

## Community Business re Covid-19, Mutual Aid

Theme – Microenterprises

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14<sup>th</sup> May 2020

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### Case Study – Flourish Together CIC

Flourish Together are a pay it forward consultancy which uses its surplus time, cash and resources to invest in women as a force for social change.

It's a well-known fact that the number of women in leadership roles in the voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors is higher than that in the private sector and Flourish seek to build on that trend and inspire and support women to follow careers and enterprise development in the social change space, to develop themselves and their communities, whilst gain economic independence.

Although Flourish's core business revolves around consultancy in social and community enterprise support (business development/value measurement/bid-writing) alongside delivering social and community enterprise capacity building programmes, Flourish Together has a long standing history of creating cash from no-where to invest in women and communities. Over the last 5 years they have led 5 successful crowdfunds and crowd sourced campaigns to create a community led seed fund year on year. They have observed that creating an independent seed fund gives them the autonomy to invest in communities and support people who fall between the cracks, have never applied for grants or whose face or idea doesn't fit with the latest funding programme means they can step up where others step back. In fact during the pandemic they are sustainably delivering and growing their social venture through a mixture of trading, contracts and grants which they have been able to adapt and continue to deliver whilst on lock down and into the future.

As a result of creative realignment of their programmes and calling out to their network of women changemakers, they have been able to create 'Just in time' cash awards alongside their programmes of support at a time when people need this most. They had previously run and attended Detroit SOUP style events but had never run these on line and decided now was the ideal time to use this model with their community to create cash, inspiration, hope and action.

### **What is the Detroit SOUP model?**

The Detroit SOUP model started out in a neighbourhood of Detroit in 2010, as a democratic experiment in micro-funding, amidst a recession and a dire need to inspire the community as well as find resources to kick start new opportunities. Events work by paying a ticket fee (in this case £6+) to attend an social community connection building event, whilst raising much needed cash for communities at the same time. The cash raised is used as a small cash investment pot on the day/night and participants vote for who they would like to see get the money. In return you usually you get a bowl of 'Soup' or some refreshments and you get to learning about who's who and what is going on in your community. You also



feel like you have the power to make a difference by having a say and voting for who gets the cash. Additional benefits from these events include sharing contacts, connections and opportunities for development and collaboration - a win win situation.

### **How did Flourish Together adapt this?**

At their virtual events run on Zoom, Flourish asked people to bring their own mug of their favourite soup or drink (!) and listen to 3-4 people pitching their businesses/ ideas to improve the community. By looking for areas of repurposing surpluses or underspend in their current programmes and consultancy they have some resources to match fund tickets purchased and created fun way to network, learn about start up and early stage social ventures and get some no strings attached cash to ventures who need it. A light touch expression of interest was put in place for people to apply to take part and events have been administered through Eventbrite. Promotion has taken place across their network via email, Facebook and Twitter.

Whilst there isn't that same level of hustle, bustle and networking you get at a SOUP event in the real world and community food producers haven't been involved, Zoom has provided a useful and relatively accessible platform for people to experience many of the other benefits of such an event.

### **What has the impact been?**

After trialling 2 events in April and May 2020, over 30 people have been involved and 6 women changemakers have secured awards in the region of £150 - £300. By the end of the initial series of 4 events they anticipate having invested over £2000 in 12 women leading projects, businesses and campaign which create positive social change and are tackling issues faced by communities during COVID19. These events just don't support the usual suspects or people who fit funding criteria and know how to write bids – they support everyday people with a passion and some skills to make a difference. Women invested in so far include:

**Heather Henry** nurse turned entrepreneur using her expertise and lived experience of being asthmatic to support children and families to get the support they need in managing asthma remotely in fun, active and creative ways through **Breath Champs**.

**Beatrice Guessie** from new community organisation **Light in the Darkness** is supporting women from minority groups, many of whom are refugees and asylum seekers access vital provision under lockdown whilst manage their mental health and overcome the challenges they face.

**Kim Bond from Visit from the Stork** is helping vulnerable new mums access basic baby supplies, often not provided through the food bank networks as well as peer support on breast feeding and positive futures for their families in spite of lock down and chronic cycles of deprivation

**Jasmin Bakhre from Women with Wings** is supporting women who have faced years of setbacks including domestic abuse, which has all be compounded through the lock down access physical and mental health support as well as vital provisions and support to develop enterprise initiatives to lift them out of poverty in future

**Fi Nicks** has grown a Facebook group which started at the beginning of lock down in to a 700 strong network and is running daily support sessions and plans to create mental health support and community training programmes

There is still time to join in with, learn from and support their Virtual SOUP events - they have one on 23<sup>rd</sup> May and one on 27<sup>th</sup> June which you can find out about and register for via their [Eventbrite Page](#). Plus having created a new and accessible way to engage their network it is highly likely they will run more of these throughout the year.