

GREATER MANCHESTER VCSE DEVOLUTION REFERENCE GROUP

Inclusive Economy case study: PossAbilities

PossAbilities aims to support vulnerable adults to live the life they choose.



PossAbilities is a community interest company, incorporated in 2014. In five years, the social enterprise has more than doubled in size, now having some 500 staff and a turnover of £12.2 million.

PossAbilities mostly supports people with learning disabilities, young people leaving care and people with dementia. This includes: day services; supported living and outreach; family-based support; shared lives / supported placements; respite, short breaks and supported holidays; and employment support. PossAbilities has achieved 'outstanding' ratings on two consecutive inspections by the Care Quality Commission, something that only 2% of health and social care providers do.

Live the life you choose

PossAbilities makes a positive impact in four main ways:

- **Core work:** Each day, PossAbilities works with and actively support hundreds of people with learning disabilities to build on their strengths, achieve their goals and aspirations and become increasingly independent. This approach enables people to engage in meaningful activity and to take an active part in community life. Many become work-ready and hold down voluntary or paid positions in local workplaces.
- **Place makers:** PossAbilities tries to improve the places in which it works. Each year, it is the catalyst for a big event in Heywood. In 2017, over 3,000 people became a walking train along the Monkey Town trail, formed with nine [ape statues](#) around the town. In World Cup year, 2018, a four-week [inclusive event](#) involved six teams of disabled and non-disabled people in a series of events which tested their teamwork, athleticism, artistic abilities and collective knowledge. In 2019, there is a month-long festival called *Hooray for Happywood – Making Heywood the Hollywood of Happiness*.



- Community connectors: PossAbilities created the Cherwell Wellbeing Garden and Farm and opened up its eight activity zones free to the whole community. PossAbilities funds a full-time Community Connector and created an app to help people discover what is going on in their neighbourhood. It also provides a drop-in social lounge where vulnerable adults can make and meet up with friends and get an affordable meal.
- Social entrepreneurship: PossAbilities addressed a shortage of accommodation for people with learning disabilities by getting a community asset transfer and investing £1.8 million in building 17 apartments adjacent to the Cherwell Wellbeing Garden and Farm and the social lounge.

The main challenges for PossAbilities have included council departments not sharing common objectives and sometimes creating barriers for each other. Equally, procurement processes do not properly take into account social, environmental and economic impact, often only allowing 500 words to describe it all.

PossAbilities makes things work effectively by thinking big and aspiring to be world-class in everything it does. It has a small, entrepreneurial management team, so there is no time to get lost in mounds of meetings. Success is celebrated, and disappointments are not dwelt on – either gets 20 minutes. In 2019, PossAbilities launched a [*Happiness Manifesto*](#): it wants all staff to spend some time focusing on ideas that can increase happiness within and outside of work.

Further details at <https://possabilities.org.uk/>