

Social entrepreneurship at the heart of social inclusion

The School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE) was created on the basis that it is not enough to invest money alone in community initiatives. **Benny Callaghan**, CEO of SSE Australia, explains that for community projects and social enterprises to be successful and genuinely sustainable, they require investment in the people that are building them, through upfront and ongoing personal and professional development.

Social inclusion is about ensuring all people feel valued and actively engaged in all aspects of society and community life. The current focus has arisen from a recognition that traditional approaches to serving those Australians most disenfranchised from society simply have not worked.

While the term social inclusion may be relatively new, the act of reaching out to excluded groups in our communities whether they are people with disabilities, new migrants or our youth is at the heart of what drives social entrepreneurs.

Social entrepreneurs identify resources where people only see problems. Rather than seeing communities as passive beneficiaries of services, they see them as the solution to the problems that they are experiencing. Social entrepreneurs begin with the assumption that communities understand better than anyone what needs to be done, and then go about finding ways to harness resources to bring those solutions to life.



The inaugural SSE cohort in Sydney with Alastair Wilson, centre back, CEO of the SSE in the UK.

The valuable role of social entrepreneurs in facilitating social inclusion from the grassroots has been well documented in the UK by the SSE. The SSE exists to provide training and opportunities to enable people to use their creative and entrepreneurial abilities more fully for social benefit. The UK SSE has been operating for over 10 years and now boasts over 450 graduates of its programs.

A recent monograph by the Chair of the SSE in the UK highlights the need to support social entrepreneurs to address entrenched disadvantage as well as the need for practical and accessible learning environments for these creative and committed individuals.

"Community development efforts will not be sustainable unless community members 'learn' how to tackle their own problems and use the contributions of others to help. The best forms of insight and capability come from 'doing' with learning support delivered as it is needed."

Charlotte Young, Chair of SSE UK Sustainable Paths to Community Development, 2007.

When a group of Australians saw the powerful impact the SSE model was having in the UK, moves were made to bring the School to Australia. With the support of Perpetual, a feasibility study was conducted which concluded that not only was there a need in Australia for such a program, but also that there was fertile ground for its establishment.

The SSE Australia was launched in March 2009 with infrastructure support from the Westpac Foundation and the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation. Two programs are currently underway in Sydney with 32 diverse and inspiring students pursuing community projects and social enterprises that are creating a more socially inclusive Australia. Plans are underway to launch a Melbourne School in March 2010.

The SSE pathway to social inclusion

The SSE model is socially inclusive in two ways. Firstly, SSE's action learning methodology directly addresses the needs of social entrepreneurs in the way that they learn. This means that the program is accessible to people regardless of

academic background, literacy levels or financial position. SSE explicitly seeks to make its program accessible to individuals and communities that most need this kind of learning program.

Secondly, the community projects and social enterprises that are pursued and created by SSE students target areas that promote greater social inclusion such as job creation and healthier lifestyles in disadvantaged communities.

Alicia Martin, Dreams Within Food Busters

Alicia's mission is to transform healthy food from being a luxury item to a necessity. Alicia developed her social enterprise to support families like her own, who struggle to afford healthy food. She also wants to help others eliminate additives and preservatives in their food which she has seen affecting her son who has a learning difficulty. Dreams Within Food Busters began with Alicia developing relationships with local wholesalers to offer affordable fresh food hampers. She has grown the business to provide back-to-basics cooking classes, a weight loss program and monthly goal setting meetings which include simple finance and saving tips.

Michael Maxwell, Mt Druitt Community Enterprise Hub

Mt Druitt (NSW) is one of the most deprived urban areas in Australia. Michael is committed to supporting community-based solutions that address this entrenched cycle of social and economic disadvantage. He has established a Community Enterprise Hub which features a food market, mobile café, op-shop, and bi-weekly community markets. The Hub creates a vibrant meeting place where community members can access affordable food and clothing as well as a series of new training, work experience and full-time employment opportunities for local residents.

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For more information on how you can become involved with the SSE, please contact Benny Callaghan at benny@sse.org.au and visit www.sse.org.au



SSE student Michael Maxwell at the community markets, held at the Mt Druitt Social Enterprise Hub, which he established alongside a foodmarket and mobile café to create a vibrant meeting place where community members can access affordable food and clothing as well as employment opportunities.

