



BUSINESS PLAN 2007-08

SOFA Leicestershire - The Furniture &
Appliance Reuse Project

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About us

SOFA is a charity and a limited company. SOFA has a long history as a Leicester project, but recently relocated to Loughborough. The project is supported by [Leicestershire County Council \(http://www.leics.gov.uk\)](http://www.leics.gov.uk).

We:

- Provide skills and confidence to local people to enable them to get into employment.

Provide training sessions, advice interviews and work placements. We can also provide courses to other organisations.

- We aim to raise aspirations of people who suffer social exclusion and enable them to have a reasonable environment.
- Provide a professional donation/collection service for used furniture and electrical appliances. These are sold at a low cost with a discounted price for people who have been referred from other charities and agencies.
- Help the environment by saving furniture and appliances from going into landfill sites.
- Network with local voluntary agencies to ensure that we are identifying gaps in provision and that we are providing a linking service for clients.

Values

We believe in:

- Providing sensitive support to trainees. To provide a nurturing work experience environment for people who lack confidence.
- Valuing diversity, reaching out to people who are socially excluded and being as widely accessible as possible.
- Providing opportunities for staff to develop their skills and knowledge. Trying to get the best out of people and valuing relationships
- Providing a pleasant shopping experience for people who are in need of low cost furniture as well as to members of the public.
- Fostering excellent customer service skills so that customers, donators, funders and colleagues from agencies that refer customers, feel valued.
- Honesty, reliability and professionalism
- Working effectively and efficiently to ensure a good reputation
- Listening to our volunteers, to our customers, to our funders and to each other.
- Benefiting the environment as a major recycling charity in Leicestershire.

Project Description

A ground floor warehouse and offices based on the main Nottingham Road, Loughborough. We are half a mile away from the town centre and close to the railway station and bus services.

Achievements in the last financial year

For Leicestershire County Council:

- Workplace training provided target is 5 per annum, we achieved 26 and of those 17 moved on into positive outcomes e.g. paid work or further volunteering
- Competency in basic employment skills target 10, achieved 22
- Working with people with disabilities target 5, we achieved 12
- Completion of training programme target 20, we achieved 22
- 1447 pieces of furniture and appliances were sold

For Carter and Carter Employment services:

- To provide training placements target 26 trainees, achieved 31

Market situation

Information about our Area and the People that we serve

Loughborough is a medium sized town. A significant segment of the population is made up of students. There are people from a variety of ethnic groups with a significant population of people from Bangladesh. Studies have identified that the Bangladeshi population of Loughborough tend to have low incomes. There is an increase in customers from eastern European countries.

We have a strong record of supporting people from eastern European countries and from the Bangladeshi population. We would like to increase the numbers of people from those groups who take volunteering and learning placements with us.

We are well known among referrers and 47 agencies from Leicestershire referred customers to us for furniture in 2006/7.

Team

Trustee/Directors

There are four trustees:

- Brian Granger – Chair
- Lee Johnson
- Val Brooke
- Jane Hopper

Our County Council Project Officer, Jane Marriott, also attends trustee meetings.

Staff

Rosemary Blake – Chief Executive

BA Hons. Post Graduate diploma in Counselling and Psychotherapy, Post-graduate certificate in Teaching Adults, Post-graduate certificate in Managing Voluntary Projects. Rosemary also has a City & Guilds certificate in teaching communication and number and NOCN Level 3 in Information, Advice and Guidance. Rosemary also has a BTEC Certificate in Business Administration.

Rosemary leads the team and networks with other organisations to promote partnership working.

She works on putting together a strategic direction and making sure that SOFA meets the requirements of funders.

Rosemary promotes an ethos of valuing diversity, empowering trainees and ensuring that the organisation has a customer focus.

George Benner – Operations Manager

Certificate in Supervisory Management

George is responsible for the trainees and volunteers who work in the warehouse and for collections and deliveries of furniture.

He also plans how we are going to operate that aspect of our work and deals with all aspects of SOFA premises.

Nancy Chudasama – Finance Administrator

Nancy holds a BTEC Diploma in Computing and Sage accounts stage 1 & 2.

Nancy manages income and expenditure, the preparation of budgets and financial donations.

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Suzanne Holland – Training Administrator

CLAIT and CLAIT plus in Computing, OCR certificate in Business Administration, NNEB in childcare, about to get the NOCN level 3 certificate in Information, Advice and Guidance

Suzanne administers the paperwork connected with NVQs, and she is responsible for the trainees and volunteers who do administration and retail work.

Alex Ellis – Customer Service Administrator

Alex has a HND in music technology, about to get the OCN level 2 in Managing voluntary projects and social enterprises.

Alex is the face of SOFA and organises the work of the office to make sure that customer service is a high priority.

