

**Transcript of conversation between Duncan Leece and Dr Gillian Murray
recorded at Boyndie Trust (July, 2019)**

Bio: Duncan Leece worked for John Lewis Partnership in London between 1979 and 1989. He then started a number of businesses and worked as a business consultant for others, before briefly returning to John Lewis Partnership, Aberdeen in 1997. In 1999 he and his wife sold their businesses and moved to Banffshire (North-East Scotland). He took a short-term contract as Project Officer for the Boyndie Trust and has now worked there for over 20 years. He is currently CEO of the Boyndie Trust.

Thank you very much for agreeing to chat to me today Duncan I believe you set up your organisation here in Boyndie in 1999. How did that come about what was the needs you were trying to address with that?

The original idea for the project wasn't mine it came from a combination of local authority officers and people within the local community, who had the broad concept of what we took forward in 1999. But, I suppose, truthfully, it was little more than an idea of what the area needed, rather than how to turn it into a deliverable and sustainable entity. So, basically, I answered a job ad looking for somebody to take the idea and turn it into a business. My background, up to then, was entirely in commercial business and I had set up and grown businesses for myself and for other people, so it was a short term contract for me to look at the idea and see whether it was a viable idea and whether it was worth taking on to the next level, which clearly it was. So intrinsic to that was an asset transfer of a school building that used to be on the site that is now at the centre here. And it was an old primary school from the Victorian era that the local authority owned and was at the end of its life and it suppose otherwise it would have been demolished, or sold, or whatever. So we asset transferred that from Aberdeenshire Council, more or less demolished it and rebuilt the purpose-built facility that we still have here and it opened in 2003, in this building. Although subsequently we have altered the building a number of times since, but the core concept of the Boyndie Trust has really remained the same.

That's possibly a thing we need to establish from the start, that there are 2 organisations based here; the Boyndie Trust, and Banffshire Partnership, both of which are independent charities in their own right, but these days really operate as one organisation. So operationally they are one organisation, legally they are not, because they started separately. And, I suppose, one day, we will unpick the legalities of turning them into one legal entity, but for the moment that seems a pointless bit of work we don't need to do - operationally they work together. The Boyndie Trust is perhaps the simpler one, that it has really one core purpose but many, many, subsidiary ones. The core purpose was always to provide skills and development training for local people, who are unemployed and have some kind of special need. Special needs quite a loose terms, but broadly we wouldn't say it covered; a learning difficulty, physical disability, mental health problems -a combination of- and really our role is to help those individuals find what they want to do in life, what their potential in life might be, and to remove the barriers for them achieving that. It's very, very rare that we would do a solo, normally that individual would be interacting with a number of organisations, of which this is one, and part of a portfolio of help they might need in order to get their goal in life. All of our training is delivered in a workplace environment, so we don't do much -very, very, little actually- in the way of class room type activity. It's all in workplace environment and its peer to peer learning, as well as trained and paid staff, who work as job coaches and training leaders. So that has been the same since day one. In order to work in a workplace environment, you need a business. So we have a real business, it is a straight forward business; it's a restaurant, a garden centre and gift shops, and some workshop areas as well -we've had some workshops too- and the only thing that has changed since the original concept is just the size and scale of it.

There is nothing really else that has changed, we're still doing in many ways what we did 20 years ago, but actually the people that we work with have changed quite a bit. We initially had quite an older group of people engage with us on our skills development programmes, typically people 50 plus, and that has changed completely. So now we have a very young group of people. I think because the activities that we do here tend to appeal more to younger people. We still have older ones, I have to say 50 plus -which is not particularly old to me these days- it is predominantly... We have a lot, for example, of contact with the local schools Buckie, Turriff, and Banff -all of whom are looking for transitions for people coming from supported learning with them into the adult world if you like. So, we have got, currently, I can't remember exactly, roughly 50 people on skills development training programmes with us and that is a fairly consistent figure -it has been that for a while. What is different, I suppose, as I said, is the age group and the complexity and level of training that we can provide.

