



Footprints Women's Centre was first established in 1991. The centre was set up in Poleglass to take care of the needs of women who had moved from inner Belfast to the outskirts of the city in search of a better lifestyle. The geographical area is characterised by big housing estates, poor social infrastructure and few resources. The women's centre was set up to draw those women together and to give them a place of contact.

Footprints is based on a very strong self help ethos and has developed and grown around what local women have asked to be delivered. Initially that was confidence building and personal development. This then progressed into education, and then vocational and accredited training as well as academic qualifications such as GCSE's and certificates that would lead people to university access. From that the organisation has moved into the arena of job creation and particularly in those areas that women naturally gravitate towards; catering and childcare. Footprints have set out to make these viable careers, providing good work conditions and recognising the value of childcare workers. The childcare programme is now self sustaining, with 21 day care places registered here and in the process of expansion. The women involved in the catering business have demonstrated high levels of entrepreneurial skills and the catering business has become an amazing success.

Footprints Women's Centre is a limited company with charitable status, essentially to protect the rights of our directors who are women from the local community. Any profits that may come from the trading company are covenanted back in to the Women's Centre. Footprints Women's Centre is managed by a Board of Directors, which is comprised mainly of local women, and some professional women whose particular expertise compliments the knowledge and skills that the local women have.

Turnover for the trading company in its first year of operation was £140,000 which exceeded the set target of £120,000. Now in its second year the company has set itself an ambitious target of £200,000 turnover and based on current projections it is set to meet that target.



Lunch in Footsteps Restaurant

When the trading company started financial assistance was given by Belfast Regeneration Office. This assistance was specific to childcare provision provided by the organisation and was necessary because of the high ratios of assistance required within childcare. This assistance supported two of the childcare jobs as well as some

running costs for the organisation. We have recently obtained funding through Lisburn Partnership to improve the Drop In area in an attempt to increase turnover through the canteen. At present the trading company arm of Footprints Women's Centre is continuing without any external financial support from any organisation.

Catering Manager's Story:

I have been employed by Footprints Women's Centre since 1998. I was involved in the design of the kitchen with the architect and environmental health service. This development was an exciting time and particularly being involved in the design aspects of the kitchen especially as you are working in a kitchen to see it develop from the early stages to completion. The kitchen staff would cater for up to ninety people a day, which includes approximately 50 persons drawn from staff, regular centre users and occasional and day visitors. We also cater for the children in the childcare unit which would be up to forty children per day and on top of this we are also involved in special functions. Volunteering is essential for the smooth running of the kitchen and at any one time we would have five volunteers training in the kitchen and in general a volunteer would work a few hours

every week over say a period of a year and as they move on other volunteers come and work for us.

Volunteers are very important to both Footprints Women's Centre and Footprints Trading limited in that the centre couldn't survive without them. The women in the area who come to the centre come firstly to the drop in area and then they feed into other areas in the centre. They may need support in some way; they may want to use the training and education facility. The drop in is a good introduction to the centre and more often than not women that use the centre want to participate in the running of the centre and offer their services. The catering arm of the business relies quite heavily upon volunteering and in particular for the kitchen. The presence of volunteers in the centre encourages other women to come into the centre and this – both from a social aspect - through our social activities - helps us fulfil our social aims and supports the centre in the pursuit of its business aims given that those who use the centre spend money there also.

The day care facility does not have volunteers as it is a difficult area to volunteer in and because of the vetting procedures. But women come into the centre and then would go on to use the day care facility, so in every sense a woman coming into the centre and volunteering is encouraging women to use both the catering and the day care facility.

Moving into trading has been a success story at the moment but

that is not to say that it has been easy or without difficulties. It is a long hard struggle because, whilst in reality there are a number of incentives for community organisation to get involved in trading, when it actually comes to doing it there is actually very little out there to support you through that process. When it actually gets down to running the business and making it work, that comes down to the commitment of the people involved. We have fifteen jobs created since 1997 purely through the trading aspect of the organisation and are looking to create more posts. We have managed to sustain current posts, which is satisfying and is bringing much needed revenue into the local community. The strategic development of the organisation - through the development of the trading company – has made Footprints much more business like in its approach to the delivery of services which has its advantages and disadvantages because there are very few models of social enterprise organisations that exist in the heart of the community and are run by the community. You will get a lot of voluntary organisations setting up in business but there are less social enterprises being delivered in the heart of communities.

In terms of the future we have to constantly reassess what we are doing, why we are doing it and whether it actually fits in with the overall core values and aims of Footprints women's centre which are, to support women. Though the future at present is rosy we are very hesitant in the sense that we don't want to storm ahead to

quickly. We could actually turn our whole building into a business but that is not the direction we want to move in. We want both the business and the social activities to operate along side each other, and that is the continuing challenge for us.