

Connection

years of social impact

Crew

Connection
Crew

Part

01

Welcome to our 10 year report. This is the story of how we employed 144 ex-homeless people to complete 67,943 hours of work in 10 years and more importantly, what we learnt.

Very occasionally, a unique mix of chance, talent, energy and determination combine to create something that is greater than the sum of its parts: 10 years ago, an idea began to grow and eventually became what we now know as Connection Crew.

Connection Crew wasn't built by a single person or vision. It has been a collaboration, a shared mission, the result of years of partnership, courage and toil by so many extraordinary individuals, against incredible odds and, at times, in impossible circumstances.

This report sets out to capture our incredible journey, but rather than a droll, self-congratulating account of how utterly, perspicaciously impeccable our judgement and decision making has been over the years, we wanted to explore something far more authentic. Our aim is to examine the social impact we have had in 10 years of being a social enterprise, but as told by the voices that were there, the actual people that have been directly involved.

The truth is, it has been tough to get this far and we made some difficult decisions and some bad decisions along the way.

We learned some incredibly important lessons that have informed much of our culture and perspective today. Without these lessons, and without the honesty and integrity to really ask the hard questions, we might not be where we are.

Most companies seek to protect valuable commercial relationships from mishaps and failures within their business in the interest of maintaining a profile of excellence in their work. But we're not just any business. We are a social enterprise with a mission to support ex-homeless people back into work and that sits deep in the heart of everything we do. So transparency is important to us, owning our mistakes helps us grow as much as owning our successes. And where there has been failure we should see this as good, because it forces us to talk about it, creates an opportunity for us to make things better and move forward.

None of the lessons in this report are unique to us. As an organisation we've faced the same challenges that many social businesses have faced over the years. The advice that is shared has also been shared before. And neither are the solutions we've tried and tested breaking innovations along the way.

So why are we sharing this with you all? Well, we hope that in sharing our experiences, in sharing our conversations over the last 10 years, we will in some way pay tribute to all the incredible people and their contributions that have made Connection Crew what it is today. We also hope that this report will help and inspire others facing similar challenges to us.

We took risks. We didn't build a social enterprise to become Best Crewing Company in the UK at the Event Production Awards 2016 without having to think on our feet and improvise. We didn't get here without a fight. It's taken a lot of guts, and a lot of people willing to take a chance because they believed in Connection Crew.

So here it is, our story of endeavour and of lessons learned. We hope you enjoy it.

Rock and roll.

Charlie and Warren

This story of 10 years of social impact at Connection Crew is told in the voices of the following people:

Jake Cave-Lynch

Crew Chief, Connection Crew

Hugh Chamberlain

Procurement Manager, Johnson & Johnson

Jamie Clark

Freelance Photographer

Cormac Collins

Crew Chief, Connection Crew

Michael Crevier

Crew Member, Connection Crew

Richard Crowe

Managing Director, Creative Staging

Charlie Dorman

Director, Connection Crew

Colin Glover

Chief Executive, Connection at St Martin's

Paul Grecian

Chairman, The Gallowglass Group

Sarah Martin

Travel and Logistics Co-ordinator,

Production Bureau

Bobby Meggie

Driver, London Venue Transfer

Emily O'Connell

Job Brokerage Executive, Crisis

Warren Rogers

Director, Connection Crew

Nick Temple

Deputy Chief Executive, Social Enterprise UK

Franck Tetu

Freelance Production Manager

Bob Thust

Strategic Advisor, Power to Change

We'd like to thank them for taking the time to be interviewed and share their experiences with us.

Contents

Part 01	p01
Foreword	
Part 02	p05
Not another shoe-shine business	
Part 03	p08
A good idea is not a license to trade on good will	
Part 04	p13
Before it all went wrong	
Part 05	p16
And then 2008 happened	
Part 06	p21
Enter Connection Crew CIC – the yes factory	
Part 07	p24
Going back to basics	
Part 08	p31
So that was our history – this is us now	
Part 09	p34
What's next?	
Part 10	p39
Close	



Rock + Roll

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Part

02

Not another shoe-shine business
Jamie + Paul + Colin / Early 2005

Lesson 1:

Coincidence is a wonderful thing

Recommendation 1:

Find people brave enough to work with you and seize upon the opportunities coincidence throws out

Meet Jamie Clark. Jamie, in his own words, a 'scruffy, beer swilling hippy', was working at the homelessness charity Connection at St Martin's (CSTM) as Deputy Manager of the Advice Team. For Jamie, working with homeless people was

"Shakespeare and we're in it. It's death, blood, sweat, all of that, literally death. Fights, people, warts and all. It's a level of society that we know is there but we never really have any face to face contact with for any length of time."

His father had passed away some time ago, and he would often take his mother to mass when he visited her. Whilst at mass he bumped into one of his fathers' old friends, John Grecian, father of Paul Grecian, the founder of Gallowglass, a gargantuan crewing company.

They got talking. Jamie recalls "I'd got to the point where I could speak articulately about what I do, plus I was frustrated about certain protocols preventing me from doing what I do effectively. I spent 10 minutes waxing lyrical about it, basically just getting shit off my chest.

And he was listening quite intently". Soon after, he got a call from John. "I liked listening to you talk. I think there could be an in here with my son Paul".

"To be frank it was my idea originally", admits Paul.

"I'd been considering for a while trying to set up a labour business that was charity-based."

Jamie bought into it immediately and then won approval from his bosses at St Martin's."

Jamie's boss was Colin Glover, CEO of CSTM. "Jamie came to me and said he had an idea, and it's possible if somebody else had said that, it wouldn't have happened but actually Jamie is the type of person who is hugely enthusiastic and it would be wrong to say no to him. So we took him out of his advice work, and gave him six months and said go and dream".

Paul's belief that everyone has a moral obligation to be socially responsible was one driver behind this project. Gallowglass has always supported charitable organisations, giving away £50k - £100k yearly.

But this wasn't just philanthropic. Paul recognised a unique business opportunity here, as well as a chance to satisfy a certain curiosity. "I was interested to see how the market would react to this concept. I hoped Connection would take business away from some of the other parasites inhabiting the lower end of the event spectrum. Instead of having to compete on price I hoped that clients would be prepared to pay Connection slightly more than they would the others."

Ouch. But brilliant nevertheless. "The initial hope was that Connection would draw on a resource too far from our reach, and as these young people gained more on-site experience and started to pull their lives together, they would gravitate towards Gallowglass." And thus freeing up space

for more ex-homeless people to join the ranks. Sounds great in theory, but it didn't quite play out like that in practice. Plus Jamie had other concerns about it. Firstly in terms of the model itself. "Clients actually said to me, you know it's hard to make a margin in this job. Even if you weren't using ex-homeless people you are going to really struggle to make money in this market". Secondly, crewing is tough. And lastly, his complete lack of experience. Remember, this was to be Jamie's baby. "I said to Paul - I've no experience of business and I've no experience of crewing or the events industry. How do you think I can do this because I don't know what I'm doing? And he said - 'well, it's really easy.' So I thought - you've made it work, I'll trust you."

For the charity there were also some concerns but they recognised the opportunity to try something innovative - social enterprises were a relatively fresh concept at the time - that could actually break the cycle of homelessness.

