



# **The Rank Foundation**

*Reflections on the Plymouth RISE Programme*

August 2020





## Reflections on Plymouth RISE Programme

*August 2020*

Written on behalf of The Rank Foundation by:

Iridescent Ideas CIC - [www.iridescentideas.com](http://www.iridescentideas.com)

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## Moments Café – reimagining the high street

Moments Café is based in the heart of Plymouth City Centre. It offers a safe environment for people to meet, eat and socialise. It is also a city centre hub providing information about dementia. There are a selection of conference and meeting rooms available on the first floor of the building. All profits go to Memory Matters; supporting people and families living with dementia in the community.

The interior of the cafe was designed to ignite conversation by recreating different eras in different zones of the cafe, including the 1950's, 60's, 70's and 80's. Moments pride themselves on good food, homemade on the premises; making dishes that are familiar, hearty and delicious! All food is sourced locally in Devon and Cornwall and they include both vegan and vegetarian options on the menu.

[www.moments-cafe.com](http://www.moments-cafe.com)

Twitter and Instagram: @MomentsPlym  
[facebook.com/MomentsPlym](https://facebook.com/MomentsPlym)





“

The Rank support has been beautifully informal. It's great. Human. Perfect.

*Core grant recipient*

## Executive Summary

The Rank Foundation is investing around £1.7 million into the Plymouth Rank Inclusive (Growth) Social Enterprise (RISE) programme. The programme started in 2018 and the first phase of three years will end in 2021.

This study is a reflection on Plymouth RISE programme activity. The Rank Foundation commissioned Iridescent Ideas CIC to explore the impact of the programme and look at what has worked well and what could be improved, alongside exploring ideas for the future.

We conducted telephone interviews with nineteen people from The Rank Foundation, from organizations within the various strands of the programme and from external partner organizations.

Our reflections study finds that The Rank Foundation programme in Plymouth has been hugely valuable. The Rank investments have given organizations and key individuals more security and the space and capacity to plan and develop their work more effectively. The programme has enhanced a culture of leadership and enterprise and added value to the concept of Plymouth being the UK's number one Social Enterprise City.

The main reported highlights of the programme were:

- Helping to create more impact for organizations
- A shared sense of social commitment
- Developing personal networks and relationships.

There were a range of perceived impacts on the wider social enterprise sector and on Plymouth. It was felt that the Rank programme had:

- Raised awareness of social enterprises in the city
- Stimulated a powerful group of influential organizations and enhanced networking
- Boosted the growth and strengthened the resilience of the sector
- Increased diversity of the social enterprise sector in Plymouth.

The impacts on social enterprises in the city have been wide ranging. Skills have improved and been enhanced. Networking opportunities have increased and new partnerships and projects have developed as a result of the interactions within and around the formal and informal structures set up through the programme.

There was universal praise for Rank's approach to funding in the city. Rank's accessibility, flexibility, personal touch and presence in Plymouth were all welcomed as brilliant.

The Rank investments, alongside the Create Change Leadership Programme, have helped propel the city's 'Inclusive Growth' agenda through providing time and space for key individuals to pursue this agenda. The leadership programme also made strides towards embracing a more diverse audience for this work. Inclusive growth is now embedded as a cross-cutting theme in Plymouth's economic strategies in part thanks to the Rank programme.

The Trade-Up programme respondents generally reported that the programme has been very valuable to them. The programme was about 'more than the money'. The connections, advice and the 'safe space' to think, talk, reflect and contemplate was seen as important.

There were many different suggestions for specific funding themes that are listed in the findings section below. We do not make a recommendation on those as we feel that is for Rank to consider but these, more conceptual, recommendations follow from the interviews we conducted:

- Bring more social enterprises into the Rank network at both start-up and growth stages
- Invest in systemic change i.e. the 'Build Back Better' and inclusive growth type policy work
- Invest in the infrastructure for social enterprise to help build a legacy for the programme.

In summary, the Rank programme has been wonderfully successful in Plymouth. People were very grateful for the money but the programme has done much more than that. It has built a family of leading social enterprises that continue to make every effort to build a fairer, more socially just and environmentally sustainable economy.

