

Ref Code	Organisation Name
2022-11-YO33	Merseyside Expanding Horizons
Visit Date	Visited By
8 th February 2023	Victoria Southwell (Zoom)
Overall aim of the funding	
<p>To provide young female offenders with a bespoke, combined programme of artistic intervention and employment/enterprise training and mentoring. This will take place pre, during and post release to enable the young women to take steps to transition into meaningful employment or self-employment harnessing their skills, creativity, and passions.</p>	
Background to Organisation and governance	
<p>Merseyside Expanding Horizons (MEH) is a Charitable Industrial and Provident Society that was established in 2000. It was set up through an SRB grant as a thematic partnership around social inclusion with the purpose of bringing a wide range of local issues together rather than funding numerous different projects. Liverpool Hope University was the original lead organisation before it became an entity in its own right. Initially it was imagined to be an infrastructure organisation but retaining this sole focus became untenable and it transitioned to become a delivery organisation. MEH employs 13 paid staff and has 10 active volunteers and four interns who work with them for between 3-6 months.</p> <p>The CEO is supported by a Management Committee made up of 6 people who come from a range of professional backgrounds that include; substance misuse, the criminal justice system, the asylum system, disability, youth work and housing associations. They meet quarterly and are looking to increase the number of people on the committee by at least two. A priority over the next 12-18 months is to become a CIC and potentially then a CIO at some point in the future.</p> <p>MEH has a strategic plan that runs for 2023 and focuses on three outcomes that will ensure they are able to deliver their vision, mission, values and service priorities. These are 1). well informed, timely and effective decision making that is evidence led, 2). be a well-managed and efficient organisation and 3). have a positive and open culture. Each of these is linked to six key service priorities that have performance metrics against them.</p>	
Leadership and expertise	
<p>At the assessment I met with Nicola Daley (CEO), Joe Hemington (Programme and Development Manager), Bryan Walsh (Employability Manager) and Rachel Worsley (Company and Artistic Director of No Place Productions).</p> <p>Nicola is from the local area that MEH works across and joined the organisation when it was established as a Programme Manager for SRB money, before quickly moving into the CEO role. She has a Masters in Social and Economic Development and extensive knowledge of the issues the people accessing MEH experience. She is well networked and sits on numerous partnerships that work across the city. Her leadership style is to allow people to grow and develop and take ownership of their projects. She believes in giving people responsibility and supporting in the background and that she</p>	

is there to do a tough job and will do so if she needs to. She expects commitment from her staff and that they share her values.

Joe started working as an advisor in Job Centres before moving into a role supporting people with mental health problems into work. He then worked in prisons for three years as a Project Manager and has extensive experience of supporting mentors to work with ex-offenders. He has been with MEH for 15 years.

Rachel set up No Name Productions in 2014 but the team had been working together as a group of artists delivering projects in prisons since 2010. NPP specialise in delivering arts programmes for people in prison or who have been in prison and mostly work in the north of England. Their work has been recognised through an award from HMPPS and they describe themselves as a grants roots organisation made up of artists from the local area, some of who have lived experience of the criminal justice system. NPP have been working with MEH on projects since 2014.

Aims and Activities

Merseyside Expanding Horizons aims to be an agency for positive influence and change, which supports and delivers a wide range of quality targeted initiatives to reduce social isolation through multi agency and cross sector partnership working. They work with and support organisations that work with socially excluded groups and individuals, with a particular focus upon those who are experiencing multiple exclusion, provide information, advice and support to capacity build organisations to promote social inclusion and promote social inclusion best practice through all activities. Projects include;

- Enterprise Skills Hub Project providing bespoke pre-start up enterprise training for individuals from disadvantaged groups,
- The Big Onion Enterprises works with people from disadvantaged groups who face multiple barriers to employment, the majority of whom have never considered self-employment or business start-up as a way back into work. A number of activities and projects are run that promote, support and enable individuals facing these barriers to start their business, become self-employed or enter mainstream employment.
- Personalised Employment Pathways (PEP) provides an innovative and customer-focused programme offering a package of holistic and bespoke information, advice, guidance and support to integrate disadvantaged young people into the labour market. It focuses upon early engagement with young people whose experience of illness, potential illness or personal circumstances (being a care leaver, parent, or carer) has a detrimental impact upon their ability to sustain or engage in meaningful employment.

