New Leaf Creative Coaching

A first year evaluation

Cultivating Creative Potential
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Introduction

The ‘Creative Economy’ has been identified by Government as an important area for economic growth and critical as a driver for rebalancing the economy.

Statistics released in December 2011 indicate that:

- Creative industries contributed 2.9% of the UK’s Gross Value Added in 2009, an increase from 2.8% in 2008
- 1.5 million people are employed in the creative industries or in creative roles in other industries, 5.1% of the UK’s employment
- Exports of services by the creative industries accounted for 10.6% of the UK’s exports of services
- There were an estimated 106,700 businesses in the creative industries on the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) in 2011, representing 5.1% of all companies on the IDBR.

Somerset has a vibrant and growing artistic and creative sector. Somerset Arts Week and local arts festivals such as the 10 Parishes in Wiveliscombe offer the opportunities for artists, writers, photographers, film-makers and the myriad of other creative businesses or individuals to showcase their work.

However, many creative people lack support to increase their confidence in business development and marketing and many do not have the time or expertise necessary to take advantage of new ways to bring their work to the attention of a wider public. Social media – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn for example – can be time-consuming but are vital to increase investment, sales and knowledge base.

It was against this backdrop that New Leaf Life Design developed the Creative Economy Business Coaching programme. Recognising both the need within the community and the potential it has to contribute to the Somerset economy Becky Wright approached Somerset County Council for funding via the Creative Industries Development Fund and this report shows how fruitful that partnership has been.
Executive Summary

Methodology

Application process

An online application form was developed and the programme advertised via the local press and social media.

New Leaf Life Design allocated all 10 places of individual monthly Creative Economy business coaching to local creative businesses who could meet the following criteria:

- Being a visual artist (although applications from others in the creative sector were considered)
- Being sole traders / small businesses.
- Having a commitment to sustainable business development.
- Having not previously benefitted from training and business development initiatives offered to creative industries.

The application process was a success and places oversubscribed.

Programme Outputs

- Each of the ten participants had 5 sessions of coaching, each session lasting 90 minutes.
- Each participant was eligible for a half day one to one to develop Social Media within their business.
- All participants were invited to form a creative nexus group to provide enduring self-support after the project finished. The group asked for earlier, and more meetings which were facilitated. The final part of the coaching process involved a day of Action Learning in March which is reported on later in this document.
- The need for a work pack was identified early in the process and one was produced.
- Project evaluation process developed

The coaching was started in November 2011 and ended in March 2012. It was delivered on time and within budget, any additional costs were borne by New Leaf.

Aims & Objectives of the Coaching Programme

The stated aims and objectives of the programme were as follows:

- Greater confidence in creative industries managers by increasing personal development and skills.
- Increased levels of sustainability by developing a stronger business model.
- Awareness of greater ‘business’ potential by using social media
• Development of a ‘Creative Nexus’ group that will provide enduring peer support after the project finishes
• Strengthened business networks, collaboration and partnership development through participation in a shared learning/business development programme.
• Coaching support to participants to develop a competitive advantage by helping to create the conditions for growth in the creative sector.

This report finds that the following results have been achieved:

• Against all their objectives participants felt the coaching helped them achieve their aims. In most cases they felt it worked ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ well.
• There was a 50:50 split between those who felt five sessions was sufficient and those felt it was too few.
• The frequency of the sessions was held to be just right.
• The experience overall was overwhelmingly a positive one
• All participants said they would recommend the programme to someone in a similar position to themselves.
• The coaching programme helped participants most significantly in the area of marketing and both motivated them and gave them a more positive outlook on their work.
• Business planning skills were significantly improved, some businesses having a written plan for the first time following this programme
• All participants felt that the programme had a positive effect on their personal development
• The programme has helped raise morale, sees participants more positive and able to set personal development targets.
• More than thirty topics were raised in the coaching sessions and highlighted at the Evaluation Day.
• Participants particularly appreciated having a business mentor from outside the creative sector.
• A number of participants felt the programme would have been even more beneficial had it been a year long process.
• Experienced artists participating in the process would like to take forward a small group working together for focused professional and personal development.

