

Social housing and social enterprise – a match made in heaven

For many social housing providers it's becoming increasingly apparent that working in their neighbourhoods to empower communities through enterprise is a model that not only builds more sustainable tenancies but also improves social cohesion.

Encouraging and supporting people to improve their life prospects brings so many rewards for individuals, their immediate families and for the wider communities in which they live.

Tapping into that untapped potential is exactly the role that social enterprises have been fulfilling in the communities they work in for many years.

Social enterprises, passionate about what they do but often working in isolation, provide hugely important support for individuals. Imagine for a moment that organisations worked more closely together, focusing resources on broader neighbourhood outcomes. Registered social landlords are key to this. Suddenly the potential to improve life prospects for local people becomes so much greater than the sum of the parts.

Positive interventions such as upskilling through work placements, volunteering, training or education; improving access to childcare or offering support with transport all help to remove barriers to opportunity and open up previously closed routes back into work for those who are furthest from the labour market. Something as simple as loaning someone smart clothes for an interview can be a big step towards securing employment.

Social enterprise also aims to tackle loneliness and isolation - enabling people to be included and actively participate within their communities – health and wellbeing, both mental and physical, and life enhancing support is being delivered daily by social enterprise, community business and the voluntary sector across the UK.

So why should social housing and social enterprise get together?

Fuse Enterprise CIC has been part of The Wrekin Housing Group for four years. We see huge positives in matching together the benefits of social enterprise activity with the work of a social housing provider, creating genuine opportunities for tenants, their families and our communities.

Everyday, we see the differences even small interventions can make to people's lives, not just because we measure it – we do – but because we hear people tell us themselves about the difference we make to their lives.

How our community garden helped someone with depression back from the brink of despair; how volunteering with us helped someone gain enough confidence to enrol at college; how a work placement led to paid employment; how joining in our community lunches gave a DV victim hope; and how activities at our community centres can help people make new friends and combat loneliness.

Who knows, some of the people we help may go on to be the next generation of social entrepreneurs. Like the Phone Box Millionaire Stephen Fear they may go from humble beginnings to successful business leaders.

At Fuse, alongside social enterprises across the country, we see our role is to encourage, support and empower people to be the very best they can be – igniting their ambitions, helping them find their dash of enterprise sprinkled with a splash of opportunity - our housing colleagues help us to do this and between us we can make a real difference to people's lives.