## About Iridescent Ideas CIC

Iridescent Ideas CIC, founded in May 2011, is an award-winning social enterprise and registered Community Interest Company (number 7635685). We are regulated by the CIC Regulator.

### **Vision**

Our vision is a more socially enterprising, inclusive economy.

### **Mission**

We deliver business advice for voluntary and community groups, community businesses and social enterprises across the UK and conduct policy, research and evaluation work to help bring about this vision.

### **Activities**

- We support new businesses to get established with firm foundations, good legal structures and strong governance
- We help existing businesses grow by finding finance, developing business plans and evaluating social and community impact
- We deliver policy work, research, evaluations and social impact reports.

## Quality and partnerships

We hold the Social Enterprise Mark. We are founding members of Plymouth Social Enterprise Network and offer time for free to this network to help fulfil its vision and mission around supporting the community of social enterprise in the city of Plymouth, UK.

We led the successful bid that saw Plymouth recognised as the UK's first Social Enterprise City in 2013. This has led to over £6 million of investment for social enterprises in the city, growth in the number and scale of social enterprises and the development of a healthy eco-system of support for social enterprise in the south west at a systems wide level. This includes political buy-in, institutional policy, investment, business support and skills development, work with councils, local enterprise partnerships, universities, business networks and others.



## About the Plymouth RISE Programme

The Rank Foundation has invested around £1.7 million into the Plymouth Rank Inclusive (Growth) Social Enterprise (RISE) programme. The programme started in 2018 and the first phase of three years will end in 2021.

The aims of the programme are to:

- Build leadership and capacity in the social enterprise sector in Plymouth
- Supporting, influencing and shaping the inclusive growth work in the city – ensuring there is fairness for all through economic activity.

There are several elements to the programme:

1. Investments in eight 'core' grant holders
2. Support to nineteen social enterprises as part of a 'trade up' programme to stimulate income generation
3. Investment into a leadership programme.

Alongside this organizations have been able to access bursaries to attend training, conferences and events. Several organizations have taken on Time to Shine leaders – typically young people developing a career in the social enterprise sector.

During the last few months, Coronavirus/Covid-19 has meant that Rank has also provided several organizations in Plymouth with extra funding to respond to the crisis.

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Rank and the network is a powerful force for positive change

*Trade-Up programme participant*



## About this study

This study is to reflect on Plymouth RISE programme activity. The Rank Foundation commissioned Iridescent Ideas CIC to explore:

1. How the RISE programme has brought people together
2. What impact it has had on grant recipient organizations
3. What has worked well on the programme
4. What could be improved on the programme
5. How it has helped develop the social enterprise sector across the city
6. Ideas for future funding
7. Associated themes and issues.

Iridescent Ideas CIC is itself a beneficiary of the Rank Foundation RISE programme and we have been very clear that this study is not a technical evaluation of the programme or an evaluation of the performance of individual organizations.

## Methodology

We conducted telephone interviews with nineteen people from a range of organizations:

1. Rank 'core' programme beneficiaries (6 interviews)
2. Rank 'Trade Up' programme beneficiaries (8 interviews)
3. Rank staff themselves (3 interviews)
4. Partner organizations: Plymouth City Council and Devon and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce (2 interviews).

We also reviewed supporting documentation and media linked to the programme:

- Plymouth RISE Trade Up Programme evaluation
- The Rank Foundation Valuing Place Report
- Upshot in Plymouth – an Evaluation
- An article on grant making in Trust and Foundation News – April 2020
- A webinar conducted by Iridescent Ideas CIC with Rank Foundation staff in May 2020.

Telephone interviews were written up and analysed using QDA Miner Lite software tool for qualitative research. Responses were coded into categories and key words and themes given a percentage weighting.

## Nudge Community Builders: community ownership and renewal

Nudge is a community benefit society that owns, creates and runs activities in disused, underused or unusual urban spaces in Stonehouse, Plymouth that lead to lasting positive change and community-led regeneration. The organization is owned by local people through a community share-membership scheme.

