



case study:
Bristol Expert Citizen Group
business plan



Maximising potential

Independent Futures Group (IF) is the lived experience advisory group who work with Golden Key. There had been a growing recognition that as IF continued to grow, and become increasingly independent, there was a need to harness momentum in an official plan that provided direction and would maximise the group’s potential. To this end, Golden Key commissioned a piece of work to support IF to create their own business plan.

Finding clarity in the midst of complexity

Golden Key is committed to doing things differently to create change and open doors. IF’s business plan is no exception to this ethos. IF felt that going through the usual process of creating a business plan with rounds of meetings would be daunting to many members and would result in a standard text heavy document which was inaccessible to many. Therefore Golden Key invited specialist arts agency, Creativity Works – with artists Davis & Jones, to support IF through an innovative process which will result in an engaging and accessible web-based plan that maps the group’s future aspirations.

Deborah Aquirre Jones, one of the artists from Creativity Works who, along with her colleague Eleanor Davis, worked with IF, explains how they supported the group to define their vision:

“As visual artists, we find that people have a lot of wisdom, knowledge and understanding that is not easily accessible or easy to represent in words or logical thinking. Often, this is some of the most important knowledge which can affect long term commitment and engagement as it relates to deeply held beliefs and feelings. It will include unusual, quirky and distinctive ideas and experiences which make a group unique.

We used a range of activities and ideas, which enabled the group to access and express what they knew and what they wanted for the group. We worked with metaphor, visual imagery and mapping to explore and represent what members of the group already knew about their vision for the future. We then transcribed what the group had told us into the structure and format which became the business plan.”



During the creative process, conversations revealed that the idea of an archipelago of islands captured the essence of IF and how its members want to be. An image then started to develop of each part of the plan being represented by a different island.

Group members each chose particular objects to appear on the islands to represent their hopes and aims for what that section of the plan will achieve. For example IF group member, Matt selected a farm for the Structure Island to represent the importance of the group being self sufficient. Ben chose a

joker card, to appear on the Marketing Island, as it is often disregarded by people but can be the most valuable card in the pack. Similarly members of IF might have been dismissed in the past because of their previous experiences but are now able to have their voices heard. A canon also appears on the Marketing Island to show how, by speaking out, the group will remove barriers. Darren chose a balloon to appear on the Plan Island to symbolise how, with effort, the group has expanded and will continue to rise.



Key aims highlighted in the business plan include:

- To guide the future growth and development of Independent Futures, allowing it to become a self-sufficient, independent organisation
- To set out how Independent Futures will develop its reputation and skills
- To help members to use their lived experience to develop skills that will empower them to build careers and progress their recovery
- To ensure that the voice of expert citizens with lived experience can be fed into services and guide service development in Bristol.

A group effort

Reflecting on the creative process involved in collating their business plan, members of IF commented on the wide-ranging benefits.



Ben, IF Chairman:

"[The process] enabled us to get a better understanding of where the group came from, how far it's come and where we plan to go. The creative process encouraged engagement and confidence building amongst members. The very words 'business plan' were intimidating to some of the group. But working in such a collaborative and fun way meant members without business experience could create a real, viable business plan with achievable goals. The results show that multiple complex needs do not have to be a barrier to achieving ambitious goals."

Karl, one of IF's original members:

"[collating the plan had] made us aware of the range of skills we have in the group, it has shown that we've all got something to contribute which means we all have a sense of value within the group."

For newer members the plan has provided a useful means to quickly get a real understanding of the group's remit and aspirations.

Colin, who joined IF two months ago:

"Just looking through the business plan has given me a much better sense of what the group are all about and what they want to achieve."



Next steps

The first version of the online business plan can be viewed at www.ifgroupbusinessplan.org.uk. The Group now want to build on the plan's accessibility by reviewing the language used, to ensure it is as straight forward and jargon free as possible. Over the coming months the group will also be adding audio content, with quotes explaining the meaning behind particular visuals on each island.

www.ifgroup.org.uk

 @ifGroupBristol

Golden Key is a citywide partnership, inspiring change in Bristol. Funded by the Big Lottery, and led by mental health charity Second Step, the eight year, £10 million programme will open doors and unlock services, creating new futures for those with the most complex needs. IF are at the heart of Golden Key. Using their combined 'lived experience' of the issues of homelessness, drug or alcohol dependency, mental health problems and offending behaviour, they continue to shape and define the project.