



Commission for
Rural Communities

Tackling rural disadvantage

Making Best Practice Stick

Rural Youth Projects: The East Cleveland Youth Housing Trust
Social Enterprise in Action



An operating division of the Countryside Agency

“The East
Cleveland Youth
Housing Trust
provides affordable
housing and
training for young
people”

Introduction

The East Cleveland Youth Housing Trust¹ (ECYHT) provides affordable housing and training for young people. It also offers a small building works service to village halls and voluntary groups in and around East Cleveland, and is hoping to develop a handyman service for the elderly. ECYHT formed in 2000, following a study into young people's housing and training needs commissioned, in 1996 by Tees Valley Rural Community Council², Community Campus '87³, and Coatham House⁴, revealed that young people generally wanted to live and work near their homes, but were in some cases, unable to do so because of the lack of affordable housing and training opportunities.

East Cleveland is the eastern part of Redcar and Cleveland Borough, but, prior to local government reorganisation in 1974, was – and, no doubt, to many locals, still is - part of the North Riding of Yorkshire. Broadly speaking the area stretches from Redcar, south of the River Tees to Lythe, near Whitby, and extends west to include the towns of Skelton, Guisborough, and South Bank. It is an essentially rural area. The coastal stretch, with its craggy, high cliffs (the name Cleveland means, Cliffland) includes the small village of Skinningrove, home to both a small Corus steel plant and ECYHT.

¹ www.ecyhtrust.com.

² www.nacvs.org.uk/cgi-bin/dirsrc.pl?ID=810.

³ <http://communitycampus87.co.uk/home.html>

⁴ www.coathamhouse.org.uk.

What does the project do?

ECYHT has three main areas of work:

- buys and renovates properties, and then lets them to young people, with priority given to single people aged between 16 and 25 with low to medium support needs;
- provides personal development opportunities for young people, including training and work experience in building and allied trades;
- provides a building and adaptations service to community groups.

The Trust acquired its first property in 2000⁵. The owner of the property could not afford to renovate it, and the Trust had no money, and so an agreement was reached with the owner, whereby the Trust leased the property for a peppercorn rent of £200 per annum, for 6 years. In return, the Trust agreed to renovate the property, and to let it to young people in housing need. The original agreement has now ended, but the owner has extended the agreement for a further two years, in return for which he gets the rent from one of the flats.

From this beginning, with continued support from 2 of the original partners, Community Campus 87 and TVRCC, and financial help from Charitable Trusts, Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), and other sources, the Trust has grown, and now owns seven properties, and leases a further three. Since the first property was bought, for about £17,000 in 2001, the price of a two bed roomed terraced house has increased to between £60-70,000, and there is evidence that developers are buying derelict properties, and in some cases retaining them rather than renovating them, in anticipation of increasing house prices.

The young people do most of the renovation work as part of their training, which is, therefore, practical, and full of purpose. The conditions attached to the SRB grant specified that, in return for providing the money needed to buy three houses, the project would work with 6 young people per year, with the aim of helping them to train, find jobs, and acquire, as appropriate, life and social skills.

The training aspect of the project's work has expanded as over the years the Trust's operations have broadened. Today it is an entrepreneurial social enterprise working with a variety of community groups. Trust staff run a service aimed at community groups who need small jobs done on, for example, a village hall, or a church hall. The work, although supervised, is done by the trainees, and includes adapting lavatories and hall entrances to bring them up to present day standards. Trainees also install disabled access ramps, and do other work to ensure that buildings comply with the Disability Discrimination Act. According to Steve Stevenson the Project Coordinator: *"The work has just grown – it's evolved. People from voluntary and community organisations began to call, asking us to, 'just come over and put up a shelf', and it's really taken off from there"*.

The Trust's 5 staff are able to help train about 20 young people a year. In addition it is also helping its tenants, of whom there are around 11 at any one time, to live independently. Young people who the staff are unable to help are referred to other organisations such as Nightstop or The Junction.

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⁵ www.loftusukonline.com.

The Trust's staff and trainees are also, of course, helping the community groups they work with⁶. Seventeen of these are mentioned in the Trust's 2004-05 annual report⁷, and the comments made (e.g., "Very professional job undertaken in a friendly manner") suggest seventeen satisfied customers.