Their flagship 'nudge' is the Clipper on Union Street in the heart of the city. This was an old pub that had been empty for a number of years. Nudge bought and renovated the pub creating two homes to meet local need and a mini market area on the ground floor for local, social entrepreneurs. Nudge grows and builds on local knowledge and experience to really make a difference in the area and make sure the local community benefits from changes in the area.

[www.nudgecommunity](http://www.nudgecommunity)

[@nudgecommunity](https://www.instagram.com/nudgecommunity)

[facebook.com/nudgecommunitybuilders](https://www.facebook.com/nudgecommunitybuilders)





## Findings

This section is arranged roughly in order of the questions asked via the telephone interviews.

### **1. Impact of Rank Foundation support on social enterprises**

The main impacts of the Rank programme have been:

- Enhanced leadership skills
- Improved entrepreneurship skills
- Improved professional skills
- Increased organization and individual capacity
- Increased security for organizations
- Facilitated increased networking
- Increased confidence.

There were a wide range of impacts reported. The most commonly reported improvements were in skills. These ranged from leadership, to entrepreneurial skills and general professional skills including: finance, marketing and impact reporting.

Another important impact was around increased capacity and security. The Rank investments had given organizations and key individuals the space and capacity to plan and develop more effectively.

Many respondents felt that Rank had helped their organizations adapt and survive, especially in the Coronavirus/Covid-19 crisis.

The wider programme had also facilitated valuable networking within the Rank steering group, the Create Change group and across the city more generally. Many people reported developing new, or deepening existing, relationships.

### **2. Highlights of the programme**

The main reported highlights of the programme were:

- Helping to create more impact for organizations
- A shared sense of social commitment
- New learning
- Developing personal networks and relationships.

Many people used the word 'family' in response to this question i.e. a highlight for them was the feeling that Rank had engendered a sense of family in the city and that this led to a strong shared commitment to social enterprise, the city and tackling social issues.

There was a powerful sense of the impact of Rank on improving the ability of organizations and people to build networks, relationships and establishing formal and informal partnerships.

Many people felt that Rank had enabled their organizations to have more impact and also Rank support had helped to develop their learning. This tallies with the responses to question one around skills and personal development.

### 3. What has worked well?

Respondents raised the following points as key things in the programme that had worked well:

- Great flexibility both in the funding itself and as a funder
- The personal touch and ability to talk to key people
- The light touch approach
- The programme has been run with discipline.

Rank's approach as a funder was hailed by many as having been brilliant. Many people said that Rank were supportive and flexible. Rank's light touch approach with simple reporting and the personal, approachable style with a key contact – the Associate Director – in Plymouth was highly valued. The visibility and presence of Rank's senior staff and trustees was also reported to have been great.

People reported that Rank had a great response to Coronavirus/Covid-19. In particular, the Trade Up organizations were very appreciative of the early release of funds.

UPSHOT was found to have worked well by those that used it.

Several new projects and partnerships have developed because of Rank's work – either directly or indirectly due to the networking opportunities

### 4. What could be improved?

Key areas mentioned for improvement were:

- Making the steering group a bit more focussed
- A desire for a bit more momentum in the Create Change leadership programme
- Improving links between Plymouth City Council and the Rank programme (although see note below)
- More activity on, and better use of, RankNet.

There were several comments about making the steering group a bit more focussed and a desire was expressed to have a sharper agenda with a little more structure. An example given was spending less time going round the room catching up and more on looking at specific strategic issues in the city.

There were a few comments that momentum on the leadership programme could be increased and that it needed to have more deliverable actions although people realised that Coronavirus/Covid-19 had impacted on progress on this element of the programme.

The impact of Coronavirus/Covid-19 on the networking was mentioned by some as unfortunate but people realised this was inevitable.

Several people expressed a need for better links between Plymouth City Council and the Rank programme. Others highlighted that there were good links with the City Council but that these were a little 'behind the scenes'.

There were several comments about improving use of RankNet and for this to be more active generally.



Some people mentioned a desire for Rank to push organizations in the city to be more ambitious around growth and impact. There was also a desire from some to deepen links with other parts of the Rank family of funds and programmes.