Colin comments:

"Employment is the only real route out of homelessness. If all we were to do at CSTM was to feed people and to occasionally put them up in a hostel, the atmosphere here would be totally different."

We're about resolving people's homelessness, and that means getting them jobs."

And it was about the type of jobs too. "What I liked so much about the idea of Connection Crew was that it wasn't just a shoe-shine business, it offered an opportunity for real progress."

Jamie, Paul and Colin's meeting of minds happened in February 2005. Connection Crew launched in May and had its first job in September.



What have events and homelessness got to do with each other?

There's a sweet spot where the profile of people who are well suited to and successful at event crewing meets with the strengths of people who have experienced homelessness. Jamie had had no exposure to crewing before but he recognised immediately that

“it's a difficult job to perform in. You need to be strong, presentable, you need to be able to think on your feet... getting to places on time.

I mean sometimes, I can't get that bloody right.”

Jake Cave-Lynch, a present day Crew Chief at Connection Crew, attempts to describe a typical day at work. “It could be starting at one or two in the morning, going from shift to shift with a few gaps in between, right through till midnight during busy times. I like the fact that there is always something different happening. Even if it's the same build in different locations, it's still different. There's not a massive amount of repetition.”

In summary, you need to have your wits about you. You need to be resilient. And you need to thrive on a lack of routine. That's what made Colin think this could actually work. “I suppose the other thing was the less than routine lifestyle - homeless or ex-homeless people are used to eking out a living and keeping chaotic hours.”

Putting events together in general is hard-core - not just the crewing element of it. Franck Tetu sums up the fit of profiles really well. Franck climbed the ranks of Connection Crew in a matter of months, going from being the first ex-homeless member of the crew, to leaving Connection Crew to become

a Production Manager. He describes one of his early production jobs. “We had men on site, a lot of them from Connection Crew, and this was a big project: for me it was 22 hours on site, go home for an hour to have a shower and change and come back. Do another 22 hours... it was mental. But I did enjoy it. The guys say, how do you do it? And I say I don't know. I'm used to it.”

And then there's the fit of Connection Crew's offer to the industry and the kind of people who work in it. As Jamie puts it “Events industry people are OK, they are not bankers [sorry bankers]. They are pretty caring people. And I think that's one of the reasons that Paul sited for starting this up originally. They are not wafty hippies but there is a certain amount of creativity required in producing events and creatives will probably want to support homeless people if they can.”

Conversely, there are many challenges that come with this fit. For example, the chaotic environment may not be unfamiliar to a homeless person but that doesn't mean that they will respond well to every element, such as having to be shouted at (it happens) or receiving orders.

And there is a gap in expectations between the private and third sectors.

“A good lad for me was different to what a good lad for Paul Grecian was.

And obviously I had barely worked in the private sector, I had a nine-month stint when I was 24. I'd had a disproportionate experience of unwell people. For me, a good lad was someone who was homeless in a low support hostel not digging their arm up with heroin” said Jamie.

The key thing is, in terms of the individuals you are employing, is to recognise when the fit is there and then to nurture it accordingly.

Part

03

A good idea is not a license to trade on good will
Jamie + Colin + Franck + Charlie
+ Richard / 2005-2006

It's September 9th 2005, and Connection Crew's first job. Franck was the very first member of crew. He recalls “It was pretty much, there is the t-shirt, there are the black trousers, there are the gloves. That was it. The first job was at Earl's Court with 10 ex-homeless guys. Yeah it was weird, nobody knew each other. Just 10 guys all wearing the same t-shirt and nobody knew what to do. But we did it.”

So, a few people with some fire in their bellies had got Connection Crew off the ground but they faced hurdles. There are a lot of negative stereotypes associated with homelessness. There is the challenge of ex-homeless people delivering a demanding job that they don't know a great deal about within an industry that cannot afford to compromise on quality. Good will doesn't last forever. To get past the starting blocks, Connection Crew needed to find a way to break down barriers and build in quality otherwise it was in danger of losing clients and damaging the confidence of the crew.

Lesson 2:

Goodwill and enthusiasm only get you so far

Recommendation 2:

Your business offer should be built on quality, not a warm fuzzy feeling, if you want to limit the damage to all involved

Jamie had a whistle-stop introduction to running a crewing company with Gallowglass, covering crewing, health and safety, marketing and more. “The marketing guy said to me ‘Here's the White Book (an event industry supplier directory), find 10 people, pop into their offices, pretend you're in the area, give them a call.

‘Hi I'm Jamie, have you got time for a coffee, I just happen to be in an obscure industrial estate in the middle of nowhere.’”

Initially the sell to clients was based around the charitable element. It's what the initial research exposed as a selling point. Colin recalls "Jamie talked to a lot of people, but possibly the wrong people. Initially he spoke to a lot of Chief Executives of companies, so it was a conversation at board level: he would say 'we are a homeless charity, if we set up a crewing company employing ex-homeless people, will you employ us, would you use us?' The answer from a board level was 'of course we would, it's in our CSR policy.' So we got very enthusiastic about the potential."

But in reality, this would fall flat largely due to the negative stereotypes that surround homelessness.

Colin continues "We soon realised that Chief Executives of companies aren't the people that make the decisions about which crewing company to use, and those that made the decisions had existing crewing suppliers and there was no particular reason why they should change.

To them the idea of a crewing company made up of ex-homeless people was a potential disaster. They assumed they would be rude, late and nick stuff."

Jamie adds "Homelessness is such a broad spectrum. The images people are fed are of old guys with beards swearing at you. So that's what people thought they were going to get. They didn't realise that homelessness can be someone sleeping on their friend's sofa for six months."

Speaking from personal experience Franck concurs. "When you are homeless nobody wants to help you because they think you are a tramp. I was homeless, but not a tramp. There is a difference. I would still shower every day." Thankfully though, as predicted, the idea did resonate with some of the creative community of event professionals. One of Connection Crew's very earliest clients was Creative Staging.

Richard Crowe, the Managing Director remembers when that first email from Jamie arrived in.

"It was very refreshing. We donate to charity but this was different. We could do something good by employing someone to do a real job. It's not someone coming to us with a begging bowl."

Connection Crew picked up a handful of like-minded clients that would be impressed with the enthusiasm of the team.

Richard describes one such occasion. "I remember once, doing an event at Lancaster House. We met the Connection Crew team outside to bring them all through security at once. There was a lot of security and they were armed with machine guns. Anyway, we all went through the barriers but somehow one of the guys got left behind. He was so keen to get in on time with us that he ran and went to jump the barrier and of course all the armed guards turned and pointed their guns at him. His enthusiasm nearly got him shot!"

"At this stage, everything about Connection Crew smacked of just OK and amateur because that was what it was to be perfectly honest" admits Jamie. The guys were not only new to crewing, but new to work. "So we sent them out with Gallowglass a few times, but how much can you learn in three or four shifts other than you don't know much? But they got a feel for it."

As Franck says "It was Connection guys wearing Gallowglass t-shirts. Just go with them and follow the crew chief and that's how you learn. That was the training then."

A step in the right direction, but it wasn't enough. The standard of the jobs coming in was low. Connection Crew were getting booked to sweep the stage while the professionals were doing the real work.

