

Pulling the Threads Together –A Co-operation Development Project

Final report

Background: Langholm & Eskdale has a rich textile industry heritage which started to decline in the 1980s, although recently we have been aware of a resurgence of interest in small scale weaving and textile manufacturing, with a growing appreciation of the Scottish brand and provenance. We were intrigued by an innovative social enterprise in Borders region called “ReTweed” (Eyemouth), which trains groups of women in sewing skills to recycle and reuse textiles to create fashions and accessories to sell from their town centre shop. Langholm may be rich in textile heritage and latent skills, but we do not have the available workforce to manufacture and sewing/embroidery and other skills are currently being outsourced. ReTweed was started from scratch in a vacuum of community & enterprise development in a town of a similar size to Langholm. We felt that by working together with ReTweed for a short, concentrated period, we could learn from each other and share valuable experiences and contacts. The Langholm Initiative has involved local individuals in workshops and discussions about the potential for future developments. From the Retweed side, Project Manager Hazel Smith has taken the lead with the support from her trainers and volunteers. New contacts have been established during the process, most notably with the newly funded “Centre of Excellence for Textiles” in Hawick.

The aims and objectives of the project were enshrined in a “Business Model Canvas” (attached)

As a co-operation development project, funding was 100% from LEADER £5000

The Project Experience

The project took place July – December 2018. The business model canvas was developed, the workshops were delivered successfully, and both partners learned a great deal from the experiences.

The project fits with the theme of “Economy Arts and Culture”, exploring the opportunities for developing the traditional arts of dyeing, weaving and making to fit with the modern age, with a view to maximising its economic contribution.

Training sessions and workshops were fully documented with photographs which were shared on social media and local press. The workshop participants benefitted greatly from the activities: basic sewing skills, machine applique, Pricing & Placing your Products, Spinning & Weaving and Working in a Co-operative (Wool Clip). New friendships have been forged between Langholm and Eyemouth and aspirations have been raised for bigger and better things in the future. There is a slight underspend on the budget: the final claim is for £4464.65

Lessons learned: We have learned a lot from ReTweed about the organisation, marketing and delivery of sewing skills courses and the running of a social enterprise in a town centre setting. We realise that we in Langholm have a wealth of community and economic regeneration experience, which ReTweed did not have at the start of their journey and we have been able to share some of our knowledge and expertise with them. We have learned that we do not wish to replicate the Retweed model but have the capacity to build on our own strengths and use our newly acquired knowledge to create an exciting new project locally. Our collaboration with Retweed is a great example of partnership working which we anticipate will fit with the forthcoming South of Scotland Enterprise Partnership and the Borderlands Initiative.