The Trust's development has taken a lot of time, and a lot of effort. Not only has money had to be raised, but relationships with the people who live near the Trust's properties have had to be nurtured, because, as is often the case with work like this, people are initially apprehensive when they hear that a social landlord is intending to provide housing for rent in their area. Fortunately, the fact that the properties have to be renovated gives Trust staff and trainees time to get to know the neighbours before the property is let. Consequently, local relationships are generally very good.

The Trust's work, therefore, extends far beyond the provision of affordable housing. The breadth of its work is reflected in the number of organisations that have helped pay for its activities and development.

How is the project paid for?

The Trust is a recognised example of good practice⁸ in a rural area. It works mainly with rural young people and community groups, and, as Steve Stevenson, the Project Coordinator, says: "*Developing and delivering rural services is expensive*". Staff and Trustees have, therefore, to put a lot of hard work into fund raising.

The main sources of capital have been the Single Regeneration Budget and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund⁹. Revenue funding has been provided by Charitable Trusts and earned income from rents and community work¹⁰ (a full list of all donors is contained in the Trust's Annual Report – see footnote 5). Rent and earnings from work done for the community groups cover some of the Trust's running costs. The Trust is, however, determined to expand, and continues to seek new work, and new sources of finance. Most recently, "Enterprise 4 Inclusion"¹¹ has awarded £8,000 to help the Trust develop as a social enterprise, and paid for 20 days of specialist advice about how to improve its marketing and publicity work. This support will help the Trust to create and implement a business plan that will enable it to continue its current activities, and expand into new areas.

⁶ The Trust is not in competition with private sector businesses, as these often find that small one-off jobs in a village hall, for example, are not cost-effective, given the remoteness of many villages, and the disproportionate amount of management time that these jobs can take.

⁷ www.ecyhtrust.com/ECYHTAnnualReport.pdf.

⁸ Trends in Services and Social Housing, 2003-2004, The Countryside Agency.

⁹ www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=10.

¹⁰ www.awardsforall.org.uk.

¹¹ www.enterprise4inclusion.org.uk.

What next for the project?

The Trust's intention is to develop in ways that complement existing work.

It hopes to buy a derelict site, and, working with Accent Homes¹², a community investment organisation, build affordable housing on it. This will, in addition to providing accommodation for young people, also produce income – and added security - for the Trust.

The Trust are also considering setting up a handyman scheme to help the elderly, and other vulnerable people, with small jobs around the house and garden (e.g. window cleaning, lawn mowing). This scheme will, in effect, be the 3rd part of a progressive training programme, whereby trainees are gradually given more responsibility and less direct supervision as they progress from house renovation, with a lot of supervision, to the additional responsibilities and freedoms that go with the community group work. Finally, when the handyman scheme starts, young people will be given the maximum amount of freedom and responsibility, and will, in most cases, be ready to seek full-time employment, or additional training.

The Trust's plans are, therefore, ambitious, but they are based on experience and achievement, both as a social landlord, and a work placement/training organisation. To judge from comments made by tenants and trainees, its services are highly valued. Michael, a trainee, said that his training was: *"A great experience, and a chance to get involved with all the different trades"*. Similarly, Michelle, a tenant, said: *"Thanks very much for letting us live in your posh pad. Hope you realise how helpful you have been."*

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¹² www.accentgroup.org/partnerships.html

Summary

The East Cleveland Youth Housing Trust is a charity that helps young people aged between 16 and 25 improve their lives. It does this in two main ways. It acquires derelict properties, and renovates them for letting, at affordable rents, to young people. It also trains young people in building and allied trades, and helps them to develop life and social skills for example by taking part in outward bound activities. Trainees help to renovate the Trust's properties, and also do work for community groups.

The Trust has plans to build new housing on a derelict site, and also intends to set up a handyman scheme which will provide both additional training opportunities and affordable help for the elderly, or other vulnerable or disadvantaged people. In short, the Trust has already achieved a lot, and plans to do much more. It is a model of good practice, and a source of information, and inspiration, for other enterprises interested in helping young people to lead fulfilling and independent lives. It has certainly made a significant contribution to improving opportunities for many young people in East Cleveland.

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