We have always had the concept of operating as, what now, I believe, can be termed as social enterprise. I didn't know that term then. In other words we are not dependant on grant funding. We earn our own income and that gives us both sustainability and, I suppose, masters of our own destiny. Very few people will give you money in the format of a grant without some terms and conditions: 'this is what we want you to do'. So we do use grant funding and have used grant funding for capital work, for example, building the training centre itself. But for revenue funding it has always been what we earn. We don't have any grant funding at all and never have had. To be honest that's the way we like it. I have heard people say that commercial learning income is perhaps more precarious, I think that is completely wrong. I think grant funding is much more precarious than commercial earned income, but then, I suppose, you have to remember that I come from a commercial background. And so I didn't convert to social enterprise from a charity background, I converted to social enterprise from a straight forward High Street business background, so that's what I am comfortable with and know.

The biggest change to the organisation came in 2005 when we -I am putting it in inverted commas- 'amalgamated' with the Banffshire Partnership. As I said from a legal point of view that hasn't happened, but operationally it did. A separate charity, no secret, Banffshire Partnership was struggling financially, but we saw the opportunity to co-locate in this building and Banffshire Partnership is now very much another thriving social enterprise. The biggest thing it delivers is transport services, which is mainly on the dial-a-bus model. So we run bus services from this very rural area through to the bigger towns such as Fraserburgh, Inverurie, Elgin, Huntly. But it's not really transport. I think of transport as being the necessity to get from one place to another. And transport is not really what the dial bus service is about. It's much more about addressing rural isolation, mental wellbeing, people being able to remain independent in their own homes. It's really social outcomes, it's not really a transport thing. Although obviously people look at a bus service as being transport, but transport is the output, but not the outcome.

We also have a little development on, which is helping other organisations. So they are community-lead economic, principle developments helping communities do community plans and that kind of thing. That is a commercial contract we have with Aberdeenshire Council and so, incidentally, is the dial-a-bus service. The transport contract, however, is a percentage contract. It is not an amount of money, so it pays for 70% out of what the transport costs to provide, which clearly means we have to get the other 30% from somewhere else. The transport contract is a commercial contract, in that, Aberdeenshire Council does not provide its own in house dial-a-ride service in Banffshire, because we do it instead. And broadly they give us the money that they would have spent on running their own in-house service. So we don't really save them any money, but what we do is provide is a much better and more extensive service for the same sum. So clearly to make the books balance we have to earn 30% from somewhere else. And for that we have a commercial activity, we provide training services. We actually do teach people how to drive busses. But the main training that we provide is around first aid, manual handling -all the health and safety type necessities that businesses have to have in their staff. And, it is mainly larger businesses that we are selling that service

to. So, just to pick a customer at random. Baxter's Food -just up the road. We can go along to them and say: 'we will make sure you have got properly trained first aiders, that requalify when they are supposed to requalify, and have all their paperwork in order, and all you need to do is write us a cheque'. So we are going along and helping them in that way and of course we are earning an income for it.

We also have a first aid events company, so that's our newest addition. It is about 3/4 years old. So we provide first aid cover, using volunteers, at events and, typically, they are anything they can be anything - village shows, what have you- but typically, they tend to be larger, and probably sporting based, so things like -a contract we picked up a few months ago- is for the Motocross, right across the North. Is extremely dangerous so we can charge lots of money. We had the contract for the Kilt Walks in Glasgow, and Edinburgh, and Dundee, and Aberdeen -and I am not sure if there were any others. We did that for a while. We actually gave that up to take the Motocross contract. So clearly we are operating way further afield than just Banffshire these days and a lot of our bigger contracts do tend to be Glasgow, Edinburgh, and that area. And so those activities, apart from being very useful for the local community, they generate us some income, which largely balances the books for the other services the Banffshire Partnerships provides. An example of where we would work together, I said operationally the Banffshire Partnership and Boyndie Trust work together. So an example of that would be lunch clubs that we provide. We have a third partner, which is Age Concern with that. So we use the Banffshire Partnerships bus fleet to pick people up, we bring them here to Boyndie Visitors Centre where the Boyndie Trust staff make them their lunch and then there is a lot of social interaction. People seem prefer to be in this kind of garden centre, gift-centre type environment, rather than locked away in a village hall somewhere, because they have the general public there as well during their lunch club, and they can look round the shops and what have you. And Age Concern subsidises that, that's their input to the partnership. So again, collectively, with Banffshire Partnership and Boyndie Trust, we have commercial contracts, or as the local authorities call them, service level agreements and straight forward earned income -in other words- things we invoice companies or individuals for.

