

Cambridge Acorn Project CIC

From idea to reality



Introduction

The [Cambridge Acorn Project](#) is a newly formed Community Interest Company (CIC). Their mission is to improve the emotional wellbeing of adults and children. They see it as

“Emotional well-being is, as the WHO recognised as long ago as 1948, a fundamental part of living a happy, functioning and fulfilling human life. It is, we believe, both a need and a right for every human being on this planet. The Cambridge Acorn Project is committed to developing services, in whatever form, to support both adults and children vulnerable to some form of emotional harm.”

They currently offer a Trauma-Focused Therapeutic Service and are exploring a number of other projects that are congruent to their mission. It is still early days but they are keen to grow and are looking at funding sources that will support new projects.

First Contact – The start of an idea

The first contact that Matt Edge, the co-founder of the Cambridge Acorn Project had with CCVS was in August 2013. He wanted to set up a group to provide therapeutic support to traumatised children. He was a qualified social worker with six years experience of working therapeutically with children and families and had been working in several schools. At this stage he had not defined the aims of the group and wanted to find out what was involved in setting up a group.

We were able to explain the different options for the structure that the group could take. We also explained the need for a committee or trustees to lead the organisation in order to get charitable. We talked through what the process might be for setting up a registered organisation.

At the end of the session we recommended he should share his ideas with some colleagues who could form a committee. We also advised him to do some more research on the counselling needs of the children and their families in order to inform the purpose of the new organisation and the need it would be meeting. Finally we sent him a number of factsheets on setting up an organisation, on legal structures and running a community group.

After this it all went quiet.

Second Contact – making it real

At the start of June 2014 CCVS received the following email message from Matt.

“I hope that this finds you well. I'm not sure if you'll remember me, but you gave me some really helpful advice last summer when I was in the very beginnings of trying to set up a charity for children in Cambridge. After doing a lot of research, we have now decided to give this a go and to try and register as a community interest company. Is there any chance at all I could meet with you again, as I

have got a load more questions, particularly around whether there is any support with the forms etc. for trying to set up a CIC?"

The next day Matt was able to meet with a CCVS development worker to look at some of his questions. We were able to offer support and advice about becoming a CIC and walk him through the process of applying; we also agreed to send him our factsheet on setting up a CIC.

This meeting helped Matt understand the process and gave him confidence that he could apply to form a CIC, and that CCVS were there if there were any questions. In his words-

"I found the meeting incredibly helpful and reassuring. Thank you and also thanks for the information you have since sent through. I will keep you posted on developments."

Third Contact – Success, but that is just the start.

At the start of September we heard from Matt that he had successfully registered the Cambridge Acorn Project as a CIC.

"I hope that this finds you well. We had some good news on Friday and are now officially a community interest company! The forms did get sent back to us once, but, would you believe it, only because we had put brackets round CIC which apparently isn't allowed. Aside from this, I'm surprised and delighted how well it's gone. Thank you so much for all of your help and support with the forms and everything else."

This good news showed the commitment and perseverance of all those engaged with the Cambridge Acorn Project, but as they realised this was just the first step.

"We are now looking at getting the management structure in place so we can bid for funding, would it be okay if I emailed you a couple of questions over the next few weeks about this, as I want to make sure that we get it right so that funding is a real possibility. We are anxious to get started and try to tackle some of the deep need which is out there. I also remember you saying that we could affiliate with CVS in some way, but, my apologies, I've forgotten the details of this. Any further advice or support would be amazing."

We were able to let Matt have information on business planning and how this should be set out and sent him a factsheet on this. Following this we arranged another face to face meeting to further discuss the scope of the business plan, its purpose and design. We were also able to give some initial advice on possible funding opportunities.

"Thank you so much for all of these links and for writing up the action points from the meeting. You gave me a lot to think about, we are starting to think about the kind of story we need to tell and we are sorting a plan out. I've done the application to join CCVS and we'll definitely look to attend some training, the courses look very helpful for some of the stuff we need to learn. Would definitely be brilliant to meet again, I'll spend some time working on this stuff and get back to you later in the year. Thanks again for all the help, it's been absolutely vital."

At this stage the Cambridge Acorn Project became a member of CCVS in order to continue to get access to free advice and support. They also booked to attend the CCVS annual conference and AGM. Following on from this they also attended the Cambridge Funding Fair and were able to meet and talk to a number of funders face to face about their ideas.

Once the initial draft of the business plan was produced a further face to face meeting was set up to discuss this. We were able to advise Matt about possible changes and act as a critical friend to help him develop a document that would serve the needs of the

organisation. We also went through the project planning tools that CCVS have produced in order to help him to start to develop a distinct project.

“Thank you for this and thank you again for the time you spent with me yesterday providing advice and talking things through, it was hugely helpful. I will prioritise finalising the business plan and making it a more 'external' document, as well as working on a project proposal.”

Since this time we have been able to send Cambridge Acorn Project specific information on safeguarding as well as information on funding pots that they may be able to apply for. Matt and others from Cambridge Acorn Project have attended our Financial Record Keeping training and have received the regular newsletters, funding bulletins and email updates that all members of CCVS get as part of their membership fees.

The Impact/change

There is now a new organisation in Cambridgeshire that supports adults and children. This is down to the hard work, enthusiasm and dedication of the founders of the Cambridge Acorn Project. CCVS has helped to steer them on their journey and offered them the knowledge and support they needed to get to where they are now.

Our work around organisational structures, planning, and the development of new projects has given them some of the tools that they needed to set up the organisation. But equally importantly the support that CCVS has been able to offer has improved the confidence of the founders of the Cambridge Acorn Project.

In the future CCVS will be there to help in other areas of where information and knowledge are needed, but more importantly we will continue to provide training and communications that enable the project to grow. We will also be there to help Cambridge Acorn Project network with other groups and to represent them and the rest of the sector with statutory and other partners.

Testimony

The following was feedback from the 2015 annual survey

“We are a very new organisation and haven't yet submitted any funding bids, but I can genuinely say that we would not be where we are if it were not for the support of ‘CCVS development worker’ in particular who has provided invaluable guidance and support as we struggled with forms/decisions about whether to seek charitable status/our early ideas/funding possibilities/management committees and many other things besides. For an organisation with very limited funds and experience this support has been crucial, responsive, attentive and in-depth. Thank you.”

Contact

If you would like to find out more about the Cambridge Acorn Project check out their website. www.cambridgeacornproject.org.uk or contact Matt Edge matt@cambridgeacornproject.org.uk