



## **Aspiring Social Enterprise case study: Tobias Recruitment Group**

### **Our social enterprise journey so far**

Tobias Recruitment Group CIC is essentially a recruitment business. We're less than a month old and specialise in the placement of permanent and contract staff into the engineering and facilities management industries. The difference with us is that we were specifically launched as a social enterprise!

Our founder Leon Coates has worked within the recruitment industry for nearly 15 years and during that time, he noticed that wherever or whoever he worked for, it was all about profits. So, with the onset of Covid-19, he decided it's time to give back rather than take out – and Tobias Recruitment Group CIC was formed.

Before starting the business, we thought long and hard about how we can give back and the areas that need the help most and, as a result, came up with a three-year plan to introduce one key service each year which we feel are urgently needed. The first project that we hope to launch is a completely free mental health clinic where people can come to feel safe and even have the chance to speak with a fully qualified mental health professional when they need it most. We've found, both through our own experience and from speaking with several local people, that access to mental health support is severely lacking and the support that is available, takes sometimes years to access. By the end of year one, we aim to have a space dedicated for local people who are struggling with everyday life to feel welcomed and safe and whenever possible, have access to professional counsellors and mental health professionals. If the venture is successful, we'd love to open additional centres in multiple locations around Plymouth and Devon to continue supporting those who need it.

Our year two project is an elderly support programme where older people can have access to a variety of services and networking events, such as coffee mornings, low impact fitness classes, light gardening and so on. Inspired by a charity close to our founders heart, this programme aims to provide the elderly with a place to come and feel welcome, whilst having the opportunity to meet other people in a similar age range with similar interests, in the hope that they can gain new friends, join in on activities and expand their local support network. We've found that in more remote parts of the countryside, some elderly people become isolated and without support which is something we hope to change.

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In year three, we intend to fully fund, or at least subsidise, a day nursery for struggling local families to access. Childcare is such an expensive and difficult service to access and some families simply can't afford it, which restricts their ability to gain employment and in turn, affects the local economy. We hope that launching this service will allow struggling families the opportunity to break down those barriers and re-join the workforce, which will ultimately contribute to local spending and boost the Plymouth economy.

Whilst the three objectives above are long-term goals, we've also pledged to offer half a day of our time each week to help the local job centre with teaching employability skills to unemployed Plymouth residents - things such as CV writing, interview techniques, presentation and communication skills etc. With Covid-19 affecting so many, we feel it's important to help lighten the load of our local job centre by offering training and development to those who need it.

### **Why we applied for the Aspiring Social Enterprise accreditation**

Even though Tobias Recruitment Group was established as a Community Interest Company, and we're a member of Plymouth Social Enterprise Network, having the Aspiring Social Enterprise accreditation was important to us as it helps to enforce our credibility as a social enterprise business. Any business can claim to give back but having this accreditation essentially proves that for us and supports us to work towards standards of good practice.

### **Our experience of the application process**

The application process was incredibly simple and straight forward. It took us only a couple of hours to complete and we received a decision within a few days, which was brilliant for us as a new business.

From our initial contact with Rachel, we received the application information the same day and had it completed and returned the following working day. After that, it took only a couple of days before we received confirmation that we'd been accepted.

The assessment feedback we received was great! As a business, we've not really marketed ourselves as a social enterprise but, after reading the feedback, have decided to follow the advice given by really advertising the projects we hope to implement and fund moving forward. As all our funds are generated from either our founder's financial backing or by commercial trade, it's the services that we offer which we initially focussed on marketing. But with the feedback provided, we've now got multiple platforms advertising the social impact we hope to provide to the local community.

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### **Support received during the process**

Whatever questions we had were quickly responded to with detailed and precise responses but honestly, with the whole process being so straight forward, we didn't really need much additional support.

### **Achieving the Social Enterprise Mark**

For us at Tobias Recruitment Group, the credibility gained and becoming part of such a worthy network of businesses is definitely the most important thing. We're proud to hold the Aspiring accreditation and we're planning to work hard in year one to achieve the Social Enterprise Mark in our second year of trading. If we can get there sooner, then great but year two is our aim. We also hope to progress to the Gold Mark in due time.

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