

Disruptive
Innovators
Network

DIN their words

Bronwen Rapley

CEO
Onward Homes

Bronwen Rapley, CEO of Onward Homes, was introduced to Community Shop at an event run by DIN.

That visit led to a long-lasting relationship that now sees Onward and Community Shop operate three vital sites for customers across Runcorn, The Wirral and North Liverpool.

Community Shops supports the UK's most deprived communities through a string of social supermarkets, but rather than just giving out food, provides a hand-up, not a hand-out.

Great quality, surplus stock is donated and sold at a fraction of the price, alongside thriving cafés where people can eat at heavily discounted prices. It also provides hubs for development too, supporting with life-changing programmes that give people the tools they need to power lasting, positive change.



What was the problem you wanted/needed to solve or improvement you wanted to make?

This initiative came about because DIN was leading a visit that gave you the opportunity to go and meet with leaders of social enterprises in London. My thinking was 'can I really afford to spend a day doing this?' but I'm so glad I did.

The last event scheduled was a visit to Community Shop in London and we met Gary Stott, its executive chairman, who explained the concept and showed us around. Community Shop fundraises for its capital costs and then the profits fund its operation. In that way, it's a brilliantly innovative model because it needs no revenue funding.

Food is a third of the retail price and the profits are invested into the local community. It's run by volunteers but has one or two community workers, who have a community hub and kitchen and they build a community around it.



What made you decide this was a priority area to take on?

Innovation very rarely has any evidence base behind it because nobody has done it before. However, I knew many people were struggling and were just not able to afford food and of course, we've got statistics in terms of issues like areas of deprivation. We also know our customers, so we knew what some of the challenges were.

I was absolutely blown away by Community Shop; I thought it was fantastic and I thought 'we have to be part of this'. At the time, we were looking at our office accommodation and some of our offices just didn't have a long-term use.

At 8.30am the next day, I rang Gary Stott - and it was the start of a long and great relationship. Our three shops, in former offices, have been beacons of hope.

If you have an opportunity to do good, at a fairly low cost to you, that makes a big positive impact on customers and communities, then it can only be a good thing.



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