



Name: Alison Holland

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Tell us about BrightKidz

BrightKidz was set up to promote walk to school schemes and high visibility clothing for children. At the same time we developed our website to provide free information for parents and teachers about walk to school schemes and how to be 'safe and seen'. As a common ownership worker co-operative, (meaning the co-operative cannot be sold for personal profit) staff receive salaries and any profit is ploughed back to fund our organisation and its objectives. We started writing our website in November 2003 and the company was founded on 10th March 2004

Why focus on climate change/the environment?

I had started a walk to school scheme at my children's local school which became very successful. I have always felt it is important that children have the opportunity to walk to and from school for their own benefit; enjoyment, health and environmental reasons and that we are all too car-dependent. Having children makes me more aware of the importance of being environmentally aware; they come home from school with lots of 'eco' messages. I also feel strongly that individuals can make a difference so every effort is worth making. I want my children to realise this.

What motivated you to start or work for a co-operative?

Originally when I wanted to start the organisation as an 'information service' and before I had ideas for products, I planned to start it as a charity. When I realised that the products would give us a sustainable source of income we decided to set up as some form of social enterprise and the co-operative model we chose was the most suitable. It gives us the freedom to trade as a 'community' organisation, which feels better to us than running a private business. I didn't want a 'them and us' feeling amongst staff and as our prime motivation is our social goals the co-operative model fits us well.

Where do you see BrightKidz going in the future? Any business support needs?

We would like to expand our UK manufacturing capacity. Also we have just introduced a 'non-high vis' range of 'eco' promotional products so people running sustainability events can have stationery and other giveaways which are sustainable (e.g. pens made from recycled tyres, pencils from old newspapers). We would like to develop more partnerships with businesses and other organisations to enable them to support schools' walking and road safety initiatives. Future support we might need includes help with networking to build good relevant contacts as well as help with UK production issues.

Do you have any advice for women thinking about starting or working for a co-operative?

Working for a co-operative should make you feel you matter and you have a say in how the business is run; it should prevent a 'them and us' feeling. If you are thinking of starting up a co-operative you need to consider the different types and understand which is right for you. It is important your staff understand the benefits of working for a co-operative e.g. potentially being a board member, so you can reap the benefits in terms of morale and their sense of empowerment.



Name: Jane Stables

Name of co-operative: Cycle Training UK

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Tell us about Cycle Training UK

Cycle Training UK (CTUK) is a not-for-profit workers' co-operative whose main purpose is to promote cycling as a form of transport. It is a best practice organisation that has been instrumental in the development of a National Standard in cycle training as well as the subsequent launch of BikeAbility (the branded National Standard). CTUK believes that cycling is for everyone, regardless of ability or mobility, and trains people to increase their skills and confidence. Instructors deliver practical on-road training tailored to the needs of the individual. CTUK also teaches complete beginners how to ride; provides cycle training in schools; provides maintenance tuition; provides support for cycling events and schemes; and trains people throughout the UK to become accredited cycling instructors. Transport for London commissioned Cycle Training Works survey found that the one-to-one approach taken by CTUK is very effective. 81% of trainees felt they cycled more confidently as a result of the training they had received. CTUK won the award for Business Contribution to Sustainable Transport at the National Transport Awards in 2005.

Why focus on climate change/the environment?

For me the provision of cycle training as an important method to encourage a shift in transport habits comes firstly from wanting to enable people to choose cycling for themselves, as a healthy and independent transport choice, and one that will have benefits for themselves and their local community. The wider implications of shifting transport habits, with regards the environment and climate change are on my agenda, but are a fortunate by-product of the work we do rather than the main objective. As a company we make no value judgements about driving or lifestyles, but equip people with the skills they need to safely and confidently choose to cycle (which is ultimately a wonderfully selfish and self indulgent thing to do). I actually never thought 'I want to work for an organisation that benefits the environment' rather, I thought that I wanted to work for an organisation that empowered individuals and improved communities.

What motivated you to start or work for a co-operative?

Studying A level politics really got me excited about ways in which people can effect change and feel empowered to shape the world they live in. I studied History and Philosophy at degree level and chose on both sides to specialise in politics. Afterwards I did an Msc in Violence, Conflict and Development. It was amazing, had a profound effect on my thinking and shifted my excitement to be around doing things a better way, rather than just being part of a running commentary on the bad job of it that other people are making. I feel really proud to now be a part of an organisation that demonstrates by what it teaches, and how it operates, that people can be truly independent.

Where do you see Cycle Training UK going in the future? Any business support needs?

I hope that we can become more financially sustainable. I would like to see us build up enough reserves and increase our efficiency enough that seasonal dips in income aren't a problem, importantly so that we can have a substantial company wide pay rise. We have a flat pay structure and although our wages are relatively low for the sector, we are an employer of choice in London for cycling instructors because of standards of delivery, professional development and because we offer secure contracts and employment benefits. We have recognised a need for some more business support and are approaching some London co-operative development agencies.