There were a few minor constructive criticisms about processes and operations:

- Some people mentioned they would have liked a little more flexibility around attending (or missing) Trade Up sessions
- There were some long days on some of the Trade Up sessions – could they be shorter?

#### **5. The wider impact of Rank Foundation support on the on the social enterprise sector and on Plymouth**

Thinking outside of their own organizations, people suggested that Rank had had the following key impacts on the wider social enterprise sector and on Plymouth:

- Raised awareness of the social enterprise sector in the city
- Stimulated a powerful group of influential organizations and enhanced networking
- Helped the growth and resilience of the sector
- Boosted Plymouth's reputation
- Increased diversity of the social enterprise sector in Plymouth.

Nearly all respondents praised the enhanced networking and improved relationships that have resulted from the Rank programme.

For several people, the visibility of organizations actually 'doing social enterprise' was seen as important. Several felt that Rank had helped contribute to the resilience of social enterprises in the city. Support for the 'Inclusive Growth' agenda was valued but some people still felt a little out of the loop on this.

Rank funding was felt to have cemented Plymouth's reputation as a great place to set up and run a social enterprise – helping to strengthen the Social Enterprise City concept.

Other wider impacts mentioned were:

- Helping to lever other funds into projects and organizations
- A feeling that social enterprise is gaining more influence in the city – helped by Rank.

#### **6. Perceptions of Rank as a 'funder in place' and how well Rank is fulfilling its own philosophy**

This question was a little difficult to interpret for some people. Some people were not aware of Rank's history and approach to place-based funding. Others had a good understanding of Rank's philosophy. The main points raised by respondents were:

- There was recognition that targeted investment like this can be very effective
- Shared learning across the programme was seen as hugely valuable.

Virtually all commented that Rank was a very supportive funder and easy to work with. People liked Rank's enthusiasm, curiosity and pioneering approach and felt that Rank genuinely cared for the city.

Many respondents felt that there was a lot of value in the widening of the programme to include the Trade Up organizations – this was felt to be inclusive and brought more people into the tent.

Several people felt that sometimes there is a negative perception about Plymouth and that Rank's funding had contributed to helping to promote the great things were going on here.

There were some questions about legacy, i.e., what happens next or when the funding ends – and that we need to start thinking about this now.

Several people commented how they perceived that Rank had been very astute in who they chose and the gaps they targeted.

## **7. Ideas for future funding programmes**

There were a wide range of responses to this question. Several just said they wanted 'more of the same'. Lots of potential

specific needs and funding themes were mentioned (these are listed in alphabetical order as there was not enough data to get a sense of prioritization):

- Assets, buildings and open spaces
- Creativity/arts
- Environment, reuse and recycling
- Food poverty
- Green transport
- Health and data
- Mental health
- Racism
- Young people and their ideas.

Furthermore, the following - more conceptual - ideas were mentioned as needing support and investment:

- Continued investment into the 'Build Back Better', 'Inclusive Growth' policy work and 'systemic' change
- Encouraging social entrepreneurship generally
- Investment into the infrastructure for social enterprise – such as representation, advocacy, convening, brokering etc (i.e. more direct support for PSEN and others)
- Investment into technical business support on issues such as legal structures and governance, financial management, marketing and communications, digital skills, social impact, HR, etc
- Leadership support and development
- More money for stimulating collaborations



- More support for micros and start-ups especially considering unemployment that may happen as a result of Coronavirus/Covid-19
- Need to push sustainability post three years – continue to incentivise growth in commercial income
- Support for 'scale-up' type programmes for existing and growing social enterprises.

These types of funding support were mentioned as all being useful:

- Standard grants
- Trade-up type grants
- Repayable grants
- Low cost/low interest loans
- Quasi-equity type investments
- Micro-loans.

#### **8. Perceptions of Rank's response to Coronavirus/Covid-19**

Rank's flexibility around Coronavirus/Covid-19 was almost universally hailed as wonderful. People praised Rank's flexibility and speed.

The release of the Trade Up grants in advance was extremely useful for relevant organizations.

Being able to apply for smaller pots of cash for specific items was also found to be very helpful.

Several organizations have had to close public facing elements of their work but having the Rank support has helped them develop new business strategies or helped them change their model of delivery in response to Coronavirus/Covid-19.

