

## Community Ventures Ltd

### Providing solutions to local unemployment and community safety

**Community Ventures Limited, a Middlesbrough-based charity, development trust and group of social enterprises, was formed in 1989 under the name East Middlesbrough Community Ventures. The company was formed with the aim of providing solutions to issues of local unemployment and community safety in Middlesbrough, and originally depended on government regeneration funding, notably the City Challenge Fund from 1990 – 1996. It became Community Ventures in 2000, and is now fully sustained financially by its six social enterprise companies.**



CSEL's CCTV control room

Community Ventures Limited (CVL) itself is a community owned company limited by guarantee, while its social enterprise arms are limited by shares owned by CVL. Each social enterprise trades commercially and all surplus profits are gift aided to CVL. Both CVL and its social enterprises operate mainly in the Tees Valley, but extend their services across the North East and the UK, with each social enterprise providing employment for local people and re-investing profits back into the community through CVL's charitable activities.

CVL's largest trading social enterprise Complete Security (Europe), or CSEL, provides security services. CSEL is CVL's largest trading company and employs 70 local people, earning

its income through commercial contracts with public sector organisations, including Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland and Erimus Housing, and private sector clients. CSEL's quality service was one of the first to achieve recognition by the Security Industry Authority which in 2007 awarded CSEL Approved Contractor Status in three categories, CCTV Operation, Guarding and Keyholding. CSEL currently has a turnover of £1.2 million per annum, and through Gift Aid provides around £150,000 annually to CVL.

CVL's other subsidiary social enterprises provide consultancy services for public and third sector charities, voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises across the UK, including procurement, human resources and health and safety management services, developing self-sustaining funding streams for third sector organisations and providing tailor-made business support for potential and developing social enterprises. Chris Beety CVL's Chief Executive says "Our consultancy services are highly regarded throughout the public and third sectors in the North East and increasingly in other UK regions.

This income allows CVL to invest in services for local communities which currently include the Community Alarms Project (funded by £0.75 million of profits from its social enterprises) which provides free of charge high-tech monitored household alarms to vulnerable people and properties in Middlesbrough, the Community On-Line Centre, an active community resource based in Thorntree, that provides free broadband internet use and onsite help for job searching and assisting refugees in contacting their family and friends in their homelands, and the European Centre of Excellence for Social Enterprise, a one-stop shop for potential social enterprises seeking advice and support. The advice given at the Centre has been well received by its users, "I want to thank you for all your help, if we had not had your input we would have struggled," said one client. In 2006, CVL's success was

recognised by the Cabinet Office in its Social Enterprise Action Plan in which CVL is highlighted as a case study, and for the fourth running CVL is listed in the Renewal list of Development Trusts with high earnings from.

Despite CVL's success, it has met with hardship in the past. As East Middlesbrough Community Ventures, a lack of internal financial control meant a bad debt led to the insolvency of one of its main trading subsidiaries, East Middlesbrough Construction Company. However, this was a learning curve for the company which brought about a restructuring of its Board. From a Management Committee comprised of local councillors and residents, the organisation implemented a two-tier board of unpaid volunteers in 1994 – a Supervisory Board made up of locals and one ward councillor whose knowledge of the needs of the local community inform CVL's strategic decision, and a Management Board comprised of experienced business and professional people, who make sure that sustainable business plans are in place to deliver strategic objectives. Chris Beety says "The restructured Board ensures that CVL has a clear community strategy matched with tight control over all aspects of business. It is the secret of our success."

CVL was recently awarded £264,000 by the Big Lottery fund which is enabling it to support the development of social enterprises not only in Middlesbrough, but across the Tees Valley. In light of the recent economic downturn, CVL is also investing in the financial inclusion of the local community, by managing the development of Credit Unions in Middlesbrough. CVL have also invested in providing a one-stop finance advice service to residents of local disadvantaged areas, a service much appreciated by locals. "I didn't know about Credit Unions until I met Elaine from CVL. She explained all about membership and I use it now to help me buy Christmas presents each year. It is much better than the clubs loans I used to have," said one local and Credit Union Member. Overall, CVL aims to continue to respond to the needs of the local community and provide high quality services that benefit local residents.

## Contact

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CVL's Community Online Centre