In terms of scale, I can't remember the exact figures. I think I have 56 paid staff if you take the two organisations together. We have about 300 dial-a-bus clients. I think we get somewhere like 60,000 visitors a year to the Visitor Centre here. I have already said we have got 50 people on skills development training. I can't tell you how many people we do training courses for on first aid, and that we have about 80 first-aid volunteers, so that's -I am just going through that stuff to give you a bit of an idea of the scale- and that really, it is as simple as that! [Laughs]

Sounds far from simple organising all of that! I am really interested in this idea of your transition from the commercial sector into social enterprise

Me personally

Yes, as you said, far more often people perhaps have been working in the voluntary sector, or a charitable, or even local authorities and try make the leap to social enterprise. So what made you give up a job in the commercial sector to do this?

I didn't really do that. So I have only ever worked for one employer, which was the John Lewis Partnership, the department store chain, and I worked for them for 10 years -when did I join them? 1979 as a management trainee, through to '89 -that was in London. And then very briefly for a couple of years I did work for them again at the end of the '90s in Aberdeen, but other than that I have had my own businesses. So my wife and I sold our businesses -basically we were given a good offer for the businesses we had in 1999, so we sold them and decided that -how can I put it? We were then in a position that we could really think what we would like to do in life. And I very much viewed this, as I said initially, I viewed this as a

short-term contract, just a few months, before we most likely would of gone and bought another business and built that up and sold it on, which is what we'd kinda' done. But I viewed this, what I now believe to be social enterprise -I certainly hadn't heard of the term then- it's really adding another interest to business. I am not saying I was bored with it, but I had so, I don't know that very much has changed for me. What I have seen though is an opportunity to add another interest to my business life. So I have always been in retailing and catering, which is what I still do, but now it's got a lot of additional interest to it. So I really like the fact that we have got all of the social benefits and seeing people develop. I've always enjoyed seeing people develop. And now I can see people develop at all kinds of levels. So for example, we have got our people with special needs who we can see develop, but I am probably thinking more in context of my 50 odd staff -that's a strange way of putting it, they're not all odd [Laughter]- but 50 plus staff, I should say. So I have got a number of relatively young staff, who I have seen being able to take more responsibility and that I really enjoy. So I'm not sure if I do actually see it as much of a change. I think the difference is obviously, I don't own the business, it's a charity. But I do take a salary from it, so I am still earning a living. I still treat it the same way as if it was my own business, in terms of being very committed to it. And, I suppose, I've got a relatively entrepreneurial nature, so I like to look at new things; 'what can we to add to the portfolio?' So it is really all the same stuff that I did for myself, purely commercially, but with the added social benefits. It's just really added something extra to my business life and I think this is a massive, massive, missed opportunity.

I have very rarely give talks or bother people with my opinions on things, but I have on occasions said that is a massive loss to Scotland that we view social enterprise as being a way of converting charities to make them more financially sustainable -and I think that is fairly fine and valid. But, I think, it can also be a way of converting businesses to have more than just commercial success. And I think there are probably, I certainly won't be unique, as somebody who had worked purely commercially and that had kinda' been there and done -and that wanted to still do it- but it is always nice to add another string to your bow. So to be honest I don't view it as having been a huge change. I am still doing all the stuff I was before just with extra benefits. But I do seem to be relatively unusual in having converted from a purely commercial business background into social enterprise, and as I say I think that is a lost opportunity.

