

# Social Audit Report 2019-2020 for Going For Independence CIC (GFI)

Company Registration date October 20<sup>th</sup> 2008 No. 6729549

For financial year 1<sup>st</sup> November 2019 to 31st October 2020

<b>Part 1</b>	<b>Description of the company's activities and impact</b>
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## 1 About Going For Independence (GFI) – our core business

The Going For Independence CIC was established in 2008. Our main aim is to enable and empower individuals to live independently and safely with the best possible quality of life.

In spite of the constraints placed on us due to the Covid-19 pandemic we have been able to continue to facilitate connections between individuals and Independent Occupational Therapists and provide impartial advice and information about equipment, gadgets and home / work adaptations (including Electronic Assistive Technology and Telecare).

We have developed our ability to use digital technology to stay in touch with our user groups, which will stand us in good stead for the future.

During the year the company has managed successfully to link to and collaborate with a number of key national organisations and with local organisations in the North of England that share our vision.

We are specialising in the provision of direct support services for people who are Blind and visually impaired, not only to help them to remain independent but also to help to reduce social isolation and to help people to learn new skills.

Like many other businesses it has been a challenging year as we have adapted to the constraints of the Covid pandemic. Our business model for working from a home office with low overheads has meant we have remained active and able to deliver some of our services, albeit with modifications.

Our thanks are extended to the National Lottery and National Lottery Players for making it possible for us to develop and deliver three projects during this year, each of which has provided key support to disabled people, in particular at this difficult time.

## 2 Sensing the Wild Project – connecting Blind and visually impaired people to nature

**Impact of Covid-19 pandemic** - Our financial year started in November 2019 and the Covid-19 pandemic hit the UK at the end of that year, with an escalating infection rate resulting in the first lockdown in March 2020.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of November we hosted a BBC Countryfile filming of one of our walks – at Errington Wood in New Markse, Redcar and Cleveland which was a great success and was particularly good for our company profile; in spite of cold and wet weather it was much enjoyed by our Blind and visually impaired walkers!. We were supported by a number of volunteers who provided essential guiding assistance.

In February 2020 we took three Blind people from our Darlington group to Newcastle to do a presentation to Heritage Lottery staff about the project which was well received.

This project was due to finish in November 2020 and with the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust we had delivered 12 workshops and 12 walks, however the pandemic restrictions for staff furloughs and no indoor meetings plus lockdowns meant we had to suspend the final 4 workshops and walks until further notice and we are hoping to resume in the New Year 2021.

### **3 Building friendships and learning new skills – Social Activities for Older and Isolated People 2019-2021**

Our project providing a range of social activities for isolated adults and older people with sensory impairments had to be suspended in March 2020 and we have instead supported people by communicating with them through the postal system and by phone.

Using the Articles for the Blind postal service we have been sending 52 people items in the post every month including quiz's , CD recordings and cards, keeping in touch and letting them know we are still here for them and that we will resume our activities as soon as we are allowed.

We have secured an extension of time for this project which will now finish in 2021.

### **4 SES Covid-19 grant – Audio Support Service project**

Individuals in our visually impaired groups were particularly affected by the lockdowns in that they became very isolated at home and also lost confidence in being out and about because of social distancing requirements, as their loss of vision made this very difficult.

In view of this we successfully applied for a Social Enterprise Covid-19 support grant in September 2020 which enabled us to set up a conference call service for our groups, using landline phones to connect people so they could continue to “meet” and have a conversation. Using the internet and online platforms like Zoom is not helpful to many of our participants many of whom are elderly and some do not use computers or even smart phones. We made contact with other organisations running conference calls and learned a lot about the processes, writing up a report and also carrying out a survey of participants to get their views.

The project also included developing podcasts covering our previous workshops and walks in the parks plus other local information which we launched on various media platforms and also made into CDs for those who used other audio equipment and who could not access the media channels. This project is due to complete in March 2021.

### **5 Discuss Game development**

Our work on the Discuss game, a conversation game using digital technology to provide an audio dice and questions, had to be put on hold throughout 2020 as we have reached a stage where we need to consult directly with Blind and visually impaired people in order to ensure the game works for them. We have remained in touch with our contacts and will resume work on its development as soon as possible. The lockdown time has enabled us to work on a card game version and to make improvements to the prototype.

In October 2020 we took on an intern for 8 weeks – a graduate from Teesside University - to work on an animation for our game using the dice image to help to show how the game is played. The intern will continue to work with us as a volunteer into 2021.

## **6 Social Enterprise in Residence at Teesside University**

At the end of 2019 our links with the university led to us being asked to be Social Enterprise in Residence which gave us an office on campus: it involves us in mentoring students on the values of social enterprise, lectures for the university, blogs and presentations.

Our profile in the community led in January to an interview on the local Zetland Radio in Redcar where I was able to talk about the work of GFI, and our staff team also met with the local Ageing Better project to look at the potential for offering activities for older people in Middlesbrough.

During the year our position as SE in Residence has led to us delivering a number of lectures - to students, to the Vonne network of voluntary organisations for Digital City, to Fashion students and to Occupational Therapist students in the Health and Social Care department, talking about the features and benefits of the not-for-profit sector. When face to face lectures stopped we were able to do this online in spite of the Lockdown restrictions.

This work will develop further in the future and is a great platform for promotion of GFI and for helping to create more successful businesses with a social purpose.

## **7 The year ahead 2020-2021**

We aim to complete our Lottery-funded projects in 2021, to further develop our work in the community and our Discuss game reaching new people and new age groups, and to develop new work streams and projects to take us into 2022 and beyond.

Our Directors contribute voluntary time to all of our work which continues to demonstrate value for money and we have great feedback from our participants to inform our project evaluations.

Being located in the north of England, we hope to build on our success and to continue to provide much needed services for Blind and visually impaired people and others in the local communities across the Tees Valley region. In addition we are looking at how we might work with organisations in other parts of the country.

## **Part 2 – Consultation with stakeholders**

Working on our Lottery projects means we continue to communicate directly with a range of new stakeholders in the community across the Tees Valley region, including volunteers who work with us.

Development of the “Discuss” game involves direct consultation with volunteers and consumers which is ongoing as we improve the prototypes in response to feedback.

GFI has developed a wide business and professional network locally and nationally including new links made with Teesside University, businesses in the region, older and disabled people, young people and children with disabilities, families, friends and carers, students, Occupational Therapists and health and social care professionals.