Lesson 3:

Exposure to quality doesn't help, you need to entrench it

Recommendation 3:

Get yourself an ace in the hole

Another fortunate coincidence was about to happen. Charlie Dorman was working as a production manager, stage manager and record producer. Things were going well, he was picking and choosing jobs and he found that he had a bit of time on his hands. He didn't like it. "So I was looking for a charity or a community project or something to go and volunteer some time to. I was doing online searches but didn't really know exactly what I was looking for." Then he found Connection Crew.

"I read the awful copy on the website but thought this looks really interesting."

Charlie and Jamie went for a pint, put the world to rights and that was it. Charlie became the first member of Connection Crew who wasn't ex-homeless. He joined as a crew member. As an outsider coming in, Charlie was able to observe what it was really like on site. "The chat and banter around the crew really wasn't appropriate a lot of the time. There were some excruciating moments. I would be standing chatting with some of the guys and they were talking about what they were doing over the weekend, things they really shouldn't have been discussing with the client standing a few feet away and looking at them as if to say a) why are you not working and b) you did what?! Another time, they were loading the truck and one of them cries 'oh sweet', picks up a fag butt from the floor and lights up. I'm thinking – seriously?"

But as he integrated into the team, he was able to bring some of his experience right into the heart of it. "Franck was crew-chieving me. I started on the ground trying to bring my years of experience to build in some quality. Quite quickly it got to the rest of the crew that I knew my way around a sound system and knew how to put things together so I was a bit of an ace in the hole for quite a while."

Lesson 4:

The homeless community can be difficult to move away from

Recommendation 4:

Disrupt the status quo to stimulate change

"I think there is a bit of the homeless community that doesn't exactly trap people, but discourages them from moving away from it, it can sort of be seen as betraying your mates"

explains Colin. A lot of the guys had known each other in hostels and had a history together outside of Connection Crew and that could be negative to the workplace. CSTM did a lot of work to disrupt those networks.

Colin goes on. "For example, years ago we would take 10 rough sleepers off the streets and put them into a house and expect them to behave like model citizens. We soon realised that was never going to happen unless we broke them up." The team learnt that asking people with no experience of crewing – or even of working – to deliver a valid service, was expecting too much. They started recruiting experienced crew to join the inexperienced crew and after some experimentation they found that one ex-homeless person in four seemed to provide the right level of support and skills in the mix to deliver quality and up-skill the less experienced crew.

So going forward the target was twenty-five percent ex-homeless crew to seventy-five percent experienced crew. As a result, the quality of service that Connection Crew could offer to clients increased and the business continued to grow.



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Part

04

Before it all went wrong
Jamie + Charlie / 2006 – 2008

The impact of a mixed crew meant business was getting busier. The quality of work was improving, the skill set of the crew was improving and Jamie's work plugging Connection Crew to everyone in the White Book meant that jobs were building steadily. However, as the business started to grow, the risks associated with running such a complex operation with so many moving parts started to come to the surface. Was Connection Crew expecting too much from everyone?

Lesson 5:

You can't be someone's social worker and manager

Recommendation 5:

Be clear with your expectations, implement a code of conduct

One of the challenges Jamie hit upon quickly was that of being a support worker and a manager.

“It's difficult to castigate and care for.”

For example, Connection Crew were accused of breaking a lift shaft by an ex-squaddie security guard and one of the crew 'offered him out' for a fight.

It's a situation that a social worker such as Jamie can empathise with. "Being accused or being told what to do and shouted at, people take that hard especially when they might have been abused psychologically and often physically."

Charlie worked closely with Jamie on devising some best practice. "We had to start thinking about what it's like to work for Connection Crew. Are we being consistent? Are we being reasonable in what we're asking people to do? Are we being clear in what's expected?"

So we created a recourse that stops it being subjective. Steering away from 'you let me down' to 'remember the code of conduct that we went through – is there anything you don't understand?'

We depersonalised it - it's not you it's the policy.”

Lesson 6:

You can't be everything to everyone all of the time

Recommendation 6:

Know your limits and start delegating for Pete's sake (don't be like Pete)

As more work was coming in, there were more and more demands for Jamie to meet. "We were up in temporary offices near the National Portrait Gallery and by the time we moved back into the brand spanking new building in Adelaide Street we had our biggest job ever. We put in and took out High School Musical at the Apollo in Hammersmith. We had 17 crew, I was doing 13 hours a day, and I got a call saying we need eight more crew for tomorrow. I remember saying OK fine, but we didn't have enough crew. The phones were down, we had no internet, so I walked into EasyNet and put an advert out on Gumtree – we need crew for tomorrow, call my mobile. So we got 'em in at three, inducted them at four and they were out on site at five."

It was around this time that Charlie started to come in a bit more often to support Jamie. "My job title then became Logistics Manager. Two or three days a week I'd give Jamie support with bookings, delivering training, some of the quality control stuff. The business started to shift into this period of growth. We measured how busy we were, how much money we needed to bring in, how much work we would need to do and how many jobs we would need to create.

All rudimentary things in business planning but at that stage there really wasn't a plan on that level. It was gung-ho - this seems like a good idea, let's just throw some shit at the wall and hopefully some of it will stick.”

Lesson 7:

Have standards - raise standards

Recommendation 7:

Set the bar high and offer training to that level

When clients had a really serious job, they weren't booking Connection Crew. They would tell Charlie 'we love it but it's not going to work – we've got four hours to put our show together. I'm all up for supporting your guys, but on site, frankly you're charging us for their time.'

So he introduced a training process. "I started examining what makes a good crew. What are we looking for, what are the standards? We didn't have any of that. There wasn't any quality control. That was the first big piece of work I did. I built the syllabus, the training materials, created those early definitions around what tools they should have, what skills we should have, what we would expect them to do.



Manpower

Colin Glover was concerned that “it seemed to become an all-male thing quite quickly and we questioned whether there were opportunities for women in this field. This is one that Connection Crew - and the industry at large - hasn’t quite nailed yet. Having said that I hear they are getting close to sending out their first all-female crew soon. It’s something they are working on.”

We started to be a bit more aspirational about where we could take it.

Getting further into that quality piece meant we were able to build a profile on who we were really looking for, who was going to be able to do this.”

Lesson 8:

Providing ex-homeless people with a job can put them at risk of losing their homes

Recommendation 8:

With careful navigation of the benefits system you can work around this

This was a concern for Jamie and CSTM right from the start but it started to rear its ugly head more as the crew got larger. Jamie commented “Many support workers, including me, would say to people who’d got into the low support hostels ‘don’t get a job, as it’s going to screw everything up, you’ll lose your housing benefit.’

The amount of times I’d gone through the system with people, got them into a hostel, then whoops, back to square one again. What happened I’d ask? Why are you back on the streets again? ‘Oh, I started working.’

So that was a real problem and alarm bells were ringing at Connection at St Martin’s.”

Jamie and the team devised a Housing Benefit Calculator – a formula to check that hours of work provided did not put the ex-homeless crew’s benefits at risk.

This period saw Connection Crew learning from mistakes but crucially, processes were being put in place allowing them to improve and progress.

Part

05

And then 2008 happened

Jamie + Colin + Charlie + Warren / 2008

In 2008 the banks collapsed and the world went into the worst recession it had seen since the Great Depression of the 1920s. The event industry was on its knees. Connection Crew lost at least 50 percent of its client portfolio in one fell swoop. Some remaining clients were operating at about 70 percent less. CSTM’s concerns about risk increased. It was looking at pulling the plug on a weekly basis and the prospect of starting from scratch was a daunting one for Jamie. A fresh approach and a lot more energy would be required if Connection Crew was to survive.