Do you have any advice for women thinking about starting or working for a co-operative?

Only that it is an incredibly rewarding, dynamic and creative way of working, and because of this genuinely gives your business an advantage.



Your names: Amy Sanders and Eleanor Norton

Name of co-operative: Dynamix

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Tell us about Dynamix

We are a training co-operative based in Swansea and our work takes us all over the UK. Our five areas of work include promoting participation, inclusion, play, co-operation and enterprise. We work with children, young people and adults. We've written several books about methods and activities including our most popular: *Participation: Spice it Up*. We run training, facilitate conferences and do consultations. Our philosophy is serious fun: dealing with serious issues in a fun and creative way. We started 20 years ago, so we're celebrating our 20th birthday this year!

Why focus on climate change/the environment?

Actually, it's not always us. Much of our work involves consulting young people and promoting their right to have a say and it's the young people we work with that always bring us to focus on the environment. Environmental issues are always at the top of the agenda when you consult young people – whether that is their immediate environment or global environmental issues. We also do a lot of work on enterprise education in schools and a large part of this involves promoting awareness of the impact of the materials economy on the world around us – socially, and environmentally. As a consequence, many of the social enterprises that we support young people to set up have an environmental theme. Even when environmental issues are not the primary aim of our training, our own environmental impact on the world is a primary focus in our decision-making because, as a co-operative, we hold our values and principles dear to us. We have had support to achieve the Green Dragon Level 3 award, which is an environmental standard for businesses.

What motivated you to start or work for a co-operative?

Amy: Personally, I had had a taste of being valued by the company I worked for and where my voice was heard. Having a say in how your business is run and feeling genuinely equal and empowered within the workplace is too precious to miss out on. I'm not only a worker – I'm an owner and manager as well. I really couldn't go back to anything else, and it's given me real dedication to Dynamix – which is an organisation I care about deeply as a result.

Where do you see Dynamix going in the future? Any business support needs?

There's so much support for co-operatives and social enterprises to start up but much less out in terms of advice and genuine expertise in sustaining and developing an established co-operative like ours. We'd welcome advice on choosing management structures, advisable policies and procedures, and the tension between growth and critical mass. There is so much scope for like-minded co-operatives to come together and share practice – but this is exceptionally difficult to fund. Partnerships, exchange visits and conferences are a way to achieve this. However, conferences don't always have small co-operatives present – they tend to have the support organisations and people in the educational field instead because these people's posts fund their attendance. There is a financial implication for small co-operatives to pay their workers to do something that does not directly contribute to the income of their business. Paid places in co-operative conferences would be a great help as would funds to enable exchanges between like co-operatives.

Do you have any advice for women thinking about starting or working for a co-operative?

Don't hesitate. Change your working life from something you do to sustain yourself to something you enjoy!



Your name: Sam Roger

Name of co-operative: Ethics Girls

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Tell us a bit about Ethics Girls

We are working up a multi stakeholder co-operative – to build an active online network of women who are committed to and interested in ethical and green shopping. We have an online one stop shop and an online magazine. We have a focus on promoting a stylish lifestyle and we are also focusing on ethical fashion. We started in June 2007.

Why focus on climate change/the environment?

We can't ignore climate change as it's inseparable from our future. I worked in Fairtrade for 10 years and I felt it was necessary to look at the ethical aspect of shopping together with the environment. Most people are interested in both aspects as they are linked very closely together. We need to ensure that we have a business that is sustainable. In order to make sure we have a future in 20/30-plus years we need to make sure that we have an offering that meets everyone's needs. I believe that in 10-plus years the environment and climate change agenda will really be impacting on our daily lives in a much more central way than it is now. We can't ignore climate change or environmental issues so I think we should embrace the opportunities that come from these changes rather than trying to ignore them. I think the opportunities that will come out of these changes are very exciting and co-operatives are well placed to take up some of the market.

What motivated you to start or work for a co-operative?

I worked in the worker co-operative movement for about 11 years. I only know the co-operative way of working – everything else seems alien!

Where do you see Ethics Girls going in the future? Any business support needs?

I am feeling very positive about our co-operative. I think it's a good time to launch co-operatives and think it will be exciting to be a consumer co-operative brand at this time as we are able to promote at a consumer level in public. I am currently looking for financial management support/mentoring.

Do you have any advice for women thinking about starting or working for a co-operative?

It is difficult. Find some people who are starting up and at a similar stage in the organisation. If you can afford it, I would suggest getting personal development support and coaching. Often it's the personal journey that is the hardest to deal with and not the stresses of the doing of the business. Get a dog! My dog is the only way I have got through this start up phase – gets you out, talking to people, and thinking while walking is invaluable for sorting out problems and issues.

