



Creating enterprise through local engagement: the Aylesbury Estate experience

“Success for me will be if one person from the Estate sets up a social enterprise.”

Aylesbury NDC/Creation Trust Director, 2009

Over 9 months in 2009/2010, a partnership of the Aylesbury NDC/Creation Trust management team and Red Ochre, a Third Sector consultancy, far exceeded this goal. In summary, the Aylesbury Community Enterprise Project (ACE):-

- Created 14 enterprises that are currently trading and receiving commissions
- Engaged many residents on the Estate with the possibility of moving out of unemployment by starting their own businesses
- Developed connections between different groups on the Estate opening up further enterprise/employment opportunities

These successes have created a sense of possibility on the Aylesbury Estate and shown what is feasible from a powerful mix of an appropriate programme, a little resource and a fertile talent pool. The transformation of several lives has also created positive role models in one of the UK's forgotten corners. So how was this latent entrepreneurial talent harnessed to empower residents to make their own opportunities?

The Aylesbury Estate: problem or opportunity?

The Aylesbury Estate in South London is often profiled as one of the worst public housing estates in the UK. It has over 9,000 residents with 25% unemployment, an above London-average BAME population and few (if any) formal local businesses.

In a drive to combat unemployment, the Aylesbury NDC Creation Trust decided to try to stimulate local entrepreneurship. Through a public tender process they appointed Red Ochre to deliver a social enterprise development programme. A social enterprise itself, Red Ochre is a leading organisational support and training consultancy for the Third Sector and the public sector. We have successfully run similar social enterprise and employment creation programmes over the last 7 years.

Critical success factors for creating enterprise on the Estate

Reflecting on our experiences in the Aylesbury, four critical factors underpinned the enterprise creation and may offer key learning for similar projects in the future:

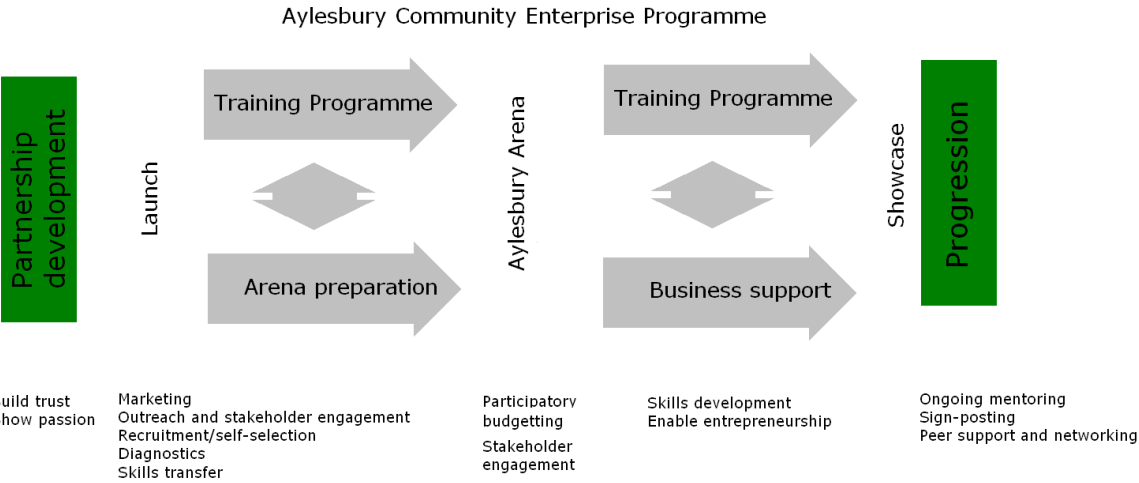
1. Partnership - The Aylesbury NDC Creation Trust management team has a deep knowledge of the Estate community. Their drive to mitigate unemployment brought in Red Ochre with our expertise of running similar enterprise and employment projects. Together we worked to connect into the community, build trust, rapport and also flexibility into a programme to develop local entrepreneurs.

2. Local inclusion - The importance of local inclusion cannot be overstated. The ACE programme was delivered in the community for the community and largely by the community. The programme was open to all; events were held on the Estate; training and support were delivered at times convenient to the residents; programme services were bought from residents. More than a hundred residents participated in a Dragon’s Den-type event (the Aylesbury Arena), ultimately awarding their favourite enterprise with a cash prize.

3. Process & Passion - Red Ochre provided a mix of training and business support designed to the needs of each participant. We did not simply deliver a ‘one size fits all’ training and support programme but worked with individuals on their own enterprise dream. Very soon our approach was viewed as something a little different. We are passionate about what we do and this enthused people. We encouraged them to be bold, to be assertive and to believe in themselves. As one ACE entrepreneur said:

‘You have shown me you can make things happen for yourself, even on the Aylesbury!’
 Toyin Adaje

The initial hook was the financial prizes but soon participants were telling us that they valued the business coaching and support more than the prize money. Workshops participants became ambassadors persuading others to join because they could see the benefit of the training and support they received. The participatory budgeting exercise and the success of the participants in the Aylesbury Arena led others to seek support.



4. Sustainability - The programme touched a diverse group of residents from a wide range of backgrounds, experience and interests - Afro-Caribbean teenagers through to middle-aged White British males resulting in feedback like:

‘I’ve started many business courses before. This is the 1st I’ve ever finished.’
 Sean Braithwaite

The linkages have continued and we foresee new individuals and groups starting to trade. However, the pan-UK NDC programme ended in March 2010 so the ACE project officially closed just as momentum was getting going on the Estate. However, we are still contacted by people from the Estate, motivated to ask for support of their ideas and aspirations.

Red Ochre has continued to work with these ACE entrepreneurs and the community. We have also established a mentoring support programme for the entrepreneurs, linking them with mentors from the commercial world.

The ACE project has shown how an enterprise programme with a mix of partnership, local inclusion, process and passion can result in a community starting new enterprises and seeing a way to move themselves out of unemployment.

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