This report was one of the stated objectives of the programme. The findings will be used to examine the value of the programme to the individuals involved and to the creative economy of Somerset.

The value of the creative industries to the economy has always been difficult to gauge. It is possible to look at obviously creative business such as photographers, artists and publishing houses but there are often creative individuals working within businesses outside the sector. However, it should still be possible to assess the longer term impact of the coaching on those who took part and a questionnaire will circulated 6 months after participants complete their coaching. The results of that evaluation will be published and appended to this report.
Some of the Creative Coaching participants at the Evaluation Day

Making connections at the evening group work session.

Simply Somerset - inspired design by Lorna Siviter

Helen Allcock displaying some of her art work at Rumwell Hall
1. The Creative Coaching programme

1.1 The aim of the programme

The creative industries sector in Somerset employs around 8000 people and accounts for approximately 8% of the county’s workforce. Somerset County Council recognised that the diverse nature of the creative sector offered opportunities to capture the enterprising, entrepreneurial and imaginative ideas to boost the local economy.

The Creative Industries Development Fund was established to boost enterprising ideas. It offers 50% match funding.

New Leaf worked with this Somerset County Council funding to provide coaching specifically to those working in the visual arts in Somerset, recognising that this part of the sector is made up primarily of sole traders working often in isolation and without business support.

1.2 Evaluation Methodology

Before the start of the Coaching Programme a formal evaluation process was established. Forms were developed to support participants in their choice of objectives and goals and to monitor their views of the programme as a whole after completion.

- With the coach, they chose three objectives for the coaching programme.
- At the end of the Creative Coaching Programme, the participants completed evaluation forms asking them to reflect on the effect that the coaching programme had on their personal development and working life, as well as asking for feedback about the Coaching Programme itself.

The results of this evaluation are presented in tables and graphs. All ten participants completed the evaluation process so the response rate is 100%. However the sample size is, by the nature of the programme, small. This must be borne in mind if percentages are offered.

Out of the ten participants, six attended all five and four attended four sessions.

A further evaluation will be undertaken six months after the coaching course was completed (September 2012). That work will focus on the longer term impact of the coaching and any economic and business advantage achieved as a result of the work with the participants.
2. Participants’ objectives

2.1 Objective setting: methodology

Each participant set their own goals and objectives at the first session, as well as stating the criteria by which success could be measured. This was done in order to set specific, immediate goals that would be the focus of the coaching programme. Each participant was given the opportunity to set three objectives. All did so bar one, who set just two.

2.2 Analysis of participants’ objectives

The objectives set were specific to each participant and covered a broad range of themes. Analysis of the participant’s objectives shows that popular themes were clearly to improve business skills (including business planning), improve networking and learn to promote a creative business more effectively.

![Participants objectives by theme](chart.png)

The table below offers some specific examples of participants’ objectives and success criteria.

**Examples of objectives and success criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective:</th>
<th>Success criteria:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To promote myself and my business more effectively</td>
<td>To raise my profile via social media, becoming more IT enthused and developing a fan base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving business awareness and sustainability</td>
<td>Sustainable business model and greater awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective:</td>
<td>Success criteria:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop a business plan</td>
<td>To write and act upon a plan and see its success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To exhibit my work and raise my profile both</td>
<td>Have a local exhibition and expand to Taunton and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>locally and nationally</td>
<td>Chelsea Flower Shows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have my work in more retail premises</td>
<td>Increase work in shops, have 10 shops selling work,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and develop a collection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 Participants’ self-reporting of achievement of objectives

At the end of the coaching programme participants were asked to revisit their original objectives and evaluate how successful they had been in meeting these objectives.