Have you ever, people sometimes talk about the challenges of squaring that social goals with commercial ones and sometimes people tell me they feel like they have had to compromise on their social goals because of commercial imperatives. Have you ever experienced that kind of conflict or tried to work through these kinds of issues?

I actually think it is more often the other way round, but that possibly comes with financial stability. So we are at the stage, as a business, after 20 years -and we are relatively successful- so that we can turn down a business opportunity because we don't think it is really in line with what we want to do as a charity. So, for example -let me give you a small example- we made a conscious decision not to have an alcohol licence for the restaurant. So I know we could generate a small amount of profit by having one, but we view the social implications of it, for some of the clients that we have, as being a negative. So therefore we knowingly -if you like- turn down a bit of profit, because that is the way we want to be. It's also the reason why, in 20 years, we have never served chips in our restaurant. So they are very simple examples. I absolutely, there could be times, when you would make compromises on your charitable side in order to make the books balance and I don't really think that is a bad thing, because if it goes out of business, you are not going to do any charitable work in order to do good for your local community. The first thing the entity has to do is to survive.

Fortunately, we are in the position where we don't really have to take those decisions any more. It is much more likely to be the way I have described, where we will forego a potential business development because it's not really in line with what we want to do. And of course, most commonly, if you rely on grant funding

that will come along more often, because you have a grant funder that will say: 'we can give you the money to survive, but we actually we want you to do that', which is probably only 80% of really what you wanted to do and feel your community needs. So that's, when I said at the start about we have got -through generating our own income- I believe we have more freedom than if we were grant funded. So I think the circumstances you described could arise, and, I think, there might be times when it would be reasonable to take that kind of decision, but I can imagine it would be unpalatable to do it. But, that is why it's great we have a board of directors. So -it's an over simplification- but principally, our board -which of course we have to have as we are a charity with a board of volunteer directors- in fact, we have two; one for Banffshire Partnership and one for Boyndie Trust. And so, principally, my job as CEO is to make sure that the thing runs right and is viable commercially. And I suppose a key job they do is to make sure we don't lose sight of our charitable aims. And so, there definitely have been occasions where I have gone to the board and said: 'look we could do this, but that would be the implications of it -'what do you think?' I have never known them not go for the charitable aims over the financial gain, but then we are in a position where we can afford to make that choice and others organisation might not be.

At first was your commercial success, and the independence it has given you, was that basically based on the restaurant, the garden centre and the gift shop, which is run as any other private enterprise and that has generated enough profit to help you add back in?

Yes, I should clarify that we don't have a trading arm as a charity. We don't need it because everything we do... So if we ran the restaurant as a commercial entity to subsidise training in a sort of classroom environment, then the restaurant would need to be a trading arm of the charity. But we don't, so everything we do; be it running the restaurant, garden centre, or the gift shops, that's how we deliver our charitable aims. So people learn their skills in such a way that... So my staff, I don't employ people to lay a concrete path in the garden. I employ people to help the people who are on skills development training come up with the idea that we need a new path, and then understand how to use the cement mixer and order the stuff from the builder's merchants, and what have you. So the whole running of the business is really one giant training tool, which develops not just new skills, but a whole sense of ownership and purpose, and a sense of self-worth and so on. And that does sometimes take a bit of understanding, that it's not the model where we are doing a straight forward commercial activity in order to pay for some charitable. The commercial activity is in itself also the charitable activity and I have had people who have great difficulty trying to understand when I have tried to explain it to them. I understand it because it just seems logical, but yeah, perhaps I am just very bad at explaining.

No, no, it makes perfect sense. Another thing I was interested in, as you were describing the organisation, was your ability to secure your commercial contracts for your first aid and so on. How did you build up the credibility that allows you to secure those contracts? I have heard that this can be another area that small organisations find difficult for people to award them a contract and give them that chance to fulfil it and gain more credibility from it.

