

Capacity Building Project



GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

Case Study 12

The Organisation:

Ipswich Buddhist Centre

The Challenge:

To generate income and engage the wider Ipswich community in activities at the Buddhist Centre

The Response:

Establishing an ethical enterprise

Examples of Good Practice:

1. Developing a set of Core Values
2. Engaging people from all levels of the organisation
3. Developing policies and procedures

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The Organisation: Ipswich Buddhist Centre

The Ipswich Buddhist Centre is a registered charity that offers classes in meditation and Buddhism and provides a context for committed Buddhists to practice Buddhism in Ipswich. It is part of an international spiritual movement called the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO). Some of the unique features of the FWBO are:

- It is open to all regardless of nationality, race, colour, education, class or caste, cultural background, gender, sexual orientation or age.
- It has set up Team Based Right Livelihood Businesses as one of its fundamental institutions. These are businesses that engage only in ethical activities and donate profits to support FWBO activities.

The Ipswich Buddhist Centre is co-located with the Higher Evolution Centre, an alternative therapy centre providing a diverse range of therapies and workshops. The two centres are run together as a Team Based Right Livelihood Business and are located in well designed premises in central Ipswich, where there is an atmosphere of calmness and friendliness. Services and activities are offered by a team of experienced, qualified and insured practitioners, therapists and teachers. Both centres are run in accordance with Buddhist ethical principles, which have been developed into a set of Core Values.

The Challenge: To generate income and engage the wider Ipswich community in activities at the Buddhist Centre

The Ipswich Buddhist Centre began operating from its first floor premises at The Thoroughfare, Ipswich, in July 2001. The Buddhist Centre's income was limited and overheads were high so there had always been a vision to create an alternative health centre which would generate income for the Buddhist Centre, raise its profile and create a context for people to have an ethical livelihood.

One of the key challenges faced by the Buddhist Centre was how to get non-Buddhists involved in activities offered by the new alternative health centre, making it a place where people of all religions and backgrounds could participate, either as practitioners or as clients. In working with a diverse range of people, another challenge was how to maintain the spiritual focus and ethical values that are so central to the vision of the Ipswich Buddhist Centre.

The Response: Establishing an ethical enterprise

In 2005, the second floor of the building was leased, paving the way for the development of the new ethical enterprise. The second floor was transformed into therapy rooms and in 2006, Higher Evolution commenced operation. In promoting Higher Evolution, the Buddhist Centre is reaching out to the wider (non-Buddhist) community of Ipswich and creating links with other groups and individuals committed to spiritual development, health and well-being. Volunteers, therapists, health practitioners and potential clients, whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist, are all made to feel welcome and encouraged to get involved in the project.

The organisation has developed a set of Core Values and they are also in the process of developing policies and procedures that reflect the Core Values and promote good practice. People from all levels of the organisation have had a say in the development of these documents through the Centre's open and consultative approach to management.

Examples of Good Practice:

The Ipswich Buddhist Centre and the Higher Evolution Centre are together building an organisation based on Buddhist ethical principles, while also making its activities open and accessible to people of all religious backgrounds.

1. Developing a set of Core Values

The organisation's Core Values were developed by the Chair of the Buddhist Centre in consultation with Buddhist Centre users and volunteers, prospective therapists and health practitioners as well as Trustees of the charity. This was considered important to create a sense of "ownership" of the Core Values by everyone involved in the two centres.

The Core Values translate Buddhist ethical principles into simple and accessible language that everyone can understand and relate to. While they are not in any way binding, they represent a set of mutual aspirations and commitments and a set of principles on which behaviour can be modelled. It is hoped they will help maintain high ethical standards in the two centres. The Core Values cover:

- Buddhist ethical principles
- Values of the Ipswich Buddhist Centre
- The Buddhist Centre community
- The Higher Evolution Centre
- Therapists and health practitioners
- Clients

A copy is provided to all staff, volunteers and practitioners at induction at which time they are asked to sign the Core Values to confirm their commitment to the principles and practices outlined in them.

2. Engaging people from all levels of the organisation

Trustees have been engaged at Trustee meetings in refining the Statement of Core Values and in the development of a new Volunteer Handbook. Once finalised, this will help clarify the roles and responsibilities of volunteers and the organisation's commitment to supporting them. The organisation's Core Values feature prominently in the Handbook, which also contains copies of policies and procedures relevant to volunteers.

In order to begin developing the Volunteer Handbook, a training and consultation event was organised in partnership with SAVO. This was an opportunity for people interested in volunteering to have a say on how volunteers should be supported. The volunteers agreed that it would be useful to formalise systems for recruiting, inducting and training volunteers and to put policies and procedures in writing.

The Volunteer Handbook is still in the process of being developed but a draft has already been used in the induction and training of new volunteers. The emphasis has been on ensuring new volunteers are familiar with the Core Values in order to build a sense of commitment to the values amongst volunteers.

Potential practitioners and therapists for the Higher Evolution Centre participated in a series of consultation meetings and have had a say in the development of the Higher Evolution Centre. All practitioners are required to attend the Buddhist Centre's 6-week introductory meditation course. There is no requirement for them to be Buddhists, but by undertaking the meditation course, they reach a better understanding of the Centre's spiritual aims and vision and of the Core Values.

3. Developing policies and procedures

The Ipswich Buddhist Centre is currently developing a range of policies and procedures. This has involved consulting staff and volunteers, engaging the Trustees and seeking advice from SAVO on aspects of good practice and legal requirements. The following policies and procedures, once approved, will be made available to volunteers during their induction through the Volunteer Handbook:

- Volunteer Policy
- Statement of Core Values
- Confidentiality Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Complaints Procedure
- Health and Safety Policy
- First Aid Procedures
- Fire Procedures
- Moving and Handling Policy
- Risk Assessment

Through its policies and procedures the organisation is aiming to meet its legal obligations as well as moving towards best practice standards. The policies and procedures are also related back to the Core Values to make them relevant and meaningful for the wide range of people involved in the activities at the Buddhist Centre and Higher Evolution.

Sharing the Learning:

The Ipswich Buddhist Centre's commitment to ethics has led to the development of a new ethical enterprise aimed at generating income for the Centre and encouraging all those involved to aspire to the standards outlined in its Core Values. The Centre is also developing policies and procedures that reflect the Core Values in order to move towards good practice standards in organisational and volunteer management.

Lessons Learnt

Identifying the organisation's core values provides a set of standards to work towards in all your policies, procedures, activities and services

Consulting people at all levels of your organisation sends the message that their views are valued and they have a contribution to make

Policies and procedures provide clarity for staff and volunteers and help the organisation meet legal obligations and work towards best practice

A Volunteer Handbook provides clarity about the roles and commitments of volunteers and the organisation's commitment to its volunteers

Questions To Consider

- Have core values been identified and agreed by people at all levels of the organisation?
- How are they translated into policies and practice?
- Do you consult people regarding important developments within your organisation?
- How do you engage people in consultations?
- Are all your policies and procedures in writing?
- How are people made aware of your policies and procedures?
- Do you have a Volunteer Handbook?
- How would your volunteers benefit from a handbook detailing how you work with volunteers?