Lesson 9:

Sometimes the shit hits the fan and there is nothing you can do to stop it

Recommendation 9:

Don’t see barriers

Charlie puts the economic situation into context. “A large corporate or bank would look at the event budget and think they wouldn’t do a big dinner or three day conference, they would sack all that off and just get the top managers round the table in a large meeting room, biscuits only, no flowers, and certainly no crew.”

The response from the corporate market was acute. “It destroyed a lot of confidence. End clients - those procuring event services from the industry - would previously have been signing off budgets six months ahead but instead that timeline became reduced to something like six weeks. There was so much financial instability at that time that they would hold on to budgets right up until the eleventh hour.

So not only was there less money being spent there was a big reduction in confidence. The demands on the industry were huge. We still needed to deliver the same quality and standards but often at a much reduced rate and on a completely diminished timeline. That was very challenging.”

Jamie and Charlie stepped up their efforts and between the two of them they managed to double their remaining clients but still it wasn’t enough to keep the business on an even keel. Gutted.

And then, Charlie recalls “I came in and as usual Jamie and I were having our catch-up in the morning, working out what we were going to do for the day. And Jamie said he’d decided to leave and explore other opportunities. That was a real shock because he’d done such an incredible job of leading this so far. He asked if I’d be interested in taking it on – and that was an even bigger shock. I thought about it long and hard and realised I was getting a lot out of working with Connection Crew. I was really engaged with it.

Over the three years I’d been there, I could see the potential and my desire to see it succeed had grown. I realised that opportunities like this don’t come up very often.

I had got to a point where I was like, ‘I kind of have to say yes to this’ because it’s the kind of thing that probably won’t ever come up again. To work with people that no one else will give an opportunity to. To see them develop and grow. So I went back and said OK, I’ll do it. But I had two conditions...”

Condition 1: I wasn’t doing it on my own

If Charlie was going to realistically be able to take it on and keep jobs and keep paying wages then he was going to bring in a partner. Charlie called Warren, a friend and business associate. Warren was living a quiet, idyllic life in the mountains of Italy, having taken respite from the craziness of being a producer in the event and peripheral music industry. A lot of the people who have heard about ‘that phone call’ have wondered what the hell Charlie could have said to entice Warren down from his mountain retreat back into the heart of London and the events industry. Warren recalls “The idea resonated with me for a lot of the right reasons. It had a real purpose, it was in events, and it was an opportunity to lead something completely unique that wasn’t likely to come up again.”

It wasn’t quite that instant. Warren didn’t put down the phone and get on the first plane back to the UK. The pair of them spent several weeks on the phone discussing it, batting things backwards and forwards, and thinking about everything very seriously. If Warren had said no, Charlie admits that he probably wouldn’t have taken it on.

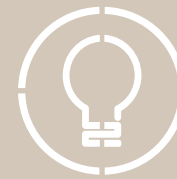
Condition 2: I was to do it my way, not governed by the charity

CSTM was thinking along the same lines anyway. Colin had already come to the conclusion that “You need to be a business with a social objective rather than a kind of social work scheme that is trying to run a business.” Jamie, Paul, Colin, Charlie and Warren spent 18 months transitioning Connection Crew out of CSTM, but first, everyone needed to be absolutely sure it was a good idea.

The charity were deeply concerned and rightly insisted that turnover needed to be raised for it to continue, and figures were reviewed on a month by month, sometimes week by week basis. Jamie recalls “It wouldn’t have happened without Paul Grecian’s support and without Colin for being mad enough to stick with it.”

Colin adds “We weren’t charging to anything in house, so it wasn’t paying for rent, it wasn’t paying for heat, light and power, it wasn’t paying for our financial team’s time, so there was a hidden subsidy. It was only when we started thinking about hiving it off that we started looking at the value of the hidden subsidy in particular because it was altering the costs.”

Warren comments on what it was like getting things to a healthy enough state to move out of CSTM’s head office in Adelaide Street. “We did everything. So it was pretty wild. It needed a hell of an amount of energy. And we worked in a box. We worked off white boards. We had two desks in there and no windows and you had to stand on each other’s desks to be able to put the crew bookings on to the board. At the same time it was a familiarisation process, getting to know how the charity worked. Also, there was getting to know about how we worked at the time and what the hell we were going to do to grow this business. We were just a couple of guys with a good idea but no real business experience.”



Being part of the charity

Working within Connection at St Martin’s and seeing the fantastic work that they do was a huge driver in getting Connection Crew off the ground. Warren remembers “Being close to their teams, going out on night walks, doing outreach work, working on their employment platforms - it gave me a huge exposure. Homeless people are very difficult to reach but we were working with them at the point when they’ve decided to be ready to come to work. Seeing some of those individuals putting on a Connection Crew jacket and getting them out to work with us, that was huge.”

Lesson 10:

Businesses and charities are culturally and financially very different beasts

Recommendation 10:

Make a decision on whether you are a going to be a project within a charity or a business

Charlie expands “Anyone who’s done it knows how punishing it is setting up a business. However, the added dynamic of trying to operate a business out of a charity means you are running a commercial operation out of a third sector organisation. It all comes down to risk. Charities by their very nature seek to diminish financial risk and their mission is to sustain services for the longest possible time. In business, there’s a need to be able to take measured risks and arguably the better those are measured, the greater the chances of success. It was at that point that it became apparent to all involved that there was a growing disparity between our financial objectives.”

If Connection Crew was going to survive it needed to leave the charity and in doing so we had to take on new risks.”

Warren adds “When we started with this, there was a big piece of work to do in setting up the business and spinning it out of the charity. There was a huge reputational risk to the charity with us taking Connection Crew out.”

Lesson 11:

Selling a unique business model can be confusing to external audiences

Recommendation 11:

Really challenge yourself to define your proposition and communicate it clearly

People understand charity, but not social enterprise. Especially then. Warren recalls “Social enterprise was around back then, but it was a grey area. In 2005 there was new legislation introduced for Community Interest Companies and start-ups. So we registered as a CIC which meant we had a legal framework that would work for us.”

At the same time we started to really examine our brand. It was a really interesting exercise at the time. When we asked ourselves what we thought we actually did, I thought well, provide crew, guys on a site, but we kept on challenging ourselves on what that really meant. The message became providing bright, committed and responsible individuals to the event industry.” Getting to those core words and those core values about the people Connection Crew wanted to work with was crucial.

Lesson 12:

Sometimes the things that you need are right under your nose

Recommendation 12:

Tap into your existing networks and play to your strengths (look under your nose)

Charlie explains “Commercially there was an opportunity and when Warren and I got out our list of contacts we realised we had a pretty fat slab of people that we could call and get business from. There were probably 10 key accounts we could bring in overnight. Both of us had been working professionally in the industry for about 10 years so we understood what clients expected. And the charity’s experience of events and running a business was limited. We were confident but didn’t expect to grow as much as we did in that first year. We just had to go for it and we did. It nearly killed us.”



Part



Enter Connection Crew CIC – the yes factory
Charlie + Warren + Cormac + Bob / 2009 – 2012

Connection Crew was on a serious growth trajectory. Concentrating on the business was working - they had grown a whopping 83 percent in the first year after exiting CSTM.