There is no doubt that the hardest in any business -well, that's not quite true. I was going to say the hardest bit is getting started and getting the credibility, which you basically get by delivering a really good service, and then you have got a portfolio of success that you can show people, or even word of mouth doing that job for you, which is -a lot of the business we get these days is by that means. But, of course, it can work the other way; that you can get given a big grant and you start driving at 100 miles per hour, first, then the grant starts to run out and you realise that you haven't built that kind of... So I am quite a conservative business person, in that, I build things gradually on a very, very sound and secure basis. So we started off by getting relatively small contracts that we delivered very well. That was actually, I suppose, truthfully, a mode I learnt from the John Lewis Partnership, who are basically a very good organisation. And back in my day the Lewis family was still involved in it, it was illegal in-house to do any kind of advertising, it was against their

business ethics -I am not saying if that is right or wrong- and it was all about: ‘we will build the business up by reputation’. And that is very much what we did.

So we started off with getting a very small contract, doing it really well. And that is the key thing you have to do your business very, very, well. So whether it is restaurant, or whether it is delivering first-aid training, or whether its operating the bus fleet, or whether it is plants in the garden, we have a very, very, high standards. And quite simply that is how I have always worked in business. And then gradually you do build that reputation up. But it isn’t easy -and it gets easier to an extent- but then if you are not careful you need to start making sure that you live up to your expectations. It’s the same as restaurants that say they are the best steak restaurant in Aberdeenshire, you kind of need to make sure that you are, because people are coming along looking. So we need to maintain our standards, but all I can say is it gets easier if you do the job really well, it gets much easier to sell and much easier to get contracts. There is a difference in that, if you go down the route of -if I’ve got the term right- PCS tender, for example, that kind of tendering I am not a huge fan of, because it’s much more mechanical and based on facts and figures. So I’m much more used to direct selling, if you like, of going and meeting somebody. But all I can say if you do whatever you do really, really, well it doesn’t seem to me to be all that hard to get business, but you know maybe that’s an over simplification.

I am also interested in how you described that, suddenly you heard you were a social enterprise, but you have also been doing work in terms of helping with development of other community-lead economic initiatives. So it would seem to me, hearing that, you maybe are part of a network of these organisations, or is it kind of bubbling up of different initiatives in the area, is that correct?

Oh yes, so the work that we do, what gets the acronym CED –community-led economic development- so CED in Aberdeenshire is a commercial contract. So, I think, I don’t know if it unique in that way, but it is certainly unusual. So, I guess, more typically speaking -you can correct me if I am wrong- I don’t know that many other areas very well. But I am guessing more typically that kind of community lead mentoring, and support, capacity building would be done by local authority staff through learning and development or whatever. In Aberdeenshire that is contracted out. So we bid for, and get, a contract from Aberdeenshire to do that. So Aberdeenshire covers that kind of activities through its economic development department. We mentioned Ruth Hutchison, as being the Officer responsible for that. And instead of employing its own development support staff, it offers 6 contracts to other organisations that can do that work for it. And those 6 contracts are 6 because they are geographically split, and we bid for and get the one for Banff and Buchan and have done for many years. And so it’s, again, a case of us doing that work instead of the local authorities employing its own staff to do it. And, I think, it is quite a cute way of doing it. Aberdeenshire Council thought it up, it wasn’t our idea, we just said that sound a good contract for us, so I think it probably is -as I said- definitely unusual. I have been told its unique, but I don’t know if that is true, contracting that kind of work out.

So what type of community organisations are you supporting, what kind of needs are they addressing?

Its quite varied. It would be anything from a small group of people who want to, for example, somebody that wants to... I will give you some real examples that is probably the easiest way of doing it. So one group we are working with are a group of people recovering from substance abuse, or families of people recovering from substance abuse, have got together to do a kind of self-help group around running a café from a community building once a week. They needed a bit of help, even simple things like how to constitute as a group, make sure that they understand how to run a simple set of account books, and just, basically, somebody to be there to say them: ‘yip, that is the way you do that’, or ‘this is who you go and see for that’, so very, very, basic level mentoring. So that would be at one end of the scale. The other end of the scale would be a large social enterprise like Portsoy Community Enterprise. As they have grown over the years,

