

## Case study

### SCOOP Aid Ltd.

**“The kind of help we need is longer-term funding.”**

#### **About the Organisation:**

SCOOP Aid (Sheffield Committee of One Parents) has worked for over 30 years to provide holistic support to lone parents in Sheffield. It is a locally-based charity with premises in Norfolk Park, and has strong grassroots links; however, its operational partnerships extend across South Yorkshire and its policy input is at the national as well as the local level. SCOOP provides a wide range of services, including a welfare rights and advocacy service, parenting courses for young mothers, training courses, careers advice, job search and 1:1 family support.

#### **Feeling the impacts of the recession...**

##### **on the organisation itself:**

The most obvious effect of the recession has been to put pressure on SCOOP Aid's staff numbers. “We've lost four of our staff in one year,” laments Jean Smith, Executive Officer, “Could that be down to the recession? Yes, I certainly think so.”

SCOOP Aid had eleven paid members of staff before the recession hit; but now two part-time staff have been made redundant as the funding streams supporting their positions simply dried up. “We'd always have been able to find more funding before, but now it's a lot harder to come by,” says Shelli Cooper, a manager at SCOOP, “We've particularly noticed that a lot of the charitable trusts are saying they've got a lot less to give on this round.” Notably, SCOOP's income in the year ending March 2008 was £245,164: significantly less than the previous two years' incomes of around £350,000 pa.

SCOOP subsequently lost another member of staff, and has had to review how to cover the cost of its Finance Worker whose salary has previously been met from interest on the charity's bank account – interest which is now negligible. Any hopes of funding work from earned interest have disappeared. “Losing our interest at the bank has had a tremendous impact,” says Jean.

The recession is also having an impact upon SCOOP Aid's ability to deliver on its contractual work. The organisation has a reputation for always delivering what it contracts to do and even within the harsher landscape of prime contracting and procurement SCOOP has managed to both secure and deliver contracts. However the task of getting lone parents into 'sustainable employment' in the current climate is not easy and with payments to SCOOP Aid dependent on achieving this outcome and no other, the organisation knows that it will not be paid the full value of its contract and thus may not be able to cover costs. “We were originally supposed to get 25 people into work,” Shelli explains, “which we then had to renegotiate down to 17. To date we have secured employment for 11 lone parents but 2 have already been made

redundant!... We have no problem engaging the parents, but if your contract is based on job outcomes then you're in a harsh place at the moment.

#### **on individuals and local communities:**

SCOOP Aid's workers have also gained insight into the way that the recession is affecting the local community, largely because they have noticed a marked difference in the type and volume of calls they receive. "The phone is ringing more often," Shelli notes, "it certainly feels like the recession is a strain. And the things people ask about are different. We've had a lot of requests for debt advice, which we don't have the resources to cover; and people wanting to know about their welfare entitlements if they lose their jobs. They've often seen others around them getting made redundant and are anxious to know their position if it happens to them."

Shelli also worries that the recession will prove a long-term setback to those that SCOOP Aid aims to help to find work. Now that the government's focus has turned to who have recently become unemployed, she fears that the hardest to reach, workless groups are being overlooked. "There was an increasing focus on 'workless' people, but now that trend seems to be being reversed. There's a real danger of authorities 'cherry-picking' those who haven't been out of work long, and leaving the long-term unemployed even further behind."

#### **Looking to the future:**

SCOOP Aid is still a thriving organisation, making a huge difference to the lives of those it supports. However, without reliable funding much of its work is under threat. "We're perfectly capable of running our own business," says Shelli, "the kind of help we need is longer-term funding. At the moment we can only fund sessional staff for our training programme, rather than long-term staff, and that really places limits on what we can do."

Jean agrees, "If you know you've got that longer-term funding, then you can plan; you can upskill your staff and maintain those staff. Our staff are dedicated. They don't leave; we only lose staff when we can't afford to pay them. Long-term funding is the single most important thing for us right now, and for the future."

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