When in 2012 Connection Crew played out its three year business plan, it had done all the things it had set out to achieve: it had grown nearly five-fold, it had an office, it had staff, it had what seemed like a big crew back then with 60-70 guys. For the first time the organisation was really dealing with the challenges of scale. Plus, with the Olympics around the corner another burn out was on the cards – they needed to create capacity to deal with demand and get back to the mission but while they had grown, they didn't have the cash-flow to resource this. They had to make time to stop, reassess, slow down and look at growing their organisation more sustainably, but to do that they needed more money.

Lesson 15:

More is more

Recommendation 15:

Think bigger, more laterally and then seek investment – be strategic

The focus shifted toward commercial success, the intention being that more growth equals more jobs, hence more social impact.

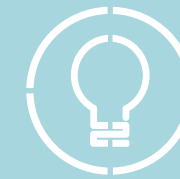
Ex-homeless numbers were still on the up, but what if you don't have the resources to deal with that? Connection Crew was struggling to implement the recruitment processes it had put in place in order to provide the support and rigour required to successfully employ ex-homeless people.

Nevertheless, the numbers all round were still rising, despite the economic climate. Connection Crew were in a good place to go to investors. Charlie summarises

“This is 2009 – and all that uncertainty in the market was very much alive.

All those voices around us saying this is the worst time to be doing this. Most companies were losing 25 percent a year and we were talking about building the same in a year. That's 50 percent over market activity.”

Connection Crew kept meeting its financial and social targets and as such it secured investment. Two more roles were funded through Big Issue Invest to share the load – Mathias Berry on operations and Robin Beshoori on sales. In theory it would free up some time for Warren and Charlie to revisit the mission. A social enterprise is not a regular business, it's exciting, it's rewarding and it's a great big responsibility. It's not just an interesting business model - it's peoples' lives.



We nearly lost one

Warren and Charlie had learnt the hard way on what creating jobs without enough consideration could do. Charlie recalls “We've had this track record that everyone has either stayed with us or gone on to another job. And then we nearly lost one. This guy had been working with us for a few years and he was doing really, really well. Historically he'd had some serious substance misuse issues, but he was clean, really on it and an amazing guy to work with. Incredible attitude on site, never quit, always smiling, always chirpy, everyone loved him.

Then one day he just didn't turn up.

We thought that's weird – he's always there half an hour early. This guy doesn't miss a beat. Ring him. No response. Let's hope he's alright. Next day, no response. We were still at CSTM at that point and I was getting really concerned, so I went and spoke to his old case worker and he said he'd look into it. We knew where he lived so we went round to his house to see if he was there and sure enough... And that was really tough. For about six months we couldn't employ him but we reconnected him with case workers from the charity. He came back to work with us eventually, worked with us for about another year or so. And then went off into the industry, working freelance and as a crew chief at another company for a bit.

That was a really powerful lesson for us. We'd failed him. We'd put him in a situation that he wasn't equipped to deal with. He was so terrified of messing things up and losing his job and flat, that in the end he couldn't cope with it. And that was our failing not his. We hadn't recognised the level of support that's required for someone to make that step – it's huge. This isn't a business plan, this isn't a fucking strategy, it isn't a concept, it's people's lives. We always took that seriously but for me that really made me pay attention in a very different way. So we went back to it and ripped it up and started again.”



Working with Deloitte

Bob Thust, currently Strategic Advisor at Power to Change comments on why Connection Crew became part of the very first Deloitte Social Innovation Pioneers programme. Bob explains how other organisations can impress and be pioneering in social enterprise too, still relevant today in terms of trying to attract investment from the corporate sector.

"I was director of Corporate Responsibility at Deloitte and I initiated the programme because I wanted to do something that was a little bit different from your standard CR activity. We did a lot of charity awards and some quite interesting programmes, but I felt like we could do something that would impact on our overall social purpose. We also hoped that the social businesses we worked with would be able to influence the way in which our business operated.

For that first round of the programme we were looking for organisations that had started strongly. Yes, Connection Crew had challenges in the early days as you always do, but Charlie and Warren clearly had a lot of experience in the events industry and were very passionate about what they were doing and they'd proven that this could work. So we felt that there was a real opportunity for them to grow.

We also wanted to feel sure social impact was fully embedded in the business: there are social enterprises that have a donation model and I have no problem with them, but fundamentally we were interested in social enterprises that deliver social impact as a core part of what they do day-to-day. The real thing that I think we got excited about with Connection was that while it was all about helping people get back into employment and breaking the cycle of homelessness, there didn't appear to be any compromise in the quality of the end product. I think some of the organisations were kind of just looking for us to tell them what we would do for them. Whereas actually we needed them to push us. Connection Crew were good. They did push us quite hard - Charlie in particular - about what they wanted and what they needed."

This era climaxed with the summer of 2012 - the very mention of which makes many event professionals shudder. Charlie was forced to remember. "That year was just an absolute monster. The summer of the Olympics, the Diamond Jubilee, it nearly killed all of us. Our growth as a business was so compressed, and so intense and so dense - basically it all happened in June and July. It was insane. Half the growth we did that year was in six weeks. That taught us a lot about ourselves - our willingness to deliver come hell or high water." Connection Crew remained committed to their clients and crew. This was noted by Cormac Collins, a present day Crew Chief at Connection Crew who started in the industry that summer. "I'd had a little experience of working for other crewing companies that summer, it was during the Olympics which was a weird time for crewing. It was personal at Connection Crew though, I noticed the difference straight away."

They decided to look at investment again. Charlie commented "We realised we needed to examine what we're doing properly otherwise we were going to keep drifting.

We needed to be sharper and more focused about what we were trying to achieve.

We did the Deloitte Social Innovation Pioneers programme and that was the start of putting together quite a big investment package to Big Issue Invest and Unltd which we won, eventually. It was about trying to think much bigger about Connection Crew and getting Deloitte to help us look at what the most difficult, knotty parts of the business were to see if we could resolve some of those issues. Scalability is as important to commercial impact as it is to social impact.

The fact is there is a limit to how big Connection Crew can be operating at with 25 per cent ex-homeless crew - there are only so many ex-homeless people that are going to be suitable for the kind of work we are doing."

Part



Going back to basics

Charlie + Warren + Emily + Cormac + Bobby / 2012 - 2015

This section of Connection Crew's story sees it implementing what it had learned in the last three years. The organisation was still growing but it was imperative that certain strategic challenges were looked at more carefully. The investment from Big Issue Invest and Unltd meant that with a few more hands on deck there was room to work with other charity partners. Numbers of ex-homeless recruits were dropping but that was preferable to employing in the same vein as previously.

It was more important to get this right. It wasn't about quick fixes and short terms goals, it was about nailing this for the next 10 or 20 years. The main issue to address was determining an effective and robust on-boarding process.

Lesson 14:

One size doesn't fit all

Recommendation 14:

Define the experience with all stakeholders and then build in the process

Over the years, Connection Crew had been developing its approach to engaging ex-homeless people. To successfully hire enough ex-homeless people, it needed to broaden its network of charity partners, and with the new roles in place, Warren and Charlie had time to develop a relationship with homelessness charity Crisis. They tested ideas together - Connection Crew learning from Crisis' own processes and creating an experience that could slot in with the journey they created for their clients, not jar against it.

