

Sunderland Home Care Associates

Winner of the 2006 Enterprising Solutions Award

Sunderland Home Care Associates 2020, the brainchild of social entrepreneur Margaret Elliott, was established in 1994 with a six month advance payment for work from Sunderland Council and a £10,000 grant from the Tyne and Wear Development Corporation. Starting out life as a



The Sunderland Home Care Team accepting their award

co-operative, Sunderland Home Care has evolved into an employee-owned social enterprise, providing care throughout Sunderland and areas of South Tyneside, through its branch South Tyneside Home Care, formed in 2006.

In an industry where many home care companies are privately owned and profit motivated, Sunderland Home Care puts the quality of its services and the welfare and rights of its 280+ staff above making profit. The company was formed with the aim of providing quality domiciliary care that benefits the local community whilst maintaining fairness and equality in the workplace.

The unique democratic structure of the company reflects this ethos. Each employee, as a share-holder in the company, is motivated to deliver the highest standard of care, and is included in the running of the company. Strategic decisions are made by an employee-elected Board of Directors, which currently includes six employees of Sunderland Home Care and one director external to the company. A Board of Trustees comprised entirely of employees, manages the employee benefit trust and monitors company shares.

With its last annual turnover standing at £2.8 million, and shares that have either stayed level or increased, the business side of Sunderland Home Care is thriving. The company generates the majority of its income through contracts with Sunderland City Council, South Tyneside Council and some private contracts, and have branched out into providing support for students with disabilities. In 1996, Sunderland Home Care began providing academic support for students of Sunderland University with physical disabilities (funded by each individual students local council), assisting them in taking lecture notes and getting around the campus. From 1999, the company has provided in-classroom mentoring support to life skills students with physical and learning disabilities, enabling them to become more active.

Recently, Sunderland Home Care has begun a new initiative, Independent Futures, in partnership with Sunderland City Council and the Local Health Authority – a significant development that could prove to be a massive success for the company and will strongly benefit those in the community who are in need of complex and intensive support. The initiative is designed for people with learning disabilities and/or challenging behaviour and introduces a different approach to support based on a very successful model in Kilmarnock called Partners for Inclusion. The aim of Independent Futures is to gradually make the receiver of support less reliant on support services, helping individuals to become more independent by supporting them in making day-to-day decisions and living in their local community. Initially, this will often be 24 hour support in each individuals home, although this will decrease as the aims of the initiative are gradually achieved.

The achievements of Sunderland Home Care have received both national and international recognition. In 2006, it was the overall UK winner of the Enterprising Solutions Award in a ceremony held in London by the Social Enterprise Coalition, and Margaret Elliott was a keynote speaker at the recent Social Enterprise World Forum in Melbourne, Australia. The company is understandably proud of its achievements, in particular its low staff turnover rates in an industry with notoriously high turnover rates and the fact that it has always been fully sustainable as a sound business and has not relied on grants to maintain its work.

Yet as the company develops and grows, Sunderland Home Care faces the challenge of maintaining its original ethics of a fair and equal workplace, whilst continuing to provide a high quality service in an increasingly competitive and regulated market. Margaret is confident that Sunderland Home Care will rise to these challenges, as it has always done. As Margaret said when accepting the prestigious UK Social Enterprise Award, “a wise man called John Ruskin once wrote, ‘What we think, or what we know, or what we believe is, in the end, of little consequence. The only consequence is what we do.’ Sunderland Home Care will continue to ‘do’ the right thing for many years to come.”

Contact

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www.sunderlandhomecare.co.uk