

Capacity Building Project



GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

Case Study 6

The Organisation:

Breakout

The Challenge:

To meet the standards required by the Charity Commission

The Response:

By working towards the standards in the Charity Commission's publication "Hallmarks of an Effective Charity"

Examples of Good Practice:

1. Trustee recruitment and induction
2. Essential policies and procedures
3. Staff management

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The Organisation: Breakout

Breakout is a charity based in Lowestoft whose objective is to raise the social, personal and vocational skills of disaffected young people by providing training and development opportunities and guidance, enabling them to 'breakout' from the merry go round of no qualifications, no job and no hope. The charity provides young people with work-based learning opportunities in its workshops where they learn a wide variety of crafts.

The project targets young people aged 14 to 16 who are at risk of being excluded from school, unemployed, homeless or lacking in confidence and motivation. For many of these young people, Breakout is their last chance. The organisation's track record of working successfully with this client group depends on the quality of the support given and the opportunity it provides for young people to do practical activities that are achievable and interesting.

The Challenge: To meet the standards required by the Charity Commission

In 2004, Breakout was advised that it was having a Review Visit from the Charity Commission. The purpose of a Review Visit is to ensure the charity is complying with its legal framework, to assess and report on whether it is aspiring to the standards in the Charity Commission's "Hallmarks of an Effective Charity" and to provide advice aimed at helping the charity achieve these standards. The purpose of A Review Visit is not to inspect but to focus on key issues and identify and encourage good practice.

Breakout had recently had a change in management and the new manager had only one month to prepare for the Review Visit. A consultant was employed to do a "health check" and one of her key findings was the need for a Staff Handbook and policies and procedures aimed at meeting the organisation's legal obligations regarding employees. Of particular concern to the new manager was the fact that employment contracts were inconsistent and there wasn't a written Code of Conduct or a Grievance and Discipline Procedure for staff. Previously, the policies and procedures that were in place were aimed only at Breakout's client group, and not employees.

Quality standards in relation to the educational services being provided by Breakout were good, with the organisation being regularly inspected by OFSTED (Office For Standards in Education) and ALI (Adult Learning Inspectorate).

The Response: By working towards the standards in the Charity Commission's publication "Hallmarks of an Effective Charity"

Some of the issues identified were addressed before the Charity Commission's Review Visit but most have been followed through in the last 18 months. During the Review Visit the Charity Commission made a number of recommendations and these gave the organisation a focus for their development

work. In line with the Charity Commission's "Hallmarks of an Effective Charity", Breakout started working towards the following changes:

- Having clearer aims and objectives, focusing on the impact they want to have on the young people accessing their services. This has led to the introduction of an annual business planning process.
- Being "fit for purpose" through clear and effective policies and procedures, particularly in relation to employee matters.
- Having sound governance by recruiting more trustees and improving their induction and training.
- Being more accountable and transparent through better financial management, with improved financial record keeping and budgeting processes.

Examples of Good Practice:

In the space of 18 months, Breakout has made rapid progress towards the Charity Commission's good practice standards. Some examples of good practice include the improvements they have made to governance, the development of policies and procedures and better staff management.

1. Trustee recruitment and induction

Breakout implemented the Charity Commission's recommendations to improve the governance of the organisation. There are more rigorous trustee recruitment processes and trustees receive better induction and training. Trustee recruitment is now an ongoing process, which aims to identify suitably qualified and skilled people in the community who could make a contribution to the organisation. Potential new trustees are invited to meet the Chair to find out what's involved in being a trustee and during this meeting the roles and legal responsibilities of trustees are emphasised. The trustees have also undertaken management training to help them understand their roles and legal responsibilities.

New trustees receive a thorough induction from Breakout's Chair and from the manager. The trustee induction pack includes a Trustees' Code of Conduct, information about Breakout, details of Trustees' roles and responsibilities and a role description. Trustees are required to sign a declaration of eligibility to be a trustee and to declare any potential conflicts of interest.

More rigorous recruitment, induction and training has resulted in more pro-active management from the trustees. Each trustee oversees a particular area of Breakout's work, making them more actively engaged in the activities of the organisation. Trustees are also actively engaged in the process of developing, implementing and reviewing policies and procedures and Trustee meetings are forward-planned to ensure that policies and procedures are covered in the Trustees' agenda.

2. Essential policies and procedures

The Charity Commission is concerned to see that all charities working with children have policies and procedures in place to keep children safe. Breakout's Child Protection policy and procedures were working effectively, although they had not been put in writing. For example, they have rigorous recruitment and selection processes that involved checking the eligibility and suitability of all staff who come into contact with children. There are also procedures for reporting child protection concerns to the authorities. During the Review Visit the Charity Commission recommended that Breakout put their Child Protection Policy in writing, which they have now done. This has had the added advantage of enabling them to get funding that they could not have accessed without a written Child Protection policy.

The manager gathered information about good practice in staff management and compiled new policies and procedures and a Staff Handbook. This was a major piece of work as it involved developing new employment-related policies and procedures including confidentiality, equal opportunities, grievance and discipline, health and safety and data protection. Breakout aims to make the policies and procedures living documents that are actually used and followed by staff and are meaningful to the way they work. The Staff Handbook also sets out the organisation’s ethos, provides a code of conduct for staff covering issues such as appropriate behaviours and gifts and hospitality, and sets out details of employees’ rights. New employment contracts were also introduced in line with current employment laws.

3. Staff management

Staff induction for new staff takes place over a period of 4 to 6 weeks. New staff members receive an induction pack covering a wide variety of important matters including information about Breakout, roles and responsibilities, telephone, security, health and safety, child protection, supervision, learning plans and staff appraisals. On the 1st day, a full induction is provided followed by a few days’ shadowing other staff. An induction checklist is worked through and signed off once the induction is finished.

Supervision of staff has been improved by providing them with regular supervision sessions with the manager every 6-8 weeks. Staff training needs are also identified and met. A wide range of training subjects have been made available from first aid to IT training, speaking and presentation skills, drugs training and teacher training. All staff have an annual learning plan and keep a log of training attended. The organisation’s commitment to its staff has now been recognised through its achievement of the Investors In People (IIP) standard.

Sharing the Learning:

Breakout found the Charity Commission’s Review Visit very helpful and constructive, and it has provided the charity with fresh impetus to improve the quality of its management. The “Hallmarks of an Effective Charity” has been a useful framework for improving various aspects of their management practice.

Lessons Learnt

Good governance depends on appropriate trustees being recruited, inducted and trained. The trustees are responsible for the overall control and management of the charity.

A charity that is “fit for purpose” will have policies and procedures in place to enable it to achieve its mission and objectives effectively.

Staff management systems will help staff to achieve the organisation’s objectives.

“Hallmarks of an Effective Charity” (CC60) is available at the Charity Commission’s website. It provides a set of standards any organisation can work towards, not just registered charities.

Questions To Consider

- How could you improve recruitment, induction and training of your trustees?
- Are they pro-actively managing the organisation?
- Do they understand their roles & responsibilities?

- Do you have the necessary policies and procedures in place?
- Are they reviewed regularly?

- Do staff receive a proper induction?
- Are staff supervised regularly?
- Are their training needs identified and do you plan their training?

- Do you have a copy of “Hallmarks of an Effective Charity”?
- What areas could you improve on to become a more effective organisation?