we have helped them with things like -I can remember when they employed their first staff member, and it was a case of: 'what do we need to know in order to become an employer?' And, I remember, when their first staff member went on maternity leave, 'so how do we do maternity leave then?' How to do cash flows, how to look at, as well as information others supply too, like potential sources of grant funding, or what have you. We are quite involved at the moment in the Leader Programme, the European source grant funding. So we have developed a bit of an expertise in that, so we can give other groups a bit of advice on what might well be a successful Leader Project, or 'don't waste your time on that, it is not going to hit the criteria.' So it's very much practical, hand-holding mentoring, critical friend -that kind of thing. It is not a very good contract, £30,000 something a year. So, you know, we are not going to pretend we put lots and lots of time into it. We put more than £30,000 a year's time into it, but that is a conscious decision by ourselves, because we think it's a valuable thing to do in our community.

And we also do very much believe in the social enterprise bubble. That being a good way for this area, we are not going to get -this is not an area that is suddenly going to get a huge employer, who builds a factory employing 5,000 people- never happen in Banff and Buchan. The economy is always going to be based on lots and lots of small things. And I actually think there's probably a strength in that. And some of those things are going to be straight forward commercial, or not really anything to do with us. The council has its own economic development team to progress that, but the community-lead stuff definitely has an important part to play. And we have kind of been there and done it, as an organisation, so we are reasonably well qualified to pass on knowledge to others. So it's a nice contract for us to have, it's a relatively small contract, but I think it definitely punches above its weight in terms of impact for the area. And all credit to Aberdeenshire Council for seeing that that's a good way of delivering that kind of advice.

I am wondering how much you feel part of a national social enterprise network up here. Do you feel that's important infrastructure that you are part of or do you very much feel yourself locally based?

Almost the latter, we have an interest in the national scene. So, for example, I always try and get time in my diary to go to the DTAS [Development Trust Association Scotland] conference, because it is terrific to see everything else that's going on in Scotland, and wider than Scotland. But I'm not somebody -so there is so many hours in a day- and, I suppose, I spend most of the hours in my day on my own organisation, and so I wouldn't say I am hugely connected in to the national scene on any topic, because I really don't have time. But don't read into that, that I don't think it is important, but it's not the prime thing for me. The prime thing for me is to keep my own organisation -not keeping it going so much- as keeping it relevant, delivering the maximum for the local community. But, occasionally, it is very interesting to go and see what everyone else is doing, and not least because sometimes you pick-up good ideas. Truthfully, I probably don't feel like I am a member of a wider group, but then I have never really tried to join one [Laughter].

I was wondering there, you clearly work quite closely with local authorities, I am just wondering how that changed over time you set up just in the few years following the change to the unitary local authorities. Have you felt that there has been cut backs over that last 20 years that you have had tried to fill, or you know what do you think that's the kind of relationship you have with local authorities, or has it been much more about changing needs in the area that has driven your development?

There definitely has been both. So there has definitely been changes to the area in 20 years and that's in terms of the employment market in the area. Clearly there has been changes to the oil industry; there has been changes to the fishing industry; there's been changes to the tourism industry. I suppose, really, the only one left is farming; there may well have been changes to that too -I am not that connected to farming. So, yes, there has definitely been changes to the area. There is also been a significant change in the way social care is delivered for people with special needs. And we, fortunately, if you like, we seem to have been the right answer, if you like. So things have changed more in line with what we have always done -not trying to

pretend that we have influenced that. There's no question that the local authorities are -its principally Aberdeenshire Council that we deal with, but we do have some dealings with Moray Council and NHS Highland- but, I think, Aberdeenshire Council is the overwhelming the principle local authority that we deal with. It's definitely is much more pressured these days. It doesn't have an enormous impact on us except that we definitely have to demonstrate, to a much higher degree than we used to, that what we are doing is actually relevant, good quality and value for money. I haven't yet come across, once we have demonstrated that, there's still has not been money to buy our service, I can foresee that might happen. But, I think, in a strange way it's been good for us because we have realised -I mentioned, for example, the dial-a-bus- we now know that we can't just say: 'yeah we take a lot of the folk to Asda'. We need to say, what difference does that make to their life and what social outcomes is that producing; and that makes us think a lot about what we do too.

