

The 3 year External Evaluation

by Sidekick Studios

What was the purpose?

We carry out an external evaluation of the impact of our awards every 3 years, as a requirement of the Millennium Awards Trust Deed. This piece of work was designed a bit differently this time round. We wanted to make sure that the products and services we provide to social entrepreneurs are fit for purpose for the 2010s.

First, that meant looking at Social Entrepreneurs, and the needs they have in today's world. Then take a view on our current products and ask are we meeting those needs, are our product fit for purpose? Because of this different approach, we commissioned Sidekick Studios, a social innovation company who have a wealth of experience in customer focused research for product design.

What did they discover?

First and foremost they found

1. People value us and the help we offer; on average they rate our support more highly than the help offered by other agencies in this field.
2. The quality and availability of people delivering the support is critical.
3. The application process is viewed positively by Award winners for being simple, quick and well supported, staff are more critical of the process.

Where did they challenge us?

1. We don't currently help people find customers as a core part of our package, but it's the thing people most want from us that we don't yet provide.
2. The current product portfolio doesn't help us to understand if we've been successful. Measurement of impact is not enough, we need to know what constitutes success for us as an organisation.

3. They challenged UnLtd's mission to help social entrepreneurs at the very earliest stages. They suggested our effort should be focused on people need more support at the stage moving to full time rather than forming an idea into a reality. UnLtd believes we have a role to play right from the start, and we continue to be committed to this.

So what's the big idea?

They identify 3 main "commitment gates" for social entrepreneurs:

- a) Committing to turn your idea into reality, to get started
- b) Committing to going full time, e.g. burning the bridges of your day job
- c) Committing to go to scale, to go beyond yourself



They suggest that best time to provide support is at these key 'commitment gates'. At the same time, it gives UnLtd a clear idea of whether our intervention has been successful i.e. when Award Winners have successfully passed through these commitment gates.

Currently Level 1 matches a) although sometimes comes after it. Level 3 matches c). But Level 2 has gradually shifted beyond b) and is now more often a reward for having gone full time rather than an award to help you do so. This is something we will examine in more detail.

The opportunity is to develop products and services to support people through these key moments. For example, key to committing full time is your first major customer or equivalent, therefore support could focus on this.

So where do we go from here?

The Product Review is now in the idea generation stage, which will be complete by June. This will review these findings and test out initial ideas for products which can best support social entrepreneurs to start up and scale up. The ideas stage will then lead into a more detailed design and final implementation stage. The ultimate timescales will depend on the outcome of the design stage.

In addition to this, Sidekick have provided us with some insights which can help us understand our **theory of change** for Social Entrepreneurs. We will be taking this and our other work, and developing a strong theory of change for social entrepreneurs, and how UnLtd supports them. This will inform the product review.

There is also a bit more research to do. Sidekick felt they didn't have enough information on UnLtd Connect to comment on this service. They also felt that young people are likely to be a special case. UnLtd Research are working with the relevant departments to fill these gaps. Meanwhile the coverage of L2 award winners was thin, and the Ventures team have already double checked some of the issues raised such as the question of going full time.

To Summarise, in Sidekick's own words

It's Not Broken. But You Can Fix it

1. The generic support needs of social entrepreneurs fall into four categories - **operational, pastoral, commercial** and **capital** [pastoral including support and confidence building; capital meaning raising finance]. Their relative importance varies for different individuals and different types of ventures.
2. UnLtd and its current product portfolio is well regarded by award winners, and it can be assumed that it is meeting the above needs to a 'good enough' standard.
3. Despite this, **the current portfolio doesn't support social entrepreneurs at the most important moment in their personal experience of becoming a successful social entrepreneur.**
4. This moment is the point at which they **commit full time** to their venture, and it is enabled by **finding a 'good' customer** for their product or service.
5. This is a powerful and simple proof point for the social entrepreneurs and their venture. It leads to **the role that the vast majority of social entrepreneurs want to be in** – working on their venture full time, and delivering social impact consistently.

6. A new UnLtd product, focused on helping social entrepreneurs commit by finding them a good customer, could increase the social impact of AW, and give UnLtd clearer success measures

The full slide pack is available on the UnLtd Research and Policy website:

<http://www.unltd.org.uk/template.php?ID=32>