Emily O'Connell, Job Brokerage Executive at Crisis describes the journey their clients go through to ensure long-term success. "I always think of it as a journey through our building. The first thing is the engagement classes we run around wellbeing, the arts classes, performing classes and fitness classes. All a really good starting point. That begins to open peoples' eyes to the fact that they are not the only ones in this situation, there are others out there who are in similar situations too. I see the next part of the journey very much as getting the qualifications and confidence to start moving on with their lives - learning courses, and training around IT, literacy. Then, from that, I would see people coming into our employment service."

Lesson 15:

We can't do it alone

Recommendation 15:

Create ownership of your social agenda across your whole organisation

Connection Crew recognised that it needed peer-to-peer support in the workplace. "It's not that as an employer we can't provide support, it's that we can't provide coaching for people, but that workplace support was really important. Also culturally, thinking about how we're communicating this, how we're building that culture of support into our crew" explains Charlie.

It trialled its very first mentoring scheme. "We didn't want to just be another crewing company, we wanted the people that we worked with to really buy into the mission. We wanted to build good attitudes to success and create ownership around it. So it wasn't the guys just doing what they'd been told to do but them wanting to."

The response from all the crew was positive. Take Cormac "We work on jobs that make no difference to anything, to my life or anybody else's life. You know, it's the profit and loss of some company. So when this came up I thought I could make a difference to someone's life by getting involved. You'd get to know an interesting person for sure."

Lesson 16:

When you start measuring impact there's so much you can do with it

Recommendation 16:

Payback your clients and partners with the data so they can use it to their benefit

Whilst Connection Crew monitored social impact from day one, it introduced more comprehensive measures from 2009. That put them in good stead to start using the data by the time 2012 and the Social Value Act came in. It launched its Connection CSR Account which gives clients evidence of their individual impact in terms of hours of work provided to ex-homeless crew members.

Warren had worked for Sarah Martin, Travel and Logistics Co-ordinator at Production Bureau, in the past and she was one of the first clients Warren brought in. The nature of her role means that she relies heavily upon her suppliers. She admits she took a punt on Connection Crew because she knew Warren, but also "Knowing that we can count on Connection Crew whilst also having a positive social impact makes working with them a bit of a no brainer. Crew always turn up on the day strong, alert and pro-active and feel like an extension of our team."

Sarah talks about receiving Production Bureau's first Connection CSR Account certificate. She says "We were very proud. Whilst using Connection Crew always felt like the right thing, it was great to have a tangible figure demonstrating the impact our custom has that we can share with our colleagues and customers."

There are so many factors involved in our client's decisions to use our services but they are invariably impressed when we highlight the social impact achieved through working with Connection Crew."

Lesson 17:

Traditional roles don't always meet the needs of an innovative business

Recommendation 17:

If the role doesn't exist, invent it – but expect to wait longer to find that person

In 2014 Connection Crew won a second investment package with Big Issue Invest following a year with Deloitte and then a year with Unltd. Until now the responsibility of delivering its social agenda, which can broadly be boiled down to recruitment, was spread across a number of desks. Therefore whenever it got busy, social impact would go down the chain. This became particularly apparent in 2012.

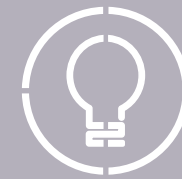
Charlie recalls: "That was the turning point. We realised that we needed someone to build, nurture and develop relationships with new charity partners, to expand that network and get more people in the mix."

We needed to get the recruitment and on-boarding framework with charities to something more like a service level agreement.

Something that's more universal, and easier for charities to understand and interact with. Something that came out of our work with CSTM and Crisis was that we recognised that we are a commercial business and they are not going to do the work for us. They are already working hard to hold on to the resources they've got and time is a precious commodity for them." Connection Crew advertised for an Impact and Personnel Officer and hired Emma Leeds in July 2015. For the first time, Connection Crew had committed resource to a role purely focused on owning its social impact outcomes as a social enterprise.

After a decade of perpetual questioning, evaluating, tweaking, testing and improving, Connection Crew – a collection of people who didn't know a great deal about social enterprise in the first instance – has grown considerably and continues to provide meaningful employment for people who have been homeless.

In fact, through all of the challenges it faced, it has maintained a 100 percent success rate. Everyone who came from a homeless background who has worked at Connection Crew and left has gone on to continued employment or education. No one has returned to homelessness.



Giving back

Bobby Meggie came to work for Connection Crew in 2012. We spoke to Bobby about how the last three years had been treating him and what he'd like to do next.

"I always wanted to get into the event industry. Well, it was something I had thought about years ago. But my situation completely changed. I was homeless for a little bit and so I was dealing with that. Then in 2012 I came to Connection Crew through Crisis.

I'd been out of work for a little while so I'd fallen out of practice of getting into work every day at a specific time or trying to do things a certain way all the time. The good thing about that was the irregular pattern of crewing didn't bother me. It was daunting at first. But you take tentative steps and you learn from the training they give you. The first job was the one that everyone was talking about that they didn't want to do - I kept hearing about this stuff called decking. When you do the training lifting decking doesn't seem too bad but when there's 25 sheets coming out it's a bit different, but you learn from the experienced guys around you. It's all very fluid really because most people know what they are doing. It's surprising, how everything just works.

A highlight for me was a recent job, driving a generator to a refugee camp in Calais and it was one of the best days I've had because everyone really appreciated everything that happened. A really good day. It's been some three years - I'd be interested in giving back by coming in and talking to the new trainees about my experience."



So in the last 10 years what does this all amount to?