The graph below shows that against all their objectives participants felt the coaching helped them achieve their aims. In most cases they felt it worked ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ well.
The evaluation does show a division amongst participants in relation to the number of sessions they were offered in order to work towards these objectives.

![Participants views on having 5 coaching sessions](image)

A 50:50 split between those who felt five sessions was sufficient and those felt it was too few indicates that the maximum value was obtained from the sessions held. With work like this participants are going to come from different stages of development, some needing more or less support so the results are not surprising.

Further analysis of these figures showed that participants felt the frequency of the sessions was just right, the experience overall was a positive one and all said they would recommend the programme to someone in a similar position to themselves.
3. Participants’ views on the impact of the Coaching Programme on their working lives

Participants were asked to rate the impact of the Coaching Programme on their working lives. They were given a variety of statements and asked how strongly they agreed with each statement.

Five options were given for each statement: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, strongly disagree or disagree.

The graph above shows that the coaching programme helped participants most significantly in the area of marketing and both motivated them and gave them a more positive outlook on their work. As the programme lasted just five months it is not surprising that there was less impact on profitability – this will be examined again in six months time – but productivity has increased as a result of this work.

There has been a significant improvement in the way participants feel about the use of technology. Just one person felt their confidence had not improved and the majority felt that they were more confident in their ability to make decisions.
4. Participants’ views on the impact of the Coaching Programme on their personal development

4.1 Examining the figures

Participants were asked how good the Creative Coaching Programme had been at helping them to improve in various areas of their personal development.

As can be seen from the graph above, all participants felt that the programme had a positive effect on their personal development, the overwhelming majority deeming it to be ‘excellent’ or ‘good’. Importantly it has helped raise morale, sees participants more positive and better able to set personal development targets.

4.2 Some direct responses

The evaluation asked participants to comment on the impact they felt the programme had on their personal development in relation to their own development. They were asked to think about the following:

Please comment on any impact that you believe the Coaching Programme has had on you:

It is just wonderful to talk through my creative business with a mentor.

I find living in a rural area can be isolating and regular contact with a mentor keeps me on track
It has given me the opportunity to access and reflect properly on my own personal aims and goals

Please comment on any impact that you believe the Coaching Programme has had on your working life:

I am more engaged with the wider creative sector and am networking again and getting positive feedback from peers that actually I am doing really well and should keep going.

I am now addressing my work-life balance which seriously needed attention...

Please comment on any impact that you believe the Coaching Programme has had on your business:

Having produced a business plan I now know the numbers so am in apposition (finally) to make informed business decisions.

I feel I have been given solid, useable tools such as using technology, using invoicing and accounting templates and seeing how smartphones can help my business..

I have been helped to even my cash flow out which has created a much steadier rhythm to business activity, reducing stresses both financially and mentally.

A video testimonial was made and can be viewed at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjU7BF80z6A
5. Participants’ review of the Coaching Programme

The evaluation form gave participants the opportunity to comment directly on the Coaching Programme and the impact it has had on their development.

As mentioned in 2. Above, the overwhelming response to the programme as a whole was positive, with 100% of the participants stating that they would recommend it to others. The qualitative responses are the most useful indicator of the impact of the coaching however:

How has the Coaching Programme compared with other learning and development opportunities you have been given?

*Because the coaching has been geared so closely to what is relevant to me it has been easy to gain a higher level of learning than in other forms of education I have taken part in*..

*It has felt kind and nurturing, treating me as a creative individual to be treasured…*

*Really great that I got to set the goals so at no point did it feel like wasting time*

Do you have any additional comments about your coaching programme?

*The whole coaching process has been the single most important business exercise I have participated in*…

*I feel I would have had more success reaching my objectives had the course been spread over a year..*

*All positives, no negatives… Time very well spent*

*I believe this is a great asset to other artists and would strongly recommend them to do this programme.*

It is interesting to note that a number of participants, particularly those quite new to business, would have liked the programme to go on beyond the five months allotted to it and all highlight the value of having a business mentor.

