

Women Friendly Enterprise Service Provider Assessment

Independent Review of Train 2000

Executive Summary

By

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May 2008

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intelligent evaluation for long-term results

Introduction

Train 2000 Ltd, operating as The Centre for Women's Enterprise and Employment is a Liverpool based women's business support organisation. It was established in 1996 as a nonprofit distributing social enterprise. Train 2000 offers a flexible and integrated programme of learning and support services for women wishing to engage in economic activity through enterprise.

Train 2000 currently delivers a range of business support contracts for a number of different funding organisations. Some of these organisations require Train 2000 to prove that it is a competent professional organisation with evidenced experience of providing quality enterprise services to their key target client groups. In particular funders want Train 2000 to demonstrate its effectiveness as a provider of business support services for women

Train 2008 engaged an independent consultant to evaluate their work, taking into account the sector's best practice standards for start up and established business support.

Dr Richardson, of Richardson Howarth LLP consultancy, was appointed to act as the independent reviewer and this note report documents the key findings from her evaluation.

The Evaluation

The evaluation approach adopted was primarily that of an external audit based upon five primary sources of evidence and information gathering/verification. This included a one day on site visit on April 16th 2008 to Train 2000's premises in Liverpool. The five sources of evidence upon which the evaluation was based are:

1. **Train 2000's own self assessment reviews.** Train 2000 have undertaken already two forms of quality self assessment exercises on their services and performance.
2. **Internal documentation, promotion and information materials and website.** Materials included financial accounts, the social accounts and other external reviews.
3. **Quality standards check.** Train 2000 currently holds and is working towards a number of quality standards that provide endorsement of their professional performance. During the site visit the consultant examined evidence that these standards are current and practiced by the organisation.
4. **Face to face interviews** with 7 staff members, 4 clients; and the chair of Train 2000's board. The staff represented all elements of the team and included both long standing and more recent recruits. The 4 clients interviewed presented a good mix of women in terms of their age, background experience, and their support needs. They ran varying types of business and were at differing stages of business development with one employing others. All 4 clients had used a range of Train 2000 services, had engaged with different staff and had experience of using business support providers (both positively and negatively) other than Train 2000.

5. **Telephone interviews** with 3 key external partners all of whom had current experience of Train 2000 delivering enterprise support services to different client groups.

During both the face to face and telephone interviews staff, clients and partner stakeholders were asked to rate Train 2000 operations against four dimensions of quality concerning 'inclusion'; 'being client focused', 'understanding and practicing equality' and an overall view of 'quality of provision'.

Conclusions

The overwhelming feedback on Train 200 throughout the evaluation was extremely positive on all aspects of the assessment. It is clear that the organisation is highly regarded by clients, funders, partners and staff alike and is seen as a professional and effective business support organisation contributing to business development locally regional nationally and internationally.

In summary the evaluation concluded that:

1. Train 2000 is an excellent provider of enterprise employment related and personal development support services for women.
2. Train 2000 presents as a well established, well run, professional organisation, which is also warm and friendly, offering a wide range of free services to varied groups of women delivered by a group of committed competent and enthusiastic staff.
3. All of the stakeholders interviewed were very complimentary. They see and experience Train 2000 as an extremely professional, proficient and innovative organisation in what services it delivers, how it delivers these services, the way in which it relates to clients and moreover how it supports others in the broader business support sector.
4. Train 2000 develops and delivers and demonstrates 'good practice in a number of ways. In particular it:
 - Has survived 10 years providing continuous good quality support for a large number of different women starting and growing business in the region.
 - Engages in continuous review and reflection about its services and the needs of its different clients groups adapting services, withdrawing services and trying out new things as their clients and other stakeholders inform them.
 - Does not pay lip service to inclusion and equality issues. For example the team understand how care responsibilities can hinder and suffocate women's attempts to make change in their lives. They provide empathy as well as practical and financial support so that women can manage these responsibilities alongside exploring enterprise employment and training opportunities.
 - Blends a very welcoming and supportive approach to women, many of whom are in very disadvantaged circumstances, with the hard headed realism of what is needed to start and grow businesses in a very competitive world.
 - Is grounded like any good business, in the reality of their clients and 'their market place' yet operates strategically informing policy and practice at regional, national and international levels.

- Is a strong advocate for women's enterprise development at all levels providing strong social and economic evidence for how enterprise can help women, their families and their local economies.
- Is open to sharing their good practice with others and actively seek opportunities to do so.

Recommendation

The only significant recommendation coming out of the evaluation is that Train 2000 should continue to do what it appears to do so well – continue to support women of Merseyside and the North West to explore and follow their ideas for enterprise employment regeneration.