



COMPANY OVERVIEW

EPIC Steps CIC

Founded by Alison Edmonds

Previous staff member in Alliance Manchester Business School,
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Funding Received: £1,000 Try It Award
£5,000 Do It Award

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Three words to describe your journey so far... Exhilaration, Liberation, Rollercoaster!



Tell us a little bit about yourself, the Social Enterprise and your journey so far. I've always loved science, education and sustainability – and since having my own children, I've loved children! They have remarkable ideas, passion, openness and creativity. After a long career in both the public and private sector, I wanted to give back some of this hindsight and expertise to the youngest people in our world. What a rewarding choice!

How was your idea conceived? I'd been pondering over leadership, careers and social responsibility for years and couldn't quite work out how I could channel these through into school life. It wasn't until I was speaking at an Institute of Directors Conference that I suddenly realised how incredible it would be if children could

benefit from the same kind of inspiration. Although my idea and business were not linked to the university or business school at all, my role certainly provided the perfect setting to develop my own knowledge.

What is your company mission? I want to help generate responsible decision-makers in everyone. If we can develop this concept in young people before they hit secondary school, then we aim to improve the way they think about themselves, their futures and their ability to make great decisions for our community and environment. It's all about helping them understand the importance of thinking creatively, collaborating, and generating solutions that work for others. We're here to share this planet and make it work for all of us – developing these values and mindsets from a young age can help generate real pioneers.

At what point, did you realise that the idea had the potential for a Social Enterprise? I had originally thought that I might deliver these experiences for children in my spare time, a

rather glorious extra-curricular activity. However, after attending a workshop for staff considering new business ideas, I quickly realised that there could be scope to make this an actual enterprise.

What approaches did you first employ to develop the idea? I learnt as much as I possibly could about education of young people and about sustainability. Knowing the market and understanding the needs of schools and young people was critical. The careers element was easy peasy – that was my 15yr expertise. I spoke to numerous people in my network and developed countless new connections. Every person mattered and all the feedback and recommendations were considered. It was market feedback that encouraged me to take the next step: to make it happen.



Why did you want to set up a Social Enterprise? It was all about the children and the value. My belief is that all enterprise should be social. Whilst I would like to run this enterprise without having to think about finances, money is still an essential part of anyone's life and we need to make enough. We don't need to make huge amounts; we simply need what is required to do great work and live sufficiently.

How did you get involved with the Innovation Optimiser? As a previous Social Enterprise Award winner, UMIP invited me to join one of the first Innovation Optimiser Roadmap courses. This was perfect timing because I needed to build on the first round of workshops already provided through Just Social.

How did this engagement help you? It's critical that all new entrepreneurs have connections with other entrepreneurs and business experts. Driving your own business is just as challenging and lonely as it is liberating and exhilarating. Everyone faces days where they just don't know how to handle something or they don't know how to access the right people, facts or information. Gaining knowledge, asking daft questions, sharing ideas and morale support provided by the Innovation Optimiser was utterly central.

What would you say was the greatest hurdle you overcame during the process? The business and finance jargon! Understanding funding applications, deciphering Social Impact, figuring out accounts, creating a winning pitch for your product or service. All this was covered by the Innovation Optimiser. Whilst you gain this knowledge, you also gain the confidence to put it into action. It's one thing understanding and discussing it, it's another doing it!

Were there any standout moments from Innovation Optimiser that helped to propel your Social Enterprise forward? It's hard to highlight just one moment. If I had to

choose, the storytelling Roadmap session was especially memorable - how to tell a good story about your business! I transformed my story and heard many other's do the same.

What have been your major milestones and achievements so far? We launched Epic Steps Conferences for Children in 2016 and reached 450 Year 5 (Y5) children from various primary schools in Manchester and Cheshire. We involved 40 secondary school helpers and 1 corporate host. In 2017, we delivered our second round of Y5 Conferences reaching 400 Y5 children. We then launched our new Year 6 Conferences reaching 270 Y6 children. In 2017, across these Conferences, we involved 70 secondary school/college students, and engaged 3 corporate hosts and 1 corporate supporter. We also secured funding from the Big Lottery Awards for All and won the support of the RSA Fellows Network.



How has being involved with entrepreneurial activity benefitted you? It's been the most liberating and challenging experience of my career to date. There is no work that compares with work that you create and drive for yourself. That is because your work follows your heart and mind – it's your passion – it's easy to put in the hours, do the research, make the connections, and deliver the value.

What future support are you looking for to progress your business? I'm now looking to develop corporate sponsorship, attract funding that would support another team member and start developing our products into the secondary school space. This will help us become sustainable.

Would you encourage other staff, academics and research students to seek support for their ideas through the Innovation Optimiser? Yes, definitely – attend as much as you possibly can which gives you access to people and knowledge, and the energy to continue with driving the business forward.