

Empowerment
Employment
Enterprise

socialfirmswales
enterprise, employment, empowerment

Valued, Useful & Included, my Place in Society

Manifesto 2021

Valued, Useful & Included, my Place in Society

Social Firms Wales works with organisations to develop unique firms that create inclusive, sustainable, and supportive work environments that recognise the value of each individual's contribution, and more broadly, positively impacts the workforce as a whole.

For people with a disability, those who have a history of offending, people managing addiction, experiences of homelessness, and people living with mental health conditions, paid work is not just about having a job. **It is about being valued, useful, and included.**

What is a Social Firm?

A Social Firm is one type of Social Enterprise. Social Firms are businesses committed to creating employment, work-based training, and volunteering opportunities for people who are furthest from the job market, who face significant barriers to gaining, and retaining employment.

Social Firms subscribe to the three values of **Enterprise, Employment, and Empowerment**. They combine commercial orientation with a social mission, a balance of 'mission and money.' offering supportive, inclusive, enabling, and progressive work environments.

What do Social Firms offer?

Social Firms throughout Wales are in the main, small social enterprises each offering a wide range of goods and services such as recycling and up-cycling, printing, manufacturing, catering, horticulture, arts and crafts, and advocacy and training. All Social Firms employ diverse workforces of which at least 25% of those employed are from easily excluded groups. Each one contributes a positive impact related to economic, social, and environmental challenges.

Like all social enterprises, Social Firms operate in the commercial market arena, facing the same challenges of all businesses, yet with additional challenges of creating inclusive, supportive, enabling, and progressive work environments. Unlike traditional business models, any profit is reinvested to enable the firm to remain sustainable and to create more paid work, and opportunities for inclusion. Fulfilling the mission of Social Firms means prioritising the employees as opposed to increasing financial rewards to managers or shareholders.

Supporting Policy

At Social Firms Wales, and in line with the Social Firms movement more broadly, we align to deliver and support key objectives set out within legislation and policy. Our key priorities are underpinned by the *Wellbeing and Future Generations Act* to deliver a *More Prosperous Wales; a More Equal Wales* and to support *Cohesive Communities*. We rise to the challenge of developing opportunities through

the *Welsh Government Economic Action Plan* and the nine outcomes outlined in *'Transforming Wales through Social Enterprise,'* Wales' social enterprise sector 10-year vision and action plan.

About Social Firms Wales

Social Firms Wales is the National Support Agency for Social Firm development across Wales. We are committed to demonstrating how Social Firms can offer a positive and sustainable solution to the challenges of unemployment and social exclusion experienced by people facing the greatest barriers in the job market. People who are disabled, ex-offenders, those who have experienced homelessness, people managing addiction, and people living with mental health issues can all experience adverse effects with the labour market, yet all, given the right support, can make a valued contribution.

Excluded groups of people have always faced significant challenges to securing and retaining paid work. This challenge has been further exacerbated by Covid-19, the global pandemic which has dominated 2020 and continues to dominate 2021, impacting negatively on the job market. At the time of drafting this manifesto the world is still working through the immediate impact of the pandemic, with many enterprises still in what may be described as 'the survival stage.' Sadly, there is an expectation that when restrictions are relaxed the real impact of the crisis will unravel. Businesses will be trying to recover, yet business support schemes will have likely ceased. There is an expectation that many businesses will close, and their workforce left unemployed. This means those who experience extreme exclusion will be de-prioritised (again) with the scant opportunities privileged to those closest to the market and recently out of work.

Yet, we believe that all people whatever their ability, culture, and background have a right to make the most of their position in society and to be valued for their contribution. It is all too easy to bypass and exclude people who present challenges to employers and workplace cultures where their ability or background over-shadows what could be their valuable contribution in the workplace and society.

Why the need for Social Firms?

Disability

Disability prevalence is higher in Wales than it is in England, with over 20% of working-age people living with some form of disability. Only around 50% of this demographic are in employmentⁱ and those who are in work are more likely to experience in-work disadvantage compared to their non-disabled counterparts.ⁱⁱ For people with an intellectual disability, the story is bleaker. Only 6% of working-age people are in any form of employment. Since the 1990s, employment for people with an intellectual disability has been a key policy issue, yet the number of people in work within this demographic has fallen and continues to do so. Specialist employment programmes prioritise those closest to the employment market leaving those who, with the right support, could offer a valued contribution to the workplace, rendered unemployable. Such strategic priorities leave little scope to increase employment prevalence.ⁱⁱⁱ

Ex-offenders

On leaving a term in prison, individuals face significant challenges which include securing accommodation and paid work. While ex-offenders are more likely to re-offend if they do not have a job, only just over 15% manage secure work within a year of release. Yet over 90% of employers that

promote inclusive and diverse recruitment strategies say that their reputation is enhanced, and they have won contracts based on their commitment to support ex-offenders.^{iv} Social Firms can support ex-offenders to integrate back into society by supporting enterprises with the employment process.^v

Addiction

Alcohol or drug addiction is a predictor of unemployment. The employment rate for those who have developed problematic dependence is less than half of the general population. Sustained employment is a priority within the UK government's Drug Strategy (2010) and there is a significant positive relationship between employment and recovery, yet few who enter a programme of treatment go on to be successful in securing paid work.^{vi} The Welsh Government have highlighted a particular challenge with younger people who have experienced addiction not having the opportunity to re-engage in education, employment, or training opportunities and recognise training and employment as a key component of successful substance misuse treatment.^{vii}