Safeguarding

MEH has a detailed Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding policy and a clear approach to implementing it. The Designated Safeguarding Lead/Safeguarding Officer is the Programme Coordinator/Psychologist and she has received Level 3 Safeguarding training. All staff are DBS checked and receive annual training from Phoenix Futures, a local drug and alcohol service. For the project being applied for key staff will also receive inhouse safeguarding training through HMPS as some work will take place on the prison estate at HMP Styal. The Employment Advisor who will be employed by MEH will also work closely with the Safeguarding Officer to manage risk associated with the young women on the programme.

Staff meet regularly to discuss caseloads and flag any safeguarding concerns or worries. The Management Committee are informed of any significant Safeguarding concerns and appropriate pathways are in place to raise any concerns externally.

Finances

Unaudited Financial Statements for the year ending 31st December 2021 show income of £1,166,653 against expenditure of £1,042,020 resulting in a surplus of £124,633. Net current assets amount to £452,515 and a reserve figure of £427,678 of which £143,791 is unrestricted. The reserves policy states that three months overheads should be held to ensure that MEH can continue to meet its objectives and to ensure financial flexibility. The current amount of unrestricted reserves is currently below this figure and MEH is committed to looking at ways of increasing unrestricted income.

Budgets and funding predictions for the two-year period of the grant show a fall in expected expenditure. This is mainly due to the ending of a number of EU funding streams that MEH have received for many years. In 2023 expenditure will fall to around £950,000 and in 2024 it will shrink to £661,300. A significant proportion of this income for both years has been secured and a strategy to grow income in 2024 and beyond involves changing MEH's status to a CIC to maximise income opportunities.

Good financial systems are in place that are overseen by the Finance Manager and supported by the CEO, who is also the Company Secretary. There isn't anyone on the Management Committee currently who fulfils a Treasurer role and this is a gap that will be recruited to in the immediate future.

Current Situation and need

In 2022 MEH held focus groups with 37 female young offenders across Merseyside. 76% identified as having a low perception of self, 89% said they felt isolated from the community, 97% said they felt isolated from the world of work, 85% were fearful of the stigma from their convictions and 100% said they felt their conviction would prevent them from gaining employment.

According to frontline probation staff in Merseyside, there are currently no interventions which specifically promote mental wellbeing and perceptions of self and the impact this has on goal setting and employability for young female offenders. The findings of the focus groups suggest the need for a bespoke approach to working with these young women that will help to build self-image, and provide skills enhancement, career guidance and help with the transition to work.

Artistic interventions are noted to be responsive to individual needs, with particularly high levels of engagement and effectiveness amongst young offenders. Common outcomes with this group tend to be reconnecting to the community and reimagining themselves in a positive light. Employment mentoring is equally recognised as providing a vital tailored approach to support marginalised young people into employment, with research suggesting that an effective mentor relationship means that young offenders are five times less likely to reoffend.

MEH want to develop the RE-WRITE programme that will work with female young offenders through their Big Onion initiative. They will work in partnership with No Place Productions who are a not-for-profit theatre and digital arts company specialising in working with young offenders. NPP create and deliver arts programmes that engage, inspire and upskill young offenders, to promote positive outcomes, aid resettlement and reduce reoffending. Its practitioners have over 40 years collective experience working with young people across the criminal justice system and they work in both the community and across the prison estate. They will also work with Adelaide House,

an 18-bed female Approved Premises that provides offending behaviour programmes and in house activities in relation to offender pathways including relationships, finance, drug and alcohol misuse, thinking/behaviour, children and families, accommodation and training and employment.