Volunteers and Trainees

Justin Starbuck – a volunteer who works on the van and in the warehouse
Stuart Morris – a volunteer who works on pricing and in the warehouse
Andy Brown – a volunteer who supervises trainees on Ebay
Susan Snow – a volunteer who works in the office

We always have [New Deal](#) trainees on placement.

Professional and advisory support

County Council Project Officer – Jane Marriott
Accountancy and Auditing – [James Nixon of Godkin and Co.](#) Loughborough
Human Resources – [MHL Support Ltd.](#)

We have also received support from [Voluntary Action Charnwood](#), the Leicestershire Vocolls project, [Social Enterprise East Midlands](#), the BEST procurement project, [Business Champions scheme](#), Leicestershire [Community Action Network](#)

Analysis of the Business Area that we are in

Getting People into Work

There has recently been an upward trend in unemployment in the East Midlands among those with no qualifications and also a rise in unemployed economic migrants from Central and Eastern Europe and from the India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. (Warwick Institute for Employment Research, '[Migrant Workers in the East Midlands Labour Market](#)' Jan 2007)

There is a pool of hard-to-reach learners who are not ready for employment and there are many training providers competing for them. For this reason we need to be aware of our unique selling points. We also need to be the best in terms of care of learners and in terms of readiness to qualify for Learning and Skills Council funding.

There is little market for IAG in isolation. It needs to be offered in conjunction with other services. Current IAG provision is linked to an umbrella organisation. Other IAG provision is within mainstream colleges. There will be a larger market for people who are on Incapacity Benefit who need a Job Brokering service

Furniture and Appliances

There is a small market for people who need second hand furniture and appliances because they have been homeless and because they are in extreme difficulties.

Other people will only buy second-hand furniture if it is in excellent condition and is still fashionable or if it is interestingly old. We can widen our market by making sure that we present the furniture well and by appealing to people who want the retro or antique look or who want to use our furniture for a renovation project. We can also widen our market by making sure that we are known in a wider area than currently.

There may be a market for supplying second-hand office furniture to start-up sole traders or to furnish the offices of other charities.

Ways of ensuring quality operations

We comply with the [PQASSO quality system](#).

Evaluation forms are sent out to Customers, Volunteers and trainees, Referrers quarterly and the staff team make adjustments as a result

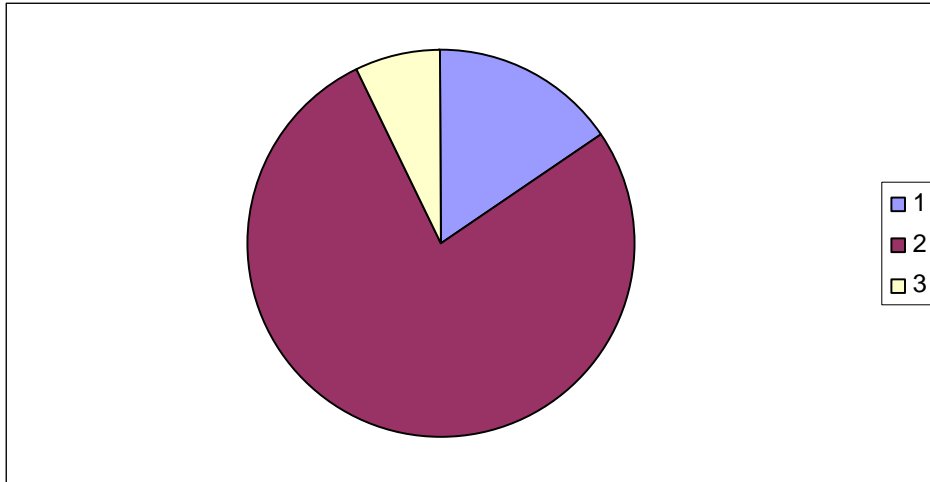
We are working towards the [MATRIX quality standard](#) for information, advice and guidance

We are working to comply with the [Common Inspection Framework](#) for Ofsted inspections of learning.

Equal opportunities monitoring will be done on the numbers of people who access the project who are disabled and from ethnic minorities and this will be compared to local demographic data to ensure that we are reaching all sectors of the community.