Homelessness

Local authorities in Wales have worked hard to ensure that the statutory homelessness provision has stayed stable throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in the short term,^{viii} yet the long-lasting economic impact is yet to be realised. With an increase of 68% in the usage of temporary B&B accommodation between March 2019 and March 2020,^{ix} this situation is precarious. People who are or have experienced homelessness are often alienated from mainstream employment, yet evidence demonstrates that paid work is an important element in helping people overcome their domestic circumstances.^x

Mental Health

Now, more than ever, supporting people who are experiencing issues with mental health is crucial. Emerging local data suggests that clinical psychological distress is being experienced by half of the population, with around 20% describing their mental state as severe – a fourfold increase. Such research is informing and preparing mental health services for a wave of mental health problems.^{xi} Employment can have significant benefits and increase an individual's quality of life by offering stability, structure, dignity, respect, a purpose, and financial independence^{xii} yet research show that over a third of people with mild to moderate mental health problems are unemployed in Wales.^{xiii}

Compounding inequalities

Around 4 in 10 ex-offenders have some form of disability or mental health issue, while around 30% have experienced addiction.^{xiv} 90% of young people who have experienced homelessness also struggle with their mental health.^{xv} These interconnected examples highlight the multiple and compounding needs likely to be experienced by people who face social exclusion. Such combinations and factors such as long histories of unemployment, low work experience, and qualifications, and poor confidence can make entering the mainstream workforce a significant challenge while reinforcing a position of marginalisation.^{xvi} This position will have no doubt, been further exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

What can the Welsh Government from 2021 do?

We believe that any Government, whatever its political persuasion, has the responsibility to set the financial and economic framework within which Social Firms, social enterprises, and other Third Sector organisations can thrive. As we move out of the global pandemic, but into a period of extremely tight public financing, the smart thing to do is to shift the mindset from departmental spending to holistic investing so that public funds are used effectively and efficiently. Here, people are supported to take paid work, to participate in society in environments where they are included, useful, and valued. With this in mind we urge all parties and departments to adopt the following proposals:

Key priority one

To address inequalities for people furthest from the job market to gain and retain jobs in the labour market within supported, inclusive, enabling, and progressive work settings. All people have the right to participate in society, to live life to the full, and to have the opportunity and support thrive, without discrimination and prejudice.

Key priority two

Create the conditions that enable the whole of the Social Enterprise sector to grow and flourish by recognising the niche areas within the broader sector. To fully recognise the need for different ways of operating a business – that is, the balance of money, balanced with a mission. To acknowledge the need for Social Firms as a model of supported work environments that can provide many opportunities for participation, volunteering, work-based training, and long-term paid employment, and as a stepping stone for progression to the broader job market.

Key priority three

Commit to social value within everyday procurement and commissioning practices. Embedding social aims that build on the foundations laid out in The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) fosters the wellbeing of the nation to improve the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of Wales is essential in not only progressing with the healthier Wales agenda but ensuring no one is left behind with the progressive and aspirational objectives.

Key priority four

Fostering collaboration and partnership working within public services. The multiple and compounding needs within socially excluded demographics highlight the demand for a multiagency approach. Breaking silos between stakeholders is an essential feature of achieving goals, enhancing innovation, achieving greater success, and increasing the likelihood of employment being a realistic prospect for socially excluded people.

Examples of Social Firms

Examples of Social Firms in operation across Wales - A selection of 4 short case studies all providing paid work, work training, participation, and volunteering opportunities for people easily excluded from society.

Pembrokeshire FRAME - is a well-established successful Social Firm based in Haverfordwest. The Company was established to promote and provide education, training; and employment opportunities to persons from any disability group and persons who are considered to be socially excluded, to enable them to test their ability to undertake meaningful occupation or work, develop new skills and change direction in their lives and be valued members of society.

Miss Tilley's Community Café – Background: Miss Tilley's is a Self-reliant group, started in September 2016 that runs a café and baking group. Ethos being Promote Equality and Celebrate Diversity. The group supports young people with additional needs to be Team members, taking active roles with the café, baking group. The Café enterprise operates from two church room settings providing morning refreshments for the local community. The church room cafes are ideal for people to learn front of house catering skill and gain experience. For those with more experience and ready to move to more demanding and paid work environment there is opportunity to move the busy canteen at the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Llantrisant where Miss Tilley's provide the catering service.

Social Entrepreneur on the move - Andreas is of Greek Cypriot origin – from early work life he worked in the hospitality sector in Cyprus. Then, after Army service, he studied for a Degree in Hospitality, and he worked in the café/restaurant/bar marketplace. In year 2001, Andreas and his wife moved to UK, and they worked in various catering environments, finally setting up a home north Wales, working in the coffee industry. In 2010, Andreas returned to Cyprus and Athens, Greece, on a regular basis, twice annually, to deliver coffee barista training in women's prisons to help women to be 'job-ready' for the busy hospitality sector for when they are released. This came from social responsibility and drive to help others using his skills, experience, and vast knowledge of the industry. Andreas is in the process of setting up a similar programme for Wales and has just made valuable link with HMP Berwyn, Wrexham.

Double Click Design & Print – describes itself as a studio with a conscience, a not-for-profit firm combining professional design and print services to any business with supporting mental health in the Flintshire community. To achieve this, they create employment, work experience, training, and volunteering opportunities within a supportive and inclusive environment for those who face significant barriers to employment. The professional design team specialise in helping businesses create a dynamic, high quality brands, and offer a wide range of marketing material.

Want to know more?

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