I am not saying I wouldn't like the local authorities to have a lot more money, but we haven't yet found the circumstances where, if you have a really good service, and you can demonstrate that it is good; but, more importantly, it is desperately needed in the area and it's not a luxury that they don't need to afford, we have found by in large that you can still make that sale, if you like. And I think if you are doing things that are nice to do, but not really necessary it's probably going to be a whole different ball game. But we are doing things that are necessary and so it's definitely made us sharpen our act up; it's definitely made us be much more questioning about we are doing and whether we are doing the best way, so it's challenging. But we haven't found it massively curtailing our business, the fact that the local authorities are -so we are hearing- in such a bad financial position. I have no idea whether they are or not, but when you hear it from so many places, I guess they probably are. So I suppose it depends on what you are doing -and what we are doing is services that- if they are still the right service for the area, and they are delivered properly, and at a reasonable cost; we have still been able to make the case that we should get a contract to do them. We've also found interestingly enough, not particularly difficult from our straight forward commercial activities you know selling lunches in the restaurant, or plants in the garden centre, or gifts in the gift shop. I think, there is no evidence that because times are harder -our trade hasn't gone down or anything like that- but the same there, people are much more conscious of value for money these days.

Do you use any specific tools for that impact measurement that you do use SROI or social audit-accounting?

This is something we know we have to get much better at and have already identified as an in-house staff goal. So everything we do up till now is stuff we have made up ourselves and it's not really probably good enough. And one of the things we have identified is that some -my business is run by a number of department managers -for one reason or another- it's not the term we actually use, but that's the most understandable term. So amongst them, and indeed myself, we have all identified that we need to do some work on our own personal development to get more up to speed with how to measure things. So what we have used up to now is just stuff we devised ourselves, but we are not completely happy with it. We've also looked at one or two models on how to do and we haven't really liked them. So it's definitely a work in progress and something we have identified as being good for our own selves as well as possibly going to be more of a requirement.

I am just wondering about the wider policy support for social enterprise. It's definitely developed since the turn of the 21st century, although you may have only dipped in and out of that wider social enterprise infrastructure, have you felt impact of the policies support for social enterprise you know around your organisation?

I think the main impact we have had, we have had a lot of people looking at us and saying that what we are doing is really good and seems to be right. So it's all really nice to know that. I don't think anybody is self-

confident enough to not benefit from a bit praise, or approval, or whatever the right terms might be. A good question would be would we have changed if people had said we were doing it wrong? I'm not actually convinced we would, but we might. I don't think we have had any direct benefits, in terms of –we've won a contract to do something because we are a social enterprise, but there definitely does seem to have been a level of approval of what we do -that is helpful in saying that we probably are on the right lines. But I would also just repeat that I am desperately bad at getting involved in things. I am not particularly well connected on things like that, because –truthfully- I just don't have time to be. But I chair the Leader Programme and that's taken me into contact with Scottish Government officers, and so on, and it's been really interesting. And as I said, I like going to things like the DTAS Conference. But, I think, really -I am trying to think- really, it's not a question that I have ever really thought of before. But I think really the main difference is people coming along and saying you are doing a really great job and that is always really nice, to know. We probably haven't really changed anything as a result of it. Its Banff and Buchan isn't, it's the back of beyond, that's why nobody's ever heard of us! [Laughter] And we like it that way –we can get away with things! [Laughter]

You mentioned a wee bit about changes in the people you have worked with through time, in terms of you have much more young people through your door than in 1999. Do you foresee any future changes down the line, or are there any kind of needs that you are picking up on that are or come through?

