**Social Enterprise (SE) Forum**

June 25th 10-11am at Simply Play, East Calder

Present: Raymond Branton (VSGWL), Helen Davis (WLYAP), Jane Masters (Play Works), Jen Howard Coombes (AVHC), Victoria Isbister (VSGWL)

Apologies: WL Savings and Loans, Struan Gard (Xcite), Alistair Shaw (The Bridge), Mark Vance (WLDAS), Gareth McKenna (BUSC)

**Welcome, apologies and introductions**

Raymond apologised for the short notice of today’s meeting and confirmed calendar invites have been sent for the rest of the year. Raymond then spoke briefly about the positives from the last (inaugural) meeting, including the suggestion of thematic meetings, which people can dip in and out of, as well as specific events.

There are a wide range of large and small Social Enterprises in West Lothian. There are a dozen people coming to event tonight at the Gateway to encourage new start-ups.

Recap on possible themes from first meeting;

* Developing income streams
* Inter trading, incl. maybe a speed dating type event, to find out what each other does
* Collective purchasing of servicing, e.g. bulk buying utilities
* Branding to encourage people to choose SE, e.g. Buy Social
* Facilitate partnerships and joint bid opportunities – make introductions
* Networking and sharing good practice – every 2nd meeting held out in members’ sites
* Share training opportunities – particularly [Business Gateway](https://www.bgateway.com/events). Agreement that it would be helpful to have these pushed out regularly as reminders. Raymond and Stuart (VSGWL) are meeting the Chamber of Commerce next week to explore opportunities.

**Discussion**

Rather than go through the agenda, with such a small group, there was a discussion to explore the above. Feedback was that these were all relevant. In Addition:

* What about a low-level mentoring opportunity – mapping skills throughout the region? Recognizable value and talent within the sector, even 2 hours commitment can be useful.
* An opportunity to offload frustrations would be welcomed, uncertainty about team building activities (like an escape room), which can cause stress. Good feedback and visual difference in people from recent development day in Craigshill gardens - being outdoors is therapeutic. Food related activities acknowledged to go well.
* A gathering without purpose – space and time to blether, as opposed to a structured event.
* West Lothian is small; would it be difficult to open up about difficulties when you are in a room with people you may know and perhaps be in competition with?
* Collective power, consortia model, better funding opportunities. Although funding reports still showing more individual organisations than Consortia being awarded funding (despite partnership working being desired). Would be useful to get big funders to the table to explain what they are looking for i.e. Heritage Lottery Fund, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Garfield Weston, CORRA, Emse Fairbairn, etc. Important that WL gets its fair share!
* Longer bigger term – collective uses of spaces in WL for Third Sector, hub structure?
* The Gateway produce an annual report (recently published), which includes case studies. Perhaps next year this might focus on SEs?
* Explore successful consortia’s - what’s the secret? Look at examples of success, organise conversations and study visits?
* It was noted that there are changes afoot in WL Council - election, changes in key roles, more budget cuts: this can bring opportunities and innovation. Can we explore what solutions we can provide (awareness of resource limitations). Also need to explore possible opportunities through Community Wealth Building agenda.
* Mapping out scale of services and examples of pilots which have already delivered, e.g. school non-attenders (Dale Hub intervention) increased school attendance, which is a large, and growing, issue.

Raymond spoke about the opportunities this forum provides and his hopes for its future: e.g. already engaging with new people, and a specific focus on social enterprise and what makes us unique.

**Data tracker development**

SCVO publish data every quarter, which is based on a national sample. Raymond plans a mini version of this for WL, which will give us local data and a comparison to the national picture. It will need a quarterly return from contributors, and he will be looking for organisations soon.

**Actions**

* Ask Clare Stewart as a guest speaker on Community Wealth Building
* Draft some plans for future meetings/themes and events
* Terms of Reference approval
* WLSEN Update and resource allocation

**Future meeting dates and venues**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 13th August ‘25 | Gateway | 10am - 12 |
|  | 24th September ‘25 | Broxburn United Sports Club | **1pm - 3pm** |
|  | 05th November ‘25 | Gateway  | 10am - 12 |
|  | 17th December 2025 | S.M.I.L.E. in Livingston | Xmas event? |
|  | 28th January ‘26 | Gateway  | 10am- 12 |
|  | 11th March ‘26 | Simply Play in East Calder 10am - 12 |
|  | 22nd April ‘26 | Gateway | 10am - 12 |

*All dates have now been circulated as calendar invites.*

Teams channel: [SE Forum | SE Forum | Microsoft Teams](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/channel/19%3ANhgpImntPCSuJEv3EvcUAfarYrQuyqeK38j5svw47J01%40thread.tacv2/SE%20Forum?groupId=d334c487-ad49-41cb-8a6f-63806fac523a&tenantId=be050862-75a4-4dfd-be60-e3f75dea411c) – chat & share away!