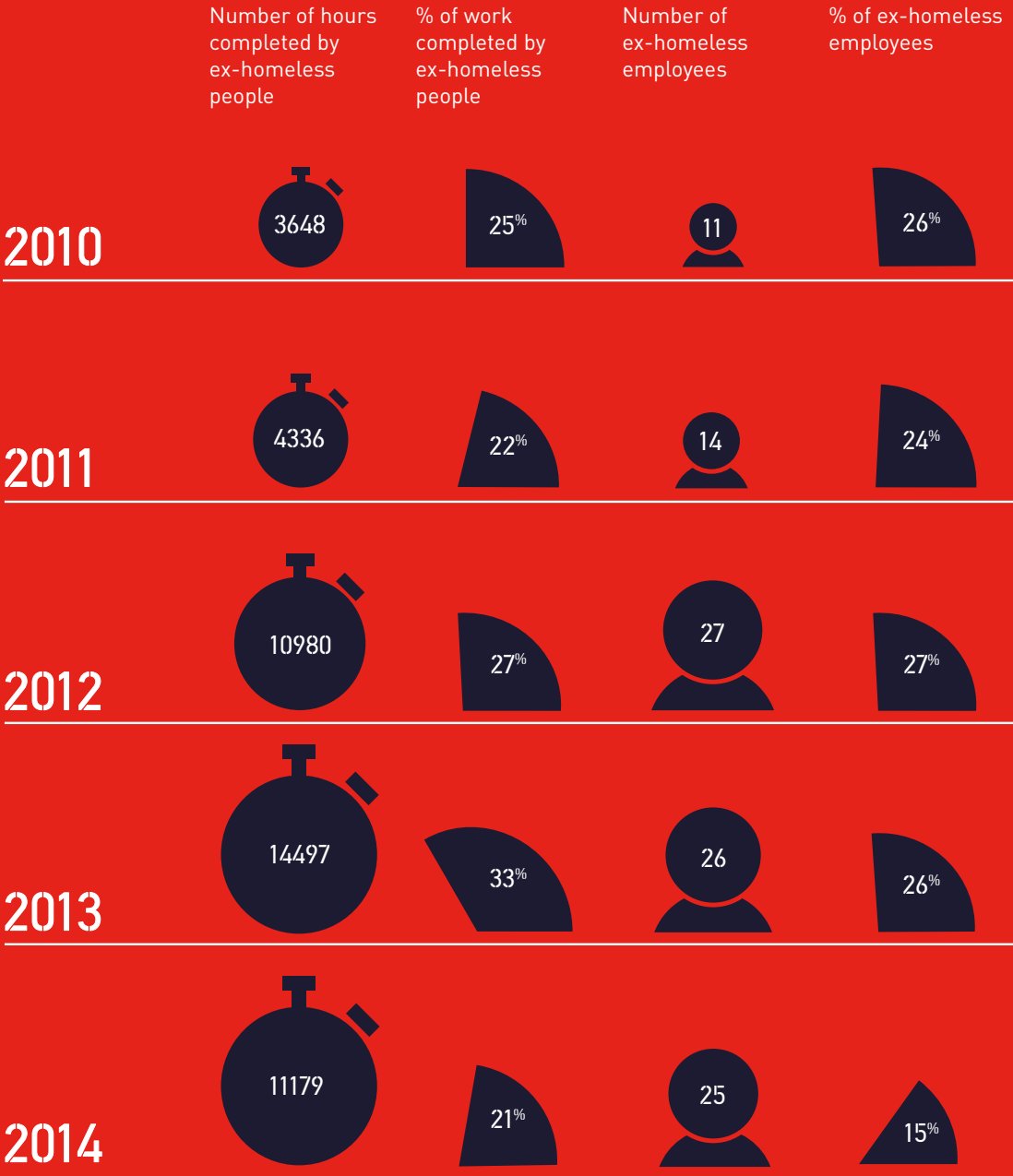


ex-homeless people employed



hours of work completed by ex-homeless people

Connection Crew has had its data endorsed by the Community Interest Company regulator since 2010. The following page shows a summary of its social impact since then:



The figures for 2015 are yet to be published by the Community Interest Company regulator

Part



So that was our history – this is us now

This section of the report lifts the lid on our present focus and objectives for 2016 and beyond.

Much of this has been informed by the lessons of the last 10 years, while some of it is current thinking and new ideas. We are setting out the criteria on which we will measure ourselves moving forward, so we can continue to assess whether we are being successful or not, monitor our growth and keep our activity in line with our Community Interest Statement.

In the financial year 2016-2017 we aim to:

- Employ more ex-homeless people (at least 25 percent of our total crew)
- Create stronger pathways into employment and connections with the events industry
- Broaden impact through lighter interactions leading to outcomes other than employment (training, coaching and work readiness)

We will achieve this mainly through recruiting ex-homeless crew members through our Connection Crew Academy – a 10-week training programme that covers the basics of event crewing and provides valuable industry experience and employability skills to people who have experienced homelessness. We piloted the programme at the tail end of 2015 with Crisis and on the back of that success, launched it officially in January 2016. It provides:

Better, slower transition into employment

The programme starts with an assessment of readiness, followed by our Big Build Day taster session, an interview, induction, training days and work shadowing. Nobody goes straight into work - hours are capped to protect benefits and to help trainees orient themselves into the work environment.

Broader reach to benefit more people

We have engaged a large pool of homelessness charities to work with to extend our reach across London. The softer, phased nature of the programme means that more people will qualify to take part.

Increased support for our charity partners

We join team meetings and attend group sessions to discuss the programme in detail so that charities can properly assess who should be referred onto the Big Build Day. Throughout the programme, it's our policy to communicate with job brokers and key workers on any progress or issues to ensure trainees are getting support from all directions.

Sharing responsibility

Participants of the Big Build Day who like the idea of the programme can attend an interview with us. The interview is an opportunity for us to assess participants' attitude and willingness to make a change. We know without this it would be unfair for us to take them on and potentially set them up for failure.

Mentoring support

Trainees are matched with mentors from our experienced crew who have gone through mentoring training. They meet in their own time for weekly mentoring sessions.

Phased approach

Participants of the Big Build Day and the interview receive a certificate of attendance to add to their CVs and benefit from interview experience. We acknowledge that a short journey with us can be a successful and beneficial one too.

Job Centre approved

Our programme is registered and trainees' benefits will not be affected by taking part, thus avoiding any unnecessary stress or disruption.

Employability and CV development

The programme includes complementary training sessions covering soft-skills like CV and portfolio development.

Exit strategy and support

At the end of the 10 weeks, the most suitable trainees will be offered a job at Connection Crew. All trainees will receive advice and guidance on how to maximise the skills and experience gained so it appeals to employers, and, where possible, we'll even broker introductions.

Our Key Performance Indicators

We are expanding on our Key Performance Indicators and will be capturing the following data going forward to build a richer, more accurate picture of the successes and failures of our strategy.

Total number of ex-homeless people employed

- Total number of new ex-homeless people employed
- Total number of existing ex-homeless people employed

Total hours of work completed by ex-homeless people employed

Number of Charity partners

Number of referrals from Charity partners

Number of Big Build Day participants

- How many go on to Connection Crew Academy
- Number of certificates issued

Number of candidates on Connection Crew Academy

- How many graduate
- How many go on to employment with Connection Crew
- How many go on to employment with other employers
- How many don't go on to employment

How many ex-homeless employees go on to other employment after employment with Connection Crew (alumni)

Number of mentors and new mentors trained

Number of candidates that were dismissed

Number of Connection CSR Account certificates issued

Softer Outcomes

- Confidence and well-being
- Employability (interview skills, communication and work readiness)
- Engagement of the wider crew

Rethinking how we measure success

Last year Connection Crew heard news of one of its ex-homeless crew members who worked with them some years ago. He went on to another job but has been suffering with some mental health issues. Perhaps it was his quick trajectory into employment 'success' that ended up exacerbating his mental health? To date, Connection Crew's 100 percent success rate has been measured against hard outcomes only – on employment and whether the person goes back to homelessness or not – but in true Connection Crew style, it has been questioning if that really defines success. It has now added soft outcomes to its evaluation process and extended contact with people who leave them. Its focus is now around employability and wellbeing, measuring confidence and self-esteem, communication skills and job seeking.

Team work makes the dream work

Michael Crevier was one of Connection Crew's first Connection Crew Academy trainees when it piloted the programme with Crisis at the tail end of 2015. He was mentored through the programme by Tarvo, one of its experienced crew members. "It was great being mentored by Tarvo, he's my main man. I call him Mr T! It's really helpful to have someone who will listen to what you're saying and really relate to it because they've been through it. Crewing can be tough. Getting to all those places around London and that steel-deck – that stuff is heavy, man.

Listening to their stories helps you understand the nature of it and prepares you for what you're gonna go through. If anything they'll tell you the worst they've been through so you think, alright I'm just going to suck it up. If you're humble enough, you'll gain a lot. I'm definitely happy that I did it. I gained a lot more than I probably realised. Not just the practical skills, but something I never thought I'd end up gaining, which is people skills. This job is a mind-set and an attitude - It's like I always say, team work makes the dream work!"