I think people have a much higher level of expectation these days. Now, when I am saying people, that is probably generally true, but also, for example, there is sort of glib quotes you hear about these days; everybody expects to have their own home, and have 2 cars in the drive, and what have you. However, if we go more into the context of the people we work with, as a charity. So these are young people with a special need, so they no longer accept a lack of ambition, if you like. I am not explaining that very well. So, they will want to do more things in their life and achieve more goals in their life, which means that they have to find -increasingly they have to find- ways round the barriers. So I am not going to say anything, but I am thinking of one lady in particular; she wants to be able to fill shelves in the shop and bake cakes in the restaurant. Now she is very physically disabled, she would have a mild learning difficulty too, but principally the barrier in life for her is physical disability. So she has a complex wheelchair that has bits bolted on to it that can get her to different heights so she can do more things and she expects to be able to do them. So, I suppose, possibly, 20 years ago possibly –maybe not even as long ago as that- she might have attended somewhere, where they all sat round a table -like the one we're sitting at here- and did crafts and what have you. That is not going to cut it for this lady. She wants to be working in the shop, and meeting people, and do the stuff everyone else wants to do her age. So what she has to do, is find ways round the barriers that stop her doing those things and that's the kind of stuff that we would will help her with. We won't have the solutions to all of them, but we might have the solutions to some.

So our customers, if you want to call them that -our clients- are demanding more of us. And there's more things they want to learn, more things they want to do. And one of the big challenges for my paid staff, as I said, is to look at business activity and break down every aspect of it into things that people can actually do. So we very much, if you work with people with special needs for long enough some kind of epiphany happens -when you no longer see their disability and what you actually see are their abilities- and that's very much what my staff do. They are not really interested in the things the person is never going to be able to do; we look at what they can do and make the most of those. So we are no longer, we never really did, but going to get away with, just everybody came into this meeting room and do crafts for a day. We want them to have a lot more out of that in life. Likewise, at the other end of the scale, older people who use the dial-a-bus, they want to still be independent, and in their own homes, and services there help do that. So, I think, overall, people's expectations are just higher and that means that we have to be forever developing the quality and breadth of our services and I wouldn't have it any other way. That how we stay vibrant as a

business; as soon as that stops happening I probably will retire, but at the moment there is so many things that we want to do and ideas that we have, and it's exciting.

I don't have any more questions for you Duncan, but is there anything I have missed from your story you would like to add?

No, I don't think so. I do think it is a valid point, that as an area -I term it Banff and Buchan, North East coast, Moray coast, or whatever- it isn't particularly well connected. There is something in the North East persona -I wasn't born here, but I've been here 30 years, so I kind of developed a North East persona- in not really not having a necessity to network, particularly, and I don't know that's that is always helpful. But it is an area that, I think, is... social enterprise doesn't seem like a foreign concept in this area, because it has always been quite a self-contained area. For example, if you take the average fishing village, there are loads of people who are used to running their own business, because that's what a fishing boat is -and a farm- and so communities being involved in running things, doesn't seem like a particularly new or foreign concept here. I can remember talking to somebody about Whitehills Harbour -a fishing village 3 miles up the road. And if you read the minutes of the meetings of when Whitehills Harbour was built in 1895 it was then, and has always been, and still is, a social enterprise. That's how it was set up, and that was 1895. So, I think, this is an area where people are used to community-lead activity, and are not particularly daunted by the concept of having to earn money to do things. When I go to events like the DTAS Conference, it does come as a bit of a surprise when you hear people saying about how, trying to sort of raise that way of doing things in the area they come from, but you don't realise that all areas don't think that way already. So, I think, it is a good area to be running the kind of activity we are running in. And, as I say, it doesn't feel at all alien, or different, or modern really. And plus, it has, in fairness, had a relatively supportive local authority. I am not saying Aberdeenshire Council are perfect -far from it- but the kind of thing we are doing is not particularly hard sell to them and they like the idea of it and, I think, probably, we are definitely I am glad we are doing it here; because certainly when you hear stories about elsewhere and it does seem to have been more difficult to get that concept in the community and in the local authority. I can't think of anything else, that is who we are and what we do. We have been doing it a long time and imagine we will be doing it for a bit longer yet too.

Thank you very much