it provides. Nevertheless, the hub recognises that although the church provides an effective space to deliver the multitude of services that it does, the building is falling into a state of disrepair and some spaces are not yet fit for purpose, which poses a financial challenge for the future if the hub is to maintain the site and grow further.



Despite grant funding still representing an important element of Aspire Ryde's business cycle, capacity and skills amongst the team for developing proposals is limited. As such, the CEO is keen to ensure that the business is not reliant on one person for bid writing and subsequently mentors other members of staff so that the skillsets needed to ensure future sustainability are embedded within the team. However, being financially self-sustainable will mean that Aspire Ryde does not have to depend on the availability of grants, nor will it have to rely on the abilities of the CEO for funding applications.

Entrepreneurialism

Another factor considered essential to the success of the business is having the entrepreneurial skills and freedom to express creativity in a focussed manner. In particular, the ability to not only be comfortable in taking risks, but having the skills required to evaluate risk effectively. It is therefore vital for the business that the board of trustees comprises individuals who not only have the relevant business knowledge and expertise to be creative and encourage ideas, but also those who will challenge decisions and act as a sounding board for staff. As such, the hub has performed a skills gap analysis to inform the selection of the current seven trustees on the board. This analysis found the following skills set requirements:

- a business owner who can provide the entrepreneurial expertise required to generate income;
- a heritage building specialist who can provide advice on how to utilise the church and highlight any building restrictions;
- a creative person who comes up with innovative ideas for groups and sessions;
- a local resident who is able to question decisions being made from a community perspective rather than from a business perspective, ensuring ideas are well grounded and relevant for local community needs;
- a bookkeeper to make sure accounting is transparent; and
- an individual with extensive financial expertise.

The hub is keen to expand operations where appropriate. However, it also acknowledges that there is a need to deliver all existing and future services effectively and efficiently. One of the main drivers of success is recognising when to say no to certain opportunities because there is a risk of damaging the business' reputation by embarking on a project that cannot be delivered effectively.

Relationship building and networking

One of the most important entrepreneurial skills highlighted as essential to the success of the business is relationship building, in particular relationships with potential stakeholders, the public and users of the hub. Being able to network effectively and communicate ideas in a simple and coherent way can drive creativity within the business forward, contributing to its financial sustainability.

In terms of key relationships, the hub considers the CoE a fundamental partner due to the asset transfer of the church to the business. However, the hub also believes that the CoE connection provides them with an air of credibility due to its size and reputation, and facilitates links with other CoE activity on the island.

Through letting out a range of different workspaces, the hub has been able to develop several relationships with key partners such as other charities and public bodies. These relationships not only lead to the generation of additional income, but also contribute to the hub's softer aims of reducing social isolation and improving wellbeing. For example, local area coordinators from Public Health are regularly based in the hub, which has led to connections with the NHS who now refer patients with mental health issues to projects run by the hub, i.e. Men in Sheds.

Furthermore, a successful collaboration with Social Enterprise Link Hampshire has not only led to social enterprises in the area looking to hire workspace at Aspire Ryde, but has also facilitated an additional relationship with a stakeholder who is collaborating with the hub to deliver a crowdfunding campaign for a 'balls and slides' play area in the main hall.

Another successful relationship has been with the local Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB). Aware of the desire in the community for a space where information and advice could be provided, Aspire Ryde ran a weekly session with health and housing expert contacts. After six months, the CAB recognised how successful this session was and instigated their own collaboration whereby the CAB run regular drop-in sessions. Although the hub only facilitates this, it believes it is good for business as 30-40 people access this service every week, and most of these people purchase refreshments, in addition to becoming more aware of the other services the hub provides.

Engaging staff and volunteers

Aspire Ryde has five paid employees, one full-time and four part-time. All are permanent posts. This is in addition to 120 volunteers. A board of seven trustees currently governs the business. Over the last year, the number of paid staff and volunteers has increased which the hub attributes to both the local community's increased awareness of its success and the credibility of its facilities and services. The hub also believes it offers an attractive environment to work and/or volunteer.



Aspire Ryde consider highly engaged employees and volunteers central to the successful running of the business, as motivated staff are needed to provide a consistent service. The hub prides itself on its ability to inspire and equip volunteers and every day the hub provides a hot lunch for all staff and volunteers. This flat structure, where stakeholders, volunteers, employees and managers all sit down together makes everyone feel part of the organisation, which encourages input and creative ideas. In addition, with the experience and skills gained at Aspire Ryde, many volunteers have gone on to find paid work.

The hub believes having paid staff is a necessity given the rapid growth of the business. The CEO has employed staff to take over operational duties so that he can focus on developing the strategy of the business. Whilst volunteers are provided with training and are committed and passionate about the hub, having paid staff ensures the delivery of a consistent and professional service.

Future direction

Although Aspire Ryde currently receives approximately 40% of its income through grant funding, the business aims to reduce this proportion considerably through the introduction of new services. For example, it plans to develop the main church hall into a large children’s play area with balls and slides and an indoor rock climbing facility. In order to do this, the hub plans to run a crowdfunding campaign, which it believes is an appropriate funding route as potential supporters will be offered something back in return, e.g. a year’s pass to the facility, which the business hopes will encourage donations. Aspire Ryde is confident that the development of the ‘balls and slides’ play area will increase the proportion of trading income, facilitating further growth of the business and move towards sustainability. Given the current financial outlook, Aspire Ryde forecasts turnover in the region of £130,000 to £140,000 in the next year and it attributes this growth to the credibility it has built in a relatively short space of time.

Financial information

Income	£110,447
Expenditure	£96,696
Difference between income and expenditure	£13,751
Surplus/deficit on ordinary activities before taxation	£13,751
Annual income from grant or subsidy	£25,859
Fixed assets	No data available
Current assets	Stocks: £0 Debtors: £1,440 Cash at bank and in hand: £12,499
Total	£13,939
Net assets	£13,751

Source: Aspire Ryde Accounts 2016, Charity Commission.