

# Bulky Waste Re-use Partners in Brighton and Hove

An example of a local authority and a social enterprise working together successfully to divert bulky waste from landfill, with both environmental and social benefits.

## Introduction

Brighton & Hove City Council is a unitary authority located on the south coast of England. Since 2004 the council and the social enterprise organisation, Sussex Central YMCA, have been working in partnership to provide a variety of community based bulky waste re-use schemes.

### Key facts 2010/11

- The charity re-used on average seven tonnes of household items per month, totalling 84 tonnes across all of its schemes. This included:
  - re-use of 3.14 tonnes of Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) per month, of which 0.3 tonnes were donated through the Hove Household Waste Recycling Site (HWRS). In total 38 tonnes or 5,000 electrical items; and
  - re-use of 3.86 tonnes per month of furniture and bric-a-brac. In total 46 tonnes or 12,000 items.
- Approximately 100 tonnes of non re-usable items were recycled, generating £15,000. This included WEEE, which was recycled by specialists MDJ Light Brothers Ltd at their Approved Authorised Treatment Facility (AATF) in Lewes.

- The charity:
  - ran electrical testing and repair workshops employing two full-time members of staff, five volunteers and unemployed people on a four-week rotation work programme;
  - worked in partnership with the council highway and cityclean team to collect, deliver for repair and then re-use abandoned bicycles;
  - ran bicycle repair workshops which employed a part-time bicycle technician as part of an alternative curriculum schools programme to provide a 36-week training course. The project was supported by both the schools and the council;
  - repaired and sold more than 200 bicycles, generating income of £6,000 over a five month period;
  - employed six members of staff through three high street shops, plus two further members of staff at the Hove HWRS; and
  - operated three retail shops, two of which are dedicated to furniture and electricals, the other to clothes, bric-a-brac and books.

## The approach

### Background – Brighton & Hove City Council

In 2004 the council and the charity met to discuss how the council might support the charity's re-use activities. The charity was looking to develop its services, to collect a greater range of re-usable items for sale and expand this key source of funding for its activities. Following this meeting the council introduced the charity to Veolia Environmental Services, the council's waste management service contractor. This in turn led to a rental agreement between Veolia Environmental Services and the charity, allowing the charity could rent an area of Hove HWRS. This was then used to open a public re-usable item drop-off point and shop.

Since 2004 the council has continued to support the charity in its expanding activities, through promotion of its services via the council contact centre, website and other forms of social media, together with occasional funding support.



### Background – Sussex Central YMCA

Sussex Central YMCA is a social enterprise organisation based in Brighton. It operates Sussex Central YMCA (Trading) Ltd, a re-use retail social enterprise and a wholly owned subsidiary of the charity. Through this organisation, the charity operates a collection and donation re-use scheme with the aim of refurbishing and selling a range of goods, including furniture, electrical items, clothes, bric-a-brac and bicycles. The income generated funds their charitable work supporting children, young people and families in Sussex. Additionally, the charity offers paid and unpaid work, with a training programme especially targeting vulnerable and at-risk young people including those at risk of exclusion from school, the unemployed, young offenders and those living in hostels.

The following re-use schemes and services are offered by the charity:

- a public donation point at the Hove HWRS;
- WEEE re-use;
- a community paint donation and re-use scheme; and
- a bicycle re-use scheme.

These re-use schemes are complemented by both a refurbishment workshop and a training centre.

The work of the charity has expanded from the original shops to the public donation point in Hove and, by 2009, a collection service for saleable furniture and large electrical items from house clearances and requested pickups.

The refurbishment of items donated or collected has also grown from small electrical refurbishments at the back of one of the outlet stores in 2005, to a warehouse and training centre that began operating in 2009. The centre allows refurbishment of large and small appliances, a bicycle repair workshop and the recycling of metal. The warehouse and training centre is the hub for training and employing young people.

In June 2011 a paint re-use scheme was set up at the Hove HWRS, with the initial set up costs funded by the council, which also promotes the service.

## The approach

### Public donation point at Hove HWRS

Since May 2004, the charity has operated a reclaimed goods shop at the Hove HWRS, which includes a sales area of 2,200 square feet. The shop diverts approximately one tonne a week, consisting mostly of smaller items of furniture such as tables, chairs and bric-a-brac. In addition, a further tonne a week is sold off site at other charity shops located in the local community. The income generated from items sold at the HWRS is approximately £40,000 per annum. The high street shops selling both diverted items and those donated directly to the shop generate a further £60,000 per annum. All electrical items are sold with a three-month guarantee.

The charity uses this income, together with the revenue raised from other activities, to fund its charitable work with children, young people and their families.

The council-owned HWRS is operated under contract by Veolia Environmental Services. The charity shop allows members of the public to donate and purchase items. The public are directed to the charity shop by HWRS staff on entry to the site if they have any items that are re-usable. There is no charge to the charity for this service.

Items suitable for donation include:

- furniture which is clean, unstained and suitable for resale (with fire labels if appropriate);
- upholstery and beds with fire labels attached;
- fridges, freezers and other electrical goods;
- bicycles;
- good quality, clean clothing and shoes (including retro and fancy dress items);
- accessories, including jewellery and bags;
- books;
- music and media (CDs, vinyl, DVDs);
- bric-a-brac (china, kitchenware, ornaments, pictures, collectables);
- soft furnishings (rugs, linen, curtains); and
- paint.

Any items that can be repaired are taken to the refurbishment warehouse and then sold via the HWRS store, one of the three outlets stores or online.