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The Rank programme has given me more awareness of difficulties of social inclusion and helped me to understand the issues and politics around the inclusive growth agenda

*Partner organization*





## **Plymouth Hope – promoting racial harmony**

Plymouth Hope is a Devon based charity which aims to promote social inclusion by supporting people who may otherwise have become socially excluded. All their programmes promote racial harmony by working with children and young people and their families; providing opportunities for sport and activity, supporting education and raising awareness about different racial groups. They endeavour to promote good relationships between people from different racial backgrounds through opportunities for community participation in healthy recreation, support with school life and a commitment to lifelong learning.

[www.plymouthhope.com](http://www.plymouthhope.com)

[@PlymouthHopeFC](https://twitter.com/PlymouthHopeFC)

[facebook.com/Plymouth-Hope](https://facebook.com/Plymouth-Hope)

## Conclusions

### *Overall impact*

Our reflections study finds that The Rank Foundation programme in Plymouth has been hugely valuable. The Rank investments have given organizations and key individuals more security and the space and capacity to plan and develop their work more effectively. The programme has enhanced a culture of leadership and enterprise and added value to the concept of Plymouth being the UK's number one Social Enterprise City.

### *Impact on social enterprises*

The impacts on social enterprises in the city have been wide ranging. Skills have improved and been enhanced. Networking opportunities have increased and new partnerships and projects have developed because of the interactions within and around the formal and informal structures set up through the programme.

Rank's work in Plymouth has helped organizations adapt and survive, especially during the Coronavirus/Covid-19 crisis. It has given individuals the chance to flourish and develop leadership skills and amplify the culture of income generation that is central to the concept of social enterprise.

- *"Rank has looked after us as individuals, helped us to be strong leaders. We are doing it well and doing it strong"*
- *"The financial planning support using Quick Books has made me more professional."*

- *"Made us more resilient and made us less risky for others – it gave us a platform"*
- *"It enabled us to deliver much more."*

### *Rank's approach*

There was universal praise for Rank's approach to funding in the city. Rank's accessibility, flexibility, personal touch and presence in Plymouth were all welcomed as brilliant. The appointment of a local Associate Director was very valued – providing a human face not commonly seen with funders and improving accessibility and the operations of the fund in Plymouth. Rank's response to Coronavirus/Covid-19 was generally hailed as wonderful – it was quick, flexible, innovative and trusting.

- *"We feel strongly that the local co-ordinator role is pivotal – he is an ambassador for Rank and Plymouth"*
- *"The relationship is more open than you would be with other funders: trust is there."*

### *Networking and collaboration*

The steering group set up to guide the programme and the Trade-Up meetings and work has helped build and magnify relationships and partnerships in the city. New collaborations have been developed – particularly in response to Coronavirus/Covid-19 – that might not have happened without Rank's involvement.



- *"The programme has been a fantastic source of networking"*
- *"We have built contacts and collaborations."*

#### *Wider policy and strategic impact*

This study did not look at the technical achievements of individual organizations. However, we did gauge wider, 'strategic' impacts.

The Rank investments alongside the Create Change Leadership Programme have helped propel the city's 'Inclusive Growth' agenda. The Inclusive Growth policy work in Plymouth was a pre-existing context but the Rank support for key organizations has given space and time for leaders to push on with this agenda.

The leadership programme also made strides towards embracing a more diverse audience for this work. Inclusive growth is now embedded as a cross-cutting theme in Plymouth's economic strategies and, in particular, in the Resurgam recovery plans post Coronavirus/Covid-19. Respondents felt that Rank's support has definitely helped with this agenda although this is unquantifiable.

- *"It has given me more awareness of difficulties of social inclusion"*
- *"It has helped understanding issues, politics, people around the inclusive growth agenda"*
- *"The inclusive growth work was going on already but Rank has given it more credibility and resources."*

#### *Impact of Trade-Up*

The Trade-Up programme respondents generally reported that the programme has been very valuable to them. This study did not examine specific monetary changes in each organization but respondents reported that the funding, the training and advice helped their organizations develop an improved culture of social enterprise and commerciality – it helped them understand monetization and stimulated a drive to generate more income.