It is totally worth it – but it isn't easy!



Your name: Linda Bratcher

Name of co-operative: Total Coverage

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Tell us about Total Coverage

Total Coverage is a graphic design worker co-operative providing a comprehensive range of graphic design, web and marketing services, based in Southampton. Employing six members of staff, we celebrated our 20th year in 2008. We work with clients that bring about a positive change in communities and the wider world and promote our co-operative values and principles to our clients wherever possible. I started working at Total Coverage in May 2003.

Why focus on climate change/the environment?

I believe that there's more to being a sustainable business than switching off the lights and recycling. Total Coverage recently walked away with two trophies at the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Sustainable Business Awards - Micro Business of the Year as well as the Sustainable Business of the Year Award. We know that sustainability makes good business sense. Total Coverage adheres to an ethical and environmental statement which sets out the standards that govern our aims and objectives, how we operate the business, and with whom we do business. Our commitment to environmental sustainability means we buy products that are recycled or from sustainable sources as often as possible. We also recycle as much as possible. Our marketing materials are printed on recycled stock using vegetable based inks by a co-operative printer. We use cleaning products that have minimal effect on the environment. Our web site is hosted by a specialist ecological hosting company. By investing in new technologies our energy consumption has decreased by 16% since 2006 which is also a great cost saving.

What motivated you to start or work for a co-operative?

Initially I was looking for any position within the design and print industry to further my career. A vacancy came up for a sales and marketing account handler at Total Coverage with the added bonus of becoming a director after an initial probationary period. I seized the opportunity as this meant that I would actually be in charge of my own employment and would be able to make decisions that would directly benefit my and my colleagues' well-being and quality of our working lives.

Where do you see Total Coverage going in the future? Any business support needs?

I would like to see Total Coverage expand by one more member – hopefully a committed younger person to ensure that our co-operative will continue to be sustainable. My current colleagues and I are not going to be here forever! I believe that we may need to look into an apprenticeship scheme to bring on a young designer who also wants to be part of a co-operative and we will support with their training in both co-operative directorship and studio, software and design training.

Do you have any advice for women thinking about starting or working for a co-operative?

Running a co-operative is like running any other business, it will be hard work, in fact probably twice as hard – you have to be committed and passionate about what you do - and you'll need to enjoy it. In a co-operative you have to look at your position from both an employee's and an employer's perspective. The best decision for the business may not be the best option for the employee and vice versa. It has made me push myself much further than in other jobs and when something goes really well I can give myself a pat on the back and be very proud, as I know I have been responsible for it happening. It's great to know that I am working with people who have the same ethics as I do and that we make our own decisions about our own company, our own jobs and the way we want to do business. I love it!

Co-operatives – an introduction

Co-operatives are businesses that are democratically owned by their members. There are many types of co-operative enterprise, but all are responsive to the needs of their members and the needs of the markets and communities that they serve. Because their members control them, co-operatives can ensure that work patterns and terms and conditions meet the members' needs. They provide a supportive environment for women new to business, building their confidence and effectively harnessing their skills and enterprise.

A co-operative is...

A people-centred organisation, jointly owned and democratically controlled by its members. Trade is a fundamental human activity, and co-operatives are trading enterprises, providing goods and services and generating profits. Those profits are not taken by outside shareholders as with many investor owned businesses, but are under the control of the members, who decide democratically how they should be used.

Co-operatives invest in education and training for their members, enabling them to contribute more effectively to the sustainable development of their enterprises.

Co-operatives are part of and work for the sustainable development of their communities. Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. Co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

The thousands of co-operative enterprises throughout the UK are just part of a global movement that employs an estimated 100 million people. The UN estimates that the livelihoods of half the world's population are made secure by co-operative enterprise.

There are various types of co-operative business

Worker co-operatives are businesses owned and controlled by their employees. Some are managed on a collective basis, in which all employees will be members and directors. Or the employee members may decide to elect a Board of directors to spearhead the business. The day to day management of the business will vary according to the number and wishes of the members. In all of these businesses the management (who are also members) is accountable to its fellow members.

Co-operative consortia are owned by a group of self-employed people, or other businesses. For example, a group of independent craftspeople may form a co-operative for joint work or marketing activities.

There are also user or consumer co-operatives, and co-operatives whereby representatives of all the key stakeholders can be members. These are known as multi-stakeholder co-operatives.

Decision making in co-operative businesses

According to the size of the business, strategic decisions are taken either by all member directors or they are delegated to an elected board of directors. Whilst the directors are responsible for the direction of the business, a manager or management team is usually given the responsibility of taking the day-to-day business decisions.

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