Experienced artists participating in the process would like to take forward a small group which can work together to remain motivated, meet challenges and achieve powerful personal and professional development in a safe, dynamic atmosphere.
6. Evaluation day

The end of coaching evaluation day was held on 21st March 2012, facilitated by Becky Wright and Katie Venner.

The day looked at the following:

- Evaluation - Why evaluation is so important in Creative Economy work and feedback from the coaching evaluations.
- What next - what does all this tell us in terms of what you need / desire/ next.
- Pick and mix peer coaching, action learning, open questions
- Endings and celebration

Last minute cancellations meant the day went ahead with 5 participants.

The group looked at the range of topics covered in the one to one coaching and were given the opportunity to choose what they considered a particular achievement and something they still want to learn more about.

The list below shows the wide range of issues explored within coaching:

- How to create stand for shows/ trade fairs
- Developing new income avenues
- Creating a business plan
- Developing a website including starting an online shop, content management and using keywords, making videos and writing biographies
- Creating press releases and newsletters
- Using photography within business
- International trade
- Copyrighting and trademarking
- Using social media Twitter, Facebook and Linkedin
- Changing attitude to money
- Moving from being invisible to visible.
- Networking
- Managing cash flow and sourcing funding
- Communicating a business vision
- Developing self confidence
- Overcoming self-criticism/self-sabotage
- Promotion and marketing
- Creating new workspace
- Writing CSR statements (Community Social Responsibility)
- Market research
- Attracting new customers
• How to get into magazines
• Work / Life Balance
• Branding and packaging
• Referral fees
• Authenticity
• Developing Associates
• Setting up accounts and opening business bank accounts
• Costing materials
• Strategies for sustaining business
• Identifying ongoing support needs.
• Diversifying products
• Using business mentors

On the day everyone felt the objectives they set in coaching were met well or very well.

It was emphasised how helpful it had been for a coach who was not part of the creative sector to be involved so they did not carry the history of the arts sector in Somerset and came from a very objective business perceptive.

What next for participants?

• Participants wanted to continue to have some reflective space, to continue networking with each other via LinkedIn creative hub and email.
• Option for employment was explored and the challenges that may emerge from taking on an employee within the company.
• A need to look at a more collaborative way of working in the future.

What next for the group?

• Opportunity to celebrate Somerset (shows, Symposia, Celebrate Somerset)
• To deliver a seminar on branding
• To be part of a small support group
• Business networking with value, to work at a deeper level.
• For New Leaf to act as a platform at a future show to launch new talent.

Action Learning

The group were introduced to Action Learning and experienced first-hand what being part of a set would be like. Five people is an ideal number for this and the group left with some enthusiasm to be part of this in the future. It was a powerful experience and the group wanted time to process it.

Time was taken at the end to reflect on highlights and CPD certificates were awarded.
7. Conclusions

It is clear from the evaluation that this programme has achieved significant results for the participants involved. When re-visited in September 2012 it will be of interest to see whether there has been a longer term gain in terms of productivity and profitability but in the uncertain financial climate that all businesses in Somerset are experiencing this might need to be repeated again when the local economy as a whole is experiencing real growth.

Evidence from this work supports the view that business mentors – from outside the creative sector – would be of value to these small businesses as they seek to grow and add value to the economy. Participants express the difficulties they face in mixing the ‘creative side with the ‘business’ side as it is often not possible to be creative to order. Clearly this programme and worked to support business in managing their time more efficiently and has given them confidence to set goals and objectives and develop the business planning process.

New Leaf has offered a great deal of additional time and support not originally included in the bid to ensure that the programme responded to immediate need. Meetings were rearranged to suit participants and as circumstances changed the programme was flexible enough to allow participants affected to continue with the process, which has been much appreciated in responses to this evaluation.
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