

# CASE STUDY



## NØW PROJECT

“Investors in People helped us focus; we began asking ourselves how could our people help us develop our business?”

**Pam Hunter, Operations Director**

### BACKGROUND

**Size:** 27 employees

**Sector:** Voluntary

**Location:** Springfield Road, Belfast

**Status:** First achieved Investors in People recognition in December 2008

### THE ORGANISATION

NØW is an organisation limited by guarantee with Charitable Status, set up in 1999 by parents and carers to meet the needs of local people with learning disabilities. The organisation has grown from strength to strength and currently delivers high quality training and employment services to over 200 people with learning difficulties supporting them get the job they want and keep it.

With its headquarters on the Springfield Road, it also operates 3 cafés and a thriving ‘corporate catering’ service which delivers quality catering across the Greater Belfast area.



Lisa McMillan (Senior Administrator), Yvonne Cull (Skills Trainer) and Pam Hunter (Operations Director) from NØW Project

- **Improved Communication**
- **Greater focus on business issues**
- **External Recognition for good practice**

## THE CHALLENGE

NOW has a dynamic board which clearly saw the value and good management within the organisation. The future years were envisaged to be more challenging, without any guarantee of receipt of future funding. The direction of NOW's strategy therefore needed to have a clear focus with both internal improvement and external recognition as key areas for growth.

NOW recognised Investors in People as one of the tools to help them with their strategic direction. Pam Hunter, Operations Director explains why: "Not only would Investors in People recognition reflect the internal quality of NOW to funders and other organisations, but with its various principles and indicators, it would also provide a framework to grow the company in a logical and controlled way, while still keeping the value of our people as its core."

## THE STRATEGY

To start the journey of business improvement through gaining Investors in People recognition, NOW made two main investments: funding for a Business Excellence Manager was attained, and the services of an external Investors in People Adviser were recruited. The main role of the Business Excellence Manager was to initially research ways of improving the internal mechanisms of the organisation and then to instigate any changes necessary. Pam described that it was quickly clear that Investors in People was this mechanism and the initial development of the Balanced Scorecard was the beginning of NOW's journey.

However, in NOW it took some time to develop from a top down approach. "Whilst the buy in from senior management and the board was there, the communication of the methods and the understanding of its purpose was a difficult journey", said Pam. "The duration for this to become truly embedded into the organisation was underestimated as it was only really in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of its use that true value was gained. NOW identified that the process for Investors in People recognition was an evolving one, and not something that could be imposed or stamped onto an organisation quickly."

Pam continues: "Not everything was used from the Investors in People framework; each tool was looked at to see if it could benefit the company and if so it was used. Then a staged implementation was planned, for example the first thing was to embed the Balanced Scorecard and embellish

on the existing appraisal process. After that had been running for a year, a pay review process was introduced where clear results were achieved from each person's scorecard and then related to a pay reward package. This gave a clear message - the overall corporate strategy, in the form of a scorecard, was scaled down to every person in the company and then duly rewarded if completed to an exceptional standard. Each person knew exactly what their targets were for the year, had a review process to help them achieve their targets and put in contingency planning if achievement looked doubtful."

## THE RESULTS

In the past, staff training in NOW had been on a windfall basis - whenever something was offered free or cheaply, Pam described how the staff would all be put on it. Now, after working with Investors in People, the skill requirement of each job is broken down and analysed, this is then matched with the job-holder's skills. Pam tells us: "The gaps are then identified and training planned for the future. Throughout the appraisal process, the balanced scorecard and the monthly support & supervisions, each member of NOW has the opportunity to grow their skill base to the benefit of themselves and the overall organisational goals."

Another area of business in NOW where Investors in People helped was their surveys of users. Pam explains: "NOW had always asked its users and stakeholders what they thought of our services, it was part of the development process of our training packages and employment services. But we had never asked our own staff what they thought of working for NOW. A yearly staff survey is now completed with the results fed back to the staff at the yearly team away day, a great way to join all staff together to feel part of something important and to feel they are listened to for the benefit of NOW's growth in the future."

Pam concludes: "Admittedly, I had heard different stories about Investors in People. The journey to recognition actually took longer for us than we expected, for us to properly embed the thinking of Investors in People into our organisation. However, it was certainly worth the effort. Having received Investors in People recognition 6 months ago, I can look back on the journey with pride. The ideas and structures of Investors in People are now used internally without us even knowing they belong to Investors in People."