

Communities and Place OSC

Review of Opportunities to Promote Rural Gateshead

Business Panel Meeting

Monday 25 January 2016

The Business Panel was made up by Danny Turner (DT) (owner of Daniels Farm near Crawcrook) and Rae Farmer (RF) (founder of BounceBack based at Chopwell and Rowlands Gill)

Please provide a brief outline of your business

DT – owner of a working farm between Wylam and Crawcrook – recently opened a farm shop, deli, tea room. Employs 15 people many of whom are local – plan to employ more in future and plan to develop the farm for school groups, disabled groups to come and visit see the animals, nature trails and walks – outdoor classrooms.

RF – sole trader (although has 3 directors – all whom are local) runs a wellbeing business, specialising in how to support change/conflict/crisis – works with a number of schools currently on a project called ‘sunshine in my tummy’

What do you find are the barriers to developing a business in a rural area?

DT – we have ideas/plans to make the visit to the farm more diverse and accessible so need to be able to accommodate disabled groups and need a toilet block installed. Found the bureaucracy and red tape especially during the planning process a long and drawn out process.

RF – I don't have/don't need an office as I go to my client base. Most of my work is based in other people's buildings. Being a sole trader can be isolating so a network/forum of other sole workers would be quite useful/helpful. Received good support from the enterprise team at the council at the start of my business venture and in particular the Going for Growth scheme. It is difficult trying to promote a business with limited networks. It would be useful to network and promote what I do within other organisations in the borough.

Being a member of the School for Social Entrepreneurs is very useful for networking and ideas but this is a national forum there is nothing local.

What would you like done to increase visitor numbers?

DT – Staff at the council have been really helpful providing more ‘technical assistance’. It is hoped that advertising and promotion will help to attract more visitors. The introduction of brown tourist signs would also be beneficial.

RF – it would be useful something if such as a sticker scheme (similar to dementia friendly places) could be created that would advertise ‘emotionally safe places’ that people could go to should then need to access such a facility. It would be useful if this type of scheme could be advertised within tourist information and also if an app for smartphones could be devised/linked.

This should be passed on to the Public Health team to take this forward.

What contact do you have with other businesses/networks?

DT – I have found the enterprise team from the council very helpful but some financial assistance to move forward or some advice on how to get financial assistance would be much appreciated.

RF - the Enterprise Team were supportive at start up but now it is unclear where I go from here. The only network I am a member of is the School for Social Entrepreneurs which is a national organisation. Is this something which could be replicated locally?

Would you recommend Gateshead as a place to live/work to anyone else?

DT – it is through choice that I live within the borough and yes I would promote it

RF– moved to the area to study and although I don’t have any family in the area I enjoy living here

Are you held back by skills issues/staff/skills groups?

DT – for the farm shop/tea room there are lots of people that can do this type of role. The council helped us and held interviews at Ryton Rugby Club. When we do expand we hope to be able to employ more local people and would definitely use the council’s enterprise team again as their help was invaluable.

RF – help in promoting my business would be useful. I have only been able to access a small number of schools using my school governor connections.

If you were to expand would you take on apprentices?

Danny – we would certainly look into this as the farm develops

Rae – yes would look at this in the future.

If you wanted to develop a website where would you go to? Is there a gap in the market for a web developer?

DT – this is something I would have to ask for assistance with so would contact the Council to help with advertising/promotion.

RF – in addition to IT, we would need face to face champion locally as I have relied on the School for Social Entrepreneurs but they are a national organisation and there is a gap for something locally here.

What is the support network like?

DT – I have always been able to speak to and felt comfortable speaking to the council's enterprise team.

RF – as I work on my own if I don't work I do not get paid so some sort of peer support would be beneficial.

Councillor Comments

- support the safe places/spaces theme and the development of overnight safe accommodation to be advertised.
- two very worthwhile enterprises and hope future links can be provided for so that they do not have to fully rely on the council's financial assistance which is diminishing
- if we can no longer provide physical/financial resources can we at least provide signposting e.g. contact with similar existing schemes e.g. Bill Quay Farm. Mental health advocates?
- Is there scope to tap into existing farming industry for support?
- Bill Quay Farm are now an independent organisation There could be opportunities to find out what information/model they currently use for their business