The mentoring programme isn't just good for the mentees

Jake Cave-Lynch is Crew Chief at Connection Crew and was a mentor during the Connection Crew Academy pilot. He discusses the impact the role mentors had on mentees and the crew as a whole.

"Crew who have come through the charities are keen to do the job and get stuck in because they've got an appreciation of the opportunity they've been given. Some of our best guys are the ones who have come through the charities. I was kind of nervous to take on the mentoring role, but it went really well. On site I've seen people who aren't currently involved with the mentoring programme but took part in the training just stepping up to that role when it's needed. It's fantastic.

There was one particular situation where one of the Academy guys had a bit of a meltdown. He'd had a really negative morning outside of the programme. One of the guys who'd been through the mentoring training saw what was happening and asked what was wrong. They talked and he managed to de-escalate the situation.

As a mentor I've learned tricks to bring people round to realisations, which is a very difficult thing to learn. Certainly in my mentee's younger days he wasn't living what a lot of people would consider a normal lifestyle, or within normal society. But I have seen, particularly over the last few weeks, his attitudes toward things are changing. And that's why I'm doing it. That's what the social responsibility side of the business is all about, it's not just getting people off the streets and into work – it's changing their lives.

At Connection Crew it seems a lot more, for lack of a better word, communal, than in other crew companies. Everyone's allowed to get involved and make suggestions, or take a little bit more responsibility for themselves. I've worked with other crews where there's a lot more of a structured hierarchy which can lead to a bit more resentment. All people need is the willingness to change and for someone to give them the opportunity to shine."

Part



What's next?

Over the next three years we will be exploring the following areas to increase social impact within and beyond our own organisation.

Building our networks

Engaging with more charities, social enterprises and employers to share standards and best practice and create more pathways into employment for more people who are furthest from the job market.

Increasing awareness

To share best practice and promote social enterprises that deliver high quality products and services as a viable approach to tackling societal issues through commerce, and increasing demand for social enterprises within the third and private sectors.

More women in the crew

It's not just about building equality into the organisation, it's about recognising that we need to create a working environment that is more suitable for female ex-homeless people to thrive in.

Accreditation and frameworks

To provide our employees and trainees with universally recognised accreditation for their achievements and strengthen their prospects for future employment.

Looking further upstream

Exploring the causes of homelessness and seeking opportunities for preventative interactions with those most at risk of becoming homeless.



Blurring the lines

Connection Crew asked leaders from the corporate and social enterprise sectors to give them their perspective on what the future holds.

Hugh Chamberlain, Procurement Manager at Johnson & Johnson (J&J), heads up its Social Impact through Procurement programme. The aim of the programme, which launched in 2014 is to support 150 jobs by spending £15 million within the social enterprise sector in the UK by 2020. Connection Crew has been providing crew for J&J events since 2015. Hugh discusses the challenges and observations he has come across since the programme's launch and what this means for J&J going forward.

“Social Impact through Procurement is about building Corporate Responsibility and social impact into our day-to-day decision making as opposed to just using an element of profit to deliver social good.

There are a few challenges large organisations will face in getting something like this off the ground.

First of all, priorities. We have a lot on on a day-to-day basis and at the moment this is an extra – so you've got to get people to really embrace the concept but we are overcoming this through good internal communication. It can be a challenge getting the message around a large complex organisation with different business units and decision makers – that takes time. We have worked with Social Enterprise UK to do this and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. I'd say that's due to our company credo - the culture is already embedded. That's always a good start.

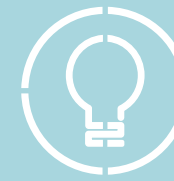
Secondly is the limitation within the supply base.

There is a bit of a dichotomy going on.

In terms of procurement, generally we look to be more efficient by working with fewer suppliers – being smarter and more streamlined to bring down costs. It would be easier to meet our £15 million target spend with social enterprises with 15 £1 million power contracts. However, currently there are not many social enterprises that can meet that kind of demand – so there is a mismatch. To overcome this we are working on innovative new partnerships within the sector including mentoring to help those social enterprises we have relationships with grow.

The third challenge is to win over our current Tier 1 suppliers and encouraging them to buy from social enterprises. For now we are taking the approach of demonstrating that our relationships with social enterprises are working for J&J and asking them to join our vision. These organisations have their own CSR programmes and sometimes the Account Managers that we are dealing with cannot always influence that – CSR has been set at a higher level. We are spending longer getting to some of those senior executives and convincing them – and it's starting to work.

And finally, we need to overcome challenges around measurement and frameworks. At J&J we are planning on building social value into our tender documentation and evaluation schemes so when people are making proposals and commissioning work we will look at social value.



Nick Temple is Deputy Chief Executive of Social Enterprise UK (SEUK). Nick comments on why SEUK uses Connection Crew as an exemplar social enterprise and with this in mind what the future holds for the sector.

“Connection Crew demonstrates how social enterprises can compete in a very commercial industry, but still succeed in growing their social impact. It also challenges people's perceptions over what sorts of areas social enterprises operate in - few expect there to be an events social enterprise. Its work corresponds well with our Buy Social campaign to get more social enterprises into corporate supply chains. The social enterprise landscape has changed a lot in the last decade.

It probably was a bit overhyped 10 years ago as the solution to everything, but now we have a robust and resilient sector competing in most sectors of the economy.

Although awareness is still not as high as it could be, it does feel like social enterprise has begun to move from the fringe to the mainstream.

The surrounding ecosystem of support and finance and regulation has also helped foster the growth of the movement as a whole in the UK.

The future is one where social enterprise continues to grow: we will see more 'social takeovers' of private business, more cross-sector partnerships, a more realistic and mature social investment world, and more consistency and consensus on how to measure social value and report in an integrated way.”



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Part **10**

We're sure anyone reading this report will draw their own conclusions and we hope that the insights and lessons from our journey offer some inspiration, and perhaps, encourage others facing similar challenges. For us, it marks an enormous milestone, but in many ways, this is just the beginning for Connection Crew.

Success for us has never been measured in numbers, but rather that we have made a difference to the lives we have come into contact with. Not just the people that have been homeless, but everyone we have employed, all the companies we are fortunate enough to work with as well as the networks of brilliant, talented people that have supported us along the way.

At times, we have made mistakes and made the wrong call in difficult circumstances, but we have always learned from them and grown as a result. To think that an idea pushed around by a handful of mavericks with limited resources and a lot of guts would become one of the most successful social enterprises in the UK is nothing short of astonishing.

Looking back, there is one thing that stands out for us. In trying to find ways to build, grow and develop our social impact through employing ex-homeless people, we have become a stronger business. When we asked ourselves what we were expecting of people, this became a quality standard for the entire company. When we examined our strategy to grow the business to create more jobs, we became a bigger business. When we asked if we were being effective, we became a better business. For us, this is the meaning of a true social enterprise. Our social impact is directly and intrinsically linked to the health and success of our commercial enterprise.

We're not done yet. We are determined to see Connection Crew grow and succeed even further. There are still thousands of people in the UK with nowhere to live and very few options to turn their lives around. Our mission to find and support these people is stronger than ever.

Connection Crew

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