Forecasts and Financial Data

Sources of income 2006/7



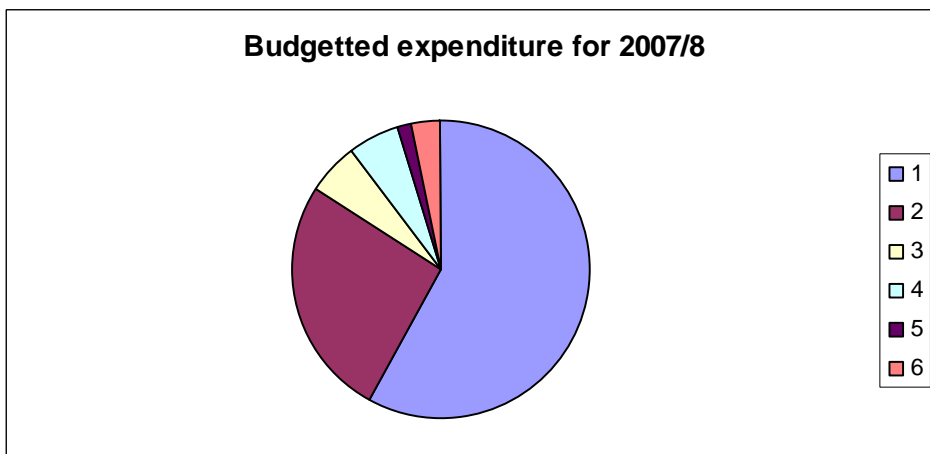
Where

Number 1 is Sales

Number 2 is grant from Leicestershire County Council

Number 3 is income from New Deal placements

Sales and income from New Deal placements have risen for 2007/8



Number 1 is staff salaries and accompanying costs

Number 2 is costs associated with the premises

Number 3 is cost of running vehicles

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Number 4 is administration costs and sundries

Number 5 is the cost of computers and computer support

Number 6 is the cost of organising NVQs

Strategic Plans

Training:

SOFA will offer NVQs in Business Administration and provide work placements to support this.

SOFA will offer personal development courses consisting of: Confidence Building, Assertiveness, Meeting skills, Equality and Diversity.

We see our future focus being on marketing and working with other local organisations to extend the amount of training that we do. We will also increase the number of people that we help into work by providing more one-to-one support.

Future plans include providing classroom training for discrete groups e.g. people with mental health problems or people for whom English is a second language. These groups would be given extra support and a staged introduction to work placement.

SOFA plans to support trainees into work by helping with CVs and application forms and by pro-actively contacting possible employers.

Workplace learning:

We aim to increase the amount of furniture and appliances that are donated and to increase the number of customers that buy from us by advertising widely.

SOFA plans to expand the marketing side of Administration to provide more work placements and to ensure that the sales function and the office function reflect the working practices in other shops and offices.

SOFA plans to increase sales in the shop both to people who have been referred as being in need and to members of the public.

SOFA also plans to develop further projects that can provide different workplace experiences e.g. painting and decorating, furniture or waste removals etc.

Action Plan based on SWOT Analysis and Analysis of Evaluation Replies

Becoming Fit for Future Work/bids/contracts:

Networking with the Leicestershire Voluntary Sector Consortium to be involved in the bid for Learning and Skills Council Funding

Working to get Quality Management Systems – PQASSO, Common Inspection Framework, Matrix

Become an NVQ Centre and aim to have an Assessor and Internal Verifier

Contingencies and Realistic planning:

Providing a plan for dealing with an end to the lease and ring fencing money to put the plan into action if necessary

Realistic budgeting when tendering for contracts or bidding for grants to cover staff time and whole cost recovery

Facilities:

Planning for outreach work rather than asking learners to come to the building

Operational Efficiency and Achieving Targets:

Ensure at team meetings take place to ensure smooth operations

Continuously evaluate the service that SOFA provides in reusing furniture

Manage stock levels to make the maximum sales

Review volunteer/trainee work plans so that they fit in with providing NVQ evidence

Actively work with trainees on their applications when they are due to leave placements

Network with local employers and 'sell' the skills of SOFA trainees

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Provide a timetable of 'soft skills' courses for volunteers and trainees and plan cover so that they are able to attend

Provide Saturday opening for the sales function. Increase efficiency of referrals of people in need by supplying referral forms to agencies via email.

Recruit further volunteers so that trainee's work can be checked and to allow sufficient time for pre-training before trainees are asked to work in the office – target retired people.

Publicity and Marketing:

Provide positive messages on publicity with our premises and ensure that the reception area is welcoming.

Budget to include newspaper advertising and exploit news opportunities

Advertise the [SOFA website](#).

Contact clubs and societies that may be interested in reupholstering or revamping furniture

Network with organizations that work with socially and economically deprived people and provide a display area for their publicity material – provide targeted publicity material so that they can publicise SOFA

Further Development:

Research into the training needs of local businesses that could be met by SOFA staff

Research ways that SOFA work placements could fit with local ethnic minority communities and develop ethnic minority volunteers so that they could provide a 'way in' for hard to reach learners

Contact borough and County waste departments to research the possibility of offering to carry furniture that doesn't fit our needs to the tip.

Research ways of expanding e.g. providing training in decorating and a decorating service.