### WEEE re-use

The charity repairs and resells electrical items ranging from large white goods, such as fridges and freezers, to small items such as lamps. The items are collected from donations to the shops, the warehouse, the Hove HWRS shop or house clearances. They are repaired and tested at the warehouse before re-sale.

In 2009 the council entered into an informal agreement with the charity to collect re-usable fridges and freezers from households requesting a pick up. Although the council has a bulky waste contract with collection contractors Kingspan, this service does not provide for the re-use of electrical items. The council is currently tendering for a new bulky household re-use collection service, which is due to start July 2012 when the current fridge and freezer agreement with Sussex Central YMCA will cease. The YMCA and other local charities have been invited to tender for this service.

Requests for collections from residents are made to the council call centre. The resident is asked whether the item is still in working order. If the answer is yes, then they refer the resident to the charity by providing them with a contact number. The customer pays for the collection depending on the item and their economic circumstances. The fee is retained by the charity.

Re-usable fridges, freezer, cookers, washing machines, microwaves and small WEEE items collected through the various avenues are then tested and repaired at the warehouse. For example, fridges and freezers are checked for safety and tested for three days to ensure consistent temperature before finally being cleaned and sterilised ready for re-use. If required, basic repairs are made including changing simple parts such as fuses and thermostats.

The repairs are carried out by two full-time members of staff and up to five volunteers at any one time. Any items that are not suitable for re-use are recycled wherever possible, which can provide an additional income stream. These items are handled by MDJ Light Brothers Limited.

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## The approach

### Community paint re-use scheme

The charity runs a paint re-use scheme. The paint is collected at the HWRS and the scheme is run in partnership between the charity, the council, Veolia Environmental Services and Community RePaint. The council funded retrofitting of shelving to the re-use shop and continues to promote the service to the local community. This promotional work has included the design and production of an information leaflet, and details of the scheme being included on the council website, Facebook page and Twitter account.

With the existing donation point and shop at the HWRS, the scheme operates at negligible cost. It accepts full and part-used paint in containers/tins from members of the public.

Water-based paints, such as emulsion, are accepted for re-use. In instances where the donated paint is not re-usable, such as when it is hard, oil-based, flammable or toxic, the paint is correctly disposed of under an agreement with Veolia Environmental Services at the HWRS at no cost to the charity.

Members of the local community, charities, pensioners, students and people on income support can pick up a free supply of paint from the re-use shop.

### Bicycle re-use scheme

The bicycle re-use scheme has been operating since late 2010. Members of the public donate bicycles to the charity at the HWRS and the charity shops. In addition, the council highways and cityclean team donates any repairable/re-usable abandoned bikes that they find. These donated bikes are taken to the workshop for repairs and a full check by a qualified bicycle technician. Additionally the charity delivers build-a-bike workshops for young people who are achieving low grades in core academic subjects. These young people are referred to the charity by the schools, with the schools funding their place on the programme.

The bicycles are sold from the warehouse and are also advertised on the charity's website, which provides detailed information about each bicycle and a full colour photograph. Bicycles are usually priced around £20 to £50 each. The latest figures available (April–December 2011) show that the charity refurbished and repaired in excess of 200 bikes, which generated £6,000 of income.

A particular success of this scheme is the informal relationship that has developed between council teams and the charity. The highways and cityclean team has a responsibility to remove and dispose of abandoned bicycles, which it takes to the charity's repair workshop.

## Critical success factors and key learning points

### From Brighton & Hove City Council's perspective

- Any items re-used result in a reduction in material being sent to landfill, reducing the council's waste management costs.
- The success of the scheme at Hove HWRS has encouraged the council to consider opening a similar service at the city's other HWRS in Brighton. The charity has submitted an expression of interest, but will be required to tender competitively.
- The partnership has raised awareness of the waste hierarchy among residents for very little financial investment. Because the schemes are self-funding, the council can promote them alongside other council services and other charitable projects.
- The local community has benefited from the provision of supplementary services in the following ways:
  - the three outlet shops provide geographically convenient donation points;
  - volunteering and training opportunities are provided by the charity, which can be seen as a route to future employment for these individuals; and
  - members of the community can purchase high quality second-hand and refurbished household items which are cheaper than buying from new, thus saving them money.

### From Sussex Central YMCA's perspective

- The charity is successfully operating a self-funding range of services - the social enterprise contributes to the charity both financially and towards its charitable aims of supporting young people.
- Although the public continue to make donations, the number of re-usable items being donated is falling. As a result of current economic conditions, households are less likely to replace an old functioning item with a new one. There has been a notable downturn in donations since 2008. However, demand for re-usable items is high, with members of the public looking for items that are cheaper than purchasing brand new. In addition there are more highly skilled people seeking volunteering positions, which benefits the quality of repairs made to items.
- The charity has learned that the larger electrical items, such as white goods, are more economically profitable from a donation and resale perspective. Smaller items such as kettles and toasters can often be purchased exceptionally cheaply from new and may cost disproportionately large amounts to repair.
- The re-use and refurbishment sector is currently in direct competition with the scrap metal industry for large electrical items, such as old washing machines, due to current high materials prices. This, combined with take back schemes under the European Union WEEE Directive, is expected to reduce the amount of donations made by the public and reduce the income stream of the charity.

## Achievements

- Local people have the benefit of access to low cost, safe, electrical and furniture items.
- The charity has been invited to tender to operate a second donation point and shop at the Brighton HWRS, as have other local charities.
- The bulky waste schemes provide employment opportunities, training and volunteering support to unemployed local people.
- Partnerships funded by schools have been made with local schools to provide training for young people.
- Working with the highways and cityclean team at the council to collect bicycles for re-use and for working spares has proved very successful

## Contacts

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