Many respondents suggested that the programme was about 'more than the money'. The connections, advice and the 'safe space' to think, talk, reflect and contemplate was seen as important. People learned new skills such as marketing, business planning, social impact and financial management. This added to people's confidence and helped them plan more effectively.

The impact of Coronavirus/Covid-19 was felt in the Trade-Up programme with some organizations having had to pause their work but most people were optimistic for the future.

- *"The programme - the stuff I learned and the things I implemented - allowed me to pivot and survive"*
- *"It has given me confidence to engage with high level people and to make the case to change"*
- *"The collective support from the cohort has been fantastic, they are a great group of organizations"*
- *"It made me more aware of need to earn money and that it is ok to monetize."*



### *Time to Shine*

There was limited mention of the Time to Shine programme amongst the respondents with only a handful of the interviewees having engaged with this. However, those that did, on the whole, found it very useful:

- *"Time to Shine has been brilliant for the individuals"*
- *"It has created opportunities for mainly young people"*
- *"It's a great model – helping people take that step up and investing in their futures."*

### *Upshot*

The programme management software – Upshot – has been used by all the 'core' grantees and some of the Trade-Up beneficiaries. Most people found this very useful:

- *"It's amazing! Every single person in our organization uses it"*
- *"Upshot has changed our lives!"*
- *"Upshot has been massively useful."*

The main reasons for not using it by the Trade-Up participants were lack of time, already having a system in place or the system just not providing what the specific organization wanted.

## Recommendations

This study was a reflection on the impact of the Rank programme in Plymouth over the last two and a half year as has been described above. As part of the study we asked people what could be improved and what ideas they had for future funding. We have split the recommendations into these two areas.

It should be noted that there was very little direct criticism of anything Rank has done and almost universal praise for their approach. Everyone suggested that Rank should continue to invest in Plymouth to deepen and enhance the impact of the first phase of the programme.

### *Suggested improvements to the programme*

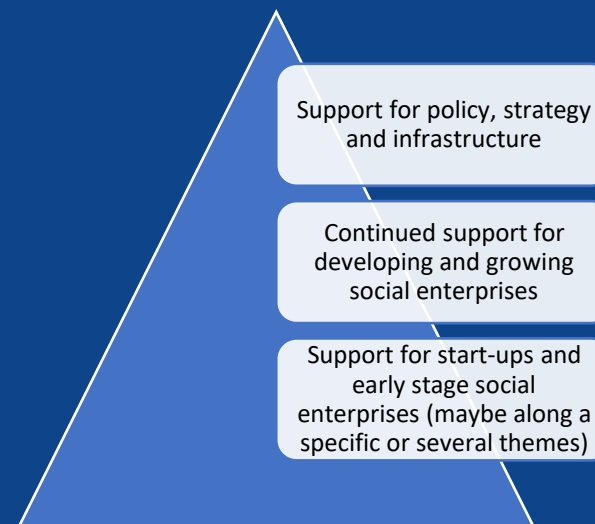
- Make the steering group more structured and/or focussed by picking some key topics that are relevant for deeper discussion
- Consider how to enhance momentum in the Create Change leadership programme
- Demonstrate the links between Plymouth City Council and the Rank programme more clearly
- Encourage more activity on, and better use of, RankNet
- Consider how to structure Trade-Up programme around different needs for very early stage businesses and more developed organizations
- Make the inclusive growth and policy work more visible and accessible to more people.

### *Ideas for the future*

There were many different suggestions for specific funding themes that are listed in the findings section above. We do not make a recommendation on those as we feel that is for Rank to consider but these, more conceptual, recommendations follow on from the interviews we conducted:

- Bring more social enterprises into the Rank family at both start-up and growth stages
- Invest in systemic change i.e. the 'Build Back Better' and inclusive growth policy work
- Invest in the infrastructure for social enterprise to help build a legacy for the programme.

A future programme could be envisioned as a pyramid of investments:



“““

Rank has given us a safe environment to look at ourselves and help us be the best version of ourselves we can be

*Trade-Up programme participant*