The young women who are recruited onto the programme will either be referred from Adelaide House, have engaged with NPP through their existing work at HMP Styal or be referred by Probation Officers. They will take part in eight artistic workshops over a four-week period that will help them to explore the issues that they are dealing with and will also be assigned a MEH Employment Advisor/Mentor who will work with them on a one-to-one basis. With support the young woman will complete a personal development programme based on the 'I Can' programme which was developed by The Windmills Foundation in partnership with MEH. At the end of this programme learners understand their skills and have an individualised action plan which is designed to help them to achieve their employment or enterprise goals. They will then embark on a bespoke programme of accredited training and volunteering in a sector they have identified an interest in. They will be given certificates detailing the specific skills that they have gained to help bridge the qualifications gap many of the young women will have.

The project will also work with employers and businesses to encourage them to become more inclusive and receptive to the needs of young female ex-offenders entering the workplace and will develop relationships with employers in key sectors to create work experience and employment opportunities. For some young women starting their own business will be a more viable option for them and MEH will draw on its expertise in supporting and incubating new enterprises to develop this element of the programme.

A grant will enable MEH to focus specific resources on this group of young women to help them to better manage their chaotic lifestyles and achieve a positive outcome that leads to a reduction in reoffending.

Expected Key Achievements in Year 1

EKA 1

60 young women develop transferable skills needed for the workplace.

EKA 2

20 participants move into paid employment.

EKA 3

Five participants start their own business.

Request and Budget

MEH is requesting **£58,518** over 2 years for a contribution to the salary costs of a Project Coordinator and project costs.

£29,259 in year 1 - £13,759 (salary contribution), £11,000 (Artistic Development workshops) and £4,500 (business start-up costs and incubation).

£29,259 in year 2 - £13,759 (salary contribution), £11,000 (Artistic Development workshops) and £4,500 (business start-up costs and incubation).

Conclusion

This is a really interesting partnership application that draws on expertise from several different organisations to deliver a project that provides wide ranging support to young women offenders. MEH and No Place Productions are very different but extremely capable organisations that have come together to build on the strengths of the other. The track record of working closely with their local community makes MEH stand out

as a grass roots and authentic organisation that understands the needs of the local area they work in well. Their staff team are well networked and their hub in a local shopping centre provides them with unique opportunities to both engage with beneficiaries and make links with other companies and employers in the centre.

No Place Productions are an extremely experienced theatre company who have been working within the prison estate for many years and who have a range of extremely experienced practitioners who both know how to work with young women offenders but also how to develop them to get the best out of them and help them to positively move on with their lives. They have a strong understanding of the trauma that these young women are likely to have experienced and work in an empathetic and empowering way. The way that the artistic sessions are structured mean that the twice weekly sessions are spaced at the start and end of the week to enable the participants to reflect between each session and do some work linked to the first session that will then be picked up again at the second.

The presence of Adelaide House within this project also adds real strength to the design as the staff at the Approved Premises that many of these young women will be staying in will be crucial to ensuring that the participants are able to move forward with the sessions. Without this element I would be a little concerned about how such high levels of engagement would be secured but this does make the target numbers feel realistic. The through the gate support that NPP will support MEH to do at HMP Styal will also be an important part of the project's success.

Whilst most of the young women who move into employment will do so through securing jobs with local businesses and organisations some will be supported to start their own businesses. MEH has a huge amount of experience in this field and this adds a unique element to the work that isn't seen in any other projects that we have funded or are recommending for funding. For some young women self-employment will be their most viable route into becoming financially independent and secure and it will be really interesting to see how this element of the project develops.

I didn't meet the worker from MEH who would take on this project should funding be awarded but I was told that she would be female and that she has expertise in working with vulnerable women. The team at No Place Productions clearly use a trauma informed approach to working with these young women and my only slight concern was if MEH has as much expertise internally. With this in mind it might be useful for MEH to think about what additional training their proposed staff member might need to lead this project. The request is for an annual grant of £29,259 and I would recommend increasing this to the maximum amount of £60,000 over two years, with the additional £741 each year being used to buy training for the MEH team around working with women who have experienced trauma.

The next few years will be important for MEH as they adjust to the disappearance of EU funding and move towards a different kind of status for the organisation. The support that will be on offer through the Spark Programme will provide much needed help for the organisation as they navigate their way through this which will add additional value to the grant funding. Therefore, I would strongly recommend support with a grant of £60,000 over two years.

Recommended Priority Rating		
Risk = Low	Difference to organisation = High	Priority = High